

## Cross-cultural Study of Iranian and English Students' Impoliteness and Threat Responses

Maryam Farnia<sup>1\*</sup>, Zahra Sheibani<sup>2</sup>

1. Department of English Language and Literature, Payame Noor University, Iran

2. Department of English, Khorasgan (Esfahan) Branch, Islamic Azad university,  
Khorasgan, Iran

\*Corresponding author: mfarnia@nj.isfpnu.ac.ir

Received:

Accepted:

Online publication: 2020.3.18

### Abstract

The purpose of the present study is to compare the impoliteness strategies employed by Iranian and English students in English and Persian Languages. The participants consisted of 60 Iranian EFL learners at intermediate level of language proficiency, 60 Iranian non-English major students, and 212 native English-speaking students. The data were collected through an open-ended questionnaire in the form of discourse completion task where responses to different threatening situations were elicited. The questionnaire consisted of six situations with variations in social power. The data were analyzed based on Limberg's (2009) model of threat responses. The findings showed variations in the use of strategies employed with variation of social power in different situations. Moreover, the overall findings displayed the frequent use of tendency strategies, that is, toward compliance, toward non-compliance, by the three groups of respondents. It is hoped that the findings of this study can add to the body of knowledge in impoliteness studies and to our understanding of how threat responses vary cross-culturally in particular.

**Keywords:** impoliteness, responses to threats, EFL learners, contextual variables

## Introduction

As an intrinsic offensive social activity (Geluykens & Limberg, 2012), threats are considered as a face-threatening act (Brown & Levinson, 1987), and face-threatening acts are often studied under impoliteness (Chang & Haugh, 2011). People might perceive threats in a wide range of forms from the consequences of failing to pay a bill, or talking to someone they should not, to not showing up on time at work or being reported to a boss, etc. The response to threats, however, could range from mild to severe, depending on the contextual variable of distance and power between the interlocutors, the degree of threats or the gender of interlocutors.

A large and growing body of literature has investigated the concept of impoliteness in various genres. For example, researchers have investigated impoliteness in military discourse (Culpeper, 1996), media (Jan & How, 2015), political discourse (Khurniawan, Wijayanto & Hikmat, 2017), internet discussion forums (Shum & Lee, 2013), legal discourse (Archer, 2011), speech acts (Félix-Brasdefer, 2006), literary works (Culpeper, 1998; Rudanko, 2006), second or foreign language context (Mugford, 2007), and interaction in academic contexts (Santamaría-García, 2017). Moreover, some studies have investigated linguistic impoliteness in various languages like Spanish (Marco, 2008), German (House, 2010), Japanese (Nishimura, 2010), Polish (Górska, 2014), English (Limberg, 2009), and Persian (Ghasempour & Farnia, 2016; Jannejad, Bordbar, Bardideh, & Banari, 2015; Mahmoodi & Salimiyan, 2016; Rahmani, Modarresi, Ghiasian, & Zandi, 2016, to name a few).

Despite its importance, however, few studies have drawn their attention to the impoliteness in the threatening situations. As Bousfield (2007a) puts it, the majority of these studies “rarely consider how addressees (or other receivers) respond to a producer of a face-threatening utterance” (p.2185). In other words, few studies have investigated addressee's responses to verbal threats (e.g. Geluykens & Limberg, 2012; Limberg, 2009; Song, 1995). One of the manifestations of impoliteness is face attacks and the responses given to it. Threats take the form of "If you do (not) do X, I might (not) do Y" (Limberg, 2009; Tedeschi, 1970). The success of a threat is seen from the extent of the addressee's compliance to the desired act or avoidance of

negative consequences, and depends on the status and power of the threatener. In some cases, speakers might create situations which deliberately cause conflicts among interlocutors, an example of which is a verbal threat. A verbal threat can make the interlocutors do or say something which might have an unfavorable outcome (Limberg, 2009; Tedeschi, 1970).

According to Harris (1984), it is hard to define what threats are. Threats do not figure in Searles's (1976) taxonomy of speech acts; yet, Fraser (1975) considers them as illocutionary acts and a subtype of speech act of warning. Many researchers have investigated threats from different perspectives such as in court (Harris, 1984), conflict talks (Limberg, 2008), gender variation (Geluykens&Limberg, 2012), and impoliteness (Limberg, 2009).

Limberg (2009) studied impoliteness strategies in response to threatening situations, describing the function and use of the threat responses in interaction and the conflict behaviors from the perspectives of the addressees. Using an open-ended questionnaire in the form of a discourse completion task, Limberg collected data from 212 British native speakers of English to study the addressees' tendency in a specific conflict situation. The data were analyzed based on a revised framework by Limberg (2003), and Limberg and Geluykens (2007). The revised framework incorporating five categories is presented in Table 1.

Table 1  
*Description of Limberg's (2009) Framework*

Response Categories		Description
Preferred	Compliance (C)	"A response that signals the target's (purported) intention or willingness to comply with threatener's demands will be taken as a form of compliance" (p.1385).
	Toward compliance (TC)	"These utterances are not as explicit and straightforward in terms of the speaker's response tendency as those instances in the C and NC category because they often combine different strategies" (p.1387).
Open-ended	Open ended (OE)	"... is included to account for those instances that are openly interpretable in terms of their illocutionary function and linguistic form"(p.1387).
Dispreffered	Toward non-compliance (TNC)	"These utterances are not as explicit and straightforward in terms of the speaker's response tendency as those instances in the C and NC category because they often combine different strategies" (p.1387).
	Non-compliance (NC)	"A non-compliance response ... potentially resulting in an unsuccessful threat which would then lead to further dispute" (p. 1385).

