# Subjectivity, Willingness to Communicate, and Iranian EFL Learners' Speech Act Strategy Learning and Use

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## Abstract

Although there are growing attempts to equip learners with strategies in the English as a Second/Foreign Language (ESL/EFL) classroom, there has not been much effort made to implement strategies to assist learners in the learning of speech acts (e.g., Cohen & Ishihara, 2005). Moreover, in the realm of second language acquisition, the exploration of individual differences has garnered significant attention from researchers and practitioners alike. Considering these two important facts, this study delved into the intricate relationship between willingness to communicate (WTC), learner subjectivity, and the utilization of speech act strategies among 200 Iranian EFL learners. Drawing upon the WTC questionnaire developed by MacIntyre et al. (2001), learner subjectivity scale by LoCastro (2001), and speech act strategy inventory by Cohen and Ishihara (2005), this research aimed to unravel the interplay between these variables. The findings obtained through Spearman's rho correlation illuminated the positive interplay between WTC and learners' speech act strategy use, as well as the positive interaction between learner subjectivity and EFL learners' speech act strategy use. These results underscore the significance of personal attributes, such as WTC and learner subjectivity, in influencing learners' strategic competence in utilizing speech acts. Furthermore, this study contributes valuable insights for learners seeking to enhance their autonomy and self-directed learning, while also fostering a deeper awareness of individual differences and speech act strategies among EFL learners to facilitate their success and self-confidence.

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## INTRODUCTION

The field of second language acquisition (SLA) has increasingly recognized the critical role of individual differences (IDs) in shaping learners' linguistic outcomes and communicative experiences (Dörnyei, 2006). Among the diverse IDs explored, willingness to communicate (WTC) and learner subjectivity have emerged as pivotal factors influencing engagement, strategic competence, and pragmatic development in second language (L2) contexts. While research has examined these constructs in isolation (e.g., Thumvichit, 2024; Wang et al., 2024) their interplay with speech act strategy use, a key facet of pragmatic competence, remains underexplored, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings. Crucially, WTC and learner subjectivity are not independent constructs; rather, they intersect in shaping how learners approach communication. WTC reflects behavioral readiness to engage, while learner subjectivity captures the deeper identity-related motivations that drive such engagement. Together, they offer a more holistic lens through which to understand learners' strategic choices in pragmatic contexts. This study investigates the dynamic relationships between WTC, learner subjectivity, and speech act strategy use among Iranian EFL learners, aiming to bridge gaps in understanding how personal attributes and strategic choices converge to facilitate or hinder communicative success.

To situate this investigation within broader pedagogical goals, it is essential to recognize that contemporary language teaching prioritizes communicative competence, not merely grammatical accuracy, as its central objective, especially in globalized educational environments. Communicative competence extends beyond grammatical accuracy to include the ability to navigate sociocultural and pragmatic dimensions effectively. However, many EFL learners struggle with pragmatic appropriateness, often due to limited exposure to authentic language use and insufficient attention to pragmatic aspects in formal instruction (Taguchi, 2019). Therefore, examining how individual psychological

traits interact with pragmatic strategies provides crucial insights into optimizing language learning processes.

Among these psychological traits, WTC has emerged as a critical factor influencing learners' engagement with pragmatic challenges. WTC, defined as a learner's predisposition to initiate and sustain communication (MacIntyre & Doucette, 2010), is a cornerstone of L2 interaction. In EFL environments, where opportunities for authentic communication are often limited, WTC becomes indispensable, as it motivates learners to seek out interactions and persist in meaning-making efforts. Learner subjectivity complements WTC as a multidimensional construct that integrates learners' self-perceptions, beliefs about language learning, and attitudes toward the target language community (Norton, 2000). A positive learner subjectivity fosters agency, resilience, and a proactive approach to language use, while incongruence between learners' identities and their L2 experiences may hinder progress (Palmer, 2023).

Understanding WTC and learner subjectivity within the broader framework of SLA theory allows us to appreciate how affective and cognitive variables mediate language performance. These constructs are not static but rather dynamically shaped by contextual factors such as classroom environment, teacher feedback, peer dynamics, and learners' imagined futures (Ushioda, 2011). Thus, exploring how WTC and learner subjectivity evolve across different learning contexts is essential for developing holistic models of language development.

Central to this study is the examination of speech act strategies— deliberate communicative choices learners employ to navigate social and cultural nuances, such as hedging, politeness markers, or indirectness. These strategies are essential for achieving communicative goals while maintaining interpersonal rapport (Kasper & Rose, 2002). Despite their importance, pragmatic aspects of L2 use, including speech act strategies, remain understudied in relation to IDs. This gap is particularly pronounced in EFL contexts, where learners often lack exposure to authentic pragmatic norms, necessitating explicit strategy instruction and self-directed practice.

In recent years, there has been a growing consensus that pragmatic competence should be an integral part of language curricula. However, its integration remains inconsistent, especially in EFL settings where standardized testing often prioritizes grammatical accuracy over communicative effectiveness (Stepykina, 2025). Consequently, many learners graduate from formal education systems without having developed the necessary pragmatic skills to function effectively in real-world communicative situations. Investigating how WTC and learner subjectivity influence the uptake and application of speech act strategies can inform more responsive and context-sensitive instructional practices.

