

1. Mohammad Reza Anani Sarab

Associate Professor of TEFL, Department of English Language & Literature, Shahid

Beheshti University, Tehran, Iran

Email: anani@sbu.ac.ir

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6281-5078>

محمدرضا عنانی سراب
دانشیار آموزش زبان انگلیسی، گروه زبان و ادبیات انگلیسی، دانشگاه شهید بهشتی، تهران، ایران

2. Amir Hossein Firoozkahi

PhD candidate in Applied Linguistics, Department of Modern Languages & Cultural

Studies, University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB, Canada

Email: fazlolah@ualberta.ca

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5791-811X>

امیرحسین فیروزکوهی
دانشجوی دکتری زبانشناسی کاربردی، گروه زبان های مدرن و مطالعات فرهنگی، دانشگاه آلبرتا، ادمونتون،

آلبرتا، کانادا

Corresponding Author:

Amir Hossein Firoozkahi

Department of Modern Languages & Cultural Studies, University of Alberta, 242-A, Arts

& Convocation Hall, Edmonton, AB, Canada. T6G 2E6. Email: fazlolah@ualberta.ca

A Cross-Cultural Study of Iranian EFL Learners and Native Speakers of English Perceptions of Impoliteness in Apologies: The Role of Language Proficiency and Gender

Abstract

This study investigated the extent to which Iranian English language learners' proficiency (B₁ and B₂) and gender influence their perceptions of impoliteness in situations requiring an apology. It also examined potential differences in the use of apology strategies between Iranian EFL learners and native English speakers. A total of 122 Iranian language learners and 31 native speakers of English participated in the study by completing an eight-item Discourse Completion Task (DCT) designed to elicit evaluations of apology scenarios and strategy preferences. Statistical analyses revealed case-specific differences across scenarios; however, no overall significant difference was found between B₁ and B₂ learners in their perception of impoliteness compared to native English speakers. Similarly, gender did not exert a statistically significant effect on participants' judgments. A comparative analysis further showed that learners and native English speakers employed largely similar apology strategies across contexts. These findings suggest that language learners' perceptions of impoliteness may not strongly depend on proficiency level or gender. These findings carry pedagogical implications for classroom instruction, particularly the need for early, explicit, and context-sensitive instruction that goes beyond linguistic forms to address how factors such as power, social distance, and imposition shape evaluations of impoliteness.

Keywords: intercultural pragmatics, impoliteness, language proficiency, apology strategies, gender

Introduction

The status of English as a global language for international communication has motivated many to learn it for personal, social, and professional interactions. Since the 1990s, teaching the target language culture alongside linguistic components has become widely adopted, as scholars believe that negotiation of meaning requires having both systematic and schematic knowledge of the language. This pedagogical approach has its roots in a revolutionary paradigm shift towards communicative competence in the 1970s, which highlighted the sociocultural aspects of language. Studies suggest a significant gap between the pragmatic competence of native speakers (NSs) and non-native speakers (NNSs) of English (Blum-Kulka et al. 1989; Kasper 1997). This gap can often result in communication breakdown and failure to use language appropriately in social interactions (House and Kádár 2021). Pragmatic failure may lead to negative attributions about non-native speakers' character rather than their limited pragmatic competence. This, along with other complexities observed in cross-cultural communication, has encouraged researchers to examine differences in pragmatic competence between native speakers and non-native speakers of a target language.

Several studies have revealed that interactions between members of different cultures often involve differing pragmatic norms and can lead to miscommunication or pragmatic failure (e.g., Koike 2006; Wierzbicka 2003). Research in this area has led to the emergence of interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) as a new field of study. ILP examines the comprehension and production of linguistic acts, such as discourse regulation among L₂ learners (Kasper and Blum-Kulka 1993), to understand how NNSs perform in the L₂ and how they master pragmatic knowledge. Such studies

are highly valuable for SLA researchers, as they deepen our understanding of the pragmalinguistic¹ and sociopragmatic² differences between native and non-native speakers across a range of social contexts (Kim 2002).

Given the significance of sociocultural competence, politeness has been widely debated since its early formulation by Goffman (1967) and later by Brown and Levinson (1987). Its negative counterpart, impoliteness, emerged in response to the dominance of politeness theory, particularly the work of Brown and Levinson. However, compared to politeness, impoliteness has attracted little attention. Fraser (1990) maintains that over 1000 books, papers, and articles have been published on politeness. Comparing the literature on politeness and impoliteness reveals a substantial gap between the two.

Nevertheless, over the past two decades, scholars such as Bousfield (2008), Culpeper (2008), and Eelen (2001) have questioned the marginalization of impoliteness within politeness research. They argue that impoliteness should be studied as an independent phenomenon rather than being reduced to a dichotomy of the absence or presence of politeness. While politeness concerns how communicative strategies are employed to maintain social harmony, impoliteness research investigates how interlocutors systematically and strategically use language to cause face loss.

Most studies conducted in Iran have focused on cross-cultural differences between NSs and Iranian language learners (e.g., Ahmadian and Vahid Dastjerdi 2010; Tajeddin et al. 2014). While such studies have shed light on cross-cultural perceptions of (im)politeness, the effects of other important variables, such as age, context, background, proficiency level, and gender, on the

¹ Knowledge of linguistic resources/forms, including lexical items, prosodic features, and syntactic forms, and their communicative function (Nguyen 2023).

² Ability to adjust speech according to different social contexts and norms (Harlow 1990).

pragmatic competence of language learners remain somewhat unclear. Due to the scarcity of research in this context, the present study examines the (dis)similarity between native speakers of English and male and female Iranian EFL learners in their evaluation of impolite utterances in apologies. Before we introduce our research method and participants, we will discuss previous research on speech acts, (im)politeness research, and variables of language proficiency and gender in impoliteness research that are most relevant to the current study.

Review of Literature

Speech Acts: Apologies

As Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) indicated, speech acts, which are functional units of communication (Cohen 1995), are considered one of the most challenging areas for language learners. For the past three decades, speech acts have been the focus of research aimed at describing and comparing them across different languages and cultures (Ogiermann 2009). Apologies, defined as a “speech act set of maximal potential semantic formulas, any one of which can act as a minimal element to represent apology” (Olshtain and Cohen 1983, 20), have been the second most-researched speech act realization after requests (Maeshiba et al. 2006). Deutschmann (2003) argues that most studies on apologies have been conducted within the framework of cross-cultural pragmatics, comparing native speakers with non-native speakers of English to analyze the realization of apologies across different cultures and contexts. The aim was to identify (dis)similarities and uncover contextual factors influencing speakers’ choices. Apologies are particularly significant in (im)politeness research for several key reasons.

First and foremost, an apology is realized through a range of universal strategies, including Illocutionary Force Indicating Device³, Taking on Responsibility, an Explanation of the Situation,

³ IFID refers to structures that point to the underlying intention of the speaker’s utterance, either through explicit performative formulas or grammatical moods.

an Offer of Repair, and Promise of Forbearance (Blum-Kulka et al. 1989), and culture-specific ones like underestimating the offence by humour (see Shahrokhi and Jan 2012). The selection and realization of these strategies and sub-strategies constitute an intricate system governed by context-internal (severity of the offence) and context-external (social distance and dominance) variables, which are affected by the cultural norms of the speech communities.

Secondly, although speech events such as apologies are identifiable through routine expressions, they involve complex socio-psychological dynamics. Because apologizing entails a loss of face for the speaker and a corresponding gain for the addressee, the decision to apologize is shaped by factors such as social distance and power relations. Research on speech acts has generated important pedagogical insights for language teaching, showing that even when NNSs demonstrate strong command of syntax and vocabulary, they may still experience communication breakdowns with NSs due to inappropriate use of forms (Blum-Kulka 1982; Rubin 1983). Accordingly, to achieve successful communication outcomes, instruction should address both sociocultural and linguistic dimensions (Olshtain and Cohen 1983).

