Speech Acts and Their Underlying Strategies by EFL Learners and Non-Learners: A Systematic Literature Review

Los actos de habla y sus estrategias subyacentes por parte de los estudiantes y no estudiantes de EFL: una revisión sistemática de la literatura

Atos de fala e suas estratégias subjacentes por EFL alunos e não-aprendentes: uma revisão sistemática de literatura

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Abstract

This paper reviews the literature related to speech acts and their investigated strategies performed by the EFL learners and those non-learners. The review aims to provide an overview of various speech acts including their underlying strategies at the production level and the perception level. Doing this will identify the gaps in the current literature which call for further primary research. In order to look at more up-to-date content, the literature search included in this review covered only the papers published from 2009 to 2018. A substantial number of scholarly articles reporting speech acts employed by different participants were identified and scrutinised based on keyword search in Google Scholar. The discussions and findings are classified according to topic relatedness and the type of target community (population). In conclusion, the review showed that the most frequently investigated speech acts were those involved in everyday argumentative talks called 'dispreferred act' namely 'disagreement' and 'refusal'. The most common employed strategies under speech acts were politeness strategies and semantic (formulae) strategies. It was evident that authors, to a considerable degree, neglected the role of gender. Moreover, the majority of the authors resorted to investigate the participants' production rather the recognition or both levels of language, for a reason related to the nature of data collection tool.

Keywords: context, EFL learners' strategies, pragmatic competence, quantitative method, speech act.

Resumen

Este documento revisa la literatura relacionada con los actos del habla y sus estrategias investigadas realizadas por los estudiantes de EFL y aquellos que no lo son. El objetivo de la revisión es proporcionar una visión general de varios actos de habla, incluidas sus estrategias subyacentes a nivel de producción y nivel de percepción. Al hacer esto se identificarán las brechas en la literatura actual que requieren una investigación primaria adicional. Con el fin de analizar el contenido más actualizado, la búsqueda en la literatura incluida en esta revisión cubrió solo los artículos publicados de 2009 a 2018. Se identificó y examinó un número sustancial de artículos académicos que informaban actos de habla empleados por diferentes participantes, basándose en palabras clave búsqueda en Google Scholar. Las discusiones y los hallazgos se clasifican de acuerdo con el tema relacionado y el tipo de comunidad objetivo (población). En conclusión, la revisión mostró que los actos de habla investigados con mayor frecuencia fueron los involucrados en las conversaciones argumentativas cotidianas denominadas "acto no aceptado", es decir, "desacuerdo" y "rechazo". Las estrategias empleadas más comunes en actos de habla fueron estrategias de cortesía y estrategias semánticas (fórmulas). Era evidente que los autores, en un grado considerable, descuidaban el papel del género. Además, la mayoría de los autores recurrió a investigar la producción de los participantes en lugar del reconocimiento o ambos niveles de lenguaje, por una razón relacionada con la naturaleza de la herramienta de recolección de datos.

Resumo

Este artigo revisa a literatura relacionada aos atos de fala e suas estratégias investigadas pelos alunos de EFL e por aqueles que não são aprendizes. A revisão visa fornecer uma visão geral de vários atos de fala, incluindo suas estratégias subjacentes no nível de produção e no nível de percepção. Fazendo isso, identificaremos as lacunas na literatura atual que exigem novas pesquisas primárias. A fim de olhar para conteúdo mais atualizado, a pesquisa bibliográfica incluída nesta revisão cobriu apenas os trabalhos publicados de 2009 a 2018. Um número substancial de artigos acadêmicos relatando atos de fala empregados por diferentes participantes foram identificados e examinados com base em palavras-chave pesquisa no Google Acadêmico. As discussões e descobertas são classificadas de acordo com a relação entre os tópicos e o tipo de comunidade-alvo (população). Em conclusão, a revisão mostrou que os atos de fala mais freqüentemente investigados foram aqueles envolvidos em conversações argumentativas cotidianas chamadas de "ato de discordância", ou seja, "desacordo" e "recusa". As estratégias empregadas mais comuns nos atos de fala foram estratégias de polidez e estratégias semânticas (fórmulas). Era evidente que os autores, em um grau considerável, negligenciaram o papel do gênero. Além disso, a maioria dos autores recorreu para investigar a produção dos participantes, em vez do reconhecimento ou ambos os níveis da linguagem, por uma razão relacionada à natureza da ferramenta de coleta de dados.

Palavras-chave: contexto, estratégias de aprendizagem de EFL, competência pragmática, método quantitativo, ato de fala.

INTRODUCTION

The advent of speech act theory was philosophical at the theoretical level, rooted firstly by Aristotle then was shaped pragmatically by Searle. As teachers and or linguistic researchers we know that speech acts studies came into the pedagogical practice as the language teaching/learning shifted from the outdated grammar-translation method into the communicative one. This led to the redirection of focus on language teaching/learning from merely linguistic competence to the larger notion of communicative competence and thus the concept has attracted lots of recent attention (Hargie, 2018).

The communicative competence was pioneered and termed by Dell Hymes in 1971 as a broad term including two types of knowledge: the linguistic knowledge, and the knowledge of a set of sociolinguistic codes and systems for using them (Ghosh, 2019). This means communicative competence is regarded as the underlying knowledge including grammatical competence (form and meaning knowledge) and pragmatics competence (knowledge of appropriate use). The pragmatic competence in Yule's account refers to the ability to speak and understand the meaning as communicated by interlocutors (Al-Khanaifsawy, 2016). It also linked with the

ability to interpret people's intended meanings and assumptions. In order to perform effective communication, levels of abilities are necessary, the socio-cultural ability and the sociolinguistic ability (Bednarek, 2017). The Socio-cultural ability means to determine the speech act appropriate based on the culture involvement in the situation, the background of the speaker, and relationship. On the other hand, the Socio-linguistic ability represents the speakers' control of the actual linguistic forms used to understand the intended speech acts such as making requests, apologies, suggestions, expressing agreements, refusals, and the like. Therefore, a large number of studies on the pragmatic developments has been done so far and still on the go.

