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Pragmatic Transfer in L2 Speech Behaviors:

A Cross-cultural Study

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#### **Abstract**

This study is an investigation into the speech act of suggestion utilized by Iranian learners of English. To this end, 150 Persian natives and 150 Iranian English learners were asked to complete a Discourse Completion Task of six situations. The Iranian EFL learners' suggestion performances were compared to those of Persian natives and English native speakers to detect whether language transfer had occurred. Percentage and Chi-square tests were utilized to analyze the research data. The study results indicated slight similarities and more noticeable variations between Iranian and English groups in terms of linguistic and cultural issues. Moreover, Iranian EFL learners transferred their L1 norms in production of several suggestion devices. Finally, the results were discussed in the context of language learning and teaching.

Key terms: Culture, Pragmatic competence, Pragmatic transfer, Speech act, Suggestion speech act

## Introduction

Culture and language are closely interwoven in a way that sociocultural values determine our way of thinking and speaking (Sapir, 1949; Whorf, 1956, as cited in Liu, 1995). A successful interaction in every language demands grammatical as well as sociolinguistic competence (Canale & Swain, 1980; Paulston, 1974; Richards, 1980; Schmidt & Richards, 1980). In other words, pragmatic competence is considered as one of the essential aspects of communicative competence (Bachman, 1990). Kim and Hall (2002, p. 332), quoting Davies (1989), defined pragmatic competence as "knowing how to connect utterances to locally situated circumstances and thus is an integration of both linguistic and cultural knowledge". Significant attention has been devoted to interlanguage pragmatic (ILP) studies, most of which have been involved with production of different speech acts. Austin (1962) defined speech acts as the acts we do in our utterances such as ordering, requesting, complaining, apologizing, suggesting, etc. Thus, speech act studies seem to provide a basis for understanding intercultural studies.

Many people face communication misunderstanding or even communication breakdown in their interactions with people from different language backgrounds. Thomas (1983) called this communication breakdown as "pragmatic failure", in which learners transfer their native language pragmatic norms into the target language. Chick (1996, as cited in Yousefvand, 2010) stated that such intercultural misunderstandings are related to

speakers' L1 cultural values. Speech act patterns might reflect such different value systems; some scholars (e.g. Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969) mentioned that speech acts operate by universal principles, whereas others (Green, 1975; Wierzbicka, 1985) maintained that their verbalization and conceptualization vary across different cultures. Therefore, the cross-cultural pragmatic literature comprises a rich body of research with regard to different speech acts in different cultures, such as request (e.g. Jalilifar, Hashemian & Tabatabayee, 2011; Taguchi, 2006), apology (e.g. Eslami-Rasekh & Mardani, 2010; Harris, Grainger & Mullany, 2006), compliment (e.g. Davayee, 2011; Wolfson, 1981), and refusals (e.g. Allami & Naeimi, 2010; Tanck, 2002), however few studies have targeted the speech act of suggestion.

Suggestion is a common speech act which is frequently employed in our daily interactions. We receive suggestions from different people in different settings. They are also utilized in educational settings in which teachers try to provide students with necessary hints. Suggestions are realized differently in different cultures. Non-native speakers may not be aware of the different influence of direct or indirect suggestion samples and need to be cognizant of the delicacies of suggestion speech act. It appears essential to investigate speech act of suggestion within various cultures' discourse samples. Therefore, this study endeavored to investigate how Iranian EFL learners' suggestion realizations are transferred

from their native culture while interacting in English. In this study, a comparative analysis is conducted between Persian and English in regard to sociocultural transfer.

### **Theoretical Framework**

In today's globalized world, we are confronted with diverse cultures and diverse languages. Understanding the variations is not always easy, so it is crucial to investigate the cultural differences between languages. Felix-Brasdefer (2008) divided speech act studies into two main categories: 1) studies which investigate native speakers' speech act realizations which may bring to focus one or two languages, 2) studies involved with non-natives' production of speech acts. In addition, there exists another category which contrasts pragmatic utterances of both natives and non natives. Such studies, which are the main focus of this study, comprise three data sets: L1 (data from L2 learners' first language), IL (data in the learners' interlanguage) and L2 (data from native speakers of target language). In other words, these studies investigate the effect of learners' native language on learners' ILP competence.

Taleghani-Nikazm (2002) examined ritual routines focusing on the ritual of "how are you" in Iran and Germany in regard to telephone conversation openings. The research data was extracted on the basis of a corpus of 87 audio-taped telephone

calls in Iran, 56 audio-taped German telephone calls, and 45 audio-taped telephone calls between native speakers of German and Iranian non-native speakers of German in Germany. The results demonstrated significant variations between the two cultures. Additionally, findings indicated that Persian non-natives of German transferred from their native telephone conversation openings to their conversations with German natives.

