



## **Emotional Intelligence as the Predictor of Pragmatic Competence: A Closer Look at Iranian EFL Learners' Politeness Strategies**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Interlanguage pragmatics concerns the inspection of interactions among people in society while they are aware of the effects that interaction imposes on them regarding culture, social values and individuals' peculiar interpretations. Of high value in social interaction, politeness is an essential constituent of interlanguage pragmatics. If considered as a skill required to cope with social environmental demands, Emotional Intelligence (EI) may play a part in modifying the interlanguage pragmatics and hence individuals' politeness in response to social interaction. This study investigates how emotional intelligence of L1-Persian EFL learners relates to politeness strategies utilized in requests. To this end, 150 male and female undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate students majored in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) were randomly selected. Instruments of the study included Emotional Intelligence Appraisal Test, Multiple-choice Discourse Completion Task (MDCT), and a politeness questionnaire based on Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness. The results of correlational and regression analyses indicated that EI cannot predict politeness, whereas educational level and pragmatic competence can predict the EFL learners' politeness appreciated in requests in different scenarios. Of interest, the higher the level of education, the more pragmatic ability and politeness thereof.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

It does not sound weird if an individual intelligence is no more related to one single trait easily measured by an Intelligence test to show the intelligent quotient of a person. The concept seems very raw if separated from other features; societal factors probably shape one's interpersonal relationship. Interpersonal pragmatics concerns the inspection of interactions among people in society while they are aware of the effects that interaction imposes on them regarding culture, social values and individuals' peculiar interpretations. As is observed, we can assume that the inclusion of EI in this study targets at finding, first, a relationship between this type of intelligence and Interpersonal Pragmatics, and second, the relationship between EI and politeness. In addition,

the interest in finding a relative power of EI in predicting both interpersonal pragmatics and politeness would be another objective of the current study.

The concept of intelligence has always overshadowed individuals' competence in developing skills necessary to handle both personal and social needs. If we trace the origin of the notion of intelligence, we reach a day when it was regarded as one single construct. Wechsler (1958), for example, regards intelligence as "the aggregate or global capacity of the individual to act purposefully, to think rationally, and to deal effectively with his environment" (p. 27). A French psychologist called Binet with the help of Simon was the pioneer in developing a scale of intelligence which came to be known as the first practical intelligence test. However, there were a number of scholars who opposed the cognitive aspect of intelligence which sees the intelligence as "single, unchanged, inborn capacity" (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 115). From among them, Thorndike (1920) presented the construct of *Social Intelligence* as "the ability to understand men and women, boys and girls – to act wisely in human relations" (p. 228). Social intelligence can be defined as the ability to appreciate and deal with both oneself and others (Thorndike & Stein, 1937). It is also defined as "the ability to perceive one's own and others' internal states, motives, and behaviors, and to act toward them optimally on the basis of that information" (Salovey & Mayer, 1990, p. 187). Having said that, we still doubt to consider so vast a construct like intelligence to be of solitary nature. Thorndike and Stein (1937) contended that "whether there is any unitary trait corresponding to social intelligence remains to be demonstrated" (p. 284). Three decades later, Cronbach (1960) admitted that in spite of "fifty years of intermittent investigation ... social intelligence remains undefined and unmeasured" (p. 319).

Further efforts were made to explicate intelligence in general and social intelligence in particular. Among those who worked on social intelligence, Sternberg, Conway, Ketron, and Bernstein (1981) developed measures of social intelligence which did not rely on verbal skills and intelligences. Ford (1982) proposed Social Competence Nomination Form. Later, Gardner (1983) leveled criticisms at traditional notion of intelligence and presented a multi-faceted concepts having seven distinct intelligent types. Gardner's theory of MI, therefore, connotes that intelligence can be improved through practice (that is, they can be mutated through time and with practice), hence they are viewed as fixed, inborn, and unchangeable capacity. His theory (2006) tapped:

... an alternative vision – one based on a radically different view of the mind, and one that yields a very different view of school. It is a pluralistic view of mind, recognizing many different and discrete facets of cognition, acknowledging that people have different cognitive strengths and contrasting cognitive styles. (p. 5)

