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Speech Act Strategy Use: The Case of Iranian L2 and L3 Learners of English

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Abstract

While the strategies utilized by bilingual or multilingual learners during the process of acquiring and employing an additional language have been a focal point of extensive research among SLA scholars, interlanguage pragmatics—specifically the application of speech act strategies—has remained underexamined. To address this gap, this study leveraged Cohen and Ishihara's (2005) speech act strategy inventory to analyze variations in the usage frequency and perceived effectiveness of speech act strategies among 200 Iranian learners of English. The participants included L2 and L3 (Azeri/Persian and Arab/Persian) learners of English of both genders. The results demonstrated that L3 learners exhibited greater proficiency in employing speech act strategies compared to L2 learners. However, no statistically significant distinctions emerged between the two L3 groups in terms of strategy usage frequency or their perceived success in utilizing these strategies. The findings indicate that multilinguals often enjoy more effective communication strategies in L2 contexts; however, the findings suggest that the influence of L1 on L2 proficiency might not be as straightforward as previously thought. This highlights the intricate nature of bilingual language acquisition and the importance of considering sociolinguistic factors in bilingualism research.

Keywords: Bilingualism, language learning strategies, monolingualism, speech act, speech act strategy use

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1. Introduction

The exigencies of the modern world urge many people around the world to learn and use more than one language. Due to the increasing prevalence of bilingualism and multilingualism in the world, many researchers including second language acquisition researchers have investigated bilingualism and multilingualism phenomena from different perspectives (e.g., Chang, 2019; Kanwal et al., 2022; Lynch, 2017; W. Zhang, 2023). Bilinguals and multilinguals are believed to be endowed with certain linguistic and non-linguistic skills, abilities and strategies that privilege them compared with their linguistically naïve counterparts in the process of learning and using a new language (e.g., D'Angelo, 2021; Huang, 2018; Kroll & Bialystok, 2013; Kuo & Kim, 2014; Torregrossa et al., 2023). This advantage in learning and utilizing a subsequent language has prompted researchers to investigate the potential connections between various influential factors, such as learning styles, cognitive development, language learning and usage, and the prior language learning experiences of learners.

The strategies adopted by bilingual and multilingual learners during the acquisition and use of an additional language have garnered significant attention from second language acquisition (SLA) researchers (e.g., Aksak & Cubukcu, 2022; Grenfell & Harris, 2015; Mitits, 2016; Mohammad Hosseinpur & Sarbandi Farahani, 2017; Pawlak & Kiermasz, 2018). However, despite this extensive focus, interlanguage pragmatics (ILP), particularly the utilization of speech act strategies, remains a relatively under-explored area requiring further investigation. To address this gap, the present study employs Cohen and Ishihara's (2005) inventory to examine whether Iranian L2 and L3 (Azeri/Persian and Arab/Persian) learners of English differ in the frequency of strategy use and their feeling of achievement in deploying speech act strategies. Additionally, the study seeks to compare the two L3 subgroups (Azeri vs. Arab speakers) to determine if variations in their first languages (L1s) correlate with differences in strategy usage patterns and perceived effectiveness.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Speech Act Theory

Speech Act Theory, initially proposed by Austin (1962) and later expanded by Searle (1969), provides a crucial theoretical framework for understanding how language functions as action rather than merely as a tool for describing reality. According to Austin, when individuals speak, they engage in three distinct acts: locutionary (the act of saying something), illocutionary (the intended meaning or function of the utterance), and perlocutionary (the effect of the utterance on the listener). For instance, making a promise, asking a question, or issuing a command

are all examples of speech acts where speakers aim to achieve specific outcomes through their utterances. Searle further categorized these acts into five types—assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations—each serving different communicative functions. This theoretical foundation highlights the performative nature of language, emphasizing that utterances enact social actions such as requests, apologies, and promises, rather than simply conveying information.

In multilingual communication, Speech Act Theory offers valuable insights into how speakers navigate pragmatics across languages and cultures. It underscores the complexities involved in ensuring that intended meanings are accurately conveyed and understood, particularly in contexts where linguistic and cultural nuances may lead to misinterpretations. For multilingual learners, conveying message becomes even more nuanced due to their broader repertoire of linguistic and cultural norms, which they draw upon when interacting in an additional language (Kecskes, 2015). Understanding these dynamics is essential for developing effective communication strategies in multilingual environments.

2.2. Speech Act Strategy

The concept of language learning strategies (LLS) has long been central to second language teaching and learning, with its origins traceable to the 1970s (Griffiths, 2015). During the late 1970s, LLS gained significant traction, particularly among researchers investigating the characteristics of successful language learners. It was recognized that certain learners achieved greater success in second language acquisition by consciously employing strategies that facilitated their proficiency (Griffiths, 2015).

Scholars have proposed diverse definitions and categorizations of LLS. According to Tarone (1983), LLS refers to the endeavor of enhancing both linguistic and sociolinguistic abilities in the target language and merging them into one's developing interlanguage proficiency. Ellis (2008) categorized strategies into three types: learning strategies, production strategies, and communication strategies. Oxford (2017) characterized second language learning strategies as intricate and adaptable thoughts and actions that learners deliberately select and employ in specific situations to manage different aspects of their cognition, emotions, and social interactions (p. 48). Drawing on the multifaceted nature of self-regulation, she highlighted their importance in performing language tasks, improving communication, and supporting sustained language proficiency over time.

While Oxford and others focused on LLS broadly, scholars like Cohen (2010, 2014) specifically examined their role in interlanguage pragmatics and speech act learning. Speech act strategies involve the methods individuals use

to execute communicative actions in social interactions, with significant cross-cultural and linguistic variation influencing how meaning is exchanged.