Yarmohammadi (2003) investigated politeness strategies comparing Persian and English language on the basis of Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework. The study regarded politeness within speech acts of favor-asking, griping, and complaint across the Persian and British English communities. This study also attempted to investigate the influential variables in speech act performance including power, ranking of imposition and gender. The participants involved British native speakers of English, Tehrani advanced learners of English, and Tehrani monolingual speakers of Persian including both males and females who were given a DCT consisting of 24 situations. The study results revealed significant variations between the three groups in their pragmatic performances. The Persian natives and EFL learners utilized more indirect strategies, demonstrating non-natives speakers' transfer of their native language norms to the second language communication. Moreover, regarding English natives, the interlocutor's gender had no significant effect on their performance, whereas for Persian natives and EFL learners it was a significant factor. The size of imposition was

important for all three groups, and power proved to be an effective factor within Iranian EFL learners and English native speakers.

Chang (2008) investigated the transfer of refusal strategies by Chinese learners of English. A DCT was given to the participants. The study involved four groups of 35 American college students, 41 English-major seniors, 40 English-major freshmen, and 40 Chinese-major sophomores. Furthermore, the proficiency level was taken into consideration. The findings indicated that participants varied in their frequency and content of refusal samples, though they utilized the same range of semantic formulas in their refusals. Native speakers of English and Chinese varied in the degree of specificity and directness of their refusal acts. No difference was observed among learners of different proficiency levels regarding the transfer samples. Eslami-Rasekh and Noora (2008) examined the transferability of six Persian request strategies to their equivalent English contexts. The results illuminated the significant influence of degree of imposition and the learners' L2 proficiency on the pragmatic transferability judgment. In another study, Wannaruk (2008) investigated similarities and differences in the production of refusals. The study participants consisted of Thai native speakers, American natives, and EFL Thai learners. The research data was gleaned via a DCT which was devised on the basis of interviews. Results revealed that all of these groups shared most of the refusal strategies

and that pragmatic transfer existed in the choice and content of refusal strategies. Language proficiency was proved to be a significant factor in pragmatic transfer.

Moreover, Allami and Naeimi (2010) explored the production of refusals by Iranian EFL learners in which 30 Persian-speaking learners of English were required to answer a DCT. In addition, 31 native speakers of Persian also filled out the same DCT, rendered into Persian. The findings were compared with those of American natives and revealed that Iranian and American speakers varied in the frequency, shift and content of refusing semantic formulas. Moreover, findings indicated a positive correlation between L2 proficiency and pragmatic transfer.

Sum-hung Li (2010) considered Cantonese students' production of suggestion samples in English not only with Australian students, who were attended as a target-based control group, but also with other native Cantonese students in Cantonese. Participants were high school students who were required to perform an open role play. The study results showed that syntactically, Cantonese students in their L2 employed fewer syntactic types in making suggestions, whereas they were pragmatically the same in their selection of perspective, directness and politeness strategies. However, there were significant differences regarding their choice of suggestion samples and redressive actions. In another study, Ahar and Eslami-Rasekh (2011) investigated English and Persian natives'

employment of gratitude speech strategies. Persian EFL learners' performance was also compared with that of English natives to detect the differences and similarities between two languages. The variables of social status and size of imposition were considered as well. Participants were both males and females and research data was gleaned via an open ended DCT. The results indicated some variations in the employment of gratitude strategies between Persian and English speakers. Persian EFL students transferred some of their L1 norms to their English gratitudes. In fact, their sensitivity to social variables made them use inappropriate gratitude samples. In another study, Vaezi (2011) discussed refusal acts comparing Iranian learners of English and Persian native speakers. 30 Iranian students participated in the study whose refusal utterances were extracted using DCT, usual interaction and role play. They involved two groups of Persian natives and Persian EFL learners who were all male participants. The findings demonstrated that Persian natives' refusals were formulaic, and they also offered indirect reasons in their refusals to avoid annoyance, whereas EFL learners refused their interlocutors more directly. Furthermore, social distance and power proved to be influential factors in Persian natives' speech.

Although we hear numerous numbers of suggestions in our daily conversations, the number of studies concerned with this speech act is really inadequate (Fernandez Guerra & Martinez-Flor, 2005). Therefore, this study attempts to make a

contrastive analysis of suggestion speech act realizations to uncover the suggestion patterns in Persian and English cultures both on surface and deep levels.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Although various speech acts have been investigated in different cultures, we still need to attend to more speech act studies in various cultures. The present study is a contribution to such a need. The study is an attempt to investigate Iranian EFL learners' suggestion speech acts to detect whether any language transfer occurs. Moreover, it aims to demonstrate the existence of sociocultural transfer on both surface and deep levels and to probe the following questions:

Q1: What are the similarities and differences among English natives, Persian natives, and Iranian EFL learners in the production of the suggestion speech act?

Q2: Are there any significant differences between Persian natives in their Persian suggestion acts and Iranian EFL learners in their English suggestion speech acts?

### **Methodology**

#### *Participants*

Two groups of subjects participated in this study. First group included 150 Iranians who were learning English in language institutes in Mashhad- a city in Iran. The participants consisted of 75 males and 75 females aged 17 to 50 with different socio-economical backgrounds. Their levels of proficiency were determined by the language institutes in which they were studying; 50 were intermediate, 50 were upper intermediate, and 50 were advanced learners. They had not spent a long time in an English native country and their primary access to English was through the English classes. English in Iran has limited out-of-class application for communication. Therefore, it is considered as a foreign language in Iran.

