



## In-directness and Politeness in Iranian Persian and English Electronic Requests to Faculty

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### ABSTRACT

This article examines the notions of (in) directness and politeness in the Persian and English electronic requests of Iranian EFL postgraduate students (nonnative speakers of English) to their professors during their education at Islamic Azad University, Najaf Abad Branch, Isfahan, Iran. To that end, the study employed both quantitative and qualitative approaches to investigate 60 English and 60 Persian e-mails composed by the participants. More specifically, a modified version of request strategies that was proposed initially by Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper (1989) and revised by Bisenbach-Lucas (2007) to fit e-mail request data was employed to analyze the request head act of each e-mail message. Findings from the study reveal that the students employ more direct strategies in their Persian e-mail requests than their English e-mail requests. The results of the study also indicate that students employ more direct strategies for the requests for information, but not for the requests for action. This study argues that e-mail requests characterized by significant directness give the faculty no choice in complying with the request and fail to acknowledge the imposition involved. Therefore, many of them might become responsible for pragmatic infelicities.

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### Introduction

With the exponential explosion and popularity of the Internet, everyday communication has been influenced by new electrically mediated modes. Electronic mail (e-mail) being heavily employed at many work-sites and within large institutions is one of these organized forms (Gains, 1999). This new medium of interaction has become part of the daily routine (Hawisher & Moran, 1993) and has emerged as a system of language conveyance in circumstances where neither speech nor writing can easily replace. Also, university students greatly apply the new medium for contacting their professors. Over the last 15 years, the interaction between students and their teachers at the university level has been changed from consultations through office hours or brief meetings before or after class to interact via email (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2006). E-mail has therefore become an efficient and accepted substitute means of interaction (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2011).

Writing an e-mail to faculty requires students to be aware of e-mail etiquette (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2007). There are a lot of complaints from faculty regarding students' e-mails ranging from irrational requests and inappropriate tone, to unsuitable salutation, abbreviations, spelling, and structural errors (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2007; Glater, 2006). As the imposition of the request, and syntactic and lexical devices have effect on request strategies in student-faculty e-mails (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2006), status-congruent requests at university level should be organized by "higher formality, avoidance of imperative requests (preference for conventional indirectness instead), fairly high level of mitigation, and acknowledgment of the imposition involved" (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2011, p. 3194).

So far few studies have focused on students' e-mails to faculty in terms of e-politeness in their requests (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2006, 2007; Chen, 2006; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2011; Hardford, & Bardovil-Harlig, 1996). Moreover, In Iran, few studies have been done specifically on Iranian electronic requests (Abdolrezaei, & Eslami-Rasekh, 2010; Chalak, Eslami-Rasekh, & Eslami Rasekh, 2010; Ghadiri, 2011; Ghasemi, & Hashemi, 2010). None of these studies have specifically focused on the pragmatic failure in Iranian university students' e-mail requests to their faculty. Regarding the widespread use of this new means of communication (e-mail writing) in the academic settings of Iran, the focus of the present study is to investigate the degree of directness in English and Persian e-mail requests composed by Iranian (nonnative speaker of English) post graduate university students to their professors. More specifically, the study aims to examine the English and Persian e-mail requests performed by Iranian (NNS of English) students to find out if the degree of directness of students e-mail requests vary with increasing imposition of requests. Based on foregoing discussion, the present study strives to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the degree of directness in requests used by the Iranian postgraduate students in their English and Persian e-mails to the academic staff?
2. Does directness level vary with increasing imposition of request?

### Review of Related Literature

#### Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory

Politeness theory formulated in 1978 by Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson. According to Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, requests can be

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categorized as face threatening acts (FTAs), as a speaker imposes her or his will on the hearer. Because the hearer's compliance with the request interferes with his or her desire to stay autonomous, requests threaten the hearer's negative face (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Brown and Levinson suggested a person had to choose between doing FTA in the most direct and well organized behavior, or trying to moderate the effect of FTA on the hearer's face.

Brown and Levinson asserted that there was a linear relationship between indirectness and politeness. Several researchers in the field of cross-cultural pragmatics have criticized Brown and Levinson's (1987) view. They believe that while politeness has to accomplish with the suitability of the statement in a given circumstances, indirectness has to do with the inferential procedure; hearer has to go through in order to understand the statement (Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper, 1989). In fact, Brown and Levinson (1987) mentioned that indirect requests such as "I don't suppose I could possibly ask you for a cup of flour, could I?" would most likely come across "standoffish" if created by a friend, and consequently made a potential threat to hearer's positive face (p. 142). Although Brown and Levinson declared that the suitability of a more or less direct request is situation-dependent, they supposed that politeness and indirectness are closely correlated in all cultures.

In their classification of request head acts, Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) included three levels of indirectness: direct strategies, conventionally indirect strategies, and nonconventionally indirect strategies. In direct requests, lexical, semantic, and grammatical means indicate the illocutionary force of a sentence uttered by a speaker (for example, "leave me alone."). Conventionally indirect utterances indicate the illocution by means of unchanging linguistic convention made in the speech community (for example, "How about cleaning up?"). In nonconventionally indirect requests, the addressee calculates the illocution from the communication of the location with its context (for example, "The game is boring.") (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989)

### **Electronic Mail as a Communicative Genre**

With the expansion of information and communication technology along with the wide-ranging use of the Internet; e-mail has been a widespread interpersonal interaction medium.

