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Learners' Use of Pragmatic Learning Strategies Across Language Learning Experience and Gender: An Investigation Framed by Rebecca Oxford's Taxonomy of Learning Strategies

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Abstract

Learners' acquisition of pragmatic competence in additional languages has received mounting attention since the 1990s. However, although studies on general learning strategies have proliferated since Oxford's (1990) influential inventory was published, studies on pragmatic-specific learning strategies contributing to the acquisition of this competence are rare. To fill this research gap, the current study purported to inquire into the main pragmatic learning strategies used by English language learners across gender and language learning experience. To collect the data, 145 learners were interviewed. These participants' answers were audio-taped and transcribed. These extracted strategies were organized into six groupings of memory-related, cognitive, metacognitive, compensatory, social, and affective pragmatic learning strategies based on Cohen's (2005, 2010) pragmatic-specific categorization and Oxford's (1990) general language learning strategy classification. The analysis showed that those learners with longer experience used more pragmatic learning strategies; nonetheless, gender did result in great differences in employing these strategies. This study presents a new categorization for pragmatic learning strategies, which can be used for more effective pragmatic learning strategy teaching and learning.

Keywords: *Gender, Language Learning Experience, Language Learning Strategies, Pragmatic Learning Strategies*

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¹Introduction

Despite an enormous amount of research on instructional pragmatics in additional languages over the past two decades, most language learners still have serious problems with the acquisition of pragmatic knowledge. These acquisitional problems can be brought to light through longitudinal and developmental studies (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig, 2013; Kasper & Rose, 2002; Schauer, 2009; Taguchi, 2023) and rigorous exploration into the influence of individual differences on the instructional and developmental pragmatic competence (Taguchi, 2019; Taguchi & Roever, 2017; Taguchi et al., 2022). These studies have been conducted on the relationship between individual differences and pragmatic acquisition or knowledge, including the role of age (e.g., Barón & Muñoz, 2023), gender (e.g., Tajeddin & Malmir, 2014), language proficiency (Roever & Al-Gahtani, 2015; Takahashi, 2015; Xiao, 2015; Xiao–Desai, 2021), motivation (Tajeddin & Zand Moghadam, 2012; Zhang & Papi, 2021), willingness to communicate and personality qualities (e.g., Taguchi, 2014), social class (Ghyasi & Salimi, 2020), and learner subjectivity (Xiao–Desai, 2021). Among learner variables, the study of language learning strategies that specifically operate in the acquisition of pragmatic knowledge can help extend our understanding of pragmatic competence and deal with pragmatic learning problems more effectively.

Cohen (2005) was among the first researchers to investigate this domain. He employed the term *pragmatic learning strategies* for those strategies that could be used to acquire pragmatic knowledge. The importance of pragmatic learning strategies, on the one hand, and the paucity of research in this domain, on the other, motivated this study on the underexplored domain of pragmatic learning strategies and the role of gender and language learning experience in employing these strategies.

Literature Review

The study of pragmatic-specific strategies that play a part in the enlargement of pragmatic competence has a relatively short history. However, this history is tied to the long-established strand of theorizing and researching language learning strategies. The conceptualizations and data-based taxonomies of language learning strategies are mainly associated with the contributions made by O'Malley and Chamot (1990), Oxford (1990, 2017), and Cohen (1998). O'Malley and Chamot (1990) categorized language learning strategies into metacognitive, cognitive, and social/affective. Oxford's (1990) taxonomy includes six components: memory, cognitive, metacognitive, compensatory, social, and affective. Later, Cohen (1998) differentiated between language learning and use strategies. These conceptualizations and taxonomies have motivated a line of conceptual and empirical studies that have afforded a clearer depiction of the construct of language learning strategies, their use in different contexts, variation in their use by learner-related and context variables, and the impact of language learning strategies on the acquisition of the four language skills and sub-skills (e.g., Chamot & Harris, 2019; Grenfell & Harris, 1999; Griffiths, 2018, 2022; Macaro, 2006).

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Among the taxonomies described above, Oxford's (1990) six-component taxonomy of language learning strategies has embraced great deliberation over the years. However, despite providing an empirically substantiated classification, its aim is not to describe the types of strategies used in pragmatic acquisition. In conjunction with his studies of language learning strategies, Cohen (2005, 2010, 2019) made a pioneering contribution to the conceptualization of and research on learning strategies in pragmatic acquisition. Cohen (2010) distinguished *pragmatic learning strategies* from *pragmatic performing strategies*, defining the former as those that are exploited to better dissect, attain, remember, and recall speech acts and their related sociopragmatic norms and pragmatic forms. He described pragmatic performance strategies as moment-by-moment strategies that assist additional language learners to appropriately perform or comprehend target speech acts in genuine communications. For example, language learners should decide on the proper pragmalinguistic forms of a speech act based on the accepted sociopragmatic norms considering the power relations among the interlocutors in any interaction. Cohen (2010) argued that L2 learners should use both pragmatic learning strategies and pragmatic performance strategies to develop pragmatic competence, arguing that "given the challenges associated with learning L2 pragmatics, it makes sense for learners to develop their own repertoire of strategies for both learning and performing pragmatics" (p. 277).