Drawing on empirical studies—such as those targeting Japanese EFL learners' speech act development in an online program (Cohen & Ishihara, 2005) and a study abroad initiative addressing language and culture (Cohen et al., 2005)—Cohen (2014) formulated a framework for speech act strategy classification. This framework encompasses strategies for learning, applying, and monitoring speech acts. Cohen (2014) also highlighted factors such as learner attributes, task characteristics, and contextual elements of language use significantly influence the effective deployment of these strategies.

2.3. Bilingualism and Multilingualism

A substantial number of the world's population speak several languages in their daily affairs. The growing number of bilinguals and multilinguals in the world population has been documented by many researchers (e.g., Crystal, 1997; Dewaele, 2015). Crystal (1997), for example, claims that two-third of children in the world live in a bilingual environment. Bilingualism and multilingualism refer to the ability of using two or more languages in society with an acceptable degree of proficiency.

The work of some researchers like Skutnabb-Kangas has been instrumental in shaping our understanding of the sociolinguistic, educational, and human rights dimensions of multilingualism. Renowned for her extensive research on linguistic human rights and multilingual education, Skutnabb-Kangas (1981) has significantly influenced global discourse on language policies and practices. Her seminal contributions emphasize the cognitive, cultural, and social benefits of multilingualism, positioning linguistic diversity as a valuable resource rather than a deficit. Skutnabb-Kangas critiques subtractive bilingualism, a process where a dominant language replaces the mother tongue, often leading to the erosion of minority languages and cultural heritage. Instead, she advocates for additive multilingualism, an approach that values and maintains all languages, enabling learners to acquire new ones without losing their native tongues. This perspective not only challenges traditional monolingual ideologies but also underscores the importance of inclusive pedagogical approaches that recognize the multifaceted role of languages in fostering cognitive, social, and economic development (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2013).

According to Skutnabb-Kangas (2013), the suppression of minority languages does not merely endanger cultural traditions; it also perpetuates systemic social inequalities by marginalizing speakers of those languages. By advocating for the maintenance and promotion of linguistic diversity as a fundamental human right, Skutnabb-Kangas provides a critical foundation for understanding the broader implications of multilingualism

in diverse societies. Her work calls for educational systems to be restructured in ways that support additive multilingualism, ensuring that learners can thrive linguistically and culturally while contributing to more equitable and inclusive societies.

Two theoretical models have been proposed to explain the relationship between the linguistic systems of bilingual or multilingual individuals in their minds. The coordinate model holds that there are two or more separate linguistic systems in the mind of a bilingual or multilingual person that are in charge of learning or using different languages. The compound model or additive view, on the other hand, assumes that there is just one linguistic system in the mind of a bilingual or multilingual person that processes two or more languages (Heredia & Cieślicka, 2014).

Steinberg and Sciarini (2006) make a distinction between two conditions through which a person becomes bilingual: sequential and simultaneous. In the first case, the learner learns two languages one after the other, such as learning a first or dominant language at home and later a second language at school or at work or another place. In simultaneous learning, on the other hand, the learner, usually a child, is exposed to two languages at the same time; it can mostly happen at home.

Superiority of bilinguals and multilinguals over monolinguals in terms of cognitive and metalinguistic development has been of remarkable interest for many researchers. It is assumed that due to the complex situations that bilingual people encounter in the process of acquiring their second language, they enjoy certain strategies which help them develop particular metalinguistic and general metacognitive abilities. As a result, bilinguals and multilinguals have more control over their linguistic, academic, and cognitive processes and enjoy more efficient metalinguistic activities and higher levels of attentional control and executive functions (e.g., D'Angelo, 2021; Huang, 2018; Kempert et al., 2011; Kroll & Bialystok, 2013; Kuo & Kim, 2014; Torregrossa et al., 2023).

In spite of the fact that the impact of bilingualism and multilingualism on subsequent language learning and use has been investigated by many researchers (e.g., D'Angelo, 2021; Huang, 2018; Kroll & Bialystok, 2013; Kuo & Kim, 2014; Torregrossa et al., 2023), it seems that investigating pragmatics, in general, and speech act strategies use, in particular, from a bilingual and multilingual perspective is an under-explored area. The relationship between bilingualism/multilingualism and pragmatic knowledge acquisition in language learners has been investigated by some researchers and has culminated in intriguing and sometimes contradictory findings. For example, both Antoniou and Katsos (2017) and Jordà (2005) explored pragmatic understanding in bilingual/multilingual children compared to monolinguals. Antoniou and Katsos investigated how multilingual, bilectal, and

monolingual children comprehend implicatures (indirect meanings in language). Participants included multilingual children who spoke Cypriot Greek, Standard Modern Greek, and English**,** bilectal children who spoke Cypriot Greek and Standard Modern Greek, and monolingual children who spoke only Standard Modern Greek. Despite lower language proficiency in the target language among multilingual and bilectal children, their performance on implicature comprehension was comparable to that of monolinguals. Regression analyses revealed a positive correlation between implicature comprehension, language proficiency, and age, but not with executive control. They found similar performance in implicature tasks, suggesting that children draw upon different resources (monolingual vs. multilingual) to achieve the same outcome. Jordà (2005), however, showed bilingual Spanish EFL learners outperforming monolinguals in request speech acts, indicating a potential benefit for bilingualism in pragmatic production and awareness. She investigated how monolingual (L1 Castilian) and bilingual (L1 Catalan, L2 Castilian) EFL learners produce pragmatic expressions in Spain. Participants' bilingual competence was assessed using a bilingualism test based on prior research, while their English proficiency was assessed using a level placement test aligned with the ACTFL proficiency guidelines. Data were collected through an open discourse completion test and a role-play task.