The second group included a total of 150 Iranian native university students who were studying different majors such as mechanical engineering, civil engineering, statistics, politics, history, social sciences, etc. in Ferdowsi University of Mashhad. They involved 75 males and 75 females aged 17 to 45, with different socio-economical backgrounds. Since studying a second language may influence learners' L1, language students of Persian, English, Arabic, French, and Russian were excluded. Moreover, none of them has been exposed to another language for a long period of time.

Following Kasper and Dahl's (1991) suggestion, a canonical design was applied for this interlanguage study which comprises three groups of L1 (data from Persian native speakers), IL (interlanguage data), and L2 (data from English native

speakers) participants. Therefore, this study needed a third group of participants comprising English natives. Since the study was conducted in a foreign context and English natives were not accessible, the data utilized for natives' production of suggestion act was adopted from the previous findings conducted by Jiang (2006) on the basis of T2K-SWAL Corpus. The data related to English natives were extracted from the TOEFL 2000 Spoken and Written Academic Language Corpus (T2K-SWAL Corpus) by Biber, Conrad, Reppen, Byrd and Helt (2002, as cited in Jiang, 2006). The T2K-SWAL Corpus involves a collection of spoken and written academic texts in US universities. The spoken register, according to which this study is based, includes class sessions, office hours, study groups, and on-campus service encounters among which office hours and study groups were chosen because they seemed to be a rich resource in regard to suggestion strategies.

### ***Instrumentation***

The research data was collected through English DCT and its related Persian version in which six natural situations were defined. According to Cohen (1996), one of the straightforward means to glean the pragmatic data is DCT and if it is well-prepared, it reveals how respondents activate their pragmatic knowledge (Martinez-Flor, 2006). Participants were required to respond as they would in their daily conversations

(see appendix I and II). The DCT was designed based on the guidelines laid down by Banerjee and Carrell (1988), Martinez-Flor (2005), Martinez-Flor (2006), Martinez-Flor and Alcon Soler (2007), and Martinez-Flor and Fukuya (2005). As Hudson, Detmer and Brown (1995, as cited in Martinez-flor & Alcon soler, 2007) stated the content of the DCT should be familiar to the students in terms of context. Thus, three DCT situations were involved with familiar daily interactions, whereas the other situations were related to students' educational affairs because all the participants were students. Moreover, according to Lorenzo-Dus (2001), cultural familiarity to the situations is a crucial element in the quality of responses; thus, "cultural unfamiliarity" (Lorenzo-Dus, 2001, p. 112) was eliminated as much as possible. Since the DCT questionnaires did not have the sufficient interaction available in authentic discourse, a short dialogue was added to each situation. Regarding the English DCT, following Matsumura's (2001) suggestion, learners were asked to imagine themselves in a foreign country studying English language. According to the guidelines provided by Martinez-Flor and Alcon-Soler (2007), the test instructions were given in L1, since a thorough understanding of how task should be performed is necessary for the learners. Furthermore, including both male and female participants, the situations were devised in a gender neutral way and regarding the status, to have a representative sample of authentic discourse, the situations involved inferior, equal and superior relationships.

In order to scrutinize the efficacy of questionnaires, a pilot study was administrated in two phases: in the first phase, 20 EFL learners and in the second phase, 20 Iranian university students took part among which some of the participants were interviewed. Each interview lasted about 10-15 minutes and the interviewees' beneficial points were recorded for further investigations. A team of specialists in L2 was asked to substantiate the content validity of the both DCTs. Therefore, DCTs were modified accordingly and their ambiguities and obstacles were eliminated. Moreover, to reach sound reliable data, two raters rated the respondents' replies. Furthermore, when they faced a conflict in rating the questionnaires, a linguist was consulted.

### ***Procedure***

The Iranian EFL learner participants, studying English at different language institutes of Mashhad, responded to the English DCT. They completed the questionnaire in the last 15 minutes of their class with the permission of their teachers. The necessary instruction was presented by the researchers in English and one example was given in their first language. The Persian native participants who were university students of Ferdowsi University responded to the Persian DCT individually, which took them about 15 minutes. They were first asked for their permission and then were provided with the necessary

instruction. Since the task required to be understood thoroughly, an example was given by the researchers.

After gleaning the research data, responses were analyzed quantitatively and interpreted qualitatively. In this study, a suggestion was regarded as an utterance in which a proposal is represented as a possibility for future performance (Sum-hung Li, 2010). As Sum-hung Li (2010) mentioned, a suggestion act consists of a head act and some other elements such as alerters (well) and/or politeness markers (e.g. downgraders: I think). A head act is the core of a suggestion act; however, mostly in the present study there often appeared to be more than one suggestion strategy in the head act all of which were taken into account. The research data was analyzed syntactically, semantically, and pragmatically. In terms of syntactic and semantic levels, a linguistic analysis comprising the head acts' strategies was conducted, whereas on the pragmatic level, the research data was interpreted pragmatically on deep levels.

