



A Contrastive Analysis of Persian and English Compliment, Request, and Invitation Patterns within the Semantic Metalanguage Framework

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Abstract

Speech acts shape the core of pragmatic competence and their mastery is a prerequisite for successful discourse encounters in an L2. Cross-cultural comparisons, as claimed by Johnstone (2018), are very effective for knowing and acquiring the speech acts. Accordingly, the purpose of this study was to compare a limited number of communicative routines in English and Persian within the framework of the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) developed by Wierzbicka (1991) and to examine if the words uttered by speakers at the surface level (exterior) would match their thoughts (interior) especially in such routines as compliment, request, and invitation patterns. The participants comprised 21 MA students studying English language teaching. The data was obtained by a validated researcher-made questionnaire containing both structured and unstructured items and 10 scenarios on the basis of which the study participants provided comments, appropriate expressions, and responses. For the English routines, the data was obtained from three English plays. The aforementioned communicative routines in Persian were described in terms of their NSM while the metalinguistic components for the English routines were adopted from Wierzbicka (1991). The results indicated that the NSM provided rich insights into subliminal cross-cultural differences. Since this study makes use of simple cultural scripts (similar to circumlocution) to describe communicative routines in both English and Persian, learners can easily understand differences within the hidden cross-cultural bound interactions. Implications of the study suggest that both EFL teachers and learners can gain more profound insights about the cross-cultural sociopragmatic differences between English and Persian.

Keywords: Cultural scripts; Invitation patterns; Natural semantic metalanguage (NSM); Requests; Semantic primes; *Ta'arof* (Compliment)

INTRODUCTION

For many decades, there has been a quest to develop comprehensive theories to explain and describe language phenomena. These theories

have gone through the test of time, critical reviews and analyses. They have been either revised or discarded. Most of these theories have been developed by western scholars, and subsequently applied to language phenomena other than English throughout the world. This trend

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was in vogue as a result of the modernist movement whereby there was a great emphasis on a single narrative mainly originating from monolithic centers of powers that claimed ownership of knowledge. It was expected that this single narrative could provide solutions to all problems throughout the world (Kumaravadivelu, 2012). In addition, it was thought that these solutions could even be applied to problems outside those monolithic centers. However, as modernism faded away and was replaced by post-modernists' views, there was an epistemological shift that focused on multiple narratives and distributed knowledge allowing for the emergence of initiatives from other non-monolithic centers too. Knowledge was no longer monopolized by powers. This view also paved the ground for the analysis of language phenomena within locally-driven perspectives (outsiders' points of view).

For many years, the analyses of language were mainly based on intuitions. Later on, linguistics (Structuralists) studied language phenomena within a scientific and analytical framework. Structuralism which was the byproduct of such scientific studies regarded language as an entity separate from the mind. In fact, the focus was on the investigation of the observable components of language. Then, the Generative Transformational Grammar developed by Chomsky emerged which postulated that the mechanism of language acquisition originates from innate or mental processes. In fact, there was a focus on linguistic competence with no recourse to the socio-cultural rules governing language performance. However, today it is strongly believed that a comprehensive theory of language must account for both the competence and performance variables that govern language use. The importance of performance variables paved the way for the emergence of sociolinguistics and pragmatics which account for socio-cultural factors including the features of interlocutors and context. In fact, language is viewed within a variety of discursive structures. As we see, theories were discarded and replaced by another through-

out history. This trend has been accompanied by accounting for diverse epistemological views rather than uniform monopolized ones.

Perhaps researchers in non-English circles were not aware of the fact that most of these models would provide terminology mainly derived from English and could be applied only to English. Anglocentrism is the term rightly used by Wierzbicka (2013, p. 33) in her seminal book: *"The Hazards of English as a Default Language"* to metaphorically underscore the fact that experts and researchers are imprisoned in English by mainly relying on tools and terms engulfed in anglocentrism and ethnocentrism.

