| RESEARCH ARTICLE

"I am Well-versed and Skillful in Teaching English": Self-praise Strategies on Instagram Bios of Iranian English Language Teachers

Reza Samandar[1] ✉ Dr. Yaser Hadidi[2] and Dr. Massoud Yaghoubi-Notash[3]
[1]M.A. Candidate in TEFL, Department of English Language and Literature, University of Tabriz, Iran
[23]Department of English Language and Literature, University of Tabriz, Iran
Corresponding Author: Reza Samandar, **E-mail**: rezasmn1@gmail.com

| **ABSTRACT**

Looking at self-praise through the lenses of face-to-face (hereafter FTF) conversational norms and social etiquette, one can find solid evidence that it has been severely censured for its potential to pose a threat to the positive face of the audience. However, with the dawn of technology and social networks, self-praise has enjoyed an often-occurring practice online considering that people make use of Social Networking Sites (hereafter SNSs) such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram to share favorable information about themselves; hence, casting their achievements and skills in a positive light. This study attempts to identify the self-praise strategies Iranian English language teachers employ to present themselves as skillful and experienced on their Instagram bios. To do so, 120 Instagram accounts belonging to English language teachers from Iran were randomly selected. Subsequently, their bios were read carefully to analyze the self-praise-carrying utterances and the employed strategies. The results of the analysis point to the predominant use of various indirect strategies by the users to form a positive image of themselves. The scarcity of direct self-praise hints at the existence of awareness on the part of the users of the potentially risky and delicate nature of the speech act in question.

| **KEYWORDS**

Self-praise, Instagram, Pragmatics, Teaching, Speech act

| **ARTICLE DOI:** 10.32996/ijllt.2022.5.3.1

1. Introduction

Forming a positive image of themselves is an ever-present matter of concern for everyone engaging in social interactions(Goffman,1959). Self-praise, as one mode of self-presentation, functions as the primary means through which this desirable image can be constructed. Normally regarded as a face-threatening speech act, self-praise "explicitly or implicitly gives credit to the speaker for some attribute or possession which is positively valued by the speaker and the potential audience" (Dayter, 2016, p.65). Mention has to be made of the point that self-praise in this study is operationalized based on this definition. Based on the previous stock of literature, certain constraints against self-praise are observed in FTF communications (Speer, 2012). However, the advent of SNSs seems to have suspended those constraints as the number of self-praise-carrying utterances abounds on social media.

Instagram is one of the most famous SNSs in the world, with 1 billion active users as of June 2018. There is an estimation that the number will reach 1.3 billion in 2023 (Statista, 2020). It also has a strong millennial demographic, with more than half of the global population of users aged 34 or younger (Statista, 2020). It offers its users opportunities for strategic presentation and self-marketing. Studies indicate that users demonstrate a propensity for individual self-promotion rather than community-oriented behavior (Dumas et al., 2017; Hu, Manikonda, and Kambhampati 2014).

Despite the rich literature on other speech acts such as to request, refusal, compliment, and disagreement, self-praise has been relatively under-researched in Iran. Although a handful of previous studies has attempted to study this speech act on Instagram posts (Dayter, 2014, 2016; Matley,2018; Chalak,2021), the bio section of this platform, which provides its users with a small area to

share some details about themselves, has not been examined yet. Therefore, the present study aims to address this gap in the literature by investigating the Iranian English language teachers' self-praise strategies on their bios to present themselves as skillful and experienced in their profession. Drawing on Tobback's (2019) study of self-praise strategies on LinkedIn, we will try to answer the following question: what strategies of self-praise are employed by Iranian English language teachers on their Instagram bios?

2. Review of literature

Self-praise is defined as a speech act in which one utters positive statements about one's self. These statements, indeed, are considered to enhance the speaker's face. (Brown & Levinson,1987). Within the realm of linguistics, a distinction has been made between two types of self-presentation: bragging or explicit self-praise and positive self-disclosure (Dayter,2014; Miller et al., 1992); while the former involves uttering dispositional statements (e.g. "How brilliant my ideas are!") as well as comparative statements (e.g. "I am better than my friends."), the latter is concerned with simple information sharing and high effort incorporation (e.g. "I have worked hard"). Miller et al.'s (1992) study concluded that positive self-disclosers possessed a higher rate of likeability than the braggers, suggesting that different forms of modesty can play a vital role in a better self-presentation. Further studies (Chen and Jing,2012; Sezer et al.,2015; Van Damme et al.,2016) also bear on the fact that enhancing self through bragging and exaggeration leads to a negative perception on the part of the audience, whereas self-presentations containing an element of modesty are perceived positively (Sedikides et al.,2007). In real-life interactions, however, it is not a simple task to tell these two types apart as the borderline is not without blurriness (Dayter,2014). By way of example, according to Matley (2018), Instagram users often accomplish self-praise through posts in which there is an absence of textual discourse related to bragging or exaggeration.