Cohen and his colleagues further delineated the concept of pragmatic learning strategies in a line of research (e.g., Cohen, 2005, 2010, 2019; Cohen & Ishihara, 2005) and investigated the crucial role of pragmatic learning strategies in speech act acquisition and production. Cohen (2005) also recommended the first categorization for pragmatic learning strategies and delineated an overall structure for strategies that are utilized to master speech acts as the core of pragmatic competence. Later, Cohen's classification was empirically scrutinized for the mastery of speech acts in Japanese and Spanish (Barón & Muñoz, 2023; Cohen & Ishihara, 2005; Cohen & Sykes, 2013), and it was expanded and slightly revised to encompass more pragmatic learning strategies.

According to Cohen (2010), the successful use of pragmatic learning strategies and pragmatic performance strategies depends on three main groups of factors: learner variables, the type of the pragmatic task, and the nature of the setting for language learning and language use. Learner variables such as age, gender, language aptitude, language learning experience, language learning style, motivation, and personality are among the most important ones in the acquisition and use of both learning and performance strategies. Like any other newly proposed taxonomy, Cohen's (2005, 2010) taxonomy for pragmatic learning strategies has its strengths and possible limitations and needs to be tested, applied, and revised. Cohen (2005) posited that, even though his classification detailed a rather exhaustive list of pragmatic learning strategies, further research is needed to assess its construct validity and to confirm and revise it. In fact, Cohen's (2005, 2010) taxonomy seems to be rather general and incorporates different parts of the construct of pragmatic competence. As such, it may not present a comprehensive typology of pragmatic learning strategies for speech acts. As pragmatic development is the mastery of a multifaceted competence, not a simple skill, it requires the employment of a particular array of different possible strategies for different components of pragmatic competence.

After the introduction of pragmatic learning strategies by Cohen (2005), a few studies have sought to investigate these strategies. Cohen and Ishihara's (2005) investigation verified that taking advantage of special learning strategies implemented through Internet webpages could give a significant boost to the specific knowledge of learners of Japanese as a foreign language. The studied speech acts in Cohen and Ishihara's (2005) research contained Japanese apologies, compliments and compliment responses, refusals, requests, and thanks. This study likewise disclosed that the use of "clusters of strategies was found to contribute to effective learning and performance of speech acts" (p. 34). Although this study emphasized the significant role of pragmatic learning strategies, it did not propose any list or taxonomy. Yuan (2012) was among the first researchers who tried to study the role of specifically tailored strategies for the acquisition of speech acts in an Asian EFL environment. Yuan reported 13 language learning strategies used for speech-act acquisition and claimed that Chinese EFL learners' insufficient speech-act knowledge could be attributed to the lack of knowledge about these strategies and not using them. Tajeddin and Bagherkazemi's (2021) study was a pioneering study about pragmatic learning strategies in Iran. They used a pragmatic learning strategy inventory (PRALSI) to examine the relationship between Iranian EFL learners' speech act performance and the use of pragmatic learning strategies. This study showed that learners used three clusters of implied, inductive explicit, and deductive explicit strategies. Tajeddin and Bagherkazemi reported a positive correlation between the use of pragmatic learning strategies and speech act production in general and a stronger relationship between learners' speech act production and the application of explicit learning strategies in particular. They also found that higher language proficiency led to the use of more pragmatic learning strategies.

In line with research on general language learning strategies, some studies have inspected the effectiveness of direct instruction of pragmatic learning strategies on the learners' acquisition of speech acts and pragmatic knowledge. Cohen (2010), for example, contended that the goal of pragmatic learning strategy research is to assist learners to "be more effective pragmatically in L2" (p. 227). Cohen argued for the necessity and strong effectiveness of pragmatic learning strategy instruction, holding that for the successful learning and performing of pragmatics, the mastery of pragmatic learning strategies through direct instruction is needed. Support for the success and usefulness of pragmatic learning strategies instruction also came from studies by Félix-Brasdefer and Cohen (2012), and Cohen and Sykes (2013).

This walkthrough of the restricted literature on pragmatic learning strategies designates that there is scant research on such an important and urgently needed construct and that further studies are required to deepen our insight into pragmatic learning strategies. The current study, informed by Oxford's (1990) taxonomy and Cohen's (2005, 2010) pragmatic learning strategies, purported to observe the impact of two important learner variables, that is gender and language learning experience, in the use of pragmatic learning strategies. Precisely, this study has addressed the following question:

RQ: What are the most important pragmatic learning strategies employed by male and female EFL learners with various durations of foreign language learning experience?

