Interlanguage Pragmatics: Iranian EFL Teachers' Cognition

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In curricula where teachers have agency to make decisions on everyday classroom activities, their cognition exerts strong influences on their pedagogical practices. The present paper reports on a qualitative multiple-case study exploring Iranian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers' cognition of interlanguage pragmatics. Through triangulation of multiple methods and data sources, the study details descriptions of five Iranian EFL teachers' classroom practices, the cognitions behind these practices, and the way their cognition and the teaching context interact in shaping their everyday teaching practices. The findings suggest that underrepresentation of pragmatic competence in the EFL classes can be attributed to contextual factors such as deficiency in the EFL teachers' content and pedagogic content knowledge of interlanguage pragmatics and curricular decisions. The main findings are then discussed against the backdrop of the literature on interlanguage pragmatics.

Dans les programmes où les enseignants ont le pouvoir décisionnel quant aux activités quotidiennes en salle de classe, les connaissances des enseignants exercent une grande influence sur leurs pratiques pédagogiques. Cet article fait état d'une étude qualitative multi-cas portant sur les connaissances en pragmatique interlangue qu'ont des enseignants iraniens d'anglais langue étrangère (ALE). Par une triangulation de nombreuses méthodes et sources de données, l'article décrit en détail les pratiques en salle de classe de cinq enseignants iraniens d'ALE, les connaissances qui sous-tendent ces pratiques et la façon dont leurs connaissances et le contexte d'enseignement interagissent pour façonner les pratiques pédagogiques quotidiennes. Les résultats indiquent que la sous-représentation d'une compétence pragmatique dans les cours d'ALE serait attribuable à des facteurs contextuels tels des lacunes dans les connaissances, chez les enseignants d'ALE, relatives au contenu et à la pédagogie en matière de pragmatique interlangue et aux décisions concernant le programme. Nous discutons des résultats principaux dans le contexte de la documentation sur la pragmatique interlangue.

Teaching a language like any other subject involves both publicly observable behaviors and deeper mental activities. Besides the exercise of skills or application of methods in a classroom, it is a complex cognitive process in which teachers negotiate and make sense of myriad factors before, during, and after teaching. Brown's (1994) notion of principled eclecticism and Kumaravadivelu's (1994) postmethod condition redefined our concept of methodology in a language classroom as a set of choices and decisions that a teacher could make. Inherent in these notions is the concept of teachers' agency, an important dimension of teachers' professionalism concerned with their active involvement in pedagogic decisions and practices within the contexts in which they work (e.g. Priestley, Biesta, & Robinson, 2015). Granted the

explicit permission to exert professional agency, language teachers will have their minds liberated to make decisions and negotiate various competing contextual demands "to shape curriculum and pedagogy toward learning" (Burns & Freeman, 2015, p.587) and "construct classroom-oriented theories of practice" (Kumaravadivelu, 1994, p. 29). Evidently, language teachers' backgrounds, identities, attitudes, emotions, knowledge, experiences, and beliefs have an impact on their thinking processes and what and how they teach.

Interlanguage pragmatics deals with both the acquisition and use of second language pragmatic knowledge (Gass & Selinker, 2008). As a component of language proficiency, pragmatics has been the focus of numerous studies that address the treatment of this important curricular domain of English language education in EFL/ESL settings. However, most existing research on interlanguage pragmatics teaching has focused on the learner and learning outcomes, with little or no attention to what teachers actually do and motivations behind their actual practices. In fact, it is paradoxical that despite its importance, no study has yet been carried out on the language teachers' cognition of pragmatic competence, whether and how it needs to be treated in EFL classes, and interaction of teachers' cognition with their actual classroom practices. This paper is an attempt to delve into the Iranian EFL teachers' cognitions of interlanguage pragmatics and the way these are mediated in practice by the contextual features of private English language institutes and their moment-to-moment exigencies.

Literature Review

A research trajectory within mainstream cognitive psychology, language teacher cognition addresses aspects of language teachers' mental life. This field of study emerged from, and actually replaced research studies on teacher thinking in the 1970s (Crookes, 2015). Studies on language teacher cognition are assumed to provide insights into the mental lives of teachers and the way cognition and teaching context interact in shaping the instructional decisions teachers make (Nishimuro & Borg, 2013). Borg (2003) defined cognition as "what teachers know, believe, and think." Delineating a contemporary scope of research on second or foreign language teacher cognition, Borg (2012) further broadened his earlier conceptualization of cognition to encompass constructs such as attitudes, identities, and emotions on the grounds that these are dimensions of the teachers' unobservable mental lives.

Teachers' cognition exerts strong influences on their pedagogical practices and this largely depends on their capacity and the level of agency they are afforded to make decisions on everyday classroom activities. What teachers say and do in the classroom is believed to be strongly governed by their tacitly held beliefs (Farrell, 2007). In Barnard and Burns's terms, teachers are "the executive decision-makers of the curriculum" who put into practice the principles and procedures devised or mandated by curriculum designers, material developers, methodological experts, and the other stakeholders (2012, p. 2).Teacher agency may be conceptualized in terms of the individual capacity of teachers to act purposefully and constructively in classrooms (Calvert, 2016) or an ecological phenomenon, i.e., agentic spaces shaping teachers' engagement with the educational environment (Biesta & Tedder, 2007). Teachers vary in terms of their capacity to act agentically. Also, educational settings vary in terms of the level of agency they give to teachers over their classroom practices and their own professional learning. Therefore, what happens in the classrooms is restrained by teachers' capacity to act (their cognition, skills, values etc.) on the one hand, and curricular decisions and administrative regulations on the other.