From the vantage point of pragmatics, Brown and Levinson's (1987) concept of the positive face can be drawn upon to gain an understanding of self-praise. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), a positive face is the desire to have one's desires and values "appreciated and approved of" (p.61). For Holmes (2009), it is the desire "to be valued, liked and admired, and to maintain a positive self-image" (p.711). Within this framework, self-praise has been labelled a potentially risky activity as the utterances containing an element of this speech act cause a threat to the positive face of the audience (Brown and Levinson,1987). With regard to Leech's Politeness Principle (1983), the utterance of self-praise infringes the 'Modesty' maxim, according to which the participants should minimize praise of self and maximize dispraise of self. In addition, a wealth of psychological research has associated self-praise with narcissism (Moon et al., 2016; Sung et al., 2016; Weiser, 2015). These studies suggest that the primary reason for sharing selfies on SNSs like Instagram is seeking attention. It has been empirically corroborated that narcissistic individuals are more active and prone to share self-promoting content on SNSs than their counterparts (Ong et al., 2011; Mehdizadeh,2010).

The rapid and unprecedented pace at which technology is advancing has made it possible for SNSs to rise in popularity among people all over the world. In fact, through these social networks, the geographical distance separating people from each other pales in significance as individuals are able to establish and continue interaction with other members of the social platforms located in different parts of the world. The advent of these "deeply social" technologies (Gasiorek, Giles, Holtgraves, & Robbins, 2012) has been a source of attraction for researchers inasmuch as they can have interactions with different audiences. Furthermore, taking into account the availability of various nonverbal cues, researchers can gain insights into language and social behavior in both mediated and non-mediated environments (Walther,2012).

SNSs have become arenas for strategic self-presentation (Geurin-Eagleman & Burch, 2016; Lee-Won et al., 2014). In other words, the existence of special affordances such as the meticulous care with which photos are selected, edition of the texts, and use of hashtags indicating one's alignment with brands and celebrities lead to an ingenious and well-thought personal disclosure on the part of the users (Chou and Edge 2012). Moreover, according to Rui and Stefanone (2013), users are able to dispel social disapproval and unfavorable impression by eliminating negative and unwanted comments on images. On the other hand, they can cast themselves in a positive light when they directly or indirectly present their achievements by means of exaggerating or third-party compliments (Lee-Won et al., 2014).

In addition to the several studies which have made use of conversation analysis to probe self-praise in oral communication in different cultural groups (Kim, 2017; Speer, 2012; Underwood,2011; Wu, 2011, 2012), within the last decade, online communities have triggered and fed researchers' interest in further exploring self-praise in written discourse. As a case in point, Dayter (2014, 2016), drawing on a corpus of 1000 tweets, explored the pragmatic strategies of self-praise employed by a community of ballet students. The strategies identified were as follows: self-praise plus a shift of focus, self-praise plus a disclaimer, self-praise plus self-denigration, self-praise plus reference to hard work, and indirect self-praise accomplished through embedding self-praise in a complaint. The study concluded that sharing self-praising narratives with other members of the community can avoid censure and serve as a means to construct solidarity among the members of the community of practice.

Matley (2018) set up to investigate the pragmatic functions of #brag and #humblebrag as employed in Instagram users' bragging photos about #fitness. He realized that these hashtags fulfil a metalinguistic function in the illocutionary force of the speech act in

question. In fact, deploying them enables the users to engage in "reflexive bragging" (p.8). Reflexive bragging occurs when the users, violating the norms against self-praise, perform it explicitly, but at the same time, they express their concern and awareness of the risky nature of self-praise through incorporating the above-mentioned hashtags. With this view in mind, Matley (2018) posits that hashtags are helpful affordances in that they open the door to social media users to negotiate an appropriate level of self-enhancement.

Turning the spotlight on LinkedIn, another popular SNS, Tobback (2019) aimed to unearth the pragmatic strategies of self-praise employed in LinkedIn summaries. To do so, 90 or so summaries composed by communication professionals were selected for analysis. The results indicated a perceptible variation in the use of indirect strategies, some of which were "specifically linked to the contents of LinkedIn summaries such as the ones based on implicatures" (p.664). As the secondary focus of the study, the researcher also analyzed the downgrading and upgrading devices that are used to water down or strengthen the impact of the utterance on the addressee, respectively. The results demonstrated a scarce use of downgrading devices in contrast to upgrading ones, which were employed abundantly.

Ren and Guo (2020) investigated the pragmatic strategies of self-praise obtained from Weibo, China's most popular social media platform. Having chosen 300 microblogs as the basis of analysis, the authors were able to find that three major categories of self-praise were used by the posters: unmodified explicit self-praise, explicit self-praise with modification, and implicit self-praise. Expressing self-praise explicitly without modification was the most frequently deployed strategy (93.92%), which appears to run counter to the Chinese norms and constraints against self-praise. Ren and Guo, however, argue that "anonymity" in online contexts may contribute to an augmented frequency of unmodified explicit self-praise as it alleviates the users' concern about threatening the positive face of the audience in comparison to FTF communications (p.186).