Another new outlook incorporated the significance of emotions as a type of otherwise different concept of intelligence. Emotional Intelligence (hereafter EI) was introduced into the field of psychology by Salovey and Mayer in early 1990s and later it reached a peak in 1995 when Goleman wrote a seminal book, "Emotional Intelligence". Salovey and Mayer (1990) regarded emotions as "disorganized interruptions of mental activity, so potentially disruptive that they must be controlled" (p. 185). In the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, emotions were viewed as directive rather than disruptive (Mandler, 1975). Salovey and Mayer (1990) defined EI:

... a set of skills hypothesized to contribute to the accurate appraisal and expression of emotion in oneself and in others, the effective regulation of emotion in self and others, and the use of feelings to motivate, plan, and achieve in one's life. (p. 185)

Seven years later, Mayer and Salovey reconsidered the definition they had already provided. Then, to them, EI was “the ability to perceive emotion, integrate emotion to facilitate thought, understand emotions, and to regulate emotions to promote personal growth” (p. 10). Goleman (1995) defined EI as “abilities such as being able to motivate oneself and persist in the face of frustration; to control impulses and delay gratification; to regulate ones’ moods and keep distress from swamping the ability you think; to emphasize and to hope” (p. 34). Another conceptualization refers to EI as “an array of non-cognitive capabilities, competences, and skills that influences one’s ability to succeed in coping with environmental demands and pressures” (Bar-On, 1997, p. 14). EI has been differently modeled by different scholars: Mayer and Salovey’s model of EI, Bar-On’s model of EI, and Goleman’s model of EI. Mayer and Salovey’s MSCEIT model considers EI as consisting of experiential EI and strategies EI with four micro categories of *perceiving emotions, facilitating thought, understanding emotions, and managing emotions*. Being different from other measures of EI, MSCEIT is not a self-report test relying not on verbal task while the following two models are founded on self report tasks to determine the level of EI in an individual.

Bar-On’s model of EI deals with five major components of EI: Intrapersonal, Interpersonal, adaptability, stress management, and general mood components. Bar-On defines EI as:

... the emotional, personal, social, and survival dimensions of intelligence, which are often more important for daily functioning than the more traditional cognitive aspects of intelligence. Emotional intelligence is concerned with understanding oneself and others, relating to people, and adapting to and coping with the immediate surroundings to be more successful in dealing with environmental demands. ... In a way, to measure emotional intelligence is to measure one’s “common sense” and ability to get along in the world. (p. 1)

Bar-On who first used the term Emotional Quotient (EQ) contrasting Intelligent Quotient (IQ) to underscore the importance of EI in daily life processes of obtaining goals and to allocate a significant role to EI as well as IQ.

Goleman’s model of EI lists four constructs including: Self-awareness, Self-management, Social awareness, and Relationship management. The first two deal with personal competence while the last two concern social competence of individuals.

Concerning the great role pragmatics and social aspect of language use play in developing a foreign or second language, we can surmise that social competence as a macro-component of EI can give rise to different interactions with others whether it be parents or people in the society or teachers or peers at learning-teaching contexts. Especially when Lakoff’s theory of politeness was linked to Grice’s Cooperative Principle, the significance of politeness in maintaining appropriate interpersonal and social relationships gained momentum. Robin Lakoff (1973) is considered the pioneer to introduce the theory of politeness, as is cited by Eelen (2001). However, it was Goffman (1967) who put forward the term for the first time. Karafoti (2007) states that Lakoff was mostly concerned with the hearer’s playing a great part in any interaction. However, Lakoff (1973) observes that the rules of pragmatic competence is affected by “the speaker’s assumptions about his relations with his addressee, his real-world situation as he speaks and the extent to which he wishes to change either or both or to reinforce them” (p. 296).