It has been broadly used for both personal and institutional interaction because of its high transmission speed and less invasive nature, mainly in academic and business organizations (Baron, 2000; Crystal, 2001).

In the academic domain where most student-professor interaction occurs during office hours, in class, before and after class, and possibly on the phone; e-mail has turned out to be a feasible alternative means of interaction. In spite of the fact that many of today's students have grown up with e-mail and other computer-mediated communication (CMC) technology, e-mail utilized in academia is still a language-using situation with less noticeably identified restraints (Malley, 2006). Socialization into satisfactory e-mail communication is slight and without much direction. Most of the time students are left to their own devices in trying to craft a message that is efficient as well as status-congruent and courteous because books on e-mail netiquette (e.g., Flynn & Flynn, 1998; Hale & Scanlon, 1999) offer little help to students who are seeking recommendation on writing e-mail messages to their professors, with whom they are in a hierarchical relationship.

Consequently, crafting an appropriate status-congruent e-mail message is like aiming at "a moving target" (Baron, 1998, p. 142). While writers can "take time to compose and edit their messages [to be more] formal, and linguistically complex" (Herring, 2002, p. 115), students can never be fairly certain about the impression of their message on the faculty, and are not able to follow consistent "standards of appropriateness set by those [with greater institutional power] in order to communicate successfully" (Chen, 2006, p. 36).

### **Research on Request Speech Acts in Student-Faculty E-mail**

Most of studies done in the e-mail medium focused on how e-mail differed from oral speech in the L2 (Chapman, 1997; Warschauer, 1996), or on how e-mail might help nonnative speakers to improve their second language (Lapp, 2000; Li, 2000; Liaw, 1998).

Few studies have focused on those linguistic features that influence the directness and politeness of e-mails. One of the earliest studies on student-faculty e-mail requests was the study of Hardford and Bardovi-Harlig (1996) who investigated the effect of e-mail requests sent by native speakers (NSs) and nonnative speakers (NNSs) to 2 faculty recipients. Their study revealed that NNSs' requests were different from those of NSs in the utilizing of mitigation (i.e., politeness aspects) as well as extra-linguistic features, like emphasis on individual requirements and irrational time frames rather than institutional claims.

Biesenbach-Lucas and Weasenforth (2000), Weasenforth and Biesenbach-Lucas (2001), and Biesenbach-Lucas (2002, 2004), applied the CCSARP (Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project) framework to native students' (NSs) and nonnative students' (NNSs) e-mail requests of faculty. Their studies revealed that both NSs and NNSs preferred correspondingly direct or indirect strategies for request comprehension, and the distinctions in request strategies selected by both groups were moderately small. On the other hand, NNSs had a tendency to utilize more direct requests than NSs, comparable to Chen's (2006) graduate student. Syntactic modification was used more by NSs than NNSs whereas NNSs employed more lexical modification mainly 'please' (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2002, 2004; Biesenbach-Lucas & Weasenforth, 2000; Weasenforth & Biesenbach-Lucas, 2001).

Chen (2006) observed a comparable unsuitable concern for student-oriented reasons and individual factors in her case study of a Taiwanese graduate student's e-mail messages to her professors. Biesenbach-Lucas (2006) examined NSs' and NNSs' e-mail messages to investigate the use of lexico-syntactic modification in their e-mails. Her study demonstrated that NSs and NNSs employed few such modifiers in frequently-occurring request patterns, but NSs utilized combinations of syntactic politeness devices in high imposition requests. In contrast, NNSs' syntactic politeness modification was restricted to the past tense, *possibly/maybe*, and *please*; and they did not show evidence of NSs' linguistic and contextual sensitivity. An unexpected result was that "NSs' request realizations [were] not overly adorned with [politeness] modification" (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2006, p. 100), proposing "that in the e-mail medium, a minimum amount of ... modification may be considered sufficient for realizing students' requests of faculty ... perhaps in an attempt at message economy and clarity" (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2006, p. 101).

Biesenbach-Lucas (2007) examined the head requestive acts of e-mail messages to scrutinize how native and nonnative

English speaking graduate students formulate low- and high-imposition requests sent for faculty. Her results indicated that although native speakers displayed greater resources in crafting e-polite messages to their professors than nonnative speakers, most requests were comprehended through direct request strategies.

Hendrik (2010) investigated English e-mail requests written by Dutch learners to see the effect of the underuse of syntactic and lexical modifiers on the degree of politeness level of the e-mails. He concluded that using extensive external modifiers helped to increase the politeness level of the e-mail, and under using of elaborate syntactic and lexical modifiers might result in decreasing the degree of the politeness of their e-mails and therefore to cause pragmatic failure.

#### **Method**

The focus of the present study is to investigate the degree of directness of students' Persian and English e-mail requests, and also to find out if the directness level of Iranian students' Persian and English e-mail requests vary with increasing imposition of requests. This part gives information on the subjects from whom the data were elicited, the instruments that were used to collect the data, and, finally, the methods for data analysis.

#### **Participants**

To collect data for this study, which employed an exploratory qualitative research design, it was decided that 60 Iranian (NNS of English) postgraduate students to write two corpuses of e-mail (one in Persian and the other one in English) to their professors. Therefore, the e-mail data consisted of 120 e-mails (60 in Persian and 60 in English). The students who wrote e-mails were studying English in Islamic Azad university, Najafabad Branch, Isfahan, Iran. They were enrolled in postgraduate degree and had a Persian background. All of these students knew the faculty personally, and their ages ranged from 25 to 32.