Slabakova (2010), in another study, focused on adult learners, comparing Korean monolinguals, English monolinguals, and Korean bilinguals. Focusing **on** scalar implicatures, she obtained the data through 2 experiments: In Experiment 1, participants evaluated pragmatically infelicitous but logically correct sentences with *some* without contextual support. In Experiment 2, scalar sentences were embedded in rich story contexts supported by pictures and text, which increased the learners' pragmatically felicitous responses to over 90%. Her findings diverged from the child studies. Bilingual learners significantly outperformed monolinguals in understanding scalar implicatures, suggesting a potential advantage for bilinguals in specific aspects of pragmatic competence. These studies highlight the complexity of the bilingualism-pragmatics relationship. While Antoniou and Katsos (2017) suggested similar performance with different strategies, Slabakova (2010) and Jordà (2005) found evidence of bilingual advantages. These discrepancies may arise from factors like age of acquisition, type of pragmatic task and measurement tools.

Research has shown that speech act strategies can be influenced by cultural factors. For instance, Meier (2010) highlighted how individuals from different cultural backgrounds may employ different strategies to achieve similar communicative goals. This perspective is important for understanding the variations of speech act strategies among Iranian speakers. Iran has a rich

linguistic landscape with numerous minority languages spoken alongside Persian, the dominant language. This multilingual background might influence how Iranian learners approach speech acts in English. Consequently, this research sought to examine whether Iranian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners—both L2 and L3 learners of English (Azeri/Persian and Arab/Persian)—exhibit differences in their use of speech act strategies, specifically regarding the frequency of implementation and their feeling of achievement in employing such strategies. To explore these aspects systematically, the following research questions were formulated.

1. Is there a significant difference between Iranian L2 and L3 learners of English regarding the frequency of use and perceived effectiveness of their speech act strategy use?
2. Does the type of L2 (Azeri vs. Arabic) make any difference in L3 learners' use of speech act strategies in terms of frequency of use and sense of success?

3. Method

3.1. Participants

The study included 200 participants (males and females) aged 20–30, divided into three groups: 72 Persian L2 learners of English, 70 Azeri/Persian L3 learners, and 58 Arab/Persian L3 English learners. All were enrolled in two English language institutes in Tehran, Iran, selected for their diverse demographics (including L2 Persian learners and L3 learners), comparable curricula, and accessibility. Participants volunteered for the study.

The participants' proficiency levels were assessed using the Michigan Test of English Language Proficiency (MTELP), which both institutes used for placement purposes. While the majority of participants were classified at the intermediate level (Level 2), a small number of learners were initially excluded from the study because their MTELP scores fell below the institute-established threshold for Level 2 proficiency. This exclusion criterion ensured that the final sample aligned with the study's focus on intermediate-level learners, as defined by the institutes' placement guidelines.

To ensure consistency and reliability across both institutes, the research team re-administered the MTELP to all participants. This step standardized proficiency classifications and confirmed comparability between L2 and L3 learners of English. Following this process, the final sample consisted entirely of participants who met the Level 2 proficiency benchmark.

3.2. Materials and Instruments

Cohen and Ishihara's (2005) speech act strategy questionnaire was modified to align with the sociocultural and linguistic nuances of the Iranian EFL context. The adapted instrument consists of 20 items representing strategies learners could employ during speech act production and comprehension. For each item, the participants were required to evaluate two dimensions-frequency of strategy use and perceived effectiveness-via two distinct 5-point Likert-type scales. The 5-point Likert format was selected to capture nuanced self-reported data, enabling precise measurement of both behavioral patterns (frequency) and metacognitive reflections (effectiveness) related to speech act strategy application.

While Likert scales are prone to biases such as social desirability and recall errors, they remain a robust tool for group comparisons. Preliminary analyses confirmed the instrument's reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.87) and content validity through expert review and pilot testing. These steps ensured that the adapted inventory accurately measured the intended constructs related to speech act strategy use.

Cohen and Ishihara's inventory was employed in this study for its specific focus on strategic competence, its dual perspective on strategy use and perceived success, its wide recognition in the field, and its adaptability to the target context, making it the most suitable instrument for addressing our research questions. In the first phase of data analysis, the internal consistency of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. This assessment measured the reliability of the instrument for both L2 participants and the two L3 groups (Arabic and Azeri speakers). Results demonstrated robust reliability across all groups for both frequency of strategy use and sense of success**,** with Cronbach's alpha coefficients as follows: 0.94 and 0.93 for L2 group**,** 0.91 and 0.88 for Arabic speakers, and 0.90 and 0.88 for Azeri speakers, respectively. Coefficients closer to 1 reflect higher reliability.

3.3. Procedure

Before administering the questionnaire, the participants provided informed consent in accordance with ethical guidelines, and the study's objectives were clearly explained to promote transparency. This process aimed to encourage honest and accurate responses by ensuring that the participants understood the purpose and scope of the research. Although the participants were already acquainted with pragmatic knowledge and speech acts, a brief overview of pragmatics and speech acts was provided to ensure all participants fully understood the task requirements and expectations.

Afterwards, all the participants were presented with Cohen and Ishihara's (2005) speech act strategy questionnaire. A brief elaboration was made on the questionnaire to make sure that the respondents knew what they do. They had no limitation of time to answer the 20 items in the questionnaire; there was not much delay by any of the participants in filling out the questionnaire.