The findings of his research showed that the majority of responses tended to use *towards compliance* or *non-compliance* strategies. In addition, the results indicated a higher degree of compliance and toward compliance responses to threats uttered by a person of equal status. In the same vein, Geluykens and Limberg (2012) found that “the majority of treat responses yielded preferred (compliant) responses regardless of the gender of the addressee; gender of the addressee has a major influence on the response type chosen” (p.10). According to Limberg (2009), the categories do not represent a polite or impolite value associated with a response; yet, while categories such as TNC or NC can be quite face-threatening as well as dispreferred behavior, categories of TC and C can carry a face-saving attribute.

Following Limberg’s study, the present cross-cultural research aimed to investigate how the Iranian addressees might respond to an offensive act such as a verbal threat made deliberately in a conversation. As a culture-specific concept, impoliteness and threat responses are examined among three groups of respondents: Iranian EFL learners at intermediate level of language proficiency, Iranian non-English major students, and native English-speaking students. Thus, the primary objective is addressing the following issue:

What strategies Iranian EFL learners, non-English major students, and native English-speaking students use in situations of threat responses with variations of social status.

## Method

### Participants

The Iranian participants were 60 EFL learners and 60 non-English major students. The data for native English speaking students were adopted from Limberg’s (2009) study of impoliteness and threat responses published in the *Journal of Pragmatics*. The total number of English speaking students was 212. The Iranian EFL learners were selected based on a self-reported language proficiency questionnaire from among MA students majoring in English Language Teaching at Azad University of Khorasgan, Iran. We then collected the questionnaires of those students who reported themselves as

intermediate level of language proficiency. Then, a number of 60 questionnaires were randomly selected from the completed questionnaire. The EFL corpus consisted of 44 females and 16 males with the age range 24 to 40 years old. The non-English major corpus consisted of non-English major students including 49 females and 11 males at the age range of 22 to 35 years old. The native English-speaking student corpus was reported to be 212 British students and at college level.

### **Instrument**

The data were collected through an open-ended questionnaire in the form of a discourse completion test (DCT) adopted from Limberg's (2009) study created to elicit participants' strategies and responses to different threatening situations. The English questionnaire consisted of six hypothetical situations to elicit strategies the participants may use in a threatening situation. Despite shortcomings in obtaining authentic responses for naturally occurring threats and responses to threats, DCT has yet its own advantage for data collection in pragmatic studies. In fact, Geluykens and Limberg (2012) consider DCT as an efficient technique for collecting data on face-threatening speech acts because of the potential to control social variables such as gender and social distance. A translated Persian version of the questionnaire was distributed among non-English major students.

### **Procedure and Data Analysis**

The study was conducted during spring semester 2018. The questionnaires were distributed voluntarily at the end of the classes with prior permission from the class lecturers. The questionnaires were distributed among the participants, the instructions were given, and the participants had around 30 to 45 minutes to fill out the questionnaires. The questionnaire composed of six situations with variations in social power (i.e., status) relative to the speaker with lower, equal and higher social power. The participants could opt out whenever they wished to do so. After the questionnaires were distributed, the DCT questionnaire was explained as follows: the participants were asked to read each situation, imagine themselves in the situations and write down what they would say to respond to the threats or face attacks in different contexts. The instructions for the writing task were provided in English and Persian in written forms as well, and no further instructions were given. To analyze the data, Limberg's (2009) model of impoliteness and threat responses with five categories of compliance, toward compliance, open-ended, toward non-compliance, and non-compliance were adopted. To ensure rater reliability, the coded questionnaires were checked by two researchers yielding the interrater

reliability index. Descriptive statistics (i.e., frequency and percentage) were drawn upon to analyze the data.

### Results

The results for the situations with similar contextual variables are presented together. Therefore, situations 1 and 4, 2 and 5, and 3 and 6 with similar social status relative to the speaker are presented in one subsection. The examples from EFL learners and non-English major students were extracted from the research corpus.

#### Situation 1 and 4: High Social Status

In the first and fourth situations, the participants were exposed to a threat made by an interlocutor who has been in a higher social status. Situation 1 is as follows:

You have to park your car in a non-parking area at the station because you are late to pick up your parents. A policeman has watched you, comes up to you and says: "This is a non-parking area where you have just parked. If you do not move your car, I will have to give you a ticket."