Pragmatics, which is considered a very important curricular domain in language teaching and learning, has been defined as "the study of speaker and hearer meaning created in their joint actions that include both linguistic and non-linguistic signals in the context of socioculturally organized activities" (Lo Castro, 2003, p. 15). Since the emergence of various models of communicative competence (Bachman, 1990; Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Canal & Swain, 1980), pragmatic competence has become an essential component of language proficiency besides other components such as grammatical, discourse, and strategic competencies. The study of pragmatics in verbal communication includes a study of the relationship between sociopragmatics and pragmalinguistics (Leech, 1983; Thomas, 1983). In this classification, sociopragmatics is the cultural understanding implicit in the exchange and, in fact, the language user's assessment of the context where the language functions are performed. Pragmalinguistics, on the other hand, is the way these understandings are realized in language i.e., the linguistic resources available to perform these functions. Incomplete awareness of the way pragmalinguistic components of language are utilized in line with an understanding of the sociocultural and pragmatic norms of the learners' second language (L2) culture (sociopragmatic considerations) can result in communication breakdowns (Gass & Selinker, 2008).

Some aspects of pragmatic knowledge are argued to be universal or may successfully transfer from the learners' first language (L1). Kasper (1997) explains that if a form-function mapping in L1 corresponds with that of L2 in a way that the form can be used in corresponding L2 contexts with the same effects, the pragmalinguistic knowledge can positively transfer. Similarly, when there is a correspondence between participants' relative social power, distributions of rights, and obligations etc. in L1 and L2 community, learners may enjoy positive transfer of sociopragmatic knowledge possibly through making minor adjustments in their L2 interactions (Mir, 1995). Pragmatic universals are already available for L2 learners (Kasper, 1997). Cases in point are the shared knowledge that communicative acts follow particular organizational principles such as turn taking, and that recurrent speech events are managed by means of conversational routines. In addition, the influence of sociocultural features of the context such as social and psychological distance, social power, and the degree of imposition involved in communication along the tenets of politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987) are among the universal knowledge already present in the repertoire of the learners. However, appropriate use of language is intricately connected with the learners' cultural identities, values, and norms which may not correspond to those of L2.

Although pragmatic competence is a broad concept encompassing the ability to use appropriate speech act formulae, comprehend indirect meaning, choose proper speech styles or make use of mitigation strategies (Taguchi, 2011a), much of the work in interlanguage pragmatics has been traditionally conducted within the framework of speech acts theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969). Kasper (2006) explains that the central place of speech acts (e.g., apologizing, inviting, promising, etc.) in the field is beyond dispute and they are the most widely researched objects in interlanguage pragmatics. See Table 1 for examples of components of pragmatic competence analyzed in this study.

Since the advent of various models of the Communicative Approach to language teaching, speech acts have been a regular feature of most English language learning courses. On the other hand, as early as in the 1990s critics cautioned against an overly simplistic tendency to present the learners with a list of phrases as linguistic formulae (exponents) to realize speech acts. McCarthy (1998) points out that equating speech acts with a list of exponents obscures the fact

that choosing appropriate exponents in any situation is a function of many sociocultural factors including an understanding of the nature of relationship between speakers and issues of social distance and power. The picture gets even more complicated in cases where the learners' L1 and L2 are socioculturally different in terms of the type of speech act required in a given situation (Koester, 2002). The sociocultural differences complicate the teaching of speech acts as their performance usually involves several semantic formulae with sequences of more than one

Table 1

Main Components of Pragmatic Competence

Components of Pragmatics	Definition	Example
Speech acts (direct / indirect)	Actions done through speaking which can cause a change in the existing state of affairs or an effect on the interlocutor; a direct speech act indicates a representation of the literal meaning. An indirect speech act is concerned with the speakers' intention via an utterance which is not clear in the literal meaning.	The expressive speech act of apology: • Let me apologize for … • Or less direct strategy: • I regret that …
Up and downgraders	Means used to modify the force of the speech acts and stress or understate them	The common expression of regret: • I'm sorry! • I'm really sorry! [lexically upgraded] • I'm *really* sorry! [prosodically stressed] • I'm really sorry for being late, but the traffic was heavy! ['but' clauses to downgrade the apology by implying a lower degree of responsibility for the speaker due to circumstances beyond their control]
Speech act formulae	Semantic formulae with sequences of more than one contribution	The expressive speech act of apology: • Excuse me! [request forgiveness] • That was my fault! [acknowledging responsibility for an action] • It won't happen again. [promise forbearance]. • I'll pay for the damage. [offering redress]
Adjacency pairs and pragmatic routines		• Here you are! • Thanks! • You're welcome!
Communicating indirect meaning		Saying 'It's really cold in here' and meaning 'close the window!'
Choosing proper speech styles		Saying 'Good morning Mr. Smith!' instead of 'Hi Jim!' when greeting an intimate friend.
Mitigation strategies	Using hedges to mitigate face-threatening acts, attenuate the full semantic value of an expression, or mitigate the full force of a speech act	• I may be wrong, but … • I don't want to change the subject, but … • I guess I owe you an explanation

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contribution in any discourse context (Cohen, 1996). As an example, Koester (2002) explains that for the act of apologizing, the sequence of speech acts may be acknowledging responsibility, offering repair, and giving an explanation or excuse in that order. Conversation analysts (e.g., Levinson, 1983) have identified adjacency pairs (such as invite-accept/refuse: Why don't you come to my place for dinner tonight? I'd love to, but I need to catch up on reading.), as the basic unit of interaction in talk. Such intricacies of speech acts pose challenges for L2 speakers in their communication and also for L2 teachers as speech acts should be seen as unfolding in discourse, and not as isolated phenomena (Koester, 2002).

