

Identity Processing Styles as Predictors of L2 Pragmatic Knowledge and Performance: A Case of Common English Speech Acts

Research Article

Ali Malmir¹
Ali Derakhshan*²

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Abstract

Identity processing styles are those psychological, sociocultural, and socio-cognitive mechanisms that shape, reshape, and establish different individuals' identities both in their mother tongues and in the second or foreign language they are striving to acquire. The relationship between these identity processing styles and L2 learners' pragmatic competence is a crucial issue that has not been explored thus far in an EFL context. Therefore, the present study sought to investigate the relationship be-

¹ Assistant Professor of Applied Linguistics, Imam Khomeini International University (IKIU), Qazvin, Iran; malmir@hum.ikiu.ac.ir

² Associate Professor in Applied Linguistics, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Department of English Language and Literature, Golestan University, Gorgan, Iran. (Corresponding author); a.derakhshan@gu.ac.ir

tween the information-oriented, diffuse-avoidant, and normative identity processing styles as measured by Berzonsky's (2011) Identity Processing Style Inventory (ISI-4) and L2 speech-act knowledge and production among 122 (82 F and 40 M) Iranian upper-intermediate to advanced proficiency level learners. A validated 35-item multiple-choice discourse completion test (MDCT) including five frequent English speech acts (requests, apologies, refusals, complaints, and compliments/compliment responses) and a related role-play interactive test were then employed. The application of multiple regression revealed that diffuse-avoidant and normative identity processing styles were significant but moderate contributors to both pragmatic knowledge and production; however, information-oriented identity processing style was a weak significant predictor. These findings imply that teachers can manage and tailor the instructional pragmatic practices in accordance with the learners' identity processing styles.

Keywords: identity processing style, information-oriented, diffuse-avoidant, normative, L2 pragmatic knowledge, pragmatic performance

Introduction

Individual differences (IDs) occupy a prominent position in learning a foreign or second language based on the existing SLA literature. Individual differences have been defined as “dimensions of enduring personal characteristics that are assumed to apply to everybody and on which people differ by degree” (Dörnyei, 2005, p. 4). Brown (2014) has mentioned that age, gender, personality, motivation, willingness to communicate, language proficiency, intelligence and aptitude, identity, and self-esteem are the most investigated individual variables in SLA research over the past century. As asserted by Ellis (2005, 2008), individual differences are significantly related to foreign or second language learning in general and some language skills and sub-skills in particular. Ellis (2008) has reported some of the most significant studies on the relationship between the aforementioned variables and L2 listening, reading, speaking, writing, grammar, and vocabulary from across various EFL and ESL contexts.

Pragmatics research also parallels the mainstream theories and research agenda in SLA, and accordingly, it has also witnessed some studies, drawing on multiple interweaving factors—linguistic, psychological, cognitive, sociological, affective, and social—which need to be scrutinized concomitantly to perceive the acquisition and learning of L2 pragmatics. A considerable amount of research has been done on the contribution of L2 proficiency (e.g., Al-Gahtani & Roever, 2018; Bella, 2012, 2014; Derakhshan, 2019; Félix-Brasdefer, 2004, 2007; Galaczi, 2014; Roever, 2005; Rose, 2000, 2009; Taguchi, 2005, 2007; Takimoto, 2009), motivation (e.g., Arabmofrad et al., 2019; Tajeddin & Zand-Moghadam, 2012; Takahashi, 2005; Ushioda, 2009), emotional intelligence (Ahmadi Safa, 2013; Derakhshan et al., in press), multiple intelligences (Sarani & Malmir, 2020), age and gender (Diskin, 2017; Malmir & Derakhshan, 2020; Tajeddin & Malmir, 2014) both as physiological and socio-psychological varia-

bles, personality types (e.g., Kuriscak, 2006; Taguchi, 2014, 2019; Verhoeven & Vermeer, 2002), and willingness to communicate (Reinders & Wattana, 2012) to L2 learners' speech acts, replicators, and conversational routines.

Social identity and language identity have also received some attention from pragmatics researchers (e.g., Bagheri Nevisi & Afsooshin, 2020; Hassall, 2015; Malmir, 2020; Nestor et al., 2012; Norton, 1997, 2000, 2010; Ohta, 2005; Peirce, 1995). Kasper and Roever (2005) have argued, both social and language identities, directly and indirectly, exert a tremendous influence on L2 pragmatic development and performance. In fact, most socio-pragmatic norms of the L2 are exquisitely interwoven into the social and cultural identity of the target community which inevitably affects the learners' pragmatic knowledge and performance (Kasper & Rose, 2002). Nonetheless, these mostly recognized types of identities may be the manifestation of a deeper cognitive and psychological identity formation mechanism. The development of any kind of identity, including social, cultural, and L1 and L2 identities, is the offspring of the psychological construct of identity processing style (Berzonsky & Ferrari, 1996). Berzonsky (2010) defined the identity processing styles as "those processing social, psychological and cultural mechanisms which shape, reshape, and determine the identity of an L2 learner in the target language s/he is acquiring" (p. 32). These identity processing styles set the stage for the formation of the individual's self-image and self-conceptualization during his/her cognitive, emotional, and social maturation in the community.

