

# IRANIAN JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE STUDIES (IJLS)

Volume 1, Issue1  
March 2006



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**IRANIAN JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE STUDIES (IJLS)**

ISSN: 1735-5184 (PRINT)      e-ISSN: 1735-7047 (ONLINE)

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Publisher: American Lulu, Inc.



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**NOTE:** The order of papers in this journal is random.





# **An Investigation on Iranian EFL Learners' Application of Avoidance Strategies in Their Writings**

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One of the outstanding and the key issues in second language research is the avoidance strategies (Ellis, 1994:68). This article aims to explore avoidance strategies found in the English writing of Persian EFL learners. It is found that that avoidance strategy often takes place at any linguistic level such as lexical and syntactic levels as well as on topic choices as a result of external and internal factors. It seems essential for English teachers to be aware of avoidance phenomenon so as to help their students make proper use of avoidance strategies and reduce their negative effects on English learning.

**Keywords:** avoidance; communication strategy; strategies; English writing; Iranian EFL learners

## **1. Introduction**

During the last two decades, a significant shift though gradual has taken place within the field of education, resulting in less stress on teachers and teaching and greater emphasis on learners and learning (Nunan, 1988). One consequence of this shift was an increasing awareness and interest in resources for learning styles and language learning strategies in foreign and second language teaching and learning. Researchers such as Oxford (1990a); Cohen (1987); and O'Malley and Chamot (1990) have stressed that effective learners use a variety of different strategies and techniques in order to solve problems that they face while acquiring or producing the language. Avoidance, being a common phenomenon in second/ foreign language learning and use, is in nature a type of communication strategy. The appropriate employment of avoidance strategies can help learners carry out their communicative goals, keep the learning channels open, and draw more comprehensible input, which are beneficial to the development of communicative competence. On the other hand, overuse or misuse of avoidance might lead to fossilization of learners' interlanguage. Therefore, avoidance is an important issue for second language acquisition research (Ellis, 1994:68). However, despite its importance, studies on avoidance, especially empirical studies are not many. Moreover, of the

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limited studies on avoidance, most of them focus on oral output, leaving written production inadequately studied. Hence, the present study is undertaken to explore the avoidance phenomena in English writings by Iranian EFL learners, aiming at an investigation of such central issues as what, why and when students often avoid in their English writing process.

## **2. Review of Literature**

To delve into the depth of such a concept, avoidance phenomenon, the researcher prefers to acknowledge the fact that the concept of avoidance phenomenon was, indeed, first reported by Schachter in 1974 in her classical paper "An Error in Error Analysis" where she discovered what she considered as a fundamental flaw in Error Analysis---a failure to recognize that learners have a tendency to avoid target language items they are not sure about, and so not to commit errors, which they would be expected to commit. For example, Schachter found that it was misleading to draw conclusions about relative-clause errors among certain English learners; native Japanese and Chinese speakers were legally avoiding that structure and thus not manifesting nearly as many errors as some native Persian and Arabic speakers. Following Schachter's study, a few studies by Daugut & Laufer (1985), Hulstijn & Marchena (1989), and Kellerman (1992), etc. testify to the prevalence of avoidance in second language acquisition. Up to now, avoidance phenomena have been widely recognized to exist in the learning and using process of a second/foreign language.

Previous researchers defined avoidance at either a phenomenal level --being a learner's behavior (cf. Scachter, 1974; Marzouk & Ghiath, 1995), or at a cognitive level--being a communication strategy (cf. Ellis, 1985). In this article, a two-tier definition is suggested as follows: Phenomenal level: When using an FL/SL, the learner often avoids some difficult words, structures, topics, etc., so that the original communicative goal is partly given up or totally abandoned. Cognitive level: The learner usually adopts avoidance consciously or subconsciously in communication. In this sense, avoidance is a communication strategy.

In effect, there are three types of taxonomies of avoidance strategies to date. Basing on an international approach, Tarone (1981) identified two types of avoidance strategies: (1) Topic avoidance; (2) Message abandonment. However, this typology is difficult to be applied to monologue (e.g. writing) when the L2 learner's interlocutor is not present. From a psychological perspective, Faerch & Kasper (1984) identified Reduction strategies (Avoidance strategies) as opposed to Achievement strategies. But the distinctions between the two types of communication strategies are not always clear-cut. From a linguistic perspective, Brown (1994) classified avoidance strategies into syntactic, lexical, phonological and topic avoidance. For the purpose of the present research, the researcher has opted to utilize Brown's

typology, only omitting phonological avoidance, as it cannot be observed in writing.

Previous studies on avoidance (Dagut & Laufer, 1985; Hulstijn & Marchena, 1989; etc.) suggest that avoidance may manifest itself on at least four occasions. First, learners may hesitate to use an L2 construction when they perceive it as markedly different from their L1 system. Second, learners may hesitate to use an L2 form for fear of making an interference error, perceiving this form as being too similar to an L1 counterpart. Third, learners may hesitate to use an L2 form having specific (as opposed to general) semantic features. Finally, avoidance is often adopted by learners as a play-it-safe strategy.

As is often the case with the study on communication strategies, the theoretical discussion on avoidance phenomena has over empirical research into their use. Most of the previous studies are qualitative in nature rather than quantitative or a combination of both methods. The difficulty of understanding avoidance and the lack of previous concrete work in this complicated but important phenomenon in SLA were the determining factors for the researcher in selecting this topic for research.

### **3. Research Design**

#### **3.1. Research Questions**

On the basis previous studies, four research questions concerning avoidance strategy were raised:

- (1) What do Iranian EFL learners often avoid in their English writing process?
- (2) Why do Iranian EFL learners often adopt avoidance strategy?
- (3) When do Iranian EFL learners tend to avoid?
- (4) What is the relationship between Iranian EFL learners' English proficiency level and their use of avoidance strategy?

#### **3.2. Participants**

The participants included in this research were 48 English major sophomores and 48 senior English majors from over 160 intermediate and advanced English learners at Dezful Azad University, Iran. The intermediate group was preparing to attend their newly registered credits, mostly in the 5<sup>th</sup> semester, when the research was conducted. To ensure their proficiency level, a pretest (Oxford, 1990) was administered to over 100 English major sophomores a week before the research and 48 candidates who had obtained around 50% were assigned to intermediate. The other 100 seniors of English major students were administered the same proficiency test and 32 students who had got higher than 75% were selected and assigned to advanced level in this experiment.

### **3.3. Instruments**

The instruments employed in this study were three types which were designed and developed, including an English writing task, a questionnaire and an oral interview. To fulfill the writing task, the participants were required to observe two pictures and answer several questions that serve as a warming-up to elicit their ideas for writing. They were then asked to write an unaided English composition of no less than 120 English words based on the information presented in one of the pictures they chose. The questionnaire was composed of two parts: the first part intended to gather personal information of the subjects and the second part, consisting of 8 items altogether, was designed around the four questioned proposed as the research questions in this study. The choices in each item were made in terms of a five-point Likert scale. Meanwhile, a pilot study concerning the questionnaire had already been undertaken on a few students of the same proficiency before carrying out the final stage of the study analysis.

### **3.4. Data Collection and Analysis Procedure**

The study was carried out with the intermediate and the advanced groups on two mornings respectively. The writing task was assigned first which lasted for about 50 minutes. Then questionnaires were distributed. After that, eight students from each group were randomly chosen to participate in the oral interview on a one-to-one basis. All the interviews were recorded and later transcribed by the researcher.

The students' compositions were analyzed manually in order to investigate potential avoidance behaviors. The data collected through the questionnaires and the oral interviews were also gathered and typed into the computer. Then the data were run through SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) program for more analyses. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were carried out.

## **4. Results**

The results are presented in line with the four research questions.

### **4.1. Results to Question 1: What to Avoid**

Through the analyses of the learners' English writings, questionnaires and interviews, three types of avoidance were identified: (1) Topic avoidance; (2) Lexical avoidance; (3) Syntactic avoidance.

#### **4.1.1. Results from the English Writings**

Of the two pictures offered for writing, picture 1 depicts more characters and implies a clearer social meaning while picture 2 has only 2 characters, yet with a wider space for imagination. Table 1 summarizes the frequencies and percentages of their topic choices and the reasons for their preferences.

Table 1: Frequencies of the Topic Choices

		IPL Group		APL Group	
		N	%	N	%
Picture 1. Reasons	Easy to describe	24	72.73	18	47.37
	More meaningful	7	21.22	15	39.47
	More challenging	2	6.05	5	13.16
	Total	33	100	38	100
Picture 2. Reasons	Easy to describe	10	66.67	6	60
	More fear for description	3	20.00	3	30
	More interesting	2	13.33	1	10
	Total	15	100	10	100

Note: IPL=Intermediate proficiency level, APL=Advanced proficiency level

33 students from the intermediate group chose picture 1, among whom 24, covering 72.73%, claimed that their reason was that picture 1 was easier to describe, while 18, covering 47.37%, out of the 38 students from the advanced group choosing picture 1 claimed the same reason. Similarly, reason “easy to describe” also ranks the highest among students choosing picture 2 in each group. The results show that no matter which picture the students choose, the first consideration of their choices is the easiness of description. This phenomenon is more conspicuous among students from the intermediate group.

The analysis of the English writings indicates that students tend to use simpler words and phrases. It seems that most of the words used by the students were learnt in their high school; only a small number of the words were learned during their university period. For example, in describing picture 2, most of the students used “thief” to refer to the man who is climbing over the window into the room of a sleeping man. Only one student used “burglar”, which is more appropriate and certainly more complex in form, and is within the teaching syllabus of high school level. Besides, students often make use of circumlocution, paraphrasing, synonyms, etc. to avoid words, phrases that they are sure about. For instance, a student wrote when describing picture 1: “... a bad man do some bad things to a young lady”, which failed to tell readers what really happened. Actually, he could have written “A robber is seizing a young woman by the throat”.

Moreover, it is found that learners usually prefer simple sentences to compound ones, and compound sentences to complex ones. For example, a student wrote, “On the picture, we can see there was a man. He was attacking a woman.” Though his article had few grammatical errors, it was lacking in coherence. If the student had used a nonfinite relative clause and thus changed the sentence into “On the picture, we see a man attacking a woman” or used a finite relative clause like “On the picture, we see a man, who was attacking a woman”, then it would have been more coherent. We there inferred that the student might have chosen two simple sentences instead of a complex one to avoid possible errors.

#### 4.1.2. Results from the Questionnaire and Oral interview

The results of the avoidance types and frequencies are summarized in Table 2, which demonstrates that all avoidance types show high frequencies (Mean > 4) except the topic avoidance by advanced group. On the whole, both groups showed a similar tendency in their avoidance behaviors. To be specific, lexical avoidance (Mean = 6.24 for the intermediate group and Mean = 5.20 for the advanced group) is used most frequently while the topic avoidance (Mean=4.69 and Mean =3.26) is the least. And syntactic avoidance ranks the second in regard to frequency.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Avoidance Phenomena

Avoidance	Group	N	Mean	Std Deviation
Topic Avoidance	IPL	48	4.69	1.36
	APL	48	3.26	1.21
Lexical Avoidance	IPL	48	6.24	.85
	APL	48	5.20	.94
Syntactic Avoidance	IPL	48	5.76	.94
	APL	48	4.78	1.03
Total Avoidance	IPL	48	5.56	.85
	APL	48	4.75	.84

Results from the oral interview also show that students often avoid difficult words, structures, and sometimes topics. Above all, data analyses of the English writings, questionnaires and interviews demonstrate that students tend to adopt lexical, syntactic and topic avoidance in their English writings.

#### 4.2. Results to Question 2: Why to Avoid

As this question is rather subjective and cannot be answered by analyzing students' compositions, the data were mainly derived from the students' introspection in response to the questionnaire. Results are tabulated in Table 3. Of the proposed four reasons for avoidance, except "for good marks" both groups agreed, to a large extent, that they used avoidance because they wanted to complete smoothly their English writings (Mean =6.33 & 5.76), avoid errors (Mean=5.95 & 6.13), and assure the accuracy and appropriateness of their expressions (Mean=5.91 & 5.91).

Table 3: Reasons for Avoidance in Iranian EFL English Writing

Avoidance Reasons	Group	N	Mean	Std Deviation
Completion of English writings	IPL	48	4.76	.60
	APL	48	4.33	.81
Error avoidance	IPL	48	5.95	1.29
	APL	48	6.13	1.03
Accuracy in expression	IPL	48	4.91	.94
	APL	48	4.91	.69
Good marks	IPL	48	6.28	.88
	APL	48	4.78	1.68

### 4.3. Results to Question 3: When to Avoid

Descriptive statistics (see Table 4) of the questionnaire demonstrates that avoidance takes place most frequently when learners cannot remember the words, expressions, sentences and structures at the moment of writing though they have learned already (Mean=6.42 for the intermediate group and Mean =6.00 for the advanced group). The second occasion recognized by learners is when they are not sure about the usage of the linguistically difficult items though they know them (Mean=5.29 and 5.44, respectively). However, for the other two reasons, learners showed little consent.

Table 4: The Occurrences of Avoidance

Avoidance Occasions	Group	Number	Mean	Std Deviation
Never learned	IPL	48	3.57	1.69
	APL	48	3.33	1.45
Cannot remember clearly	IPL	48	6.42	.87
	APL	48	6.00	1.14
Not sure about	IPL	48	5.29	1.57
	APL	48	5.44	1.64
Difficult to use	IPL	48	3.13	1.39
	APL	48	3.57	1.81

Interviews with the subjects show that they usually avoid deliberately when they are faced with difficulties in expressing themselves, which is in line with the results of the questionnaires and in accord with Schachter's interpretation to avoidance, that is, difficulty and insecurity lead to avoidance.