Examples for the responses given for situation 1 are as follows:

"Ok, I will change" (C, S1, EFL learner corpus)

"Ok, no problem. I have to pick up my parents very soon, after that yes." (TC, S1, EFL learner corpus)

"I always obey the rules but this is urgent situation, Please don't give me a ticket. I will go soon." (TNC S1, EFL learner corpus)

"I have to park here for five minutes because my parents are waiting for me. Give me a ticket" (NC, S1, EFL learner corpus)

«ببخشید همین الان حرکت می کنم. فقط یک دقیقه» (TC, Iranian non-English major corpus)

«سرکار، خیلی طول نمی کشه! دیرم شده» (TNC, Iranian non-English major corpus)

«من کارم رو زود انجام میدم و میرم. پدر و مادرم پیر هستند و باید اینجا بایستم. اگه میخواهید جریمه کنید.» (NC, Iranian non-English major corpus)

Table 2 presents the distribution of strategies in frequency and percentage in Situation 1. As shown in Table 2, the most frequently used strategy in the EFL learners and native English-speaking student corpus was *toward non-*

*compliance* (TNC) strategy. In other words, this strategy was used in 50.94% and 43.34% of native English-speaking student corpus and EFL learner corpus, respectively. This strategy was used in 33.35% of Iranian non-English major corpus.

Table 2

*Distribution of Strategies in Situation 1 (higher social status)*

Situation 1		EFL Learner Corpus		Non-English Major Student Corpus		Native English-Speaking Student Corpus	
		F	%	F	%	F	%
Preferred	C	17	28.34	15	25	73	34.43
	TC	13	21.66	23	39	26	12.26
Open-ended	OE	0	0	0	0	2	0.94
Dispreferred	TNC	26	43.34	19	31	108	50.94
	NC	4	6.66	3	5	3	1.43
Total		60	100%	60	100%	212	100%

Note: C: Compliance, TC: Toward Compliance, OE: Open Ended, TNC: Toward Non-Compliance, NC: Non Compliance

The second most frequently used strategy was *compliance* (C) in the native English-speaking student corpus and EFL learner corpus with occurrences of 34.43% and 28.34% in the two groups, respectively, while the Iranian non-English major group utilized TNC as the second most frequent strategy. Results also showed that the open ended (OE) strategy was used in 0.94 % of the native English-speaking student corpus while this strategy was absent in EFL learners and Iranian non-English major corpus. Moreover, with the exception of OE strategy, the NC strategy was the least frequent strategy in the three groups.

Table 3 presents the distribution of strategies in frequency and percentage in Situation 4. Situation 4 is as follows:

You are taking the train to see a friend of yours in London. A few minutes before the train leaves you arrive at the station. You quickly buy the ticket at the ticket machine and rush to the platform. When the guard wants to see your ticket on the train you can't find it anywhere. She says to you: "Travelling without a ticket is forbidden. If you do not have a ticket, I will have to charge you \$ 50.

- Examples for the responses given for situation 4 are as follows:
- “Wait please! I’ll find it.” (TC, EFL learners’ corpus)
- “I bought it but I cannot find it. Please let me find it.” (TC, EFL learners’ corpus)
- “I lost my ticket” (OE, EFL learners’ corpus)
- “No problem! I pay the money because I want to see my friend.” (C, EFL Learners’ corpus)
- “I bought a ticket, I swear! Why don’t you believe me?” (TNC, EFL learner’s corpus)
- «C, Iranian non-English major corpus) «به خدا بلیط دارم. الان پیداش میکنم میدم».
- «TNC Iranian non-English major corpus) «اما من بلیط گرفتم. پولشو دادم. جریمه کن اما گردن خودت».

Table 3  
Distribution of Strategies in Situation 4 (higher social status)

Situation 4	EFL learner Corpus		Non-English Major Student Corpus		Native English-Speaking Student Corpus		
	F	%	F	%	F	%	
Preferred	C	17	28.34	11	18	12	5.65
	TC	33	55	36	60	112	52.83
Open-ended	OE	4	6.66	1	2	15	7.08
	TNC	6	10	9	15	56	26.42
Dispreferred	NC	0	0	3	5	17	8.02
	Total	60	100%	60	100%	212	100%

Note: C: Compliance, TC: Toward Compliance, OE: Open Ended, TNC: Toward Non-Compliance, NC: Non Compliance

As shown in Table 3, TC was the most frequently used strategy in responding to the threat by the three groups in the fourth situation. This strategy occurred in 52.83%, 55 %, and 63.15 % of native English-speaking student corpus, EFL learner corpus and Iranian non-English major corpus, respectively. Moreover, the second most frequent strategy in the native English-speaking student corpus was TNC (26.42%) and C was the second most frequently used strategy in EFL learner corpus (28.33%), while these two strategies (i.e. C and TNC) were the second most frequently used

strategies in the Iranian non-English major corpus (15.78%, each). The results showed that NC was absent in EFL learner corpus, and OE and C were the least frequently used strategy in Iranian non-English major corpus (1.75%) and native English-speaking student corpora (5.65%), respectively.

Table 4 displays the overall distribution of strategies in situation 4 and 1 where the speaker has a higher social status relative to the other interlocutor. As shown in Table 4, the EFL learner corpus and Iranian non-English major corpus used Toward Compliance Strategy more frequently in situations where the speaker has a higher social status, while the native English-speaking student corpus used Toward-Non-Compliance more frequently in these situations.

