A qualitative study of politeness strategies used by Iranian EFL learners in a class blog

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A B S T R A C T

In regard to the significant role of information and communication technology (ICT) in educational systems, it becomes increasingly important to gain a better understanding of the features of the language used by learners in the new contexts created by this medium. This paper aims at analyzing politeness strategies including negative politeness, positive politeness, bald on-record, and bald-off record strategies in posts written by Iranian EFL learners in a class blog as an opportunity for asynchronous interaction in response to their teachers and peers. The participants of the study were 14 Iranian EFL learners selected based on their level of language proficiency. There were 1520 politeness utterances across all posts including 800 politeness utterances used when learners were interacting with their instructor and 720 politeness utterances used when learners were interacting with their peers. The collected data were analyzed using content analysis as well as Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA). The results revealed that learners frequently used positive strategies as signs of psychologically close relationship, reciprocity and friendship in a group.

Keywords: politeness strategies; negative politeness; positive politeness; bald on-record strategies; bald-off record strategies; Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL)

A R T I C L E   H I S T O R Y

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Introduction

Fraser (1983) describes pragmatic competence as "the knowledge of how an addressee determines what a speaker is saying and recognizes intended illocutionary force conveyed through subtle attitudes" (p.30). Without this knowledge, there are cases where interlocutors cannot understand each other and failure in communication occurs. One important aspect of pragmatic competence is politeness. Politeness is "the expression of the speakers' intention to mitigate face threats carried by certain face threatening acts toward another" (Mills, 2003, p.6). There are strategies by which the interlocutors can mitigate threads carried by face threatening acts which are called *politeness strategies*. Within the last two decades, technological advancements made the researchers investigate the use of politeness strategies in computer-mediated communities (Saidi & Khosravi, 2015). Whereas politeness strategies in computer-mediated communities and computer-mediated communication (CMC) have been prominently investigated (Chejnová, 2014; Graham, 2007; Harrison & Barlow, 2009; Hobbs, 2003; Luzon, 2013; Park, 2008; Shallert, et al., 2009; Shum & Lee, 2013; Sifianou, 2015), such a subject has been studied in Iran only by a few researchers like Izadi and Zilaie in 2012 and is hence, thought to be under-researched.

This paper aims at investigating the politeness strategies used by Iranian EFL learners in a blog constructed by the researchers as an extra opportunity for their interaction and communication. Much of what we say and communicate is determined by our social relationships and politeness as a means for creating, sustaining, changing and realizing social relations. Leech (1983) states that the main role of politeness is "avoiding disruption and maintaining the social equilibrium and friendly relations" (p. 23). Regarding this important social role of politeness, we have tried to investigate how learners use politeness strategies in the class blog in their interaction with their teacher and other learners in order to bring to light how they interact with each other and how blogging can change these interactions and relations. Park (2008) argued that "to understand the manifestation of online social interaction and to foster successful interaction and collaboration through the CMC channel, analysis of socio-interpersonal communication patterns among online discourse participants is critical (p. 2207).

Review of Literature

Politeness Strategies

Watt (2003) defined politeness as the ability to please others through external actions. Moreover, Foley (1997) referred to politeness as "a battery of social skills whose goal is to ensure that everyone feels affirmed in a social interaction" (p. 270). As an important aspect of pragmatic competence and consequently communicative competence, politeness has been addressed by different researchers applying different approaches. The conversational-maxim view is derived from Grice's (1975) theory of meaning and Cooperative Principle (CP) which explains that you should "make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of talk exchange in which you are engaged" (p. 45). The theory of meaning also focuses on speaker's intended meaning and the inferential ability of the listener, and it states how people use the language. Grice proposed four conversational maxims including maxim of quantity, quality, relevance and manner. He insisted that these rules govern conversation. Although Grice's maxims did not address the notion of politeness directly, they became the basis of subsequent studies investigating politeness.