So far, an extensive volume of research on interlanguage pragmatics teaching has been accumulated (Norris & Ortega, 2000; Rose, 2005). These studies have addressed three central questions relating to the effect of instruction on pragmatics, namely, whether pragmatics is teachable, whether the instruction is more facilitative of pragmatics competence than exposure alone, and whether various instructional strategies are different in their effects (Rose, 2005). These key questions have been explored with different groups of learners and in different contexts, taking various pragmatic features as the target of learning, e.g., speech acts, pragmatic routines (Bardovi-Harlig, Mossman, & Vellenga, 2015), discourse markers, and strategies. Generally, these studies suggest that pragmatics can indeed be taught (Rose & Kasper, 2001). This established, researchers set about investigating the optimal practice for pragmatic growth.

Instructional strategies to develop interlanguage pragmatics have exercised the minds of researchers for a long time. Kasper (1997) classifies these strategies and activities into those aiming at raising students' pragmatic awareness, and the ones that offer opportunities for communicative practice. Hedge (2000) defines pragmatic awareness raising as making learners knowledgeable about the way language is used in relation to its sociocultural context. Through awareness-raising activities, students may acquire sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic information, e.g., the function of complimenting in an English-speaking culture, appropriate topics for complimenting (sociopragmatic considerations), and the linguistic formulae for compliments (pragmalinguistic issues) (Kasper, 1997). Raising L2 learners' pragmatic awareness is closely related to the explicit mode of language instruction (Judd, 1999). Two instructional paradigms, namely explicit and implicit intervention are generally distinguished in terms of the metalanguage employed to raise the learners' awareness of pragmatic features. Explicit instruction involves pointedly discussing the relationship between the language form and function of the pragmatic feature and guiding learners' attention towards the target forms. Implicit instruction or incidental learning of pragmatic features, in contrast, involves attracting the learners' attention without engaging in metalinguistic instruction while avoiding the interruption of communication (Doughty, 2003). Schmidt (1993) pressed for input enhancement on the part of the teacher and consciousness-raising on the part of the learner to facilitate interlanguage pragmatics. Coined by Sharwood-Smith (1980), input enhancement is conceptualized as providing L2 learners with corrective feedback and form-focused instruction (White, Spade, Lightbown, & Ranta, 1991). Pragmatic corrective feedbacks as Shirkhani and Tajeddin (2017, p. 27) defined them, consist of "any reaction to a learner's utterance which aims to help the learner notice their pragmatic failure and understand what the true form is with regard to the social context in which it is used." Although corrective feedback involves providing negative evidence, form-focused instruction provides an opportunity for both positive and negative evidence. Schmidt (1993) asserts that explicit and implicit learning have a synergetic relationship where both the input enhancement strategies (explicit, deductive, top-down instruction) and naturalistic or incidental approaches (implicit, inductive, bottom-up

processing) are needed to foster interlanguage pragmatics. Opportunities for practicing L2 pragmatic abilities may be created by engaging L2 learners in student-centered interaction where they are assigned interpersonal communication tasks more concerned with social relationships (Kasper, 1997). These tasks according to Kasper (1997) include communicative acts such as opening and closing conversations, expressing emotive responses as in thanking and apologizing, or influencing the other person's course of action as in suggesting and requesting.

Generally, EFL teachers' cognitions of sociocultural aspects of language and effective techniques for teaching pragmatics have rarely been addressed in the literature (Cohen, 2008; Eslami-Rasekh, 2005; Taguchi, 2011a). The present study was an attempt to address this gap and, in doing so, the following set of questions was formulated both from the literature reviewed and the ongoing data collection and analysis:

1. What practices characterize the pragmatic teaching of Iranian EFL teachers in private language Institutes?

2. What cognitions underpin these practices?

3. What contextual factors shape the teachers' pragmatics teaching practices?

Methods

A qualitative multiple case study approach was employed to gain an in-depth understanding of EFL teachers' cognition of interlanguage pragmatics. Through triangulation of multiple methods and data sources, the study documented general trends and significant patterns of the teachers' treatments and cognitions of pragmatics, as well as contextual factors that constrained them.

Context and Participants

The context of the study was a private English language institute in western Tehran. The Institute was selected based on the availability criterion; however, care was taken to choose a setting that was typical of private English language institutes in the country. Generally, these institutes aim at filling the existing gap in public EFL education in the country: oral communication in English. The teaching staff are usually composed of a number of teachers and a supervisor—an experienced teacher who is responsible for managing educational issues including learner placement, deciding on the teaching material, evaluating the teachers' performance, and providing them with support when needed.

There were 17 male and female teachers including a male supervisor in the language institute under study. The Institute adopted an integrated syllabus with oral communication as the main unit of study. *American English File* series (2nd edition) by Latham, Oxenden, and Boyle, published by Oxford University Press (2013) was the main course book which was supplemented with some material for improving the learners' vocabulary and reading. Each term lasted six weeks with classes meeting three times a week and a total of 27 hours of instruction per term. The learners (n=450) were both males and females in the age range of 6-35. Depending on their initial proficiency level determined by placement tests or their performance in the last term, the learners were scattered in a continuum from elementary to advanced levels of English language proficiency according to the Institute's standards.