Table 4

*Overall Distribution of Strategies in Situations 4 & 1 (Higher Social Status)*

Situation 1+4		EFL learner Corpus		Non-English Major Student Corpus		Native English-Speaking Student Corpus		X <sup>2</sup>	Sig
		F	%	F	%	F	%		
Preferred	C	34	28.3	26	21.7	85	20.0	3.76	.152
	TC	46	38.3	59	49.2	138	32.5	11.32	.003*
Open-ended	OE	4	3.3	1	0.8	17	4.0	----	.261
Dispreferred	TNC	32	26.7	28	23.3	164	38.7	13.12	.001*
	NC	4	3.3	6	5.0	20	4.7	.494	.781
Total		120	100	120	100	424	100		

Note: C: Compliance, TC: Toward Compliance, OE: Open Ended, TNC: Toward Non-Compliance, NC: Non Compliance

Results of the chi-square also showed that Iranian EFL learners and Iranian non-English major corpus used TC significantly more frequently than native English-speaking student corpus, while the latter group used TNC significantly more compared to Iranian EFL learners and Iranian non-English major corpora.

### Situations 2 and 5: Equal Social Status

In the second and fifth situations, the participants were exposed to a hypothetical threat by an interlocutor who has an equal status relative to the addressee.

Table 5 presents the distribution of strategies in frequency and percentage in Situation 2. Situation 2 is as follows:

A fellow student of yours helps you out with your English homework and even gets some former exam papers for you to practice. In return, you promised to help him with the proofreading of his term paper, which you cannot do for lack of time. When you meet him he says to you: "You were supposed to proofread my paper. If you do not help me with my paper, you must not count on my help any longer."

*Examples for the responses given for situation 2 are as follows:*

"Sorry, I was very busy last week, but I promise to help you in the next week" (TC, EFL learner's corpus)

"Ok, never mind." (NC, EFL learner's corpus)

"I don't have time. Sorry." (NC, EFL learner's corpus)

«به خدا من همه سعی خودم رو کردم اما همیشه» (TC, Iranian non-English major corpus)

«بابا من وقت ندارم بیکار که نیستم. چقدر میخوای منت بزاری. اصلا نمیخوام. خودم میخونم.» (NC, Iranian non-English major corpus)

«سعی میکنم مقاله‌ات رو ویرایش کنم. فقط شاید کمی دیرتر از موعد مقرر بشه.» (TC, Iranian non-English major corpus)

«فکر نمی‌کردم چنین شخصیتی داشته باشی. حتما مشکلی برای من به وجود اومده که نتونستم» (TNC, Iranian non-English major corpus)  
 «اول بپرس بعد قضاوت کن.» (TNC, Iranian non-English major corpus)

Table5  
*Distribution of Strategies in Situation2*

Situation 2	C	EFL learner Corpus		Non-English Major Student Corpus		Native English-Speaking Student Corpus	
		F	%	F	%	F	%
Preferred	TC	3	5	6	7	32	15.10
Open-ended	OE	32	53.34	24	42.10	128	60.38
Dispreferred	TNC	0	0	3	5.30	3	1.42
	NC	15	25	22	38.60	39	18.40
Total		10	16.66	5	7	10	4.70
		60	100%	60	100%	212	100%

Note: C: Compliance, TC: Toward Compliance, OE: Open Ended, TNC: Toward Non-Compliance, NC: Non Compliance

As can be seen in Table 5, the most frequently used strategy in the three groups was the TC. More specifically, this strategy was used in 60.38%, 53.34%, and 42.10% of native English-speaking students, EFL learners and Iranian non-English major students, respectively. The second high frequency strategy was the TNC in the three corpora. In addition, OE strategy was used in 1.42 % of the American corpus and in 5.26 % of the Iranian non-English major student corpus, while it was absent in the EFL learner corpus. On the other hand, with the exception of Open Ended strategy, the Compliance strategy was the least frequently used strategy by Iranian EFL learners (5%), while the NC strategy was the least frequently used strategy by English natives (4.72%). In Iranian non-English major corpus, both C and NC strategies were the least frequently used strategies in the Iranian non-English major corpus (7.01%).

Table 6 presents the distribution of strategies in frequency and percentage in Situation 5. This situation is as follows:

You are sharing a flat with a roommate. It is exam time and you have a lot to study and less time to spend on other things such as cleaning the flat. Your roommate is fed up with you not doing your chores, so the roommate says to you: "The bathroom is still in a mess and it's your turn to clean it. If you are not cleaning up when's your duty, you must do my chores next time."

Examples for the responses given for situation 5 are as follows:

“I am sorry my dear! I have a difficult exam and I can't do it. I promise to do the chores next week” (TC, EFL learner's corpus)

“No problem. I will do it next time” (C, EFL learner's corpus)

“I don't have enough time to study, and I can't do it.” (TNC, EFL learner's corpus)

«من دیگه از دست کارهای تو خسته شدم. مگه تو در کارهای دیگه خونه کمک می‌کنی که من  
(NC, Iranian non-English major corpus) لان به تو کمک کنم.»

«فعلا شما انجام بده. اگه تو هم یک روز نتونستی و امتحان داشتی، قول میدم من برای تو انجام  
(TC, Iranian non-English major corpus) بدم.»