Speaking of speech act strategies, it is important to be familiar with the term 'strategy' and 'speech act strategy'. The term strategy is the "specific methods of approaching a problem or task, modes of operation for achieving a particular end, planned designs for controlling and manipulating certain information" (Brown, 2007:119 cited in Al-Khanaifsawy, 2016). Based on this definition and the above-mentioned concepts, speech act strategy is the way the participants utilize and employ their communicative competence to perform certain

speech acts in communication. Since speech acts strategies can be directed to test the interlocutors' ability to communicate properly, thus, researchers should investigate the speech acts competence rather than the linguistic one in order to survey their effectiveness in communication.

The purpose of this paper, is to review the literature on various speech acts and their strategies employed by EFL learners and non-learners at the production level and or the recognition level using a systematic mode. For this purpose, three questions are posed:

1. What are the recent types of speech act studies?
2. What is the most common method used in the recent speech act studies?
3. What are the common underlying strategies of the speech acts?
4. To what extent do authors consider the factor of gender in the recent literature?

METHOD

The papers discussed here are taken from peer-reviewed journals documented under Google Scholar, published in the last 10 years; 2009-2019, using many search keywords like: 'pragmatic strategies', 'speech acts', 'direct and indirect', 'semantic formulae', 'politeness' and 'communicative competence'. The speech act literature is grouped according to the type of speech act; on the basis of topic relatedness first, and the type of participants involved. So, the papers with similar topics sharing the same foci and community of participants are reviewed together. The studies discussed are only these about speech acts which are applied to participants. These which have been applied to texts like Flores-Salgado & Castineira-Benitez (2018) applied to WhatsApp messages and Flöck, & Geluykens (2018) applied to written corpus will be excluded, since the scope of this paper is limited to studies with participants only. The literature will not be limited to the EFL learner's speech acts strategies, but will extend to include studies conducted on non-learners. The

reason for that is to provide wide-ranging insights about speech acts studies for teachers, researchers and other interested personnel. Other non-pragmatic strategies such as reading or writing conducted on the syntactic, semantic levels are excluded from this review because they have no relevance to speech acts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A review paper generally summarizes the published literature concentrating on a certain topic in order to explain the existing state of understanding on the topic in question. Reviews are valuable in that they enable the reader to have an idea about the published works in a certain field of study without going to the works themselves. Reviews fall into three categories; narrative, best-evidence, and systematic. A narrative review is a summary paper in which lists of related studies are grouped and compared to highlight diversities, methods, models, and contexts of the research topics. It helps give a holistic understanding of the current trends and issues (Green, Johnson & Adams, 2006). A best-evidence review is, to a large degree, a combination of narrative and systematic review. It focuses on the best evidence in a certain filed. It reviews a group of selected studies (mostly scientific) which are systematically combined to synthesize a representative sample of certain studies to reach a conclusion (McMaster, Kunkel, Shin, Jung & Lembke, 2017). A systematic review attempts to answer a question posed in the existing literature. In such review, the findings obtained from single studies are statistically meta-analysed using strict procedure (Boland, Cherry & Dickson, 2017). The current review is intended to be a systematic one. It summarizes and describes the literature published dealing with the subject of speech acts and their related strategies in terms of the methods used, foci, and trends.

The following table gives an introductory systematic account of the reviewed literature and the rest is explained in details in the sub-sequent discussion section.

Table 1. Speech act studies and their particulars

	Author(s)	Title	Speech Act	Specific Strategies	Gender	Weaknesses
1	Sharqawi & Elizabeth (2019)	"Analyzing the Speech Act of Disagreement Produced by Iraqi EFL	Disagreement	Directness	+	Using one tool to collect data that is a DCT