Part of the reason that researchers mainly tend to analyze and describe language phenomena, in languages other than English, within the English perceptive has to be traced to the history of the growth of English in colonial times and dominance of scientific movement in the west. Therefore, the insights which have come out of the western researchers' endeavors are considered as interested knowledge. Any study not done within this framework is not highly appreciated and is considered faulty (Wierzbicka, 2013). As a result, some descriptions and explanations may look odd because the researcher has looked at the phenomenon through the prism of English as an orienting lens. To illustrate the dominance of western epistemological views, Kumaravadivelu (2012) characterizes postcolonial thoughts as having four overlapping dimensions, namely, scholastic, linguistic, cultural and economic suggesting that knowledge originated from the west is believed to be superior to localized ones, that the status of local languages has been relegated to a marginalized one, that teaching English is inextricably interwoven with the teaching anglo cultures, and that the role of English worldwide has greatly benefitted the economy of the English speaking countries.

Given the aforementioned considerations, Wierzbicka proposes The Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) that contains a set of universals (similar concepts shared by all languages) and is used "to approach any field of study in

human sciences bearing in mind the distinctions between ‘universal words’ and words that are cultural specific” (Wierzbicka, 2013, p. 33). Levisen and Jogie (2015) argued that the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) approach provides us with an optimal apparatus for examining discursual and cultural-bound interactions, as it focuses on “semantic-conceptual primes, elements of meaning which appear to have exponents in all (or in almost all) languages and linguistic varieties” (Levisen & Jogie, 2015, p. 172).

The Natural Semantic Metalanguage provides a tool that can be used to describe deeply culturally-specific phenomena in any language and is free from anglocentrism and ethnocentrism. This is not dependent on any language but shares a set of universally similar concepts. As stated by (Wierzbicka, 2013), the Natural Semantic Metalanguage refutes the application of any formal language to describe the intended meanings in sociocultural interactions, and as a result, is at variance with the dominant truth-functional and conceptual semantics. Nevertheless, NSM does employ language to detect the meanings, i.e., an alternative to a naturally occurring language.

In addition to a lexical core, it is believed that languages have a grammatical core in which the words appear. Both the lexical core and the grammatical core form a mini English referred to as NSM which shares many concepts with mini Persian and is a culture free Metalanguage that is used for “analyzing meanings and ideas, for comparing languages and cultures, and for elucidating ideas in any domain of social science and ...” (Wierzbicka, 2013, p. 33).

This study intends to compare and contrast a limited number of communicative interaction routines in English and Persian in terms of the cultural scripts by using the Natural Semantic Metalanguage revised and modified by (Wierzbicka, 2003). Yarmohammady (1998) argues that human beings are constantly engaged in comparing and contrasting things and entities, which leads to developing epistemologies in any domain of sciences. Therefore, they have always made an attempt to look for a commonality be-

tween two things. This commonality is referred to as “*Tertium Comparationis*” used as an equivalent base for the comparative analysis. This study includes such common topics as complement routines, a food offering, and request patterns. Differences emerge as these common bases are compared and contrasted.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The relevant literature abounds in presentations and publications including books and articles which have provided readers with appraisal and criticisms of the principles and tenets of theories developed throughout history to explain and describe language phenomena. Many researchers have applied these tenets and principles to languages other than English. The claims that they are universal have been criticized and rejected. Wierzbicka (2013) argues that every nation has its unique ways of speaking, deeply ingrained in their relevant cultures, which must be explored from an insider’s point of view. Therefore, Wierzbicka (1991) proposed the NSM that can be derived from any language. As she states, her model has been appreciated, criticized and used by researchers since then. It seems that the results of research undertakings have not undermined the principles of the Semantic Metalanguage but consolidated them.

Grice’s cooperative principle has been criticized on the ground that Grice thinks of an idealized form of cooperation which is totally different from laymen’s terms and often misleading (Cutting, 2008; Flowerdew, 2013). This rendition suggests that interlocutors involved in the conversation are cooperative and good communicators and that there is no resistance and their interaction is rational. However, as asserted by Paltridge (2006), interaction could be non-cooperative and irrational. The interlocutors tend to be bad communicators using this discursive strategy to miscommunicate. Besides, Grice’s cooperative principle is asocial and fails to account for social and situational factors that cause interlocutors to miscommunicate (Hadi, 2013; Johnstone, 2018).