Respecting the main components of Grice's approach, Leech (1983) proposed the principle of politeness including a set of politeness maxims as forms of behavior that establish and maintain

respect and friendship. Fraser argued that politeness maxims "minimize the expression of beliefs which are unfavorable to the hearer and at the same time (but less important) maximize the expression of beliefs which are favorable to the hearer" (1990, p. 225).

Leech's (1983) maxims are: *Tact* (Minimize cost to other; maximize benefit to other), *Generosity* (Minimize benefit to self; maximize cost to self), *Approbation* (Minimize dispraise of other; maximize praise of other), *Modesty* (Minimize praise of self; maximize dispraise of self), *Agreement*, (Minimize disagreement between self and other) and *sympathy* (Minimize antipathy between self and other).

A number of studies have also attempted to apply another theory called *relevance theory* to the study of politeness (Escandell-Vidal, 1996; Jary, 1998). Relevance theory is essentially a theory of utterance comprehension from the perspective of the hearer. The main point of this theory is that all communication is constrained by the principle of relevance. The principle of relevance as explained by Sperber and Wilson (1986) is "every act of ostensive communication communicates the presumption of its own optimal relevance"(p. 260). The hearer infers the preferred meaning of an utterance from among several possible ones relying on the expectation of relevance created in his/her mind by the utterance based on the clues and context-mediated information. Relevance theory has been criticized as an inherently asocial pragmatic theory (Mey & Talbot, 1988).

The theory used in the present study is the *model of politeness strategy* offered by Brown and Levinson (1987). Most of the research into politeness may be characterized as somehow related to Brown and Levinson's theory (Watts, 2003). Although different aspects of this theory have been criticized by many researchers, it has been the preferred model focusing on the notion of politeness. Critics were mainly the researchers from Asia challenging the universality of the model as theoretical assumptions of the model were based on just three languages of English, Tzeltal and Tamil. According to Ogiermann (2009), "Brown and Levinson's face is something that individuals claim for themselves" (p. 13). Asian researchers in their criticisms explained that such an individualistic notion of face could not be applied to collectivist cultures (Gu, 1990; Mao, 1994; Matsumoto, 1988; Yu, 2001).

Brown and Levinson's politeness model is founded on the notions of face which was explained by Goffman as the "positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by his or her self-presentation" (1967, p. 5). Additionally, Deutsch (1961) referred to face as "one of an individuals' most sacred possessions" (p. 897) and insisted that maintaining this possession is necessary to sustain one's self-esteem. Brown and Levinson (1987) sought to develop an explicit model of politeness based on what it is to be a human being.

Brown and Levinson (1987) outline four main types of politeness strategies including bald on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record (indirect). The main idea is realizing various strategies used by various people in their interactional behavior to satisfy specific wants of face.

Bald on-record

The aim of bald on-record strategies is not minimizing the threat to the hearer's face and they are used to directly address the other person to express his/her needs. Using imperative forms is an example of bald on-record as it can be seen in the phrase *give me the pen*. Using mitigating devices such as 'please' in the phrase *please give me the pen* can soften the command. It should also be added that in an emergency situation, for instance, a command such as *don't touch the bottle* has no politeness function.

Furthermore, Culpeper (1996) says that bald on-record politeness strategy is used when threat to the hearer's face is very small (e.g., in phrases such as *come in* and *sit down*) or in a situation when the speaker is more powerful than the hearer as in the interaction between a parent and a child when the parent says: *stop complaining*.

Positive Politeness

Positive politeness strategies are used to reduce the threat to the hearer's positive face (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Fifteen strategies can be used to indicate positive politeness as is expressed by the theory of Brown and Levinson (1987). These strategies include the following ones:

1. Noticing and attending to the hearer,
2. Exaggerating by giving different intonation, tone and other prosodic features or exaggerating by using intensifying modifier*s,*
3. Intensifying interest to hearer,
4. Using in-group identity markers,
5. Seeking agreement by the addressee's statements through using specific statements or repetition,
6. Avoiding disagreement by using false agreement, by expressing pseudo-agreement, by using hedge or by making white lies,
7. Showing common ground,
8. Joking,
9. Showing the speaker's concern for the hearer's wants,
10. Offering and promising,
11. Being optimistic,
12. Including both the speaker and the hearer in the activity,
13. Telling or asking the reason,
14. Assuming reciprocity,
15. Giving gift to the hearer in the form of sympathy, understanding and cooperation in the conversation,

