

## Investigating (Im)politeness in online forums between English speakers and English as a foreign language learners

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### Abstract

This study investigated the use of (im)politeness and disagreement in online discussion forums among English speakers and English as a foreign language (EFL) learners. It also explored how internet forum browsers judge (im)politeness and parameters of relational work ((in)appropriateness and negatively/positively marked behaviour) in disagreement. Three hundred and sixty disagreement responses were analysed following a list of disagreement strategies. The most frequent strategy applied by English speakers was 'making scornful and humiliating statements', while EFL learners used 'showing unmitigated disagreement' and 'showing smileys' as the highest and lowest ones. Most of the strategies used by English speakers were judged as polite and appropriate, but neither negatively nor positively marked, while 13 types of EFL strategies were considered as polite, but neither appropriate and positively marked nor inappropriate and negatively marked. Further, the three parameters had positive relationships with one another. This study provides worthwhile information for improving teaching communication skills in EFL courses.

**Keywords:** (Im)Politeness, disagreement, English as a foreign language learners, interactional and discursive approach, online forum

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## 1. Introduction

The invention of computers and communication technologies has completely changed communications and developed forms of group work. People have been more encouraged to use computer networks owing to decreasing costs, increasing accessibility of information, and exchanging documents, databases and messages very quickly (Siegel, Dubrovsky, Kiesler, & McGuire, 1986). In this way, the communication is established beyond time and space (Iivonen, Sonnenwald, Parma, & Poole-Kober, 1998).

People always make friends in online chat rooms, do business through email, search information and even play online games with people who live in another part of the world. Learning how to use the technology and handle different cultures can be the biggest challenge (Grosse, 2002). The growing and promoting of internet activities have significantly affected today's world. This form of communication is called computer-mediated communication (CMC).

Among the various online communication methods, discussing in internet forums as one of the most popular methods of cyber-space has currently enabled people from different locations to debate to each other across space and time. Discussion forums have gained popularity as a system and increase individuals' relationships in the online environment. Unlike text, audio and video conferencing, the discussion forum as an asynchronous technology does not require all participants to be online simultaneously. Bullen (1998) and Thorpe (1998) explained how CMC and specifically discussion forums can promote interactions in groups. Furthermore, discussion forums enhance interaction and discussion between participants and also can build learning societies (Garrison, 1993).

In every society, competent adult members learn how to behave, politely, appropriately, linguistically and otherwise. Therefore, politeness is not an instinctive humankind property. To apply any form of politeness to the methods of online communication, one must first recognise the insufficiencies that are linked to the model of politeness theory. Politeness theory is a strong system that categorises and predicts speech acts and responses. However, applying its methodology is problematic. Grainger (2011) divided the development of politeness theory into three waves.

The classic view of politeness or the Gricean approach is the first wave. The politeness model of Brown and Levinson (1987) and the Politeness Principle of Leech (1983) is seen as a milestone in the study of politeness in the first wave (Shum & Lee, 2013). Brown and Levinson have offered the first systematic politeness theory based on their observation of similarities in the linguistic strategies used by people with different language backgrounds. This theory takes into account the notion of face. The concept of face is first introduced by Goffman in 1967. Goffman (1967) defined face as an image 'pieced together from the expressive implications of the full flow of events in an undertaking' (p. 31). In this case, face does not reside in individual but is negotiated in the flow of communicative events.

The second wave of politeness theory is the discursive approach to politeness as a postmodern view starting with the work of Watts (1992). The discursive approach has been developed in the last decade (Locher, 2004; Locher & Watts, 2005; Watts, 2003). Locher (2006) proposed that the researchers' 'knowledge of prefabricated inherent linguistic devices' and their assessment with little consideration of contextual factors can determine the (in) appropriateness of language use (p. 249). This approach 'questions all concepts and evaluations and is skeptical of all overarching theories that attempt to generalise or universalise' (Mills, 2011, p. 28). The discursive approach distinguishes synchronic and diachronic variations in behaviour and perception as being part of specific contexts and social practices (Zhu, 2014). It also proposes that (im)politeness should be investigated in relation to the concept of relational work. The relational work is not taken into account as oriented to the preservation of harmony, cooperation and social equilibrium (Locher & Watts, 2005). It is a framework that includes impolite, polite or merely appropriate behaviour.

The third wave is the interactional approach which is based on the coconstituting model of communication (Arundale, 1999; 2006). In this approach, (im)politeness achieves in a collaborative manner through interaction by participants (Haugh, 2007). The sociological aspect is the core of this approach. The interactional approach illustrates how the communicative goals are organised sociologically in the interactional area, rather than in the heads of the speakers. The analysis is defective because it tells that one of the conversational management strategies is off-record indirectness, but it does not tell us why. In other words, we cannot recognise whether indirectness is polite in the first-order sense or not (Shum & Lee, 2013).

The interactional approach cannot be compared with neither Gricean approach nor the postmodern approach, although it admits both of these approaches in interpretation of (im)politeness (Grainger, 2011). Haugh (2007) declared that the interactional approach provides an obvious method to analyse (im)politeness when it is in contrast with the discursive approach. The interactional approach focuses on how (im)politeness is constructed within participants' interaction, while the discursive approach is paid more attention to interlocutors' judgement and interpretation of (im)politeness (Haugh, 2007).

Today, the most recent studies tend to investigate politeness based on a postmodern perspective (e.g., Abuseileek & Qatawneh, 2013; Behnam & Niroomand, 2011; Samar, Abaszadeh, & Pormohamadi, 2013; Guarda, 2012). In these researches, the postmodern approach lives up to social norms, practices and experiences that interactants have obtained. As for interactants' needs arising in interactions, they will adjust their politic behaviour.