While prior studies highlight the link between higher WTC and increased L2 proficiency (Zhou et al., 2023), fewer have explored how these variables interact with learners' subjective experiences and pragmatic knowledge (Mohammad Hosseinpur & Bagheri Nevisi, 2017). By focusing on Iranian EFL learners, this research addresses a critical need for context-specific insights into how IDs shape pragmatic development. Iranian EFL learners present a compelling case for such inquiry due to the unique sociolinguistic and educational landscape in which English is taught and learned. The majority of language instruction occurs in formal classroom settings with limited opportunities for meaningful interaction outside the classroom. Moreover, the sociopolitical context influences learners' access to native speaker input and digital resources, further complicating the development of pragmatic awareness. Therefore, examining how internal motivational and attitudinal factors intersect with pragmatic strategy use in this population offers valuable insights into both universal and context-bound mechanisms of L2 development.

This study contributes to SLA research by illuminating the interplay between cognitive, affective, and sociocultural dimensions of language learning. Findings will inform pedagogical practices aimed at enhancing learners' strategic competence, fostering positive subjectivities, and designing interventions that prioritize both grammatical accuracy and pragmatic appropriateness. Ultimately, this work underscores the necessity of

integrating IDs into pragmatic instruction to empower EFL learners as effective, confident communicators in globalized contexts.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The field of SLA has increasingly recognized the importance of IDs in shaping language learning outcomes. Among these differences, WTC and learner subjectivity have emerged as critical factors influencing learners' strategic competence, particularly in the use of speech act strategies. Speech acts, as fundamental units of communication, play a pivotal role in effective language use, especially in EFL contexts. However, to fully contextualize this study, it is vital to situate the study within empirical research on L2 pragmatic competence, strategic competence, and IDs, particularly in the Iranian EFL context. Recent studies have significantly advanced understanding of pragmatic development among Iranian learners. For instance, Derakhshan et al. (2024) demonstrated that interlanguage pragmatic learning strategies vary significantly based on proficiency level, age, and gender, factors closely tied to IDs. Similarly, Tajeddin and Malmir (2024) found that learners with more language experience used more strategies, and gender also influenced strategy choice, leading to a refined categorization framework to enhance pragmatic instruction. These studies affirm that pragmatic competence is not merely a product of exposure but is mediated by learner-internal factors.

## Willingness to Communicate (WTC)

WTC, conceptualized as the readiness to start a conversation when circumstances allow (MacIntyre et al., 2001), has become a central concept in the field of SLA research. Drawing from both communicative theory and psychological frameworks, the notion of WTC initially developed from investigations into native language interaction. It was originally characterized as an individual's inclination or tendency to participate in spoken discourse. In SLA, MacIntyre et al. (1998) reconceptualized WTC as a dynamic, context-dependent trait central to

language learning, asserting that fostering WTC should be a primary goal of language education.

This reconceptualization marked a significant shift in understanding communication as not merely a product of linguistic competence but also a function of learners' affective and motivational states. The model proposed by MacIntyre et al. (1998) emphasizes that WTC operates within a complex network of internal and external influences, making it a multi-dimensional construct rather than a unidimensional personality trait. This perspective aligns with broader theories of motivation in SLA, such as Dörnyei's (2014) L2 Motivational Self System, which underscores the role of ideal self-images and future-oriented goals in shaping learner behavior.

WTC is shaped by a complex interplay of psychological, affective, and contextual factors. MacIntyre et al.'s (1998) Pyramid Model identifies six hierarchical layers influencing WTC: (1) *communication behavior* (actual acts of communication), (2) *behavioral intentions* (planned communication), (3) *situated antecedents* (immediate contextual triggers), (4) *motivational propensities* (long-term goals), (5) *affective-cognitive context* (attitudes, beliefs, and perceived competence), and (6) *social and individual context* (cultural and environmental factors). While the first three layers reflect transient, situation-specific variables, the latter three represent stable, enduring influences such as L2 attitudes, communicative confidence, and anxiety.

Each level of the Pyramid Model interacts dynamically, meaning that fluctuations in situational factors, such as classroom dynamics, peer interactions, or task demands, can significantly influence a learner's momentary WTC, even if their underlying dispositions remain relatively stable. For instance, a learner who generally feels confident in English may exhibit low WTC during a high-stakes oral presentation due to situational anxiety. Such variability highlights the importance of designing instructional environments that reduce barriers to

communication and promote positive emotional experiences (Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002).

Empirical studies consistently link higher WTC to increased language proficiency, communicative competence, and overall success in SLA (Mohammad Hosseinpur & Bagheri Nevisi, 2017; Peng, 2007). In EFL contexts, where authentic communication opportunities are often scarce, WTC becomes particularly critical. It motivates learners to seek interactions, persist in meaning-making, and bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-world application. However, most WTC research has focused on Western second language (e.g., French in Canada) or East Asian EFL settings (e.g., Japan, Korea, China), highlighting a need for broader cross-contextual investigations.

This study situates WTC within the EFL context of Iran, examining its interplay with learner subjectivity and speech act strategy use. By addressing gaps in non-Western contexts, the research aims to deepen understanding of how WTC, shaped by psychological and sociocultural factors, drives learners' strategic engagement in pragmatic communication.

## Learner Subjectivity in SLA

Learner subjectivity, a dynamic and multifaceted construct, refers to learners' self-perceptions, beliefs, and emotional orientations toward their role as language learners, as well as their evolving relationship with the target language and culture. According to Norton (2000), learner subjectivity can be understood as the way individuals perceive themselves in relation to their surroundings, the ways in which this perception develops through time and place, and how they envision their future possibilities. This perspective highlights the dynamic connection between learners' sense of self, the sociocultural environments they inhabit, and the active role they play in shaping their language learning experiences.