### 4.4. Results to Question 4: Relationship between Avoidance and English Proficiency Level

From Table 2, we see marked differences between the avoidance behaviors of the intermediate group and the advanced group. The frequencies of every avoidance type of the intermediate level are all higher than those of the advanced group. To examine whether these differences were significant, an independent samples t-test was performed.

Table 5: T-test Results of Group Differences in the Number of Avoidance Employed

Avoidance	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Topic avoidance	1.98	94	.178	.32
Lexical avoidance	6.67	94	.000	.71
Syntactic avoidance	6.01	94	.000	.64
Total avoidance	5.82	94	.000	.52

The results (see Table 5) show that there are significant differences between the intermediate and advanced groups on lexical avoidance ( $P < .001$ ) and syntactic avoidance ( $P < .001$ ), but the difference of the employment of topic avoidance hasn't reached a significant level. On the whole, the difference of total frequencies of avoidance between the two groups is highly significant ( $P < .001$ ). In conclusion, the intermediate group used more avoidance

strategies than the advanced group. To investigate further the relationship between avoidance and frequency level, a correlation analysis was carried out.

Table 6: Correlation Analysis between Avoidance and English Proficiency Level

Correlation	Avoidance	Proficiency Level
Avoidance	1	-.426**
Proficiency Level	-.426**	1

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The result ( $r = -.426$ ) indicates that the avoidance is inversely correlated with English proficiency level, which is in line with the research findings of some previous studies (e.g. Tarone, 1977; Paribakht, 1985; Poulisse & Schils, 1980). In other words, the higher the English proficiency level is, the fewer avoidance strategies the learners will employ in their writing process.

## 5. Discussions

The reasons why students adopt avoidance strategies are various. Besides those investigated in this study, namely, students want to complete smoothly their English writings, to avoid errors, and to guarantee the accuracy and appropriateness of their expressions, there exist more fundamental causes of learners' avoidance behaviors, which can be roughly divided into two categories: objective causes and subjective ones. The former causes are usually beyond the ability of students as they are due to the objective, or external factors, such as the difference or similarities between English and Persian, the lacking in comprehensible input and output, deviations between foreign language competence and ideation proficiency, etc. On the other hand, subjective causes mainly include such internal factors as the teachers and students' attitudes toward errors, the fear of difficulties, and the strategy of testing – playing safe, etc. Since avoidance is widely acknowledged to imply a psychological process, subjective causes take the assumption that learners have the ability to use or partially use the complex and appropriate words and sentences, but they consciously or subconsciously avoid using them.

Another important issue concerning avoidance behavior is its relationship with second language acquisition. Concerning this issue, the students' perceptions were, therefore, examined. Results (see Table 7) demonstrate that both intermediate and advanced groups regard frequent use of avoidance as more disadvantageous than advantageous to English learning. And the advanced group's attitude is more conspicuous as 40 out of 48 (83.34%) of them consider avoidance as disadvantageous to SLA whereas only 33 (68.75%) students of the intermediate think so. More students from the intermediate group (31.25%) than from the advanced group (16.66%) hold that avoidance has both advantages and disadvantages to SLA. This also suggests that the intermediate group might use more avoidance strategies than the advanced group.



Table 7: The Relationship between Avoidance and ASL

Attitude on Avoidance	Disadvantageous(1+2)	%	Both(3)	%	Advantageous	%
IPL	33	68.75	13	27.08	2	4.17
APL	40	83.34	7	14.58	1	2.08

The result of oral interviews also shows that learners, generally speaking, have a negative attitude toward avoidance. However, despite their awareness, students often use avoidance strategies in English writing. This discrepancy between students' attitudes toward and employment of avoidance strategies proves to some extent that avoidance can help carry out their communicative needs; otherwise, they will not use avoidance. Thus it is too hasty to conclude that avoidance is disadvantageous to English learning.

Although avoidance phenomena, like errors, may not be avoided in the learning process, the negative effects can be reduced if students grasp the optimum use of avoidance strategies. The following are a few suggestions for English teachers to help their students reduce the negative effects of avoidance:

- (1) Increase comprehensible input and output;
- (2) Raise students' linguistic and cultural consciousness and sensitivity in language learning process;
- (3) Develop an appropriate attitude toward errors;
- (4) Break students' psychological barriers in English learning process;
- (5) Provide students with strategies instruction
- (6) Encourage students to test their own hypotheses in the learning process.

## 6. Conclusion

Avoidance is a common phenomenon in language learning and use. However, it has not been given adequate attention by applied linguists and language educators yet. This study explores the avoidance phenomenon in the English writings by Iranian EFL learners. It is found that avoidance often takes place at lexical, syntactic levels as well as on topic choices when students have difficulties in expressing themselves. And avoidance is inversely related to English proficiency level. Besides, language proficiency level, there are many other factors influencing students' avoidance behaviors, such as the nature of the problem source (Tarone, 1977), the learner's personality (Tarone, 1977), and the learning situation (Piranian, 1979), etc, which, however, require further and more in-depth researches.

Although the present study is only a preliminary step towards unraveling the mysteries of avoidance phenomena, it suggests several implications as follows:

1. The appropriate use of avoidance can help learners carry on communicative goals in immediate communication, which helps build up their strategic competence.

2. Avoidance can keep the learning channels open and draw more comprehensible input, which are beneficial to the acquisition of a foreign language.
3. Misuse of avoidance might mislead learners in SLA. By adopting avoidance strategies learners may be over-satisfied with their success in immediate communication and stop making efforts to developing their interlanguage. In other words, overuse or misuse of avoidance might lead to fossilization problem.

In conclusion, English teachers need to be aware of avoidance phenomenon so as to help their students make proper use of avoidance strategies and reduce their negative effects on English learning. Moreover, strategies instruction is needed to enhance students' motivation, reflect negative affective influence, develop the learner autonomy and above all, help students make efficient use of communication strategies.

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# Using Online Dialogue to Develop Cross-Cultural Understanding

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The present study recommends that cross-cultural online dialogue be part of the EFL college classroom in Saudi Arabia. It proposes a model for dialogue skills, cross-cultural themes that can serve as a basis for selecting dialogue topics, print and electronic resources for locating stereotypes and misconceptions about Saudi Arabia, Islamic and Arabic cultures. Examples of online instruction and collaborative and interactive activities; and recommendations for successful dialogue between Saudi and English-speaking-students are given.

**Keywords:** cross-cultural understanding; online dialogue; second language; foreign language; intercultural communication

## 1. Introduction

The world has become a small village due to latest developments in information and communication technology. As a result, ecological, economic, political, cultural, social and technological systems in the world have become interrelated and inter-dependent. Students are no longer citizens of their own country, they have become global citizens. They are exposed to a flow of information from around the world coming through satellite T.V., online and print media and the internet. Many stereotypes and misconceptions about different Islamic and Arabic beliefs, traditions, practices, concepts, social and political status and way of life are being transmitted to students in Arab and Islamic countries especially after September 11.

Interest in cross-cultural communication, cross-cultural understanding, cross-cultural dialogue among politicians, economists, businessmen, educators and other partners is increasing. Culture homogenization is being called for. L2 students no longer need to travel or leave their homes to meet people from other countries and learn about their culture. Foreign language educators in countries like Japan, Taiwan, Korea, Germany, and South America are making use of information and communication technologies to connect L2 students with students of the target language in the USA, UK or Canada. Online

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collaborative and interactive projects are being used to develop students' cultural awareness, communication, and understanding. A review of the L2 literature has shown that web-based video, e-mail, audio and video conferencing, web-page design, internet-based resources, culture portfolios, online newspapers and online chat rooms have been integrated in the teaching of target culture to junior and senior high school and college students learning English, French, German and Spanish as a second or foreign language (Abrams, 2002; Cifuentes and Shih, 2001; Chen, 2001; Schoorman and Camarillo, 2000; Kinginger, Gourves-Hayward and Simson, 1999; Ruhe, 1998; Singhal, 1998; Osuna and Meskill, 1998; Lee, 1998; Aspaas, 1998; Shelley, 1996; Suozzo, 1995). In these studies, cross-cultural collaboration between L2 and L1 students or pre-service teachers has resulted in significant gains in L2 students' knowledge of the target culture.

## **2. Need for Study**

Although many discussion forums in which students from around the world participate and discuss cultural issues are available on the internet, those in which Arab, Muslim and Saudi students participate are very few. For example, in Dave's ESL Café Student Discussion Forums, students from Japan, China, Korea, and other countries post questions and exchange cultural information. Examples of the cultural threads posted in Dave's ESL Café Student Discussion Forums are: *Japanese culture; Korean culture; American social problems; Asian vs. Western Culture; About women; The Oldest in the world--the Chinese culture; Tell me about culture in Europe esp. France; about special food culture; Is it good or bad to be bicultural or multicultural*. However, discussions about the Islamic and Arabic cultures are almost lacking.

In the Usenet discussion forums, 130,000 cultural threads were posted in the Arabic newsgroup alone. Participants in the Arabic newsgroup post threads about current events in the news such as: *Those who support the illegal and immoral war on Iraq; It (the wall) exists not for security but for apartheid; Hundreds of Palestinians in anti-fence demonstration...; Zionist forces block travel of Nablus residents*'. Participants of the Usenet Arabic Newsgroup come from different countries and cover students and non-student members. The purpose of the Usenet discussion forums is not instructional.

The Online Writing Collaboration Project which was developed by a Saudi graduate student at the University of Indiana at Pennsylvania in 2000 is the only discussion forum where Saudi students and English-speaking students from other countries participate. It has more than 2500 members. The students' educational level range between freshman and doctoral, and include both male and female participants with different cultural backgrounds and different majors. Participants have posted more than 260 threads and 1400 posts in the three 'Cross-cultural Communication' forums. Examples of the cross-cultural themes discussed by the participants are: *Mohammed, Legacy of a prophet, Palestine, Happy Ramadan, Clinton tells Saudis don't fight the*

*tides of change, Headscarves and France, Wag the Dog, American Culture? American Dream, Arabs and ethnocentrism, Arabs and literacy, political, social change for Arabs.* In addition to the forums, OWCP members may browse 'Culture through pictures' and 'culture related media'. The discussion topics in the OWCP forums are posted on a voluntary basis and they are not part of a credit course.

In addition, only one instance on online interaction between Saudi students and students from different countries exists. An online cross-cultural collaborative project between Saudi, Ukrainian and Russian students was initiated using an online course with Nicenet (Al-Jarf, 2004a). The cross-cultural exchange was used as a supplement to in-class writing instruction. The aim of the project was to develop students' writing skills in EFL and to develop their awareness of local and global cultural issues and events. The cultural material consisted of 13 discussion threads, 20 external links, 9 documents, a photo gallery and Powerpoint presentations which were posted throughout the semester. The documents were used for online extensive reading and covered topics such as: *ancient men and women, cross-cultural problems, cultural dimensions, netiquette rules, the difference in news coverage by the US mass media and mass media in other countries.*

The cross-cultural exchange between Saudi students and students from other countries in the OWCP cross-cultural discussion forums and the Nicenet online course has proven to be effective in developing participants' awareness of the other and of current global events and issues. The cultural exchange between Saudi, Ukrainian and Russian students had a positive effect on students' attitudes (Al-Jarf, 2004a). All of students enjoyed discussing and expressing opinions about global cultural issues and events. They reported that the course helped them understand some aspects of "world life". The documents helped them in generating ideas for their messages, in learning new vocabulary items, and in enhancing their reading and writing skills. All the students expressed an interest in continuing the project or participating in similar cross-cultural projects in the future. Similar results were reported by a sample of Saudi and American students who participated in the OWCP cross-cultural discussions. They indicated that such informal discussions had a positive effect on developing cross-cultural understanding, changing stereotypes, raising awareness of current global issues and developed reading and writing skills among EFL participants in particular (Al-Jarf, 2004b).

To conclude, Arab and Muslim students, in general, and Saudi students, in particular, need to have a more active role in cross-cultural contact with students from other cultures. Direct discussions between Saudi and English-speaking college students need to be encouraged to open new channels for communication, awareness, understanding, tolerance, acceptance, cooperation and peace. Saudi college students need to develop reading, writing, discussing and dialogue skills in order to communicate with students

from other cultures better. They need to be aware of how others see us and how we see others.

For the above reasons, the present study proposes a model for integrating dialogue skills in the writing classroom to help EFL college students develop an awareness of current global issues and events and misconceptions that cross borders, to share and exchange information about their own culture and other cultures with native-speaking students, and to recognize and modify stereotypes about Saudis, Arabs and Muslims. The study will briefly delineate dialogue skills, give examples of cross-cultural themes, internet resources where stereotypes and current global issues and events can be located, cross-cultural concepts to be developed, and how online instruction can be carried out.

### **3. Subjects**

Subjects of the present study are EFL undergraduate college students enrolled in English departments or colleges of languages and translation in Saudi Arabia. In their reading and writing classes, EFL college students can engage in collaborative and interactive cross-cultural dialogue with native English-speaking students in the USA, UK, Canada or Australia. Cross-cultural misconceptions and stereotypes can serve as a theme for such dialogue.