Abuseileek and Qatawneh (2013) explored the effects of synchronous and asynchronous CMC oral discussion on question types and strategies used by EFL learners. The study concluded that students who used the asynchronous CMC mode produced remarkably more discourse functions regarding question types and strategies than students in the synchronous group. It was also noticed that the asynchronous CMC mode stimulated learners to ask a series of questions which support long answers and search more details by examples, clarification and extension, whereas, the question types and strategies based on the short answers are supported by the synchronous CMC mode.

Samar, Abaszadeh and Pormohamadi (2013) investigated the expression of disagreement by Iranian advanced English learners. They collected the data from the recorded discussion of 26 males and females interlocutors in three different settings: Language institute, home environment and university setting. The results pointed to the influence of contextual factors. Moreover, the various factors, namely, the interlocutors' power, relationships, background and the situational context affected their realisation as face-threatening or face-enhancing speech acts.

Guarda (2012) tested the language used by a group of Italian advanced EFL learners participated in a private online discussion forum with a group of American university students. All the contributions to the online debate were explored. In this work, both groups used linguistic patterns and pragmatic strategies not only to express personal visibility in the discussion but also to show agreement and disagreement. The findings of corpus observation were finally used to design corpus-based exercises.

As Behnam and Niroomand (2011) said, the speech acts of disagreement receives the least attention in the field of pragmatics. They tried to find out the ways power relations influence politeness strategies in disagreement provided by Iranian EFL learners in a university setting, across different proficiency levels (intermediate and upper-intermediate). The findings revealed the relationships between the learners' level of language proficiency and the type and frequency of disagreement and the selection of politeness strategies.

Although (im)politeness and disagreement have been investigated in many empirical studies, it seems that little research has been carried out on the rules of these variables in online interactions. Another problem relates to English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' ability to discuss online.

Some of the problems that EFL learners face in online communication may root in their lack of knowledge about the second language (i.e., English). Kasper (1992) indicated that learners regularly perform speech act such as requests, apologies and refusals according to the sociolinguistic norms of their native language.

Hence, this study attempts to scrutinise the use of (im)politeness and disagreement in online discussion among English speakers and EFL learners. The notion of disagreement to intercultural communication is significant because expressing disagreement, which is not avoidable in everyday interactions, may destroy the relationship between the interlocutors and this destruction can be decreased by the use of politeness strategies (Locher, 2004).

To conduct a comprehensive analysis of (im)politeness and disagreement, this study attempts to explore the following research questions:

- 1) Is there any difference between English speakers and EFL learners in terms of disagreement strategies when they discuss in online internet forums?
- 2) What disagreement strategies do English speakers and EFL learners use in their disagreement comments when they discuss in an online internet forum?
- 3) How do English and EFL browsers of internet forum judge (im)politeness and the other two parameters of relational work (i.e., (in)appropriateness and negatively/positively marked behaviour) in disagreement?
- 4) What is the relationship between the three parameters of relational work in English speakers and EFL learners' disagreement comments?

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Data

The data consisted of a total of 360 comments showing disagreement on 12 different topics by English speakers and EFL learners in two popular internet discussion forums, namely 'Hammihan' and 'Gaiaonline'. These internet forums were selected based on the monthly ranking list published by Wikipedia website. While three topics, namely 'living together before the marriage', 'polygamy for men should be legal' and 'husbands and wives should be at the same educational level' were chosen by the researcher to motivate the EFL learners to discuss, nine other topics that had successfully attracted English speakers were chosen from Gaiaonline forum. Some topics are more controversial than others based on their comments in two different online discussion forums. Tables 1 and 2 illustrate all topics along with the number of comments and the most and the least ones in two forums

**Table 1. The list of topics with the number of comments by each group**

Topics	The number of comments	The number of comments (percent)
	(percent) by English speakers	by EFL learners
women are less intelligent than men	49 (11.34)	54 (16.36)
Electronics should be allowed in schools	42 (9.71)	58 (17.58)
Husbands and wives should be at the same Educational level	17 (3.95)	34 (10.30)
Girls are only going to marry smart	65 (15.05)	6 (1.81)
Parents should beat their children for their Misbehaviours	25 (5.78)	24 (7.28)

Men are more gossips than women	25 (5.78)	46 (13.95)
Husbands can beat their wives	69 (15.97)	18 (5.45)
Having a big family is better than having only one child	25 (5.78)	16 (4.85)
Changing women's last names after their marriage	68 (15.77)	8 (2.42)
Girls and boys should live together before their marriage	0 (0)	40 (12.13)
Polygamy for men should be legal	31 (7.17)	12 (3.63)
The boy's nose surgery	16 (3.70)	14 (4.24)

**Table 2. Most and least controversial topics in the two online discussion forums**

Forum	Post types	Post topic	Number of comments (percent)
Gaiaonline (Posted to English speakers)	Least controversial	The boy's nose surgery	16 (3.70)
	Most controversial	Husbands can beat their wives	69 (15.97)
Gaiaonline (Posted to EFL learners)	Least controversial	Girls are only going to marry smart	6 (1.81)
	Most controversial	Electronics should be allowed in schools	58 (17.58)

## 2.2. Participants

In this study, 132 English and 110 EFL internet forum users, both male and female participated to comment on different topics posted on the English forum. The researcher asked M.A students of Islamic Azad University of Ahvaz who were studying in the third semester of English Language Teaching to sign up to the English forum and participate in the English discussions. Each group of participants comprised two different groups, 1) active participants who were involved in forum discussions (i.e., forum interlocutors) and 2) lay participants who visit online forums and browse discussion messages but may not give any responses (i.e., forum browsers). Forum interlocutors consisted of 72 English, and 50 Iranian EFL users, while each group of participants comprised 60 forum browsers.