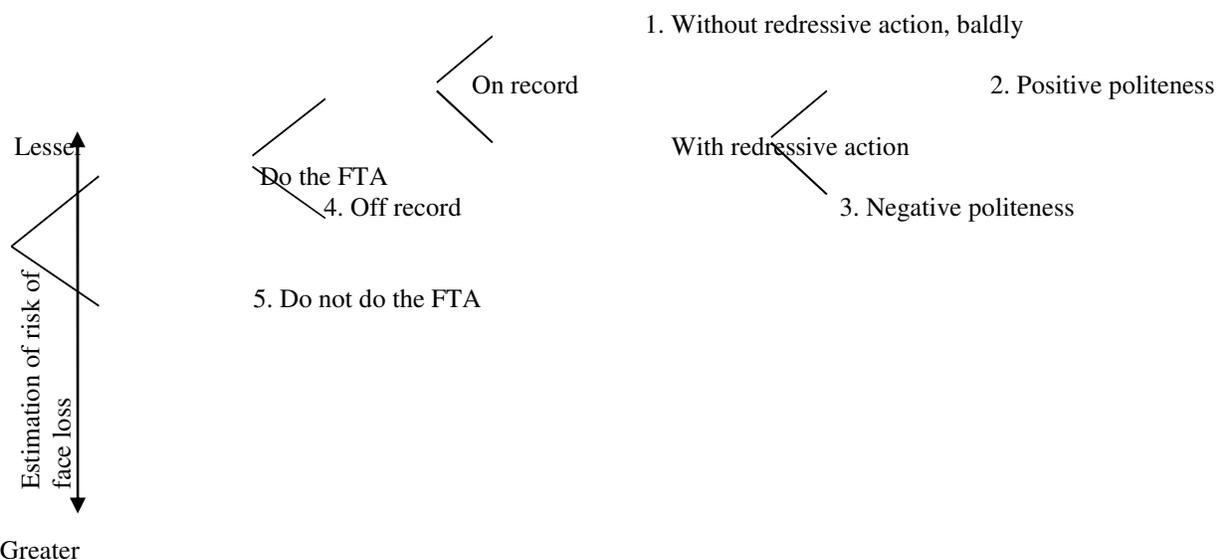
As a matter of fact, we can hardly overlook the great role pragmatics and social aspect of language use play in developing a foreign language. The term interpersonal pragmatics, according

to Locher and Graham (2010) is used “to designate examinations of the relational aspect of interactions between people that both affect and are affected by their understandings of culture, society, and their own and others’ interpretations” (p. 2). Later, Haugh, Kádár, and Mills (2013) stated interpersonal pragmatics is a field including two rather formerly independent fields of pragmatics and communication. Arundale (2013) underscored that if we take pragmatics as the study of language use, then interpersonal pragmatics can be taken as “the study of language use between persons” (p. 12). What follows, in fact, is a set of ideas to elaborate language use when addressees are different in characteristics hence a need to coordinate language use to individuals’ face, power, identity, and inter alia culture and socio-economic status. What we can grasp, actually, is that the relational side of pragmatics modifies the way interlocutors address one another in various contexts. Before considering what factors are significant while conversing, we can clarify our discussion with one example extracted from the book *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics* written by Holmes (1992):

(1) Every afternoon my friend packs her bag and leave her Cardiff office at about 5 o’clock. As she leaves, her business partner says *goodbye Margaret*, (she replies *goodbye Mark*) her secretary says *goodbye Ms Walker* (to which she responds *goodbye Jill*) and the caretaker says *Bye Mrs Walker* (to which she responds *Goodbye Andy*). As she arrives home she is greeted by *Hi mum* from her son, Jamie, *hello dear, have a good day?*, from her mother, and simply, and *you’re late again!* from her husband. Later in the evening the president of the local flower club calls to ask if she would like to join. *Good evening, is that Mrs Billington?* She asks. *No it’s Ms Walker, but my husband’s name is David Billington*, she answers. *What can I do for you?* Finally a friend calls *Borodar Meg, how’s things?* (p. 3)

As can be extracted from her statements, we can conclude different addressees receive different responses based on what status they enjoy in the social context. In fact, different speech acts are used hence different titles, different ways of greetings and farewell are used to get the meaning across. As Locher and Gramahm (2010) observe, “the choice of lexems on both sides is influenced by factors such as power, distance, closeness, and affect between her and the addressees as well as the expectations about appropriate conduct linked to roles in particular situations” (p. 2). Pieces of information exchange remain similar, however, the ways and techniques used to address a hearer differ. As Holmes contends, “linguistic variation can provide social information” (p. 4). In all, we may conclude that appropriate language use depends in part to developing a knowledge of the components of all languages especially lexis, syntax and semantics, but also learning to use language in different contexts as to the relationship the speakers develop between themselves and their hearers regarding the kind of status they have in a society where they converse.