The students were supposed to be advanced at the level of language proficiency because all of them had studied English for at least 4 years in BA (Bachelor of Art) before entering their MA (Master of Art) program. They had also passed a language proficiency entrance exam for being accepted as MA students. Therefore, they are considered competent enough to write an e-mail of this type without any need for further proficiency level inquiry.

The professors who students addressed them were between 35 and 60 years old, doctorate holders. Their communication style with their students could be characterized as formal (e.g., they had contact with students only during class and office hours). All of these faculty members were native speakers of Persian and had native-like proficiency in English.

#### **Data Collection**

Students were asked to address one of their professors of a course within their major and write two corpuses of e-mail samples to him or her (one in Persian and the other one in English). As this study attempted to investigate English and Persian electronic requests in terms of degree of directness, a time interval between writing 2 e-mails was considered so that students couldn't translate their Persian e-mails to English. This time interval that was considered about one month gave students enough time to forget the ways of expressing their requests written by them in the first corpus of e-mail samples. It was considered the first

corpus e-mail samples written by students to be in English because the probability of forgetting the English e-mails for Iranian EFL students who didn't have a native-level command of English were easier than Persian e-mails that were written in their native language.

Two topics were chosen and offered to the participants to write e-mails about. The topics in question were selected with a view to fulfilling the requirements for the research questions.

It was tried to choose the topics with which the subjects were quite familiar, and those in which they had some practice.

First, students were asked to write an English e-mail to their professors and request for reconsidering their grades and ask their professors to give them a chance of meeting them in their office. After about one month, they were asked to write another e-mail to their professors and repeated their request in Persian.

The e-mail requests collected involved both requests for information, which had higher imposition such as request for revision of grade, and requests for action, which had lower imposition such as request for an appointment. Therefore, both lower and higher imposition requests were included in the study.

In order to address the ethical issues in relation to such a study, students were informed that their e-mails would be kept confidential and no personal information would be revealed.

#### **E-mail Analysis Procedures**

For e-mail analysis, the request head act of each e-mail message (both English and Persian) was elicited and analyzed. The researcher coded each request head act based on the degree of directness (direct requests, conventionally indirect requests, or hints) For determining the degree of directness, the researcher used a modified version of request strategies that was proposed initially by Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper (1989) and revised by Bisenbach-Lucas (2007) to fit e-mail request data. Request for action and request for information were analyzed on a separate scale of directness. Both e-mail requests for action and requests for information were analyzed along the following main directness levels of (a) most direct strategies, (b) conventionally indirect strategies, and (c) non-conventionally indirect strategies. Appendices A and B include the main strategies and sub strategies for analyzing requests for action and request for information.

Chi-square tests of Independence, being suitable for nominal data, were also conducted in order to check whether there were significant differences between the directness employed in students' e-mail requests for action and requests for information. They were also conducted in order to check whether there were significant differences between the directness employed in students' Persian electronic requests and English electronic requests.

#### **Results**

##### **Degree of Directness of Students' English E-mail Requests**

English E-mail requests for action and requests for information were analyzed separately. The results indicated that students employed a great deal of indirect strategies in English e-mail requests for action (65%) (see Table 1— indirect strategies: 65%), and particularly, a large number of query preparatory was used (see Table 1- query preparatory: 61.6%). The English e-mail below is a typical example composed by student No. 43.

[1]

Student No. 43

[Dear Sir

I am writing to request information about my grade. **I would appreciate it if you could evaluate my exam paper and modify my grade.** Also, Could you please arrange an appointment for me to visit you? I am looking forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Thank you

..... (student name)]

As far as requests for information were concerned, NNSs resorted direct strategies in great majority of the English e-mail requests for information (see Table 2 – direct strategies: 63.4%), and more specifically, an imperative sentence for information (see Table 2 –imperatives: 38.4%), as example (2) in below:

[2]

Student No. 20

[Dear Dr. .... (professor name)

hello

I shocked when I saw my score in sociology course. My score was low in your test. Please **give me an appointment** and let me meet you in your office to explain why I have done badly in your exam.

Thanks in advance

..... (student name)]

The general results indicated that students employed more indirect strategies in their English e-mail requests for action and requests for information and there was overall preference on the part of the students for indirectness (Table 3).

These are the total percentages for English e-mail requests for action and for information. As can be seen from Table 3, 49.2% of the students' English e-mails included a direct request, 49.2% of the students' English e-mails included conventional indirectness, and Hints were present in 1.6% of the students' English e-mails.

The most widely direct substrategies were used by students in their English e-mail requests for action and requests for information were as follow:

(a) Imperatives/mood derivable (Table 3: 27.5%)

(b) Want statements (Table 3: 12.5%)

(c) Performatives (Table 3: 6.6%)

The typical imperative construction that was utilized by students was 'please + imperative'. The use of 'please + imperative' form in a student's English e-mail requests was demonstrated in the examples below:

[3]

Student No. 16

[Hi my teacher

**Please check my paper again.** I think my mark is more than the announced score. I want to meet you if you have a free time.

Thanks for your attention

..... (student name)]

Students typically utilized 'I want you ' for want statements and therefore used a speaker perspective as in example (4) below:

[4]

Student No. 31

[Dear Instructor

Thanks for your working during semester in terms of teaching. **I want you check my score** and change that if possible. By the way make an appointment to meet each other and let me know about that.