Identity processing styles as a very important class of individual differences have been comparatively less studied in SLA in general, and to date, no study has been conducted to examine their contributions to L2 pragmatic knowledge and performance. Therefore, the present study attempted to examine the extent of the contribution of information-oriented, diffuse-avoidant, and normative styles as the three essential types of identity processing styles to L2 learners' knowledge and actual performance speech acts. Moreover, this study has tried to scrutinize the relationship between these identity processing styles and a larger number of speech acts in comparison with the majority of the earlier speech-act studies that only focused on one or two speech acts.

Literature Review

Pragmatic Competence

Pragmatic competence is the ability that lets second or foreign language learners know how to use the linguistic forms to express their needed meanings and to achieve their communicative purposes/functions based on the variables present in the social context. Taguchi (2017, 2019) has pointed out that pragmatic competence entails a comprehensive knowledge of L2 linguistic forms and their use in the contexts to complete social actions. Bardovi-Harlig (2005) defined pragmatic competence as the second or foreign language learners' knowledge and use of the target language in sociocultural exchanges. Bardovi-Harlig (2010) maintained that pragmatic competence is that kind of knowledge that

bridges the gap “between the system side of language and the use aside” (p. 1). Barron (2003) depicted pragmatic competence as the knowledge of pragmalinguistic forms and sociopragmatic norms and how to appropriately use them to achieve communicative functions based on the dynamic and complex sociocultural requirements that are inherent in human interactions.

Nearly all these definitions provided for pragmatic competence emphasize three important types of abilities or capabilities. First, L2 learners need to develop an effective repertoire of declarative knowledge regarding linguistic aspects of the language, including lexical and grammar information. Second, L2 learners should achieve a level of procedural knowledge use that abstract theoretical competence in actual everyday encounters, i.e., how to act and use the language to express the meanings and intentions. And finally, L2 learners should have the skill to use pragmatic knowledge and abilities based on the demands of the situation and dynamism of the sociocultural context, which is under the influence of some micro-level and macro-level sociocultural factors. Therefore, in line with the dichotomy made by Kasper and Rose (2002), we can dissect pragmatic competence into knowledge and performance modules. This dichotomous division has been echoed in the current pragmatic literature by many of the renowned scholars (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig & Bastos, 2011; Roever, 2013; Taguchi, 2007, 2008, 2009).

As far as the content of the pragmatic competence is concerned, the majority of the researchers and scholars agree that speech acts are the building blocks of pragmatic competence. The speech acts accompanied by implicatures and conversational routines are the core of pragmatic knowledge with the lion share for speech acts (Taguchi & Roever, 2017). In effect, whenever we engage in interactions, we are using a chain of various speech acts, or we are answering a range of speech acts produced by others. As a result, successful language learners should continually assess how to produce speech acts and how to comprehend them based on the events in the scene of the conversation. According to Schauer (2009), speech acts are the functions of language and the communicative acts that convey the intended meanings and intentions of the interlocutors in any language encounter.

Speech acts have been classified from different perspectives and by different scholars over the past century (See Flowerdew, 2013 for a complete list); however, the most preferred classification is based on what speech acts actually do in the real world. Therefore, classifications of the speech acts from the 1990s thus far include categories such as requests, apologies, refusals, thank-yous, greetings, complaints, compliments and compliment responses, condolences, accepting, and rejecting these types of functions, and so forth. Speech acts have been studied from a purely linguistic perspective and learning or teaching perspective based on the educational needs of language practitioners in L2 pragmatics research. One of the areas of researching speech acts has been their relationship with L2 learners’ differences since learners have different cognitive, affective, and social predispositions and tendencies that directly and indirectly influence their acquisition and use of L2 speech acts an issue that it is briefly dealt with in the next section.

Individual Differences and Pragmatics

The relationship between individual/learner variables and acquisition and use of various L2 speech acts have been the focus of theoretical and empirical investigation over the half past century. Taguchi and Roever (2017) have divided these individual differences into two groups of cognitive versus social categories. Cognitive individual differences include variables such as language proficiency, intelligence, and aptitude; whereas, social individual differences include variables such as willingness to communicate (WTC), L2 language identity, and personality factors. Some other scholars (e.g., Roever et al., 2014) have divided the individual differences into three groups by adding affective variables and including personality types and motivation within that group.

Another theoretical debate about the role of individual differences in L2 pragmatic development and performance is how researchers and scholars should treat these individualistic peculiarities in their studies and how they can operationalize the related constructs. Initially, these individualistic characteristics were considered as fixed, unidimensional, and stable over time that lend themselves to psychometric evaluation and hence to instructional intervention. However, in the turn-of-the-century, as our knowledge in psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics augmented, L2 researchers and experts advanced this argument that these individual differences should be considered as dynamic, ever-changing, and unstable traits that are highly under the influence of the dynamism of the sociocultural context and easily cannot be measured by the traditional psychometric tests and that we need more sophisticated operational definitions for them in applied linguistics research (Roever, 2006).