The participants were five Iranian EFL teachers who were selected based on a purposive

Table 2

Overview of the EFL Teachers Participating in the Case Study

Name	Age	Gender	Education	Teaching Experience (Years)	Residence in an English Speaking Country*
Ali	39	male	Master's Degree—TESOL	15	No
Maryam	29	female	Bachelor's Degree—Civil Engineering	5	Yes
Raana	23	female	Bachelor's Degree—English Translation	6	No
Reza	26	male	Bachelor's Degree—English Language and Literature	7	Yes
Soha	24	female	Master's Student—TESOL	3	No

*Staying more than 40 days in an English speaking country was decided to count as residence.

sampling procedure (Ary, Jacobs, & Sorensen, 2010) from among a total of 17 teachers in the institute under study. Prior to data collection, the relevant permissions were obtained from the Institute administration to observe and audio-record classes, analyze documents, and conduct interviews. Also, the participants' consent was obtained and they were assured that their identities and privacy will be protected and that they will benefit from taking part in the study. The EFL teachers were selected to reflect diversity among teachers in terms of their education (student, graduate, or undergraduate), gender, language teaching experience, and major (TESOL related or unrelated). It is a common practice in Iranian private English language institutes to recruit some EFL teachers without a TESOL education background often based on general language proficiency tests. These teacher candidates are usually those with several months of education in English language institutes or with an experience of residence in English speaking countries. The candidates are usually asked to take some teacher training courses where they are prepared for dealing with different components of the language and also may be asked to observe some EFL classes run by experienced teachers before they are allowed to start their EFL teaching career. Table 2 provides an overview of the participants who were all Persian L1 speakers. Pseudonyms are used to protect the participants' identities.

Data Collection

Data were collected by one of the researchers, a male Iranian EFL teacher trainer, to examine a group of 5 EFL teachers' actual pragmatic teaching practices in detail and individually before moving on to consider the findings collectively. The researcher was also a teacher of the institute and this insider position enabled him to maintain control over the research project without having to rely on a third party, to create and sustain a nonthreatening environment (Stewart and Shamdasani, 1990), and to moderate the potential for the interviewees to become argumentative during focus group semi-structured interview session (Gladman, 2012).

Multiple collection methods were employed for data triangulation and obtaining different perspectives on the participants' cognition of interlanguage pragmatics. First, a non-participant observation procedure was applied in a normal classroom setting where each participant was observed teaching 20regular lessons of 90 minutes for a period of 6 months. All observed classes were audio-recorded for later analysis. The observer did not have any interaction with the teachers or students and only took field notes for subsequent analysis and discussion with the

teachers. Second, after each observed session, the teacher was asked to participate in post-observation recall interviews where the field notes were used to prompt a discussion of teacher's approach to pragmatics and of factors shaping it. Participants were asked to comment on aspects of their teaching and verbalize their thinking. The instances of pragmatic issues which surfaced during each class time were discussed with each teacher individually and their explanations on what they did and why they did it were recorded. A semi-structured interview was also conducted in a focus group data collection session in month 6 when the participants were allowed to interact and form their own opinions. Although the researcher had a clear picture of the topics to be covered, the interview was allowed to develop naturally in unexpected directions as important new topics opened up. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for further analysis. This led to the enrichment of the initial sets of questions developed from an in-depth review of the literature. Third, the data collected through the interview were triangulated by member checking, i.e., having participants verify the accuracy of the interview transcripts and the researcher's analysis. Triangulation was also achieved through submitting documents such as class tests, teaching material, teacher manuals, and the Curriculum for Master's Program in TESOL (High Council of Planning, the Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology) to content or document analysis.

Data Analysis

Observational data and focus group semi-structured interviews were analyzed according to the established principles for working with qualitative data (Creswell, 2012). Components of pragmatic competence were identified and grouped together by carefully analyzing the documents which were also compared to the themes in the literature (Table 1). Depending on the aims of analysis, the way these main themes were presented, treated, or tested was then identified. Through repeated readings of the field notes and the observation and interview transcripts, key themes and tentative categories in the teachers' account of how they teach pragmatics and why they teach it in particular ways were identified and categorized following an inductive data analysis procedure. Moreover, references by the teachers to documents such as final exams, the teaching materials, and teacher manuals were also analyzed for corroboration through the content analysis of these documents.

The observational data for each teacher were analyzed to identify key instructional episodes in their classroom practice (Borg, 1998). A key pragmatic instructional episode was defined as one that illustrates an aspect of the teacher's pedagogic action in teaching pragmatics. Teachers' pragmatic actions were defined in terms of the key themes in the literature on pragmatics teaching including, but not limited to, the provision of implicit/explicit input, error correction and feedback, awareness raising tasks or input enhancement techniques, and the use of L1 and metapragmatics. In identifying such episodes, the evidence of the ways teachers introduced and practiced various components of pragmatics were recorded. As a result of this analysis, the key characteristics of each teacher's practice in teaching pragmatics were identified.

Results

The Necessity of Teaching Pragmatics in EFL Context

The teachers mainly believed that the ability to use English appropriately is an important aspect

of the learners' language competence. However, they felt that the sociopragmatic features or sociolinguistic rules of language use are areas underemphasized, if not totally abandoned, in language courses and textbooks. For instance, Ali explained that "in the course books we are currently teaching, the main emphasis is on the four skills, ... let's say more on speaking ... there are also activities for grammar and vocabulary. I think [there is] nothing on pragmatics." Raana also considered the rules of appropriate use of language as "an important issue ... but these depend on the learners' level of English."