Chalak (2021) studied Iranian EFL learners' reactions to three types of self-praise (bragging, complaint, and humblebragging) on two levels of literal and ironic on three factors of likeability, modesty, and sincerity. The results of the analysis showed the participants had a considerably higher rate of perception for literal rather than ironic self-praise, with sincerity possessing the highest rating. In terms of value, the participants tended to hold modesty in low regard, which, according to the author, suggests that self-praise is not viewed as an "acceptable or appropriate norm" in Iranian culture despite the fact that it is prevalent on Instagram (p.11).

As can be seen, interest in studying self-presentation in general and self-praise, in particular, has grown exponentially within the last decade. However, to the best of our knowledge, self-praise on the bio section of Instagram has not been brought under scrutiny yet. Moreover, the speech act in question has received scant attention in Iran, probably due to its discouraged and frowned-upon nature in Iranian culture. Therefore, the present study attempts to address this gap in the burgeoning scope of the literature by examining the self-praise strategies as evidenced on Instagram bios of Iranian English language teachers.

3. Methodology
3.1 Data collection
This study aims to investigate the self-praise strategies on Instagram bios of Iranian English language teachers. As a growing trend, Instagram serves as a new venue for many users to freely engage in sharing their professional talents and strengths to attract clients in need of their services. Iranian English language teachers are no exception. With English being a foreign language in Iran and the number of people desiring to learn it constantly increasing, teachers seize this opportunity to offer their help. To catch the attention of those looking for a good and skillful instructor, the teachers create pages where they post educational content with the intention of presenting their teaching skills.

Drawing upon the search function of Instagram, the hashtags #English andزبان انگلیسی# (English language), were typed in the search interface individually. The result of the search was a large number of posts created by different teachers. Through tapping on the usernames of the posts, we were ushered into the profiles of the teachers who had created the posts.120 accounts were selected randomly based on a certain leading criterion: the use of the Persian language as the national language of Iran on the bio section of the teachers. Both full sentences and bullet points were taken into account. Moreover, the data is gender-balanced in that 60 accounts belong to male teachers and 60 to female ones. In conjunction with ethical issues, user IDs are omitted to reveal no sensitive information about the authors.

3.2 Data analysis
The present study mainly consists of qualitative analyses complemented by some descriptive statistics. As the main source of inspiration for conducting this study, the researchers used the conceptual framework put forth by Tobback (2019) for analyzing the instances of self-praise strategies. Notably, slight modifications were needed to suit the nature of the collected data. Based on a classical distinction in politeness theory, self-praise strategies in this framework are realized in direct and indirect ways. Having selected 120 Instagram accounts as the data set, we carefully read through their bio sections in order to code the self-praise strategies employed by the authors. The strategies that served a similar function fell under the same category. While coding the

strategies, it was realized that a mixture of self-praise strategies was employed in most of the bios. Therefore, we decided to include each independent strategy under a separate coding. This being the case, 120 bios selected for this study yielded a total of 243 instances of self-praise. To respect user privacy, IDs were eliminated. The data will be presented without any modification in terms of typography so as to maintain authenticity.

4. Results

This section will first analyze the data quantitatively, demonstrating the frequencies and percentages of each individual self-praise strategy. Subsequently, a qualitative analysis will shed more light on each strategy. Table 1 displays the frequencies and percentages of self-praise strategies identified in the data.

Table 1: Frequency and percentage of self-praise strategies

Strategy	Frequency	Percentage(%)
Direct self-praise	**37**	**15.22**
Indirect self-praise	**206**	**84.78**
Indirect type 1	75	30.8
Third party as the beneficiary	75	30.86
Indirect type 2	131	53.92
1 Implicatures based on accomplishments		
a) education or degrees	29	11.93
b) names of clients or employees	4	1.64
c) concrete work experience	38	15.63
d) what is generally offered	29	11.93
2 Implicatures based on doing with attitude	5	2.05
3 Implicatures based on cognitive attitudes	26	10.69
Total	**243**	**100**

A quick glance at Table 1 indicates the apparent dominance of indirect strategies over direct self-praise (84.78% and 15.22%, respectively). In the following, we will analyze each individual strategy in more detail using some representative examples from the data.

4.1 Direct self-praise

As the term indicates, direct self-praise is associated with explicitly attributing some credit *to* the speaker *by* the speaker. This form of self-praise can be regarded as bragging. The use of dispositional statements as well as comparatives and superlatives signal the presence of this type of self-praise (Matley,2018). The obtained data accounts for the occurrence of only one strategy through which the teachers directly praised themselves: using evaluative nouns or descriptive adjectives that enables the authors to show their being well-versed and skillful in an explicit way. Examples *(1)* and *(2)* will help to illustrate this point:

بهترین پیج برای یادگیری زبان انگلیسی

(1) The **best** page for learning English

پست های خفن و بی نظیرمو از دست نده!