### 2.3. Instruments

The online discussion forum was the first instrument for the two groups of participants. The list published by the Wikipedia Website showed that 'Gaiaonline' was very popular among various internet forums on the basis of their number of comments. Both groups of interlocutors commented on the controversial topics on Gaiaonline. A framework of disagreement strategies relating to CMC interactions based on Locher (2004), Culpeper (1996) and Bousfield (2008) was the second instrument. The list was used as a reference for the identification of disagreement strategies because it was not extremely complete (Appendix 1). Eight out of 22 disagreement strategies were found in the data. Those found are presented below.

1) Be disinterested: Person B is disinterested, unconcerned or unsympathetic about the issue or what Person A says (Culpeper, 1996).

(1) The topic is 'changing women's last name after their marriage'. One of the conversations between English speakers is as follows:

A: I would question how serious someone would be if they did not want everyone in the family to have the same family name...

B: To me, the last name is the last name. No difference! Why you ask such a stupid question?

2) Use taboo words: Person B uses the vulgar words when s/he disagrees with Person A (Culpeper, 1996) such as swear words and the use of abusive or profane language (Bousfield, 2008; Culpeper, 1996).

(2) The topic is 'girls are only going to marry smart'. One of the conversations between English speakers is as follows:

A: Most girls are fucking retarded and smart guys would not marry idiots.

B: Piss off.

3) Condescend, scorn, mock or ridicule: Person B shows that what Person A thinks is stupid, unreasonable or not worth accepting and emphasises his/her relative power (Culpeper, 1996).

(3) The topic is 'women are less intelligent than men'. One of the conversations between EFL learners is as follows:

A: Yes, I agree. Women are dumb.

B: Actually men especially boys, are so stupid!!!

4) Explicitly associate the other with a negative aspect: Person B makes comments on an issue prominently in a comparatively negative tone. S/he states what s/he thinks to be the right thing to do and proceeds to accuse Person A, or makes a comparison with what they think is the wrong doing of Person A in a personalised way, using the pronouns of 'I' and 'You/Your' (Bousfield, 2008; Culpeper, 1996).

(4) The topic is 'big family versus an only one child'. One of the conversations between English speakers is as follows:

A: I wanna have a big family someday. I do not care about being selfish for adding like six more kids to the population.

B: Do not have a bunch of kids and then drain the government's money.

5) Criticise: Person B disagrees by dispraising, expressing his/her disapproval of someone or something or talking about their faults (Bousfield, 2008).

(5) The topic is 'electronics should be allowed in schools'. One of the conversations between EFL learners is as follows:

A: Yes. It can motivate students.

B: But Iranians use these things in a bad and not appropriate way. It takes a huge time to become aware of the fact...

6) Hedges: Person B uses hedges to mitigate disagreement such as sort of, maybe and probably. S/he uses hedges as a means to hesitate, to comment on what is in Person A's mind, or to abbreviate information (Locher, 2004).

(6) The topic is 'men are more intelligent than women'. One of the conversations between EFL learners speakers is as follows:

A: Do you agree men are so stupid????

B: I don't think so...maybe they have better concentration!!!!

7) Unmitigated disagreement: Person B uses unmitigated disagreement when it is more important to defend his/her view, or there is a wish to be rude, disruptive or hurtful (Locher, 2004).

(7) The topic is 'parents should beat their children for their misbehaviours'. One of the conversations between EFL learners is as follows:

A: In some cases, it may work...

B: No no no... not at all.

8) Objections in the form of a question: Person B disagrees in the form of question such as a negative tag question or a question using negative interrogatives or another kind of question. The question displays a very clear opposite view (Locher, 2004).

(8) The topic is 'husbands and wives should be at the same educational level'. One of the conversations between EFL learners is as follows:

A: It helps them understand each other better.

B: I totally disagree. Most of the high educated people have no insight at all...hahaha. How can they understand each other while there is no understanding?

In addition, nine new strategies were added to the list during the corpora analysis such as:

9) Using contrary opinions

The topic is 'husbands and wives should be at the same educational level'. One of the conversations between EFL learners is as follows:

A: It could be best if both people in a relationship have the same educational level because the other one does not feel superior over another. Depression can result because of this.

B: There are more important things than degrees. The same educational level helps them to have closer points of view toward life, but it is not like they cannot get along well with different degrees.

10) Giving positive statements

The topic is 'polygamy for men should be legal'. One of the conversations between EFL learners is as follows:

A: It is usual for men...

B: Oh God!!! It is a dirty word. These kinds of men I mean who like this are sick.

11) Giving personal experience

The topic is 'changing women's last name after their marriage'. One of the conversations between English speakers is as follows:

A: I got married on the 31<sup>st</sup> of October and am currently in the process of changing my last name. I have my marriage certificate sitting at the courthouse waiting for me...

B: I'm still not sure what I'd want to do. I don't really have strong feelings on it. Last name is the last name, so what is the fucking issue u discuss!

12) Giving negative comments

The topic is 'men are more gossips than women'. One of the conversations between English speakers is as follows:

A: I totally agree☹

B: A man's nature does not agree to do gossip.

#### 13) Using smileys

The topic is 'electronics should be allowed at schools'. One of the conversations between EFL learners is as follows:

A: I agree. Students should definitely be able to use their phones during the class.