According to Taguchi and Roever (2017), language proficiency has been the most studied individual variable in L2 pragmatics, and how it is related to pragmatic production and performance concerning the most frequent speech acts. Bella (2012) examined the relationship between the knowledge of L2 Greek and proficiency level and revealed that advanced learners had a better knowledge of Greek refusals compared with intermediate and lower proficiency learners. Interestingly, she also found that even advanced learners could not be compared with the native speakers of Greek, clearly highlighting the role of proficiency in the target language. Taguchi's (2011) study also showed that L2 proficiency was positively correlated with the knowledge of L2 speech acts and various conventional and nonconventional implicatures. Having reviewed some of the important studies, Taguchi and Roever have concluded that higher language proficiency levels better correlate with both speech act knowledge and performance. The second most investigated individual characteristic was language motivation or pragmatic motivation. Generally, the existing literature on the relationship between motivation and acquisition and use of various speech acts revealed that motivation in general and pragmatic motivation in particular positively correlates with higher knowledge of speech acts (Kasper & Rose, 2002). It should be noted that the correlation between motivation and pragmatic production/performance is less than pragmatic knowledge. In a seminal study, Takahashi (2005) found that proficiency was a significant contributor to

EFL learners' awareness and noticing of various English pragmalinguistic forms in return conversations. Various types of personality factors have also been the focus of the scrutiny in L2 pragmatics research. The five big personality characteristics, as labeled in the literature, for example, have been studied by many scholars (e.g., Kuriscak, 2006; Taguchi, 2014; Verhoeven & Vermeer, 2002). In their research, Verhoeven and Vermeer (2002) investigated the relationship between L2 Dutch pragmatic knowledge and personality type as measured by the Big Five model. The results of this study showed a moderate positive correlation between openness to experience and L2 Dutch pragmatic knowledge. Taguchi and Roever (2017) have summarized these studies reporting that introversion /extroversion is the most examined personality factor in the existing literature.

Compared with the above-mentioned individual variables, language identity, or social identity roles in the development of the speech act knowledge and performance have been comparatively less investigated. These studies have tried to examine the extent of the relationship between language identity or L2 social identity as measured by a questionnaire or survey and L2 speech act knowledge (e.g., Block, 2006; Duff, 2002; McNamara, 1997; Norton, 2000; Siegal, 1996). These studies have reported a positive correlation between the two. Nonetheless, identity is a very complex individual characteristic that acts based on psychological, cognitive, and social dimensions. So, we need to answer how the identity formation processes at the cognitive and psychological level are related to L2 learners' speech act knowledge and performance. Thus, before studying the relationship between L2 identity and pragmatic competence, we need to check the relationship between general identity processing styles and pragmatic knowledge and performance, a research gap that has not been seriously dealt with in the existing literature.

Identity Processing Styles

Identity is the learners' definition of his or her relationships with the external sociocultural world and internal emotional and socio-cognitive predispositions that determine the individual's notion of self, family, society, and the whole of humanity. Identity has been the target of extensive studies in psychology, sociology, sociolinguistics, and anthropology because of its inherent importance that is very crucial in many sub-branches of social sciences and humanities. Norton (2013) pointed out that the identity of the individuals is the focal site of all knowledge and science, applied linguistics being no exception. Berzonsky (1990) described the concept of identity as "a self-constructed cognitive representation of oneself that is used to interpret self-relevant information and to cope with personal problems and life events" (p. 156). Cote and Levine (2002) stated that identity formation is a dynamic and lifelong process that is shaped by the individuals' interactions with other people within the society based on their own idiosyncratic tendencies and capabilities. As a consequence, when talking about identity, we should consider its multilayered and complex composite. Block (2007) mentioned that whenever a person acts in society, (s)he

displays a dimension of his/her constructed identity which is materialized as a person's intellectual identity, family identity, social identity, political identity, L1, and L2 identities, and so forth. Berzonsky (2004) maintained that these three identity processing styles are, in essence, problem-solving abilities and failure-coping mechanisms that can conspicuously show themselves in the language used by different people.

As far as identity processing styles are concerned, most identity theories adhere to three main categories: information-oriented, normative, and diffuse-avoidant (e.g., Berzonsky & Adams, 1999; Berzonsky & Neimeyer, 1994; Schwartz et al., 2006). According to Duff (2002), individuals with dominant informational identity aside are very capable at encountering and solving different problems tactfully and effectively, they are congenial and highly willing to integrate and intermingle with people around them, they are not impulsive and do not judge the events quickly, and they set clear short-term objectives and long-term aims for their own progress and self-fulfilment. Additionally, they try to educate themselves for achieving their own goals and expectations, show resilience in the face of adversity, and the difficulties that challenge them in their individual life, social encounters, and occupational experiences (Berzonsky & Kuk, 2005). Taylor (1989), one of the pioneers of identity research, maintained that information-oriented individuals have sharp minds and do not quickly believe what they have been told, are good evaluators, and try to self-explore their own and others characteristics.

Berzonsky and Kinney (1994) mentioned that individuals with the predominant normative identity aside learn and internalize other people's values, respect their standards and accepted ethics, and they moderately get involved in relations with other people. However, these individuals are more malleable by the forces of the sociocultural context and they need to be externally organized by others (Norton, 2010). Furthermore, people with normative identity processing style seek to obtain information that is more consistent with their own values and the values of the important people around them, they are more closed-minded compared with the informational people and are more easily influenced by other people's advice especially by those who have some kind of social or intellectual power, they like to decide after receiving analysis and consultations from others, and they tried to self-assess themselves in different areas of their lives (Berry, 2005).