(2) Don't miss my **awesome** posts!

 The superlative 'best' in example (1) is an attempt to praise how professional and skillful the author is. Obviously, he/she believes among all the existing pages that teach English; his/hers is the one that learners should follow. In a similar vein, in example (2), the author has used a descriptive adjective directly praising the content produced by him/her.

4.2 Indirect type 1

Following Tobback (2019), indirect self-praise strategies fall into two main categories in this study: indirect type 1 and indirect type 2. The former, adopted from previous pioneering studies (Dayter, 2014; Speer, 2012), is concerned with shifting the focus away from the self. The latter, however, places emphasis on the self rather than third parties to express self-praise. In fact, these types of indirect strategies draw upon the use of "inferences" or "particularized conversational implicatures" that are cancellable and must be inferred by the readers (Tobback 2019, p.653).

Tobback's (2019) study identified two sub-strategies for indirect type 1 strategies: reported third-party praise and third party as the beneficiary of the skillfulness of the author. In the first one, the author shifts the focus away from himself as he reports the positive remarks of the clients or employees about his skillfulness; hence, not claiming any rights to self-assess (Heritage and Raymond,2005). In contrast, the teachers did not employ this sub-strategy in the present study. The second sub-strategy, however, was employed rather frequently. Below, we will explain it in more detail.

4.3 Third-party as the beneficiary of the skillfulness of the author

Considered as an alternative means to shift the focus away from the self, this indirect way of self-praise is achieved by offering the skills capable of addressing the clients' needs or being of immediate benefit to them. Accounting for 30.86% of the collected data, this sub-strategy was the most frequently used one among all self-praise strategies.

تو این پیج یاد میگیری که چطور مثل یه حرفه ای انگلیسی صحبت کنی .

(3) Through this page, **you will learn how to speak English proficiently.**

زبان انگلیسی رو درست و اصولی یاد بگیر.

(4) **Learn** English in the **right and principled way.**

یادگرفتن انگلیسی کار سختی نیست من بهت کمک میکنم راحت یادش بگیری .

(5) Learning English is not tough. I will **help you learn it easily**.

As can be seen from the above examples, the authors try to shift the attention away from themselves by offering their skills as solutions to their client's problems. At the same time, however, they are indirectly praising themselves by hinting that they have the required skills to make the otherwise laborious process of learning a foreign language happen in an organized (4) or easy way (5).

4.4 Indirect type 2

With the highest frequency of occurrence (53.92%), the second category of indirect strategies does not rely upon a third party or some external factors to show skillfulness. The authors themselves are the only party involved. The indirectness of the strategies stemming from this category is contingent on the pragmatic inferences hinting at the skillfulness of the authors. In other words, these strategies convey an implicit meaning. Following Tobback (2019), based on the kind of evidence that yield the implicatures, three kinds of subcategories are identified in this study: implicatures based on doing or accomplishments, implicatures based on doing with attitude, and implicatures based on cognitive attitude.

1. Implicatures based on doing (accomplishments)

As the term clearly indicates, authors draw upon this strategy to paint a vivid picture of what they have achieved or what they generally do. The following sub-strategies are all motivated by one leading goal: presenting skillfulness in teaching English.

a) The education authors had or the degrees they obtained

Being educated in a particular domain can be regarded as the fundamental step taken toward building professionalism in that domain. Through this strategy, the authors impart the impression of skillfulness in what they do given the point that proper education is capable of giving the authors thorough knowledge and rudimentary skills in the domain in question. According to Table 1, this sub-strategy accounts for 11.93% of the data collected.

کارشناسی ارشد آموزش زبان از دانشگاه تهران

(6) **M.A in TEFL**, University of Tehran

دانشجوی دکتری آموزش زبان آنگلیسی

(7) **Ph.D. candidate in TEFL**

In addition to the educational degree in (7), the author mentions the university from which he/she has graduated. This, in fact, strengthens the impression of being a professional and skillful English language teacher since the institutions that offer degrees have the benefit of authority. In this case, referring to the University of Tehran, which holds the topmost rank among the other universities in Iran, highlights the author's credentials.

b) *Citing the names of the clients or employers one has worked for*
This strategy functions in the same way as the previous one. The authors boost their skillfulness by alluding to the kinds of employers to whom they have offered their services. The message lying behind this strategy is that only able and skillful teachers can teach clients of considerable importance and prestige. With only 1.64% of the whole data, this sub-type of indirect strategies was the least frequently employed.

سابقه تدریس برای مدیران شرکت خودروسازی سایپا

(8) Have experience teaching **CEOs of Saipa car manufacturing company**

مدرس کانون زبان ایران

(9) A teacher in **Iran Language Institute**

c) *Concrete work experience*
This strategy involves describing concrete work experience like positions and functions (10), professional domains (11), and successes (12). Accounting for 15.63% of all the data, this strategy occurred quite frequently.