B:

#### 14) Giving facts

The topic is 'husbands and wives should be at the same educational level'. One of the conversations between EFL learners is as follows:

A: I think the difference is not important...

B: Men's educational degree should be higher...the overall share of couples of similar education levels is down from nearly 80% in 1960 to about 60% in 2012.

#### 15) Utilizing interjections

The topic is 'men are more gossips than women'. One of the conversations between English speakers is as follows:

A: My husband gossips more than I do...It's funny.

B: Gosh... It's not funny at all!!!!

#### 16) Using the word 'if'

The topic is 'girls and boys should live together before their marriage'. One of the conversations between EFL learners is as follows:

A: Good point. Any volunteer?

B: Cohabitation before marriage is a good way for knowing each other if our culture allowed!!!!

#### 17) Using the word 'unless'

The topic is 'the boy's nose surgery'. One of the conversations between English speakers is as follows:

A: I like big noses on men tho.

B: Why? How can you watch such a person?

A: For the most I don't really get the need to have cosmetic surgery, unless it is to correct a defect.

The last instrument was two questionnaires developed based on some instances of the identified disagreement strategies in the comments. They were administered to the browsers of the internet discussion forums. They were asked to find out how they evaluated the identified disagreement strategies, and how they rated them in the aspects of three parameters of (im)politeness, (in)appropriateness and negatively/positively marked behaviour. For each question, the researcher first asked if the browsers agreed that the response was a disagreement, and finally asked them to judge the disagreement strategies based on the three parameters mentioned above on a five-point Likert scale (Appendixes 2 & 3 for more details).

## 2.4. Procedure

To answer the research questions, a triangular method was used to find out (im)politeness and disagreement in English internet forum. First, 12 controversial topics were posted on Gaiaonline. Second, a list of disagreement strategies adopted from Locher (2004), Culpeper (1996) and Bousfield (2008) was prepared as a reference to identify disagreements from the forums interlocutors' interactions in the posts based on the interactional approach. During the analysis, some new strategies were also added. To check the feasibility of the framework, a pilot study was carried out.



The frequency of different types of identified disagreement strategies and the average length of words and clauses in disagreement responses were calculated in this step.

The two questionnaires for the two groups of participants were administered with reference to the discursive approach. Based on the parameters of relational work on a five-point Likert scale, the browsers of internet discussion forums evaluated and rated the identified disagreement strategies. Finally, the Spearman correlation test was used to analyse the correlations among the ratings of the three parameters.

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### 3.1. Comparison of disagreement comments between English speakers and EFL learners

After the separation of 360 disagreement comments from agreement ones; 142 comments for English speakers and 218 ones for EFL learners, different types of disagreement strategies were searched in the first step. Regarding the list of strategies, 15 types of disagreement strategies were found in English comments; however, EFL learners used 13 types of strategies. In the second step, the analysis of all the comments began according to the number of words and clauses, their average length in one comment and disagreement density. All the results along with the frequencies and percentages of each strategy in both groups are presented in the following tables.

**Table 3. The total number of words and clauses in English and EFL comments**

Corpus	Number of words	Number of clauses
English	7489	994
EFL	5890	902

**Table 4. The average length of words and clauses in English and EFL comments**

Corpus	The average length of words	the average length of clauses
English	52.73	7
EFL	27.01	4.13

**Table 5. The disagreement density per hundred words and clauses in English and EFL comments**

Corpus	Density of words	Density of clauses
English	2.53%	19.11%
EFL	4.99%	32.59%

As Table 3 reveals, English speakers appeared to discuss in longer comments. In the comparison between English and EFL corpora, Table 4 reveals that English speakers have longer sentences and comments when they discuss in internet forums, but EFL learners use shorter comments with shorter sentences. The last table manifests that EFL learners disagreed more about the 12 topics or the other participants' opinions on the internet forum unlike the English speakers (Table 5).

Concerning the disagreement strategies listed by Locher (2004), Culpeper (1996) and Bousfield (2008), various strategies with their frequencies and percentages in English and EFL corpora were identified.

**Table 6. Results for different types of disagreement strategies in English and EFL comments**

Types of disagreement	Frequencies (Percentages) in English comments (%)	Frequencies (Percentages) in EFL comments (%)
Making a critical statement	10 (5.2)	14 (4.7)
Using vulgar statements	19 (10)	0 (0)
Using hedge words/phrases	12 (6.3)	10 (3.4)
Raising rhetorical questions	8 (4.2)	40 (13.6)
Showing unmitigated disagreement	19 (10)	72 (24.4)
Giving negative aspect	20 (10.5)	10 (3.4)
Being disinterested	3 (1.5)	0 (0)
Making scornful and Humiliating Statements	23 (12.1)	28 (9.5)
Giving personal experience	22 (11.5)	0 (0)
Giving negative comments	17 (8.9)	20 (6.8)
Giving facts	14 (7.3)	8 (2.7)
Using the word 'unless'	5 (2.6)	0 (0)
Using contrary opinions	11 (5.7)	34 (11.5)
Utilizing interjections	5 (2.6)	10 (3.4)
Using smileys	2 (1)	4 (1.3)
Giving positive statements	0 (0)	24 (8.1)
Using the word 'If'	0 (0)	20 (6.8)
Overall Chi-square	0.0	

Compared to dispreferred responses, the EFL comments were remarkably shorter than English ones when they discussed the similar topics. It is worth mentioning that learners' level of language proficiency and type of disagreeing relate to each other (Behnam & Niroomand, 2011). They argue that high proficiency learners with their high linguistic competence apply worthy features more frequently than low proficiency learners. Regarding the disagreement comments in the internet forum, the simple linguistic features and short statements were included in learners' expressions of disagreement. Iranian EFL learners, compared to English speakers, applied more their L1 disagreement strategies (i.e., Persian); that is, they tended to employ more mitigation strategies and avoided to disagree directly to save their interlocutors' face (Bardovi-Harlig & Salsbury, 2004; Behnam & Niroomand, 2011; Dippold, 2011).