(Im)politeness Research

The lack of consensus on what constitutes impoliteness makes defining it particularly challenging (Locher and Bousfield 2008). A major reason for this difficulty is that impoliteness is not an absolute phenomenon, since one verbal behaviour regarded as impolite in one situation may not be perceived as such in another. As a result, impoliteness is a context-specific and discursive practice (Culpeper 2011; Haugh and Chang 2019). Culpeper (2011) further noted that his idea of impoliteness has evolved over the years. His latest conceptualization, which we are using in this paper as our operational definition, describes impoliteness as “a negative attitude towards specific behaviours occurring in specific contexts. It is sustained by expectations, desires, and/or beliefs

about social organization, including how one person's or a group's identities are mediated by others in interaction" (Culpeper 2011, 59). This understanding of impoliteness may also overlap with cases of "unmotivated rudeness", where norm violations arise from insufficient linguistic and cultural knowledge rather than intentional face-threatening behaviour (see Kienpointner 1997, 269).

In recent years, (im)politeness and its realization in speech acts have been investigated in the Iranian context, including Adel et al. (2016), Gharaghani et al. (2011), Niroomand (2012), Tajeddin et al. (2014), and Tajeddin and Pezeshki (2014). The somewhat detailed account of two of these studies below can be informative.

Nikoobin and Shahrokhi (2017) examined complaint strategies used by Iranian EFL learners and native English speakers through a multiple-choice discourse completion task (DCT). Their findings showed that social distance significantly influenced the learners' choice of complaint strategies, whereas it did not have a comparable effect on native speakers. In addition, they realized that, overall, both NSs and Iranian learners employed similar complaint strategies in terms of frequency.

In another study, Tajeddin et al. (2014) examined perceptions of impoliteness among 177 EFL learners by comparing them with native speakers' judgements, using an eight-scenario DCT. Nineteen evaluative criteria emerged from the analysis of participants' written comments, 18 of which were shared by both NSs and Iranian EFL learners. The findings further indicated that differences in impoliteness evaluation were not statistically significant, suggesting that both groups perceived impoliteness in largely similar ways.

Language Proficiency and Pragmatic Competence

One who knows a language requires more than grammatical competence; they also need pragmatic competence (Canale and Swain 1980), which allows individuals to understand “how to say what they want to say with the level of formality, politeness and directness required in a situation, or sometimes not to speak at all and communicate intention only non-verbally” (Taguchi 2018, 53). While theoretical models assume that development in pragmatic competence is positively correlated with language proficiency, prior studies have yielded inconsistent results regarding the effect of proficiency level on the production and/or realization of speech acts among language learners across different geographical contexts and speech act types.

Some studies have observed higher sociopragmatic competence in more proficient language learners (see Al-Harbi and Mahfoodh 2021; Li and Suleiman 2017; Rastegar and Yasami 2014) while others have reported no significant difference between language learners’ proficiency levels and their pragmatic knowledge (Dashti Khadivaki 2023; Farashaiyan and Tan 2012; Khorshidi et al. 2016).

A broader perspective on this relationship is offered by Xiao (2015), who synthesizes findings from twenty-eight empirical studies on adult second language learners. The analysis suggests that increased proficiency is generally associated with more appropriate pragmatic performance, as learners at higher levels tend to employ a wider range of strategies and exhibit greater control over L₁ transfer. At the same time, the review highlights that advanced linguistic ability does not automatically lead to native-like use of language in context. Outcomes appear to vary depending on the type of speech act under consideration as well as contextual variables such as social power and status.

Discrepancies in the studies discussed above may stem from evidence showing that language learners demonstrate different levels of pragmatic competence across speech acts (Jin et

al. 2025). Moreover, other variables and factors, such as personality type (Verhoeven and Vermeer 2002), motivational dispositions (Zhang and Papi 2021), age group and study context (Sánchez-Hernández et al. 2024), and beliefs about self-efficacy (Yang and Lian 2023), have been found to affect the development of L₂ pragmatic competence. Due to methodological limitations, it is difficult for researchers to account for all relevant predictor variables, which in turn may lead to inconsistent findings across different research contexts and participant groups.

Before turning to the role of gender in impoliteness perception, it is worth considering sociolinguistic appropriateness at the B₁ and B₂ levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, which, along with gender, are independent variables in this study. This provides a clearer basis for understanding learners' performance in terms of sociolinguistic competence, defined as “the knowledge and skills required to deal with the social dimension of language... linguistic markers of social relations; politeness conventions; register differences; and dialect and accent” (Council of Europe 2020, 136).

At the B₁ level, learners are able to perform a range of communicative functions using a generally neutral register and show basic awareness of politeness conventions. However, their use of these conventions tends to be reactive rather than strategic. Although they can recognize salient cultural differences between their own and the target language community, they do not yet consistently adjust their language to meet sociolinguistic demands. By contrast, B₂ learners demonstrate a more developed level of sociolinguistic competence. They can interpret sociocultural and sociolinguistic cues and adapt their language use in accordance with factors such as formality, social relationships, and interactional context. Moreover, they are typically able to sustain interaction with target language users without causing unintended offence or

communicative strain, reflecting a level of pragmatic control that extends beyond awareness to more flexible and context-sensitive language use (Council of Europe 2020, 137).

Gender and perception of (im)politeness

As Kienpointner and Stopfner (2017) argue, ideologies of impoliteness 1, defined as lay speakers' opinions of what counts as impolite, are shaped by several factors, most notably class, gender, race, and age. Assumptions about gender often shape expectations of appropriate communicative behaviour. In addition to proficiency and contextual factors, gender has been identified as a potential influence on how (im)politeness is perceived and evaluated (Mills 2005; Sung 2012). Accordingly, researchers have examined the role of gender in perceptions of impoliteness across a range of settings, including social interactions (Bataneh et al. 2023; Makarla et al. 2024), academic and classroom contexts (Haider and Zandi 2022; Lorenzo-Dus and Bou-Franch 2003; Saidi and Khosravi 2015), social and mainstream media (Kenski 2019; Sung 2012), and, more recently, interactions involving conversational artificial intelligence (O'Driscoll and Blackwell 2025).

Among studies that have examined this issue empirically, Bataneh et al. (2023) explored how adult men and women in Jordan perceive different forms of impoliteness by drawing on a checklist of thirty-one verbal and behavioural practices. Although participants of both genders generally agreed in identifying these behaviours as rude, women tended to apply stricter criteria when judging what qualifies as offensive conduct. Bataneh and colleagues interpret this pattern as reflecting broader socialization processes, whereby women are often positioned as custodians of communal values and norms of polite interaction. Men, by contrast, appeared particularly sensitive to acts that challenged their personal authority, such as being given orders or having their opinions dismissed.

Along similar lines, Saidi and Khosravi (2015) examined this issue in an EFL setting. The study investigated how Iranian EFL learners evaluate requests that lack conventional politeness markers, focusing specifically on whether gender influences judgments of appropriateness and subsequent verbal and non-verbal responses. Based on data from sixty participants who completed a Discourse Completion Task, findings suggest that men and women largely share similar perceptions of what constitutes impoliteness across social contexts. However, gender differences emerged in behavioural responses, with women at times showing a greater tendency toward direct verbal refusals or complaints. Overall, the authors conclude that variables such as social power and situational context play a more significant role in shaping politeness evaluations than gender alone.

Based on the review above, studies on impoliteness evaluations of apologies slowly started to emerge only after the second half of the 2010s. The paucity of perception studies in this area has also been observed by Chang and Haugh (2011), who attributed this lack to an overemphasis on the production of apologies and the belief that apologies are in and of themselves politeness strategies, neglecting to understand that the same apology could be perceived in different shades by different interactants. Therefore, while a substantial body of studies has examined the production of speech acts, few have examined EFL learners' perception of the impoliteness of apologies, and, most importantly, how language proficiency and gender can shape their understanding of it. To address these gaps in intercultural pragmatics, this study examines the role of proficiency levels and gender in the perceptions of impoliteness in apologies among EFL learners and native speakers and aims to answer the following research questions:

- 1) Do adult Iranian EFL learners with B₁ and B₂ proficiency levels and native English speakers differ significantly in their evaluation of impolite utterances in the apology speech act?
- 2) Do male and female adult Iranian EFL learners differ significantly in their evaluation of impolite utterances in apologies?
- 3) How do Iranian EFL learners differ from native speakers of English in their use of apology strategies?