3.4. Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were utilized to provide an overview of the data, while a chi-square test was conducted to evaluate significant differences in the frequency of speech act strategies between L2 and L3 EFL learners. To explore participants' speech act strategy use, we used descriptive measures of perceived success and strategy frequency. Comparative analyses were then conducted to examine variations in strategy use between L2 and L3 groups, as well as between subgroups within the L3 cohort.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Results

The first research question explored whether there are differences between Iranian L2 and L3 learners of English in how they employ speech act strategies, with attention to both the frequency of use and their perceived effectiveness. Frequency was assessed by having the participants rate how often they utilized each strategy on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 represented "never" and 5 indicated "always." The results are outlined in Table 1, which provides an overview of the frequencies, percentages, and standardized residuals (Std. Residual) for both groups concerning their use of speech acts. Frequencies and percentages are descriptive statistics, while standardized residuals provide inferential information. By examining these residuals, one can identify cells with frequencies that deviate significantly from what would be expected by chance. If the Std. Residual value is greater than +/- 1.96, it suggests a statistically significant difference in frequency (higher or lower than expected).

Table 1 presents data indicating that L3 learners are significantly more likely than L2 ones to *always* employ speech act strategies, with 41.4% of L3s reporting this behavior compared to 32.7% of L2s. This difference is statistically significant, as evidenced by the standard residuals exceeding the critical values of ±1.96. Additionally, both groups report similar frequencies of *often* usage of speech act strategies, with L3 group slightly edging out L2 group (43.1% vs. 42.8%). However, the statistical significance of this difference is marginal, as the standard residuals approach but do not exceed the critical values.

Table 1

Frequency of Use of Speech Act Strategies (L2 vs. L3 Learners)

		Frequency of Use				Total
		Occasionally	Sometimes	Often	Always	
L2 learners	Count	45	307	617	471	1440
	%	3.1%	21.3%	42.8%	32.7%	100.0%
	Std. Residual	2.9	4.3	-.1	-3.4	
L3 learners	Count	36	361	1104	1059	2560
	%	1.4%	14.1%	43.1%	41.4%	100.0%
	Std. Residual	-2.2	-3.2	.1	2.6	
Total	Count	81	668	1721	1530	4000
	%	2.0%	16.7%	43.0%	38.3%	100.0%

Further insights from Table 1 reveal that L2 learners are more inclined than L3 learners to *sometimes* utilize speech act strategies, with 21.3% of L2 learners versus 14.1% of L3 students reporting such behavior. This discrepancy is statistically significant, with standard residuals exceeding the critical values for both groups. Similarly, a smaller percentage of both groups, 3.1% of L2s and 1.4% of L3s, admitted to *occasionally* employing speech act strategies, with the difference between these percentages being statistically significant. In summary, L3 participants consistently and frequently utilized speech act strategies at higher rates than their L2 counterparts. Conversely, L3 learners reported fewer occurrences of occasional or infrequent use of these strategies compared to L2 learners.

A chi-square analysis (crosstabs) was conducted (Table 2) to explore potential differences in the application of speech act strategies among Iranian L2 and L3 language learners, focusing on the frequency of their use. The findings from the chi-square analysis ($\chi 2$ (3) = 60.27, $p < .005$) confirm the presence of significant differences in the use of speech act strategies between Iranian L2 and L3 EFL learners. The effect size, as measured by Cramer's V (.123, $p < .005$), underscores the substantial impact of these differences, highlighting a notable disparity in the strategic speech act language use patterns between Iranian L2 and L3 learners.

Table 2

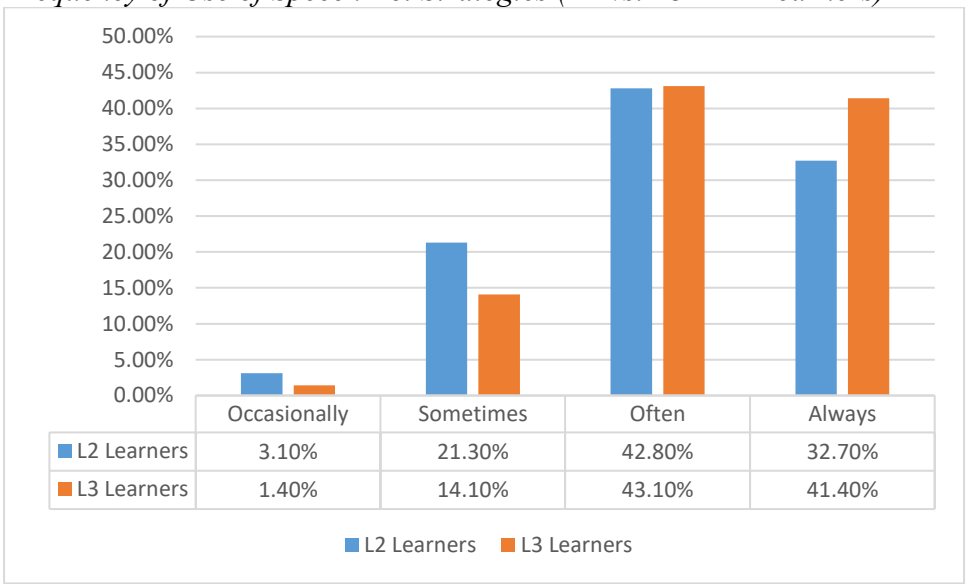
Chi-Square Tests for Frequency of Use of Speech Act Strategies (L2 vs. L3 EFL Learners)

	Value	Degree of freedom	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	60.276	3	.000
Likelihood Ratio	59.146	3	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	57.297	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	4000		
Cramer's V	.123		.000

Figure 1 visually represents the findings on frequency of speech act strategy use between L2 and L3 learners.