All that can be found on the role of politeness and pragmatics in the literature underscore the importance of both linguistic and social aspect of language in interactions. After the initiative taken by Lakoff (1973) in introducing three rules of politeness, that is *Don’t impose, Give options, and Make A feel good-be friendly*, other scholars took the following steps to define politeness. Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) stressed the significance of *face* and a more broad view of the concept of politeness which was founded on the Gricean notion of maxims (that is quantity, quality, relation, and manner) but approximated the social aspect of linguistic behavior under the duress of society and people. In fact, they regarded *Face Threatening Acts* (FTA) and politeness strategies as pivotal in any interaction. The choice of strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson are illustrated in Figure 1.



*Note.* Adapted from “Politeness: Some universals in language usage,” by P. Brown and S. C. Levinson, 1987, p. 60. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Following Lakoff (1973, 1975, 1990), and Brown and Levinson, a great number of scholars scrutinized the issue of politeness. Since it is not possible in this paper to detail the studies of many scholars on politeness issues, their names are just cited for those who would like to refer to their words to learn more about what they have done (Leech, 1977, 1983; Eelen, 2001; Watts, 2003; Bargiela-Chiappini, 2003; Kasper, 1990; Fraser, 1990; Goffman, 1967; Nwoye, 1992; Werkhofer, 1992; Meyerhoff, 2011; Salvesen, 2015; Mohammadi & Tamimi Sa’d, 2014; Bosuwon, 2015; Kiyama, Tamaoka, Takiura, 2012; Yuka, 2009; Clark & Schunk, 1980; Khatib & Lotfi, 2015; Safavi & Zamanian, 2014; Linde, 2009; Blum-Kulka, 1982, 1987; Félix-Brasdefer, 2004, 2005; Kitamura, 2000; Zhu, 2012; Kasper, 1994; Levinson, 1983; Chen, 2014; Lestari, 2014; Leech, 1977, 2014; Gu, 1990; Ide, 1982, 1989, 1993, 2005; Fukushima, 2000; Fukada & Asato, 2004; Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1985; Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989; Fraser & Nolen, 1981; Janney & Arndt, 1992 amongst many others).

It is noteworthy, however, to mention that Leech (2014) calls politeness “communicative altruism” (p. 7). Here, a tentative conclusion may be drawn: language use among interlocutors of a variety of languages depends on the value which is in tune with social norms spread among people with different walks of life in specific situations and given contexts. Thus, being polite (or impolite thereof) is intertwined with not only syntactic/lexical forms of languages but with who are involved, what is the target of language use, for what purpose the language is being used, when the language is used, and finally how the language is used when the afore-mentioned criteria have factored in. The current study tends to bring the pragmalinguistic aspect of language into limelight putting emphasis on how emotional intelligence and its components *social competence* can be related in any manner to politeness when the language is used to make requests. In doing so, the following research questions were made:

1. How are EI and pragmatic competence related?
2. How are EI and politeness strategies related?

3. Which is the best predictor of politeness: EI, pragmatic competence, or educational level of EFL learners?

## METHODOLOGY

### Participants

A cohort of 150 university students majoring in TEFL comprised the participants of this study. From among 150, 95 were undergraduate, 38 graduate, and 17 postgraduate students. Gender as a modifying variable was factored in. Their age ranged from 18 to 34 years. All the participants were L1-Persian speakers.

### Instrument

The instruments used in this study were of three types. First, an EI appraisal test was administered to the participants. It was taken from Bradberry and Greaves (2009). The test is called Emotional Intelligence Appraisal. Emotional Intelligence 2.0 provides you with 66 strategies for the categories of EI; taking the test, you become aware of the flaws realized in strategies you use for self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relational management. The test includes four sections each of which focuses on one of the above-mentioned factors. It is a 28-item test with a 6-point Likert scale marked by 1. Never, 2. Rarely, 3. Sometimes, 4. Usually, 5. Almost always, and 6. Always. What follows is a sample of EI Appraisal Test administered to the participants of this study.