	Learners A Gender Study"				
Elham (2017)	"An Investigation of Apology Strategies Employed by Iranian EFL Learners"	Apology	Semantic formulae	+	Using one tool to collect data that is a DCT.
Keshani & Heidari-Shahreza, (2017)	"A Comparative Study of Apology Strategy Use by Iranian and German EFL Learners: Gender Differences in Focus"	Apology	Politeness strategies	+	Using one tool to collect data that is a DCT. Insufficient DCT scenarios to elicit polite responses
Darweesh & Al-Aadili, (2017)	"Investigating Iraqi EFL Learners' Performance in Utilizing the Speech Acts of Advice and Suggestion"	Advice and Suggestion	Directness & Politeness strategies	-	the act of advice and suggestion are interrelated in meaning and structure and this, for sure, confuses the learners when responding to the DCT situations which are limited in number.
Borovina, (2017)	"Croatian EFL Learners' Interlanguage Requests: A Focus on Request Modification"	Request	Structural strategies	-	Using one tool for collecting data; DCT. Relying on old coding models in analysis.
Al-Momani, Jaradat, Al-Khawaldeh, & Bani-Khair (2017)	"Expressing Gratitude in an EFL Context: The Case of Jordanian Learners"	Gratitude	Semantic & politeness strategies	-	Using one tool for collecting data; DCT that has only 8 situations.
Yan (2016)	"A Contrastive Pragmatic Study of Politeness Strategies in Disagreement between Native Speakers of English and Chinese EFL learners"	Disagreement	Politeness strategies	-	Using one tool for collecting data; DCT. The DCT situations were written in Chinese, not in English. "The participants in the study were relatively few."
Al-Mahrooqi & Al-Aghbari (2016)	"Refusal Strategies Among Omani EFL Students"	Refusal	Politeness strategies	-	Using one tool for collecting data; DCT. Using convenience sampling with few participants besides the method is quantitative.
Çiftçi (2016)	"Refusal Strategies in Turkish and English: A Cross-cultural Study"	Refusal	Politeness strategies	-	Using one tool for collecting data; DCT that includes only 6 politeness scenarios.
Ugla & Abidin (2016)	"A Study of Apology Strategies Used by Iraqi EFL University Students"	Apology	Politeness strategies	-	The qualitative results are not explained as well as the quantitative, nor are they linked to the quantitative results.
Darweesh & Mehdi (2016)	"Investigating the Speech Act of Correction in Iraqi EFL Context"	Correction	Semantic & politeness strategies	-	Using one tool for collecting data; DCT that has a few numbers of DCT situations.
Ali & Pandian (2016)	"Inappropriateness in Iraqi EFL Learners"	Request	Politeness strategies	-	Using an old model of analysis. The test (emails) has a high level of formality & thus

					politeness is expected to be high.
Al-Khanaifsawy (2016)	"Investigating Iraqi EFL Learners' Use of the Speech Act of Agreement"	Agreement	Directness strategies	-	An insufficient number of participants whose selection criteria is not explained. Using one tool for collecting data; DCT
Al-Shboul & Huwari (2016)	"Congratulation Strategies of Jordanian EFL Postgraduate Students"	Congratulation	Politeness strategies	-	The DCT has insufficient items whose scenarios do not give a consideration to 'social distance' when examining politeness.
Taqim (2016)	"Politeness in Speech Act of Disagreement by English Learners of Lampung University"	Disagreement	Politeness strategies	+	The DCT includes insufficient scenarios. The number of the participants is very low.
Al-Shafie & Al-Jubbory (2015)	"Iraqi EFL learners' Use of the Speech Acts of Warning and Threatening in Situational Dialogues"	Warning & threatening	Directness strategies	-	The participants are not expected to separate warning from threatening as they are interrelated. Using a weak method in a qualitative study
Ebadi & Salman (2015)	"Using Compliment Responses in Arabic and English: Focusing on Male and Female EFL Learners in Iraq"	Compliment Responses	Semantic formulae	+	Using one tool for collecting data; DCT. No gender statistical analysis is set.
Deveci (2015)	"The Complaint Speech Act Set Produced by University Students Speaking English as a Foreign Language"	Complaint	Semantic formulae	-	Using one tool for collecting data that is an oral DCT "the inauthentic nature of which may have had an impact on the data collected" (Deveci (2015:2170).
Tseng (2015)	"You Must Let Me Pass, Please: An Investigation of Email Request Strategies by Taiwanese EFL learners"	Request	Politeness strategies	-	Employing an insufficient number of participants. Using an old model of analysis.
Li, Raja & Sazalie, (2015)	"An Investigation into Chinese EFL Learners' Pragmatic Competence"	Apology, Refusal, & Request	Politeness strategies	-	The analysis of the interview part is not well explained and linked as/to the two DCTs parts.
El Hiani (2015)	"Performing Speech Acts among Moroccan EFL Advanced Learners"	Various speech acts	Structural strategies	-	Though the study is quantitative and is about 14 acts, no statistical analysis was performed.
Huwari and Al-Shboul (2015)	"A study on the Perception of Jordanian EFL Learners' Pragmatic Transfer of Refusals"	Refusals	Politeness strategies	-	An insufficient number of DCT items to elicit quantitative polite responses.
Parvaresh, Rasekh & Simin (2015a)	"The Study of Disagreement Strategies to	Disagreement	Politeness strategies	+	Using one DCT for collecting data and it does not consider the social distance.

	Suggestions Used by Iranian Male and Female learners"			
Parvaresh, Rasekh & Simin (2015b)	"A Cross-cultural Study of Disagreement Strategies to Suggestions Between Persian EFL Learners and American Native English Speakers"	Disagreement	Semantic formulae	-	Using one DCT for collecting data and it does not consider the social distance.
Christoffersen (2015)	"Mitigation of Disagreement in Peer Review Among L2 Learners and Native Speakers in a College"	Disagreement	Semantic formulae	-	Using only written corpus as a way of data collection
Heidari, Rasekh & Simin (2014)	"Speech Act Disagreement among Young Men in Iran"	Disagreement	Politeness strategies	-	Using one DCT for collecting data. The DCT has an inadequate number of social scenarios.
Choyimah & Latief (2014)	"Disagreeing Strategies in University Classroom Discussions among Indonesian EFL Learners"	Disagreement	Structural strategies	-	Using the only act of disagreement to test the wide pragmatic competence.
Lin (2014)	"An Interlanguage Pragmatic Study on Chinese EFL Learners' Refusal: Perception and Performance"	Refusal	Politeness strategies	-	Using only three DCT scenarios to elicit data.
Saleem, Azam & Saleem (2014)	"The Use of Apology Strategies in English by Pakistani EFL University Students in Pakistan"	Apology	Semantic formulae	-	Employing an insufficient number of participants. Using one DCT for collecting data.
Salehi (2014)	"A Comparative Analysis of Apology Strategy: Iranian EFL Learners and Native English Speakers"	Apology	Politeness strategies	-	Using one DCT to collect data. Using an insufficient number of DCT scenarios.
Altalhi (2014)	"Speech Acts of Thanking and Thanking Responses by Hijazi Females"	Thanking & Thanking Responses	Semantic formulae	-	"The role of further thanking variables, such as age, social status, social distance and the length of gratitude expression were not addressed due to the limited data collected for this study." (Altalhi, 2014: 55)
Gu (2014)	"Pragmatic Development of Chinese EFL Learners: A Study on FL Suggestions"	Suggestion	Semantic & Structural strategies	-	Targeting the speech act of suggestion only as a means to an end that is pragmatic competence.
Bayat (2013)	"A Study on the Use of Speech Acts"	Various speech acts	Semantic or	-	The tool used for collecting data is vague as it is unnamed. No clear cut whether the study