Figure 1

Frequency of Use of Speech Act Strategies (L2 vs. L3 EFL Learners)



	Occasionally	Sometimes	Often	Always
L2 Learners	3.10%	21.30%	42.80%	32.70%
L3 Learners	1.40%	14.10%	43.10%	41.40%

The second part of the study's initial inquiry focused on discerning potential variations in the application of speech act strategies among Iranian L2 and L3 language learners, specifically concerning their perceived feeling of achievement. To address this query, the participants were asked to evaluate their satisfaction with employing these strategies through a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire, ranging from "no success" to "great success." Descriptive statistics for the sense of success in utilizing speech act strategies are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics for Sense of Success at Using of Speech Act Strategies (L2 vs. L3 Learners)

		Sense of Success					Total
		No Success	Little Success	Some Success	Success	Great Success	
L2 learners	Count	1	41	335	652	411	1440
	%	0.1%	2.8%	23.3%	45.3%	28.5%	100.0%
	Std. Residual	-.1	2.5	5.8	.9	-5.5	
L3 learners	Count	2	36	343	1097	1082	2560
	%	0.1%	1.4%	13.4%	42.9%	42.3%	100.0%
	Std. Residual	.1	-1.9	-4.4	-.7	4.1	
Total	Count	3	77	678	1749	1493	4000
	%	0.1%	1.9%	17.0%	43.7%	37.3%	100.0%

Insights from Table 3 reveal that a notable proportion of L3learners (42.3%) reported achieving *great success*, accompanied by a standard residual of 4.1, exceeding the threshold of 1.96, indicating statistical significance. Conversely, L2 learners represented a slightly lower percentage (28.5%), with a standard residual of -5.5, also surpassing the -1.96 threshold, highlighting a significant difference in this aspect between the two groups. Interestingly, both groups demonstrated a similar tendency towards claiming successful usage of speech act strategies, albeit with a slight edge towards L2 learners (45.3% vs. 42.9%).

Further examination of Table 3 shows that L2 learners (23.3%) were more likely to report *some success* compared to L3 learners (13.4%), with corresponding standard residuals that exceed the respective thresholds, underscoring the statistical significance of this difference. Additionally, a minimal percentage of both groups (L2s at 2.8%, L3s at 1.4%) acknowledged having *little success*, with the difference between the two groups being statistically significant. Remarkably, both groups nearly identically reported *no success* in using speech act strategies, with negligible differences between them. In summary, the findings suggest that Iranian L3 learners perceive themselves as having achieved *greater success* and *success* in employing speech act strategies compared to their L2 peers. However, L2 learners reported experiencing *some success* and *little success* more frequently than their L3 counterparts.

A chi-square analysis (crosstabs) was conducted to explore any substantial differences in the sense of success between the two groups regarding the use of speech act strategies (Table 4). The results of the chi-square analysis ($\chi 2$ (4) = 110.61, $p < .005$) confirmed the presence of

significant differences between Iranian L2 and L3 language learners' perceptions of success in using speech act strategies. The Cramer's V coefficient (.166, $p < .005$) further emphasized the magnitude of these differences, indicating a considerable effect size.

Table 4

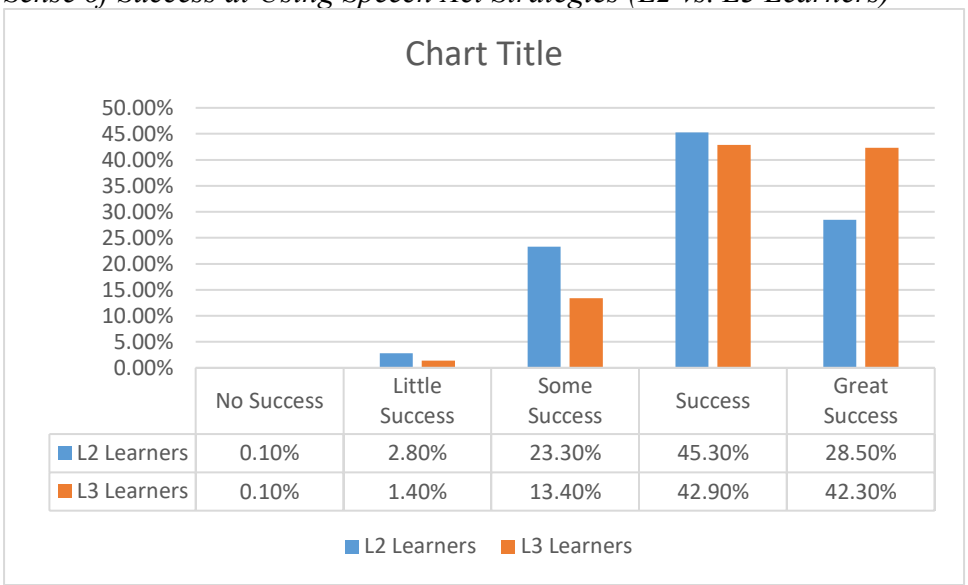
Chi-Square Tests for Sense of Success When Using Speech Act Strategies (L2 vs. L3 Learners)

	Value	Degree of freedom	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	110.614	4	.000
Likelihood Ratio	110.046	4	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	107.406	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	4000		
Cramer's V	.166		.000

Figure 2 summarizes the results discussed above and depicts them graphically.

Figure 2

Sense of Success at Using Speech Act Strategies (L2 vs. L3 Learners)



The second research question concentrated on L3 participants, specifically aiming to discern if there were notable differences between Azeri and Arab respondents regarding their utilization of speech act strategies, both in terms of frequency of use and sense of success.