No	Question	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually	Almost always	Always
1	Are confident in your abilities?						
2	Play a part in creating the difficult circumstances you counter?						
3	Do things your regret when upset						
4	Are withdrawn in social situations						

The second instrument of the study used was a Multiple-choice Discourse Completion Task (MDCT). Liu (2006) proposed a four-stage process for creating a multiple-choice discourse completion task: exemplar generation, situation likelihood investigation, meta-pragmatic assessment, and situation pilot study. To follow such processes, the researchers first observed what type of request the participants of the study provide in exemplar generation stage in harmony with their peculiar culture. During the next stage, they were asked to predict the likelihood of their occurrence in their real life; finally, from among the situations and types of requests, a 28-item questionnaire was made to measure the pragmatic competence of the participants. The items of the questionnaire were similar to the ones provided by Tannen's (1993). The following is one example of the items appearing in the questionnaire:

Scenario 1: You are going to have a presentation at the university tomorrow and your laptop does not work properly. You ask your friend if she can lend you hers so that you can use it in your presentation. What would you say to her?

- A. Would it be OK if I borrowed your laptop for my tomorrow's presentation.
- B. Can you lend me your laptop for the presentation that I will have at the university tomorrow?
- C. I would like to have a lecture tomorrow in the class. My laptop does not work.
- D. I would like to borrow your laptop for my tomorrow's presentation. Mine does not work properly.

The third instrument used in this study was a politeness questionnaire. It consisted of 25 items which were constructed with regard to Brown and Levinson's model (1987), that is *bald-on record* without redress, *on record* with *positive politeness*, *on record* with negative politeness, *off-record*, *not do the Face Threatening Act (FTA)* the directive at all: i.e., Silence. An example of this questionnaire is provided here:

Which expression do you use for borrowing a pen from your friend?

- A. Give me your pen.
- B. Be nice and lend me your pen.
- C. Could you lend me your pen?
- D. I have an exam, but I do not have a pen.

## Procedure

The first instrument that was administered by the researchers was EI Appraisal Test. They were given ample amount of time to complete this 28 item test. Afterwards, they were provided with MDCT in which they were a number of situations followed by a number of options to be chosen as the answer to that particular situation. And finally, they were asked to go through the politeness questionnaire that required reading a situation and selecting the option among four choices provided as the polite form of request used in that situation. It should be noted that the study does not aim at finding the most polite form of the making a request or ranking the options from the most to least polite forms. The study, in fact, targets to find which expressions L1-Persian speakers use to convey polite requests. All the participants cooperated with the researchers in the course of data collection and no one quit the task leaving the researchers enough data to analyze.

## RESULTS

Different statistical analyses were conducted through using SPSS 23 so as to answer the questions of the study. As for the first research question, i.e., the relationship between EI and pragmatic competence, the result of Pearson's product moment correlation showed that there was a strong positive correlation between the two variables [ $r=.66$ ,  $n=150$ ,  $p<.05$ ]; this signifies that the higher the level of EI, the greater the pragmatic competence of EFL learners. Also, coefficient of determination indicated that EI can help explain just 43 percent of the variance in EFL learners' scores on pragmatic competence. In line with Cohen's (1988) idea of the effect size, the value of  $r$  showed that there is a strong effect size ( $r \geq .5$ ). The same statistical procedure was carried out to answer the second research question; the correlation coefficient indicated that EI was strongly related with politeness strategies [ $r=.49$ ,  $n=150$ ,  $p<.05$ ], hence the correlation coefficient index is

statistically significant although the coefficient of determination just accounted for 24 percent of common variance between EI and politeness strategies. The effect size, however, showed a moderate effect ( $r < .5$ ) of EI and politeness strategies. To answer the third research question, a multiple regression analysis was conducted. Prior to running this statistical analysis, the assumptions of multiple regressions analyses were checked. The assumption of multicollinearity was not violated in the study since we obtained *Tolerance* of our independent variables as acceptable (EI=.46, Pragmatic competence=.39, Educational level=.35 respectively). Then normality and linearity of the model were inspected. For normality checking, we can look at the Normal Probability Plot at the end of the output of regression. In the Normal Probability Plot we wish to see that the points will form a straight diagonal line from left to right. This would indicate no deviations from normality. Figure 2 demonstrates the issue. Moreover, Figure 3 illustrates the Scatterplot of standardized residuals. According to the assumptions of multiple regression analysis, it is better for the Scatterplot to be rectangularly distributed. It is preferable not to see any clear or systematic pattern for residuals for example curvilinear or higher on one side than the other. As can be seen, again we have met this assumption as well.