A closer look at the data reveals that Iranian EFL learners were mostly characterised by the absence of the surface features established for native-like language use. As shown in a number of disagreement types, learners in contrast to English speakers expressed their disagreements indirectly (implicitly), namely using mitigating devices and positive markers. Another point is that the face wants of the interlocutors are more important for EFL learners, unlike English speakers. They try to apply different politeness strategies to soften disagreements when they are discussing with one another. As Kasper (1996) points out, what affects the formation of learners' L2 is their knowledge of previously learned languages, their native languages and cultures. In other words, when learners used L1 speech act strategies which are not appropriate according to L2 setting, pragmatic transfer takes place.

### **3.2. English and EFL respondents' judgement on disagreement strategies**

The English questionnaire consisted of 15 questions showing each type of disagreement strategies obtained from the 12 topics in the English online forum. Only one scene represented each type of disagreement strategies. An overwhelming majority of the respondents judged the responses listed in

the questionnaire as disagreement strategies, except 4.23% of them. The frequency rates for each of the three parameters within the 15 types of disagreement strategies and the rating for each type of disagreement strategies based on the (im)politeness, (in)appropriateness and negatively/positively marked behaviour are presented in the following tables.

**Table 7. Total frequency rates by English speakers for the 15 types of disagreement strategies in (Im)politeness, (In)appropriateness and negatively/positively marked behaviour**

Rating	Frequency (percent)		
	(Im)politeness (%)	(In)appropriateness	Negatively/positively marked behaviour (%)
1	105 (11.67)	82 (9.12)	118 (13.11)
2	167 (18.56)	118 (13.12)	132 (14.67)
3	199 (22.10)	176 (19.56)	239 (26.56)
4	258 (28.67)	292 (32.44)	209 (23.21)
5	133 (14.77)	194 (21.53)	164 (18.22)
Invalid	38 (4.23)	38 (4.23)	38 (4.23)
Total	900 (100)	900 (100)	900 (100)

**Table 8. Frequency rates by English speakers for each type of disagreement strategy in (Im)politeness**

Frequency (Percent)/Strategy	Rating=1 Very impolite (%)	Rating=2 (%)	Rating=3 (%)	Rating=4 (%)	Rating=5 Very polite (%)	Invalid (%)
Giving Personal Experience	0 (0)	0 (0)	9 (15)	27 (45)	21 (35)	3 (5)
Giving facts	12 (20)	9 (15)	18 (30)	21 (35)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Raising rhetorical questions	3 (5)	3 (5)	5 (8.4)	31 (51.7)	9 (15)	9 (15)
Using the word unless	0 (0)	6 (10)	10 (16.7)	21 (35)	15 (25)	8 (13.4)
Using contrary opinions	3 (5)	7 (11.7)	14 (23.4)	21 (35)	15 (25)	0 (0)
Utilizing interjections	3 (5)	18 (30)	6 (10)	20 (33.4)	13 (21.7)	0 (0)
Giving negative aspect	5 (8.4)	8 (13.4)	22 (36.7)	22 (36.7)	3 (5)	0 (0)
Showing unmitigated Disagreement	6 (10)	12 (20)	23 (38.4)	19 (31.7)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Being disinterested	6 (10)	15 (25)	19 (31.7)	10 (16.7)	6 (10)	6 (10)
Using smileys	10 (16.7)	8 (13.4)	22 (36.7)	16 (26.7)	4 (6.7)	0 (0)
Giving negative comments	4 (6.7)	6 (10)	9 (15)	17 (28.4)	24 (40)	0 (0)
Using hedge words/Phrases	6 (10)	5 (8.4)	6 (10)	16 (26.7)	18 (30)	9 (15)
Using vulgar statement	24 (40)	20 (33.4)	16 (26.7)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Making scornful and humiliating statements	20 (33.4)	15 (25)	15 (25)	5 (8.3)	3 (5)	2 (3.4)
Making a critical	3 (5)	33 (55)	6 (10)	15 (25)	3 (5)	0 (0)

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statement

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**Table 9. Frequency rates by English speakers for each type of disagreement strategy in (In)appropriateness**

Frequency (percent)/Strategy	Rating=1 Very appropriate (%)	Rating=2 (%)	Rating=3 (%)	Rating=4 (%)	Rating=5 Very appropriate (%)	Invalid (%)
Making a critical statement	6 (10)	14 (23.4)	7 (11.7)	24 (40)	9 (15)	0 (0)
Giving personal experience	0 (0)	0 (0)	5 (8.4)	28 (46.7)	24 (40)	3 (5)
Giving facts	10 (16.7)	6 (10)	20 (33.4)	24 (40)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Raising rhetorical questions	3 (5)	3 (5)	11 (18.4)	18 (30)	16 (26.7)	9 (15)
Showing unmitigated disagreement	2 (3.4)	12 (20)	15 (25)	25 (41.7)	6 (10)	0 (0)
Giving negative aspect	3 (5)	6 (10)	18 (30)	28 (46.7)	5 (8.4)	0 (0)
Using the word unless	0 (0)	9 (15)	10 (16.7)	18 (30)	14 (23.4)	9 (15)
Utilizing interjections	0 (0)	13 (21.7)	8 (13.4)	21 (35)	18 (30)	0 (0)
Using smileys	10 (16.7)	6 (10)	16 (26.7)	22 (36.7)	6 (10)	0 (0)
Being disinterested	7 (11.7)	8 (13.4)	15 (25)	15 (25)	9 (15)	6 (10)
Giving negative comments	3 (5)	0 (0)	5 (8.4)	22 (36.7)	30 (50)	0 (0)
Using hedge words/Phrases	6 (10)	0 (0)	10 (16.7)	11 (18.4)	24 (40)	9 (15)
Using contrary opinions	0 (0)	7 (11.7)	15 (25)	15 (25)	23 (38.4)	0 (0)
Using vulgar statements	17 (28.4)	22 (36.7)	9 (15)	9 (15)	3 (5)	0 (0)
Making scornful and humiliating statements	16 (26.7)	13 (21.7)	10 (16.7)	14 (23.4)	5 (8.4)	2 (3.4)