Crucially, learner subjectivity not only is an internal psychological state but is co-constructed within social interactions and institutional

structures. It reflects how learners interpret and respond to power dynamics, societal expectations, and opportunities for participation in linguistic communities. As such, it plays a critical role in determining how learners engage with, or disengage from, language learning processes. This understanding moves beyond traditional trait-based models of identity and instead embraces a more fluid and socially embedded view of the learner (Miller, 2012).

Rooted in poststructuralist theory, learner subjectivity challenges static notions of identity, instead framing it as fluid and continuously renegotiated through interactions with social, cultural, and institutional discourses (Weedon, 1987). Weedon conceptualizes subjectivity as encompassing both the conscious and unconscious mental and emotional experiences of a person, including how she perceives and defines herself, as well as the ways in which she interprets and makes sense of her connection to the world around her. This perspective aligns with Tajfel's (1981) social identity theory, which highlights how group memberships and their emotional significance shape individuals' self-concepts.

The intersection of poststructuralist and social identity theories allows researchers to explore how learners negotiate multiple identities, such as gender, ethnicity, nationality, and socioeconomic status, within the context of language learning. These intersecting identities influence how learners perceive their legitimacy within L2 communities and affect their willingness to adopt new communicative practices. For example, learners may resist certain aspects of target language use if they perceive them as conflicting with their cultural values or personal ethics (Darvin & Norton, 2015).

In SLA research, learner subjectivity has gained prominence for its role in mediating motivation, engagement, and persistence. Norton's (2000) seminal work with immigrant women in Canada demonstrated that learners' subjectivities, shaped by their social positioning, access to resources, and imagined futures, profoundly influenced their language-learning trajectories. A positive and empowering subjectivity fosters agency, enabling learners to

actively participate in communicative practices and embrace challenges (Eslami et al., 2014). Conversely, incongruence between learners' identities and their L2 experiences may hinder progress.

This concept of agency, central to Norton's (2000) model, emphasizes learners' capacity to act upon and reshape their environments rather than being passive recipients of instruction. When learners feel empowered and see relevance in their language learning journey, they are more likely to take risks, seek out practice opportunities, and persist in the face of difficulties. However, when learners experience marginalization or misrecognition, either within the classroom or broader society, their subjectivity may become constrained, leading to disengagement and reduced investment in language learning (Eslami et al., 2014)**.**

Sociocultural factors, such as interactions with the target language community and exposure to cultural norms, further shape subjectivity (Houlden & Veletsianos, 2021). For instance, learners navigating multilingual environments often renegotiate their identities, balancing affiliations with their native culture and the target language community. This process of "becoming" through language highlights the transformative potential of SLA, where subjectivity and language competence develop in tandem.

## Speech Act Strategies

Speech act strategies represent the conscious, goal-oriented choices learners make to convey meaning in socially and culturally appropriate ways (Oxford, 2016). These strategies encompass a broad spectrum of communicative behaviors, such as directness, indirectness, hedging, politeness markers, and mitigation techniques, which learners deliberately employ to navigate interpersonal dynamics and achieve communicative goals while preserving relational harmony (Kasper & Rose, 2002). Effective use of such strategies is critical for successful communication, as it enables learners to balance clarity of intent with contextual sensitivity, particularly in cross-cultural interactions

where pragmatic norms may differ significantly from their first language (Zhao & Throssell, 2011).

Strategic competence in pragmatics, defined as the ability to select, adapt, and deploy contextually appropriate speech acts, is a core component of communicative competence (Cohen, 2010). Research shows that strategic competence does not emerge automatically from linguistic knowledge; rather, it requires explicit attention, practice, and metapragmatic reflection (Taguchi, 2019). In the Iranian context, studies by Tavakoli et al. (2025) and Tajeddin and Malmir (2024), for example, confirm that learners who receive strategy-based instruction demonstrate significantly higher pragmatic accuracy and flexibility than those who do not. This underscores the teachability of speech act strategies and the importance of linking them to learner-internal variables like motivation and identity.

The importance of speech act strategies lies not only in their functional utility but also in their role in shaping how learners are perceived by native speakers and other interlocutors. Misuse or overuse of certain strategies, such as excessive hedging or inappropriate directness, can lead to misinterpretations, social discomfort, or even negative evaluations of the speaker's competence or intentions. Therefore, developing strategic competence in speech acts is essential for achieving both linguistic accuracy and social appropriateness, two pillars of communicative competence (Cohen, 2010).

Various theoretical models have aimed to classify and clarify how speech act strategies contribute to the process of language acquisition. Cohen (2010) introduces a classification system that identifies three key categories: (1) learning-oriented strategies for understanding speech acts, such as interpreting situational hints or requesting clarification; (2) execution-based strategies used in carrying out speech acts, like adapting language for politeness or choosing suitable fixed expressions; and (3) metapragmatic techniques involved in assessing and refining speech act performance, including considering cultural relevance and adapting behavior according to the listener's responses. This framework aligns with

Oxford's (2016) broader concept of self-regulated learning strategies, which emphasizes metacognitive, cognitive, and affective dimensions of strategic competence. For instance, learners may deploy metacognitive strategies to plan and assess their use of requests or apologies, while cognitive strategies might involve memorizing pragmatic routines or adapting language to specific social contexts.

This layered model reflects the recursive nature of strategy development, wherein learners engage in continuous cycles of planning, performing, monitoring, and revising their communicative actions. Such processes are especially crucial in EFL settings, where opportunities for real-time feedback are limited and learners must often rely on internalized knowledge of pragmatic norms. The integration of metapragmatic awareness into this framework highlights the importance of reflection and self-assessment in fostering long-term pragmatic development.