... (student name)]

Performatives were typically phrased with 'I request you' and therefore employed a speaker perspective as in example (5) below:

[5]

Student No. 57

[Dear Professor,

**I request you to revise my grade** and change my mark so that my average in this semester to be improved and make an appointment to meet you and talk with you about my exam.

Thank you very much for accepting my request.

... (student name)]

Chi-square tests of Independence, being suitable for nominal data, were also conducted in order to check whether there were significant differences between the directness employed in students' English e-mail requests for action and requests for information.

The statistical results of e-mail requests written by students in English indicated a significantly higher number of direct strategies in students' English e-mail requests for information, and a significantly higher number of conventionally indirect strategies in students' English e-mail requests for action,  $\chi^2 (1, n = 120) = 8.54, p = .003$ . These differences were significant at a  $p < .05$  level (Table 4).

#### Degree of Directness of Students' Persian E-mail Requests

The analysis of Persian e-mail requests for action and requests for information revealed the following quantitative results. The results indicated that the majority of Iranian students employed a great deal of direct strategies in their Persian e-mail requests for action. The total percentage of direct requests for action was 58.4% made up of 'Imperatives/mood derivable' (33.3%), 'performatives' (18.3%), 'want statements' (3.3%), 'need statements' (1.6%), and 'expectation statements' (1.6%). Conventionally indirect requests, on the other hand, consisted of 'query preparatory' (41.6%); and students didn't employed any non- conventionally indirect requests in their requests for action (see Table 5). The e-mail below is a typical example (see Appendix C for the phonetic guide for Persian examples).

[6]

Daaneshju shomaare 20

[Jenaabe doctor Man dar emtehaane shomaa nomreya paaini gerefteam. Lotfan ejaaze bedahid ke raaje be in ke cheraa dar emtehaan zaif budam tozih bedeham. Pas dar surate emkaan yek vaqte molaqaat be man bedahid. **Hamchenin barge man raa dobaare barresi konid.**

..... (naame daaneshju)]

Student No. 20

[Dear Doctor My score is low. Please let me explain for you why I have done badly in the exam. If it is possible give me an appointment to meet you and **re-correct my answer sheet.**

..... (student name)]

جناب دکتر

من در امتحان شما نمره پایینی گرفته ام. لطفا اجازه بدهید که راجع به این که چرا در امتحان ضعیف بودم توضیح بدهم. پس در صورت امکان یک وقت ملاقات به من بدهید. **همچنین برگه من را دوباره بررسی کنید.**  
... (نام دانشجو)

The distribution of (in) directness strategies in requests for information were as below:

(a) Direct requests 78.3%

- (b) Conventionally indirect requests 21.7%  
 (c) Nonconventionally indirect requests 0%.

The result indicated that the majority of Iranian students resorted direct strategies in great majority of the Persian e-mail requests for information, and more specifically, an imperative sentence for request for information (see Table 6– imperatives: 51.7% ). The small percentage of indirect requests means that the students preferred to be more direct in their Persian requests for information. The e-mail below is an example from the data.

[7]

[Daaneshju shomaare. 32

Zemne arze salaam va ehtaraam

Ostaade geraami hamaantor ke mostahzar hastid injaaneb darse zabaanshenaasi raa terme gozashte baa shomaa daashteam va nomreya khubi az aan kasb nakardeam. Lotfan dar surate salaahdid bargeye emtehaani man ra morede barresi mojadad qaraar dahid va forsati be man bedahid ke hozuran shomaa raa molaqaat konam.

Baa tashakor

.... (naame daaneshju)]

Student No.32

[Hello

Dear professor, as you know I had linguistics course with you in the last semester and I haven't got a good score in it. Please if it is possible revise my answer sheet and give me an appointment to meet you.

Thanks

.... (student name)]

ضمن سلام و احترام  
 استادگرامی همانطورکه مستحضرید اینجانب درس  
 زبانشناسی را ترم گذشته با شما داشتم و نمره  
 ی خوبی از آن کسب نکرده ام. لطفا در صورت  
 صلاحدید برگه ی امتحانی من را مورد بررسی  
 مجدد قرار دهید و فرصتی به من بدهید که حضوراً  
 شما را ملاقات کنم. با تشکر.... (نام دانشجو)

The general quantitative analysis of requests for action and requests for information indicated that students preferred to be more direct in their Persian e-mail requests. The percentage of direct strategies in students Persian e-mail requests were 68.3% (see Table 7). As can be seen from Table 7, 68.3% of the students' Persian e-mails included a direct request, 31.7% students' Persian e-mails employed conventional indirectness, and Hints were not presented in any of students' Persian e-mails. Students employed the following direct substrategies in their Persian e-mail requests.