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics for Frequency of Use of Speech Act Strategies (L3 EFL Learners)

		Frequency of Use				Total
		Occasionally	Sometimes	Often	Always	
Arab	Count	20	149	516	475	1160
	%	1.7%	12.8%	44.5%	40.9%	100.0%
	Std. Residual	.9	-1.1	.7	-.2	
Azeri	Count	16	212	588	584	1400
	%	1.1%	15.1%	42.0%	41.7%	100.0%
	Std. Residual	-.8	1.0	-.6	.2	
Total	Count	36	361	1104	1059	2560
	%	1.4%	14.1%	43.1%	41.4%	100.0%

Table 5 presents the frequency counts, percentages, and standardized residuals (Std. Residual) for the usage patterns of speech act strategies among Azeri and Arab L3 learners of English. Notably, none of the standardized residuals exceeded the threshold of +/- 1.96, indicating that there were no substantial differences in how frequently these two groups employed speech act strategies.

The findings indicated that both Arab L3 learners (41.7%, with a Std. Residual of.2, which is less than 1.96) and Azeri L3 learners (40.9%, with a Std. Residual of -.2, which is less than -1.96) reported using speech act strategies consistently. Similarly, the rates at which both groups *often* utilized these strategies did not differ significantly: 44.5% versus 42% (with corresponding Std. Residuals of.7 versus -.6). Additionally, when examining the *sometimes* use of speech act strategies, there were no significant differences between the two groups, with Arabic-speaking participants reporting a rate of 12.8% (Std. Residual = -1.1) and Azeri students at 15.1% (Std. Residual = 1), closely mirroring each other's usage patterns.

Further analysis through a chi-square test (cross-tabulations) was conducted to investigate potential differences in the frequency of speech act strategy use among Iranian L3 learners (Table 6). The outcomes of this chi-square test ($\chi 2$ (3) = 4.89, $p > .05$) confirmed that there were no significant differences in the use of speech act strategies based on the trilingual background of the participants (Azeri vs. Arab). This lack of significance was further supported by the Cramer's V value (.044, $p > .05$), suggesting a minimal effect size, thus reinforcing the conclusion that the frequency of speech act strategy use does not vary significantly between Azeri and Arab trilingual language learners.

Table 6

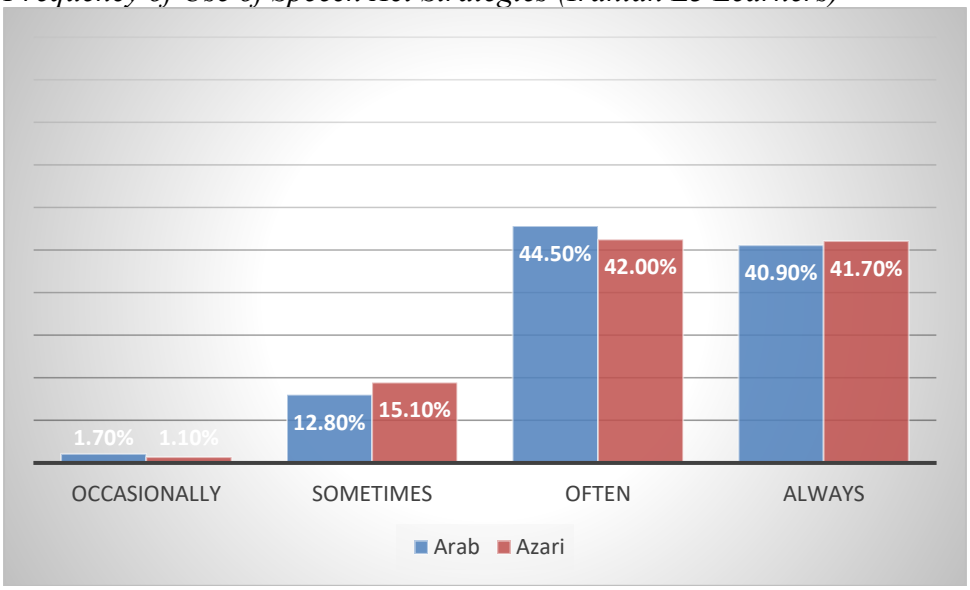
Chi-Square Tests for Frequency of Use of Speech Act Strategy (Iranian L3 Learners)

	Value	Degree of freedom	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	4.897	3	.180
Likelihood Ratio	4.901	3	.179
Linear-by-Linear Association	.016	1	.900
N of Valid Cases	2560		
Cramer's V	.044		.180

Figure 3 below displays differences between Azeri and Arab L3 learners in terms of frequency of use of speech act strategies.

Figure 3

Frequency of Use of Speech Act Strategies (Iranian L3 Learners)



The second part of the study's second research question focused on evaluating the L3 participants' sense of achievement at using speech act strategies. Table 7 presents detailed statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and standard residuals, for both Azeri and Arab L3 learners.

Table 7

Frequencies, Percentages and Std. Residuals for Azeri and Arab Respondents' Feeling of Achievement at Using Speech Act Strategies

		Sense of Success					Total
		No Success	Little Success	Some Success	Success	Great Success	
Arab	Count	1	19	148	508	484	1160
	%	0.1%	1.6%	12.8%	43.8%	41.7%	100.0%
	Std. Residual	.1	.7	-.6	.5	-.3	
Azeri	Count	1	17	195	589	598	1400
	%	0.1%	1.2%	13.9%	42.1%	42.7%	100.0%
	Std. Residual	-.1	-.6	.5	-.4	.3	
Total	Count	2	36	343	1097	1082	2560
	%	0.1%	1.4%	13.4%	42.9%	42.3%	100.0%

Upon analyzing the data presented in Table 7, it becomes evident that Iranian Arab L3 learners (41.7%, Std. Residual = -.3) and Azeri L3 learners (42.7%, Std. Residual =.3) reported nearly identical levels of confidence in their ability to successfully utilize speech act strategies. This similarity extends to their perceptions of moderate success (Arabs = 43.8%, Std. Residual =.5 vs. Azeri = 42.1%, Std. Residual = -.4), limited success (Arabs = 1.6%, Std. Residual =.7 vs. Azeri = 1.2%, Std. Residual = -.6), and instances of no success (Arabs =.1%, Std. Residual =.1 vs. Azeri =.1%, Std. Residual = -.1). In summary, both groups of Iranian L3 learners exhibit remarkably comparable levels of self-reported success in applying speech act strategies. To further explore potential differences in their perceptions of achievement, a chi-square test (cross-tabulation) was conducted, as outlined in Table 8.