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Table 10. Frequency rates by English speakers for each type of disagreement strategy in negatively/positively marked behaviour

Frequency (percent)/Strategy	Rating=1 Negatively marked (%)	Rating=2 (%)	Rating=3 (%)	Rating=4 (%)	Rating=5 positively marked (%)	Invalid (%)
Giving facts	14 (23.4)	10 (16.7)	18 (30)	15 (25)	3 (5)	0 (0)
Showing unmitigated disagreement	3 (5)	11 (18.4)	30 (50)	12 (20)	4 (6.7)	0 (0)
Using the word unless	0 (0)	0 (0)	22 (36.7)	14 (23.4)	15 (25)	9 (15)
Using contrary opinions	4 (6.7)	15 (25)	21 (35)	5 (8.4)	15 (25)	0 (0)
Utilising interjections	6 (10)	13 (21.7)	21 (35)	8 (13.4)	12 (20)	0 (0)
Using smileys	8 (13.4)	7 (11.7)	22 (36.7)	15 (25)	8 (13.4)	0 (0)
Giving negative aspect	2 (3.4)	15 (25)	18 (30)	18 (30)	7 (11.7)	0 (0)
Raising rhetorical questions	3 (5)	0 (0)	15 (25)	23 (38.4)	10 (16.7)	9 (15)
Being disinterested	9 (15)	11 (18.4)	9 (15)	18 (30)	7 (11.7)	6 (10)
Giving personal experience	0 (0)	0 (0)	19 (31.7)	24 (40)	14 (23.4)	3 (5)
Giving negative comments	3 (5)	3 (5)	7 (11.7)	19 (31.7)	30 (50)	0 (0)
Using hedge words/Phrases	0 (0)	9 (15)	9 (15)	11 (18.4)	22 (36.7)	9 (15)
Making a critical statement	18 (30)	9 (15)	5 (8.4)	15 (25)	13 (21.7)	0 (0)
Using vulgar statements	27 (45)	13 (21.7)	14 (23.4)	0 (0)	6 (10)	0 (0)

Making scornful and humiliating statements	20 (33.4)	15 (25)	10 (16.7)	10 (16.7)	3 (5)	2 (3.4)
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The majority of the respondents rated seven out of the 15 types of disagreement strategies as polite (rating=4) such as ‘giving personal experience’, ‘giving facts’, ‘raising rhetorical questions’, ‘giving negative aspect’ and ‘using the word unless’ (Table 8). Ten out of the 15 types of disagreement strategies were rated as appropriate (rating = 4) such as ‘making a critical statement’, ‘giving personal experience’, ‘giving facts’ and ‘raising rhetorical questions’, and the like, while three types of strategies were rated five as very appropriate (Table 9). The rating of three consisted of seven types of strategies which were considered as neither positive nor negative marked behaviour. Some of these strategies were ‘giving facts’, ‘showing unmitigated disagreement’, ‘using the word unless’, ‘using contrary opinions’ and so on (Table 10).

Thirteen questions representing each type of disagreement strategies were included in the EFL questionnaire. An overwhelming majority of the respondents agreed that the responses were disagreement strategies. Only 2.69% of the respondents did not agree. The tables below represent the total frequency rates and the total frequency rates for each of the three parameters by EFL learners.

Table 11. Total frequency rates by EFL learners for the 13 types of disagreement strategies in (Im)politeness, (In)appropriateness and negatively/positively marked behaviour

Rating	Frequency (Percent)		
	(Im)politeness (%)	(In)appropriateness	Negatively/Positively marked behaviour (%)
1	69 (8.84)	61 (7.83)	124 (15.89)
2	137 (17.56)	138 (17.69)	152 (19.48)
3	167 (21.42)	197 (25.26)	182 (23.35)
4	192 (24.62)	193 (24.74)	147 (18.85)
5	194 (24.87)	170 (21.79)	154 (19.74)
Invalid	21 (2.69)	21 (2.69)	21 (2.69)
Total	780 (100)	780 (100)	780 (100)

Table 12. Frequency rates by EFL learners for each type of disagreement strategy in (Im)politeness

Frequency (percent)/Strategy	Rating=1 Very impolite (%)	Rating=2 (%)	Rating=3 (%)	Rating=4 (%)	Rating=5 Very polite (%)	Invalid (%)
Giving negative comments	8 (13.4)	9 (15)	13 (21.7)	26 (43.4)	4 (6.7)	0 (0)
Making a critical statement	0 (0)	5 (8.4)	10 (16.7)	26 (43.4)	19 (31.7)	0 (0)
Using hedge words/Phrases	2 (3.4)	8 (13.4)	15 (25)	28 (46.7)	7 (11.7)	8 (13.4)