ده سال سابقه ی سوپروایزری دوره های بزرگسالان

(10) Ten years of experience as a **supervisor of adult courses**

تدریس تخصصی گرامر آیلتس

(11) **Professional teaching of IELTS grammar**

کسب نمره 8.5 آزمون آیلتس

(12) I hold **Band 8.5 of the IELTS exam**

All the above examples demonstrate how skillful the authors are in each particular domain, albeit in a veiled and indirect manner.

d) *What is generally offered*
Deploying this strategy enables the authors to give a description of what they normally offer to their clients or with what method they work. Similar to *education or degrees,* this strategy contributed to 11.93% of all self-praise strategies.

من بهت اصطلاحات روزمره ای که تو فیلما استفاده میشن رو یاد میدم

(13) I teach you the **everyday idioms and expressions used in movies**

کلاسای من شبیه موقعیت های دنیای واقعی هستن

(14) My classes are **similar to real-world situations**

2. Implicatures based on doing with attitude
The second sub-category of indirect type 2 strategies involves utterances expressing the passion with which the authors regard their profession and its activities. This is considered an implicit way of self-praise as the authors, through claiming that they revel in what they do, display their ability to do it successfully and effortlessly. It is noteworthy to mention that this strategy was used infrequently (2.05%).

من یه معلمم که عاشق انگلیسیه!

(15) I'm a teacher who **adores English!**

من با عشق و علاقه بهت درس میدم.

(16) I teach you **with love and passion.**

3. Implicatures based on cognitive attitude

The last sub-category of indirect type 2 strategies accounts for 10.69% of the data. It involves stating the general goals toward which the authors intend to lead their clients. It is a very implicit way to impart skillfulness since teachers can be regarded as trustworthy and experienced if they have a clear vision about what they do and what they aim to achieve.

هدف من اینه که انگلیسیتو به بالاترین سطح برسونم.

(17) **My goal** is to help your English improve.

تنها هدفم رسوندن تو به خواسته هات تو زبان انگلیسیه.

(18) **My sole purpose** is to help you reach your goals in English.

It is worthy to mention that in the above examples, the teachers' goals are presumably to be of benefit to the audience; hence, these utterances could also be coded under the strategy of a *third party as the beneficiary*, which was elaborated earlier.

5. Discussion

Throughout this study, an attempt was made to probe into self-praise strategies as evidenced on Instagram bios of Iranian English language teachers. As the results demonstrate, two major categories of self-praise were employed: direct and indirect. It was found that the teachers showed a tendency toward being indirect when presenting themselves as skillful given that this type of self-praise was deployed most frequently (84.78%). In contrast, with 15.22%, direct self-praise was used infrequently.

The evident popularity of indirect self-praise strategies in this study can be ascribed to the authors' concern about the positive face of their audience (Brown and Levinson,1987). In other words, the pressure to avoid bringing displeasure on the audience coupled with the desire to minimize the risk of being considered a braggart has led them to choose a safer way of presenting themselves well-versed in their profession. By way of comparison, this finding is congruent with You and Gen (2020), who found that implicit self-praise accounted for a large number of all self-praise strategies that Chinese celebrities had employed (41.45%).

Within indirect self-praise strategies, the *third party as the beneficiary* enjoyed frequent use (30.86%). Through this strategy, the authors present their skills as good enough to be of benefit to the audience or as possible solutions to their problems. The rationale behind using this strategy more frequently than others can be attributed to the nature of the profession in which teachers are involved. In other words, a good and seasoned teacher is commonsensically a teacher who can facilitate the process of learning and also help learners overcome the hindrances they might have throughout the process. This facilitative role, actually, rises in significance when it comes to learning a foreign language such as English. Therefore, when presenting their skills capable of helping learners, the teachers indirectly praise themselves as being skillful and well-aware of the potential difficulties that arise in the process of learning.

With respect to indirect type 2 strategies, which include implicit expressions of skillfulness, Iranian teachers used them more frequently than indirect type 1 strategies (53.92% and 30.86%, respectively). While the latter relies on a third party to express self-praise, the former puts the self at the center. The indirectness of these strategies hinges upon the inferences signaling skillfulness. The obvious preference for this type of self-praise can be justified by the teachers' attempt to pose a minimum threat to the face of the audience. Although implicit expressions of self-praise are a much safer choice, they are not in consonance with the relevance theory put forth by Sperber and Wilson (1995). Based on this theory, information processing ought to demand as little mental effort as possible in order to be relevant. More precisely, the audience should not have any trouble comprehending the author's intended meaning. Iranian teachers, however, do not seem to conform to this concept at the expense of the augmented cognitive processing load required for deciphering the real intention of their utterances. Apart from the attempts to attenuate the threat to the positive face of the audience, this inclination toward implicitness and implicatures can be traced to Iranian cultural and social norms. Persian being a face-saving and collectivist culture, Iranians regard each other as members of a community and depend heavily on each other; hence, they do not want to hurt other members' feelings by stating directly that they are superior to them or are more skillful than them in a particular domain (Koutalki,2002; Eslamirasekh,2004). In fact, a relatively large body of research investigating other face-threatening speech acts such as requests and refusals in the Iranian context lends support to the findings of this study regarding the apparent popularity of indirect strategies among Iranian people (Allami and Naeimi,2010; Pishghadam and Sharafadini,2011; Vaezi,2011; Hosseini and Talebinezhad,2014; Farnia and Abdul Sattar,2015, Shahidipour and Zarei,2017).