### **4. Searching for Cross-cultural Themes**

Cultural themes, misconceptions, and stereotypes may be located by the students and/or their instructors from sources such as print newspapers, online newspapers, 1000 videos, NPR, CNN, BBC, Discovery channel, and movies. To be able to locate cultural themes, EFL college students need to develop the following electronic searching skills:

- Defining the search terms.
- Combining search terms using '*and, or, not, all the words, exact phrase, any of the words*'.
- Using advanced and simple searches.
- Using search engines like *Google, Beaucoup, All the Web, Ask Jeeves*.
- Searching websites like *CNN, BBC, NBR, CNBC, Discovery, AOL* and so on.
- Searching online newspapers like *USA Today, Newsweek, the Guardian* and so on.
- Finding posts in newsgroups and discussion forums.

### **5. Examples of Cross-cultural Themes (Types of Stereotypes)**

Topics for online dialogue can be located in the sources mentioned above. Cross-cultural themes may be classified into the following categories:



### **5.1. Socio-cultural issues as in the following:**

*Contributions of Muslim scientists and scholars to humanity, impact of Islamic civilization on western civilization, women's image in the media, dress, Hijab, segregation, women's social role, women and driving, working women, Mixed marriages between Muslims and non-Muslims, Islamic and western holidays, cultural pluralism, ethnocentrism, social security, elderly care, handicapped, children's rights, social changes, Earth Summit, misunderstanding Islamic expressions (inshall), non-verbal behavior from culture.*

### **5.2. Educational issues as in the following**

*School curriculum and terrorism, religion curriculum, illiteracy, women and literacy, women's education, use of technology in education.*

### **5.3. Economic issues as in the following**

*Economic problems, economic development, causes of economic backwardness, oil-rich countries, global markets, current technological status, consumer society, UN Development Report, Charities, job opportunities, unemployment, poverty.*

### **5.4. Political issues as in the following**

*Democracy, political changes, political reform, relationship between Islamic and non-Islamic countries, world peace, terrorism, violence, conflict among religions, suicidal bombers, Palestine, Jerusalem, Arab-Israeli conflict, the fence, Islam and politics, non-Muslim minorities in Arab countries, Muslim minorities in Europe and America, women and politics, voting, elections, representation in parliament.*

### **5.5. Ideological issues as in the following:**

*Islam and violence, Islam and terrorism, Islam and aggression, Jihad, suicide bombers, Islam and politics, Wahhabism, Islamic fundamentalism, status of women in Islam, women's rights, family in Islam, marriage in Islam, polygamy in Islam.*

## **6. Dialogue Skills**

According to Webster Dictionary, "dialogue" is an exchange of ideas and opinions, and a discussion between representatives of parties to a conflict that is aimed at resolution. Dialogue implies that the person who states an argument has tried to understand the matter in question and is using powers of reason as to how and why evidence supports his or her position. United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Anan said: "I see...dialogue as a chance for people of different cultures and traditions to get to know each other better, whether they live on opposite sides of the world or on the same street". Banathy (2003) views dialogue as a disciplined, consensus-building process of collective communication based on shared values and beliefs. From these

definitions, it can be said that dialogue among students belonging to two different cultures requires the students to comprehend, discuss, argue, use logic, collect relevant information and provide evidence that support his/her position concerning the topic under dialogue. The components of the dialogue skills are given below. Some of the specific skills listed in the *'Detecting Fallacies, Persuasion Skills, Reasoning Abilities, Dialogue Ethics'* sections below were adopted from Kennedy, Kennedy and Holladay, (1993); Brittin and Brittin, (1981); Ruetten (1986); and McCall, (1966). Dialogue between L2 and L1 students requires skills listed below.

### **6.1. Reading Comprehension Skills**

EFL college students should be able to read an article about a cultural issue, and do the following:

- Highlight the main arguments or the main points in an article.
- Analyze argument.
- Find support for main argument.
- Identify and understand opposing points of view.
- Find reasons author used to support his opinion.
- Distinguish between fact and fiction.
- Identify general and specific statements.
- Find the basis for an inference.
- Identify a bias.
- Identify a point to be discussed or argued.
- Find a point where both the student and the opponent agree.

### **6.2. Detecting Fallacies (While Reading)**

Fallacies are common mistakes in thinking—often, the making of statements that lead to wrong conclusions. To detect fallacies, EFL college students should be able to:

- Break an argument down into its syllogism: Major premise (the initial generalization), minor premise (the specific case) and conclusion (resultant statement).
- Recognize various expressions for all (use of *each* and *every*).
- Recognize fallacious conditions of *either-or* arguments.
- Know that people may not choose to use logic.
- Detect propaganda devices.

- Detect inconsistencies in the presentation of information.
- Recognize statements that lack proof.
- Recognize that distortion can occur by taking a statement out of context.
- Recognize the necessity of a premise or assumption to be true in order to result in a true conclusion.
- Recognize a statement of generalization and describe its limitations.

### **6.3. Persuasion skills**

An argumentative essay is one that attempts to change the reader's mind, to convince him or her to agree with the point of view or opinion of the writer. Therefore, the argumentative essay attempts to be highly persuasive and logical. To win an argument, EFL students should have both knowledge that provides evidence, and good powers of reasoning. According to Ruetten (1986) and Brittin and Britin (1981), an argument ensues when two parties disagree about something. One party gives an opinion and offers reasons in support of it, and the other party gives a different opinion and offers reasons in support of their position. The kind of argument that can be argued logically is one based on an opinion that can be supported by evidence. To be able to persuade, EFL college students are required to:

- Be aware of the audience – the reader.
- Present the cause, reasons and history of the controversy in the first paragraph.
- Tell the reader quickly which side they support.
- Define terms so that people can agree on exactly what the argument is about.
- Make several assertions that support their belief and back them up with evidence that has a bearing on the issue.
- Use up-to-date facts, figures, charts, quotations, cite authorities, and the like.
- Provide evidence in each paragraph that supports the main topic of the paragraph.
- Present strong evidence on both sides.
- Weigh facts.
- Compare cultures.
- Explain or analyze.
- Discuss advantages and disadvantages.

- Present evidence logically.
- Avoid generalizations by others or by themselves.
- Use analogies, i.e. similarities between situations, the situation being argued about should be treated in the same manner that a former situation was treated.
- Arrive at a conclusion based on evidence.
- Avoid disproving all that the opposition claims.
- Use a positive tone.
- Use emotions to make the argument seem convincing.
- Base judgments on standards that people accept.
- Reaffirm their position in the conclusion.

#### **6.4 Reasoning Abilities (While Writing)**

Reasoning abilities require the students to:

- Avoid faulty logic.
- Recognize the problem inherent in most ‘*all*’ statements.
- Avoid stating or implying that something is true of an entire class of things (use of *all, everyone, no one, always, never, each, every*).
- Avoid stating a claim that does not follow from the writer’s first premise.
- Avoid offering a neat and easy solution for large complicated problems.
- Avoid confusing cause and effect.
- Avoid repeating what is true, arguing in a circle, demonstrating a premise by a claim and a claim by a premise, or defining a word by itself.
- Avoid ‘*either-or*’ reasoning, i.e., assuming that there are only two sides to a question that all statements are either true or false, or either a “*yes or a no answer*”.
- Avoid using argument from dubious authority.
- Avoid using a metaphor as though it were evidence to support a claim.
- Provide sufficient evidence – enough examples- to draw conclusions.
- Make inferences from logical statements.
- Use inductive logic, i.e., formulate a generalization after examining evidence.

- Use deductive reasoning, i.e., begin with a generalization and apply it to a specific situation.

### **6.5. Applying Dialogue Ethics**

Dialogue requires that EFL college students do the following:

- Avoid attacking people's opinions by attacking their character.
- Avoid personal attacks and discrediting an opponent's character instead of discussing the issues.
- Avoid accusing a person of selfish motives for their beliefs,
- Avoid treating the reasoning and evidence with scoffing and sarcasm.
- Avoid attacking the reader with statements such as "*Anyone who believes ...must be ignorant or out of touch with reality*".
- Avoid calling each other names, making threats, or breaking off friendly relations.
- Avoid becoming violently emotional, quarrelsome, unpleasant, or nasty.
- Admit lack of knowledge or suspend judgment if evidence is not decisive.
- Write objectively, logically and respectfully.

### **7. Concepts to be developed**

Dialogue among college students requires the development of the following concepts: *global awareness, tolerance, understanding, cooperation, acceptance, otherness, competition, solidarity, exchange, integration, unity, terrorism, anti-terrorism, peace, peace process, settlement, dialogue, negotiations, stability, legitimacy, conflict, conflict resolution, aggression, hatred, resentment, rejection, responsibility, participation, including others, relief work, respecting differences, recognizing oneself, appreciating national and ethnic heritage, ethnocentrism, propaganda, bias, objective, subjective.*

### **8. Online Instruction**

To develop online dialogue between Saudi and native-English-speaking students, the EFL college instructor can arrange for the cross-cultural exchange with a counterpart at an American, British or Canadian university. Both instructors can create a student newsgroup using *Yahoo, MSN, Usenet* and the like, or a student discussion forum using *Nicenet, OWCP, or Dave's ESL Café*. These websites can be used free of charge. They should plan the resources and prepare the students for the online dialogue. The dialogue ethics can be posted in the forum. The steps to be followed in the dialogue may be identified and illustrated by an example. They may train the students in electronic searching, may assign online reading material, video clips, movies, digital pictures, online stories, print and electronic newspaper

excerpts that would serve as a basis for the discussion. A list of cross-cultural themes can be prepared by the instructors prior to enrollment in the newsgroup or online forum. The cross-cultural discussion topics may be determined on a weekly basis depending on the current world, regional and local events. A student or instructor can post any thread related to a global or local issue and other participating students and instructors may post their reactions to a given thread. The threads chosen for discussion may be based on a movie, a newspaper news story, an issue that was read in a T.V. website, current world events and issues, or a participant's personal experience with people from other cultures.

To be successful, threaded discussions should be informal. The students can select the discussion topics and stories and they should feel free to post any topic, agree or disagree with the issue under discussion, and should express their opinions and beliefs freely. The discussion threads can be posted on a voluntary basis. Participating instructors should act as facilitators. They can prompt the students, share in the discussions, and give positive feedback. Grammatical and spelling errors should not be corrected. Students should focus on the message content rather than grammar and spelling errors. Extra credit can be given for participation. There should be a balance between the topics representing both parties. Responses should be polite and respectful. Discussion forums can be first tried out and used as a supplement to in-class writing instruction, before writing instruction is delivered fully online.

## **9. Conclusion**

Direct contact and interaction between Saudi and English native-speaking students can play a vital role in developing cross-cultural communication, awareness, and understanding. Through online discussion forums or newsgroups, Saudi and English-speaking students can have the opportunity to discuss misconceptions about Saudi, Arabic, Islamic or American cultural issues, improve their reading, writing and dialogue skills.

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# Iranian Complainers' Use of Conversational Strategies: A Politeness Study

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In a study of the effects of complainers' sex, age, perceived situational seriousness, and social class on the use of conversational strategies in their response to complaining behavior of complainers, 465 subjects of varying age, sex, and social class were observed and tape recorded in spontaneous conversation by 25 field workers. The field workers also filled out a checklist that provided the data of the study, which were then input into two nonparametric tests: (a) Mann-Whitney U Test, and (b) Kruskal Wallis H Test. The results of data analysis showed that sex and social class caused the differential use of two conversational strategies whereas perceived situational seriousness caused the differential use of only one strategy. The results also indicated that age resulted in the differential use of none of the conversational strategies in questions.

**Keywords:** sociolinguistics; pragmatics; speech act theory; face-threatening acts; non-face-threatening act; griping; troubles-telling; politeness; whinging; sociopragmatics; complaining

## 1. Introduction

Direct complaint (DC) is a face-threatening act through which a speaker makes complaints about someone or something that is present in the speech act scene (Murphy and Neu, 1996; Olshtain and Weinbach, 1993). Indirect complaint (IC) or Griping, on the other hand, can be described as a non-face-threatening speech act in which the responsible party or object of the complaint is not present during the interaction within which the speech act is performed (D'Amico-Reisner, 1985). Both direct and indirect complaints have the potential of leading to lengthy interactions between speaker and addressee; however, it is usually in the indirect complaint or griping that one finds conversational material upon which shared beliefs and attitudes may be expressed (Tatsuki, 2000). As such, the indirect complaint (IC) becomes a solidarity-building device since it freely invokes the listener to engage in a series of commiserative responses to demonstrate attention and concern, or to maintain intimacy and stable social relationships.

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Closely related to the concept of griping is what in Australian English is called whinging. Using Natural Semantic Approach, Wirezbicka (1991, pp.181-2) defines whinging as:

- a) I say something bad is happening to me
- b) I feel something bad because of this
- c) I can't do anything because of this
- d) I want someone to know this
- e) I want someone to do something because of this
- f) I think no one wants to do anything because of this
- g) I want to say this many times because of this

Wierzbicka (1991) compared her own definition of whinge with the definitions of complaints (direct and indirect) to highlight the range of meanings a word can have with respect to the culture in which it is a part.

According to both Tannen (1990) and Michand & Warner (1997), indirect complaints frequently serve as back-channels or evaluative responses in an extended structure of discourse exchanges; they may invoke expressions like "Oh, that's horrible!", "Yeah, I know what you mean", and "That's too bad."