Each suggestion strategy was rated according to the category it belonged to, on the basis of the taxonomy utilized. Participants' minor errors were tolerated, whereas those major errors leading to miscommunication or communication breakdown were not considered as suggestion acts. Since the data related to English natives' production of suggestions was adapted on the basis of previous findings conducted by Jiang (2006), his

taxonomy was also utilized to analyze both Iranian natives and EFL learners' suggestion samples.

The taxonomy of suggestions conducted by Jiang (2006) categorizes the suggestion samples into nine categories on the basis of their linguistic features such as:

- Let's (let's try...)
- Certain modals and semi-modals (You have to. . . . You need to. . . . You'd/had better...)
- Wh-questions (Why don't you . . .?)
- Conditionals (If I were. . .)
- Performatives (I suggest.../ I propose..., my suggestion is ... / my recommendation is ...)
- Pseudo cleft structures (All you need to do is...)
- Extraposed to-clauses (It might be difficult to ...)
- Yes-no questions (Have you heard...)
- Imperatives (do your best ...)

The Persian equivalents for suggestion expressions according to Jiang's taxonomy comprise:

- Let's (*Bia baham berim teria ye ghahve bokhorim./* Let's go to a cafe to drink coffee.)
- Modals (*Dar ye ketabforooshiye dige in ketabo mitoonin be gheymate kamtari bekharin./* You can buy this book with a less price in another book.)
- Wh-questions (*Chera ye safar be ye keshvare dige nemikoni?/* Why don't you travel to another country?)

- Conditionals (*Age kare zaroori nadari behtare ye vaghte dige beri./* If you don't need to go, it's better to go another time.)
- Performatives (*Behet pishnehad mikonam nazareto taghyir bedi./* I suggest you to change your idea.)
- Pseudo clefts do not exist in Persian language as a suggestion strategy.
- Extraposed to-clauses (*Hamishe rahhaye khoobi baraye ertebat vojood dare./* There are always good ways to communicate.)
- Yes-no questions (*Behtar nist barnameye safare khod ra ba tavajo be in sharayet tanzim konid?/* Is not it better to schedule your trip according to the available conditions?)
- Imperative (*Az in shokolatha nakhar./* Don't buy these chocolates.)

Then, the data was submitted to the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS version 11.5) for analysis. Chi-square test and Percentage were employed to analyze the data.

## Results

This study intended to investigate elaborately the Iranian EFL learners' suggestion act to find out whether language transfer occurs. Therefore, Iranian participants' responses were analyzed upon a suggestion taxonomy conducted by

Jiang (2006). In fact, both Persian natives' and Iranian EFL learners' frequency and percentage of suggestion samples were taken into account. Furthermore, since this study was carried out in a foreign setting and English natives were not accessible, the data related to English natives was adopted from Jiang's (2006) findings on the basis of T2K-SWAL Corpus.

Table 1

*Frequency and Percentage of Suggestion Linguistic Devices Made by English Natives, Persian Natives, and Iranian EFL Learners*

|              | English Natives |            | Iranian EFL Learners |            | Persian Natives |            |
|--------------|-----------------|------------|----------------------|------------|-----------------|------------|
|              | Frequency       | Percentage | Frequency            | percentage | Frequency       | percentage |
| Let's        | 213             | 40.8%      | 22                   | 1.6%*      | 28              | 2.1%*      |
| Modal        | 148             | 28.3%      | 485                  | 37.2%      | 224             | 16.9%      |
| Wh-question  | 34              | 6.5%       | 64                   | 4.9%       | 35              | 2.6%       |
| Conditional  | 18              | 3.4%       | 132                  | 10.1%      | 282             | 21.3%      |
| Performative | 11              | 2.1%       | 64                   | 4.9%*      | 53              | 4%*        |
| Pseudo cleft | 13              | 2.4%       | 1                    | 0.07%      | 0               | 0%         |

|            |    |       |     |        |     |        |
|------------|----|-------|-----|--------|-----|--------|
| To-clause  | 3  | 0.5%  | 229 | 17.5%* | 220 | 16.6%* |
| Yes-no     | 0  | 0%    | 68  | 5.2%*  | 79  | 5.9%*  |
| Imperative | 82 | 15.7% | 237 | 18.2%  | 398 | 30.1%  |

As Table 1 indicates the three groups of English natives, Persian natives, and Iranian EFL learners demonstrated some slight similarities and noticeable variations in their suggestion samples. The study results are summarized as below:

*English natives: **Let's** > **Modal** > **Imperative** > *Wh-question* > *Conditional* > **Pseudo cleft** > **Performative** > **To-clause**.*

*Iranian non-natives: **Modals** > **Imperative** > **To-clause** > *Conditional* > *Yes-no question* > *Wh-question* > *Performative* > **Let's** > **Pseudo cleft**.*

*Persian natives: **Imperative** > **Conditional** > **Modal** > **To-clause** > *Yes-no question* > *Performative* > **Wh-question** > **Let's**.*

As Table 1 demonstrates, both Persian natives and EFL learners utilized all suggestion types except pseudo cleft

category which was not employed at all by Persian natives as a suggestion strategy.