«ببین به نظرم بهتره نظافت رو بزاریم برای بعد از امتحانات.»  
(TNC, Iranian non-English major corpus)

Table 6  
Distribution of Strategies in Situation 5

Situation 5	EFL learner Corpus		Non-English Major Student Corpus		Native English-Speaking Student Corpus		
	F	%	F	%	F	%	
Preferred	C	16	26.66	12	17.55	57	26.89
	TC	30	50	24	42.10	95	44.81
Open-ended	OE	1	1.66	2	3.50	6	2.83
	TNC	11	18.33	19	33.35	40	18.87
Dispreferred	NC	2	3.35	3	3.50	14	6.60
	Total	60	100%	60	100%	212	100%

Note: C: Compliance, TC: Toward Compliance, OE: Open Ended, TNC: Toward Non-Compliance, NC: Non Compliance

As set out in Table 6, TC was the most frequently used strategy in responding to the threat in situation 5 by the three groups. It occurred in 44.81%, 50%, and 42.10% of native English-speaking students, EFL learners and Iranian non-English major students, respectively. In addition, OE strategy was the least frequently used strategy by Iranian EFL learners (1.66%) and native English-speaking student corpus (2.83%). However, OE and NC strategies were the least frequently used strategies by Iranian non-

English major speakers (3.50%). On the other hand, with the exception of OE strategy, the NC strategy was the least frequently used strategy in the three groups.

Table 7 shows overall distribution of strategies in situations 2 and 5 where the speaker has an equal social status relative to the other interlocutor. As shown in Table 7, the participants in the three corpora opted out for TC as the most frequently used strategy in the situations where the interlocutors have an equal social status.

Table 7  
*Overall Distribution of Strategies in Situations 2 & 5 (Equal Social Status)*

Situation 2+5		EFL learner Corpus		Non-English Major Student Corpus		Native English-Speaking Student Corpus		X <sup>2</sup>	Sig
		F	%	F	%	F	%		
Preferred	C	19	15.8	18	15.0	89	21.0	3.124	.210
	TC	62	51.7	48	40.0	223	52.6	6.069	.048*
Open-ended	OE	1	0.8	5	4.2	9	2.1	---	.255
	TNC	26	21.7	41	34.2	79	18.6	13.167	.001*
Dispreferred	NC	12	10.0	8	6.7	24	5.7	2.847	.241
	Total	120	100	120	100	424	100		

Note: C: Compliance, TC: Toward Compliance, OE: Open Ended, TNC: Toward Non-Compliance, NC: Non Compliance

However, results of chi-square showed that native English-speaking students and EFL learners used TC significantly more than Iranian non-English major students (sig.:0.048,  $p < 0.05$ ). On the other hand, TNC was used significantly more in the Iranian non-English major student corpus (sig.:0.001,  $p < 0.05$ ).

### **Situations 3 and 6: Low Social Status**

In the third and sixth situations, the participants were exposed to a hypothetical threat by an interlocutor who has a lower status relative to the addressee.

Table 8 presents the distribution of strategies in frequency and percentage in Situation 3. Situation 3 is as follows:

You are taking care of your little niece. Before she is allowed to watch TV in the evening, she has to finish her homework. This takes a while; therefore, you only let her watch TV for a short time. Although it is not bedtime yet, you send her to bed because she is becoming a nuisance and you want to call one of your friends. She says to you: "But I always get to watch the next show. If I am not allowed to watch TV any longer, I will tell my parents."

Examples for the responses given for situation 3 are as follows:

"No problem, you can do and say whatever you want." (NC, EFL learner's corpus)

"I 'm sorry but I have to call my friend. After that I let you watch TV." (TC, EFL learner's corpus)

"Anyway, you should go to bed." (NC, EFL learner's corpus)

"I'll allow you to watch the next show and then you should go sleep" (C, EFL Learner's corpus)

«عزیزم ببین، کلا تلویزیون ضرر داره بهتره تلویزیون ضرر داره بهتره تلویزیون دیدنتو از (TNC, Iranian non-English major corpus) همین الان کم کنی.»

«تو الان باید تکالیفت رو بنویسی و من هم کار دارم. اگر تو تکالیفتو ننویسی، پدر و مادرت از (NC, Iranian non-English major corpus) من ناراحت میشن.»

«برو ببین، اماتکالیفات رو انجا بده» (C, Iranian non-English major corpus)

**Table 8**

*Distribution of Strategies in Situation 3*

Situation 3		EFL learner Corpus		Non-English Major Student Corpus		Native English-Speaking Student Corpus	
		F	%	F	%	F	%
Preferred	C	11	18.33	3	1.75	13	6.13
	TC	13	21.66	6	10.55	63	29.72
Open-ended	OE	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TNC	19	31.66	15	26.30	85	40.09
Dispreferred	NC	17	28.35	36	61.40	51	24.06
	Total	60	100%	60	100%	212	100%

Note: C: Compliance, TC: Toward Compliance, OE: Open Ended, TNC: Toward Non-Compliance, NC: Non Compliance

As Table 8 displays, the most frequently used strategy by English corpus and Iranian EFL was the TNC which occurred in 40.09% and 31.66% of native English-speaking student corpus and EFL learner corpus, respectively. However, NC was the most frequently used strategy in Iranian non-English major corpus (61.40%). The findings show that OE strategy was absent in the three corpora, and with the exception of OE strategy, C strategy was the least frequently used strategy by the three groups.

Table 9 presents the distribution of strategies in frequency and percentage in Situation 6. Situation 6 is as follows:

Your little brother has been given a brand new digital camera for his birthday, a present you have been keen on as well. One weekend you are going away with your friends to the seaside and you would like to borrow your brother's camera. He is not at home when you leave so you take it without permission. When you return he says to you: "I didn't allow you to take my new camera. If there is something wrong with the camera, I want you to replace it."