Using smileys	8 (13.4)	8 (13.4)	11 (18.4)	21 (35)	12 (20)	0 (0)
Raising rhetorical questions	6 (10)	14 (23.4)	18 (30)	13 (21.7)	5 (8.4)	4 (6.7)
Utilizing interjections	4 (6.7)	19 (31.7)	22 (36.7)	9 (15)	6 (10)	0 (0)
Giving negative aspect	7 (11.7)	14 (23.4)	20 (33.4)	14 (23.4)	2 (3.4)	3 (5)
Using contrary opinions	1 (1.7)	6 (10)	16 (26.7)	15 (25)	16 (26.7)	6 (10)
Using facts	1 (1.7)	2 (3.4)	11 (18.4)	12 (20)	34 (56.7)	0 (0)
Giving positive statements	5 (8.4)	8 (13.4)	10 (16.7)	11 (18.4)	26 (43.4)	0 (0)
Using the word if	2 (3.4)	3 (5)	9 (15)	12 (20)	34 (56.7)	0 (0)
Showing unmitigated disagreement	10 (16.7)	24 (40)	14 (23.4)	12 (20)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Making scornful and Humiliating statements	16 (26.7)	20 (33.4)	7 (11.7)	7 (11.7)	10 (16.7)	0 (0)

**Table 13. Frequency rates by EFL learners for each type of disagreement strategy in (In)appropriateness**

Frequency (percent)/Strategy	Rating=1 Very inappropriate (%)	Rating=2 (%)	Rating=3 (%)	Rating=4 (%)	Rating=5 Very appropriate (%)	Invalid (%)
using facts	3 (5)	4 (6.7)	14 (23.4)	15 (25)	24 (40)	0 (0)
Using hedge words/phrases	0 (0)	11 (18.4)	8 (13.4)	13 (21.7)	20 (33.4)	8 (13.4)
Giving positive statements	7 (11.7)	5 (8.4)	14 (23.4)	10 (16.7)	24 (40)	0 (0)
Using the word if	4 (6.7)	3 (5)	4 (6.7)	21 (35)	28 (46.7)	0 (0)
Making a critical statement	0 (0)	0 (0)	21 (35)	26 (43.4)	13 (21.7)	0 (0)
Using contrary opinions	3 (5)	0 (0)	14 (23.4)	25 (41.7)	12 (20)	6 (10)
Using smileys	5 (8.4)	12 (20)	11 (18.4)	22 (36.7)	10 (16.7)	0 (0)
Giving negative comments	4 (6.7)	18 (30)	20 (33.4)	17 (28.4)	1 (1.7)	0 (0)

Raising rhetorical questions	4 (6.7)	14 (23.4)	18 (31.7)	11 (16.7)	9 (15)	0 (0)
Utilizing interjections	4 (6.7)	16 (26.7)	29 (48.4)	5 (8.4)	6 (10)	0 (0)
Giving negative aspect	7 (11.7)	14 (23.4)	17 (28.4)	12 (20)	7 (11.7)	3 (5)
Showing unmitigated Disagreement	10 (16.7)	23 (38.4)	16 (26.7)	7 (11.7)	4 (6.7)	0 (0)
Making scornful and Humiliating statements	9 (15)	19 (31.7)	11 (18.4)	11 (18.4)	10 (16.87)	0 (0)

**Table 14. Frequency rates by EFL learners for each type of disagreement strategy in negatively/positively marked**

**behaviour**

Frequency (percent)/Strategy	Rating=1 negatively marked (%)	Rating=2 (%)	Rating=3 (%)	Rating=4 (%)	Rating=5 positively marked (%)	Invalid (%)
Making a Critical Statement	0 (0)	3 (5)	21 (35)	6 (10)	30 (50)	0 (0)
Using Facts	4 (6.7)	3 (5)	16 (26.7)	11 (18.4)	26 (43.4)	0 (0)
Giving Positive Statements	7 (11.7)	17 (28.4)	8 (13.4)	9 (15)	19 (31.7)	0 (0)
Using the Word If	1 (1.7)	6 (10)	10 (16.7)	23 (38.4)	20 (33.4)	0 (0)
Using Contrary Opinions	3 (5)	5 (8.4)	8 (13.4)	16(26.7)	12 (20)	6 (10)
Giving Negative Comments	8 (13.4)	10 (16.7)	24 (40)	18 (30)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Utilizing Interjections	14 (23.4)	17 (28.4)	22 (36.7)	5 (8.4)	2 (3.4)	0 (0)
Using the Hedge Words/Phrases	4 (6.7)	6 (10)	17 (28.4)	14 (23.4)	11 (18.4)	8 (13.4)
Raising Rhetorical Questions	12 (20)	17 (28.4)	13 (21.7)	6 (10)	8 (13.4)	4 (6.7)
Giving Negative Aspect	13 (21.7)	17 (28.4)	11 (18.4)	10 (16.7)	6 (10)	3 (5)



Showing Unmitigated Disagreement	22 (36.7)	20 (33.4)	7 (11.7)	11 (18.4)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Making Scornful and Humiliating Statements	20 (33.4)	17 (28.4)	8 (13.4)	8 (13.4)	7 (11.7)	0 (0)
Using Smileys	16 (26.7)	10 (16.7)	8 (13.4)	14 (23.4)	12 (20)	0 (0)

It was inferred that the ratings of 3, 4 and 5 had the highest frequencies of four types of strategies. 'Giving negative comments', 'making a critical statement', 'using the hedge words/phrases' and 'using smileys' were rated four as polite. 'Raising rhetorical questions', 'utilizing interjections', 'giving negative aspect' and 'using contrary opinions' were selected as neither polite nor impolite (rating = 3, Table 12). In Table 13, as it can be seen, the majority of the respondents rated four out of the 13 types of disagreement strategies with the highest frequencies. 'Giving negative comments', 'raising rhetorical questions', 'utilizing interjections' and 'giving negative aspect' were seen as neither appropriate nor inappropriate (rating = 3), while 'using facts', 'using hedge words/phrases', 'giving positive statements' and 'using the word if' as appropriate (rating 5). As the last table indicates, the majority of the respondents selected 'making a critical statement', 'using facts' and 'giving positive statements' as very positive (rating = 5), whereas 'showing unmitigated disagreement', 'making scornful and humiliating comments' and 'using smileys' were rated as very negative (rating = 1, Table 14).