Negative Politeness

Negative politeness strategies refer to the avoidance of imposition on the hearer and can be considered as is the desire to remain autonomous using distancing styles like using modal verbs or hesitation, apologizing for imposition, asking questions or asking for permission to ask a question. Koike (1992) defined negative politeness as "consideration of the listener's wish to be unimpeded in taking action and having attention" (p. 21).

Based on the theory of politeness by Brown and Levinson (1987), ten strategies can be used to show negative politeness including the following ones:

1. Being indirect,
2. Using questions and hedges,
3. Being pessimistic (i.e. being pessimistic whether the hearer wants to do what we ask or not),
4. Minimizing the imposition,
5. Giving deference and being deferent to the hearer,
6. Apologizing,
7. Impersonalizing speaker and hearer by making your addressee unmentioned,

8. Generalizing expression rather than mentioning addressee directly,
9. Nominalizing,
10. Going on record as incurring a debt, or as not indebting the hearer,

Off-record (indirect)

Off-record strategy was explained by Brown and Levinson (1987) as the use of indirect language to remove the speaker from the potential to be imposing. There are fifteen strategies indicating off-record politeness as is expressed in Brown and Levinson's theory (1987). These strategies are the following:

1. Giving hints,
2. Giving association clues,
3. Presupposing,
4. Understating or saying less than is required,
5. Overstating or giving information more than what is needed,
6. Using tautologies (uttering patent and necessary truth),
7. Using contradictions,
8. Being ironic,
9. Using metaphor,
10. Using rhetorical questions that do not require any answer,
11. Being ambiguous,
12. Being vague,
13. Overgeneralizing and not naming the hearer or addressing him directly,
14. Displacing,
15. Being incomplete by using ellipsis,

The second important term is a class blog which is explained as follows:

A Class Blog

In the social constructivist theory, the emphasis is on the learner rather than the teacher. It is the learner who interacts with objects and events and individually discovers and transform complex information providing solutions to problems (Vygotsky, 1978). In recent years, most teachers have gradually come to realize that their role and duty as a teacher is to use the teaching of their subjects as a means of empowering and improving the personal growth of each student and to give students the skills to be lifelong learners as is observed in Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL).

CALL is a trend in teaching that aims at providing such an opportunity for learners and teachers through the use of technology. Levy described CALL as "the search for and study of the applications of the computer in language teaching and learning" (1997, p.1). As Mushangwe (2014) argued "use of technology in teaching and learning is also not a new topic in language learning" (p. 66). The use of the computer in the classroom may also involve the application of web 2.0 technologies. According to Williams and Chinn (2009), web 2.0 technologies such as blogs, wikis, podcasts, social networks and virtual worlds have become popular and instructors need to find innovative ways to use such technologies in the classroom. Paquet (2003) refers to the term blog as a log of the web or weblog. Blogging is a conversation between the teacher and the students that provides the opportunity for the students to create and express their meaning to the interlocutor of the conversation. In this specific form of interaction, students are allowed to start using language and communication as they like. Blogging is an interaction through which the students discover and can be discovered.

Since blogs have recently been gaining popularity as an educational tool, several studies were conducted on the uses of blogs for language learning (Campbell, 2003; Dieu, 2004; Godwin-Jones, 2003).