Empirical research underscores the influence of multiple factors on the acquisition and deployment of speech act strategies (Mohammad Hosseinpur & Bagheri Nevisi, 2020). Learner characteristics such as language proficiency, cultural background, and exposure to authentic communication play significant roles in shaping pragmatic competence (Ishihara, 2010). Additionally, Cohen (2010) highlights that the effectiveness of speech act strategies is mediated by variables such as age, gender, language aptitude, task complexity, and contextual constraints. For example, a learner's ability to employ indirectness in a request may depend on their familiarity with target culture norms or their confidence in managing ambiguous social interactions. Instructional interventions, including explicit teaching and strategy-based training programs, have also been shown to enhance learners' pragmatic awareness and strategic flexibility.

## PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Despite growing interest in this area, research on speech act strategies in EFL contexts remains limited, particularly regarding how IDs, such as WTC and

learner subjectivity, interact with strategic choices. This gap highlights the need for context-specific investigations into how learners' psychological and sociocultural orientations influence their pragmatic development. By integrating cognitive, affective, and sociopragmatic dimensions, this study aims to advance understanding of the multifaceted nature of speech act strategy use and its role in fostering communicative competence.

In particular, there is a growing recognition that speech act strategy use cannot be fully understood without considering the learner's internal states and identity positions. Willingness to engage in communicative acts, for instance, may determine whether learners take risks in applying newly learned strategies or retreat to safer, more formulaic expressions. Similarly, learners who hold positive subjectivities toward the target language and culture may be more inclined to adopt and adapt to new pragmatic conventions. Thus, examining these interconnections provides a more holistic view of how learners negotiate meaning and build pragmatic competence within complex, dynamic environments. To address the aims of this study, the following research questions were developed:

(1) Is there a significant relationship between Iranian EFL learners' subjectivity and their speech act strategy use in terms of frequency of use and sense of success?
(2) Is there a significant relationship between Iranian EFL learners' WTC and their speech act strategy use in terms of frequency of use and sense of success?

## METHOD

## Participants

To conduct this research, a sample of 200 male and female graduate and postgraduate students specializing in various sub-disciplines of English language studies was recruited through a convenience sampling approach.

The participants were drawn from both private and public universities across Iran, ensuring a diverse representation of academic backgrounds. The age of the participants ranged between 20 and 40 years, reflecting a broad spectrum of academic and life experiences.

To enhance internal validity, several background variables were controlled via a preliminary screening questionnaire. Specifically, participants were excluded if they had (a) resided in an English-speaking country for more than three months, (b) completed a university-level course explicitly focused on pragmatics or speech acts, or (c) reported regular interaction with native English speakers (more than once per week) outside the classroom. These controls were implemented to minimize confounding effects of prior pragmatic instruction or immersive experience, thereby isolating the influence of WTC and learner subjectivity on strategy use.

In order to mitigate possible issues related to response bias, stringent ethical protocols were put in place. The questionnaire clearly informed the participants that all their responses would be kept entirely confidential and would only be utilized for academic research purposes. This emphasis on anonymity was designed to foster honest self-assessment, thereby enhancing the validity of the data.

## Instruments

To gather data for this study, three questionnaires were utilized:

### *Willingness to Communicate (WTC) Questionnaire*

To measure students' WTC in English, a standardized questionnaire was utilized (r=0.87). This tool was originally based on the pioneering research of MacIntyre et al. (2001) and later adapted by Mohammad Hosseinpur and Bagheri Nevisi (2017) to better reflect the sociocultural and educational characteristics specific to the Iranian setting (Appendix A). The instrument consists of 27 items presented on a five-point Likert scale, where responses ranged from 1 ("extremely unlikely to engage") to

5 ("highly likely to engage"). It allowed the participants to indicate their likelihood of participating in English communication during classroom-based interactions. Each item targeted specific communicative scenarios, such as initiating conversations, participating in group discussions, or responding to instructor prompts, thereby capturing a comprehensive snapshot of students' communicative confidence and behavioral intentions.

## *Learner Subjectivity Scale*

To evaluate learner subjectivity in language education, the present study utilized the Learner Subjectivity Questionnaire, originally developed by LoCastro (2001) (r = 0.89). The questionnaire was designed using a five-point Likert-style format, consisting of 30 items that ranged from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree") (Appendix B). It was intended to encourage the participants to evaluate and express their feelings, viewpoints, and emotional dispositions regarding the process of learning a language. By employing a Likert scale, the questionnaire facilitated nuanced differentiation between varying intensities of agreement, allowing researchers to capture subtle gradations in learners' psychological and behavioral dispositions.

Furthermore, the 30-item structure was carefully balanced to cover cognitive, affective, and behavioral facets of subjectivity, ensuring comprehensive insights into how learners navigate challenges, perceive their progress, and interact with peers and instructors.

## *Speech Act Strategy Inventory*

The final instrument employed in this study was the Speech Act Strategy Inventory (Appendix C), originally developed by Cohen and Ishihara (2005) to assess learners' strategic competence in navigating communicative challenges across diverse linguistic contexts (r=0.81). This inventory comprised 20 items, each requiring the participants to rate their likelihood of employing specific speech act strategies, such as requests, apologies, or

refusals, on a five-point Likert scale (*1 = "never likely" to 5 = "always likely"*). Designed to evaluate pragmatic decision-making and sociolinguistic awareness, the Speech Act Strategy Inventory (SASI)probes learners' ability to adapt their communication styles to situational demands, cultural norms, and interlocutor relationships.

