Research Paper

Discourse of Requests: (Im)politeness Strategies in Virtual vs. Actual Life of Iranian EFL Learners

Shiva Grami[1], Azizeh Chalak[2]*
[1]Ph.D. Candidate, English Department, Islamic Azad University, Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch, Isfahan, Iran
shiva.grami@yahoo.com
[2]Associate professor, English Department, Islamic Azad University, Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch, Isfahan, Iran
azichalak@gmail.com

Abstract

The rapid development of messaging technologies has bridged the gap between teachers and learners and brought a new style in daily social interactions of the individuals, which promoted concerns about the matter of politeness in interacting via different means of communication. This study investigated the politeness strategies and the levels of (im)politeness in requests made by Iranian EFL learners via Telegram, email, and face-to-face interactions. It also investigated the gender differences via these channels of communication. To this end, 56 upper-intermediate EFL learners were randomly selected and their requests made via different means of communication were collected. The content of the requests was analyzed and coded as bald on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record strategies. The (im)politeness level was rated as very impolite to over-polite. The data analysis procedure included counting the frequency, calculating the percentage, and a chi-square test. The results indicated that Iranian EFL learners tend to use the positive-politeness strategy more than the others. The findings also showed that the requests made via email were significantly more polite those made in Telegram or face-to-face interactions. The outcomes of the interview revealed that the learners tend to transfer Persian pragmatics in chatting via Telegram. The findings of this study could raise the awareness of EFL practitioners and learners and make them conscious in applying more appropriate strategies in their interactions.

Keywords: *Email Interaction, Face-to-face Interaction, Level of (Im)Politeness, Politeness Strategy, Telegram Interaction*

Introduction

These days, the development of smartphone technologies has made interactions easier and faster than before by bringing a special style of interacting such as abbreviate writing or paralanguage features (Hsieh, 2009; Ko, 2018). In recent years, messaging applications such as WhatsApp, Telegram, Skype, and so are considered effective mediums among people. They are now becoming increasingly universally accepted means of communication and social interactions. As Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) and Mobile Mediated Communication (MMC) technologies penetrating humans' daily social activities, email interaction has found its place in all social relationships from formal official to informal friendly occasions. Therefore, applying MMC and CMC technologies as means of communication in the educational environment may bring up many advantages for both teachers and learners such as low-cost-high-quality of interactions, high speed of exchanging information, and unlimited cloud storage.

CMC has been interwoven with all social relations of human beings since decades ago, among them email interactions play a crucial role. Extensive use of the internet all around the world made email a widespread and popular means of interaction (Chalak et al., 2010). According to Chen (2006), email interaction is based on spoken language and written language simultaneously. The presence of emojis and emoticons represent some features of a spoken language, but the absence of body language and nonverbal cues may lead to misinterpretation.

The advancement of technology within a couple of decades ago made many researchers investigate the linguistics and sociolinguistics features of common recently made electronic means of communication, among them, politeness and impoliteness strategies have gained attractions (Chalak, et al., 2010; Sifinou, 2013; Zojaji et al., 2020). At the university level, interactions between students and instructors have been changed to electronic ways, especially email rather than traditional face-to-face interaction (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2007). Najeeb et al. (2012) declared that email interactions have brought a closer contact to the teachers and students. By the development of smartphones, many scholars (e.g., Koivisto, 2009; Miller-Ott, & Kelly, 2017) have examined the effect of such devices, their applications, and their facilities on social behaviors, interactions, and relations concerning politeness.

Many researchers (e.g., Brown and Levinson, 1987; Kamehkhosh & Larina, 2020; Leech, 2014) have proposed the definition of politeness such as Leech (2014) who defined politeness as principals of maintaining the social equilibrium as well as the friendly relations that enables individuals to actively and cooperatively interact with one's interlocutors. Kamehkhosh and Larina (2020) studying Iranian and British culture, defined politeness as "respecting people's privacy and keeping distance" (p. 606); however, they mentioned that the safe distance is different between the Iranian and the British people.

Brown and Levinson (1987) define politeness as "formal diplomatic protocol […] which presupposes that potential for aggression as it seeks to disarm it and makes possible communication between potentially aggressive parties" (p. 1). They also identified the strategies that individuals may use during an interaction. The strategies that they proposed were divided into four categories: (a) bald on record: refers to the situation where the senders of the message try to make no effort to decrease the threat that recipient may infer (e.g., open the door), (b) positive politeness: refers to the situation where the sender of the message tries to reduce the threat to the recipient's face (e.g., *Darling! Would you open the door, please*?!), (c) negative politeness: refers to the situation where the senders of the message is well aware of the level of imposition that his or her request may have, therefore, s/he tries to explain the reason or show the

urgency (e.g*., would you mind if you open the window?! It is too hat in here. I cannot really bear it, but a backache is killing me. It's really difficult for me to walk toward the window*), and (d) off-record: refers to the situation while the sender implicitly made his/her request and make the level of imposition at the lowest degree, in that, the recipient can decide whether to accept it or not (e.g., *Oh it's too hot in here!*).