Several researchers also studied the role of blogging in language learning and argued that blogs can improve learners' writing, critical thinking, and interaction (Bernstein, 2004; Carlson, 2003; Godwin-Jones, 2003; Johnson, 2004; Oravec, 2003). Ward (2004) investigated the effect of blogging on reading/writing and found many positive results, as well. Rezaee and Oladi (2008) examined how blogging could affect social interactions and writing proficiency. In addition, Lee (2010) conducted a study to analyze the effect of blogging on EFL learners' writing concluding that the opportunity for personal expression and interaction led to improving writing fluency. Fageeh (2011) also investigated the effects of blogging on writing proficiency and attitudes. The results of the study revealed that blogging could provide learning motivation and chances for authorship and readership. In an attempt to investigate the effect of blogging on learners' autonomy and intercultural competence, Lee (2011) reported the significant effect of blogging due to the opportunity that could be provided for the learners to work independently and to reflect upon cross-cultural issues.

The present study aims at investigating the effect of blogging, as one of the web 2.0 technologies, on Iranian EFL learners' politeness strategies when they are communicating with their teachers and peers because understanding communication "is expected to lead to a reduction of prejudiced views of others and prejudiced actions towards them" (Byram, 2013, p. 5). Several studies have addressed the use of politeness strategies in Computer-Mediated Communication. Hobbs (2003) conducted a study to compare the use of politeness strategies in men's and women's voice mail messages. The researcher of the study concluded that male speakers' use of politeness markers was almost equal to that of women's and positive politeness strategies were mainly used by male speakers. Graham (2007) examined expectations of (im)politeness within an e-mail community. The result of the analysis of data revealed that the norms for interaction within the community of practice combined with the norms of (polite) interaction within the computer medium resulted in novel expectations of (im)politeness.

Park (2008) also investigated linguistic politeness in Computer-Mediated Communication. The analysis of real-time, online discussions of participants of the study showed that politeness strategies were used for the purpose of interpersonal-communication.

Comparing the synchronous and asynchronous Computer Mediated Discussions (CMDs), Shallert, et al. (2009) investigated the use of politeness strategies and argued that synchronous CMD provided more opportunity for information seeking, information providing, and social comments whereas asynchronous discussions created the atmosphere for discussion generating, experience sharing, idea explanation, and self-evaluation

Focusing on people with arthritis, Harrison and Barlow (2009) explored the use of politeness strategies in an online self-management program. The findings of their study showed that the participants used indirect suggestions and positive strategies to express their shared problems and experiences. Further, Li (2012) conducted a study to analyze discourse used in Wiki in a Chinese EFL context. Result of the study indicated that participants used positive, negative, and bald on-record strategies to provide an atmosphere of friendship and solidarity. Morever, Luzón (2013) also studied the use of (im) politeness strategies in academic blog discussions indicating a high occurrence of the strategies used to construe conflict. Chejnová (2014) studied the realization of impoliteness in e-mail communication analyzing verbal means of expressing politeness, degrees of directness, and amounts of lexical and external modifications. The researchers observed that the participants used both positive and negative strategies in conveying their meanings. Further,

Sifianou (2015) conducted a study on the conceptualization of politeness in Twitter as a source of naturally occurring data concluding that the new medium affected the use of politeness strategies.

In Iran, Izadi and Zilaie (2012) examined the use of politeness strategies in email exchange. The collected data obtained from fairly intimate friends included 60 emails written in Persian. As the participants of the study were close friends, the researchers analyzed the collected data in terms of constituent positive politeness strategies to enhance ways for intercultural computer mediated communication.

The present study is investigating the language used by Iranian EFL learners in their class blog. The researchers addressed politeness strategies regarding the important role they play in creating the opportunity of a successful communication. The aim is analyzing the politeness strategies to discover challenges and obstacles leading to pragmatic errors and break downs in communication. In this study, the following research questions are investigated:

> 1. What kinds of politeness strategies do Iranian EFL learners use in a class blog when interacting with their instructor?

> 2. What kinds of politeness strategies do Iranian EFL learners use in a class blog when interacting with their peers?