The outcomes of the chi-square analysis ($\chi 2$ (4) = 2.06, $p > .05$) revealed no statistically significant disparities in the sense of accomplishment between the two L3 language learner groups. Additionally, the Cramer's V statistic (.028, $p > .05$) suggested a negligible effect size, reinforcing the conclusion that there are no substantial differences in how Iranian L3 learners perceive their success in using speech act strategies.

Table 8

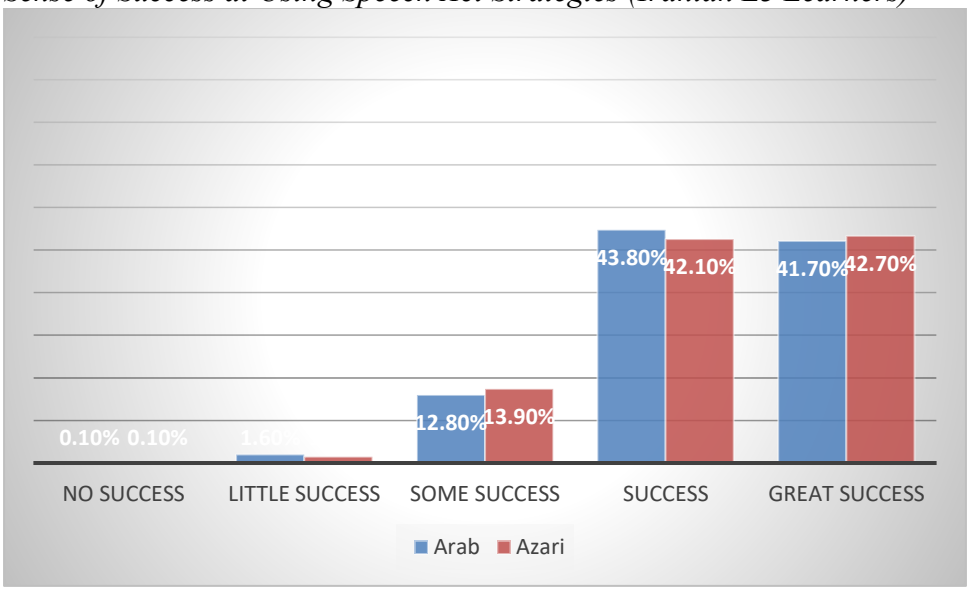
Chi-Square Tests for Sense of Success at Using Speech Act Strategies (Iranian L3 Learners)

	Value	Degree of freedom	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	2.061	4	.724
Likelihood Ratio	2.058	4	.725
Linear-by-Linear Association	.058	1	.810
N of Valid Cases	2560		
Cramer's V	.028		.724

Figure 4 displays differences between Azeri and Arab L3 learners in terms of sense of success at using speech act strategies.

Figure 4

Sense of Success at Using Speech Act Strategies (Iranian L3 Learners)



4.2. Discussion

This study explored the usage frequency and perceived effectiveness of speech act strategies among Iranian English learners, including both L2 and L3 learners of English (Azeri/Persian and Arab/Persian). The results confirm that L3 learners exhibited both a higher rate of strategy use and a stronger sense of success in employing these strategies compared to L2 learners. This aligns with existing literature suggesting that multilingual individuals often possess enhanced metalinguistic awareness and cognitive flexibility, which may facilitate more effective communication strategies in L2 contexts (e.g.,

D'Angelo, 2021; Huang, 2018; Kroll & Bialystok, 2013; Kuo & Kim, 2014; Mohammad Hosseinpur & Bagheri Nevisi, 2017; Torregrossa et al., 2023). This finding underscores the importance of considering multilingual learners' unique linguistic profiles when designing language education policies and curricula.

More specifically, previous research suggests that bilingualism and multilingualism can enhance pragmatic competence, including proficiency in performing speech acts (e.g., Félix-Brasdefer, 2021; Kecskes, 2015; Walters, 2014). It seems that the observed advantage of L3 learners in speech act strategy use stems from a combination of factors, including enhanced metacognitive awareness, cognitive benefits, exposure to different language structures, enriched multicultural experiences, strategic learning advantages, and increased linguistic intelligence. These factors collectively equip multilingual individuals with a broader repertoire of tools and strategies for effective communication.

Multilingual individuals often exhibit higher metacognitive awareness compared to bilinguals. This heightened awareness could lead to more effective strategic planning and execution in various communicative contexts, including speech act strategies (Kecskes, 2015). Research indicates that bilingualism/multilingualism can confer cognitive advantages, such as improved memory, executive function, and problem-solving skills. These benefits could potentially enhance the ability to employ speech act strategies effectively (Arabmofrad et al., 2020; Kecskes, 2015; Moghtadi et al., 2015).