While the first two research questions focus on the decoding of apologies (i.e., receptive skills), the final question addresses the use of apology strategies (i.e., productive skills). The inclusion of this dimension is motivated by the strong interdependence between learners' receptive and productive language abilities (Aysu 2025), as well as the recognition that both the interpretation and production of sociolinguistic cues and language functions are essential to sociolinguistic appropriateness (see Council of Europe 2020, 136). Accordingly, we extend our analysis beyond the evaluation of (im)polite sociolinguistic cues to examine learners' ability to use appropriate linguistic forms in apologies, compared with native speakers of English.

Research Method

In this section, we outline the study's theoretical framework, describe the demographic profile of the participants, introduce the data collection instruments, explain the research procedure, and discuss the methods used to analyze the data.

In keeping with developments in impoliteness research that have shifted focus from the interpretation of impoliteness theorists (impoliteness 2) to understanding of the participants (impoliteness 1) (Mitchell and Haugh 2015), this study draws on first-order approaches to

impoliteness, which highlight hearers' uptake rather than speakers' intentions in evaluations. From this perspective, whether an utterance is perceived as over-polite, polite, or impolite depends less on what the speaker intended and more on how it is interpreted and evaluated by participants in interaction (Locher and Watts 2008). In other words, assessments of (im)politeness emerge through participants' perceptions, particularly as they comment on, negotiate, and account for behaviour in interaction (Eelen 2001).

First-order theories thus adopt an emic and ontological orientation, in contrast to second-order approaches, which treat (im)politeness as an epistemological construct developed through scholarly theorization and analysis. First-order perspectives conceptualize impoliteness as linguistic behaviour that interactants themselves evaluate negatively when it clashes with their expectations and normative frameworks (Locher and Watts 2008, 81). This shift from speaker's intention to hearer's judgment is further supported by research demonstrating that impoliteness is not always intentional (see Kienpointner 1997, 269). Speakers may at times be unaware of the potential impact of their words or may fail to anticipate how their utterances will be interpreted (Culpeper and Hardaker 2017).

Participants

The participants in this study were divided into two main groups. The first comprised 60 female and 62 male EFL learners. The second group consisted of 31 educated adult native English speakers from Australia, Canada, England, and the United States. The participants in the first group were homogeneous in terms of their mother tongue, Farsi, and age level (+14). However, their proficiency levels varied in line with the two levels under investigation (i.e., B₁ and B₂). The 122

language learners participating in this study were from branches of a well-known language institute in Tehran, and their participation was voluntary.

The native speaker group comprised 31 participants (22 males and 9 females), aged 24–58 years. In terms of nationality, 22 were from North America (14 from Canada and 8 from the United States), five from Australia, and four from England. Regarding educational attainment, 11 participants held a college diploma, 15 a bachelor’s degree, and five a graduate degree. We used convenience sampling, a form of non-probability sampling, to select the participants in both groups. We asked our personal contacts to share information about our study with native English speakers in the countries mentioned above, which explains the larger number of participants from North America. Table 1 below summarizes the description of our participants.

Table 1. *Description of the participants*

	Value		Value	N
	Label	N	Label	
EFL Learners	Male	62	B ₁	57
	Female	60	B ₂	65
	Total	122	Total	122
Native Speakers	Male	22		
	Female	9		
	Total	31		

Instruments

Quick Oxford Placement Test

Due to the mismatch between the institute's language proficiency levels and the CEFR scale, learners were asked to take a brief placement test based on the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (2001) to classify them into B1 and B2 levels. The test consisted of 60 questions covering general English, including 25 multiple-choice cloze test items and 35 multiple-choice questions, which measured learners' command of English vocabulary, grammar, appropriate use of signage, and proper use of prepositions.

Discourse Completion Task (DCT)

This study employed a multiple-choice DCT (see Appendix) adapted from Tajeddin et al. (2014), with its validity established by two experts in pragmatic assessment and its scenarios further refined by an educated native speaker to enhance linguistic clarity. The situations varied according to power, imposition, and distance. DCTs have proven to be useful for data collection in pragmatics research (Kwon 2004; Nurani 2009) due to their ease of administration (Aufa 2012; Varghese and Billmyer 1996) and their ability to elicit a large amount of data in a relatively short time (Beebe and Cummings 2006). They also allow researchers to account for social and situational variables, such as the participant's age, gender, and social status (Kwon 2004). Using DCTs, researchers can recruit a large number of participants, which partially offsets the limitations associated with the small number of situations (Cohen 1995).

Procedure

In this study, we adopted a proactive *ex post facto* design since no active independent variable is present. "Ex post facto (Latin for *after the fact*) research is conducted after variation in the variable of interest has already been determined in the natural course of events" (Ary et al.

2018, 357). After coordinating with the classroom teachers and distributing consent forms, the researchers administered the placement test and the DCT. Participants were asked to provide genuine answers to all questions without resorting to any form of unauthorized help from other learners, print or non-print sources. They were also informed that this score would serve only research purposes and would have neither a positive nor a negative impact on their final score.

Participants were required to read the eight scenarios and their corresponding responses in the DCT after providing their demographic information, including age and gender. They were instructed to choose a number from 1 to 5 based on how impolite they perceived the responses. They were also asked to explain why they thought the given response was (not) impolite and what they would say if they were the offender in a comment section placed below each item.

The above procedure was repeated with the native speakers' DCT. However, since they were not physically available, we invited them to participate electronically via Google Forms in the study.

Data Analysis

For the first research question, we conducted a one-way ANOVA to compare the two proficiency groups, using NSs as the benchmark. The same procedure was repeated for the second research question to understand the effect of participants' gender on their evaluation of impoliteness. To control for the effect of proficiency level on participants' perceptions of apologies and to isolate the role of gender, we conducted within-group comparisons, examining differences between male and female participants at each proficiency level, which means comparing B₁ male participants with B₁ female participants, and B₂ male participants with B₂ female participants only. This approach allowed us to hold proficiency constant while assessing the effect of gender, thereby eliminating it as a confounding variable.

In comparing the responses of EFL learners and native speakers to the scenarios in the third question, we took a different approach. Unlike the first two questions, where we separated EFL learners by proficiency level or gender, we analyzed the data collectively. Rather than examining the effects of gender or proficiency level, we focused on Iranian EFL learners' use of apology strategies as a single group. To that end, we used Cohen and Olshtain's (1981) and Blum-Kulka and Olshtain's (1984) classification of apologies as our analytical frameworks, in which five questions related to different components of an apology (IFID, explanation, compensation, and forbearance, as listed below) were asked and answered for each utterance. The utterance was then assigned to the appropriate category if the answer was positive.

- (1) Does the utterance include an illocutionary indicating force device (IFID)?
- (2) Does it give an account of what happened?
- (3) Does the S take responsibility?
- (4) Does it offer compensation?
- (5) Does it include a promise of forbearance?

Using the detailed explanations provided in the frameworks mentioned above, the second author analyzed the written responses to determine whether they included any of the following elements, regardless of order: a performative verb expressing regret, offering an apology, or requesting forgiveness (Question 1); an explicit or implicit account of the cause (Question 2); expressions of self-deficiency or self-blame (Question 3); a specific or unspecific offer of repair (Question 4); and a promise of forbearance (Question 5). The coding was then double-checked for consistency, after which the first author conducted a random review of the analyses to ensure accuracy.

Results and Discussion

To answer the first research question, we examined the impoliteness evaluation of expressions across B₁ and B₂ levels, using native English speakers as the benchmark for comparison. To this end, a one-way ANOVA was conducted to examine each scenario individually. The ANOVA assumption of homogeneity of variances was checked using the Levene test, and the normality of the distribution was checked using the Shapiro-Wilk test. The results of the Levene test for each scenario are displayed in Table 2. As shown, the homogeneity of variances assumption was met for most scenarios at a significance level of 0.05; however, Scenario 2 ($p = .047$) and Scenario 7 ($p = .004$) violated this assumption. Accordingly, Tamhane's T2 post-hoc test was applied for these two scenarios, as it does not assume equal variances, while standard post-hoc procedures were used for the remaining scenarios.