Lakoff (1989) also defined politeness as a means of communication that minimizes "the confrontation in discourse… and [minimizes] the possibility that a confrontation will be perceived as threatening" (p 102). Culpeper (2009) viewed that politeness is a learned behavior in which individuals practice it both linguistically and non-linguistically. Culpeper believed that politeness is a facilitating tool for interlocutors in any interaction that focuses on the strategies chose to conduct a pleasant social contact, however, choosing offensive and face-threatening strategies considered as impoliteness. On the other hand, Watts (2003) argued that politeness is more than using particular linguistic devices and is more than using some particular strategies. They believe that politeness is a mutually cooperative behavior that constitutes linguistic features maintaining the face and polishing interactions.

Many researchers (e.g., Chalak & Heidari Tabrizi, 2013; Faramarzi, et al., 2015; Leech, 2014; Najeeb, et al., 2012, Molavi, et al., 2018) have focused on different aspects of politeness and genre-based discourse analysis. Some have argued that impoliteness is not always the absence of polite behavior. Sometimes overuse of polite behaviour is also impolite. Leech (2014) advanced it out as a "battle of politeness" (p.7). By the battle of politeness, he means not preserving the balance such as overusing polite behavior. To illustrate it more, he pointed out an example of inviting, declining, and accepting. He uttered that if this process occurred too many times, it was considered as impolite behavior, either impolite behavior from the side of the inviter or the recipient of it.

By the development of smartphones, many scholars (e.g., Chen, 2006; Koivisto, 2009; Leech, 2014; Zojaji et al., 2020) have examined the effect of such devices, their applications, and their facilities on social behaviors, interactions, and relations with regard to politeness.

Nowadays, mobile communication and information communication technologies are penetrating human lives and are getting more and more popular by creating new patterns of communication such as SMS (Koivisto, 2009), WhatsApp, Telegram, and also educational messaging apps such as Tandem. Yulia (2016) declared that the advancement of smartphone technologies has made interactions easier by minimizing and diminishing the distance among people. She pointed to the existence of short message services along with online messengers, such as WhatsApp and Blackberry led to faster and easier communication.

Although email interaction has widely been accepted and nearly all of the official correspondence has been done via email, it is losing its popularity among students because new messaging applications are offering higher speed, more cloud storage, and more paralanguage features such as stickers and GIFs. In Iran also messaging applications such as Telegram, WhatsApp, and Gap have found popularity especially in the educational setting among young learners.

Analyzing postgraduate Arab students, Najeeb, et al. (2012) pointed out that Arab students tend to use over-politeness. They uttered that over-politeness is a polite behavior between Arab nations consisting of asking about health state, saying hello to the family of the interlocutor, and so. They concluded that transforming this kind of behavior into English interactions, actually with non-Arab interlocutors, led them to misinterpret the message as rude or not polite.

The advancement of interactional technologies such as email and online instant messaging made interaction easy for people from all over the world with different cultural backgrounds.

According to Hsieh (2009), world is facing a constant growth in the number of internet users, therefore, interactional technologies are becoming inseparable from our lives. Bargiela-Chiappini (2003) declared that electronic intercultural communication has brought change to our lives and has modified the identified characteristics of face-threatening factors.

Santamaría-García (2017) and Ehrhardt (2020) mentioned that (im)politeness behaviors have emotional and educational consequences for the students. She believed that if the students do not know how to text, email, message, or even speak properly, it may affect the emotions of the teacher, therefore, it may affect the educational process. From the finding of Santamaría-García, one may conclude that it is really important to teach the basis of (im)politeness in virtual or actual behavior to oversea students.

A couple of decades ago, when email stands among the few electronic interactional technologies, many scholars criticized it as it lacks social contextual cues such as nonverbal behavior and the physical environment (Sproull & Kiesler, 1986); however, by the development of electronic paralanguage, such as emotions and emojis, many researchers pointed the important role and the benefits of such features in electronic interactions, (Hsieh, 2009; Metz, 1994).