			directness strategies		targets the semantic and/or directness strategies as an end.
Abu Humeid (2013)	"The Effect of Gender and Status on the Apology Strategies Used by American Native speakers of English and Iraqi EFL University Students"	Apology	Politeness strategies	+	Using one DCT for collecting data. The DCT does not consider the social distance.
Bella (2013)	"Developing the Ability to Refuse: A Cross-Sectional Study of Greek FL Refusals"	Refusals	Politeness strategies	-	Employing an insufficient number of DCT scenarios.
Abu Humeid & Altai (2013)	"Refusal Strategies Used by Iraqi EFL University Students"	Refusals	Politeness strategies	-	Employing an insufficient number of participants in a quantitative study.
Arani & Tehrani (2013)	"The Impact of Age and Sex on the Refusal Strategies Used by Iranian EFL Learners"	Refusals	Directness strategies	+	Using one DCT for collecting data. A high number of DCT situations can create fatigue in the part of the participants who may not respond properly.
Shum & Lee (2013)	"(Im)Politeness and Disagreement in two Hong Kong Internet Discussion Forums"	Disagreement	Politeness strategies	-	Impoliteness is already expected to be high since in the communication via the internet (whether synchronous or asynchronous) is indirect & less formal.
Fernandez (2013)	"The Linguistic Realization of Disagreements by EFL Egyptian Speakers"	Disagreement	Different strategies	-	The type of the targeted strategies (whether semantic, politeness, directness or structural) are not stated clearly.
Koczogh (2012)	"The Effects of Gender and Social Distance on the Expression of Verbal Disagreement Employed by Hungarian Undergraduate Students Doctoral School in Linguistics"	Disagreement	Politeness strategies	+	Although the study is about politeness, it is not clear, at least to the reader, whether the social distance is considered.
Aribi (2012)	"A Socio-Pragmatic Study of the Use of Requests in English By Tunisian EFL Learners"	Requests	Semantic & politeness strategies	-	Using an insufficient number of DCT situations in a quantitative study.
Aliakbari & Changizi (2012)	"On the Realization of Refusal Strategies by Persian and Kurdish Speakers"	Refusal	Politeness strategies	-	"One limitation concerns with the generalizability of the results which is due to the limited number of languages investigated in the study." (Aliakbari & Changizi, 2012: 667)
Kuhi & Jadidi (2012)	"A Study of Iranian EFL Learners' Understanding and Production of Politeness in Three	Request, Refusal, & Apology	politeness strategies	-	Using an outdated model for analysing the politeness

	Speech Acts: Request, Refusal, and Apology"				strategies developed by Brown and Levinson (1987).
Mofidi & Shoushtari (2012)	"A Comparative Study of the Complaint Strategies among Iranian EFL and ESL Students– The Study of the Effect of Length of Residence and the Amount of Contact"	Complaint	politeness strategies	-	Using one DCT for collecting data. The study relied mainly on the participants production of the act of complaint only to measure the development of the pragmatic competence.
Sofwan & Suwignyo (2011)	"The Realization of Disagreement Strategies by Non-native Speakers of English"	Disagreement	Semantic or politeness strategies	-	There is no clear cut whether the study targets the semantic formulae or politeness strategies as an end. The objectives of the study are not clearly established.
Behnam & Niroomand (2011)	"An Investigation of Iranian EFL Learners' Use of Politeness Strategies and Power Relations in Disagreement across Different Proficiency Levels"	Disagreement	politeness strategies	-	The model of politeness is limited to an insufficient number of scenarios.
Abed (2011)	"Pragmatic Transfer in Iraqi EFL Learners' Refusals"	Refusals	politeness strategies	+	The study relied on one data collection tool; DCT. In the DCT, the social distance between interlocutors is not considered.
Jalilifar, Hashemian & Tabatabaee (2011)	"A Cross-sectional Study of Iranian EFL Learners' Request Strategies"	Request	politeness strategies	-	The study relied on only one data collection tool; DCT. The tool includes more than 20 items which can cause fatigue in the part of the participants who, therefore, may not respond fully.
Pishghadam & Rasouli (2011)	"A Cross-linguistic Study of Persuasive Strategies Used in Persian and English Languages"	Persuasion	Semantic formulae	-	The study relied on only one data collection tool; DCT with an insufficient number of situations.
Parvaresh & Rasekh (2009)	"Speech Act of Disagreement among Young Women in Iran"	Disagreement	Politeness strategies	-	The DCT does not account for all the social scenarios; social status and distance are all not considered in all scenarios.
İstifçi (2009)	"The Use of Apologies by EFL Learners"	Apology	Semantic formulae	-	The study relied on only one data collection tool; DCT.