Method

The data used in the current study are part of a larger data set partly reported by Tajeddin and Malmir (2014, 2015). Tajeddin and Malmir (2014) drew on questionnaire data to investigate the role of age, gender, and language learning experience in additional language speech-act performance among a cohort of 500 EFL learners, and Tajeddin and Malmir (2015) explored pragmatic learning strategies and their construct validity. This research diverges from these two studies as it draws on qualitative interview data to afford a deeper understanding of the use of pragmatic learning strategies.

Participants

A total of 145 Iranian EFL learners participated in this study, 103 of whom were females and 42 were males. These learners were high school ($n = 32$), pre-university ($n = 22$), and undergraduate university students or graduates ($n = 62$), and in a few cases, they were MA ($n = 22$) and PhD ($n = 7$) students studying English at different language institutes. Participants' ages fluctuated from 14 to 40 ($M = 20.2$) including 42 intermediate, 55 upper-intermediate, and 48 advanced learners. Regarding their learning experience, 45 students had a language learning experience of 1-2 years, 58 had been acquiring English for 3-5 years, and the rest 42 had been engaged in learning for over 6 years. Their native language was mostly Persian, but some learners were bilinguals and spoke other Iranian languages besides Persian. As noted above, the participants were part of a cohort of 500 EFL learners in a larger project by Tajeddin and Malmir (2014, 2015) who were recruited based on their performances on English language proficiency tests and a multiple-choice written discourse completion test (WDCT). Therefore, the participants in the present investigation had the required general English proficiency and threshold pragmatic knowledge appropriate for the objectives of the study. These 145 EFL learners participated in the study based on their volition, and their consent was obtained.

Data Collection

Semi-structured oral interviews were employed for data collection. The oral interview questions were adapted from Tajeddin and Malmir (2015), who interviewed their participants to investigate the application of pragmatic learning strategies by low- and high-pragmatic achievers. The oral interviews were conducted to tap into the pragmatic learning strategies of 145 EFL learners who were top pragmatic performers to scrutinize the role of their gender and language learning experience in the employment of these strategies. It included 15 questions that were developed based on pragmatic theories and concepts such as politeness theory, implicatures, power dynamics, sociocultural conventions, and speech act theory. The oral interview questions were translated into Persian to elicit more informative responses from the participants. The content of each of the 15 questions encompassed in the oral interview is displayed in Table 1.

Table 1

The Issues Asked in the Semi-Structured Oral Interviews (Adapted from Tajeddin & Malmir, 2015)

Pragmatic Issues
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceiving various speech acts, concentrating on them; employing them • Perceiving the power relation, contextual aspects, age, and gender variables; practicing and utilizing them • Perceiving politeness concerns in the employment of speech acts and internalizing them • Perceiving sociocultural standards; mastering and employing them • Perceiving lexical and grammatical characteristics of speech acts; mastering and employing them • Perceiving conversational routines, chunks, and collocations; mastering, practicing, and employing them • Internalizing implicatures • Cross-cultural contrasts between Persian and English speech acts, sociopragmatic norms, and pragmalinguistic forms; practicing and employing them • Using external pedagogical contents including books, materials, and the teacher's practices in pragmatic progress • Employing flashcards, highlighting, note-taking, underlining, recording, and repeating pragmatic knowledge cases • Employing English properly through face-to-face interactions, telephone exchanges, chat rooms, social networks, and so forth • Relying on teachers, instructional and conversational books, dictionaries, language software, websites, or native speakers • Inquiring for help from the other interlocutors • Managing, assessing, and determining the pragmatic information • Managing emotions during pragmatic letdown/misinterpretation

Data Analysis

Pragmatic learning strategies were extracted through accurate transcription of the oral interviews and meticulous exploration of the presented strategies by the participating EFL learners across gender who had various language learning experiences grouped in three levels. Based on the 15 interview questions and Oxford's (1990) taxonomy, different numbers of strategies were extracted for the six sorts of pragmatic learning strategies and were classified and arranged for male vs. female learners and for participants with 1-2, 3-5, and 6+ years of language learning experience. Percentages and qualitative interpretations were employed for the classification of pragmatic learning strategies.

Results

After the extraction and determination of the pragmatic learning strategies based on the transcribed version of the content of oral interviews by the second author, these elicited pragmatic learning strategies for male vs. female participants in terms of three different durations of English language learning experience were categorized into six sorts of memory, cognitive, metacognitive, compensatory, social, and affective strategies. Strategy category, number of learners employing them, and proportion of strategy application for male vs. female and for three durations of language learning experience are described below.