Examples for the responses given for situation 6 are as follows:

*"It is my fault and I accept it."* (C, EFL learner's corpus)

*"S\*\*\* up! I am your older brother and you cannot talk to me like that"* (NC, EFL learner's corpus)

*"You were not at home"* (TNC, EFL learner's corpus)

*"You're right, but I needed it. If it is broken, I'll replace it."* (TC, EFL learner's corpus)

«حالا یک دوربین داری ببین چیکار داری میکنیها» (NC, Iranian non-English major corpus)

«تعمیرش کن. نیازی نیست یک نوش رو برات بخرم.» (NC, Iranian non-English major corpus)

«حالا که خراب نشده اینطوری سر و صدا میکنی. خسیس.» (TNC, Iranian non-English major corpus)

**Table9***Distribution of Strategies in Situation 6*

Situation 6		EFL learner Corpus		Non-English Major Student Corpus		Native English-Speaking Student Corpus	
		F	%	F	%	F	%
Preferred	C	10	16.66	11	18.33	50	23.58
	TC	24	40	29	48.35	69	32.55
Open-ended	OE	2	3.35	1	1.66	15	7.10
	TNC	17	28.33	10	16.66	70	33.47
Dispreferred	NC	7	11.66	9	15	8	3.3
Total		60	100%	60	100%	212	100%

Note: C: Compliance, TC: Toward Compliance, OE: Open Ended, TNC: Toward Non-Compliance, NC: Non Compliance

As Table 9 displays, the most frequently used strategy by Iranian EFL and Iranian non-English major corpus was TC strategy. In other words, TC was used in 50.87% and 40% of Iranian non-English major corpus and EFL learner corpus, respectively. On the hand, TNC was the most frequently used strategy in native English-speaking student corpus (33.47 %). Moreover, the second most utilized strategy for Iranian EFL and Iranian non-English major students was the TNC with 28.33% and 17.54% of occurrence in EFL learner and Iranian non-English major corpus, respectively, while TC was the second most frequently utilized strategy in the native English-speaking student corpus (32.55 %). Moreover, OE strategy was the least frequently used strategy by Iranian EFL learners (3.33%) and Iranian non-English major corpus (1.75%), while NC strategy was the least frequently employed strategy in native English-speaking student group (3.3%).

Table 10 showed the overall distribution of strategies in situations 3 and 6 where the speaker has a lower social status relative to the other speaker. As shown in Table 10, EFL learners opted for both TC and TNC strategies in situations where the speaker has a lower status relative to them. However, Iranian non-English major students and native English-speaking students chose NC and TNC strategies, respectively.

**Table 10***Distribution of Strategies in Situations 3 &6 (Low Social Status)*

Situation 3+6		EFL learner Corpus		Non-English Major Student Corpus		Native English- Speaking Student Corpus		X <sup>2</sup>	Sig
		F	%	F	%	F	%		
Preferred	C	21	17.5	14	11.7	63	14.9	1.632	.442
	TC	37	30.8	35	29.2	132	31.1	.171	.918
Open-ended	OE	2	1.7	1	0.8	15	3.5	---	.268
Dispreferred	TNC	36	30.0	25	20.8	155	36.6	10.962	.004*
	NC	24	20.0	45	37.5	59	13.9	33.482	.001*
Total		120	100.0	120	100.0	424	100.0		

Note: C: Compliance, TC: Toward Compliance, OE: Open Ended, TNC: Toward Non-Compliance, NC: Non Compliance

The results of chi-square analyses showed that native English-speaking student corpus used TNC strategies significantly more than the other two corpora, and NC strategy was used significantly more by Iranian non-English major corpus.

#### **Distribution of Strategies across the Questionnaire**

Table 11 shows the distribution of strategies across the questionnaire. As shown in Table 11, TC strategy was the most frequently used strategy by the three groups. Moreover, the second most utilized strategy for the three groups was TNC with 26.11%, 27.50%, and 31.30% of occurrence in EFL learner, Iranian non-English major and native English-speaking student corpus, respectively. The findings show that OE strategy was the least frequently used strategy in the three corpora.

**Table 11**  
*Distribution of Strategies Across all Situations*

All situations		EFL learner Corpus		Non-English Major Student Corpus		Native English-Speaking Student Corpus		X2	Sig
		F	%	F	%	F	%		
Preferred	C	74	20.6	58	16.1	237	18.6	2.38	.304
	TC	145	40.3	142	39.4	493	38.8	.287	.866
Open-ended	OE	7	1.9	7	1.9	41	3.2	2.80	.247
	TNC	94	26.1	94	26.1	398	31.3	5.93	.051*
Dispreferred	NC	40	11.1	59	16.4	103	8.1	21.62	.001*
	Total	360	100	360	100	1272	100		

Note: C: Compliance, TC: Toward Compliance, OE: Open Ended, TNC: Toward Non-Compliance, NC: Non Compliance

Results of chi-square analyses show that native English-speaking student corpus employed TNC strategy significantly more frequently than the other two corpora, while Iranian non-English major corpus used NC strategy significantly more frequently than the other two groups across the situations in the questionnaires.