- (a) Imperatives/mood derivable (Table 7: 42.5%)  
 (b) Want statements (Table 7: 4.1%)  
 (c) Performatives (Table 7: 18.3%)  
 (d) Need statements (Table 7: 2.5%)  
 (e) Expectation statements (Table 7: 0.8%)  
 (f) Reminder requests, elliptical requests, and direct questions (Table 7: 0%)

The typical imperative construction that was utilized by students was 'please + imperative'. The use of 'please + imperative' form in a student's e-mail request was demonstrated in the examples ( 8) below:

Daaneshju shomaare 54

[Baa Arze Salaam Va khaste nabaashid

Ostaade geraami injaaneb....(naame daaneshju) daaneshjuye kelaas nesbat be nomreya darse jaameshenaasiye zabaan eteraaz daraam va khaastaare residegi hastam. Khaaheshmandam barge injaaneb raa yekbaare digar chek

namaaid va dar surate emkaan ejaaze dahid shomaa raa dar daftaretaan bebinam va dar morede nomream hozuri baa shomaa sohbat konam.]

Student No. 54

[Hello

Dear professor, I am .... (student name), your student. I have an objection to my sociology course exam score and I want you to consider my request. Please check my answer sheet once more and if it is possible for you let me meet you in your office and speak about my score.]

با عرض سلام و خسته نباشید  
 استاد گرامی اینجانب..... ( نام دانشجو)  
 دانشجوی کلاس نسبت به نمره ی درس جامعه شناسی  
 زبان اعتراض دارم و خواستار رسیدگی هستم.  
**خواهشمندم برگه اینجانب را یکبار دیگر چک**  
**نمایید** و در صورت امکان به من اجازه دهید شما  
 را در دفترتان ببینم و در مورد نمره ام حضوری  
 با شما صحبت کنم.

Students typically utilized ' I want you ' for want statements and therefore used a speaker perspective as in example (9) below:

Daaneshju shomaare 17

[Salaam be behtarin moallemam. Aval mikhaaham tashakor konam baraaye behtarin metodhai ke az aan tariq tadrīs kardid. Man fekr mikonam shomaa behtarin moallemi hastid ke man taa haalaa daashteam . Man mikhaaham shomaa raa bebinam va darmorede nomrehaam baa haatun sohbat konam man fekr mikonam dar nomre man eshkaali vojūd darad va az shomaa mikhaaham taa barge man raa dobaare barresi konid.

Daaneshjuye shomaa

..... (naame daaneshju)]

Student No.17

[Hello to my best teacher

First, thank you for your method of teaching. I think you are the best teacher that I have ever had. I want to meet you to speak about my score. I think there is a problem about my score. I want you to check my answer sheet once more.

Your student

.... (student name)]

سلام به بهترین معلمم. اول می خواهم تشکر کنم  
 برای بهترین متدهایی که از آن طریق تدریس  
 کردید. من فکر می کنم که شما بهترین معلمی  
 هستی که من تا حالا داشته ام. **من می خواهم**  
**شما را ببینم** و در مورد نمره ام باهاتون  
 صحبت کنم. من  
 فکرمی کنم در نمره من اشکالی وجود دارد. و  
**از شما می خواهم تا برگه من را دوباره بررسی**  
**کنید.** دانش آموز شما  
 .... (نام دانشجو)

Performatives were typically phrased with 'I request you' and 'I would like' therefore

employed a speaker perspective as in example (10) below:

Daaneshju shomaare 1

[Injaaneb ....( naame daaneshju) daaneshjuye shomaa **az shomaa darkhaast daaram taa negaaye digari be bargeye injaaneb daashte baashid** be dalile inke man nomre kaamel raa baraaye paas kardan migiram va be khaatere fa'aaliyathaaye kelaas ham fekr mikonam mitavaanam nomreya qabuli raa daashte baasham dar zemn **maayelam baa shomaa molaaghaati hozuri dashte baasham.**

Az pish moteshakeram]

Student No. 1

[I'm .....(student name) , your student. **I request you to check my answer sheet once more.** Because I think I can get the passing score for the course and also because of my activities in the classroom, I think I can get the passing score . However, **I would like to meet you in your office.**

Thanks]

اینجانب .....(نام دانشجو) ی شما از شما در خواست دارم تا نگاه دیگری به برگه اینجانب داشته باشید به دلیل اینکه من فکر می کنم نمره کامل را برای پاس کردن می گیرم و به خاطر فعالیت های کلاس هم فکر می کنم می توانم نمره ی قبولی را داشته باشم در ضمن مایلیم با شما ملاقاتی حضوری داشته باشم. متشکرم

The general results indicated that the number of direct strategies in students' Persian e-mail requests for action and requests for information were more than indirect strategies and there was overall preference on the part of the students for directness(see table 7).

In order to check whether there were significant differences between the directness employed in students' Persian e-mail requests for action and requests for information Chi-square tests of Independence, being suitable for nominal data, were also conducted. The statistical results indicated that there were statistically significant differences at the  $p < .05$  level between the directness employed in students' Persian e-mail in requests for action and requests for information,  $\chi^2(1, n = 120) = 4.7, p = .031$  (see Table 8).

#### Degree of Directness of Students' E-mail Requests – English vs. Persian

English and Persian electronic requests written by Iranian EFL learners compared to find out if they were distinct in terms of degree of directness.

Table 9 indicates the total percentages for English and Persian e-mail requests for action and for information. As can be seen from Table 9, students used more direct strategies (68.3%) in their Persian e-mail requests than their English e-mail requests (%49.1). While the majority of students resorted indirect strategies in their English requests for action (65%) (see Table 1), the most widely used strategies employed in students' Persian e-mail requests for action were direct strategies (58.4%)(see Table 5). In the case of requests for information the majority of students used direct strategies in both English and Persian requests (see Tables 2 and 6).