## **2. Background**

Brown and Levinson's (1978) definition of the notion of face created interest in the study speech acts that had to do with face. One such speech act is complaining. The earliest attempts at studying complaints were made in the 1980s. Jefferson and Lee (1981) and Jefferson (1984a, 1984b) studied 'troubles-telling' encounters from a conversation analysis point of view. Katriel (1985) conducted a research on griping. Katriel examined the ritual gripings among Israelis. All of these studies referred to the potential of establishing solidarity through griping.

In a study on Turkish commiserative responses, Bayraktaroglu (1992) found that griping was a common speech act among friends and intimates. He said:

"When one of the speakers informs the other speaker of the existence of a personal problem, the subsequent talk revolves around this trouble for a number of exchanges, forming a unit in the conversation where trouble is the focal point ..., [involving] the speaker who initiates it by making his or her trouble in public, the trouble-teller, and the speaker who is on the receiving end, the 'trouble-recipient.'"

(Bayraktaroglu, 1992, p. 319)

Bayraktaroglu also distinguished griping from troubles-talking in that the latter is a type of oral narrative which is initiated by the former.

Indirect complaint (IC) refers to the expression of dissatisfaction to an interlocutor about someone or something that is not present. An indirect complaint is defined as a negative evaluation wherein the addressee is neither held responsible for the perceived offense nor capable of remedying the perceived offense. Native English speakers usually use indirect complaints as a positive strategy for establishing points of commonality; they frequently employ indirect complaints (ICs) in an attempt to establish rapport or solidarity between themselves and their interlocutors. One of the early attempts at studying ICs was made by Boxer (1993a). In Boxer's study, 295 interlocutors produced 533 indirect complaints. Boxer identified three different types of IC themes (personal, impersonal, and trivial), and six types of IC responses (nothing or topic switch, question, contradiction, joke/teasing, advice/lecture, and commiseration). The study focused mainly on the role of gender, social status, social distance, and theme in connection to ICs. Since half of interlocutors in Boxer's study were Jewish, it was possible to investigate ethnicity. Boxer found that Jews complain more. She also found that approximately 25% of griping sequences served to distance the interlocutors from one another while 75% of the gripings were found to be rapport-inspiring by a group of ten native English-speaking raters. Boxer's study found that speakers of English often employed gripings in sequential interaction in an attempt to establish solidarity. It was also found that women mostly commiserated with ICs, while men contradicted or gave advice. Boxer noticed that ESL textbooks, with respect to gender, did not include ICs or included them but did not treat them as ICs. The study, therefore, suggested that non-native speakers (NNSs) should know that commiserating with complaints is important in that it signals to the speaker (S) that the hearer (H) is supportive; this builds solidarity.

In another study by Boxer (1993b), indirect complaints as well as commiseration in conversations between Japanese ESL learners and their E1 peers were studied. Boxer used spontaneous speech or field notes. In this study, 295 interlocutors were recorded in spontaneous conversation (195 women and 100 men). The issue that emerged was that of how to respond to an indirect complaint. The results showed that natives used (a) joking/teasing, (b) nonsubstantive reply ("hmn"), (c) question, (d) advice/lecture, (e) contradiction, and (f) commiseration. With NSs most responses were commiseration with some questioning. For NNSs, the major category was nonsubstantive, sometimes accompanied by some questioning and some commiseration. The study concluded that the Japanese ESL learners were missing out on opportunities for conversation by not engaging in the interaction more fully; they did not utilize talk in the same way as NSs did.

In a study in 1993 by Frescura, eighty three subjects provided the tape-recorded role-play data on reactions to complaints (mostly apologies). The subjects of the study belonged in four different groups: (a) native Italian speakers in Italy, (b) native English speakers in Canada, (c) Italians residing in Canada, and (d) English-Canadian learners of Italian. The respondents,

after being tape-recorded in six role-play interactions, were asked to listen to all six recordings and to provide retrospective verbal report on:

- (a) how close to real life they felt their performance to be;
- (b) how dominant they felt their interlocutor was;
- (c) their sensitivity to the severity of the offense and to the tone of the complaint; and
- (d) their possible linguistic difficulties (for Italians in Canada and Canadian learners of Italian).

The data were coded according to a taxonomy comprising seven semantic formulas in two categories: (a) hearer-supportive (including formulas providing gratification and support for the "face" of the complainers), and (b) self-supportive (including formulas uttered by the speakers to defend and protect their own "face"). Performance was measured according to the three dimensions of (1) production (total output of formulas, including repetitions), (2) selection (types of formulas used, excluding repetitions), and (3) intensity of formulas produced. The results, after data analysis, revealed that native speakers of Italian had an overall preference for the self-supportive category of formulas; native speakers of English, however, had a preference for the hearer-supportive category. Moreover, Canadian learners of Italian did not indicate any preference; by way of contrast, Italian-Canadian speakers, though diverging some from the native norm, gave indication of language maintenance as well. Frescura had used verbal report which helped her establish, among other things, that the learners of Italian tended to think in English first before responding to the role plays.

According to Du (1995), in Chinese culture face is not only socially-oriented but also reciprocal. Some method of maintaining 'face balance' is therefore required. Depending on (a) the relationship between the interlocutors and (b) the nature of the message, the act of 'giving bad news' may in some cases be face-saving. However, 'complaining' and 'disagreeing' are in most cases, clearly face-threatening. The former indicates that the person's behavior is not approved or accepted by other social members and the latter indicates a contradiction or negative evaluation of a person's face. These acts, therefore, require some strategy for preserving the face of both interlocutors. Du (1995) conducted a study with thirty students (male and female) from Beijing Normal University ranging from 19 to 30 years old. The study gave a definition of these three face-threatening acts—complaining, giving bad news, and disagreeing. Du also discussed the illocutionary verbs which denote these acts and the semantics of face in Chinese culture. Du used a 19-item questionnaire that described face-threatening situations and asked each subject to contemplate the situation and write his or her response. The results of Du's study showed that strategy choice varied according to (a) the referential goal and (b) the nature of the interlocutor relationship. Du also noticed a general pattern: face-threatening acts in Chinese tend to be performed in a

cooperative rather than confrontational manner. Attention is paid to both participants face by emphasizing common ground and constructive problem solutions.

Morrow (1995) studied twenty students enrolled in two spoken English classes in an intensive ESL program in the United States. Morrow used a three-hour intervention using model dialogues, prescribed speech-act formulae, and various types of performance activities (games and role playing) about refusals and complaints. Oral data were collected in three phases: (a) prior to the intervention, (b) immediately following the intervention, and (c) six months after the intervention. Morrow collected the oral data by means of seven semi-structured role-play tasks which prompted subjects to perform three direct complaints and four refusals with peer interlocutors. The data were analyzed in two ways: (a) using holistic ratings of clarity and politeness, and (b) comparing the pretest and posttest distributions of discourse features with those of native English speaking controls ( $N=14$ ). T-tests were conducted to compare the pooled pretest and posttest holistic scores. The t-tests, which were significant at  $p<.0005$ , revealed improvements in subjects' levels of clarity and politeness; however, similar comparisons of the posttest from phase two of the study, and delayed posttest scores from phase three of the study, did not attain statistical significance. The refusal analysis of discourse features (semantic formulae) revealed increases in the use of politeness strategies, especially of negative politeness strategies. Frequently these developmental changes appeared pragmatically appropriate even when they failed to converge toward the native speaker frequencies. Morrow reported that analysis of propositions and modifiers in the complaint data revealed gains in pragmatic competence. These pragmatic gains were indicated by such changes as (a) increased indirectness, (b) more complete explanations, and (c) fewer explicit statements of dissatisfaction. Morrow's results, which corroborated the findings from the holistic ratings, suggested that speech act instruction helped the subjects to perform complaints and refusals which were clearer, more polite, and, to a limited extent, more native-like. Additional intra-task comparisons found that higher levels of pragmatic competence were achieved when the interlocutor's level of social distance was lower (i.e., friends as opposed to acquaintances).

The study conducted by Murphy and Neu (1996) had two objectives: (1) to compare components of the speech act of complaining produced by American native speakers and Korean non-native speakers of English, and (2) to ascertain how this speech act was judged by native speakers based on a number of factors (such as whether the act was aggressive, respectful, credible, appropriate, and similar to what a native would use). As such, the study had two parts: (a) the productive part, and (b) the receptive part. For the productive part of the study, the subjects were fourteen male American and fourteen male Korean graduate students from Penn State University. Twenty-three undergraduate and four graduate students (for a total of twenty

seven) participated in the receptive part of the study, who judged the acceptability of the speech acts.

The speech act data were collected by means of an oral discourse completion task (DCT). A hypothetical situation was presented in which the subject was placed in the position of a student whose paper had been unfairly marked and the subjects were directed to "go speak to the professor." Then, the subjects' responses were tape-recorded. The instrument in the acceptability judgment part of the study was a questionnaire with 10 yes-no questions and one open-ended question. Five of the yes-no questions were "distractor items" and the other 5 were designed to measure the native speakers' perceptions about the speech act acceptability. The open-ended question asked, "If you were the student in this situation, would your approach be different from the student you've just heard? Please explain your answer for both speaker-student 1 and speaker-student 2." Each subject was alone during the DCT and his or her data were later transcribed into written form. The speech data elicited for the first part of the study were examined using Cohen and Olshtain's (1981) definition of speech act set. A .05 alpha level of significance was set for a Chi-square analysis of the American students' responses to the five yes-no questions (which were not distractors) and the Yate's Correction for Continuity was used to analyze all differences between responses.

Murphy and Neu (1996) found that, when expressing disapproval about a grade received on a paper to a professor, most American native speakers of English would produce a complaint speech act set, while most Korean non-native speakers (11 out of 14) would not; both native and non-native speakers used an "explanation of purpose" to begin the speech act set in similar ways. The native speakers then produced a complaint only after the explanation of purpose. This complaint appeared to be what most of these native speakers felt was the most socially appropriate option for expressing disapproval. The act involved: acceptance of responsibility, depersonalization of the problem, questioning techniques that used modals "would" and/or "could," use of mitigators, and use of the pronoun "we." The 11 non-native speakers who did not use a complaint form employed what was perceived by native speakers as a form of criticism instead which: served to abdicate responsibility, personalized the problem (placed blame), and involved using the modal "should." This represented a serious deviation from the native speakers' speech data. Both the native and non-native speakers then used similar types of "justifications" in their speech act sets, referring to amount of time, effort, and/or work put into the paper. Finally all of the native and most (12 out of 14) of the non-native speakers included a candidate solution: a request form in the speech act set in order to propose an option that would politely remedy the situation (such as reconsidering the grade, discussing the paper, or editing the paper further for an improved grade). As a result of the "criticism" form used by the many of the Korean non-native speakers, native speakers judged the non-native speakers' speech act sets to be more aggressive, less respectful, less

credible, and less appropriate than the common "complaint" speech act sets offered by native speakers.

In a cross-linguistic study of the speech act of complaining, Nakabachi (1996) compared complaints produced by Japanese L1 speakers and Japanese EFL speakers. The study looked at whether Japanese EFL learners changed their strategies of complaint when they spoke in English, and if so, what factors caused the change. The subjects of the study were thirty nine undergraduate students with an intermediate level of proficiency in English who had no experience of living in English speaking countries. A discourse completion test (DCT) including eight situations was used for data collection. Nakabachi (1996) found that almost half of the subjects changed their speech strategies in English; they used more severe expressions than natives did. This was interpreted as over-accommodation to the target language norms, and seemed to suggest the risk involved with attempting to adapt to the local sociocultural norms.

The study conducted by Arent (1996) is an exploratory research that compares the relative frequency of the performance and avoidance of oral complaints by twenty two Chinese learners and twelve native speakers of American English. The subjects of the study were asked to respond to three problematic situations that were set in the same university housing complex. Three sets of data were obtained: (a) audiotaped roleplays, (b) interview data on perceived situational seriousness, and (c) verbal report data. The respondents were allowed to opt out; in addition, the effects of social distance, power, and type of social contract were controlled for. Arent found that sociopragmatic decision making for Chinese learners and NSs of American English appeared to be associated with (a) individual perceptions of situational seriousness and (b) with culturally-conditioned perceptions of the flexibility of explicit social contracts.

Boxer (1996) endorsed ethnographic interviewing as a way of tapping the norms of the communities (a) in research on speech act usage among native speakers in particular languages and (b) in research on non-native speaker pragmatic transfer. She discussed the results of two sets of interviews (one structured and another open-ended) which were designed to evaluate "troubles-telling" in a group of native speakers. Troubles-telling is defined as 'indirect complaining' designed for sharing mutual sentiment between speakers and hearers. Boxer's goal in the studies was to tap not only sociolinguistic knowledge that was explicit, but knowledge that was tacit in the "naive" respondents. There were ten informants who were students, staff, faculty members, or alumni at a large university in the northeastern US, all of Jewish background. The spontaneous speech data consisted of 533 troubles-telling exchanges that were tape recorded or recorded in field notes. Six major categories of responses emerged as ways in which this speech community responded to indirect complaints: (1) response or topic switch, (2) questions,

(3) contradiction, (4) joke/teasing, (5) advice/lecture, and (6) agreement/commiseration.