## Data Collection Procedure

To ensure methodological flexibility and broad accessibility, data for this study were collected through a hybrid approach**,** combining both in-person and electronic methods across multiple universities. The participants were given the option to engage with the research process through their preferred mode: Printed questionnaires were distributed during scheduled sessions on campuses, while digital versions were made available via platforms such as Telegram and Google Forms to accommodate remote participation. This dual strategy was designed to maximize inclusivity, catering to diverse preferences and logistical needs while maintaining the integrity of the data.

Before gathering any data, every participant was provided with a comprehensive overview outlining the purpose of the research, the ethical principles guiding the study, and guarantees regarding the confidentiality of their responses. For in-person sessions, researchers administered printed questionnaires in controlled settings, ensuring clarity and offering immediate assistance to address any ambiguities. Simultaneously, electronic links were shared through university networks and messaging apps, allowing the participants to complete the surveys at their convenience. The three questionnaires—focused on WTC, learner subjectivity, and speech act strategies—were standardized across both formats to ensure consistency in responses.

## Data Analysis

The data gathered from the study were processed using SPSS (Version 21). Initial analysis involved the use of descriptive statistics to outline key

demographic details of the participants as well as their responses to the survey instruments. To investigate the connections among the variables under study, Spearman's rho correlation was utilized, chosen specifically due to the data's deviation from a normal distribution.

Although structural equation modeling (SEM) would have allowed for simultaneous examination of the relationships among WTC, learner subjectivity, and speech act strategy use, the current study employed bivariate non-parametric correlations for methodological and practical reasons. First, SEM typically requires larger sample sizes (N > 200–300) to ensure model stability and adequate power, especially when latent variables are estimated from multi-item scales (Kline, 2015). With N = 200, our sample approached but did not exceed this threshold, increasing the risk of model misspecification or convergence issues. Second, the primary aim of this exploratory study was to establish whether significant associations exist between each ID variable and strategy use, rather than to test a full mediation or path model. Spearman's rho provided a robust, assumption-light method to detect monotonic relationships in non-normally distributed data, aligning with our research questions. Future studies with larger samples are encouraged to employ SEM to model the joint and interactive effects of WTC and learner subjectivity on pragmatic strategy deployment.

## RESULTS

As a first step, the reliability of the three questionnaires used in this study was measured through running Cronbach alpha. Table 1 provides an overview of the number of items included in each questionnaire, along with their corresponding reliability coefficients.

**Table 1.** Reliability of the Instruments

| Questionnaires | No. of Items | Reliability Index |
|---|---|---|
| Learner subjectivity | 30 | .89 |
| Speech act strategy | 40 | .81 |
| WTC | 27 | .87 |

In order to decide on parametric or non-parametric analysis to be run, a test of normality of data was performed. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov index was used to make sure of the normal distribution of data in the following Table.

**Table 2.** Normality of the Data

|  | Kolmogorov-Smirnov | | | Shapiro-Wilk | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | Statistic | Df | Sig. | Statistic | df | Sig. |
| Subjectivity | .223 | 200 | .000 | .849 | 200 | .000 |
| SAS | .167 | 200 | .000 | .894 | 200 | .000 |
| WTC | .188 | 200 | .000 | .867 | 200 | .000 |

Table 2 shows that the assumption of the normality of the data was violated; thus, the data were not normal (p = 0.000) for any of the questionnaires, consequently, non-parametric data statistics was employed. In case of measuring the relationship among the variables, Spearman correlation test was used.

## The First Research Question

The initial inquiry explored whether there was a potential link between the subjectivity of learners and the strategies they employed in performing speech acts, particularly in relation to how often these strategies were used and how successful the learners felt they were. As previously noted, the data did not follow a normal distribution, so non-parametric methods were used for analysis. Given that the main aim of the research was to assess both the strength and statistical significance of the relationship between these variables, the Spearman's rank correlation test was selected as the appropriate analytical tool.

**Table 3.** Spearman's rank correlation between learner subjectivity and their Speech Act Strategy use

|  |  |  | Subjectivity | SAS |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Spearman's rho | Subjectivity | Correlation Coefficient | 1.00 | .76$^{*}$ |
|  |  | Sig. (2-tailed) | . | .00 |
|  |  | N | 200 | 200 |

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

As illustrated in Table 3, a statistically significant and positive association exists between learners' subjectivity and their overall use of speech act strategies (r = 0.76, p = 0.00). If the former increases, the latter will also increase and if it decreases the other variable will also decrease.

## The Second Research Question

The second inquiry examined whether a connection exists between the WTC of EFL learners and the strategies they employ in performing speech acts, focusing specifically on how frequently these strategies are utilized and how successful the learners perceive them to be. As mentioned above, the distribution of the data was not normal and a non-parametric data analysis was run. So, a Spearman correlation test was employed.

**Table 4.** Spearman correlation between learners' WTC and their Speech Act Strategy use

|  |  |  | Subjectivity | WTC |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Spearman's rho | WTC | Correlation Coefficient | 1.00 | .20[*] |
|  |  | Sig. (2-tailed) | . | .00 |
|  |  | N | 200 | 200 |

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

As presented in Table 4, a statistically meaningful and positive correlation exists between learners' WTC and their overall indices related to speech act strategy application (r = 0.204, p = 0.004). If learners' WTC increases, their speech act strategy use will also increase and if the former decreases the latter will also decrease.