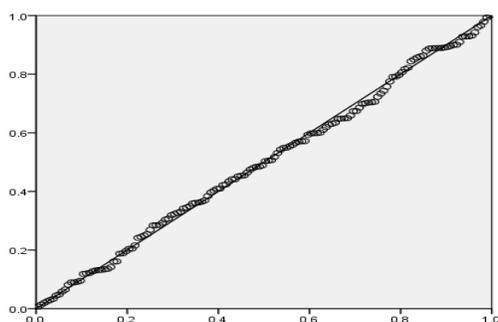


Figure 2. Normal P-P Plot of Regression Standardized Residuals

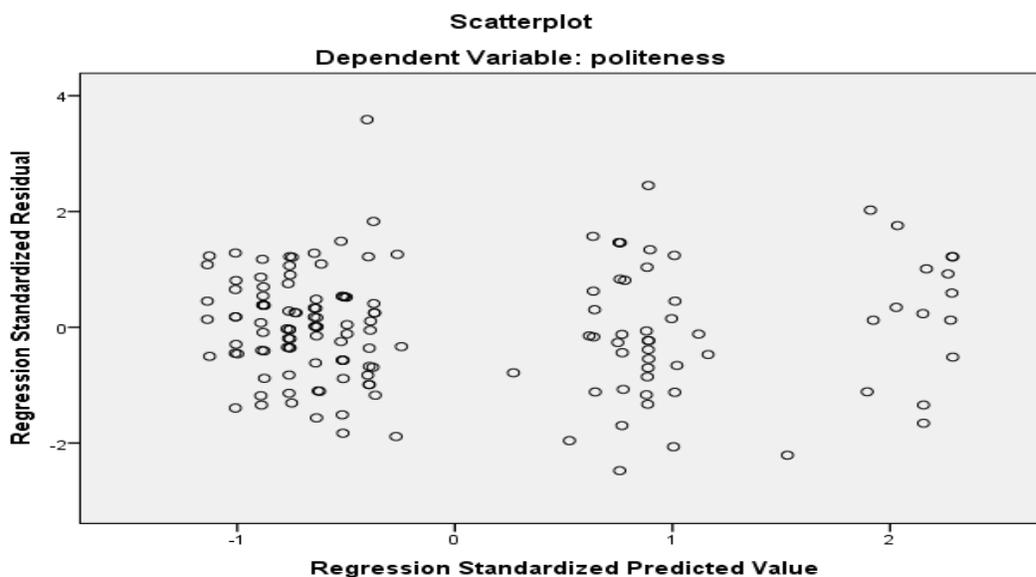


Figure 3. The Scatterplot of Standardized Residuals

Now that we have met the assumptions for the model, it is better to evaluate the model. To begin, we should look at the Model Summary.

**Table 1.** Model Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.665	0.442	0.430	6.346

As can be observed, this model accounts for 44.2 percent of the variance in the politeness. Table 2 is presented to assess the statistical significance of the result of the multiple regression analysis. ANOVA probes the linearity of the regression model. If the significance value of the F statistics is small ( $< 0.05$ ), then the independent variables do a perfect job explaining the variation in the dependent variable. As can be observed in Table 2, we have a good model fit since we have a significance value of 0.005 which is smaller than 0.05. This significant F-value also indicates that the regression model is linear.

**Table 2.** ANOVA<sup>b</sup> for Predictors and Indicator

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig
1 Regression	103.687	3	34.562	2.175	0.005 <sup>a</sup>
Residual	413.113	26	15.889		
Total	516.800	29			

a. Predictors: (Constant), EI, Pragmatic competence, Educational level

b. Dependent Variable: Politeness

After checking for the model fit, we would like to know the relative importance of each IV (Independent Variable) in predicting DV (Dependent Variable).