Boxer found that troubles-telling in this community was used (a) to further conversation, (b) build relationships, and (c) establish solidarity. She also found that using the same questions with each of the subjects, as was done with the structured interview, was not the best idea because it inherently limited the depth of the subjects' responses. In the second (open-ended) interview, Boxer used a more open format, which allowed for expansion of ideas and greater flexibility of responses. It was easier to obtain more information about the assumptions and perceptions, which shaped the respondents' answers and ideas about troubles sharing. She described the factors that made for a more ideal ethnographic interview, such as (a) rapport with the subjects, (b) having subjects who feel comfortable doing much of the talking, and (c) following the lead of the subjects' narratives. Her findings revealed that in terms of troubles sharing, most respondents felt that while direct complaints qualify as "complaints," indirect complaints were not seen so much as complaining but rather a positive way of sharing mutual information and building relationships. She also found (a) that more women participated in troubles-talk than men and (b) that women were recipients of more indirect complaints because they were seen as more supportive in general than men. Boxer claimed that, while the explicit assumption about complaining was that it constitutes negative speech behavior, tacit assumptions proved otherwise.

The subjects of Molloy and Shimura's (2003) study were 304 Japanese university students aged 18-21. They were students at five universities in the Kanto area. To collect the data, a discourse completion instrument (DCT) with twelve complaint situations was used. The DCT was meant to assess EFL complaints. The respondents were allowed to opt out or to give a non-verbal response as well. The respondents tallied two things: (a) the strategies used and (b) the combinations of interactions. Molloy and Shimura found that the two most common strategies were (a) to notify and (b) to seek redress.

Holmes (2003) reports on the Victoria University of Wellington Language in the Workplace (LWP) Project findings regarding talk in the workplace. The corpus had at the time over 2,000 interactions recorded. The focus of the study was on what was necessary for fitting in and becoming an integrated member of the workplace as a community of practice. Holmes's paper examines the positive discourse strategies of small talk and humor; it also illustrates how these provide a challenge for workers with an intellectual disability. Then the analysis turns to the more negatively affective area of workplace whinges and complaints. Holmes specifically examines how whinges and complaints may present difficulties to those from non-English-speaking backgrounds. The study provides a basis for developing useful teaching materials for those entering workplaces for the first time.



Drawing on Politeness Theory and the Community of Practice model, Holmes, Newton, and Stubbe (2004) examined the uses and functions of the expletive 'fuck' in interaction between workers in a New Zealand soap factory work team. They extensively recorded the factory team in their daily interactions to obtain a corpus of thirty five hours of authentic workplace talk from which they selected a small number of paradigmatic interactions for discussion in their paper. Particular attention was given to the way in which the expletive fuck was used in two face threatening speech acts, (a) direct complaints and refusals, and (b) its contrasting function in the speech act of whinging. The analysis focused on the complex socio-pragmatic functions of fuck and its role as an indicator of membership in a specific community of practice. Holmes, Newton, and Stubbe (2004) demonstrate how the speech act is accomplished over a series of different turns. They illustrated the slippery nature of the concept of politeness, in that they found the expletive fuck to serve as a positive politeness or solidarity marker when confined to members of a particular team within this factory.

Kumagai (2004) defined complaint conversations as conversations that involve two parties with distinct communicative orientations: (a) the complainer and (b) the complaine. She distinguished complaint conversations from quarrels in that the former involves an effort by the complaine to minimize the confrontation while, with the latter, the two confront each other on a par. She took the two conversations she used for her study from a corpus she had collected earlier in 1991. In the first conversation the complainer was a male shopkeeper in downtown Tokyo and the complaine a male university student attempting to conduct a survey. The complainer's mother and wife also participated in an effort to keep the peace when the shopkeeper returned to the shop to find the student there after he had told him he could not do his survey there. In the second conversation, one teenage girl was accusing the other of being late for their appointment. Kumagai (2004) focused on these two complaint conversations and discussed how the repetition of utterances within such conversations could function as a conversational strategy to:

- (1) express emotions (complainer expresses negative feelings and disapproval, and complaine expresses regret and disagreement);
- (2) deal with the complaint situation effectively as a complainer or a complaine (complainer: intensification of reproach, maintaining stance by adding utterances, sarcasm using complaine's words; complaine: repeating apologies, stalling or diverting the complaint);
- (3) provide rhetoric for argument (complainer: holding the floor by speaking fluently and adding utterances, controlling the topic of the complaint; complaine: reorienting the conversation to a solution, closing the conversation); and
- (4) manipulate the conversational development.

In particular she focused on uses of repetition, both exact repetition as well as modified repetition or paraphrase, of utterances made earlier in the same conversation. Kumagai's results supported Tannen's (1990) claim that repetition is a major means for creating speaker involvement and not merely a matter of redundancy.

Molloy and Shimura (2004) looked at responses to complaints in up to twelve situations out of a sample of 259 Japanese university students (80% women). They performed a rigorous statistical analysis and found wide idiosyncratic variation in response patterns. Some respondents were more fine-tuned in their selection of speech acts relevant to the situation in question while others were less so. Molloy and Shimura raised numerous questions as to why this was the case, but they did not provide any preferred explanation.

To sum up, the review of the literature related to complaints (whether direct(DC) or indirect (IC), and whether followed by troubles telling or not) revealed three major areas that had previously been studied: (a) functions of complaints, (b) responses to complaints, and (c) conversational strategies used by complainers and complainees for complaining or troubles-telling. According to literature, the functions of complaints are threefold: (a) to further conversation, (b) to build relationships, and (c) to establish solidarity (Boxer, 1993; Boxer 1996). Six responses to complaints have been identified in the literature: (a) no response, nonsubstantive response, or topic switch; (b) questions; (c) contradiction; (d) joke/teasing; (e) advice/lecture; and (f) agreement/commiseration (Boxer, 1993; Boxer, 1996). In addition, there were four conversational strategies which were used by complainers and complainees: (a) expressing emotions, (b) dealing with complaint situation, (c) providing rhetoric for argument, and (d) manipulating conversational development (Kumagai, 2004).

### **3. Aim of the study**

The literature reviewed in the previous section clearly shows the importance of the study of complaints. To date, no study has addressed this speech act in Farsi. As such, the present study was an attempt at describing the salient conversational strategies that are used in the speech act of complaining in Farsi (See Appendix A for a summary of conversational strategies used in complaints). The study specifically focused on the role of complainees' sex, age, perceived situational seriousness, and social class in relation to their responses to complaining behavior.

## **4. METHOD**

### **4.1. Subjects**

A total of 465 subjects (all of them complainers in their spontaneous conversations) comprised the sample of the study. They belonged to different

age groups, social classes, and sexes. Table 1 represents the frequency analysis for the subjects of the study.

Table 1: *Frequency Analysis for Subjects of the Study*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<b>Sex</b>	Male	233	50.1%	50.1%	50.1
	Female	232	49.9%	49.9%	100.0
<b>Age Group</b>	Teen	110	23.7%	23.7%	23.7
	Young	117	25.2%	25.2%	48.8
	Adult	120	25.8%	25.8%	74.6
	Old	118	25.4%	25.4%	100.0
<b>Social Class</b>	Low	152	32.7%	32.7%	32.7
	Mid	159	34.2%	34.2%	66.9
	High	154	33.1%	33.1%	100.0
<b>TOTAL</b>		465	100%	100%	

From the subjects of the study, 233 were male (50.1%) and 232 female (49.9%). As for the age groups, 110 subjects (23.7%) were teenagers (between 13 and 19), 117 subjects (or 25.2%) were young (between 19 and 35), 120 (or 25.8%) were adult (between 35 and 50), and 118 (or 25.4%) were old (50+). 152 of the subjects (32.7%) belonged in the low social class, 159 (34.2%) came from the mid social class, and 154 (33.1%) were members of the high social class. The social class of subjects was identified by such factors, as total monthly income, neighborhood of residence, brand of private car, possession of private cellphones, and possession and type of private house.

#### 4.2. Instruments and procedures

The data for the present study were collected by 25 field workers who observed and tape-recorded the subjects in spontaneous conversation. The field workers were all master's students majoring in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) who had already passed their sociolinguistics and discourse analysis courses. They used hidden tape-recorders to record the spontaneous conversations of the subjects. They were instructed to tell the truth about the recordings to the subjects after they had been recorded, and to ask their permission for using the tape scripts in the study. Those subjects who did not permit the use of their recorded conversations were discarded from the study, and the respective tape scripts were erased. The field workers assigned each tape script a unique reference number and filled out a checklist (one for each tape script) that provided the data for the study (See Appendix B). The field workers also indicated their evaluation of the degree to which they thought the complainers perceived the situation to be serious, and provided any comments that could make the coding of the data easier.

The data collected in this way were then submitted to the SPSS 13.0 for Windows (SPSS, Inc., 2004). Three different statistics were used: (a) Frequency analysis, (b) Mann-Whitney U Test, and (c) Kruskal Wallis H Test. Frequency analysis was conducted to identify the proportion and percentage

of subjects in the different subgroups of the sample (See table 1 above). The Mann-Whitney U Test (which is the non-parametric counterpart for independent samples t-test) was used to measure the effect of subjects sex on their use of conversational strategies in their responses to the speech act of complaining. The Kruskal Wallis H Test (which is the nonparametric alternative to a one-way between-groups ANOVA) was also performed to analyze the effects of subjects' social class, age, and perceived situational seriousness on their use of conversational strategies in their responses to the speech act of complaining.

## 5. Results and discussion

To identify the frequency of strategies and substrategies which had been used by the complainers, I conducted a frequency analysis. The results of this analysis are presented in table 2 below.

Table 2: *Frequency and Percentage of Strategies and Substrategies*

		FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
<b>Strategy 1</b>	Expressing regret	269	57.8%
	Expressing disagreement	196	42.2%
<b>Strategy 2</b>	Repeating apologies	143	30.8%
	Stalling the complaint	176	37.8%
	Diverting the complaint	146	31.4%
<b>Strategy 3</b>	Reorienting conversation to a solution	245	52.7%
	Closing the conversation	220	47.3%
<b>Strategy 4</b>	Minimizing the confrontation	196	42.2%
	Confronting the complainer on a par	269	57.8%

The strategies identified with numbers 1 through 4 in table 2 above, and in all the tables that follow, refer to "expressing emotions," "dealing with the complaint situation," "providing rhetoric for argument," and "manipulating development of conversation" respectively.

The first question addressed by the study was "Do male and female complainers differ in terms of their use of conversational strategies in their responses to complaints?" To answer this question, the data were analyzed by means of the Mann-Whitney U Test. Table 3 represents the results of the Mann-Whitney U Test for the four conversational strategies commonly used in complaints (See Appendixes A and B).

Table 3: *Mann-Whitney U test for Sex as the Grouping Variable*

	STRATEGY 1	STRATEG Y 2	STRATEGY 3	STRATEGY 4
<b>Mann-Whitney U</b>	24054.500	25510.500	16510.500	24886.500
<b>Wilcoxon W</b>	51082.500	52771.500	43771.500	51914.500
<b>Z</b>	-2.400	-1.113	-8.394	-1.728
<b>Asymp. Sig. (2- tailed)</b>	.016(*)	.266	.000(*)	.084

The four strategies under study were: (1) expressing emotions, (2) dealing with complaint situation, (3) providing rhetoric for argument, and (4) manipulating development of conversation. As for strategy 1 (i.e., expressing emotions), male and female complainers were different in their use of the strategy ( $Z = -2.4, p = 0.16$ ). Male and female complainers were also different in their use of the third ( $Z = -8.394, p = .000$ ). The statistical difference between male and female subjects in their use of the second strategy ( $Z = -1.113, p = .266$ ) and fourth strategy ( $Z = -1.728, p = .084$ ), however, was not significant. Figure 1 illustrates the mean rank comparisons for males and females.

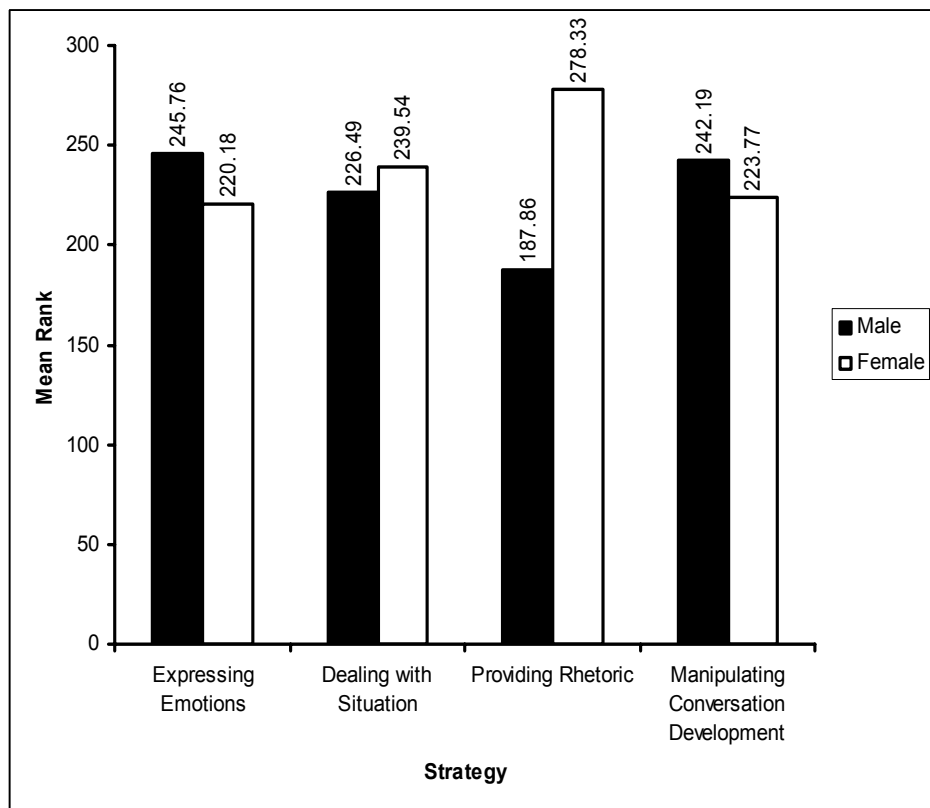


Figure 1. Comparison of mean ranks for strategy use by males and females.