Methodology

Participants

The participants of this study were 14 English translation students at Payam-e-Noor university. All the participants were female aged from 19 to 25. Adler and Adler (in Baker & Edwards, 2012) advise the researchers of the qualitative studies to sample between 12 and 60. In the present study, 14 EFL learners were selected due to the length of the study which was 12 weeks. Criterion sampling was used to select participants. Criterion sampling involves "selecting cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance" (Patton, 2002, p. 238). In the current study, the criterion of importance was learners' general language proficiency. Thus, before carrying out the treatment, the participants were given the standardized 200A test of Nelson English Tests (book 2, Intermediate) by Fowler and Coe (1976) to ensure their homogeneity.

The participants had the course of *Study Skills* and were taught the book of *Study Skills for Students of English* by *Richard C. Yorkey* (2002).

Instrumentation

The Standardized 200A Test of Nelson English Test

The participants were selected using the standardized 200A test of Nelson English Tests (book 2, Intermediate) to ensure their homogeneity at the very beginning of the course. As the course to be taught was *Study Skills* and students were in their first academic year, the researchers preferred to focus on EFL learners at intermediate levels. The reliability of the test was estimated using KR-21 method. The results revealed a high degree of reliability ($r = .73$). It consisted of three sections: cloze tests, structure, and vocabulary in the form of multiple choice questions including 50 items.

A Class Blog

At the beginning of the semester, the students were informed that they were required to use a class blog. The students were strongly encouraged to ask questions regarding the assigned topic and/or make comments on others' postings. They were asked to upload each comment or question to the blog for others to view. The participants participated in blogging as part of their regular class requirements.

Procedure

The participants practiced blogging in addition to participating in the class from the second session because in the first session, the researchers tried to explain the nature of blogging and their assignment for the following sessions. Students were supposed to participate in six classes held every two weeks. Thus, the class blog was opened for about 12 weeks. First, some initial instructions were given to participants as follows:

1) Post your comment on the class blog

2) The instructor's answer will be to what you say not to how you say unless you yourself ask a question

3) You can write about what you are interested in: your feeling, your views. You can ask questions and respond to the researchers in any way you prefer.

Furthermore, it was explained that they could write about anything they liked. The students wrote about the conversations in the class, their experiences, and their problems in learning the foreign language, and often about what they had watched and what they had read. The researchers read what they had written and gave comments on them.

The aim of this blogging task was creating interaction in a way that the students might be stimulated to communicate and to use the language they were learning. As the aim of this research was communication, the researchers tried to comment on the students' posts and tried to correct their errors indirectly without highlighting them. We tried to correct the students' errors through interaction. We also tried to focus on expressing meaning and tried to give a model of correct language without concentrating on students' errors that could lead to disappointment in continuing the interaction. In fact, we used indirect corrective feedback. Bitchener and Knoch (2008) explained that in indirect corrective feedback "Rather than the teacher providing an explicit correction, students are left to resolve and correct the problem that has been drawn to their attention" (p. 414). These indirect corrective feedback techniques mainly took the form of highlighting, underlining, and writing an indication to show that an error or errors occurred.

Results and Discussion

The collected data were analyzed using content analysis based on Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness strategy (1987) as well as Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA) (Herring, 2004). Nartey (2013) argued,

Content analysis is a key methodological apparatus that enables researchers to understand the process and character of social life and to arrive at a meaning, and it facilitates the understanding of the types, characteristics and organizational aspects of documents as social products in their own right as well as what they claim (p.122).

The content analysis used in the present study followed a deductive approach and collected data were analyzed based on some predetermined categorical schemes. The unit of analysis was taken to be the politeness strategy. Data gathered were categorized into four categories of politeness strategies including negative politeness, positive politeness, bald on-record, and bald-off record strategies identified by Brown and Levinson (1987).