**Table 3.** Coefficients<sup>a</sup>

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
Constant	38.192	5.006		7.629	0.000		
EI	0.008	0.088	0.008	0.092	0.926	0.463	2.160
PR	0.137	0.059	0.230	2.333	0.021	0.393	2.545
EDL	5.668	1.257	0.467	4.510	0.000	0.357	2.802

a. Dependent Variable: Politeness

b. Independent Variables: EI (Emotional Intelligence), PR (Pragmatic Competence), EDL (Educational Level)

First we should check the column called Beta under Standardized Coefficients. In order to compare the different variables, it is important to look at the Standardized coefficients, not the unstandardized ones. The largest beta coefficient is 0.467. This means that this variable i.e., educational level makes the strongest unique contribution to explaining the dependent variable, when the variance explained by other variables in the model is controlled for. Educational level apart, pragmatic competence and then EI contribute to our dependent variable, i.e., politeness.

Besides, we should check the value in the column headed Sig. This tells us if the given variable is making a statistically significant contribution to the equation or not. If the Sig. value is less than 0.05, then the variable is making a significant unique contribution to the prediction of the dependent variable. In this study, Educational level (Sig. 0.0005 < 0.05) makes a significant contribution to the prediction of politeness as well as pragmatic competence (Sig. 0.021 < 0.05) but not EI (Sig. 0.926 > 0.05).

Another point to consider is the value of *t* in Table 3, since it can help us determine the relative importance of each variable in the model. Regarding useful predictors, the *t* value should be above 2 or below -2. In this study, educational level whose *t* value equals 4.510 can be a good predictor of politeness; this is also true with pragmatic competence ( $t = 2.333$ ) while EI ( $t = 0.092$ ) cannot predict politeness in the model.

## CONCLUSION

As was observed in the previous section, there happened to be a positive relationship between pragmatic competence and EFL learners' politeness strategies on the one hand, and emotional intelligence and politeness strategies on the other hand. It was in tune with what was anticipated at the outset of the study. A non-native speaker of English always finds it confounding to deal with the pragmatics of the contexts where it is felt that communication with other people needs adaptation to not only the syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic features of the language but also to the culture of that arena where language use depends on learners' pragmalinguistic knowledge of foreign or second language. This is rather demanding for a person unfamiliar with the norms of the language use in the target context and culture especially when the pragmatic transfer from L1 to L2 is not considered appropriate and may lead to pragmatic failure in wide variety of situations. Being polite (or impolite thereof) is context dependent. Pragmatic awareness helps EFL learners to succeed in using language which is in harmony with the demands of the communicative interactions. In fact, pragmatic competence enables EFL learners to think of polite requests that would not be considered as face threatening acts. In fact, perhaps the relationship between pragmatic competence and politeness strategies has been taken for granted thus far and in the literature lies the fact that any sort of successful flow of conversation is contingent upon appropriate language use in a wide variety of contexts; the positive strong relationship between politeness strategies of EFL learners and pragmatic competence in the current study indicates that we cannot separate these two aspects and this has already verified by McNamara and Roever (2006) who contend that: "because of close connection between them, it is difficult to design a test that tests pragmalinguistics to the exclusion of sociopragmatics or vice versa" (p. 55). Tsutagawa (2013) states that a myriad of research recently has focused on "speech acts to investigate various pragmatic phenomena" (p. 3). This study included requests as just one of many speech acts we utilize in our communication. Although contradictory to some extent, almost all research in this regard bear the evidence that not only do we need to develop syntactic and semantic aspects of

language, but we also need to factor in pragmatics of politeness and socio-cultural variables that may affect the nature of communication as distinct situations arise in everyday communications (Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989).