Culpeper (2009) drew on the benefits of virtual interaction communication mediated through computers and declared that "people who hesitate to express their opinion in face-to-face setting can be more willing to voice their opinion online" (p.41). Hayes et al. (2020) and Metz (1994) illustrated four main usages of electronic paralanguage, the emotional icons or emoticons: (a) verbalizing the physical cues, (b) describing actions, (c) emphasizing, and (d) signifying facial expressions.

Hsieh (2009) called electronic paralanguages "virtual faces in computer-mediated communication" (p.41). He declared that virtual faces conveyed the value and attitudes of the speakers, therefore, it enables the sender to deliver the polite or rather an impolite intention of his/her messages. In other words, emojis and stickers' responsibility is to help the sender and the receiver of the message to interpret the message more correctly.

Many researchers have empirically studied the politeness of virtual interactions. Li (2012) analyze Chinese students' discourse exchanged in Wiki using the Brown and Levinson (1987) strategies. The findings of his study revealed that Chinese students tended to use more positive strategies both to be polite and to make a closer relationship or even friendship with the recipient. Najeeb, et al. (2012) analyzed 18 emails of 6 Arab postgraduate students to their supervisors. Their findings revealed that Arab students used more positive and negative strategies rather than bald off record. They tended to be over-polite and start their emails with over greeting such as asking about the health state of the family of the recipients.

Duthler (2006) analyzed 148 emails and voice mail of 151 undergraduate students. He evaluated the address phrase by rating it on a nine-point scale. He found that text-based emails are significantly politer than voice mail. He declared that this difference might result from the text-based nature of the email that enables students to re-read and re-evaluate their messages several times.

With the advancement of smartphone technologies and the rapid development of new messaging applications, the world constantly faced a growth in using messaging applications in the academic setting (Yulia, 2016). Analyzing politeness issues manifesting in Indonesian and English text messages in a chat board between teachers and school students in Indonesia, Yulia found that there were some features in text messages which were not in line with the principle of politeness, such as poor dictation, ignorance of the address terms, and the issues of power, in that,

the senders surmised they were in an equal or higher state than the receiver, in other words, the text messages were highly sender or task-oriented.

In Iran many researchers have also investigated politeness (Adel et al., 2016; Izadi & Zilaie, 2012; Rahmani et al., 2014). Adel et al. (2016) examined 1520 utterances posted on the class blog from 14 Iranian EFL learners, both male and female. Their finding showed that the Iranian learners frequently used positive strategies to make a friendship and psychologically close relationship with their classmates or instructors within a group. On the other study run over Iranian M.A student of TEFL, analyzing 52 requests made via email, Rahmani, et al. (2014) found that negative politeness is the most frequent strategies used by both males and females. Esfahlan and Boroumand (2020) investigating 100, males and females university students' discourse of their requests, pointed that females tended to use indirect sterategies more than males; however, there is no significant difference between the politeness strategies used by different socioeconomic levels of the participants.

Bargiela-Chiappini (2003) and Watts (2003) declared that the concept of politeness is bound to culture, therefore, the matter of politeness is understood differently within different cultures, because of that, despite the diversity and variety of the study regarding politeness, the field still needs more research and clarifications. According to Chen (2006), email interaction has its writing style. Similarly, specific styles are shaping within the newly developed messaging applications such as WhatsApp, Skype, or Telegram. Being not familiar with such style may lead individuals, here sender of the message, not being seen as polite enough or may lead readers or receivers of the message misinterpreting the intention of the sender (Chalak, et al., 2010). Therefore this study attempted to scrutinize the student requests via email, Telegram, and traditional face-to-face classroom interactions concerning the level of politeness. In addition, to the best knowledge of the researchers, there has been less previous evidence comparing the politeness strategies in the virtual and actual life of Iranian EFL learners. Therefore, the current study aimed to investigate differences in the (im)politeness strategies employed by L2 learners via email, telegram, and face-to-face interactions. In doing so, the following research questions were posed.

Q1. Are there any significant differences in the politeness strategies used by Iranian EFL students to make requests via online platforms vs. face-to-face interactions?

Q2. Does gender make any significan difference in the politeness strategies used by Iranian EFL students to make requests via online platforms vs. face-to-face interactions?

Q3. Are there any significant differences in the level of politeness in online platforms vs. face-to-face interactions?

Q4. Does gender make any significant difference in the level of politeness used in online platforms vs. face-to-face interactions?