All teachers thought that sociopragmatic aspects of the language should be reserved for the later stages of the language development when the learners have been already comfortable with the forms and pragmalinguistic features. Reza when teaching the speech act requests through modal auxiliary simply contented himself to saying "could is more polite than can." In the post-observation interview, he explained that "at this level, I must focus on using good English." It followed that by 'good English" he meant grammatically correct sentences. Moreover, he observed that details of sociopragmatic rules should be kept for more advanced learners of English.

Employing L1 Background Knowledge

There was no consensus among the participants as to the necessity and viability of employing the learners' L1 background knowledge in their performance in the target situation. Implied in some comments was the concept of universals or transferable L1pragmatic knowledge that would take care of itself. Reza believed that "every language learner already knows where to be polite ... I mean this is part of their personality and there is no need to remind them of the rules of politeness." Maryam also argued that "my students know that they can ask for something directly or indirectly because this is what they do in Persian". In addition, she sees no point in drawing the learners' attention to what they possess as the available pragmatic knowledge. She further maintained that "we are not allowed to use Persian in our classes ... if I use the Farsi examples in my teaching, the supervisor puts a negative [point] for me!" Beside the administrative regulations, Raana also mentioned limitations in using Persian examples in terms of the teacher's esteem and position among colleagues explaining that using examples from Persian "feels like your English is not good... it is not good for your prestige among the students and other teachers."

An interesting instance of the divergence between L1 and L2 pragmatic routines surfaced as we observed a rare key pragmatic instructional episode during a pair work activity. Two learners were having a short conversation in which there was a natural exchange of the pragmatic routine of offering for help and accepting it. The relevant excerpt is repeated here for analysis (S1, S2, etc.: Student 1, Student 2, etc.; T: Teacher).

Example 1:

S1: Do you want my pencil?
S2: Um, thanks!
T: Thanks what? Either say 'yes please' or 'no, thanks!'
S2: Oh? Yes, please!

The teacher in the post-observation interview commented that:

I think she [S1] used a Persian structure … by saying 'thanks' we politely accept or decline an offer … depends on our body language or intonation. [But] in English we politely accept the offer saying 'Yes please!' or refuse it by saying 'No, thanks!

In response to a more explicit question on whether he exploits the similarities and differences between the L1 and L2 when teaching pragmatics, Ali maintained that "similarities, not usually! but differences, maybe! These are more difficult to detect even for me … you know … and when we use a wrong form based on Persian structure, nobody thinks it is unnatural or different from English." Ali is actually referring to the deficiency in the teachers' knowledge of interlanguage pragmatics as a limiting factor for instructional intervention.

Teacher Education and Knowledge of Interlanguage Pragmatics

Most of the participants were not able to engage in metapragmatic talks. This was particularly evident in the EFL teachers without an education background in TESOL. The researcher had to explain the relevant terminologies and clarify them with examples. Maryam, the EFL teacher with a bachelor's degree in civil engineering, has learned English in a private language institute where, she claimed, she never received any explicit instruction about pragmatics and the way it may be treated in language classes. She explained "I guess I learned different ways of agreeing, disagreeing, complimenting … like … vocabulary items… and never had other education." Reza with a bachelor's degree in English language and literature also acknowledged that "there was a course in linguistics during my BA, … we read about pragmatics … but I have no idea of teaching pragmatics … I teach English language and not such things as sociology." Soha, who was studying a Master's degree in TESOL, believed that while students in the TESOL programs in Iranian universities may be introduced to interlanguage pragmatics, the issue does not receive the attention it deserves. Ali also voiced a stronger claim asserting that "this component of language is totally neglected in our EFL teacher education programs … even in our teacher training workshops in this Institute." This view was later reiterated during the focus group interview where the teachers unanimously confirmed that they were not prepared for pedagogical treatment of pragmatic competence in either the pre-service or in-service teaching training courses in the Institute. To verify the obtained data, the earlier version of the Curriculum for Master's Program in TESOL was submitted to document analysis as a data triangulation procedure. This document was issued in 1987 by High Council of Planning, a government body in Iran's Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology (the recently updated version of this document issued in 2016 did not apply to the participants of the study and therefore was disregarded for data collection).The document presents the academic contents and courses to be taught in the Master's programs in TESOL and briefly explains the skills teacher trainees are expected to learn and the learning objectives they are expected to meet. The analysis of the document showed no specific reference to developing pragmatic competence in EFL learners. For example, in the proposed content of a course titled *Issues in Linguistics*, there is only a short reference to analysis of semantics and different types and levels of meaning as an objective of the course. Also, the content of the course *Methods of Teaching a Foreign Language* broadly mentions studying the components of language for teaching language skills without further explanation.

Pedagogical Interventions for Developing Pragmatics

Generally, the pedagogical interventions for the development of pragmatic competence were infrequent. Rarely did the researcher come across with any key pragmatic instructional episode. When asked if he preferred explicit or implicit pragmatic instruction, Reza made it clear that,

> I usually give brief explanations for grammar, but not for pragmatics, … actually, I have never talked about speech acts in my classes … to be honest, I cannot talk on these … I think if they were important you would see activities in the book or as test items in the final exams.