Multilinguals are exposed to the grammatical and structural nuances of some languages, which can foster a deeper understanding of language mechanisms. This exposure might enable multilinguals to apply more sophisticated speech act strategies than their monolingual or bilingual counterparts (Kroll & Bialystok, 2013; Moghtadi, et al. 2015). Moreover, studies have shown that bilinguals/multilinguals tend to outperform monolinguals in certain learning tasks, possibly due to their ability to draw upon strategies learned in one language when applying them in another. This transferable skill set could extend to the use of speech act strategies (Moghtadi et al., 2015).

Another possible justification for the outperformance of the multilingualism in terms of the frequency of use and sense of success of speech act strategies could be related to multilinguals' richer multicultural experience, which can enhance creativity and flexibility in thinking. These qualities could contribute to the ability to navigate complex social interactions and employ a wider range of speech act strategies (Arabmofrad et al., 2020; Walters, 2014; Xia & Haas, 2024). Finally, it could be claimed that bilingualism/multilingualism is associated with increased linguistic intelligence, which encompasses the ability to understand and use languages

flexibly and creatively. Enhanced linguistic intelligence could facilitate the use of speech act strategies (Fayyazi et al., 2017; Moghtadi et al., 2015).

However, the absence of statistically significant differences between Azeri/Persian and Arab/Persian trilingual learners in speech act strategy application challenges the assumption that L1-to-L2 cross-linguistic influence follows a linear trajectory, suggesting instead that multilingual proficiency dynamics may be more complex than previously conceptualized (e.g., Diaubalick et al., 2023; M. Zhang, 2018; Yamashita & Jiang, 2010), and highlights the complexity of bilingual/multilingual language acquisition processes. It raises questions about the specific features of these languages and their impact on bilingual/multilingual learners' strategic language use. Further research could explore the linguistic and cultural characteristics of Azeri, Arabic, and Persian that might contribute to similar patterns of speech act strategy use among bilingual/multilingual learners.

The absence of a significant difference in speech act strategy use between the L3 groups could be attributed to several factors. One possibility is that the specific languages involved (Azeri and Arabic) share similar pragmatic features with Persian, leading to a similar level of transfer to English. Since both Azeri and Arabic are spoken in Iran, and their speakers share Persian as a second language, they might have some structural or functional overlap in terms of speech acts. This overlap could lead to similar strategic approaches when using speech act strategies in a new language. Future research with larger sample sizes and a wider range of bilingual language combinations could provide further insights. Similar proficiency levels of both groups might have been another reason (Poorebrahim, 2020). This similarity in proficiency could lead to comparable strategies in using speech acts, as both groups face similar challenges and opportunities in communication.

Shared sociolinguistic and cultural environment might be another justification. The participants from both groups likely share similar social norms and cultural expectations regarding communication. This shared environment might influence their use of speech act strategies in a similar way, regardless of their first language. In the same vein, they share linguistic features that might influence their approach to speech acts. For instance, the presence of similar phonemes across these languages could affect how they perceive and produce speech acts, leading to convergent strategies despite their different first languages (Arabmofrad, 2020). The finding emphasizes the importance of considering the sociolinguistic context when studying bilingualism/multilingualism and speech act strategy use. Shared environments might influence communication strategies.

Finally, one can refer to the educational policies and practices in Iran. The educational system in Iran uses the same textbooks across the country, regardless of the students' background languages. This uniform approach

might standardize the exposure and teaching methods for speech acts, reducing the impact of bilingualism/multilingualism on strategy use. It suggests that the educational environment could play a significant role in shaping bilingual/multilingual students' communicative strategies (Poorebrahim, 2020).

5. Conclusion and Implications

This research sheds light on how speech act strategies are applied and perceived in terms of effectiveness among Iranian learners of English, highlighting distinctions between L2 learners of English and their L3 counterparts (Azeri/Persian and Arab/Persian). The primary finding indicates that L3 learners exhibit a higher frequency of use and a stronger sense of success in employing these strategies compared to their L2 counterparts. This outcome aligns with the broader literature suggesting that bilingualism/multilingualism can offer cognitive advantages, including enhanced metalinguistic awareness and flexibility in language use. However, the observation that there were no significant differences between the two L3 groups implies that the influence of the first language on second language proficiency may not be as straightforward as previously assumed. This finding underscores the complexity of bilingual/multilingual language acquisition and suggests that other factors, such as individual learning strategies, exposure to English, and cultural contexts, may play equally important roles in shaping L2 proficiency.

This study's implications extend beyond the realm of language acquisition, offering insights relevant to educational policies and practices in bilingual settings. The findings suggest that educators should consider the multifaceted nature of bilingualism/multilingualism and its potential benefits for language learning. By recognizing and capitalizing on the strengths of bilingual/multilingual students, educators can design more inclusive and effective learning environments that address the diverse needs of multilingual learners. Given the growing diversity of student populations in many educational contexts, understanding how different language backgrounds influence L2 learning is crucial. The study's findings suggest that bilingual/multilingual students possess the potential to excel in using complex speech acts, which should encourage educators to consider bilingual/multilingual students' strengths in language instruction. Moreover, the lack of significant differences between L3 groups underscores the need for flexible and adaptable teaching approaches that accommodate the diverse linguistic backgrounds of learners.

While this study contributes some insights, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. The sample size was limited to Iranian EFL learners and may not fully represent the diversity within bilingual/multilingual

populations. Additionally, the study was built upon self-reported data through the speech act strategy inventory and focused solely on participants' linguistic background, excluding other factors. Future research could benefit from expanding the scope of the research and exploring the impact of other factors such as proficiency level, motivation, age, socioeconomic status, sociolinguistic context and exposure to English-speaking environments on speech act strategy use.

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