### Discussion

The findings showed that for situation1 where the interlocutor is more powerful than the addressee, the EFL learner respondents and native English-speaking students opted for similar strategies. In other words, TNC and C were the first and second most frequently used strategies for these groups, respectively, while Iranian non-English major respondents employed TC strategy and then TNC strategy more frequently. However, this diversity of responses, according to Limberg (2009), suggests that the respondents either decided to go along with the threat, and thus they used a clear compliance, or "they felt unjustly treated by the officer, their response communicated an indirect rejection of the threat" (p.1390). The highly frequent use of TNC in English responses might have stemmed from the urgency of this situation where the addressee has been late to pick up their parents, and so they argue with the police officer to buy some time to stay rather than leave immediately. In Iranian non-English major corpus, however, the responses were more face-saving to comply with the police

officer which culturally signals respect to the one who has power; yet, they argue to stay with employing TNC as the second most frequent strategy.

As for Situation 4 (the ticket scenario), the findings showed that the three groups used TC more frequently than other strategies. In other words, unlike the police scenario, there was a marked tendency to opt for toward compliance in the ticket situation which could be due to participants' association with other factors such as "whether the threat is justified on the grounds of their inappropriate behavior" (Limberg, 2009, pp. 1390-1391). Overall, however, the findings showed that EFL learners and Iranian non-English major group showed a strong tendency towards compliance in situations where the speaker has more power relative to the addressee. In other words, they opted for more face-saving strategies when receiving threats in an unequal high social status situation.

Regarding Situations 2 and 5, the results showed that TC has been the most frequently used strategy in a situation of equal social status for the three groups of respondents. According to Limberg (2009), the "addressees felt a stronger need to comply with a threat that comes from a friend than from a seemingly 'powerful' and unknown official" (p.1391). However, both EFL learners and Iranian non-English major respondents used TNC as the second most frequently used strategy in equal social status situations. In other words, it seems that Iranian respondent's first priority was to comply with a friend and to opt for a face-saving strategy; however, if the target's behavior is found to be offensive or other than what is expected in a friendship, the respondents might choose a face-threatening act.

In Situations 3 and 6, the scenarios of interlocutors' lower social status, the respondents showed a different behavior. In situation 3, the EFL learners opted for a combination of NC and TC strategies, while Iranian non-English major group preferred a strong NC strategy (61.40%) or TNC strategy (26.30%), and native English-speaking student group showed a tendency towards TNC and TC strategies. This decision to use TNC strategy in Situation 3 turned to be more TC in situation 6 where the addressee used his/her younger brother's digital camera without his/her permission. According to Limberg (2009),

"This finding may be explained with reference to the situational circumstances given in the questionnaire. The addressee has taken his/her brother's camera without asking for permission. Since a digital camera can be expensive, one could reasonably expect it to be replaced if it were broken" (p.1391).

In Situation 3, however, the Iranian respondents expected the senior to be more cooperative and when the senior was not, they used a more face-threatening strategy. The overall findings in these two situations showed that the EFL learners and native English-speaking students had stronger tendencies towards TNC while Iranian non-English major group opted for NC in these situations.

With regard to the overall results across all situations, these results are in agreement with Limberg's (2009) findings where the majority of respondents were in the category of tendency categories. In other words, the participants either showed a tendency toward compliance or tendency non-compliance strategy (see Table 11). Moreover, the total amount of the combination strategies of C and TC are more frequent than those which indicate the combination strategies of TNC and NC in EFL learners and Iranian non-English major group which are similar to Limberg's (2009) native English-speaking student group. In other words, the preferred responses, for example, C +TC, were favored by all groups.

The results of the present study would be of interest to anyone in the field of teaching English as a Foreign or Second language (EFL/ESL). Specifically, such studies would be significant for language learners and teachers in that their outcomes could inform them as to how speakers of English might behave in situations of receiving threats, and this way identify cross-cultural variations between Iranian and English students. Besides, being aware of cross-cultural differences in terms of politeness and impoliteness could help enhance English language learners' pragmatic competence. Furthermore, by teaching learners the impoliteness strategies teachers could not only raise their cognizance of the power of language but also their awareness of the language they may use in diverse contexts. Lastly, to improve learners' language proficiency, textbook designers may focus on this issue in order to set up appropriate contexts where strategies for responding to face attack or threatening are utilized.

Further studies can analyze larger sample sizes so as to obtain more generalizable findings. In addition, further research should be undertaken to investigate the influence of other social variables such as age. Finally, as Geluykens and Limberg (2012) aptly pointed out, "Gender [of the addressee] has a major influence on the [threat] response type chosen" (p.10). Thus, this factor also needs to be taken into account in future studies.

Note: The cited examples for native English-speaking students were limited to the first situation as published in Limberg's (2009) paper.