## DISCUSSION

The outcomes of this research indicate strong and statistically significant associations among learners' subjectivity, their WTC, and the deployment of speech act strategies within the context of Iranian EFL education. These findings are consistent with earlier scholarly work that highlights

the critical influence of individual learner differences in SLA, especially concerning the cultivation of pragmatic skills (e.g., Derakhshan et al., 2024; Dörnyei, 2014; Mohammad Hosseinpur & Bagheri Nevisi, 2017; Zhang & Aubrey, 2024).

Notably, the results of this study align with empirical work in the Iranian context. For example, Derakhshan and Shakki (2021) found that learners with higher levels of pragmatic awareness also reported stronger investment in L2 learning, a construct closely related to learner subjectivity. Similarly, Tajeddin and Mohammad Hosseinpur (2014) observed that Iranian EFL learners' ability to produce context-appropriate requests was significantly predicted by their self-efficacy and motivation, reinforcing the role of affective variables in pragmatic performance. The findings of this study that learner subjectivity (r = .766) shows a much stronger association with speech act strategy use than WTC (r = .204) echoes Tajeddin and Malmir's (2024) conclusion that identity-related factors exert a more profound influence on pragmatic choices than momentary willingness to speak.

The strong positive correlation between learner subjectivity and speech act strategy use (r = 0.766, p < 0.01) suggests that learners who possess a well-defined sense of self and positive beliefs about language learning are more likely to employ effective speech act strategies. This result supports the perspective put forward by Norton and Toohey (2011), who argued that how learners view their place in the world and envision their future prospects, what is referred to as learner subjectivity, has a significant impact on the language learning process. According to their view, individuals who possess a well-developed sense of self are more inclined to participate in linguistic activities that reflect their personal identities and aspirations. This alignment ultimately contributes to the advancement of their pragmatic abilities.

For example, individuals who perceive English as an essential asset for both personal development and career advancement tend to be more motivated to acquire speech act strategies that enhance their communicative effectiveness. This aligns with the findings of Mohammad

Hosseinpur and Bagheri Nevisi (2017), who found that learner subjectivity positively correlated with pragmatic competence among Iranian EFL learners. The current study extends this finding by demonstrating that learner subjectivity also influences the frequency and success of speech act strategy use.

The notion of learner subjectivity is also closely connected to the idea of learner autonomy, which highlights the significance of self-directed learning and awareness of one's own cognitive processes in the acquisition of language (Benson, 2013). By fostering an environment that encourages reflection and self-assessment, educators can help learners develop a robust sense of subjectivity, enabling them to make informed decisions about when and how to deploy appropriate speech act strategies. This method not only contributes to the refinement of learners' pragmatic abilities but also strengthens their general self-assurance and effectiveness when engaging in authentic communicative situations (Ueno et al., 2025).

The positive correlation between WTC and speech act strategy use ($r = 0.204$, $p < 0.01$) indicates that individuals who demonstrate a greater readiness to engage in communication tend to apply speech act strategies more proficiently. This outcome provides support for MacIntyre et al.'s (1998) theoretical framework of WTC, which suggests that WTC is influenced by both situational and enduring factors, including self-confidence, motivation, and perceived communicative competence. Learners with higher WTC are more likely to seek out opportunities for communication, which provides them with the practice necessary to refine their pragmatic skills.

Moreover, the observed connection between WTC and speech act strategy use supports the socio-cognitive framework proposed by MacIntyre et al. (1998), which posits that affective variables like WTC interact dynamically with cognitive processes during communication. For example, learners who exhibit higher WTC may be more likely to experiment with various speech acts, leading to increased proficiency over time. Such insights

are particularly relevant for educators seeking to design instructional activities that promote learner autonomy and self-directed learning (Benson, 2013).

However, the relatively weaker correlation between WTC and speech act strategy use compared to learner subjectivity suggests that WTC alone may not be sufficient to ensure effective pragmatic performance. Other factors, such as cultural awareness, linguistic proficiency, and explicit instruction, may also play a role. This is consistent with the findings of Peng (2007), who argued that while WTC is a significant predictor of language use, it must be supported by other cognitive and affective factors to fully enhance communicative competence.

The study also highlights the interplay between learner subjectivity and WTC. Learners who have a strong sense of subjectivity are more likely to develop higher WTC, as they view language learning as a means of achieving their personal and professional goals. This corresponds with Norton's (2000) notion of "investment," which proposes that learners are more inclined to participate actively in language learning when they view it as a meaningful contribution to shaping their identity and advancing their future prospects.

For example, learners who see English as a gateway to global communication and career advancement are more likely to be willing to communicate and use speech act strategies effectively. This finding underscores the importance of fostering both learner subjectivity and WTC in EFL classrooms to enhance learners' pragmatic competence.

## CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study concludes that learner subjectivity and WTC are significantly and positively correlated with EFL learners' speech act strategy use. These findings underscore the importance of considering individual learner differences in language teaching and learning. By fostering learners' subjectivity and WTC, educators can empower them to become more

effective and confident communicators. The study highlights the need for pedagogical interventions that not only focus on explicit instruction of speech act strategies but also address learners' self-perceptions, beliefs, and motivations. By creating a supportive and encouraging learning environment, teachers can help learners develop a stronger sense of self, increase their WTC, and ultimately enhance their ability to use speech acts effectively.

The results of this research carry notable implications for teaching practices in EFL contexts. To begin with, educators need to recognize and take into account the influential part that learner subjectivity plays in the process of acquiring a language. They should create a classroom environment that values learners' perspectives, encourages self-expression, and fosters a sense of belonging. Activities that promote self-reflection, goal setting, and identity exploration can help learners develop a stronger sense of self and enhance their learner subjectivity.