People who possess diffuse-avoidant identity processing styles utilize more emotional strategies in their social interactions, are not good decision-makers especially in challenging circumstances, are very conservative and hesitant in their decisions and try to pay meticulous attention to all possible repercussions of their decisions in advance (Schwartz, 2011), are somehow unpredictable in their demeanor and speech (Dollinger, 1995). Meeus and Dekovic (1995) asserted people with diffuse-avoidant identity processing styles employ fewer metacognitive and cognitive strategies in their learning and assessment of their own progress and changes in the surrounding environment.

A great deal of research has been conducted on the relationship between these three different types of identity processing styles and educational achievement (e.g., Berzonsky & Kuk, 2005; Crocetti et al., 2008; Dollinger, 1995; Eryigit & Kerpelman, 2009; Schwartz, 2011); however, there is comparatively little research about their investigation in second or foreign language learning and teaching in EFL/ESL contexts and very few studies can be mentioned in this regard (e.g. Razmjoo, 2010; Razmjoo & Izadpanah, 2010; Razmjoo & Neissi, 2010).

As depicted in the previous literature, the importance and centrality of identity processing styles as psychological, sociocultural, and socio-cognitive variables in learning and L2 are undeniable, and they have shown the contribution to the development of reading and writing skills as reported by Razmjoo and Izadpanah (2010); however, their relationship with L2 pragmatic knowledge and performance, to date, has not been investigated through empirical studies. Accordingly, due to their probable significant contribution to language development and the paucity of research in this regard, the current research attempted to examine the relationship between identity processing styles and L2 learners' knowledge and performance for common English speech acts as the core of the pragmatic competence. Specifically, the current study was guided by the following two questions:

- 1) How well do identity processing styles contribute to Iranian EFL learners' L2 speech-act knowledge? Which identity processing style is a stronger predictor of L2 speech-act knowledge?
- 2) How well do identity processing styles contribute to Iranian EFL learners' L2 speech-act production? Which identity processing style is a stronger predictor of L2 speech-act production?

Method

The present research tried to investigate the relationship between identity processing styles and L2 pragmatic knowledge and performance regarding the common speech acts through the correlational ex post facto design.

Participants

A sample of 122 Iranian EFL learners took part in this study. These learners were selected among the 203 BA students at Imam Khomeini International University (IKIU), Qazvin who were studying either English language translation studies or teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) English language teaching. The study sample was selected based on the results of the Michigan Test of English Language Proficiency. Those learners whose scores fell at or beyond the mean score were chosen. The selected participants were seniors ($n = 36$), juniors ($n = 35$), sophomores ($n = 29$), and freshman ($n = 22$) regarding the language learning experience at the university level; however, they had

been engaging with English from 2 to 7 years before entering the university ($M = 6.2$ years, $SD = 3.4$). The participants' age range was between 18 and 25 ($M = 21.3$, $SD = 2.4$), and 82 of them were females (67.2 %), and the rest 40 were males (32.8 %). The dominant mother tongue of the learners was Persian or its dialects ($n = 87$); however, some learners had Turkish ($n = 12$), Kurdish ($n = 8$), Tati ($n = 6$), Arabic ($n = 4$), Chinese ($n = 3$ female students from China), Thai ($n = 1$), Japanese ($n = 1$). The majority of the learners were Iranians; but as aforementioned, there were some students from China, Japan, Syria, and Lebanon.

Instruments

The current study utilized a language proficiency test and two pragmatic assessment tools as follows: The Michigan Test of English Language Proficiency (MTELP) as a homogeneity test, a multiple-choice discourse completion test (MDCT), and interactive pragmatic role-plays. The features of the used instruments, their content, reliability, and implementation steps will be briefly touched upon in the next sections.

The Michigan Test of English Language Proficiency. In order to target a homogenous group having a similar level of language proficiency, the Michigan Test of English Language Proficiency (MTELP) was utilized. This test includes 100 multiple-choice items within three sections of reading comprehension (20 items based on four reading passages), vocabulary (40 items), and grammar (40 items). It has also been found to be of high reliability as reported in previous studies (e.g., Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010; Shohamy et al., 2017). The reliability of the test estimated in the present study was .82.

The Identity Processing Style Inventory (IPSI-4). The Identity Processing Style Inventory (IPSI-4) was developed and validated by Berzonsky (2011). It is a five-point Likert-scale including 40 items that determines four major types of identity processing styles: a) the informational-style scale (7 items); b) normative-style scale (8 items); c) diffuse-avoidant-style scale (9 items); and d) the commitment-style scale (9 items). The commitment subscale with 9 items usually applied in psychology research that was excluded from this study based on the guidelines given by the inventory developer; therefore, the final scale is made up of 31 items. Berzonsky has validated and modified the inventory in a series of studies (1990, 1992, 1994, 2011), reporting reliability indices beyond .75. The three components of the inventory have been extracted through componential factor analysis with high alpha values for the whole inventory and the subsections. This inventory has also proved its high reliability in the Iranian EFL context (e.g., Razmjoo & Izadpanha, 2010; Razmjoo & Neissi, 2010). The test rubrics provide information about the items that estimate each type of identity processing style. It will take 10 to 15 minutes to fill out the inventory.