Any analysis based on CMD can include frequency counts (e.g., of messages, message length), a structural analysis (e.g., abbreviation, vocabulary), a pragmatic analysis (e.g., speech acts, politeness strategies), or grounded theory. In the present study, researchers focused on the use of politeness strategies. It should be added that the following theoretical assumptions proposed by Herring (2004) guided the analysis of data:

1.   Discourse indicates regular pattern.

2.   Discourse includes language user's choices.

3.   Computer-mediated discourse may be shaped by the technological features of computer-mediated communication system.

There were 1520 politeness utterances across all posts including 800 politeness utterances used when learners were interacting with their instructor and 720 politeness utterances used when learners were interacting with their peers. The percentage of politeness utterances for both cases are presented in Table 1:

Table 1
Use of Different Politeness Strategies in a Class Blog in Percentages

	Politeness Strategies	Student-Instructor Interaction	Student-Student Interaction
1	Positive	60.6	59.4
2	Bald on-record	15	22.6
3	Negative	19.4	18
4	Off-record	5	--
	Total	100	100

As shown in Table 1, the most frequently used politeness strategies were positive strategies used in student-instructor interaction (60.6). In student-student interaction, the most frequently used politeness strategies were positives followed by bald-on records (59.4 % & 22.6 %, respectively).

In order to check if there was any significant difference between the frequency of politeness strategies, chi-square tests were used. The results of these tests are presented in Table 2:

Table 2
Chi-Square Test for Frequency of Politeness Strategies

	Student-Instructor Interaction	Student-Student Interaction
Chi-Square	50.6	22.3
Df	3	2
asymp. Sig.	.000	.000

The result in Table 2 indicates that there was a significant difference between the frequency of politeness strategies when learners were interacting with their instructor (χ^2 (3, N = 800) = 50.6, p = .000). The result also indicates that there was a significant difference between the frequency of politeness strategies when learners were interacting with their peers ($\chi2$ (2, N = 720) = 22.3, p= .000). Examples of politeness strategies used by the participants of the study in their interaction with their instructor and classroom peers are provided in the appendices.

People use language differently to communicate with each other. As it can be revealed from the analysis of data, politeness strategies used by learners were frequently positives. When people communicate, they do not only exchange information, but they shape their interpersonal relationships. Initially, learners used negative politeness strategies in their interaction with their instructor. Brown and Levinson defined negative politeness as "a redressive action addressed to the addressee's negative face: his want to have his freedom of action unhindered and his attention unimpeded" (1987, p. 129). But, blogging gave them this opportunity to become closer to their instructor and to experience using positive politeness strategies in their interaction with the instructor. Result of the analysis of the learners' posts when they were interacting with each other also revealed that there was a tendency towards positive strategies although learners used negative and bald on-record strategies in their first posts. Positive politeness plays an important role when forming good interpersonal relationships. As is expressed by Holtgraves (2002) "The essence of positive politeness is the staking of a claim for some degree of familiarity with one's interlocutor. It is thus the language of intimacy" (p. 46).

The frequent use of positive politeness and bald-on-record strategies in the class blog was in line with the results of the study conducted by Park (2008) on the use of politeness strategies in CMC. According to Park (2008),

> The commonality of bald-on-record and positive politeness strategies lies in the fact that both tactics are grounded in proximity. Accordingly, they bring forth close interpersonal relationships between participants. Employment of such politeness tactics indicates that effective interpersonal communication plays a vital role in the enhancement of group discussion (p. 2208).

These findings were in agreement with the study conducted by Li (2012) on the use of politeness strategies in Wiki-mediated communication in which participants used positive strategies to establish friendship, and solidarity. The obtained findings were also in line with the results of the study conducted by Harrison and Barlow (2009) indicating that the participants frequently used positive strategies to express their shared problems and experiences in an online self-management program.

The result of this study was in contrast with the study conducted by Alfattah and Ravindranath (2009) in which the researchers investigated the ways in which Yemeni learners realized requests in their English interlanguage focusing on politeness strategies as proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987). Based on the findings of the study, the participants primarily used indirectness strategies. The difference in the results may be attributed to the collective effect of different factors including the research context or participants' gender and culture. The learners chosen as the participants of

our study and their instructor were female, which may have affected the final results. Pilkington (1998) argued that women mainly use positive politeness strategies in their interaction with their interlocutors who are the same sex.