Memory-related Pragmatic Learning Strategies

Memory-related pragmatic learning strategies were those strategies employed by the participants to remember, master, and retain sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic knowledge

in short-term and long-term memories and subsequently to recall this knowledge. Highlighting and underscoring speech acts, writing synopses, connecting the lately acquired speech acts with the formerly acquired pragmatic information, rereading, employing online and offline flashcards, and internalizing by repetition were among the elicited memory-related pragmatic learning strategies. From the interview data, eight memory-related strategies were extracted, as listed in Table 2.

Table 2*Memory-Related Pragmatic Learning Strategies Used by Participants*

Memory-related Strategies	Pragmatic Learning	Language Learning Experience			Gender	
		1-2 years	3-5 years	6+ years	Male	Female
		n = 45	n = 58	n = 42	n = 42	n = 103
-Highlighting or underscoring examples of various speech acts and their specific lexico-grammar		12 (27%)	34 (59%)	40 (95%)	29 (69%)	68(66%)
-Writing down the form-function-context mappings of various speech acts		10 (22%)	29 (50%)	40 (95%)	28 (67%)	68 (66%)
-Tailoring the go-togetherness between the previously internalized English speech-act knowledge and the newly encountered pragmatic information		9 (20%)	21 (36%)	39 (93%)	21 (50%)	50 (49%)
-Rereading the extracted acts in accompaniment with their socio-pragmatic norms and pragmatic forms and their contextual appropriateness		8 (18%)	22 (38%)	36 (86%)	19 (45%)	47 (45%)
-Remembering English speech act forms and functions through contextual examples		4 (9%)	23 (40%)	32 (76%)	18 (43%)	41 (40%)
-Employing a variety of forms based on the form-function-context interrelationships		4 (9%)	16 (28%)	28 (67%)	15 (36%)	38 (37%)
-Employing paper-and-pencil or digital flashcards to review various speech acts and their numerous pragmatic forms		3 (7%)	16 (28%)	23 (55%)	12 (29%)	30 (29%)
-Solidifying the retrieval of the acquired speech act forms and norms by meaningful and contextual repetition		5 (11%)	14 (24%)	20 (48%)	10 (24%)	29 (28%)

As shown in Table 2, the percentages of Pragmatic Learning Strategies employed by males and females are similar and the differences are small, indicating that gender does not take a salient part in the employment of memory-related pragmatic learning strategies; however, across all memory-related strategies, learners with longer language learning experience used more strategies.

Cognitive Pragmatic Learning Strategies

Mental processes such as perceiving, concentrating, attending, understanding, scrutinizing, comparing and contrasting, practicing, employing creatively, and looking for creative and genuine methods and superior input to master and employ sociopragmatic norms and pragmalinguistic forms were the cornerstones of cognitive pragmatic learning strategies (Table

3). Perceiving the role of age and gender in using speech acts, perceiving the conversational formula, discerning the conventionalism and lexico-grammatical facets of speech acts, employing speech acts in exchanges with English speakers, and noticing implicatures and nonverbal gestures were instances of cognitive pragmatic learning strategies. Table 3 tallies the number and percentage of 19 cognitive strategies.

Table 3
Cognitive Pragmatic Learning Strategies Used by Participants

Cognitive Pragmatic Learning Strategies	Language Learning Experience			Gender	
	1-2 years n = 45	3-5 years n = 58	6+ years n = 42	Male n = 42	Female n = 103
-Paying attention to the differentiations between the use of speech acts by native versus non-native speakers of English	23 (51%)	40 (69%)	40 (95%)	35 (83%)	84 (82%)
-Focusing the variety in the use of speech acts to express various sociocultural meanings	17 (38%)	39 (67%)	39 (93%)	33 (79%)	80 (78%)
-Discerning the gender and age differences in the employment of various speech acts	17 (38%)	36 (62%)	39 (93%)	31 (74%)	76 (74%)
-Noticing the dynamic nature of the power relations, occupational interactions, and hierarchical social positions in the use of various speech acts	18 (40%)	32 (55%)	38 (90%)	29 (69%)	68 (66%)
-Discerning and mastering the lexical and grammatical manifestations of the politeness considerations	18 (40%)	30 (52%)	38 (90%)	27 (64%)	65 (63%)
-Discerning the formality versus informality of the lexico-grammar when using the appropriate speech acts	15 (33%)	29 (50%)	37 (88%)	25 (60%)	63 (61%)
-Perceiving the prosodic and super-segmental features in the producing and understanding of various speech acts	15 (33%)	27 (47%)	37 (88%)	24 (57%)	61 (59%)
-Perceiving and internalizing the contextual manifestations of various speech acts based on the social and linguistic aspects	15 (33%)	26 (45%)	37 (88%)	23 (55%)	59 (57%)
-Internalizing speech acts directly through audiovisual instructional materials or indirectly through these and other sources	9 (20%)	25 (43%)	36 (86%)	21 (50%)	50 (49%)
-Perceiving the body language and facial expression of the native speakers during the employment of various speech acts through movies and TV series or other internet possibilities such as podcasts	11 (24%)	23 (40%)	36 (86%)	20 (48%)	50 (49%)
-Paying attention to turn-taking patterns in conversations that entail the use of various types of speech acts	11 (24%)	22 (38%)	35 (83%)	20 (48%)	47 (47%)
-Acquiring the competency to decipher the meaning of various types of implicatures based on pragmatic, sociocultural, lexical, and grammatical clues	11 (24%)	21 (36%)	34 (81%)	20 (48%)	46 (45%)
-Paying attention to the formal and functional differences between various classifications of speech acts between English and Persian	11 (24%)	20 (34%)	33 (79%)	19 (45%)	45 (44%)
-Practicing the previously acquired speech acts with other competent classmates	12 (27%)	19 (33%)	32 (76%)	18 (43%)	45 (44%)
-Making an effort to use the previously learned speech acts in actual and real-world	18 (40%)	25 (43%)	30 (71%)	18 (43%)	38 (37%)