On the other hand, direct self-praise accounted for only 15.22 % of all self-praise strategies in the collected data. This manifest dispreference for straightforwardly and unreservedly presenting their skillfulness hints at the teachers' awareness of the socially and interactionally hazardous nature of the speech act of self-praise. As pointed out earlier, direct self-praise may culminate in a threat to the positive face of the addressee as it puts the speaker above the hearer. The following underlying reasons explain the teachers' decision to avoid applying this strategy frequently. Firstly, the Iranian cultural schema *shekaste nafsi*, roughly translated as 'modesty', suggested by Sharifian (2005), plays a crucial role in the teachers' avoidance of blowing their own trumpet. Unique to Persian culture, this schema encourages speakers to downplay their skills, talents, achievements, and many other topics. The

practice of this concept actually allows the Iranian people to display politeness toward the addressee. Another factor at play is the attempts of the teachers to attain successful impression management (Leary, 1995). Bearing in mind that their pages are public and that, unlike the ordinary people who can choose to be anonymous, their real names are used, the teachers barely engage in directly praising their skills, which underscores their concern about the potential threat to their audience's face. This apparent concern is in line with Leary and Kowlaski (1990), who maintain that "the more public one's behavior, the more likely one is to be concerned with how it appears to others" (Leary and Kowlaski,1995; p.38). There is, however, a stark contrast between this study and Ren and Guo (2020) in terms of the application of direct self-praise. While in this study the users displayed little interest in explicitly praising their teaching prowess (15.22 %), the Chinese users of Weibo used explicit self-praise most frequently (51.06%).

In summary, the existence of self-praise in profusion on Instagram bios of Iranian English language teachers can be explicated by a number of underlying factors. First, individuals draw upon self-presentation as a helpful way of carving their desired impression on the audience's minds and constructing their public identities (Leary,1995; Leary and Kowlaski,1990). English language teachers who create educational pages accessible to everyone can be regarded as public figures endeavoring to make and manage their impression through engaging in self-praise as a kind of self-presentation. Second, economic motives may also have a role to play. To be more precise, through Instagram, users can generally carry out their businesses, pursue employment opportunities, or seek new business clients; thus, this SNS can be seen as a potential source of income. Iranian English language teachers are no exception in this regard. As English is an international and foreign language in Iran, a vast number of individuals feel it incumbent on themselves to start learning it. Consequently, in recent years the number of English teachers has risen substantially. In addition to teaching in language institutes, most of these teachers, with the reasonable prospect of supplementing their income, create an educational profile on Instagram and start posting videos or photos in which they teach various aspects of English. Appropriate self-praise can come to their aid in distinguishing them from other teachers; thus, attracting more followers and language learners who might want to start private courses with them. Finally, the theory of self-politeness proposed by Chen (2001) can explain the profusion of self-praise on the bios of the teachers. According to this theory, a speaker's linguistic and pragmatic behavior is affected by the need to protect and enhance not only the hearer's face but also that of the speaker. With this self-directed theoretical framework in mind, self-praise on the bios of the Iranian English language teachers can be viewed as aimed at protecting and enhancing the teacher's his/her own face.

6. Conclusion

The present study set out to investigate the self-praise strategies as manifested on the Instagram bios of Iranian English language teachers. The analysis of the data indicated that the teachers performed the speech act in question through two major categories: direct and indirect. Indirect strategies were employed more predominantly than direct self-praise. Given that self-praise has received scant attention in Iranian online contexts, this study may contribute to the existing literature. In addition, since the collected data pertained to English teachers, the present study could be useful in providing insights for teachers and teacher trainers to obtain information on how to use SNSs to present themselves as skillful in ways that pose a minimum threat to the face of their audience. More importantly, although previous studies had attempted to examine self-praise on Instagram, the bio section of this platform had not been brought under scrutiny. Therefore, this study, having focused on the bios of Instagram for the first time, can broaden the scope of research on self-praise and spark other researchers' interest in probing further linguistic and pragmatic features existing on the bio section.