Multiple-Choice Discourse Completion Test (MDCTs). Tajeddin and Malmir (2015) designed and validated the multiple-choice discourse completion test (MDCT) to assess speech act knowledge of EFL learners. It comprised 50 items, each of which involved a pragmatic context, a three to eight-line conversation,

and three options, one of which was the most suitable choice concerning pragmatic criteria and a specific situation. Well-known American English conversation books and their specific speech acts of compliment/compliment responses, requests, refusals, complaints, and apologies informed the production of the content of the pragmatic test. The criterion for choosing these five speech acts was their frequent use in the language. All aspects of the content including the conversation, contexts, and options were produced by American English native speakers in real-world situations as mentioned by the American English conversation books used for developing the test. It should be also noted that only minor revisions were made to the content for the purpose of the test. Originally, to pilot the test, it was given to a group of 60 American English native speakers. Item discrimination and item facility results revealed 10 items needing to be excluded from the test. Besides, the test was reduced for its length by putting the conversations into the contexts. The Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient found in this regard was .89. But the test went through a second pilot study with a group of 80 EFL learners for ensuring its reliability in the EFL context. The Cronbach alpha result reported was .75. Besides, some modifications were made to the test such as the elimination of five more items. For instance, item number 5, in the final version, is presented below:

Item 5

Pragmatic Scenario: Eric works as a waiter. He is supposed to work this afternoon but he hasn't been feeling well lately and wants to go and see his doctor. He decides to ask his colleague Nikita to take his shift. What would he say?

- a. Nikita, be a real friend! Take my shift this afternoon. I know you are free. I am going to the doctor.
- b. Nikita, I know you're free today. As I am going to the doctor, you will take my shift this afternoon.
- c. Nikita, would you mind taking my shift this afternoon? I'd really appreciate it. I am going to the doctor.

After the validation process, the final version of the test included 35 items. The parts of the last version of the MDCT are presented in Table 1.

Table 1.
The Speech Act Components of the MDCT (Adapted from Tajeddin & Malmir, 2015)

Speech Act	Number of Items
Request	7
Apology	9
Refusal	8
Compliment/ Compliment Response	7
Complaint	4
Total	35

Interactive Pragmatic Role-plays. Role-plays are a type of interactive production data collection tool in L2 pragmatics research and a logical balance and a beneficial compromise between the highly controlled and structured data collection procedures and naturally occurring data. According to Roever (2005), to estimate L2 learners' pragmatic performance, the researchers should use interactive instruments rather than traditional metapragmatic judgment tasks which only gauge pragmatic knowledge, what we did in the second phase of the current study. According to Taguchi and Roever (2017), role plays are either closed or open. In the current study, open role plays were used to elicit an interaction around the given pragmatic scenarios between two participants. The researchers could themselves be the interlocutors; however, they avoided it, because in that case, learners might have felt more psychological and cognitive pressure and considered the whole role-play sessions as artificial. Accordingly, the role plays were acted out by pairs of peers in a non-threatening and joyful environment, and the researchers were observers, recorders, and cognizant analysts in this scene of the events. Besides the pragmatic scenario, the interlocutors were given some role-play cards determining the relationship between the two parties and who was the initiator of the conversation. No time limit was imposed on the flow of the conversation and when the learners felt they cannot continue any more they closed the conversation.

As mentioned by Schauer (2009), the application of role plays in pragmatics research may be open to validity and authenticity threats; accordingly, the researchers tried their best to provide a non-threatening environment for the study participants, and they were informed that there was no assessment judgment and their performances were kept confidential, and after some time the recorded conversations were deleted. Moreover, the researchers did not interrupt the moment by moment co-construction of the interaction and tried to let students act as if they are in real-world situations interacting with native speakers of English. Additionally, the participants were not forced to close the conversations, and they were given this permission to continue the conversation until the topic was well exchanged between the two parties and reached a saturation point. The researchers did not intervene at all during the recordings.

For analyzing the data and before quantitatively deciding on the pragmatic performance abilities of the learners regarding the five common speech acts, all the recorded role plays were first transcribed based on their Jefferson's (2004) transcription system for conversation analysis (CA). This transcription system is the most comprehensive conversation analysis package that represents sentences and words by the formal and sometimes informal orthographic representations, pauses, overlaps, latches, and other emotional behaviors. Jefferson's (2004) transcription system can be used hierarchically from the formal spoken and written sentences to minute feelings and emotions, pauses, laughter, reduced forms, dialectical contractions, and many other suprasegmental features; however, since this study purported to only estimate the learners' ability to produce corrected speech acts considering appropriate socio-pragmatic forms and pragmalinguistic norms, it did not follow the detailed modules of the sys-

tem, and it opted the general paradigms inasmuch as it could disclose learners' speech act performance abilities.