conversations with classmates					
-Acquiring various speech acts through direct instruction and metapragmatic awareness given by teachers	18 (40%)	26 (45%)	30 (71%)	17 (41%)	39 (38%)
-Strengthening the knowledge of speech acts by being involved in co-constructed conversations or role plays	12 (27%)	18 (31%)	27 (64%)	16 (38%)	39 (38%)
-Browsing various websites that have been developed to teach English expressions and speech acts	18 (40%)	24 (41%)	25 (60%)	15 (36%)	38 (37%)
-Eliciting pragmatic information about speech acts from competent EFL speakers or from native speakers of English	12 (27%)	17 (29%)	23 (55%)	14 (33%)	35 (34%)

As with memory-related pragmatic learning strategies, males and females employed somehow similar cognitive pragmatic learning strategies although both groups used more cognitive strategies than memory-related strategies. Besides, learners with over six years of language learning experience reported the use of more cognitive strategies than the other two language learning experience groups. In the same vein, learners with 3-5 years of learning experience employed more cognitive strategies than those with less than 2 years of language learning experience.

Metacognitive Pragmatic Learning Strategies

Metacognitive pragmatic learning strategies encompassed consolidating strategies for preceding, existing, and forthcoming pragmatic learning, appraising the efficiency and deficiency of former and present pragmatic learning, perceiving pragmatic knowledge shortcomings and failure, envisaging upcoming goals to cultivate pragmatic knowledge, and seeking superior methods to learn speech acts. Eight metacognitive strategies, their number, and their percentage are shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Metacognitive Pragmatic Learning Strategies Used by Participants

	Language Learning Experience			Gender	
	1-2 years n = 45	3-5 years n = 58	6+ years n = 42	Male n = 42	Female n = 103
Metacognitive Pragmatic Learning Strategies					
-Processing pragmatic errors during conversations performed by other learners	19 (42%)	42 (72%)	33 (78%)	33 (79%)	80 (78%)
-Searching for opportunities to internalize, practice, and employ various speech acts with other classmates or native speakers	14 (31%)	41 (70%)	29 (69%)	27 (64%)	68 (66%)
-Getting awareness about one's own pragmatic knowledge gaps and deficiencies	10 (22%)	39 (67%)	27 (64%)	22 (52%)	53 (51%)
-Discovering one's capabilities for better acquisition of a speech act and pragmatic knowledge in English	13 (29%)	33 (57%)	25 (60%)	20 (48%)	48 (47%)
-Organizing one's own acquisition of English speech acts	10 (22%)	32 (55%)	20 (54%)	17 (41%)	43 (42%)
-Evaluating and managing the learning of English speech acts and tailoring new plans for the betterment of speech-act knowledge	9 (20%)	30 (52%)	20 (47%)	15 (36%)	37 (36%)

-Predicting the possible form-function-context mappings of speech acts and pragmatic knowledge before participating in dialogs with competent non-native speakers or native speakers of English	7 (16%)	28 (48%)	19 (45%)	13 (31%)	34 (33%)
-Recording or filming one's own conversations that entail speech acts and pragmatic knowledge to pinpoint the deficiencies and problems	4 (9%)	25 (43%)	18 (43%)	11 (26%)	30 (29%)

The frequency and percentage of metacognitive pragmatic learning strategies employed by males and females were rather similar with small fluctuations in favor of each gender for some items. Learners with 3-5 and 6+ years of language learning experience used rather similar metacognitive strategies. Learners with 3-5 years of language learning experience used some metacognitive strategies more than those learners with more than six years of language learning experience. Moreover, these two ranges of language learning experience were related positively with more frequent application of metacognitive strategies in comparison with those learners who had been learning English for 1-2 years.