Students also frequently (in 60% 0f their posts) used emoticons when they were interacting with their peers. According to Skovholt, Grønning and Kankaanranta (2014), the word "emoticon," a construction of the words "emotion" and "icon," means graphic representations of facial expressions, which often follow utterances in written Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC).

Emoticons may be produced by symbols (:-)) or by pictograms which are graphic symbols (😳). They also added that emoticons reflect sincerity of users in their expression and are used for the purpose of collaboration. Wagner and Lee (1999) argue that the frequency of nonverbal emotions increases when the interaction partner is considered to be a friend.

This study focused on the use of the politeness strategies concerning its important role in shaping classroom interactions. According to Peng, Xie, and Cai (2014), " the adoption of politeness strategies shortens the teacher-student social distance, makes the class interesting, and in turn facilitates English teaching and learning" (p. 110).

Conclusion and Pedagogical Implications of the Study

The present study investigated the use of politeness strategies in a class blog. The results of the study revealed that blogging made it possible for teachers and learners to explicitly negotiate their powers which, as explained by Sarroub and Quadros (2015), occurs implicitly in daily interactions between teachers and learners in the discursive practices of the classroom. In fact, blogging provided the chance for equalizing power relation, and this is in line with Clark's (1985) recommendations that,

> Throughout a tutoring session you should defer to student and remember that tutoring is a partnership……. Remember that she'll learn more if instead of slavishly following your direction, she uses your advice to reach her own conclusion and often you are more effective if you remind the student that she will make final choice (p.130).

The findings of the present study may result in a greater and deeper understanding of the role of politeness strategies used in a learning atmosphere in constructing and distributing power relations. This study can also make many teachers and researchers think about the use of technology in order to support their work, personalize learning and shape relations and interactions and may also stimulate researchers to investigate many other contextual factors affecting the choice of strategies including rank of imposition or social distance. The results of this study will also be helpful for teachers of universities and can draw the attention of teachers to the importance of technology to manage the interpersonal relationships.

The number of participants in this study was relatively small and all participants were female. This necessarily limits the conclusions that can be made from the study. Thus, the generalization of the results requires more approval from other contexts. It would be helpful to conduct similar studies with learners with different proficiencies in their second language. Furthermore, it would be insightful to examine the use of politeness strategies in other forms of CMC including the social networks and video-conferencing. The researchers can further compare Iranian EFL learners' use of politeness strategies in their native language and foreign language due to the uniqueness of the language used by L2 users (Cook, 2013).

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Appendix

Examples of Strategies Used by Learners in their Interaction with Their Instructor

Comments	Strategies Used
Sorry professor, I just wanted to know if it is possible to edit our sentences and add the correct one to the blog.	Negative (apologizing and minimizing imposition)
Dear teacher, Why don't we have more classes for this course?	Positive (telling or asking for reason)
Dear teacher, why don't we answer exercises of the book?	Positive (telling or asking for reason)
My dearest teacher, What a nice sentence!	Positive (exaggerating)
Can't we ask our questions about other courses? Can we?	Negative (being pessimistic)
Teacher, please forgive me, I couldn't complete my outline. I don't know how find reasons for explanation of my subject, in fact, my topic.	Negative (apologizing)

Note: Comments used in tables 1 and 2 are exact words used by learners in their posts.

Examples of Strategies Used by Learners in Their Interaction with Their Peers

Comments	Strategies Used
Give your examples Shiva	Bald on record (using imperative without redress)
My dear friends, Let's start answering exercises of the book and sharing our answers and views.	Positive (including both speaker and hearer in the activity)
I like this blog. We can focus on our writing and outlining but my dear classmates why we don't ask other professors for such a practice?	Positive (telling or asking for reason)
Dear Nastaran, can I ask some questions from you about your outline and answer of the exercise of the chapter two?	Negative (using question)
You must forgive me but I could not understand the meaning of poem you have written.	Negative (apologizing and being indirect)
Oh, dear, I got very unhappy when I heard that.	Positive (giving gift to hearer in the form of sympathy)