The study, however, was not limitation-free. First, the results of this study should be taken into account with caution due to its small scope that was limited to only 120 Instagram accounts belonging to Iranian English teachers, which calls the generalizability of the findings into question. More significantly, in line with Tobback (2019), the pragmatic strategies of self-praise have been analyzed against a particular instance of self-praise: self-praise directed at showing skillfulness. In other words, the intended meaning of the teachers, that is, 'I am well-versed and skillful in teaching English', was the background against which the utterances of self-praise present in the bios were interpreted. Therefore, the typology of direct and indirect strategies only holds in the framework of the present study. Second, this study focused only on Iranian teachers due to practicality issues. Future studies can provide interesting insights into cross-cultural and cross-linguistic issues of self-praise by comparing the bios of Iranian teachers with those of, say, American or British teachers. Third, although the researchers tried to balance the gender issue by randomly selecting 60 pages for male teachers and 60 for female ones, future studies can make attempts to examine whether the teachers' gender has an influence on their self-praise strategies or not. Additionally, the effect of other social variables such as age and education could also yield interesting results. Finally, we analyzed the data from our own (etic) perspective. As another venue for future research, the teachers' emic perspective regarding self-praise on their bios can be explored through interviews to gain an understanding of both producing and perceiving self-praise in online contexts.

Reference

[1] Allami, H., & Naeimi, A. (2010). A cross-linguistic study of refusals: An analysis of pragmatic competence development in Iranian EFL learners. *Journal of Pragmatics, 43* (1), 385-406.

[2] Brown, P., & Levinson, S. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage.* London: Cambridge University Press.

[3] Chalak, A. (2021). Pragmatics of self-praise and self-presentation by Iranian EFL learners. *Teaching English as a Second Language Electronic Journal (TESL-EJ) 25*, (1). https://tesl-ej.org/pdf/ej97/a10.pdf.

[4] Chen, R. (2001). Self-politeness: A proposal. *Journal of Pragmatics,33*(1), 87-106.

[5] Chen, F.F., & J, Y. (2012). The impact of individualistic and collectivistic orientation on the judgement of self-presentation. *European Journal of Social Psychology,42* (4). DOI: 10.1002/ejsp.1872.

[6] Chou, G.H.T., & Edge, N. (2012). They are happier and have better lives than I am: The impact of using Facebook on perceptions of others' lives. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking, 15* (2). DOI: 10.1089/cyber.2011.0324.

[7] Dayter, D. (2014). Self-praise in microblogging. *Journal of Pragmatics, 61*,91-102.

[8] Dayter, D. (2016). *Discursive self in microblogging: Speech Acts, stories and self-praise.* Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

[9] Dumas, T., Maxwell-Smith, M., Davis, P.J., & Giulietti, P. (2017). Lying or longing for likes? Narcissism, peer belonging, loneliness, and normative versus descriptive like-seeking on Instagram in emerging adulthood. *Computers in Human Behavior,71*. DOI:10.1016/j.chb.2017.01.037.

[10] Eslami-Rasekh, Z., Eslami-Rasekh, A., & Fatahi, A. (2004). The effect of explicit metapragmatic Instruction on speech act awareness of advanced EFL learners. *Teaching English as a Second Language Electronic Journal (TESL-EJ), 8*(2),1-12.

[11] Farnia, M., & Abdul Sattar, H. Q. (2015). A cross-cultural study of Iranians' and Malays'expressions of gratitude. *Journal of Intercultural Communication,37*, 1-20.

[12] Gasiorek, J., Giles, H, Holtgraves, T., & Robbins, S. (2012). Celebrating thirty years of the JLSP: Analyses and prospects. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology, 31*(4), 361-375.

[13] Geurin, N.A., & Burch, M.L. (2015). Communicating via photographs: A gendered analysis of Olympic athletes' visual self-presentation on Instagram. *Sport Management Review, 19* (2), 133-145.

[14] Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life.* New York: Anchor

[15] Gou, Y., Ren, W. (2020). Managing image: The self-praise of celebrities on social media. *Discourse, Context, and Media,38,* 622-659.

[16] Heritage, J., & Raymond, G., (2005). The terms of the agreement: Indexing epistemic authority and subordination in talk-in-interaction. *Social Psychology Quarterly,68*(1), 15-38.

[17] Holmes, J. (2009). Politeness strategies as linguistic variables. *Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics*,684-697.

[18] Hosseini, H., & Talebinezhad, M. R. (2014). A comparative study of the use of refusal strategies between Iranian EFL learners and native speakers of English. *International Journal of Language Learning and Applied Linguistics World(IJLLAW), 5*(2),176-188.

[19] Hu, Y., Manikonda, L., & Kambhampati, S. (2014, June 1-4). *What we Instagram: The first analysis of Instagram photo content and user types*. Paper presented at Proceedings of the Eighth International AAAI Conference on Weblogs and Social Media in Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA.

[20] Kim, M.S. (2017). The practice of praising one's own child in parent-to-parent talk. *Discourse studies,19*(5), 536-560.