Compensatory Pragmatic Learning Strategies

As the name implies, these strategies helped learners compensate for the lack of pragmatic information while acquiring or employing speech acts by appealing to L1 pragmatic knowledge, circumventing a special speech act, employing parallel speech acts, using an easier pragmalinguistic formula for the required speech act, taking assistance from native or non-native speakers, seeking aid from other interlocutors, and visiting teachers, books, and websites. Table 5 presents the number and percentage of seven compensatory pragmatic learning strategies.

Table 5

Compensatory Pragmatic Learning Strategies by Participants

	Language Learning Experience			Gender	
	1- 2 years	3-5 years	6+ years	Male	Female
Compensatory Pragmatic Learning Strategies	n = 45	n = 58	n = 42	n = 42	n = 103
-Seeking help from other interlocutors who are pragmatically more competent when encountering pragmatic failures and misunderstandings or avoiding the use of those speech acts completely	15 (33%)	30 (52%)	37 (88%)	30 (71%)	73 (70%)
-Simplifying one's own language for the other interlocutor when one cannot find the correct speech act or the intended meaning	14 (31%)	27 (47%)	36 (86%)	27 (64%)	63 (61%)
-Transferring the Persian speech acts into English through translation when one cannot use the proper speech act in English	18 (40%)	22 (38%)	32 (76%)	23 (55%)	57 (55%)
-Using various online and off-line instructional materials and sources including books, websites, conversation books, and other possibilities to find the correct speech acts during the conversations or in advance	15 (33%)	19 (33%)	30 (71%)	17 (41%)	47 (45%)
-Asking the language teacher to help and provide information about speech acts when one does not	16 (36%)	17 (29%)	27 (64%)	15 (36%)	39 (38%)

know how to use the required speech acts appropriately					
-Asking for help from other interlocutors for help when one thinks they are pragmatically more competent to give information about the form, function, or politeness aspects of the intended speech acts	12 (27%)	19 (33%)	24 (57%)	14 (33%)	36 (35%)
-Taking help from native speakers through online and off-line possibilities when one encounters pragmatic failure or misunderstanding	13 (29%)	15 (26%)	22 (52%)	12 (29%)	33 (32%)

Male and female EFL learners were roughly similar in the utilization of various compensatory strategies. Further, those learners with longer learning experiences used more compensatory strategies as reported for most of the previous categories of pragmatic learning strategies.

Social Pragmatic Learning Strategies

Social pragmatic learning strategies comprised strategies for learning pragmatic knowledge in collaboration with other competent native or non-native speakers, learning through peer feedback, increasing sociocultural and pragmatic consciousness, applying the language communicatively to acquire speech acts, and employing politeness in the real-world use of speech acts. Table 6 displays the number and percentage of eight social pragmatic learning strategies.

Table 6

Social Pragmatic Learning Strategies Used by Participants

Social Pragmatic Learning Strategies	Language Learning Experience			Gender	
	1-2 years n = 45	3-5 years n = 58	6+ years n = 42	Male n = 42	Female n = 103
-Paying attention to the politeness dimensions in the use of various speech acts and trying to expand the knowledge of politeness strategies	18 (40%)	50 (86%)	37 (88%)	30 (71%)	73 (71%)
-Detecting the role of gender and social class in the use and form of various speech acts and politeness strategies	15 (33%)	49 (85%)	36 (86%)	28 (67%)	68 (66%)
-Employing English speech acts properly through interacting with competent non-native speakers or native speakers of English in face-to-face discussions, telephone exchanges, chat rooms, and social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, and Telegram	14 (31%)	47 (81%)	34 (80%)	24 (57%)	60 (59%)
-Seeking opportunities to engage in conversations that require speech acts in one's interactions with native speakers or non-native speakers of English	10 (22%)	41 (71%)	30 (71%)	19 (45%)	45 (44%)
-Mastering the sociocultural knowledge that is required to employ speech acts appropriately	13 (29%)	39 (67%)	28 (67%)	16 (38%)	39 (39%)
-Practicing various pragmatic features of speech acts with other classmates	10 (22%)	38 (66%)	25 (69%)	15 (36%)	36 (35%)

-Showing respect to other interlocutors' ideas and feelings by using appropriate language and speech acts	9 (20%)	37 (64%)	24 (59%)	15 (36%)	37 (36%)
-Asking pragmatically competent non-native speakers or native speakers of English to assess one's pragmatic knowledge regarding various speech acts in conversations with them	7 (16%)	35 (60%)	22 (52%)	13 (31%)	33 (32%)

In the same vein, the strategies employed by male and female EFL showed similar frequencies and percentages in applying various social pragmatic learning strategies. Moreover, students with longer language learning experience drew on more social strategies although such differences in percentages were close for learners with 3-5 years of learning experience and those with more than six years of learning experience.