Table 2. Results of the Test of Homogeneity of Variances across the eight scenarios

	Levene			
	Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Scenario1	.559	2	150	.573
Scenario2	3.111	2	150	.047
Scenario3	.482	2	150	.618
Scenario4	.595	2	150	.553
Scenario5	.187	2	150	.829
Scenario6	.581	2	150	.561
Scenario7	5.714	2	150	.004
Scenario8	1.437	2	150	.241

As presented above, the homogeneity of scenarios 2 and 7 was not assumed (Sig<0.05). Consequently, instead of the LSD⁴ test, the results of Tamhane's T2 were reported in Table 3, revealing that the mean differences were not significant in almost all cases except for scenarios 1, 6, and 7, which we will discuss in more detail below.

Table 3. Results of multiple comparisons for individual scenarios

Dependent Variable	(I) Proficiency	(J) Proficiency	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	
Scenario1	LSD	B2	B1	-.491*	.192	.012
		Native Speaker	B2	.081	.234	.731
			B1	-.410	.235	.083
Scenario2	Tamhane	B2	B1	-.063	.249	.992
		Native Speaker	B2	.581	.262	.087
			B1	.518	.270	.166
Scenario3	LSD	B2	B1	-.163	.211	.442
		Native Speaker	B2	-.081	.256	.754
			B1	-.244	.258	.346
Scenario4	LSD	B2	B1	.026	.246	.917
		Native Speaker	B2	-.387	.299	.197
			B1	-.361	.300	.231
Scenario5	LSD	B2	B1	-.082	.232	.723

⁴ The least significant difference

		Native Speaker	B2	.000	.282	1.000
			B1	-.082	.283	.772
Scenario6	LSD	B2	B1	-.059	.281	.833
		Native Speaker	B2	1.016*	.341	.003
			B1	.957*	.343	.006
Scenario 7	Tamhane	B2	B1	-.243	.228	.641
		Native Speaker	B2	-1.161*	.202	.000
			B1	-1.404*	.221	.000
Scenario8	LSD	B2	B1	.369	.249	.140
		Native Speaker	B2	-.435	.302	.152
			B1	-.066	.304	.828

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

While Hoffman-Hicks (1992) claims that linguistic competence is a prerequisite for developing pragmatic competence, and language users should obtain some level of linguistic competence before conveying their intended message with sociocultural appropriateness, others argue that demonstrating a high level of grammatical competence is not necessarily equal to a high level of pragmatic competence (Delen and Tavitil 2010; Liu 2004; Rattanaprasert and Aksornjarung 2011; Takahashi and Beebe 1993). Therefore, a strong command of the language alone does not necessarily indicate intercultural communicative competence (Griffith and Lim 2024). The findings of the present study are in congruence with those of Farashaiyan and Tan (2012), who investigated the relationship between proficiency level and pragmatic knowledge of English

translation students. They found that participants' pragmatic knowledge was not affected by differences in proficiency.

Scenario 1

Although the comparison between NSs ($M = 2.81$) and proficiency levels ($B_1M = 2.73$, $B_2M = 3.22$) was not significant ($p_{NS/B_2} = 0.731$, $p_{NS/B_1} = 0.083$), the difference between B_2 and B_1 was significant ($p_{B_2/B_1} = 0.01$). In the first scenario, where an employee forgets an important meeting with the boss for the second time, B_1 ($M_1 = 3.22$) participants considered the apology significantly more impolite than their B_2 ($M_1 = 2.73$) counterparts. This might suggest that B_2 learners' perceptions of contextual factors of relative power (P), the social distance (D) between employees and employers, and the cultural imposition of an act (R) are closer to NSs of English ($M_1 = 2.83$).

Scenario 6

Unlike scenario 1, the mean differences in scenario 6 were statistically significant. Comparing NSs and B_2 EFL learners showed mean scores of 3.29 and 2.27, respectively, with a significant difference between the two groups ($p_{NS/B_2} = 0.03$). However, comparisons between B_1 and B_2 , as well as between B_1 and NSs, were not significant ($p_{B_2/B_1} = 0.83$, $p_{NS/B_1} = 0.06$). The difference in the sixth scenario, where the offender broke a small vase while spending an evening in a friend's apartment, was found significant ($p_{NS/B_1} = 0.00$, $p_{NS/B_2} = 0.00$) as both B_1 ($M_6 = 2.33$) and B_2 ($M_6 = 2.27$) drastically diverged from how the NSs perceived apology and the offence ($M_6 = 3.29$). Although the response provided an IFID, an account, and compensation for what happened, NSs still believed it was not appropriate enough. For instance, a participant suggested that the offender should have asked for a vacuum cleaner to clean the mess.

Scenario 7

Although significant differences were found among NSs ($M= 2.13$), B₂ ($M= 3.29$), and B₁ ($M= 3.53$) in scenario 7 ($p_{NS/B_1}= 0.00$, $p_{NS/B_2}= 0.00$), there was no significant difference between B₂ and B₁ ($p =0.641$). As expected, learners with higher proficiency were closer to native speaker norms than B₁ learners. Moreover, across all situations, the mean impoliteness rating for B₂ participants ($M= 2.83$) was closer to that of NSs ($M= 2.78$) than that of B₁ participants ($M= 2.92$). In this case, where one bumps into a colleague, the difference between NSs and B₁/B₂ might relate to Iranians' tendency to apologize more than once out of politeness (Bagherinejad and Jadidoleslam 2015). A similar pattern of offering multiple apologies for an offence has been observed in other Oriental cultures, where merely saying "sorry" is considered insufficient (Barnlund and Yoshioka 1990; Chang 2008). Overall, the findings in this scenario may point to the influence of first language transfer in the acquisition of foreign language pragmatics (see Bardovi-Harlig 2018)

To address the second research question concerning the role of participants' gender in their evaluation of impoliteness in apologies, proficiency was held constant in the analysis. Specifically, comparisons were made within the same proficiency levels (i.e., B₁ male participants were compared with B₁ female participants, and B₂ male participants with B₂ female participants). Before reporting the results of multiple comparisons, a test of homogeneity of variances was conducted across all eight scenarios. The assumption was met in all cases (Levene's test, all $p > 0.05$), and therefore the LSD post-hoc test was applied consistently across scenarios. As shown in Table 4, in none of the eight scenarios did we observe significant differences in the impoliteness evaluation of apologies by participants' gender; in other words, participants' gender did not have a significant effect on their impoliteness perception in the present study.

Table 4. Results of the multiple comparisons for the effects of gender and proficiency across eight scenarios

Dependent Variable	(I) proficiencygender	(J) proficiencygender	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Scenario1	B2male	B2female	.033	.282	.907
		B1male			
	B1male	B1female	-.364	.416	.385
Scenario2	B2male	B2female	.008	.373	.982
		B1male			
	B1male	B1female	-.442	.551	.426
Scenario3	B2male	B2female	-.029	.327	.930
		B1male			
	B1male	B1female	.091	.483	.851
Scenario4	B2male	B2female	.299	.376	.429
		B1male			
	B1male	B1female	.032	.556	.954
Scenario5	B2male				
	B2female		-.361	.353	.309

	B1male			
		B1female	-.325	.521
				.535
Scenario6	B2male			
		B2female	.317	.428
				.461
	B1male			
		B1female	-.799	.632
				.210
Scenario7	B2male			
		B2female	.150	.337
				.657
	B1male			
		B1female	.442	.498
				.378
Scenario8	B2male			
		B2female	.314	.375
				.405
	B1male			
		B1female	-.188	.554
				.735