Regarding the similarities between Persian natives' and Iranian EFL learners' suggestion forms which involve the main focus of language transfer, noticeable similarities were detected in some suggestion strategies such as let's, performatives, to-clauses, and yes-no questions in which their frequencies varied with those of English natives. Persian natives and Iranian EFL learners employed let's structure as one of their least preferable strategies (P= 2.1%, P= 1.6%), whereas it was utilized by English natives as their most preferable strategy (P= 40.8%). Iranian participants also applied performatives (P=4%, P=4.9%) quite frequently, while English natives adopted them as one of their least frequent strategies (P=2.1%). Moreover, Persian natives and Iranian EFL learners utilized to-clauses (P=16.6%, P= 17.5%) most frequently in contrary to English natives who applied this suggestion device as one of their least common strategies (P=0.5%). Iranian participants also used yes-no questions (P=5.9%, P=5.2%) quite frequently which was not employed as a suggestion formula in English natives' speech sample. Therefore, as it is obvious traces of language transfer can be observed in the mentioned suggestion devices since noticeable similarities were observed between Persian natives and Iranian EFL learners and noticeable variations were reported comparing with English natives' suggestions.

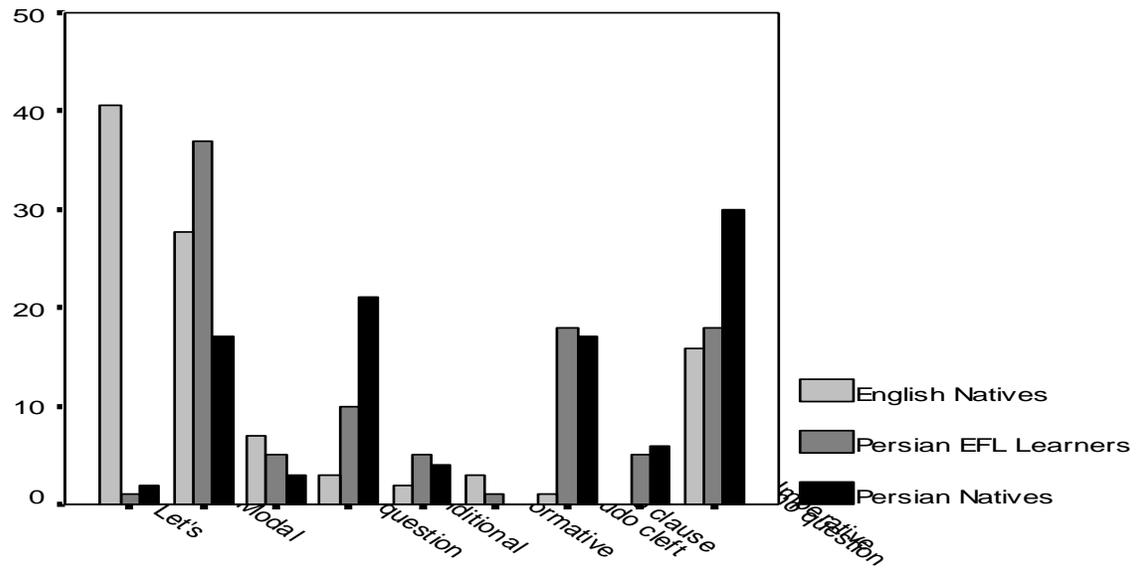


Figure 1. The Percentage of English Natives', Persian Natives' and Persian EFL learners' Suggestion Linguistic Devices

As figure 1 illustrates, generally non-natives' suggestions can be categorized into three classifications: first, there are strategies in which EFL learners demonstrated noticeable similarities to their native language such as let's and to-clauses. These are the areas in which learners totally transferred their L1 linguistic norms to their L2 suggestion

samples; second, there are strategies which indicate that although the EFL learners still share a similar performance with the native Persian speakers, they are moving from their L1 linguistic extremes towards a more English native-like performance such as conditionals and imperatives. These are the areas in which some slight similarities can be observed regarding Persian natives' and Iranian EFL learners' pragmatic performance; finally, there are suggestion samples in which non-native speakers' pragmatic interlanguage differs from those of Persian natives as well as English natives like modals.

This study intends to investigate whether Iranian EFL learners have transferred from their native language. Therefore, a Chi-square test was utilized to demonstrate the significant similarities and variations between the two groups.