Regarding disagreement strategies, Sharqawi and Elizabeth (2019) examined the role of gender in varying disagreement strategies produced by Iraqi EFL learners. The study dealt with the speech act of disagreement quantitatively from directness and explicitness perspectives using DCT. Results have shown that no significant gender difference in terms of explicit disagreement strategies but in terms of directness, female learners were found to be more indirect than males. Koczogh (2012) and Parvaresh et al., (2015a) investigated politeness strategies with respect to gender. Both studies examined the production level only. But each of

which used different methods. Koczogh adopted a qualitative method in collecting the data and she came up with the findings that women resorted more expressive and more explicit disagreements than did by men. This result disputed former common hypothesis in which men were assumed to disagree in a more overt way. The result contradicted, to a considerable degree, with a quantitative method study by Parvaresh et al., (2015a) in which women were found to be more careful, implicit and used more polite strategies than men. Results can vary within one single study if two methods are employed. Fernandez (2013) investigated the EFL learners' use of different mitigated disagreement strategies and compared their production with that of English natives. Fernandez (2013) used two methods for data collection, DCT in addition to Facebook data, and found that using different methods leads to different EFL disagreement strategies. However, the English natives did not exhibit strategies with such amount of difference. Not only that, but it was found that the use of expressions of disagreement was affected by the topic as well.

In the Indonesian context, two studies on disagreement explored the choice of strategy and politeness involvement by the EFL learners at the production level. Choyimah & Latif (2014) and Taqim (2016) both adopted mixed methods. In the first study, it was found that learners, with high proficiency, tried to avoid direct ways, whereas those with low proficiency were more direct as being held back by their linguistic constraints. The high-level learners were aware that politeness is achieved through indirectness. The second study, like the first, ended with the finding that indirect strategies are employed to maintain respect for communication and thus politeness. Sofwan & Suwignyo (2011) and Christoffersen (2015) carried out studies on how EFL learners mitigate their semantic expressions in disagreement. Although the first study (being western) investigated the production and the recognition level of performance as a whole and the second (being eastern) investigated the production level only; however, both had come up with rather common findings that the EFL learners employed various semantic expressions as mitigation strategies.

Iranian context appears to be rich with disagreement studies. A study by Parvaresh et al., (2015a) conducted a non-gender study on EFL learners' semantic expressions for politeness and social power influences. The same focus by Behnam & Niroomand, (2011) was given to their study. Both studies utilized quantitative DCTs

for obtaining data. Testing the production level, the two studies concluded that learners tended to use more polite strategies with high social status. The second study added that even the high proficiency learners failed to act out different strategies. The above outcomes, considerably, resembled quantitative approach outcomes by Yan (2016) where he found that the Chinese learners were more led by their social power and distance in performing polite disagreement.

In their mixed method, Shum & Lee (2013) applied a study on Cantonese internet forum interlocutors and forum browsers of Hong Kong testing their politeness strategies. Text analysis for forum users and questionnaire for forum browsers showed that they rated (im)polite and (in)appropriate disagreement strategies incorrect way, especially these posts by politic forum interlocutors which were rough and impolite. In all the above studies, the disagreement seems to be dealt with from their either directness and or politeness strategies and this because such an act potentially carries a high amount of imposition for being a face-threatening act.

Abed (2011) and Arani & Tehrani (2013) questioned whether the role of gender influence EFL learners' refusal strategies. Both studies employed quantitative DCTs in their methods. In both studies, the performance of the participants was compared with selected English natives. Abed (2011) found out that sex had no considerable effect on the use of refusal politeness strategies. This finding resembles the finding of the second study where females were slightly spotted to use more directness strategies. Arani & Tehrani (2013) stated that the use of direct and indirect strategies varies with gender, where males opted to employ more direct strategies than females.

Three studies on EFL learners were meant to question the strategy types in terms of social status of refusals. The three adopted quantitative DCTs in their methods. Al-Mahrooqi & Al-Aghbari (2016) works on Omani EFL learners concluded that learners utilized direct refusals strategies with interlocutors of different social status, and thus insensitive to a person status. Similarly, a work by Ciftci (2016) stated that Turkish learners used a low number of strategies. However direct they were, the strategies were best formulated with regard to status. Abu Humeid & Altai (2013) also explored the Iraqi learners' strategies in the same regard and reached to findings that learners showed slight consideration to status and were pragmatically incompetent in their use of refusals.

Huwari & Al-shboul (2015) and Lin (2014) investigated the perception of EFL learners' different refusal strategies using mixed methods. In the first study, comparing their responses with English natives and Arabic natives, they concluded that the learners exhibit similarities as well as differences, but as a whole, a pragmatic transfer from Arabic to English was clear in their perception of politeness strategies. The other study in which the learners' perception was examined along with that of English natives, ended up with two main findings that the learners recognized the face-threat (by certain expressions) more than the two groups and those learners, as in the former study, have resorted to their first language in their perception. Bella (2013) explored the main developments of refusal politeness strategies between the FL learners of Greek as opposed to the Greek natives. The adopted method was a qualitative one based on verbal reports and role plays checked over time. In terms of the grammatical and socio-cultural developments, the study yielded that the advanced learners' strategies approached more closely to those by the Greek natives in terms of grammatical developments; however, these advanced learners fell behind socio-culturally. An Iranian scholar, Aliakbari (2012) and a Turkish one, Changizi (2012) conducted a comparative quantitative method study on Iranian and Kurdish participants investigating the refusal strategies in term of semantic formulas and social power. The outcomes showed that both the Persians and Kurdish almost utilized similar formulae and used socially appropriate strategies in refusals, however, differences existed in number and variations in the part of Persians.