However, there were also teachers who believed in the explicit teaching of the pragmatic feature. For instance, Ali contended that the teacher should pointedly discuss the relationship between the language forms and functions in the classroom although he admitted that he does not practice this on the ground that he needs to "cover the book that itself does not have activities explicitly for pragmatics learning."Soha also thought that the textbooks do not provide comprehensive speech acts, pragmatic routines, and hedging inputs asserting that "I know these are important features of language but I do not think our teachers are able to give metapragmatic information." She further argued that,

> … I do not usually teach by the explicit instruction of pragmatic points … maybe these are learned just by doing the activities … without teaching … my students would think that I am teaching beyond the book and nobody appreciates it.

In her classes, Soha had a habit of having the students underline some important vocabulary items and language chunks with some very brief explanation toward the end of each session. The following excerpt shows the way she engages in input enhancement practice, making salient a learning point, here pragmatic routines:

> **Example 2:**
>
> T: … also in line 2 underline this … 'I see what you're saying, but …'. We use this when we disagree with someone but we wish to be nice …so we first show some … let's say sympathy, and then show our disagreement with 'but'.

During the post-observation interview, it turned out that the teacher considered the pragmatic formula as merely a language chunk, explaining that she believed in making the learners notice language points, mostly multiword units, by making these forms more salient in the input (positive input enhancement).

Error Correction and Feedback

A particularly relevant type of pedagogical intervention for language points is providing pragmatic corrective feedback. Although numerous feedbacks were provided by the participants during the data collection period, they were almost always targeted at language points other than those of pragmatics. Example (3) is an excerpt from an interview roleplay activity with intermediate students.

Example 3:

T: How are you?
S: Thanks!
T: OK, can I ask you some questions?
S:Yeah!
T: Please tell me if you have ever had a fishing experience?
S: Well, no, but I wish I have!
T: Aha, you wish you … [looking at the student with raised eyebrows and then other students in the class, waiting for correction]
S: I had … I wish I had fishing experiment!
T: Very good, so you wish you had fishing experiences!

The teacher disregards the student's failure in using the routine formula for the speech acts in greeting e.g., 'I'm fine, thanks! (and you?)'and her failure to provide an appropriate response to the request, e.g., 'yes, please!'. On the other hand, she was quick to pinpoint and treat the grammar and vocabulary error, making use of various feedback strategies, e.g., providing the opportunity for self- or peer correction, providing positive feedback, and recast. Interestingly, in the post-observation interview when the teacher was asked to comment on her practice, it turned out that she even did not notice the student's pragmatic failure. She explained that,

> I had to take care of many things …. you know, what she actually wanted to say, vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation … even we teachers sometimes are not sure [if] these are errors or are important. I mean, they may not be as important as the grammar errors. They are very hard to find after all.

Once again, this suggests the limitation in the teachers' knowledge base, a theme that already surfaced in the study. The teacher also refers to the cognitive burden on the EFL teachers who need to deal with many details simultaneously, resulting in the unfortunate outcome that grammar, lexicon, and pronunciation errors are treated at the expense of ignoring pragmatic failures.

Finally, teachers' rare pedagogic interventions for pragmatic failure were observed only in cases of pragmalinguistic failure, e.g., when pragmatic force mapped on to a structure or linguistic token is different from what native speakers normally assign to it.

Example 4:

T: How much of that book did you cover last term?
S: We covered page 43—excuse me, page 44!
T: I will excuse you [laughs]! Say sorry when you correct yourself!

Here the student uses "excuse me" as the linguistic token for correcting a remark instead of "sorry," the token normally preferred in English. The interference from the learner's L1 (Persian) seems to be the source of error in this subtle aspect of the speech act of apologizing. The subsequent post-observation interview revealed that the teacher was not even aware that this was a pragmalinguistic failure and simply considered it as a word choice error. In fact, reducing pragmalinguistic errors to simply a linguistic error of word choice did not stem from a pedagogical decision, rather it was indicative of a deficiency in the teacher's knowledge base.

Discussion

Teachers' Cognition

Participants mainly considered pragmatic competence as an important aspect of the learners' language competence. However, sociopragmatic features of language were underemphasized, if not totally abandoned in their classes. In her meta-analysis, Bardovi-Harlig (2001) notes a repeated finding of the studies that high general proficiency does not guarantee a nativelike pragmatic performance. In fact, highly proficient L2 learners still transfer L1-based speech act strategies, do not measure up to nativelike sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic standards, and their processing efficiency and also fluency in pragmatic performance fall short of expectations (Taguchi, 2011b). These pieces of evidence provide a sound rationale against the common practice of ignoring pragmatic education in the EFL classes.

The teachers' instructional practices were limited to covering the text books and other supplementary materials. Relying on these materials is particularly risky as studies have raised serious questions about the coverage and treatment of the pragmatic component of language in ELT textbooks (Alemi et al., 2013; Bardovi-Harlig et al., 1991; Crandall & Basturkmen, 2004; Nguyen, 2011; Petraki &Bayes, 2013; Vellenga, 2004). Limberg (2016) summarizes findings of several studies which criticize ELT textbooks for their treatment of pragmatic competence as being simplistic and cursory, providing constructed examples based on authors' intuitions, and containing little contextualization clues necessary for inferring the relevant sociopragmatic considerations. A pragmatically friendly ELT textbook is recommended to feature pragmatic awareness raising activities, presentation of various pragmalinguistic choices for accomplishing a speech act along with the relevant sociocultural contextual information to enable sociopragmatic choices (Vellenga, 2004). Taguchi (2011a) emphasizes the crucial role of cognitively demanding tasks e.g., having learners engage in comparisons between their performance and target-like pragmatic performance. However, these features are shown to be largely missing from textbooks. For example, Huang (2000) studying a number of ELT course books found that while these materials featured descriptions of complimenting in English, they lacked sociopragmatic rules of using this speech act appropriately.