Affective Pragmatic Learning Strategies

Affective pragmatic learning strategies are employed to curtail undesirable feelings triggered by pragmatic misunderstanding through alleviating nervousness, encouraging and gratifying oneself, sharing negative emotions about pragmatic learning or interacting with a more competent native speaker or non-native speaker of English, and feeling proficient in acquiring English speech acts (Table 7).

Table 7

Affective Pragmatic Learning Strategies Used by Study Participants

	Language Learning Experience			Gender	
	1-2 years n = 45	3-5 years n = 58	6+ years n = 42	Male n = 42	Female n = 103
Affective Pragmatic Learning Strategies					
-Considering oneself talented for learning pragmatic knowledge regarding speech acts and their sociocultural dimensions	36 (80%)	43 (74%)	41 (98%)	36 (85%)	84 (82%)
-Keeping one's motivation to continue the conversation in English even after committing pragmatic mistakes or encountering a pragmatic failure	38 (84%)	39 (67%)	40 (95%)	35 (83%)	83 (81%)
-Keeping one's serenity and tranquility after making pragmatic mistakes or feeling a pragmatic failure	39 (87%)	33 (57%)	39 (93%)	35 (83%)	82 (79%)
-Filling the potential and capability to use a speech act and taking the risk of not being sure about one's speech acknowledge	38 (84%)	30 (52%)	35 (83%)	30 (71%)	73 (71%)
-Managing one's embarrassment and overcoming the anxiety and panic after noticing one's pragmatic failure or misunderstanding	27 (60%)	35 (60%)	37 (88%)	28 (67%)	72 (70%)
-Feeling enjoyment and satisfaction or rewarding oneself when one thinks one has carried out English exchanges that entail the use of pragmatic knowledge and speech acts successfully	25 (56%)	32 (55%)	33 (79%)	25 (60%)	65 (63%)

Unlike the previous types of pragmatic learning strategies, learners with 1-2 years of language learning experience stated that they used more affective pragmatic learning strategies. Learners with more than 6 years of language learning experience ranked second in applying

affective strategies, whereas learners with 3 to 5 years of language learning experience employed fewer affective strategies, which stands differently from the use of the other types of pragmatic learning strategies by the more experienced EFL learners. Although for some strategies, female learners employed more affective strategies, the discrepancies between males and females in employing affective strategies were again close to each other.

Discussion

The present study yielded three important findings. First, it proposed a more comprehensive taxonomy for pragmatic learning strategies to supplement the previous ones such as Cohen's (2005, 2010). This taxonomy, in line with Oxford's (1990) categorization of language learning strategies, grouped the elicited strategies obtained from the semi-structured oral interview into six main categories of memory, cognitive, metacognitive, compensatory, social, and affective pragmatic learning strategies. Second, no great differences were witnessed between female and male EFL learners in using pragmatic learning strategies. Furthermore, the current research revealed that language learning experience resulted in great discrepancy in employing pragmatic learning strategies. It was observed that higher durations of language learning experience were associated with the more frequent use of pragmatic learning strategies.

This study presented a new taxonomy for pragmatic learning strategies and supported the soundness of the taxonomy proffered by Oxford (1990) for language learning strategies when applied to the learning of pragmatics. The support for the construct validity of pragmatic learning strategies modeled in this study is also reinforced by some former research (Cohen, 2005, 2010; Tajeddin & Malmir, 2015). Compared with Cohen's pioneering classification, which named pragmatic learning strategies as the strategies for the learning of pragmatic knowledge and classified metacognitive strategies as a separate class, this study listed all pragmatic learning strategies in a six-component taxonomy. This new taxonomy was informed by previous taxonomies by Cohen (2005, 2010) and research on general language learning strategies by Oxford (1990). The tangible argument for the construct validity of pragmatic learning strategies helps propose a more inclusive and valid definition of pragmatic learning strategies. These strategies include any groups of deliberate and mindful thoughts, performances, mental processes, tasks, procedures, tactics, actions, and experiences that are executed by L2 learners to simplify, accelerate, foster, endorse, and self-direct the attainment, maintenance, storage, recovery, and utilization of pragmatic knowledge involving speech acts and their related sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic features. Pragmatic learning strategies, hence, are what learners execute to acquire formal and functional competencies compulsory to effectively cultivate L2 pragmatic competence, how learners supervise and manage these struggles, and how learners gauge their pragmatic progress.