Table 2

*Chi-square Results of Suggestion Linguistic Devices Made by Persian Natives and Iranian EFL Learners*

|       | Observed |     | Expected N |       | Df | $\chi^2$ | Sig   |
|-------|----------|-----|------------|-------|----|----------|-------|
|       | Persian  | EFL | Persian    | EFL   |    |          |       |
| Let's | 28       | 22  | 25.0       | 25.0  | 1  | .720     | .396* |
| Modal | 224      | 485 | 354.5      | 354.5 | 1  | 96.080   | .000  |

|                    |     |     |       |       |   |        |       |
|--------------------|-----|-----|-------|-------|---|--------|-------|
| Wh-question        | 35  | 64  | 49.5  | 49.5  | 1 | 8.495  | .004  |
| Conditional        | 282 | 132 | 207.0 | 207.0 | 1 | 54.348 | .000  |
| Performative       | 53  | 64  | 58.5  | 58.5  | 1 | 1.034  | .309* |
| Pseudo cleft<br>•  | 0   | 1   | -     | -     | - | -      | -     |
| To-clause          | 220 | 229 | 224.5 | 224.5 | 1 | .180   | .671* |
| Yes-no<br>question | 79  | 68  | 73.5  | 73.5  | 1 | .823   | .364* |
| Imperative         | 398 | 237 | 317.5 | 317.5 | 1 | 40.820 | .000  |

•This suggestion linguistic device was applied only by EFL learners and Chi-square test could not be performed.

Persian natives' and EFL learners' suggestion frequencies varied significantly in several suggestion strategies such as modals ( $\chi^2 = 96.080$ ,  $p < .05$ ), wh-questions ( $\chi^2 = 8.495$ ,  $p < .05$ ), conditionals ( $\chi^2 = 54.348$ ,  $p < .05$ ), and imperatives ( $\chi^2 = 40.820$ ,  $p < .05$ ). EFL learners utilized modals and wh-questions more frequently (N= 485, N= 64) than the expected frequencies (N=354.5, N=49.5), whereas Persian natives employed conditionals and imperatives (N=282, N=398) more often than the expected frequencies (N= 207, N=317.5). Since this section intends to detect whether any language transfer has occurred, identifying the categories in which no significant variations have occurred

is crucial. Thus, as Table 2 reports, EFL learners' and Persian natives' suggestion frequencies were not significant in several strategies such as let's ( $x^2 = .720, p > .05$ ), performatives ( $x^2 = 1.034, p > .05$ ), to-clauses ( $x^2 = 180, p > .05$ ), and yes-no questions ( $x^2 = .823, p > .05$ ). Regarding let's strategy, Persian natives (N=28) utilized this strategy more frequently than EFL learners (N=22), though comparing with its expected frequency (N=25) the difference was not significant. Second, performatives were also applied within Persian natives (N=53) and Iranian English learners (N=64), which considering the expected frequency (N=58.5), their difference proved to be slight. Furthermore, EFL learners utilized to-clauses (N=229) more often than the Persian natives (N= 220) who employed yes-no questions (N=79) more frequently than EFL learners (N=68). Regarding both suggestion types, the difference appeared to be insignificant comparing with their expected frequencies (N=224.5, N=73.5). Therefore, both groups of Persian natives and Iranian EFL learners demonstrated some similarities in regard to suggestion types of let's, performative, to-clause and yes-no question. On the other hand, noticeable variations were reported in these suggestion devices in comparison with English natives. Therefore, it might indicate that EFL learners have transferred negatively from their L1 and did not show a native-like performance in their suggestions.

## **Discussion**

As it was mentioned, this study aimed at first, pinpointing the similarities and differences among English natives, Persian natives, and Iranian EFL learners in the production of suggestion speech act, and second, finding whether there is any significant difference between Persian natives in their Persian suggestion acts and Iranian EFL learners in their English suggestion speech act.

Regarding the first goal of the study, Iranian EFL learners demonstrated slight similarities to English natives, though almost in most respects their suggestions differed from native speakers specially in terms of direct/indirectness. In other words, noticeable variations were observed between the two groups in their pragmatic competence indicating transfer from their native language due to cultural differences and pedagogical materials.

With respect to the cultural values, Hofstede (1980, as cited in Tavakoli, Keenan, & Crnjak-Karanovic, 2003) indicated four dimensions according to which all the cultures of world could be classified. The dimensions involve power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism, and masculinity. Later Hofstede and Bond (1988, as cited in Tavakoli et al., 2003) introduced another category named long term orientation in contrary to short term orientation. Long term cultures are

totally oriented towards future rewards and thrift, whereas short term cultures regard both past and present; they particularly respect tradition, face perseverance and social conventions.

Three of these factors provide beneficial insights into our discussion in terms of differentiating between Eastern and Western cultures including power distance, individualism, and long-term orientation. Regarding the power distance, as Tavakoli et al. (2003, p.53) stated it is "the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally" (Hofstede, 1997, p. 28). Not only such hierarchy exists among Easterners, but also it is intertwined in their sociocultural values, whereas the Westerners prefer the equality. Second, Easterners share a collectivist society, whereas the westerners belong to an individualistic one in which "the ties between individuals are loose" (Hofstede, 1997, p. 51, as cited in Tavakoli et al., 2003) and lastly, the variations between Easterners and Westerners lie in the long term orientation in which the Eastern society demonstrates a devotion to traditional values. This can be demonstrated in the communities' strong ties with religion and traditional conventions (e.g. 'ehteram', friendship, 'tæ'arof' in Iranian culture). Consequently all these variations lead English natives and Iranian EFL learners to opt for different styles of the suggestion act.