Four gender studies on apologies approached using quantitative methods to explore the strategies type of the EFL learners' production level along with their gender differences. Abu Humeid (2013) compared the performance of Iraqi EFL learners with another of American natives and found that learners' politeness strategies were less, shorter and ungrammatical. Males employed more categories than females with others of low, equal and high status. However, females were more reserved and polite. But the results of a study, by Saleem et al., (2014) applied on Pakistani EFL learners, confirmed that there were no significant differences between males and females' semantic expressions. The gender variation goes up to surface through an Iranian study by Elham (2017) in which males were found to employ the 'regret' strategy (as a semantic formula) more

than females. In the latter study, Keshani & Sharezha (2017) in which Iranian EFL learners' outcomes were compared with German EFL learners' ones, revealed no clear statistical variation between males and females Iranian and German EFL learners in terms of using politeness strategies. Other three quantitative method but non-gender studies were conducted to explore the EFL learners' performance at the production level. Istifci (2009) questioned the semantic expressions by the Turkish learners compared with English natives. He found that many intermediate level learners transferred native Turkish norms into English, while in some cases learners of advanced level approached the English natives' norms. Another context, Salehi (2014) who had a related study on Iranian EFL learners, yielded that English natives never used some politeness strategies that were used by learners. Still, with politeness expressions, Ugla and Abidin (2016) confirmed that Iraqi EFL learners employed explicit expressions of apology in English as the most frequent strategy, but 'swearing with lack of intent' strategy was more frequent in Iraqi Arabic.

Of general studies about speech acts with gender involvement targeting the EFL learners' strategies in a quantitative approach, Darweesh & Al-Aadili (2017), Kuhi & Jadidi (2012) examined the gender variance investigating the speech acts of advice and suggestion, Darweesh & Al-Aadili projected that Iraqi EFL learners use direct strategies more and better than the indirect ones and female were found more polite and aware of the social status in telling advice and suggestions. The investigation of the second study output that the Iranian learners' performance in requests, apologies and refusals was less politely expressed in general, however, females' approach to politeness was positive in comparison. The study concluded that participants had sufficient cognitive knowledge about politeness but did not, have the pragmatic competence to use it appropriately. El Hiani (2015), Li et al., (2015), analysed different EFL learners' speech acts outcomes. The two studies adopted quantitative methods. Corrected by American English natives, El Hiani concluded that in the Moroccan learners' production most of the congratulations were scored as 'good', apologies, introduces, greetings, gratitudes, and refusals scored 'fair', while the rest of speech acts (seven acts) scored 'bad' depending on their structures. The author attributed these inappropriate responses to the negative pragmatic transfer. But in Li et al., (2015) the study dealt with the production and recognition levels, the purpose was to investigate certain

speech acts as a means to a larger end which is 'pragmatic competence. The study proposed that the Chinese EFL learners were weak in both recognizing and producing contextually appropriate speech acts which negatively reflect their competence.

Exploring the requests at the production level, Tseng (2015), Ali & Pandian (2016) and Borovina (2017) performed studies on EFL learners, focusing on politeness and the (syntactic) internal and or external modification devices. Tseng's mixed method study concluded that Taiwanese learners with low proficiency preferred direct and less polite strategies as they fell short in employing internal or external modifiers. Similar outcomes by Ali and Pandian's qualitative method study where the Iraqi EFL learners tended to use more direct (thus less polite) strategies in their formal emails and they failed to tone down impositions. The same results were demonstrated in Borovina (2017)'s a quantitative study on the Croatian learners who also failed to use syntactic modification in requests. At the halt of the production level of the EFL learners, two quantitative studies with similar foci examining the strategies type and politeness in social context were administered by Jalilifar et al., (2011) and Aribi (2012). In the first study results found that there was a positive connection between indirectness and proficiency level, thus only proficient Iranian learners overused highly polite strategies, but for social politeness, the learners showed closer performance to the English natives. The latter study concluded that the female Tunisian EFL learners were linguistically affected by their cultural backgrounds, and applied direct as well as indirect requests strategies according to the social factor, and thus used more direct ones with acquaintances.

With gratitude strategies, Al- Momani et al., (2017) explored the Jordanian EFL learners' semantic and politeness strategies in terms of type and number. The study compared the learners' strategies with the Americans'. The production level was investigated using DCT. The results yielded that the learners produced more gratitude expressions than the English natives. Unlike the American natives, the learners' strategies were highly influenced by the interlocutors' social status. A non-EFL dialectal study on the production of gratitudes with a quantitative method by Altalhi (2014). She analysed texts of local females' exchanges in Hijazi dialect (spoken in west Saudi Arabia). The outcomes confirmed the proposed hypotheses in that females employed distinct gratitude

semantic formulae to express thanks for a favour, meal, gift and help. As a whole, the gratitudes were lengthier than expected.

In a semi-gender study on complaints strategies on EFL learners from four Arab countries, the UAE, Libya, Tunisia and Yemen, Devici (2015) analysed their role-plays at the production level to find that most learners' semantic expressions were socio-pragmatically incompetent in general, as most participants were not respectful to their instructors when they complained about low marks. However, if we exclude females' strategies, to some extent, males were better in using mitigators. Arguing former confirmations, Mofidi & Shoushtari (2012) investigated the ESL learners' complaints strategies in terms of politeness as a means to answer the research questions if there is a connection between the time spent in the speech community and the development of the complaints as a way to measure the pragmatic competence of the Iranian ESL learners. Comparing the production of the learners with English natives' using a qualitative approach, results showed that, unlike former beliefs, there was no significant connection linking the time of residence in that target community and the participants' pragmatic ability in complaints.