The two researchers whose area of interest in applied linguistics research is pragmatics and discourse analysis were the raters. As mentioned by discourse analysts and pragmaticians, there is no established and unanimously agreed upon rubric or checklist for scoring the role-plays (see Taguchi & Roever, 2017); however, the researchers should consider issues such as politeness, power, imposition, and distance based on the dynamism of the sociocultural context to quantify the qualitative role-plays, a process which is not exempt from human error and misjudgments. In tandem with the existing literature and some earlier empirical studies, this research assigned the successful use of the speech acts with appropriate locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts based on a scale from zero to four. Therefore, the total score given for the successful contextualized use of the speech acts for each party in the conversations could be 20. The raters gave their scores based on a checklist provided and agreed upon prior to the data analysis.

It should be humbly noted that despite all the efforts made to provide precise quantification of purely qualified and sociocultural phenomena like interactions as elicited through role-plays, there are some issues of validity and authenticity. As argued by Taguchi and Roever (2017), we need to compromise between researching pragmatics by tolerating the challenges and intervening factors instead of abandoning the inquiry discourse analysis and pragmatics. MAXQDA Intercoder Agreement Function was employed to estimate the intercoder reliability that is a prerequisite in qualitative analysis. The estimated average percentage agreement was 87.53%, representative of a strong agreement between the scores given by two raters as mentioned in the literature (e.g., Aspers & Corte, 2019; MacPhail et al., 2015).

Data Collection Procedure

To determine the extent of the contributions of identity processing styles to L2 speech act knowledge and performance, first, an initial sample of 203 BA students at Imam Khomeini International University, Qazvin were selected and were given the Michigan Test of English Language Proficiency (MTELP). A sample of 122 students who scored at or beyond the mean ($M = 55.41$, $SD = 12.31$) was accepted into this three-phased study.

In the first phase, Berzonsky's (2011) Identity Processing Style Inventory (IPSI-4) was filled out by the students. Next, they answered Tajeddin and Malmir's (2015) multiple-choice discourse completion test of common English speech acts. Finally, the participants were required to role-play in a conversation based on the same pragmatic scenarios observed in the MDCT given in the previous stage. It should be noted that to reduce the test and retest effect, the role-plays were recorded three weeks after the administration of the MDCT. The students' role-plays were mostly audio- and sometimes video-recorded for further analysis by the raters. This phase was the most difficult and laborious

part of the study since it entailed the participants in pairs to engage in joint role-plays for one pragmatic scenario from each of the five speech act groups. The process was time-consuming and sometimes exhausting for students and the stage witnessed a sharp decrease in the number of students who cooperated. It took about one hour to record the five role-plays.

Data Analysis

The present study made use of both descriptive and inferential statistics employing the SPSS program (version 23). Descriptive statistics, including reliability tests, normality tests, and other needed preliminary tests for checking the required assumptions for inferential statistics, were obtained. The standard multiple regression was employed twice to answer the two research questions since, in the current study, there was an independent variable with three levels and one dependent variable in each of the research questions.

Results

The results of the learners' performances on the three different sections of the identity processing styles inventory (IPSI-4) and the multiple-choice discourse completion test (MDCT) are presented in Table 2.

Table 2.
Descriptive Statistics of the Scores on the IPSI-4 and the MDCT

	<i>N</i>	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>
Total IPSI Score	122	64	112	87.52	9.432
Information-Oriented Style	122	22	42	31.51	3.917
Normative-Style	122	19	38	29.50	3.885
Diffuse-Avoidant Style	122	15	38	26.51	4.818
Pragmatic Knowledge	122	20	33	25.88	3.416
Pragmatic Performance	122	7	24	13.58	3.300

The mean score for the students' scores on the identity processing styles was 87.52 with a standard deviation of 9.43. Generally, students did better on the information-oriented style subscale ($M = 31.51$, $SD = 3.91$), followed by the normative ($M = 29.50$, $SD = 3.88$) and diffuse-avoidant style ($M = 26.51$, $SD = 4.81$) subscales. However, these differences and descriptive statistics do not imply any statistical difference because the number of items for each of the subscales is not the same, and also because this study is a correlational one. Participants' mean score and standard deviation were 25.88 and 3.41, respectively.

The same statistics for learners the speech act performance on the MDCT of common speech acts were 13.58 and 3.30. Again, the apparent differences are due to the different number of items in this test. Preliminary data analysis demonstrated that the distribution for the scores obtained on the three study

measures and the subscales of the IPSI-4 was normal and the skewness ratios were within the range of -1.96 and +1.96. The normal probability plots, i.e., Normal Q-Q Plots, and Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests confirmed the normality of each measure's scores. No outliers were located as well.

Research Question One

The first research question sought to determine the contribution of the informational, normative, and diffuse-avoidant identity processing styles to the pragmatic knowledge of the five common speech acts. Before the application of regression analysis, its special requirements such as multicollinearity, linearity, homoscedasticity, the independence of residuals, the linear relation between each pair of variables, and homoscedasticity were checked (based on Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007), and no serious violations were observed.

Learners' scores on the three sections of the identity processing styles inventory were the independent or predictor variables and their speech-act knowledge of scores comprised the dependent or predicted variable. Based on the constructed model, R was 0.786 and hence R^2 equaled 0.617, clearly indicating that the constructed model could account for 61.7 percent of the total variation speech-act knowledge scores. Results of the ANOVA in Table 3 [$F(3, 121) = 63.429, p = 0.000$] revealed that the constructed model can significantly predict L2 learners' knowledge of pragmatic regarding common English speech acts.