About English and EFL respondents' judgement, 'making a critical statement', 'using vulgar statements' and 'making scornful and humiliating statements', for English internet browsers, and 'showing unmitigated disagreement' and 'making scornful and humiliating statements', for EFL internet browsers were as impolite, inappropriate and negatively marked, while many types of strategies such as 'giving facts' and 'using hedge words/phrases' were adopted as polite, appropriate and positive behaviour because they are interpreted as supportive and not as threats to attack the addressees' face.

The discursive approach to the study of politeness and impoliteness assert that in relation to the social norms and expectations of particular social practices, the internet forum browsers made their judgements about the appropriateness of behaviour and negatively/positively marked evaluations led to meta-comments such as polite or impolite (Locher, 2010). A wider variety of forms of social behaviour in addition to the double notions of polite and impolite can be explained more by the continuum of relational work proposed by Watts (2003). Therefore, 'taking a discursive perspective on polite behaviour by seeing it as a part of the relational work inherent in all human social interaction' (Locher & Watts, 2005, p. 28) is preferred since the participants do not tend to follow theoretical rules for the purpose of mitigating face-threatening acts.

### **3.3. Correlations among the three parameters**

The Spearman correlation test was also used to examine the correlations among the three parameters due to the English and EFL data (Table 15 and 16).

**Table 15. Spearmen correlation for the English data**

		(Im)politeness	(In)appropriateness	Negatively/Positively marked behaviour
(Im)politeness	Correlation coefficient	1.000	0.692	0.665
	Sig. (two -Tailed)		0.000	0.000
(In)appropriateness	Correlation coefficient	0.692	1.000	0.569
	Sig. (two -Tailed)	0.000		0.001
Negatively/Positively marked behaviour	Correlation coefficient	0.665	0.569	1.000
	Sig. (two-Tailed)	0.000	0.001	

**Table 16. Spearmen correlation for the EFL data**

		(Im)politeness	(In)appropriateness	Negatively/positively marked behaviour
(Im)politeness	Correlation coefficient	1.000	0.817	0.537
	Sig. (two -Tailed)		0.000	0.002
(In)appropriateness	Correlation coefficient	0.817	1.000	0.632
	Sig. ( two-Tailed)	0.000		0.000
Negatively/Positively marked behaviour	Correlation coefficient	0.537	0.632	1.000
	Sig. (two -Tailed)	0.002	0.000	

As Table 15 manifests, on the one hand, politeness had a reasonably positive linear relationship with the two other parameters and, on the other hand, the relationship between appropriateness negatively/positively marked behaviour was marginally acceptable. According to Table 16, the results showed that politeness had a moderately positive linear relationship with appropriateness while it had a .537 correlation with negatively/positively marked behaviour which is marginally acceptable.

As Brown and Levinson (1987) discuss, politeness is considered as a complex system to mitigate face-threatening acts. They argue that the linguistic strategies used by interactants allow them to show their politeness behaviour in different degrees. Then, behaviour is implicitly impolite when it is not interpreted as polite. Fraser (1990) also argues that while politeness is considered as the norm and is not commented on, the interactants remarked on the impoliteness which makes up a breach of this norm. According to the content and the norm or the culture of internet forums, politeness and appropriateness are two distinct parameters which can affect each other. Although the correlation

between the parameters was revealed through both statistical and qualitative data, this may not stay consistent. According to Locher (2006), there are boundaries within the relational work which show that they are permeable and may change over time. Moreover, the boundaries differ from community to community.

#### 4. Conclusion

Compared to English speakers, differences in EFL comments were found in terms of disagreement strategies and their frequencies. EFL learners express their disagreements indirectly, using mitigating devices. Different politeness strategies are applied to soften disagreements when they discuss with one another such as 'raising rhetorical questions' and 'using contrary opinions'. Moreover, this study revealed that the uses of different disagreement strategies on different topics are highly dependent on the cultural, social and religious factors of that society. Judgements of the three parameters in disagreement seem to be made flexibly subject to many factors, one of which is the participants' interpretation of behaviour appropriate in an internet community. Correlations among the three parameters of (im)politeness, (in)appropriateness and negative/positive marked behaviour, which are asserted by statistical analysis, are also obvious in English and EFL discourses.

The demand for including the social rules of language use in the foreign/second language classroom is pointed out by many researchers who focus on cross-cultural communication and second language teaching (Afghari & Karimnia, 2007; Aliakbari, 2004; Cortazzi, 2000). L2 learners' lack of enough linguistic proficiency refers to not having access to the same range of speech acts and realisations as do native speakers. The findings are useful for the designers of textbooks and classroom activities and materials for EFL learners. It is important to point out that too little information about language use is contained in textbooks in Iran in general, and the dialogues which are included in textbooks do not follow the patterns of naturally occurring talk in particular (Aliakbari, 2004).

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