Method

Design and Context of the Study

The current study was a descriptive study observing Iranian EFL upper intermediate learners divided into two groups by their gender: male and female. It analyzed the pragmatics of the requests to the instructors via three different means of communication: Telegram chat, email, and face-to-face interactions. It followed up an interview pointing out the attitudes of the learners in making requests via the afore-mentioned means of communication. The data for this study were collected during six months from December 2018 to May 2019. The participants were EFL learners who lived in Isfahan, Iran. Moreover, the interview was done in May and June 2019 in real face-to-face interaction or online face-to-face interactions using Skype and WhatsApp. All of

the participants were university students either at B.A. or M.A level studying English at university. The data were collected from participants with an approximately similar social and economic status.

Participants

The participants of this study were 56 upper-intermediate EFL learners (29 females & 27 males) studying in the different institutes in Isfahan. Their age ranged between 18 to 31 years. All the participants were familiar with email and Telegram messaging applications. The instructors were all Iranian female non-native speakers with the age range of 25 to 35. They all had more than 5 years of experience in teaching English as a foreign language. All of them had master's degrees or were Ph.D. Candidates in TEFL. Tables 1 illustrate the number of requests made via different means of communication.

Table 1
Requests Collected via Different Means of Communication

	Telegram	Email	Face to Face
Male	77	67	79
Female	71	61	73

Table 2 depicts the characteristics of the participants, their numbers, and background information.

**Table 2**
Demographic Background of the Participant

No. of students	**56**
Gender	Both male and female (29 and 27 male)
Mother tongue	Persian
Proficiency level	Upper-intermediate
Background	More than 5 years studying EFL. Never lived in any English speaking country
Academic year	2018- 2019
Instructors	Young female (age range: 25- 35)
Means of education	Institutes at Isfahan, Iran,

Instruments

The participants' requests were first categorized according to the strategies they used in order to be (im)polite. Then, the level of politeness was checked by two raters, using a six-point Likert scale. The content of the messages, either oral or written, was analyzed and coded based on the common and widely accepted categorical schemes introduced by Brown and Levinson (1987). Their principle has been widely used by many researchers (e.g., Adel, et al., 2016; Li, 2012; Najeeb, et al., 2012). This study used the model of Brown and Levinson adjusted by Najeeb, et al. (2012). Figure 1 demonstrates the modified model used in the current study.

Figure 1
Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness strategies adapted from Najeeb, et al. (2012)
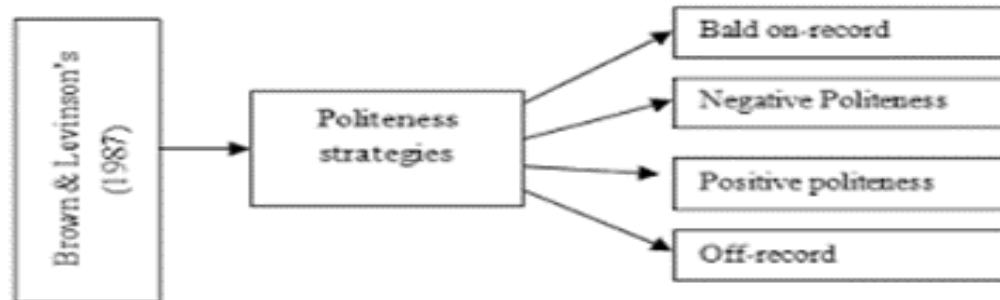
Izadi and Zilaie (2012) pinpointed that Brown and Levinson's (1987) model, concerned with the concept of face, which they defined as "public self-image that all members of the society have and seek to claim for themselves" (p.86). According to Rahmani et al. (2014), these categories demonstrate four different levels of politeness, in that, the first one by showing no attempt to save the face of the interlocutor is considered as completely impolite and the last one by minimizing the level of imposition and maximizing the face maintenance of the interlocutor is considered very polite. To bring an example, the following strategy was considered as negative politeness:

<<Dear XX,
I feel sorry to send my homework so late. It was due to the sickness and a bad headache. Actually, I tried to complete my assignment but I can't. I needed to rest a lot. Would you check my essay, please? I know you have already checked the essay of my classmates, but please!!!
Sorry! 🙇🙇🙇 I hope you will accept my apology.
Thank you
Best Wishes
XX>>

Regarding the level of politeness, current study used a six-point Likert scale (1= very impolite; 2= impolite; 4= polite; 5= very polite; 6= over-polite). The reliability of the scale was checked and calculated by the Cronbach alpha formula, the reliability index was to be 0.82. The construction of this scale was based on a five-point scale (1= very impolite to 5= very polite) made by Mirzaei Jegarlooei and Allami (2018) and Najeeb, et al. (2012) nine-point scale adding the over-politeness as one of the factors influencing polite behavior.
<<Hi
Send us the file. >>
<<Hello. Good morning.
Happy New Year to you and your family.
[🍀 Sticker]
Would you mind check my writing? I have an exam right after the holiday.