Table 3.
ANOVA Test for the Contributions of Identity Processing Styles to L2 Speech-act Knowledge

	<i>SS</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Regression	871.332	3	290.444	63.429	.000
Residual	540.324	118	4.579		
Total	1411.656	121			

Table 3 displays the standardized beta coefficients that determine the extent of contribution each type of the identity processing style makes to L2 learners' speech-act knowledge.

Table 4.
Coefficients for the Contribution of Informational, Normative, and Diffuse-avoidant Identity Processing Styles to L2 Speech-act Knowledge

<i>Predictor Variable</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Information-oriented Style	.473	8.228	.000
Normative Style	.264	4.591	.000
Diffuse-avoidant Style	.093	2.172	.032

Information-oriented style has the largest β coefficient ($\beta = .473, t = 8.228, p < .05$), revealing that informational identity processing style was a significant

moderate contributor to pragmatic knowledge of the speech acts; however, normative style was weak predictor ($\beta = .264, t = 4.591, p < .05$). Moreover, diffuse-avoidant style was a significant albeit a very poor predictor of L2 speech act knowledge ($\beta = .093, t = 2.172, p = .032 < .05$).

Research Question Two

The second research question aimed at examining the contributions of the three types of identity processing styles to the pragmatic production or performance of the EFL learners regarding the most common English speech acts. Therefore, another multiple regression was employed after checking that the prerequisite assumptions as aforementioned for question one were without any critical violations. The informational, normative, and diffuse-avoidant identity processing styles as the predictor variables an Iranian EFL the speech-act performance scores obtained through conducting role-plays as the predicted variable were fed into a standard regression analysis utilizing the Enter method.

The constructed model showed an R value of 0.625 and an R^2 of equaled 0.391, evidently signifying that the constructed model could explain about 39.1 percent of the total variance in L2 learners' productive knowledge of common English speech acts. As presented in Table 5 below, the application of the ANOVA test [$F(3, 121) = 25.234, p = 0.000$] demonstrated that the produced regression model could significantly determine L2 learners' productive knowledge of common English requests, apologies, refusals, compliment/compliment responses, and complaints.

Table 5.
ANOVA Test for the Contributions of Identity Processing Styles to L2 Speech-act Performance

	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Regression	515.096	3	171.699	25.234	.000
Residual	802.914	118	6.804		
Total	1318.010	121			

To find a more accurate estimate of the contributions of the three types of identity processing styles to learners' pragmatic production of frequent English speech acts the standardized beta coefficients in the next table should be referred to.

Table 6.
Coefficients for the Contribution of Informational, Normative, and Diffuse-avoidant Identity Processing Styles to L2 Speech-act Performance

<i>Predictor Variable</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>P</i>
Information-oriented Style	.322	4.594	.000
Normative Style	.211	3.012	.003
Diffuse-avoidant Style	.121	2.321	.022

Like the previous research question, information-oriented style showed the highest β coefficient ($\beta = .322, t = 4.594, p < .05$), representative of a significant moderate predictor of productive capability of learners with regard to the target speech acts. Both normative ($\beta = .211, t = 3.012, p = .003 < .05$) and diffuse-avoidant ($\beta = .121, t = 2.321, p = .022 < .05$) styles were significant, notwithstanding, poor contributors to the productive knowledge of L2 speech acts.

Discussion

This study attempted to investigate the relationship between identity processing styles and Iranian EFL learners' knowledge and production of common English speech acts through the correlational *ex post facto* design. Results of data analysis using multiple regression revealed some significant findings. First, information-oriented processing style turned out to be a moderately significant predictor of both knowledge and production of common English speech acts including requests, refusals, apologies, complaints, and compliments and compliment responses, the obtained β coefficient value was slightly higher for predicting the speech act knowledge ($\beta = .473$) than the production ability for the aforementioned speech acts ($\beta = .322$). Second, the normative style was weak but a significant predictor of the knowledge and production of L2 speech acts with a higher coefficient value for the knowledge dimension of the speech acts like the previous finding ($\beta_{\text{knowledge}} = .264 > \beta_{\text{production}} = .211$). Finally, the diffuse avoidant identity processing style was a very weak, albeit a significant contributor to L2 speech act competence dimensions investigated in the current study ($\beta_{\text{knowledge}} = .093 > \beta_{\text{production}} = .022$).

The more significant contribution of informational identity processing style to both L2 pragmatic knowledge and production regarding common English speech acts can be accounted for by the characteristics of learners who possess this identity style. As mentioned by Berzonsky (2011), information-oriented individuals are more effective communicators and social collaborators, and they are more willing to engage in interaction with people around them. Willingness to communicate in the target language and more tendency to engage in conversations with others encourages individuals to receive more input and output in the L2. As cited in the pragmatic literature (e.g., Taguchi, 2011, 2015; Taguchi & Yamaguchi, 2019) and the earlier empirical studies (Garcia, 2004) in this regard, higher degrees of willingness to communicate and more interaction will set the stage for the development of more effective pragmatic knowledge, in this study speech act knowledge, and hence actual pragmatic performance. Moreover, according to Schwartz (2011), individuals with dominant informational identity style are more language-sensitive and pay attention to different layers of the expressed ideas and sentences which pragmatically imply that these learners pay more attention to the appropriate socio-pragmatic norms and the pragmalinguistic forms. They will try to assess how to put their own meanings into the lexicogrammar, and as we know from the pragmatics literature, all of these peculiar features can give a boost to pragmatic competence development.