To identify pragmatic and cultural differences between English and Persian native speakers, Pishghadam & Rasouli (2011) examined cross-cultural speech acts of persuasion on English natives, Persian natives and Iranian EFL learners. The study also investigated whether gender plays a role in variation. Utilizing the DCT to examine their productions of semantic expressions, the three groups were found to express persuasion with common expressions in types. But, in terms of gender and culture factors, the expression' differences were significantly distinct.

Al-Khnanifsawi (2016) conducted a study on EFL learners to explore their production of agreement strategies in terms of directness and explicitness using quantitative written DCT designed for this purpose. The study proved the proposed hypotheses that Iraqi learners' direct agreements are pragmatically better than the indirect ones. Within directness, the pragmatic performance of the learners' explicit strategies is better than that in the implicit ones.

Ebadi & Salman (2015) administered a study on the Iraqi EFL learners' employment of different patterns of Arabic and English compliments questioning the role of gender in this regard. The researchers investigated the production level

using DCT. The study revealed that learners' general semantic expressions in Arabic differ from that in English, which means no significant pragmatic transfer. In English, females employed more 'questions' whereas males tended towards 'acknowledgement and praise upgrade strategies.

The checking of the over-time development of Chinese learners' suggestion strategies in a three-year period was done by Gu (2014). This qualitative study relied on more than 200 files of an extracted recorded dialogues. The outcomes revealed that the development occurred in the use of linguistic forms, and the most frequent formulae of suggestions were 'modals with condition' and 'obligation modals', which was an indication of positive development.

In their multi-focus study, Al-Shafie & Al-Jubbory (2015) set a quantitative study on Iraqi EFL learners' production and perception of warning and threatening directness strategies. The aims were to identify the learners' expressions of and ability to differentiate and employ warning and threatening strategies. The work revealed that the learners' performance at the recognition level is better than that at the production level. The learners' performance in the warning is better than the one in threatening. The ability of learners' in recognizing these speech acts depends on the degree of explicitness.

Al-Shboul & Huwari (2016) questioned the main types of polite congratulation strategies applied by the male Jordanian EFL learners, using the DCT to check their production level. The results showed that the learners employed their strategies with 'offer good wishes' and 'expression of happiness' and they performed, positively, polite strategies in an exaggerative manner. The outcomes indicated that learners still resort to employing their native linguistic knowledge on the foreign language.
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Lastly and speaking of the correction strategies, Darweesh & Mehdi (2016) explored correction speech act as produced by Iraqi learners. They proposed two hypotheses that learners use different formulae to produce the correction and they are aware of the effect of power status in their interaction. After analysing the results of DCT, the study showed that learners tended to employ direct strategies of correction. They were aware of the status and thus tried to utilize some softeners to reduce the threat of the speech act.

DISCUSSIONS

Whether gender or not, the above speech act studies varied in their outcomes due to different inputs like the cultural background of the population, their educational level, and the pragmatic competence. In fact, testing the participants pragmatic competence requires that the study includes more than two speech acts, because it is not rational to determine their competence by only one act as in Gu (2014), Choyimah & Latief (2014), and Mofidi & Shoushtari (2012) because they may be good and polite at making suggestions but not when expressing disagreement. However, this constitutes a partial aspect of the pragmatic competence, not all of it.

By grouping the literature according to topic relatedness, it is clear that most of the pragmatic studies have dealt with the speech act of disagreement, refusals and apologies at the production level rather than the recognition level. Maybe this is due to the fact that these acts are more face-threatening than other acts and thus authors intend to reveal how the participants deal it linguistically and or politely. The following is Table 2. shows the frequencies of the most common three speech act studies

Table 2. The frequent studies

	Study	Frequency	Percentage
1	Disagreement	13	26%
2	Refusal	10	20%
3	Apology	8	16%

So, out of the total speech act studies, the majority were executed on disagreements. Other

studies on speech acts are found relatively attractive to authors are refusals, which are more

recurrent than apologies. It seems that speech acts causing a kind of embarrassment, namely 'disagreement' and 'refusal', in communication are most common in the literature compared to studies on neutral acts, which indicates the authors' attention to the need to overcome the communication difficulties inherent in these speech acts. Studies on various speech acts; requests, gratitudes, and complaints are less.

Of the methods under studies, it has been revealed that the majority of the studies employed quantitative methods rather than qualitative and mixed. This could be attributed to the nature of the instrument of data collection that is majorly DCT which, according to Kasper (2000: 325), enables the authors to inspect "the types of strategies by which a communicative act can be implemented." The frequencies and percentages of the common methods are tabulated underneath.

Table 3. Types of methods adopted in the recent literatura

	Method	Frequency	Percentage
1	Quantitative	33	66%
2	Mixed	13	26%
3	Qualitative	4	8%
	Total	50	100%

Few are the instances in which a quantitative method was adopted without utilizing DCT as Christoffersen (2015) did. The number of quantitative studies is higher and this is due to the fact that using DCT requires quantitative statistical analyses. Besides, according to Yuan (2001), DCTs enable the researchers to quantify the elicited speech data into numerical data.