Regarding the pedagogical materials, according to Kasper (1996) pragmatic input provided by pedagogical materials is inadequate. As a matter of fact, the textbook language is not consistent with every day authentic language (Scotton & Bernsten, 1988, as cited in Jiang, 2006). The way materials are represented in the textbooks is an important issue. Speech act materials are expressed as simplified phrases (McCarthy, 1998, as cited in Jiang, 2006), whereas they should involve authentic materials presented in their appropriate context (Koester, 2002, as cited in Jiang, 2006).

Regarding the second goal of the study, Iranian EFL learners were found to transfer from their L1 in the production of suggestion strategies including both linguistic and sociocultural transfer. The negative transfer of Iranian EFL learners is discussed at surface as well as deep levels. The former involves linguistic variations, whereas the latter deals with learners' sociocultural values. According to Kasper and Dahl (1991), three data groups of L1 (Persian natives), IL (interlanguage data), and L2 (English natives) were attended to detect whether any transfer has occurred. If significant variations exist between IL and L2 data sets and significant similarities between IL and L1 are revealed, it can be inferred that negative transfer has occurred. Furthermore, L1 and L2 must be assumed to be different in this regard.

Iranian EFL learners demonstrated both linguistic and sociocultural transfer in the production of suggestion

strategies. Therefore, the results of our study generally lend support to the findings of Ahar and Eslami-Rasekh (2011), Eslami-Rasekh (1993), Keshavarz, Eslami-Rasekh and Ghahrman (2006), Taleghani-Nikazm (2002), Jalilifar et al. (2011), and Yarmohamadi (2003) who reported negative transfer among their Iranian participants. Moreover, our findings are not consistent with those of Vaezi (2011) in which no similarity was revealed between EFL learners and Persian natives. Regarding linguistic transfer, Persian EFL learners demonstrated negative transfer in several suggestion strategies such as let's, performatives, to-clauses, and yes-no questions. Learners' under-performance of let's utterances and out-performance of to-clauses and yes-no questions can be clarified via their cultural values. As mentioned before, Eastern cultures such as Iran and China, possess a high context (Shang-chao, 2008) and collectivistic (Chang, 2008) culture that regard the concept of face as a crucial matter trying to maintain the group harmony as well. Therefore, people of such cultures prefer to choose more indirect suggestion strategies in comparison with English natives. In contrast, Western cultures hold a low context and an individualistic culture that prefer a direct communication style (Shang-chao, 2008). Therefore, since cultural values are deeply rooted in learners' identities, they have transferred their cultural style into their L2 suggestion strategies.

Regarding performatives, they can be considered as a direct type of suggestion strategy (Martinez-flor, 2005) which

was preferred by both Iranian natives and EFL learners much more frequently than English natives. The reason may lie in the fact that as Jalilifar et al. (2011) stated learners have chosen one of the familiar and easy ways of speech act performance. In fact, due to incomplete L2 pragmatic competence learners employed this strategy in the same way as it is applied in their first language. Furthermore, direct strategies such as performatives may be considered as one of the most feasible suggestion expressions in comparison to indirect suggestion strategies in which the relation between the surface structure and underlying illocutionary force is not direct (Jalilifar et al., 2011). The reason why Persian natives and EFL learners utilized performatives may be related to the questionnaires' instructions as well. Since the DCT task needed to be understood thoroughly, learners were directly asked to suggest in the test instructions. Thus, it may be quite natural to utilize this direct strategy frequently. Therefore our study is in line with Koike (1996) who reported transfer from participants' L1 in their suggestion acts.

That pragmatic transfer occurred in the use of direct/indirect suggestion strategies may be due to the reason that there exists a hierarchy of difficulty for learning sociolinguistic rules. According to Chang (2008), as grammatical structures have a degree of difficulty to be learned, there exists the relative degree of difficulty for sociolinguistic rules as well. Those rules which demand some variations in cultural norms such as direct/indirect communication style

between two cultures are much more difficult to acquire rather than those rules proposing existence/nonexistence of expressions; thus, those sociolinguistic rules which add new categories to the learners' competence are easier than those which require modifying their cultural norms (Chang, 2008). Therefore, our findings support those of Kim (2007) who reported pragmatic transfer regarding the levels of directness.

This study entails some pedagogical implications. From a cross-cultural point of view, the findings reveal the appropriate cultural and linguistic features to perform a certain speech act (i.e. suggestion). They also indicate those areas in which communication breakdown may occur. Successful communication between Iranian and English natives does not occur if both groups regard different expectations and perceptions in their communications. Moreover, since syllabus designers should make learners cognizant of how natives realize a certain act, they also may benefit from the information regarding the production of suggestions. Therefore, as Intachakra (2004) mentioned pragmatic materials should attempt to evoke both learners' conscious raising and production with the assistance of authentic natural materials. Finally, it is hoped that the findings of the current study will contribute to contrastive pragmatic literature in showing suggestion patterns of two cultures, uncovering the complexities for a better communication between Iranians and other people in the global village.