All participants of the study thought that sociopragmatic aspects of the language should be reserved for the later stages of the language development when the learners are already comfortable with the forms and pragmalinguistic features. This implies a perception that linguistic competence should precede pragmatic competence. Generally, interlanguage pragmatics researchers have suggested that high general proficiency supports language learner's pragmatic and sociolinguistic development (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001).Jeon and Kaya (2006, p.182) observe that "within the instructed L2 pragmatics research community, it is implicitly believed that a linguistic threshold is required for the acquisition of L2 pragmatics."Bardovi-Harlig (2013) emphasizes, most aspects of the grammatical system such as verbal morphology (tense, aspect, mood, person, and number), nominal morphology (person and number, embedding, lexicon), modals, honorific systems, and phonology including prosodyare pragmalinguistic resources. Therefore, language learners need sufficient grammatical and lexical development to have a repertoire of multiple forms for one function (or multiple functions for one form), before they are able to select an appropriate form from among different alternatives (Bardovi-Harlig, 2013). Nevertheless, this argument does not necessarily mean that no categories of pragmatics

should be treated at intermediate or even elementary levels. A case in example is adjacency pairs and pragmatic routines used in speech acts such as greetings. As early as the first day of instruction, EFL learners are presented with greetings. Although getting the messages across is the primary and essential goal of communication, the teacher can also deal with the speech acts involved, formulaic nature of the sequence of speech acts, and sociopragmatic norms of the target speech community.

The EFL teachers in the study generally had few pedagogical interventions for the development of pragmatic competence in the learners. Although this may apparently suggest that the participants believed in implicit instruction, further analysis revealed a deficiency in the teachers' pedagogic content knowledge. Exposure to language input is considered to be an influential factor in language acquisition, and in instructed language learning contexts of classrooms it is the main responsibility of the teachers to provide authentic, representative language (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001).However, teacher-fronted interaction may not be as helpful for pragmatic development as it seems at first. Kasper (2001) summarizes the findings of studies showing the inherent restrictions in teacher-fronted interactions for providing pragmatic inputs and the opportunity for productive language use. The asymmetrical social context of classrooms where the teacher is in the position of authority may not correspond to the various everyday life contexts outside the classroom arena. Also, the basic interactional routine in teacher-fronted language classes "strongly favors monopolization of topic management, turn allocation, and third-turn assessment by the teacher" (Kasper, 2001, p.36). Irrespective of the source of pragmatic deviation in the teachers' talk, i.e., whether it is a reflection of their institutional role as a teacher or a deficiency in their pragmatic knowledge base, EFL learners are usually exposed to only classroom social contexts with their own pragmatic constraints. On the other hand, experimental studies suggest that learners who receive explicit instruction, i.e., instruction involving metapragmatic discussion, outperform both those receiving implicit pragmatic instruction and those not receiving instruction (e.g., Jeon &Kaya, 2006; Rose, 2005). Ishihara (2010) makes a case for the awareness-raising approach to L2 pragmatics instruction. In his meta-analysis, Taguchi (2011a) observes that noticing and the relevant concept of consciousness have long dominated pragmatic instruction. In fact, as Rose (2010) argues, drawing learners' attention to the target features explicitly, i.e., through metapragmatic information, is in line with Schmidt's (1993) noticing hypothesis. Ishihara (2010) recaps the knowledge and skills necessary to provide effective L2 pragmatic instruction as an awareness of diverse pragmatic norms in a speech community, the ability to present L2 metapragmatic information, the ability to develop and assess learners' pragmatic competence, and an awareness of learners' subjectivity and sociocultural identity.

Most of the participants, both with and without a formal education in TESOL, were not able to provide metapragmatic information. Moreover, the analysis of academic contents and courses of the Curriculum for Master's Program in TESOL issued by Iranian High Council of Planning had no reference to developing pragmatic competence as a goal in the EFL teacher development. In fact, L2 pragmatics has traditionally been underrepresented in teacher development programs (Cohen, 2005). For instance, in their nationwide survey, Vásquez and Sharpless (2009) found that in the master's TESOL curriculum in the US, the treatment of pragmatics centers on theoretical models (e.g., politeness and speech acts theories) neglecting practical issues of e.g. how to teach L2 pragmatics. Although there is no study on the status quo of pragmatics in teacher development programs in Iran, the situation does not seem to be any better. Despite the importance of pragmatic competence, L2 teacher training programs have not

been paying attention to the issue as much as it deserves and EFL teachers are often left to their own devices for developing pragmatic competence in their learners. This is particularly critical as even teacher resource books and manuals rarely feature metapragmatic information for pedagogic intervention of the teachers (Vellenga, 2004).