General results indicated that while there was an overall preference on the part of students for directness in their Persian e-mail requests for action and information, students employed more indirect strategies in their English e-mail requests for action and requests for information as can be seen in Table 9 where the general results are presented.

Importantly, a closer look at the direct substrategies employed in both English and Persian requests indicated that the most widely used substrategy was imperatives/mood derivable. While Hints were not presented in any of students' Persian e-mails, they were found in 1.6% of students' English e-mails (see Table 3 and 7).

Chi-square tests of Independence, being suitable for nominal data, were also conducted in order to check whether there were significant differences between the directness employed in English and Persian electronic requests, as written by Iranian EFL learners. The statistical results indicated that students employed a significantly higher number of direct strategies in their Persian e-mail requests,  $\chi^2(1, n = 240) = 8.32, p = .004$ . These differences were significant at a  $p < .05$  level (see Table 10).

**Table 1. Type of Strategies and Degree of Requestive Directness: Requests for Action (N: 60)**

Total	Percent	Type of Strategies	
21/60 (35%)	10/60 (16.6%)	Imperatives/mood derivable	Direct
	0/60(0%)	Elliptical requests	
	4/60 (6.6%)	Performatives	
	6/60 (10%)	Want statements	
	0/60 (0%)	Need statements	
	1/60 (1.6%)	Expectation statements	
	0/60 (0%)	Reminder requests	
37/60 (61.6%)	37/60 (61.6%)	Query preparatory	Conventionally indirect
2/60 (3.4%)	2/60 (3.4%)	Strong hints/Mild hints	Hints

**Table 2. Type of Strategies and Degree of Requestive Directness: Requests for Information (N: 60)**

Total	Percent	Type of Strategies	
38/60 (63.4%)	0/60(0%)	Direct questions	Direct
	0/60(0%)	Elliptical requests	
	23/60 (38.4%)	Imperatives/mood derivable	
	4/60 (6.6%)	Performatives	
	9/60 (15%)	Want statements	
	2/60 (3.3%)	Need statements	
22/60 (36.6%)	22/60 (36.6%)	Query preparatory	Conventionally indirect
0/60 (0%)	0/60(0%)	Strong hints/Mild hints	Hints

**Table 3. Type of Strategies and Degree of Requestive Directness: General Results (N: 120)**

Total	Percent	Type of Strategies	
59/120 (49.2%)	33/120 (27.5%)	Imperatives/mood derivable	Direct
	0/120(0%)	Direct questions	
	0/120(0%)	Elliptical requests	
	8/120 (6.6%)	Performatives	
	15/120 (12.5%)	Want statements	
	2/120 (1.6%)	Need statements	
	1/120 (0.8%)	Expectation statements	
	0/120(0%)	Reminder requests	
59/120 (49.2%)	59/120 (49.2%)	Query preparatory	Conventionally indirect
2/120 (1.6%)	2/120 (1.6%)	Strong hints/Mild hints	Hints

**Table 4. Chi-Square Test Results for Students' English E-mail Requests for Action and Requests for Information**

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	9.636	1	.002		
Continuity Correction	8.536	1	.003		
Likelihood Ratio	9.769	1	.002		
Fisher's Exact Test				.003	.002
Linear-by-Linear Association	9.556	1	.002		
N of Valid Cases	120				

**Table 5. Type of Strategies and Degree of Requestive Directness: Requests for Action (N:60)**

Total	Percent	Type of Strategies	
35/60 (58.4%)	20/60 (33.3%)	Imperatives/Mood derivable	Direct
	0/60 (0%)	Elliptical requests	
	11/60 (18.3%)	Performatives	
	2/60 (3.3%)	Want statements	
	1/60 (1.6%)	Need statements	
	1/60 (1.6%)	Expectation statements	
	0/60 (0%)	Reminder requests	
25/60 (41.6%)	25/60 (41.6%)	Query preparatory	Conventionally indirect
0/60 (0%)	0/60 (0%)	Strong hints/Mild hints	Hints

**Table 6. Type of Strategies and Degree of Requestive Directness: Requests for Information (N: 60)**

Total	Percent	Type of Strategies	
47/60 (78.3%)	0/60(0%)	Direct questions	Direct
	0/60(0%)	Elliptical requests	
	31/60 (51.7%)	Imperatives/mood derivable	
	11/60 (18.3%)	Performatives	
	3/60 (5%)	Want statements	
	2/60 (3.3%)	Need statements	
13/60 (21.7%)	13/60 (21.7%)	Query preparator	Conventionally indirect
0/60 (0%)	0/60(0%)	Strong hints/Mild hints	Hints

**Table 7. Type of Strategies and Degree of Requestive Directness: General Results (N: 120)**

Total	Percent	Type of Strategies	
82/120 (68.3%)	51/120 (42.5%)	Imperatives/Mood derivable	Direct
	0/120 (0%)	Elliptical requests	
	22/120 (18.3%)	Performatives	
	5/120 (4.1%)	Want statements	
	3/120 (2.5%)	Need statements	
	1/120 (0.8%)	Expectation statements	
	0/120(0%)	Reminder requests	
	38/120 (31.7%)	38/120 (31.7%)	
0/120 (0%)	0/120 (0%)	Strong hints/Mild hints	Hints

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	5.546	1	.019		
Continuity Correction	4.660	1	.031		
Likelihood Ratio	5.618	1	.018		
Fisher's Exact Test				.030	.015
Linear-by-Linear Association	5.499	1	.019		
N of Valid Cases	120				