The less significant contribution of normative identity processing style to L2 pragmatic knowledge and performance compared with the informational style can be justified by learners' less willingness to communicate in comparison with the first group of learners. According to Berzonsky and Kinney (1994), learners with dominant normative identity processing styles tend to engage in conversations with other people after evaluating social values and standards. These peculiar features of the normative style have a negative side because they are unwilling to easily engage in conversations with others, and they have a positive side in that normative learners are sensitive about how people express their own ideas in accordance with their standards and values. This second feature is an indirect facilitator of pragmatic and semantic meanings since the learner tries to uncover other persons' ideological and intellectual predispositions as manifested in their language. Inevitably, these learners should assess semantic, pragmatic, and sociocultural dimensions of what they hear and what they want to say, all of which, according to pragmatic literature, can pave the way for the better attainment of pragmatic knowledge.

Additionally, these people are less open-minded than the informational style individuals, and they do not engage in conversations until other people initiate the conversations. People with a normative identity processing style also tend to interact with those people whose values and the standards have a kind of resemblance with their ideas and values. These internal tendencies hinder the learner from extensive engagement with the people around them specifically in a socially and culturally heterogeneous environment like an L2 classroom. As a consequence, these people receive less linguistic and pragmatic input, less pragmatic intake, and output. The less presence of the aforementioned input-intake-output impedes pragmatic competence and production development, according to Rose (2009) and Taguchi and Roever (2017).

Based on the study findings, the diffuse-avoidant identity processing style was a very weak contributor to L2 speech-act ability and performance. This finding can be explained by the fact that individuals with diffuse avoidant-identity processing styles are more emotional in their decisions, attitudes, and behaviors in the outer social context, and they are less language-sensitive as cited by Cote and Levine (2002). These individuals are less interested in what is happening around them, and they are more introverted and more involved with their feelings and emotions. They try to avoid encounters with people that and they require constant assessment and evaluation of the linguistic and nonlinguistic dimensions of what they hear. These features including less language sensitivity, reluctance to engage with the surrounding environment, less use of cognitive and metacognitive strategies and more reliance on emotional aspects of the events insinuate that these learners are not good language learners in general and good pragmatic knowledge intakers in particular based on the pragmatic development theories (Kasper & Rose, 2002).

Finally, the stronger predictability power of informational and normative processing styles and even the diffuse-avoidant style for speech acts knowledge in comparison with speech-act production/performance is more related to the

demanding nature of pragmatic production rather than pragmatic knowledge as claimed by many pragmatic experts (e.g. Barron, 2003; Taguchi, 2017). Taguchi (2017), for example, argued that pragmatic knowledge is a kind declarative knowledge, and its development is easier than pragmatic production which puts the learner in the situation to deal with sociocultural and contextual appropriacy that is perplexingly challenging for the L2 learners. Generally, learners cannot efficiently put into practice what they have acquired during their own learning experiences and how to map out form-meaning-context realizations of the language (Bella, 2014).

Conclusion and Implications

The present investigation came to some important conclusions as follows. First identity processing styles were generally found to be significant contributors to both L2 speech-act knowledge and performance. Second, the information-oriented style could moderately predict L2 learners' knowledge and performance regarding common English speech acts. Thirdly, the normative style was a weak predictor; however, the diffuse-avoidant style was a very poor predictor of the speech-act related pragmatic competence and performance. Fourth, the aforementioned identity processing styles were slightly stronger contributors to speech-act knowledge than speech act production.

The findings of the present research can have some pedagogical implications for L2 teachers and learners. Teachers, for instance, are recommended to determine their learners' dominant identity processing styles and try to tailor the classroom practices based on these learner differences that exert an undeniable influence on L2 learners' pragmatic development and performance. Particularly, those learners with diffuse-avoidant style need to be handled more seriously because they cannot expand the pragmatic knowledge and performance capabilities like learners with informational and normative identity processing styles. The insights gained from the present study can also inform EFL materials developers' practice as they are advised to take account of learners' individual differences in general and identity processing styles in particular when producing textbooks and other content materials. In essence, unless learners' individual differences are taken into account in every aspect of education including instruction, materials development, testing, and evaluation, not an effective learning truly engaged with learners' desires, needs, and goals can be achieved.

Like all other studies in applied linguistics, this study had its own limitations and was bound to some delimitations. The researchers did not control the age and gender of the participants. Moreover, due to the difficulty of conducting role-plays, recording, and then transcribing them for measuring the productive speech-act knowledge of the learners, they were only required to engage in interactions only based on one of the scenarios for each of the five types of common English speech act. Further research can be done on the relationship between identity processing styles and other types of pragmatic knowledge such

as implicatures and conversational routines with larger samples and other pragmatic assessment instruments. Moreover, the interaction between these identity styles and various forms of personality types and their relationship with various aspects of L2 pragmatic competence can provide a promising range of new topics for upcoming studies using methodologically sound procedures and better data collection tools.

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