The second question addressed by the study was whether there was a significant difference in the complainers' use of conversational strategies across different social class groups. To answer this question, the data were analyzed by means of a Kruskal Wallis H Test (which is the nonparametric

alternative to a one-way between-groups analysis of variance). Table 4 manifests the results of this analysis.

Table 4: Kruskal-Wallis H test for Social Class as the Grouping Variable

	STRATEGY 1	STRATEGY 2	STRATEGY 3	STRATEGY 4
<b>Chi-Square</b>	40.718	4.028	.545	18.499
<b>df</b>	2	2	2	2
<b>Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)</b>	.000(*)	.133	.761	.000(*)

As it can be understood from table 4, complainees' social class related to their use of the first (Chi-Square = 40.718, df = 2, and  $p = .000$ ) and the fourth (Chi-Square = 18.499, df = 2, and  $p = .000$ ) conversational strategies in a statistically significant way. Subjects' social class did not seem to affect their use of the second (Chi-Square = 4.028, df = 2,  $p = .133$ ) and third (Chi-Square = .545, df = 2,  $p = .761$ ) strategies in a statistically significant way.

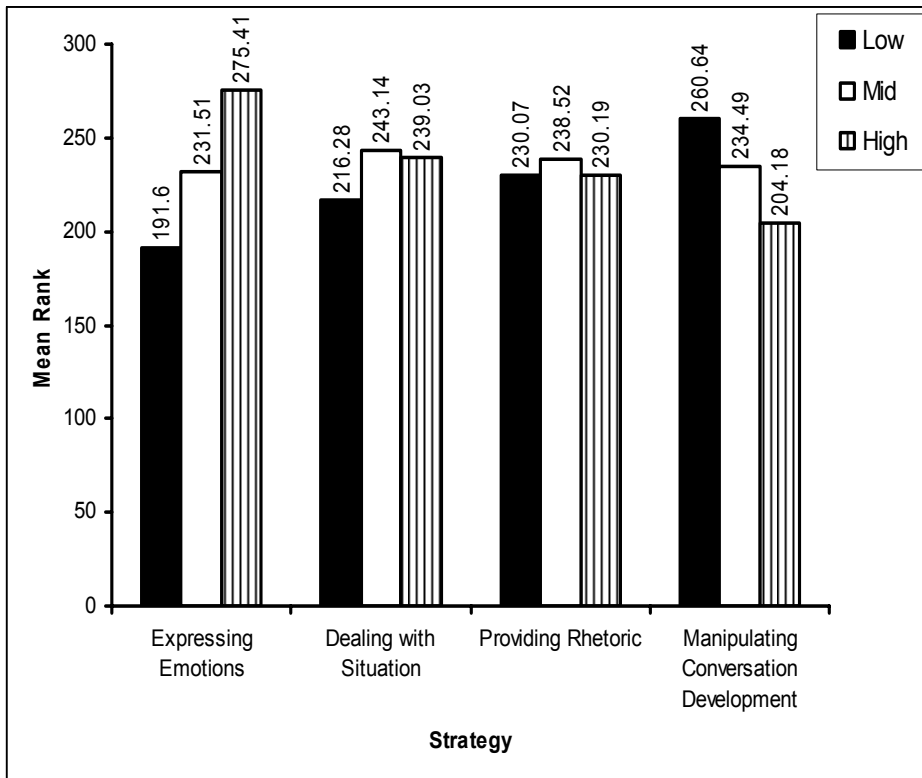


Figure 2. Comparison of mean ranks for strategy use by subjects across social classes.

Yet another question addressed by the present study was whether there was any statistically significant difference between subjects' use of conversational strategies across different age groups. Here again, a Kruskal Wallis H Test was

performed. The results of this analysis are tabulated in table 5 below. In this case, age group was not a factor in relation to any of the conversational strategies. In other words, age did not affect they way subjects handled complaints.

Table 5: Kruskal-Wallis H test for Age as the Grouping Variable

	STRATEGY 1	STRATEGY 2	STRATEGY 3	STRATEGY 4
<b>Chi-Square</b>	.932	1.024	1.172	1.528
<b>df</b>	3	3	3	3
<b>Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)</b>	.818	.795	.760	.676

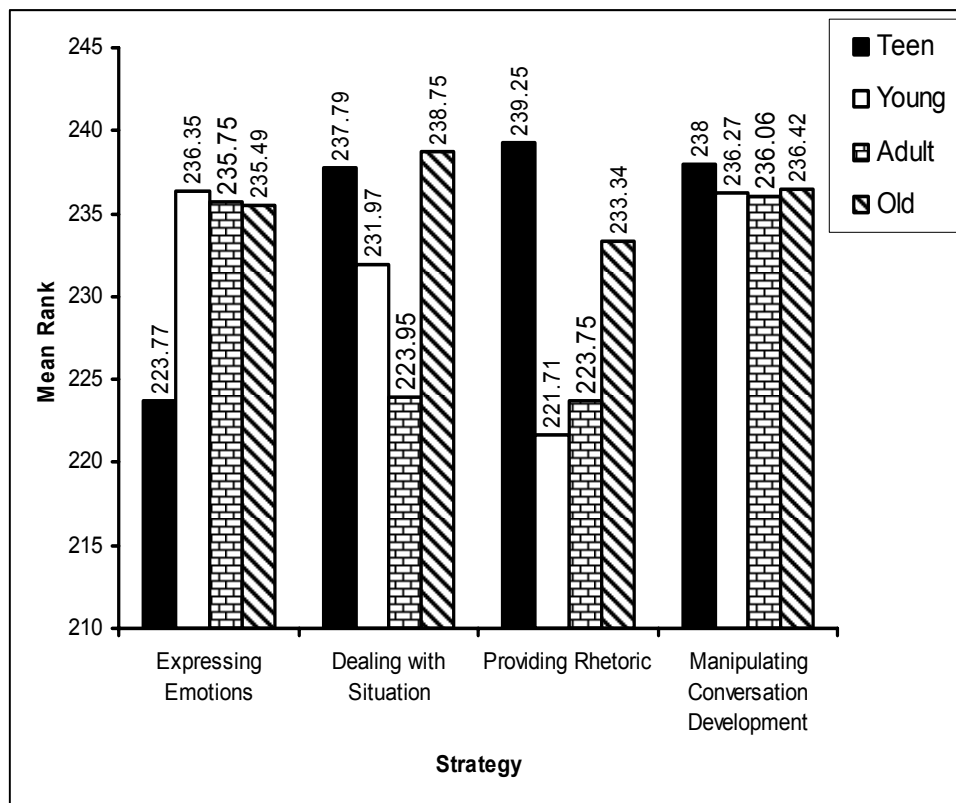


Figure 3. Comparison of mean ranks for strategy use by subjects across age groups.

The last question addressed by the present study was whether complainers' perceived situational seriousness affected their use of conversational strategies in any significant way. One again, a Kruskal Wallis H Test was performed. The results of the Kruskal Wallis H Test are presented in table 6 below.

Table 6: Kruskal-Wallis H test for Perceived Situational Seriousness as the Grouping Variable

	STRATEGY 1	STRATEGY 2	STRATEGY 3	STRATEGY 4
Chi-Square	.085	.122	3.078	18.453
df	2	2	2	2
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.959	.941	.215	.000(*)

The results of data analysis indicated that perceived situational seriousness was a factor only in relation to the last conversational strategy [i.e., performers' manipulation of the development of conversation (Chi-Square = 18.453, df = 2, and  $p = .000$ )]. Perceived situational seriousness was not a factor in relation to the other conversational strategies.

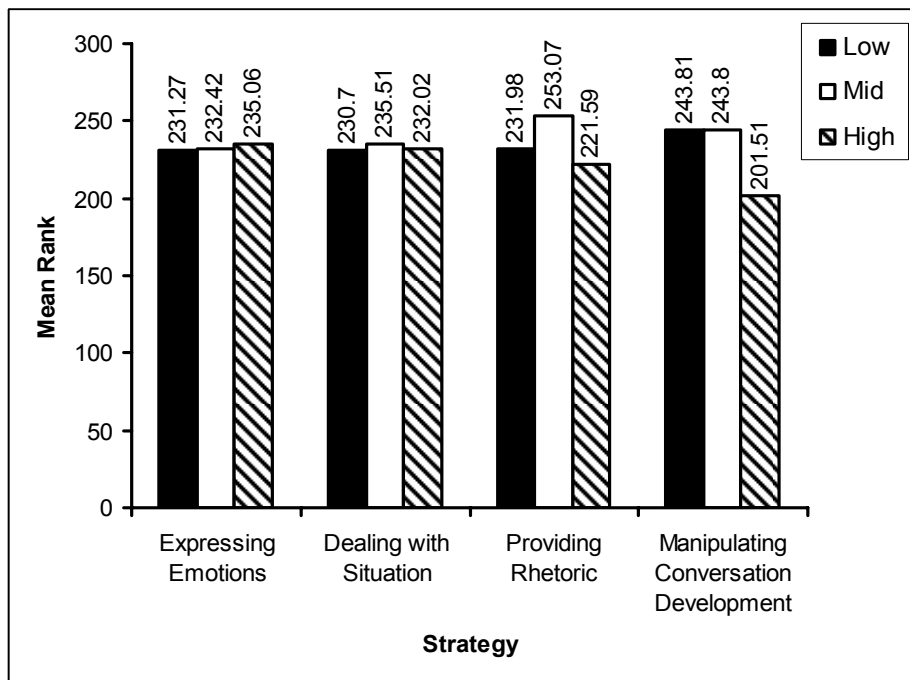


Figure 4. Comparison of mean ranks for strategy use by subjects in relation to perceived situational seriousness.

To identify the relationship between subjects' sex and the type of sub-strategy they used, the percentage for each substrategy in each sex group was calculated.

In their emotional reaction to complaints, more male than female subjects expressed disagreement whereas more female than male subjects expressed regret. As for the second strategy (i.e., dealing with the complaint situation), stalling and diverting were female rather than male strategies while repeating was a male strategy. The third strategy had to do with the way subjects



provided rhetoric for argumentation. Male subjects preferred to reorient the conversation or complaint to a solution whereas female subjects preferred to close the conversation. As for manipulating the development of the conversation, which is the fourth strategy, males preferred to confront the complainer on a par where as females preferred to minimize the confrontation. Compare the percentages for male and female strategies in table 7 above.

Table 7: Percentage of Strategies across Different Sexes

		MALE %	FEMALE %
<b>Strategy 1</b>	Expressing regret	52.4%	63.4%
	Expressing disagreement	47.6%	36.6%
<b>Strategy 2</b>	Repeating apologies	34.3%	27.2%
	Stalling the complaint	34.8%	40.9%
	Diverting the complaint	30.9%	31.9%
<b>Strategy 3</b>	Reorienting conversation to a solution	72.1%	33.2%
	Closing the conversation	27.9%	66.8%
<b>Strategy 4</b>	Minimizing the confrontation	38.2%	61.8%
	Confronting the complainer on a par	46.1%	53.9%

To identify the relationship between subjects' social class and the type of sub-strategy they used, the percentage for each substrategy in each status group was calculated. The results of this analysis are presented in table 8 below.

Table 8: Percentage of Strategies across Different Sexes

		LOW %	MID %	HIGH %
<b>Strategy 1</b>	Expressing regret	75.7%	58.5%	39.6%
	Expressing disagreement	24.3%	41.5%	60.4%
<b>Strategy 2</b>	Repeating apologies	44.7%	33.3%	14.3%
	Stalling the complaint	20.4%	26.4%	66.9%
	Diverting the complaint	34.9%	40.3%	18.8%
<b>Strategy 3</b>	Reorienting conversation to a solution	53.9%	50.3%	53.9%
	Closing the conversation	46.1%	49.7%	46.1%
<b>Strategy 4</b>	Minimizing the confrontation	30.3%	41.5%	54.5%
	Confronting the complainer on a par	69.7%	58.5%	45.5%

The percentages presented in table 8 indicate that there is a trade-off between subjects' social class and their expression of regret in reaction to complaints that are directed towards them. Low-class subjects expressed regret more than mid-class subjects; mid-class subjects, in turn, expressed regret more than high class subjects. This may have to do with power. High class people are assumed to be more powerful in the community and, as a result, do not degrade themselves by the expression of regret. The comparison of percentages for expressing disagreement across social classes further illustrate

the importance of power in the choice of strategy. As for the second strategy, the percentages indicated that high class subjects preferred to stall the complaint. The preferred strategy for low class subjects was repetition (of the apology); the mid class subjects, however, preferred to divert the complaint. In the case of the third strategy, subjects across all social classes preferred to reorient the complaint to a solution. Finally, the high class subjects tried to minimize the confrontation between the complainers and themselves while both the low class and the mid class subjects preferred to confront the complainers on a par.