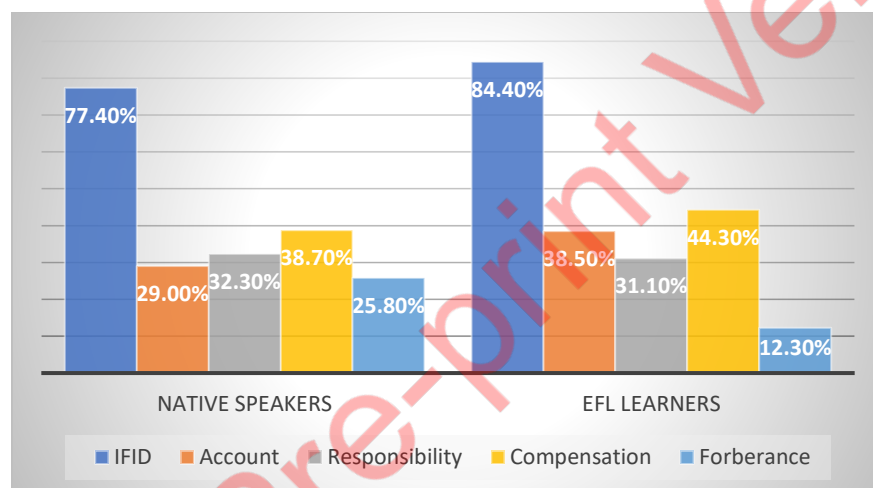
The results of the gender effect are consistent with Chang's (2008) exploration of the differences in the perceptions of impoliteness using an intercultural conversation. The study revealed that the gender of the participants did not significantly affect their perceptions of apologies, and cultural elements were more influential in one's perceptions of impoliteness than the gender of the hearers. Moreover, the results are also in line with Saidi and Khosravi (2015), who found similar perceptions among male and female EFL learners' ratings of impoliteness in requests.

However, Kuhl and Jadidi (2012), who examined the effect of gender on the cognitive knowledge of politeness among ELT students, indicated that males had higher ratings than females

in all three speech acts. They concluded that males had a more expansive repertoire of cognitive politeness knowledge and were able to evaluate impoliteness more effectively than females. Nevertheless, one criticism that can be levelled against their argument is that it is unclear whether the difference between male and female ELT students was significant, as they only reported frequencies, without statistical analysis.

For the third research question, we analyzed the written data obtained from EFL learners and NSs based on Cohen and Olshtain's (1981) and Blum-Kulka and Olshtain's (1984) classification of apology. Figure 1 presents the apology strategies employed by the participants.

Figure 1. Frequency of apology strategy use among EFL learners and native speakers of English across eight scenarios



Striking results emerged from the analysis of the written data for the last research question. From Figure 1, we can see that EFL learners tended to use apology strategies more often than NSs in almost all cases, except the apology strategy of *forbearance*, in which the speaker indicates that the action that offended the hearer will not be repeated. Furthermore, both groups, especially the EFL learners, tended to include an IFID in apologies, which may include an expression of regret (e.g., I'm sorry), an offer of apology (e.g., I apologize), and a request for forgiveness (e.g., excuse

me, pardon me). A Chi-Square test was run to determine whether the differences in strategy use were significant or not. The results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. *The results of Pearson Chi-square Test for apology strategy use between EFL learners and NSs of English*

	Value	Df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.860 ^a	1	.354		
Continuity Correction ^b	.435	1	.509		
Likelihood Ratio	.813	1	.367		
Fisher's Exact Test				.421	.249
Linear-by-Linear Association	.855	1	.355		
Pearson Chi-Square	.960 ^a	1	.327		
Continuity Correction ^b	.594	1	.441		
Likelihood Ratio	.985	1	.321		
Fisher's Exact Test				.406	.222
Linear-by-Linear Association	.954	1	.329		
Pearson Chi-Square	.014 ^a	1	.905		
Continuity Correction ^b	.000	1	1.000		
Likelihood Ratio	.014	1	.905		

Fisher's Exact Test				1.000	.532
Linear-by-Linear Association	.014	1	.906		
Pearson Chi-Square	.311 ^a	1	.577		
Continuity Correction ^b	.126	1	.723		
Likelihood Ratio	.313	1	.576		
Fisher's Exact Test				.686	.364
Linear-by-Linear Association	.309	1	.578		
Pearson Chi-Square	3.533 ^a	1	.060		
Continuity Correction ^b	2.554	1	.110		
Likelihood Ratio	3.165	1	.075		
Fisher's Exact Test				.088	.060
Linear-by-Linear Association	3.510	1	.061		

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 5.27.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

As expected, no significant differences were found in the use of apology strategies between English NSs and Iranian EFL learners. Both groups employed apology strategies in largely similar ways, with the p-value exceeding 0.05. However, a trend is observable in the forbearance strategy ($p = 0.06$). The findings align with those of Olshtain (1989) and Abedi (2016). The latter concluded that there was no significant difference between EFL learners and NSs of English in their use of the apology strategy. The similarity between EFL learners and NSs of English could be justified

on two grounds. First, it might result from the universality of the selection and frequency of apology strategies across languages. As Olshtain (1989, 171) notes, “at a global level of analysis, we can identify universal manifestations of strategy selection ... given the same social factors, the same contextual factors and the same level of offence, different languages will realize apologies in very similar ways”. Secondly, the similarity in the frequency of apology use may be attributed to the fact that apologies in Farsi and English share a comparable formulaic semantic structure and align with the categories identified in other contexts in the CCSARP project (see Afghari 2007; Shariati and Chamani 2010). Consequently, the positive transfer of apology strategies into L₂ could result in an interlanguage that approximates the norms and standards of the target language (see Maeshiba et al. 2006). More recent evidence of L₁ pragmatic transfer is also reported in MacNab and Mavrou’s (2025) study of Spanish speakers’ responses to impoliteness, particularly in relation to how mood influenced their linguistic choices.

Conclusion

This study examined the impoliteness evaluations of B₁ and B₂ Iranian EFL learners and native speakers of English to understand how proficiency levels and gender of EFL learners affect Iranian EFL learners’ evaluation of impoliteness in apologies. In summary, although the difference between Iranian EFL learners and native speakers’ conceptualization of impoliteness was not significant due to the universality of this notion, we observed case-wise differences, partly due to variations in perceptions of social distance, task imposition ranking, relative power, and contextual factors. These findings are consistent with the emic perspective (impoliteness 1) adopted in this study, in that impoliteness is not a fixed property of an utterance but emerges from hearers’ judgments shaped by their expectations. Therefore, we can conclude that universal aspects,

context-specific norms, and cultural schemas can play a prominent role in how impolite remarks are perceived and responded to.

In the present study, reliance on quantitative data and, in particular, a limited native speaker sample size warrants caution in interpreting and generalizing our findings. Therefore, future studies in intercultural pragmatics and impoliteness research could employ data collection and elicitation techniques such as role-plays and interviews, or adopt corpus-based approaches, to gather qualitative data that shed more light on the whys rather than the whats. Moreover, future experimental studies on the effectiveness of pragmatic instruction across different proficiency levels can inform curriculum developers and educators about the most appropriate stage for introducing such instruction.

Furthermore, in light of recent developments in the field, we encourage scholars in this line of research to move beyond the binary distinction of first and second order impoliteness frameworks by adopting a multi-dimensional and prismatic model for impoliteness research (see Haugh 2024), which takes into account both first-order (emic) and second-order (etic) understandings to different extents, rather than treating them as rigidly separate perspectives.

Finally, one pedagogical implication concerns the teaching of impoliteness in EFL classrooms. In light of Talebzadeh and Khazraie's (2024) findings highlighting the underrepresentation of impoliteness acts and responses in ELT textbooks, particularly at lower proficiency levels, we suggest that materials developers and educators incorporate pedagogical models for teaching impoliteness into EFL classrooms at lower proficiency levels to support learners' development of pragmatic competence. Even though our study suggests that Iranian EFL learners and native speakers of English may share a general understanding of impoliteness, differences in how contextual variables such as social distance, power relations, and degree of

imposition are interpreted indicate that impoliteness instruction should go beyond the teaching of linguistic expressions that merely make internal modifications to speech acts to make them polite. A case in point is a four-step model proposed by Félix-Brasdefer and Mugford (2017), which relies on raising awareness, exposing learners to pragmatic input through identification and reflection, teaching grammar as a communicative resource, and conducting discourse-level speaking simulations. This approach will enable students to navigate difficult conversations and sensitive topics with greater care and awareness of factors such as relative power, social distance, and other key variables. However, as noted above, further research is needed before introducing such activities at lower proficiency levels to ensure that students are both linguistically competent and cognitively prepared for these tasks. Another pedagogical implication is that EFL educators can make learners aware of the similarity between apology strategies in Farsi and English to facilitate and expedite their positive transfer to the L₂. Finally, it is recommended that both academics and the broader society reconsider traditional, gendered overgeneralizations about the perception and realization of speech acts, and instead focus on context-specific factors that influence communication.