[🙍 Sticker]
SORRY, SORRY, SORRY. I know it's your holiday 2.
Thank you in advance
[💐 Sticker]
[❤️ Sticker]
[😔 Sticker]
Wish you and your family a very happy new year
[❤️ Sticker] >>

A semi-constructed interview with open-ended questions was run to find the attitude of the learners toward making requests in three means of communication: face-to-face, Telegram, and email.

Data Collection Procedure

The data of this study were collected during 6 months (2018-2019) and they compromised of 428 requests: 152 requests made via face-to-face interactions whether in the traditional classroom, 128 requests were collecd via email and 148 requests via Telegram chat. The requests contained different topics such as the request for feedback, extending the deadline, extra sources, and scoring the assignment.

Both the traditional and online classes were recorded and all the participants were aware of that, but they were not aware that they were under the study. At the end of each session, the recorded file, whether the voice file of the traditional classroom or the screen recorded file of the online classes, were shared with the learners, in order to listen or watch it to find their weak points and correct themselves. To use these files for the current study, first, the audio and video files were transcribed by words and gestures. In order to minimize the shortcomings of memory, the audio files were transcribed immediately after the classes. In cases that the instructors of the participants were not one of the authors of this study, after transcribing the requests, the instructors were asked to add their learners' tone and gestures producing the utterances. If they failed to remember or if they were not sure about their memory, that utterance was excluded from the study.

Those emails and Telegram messages sent in Persian either with Persian or English script were excluded from this study. It should be mentioned that voice messages in Telegram and forwarded messages both in Telegram and email that their words were not that of the learners, were excluded too. During the data collection procedure, none of the participants were aware of being under the study, therefore, they made their requests freely. In order to observe the ethics of research, after collecting but before analyzing the data, they were informed and those who did not agree were excluded from the study.

Data Analysis Procedure

This study used a quantitative and qualitative approach for analyzing the data on the request of Iranian EFL learners. The unit of analysis was taken to be the level of politeness and politeness strategies. Data analysis included discourse and pragmatic analysis (e.g., politeness strategies, (im)politeness level) and frequency counts (e.g., of strategies and scores on the level of poliness). The politeness strategies were checked according to Brown and Levinson (1987) four categories: bald on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, off-record or indirect. After that, each strategy was coded and then the frequency of each strategy was checked separately for

each group: male and female using Telegram, email, and face-to-face interaction. Then a test of chi-square was run to calculate the significance of the differences that appears between each strategy and/or each group.

In the second phase, the content of each request was analyzed and coded, regarding the level of politeness, by at least two raters. For requests made via face-to-face interactions, there were attempts to have been rated once by the instructor and then by one of the researchers of this study. In cases that the request has been produced by one of the learners or students of the current researchers, then the transcribed form of the request has been checked by one of the experienced colleagues of the researcher. Then wherever and whenever there was a difference between the scores, the raters came together and discussed it, until they came to the unite score. In other words, the inter-rater reliability index checked by Cronbach's alpha formula was 1. To check if the differences between the frequency counts were significant, a chi-square test was run.

The final phase of the study was a semi-constructed interview to check the attitude of the Iranian upper-intermediate learners toward the different means of communication: face-to-face interaction, Telegram chat, and email. To do so, 20 learners were randomly selected from the sample of 56. The reason for choosing the sample size of 20 out of 56 was that the researchers reached the saturation point. According to Burmeister and Aitken 2012, in the qualitative research project, the sample size has been insured when the researchers were faced with repetitive enough data which were able to answer the questions of the study.

After transcribing the interview, the content of the responses was analyzed and categorized. With regard to the similar or repeated answers. Then the frequency of the answers was checked and the percentage of each answer was calculated.

Results

The learners' messages either verbal or written were analyzed with both descriptive and inferential statistics. The data of this study were nominal and based on frequencies. To not focus on the raw data, the percentage of each was calculated. In addition, to find out if the differences were statistically significant, a chi-square test was run.

Table 3 illustrating the tendency of Iranian learners toward using different types of strategies in requesting via different means of communication by counting the frequency and calculating the percentages. It also illustrated the gender and probable differences.

The analysis of Telegram messages sent by upper Iranian intermediate learners revealed that both male and female learners used all types of politeness strategies: bald on-record, positive, negative, and bold off-record. As shown in Table 3, Iranian EFL learners used positive politeness in requesting via Telegram more than other types of strategies. Negative politeness stood at the second stage for males while bald off record stood at the second stage for females. It revealed that Iranian female learners tended to ask more indirectly than male learners. It also declared that the strategies chosen to be used in Telegram were more similar to that of face-to-face rather than email. In order to see if the difference between males and females in using different strategies to be polite in Telegram chat was statistically significant, a test of chi-square was run. The sig. value of 0.676 with the p value of 0.05 revealed that the differences between males and females were not statistically significant.