Another factor that was studied in connection to subjects' use of strategies was their age. It was argued above that the differences in subjects' use of strategies across age groups were not statistically significant. In order to see how age related to subjects use of strategies, the percentage for each substrategy in each age group was calculated. The results of this calculation are presented in table 9 below. As for the first strategy, expressing emotions, the preferred substrategy across all age groups was the expression of regret. In connection to the second strategy, the percentages show that subjects across all age groups preferred to stall the complaint more than they resorted to repeating apologies or diverting the complaint. As for the third strategy, teenagers did not show any preference for either reorienting the complaint to a solution or closing the conversation. Subjects across the remaining age groups, however, had a preference for reorienting the conversation to a solution. The last strategy, manipulating development of conversation, was also studied through the comparison of percentages. Subjects across all age groups preferred to confront the complainer on a par. Compare the percentages for age-group strategies in table 9 below.

Table 9: *Percentage of Strategies across Different Age Groups*

		TEEN %	YOUNG %	ADULT %	OLD %
<b>Strategy 1</b>	Expressing regret	61.8%	56.4%	56.7%	56.8%
	Expressing disagreement	38.2%	43.6%	43.3%	43.2%
<b>Strategy 2</b>	Repeating apologies	29.1%	31.6%	33.3%	28.8%
	Stalling the complaint	38.2%	36.8%	38.3%	38.1%
	Diverting the complaint	32.7%	31.6%	28.3%	33.1%
<b>Strategy 3</b>	Reorienting conversation to a solution	50.0%	51.3%	56.7%	52.5%
	Closing the conversation	50.0%	48.7%	43.3%	47.5%
<b>Strategy 4</b>	Minimizing the confrontation	40.0%	47.0%	40.8%	40.7%
	Confronting the complainer on a par	60.0%	53.0%	59.2%	59.3%

To identify the relationship between subjects' perceived level of situational seriousness and the type of sub-strategy they used, the percentage for each substrategy at each level was calculated.

The results indicated that the expression of regret was preferred over the expression of disagreement by all subjects when they wanted to react to the complaint emotionally. When subjects perceived that the situational

seriousness of the complaint was low or medium, they preferred to stall the conversation. However, when they perceived a high level of situational seriousness, they resorted either to repeating their apologies or to diverting the complaint. In addition, complaints with low or high levels of perceived situational seriousness very often resulted in subjects' attempts at reorienting the conversation to a solution; however, complaints with a medium level of perceived situational seriousness often a preference for attempts at closing the conversation. Finally, complaints with low or medium levels of perceived situational seriousness motivated the complainers to confront the complainers on a par whereas complaints with high levels of perceived situational seriousness caused the complainers to try to minimize confrontation with the complainers. The results of this analysis are presented in table 10 below.

Table 10: *Percentage of Strategies across Different Levels of Perceived Situational Seriousness*

		LOW %	MID %	HIGH %
<b>Strategy 1</b>	Expressing regret	58.6%	58.1%	57.0%
	Expressing disagreement	41.4%	41.9%	43.0%
<b>Strategy 2</b>	Repeating apologies	30.5%	27.4%	34.8%
	Stalling the complaint	39.8%	43.0%	30.4%
	Diverting the complaint	29.7%	29.6%	34.8%
<b>Strategy 3</b>	Reorienting conversation to a solution	53.1%	48.0%	57.6%
	Closing the conversation	46.9%	52.0%	42.4%
<b>Strategy 4</b>	Minimizing the confrontation	37.5%	33.5%	55.7%
	Confronting the complainer on a par	62.5%	66.5%	44.3%

## 6. Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, a cline of significance can be suggested for each of the independent variables in question. Such a cline might look something like the following illustration where the order of strategies (from left to right) identifies the degree to which they are affected by the independent variable to the left of them, and where the symbol (\*) represents statistical significance. As it is indicated by the cline, sex and social class are the variables that cause the differential use of two conversational strategies whereas perceived situational seriousness causes the differential use of only one conversational strategy. Age resulted in the differential use of none of the conversational strategies.

	most important			least important
SEX	strategy 3(*)	strategy 1(*)	strategy 4	strategy 2
SOCIAL STATUS	strategy 1(*)	strategy 4(*)	strategy 2	strategy 3
AGE	strategy 4	strategy 3	strategy 2	strategy 1
SITUATIONAL SERIOUSNESS	strategy 4(*)	strategy 3	strategy 2	strategy 1

The present study only focused on the conversational strategies that were used by Iranian complainers. Similar studies can be designed to research the use of conversational strategies by complainers in other languages.

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**APPENDIX A: Summary of Conversational Strategies Used in Complaints**

<b>STRATEGIES</b>	<b>COMPLAINER</b>	<b>COMPLAINEE</b>
1) Expressing emotions	a) Expressing negative feelings b) Expressing disapproval	a) Expressing regret b) Expressing disagreement
2) Dealing with complaint situation	a) Intensification of reproach b) Maintaining stance by adding utterances c) Sarcasm (and insulting) d) Using complainees' words humorously	a) Repeating apologies b) Stalling the complaint c) Diverting the complaint
3) Providing rhetoric for argument	Holding the floor a) by speaking fluently b) by adding utterances c) by controlling complaint topic	a) Reorienting the conversation to a solution b) Closing the conversation
4) Manipulating development of conversation	a) Continuing the complaint 1. by exact repetition 2. by modified repetition or paraphrase b) Avoiding continuation of complaint	a) Minimizing the confrontation b) Confronting the complainer on a par

**APPENDIX B:** Checklist to be filled out by the observer/interviewee

<b>INTERVIEWEE'S/OBSERVER'S CHECKLIST</b>	
<b>TAPE SCRIPT NUMBER:</b>	-----
<b>COMPLAINEE DETAILS:</b>	<b>Sex:</b> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female <input type="checkbox"/>
	<b>Social Class:</b> Low <input type="checkbox"/> Mid <input type="checkbox"/> High <input type="checkbox"/>
	<b>Age:</b> Teen <input type="checkbox"/> Young <input type="checkbox"/> Adult <input type="checkbox"/> Old <input type="checkbox"/>
	<b>SITUATIONAL SERIOUSNESS:</b> Low <input type="checkbox"/> Mid <input type="checkbox"/> High <input type="checkbox"/>

<b>CONVERSATIONAL STRATEGIES</b>	<b>COMPLAINEE'S BEHAVIOUR</b>
Expressing emotions (Strategy 1)	a) Expressing regret <input type="checkbox"/>
	b) Expressing disagreement <input type="checkbox"/>
Dealing with complaint situation (Strategy 2)	a) Repeating apologies <input type="checkbox"/>
	b) Stalling the complaint <input type="checkbox"/>
	c) Diverting the complaint <input type="checkbox"/>
Providing rhetoric for argument (Strategy 3)	a) Reorienting the conversation to a solution <input type="checkbox"/>
	b) Closing the conversation <input type="checkbox"/>
Manipulating development of conversation (Strategy 4)	a) Minimizing the confrontation <input type="checkbox"/>
	b) Confronting the complainer on a par <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>INTERVIEWEE'S/OBSERVER'S COMMENTS:</b>	





# A Cognitive Approach to Teaching in EFL Writing Classes

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The present paper underscores the importance of the cognitive orientation of EFL students in their success in writing courses. A few suggestions are made as to how EFL teachers can put their students on the right cognitive path in their writings.

**Keywords:** EFL writing; EFL classroom; Cognitive orientation; Cognition; Teaching

## 1. Introduction

Since 1970, when language teaching methodology released itself from the shackles of 'oral approaches', it seemed notably reasonable to develop a new method in which the curricular plans would be consistent with, and ruled by, objectives the language learner conceives in relation to acquiring a second language. Hence, some corners of second language process, which were kept in dark, began glittering in the light of new trends. 'Writing', by definition, was a skill whose identity was rediscovered when its negligence as a 'by-product' in oral approaches was removed, and stood as an ultimate goal by itself for an enormous number of foreign language learners.

Notwithstanding the fact that a sizable portion of the syllabus is allocated to writing courses, a desirable outcome has not often been obtained. Many class hours are spent on teaching sentence structures and combinations. Yet, when asked to write a short paragraph, the learners will find it terribly painstaking. The inefficiency with writing courses, as has already been detected, is attributed to a number of factors, among which the inadequacy of cognitive competence stands out.

The purpose of this article is two-fold. First, an attempt will be made to expound how the skill of writing is in line with cognitive improvement. Second, an effort will be made to propose a cognitively oriented approach to the task.

One of the terms currently used in education, linguistics, and teacher training today is undoubtedly competence. We strive daily to produce language competency in our students so that they can deal with facts, findings, and

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opinions, as in the case of other academic disciplines. We try to develop in our students a relative mastery of language structures and usage, logical presentation and development of ideas, and the creative use of imaginative symbolic thinking. Yet, in practice we often feel rather embarrassed to confess that not only have we not taken further any successful steps to achieve the goal, but we also have deteriorated the kinds of motivations with which students had armed themselves to face the eventualities of the course.

## **2. What is a cognitive orientation approach?**

A cognitively oriented approach, in Mann's terms (1970), is "primarily concerned with the refinement of intellectual operation." It may seem that this description may rarely refer to curriculum content. However, when examined more carefully, it can well account for the central problem of curriculum as that of both sharpening the intellectual process and developing a set of cognitive skills applicable to learning.

The approach is largely process oriented in two senses: (1) It identifies the goals of teaching as providing a repertoire of essentially 'content-independent' cognitive skills; And, (2) it is also concerned with understanding how the process of learning occurs in the classroom (Bruce, 1960). Here, the relationship between the learner and the materials is of prime importance. Syllabus can be, accordingly, defined as the constant interaction between the learner and the materials to which he is exposed. The problem of the syllabus designer is thus to identify the appropriate setting through which a reconciliation is made between the learner and the situation.

Typically, an analysis of what groups of language learners require to know in order to effectively participate in their particular situations depends heavily on the particularity of those very situations. The aim of a cognitive approach is to develop an insight in the learner, enabling him to make his own selections and interpretations of the existing situations. The insight provides the learner with opportunities to stretch his skills beyond the classroom setting.

## **3. Cognitive orientation in EFL writing**

The cognitive process orientation tends to develop a deductive approach to the process of 'writing'. Unlike the inductive approach in which writing is seen as a practice in language usage, the deductive approach views writing as an organization of ideas. As for the former, writing incorporates correct language into correct usage, resulting from the development of linguistic competence. So, a major bulk of class activity is devoted to the enhancement of 'usage' (Widdowson, 1984) such as subject/verb consistency, active/passive voice, and so on. However, writing is not a linguistic process per se. It encompasses a wide range of exercises that go beyond the linguistic scope.

It should be made clear that an emphasis on developing cognitive competence does not detract from the significance of linguistic competence. Needless to say, the student should have activities stimulated through the linguistic

approach as well as activities introduced by the new approach. In fact, linguistic knowledge affords the building blocks out of which the learner's thought is shaped. The learner, however, needs to get the blocks into shape. He needs to learn how to think logically, and how to develop his ideas convincingly. The teacher's job is, therefore, to develop the learner's cognitive abilities, rather than merely focusing on the problems of syntax and vocabulary. The cognitive approach conceptualizes writing as a means of directing learners to assess their own structures, which, in turn, leads to the understanding of Communicative Competence. As Di Pietro (1982) states, matters of grammatical form are best explained in strategic contexts.

The process of writing is almost always directed towards readers whose expectations shape the form and content of the message. Therefore, writers should always discover solutions, as they move on, to the problem of interaction with readers. They should modify their discourse as they attempt to get closer to their intended meaning. This is the time when the teacher's role carries the greatest latitude in the classroom. It is the teacher's behavior which guides that of the student. The teachers' main part is to activate 'productive thinking' in their pupils through developing appropriate strategies with which the writers can approximate their meaning. They engage their students in different activities, use particular procedures, or employ specific techniques.

Such an approach may look similar to 'discovery learning' in the sense that active participation by the student is an indispensable condition for learning, and that it aims to enhance 'productive thinking' of the learner. However, the two approaches should not be confused. Discovery learning approach is too extremely process-oriented for which to assign any objectives refuses to count. In other words, one cannot identify any clear objectives for such an approach, because the structure of the stimuli is too complex to be determined in advance. In the cognitive approach, the role that the teacher plays in the classroom is of vital importance. S/he is not a mere mediator between the learner and the phenomenon of writing, but rather an authoritative source of information that appropriates and guides the 'productive thinking' in their students.

#### **4. The teacher's role**

In this approach to writing the student's attention should be towed away from mere linguistic structures to the 'communicative part' linguistic ingredients play in 'writing'. The learner should be made aware of the functions of different grammatical structures. Actual writing begins when learners having already acquired the basic principles of the language—how different forms are made and what functions they fulfill. The common term for this stage is 'paragraph writing'.

Usually at 'paragraph writing', the learners become familiar with different methods of paragraph development. They are taught the narrative,

descriptive, and other paragraph types. They learn how rhetorics is used in different texts. After a general statement about each type, sample paragraphs of a specific nature are presented to the learner. This is where writing begins. Students are asked to write a similar paragraph on a suggested topic. The compositions are then proofread by the teacher. Unfortunately, the main part of the teacher's correction concerns that of the learner's grammatical mistakes and little is done with respect to the overall organization of the composition.

It is mainly at this stage that students find themselves at a loss, (i.e. being unable to write an acceptable composition). Often they know where to begin, but they do not know how to develop a piece of writing. The problem is not with 'rhetorical functions' (to use Trimble's term, 1985) in writing since they have been taught about each type of paragraph effectively through a lot of explanation and examples. Nor are the students incapable of producing 'rhetorical techniques' since in their earlier courses they have been exposed to different sentence structures, and have done a lot of practice in this relation. The main trouble lies in the intervening sections, or what can be eloquently termed 'operational intermediates'. If the process of writing is sketched in the form of a tree diagram, then it could be said that the sections appearing between the higher nodes and the lower ones tend to be missing in the students' compositions.