The role of emotions in the use of speech acts of requests and refusals cannot be neglected. As Hajmalek (2015) states, “emotional intelligence and pragmatic ability may appear quite related due to the fact that EI encompasses very obvious social aspects and skills which can be hypothesized to be linked to the social aspects of language, namely, pragmatics” (p. 123). His research, though, did not contribute to this idea pinpointing the fact that there is no significant relationship between EI and the pragmatic production of Iranian EFL learners. He concluded that in case of L1-Persian learners of English as a foreign language, the pragmatic production of the learners does not depend on their emotional intelligence and EI is not capable of predicting the participants’ performance on a discourse completion test. However, Hajmalek’s findings revealed that EI and politeness are positively correlated showing that L1-Persian “EFL learners with higher degrees of EI demonstrated greater concern for politeness and tried to employ politer utterances while performing the speech acts targeted in this study” (p. 125). Along the same line, Mousavi Nadoushani (2015) found that EI and politeness strategies are not related among Iranian EFL learners. He also found that politeness and four subcategories of EI (i.e., self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and relational management) are not meaningfully related to one another. This controversy may stem from L1 and L2 pragmatic variations which can affect the use of polite utterances in different situations. Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) pointed out that being polite or impolite has its roots in three factors: power, social distance and the cost of imposition. Culture, also, has a say in this respect. As Blum-Kulka (1982) maintains, different cultures have their own norms of politeness and what is deemed polite in a culture may be impolite in another culture. Meyerhoff (2011) states that intercultural contact “can create dilemmas for participants if they do not know whether to remain true to the politeness norms of their own culture or if they should adopt the new culture’s politeness norms” (p. 100). Salvesen (2015), researching on politeness strategies in requests made by Norwegian learners of English, found that “politeness strategies can transfer from the learners’ first language to their target language” (p. 53); there are several research studies considering the pragmatic transfer of politeness from L1 to L2, however, the results are contradictory. Although demanding and not that much effective, teaching politeness strategies to learners of a foreign or second language seems rational. O’Keefe, Clancy, and Adolphs (2011) cite that in the classroom context teachers respond to politeness (or impoliteness thereof) behavior of their learners; they state that politeness can be shown in English in two ways in foreign or second language contexts: “showing people that we respect and value them (positive politeness), and making what you say or write less direct so as not to sound too forceful (negative politeness); what they pinpoint is that we as teachers can teach pragmatics of politeness to learners the result of which cannot be exactly what is expected from and accepted by native speakers of target language.

“Politeness almost always matters”, Clark and Schunk (1980) assert. The current study underscores this fact and extends the idea to the context of L1-Persian learners of EFL. Although EI was found to play no role in predicting how politely people behave under different circumstances but it is strongly related to politeness strategies learners use to communicate; moreover, the close tie between pragmatic competence and politeness strategies is revealed by the findings of the study, therefore, the idea can be extended to incorporate all aspects of language taught to learners of English as a second or foreign language. Also, it became quite clear that the higher the educational level of the learners, the more polite strategies they utilize for

communication to have a normal and at the same time appropriate flow. It seems that with higher education, EFL learners become further acquainted with subtleties of pragmatics of the politeness in the target language. The findings depicted this fact that educational level of learners can be a good predictor of how politely they respond to environmental stimuli.

Due to the complexity of pragmalinguistic aspect of language, this study and other studies alike bear several limitations. The context of language use is influenced by Persian culture, therefore, any generalization to other contexts should be made quite cautiously. The sample size, if increased, can strengthen the findings of the study. The higher the number of participants, the more reliable results we can obtain and the more the power of generalizability of the findings. Participants, also were selected from the pool of university students who were available to the researchers, therefore, educational level was not based on scores obtained through standardized tests but rather on which level at the university they were at the time of the study. The instruments of the study raise another concern for further research. As for EI, different measures can be taken to appraise the emotional quotient of language learners; as far as pragmatic competence is concerned, MDCT was used; however, it could have been a better idea to include other measures of pragmatic competence, like Oral Discourse Completion Task (ODCT), Written Discourse Completion Task (WDCT), Discourse Role-play task (DRPT), Discourse Self-assessment Task (DSAT), and Role-play Self-assessment (RPSA). The speech act which was the focus of the current study was request, hence it would be a good idea to consider other speech acts like refusals, apologies, greetings, invitations, suggestions, complaints, or compliments. Politeness strategies can also be context-dependent, therefore, it should be investigated in contexts other than universities and academia where the language tends to be polite. Finally, there has been lots of suggestions put forward for the analyses of findings of pragmatic tests. Analyses can be done through Rasch, FACETS, and G-theory and other models so that researchers find a yardstick to compare the results obtained through CTT and these types of data analyses.

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