Taking Table 3 into deeper consideration, it could be inferred that similar to Telegram chat, Iranian learners used all four types of strategies in face-to-face interactions. Just like two electronic means of communication, a positive strategy stood in the first place, both for males and females. Unlike email and Telegram, off-record strategy stood in the second place, that is, Iranian EFL learners, in face-to-face interactions, tended to be more indirect than in interactions via

email or Telegram. Although there is a slight difference between males and females, the Chi-square test with the *p* value of 0.05 revealed that the differences between males and females were not statistically significant.

Table 3
Strategies Used in Requests Made by Different Genders

		Strategies used in making requests				Total	*Sig.*
		Bald on record	Positive	Negative	Bald off record		
Telegram	Male	10 (14.1)	28 (39.4)	17 (23.9)	16 (22.5)	71 (100.0)	.676
	Female	8 (10.4)	36 (46.8)	14 (18.2)	19 (24.7)	77 (100.0)	
	Total	18 (12.2)	64 (43.2)	31 (20.9)	35 (23.6)	148 (100.0)	
Email	Male	0 (0.0)	40 (65.6)	21 (34.4)	0 (0.0)	67 (100.0)	.326
	Female	0 (0.0)	19 (28.4)	46 (68.7)	2 (3.0)	67 (100.0)	
	Total	0 (0.0)	59 (46.1)	67 (52.3)	2 (1.6)	128 (100.)	
Face-to-Face	Male	13 (17.8)	26 (35.6)	13 (17.8)	21 (28.8)	73 (100.0)	.961
	Female	12 (15.4)	28 (35.9)	13 (16.7)	25 (32.1)	78 (100.0)	
	Total	25 (16.6)	54 (35.8)	26 (17.2)	46 (30.5)	151 (100.0)	

The second phase of this study focused on the level of (im)politeness the message carried. As Rahmani et al. (2014) declared, the quadripartite model of strategies advanced by Brown and Levinson (1987) carried different levels of politeness, from completely impolite to totally polite. Using a six-point Likert scale for evaluating (im)politeness, the current study attempted to find out if there is any difference between the level of politeness inferred from the Iranian requests made via different means of communication, either in actual or their virtual life.

Tables 4 cross-tabulated gender and levels of politeness in requests made via three different means of communication. As shown in Table 4, in face-to-face interactions, Iranian EFL learners, either male or female tended to be politer. However, over-politeness (e.g., repetitive polite acts, over-use of greeting) was more frequent in face-to-face interaction rather than any other means of communication between female learners than male. Similar to face-to-face interaction, over-polite behavior can be observed in Telegram communication. Over-politeness might be an act of impolite behavior in some cultures (Najeeb, et al., 2012) yet it was not considered as impolite behavior in Iran.

Taking the bellow table into a deeper consideration, one could infer that the impolite and over-polite behavior has been deleted from the choice of the learners to write Emails. Table 4 also illustrated that Iranian learners both males and females tended to be very polite in requesting via email. Comparing face-to-face and email made it clear that there is at least a 10% decrease in neutral writing and a nearly 30% decrease in polite writing in very polite writing.

The result of frequency counts presented a slight difference between male and female in all three means of communication, however, the chi-square test at p=0.05 declared the difference observed between male and female is not statistically significant.

Taking a closer look at Table 4 and figure 2, one could conclude that the Telegram chat pattern of politeness was more like face-to-face interactions rather than email interactions. The chi-square tests illustrated that the differences in the level of politeness between three different means of communication were statistically significant.

Table 4
Level of Politeness in Requests via Different Means of Communication

		Level of (im)politeness in requests					Total	*Sig.*
		Impolite	Neutral	Polite	Very polite	Over polite		
Telegram	Male	5 (7.0)	19 (26.8)	43(60.6)	3 (4.2)	1 (1.4)	71 (100.0)	.195
	Female	4 (5.2)	15 (19.5)	46 (59.7)	4 (5.2)	8 (10.4)	77 (100.0)	
	Total	9 (6.1)	34 (23.0)	89 (60.1)	7 (4.7)	9 (6.1)	148(100.0)	
Email	Male	0 (0.0)	6 (9.8)	12 (19.7)	43 (70.5)	0 (0.0)	61 (100.0)	.891
	Female	0 (0.0)	7 (10.4)	11 (16.4)	49 (73.1)	0 (0.0)	67 (100.0)	
	Total	0 (0.0)	13 (10.2)	23 (18.0)	92 (71.9)	0 (0.0)	128 (100.)	
Face-to-Face	Male	2 (2.7)	18 (24.7)	40 (54.8)	7 (9.6)	6 (8.2)	73 (100.0)	.675
	Female	1 (1.3)	16 (20.3)	42 (53.2)	8 (10.1)	12 (15.2)	79 (100.0)	
	Total	3 (2.0)	34 (22.4)	82 (53.9)	15 (9.9)	18 (11.8)	152 (100.0)	