Disclosure Statement: The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

Funding Details: There are no relevant financial or non-financial competing interests to report.

Authors' Contribution: Both authors contributed equally to the conceptualization, design, analysis, and writing of this study.

References

- Abedi, Elham. 2016. "A Cross-Cultural Comparative Study of Apology Strategies Employed by Iranian EFL Learners and English Native Speakers." *Advances in Language and Literary Studies* 7 (5): 35–44. <https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.all.v.7n.5p.35>.
- Adel, Seyyed Mohammad Reza, Mohammad Davoudi, and Akram Ramezanzadeh. 2016. "A Qualitative Study of Politeness Strategies Used by Iranian EFL Learners in a Class Blog." *Iranian Journal of Language Teaching Research* 4 (1): 47–62.
- Afghari, Akbar. 2007. "A Sociopragmatic Study of Apology Speech Act Realization Patterns in Persian." *Speech Communication* 49 (3): 177–85. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.specom.2007.01.003>.
- Ahmadian, Mohammad Javad, and Hossein Vahid Dastjerdi. 2010. "A Comparative Study of Perception of Politeness of American Reprimands by Iranian EFL Learners and Americans." *The Social Sciences* 5 (4): 359–63.
- Al-Harbi, Hamzeh Mohammad, and Omer Hassan Ali Mahfoodh. 2021. "The Production and Comprehension of Apology Strategies: Effects of English Language Proficiency." *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies* 17 (Special Issue 1): 69–85.
- Ary, Donald, Lucy C. Jacobs, Christine K. S. Irvine, and David Walker. 2018. *Introduction to Research in Education*. 10th ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning.
- Aysu, Semahat. 2025. "Exploring the Relationship between Receptive and Productive Skills in EFL Test Performance: Evidence from a Turkish Preparatory Class Context of a State University in Türkiye." *Asya Studies* 9 (33): 239–52. <https://doi.org/10.31455/asya.1653483>.

- Aufa, Fauzul. 2012. "The Assessment Tool of L2 Learners' Pragmatic Competence: Written Discourse Completion Test (WDCT)." *Journal of English and Education* 6 (1): 41–44.
- Bagherinejad, Issa, and Mohammad Reza Jadidoleslam. 2015. "On the Use of Apology Strategies by Iranian EFL Learners: Do Gender and Proficiency Level Matter?" *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* 5 (6): 1263. <https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.0506.20>.
- Bardovi-Harlig, Kathleen, and Robert Griffin. 2005. "L2 Pragmatic Awareness: Evidence from the ESL Classroom." *System* 33 (3): 401–15. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2005.06.004>.
- Barnlund, Dean C., and Miho Yoshioka. 1990. "Apologies: Japanese and American Styles." *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 14 (2): 193–206. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0147-1767\(90\)90005-H](https://doi.org/10.1016/0147-1767(90)90005-H).
- Bataineh, Rula Fahmi, Ruba F. Bataineh, and Lara K. Andraws. 2023. "How Polite Can Impoliteness Be? A Jordanian Gendered Perspective." *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies*, December 19, 16–28. <https://doi.org/10.29333/ejecs/1740>.
- Beebe, Leslie M., and Martha Clark Cummings. 2006. "Natural Speech Act Data versus Written Questionnaire Data: How Data Collection Method Affects Speech Act Performance." In *Speech Acts Across Cultures*, edited by Susan M. Gass and Joyce Neu. Mouton de Gruyter. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110219289.1.65>.
- Blum-Kulka, Shoshana. 1982. "Learning to Say What You Mean in a Second Language: A Study of the Speech Act Performance of Learners of Hebrew as a Second Language." *Applied Linguistics* III (1): 29–59. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/III.1.29>.
- Blum-Kulka, Shoshana, Juliane House, and Gabriele Kasper. 1989. *Cross-Cultural Pragmatics: Requests and Apologies*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

- Blum-Kulka, Shoshana, and Elite Olshtain. 1984. "Requests and Apologies: A Cross-Cultural Study of Speech Act Realization Patterns (CCSARP)1." *Applied Linguistics* 5 (3): 196–213. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/5.3.196>.
- Bousfield, Derek. 2008. *Impoliteness in Interaction*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Brown, Penelope, and Stephen C. Levinson. 1987. *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Canale, Michael, and Merrill Swain. 1980. "Theoretical Bases of Communicative Approaches to Second Language Teaching and Testing." *Applied Linguistics* 1: 1–47. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/1.1.1>.
- Chang, Wei-Lin. 2008. "Australian and Chinese perceptions of (Im)Politeness in an Intercultural Apology." *Griffith Working Papers in Pragmatics and Intercultural Communication*: 59–74. <https://hdl.handle.net/10779/uow.27714456.v1>
- Chang, Wei-Lin Melody, and Michael Haugh. 2011. "Evaluations of Im/Politeness of an Intercultural Apology." *Intercultural Pragmatics* 8 (3): 411–442. <https://doi.org/10.1515/iprg.2011.019>.
- Cohen, Andrew D. 1995. "Speech Acts." In *Sociolinguistics and Language Teaching*, edited by Sandra Lee McKay and Nancy H. Hornberger, 383–420. Cambridge Applied Linguistics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cohen, Andrew D., and Elite Olshtain. 1981. "Developing a Measure of Sociocultural Competence: The Case of Apology." *Language Learning* 31 (1): 113–34. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-1770.1981.tb01375.x>.

Council of Europe. 2001. *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Council of Europe. 2020. *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment – Companion Volume*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing.
www.coe.int/lang-cefr.

Culpeper, Jonathan. 2008. “Reflections on Impoliteness, Relational Work and Power.” In *Impoliteness in Language: Studies on Its Interplay with Power in Theory and Practice*, edited by Derek Bousfield and Miriam A. Locher, 17–44. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Culpeper, Jonathan. 2011. “‘It’s Not What You Said, It’s How You Said It!’ Prosody and Impoliteness.” In *Discursive Approaches to Politeness*, edited by Linguistic Politeness Research Group, 57–84. Berlin, New York: De Gruyter Mouton. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110238679.57>.

Culpeper, Jonathan, and Claire Hardaker. 2017. “Impoliteness.” In *The Palgrave Handbook of Linguistic (Im)Politeness*, edited by Jonathan Culpeper, Michael Haugh, and Dániel Z. Kádár, 199–225. Palgrave Macmillan UK. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-37508-7_9.

Dashti Khavidaki, Mansooreh. 2023. “The Interplay of Contextual Variables and Language Proficiency in Request Realization.” *Sage Open* 13 (4): 21582440231220457.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440231220457>.

Delen, Büşra, and Zekiye Müge Tavail. 2010. “Evaluation of Four Coursebooks in Terms of Three Speech Acts: Requests, Refusals and Complaints.” *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 9: 692–97.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2010.12.219>.