**Table 9. Type of Strategies and Degree of Requestive Directness: General Results for Persian and English Requests (N: 120)**

Percent	Type of Strategies (English)	Percent	Type of Strategies (Persian)
59/120 (49.1%)	Direct	82/120(68.3%)	Direct
59/120 (49.1%)	Conventionally indirect	38/120(31.7%)	Conventionally indirect
2/120 (1.6%)	Hints	0/120 (0%)	Hints

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	9.095	1	.003		
Continuity Correction	8.322	1	.004		
Likelihood Ratio	9.161	1	.002		
Fisher's Exact Test				.004	.002
Linear-by-Linear Association	9.057	1	.003		
N of Valid Cases	240				

## Discussion

This study tried to examine English and Persian electronic requests written by Iranian EFL learners to find out the degree of directness in requests used by the Iranian (NNS of English) postgraduate students in their English and Persian e-mails to the academic staff. More specifically, the study aimed to examine the English and Persian e-mail requests performed by Iranian (NNS of English) students to find out if the degree of directness vary with increasing imposition of requests in students' e-mail requests.

The statistical results indicated that students employed a significantly higher number of direct strategies in their Persian e-mail requests. General results indicated that while there

was an overall preference on the part of students for directness in their Persian e-mail requests for action and information, students employed more indirect strategies in their English e-mail requests for action and information.

The explanation for this might be that, students tried to make use of certain lexical items to mitigate their Persian e-mail requests instead of using indirect strategies. Although the majority of students used imperative construction in their Persian e-mail requests, they tried to use certain lexical items such as 'khaaheshmand ast', 'khaahesh mikonam', 'lotfan', 'ehteraaman', 'ehteraaman khaaheshmandam', 'estedaa daaram', 'aajezaane estedaa daarm', all of these lexical items have the meaning of 'please' in English, to make their requests polite.

Some of the students preferred to use the expression of 'bande haqir' instead of using 'I' pronounce to mitigate their Persian requests, while others tried to use certain lexical items such as 'hazrateaali', 'jenaabeaali', which are used in more polite situations in Persian instead of 'you' pronounce, to show their respect toward their professors.

However, the majority of students preferred to employ direct strategies in their Persian e-mails. This finding is not in line with findings of previous studies in that conventional indirectness is the most preferred strategy in other languages (Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper, 1989; Felix-Brasdefer, 2005; Garcia, 1993; Hassall, 1999; Le Pair, 1996).

The finding also does not support that of Blum-Kulka (1987) and Marquez-Reiter's (2002) study who found that speakers used conventional indirectness to balance pragmatic clarity and non-coerciveness during the negotiation of face in their interactions. Unlike Brown and Levinson's (1987), and Leech's (1983) claim that directness enhances degrees of politeness during the realization of a face-threatening act such as requests, the results from the present study indicate that on-record or direct requests seem to be the expected behavior in Persian politeness system.

This finding is in line with Eslami-Rasekh's (1993) claim that direct request is the common form of request speech act in Persian language and also with Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989) finding whose study of Australian English, German, French, Hebrew, and Argentinean Spanish speakers' requests indicated that "the specific proportions in the choices between the more direct and less direct strategies are culture-specific" (p. 133).

This finding also confirms Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989) claim that the degree of directness does not essentially means that the speakers of one language are more polite than the speakers of other language. Directness is only one aspect of the request sequence related to politeness and other elements of requests sequence play an important role in this respect (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989).

In general, comparing the distribution of the degree of directness emerging in Persian and English e-mails it can be



argued that culture is the most important factor involved in the use of direct strategies because members of a speech community utilize direct strategies according to their socio-cultural relationship. It cannot be said that students were more polite in their English e-mails than in their Persian e-mails, because each language has its own system of asking requests.

One explanation for direct strategies not used by majority of students in their English e-mails might be that the EFL students of this study, as a result of studying English at university, were aware of the conventions of politeness in English. Therefore, they avoided using direct strategies in their English e-mails.

Moreover, although students used more indirect strategies in their English e-mail request, they also employed an almost high amount of direct strategies in their English e-mail requests, with the imperative as the most preferred sub-strategy. This result is in line with Biesenbach-Lucas (2002, 2004), Biesenbach-Lucas and Weasenforth (2000) and Chen (2006) who similarly found that their NNSs tended to also employ a largely amount of direct strategies in their e-mail requests. However, as such significantly direct strategies don't give the faculty no choice in complying with the request, they can easily become responsible for pragmatic infelicities (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2011).

As Bloch (2002) argues, the degree of power in e-mails characterized with direct strategies is not properly allotted to the faculty members, therefore, the use of the imperative in particular can be seen as an institutionally inappropriate strategy. According to Hartford and Bardovi-Harlig's claim (1996), "Students do not have the institutional status to issue Directives to faculty, and the use of this form puts them seriously out-of-status. . . Such noncongruent acts in institutional talk require a fairly high level of mitigation" (p. 59).

Hartford and Bardovi-Harlig (1996), however, noticed that those e-mails that did not acknowledge the imposition on the faculty and the faculty's time were negative affect e-mails. It could be argued that the wide use of direct strategies in students' e-mail requests is a result of the students' misinterpretation of their rights and the faculty's obligation (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2011).