Very often we notice in our students' compositions that an idea is left out without being fully developed, and that there is a sudden leap from the rhetorical functions to the rhetorical techniques. This problem can be attributed to the student's excessive preoccupation with correct structures, which overwhelms their reasoning capacity. They are so absorbed in the forms that the outlining of their ideas is neglected. Here, through concentrating on the logical expansion, the student should be informed of the primacy of thought over linguistic expressions.

It is necessary that the operational intermediates be employed in all types of paragraphs. The learners should know how much information they are required to put in their compositions so that the readers may follow their line of argument with ease. They should also learn how to order and sequence their ideas so that the readers will not be left alone in the labyrinth of the writer's clumsy composition. Students also need to be equipped with a knowledge of the so-called 'Cohesive Devices' and the application of this knowledge in writing. Although their significance has been repeatedly indicated to the students, cohesive devices are often absent in our students' compositions. Often, the sentences written by the students are so loosely conjoined that the readers may feel they have been unevenly fit in the wrong place. Therefore, a good deal of practice in using cohesive devices seems necessary. It should be noted that the teaching of such devices in isolation would not be of much use. Rather, it would be more advantageous if they received sufficient attention while different types of composition—argumentative or expository—are practiced.

## **5. Cognitive process techniques**

The commonest sequence in practicing types of writing suggests that the narrative be exercised first. (Psycho)logically speaking, it is good start. As Goldman (1972) says, you may admit that people have less trouble when components of any entity are given to them. In narration the writer is provided with the subject matter he wants to write about, since narration demands little or almost no reasoning capacity. The students are often successful in narrative writing, for they need almost no extra components about the sequence of events to cope with. However, the students still need to develop productive thinking in order to connect sets of events together. The usual procedure in the narrative is that the topic is given to the students, and they are required to depict an imaginary or real situation on which they write. The suggestion here is to hand out pictures that, when looked at serially, provide a brief account of stories. It is assumed that such pictures can spur the cognitive ability of the students. They should think of a logical or natural sequence for the pictures.

Description is another type of writing. It is often suggested that description be presented after narration. Description is a little more troublesome for students because it is, in fact, the first step towards reasoning. In writing descriptive paragraphs the students need to think of the important details they want to put into their compositions. They should be informed as to which pieces of information are needed for their specific compositions. Pictures can still be used to provide the students with the theme of their compositions. After looking carefully at the pictures, the students should judge what is essential to put into their writing.

The other types of writing include explanation and argumentation, which are the most difficult, for the students should think of both the subject matter and rational writing to convince the readers. At this stage, pictures are of little use because they do not provide an in-depth cognitive framework for the students. By this time, the students are supposed to have developed their reasoning capacity in such a way as to write convincingly and appropriately. Their compositions are expected to qualify for both sufficient information and logical ordering. Now, the teacher's role becomes less important, and the students are expected to have reached a level of language competency to work independently. Still the teacher can help. At this stage, the teachers' job is to identify the common logical fallacies that the students may face. Teachers can also provide their students with examples—of written materials—that illustrate these fallacies and pitfalls; they can also make some suggestions as to how the students can avoid them.

## **6. Conclusion**

In brief, the main component of instruction in a cognitive approach is 'revision'. As they take on the role of both writers and readers, the students are taught to review their writings, predicting what problems they may have, and

what possible reactions they may show towards their writings. The suggestion here is to write some of the compositions on the board or to use an Overhead/Opaque projector to this end. The students may then be urged to identify the mistakes, both grammatical and rhetorical, in their compositions. This procedure can develop an interactional attitude, and enhance productive thinking in the students.

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## How Does Text Cohesion Affect Reading Comprehension?

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This paper underscores the effect of text cohesion on EFL reading comprehension. 160 EFL (n=80) and non-EFL (n=80) university students took two versions of a cloze test based on a passage of 750 words length—one developed with every nth word deletion and the other with cohesive word deletion. The results of analyses of variance indicated that text cohesion positively affected text comprehension. Pedagogical implications of the study are discussed.

**Keywords:** Text; Cohesion; Text effect; EFL; Reading comprehension; Reading; EFL class; Texture

### 1. Introduction

The present study is an attempt at examining the effect of cohesive ties on language comprehension. Language comprehension is an interactive process consisting of background knowledge, cognitive tasks and conceptual abilities. These three factors contribute most to an individual's comprehension. Cohesion (lexical or referential) being a text feature is decisive with regard to an individual's comprehension of a passage, particularly to non-natives. In the following sections the relationship between this feature and of the text and the cognitive processes involved will be discussed at large.

Over centuries language analysis has been approached analytically. The most important characteristic of these approaches is that they consider language to be a self-contained system which is independent of the pragmatic environment. Moreover, language was considered to be made up of parts and the study of language meant the study of its parts. This view is well illustrated in the traditional grammars so far written.

On the other hand, newer approaches to language have viewed language as a synthetic phenomenon. In other words, in the study of language, one should take into account a good number of social, cultural, and situational factors that are assumed to affect language use and its features. In such a view, not only the linguistic code but also a knowledge of the communicative value of the linguistic code in relation to its linguistic and situational context is considered.

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## 2. Text and discourse

A distinction is usually made between the words text and discourse. Nourmuhammadi (1988) defines text as "the formal properties of a piece of language. A text is regarded as an exemplification of the operation of the linguistic code at an intra-sentential level." So, a text is a combination of sentences as formal linguistic objects. On the other hand, the use of such a sentence combination is referred to as discourse.

Texts are better to be studied in terms of their own features. For one may think that because it is a combination of sentences, it should carry the characteristics of a sentence. Texture refers to a text with its related features. Different types of features have been distinguished and defined by researchers with three different viewpoints. These include: the procedural approach to text, the functional approach, and the schema-theoretical approach. Of these three approaches, we are interested in the third one i.e. the schema-theoretical approach. In this approach, the text itself does not carry any meaning; it is the text user who is responsible for the interpretation of the text on the basis of the clues that exist in the text. In this section, we will review the literature on this approach.

Cohesion has been defined in a number of ways. Widdowson defines it in terms of the distinction that is made between the illocutionary act and the proposition. In his view (P.52), propositions, when linked together, form a "text" whereas illocutionary acts, when related to each other, create different kinds of "discourse."

According to Halliday and Hasan (1976), cohesion and register enable us to create a text. Register is concerned with what a text means. It is defined by Halliday and Hasan as the "set of semantic configuration that is typically associated with a particular class of context of situation, and defines the substance of the text."

Cohesion, as contrasted with register, is not concerned with what a text means. Rather, it refers to a set of meaning relations that exist within the text. These relations are not of the kind that link the components of a sentence and they differ from sentential structure. The discovery of these meaning relations is crucial to its interpretation. For instance, in the following text:

Mary bought a new pencil. She put it in her drawer.

the interpretation of the elements she and it is dependent on the lexical items Mary and Pencil. So, cohesion is in the semantic relation that is setup between these elements.

According to Halliday and Hasan, the function of cohesion is to relate one part of a text to another part of the same text. Consequently, it lends continuity to the text. By providing this kind of text continuity, cohesion enables the reader

or listener to supply all the components of the picture to its interpretation. Halliday and Hasan hold that cohesion in its normal form, is the presupposition of something that has gone before in the discourse, whether in the immediately preceding sentence or not. This form of presupposition is referred to as anaphoric. The presupposing item may point forward to something following it. This type of presupposition is called cataphoric. On the other hand, exophoric and endophoric presuppositions refer to an item of information outside and inside the text, respectively.

Halliday and Hasan recognize five types of cohesive devices in English and in the lexicogrammatical system of the language. They are reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and lexical cohesion. Reference, substitution, and ellipsis are grammatical; lexical cohesion is lexical; conjunction stands on the border line between the two categories. In other words, It is mainly grammatical but sometimes involves lexical selection.

Constructionalists view language comprehension as an interactive process between the text and the person using the text. They assume that meaning does not exist in the text but becomes available to the reader as a result of his own contribution. Language users employ text in comprehension as a set of guidelines to the active (re)creation of meaning.

Jonz (1987) in his explanation of the advantage(s) of adopting a constructionist point of view says:

... one is able to speculate on the structure of language knowledge and on the various stages in the acquisition of such structures as well as their application to the cognitive tasks involved in comprehending.

From the above statement, it follows that constructionists emphasize the role of background knowledge as a feature of a text; and the cognitive tasks involved in the comprehension process. Below we will discuss these key points i.e. background knowledge and cognitive tasks at large.

Coady (1979) presents us with a psycholinguistic model of reading in which he illustrates the interaction of cognitive tasks with background knowledge in a reading task.

He defines the term conceptual ability as general intellectual capacities, and process strategies as various subcomponents of reading skills which also apply to oral language. Regarding background knowledge, he believes that it will become an important variable when we notice students with western backgrounds of some kind learn English faster, on average, than those without such kind of background.

Carrel and Eisterhold (1983) consider language background knowledge an important factor in comprehending a text; they express this importance as follows:

Efficient comprehension requires the ability to relate the textual material to one's own knowledge. Comprehending words, sentences, and entire texts involves more than just relying on one's linguistic knowledge.

Further in their article, Carrel and Eisterhold (1983) talk of two types of background knowledge: formal and informal. Formal knowledge refers to the reader's knowledge of the rhetorical organizational structures of different types of texts; content knowledge refers to the content area of a text. They also believe that reader's failure to provide the proper formal and, particularly, content knowledge (schema) would result in various degrees of non-comprehension.

Farhady (1982), in an attempt to examine the importance of learner characteristics (i.e. his schema) in relation to learner performance on ESL tests, comes up with significant differences between his subjects with different major fields. He also points out that this difference, as a variable, should be esteemed in the tests that are designed in such a way as to refrain from pushing any sort of injustice against learners in a heterogeneous class.

Discussing the cognitive processes involved in reading a text, Eisterhold (1983) distinguishes two basic modes of information processes: bottom-up and top-down. He further elaborates on how these two modes function in a schema theory model. He says:

Schemata are hierarchically organized, from most general at the top to most specific at the bottom. As these bottom-level schemata converge into higher level, more general schemata, these, too, become activated. Top-down processing, on the other hand, occurs as the system makes general predictions based on higher level, general schemata and then searches the input for information to fit into these partially satisfied higher order schemata.

From the above quotation one may infer that these two modes function separately. However, both these modes function simultaneously at all levels: the data needed to instantiate the schemata become available through bottom-up processing; top-down processing facilitates their assimilation if they are anticipated on the part of the listener or reader's conceptual expectations.

### **3. METHOD**

160 university students (80 English majors and 80 non-English majors) served as the subjects of this study. The English majors, all taking "Advanced Translation" course in the Azad University of Meybod (in Yazd province) were normally supposed to be of higher proficiency level, than their non-English major counterparts in the same university. The non-English major subjects were all engineering students, taking "General English II." The only criteria for the assignment of subjects to the two groups were their major fields and the above-mentioned courses they were taking.

### **3.1. Instruments**

Two cloze tests were designed out of a passage of 750 words length. The passage was chosen from a reading textbook. Then every fifth word was deleted. The first and the last sentences remained intact, resulting a passage of which 40 words were left out. In the second version of the test, first all the cohesive ties were identified according to the taxonomy proposed by Halliday and Hasan (1976). Then one member of each pair of cohesive ties was deleted. The cohesive ties were either of lexical or referential type. Again leaving the first and last sentences of the text intact, we came up with a passage of which 40 words were left out.

### **3.2. Procedures**

Testing took place during the spring of 1994. In order for the test to be taken seriously, students were told that the test was part of their course requirements. To make the subjects familiar with the test-taking procedure, the instruction was orally given both in English and Farsi. For the sake of eliminating any sort of probable misunderstanding, illustrative examples were given prior to the test-taking procedure. The subjects' performance was scored using the acceptable word method. The data thus obtained were subjected to a two-way ANOVA. Tables I and II (in appendices) show the descriptive statistics and the two-way analysis of variance.

### **4. Analysis**

To determine the effects of each of the two variables (i.e. test format and language proficiency), a two-way ANOVA was applied to the data. In both versions of the test, English-major students outperformed non-English-major subjects. The two-way ANOVA main effect for language proficiency was  $F[1, 38] = 31.21, P \ll 0.05$ . The difference due to the format of the test was also significant. The scores on the cohesive ties format were significantly higher than those on standard format test. The two-way ANOVA main effect for the test format was  $F[1, 38] = 9.93, P \ll 0.01$ . All the computations were done by the employment of the SPSS Computer Software.

### **5. Results and discussion**

Regarding language proficiency, the results were neither new nor interesting because it is quite obvious that English-major subjects would normally perform better than their non-English-major counterparts. The differences due to test format, however, were very interesting. All subjects, regardless of their majors, performed better on the cohesive ties format (although, again, the English-major subjects did better). This difference in performance can be accounted for with a consideration of the fact that, in standard fixed-ratio format, deletions with regular intervals may be crucial to the meaning of the text and may sometimes leave no clue to the meaning and consequently to the words to be supplied. In the cohesive ties format, since one member of any

pair of cohesive ties is left intact, enough context is provided for the testee to supply the correct words.

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