Secondly, teachers should actively promote WTC in the classroom. This can be achieved through various strategies, such as creating opportunities for authentic communication, encouraging risk-taking, and providing positive feedback. Teachers can also use activities that simulate real-life interactions, such as role-plays and simulations, to provide learners with opportunities to practice their speech act strategies in a safe and supportive environment. Thirdly, explicit instruction on speech act strategies is crucial. Teachers should provide learners with clear explanations of different speech acts, their functions, and their appropriate use in various contexts. They should also provide learners with opportunities to analyze and practice different speech act strategies through activities such as analyzing dialogues, role-playing, and creating their own dialogues.

Finally, teachers should raise learners' awareness of the interplay between learner subjectivity, WTC, and speech act strategy use. By guiding learners to recognize how these elements affect their language development, educators can support them in gaining greater agency over their learning journey, fostering increased independence and self-regulation. This objective may be accomplished through activities such as

reflective discussions, critical thinking exercises, and structured self-evaluation tasks.-

Although this study offers meaningful contributions to understanding how learner subjectivity, WTC, and the application of speech act strategies are related, it has several limitations that should be acknowledged: The study involved 200 Iranian EFL learners, which may not be representative of all EFL learners. Furthermore, the participant pool consisted exclusively of graduate and postgraduate students, potentially restricting the applicability of the results to broader populations with different age ranges or language proficiency backgrounds.

In addition, the data were gathered using self-reported questionnaires, a method that may be influenced by social desirability bias. As a result, the participants might have exaggerated their WTC or the extent to which they employ speech act strategies in order to create a favorable impression. The research adopted a cross-sectional approach, which restricts the possibility of determining cause-and-effect relationships among the variables under investigation. To better understand how learner subjectivity and WTC evolve over time and impact the use of speech act strategies, future longitudinal studies are necessary. Lastly, since the study was carried out within an Iranian EFL environment, the results may not be directly transferable to other cultural or linguistic contexts. Further research should examine these dynamics across diverse sociocultural and language learning settings to enhance the generalizability of the findings.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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**Appendix A:**
**Students' Willingness to Communicate**

This questionnaire is composed of some statements concerning your feelings about communication with other people, in English. Please indicate the frequency of time you choose to speak in English in each classroom situation (adapted from MacIntyre, Baker, Clément, & Conrod, 2001).

1 = Almost never willing
 2 = Sometimes willing
3 = Willing half of the time
4 = Usually willing
5 = Almost always willing

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Speak in a group about your summer vacation | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. | Speak to your teacher about your homework assignment | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. | Have a conversation with a stranger if he/she talks to you first | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. | Ask for instructions/clarification when you are confused about a task you must complete | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. | Talk to a friend while waiting in line | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. | Be an actor in a play | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. | Describe the rules of your favorite game | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. | Participate in a debate | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. | Read part of an English novel | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. | Read an English article in a paper | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11. | Read letters from a pen pal written in native English | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. | Read personal letters or notes in which the writer has deliberately used simple words and constructions | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13. | Read an advertisement in the paper to find good merchandise, e.g. a book, you can buy | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14. | Read reviews in English for popular movies | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15. | Write an invitation to invite your schoolmates to a weekend party | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 16. | Write down the instructions for your favorite hobby | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 17. | Write a report on your favorite animal and its habits | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 18. | Write a story | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 19. | Write a letter to a friend | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 20. | Write a newspaper article | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 21. | Write the answers to a "fun" quiz from a magazine | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 55 |

| 22. | Write down a list of things you must do tomorrow | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 23. | Listen to instructions in English and complete a task | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 24. | Bake a cake if instructions were in English | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 25. | Fill out an application form in English | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 26. | Take directions from an English speaker | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 27. | Understand an English movie | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

**Appendix B:**
**Learner Subjectivity Questionnaire by LoCastro (2001)**

Here are some statements about the English language. Please say whether you agree or disagree with these statements. There are no right or wrong answers. Please be as honest as possible. Answer with ONE of the following choices.

Column No. 1: Strongly Agree
Column No. 2: Agree
Column No. 3: Neither Agree nor Disagree
Column No. 4: Disagree
Column No. 5: Strongly Disagree

| | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **5** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I like hearing English spoken. | | | | | |
| 2. I prefer to watch TV in English than in Farsi. | | | | | |
| 3. It's a waste of time to learn English. | | | | | |
| 4. I'd like to speak English fluently. | | | | | |
| 5. English is a difficult language to learn. | | | | | |
| 6. There are more useful languages to learn than English. | | | | | |
| 7. English is a language worth learning. | | | | | |
| 8. English has no place in the modern world. | | | | | |
| 9. Children should not be made to learn English. | | | | | |
| 10. You are considered a higher-class person if you speak English. | | | | | |
| 11. In future, I would like to marry an English speaker. | | | | | |
| 12. If I have children, I would like them to be English speaking. | | | | | |
| 13. It is important to be able to speak English. | | | | | |
| 14. Knowing English makes people cleverer. | | | | | |
| 15. Speaking both Farsi and English help one get a | | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| job. | | | | | |
| 16. It will cause problems if English is introduced into the primary schools. | | | | | |
| 17. People who speak Farsi and English have more friends than those who speak only Farsi. | | | | | |
| 18. I respect people who speak both Persian and English. | | | | | |
| 19. Speaking both Persian and English helps people get promotions in their jobs. | | | | | |
| 20. It is preferable for Iranian people to be able to speak English. | | | | | |
| 21. If it were possible, I would prefer to have been born an English speaker. | | | | | |
| 22. To be able to speak English is important to be cosmopolitan. | | | | | |
| 23. People who speak English fluently are well-educated. | | | | | |
| 24. English is the international language. | | | | | |
| 25. When we study English, we need to learn to behave like its native speakers. | | | | | |
| 26. The Iranian president should give a speech in English when he is in the country where English is spoken. | | | | | |
| 27. To be sophisticated, one must speak English. | | | | | |
| 28. It is not necessary to study English; any other European language (for example, French or Spanish) will do. | | | | | |
| 29. It is not necessary to study English: another Asian language (Arabic) would be just as important. | | | | | |
| 30. Knowing another language well might cause me to lose my Iranian identity. | | | | | |