The findings of the present study also indicated that students employed more direct strategies for the requests for information, which are lower imposition requests, but not for the requests for action, which are the highest imposition requests. This suggests that students do not consider all e-mail requests of faculty equal. In other words, although the nature of the face-to-face clues lack in interaction via e-mail, they do not prevent differentiation among different request goals (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2007). This finding is in line with Biesenbach-Lucas' (2007) and Economidou-Kogetsidis (2011) findings who similarly found that their NNSs tended to also employ more direct strategies in their e-mail request for information than e-mail requests for action.

### Conclusion

The present study aimed to investigate English and Persian e-mail requests written by Iranian (NNS of English) post graduate university students to their professors to investigate the degree of directness employed in students' Persian and English e-mail requests and also to find out if the degree of directness employed in students' email requests vary with increasing imposition of requests.

The results of the study indicated that while the students' Persian e-mails were typically characterized by significant directness, students employed more indirect strategies in their

english e-mail requests. The general results indicated that students tried to make use of certain lexical items to mitigate their Persian e-mail requests instead of using indirect strategies. This suggests that the relationship between indirectness and politeness is interpreted differently across cultures, and directness in some cultures should be considered as a way of stating connectedness, intimacy, amity, and affiliation (Al-Marrani & Szaliev, 2010; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2002; Wierzbicka, 2003).

The result of the study also revealed that student employed more direct strategies in their request with lower imposition. To sum up, the results of the study indicated that Iranian students tended to employ almost a high amount of direct strategies in their Persian and English e-mails requests. It has been argued that as these e-mails give the faculty no choice in complying with the request and fail to acknowledge the imposition involved, many of them might become responsible for pragmatic infelicities. This study has confirmed that writing e-mails to authority figures appropriately remains a demanding task and requires student to be aware of politeness strategies and to have high pragmatic competence. Students should be aware of e-mail etiquette so that they can write an e-mail to their faculty appropriately (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2007).

### Implication, Limitations, and Suggestions for Further Research

As electronic communication is becoming a more popular medium for bridging the wide gap of remoteness of physical distance between parties involved in all interactions in general and in academic environments in particular, Iranian EFL instructors, graduate students, supervisors, and program coordinators should help students to be aware of how to use the electronic medium and how to do this in an effective, yet appropriate manner. Many Iranian EFL students, nevertheless, are not competent enough in e-mail communication to be able to use this technology appropriately because of their insufficient ability in applying different strategies for writing more influential and persuasive e-mails. Therefore, the results of this study can be used for teaching in the areas of syllabus design, material development, and classroom activities to make students aware of what is the appropriate relationship between professors and students in the academic context.

The limitations of this study revolve primarily around the way of the data collection process. The data didn't comprise naturalistic due to ethical reasons. This may have some effects on the way participants requests via e-mail. Because of this limitation participants may not make genuine effort to make requests in the way they would normally do in an actual e-mail exchange. This limitation have some effects on participants' actions and behaviors and hence distorts research results.

The current study ignores the matter of gender and its effect on the degree of directness of e-mail requests. Gender can have some influence on the different concepts of face and politeness between men and women and as a result on different way they interact and apply these concepts.

Further research can control factors such as proficiency level, amount of input and practice, length of exposure in the target culture and academic environment, and pragmatic transfer to determine optimal intervention. If possible, studies can be undertaken to analyze e-mail messages sent by different genders, and investigate the effect of age, gender, personality, and distance between the students and the faculty members.

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#### Appendix A Degree of Directness - Coding Categories for E-requests for Action

Examples	Request strategies	Directness level
- Please note what changes should be made.	Imperatives/mood derivable	Most Direct
- Any comments?	Elliptical requests	
-I have to ask for extension for a week.	Performatives	
- I would like your suggestion.	Want statements	
- I want to have an extension.		
-I will need a little more time.	Need statements	
-I hope you'll give me the weekend to finish my assignment.	Expectation statements	
- I look forward to hearing from you.		
- I would like to remind you of my reference letter.	Reminder requests	Conventionally indirect
- I will hand my assignment in tomorrow.	Pre-decided statements	
-can/could/would you mind...? -I would appreciate it if .....	Query preparatory (ability, willingness, permission)	
- Attached is a draft of my work. - I have some trouble in understanding the essay.	Strong hints/mild hints	Hints

#### Appendix B Degree of Directness – Coding Categories for E-requests for Information

Directness level	Request strategies	Example
Most direct	Direct questions	- Did you get my project?
	Elliptical	-Any news?
	Mood derivable	- Please let me know if you have to withdraw me from class.
	Performative	- I would like to ask if....
	Want statements	- I would like to know what your policy is on grading students for the degree equivalence program.
	Need statements	- I will need to know.
Conventionally indirect	Query preparatory (ability, willingness, permission)	-Could you tell me...?
Hints	Strong hints/Mild hints	- I tried very hard to find but couldn't find it.

#### Appendix C Guide to phonetic Symbols Used for Reporting Persian Examples.

Symbol Example	Symbol Example	Symbol Example
v	p	pen
voice	s	so
q	ch	change
aa	kh	khub
o	z	red
u	zoo	shoe
a	zh	foot
e	vision	good
i	n	noon
	y	yard
	k	kill
	l	land
	t	tea
	j	joke
	h	house
	d	door
	r	red
	sh	shoe
	f	foot
	g	good
	m	moon
	b	bad