Cohen's (2005, 2010) taxonomy consists of three components: pragmatic learning strategies, performing strategies, and metacognitive strategies. In this taxonomy, all diverse types of pragmatic learning strategies are included in the first set of strategies named "pragmatic learning strategies," and no explicit division is made between memory, cognitive, metacognitive, compensatory, social, and affective strategies. Although this study considers Cohen's (2005, 2010) list of pragmatic learning strategies as general and holistic, it values his dichotomy of pragmatic learning strategies vs. pragmatic performance strategies. The current research argues that all these six types of strategies can also be considered for pragmatic

performance strategies. As such, the sole difference relates to pragmatic performance strategies, which are used to manage and assist pragmatic performance in Cohen's conceptualization. In addition, based on our findings, the third class of strategies in Cohen's (2005, 2010) taxonomy cannot be considered a separate class by itself; rather, metacognitive strategies act as a group of pragmatic learning strategies and at the same time as a group of pragmatic production strategies. Therefore, pragmatic competence can be modeled to have a strategy module involving both pragmatic learning strategies and pragmatic production strategies, which act together and possibly in conjunction with some general language learning strategies proposed by Oxford (1990). As Cohen (2010) rightly pointed out, pragmatic learning strategies and pragmatic production strategies reinforce and promote the acquisition and function of each other.

Concerning the role of gender, the findings can be likened and juxtaposed with only a few previous studies owing to the dearth of investigation in this area. Malmir and Derakhshan (2020), for example, reported that male and female EFL learners did not significantly differ from each other in using pragmatic, socio-cognitive, and lexico-grammatical strategies. This finding corroborates the general finding about the role of gender in additional language pragmatic competence. Some previous research has indicated that gender as a biological factor does not play a substantial role in the acquisition of various types of pragmatic knowledge (Kasper & Rose, 2002; Taguchi & Roever, 2017).

Concerning language learning experience, generally, more language learning experience led to variation in the use of most types of pragmatic learning strategies, specifically memory, cognitive, social, and compensatory categories. The role of learning experience in using pragmatic learning strategies cannot be supported by other studies because of the paucity of research on the nexus between these two variables. The main argument that can be put forward is that longer periods of learning a language triggered the development of more awareness and metapragmatic knowledge about the target language, which endorses the use of pragmatic learning strategies. The present study illuminated that learners with 3 to 5 years of experience used more metacognitive, social, and affective pragmatic learning strategies. The reason for the more frequent use of metacognitive pragmatic learning strategies by learners with 3-5 years of experience in comparison with learners with more than six years of language learning experience may be attributed to more motivation of the former group to improve their English in these years in comparison with those learners who may think their English is good enough and hence may not try to manage or plan for more acquisition of pragmatic knowledge and the relevant pragmatic learning strategies to achieve this aim. The same arguments to justify the differences in favor of learners with 3-5 years of language learning experience can be put forward here. Those learners with 3 to 5 years of language learning experience think they need to develop their English and, accordingly, are eager to develop an understanding of the sociocultural elements of the L2 and the social pragmatic norms of the additional language. However, more proficient and competent learners may feel they are capable enough to engage in genuine communications in the L2 and accordingly are less motivated to use more social pragmatic learning strategies. It can be argued that when learners are more proficient and have the longer experience of learning an additional language, they may easily compensate for the pragmatic inefficiencies and inadequacies in comparison with learners with less experience.

These findings imply that both EFL teachers and learners should be aware of the fundamental role of pragmatic learning strategies in fostering additional language pragmatic competence and that they should aim to improve the use of these strategies. Moreover, the longer experience of learning and using the additional language can be influential in using pragmatic learning strategies and hence developing additional language pragmatic knowledge.


Conclusion

From these findings, some tentative conclusions can be made. First, additional language learners use pragmatic-specific learning strategies to acquire additional language speech acts and their related sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic knowledge. These strategies can be described and categorized into six types of memory, cognitive, metacognitive, compensatory, social, and affective based on findings of the present study, Cohen's (2005, 2010) taxonomy, the limited existing literature (Cohen & Sykes, 2013), and the general taxonomy of language learning strategies proposed by Oxford (1990). Second, it can be concluded that gender is not a major factor in differences in the percentage and frequency of the use of the six types of pragmatic learning strategies. Third, EFL learners with longer language learning experience tend to use more memory, cognitive, and compensatory pragmatic learning strategies in comparison with those with shorter language learning experience. From these experience-related findings, it may be concluded that the application of pragmatic learning strategies tends to increase with language learning experience, which, in turn, may enhance the acquisition of speech act knowledge.

These implications and conclusions suggested above should be considered given the limitations of this study. The instrument used to explore language learners' pragmatic learning strategies was limited to interviews and some speech acts. Further research could examine these strategies using more comprehensive pragmatic measures including other types of speech acts and methods of data collection such as learner diaries. Also, this study is one of the few ones in the domain of pragmatic learning strategies; thus, extensive research with larger samples and in other contexts is needed to broaden our understanding of pragmatic learning strategies.

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