This research suffers from some limitations; thus, some suggestions are proposed for future studies. This study involved small number of participants. Therefore, its generalizability may not extend beyond this study. Using DCT to glean the research data, we should mention that since learners must provide written answers, what learners are supposed to say in a certain situation may not be parallel to what they would truly say in that setting (Golato, 2003, as cited in Martinez-Flor, 2006). Moreover, other social variables such as age, social class, and educational background may be investigated.

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#### **Appendix I: English DCT**

1. You and one of your English teachers meet in a bookstore. He/she is considering buying an expensive book about English vocabulary learning. However, you have seen the book in another bookstore at a lower price. What would you suggest to your teacher?

Teacher: This book contains useful points and of course it is expensive.

You:.....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....

2. Your sister/brother's friend (younger than you) would like to contact people from other countries in order to know other customs and be able to practice the English language. You think that chatting on the internet is a very good and fast way of meeting people from all over the world. What would you suggest her?

Sister/brother's friend: but I did not discover an appropriate way to contact people from other countries.

You:.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

3. You see one of your new classmates working in the library very late in the evening. She/he is searching the Internet in order to prepare a lecture and looks very tired. What would you suggest to this classmate?

Classmate: I am so tired since I've been working all day.

You:.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

4. You're at the grocery store with your neighbor. He/she is about to buy some potato chips which are on sale. You notice that the expiration date is September 2010; this is November 2011. What would you suggest him/her?

Neighbor: I need some of those potato chips on the sale, please.

You:.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

5. You arrive home and would understand that your father is planning to drive to a city that evening. You have just heard the weather forecast and know that six inches of snow and freezing rain are predicted for that city. What would you suggest him?

Father: I am going to drive there this evening.

You:.....  
.....  
.....

6. You go to the candy store and buy some delicious looking candy. You are very disappointed when you taste it because it tastes terrible. A little girl whom you don't know comes to buy some of them. What would you suggest her?

Girl: What delicious looking candy!

You:.....

.....  
 .....  
 .....

#### Appendix II: Persian DCT

1. یکی از اساتید انگلیسی خود را در یک کتاب فروشی ملاقات می کنید. او دارد فکر می کند که آیا یک کتاب گران قیمت را که در مورد یادگیری لغات انگلیسی است بخرد یا نه. اما شما این کتاب را در یک کتاب فروشی دیگر با قیمت پایینتری دیده اید. چه پیشنهادی به او می کنید؟

معلم: این کتاب نکات مفیدی رو در بر دارد اما قیمت آن گران است.

شما:.....

.....  
 .....  
 .....

.....  
 .....

2. دوست خواهر یا برادر شما (کوچک تر از شما) تمایل دارد که با مردم کشورهای دیگر ارتباط داشته باشد تا با آداب و رسوم آنها آشنا شده و همچنین بتواند در کنار آن زبان انگلیسی را تمرین کند. شما فکر می کنید که چت کردن از طریق اینترنت راه خوب و سریعی برای ارتباط با مردم سراسر دنیا است. چه پیشنهادی به او خواهید داد؟

دوست برادر یا خواهر شما: اما من راه مناسبی برای تماس با مردم کشورهای دیگر پیدا نکردم.

شما: .....

.....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....

3- شما یکی از هم کلاسی های جدید خود را حین کار کردن در کتابخانه می بینید در حالیکه خیلی دیر شده و نزدیک غروب است. او برای آماده کردن یک سخنرانی در حال جستجو در اینترنت است و بسیار خسته به نظر می رسد. چه پیشنهادی به او می کنید؟

همکلاسی: از آنجا که کل روز را در حال کار کردن بودم خیلی خسته هستم.

شما: .....

.....

.....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....

4. شما همراه با یکی از همسایگانتان در مغازه خوار بار فروشی هستید . او در حال خریدن چند چیپس است. شما متوجه می شوید که تاریخ انقضای گذشته است. چه پیشنهادی به او می کنید؟

همسایه: آقای فروشنده خواهش می کنم به من چند تا از آن چیپس ها را بدهید.

شما: .....

.....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....

5- هنگامیکه به خانه می آید می بینید پدرتان بعد از ظهر قصد سفر به یک شهر را دارد . شما گزارش وضع هوا را شنیده اید و می دانید که برف و تگرگ در آن شهر خواهد بارید. چه پیشنهادی به او می کنید؟

پدر: قراره همین بعد از ظهر بروم .

شما: .....

.....

.....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....

6- شما به یک شیرینی فروشی می روید و چند شکلات می خرید که به نظر خوشمزه می آید. اما بعد از چشیدن (به خاطر مزه بد آن) بسیار ناراحت می شوید. یک دختر بچه کوچک که شما او را نمی شناسید می خواهد چند تا از آنها رو بخرد. چه پیشنهادی به او می کنید؟

دختر بچه: چه شکلات خوشمزه

شما: .....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....

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