[21] Koutlaki, S. A. (2002). Offers and expressions of thanks as face enhancing acts: Tæ'arof in Persian. *Journal of Pragmatics,34*(12), 1733-1756.

[22] Leech, G., (1983). *Principles of pragmatics.* London: Longman.

[23] Leary, M. R., Kowalski, R.M. (1990). Impression Management: A Literature Review and two-component model. *Psychological Bulletin,107*(1), 34-47.

[24] Leary, M. R. (1995). *Self-presentation: impression management and interpersonal behaviour.* Colorado, Boulder: Westview Press

[25] Lee-Won, J. R., Shim, M., Joo, K. Y., & Park, G. S. (2014). Who puts the best "face" forward on Facebook?: Positive self-presentation in online social networking and the role of self-consciousness, actual-to-total Friends ratio, and culture. *Computers in Human Behavior, 39*, 413-423.

[26] Matley, D. (2018). This is NOT a #humblebrag; this is just a #brag: The pragmatics of self-praise, hashtags, and politeness on Instagram. *Discourse, Context, and Media, 22*, 30-38.

[27] Mehdizadeh, S. (2010). Self-Presentation 2.0: Narcissism and self-esteem on Facebook. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking, 13*, 357-364.

[28] Miller, L. C. (1992). Should I brag? Nature and impact of positive and boastful disclosures for women and men. *Human Communication Research, 18*(3), 364-399.

[29] Moon, J.H., Lee, E., Lee, J.-H., Choi, T.R., & Sung, Y. (2016). The role of narcissism in self-promotion on Instagram. *Personal Individual Differences, 101*, 22-25.

[30] Ong, E.Y. (2011). Narcissism, extraversion and adolescents' self-presentation on Facebook. *Personality and Individual Differences, 50*(2), 180-185.

[31] Pishghadam, R., & Sharafadini, M. (2011). Contrastive study into the realization of suggestion speech act: Persian versus English. *Canadian Social Science, 7*(4), 230-239.

[32] Ren, W., Gou, Y. (2020). Self-praise on Chinese social networking sites. *Journal of Pragmatics, 169*, 179-189.

[33] Rui, J., & Stefanone, M. (2013). Strategic self-presentation online: A cross-cultural study. *Computers in Human Behavior, 29*(1), 110-118.

[34] Sedikides, C., Aiden P.G., & Claire M. H. (2007). *The importance of being modest.* New York: Psychology Press.

[35] Sezer, O., Francesca, G., & Michael, N. (2015). Humblebragging: A distinct and ineffective self-presentation strategy. *SSRN Electronic Journal. DOI:10.2139/ssrn.2597626.*

[36] Sharifian, F. (2005). The Persian cultural schema of Shekasteh-nafsi: A study of compliment responses in Persian and Anglo-Australian speakers. *Pragmatics and Cognition,13*(2), 337-361.

[37] Shahidi Pour, V., & Zarei, G.R. (2017). Investigating the use of compliments and compliment responses in Persian: Effect of Educational Background. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature, 6*(1).

[38] Speer, S.A. (2012). The interactional organization of self-praise. *Social Psychology Quarterly, 75*(1), 52-79.

[39] Sperber, D., & Wilson, D. (1995). *Relevance: Communication and cognition.* London: Blackwell, Oxford.

[40] Statista. (2020). Most popular social networks worldwide as of October 2020, ranked by a number of active users. https://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networksranked- by-number-of-users.

[41] Sung, Y., Jung-Ah, L., Eunice, k., & Sejung, M.G. (2016). Why we post selfies: Understanding motivations for posting pictures of oneself. *Personality and Individual Differences, 97*, 260-265.

[42] Tobback, E. (2019). Telling the world how skilful you are: Self-praise strategies on LinkedIn. *Discourse and Communication, 13*, 647-668.

[43] Van Damme, C., Hoorens, V., &Sedikides, C. (2015). Why self-enhancement provokes dislike: The hubris hypothesis and the aversiveness of explicit self-superiority claims. *Self and Identity,15*(2), 173-190.

[44] Vaezi, R. (2011). A Contrastive Study of the speech act of refusal between Iranian EFL learners and Persian native speakers. *Cross-Cultural Communication, 7*(2), 213-218.

[45] Walther, J. B. (2012). Interaction through technological lenses: Computer-mediated communication and language. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology, 24*(1), 36-65.

[46] Weiser, E. B. (2015). #Me: Narcissism and its facets as predictors of selfie-posting frequency. *Personality and Individual Differences, 86*, 477-481.

[47] Wu, R. (2011). A conversation analysis of self-praising in everyday Mandarin. *Journal of Pragmatics, 43*, 3152-3176.

[48] Wu, R. (2012). Self-praising through reporting: Strategic use of two reporting practices in Mandarin conversation. *Discourse Process, 49*, 622-659.