### References

- Archer, D. (2011). Cross-examining lawyers, facework and the adversarial courtroom. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 43(13), 3216-3230. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2011.06.007>
- Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bousfield, D. (2007a). Beginnings, middles and ends: a biopsy of the dynamics of impolite exchanges. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 39 (12), pp. 2185-2216. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2006.11.005>.
- Chang, W. M., & Haugh, M. (2011). Strategic embarrassment and face threatening in business interactions. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 43(12). 2948–2963
- Culpeper, J. (1996). Towards an anatomy of impoliteness. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 25(3), 349-367. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0378-2166\(95\)00014-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/0378-2166(95)00014-3)
- Culpeper, J. (1998). (Im)politeness in drama. In: J. Culpeper, M. Short & P. Verdonk. (Eds.), *Studying drama: From text to context* (pp. 83-95). London: Routledge.
- Félix-Brasdefer, J. C. (2006). Linguistic politeness in Mexico: Refusal strategies among male speakers of Mexican Spanish. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 38(12), 2158-2187. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2006.05.004>
- Fraser, B. (1975). Warning and threatening. Centrum: Working Papers of the Minnesota Center of Advanced Studies in Language, *Style and Literary Theory*, 3, 169–180.
- Geluykens, R. & Limberg, H. (2012). Gender variation, indirectness, and preference organization in threat responses. *Rice Working Papers in Linguistics*, 3, 1-12.
- Ghasempour, B. & Farnia, M. (2016). A comparative study of perception of (im) politeness between Iranian EFL Learners and Americans: The case of request speech act. *Studies about Languages*, 29, 19-30. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5755/j01.sal.0.29.14168>
- Górska, A. (2014). Impoliteness in the language of WłatcyMóch, a Polish animated series. *PraceJęzykoznawcze*, 16(3), 23- 29.
- Harris, S. (1984). The form and function of threats in court. *Language & Communication*, 4, 247–271.

- House, J. (2010). Impoliteness in Germany: Intercultural encounters in everyday and institutional talk. *Intercultural Pragmatics*, 7(4), 561-595. <https://doi.org/10.1515/iprg.2010.026>
- Jan, J. M., & How, C. (2015). Discursive construction of Asian responses towards impoliteness. *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities*, 23, 89-106.
- Jannejad, M., Bordbar, A., Bardideh, A. & Banari, R. (2015). The analysis of impoliteness in family discourse: Verbal interactions between irreconcilable Iranian couples. *ELT Voices*, 5 (6), 19-41.
- Khurniawan, R., Wijayanto, A., & Hikmat, M. H. (2017). *The impoliteness strategies in republican party's debate of Donald Trump*. Doctoral dissertation, Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta. <http://eprints.ums.ac.id/51195/>
- Limberg, H. (2003). *Classifying Threats and Responses to Threats: A Sociopragmatic Analysis*. Unpublished MATHesis. University of Muenster.
- Limberg, H. (2008). Threats in conflict talk: impoliteness and manipulation. In D. Bousfield & M.A. Locher (Eds.), *Impoliteness in language: Studies on its interplay with power in theory and practice* (pp. 155–179). Mouton de Gruyter, Berlin.
- Limberg, H. (2009). Impoliteness and threat responses. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 41(7), 1376-1394. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2009.02.003>
- Limberg, H., & Geluykens, R. (2007). Investigating preference organization and social variation through questionnaires: the case of threat responses. In B. Kraft & R. Geluykens (Eds.), *Cross-Cultural Pragmatics and Interlanguage English* (pp.159-185) München: Lincom Europa.
- Mahmoodi Bakhtiari, B., & Salimiyan, S. (2016). Linguistic impoliteness patterns in Sayyadan. *Language Related Research*, 7(1), 129-149.
- Marco, M. A. (2008). Influence of situational factors on the codification and interpretation of impoliteness. *Pragmatics: Quarterly Publication of the International Pragmatics Association (IPrA)*, 18(4), 751-773. <https://doi.org/10.1075/prag.18.4.09alb>
- Mugford, G. (2007). How rude! Teaching impoliteness in the second-language classroom. *ELT journal*, 62(4), 375-384.
- Nishimura, Y. (2010). Impoliteness in Japanese BBS interactions: Observations from message exchanges in two online

- communities. *Journal of Politeness Research: Language, Behaviour, Culture*, 6(1), 35-55. <https://doi.org/10.1515/jplr.2010.003>
- Rahmani, H., Modarresi, Y., Ghiasian, M.S., & Zandi, B. (2016). Politeness and impoliteness in Persian-speaking youngsters' novels. *Language Related Research*, 7(5), 1-22.
- Santamaría-García, C. (2017). Emotional and educational consequences of (im) politeness in teacher–student interaction at higher education. *Corpus Pragmatics*, 1(3), 1-23.
- Searle, J. R. (1976). A classification of illocutionary acts. *Language in Society*, 5, 1-23.
- Shum, W., & Lee, C. (2013). (Im)politeness and disagreement in two Hong Kong Internet discussion forums. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 50(1), 52-83. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2013.01.010>
- Song, K. S. (1995). Pragmatics and speech acts of threatening and warning in English conversational discourse: A stepping-stone to TESOL. *English Language & Literature*, 41 (4), 1209-1227.
- Tedeschi, J. T. (1970). Threats and promises. In P. Swingle (Ed.), *The structure of conflict* (155–191). London: Academic Press.

#### Biodata

**Maryam Farnia**, PhD in Applied Linguistics, is Assistant Professor at the Department of English Language and Literature, Payame Noor University, Iran. Her areas of research include discourse analysis, genre analysis, interlanguage pragmatics, humor, im/politeness and speech act.

**Zahra Sheibani** received her MA in English Language Teaching from Islamic Azad University, Khorasgan (Esfahan) branch, Iran. She has been teaching English at foreign language institutes for the last decade. Her areas of research are discourse analysis and language teaching.

پرتال جامع علوم انسانی