**Appendix C:**
**Speech Act Strategy Inventory**
Developed by Andrew D. Cohen & Noriko Ishihara
CARLA, University of Minnesota, August 2003
(With some minor modifications for Iranian context)

As you become a proficient speaker of a foreign language, you develop an enhanced sense of the speech that is appropriate for given situations. You almost inadvertently begin to keep track of what the preferred things are to say so as not to offend anyone. You learn that successful speaking is not just a matter of using the correct words and forms—but that it means using whatever strategies are necessary for learning what to use them for, when to use them, and how to use them. Particularly challenging for language learners are those patterned, routinized phrases used regularly to perform a variety of functions or speech acts, such as requests, refusals, compliments, thanks, and apologies.

The following is an inventory of the strategies that you may use in performing or comprehending speech acts.

For each of the following 20 strategies, <u>in the left column</u> please circle the   number corresponding to the **frequency** with which you use the strategy:

For each of the following 20 strategies, <u>in the right column</u> please circle the number corresponding to your **sense of success** at using the strategy:

| | |
|---|---|
| 5 – I always use this strategy. | 5 – I use this strategy with great success. |
| 4 – I often use this strategy. | 4 – I use this strategy with success. |
| 3 – I sometimes use this strategy. | 3 – I use this strategy with some success. |
| 2 – I use this strategy on occasion. | 2 – I use this strategy with little success. |
| 1 – I never use this strategy. | 1 – I use this strategy with no success. |

1. I **listen to others** carefully to see how they perform speech acts in order to learn from them how to do it.

  frequency 5—4—3—2—1                    success   5—4—3—2—1


2. I **inquire from natives/near-natives** of the language and culture as to the appropriate way to perform speech acts.

  frequency 5—4—3—2—1                    success   5—4—3—2—1


3. I draw on **written publications** for explanations of how English language and culture deal with various speech acts.

  frequency 5—4—3—2—1                    success   5—4—3—2—1

4.  I consciously endeavor to **make and revise hypotheses** regarding the appropriate way to perform speech acts.

  frequency 5—4—3—2—1                        success  5—4—3—2—1

5.  I adjust my language according to my **level of acquaintance** with the other person (intimate, close friend, distant friend, acquaintance, and stranger).

  frequency 5—4—3—2—1                        success  5—4—3—2—1

6.  I take **age** into account when performing speech acts in English.

  frequency 5—4—3—2—1                        success  5—4—3—2—1

7.  I adjust the **politeness level** of my language given my **social status** in relation to the person(s) I am speaking to.

  frequency 5—4—3—2—1                        success  5—4—3—2—1

8.  I adjust my language according to my **role** in relation to the other person in an English speech act.

  frequency 5—4—3—2—1                        success  5—4—3—2—1

9.  I make use of **intensifiers** (e.g., "really," "so," and "very") to ensure that my feelings are appropriately expressed.

  frequency 5—4—3—2—1                        success  5—4—3—2—1

10. I use certain words (e.g., just, a little) to **reduce the force of the speech act** to make it sound more likely acceptable.

  frequency 5—4—3—2—1                        success  5—4—3—2—1

11.  I use a **tone of voice** that is appropriate for the given speech act situation.

  frequency 5—4—3—2—1                        success  5—4—3—2—1

12.  I **speak hesitantly** so as to appear humble when the speech act calls for it.

  frequency 5—4—3—2—1                        success  5—4—3—2—1

13.  I **purposely leave my utterance incomplete** when the speech act calls for it.

  frequency 5—4—3—2—1                        success  5—4—3—2—1

14. I **use non-verbal signals** (e.g., bowing and eye contact) to help in the delivery of speech acts.

frequency 5—4—3—2—1                    success  5—4—3—2—1

15. I **monitor and adjust my responses** to the speech acts to fit a given situation.
  frequency 5—4—3—2—1                    success  5—4—3—2—1

16.  I **use repetition** of one or more things I say in order to achieve the appropriate effect in my English speech act performance.
  frequency 5—4—3—2—1                    success  5—4—3—2—1

17.  I do my best to say what a native would to **close** a given speech act interaction.
  frequency 5—4—3—2—1                    success  5—4—3—2—1

18.  I make sure that my speech act performance abides by English cultural rules and is not simply a **translation** from the way I would perform it in Farsi.
  frequency 5—4—3—2—1                    success  5—4—3—2—1

19.  I **warn the other person** before performing a speech act I may do incorrectly in order that they will not take offense.
  frequency 5—4—3—2—1                    success  5—4—3—2—1

20.  I **clarify my intentions** when realizing I have made errors in speech act delivery (e.g., by rephrasing, repeating, or explaining myself).
  frequency 5—4—3—2—1                    success  5—4—3—2—1