- O'Driscoll, Aoife, and Alan F. Blackwell. 2025. "Social Norms, Social AI: Investigating the Effects of AI (Im)Politeness and Gender on User Perception." Paper presented at 38th International BCS Human-Computer Interaction Conference. <https://doi.org/10.14236/ewic/BCSHCI2025.66>.
- Eelen, Gino. 2001. *A Critique of Politeness Theory*. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315760179>.
- Farashaiyan, Atieh, and Kim Hua Tan. 2012. "On the Relationship Between Pragmatic Knowledge and Language Proficiency." *3L: The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies* 18 (1): 33–46.
- Félix-Brasdefer, J. César, and Gerrard Mugford. 2017. "(Im)Politeness: Learning and Teaching." In *The Palgrave Handbook of Linguistic (Im)Politeness*, edited by Jonathan Culpeper, Michael Haugh, and Dániel Z. Kádár, 489–516. Palgrave Macmillan UK. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-37508-7_19.
- Fraser, Bruce. 1990. "Perspectives on Politeness." *Journal of Pragmatics* 14 (2): 219–36. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0378-2166\(90\)90081-N](https://doi.org/10.1016/0378-2166(90)90081-N).
- Gharaghani, Zahra, Abbas Eslami Rasekh, Azizollah Dabaghi, and Iman Tohidian. 2011. "Effect of Gender on Politeness Strategies in Greetings." *Cypriot Journal of Educational Sciences* 6 (3): 93–117.
- Goffman, Erving. 1967. *Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face-to-Face Behavior*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

- Griffith, W. I., and Hye-Yeon Lim. 2024. "Teaching Intercultural Communicative Competence in the Foreign Language Classroom." *Mextesol Journal* 48 (1): 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.61871/mj.v48n1-13>
- Haider, Iftikhar, and Hamed Zandi. 2022. "In My Professor's Eyes: Faculty and Perceived Impoliteness in Student Emails." *Lodz Papers in Pragmatics* 18 (1): 197–222. <https://doi.org/10.1515/lpp-2022-0009>.
- Harlow, Linda L. 1990. "Do They Mean What They Say? Sociopragmatic Competence and Second Language Learners." *The Modern Language Journal* 74 (3): 328–51. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.1990.tb01070.x>.
- Haugh, Michael. 2024. "(Im)Politeness as Object, (Im)Politeness as Perspective." *Journal of Politeness Research* 20 (1): 201–26. <https://doi.org/10.1515/pr-2023-0082>.
- Haugh, Michael, and Wei-Lin Melody Chang. 2019. "'The Apology Seemed (in)Sincere': Variability in Perceptions of (Im)Politeness." *Journal of Pragmatics* 142 (March): 207–22. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2018.11.022>.
- Hoffman-Hicks, Sheila. 1992. "Linguistic and Pragmatic Competence: Their Relationship in the Overall Competence of the Language Learner." *Pragmatics and Language Learning* 3: 66–80.
- House, Juliane, and Dániel Z. Kádár. 2021. *Cross-Cultural Pragmatics*. 1st ed. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108954587>.
- Jin, Jing, Yang Yang, and Jieun Lee. 2025. "Assessing Pragmatic Comprehension Competence in Chinese as a Second/Foreign Language: From the Perspective of Speech Acts in Chinese." *International Journal of Applied Linguistics* 35 (4): 2183–200. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijal.12762>.

- Kasper, Gabriele. 1997. "The Role of Pragmatics in Language Teacher Education." In *Beyond Methods: Components of Language Teacher Education*, edited by K. Bardovi-Harlig and B. Hartford, 113–136. New York: McGraw-Hill
- Kasper, Gabriele, and Shoshana Blum-Kulka. 1993. "Interlanguage pragmatics: An introduction." In *Interlanguage Pragmatics*, edited by Gabriele Kasper and Shoshana Blum-Kulka, 3–17. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kienpointner, Manfred. 1997. "Varieties of Rudeness: Types and Functions of Impolite Utterances." *Functions of Language* 4 (2): 251–87. <https://doi.org/10.1075/fol.4.2.05kie>.
- Kienpointner, Manfred, and Maria Stopfner. 2017. "Ideology and (Im)Politeness." In *The Palgrave Handbook of Linguistic (Im)Politeness*, edited by Jonathan Culpeper, Michael Haugh, and Dániel Z. Kádár, 61–87. Palgrave Macmillan UK. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-37508-7_4.
- Khorshidi, Sepideh, Fariba Mobini, and Mahdi Nasiri. 2016. "Iranian English Teaching Applicants' Request and Apology Speech Acts: Special Focus on Language Proficiency." *Journal of Language Teaching and Research* 7 (3): 534 . <https://doi.org/10.17507/jltr.0703.14>
- Kim, Duk-Young. 2002. *A Descriptive Analysis of Korean and English Apologies with Implications for Interlanguage Pragmatics*. PhD diss., University of Florida.
- Koike, Dale April. 2006. "Transfer of Pragmatic Competence and Suggestions in Spanish Foreign Language Learning." In *Speech Acts Across Cultures*, edited by Susan M. Gass and Joyce Neu, 257–281. Mouton de Gruyter. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110219289.2.257>.

- Kuhi, Davud, and Mohammad Jadidi. 2012. "A Study of Iranian EFL Learners' Understanding and Production of Politeness in Three Speech Acts: Request, Refusal, and Apology." *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* 2 (12): 2624–33. <https://doi.org/10.4304/tpls.2.12.2624-2633>.
- Kwon, Jihyun. 2004. "Expressing Refusals in Korean and in American English." *Multilingua - Journal of Cross-Cultural and Interlanguage Communication* 23 (4): 339–64. <https://doi.org/10.1515/mult.2004.23.4.339>.
- Li, Rui, and Raja Rozina Raja Suleiman. 2017. "Language Proficiency and the Speech Act of Complaint of Chinese EFL Learners." *3L The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies* 23 (1): 60–74. <https://doi.org/10.17576/3L-2017-2301-05>.
- Liu, Jianda. 2004. "Measuring Interlanguage Pragmatic Knowledge of EFL Learners." PhD diss., City University of Hong Kong.
- Locher, Miriam A., and Derek Bousfield. 2008. "Introduction: Impoliteness and Power in Language." In *Impoliteness in Language*, edited by Derek Bousfield and Miriam A. Locher, 1–13. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Locher, Miriam A., and Richard J. Watts. 2008. "Relational Work and Impoliteness: Negotiating Norms of Linguistic Behaviour." In *Impoliteness in Language*, edited by Derek Bousfield and Miriam A. Locher, 77–100. Mouton de Gruyter. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110208344.2.77>.
- McNab, Nicola Claire, and Irimi Mavrou. 2025. "How We Are versus How We Are Feeling: The Role of Emotional Intelligence and Mood in Reactions to Impoliteness in L1 and L2." *Journal of Pragmatics* 246 (September): 121–33. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2025.07.001>.
- Maeshiba, Naoko, Naoko Yoshinaga, Gabriele Kasper, and Steven Ross. 2006. "Transfer and Proficiency in Interlanguage Apologizing." In *Speech Acts Across Cultures*, edited by Susan M.

Gass and Joyce Neu, 155–190. Mouton de Gruyter.

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110219289.2.155>.

Makarla, Pavitra Rao, Gitte Henssel Joergensen, Kendal Brice Tyner, Caroline Sprinkle, and Kathrin Rothermich. 2024. “Differences in Politeness Perception of Irony and Prosocial Lies: Exploring the Role of Age, Gender, and Geographic Location.” *Canadian Journal of Experimental Psychology / Revue Canadienne de Psychologie Expérimentale* 78 (2): 100–113.

<https://doi.org/10.1037/cep0000324>.

Mills, Sara. 2005. “Gender and Impoliteness.” *Journal of Politeness Research. Language, Behaviour, Culture* 1 (2): 263–80. <https://doi.org/10.1515/jplr.2005.1.2.263>.

Mitchell, Nathaniel, and Michael Haugh. 2015. “Agency, Accountability and Evaluations of Impoliteness.” *Journal of Politeness Research* 11 (2): 207–238. <https://doi.org/10.1515/pr-2015-0009>.

Nguyen, Minh T. T. 2023. “Pragmalinguistics.” In *The Encyclopedia of Applied Linguistics*, 1st ed., edited by Carol A. Chapelle. Wiley. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781405198431.wbeal0935.pub2>.

Nikoobin, Atefeh, and Mohsen Shahrokhi. 2017. “Impoliteness in the Realization of Complaint Speech Acts: A Comparative Study of Iranian EFL Learners and Native English Speakers.” *International Journal of English Linguistics* 7 (2): 32–51. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ijel.v7n2p32>.