Figure 2
Levels of (im)politeness in different means of communication.
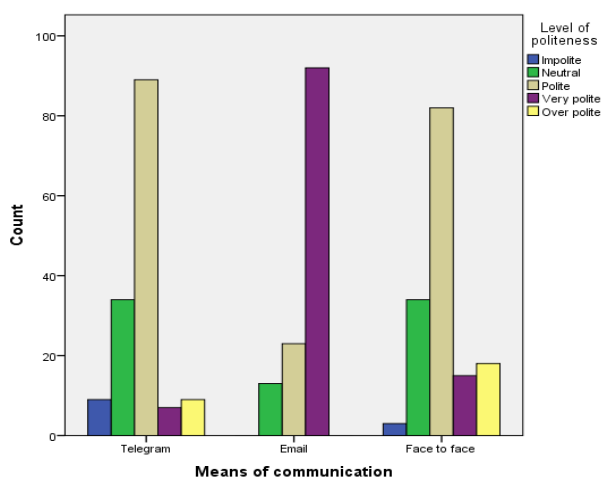
The third phase of the study was a semi-constructed interview with open-ended questions. The repetitive answers were collected and the frequency and percentage of them were calculated. The results of the interview revealed that almost all of the participants (95%) were aware of their different styles for writing email or chatting in Telegram and were aware of the difference between requesting in a face-to-face manner or in the electronic way either email or Telegram. The majority of them (85%) declared that email interactions induced a kind of pressure on them in order to be very polite and very formal. About 90% of them declared that they have never interacted with their friends via email. For 80% of them, email interaction is limited to interact

with their university instructors/professors. About 65% of the participants believed that email interaction belonged to old or psychologically distanced persons. Half of the participants declared that in email interaction, they were always worried about the misinterpretations of the recipient, however, half of the others declared that using emojis, they tried to reduce the chance of misinterpretations. Majority of the interviewee declared that they feel more at ease to request something in person rather than via Telegram or email. In addition, many of them (80%) declared that they feel the more intimate atmosphere in Telegram chat rather than email. They also tried to actively make a closer and more intimate interaction in Telegram constantly.

In responding to the questions about their view toward emojis and stickers, 85% of them declared that they used emojis a lot in interactions with their instructors because they are faster and easier than typing some things. About using stickers, the majority of the interviewee (90%) uttered that they help them to show their true emotions.

Responding to the questions about transferring cultural behavior (e.g., over-politeness), 35% of them declared that they were not aware of such differences until the moment of the interview and the reason that they had not ever used it in the email was that the style of email writing that they have learned did not allow them to produce such sentences. On the other hand, 65% declared that they were aware of the differences, however, a few of them uttered that they used it in Telegram chat and face-to-face interactions mindfully because they think that in interacting with an Iranian instructor they have to follow the Iranian cultural rules, regardless of the language they were sharing.

Discussion

Tables 3 and 4 showed that Iranian EFL learners learned the pragmatics of email writing better than the pragmatics of chatting via Telegram or interacting in a face-to-face manner. To bring an example, there was no ill-formed, impolite, or inappropriate request such as <<send me the book 🍀 ❤️ >> in messages sent via email. On the other hand, the phrases like would you please, do you mind, and could you please were frequently seen in emails. The results showed that these learners transfer the pragmatics of Persian into English by chatting via Telegram and in face-to-face interactions. Combining all phases of this study, it can be concluded that the Iranian EFL learners need more training on the pragmatics of semi-formal and informal discourse to prevent being impolite, rude, and/or busybody.

The findings of Table 3 provided the answer for the first two research questions, in that, there are significant differences between the politeness strategies and the means of communication. The statistical findings also revealed that there was no significant difference between the strategies male and female used in different means of communication. The outcomes of the first phase of this study are in line with the findings of Adel et al. (2016), Li (2012) and Chalak (2018), but tend to be not in accordance with the findings of Rahmani et al. (2014), in that, the most frequent strategy was used by both Iranian males and females was the negative politeness, the result of the first phase of this study showed that positive politeness was the most favorable strategies used by Iranian male and female EFL learners in all types of means of communication. The findings of the second phase of the current study answered the two last research questions, in a way that, there were significant differences between the level of politeness and the means of communication, however, the differences between males and females were not significant.