Pragmatic errors were not generally treated by the EFL teachers and they mostly focused on linguistic errors, employing various error treatment strategies. This is in line with the findings of Shirkhani and Tajeddin (2017) who observed that only one percent of the errors treated by 40 teachers during 128.12 hours of recorded classroom sessions were related to pragmatics. Glasgow (2008) argues that the teachers' overwhelming grammar correction can be possibly attributed to the salience of grammatical features. On the other hand, addressing the question of which errors to correct, Ellis (2009) contends that during oral communication, teachers are hard-pressed for time and the selection of errors to treat are impossible in on-line oral correction. This suggests that the teachers' failure to provide feedback for pragmatic errors may stem not just from their perception of these errors as unimportant or impervious to correction. Rather, the EFL teachers in the study may be insensitive to these errors possibly due to a deficiency in their knowledge base. This was further confirmed in the post-observation interview where a teacher believed that she simply corrected the student's word choice error.

Pragmalinguistic errors are basically a linguistic problem and therefore, a matter of highly conventionalized usage. They occur when a different pragmatic force is mapped onto a structure or linguistic token or when inappropriate speech act strategies are transferred from L1 to L2 (Thomas, 1983). Thomas (1983) believes that it is essential for the language teacher to distinguish between pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic errors. Although pragmalinguistic errors are language-specific and should be possible for the teacher to correct straightforwardly, sociopragmatic errors are culture-specific, reflecting the student's system of values and beliefs, and thus, Thomas recommends only identifying and discussing them with the foreign learners without value judgments.

Finally, no general trend was detected in the participants' cognition as to the necessity and viability of employing the learners' L1 background knowledge in teaching L2 pragmatics. However, some participants implied the idea of universals or transferable L1 pragmatic knowledge. Kondo (2008) advocates raising the learners' awareness of pragmatic similarities and differences between L1 and L2 to achieve optimal convergence of sociopragmatic rules but generally, there are administrative constraints on using L1 features and examples in English language institutes in Iran. Contextual factors that impinge upon the EFL teachers' practices are discussed presently.

Contextual Factors

The relationships between teachers' beliefs and practices have been explored by teacher education researchers for over four decades now (see e.g., Basturkmen, 2012). Curricular decisions and administrative regulations (course book selection, adhering to the book and the policy of covering only the available teaching material), situational constraints (time constraints and washback effects of the achievement tests), and the deficiency in the teachers' pedagogic content knowledge and pragmatic competence were the most important factors defining EFL teachers' treatment of interlanguage pragmatics in the study. Dividing features of the context into macro and micro levels, Li (2013) argues that whether the teachers' beliefs and practices are convergent or divergent is a product of the interactions between both levels. The classroom

micro-contexts, i.e., the moment-to-moment variables, and the situational macro-context e.g., the teacher's education and personal experience, and the curricular decision such as the level of agency granted to the teacher all inform the teacher's overarching pedagogical practices and instructional activities.

Conclusion

EFL teachers in the study were not informed of the findings of research on the treatment of interlanguage pragmatics in EFL teacher-fronted classrooms. The imperfect or faulty cognition on the part of the teachers was further matched with contextual factors leading to the unfortunate consequence of underrepresentation of pragmatic competence in the classes observed. The teachers were required to cover the course books that generally do not provide for L2 pragmatic competence. The teachers also struggled to prepare language learners for tests which do not feature components of pragmatics.

Borg (2003) observes that teacher cognitions and practices are mutually informing. Given the inconspicuous nature of L2 pragmatic competence, it is not sufficient simply to have teachers reflect on their practices to improve their cognition/practice. The participants lacked the necessary pedagogic content knowledge and expertise to engage in activities to develop pragmatic competence in their learners. This is why their decisions, if any, were not conducive to development of interlanguage pragmatics. Barnard and Burns (2012, p.2) consider language teachers' cognition as "a complex nexus of interacting factors" with influences from a variety of sources. These factors include the teachers' experience of language learning, professional training or development programs, professional experience as teachers, reading scholarly books and articles, attending conferences and seminars, interacting with their learners, colleagues and significant others in their personal lives, and the administrative and curricular influences by decision makers at various levels from schools to ministries of education (Barnard and Burns, 2012).

Despite limitations of the study in terms of sampling procedure and the sample size, findings have implications for EFL teachers, teacher educators, researchers, and other stakeholders. There is a wide consensus among researchers and scholars in the field of language education on the importance of pragmatic competence in L2 education and this needs to be proportionally reflected in language classes, learning materials, and teacher education programs. In addition, EFL teachers' cognitions and the contextual factors that define what they actually do in the class should be taken into account in determining curricular goals. Effective teaching goes beyond mere impartation of information. As Barnard and Burns (2012) argue, managing and maintaining the learning procedure can be appreciated only by exploring the teachers' mental lives. Therefore, L2 teacher education programs need to start from teachers' cognitions and experiences in an attempt to promote critical thinkers able to reflect on their own practices and exert professional agency in the social context of language classrooms. This study was an attempt to fill the existing gap in our understanding of EFL teachers' cognition of interlanguage pragmatics, the pedagogical decisions they make, motivations behind these decisions, and contextual factors governing the relevant pedagogical practices. Due to its exploratory nature, the study did not focus on teacher learning. Nevertheless, being part of the study afforded the participants an opportunity to reflect on their practices and verbalize their cognitions. The discourse associated with critical and open-minded reflection on the teaching content, process, and practices during dialogic interaction (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994) can potentially reshape

teachers' thoughts and subsequently, their practice. Therefore, the researchers believe that some learning may have occurred in the participants of the study. The study concludes with a call for research to improve in-service EFL teachers' cognition of interlanguage pragmatics, to equip them with the means for optimal pedagogic intervention, and to enrich the available EFL course books with the pragmatic component of language.

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