Niroomand, Masoumeh. 2012. “An Exploration of Upper-Intermediate Iranian EFL Learners’ Perception of Politeness Strategies and Power Relation in Disagreement.” *English Language Teaching* 5 (10): 180–191. <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v5n10p180>.

Nurani, Lusia Marlina. 2009. “Methodological Issue in Pragmatic Research: Is Discourse Completion Test a Reliable Data Collection Instrument?” *Jurnal Sosioteknologi* 8 (17): 667–678.

- Ogiermann, Eva. 2009. "Politeness and In-Directness across Cultures: A Comparison of English, German, Polish and Russian Requests." *Journal of Politeness Research. Language, Behaviour, Culture* 5 (2). <https://doi.org/10.1515/JPLR.2009.011>.
- Olshtain, Elite. 1989. "Apologies Across Languages." In *Cross-Cultural Pragmatics*, edited by Shoshana Blum-Kulka, Juliane House, and Gabriele Kasper, 155–73. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Olshtain, Elite, and Andrew Cohen. 1983. "Apology: A Speech Act Set." In *Sociolinguistics and Language Acquisition*, edited by Nessa Wolfson and Elliot Judd, 18–35. Rowley, MA: Newbury House.
- Rastegar, Sanaz, and Fariba Yasami. 2014. "Iranian EFL Learners' Proficiency Levels and Their Use of Apology Strategies." *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 98 (May): 1535–40. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.03.575>.
- Rattanaprasert, Tawan, and Prachamon Aksornjarung. 2011. "The Study of Relationship Between Learners' Knowledge About Grammar and Vocabulary and Pragmatic Competence: A Case Study of 1st Year Medical Students." Paper presented at the Third International Conference on Humanities and Social Sciences, Hat Yai, Thailand.
- Rubin, Joan. 1983. "How to Tell When Someone is Saying 'No' Revisited." In *Sociolinguistics and Language Acquisition*, edited by Nessa Wolfson and Elliot Judd, 10–17. Rowley, MA: Newbury House.
- Sánchez-Hernández, Ariadna, Júlia Barón, and Àngels Llanes. 2024. "The Development of Pragmatic Markers in English as a Second Language: Do Age and Learning Context Matter?" *Languages* 9 (4): 115. <https://doi.org/10.3390/languages9040115>.

- Shahrokhi, Mohsen, and Jariah Mohd Jan. 2012. "The Realization of Apology Strategies Among Persian Males." *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 46: 692–700. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2012.05.183>.
- Shariati, Mohammad, and Fariba Chamani. 2010. "Apology Strategies in Persian." *Journal of Pragmatics* 42 (6): 1689–99. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2009.10.007>.
- Sung, Chit Cheung Matthew. 2012. "Exploring the Interplay of Gender, Discourse, and (Im)Politeness." *Journal of Gender Studies* 21 (3): 285–300. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2012.681179>.
- Taguchi, Naoko. 2018. "Description and Explanation of Pragmatic Development: Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Methods Research." *System* 75 (July): 23–32. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2018.03.010>.
- Tajeddin, Zia, Minoos Alemi, and Sajedeh Razzaghi. 2014. "Cross-Cultural Perceptions of Impoliteness by Native English Speakers and EFL Learners: The Case of Apology Speech Act." *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research* 43 (4): 304–26. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17475759.2014.967279>.
- Tajeddin, Zia, and Maryam Pezeshki. 2014. "Acquisition of Politeness Markers in an EFL Context: Impact of Input Enhancement and Output Tasks." *RELC Journal* 45 (3): 269–86. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0033688214555357>.
- Takahashi, Tomoko, and Leslie M. Beebe. 1993. "Cross-Linguistic Influence in the Speech Act of Correction." In *Interlanguage Pragmatics*, edited by Gabriele Kasper and Shoshana Blum-Kulka, 138–157. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Talebzadeh, Hossein, and Marzieh Khazraie. 2024. “‘Ignoring the Elephant in the Room’: (Under-)Representation of Impoliteness Phenomenon in Popular ELT Textbooks.” *Language Teaching Research* 28 (4): 1311–43. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13621688211029028>.
- Varghese, Manka, and Kristine Billmyer. 1996. “Investigating the Structure of Discourse Completion Tests.” *Working Papers in Educational Linguistics* 12 (2): 39-58.
- Verhoeven, Ludo, and Anne Vermeer. 2002. “Communicative Competence and Personality Dimensions in First and Second Language Learners.” *Applied Psycholinguistics* 23 (3): 361–74. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S014271640200303X>.
- Wierzbicka, Anna. 2003. *Cross-Cultural Pragmatics: The Semantics of Human Interaction*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Xiao, Feng. 2015. “Proficiency Effect on L2 Pragmatic Competence”. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching* 4: 557–581. <https://www.cceol.com/search/article-detail?id=330115>
- Yang, He, and Zheyu Lian. 2023. “Ideal L2 Self, Self-Efficacy, and Pragmatic Production: The Mediating Role of Willingness to Communicate in Learning English as a Foreign Language.” *Behavioral Sciences* 13 (7): 597. <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs13070597>.
- Zhang, Yiran, and Mostafa Papi. 2021. “Motivation and Second Language Pragmatics: A Regulatory Focus Perspective.” *Frontiers in Psychology* 12 (October): 753605. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.753605>.

Appendix

Discourse Completion Task

Instruction: Please carefully read each scenario and the **bolded** response, then decide whether the response is impolite or not by choosing a number from 1-5. Finally, write your comment on why you think the response is or is not impolite.

1. You completely forget a crucial meeting at the office with your boss. An hour later you call your boss to apologize. The problem is that this is the second time you've forgotten such a meeting. Your boss gets on the phone. In order to apologize, you say:

Sorry for not being present at the meeting.

Your comments:

Not at all Impolite 1 2 3 4 5 Extremely Impolite

2. You forget a get-together with a friend. This is the second time you've forgotten such a meeting. You call your friend to apologize. In order to apologize, you say:

Oh dear, I get so forgetful these days but I hope this mistake does not ruin our friendship.

Your comments:

Not at all Impolite 1 2 3 4 5 Extremely Impolite

3. Backing out of a parking space, you run into the side of another car. It was clearly your fault. You dent in the side door slightly. The driver gets out and comes over to you angrily.

In order to apologize, you say:

I'm really sorry about the damage to your car. Accidents will happen.

Your comments:

Not at all Impolite 1 2 3 4 5 Extremely Impolite

4. You promised to return a textbook to your friend within a day or two, after photocopying a chapter. You hold onto it for almost two weeks. You see your friend. he seems to be really upset about the book because he needed it to prepare for last week's class. In order to apologize, you say:

To tell you the truth, I could not photocopy that chapter within the predetermined time.

I am so sorry but I know you will understand.

Your comments:

Not at all Impolite 1 2 3 4 5 Extremely Impolite

5. You accidentally bump into a well-dressed elderly lady at an elegant department store, causing her to spill her packages all over the floor. You hurt her leg, too. In order to apologize, you say:

Oh, I am thoroughly sorry.

Your comments:

Not at all Impolite 1 2 3 4 5 Extremely Impolite

6. Spending an evening at a friend's apartment, you accidentally break a small vase belonging to her. In order to apologize, you say:

So sorry, it happened accidentally. I'll try to buy a similar one for you.

Your comments:

Not at all Impolite 1 2 3 4 5 Extremely Impolite

7. Rushing to get to a meeting on time, you run round the corner and bump into one of your colleagues, almost knocking him down. In order to apologize, you say:

Sorry.

Your comments:

Not at all Impolite 1 2 3 4 5 Extremely Impolite

8. You are riding a bus. You see a man who looks like one of your friends. You go up to him and pat him on the shoulder. The man feels surprised at your behavior. You realize you have made a mistake; the man is not your friend. In order to apologize, you say:

Oh, I mistook you for one of my friends.

Your comments:

Not at all Impolite 1 2 3 4 5 Extremely Impolite

Pre-print Version