The findings of this study are in line with those of Duthler (2006), in that the politeness of text-based emails was significantly higher than voice males. The outcomes of this phase tended

to disagree with the result of Najeeb et al. (2012) that declared learners tended to be more over-polite in email interactions. Yet the concept of politeness is bound to the different cultures (Chapini, 2003; Watts, 2003); therefore, the findings of this study may agree or disagree with the result of many other pieces of research.

Duthler (2006) declared the reason that text-based email interaction was politer than voice mail or real interaction is that the learners have more time to re-read and re-evaluate their messages. On the other hand, Chen (2006) uttered that email interaction has its specific writing style which causes the difference in choosing different strategies and different levels of politeness. To find out the reasons for the difference between email, Telegram, and face-to-face level of interaction, the third phase of the study was run which was having an interview with participants about their attitudes toward email, Telegram, and face-to-face interactions.

To put it in a nutshell, the result of this interview revealed that the reason behind the different strategies and different levels of politeness in email, Telegram, and face-to-face communication within the requests made by Iranian EFL learners was more in line with the viewpoint of Chen (2006) who declared that email interaction has its writing style which makes it different from the others. Expanding his points of view and comparing it with the outcomes of this study, one could conclude that messaging applications also have their special style which is not as formal as email and is not just like face-to-face interactions, in that, although paralanguage features have come in handy and make Telegram chat closer to real face-to-face interactions, it still lacks facial expressions and body languages.

Conclusion

The current study aimed to examine the requests Iranian upper-intermediate EFL learners sent to their instructors in different means of communications (Telegram, email, face-to-face interaction) to find out which politeness strategies were used more frequently and find out the level of politeness carried by each message. It also aimed to find out the attitude of learners toward aforesaid three different means of communication.

The first phase of this study concerned the most frequent politeness strategy. The content of each request was analyzed and coded according to the quadripartite model of Brown and Levinson (1987): bald on-record, positive, negative, and off-record. The results of the study showed that positive politeness strategy in all three different means of communication and for both male and female was the most frequent and the most favorable strategy.

The second phase of the study concerned with the level of (im)politeness carried by each message and inferred by the instructors and the raters. The results indicated that the level of politeness has been changed by changing the means of communication, in that, learners tended to be very polite in requesting via Email, while they tend to be just polite in telegram and face-to-face manner. In addition, the outcomes of the study showed that there was no difference between the male and female level of politeness nor the strategies they chose to be polite to make requests using different means of communication.

The third phase of the study interviewed the participants to find out the learners' attitude toward politeness in their virtual and actual life. The result showed that the majority of them feel more at ease to request their instructors in a face-to-face manner to reduce misinterpretations. Futhermore, most of the interviewees preferred requesting in Telegram rather than email in cases they could not make an appointment with their instructors. The analysis of the interview revealed some more interesting reality of learners' views toward politeness in different means of communications such as nearly half of them indicated that email interactions put more psychological pressure on them to be very polite because they were concerning a lot about

misinterpretations of their instructors. Analysis of the interview indicated that the presence of paralanguage features in Telegram such as stickers came in handy for Iranian EFL learners' communication, in that, they decreased misinterpretation and speeded up the communications. In addition, it revealed that the tendency of nearly one-third of the participant toward using over-polite behavior is their lack of cross/inter-cultural communicative knowledge and competence.

This study might have implications at both micro and macro levels. The results of this study might have implications for teachers in the institute, in that, not to push the learners to communicate via email in order to decrease the psychological pressure until they find a solution to teach them how to interact via email without being worry about misinterpretation following the most appropriate style in addition to teaching them how to request things in messaging applications in the way that the message carries an appropriate level of politeness while making it in line with the nature of online messaging applications which is speed and briefness. It also may imply teachers teaching geographically distanced students to teach them the pragmatics of the target language in informal, semi-formal, and formal discourses focusing on both writing and speaking skills to teach them how to be polite. Moreover, this study might have implications for policymakers or material developers to provide opportunities for EFL learners to study the cultural differences focusing on the matter of politeness.

The instructors who participated in this study were all young females; therefore, interested researchers may want to find out if the gender of the instructor affects the strategies and the level of (im)politeness in the messages sent by the learners. Moreover, both the participants and the instructors were young in this study it can be duplicated with instructors and learners from different generations.

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