Speaking of gender involvement, it is clear that the recent literature has poorly considered the effect of gender on the way speech acts in question are produced and recognized. The discussions show that out of 50 only 9 studies have addressed the effect of gender. Gender studies formed only 18% against 82% non-gender studies which can signify the scant

attention to gender effect. The need for gender studies has been highlighted significantly by some scholars like Coates (2015) in her "Women, men and language: A sociolinguistic account of gender differences in language" and Moradi (2017) in his "A Review of Gender Linguistics Studies" claiming that gender factor remained sidelined and thus requires further inquiries. Although most studies employed both males and females in participation, however, this does not mean that they seek to measure gender effect, rather it was to meet the homogeneity of the population. In fact, gender is taken into consideration in every population since the sample is preferred to be random, representative, and homogenous. The following figure shows the percentage of gender studies.
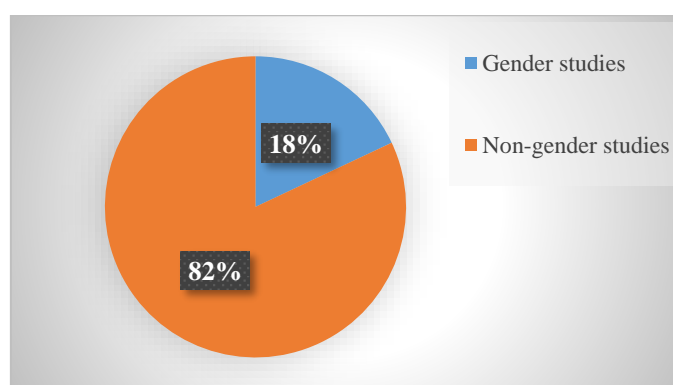

Figure 1. Distribution of gender and non-gender studies

Regarding the specific types of strategies, it is clear that most studies targeted the participants' politeness strategies rather than others. It seems that the higher the amount of the imposition or the face-threatening aspect of the speech act is, the higher the possibility politeness strategies are considered. Thus, since disagreements, refusals are more frequent than other speech acts, then politeness strategies are likely overused. Table 4. gives more details about the frequency of the strategies under study.

Table 4. Distribution of the speech act strategies

	Targeted Strategies	Frequency	Percentage
1	Politeness Strategies	27	54%
2	Semantic Formulae	9	18%
3	Structural Strategies	3	6%
4	Semantic and Politeness Strategies	3	6%
5	Directness Strategies	3	6%
6	Directness and Politeness Strategies	1	2%
7	Different Strategies	1	2%
8	Semantic or Politeness Strategies	1	2%
9	Semantic or Directness Strategies	1	2%
10	Semantic and Structural Strategies	1	2%
	Total	50	100%

This means that the higher frequency of the politeness strategies was due to the argumentative nature of 'disagreement' and 'refusal' speech acts which also constituted high frequency in the recent literature. An author can test the participants' politeness using three ways: the first is by analysing the participants' actual politeness strategies which are exclusively developed to measure the degree of politeness in communication such Leech's (1983) model and Brown & Levinson's (1987) model where certain strategies are deemed either polite or impolite. Another way to analyse politeness is via the semantic (formulae) expressions used by the participants. For instance, a polite strategy is marked by using 'softeners' like 'I think', or using 'question' like 'Do you believe…?'. The third way is through investigating the level of directness in which the direct strategy (when used with someone with higher status) is considered impolite for instance when saying "I disagree with you", while the indirect strategy is considered polite in the same situation like "I wish could agree with you but'.

It is obvious that in gender studies in which speech acts with a face-threatening aspect reveal common but distinctive results between males and females. Conclusions where females use better structures, more polite strategies, or less direct than males were common in gender studies. However, combinations of at least three strategies are rare.

In terms of regional context; where studies were conducted, it has been clear that Iran and Iraq are comparatively richer in speech act literature. One contributing reason might be the fact that both countries try to make up for the communication disconnections from the international community at the social and political levels 20 years ago when sanctions were imposed.

CONCLUSION

Based on the review outcomes above, it is found that most commonly inspected speech acts by the researchers were those involved in everyday argumentative talks called 'dispreferred act' which are disagreement strategies and refusal

strategies. With this finding, it is strongly recommended, to fill the literature gap, that future studies should consider carrying out their enquiry on these least frequent speech acts. Looking at the methods adopted in these studies, it is obvious that the dominant one is the quantitative as Table 3 indicates while the qualitative and mixed methods were, respectively, less. However, it is expected that upcoming studies will keep on adopting quantitative method since the DCT (with its quantitative nature) is a very common tool in speech act studies. Speaking of the language level, whether production, perception, or both, it is found that only one study was conducted at the perception level, few studies on mixed mode, and the majority on the production. As a generalized assumption, based the above discussions, it has been assumed that studies with quantitative methods are restricted to the investigation of the production level only since they deal only with the specific types of speech acts the participants actually say. Or else, in case the studies examine the recognition (perception) level, they tend to be qualitative in nature since they are after how and why the participants subjectively perceive or understand speech in a certain way than others. In terms of gender, recent literature does not lay weight to its effect on varying the speech act strategies. At the halt of the types of the strategies, it is revealed that authors lay greater attention to the politeness strategies as Table 4 shows, especially when the speech act is a 'dispreferred act' (with a potential degree of embarrassment) such as disagreement, refusal, request, correction, warning, threatening, complaint, and suggestion. Reviewing the context of the studies in question, it has been clear that most of them were carried out by and targeted Eastern participants. Nevertheless, it is expected to have more studies in Eastern context since English in this area is still developing especially when English has become a second tongue due to be a need to achieve academic and non-academic purposes. It is believed that more studies are required in the field of speech acts in the Eastern area, especially the under developing Arab countries (Molnar, 2017) including Iraq.

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