P. Brown and Levinson (1987) claim their notion of “face” originates from the English folk term. Matsumoto (1988, p. 405) argues that the notion of positive and negative face “has been acknowledged as playing an increasingly dominant role in European and American culture”. However, the notion of face is realized differently in Japanese culture and society. The individual’s territory is not of great importance. Matsumoto (1988, p. 405) asserted that rather:

a Japanese generally must understand where s/he stands in relation to other members of the group or society and must acknowledge his/her dependence on the others. Acknowledgment and maintenance of the relative position of others, rather than the preservation of an individual’s proper territory, governs all social interaction.

Another well-known theory that has been applied to describe the intended speaker’s meaning with regards to both semantic and pragmatic aspects is referred to as the speech act theory. The former determines the intention of the speaker on the basis of the context and the latter specifies the illocutionary force assigned to utterances (Gee, 2011). Wierzbicka (2013) argues that for speech acts to be appropriately plausible, they need to meet four felicity conditions, namely, propositional content, preparatory, sincerity, and essential conditions. These conventions are believed to be universal. That speech acts exist in all languages is out of the question. However, they are realized differently in different cultures. Thomas (1983), in his discussion of pragmatic failure, contends that the illocutionary force assigned to speech acts is ambivalent. That is, the utterance ‘*would you like to come and sit down?*’ depending on the situation could be interpreted as an invitation, a request or a directive leading to a case of indeterminacy. And pragmatics analysts usually find it difficult to find out the exact intentions of speakers. In this regard, Wierzbicka (1991, p. 198) points out that “most utterances can’t be identified unambiguously”. In addition,

she argues that pragmatics assigns functions to an utterance by relying on wild guesses. Speech acts have also been discussed in terms of the effect they could have on the hearer. However, the statement that any utterance is intended to have perlocutionary intent has no truth in reality (Salehizadeh, 1997).

The analysis of language in terms of the Semantic Metalanguage has still remained a somewhat uncharted territory, particularly in Persian. Sahragard (2003) elaborates on a variety of concepts including *ta’arof* in Persian, arguing that this concept cannot be appropriately defined in English terms because it is cultural-specific and used in a unique way. He makes an attempt to describe this concept in terms of the Semantic Metalanguage postulating it contains multi-components of meaning such as *adab*, *rudarbyesti*, *ehteram*, *mehmanavaazi* and *tavaazo?*, which roughly mean politeness, self-restraint, respect, hospitality, and modesty respectively. Vally (2016) has a beautiful account of Iranian “ta’arof” on the BBC travel website and elaborates on her experience with it when she traveled to Iran. She states:

in the world of ta’arof, politeness holds the place of honor. In its name, people refuse when they want to accept, say what is not meant, express what is not felt, invite when it is not intended, and replace bad news with false hope. By doing so, they try to say what they “wished it were” – without ever admitting that it isn’t. (para. 4).

Zamanian and Hashimi (2012) made an attempt to compare and contrast suggestions and rejection of suggestions in both English and Persian by using the cultural scripts developed by Wierzbicka (1991) and concluded that the Semantic Metalanguage was applicable to communicative interaction routines in Persian contributing to an in-depth understanding of language and cross-cultural differences.

For many decades, the epistemological analysis of language has been done on the basis of a dichotomy of the ‘mind’ and ‘body’. Structural-

ists studied the language with no recourse to the mind while the Chomskyan school of thought attached a great role to the mind relegating the role of the environmental factors to secondary importance. Cognitivists emphasized the role of both the mind and the environmental factors in different degrees meaning that some proponents gave a greater role to the mind than the environment while others believed in the reverse order (Marsden, Mitchell, & Myles, 2013). However, within the sociocultural theory of language learning, Johnson and Golombek (2016), quoting from Vygotsky, argued for the inherent interconnectivity between the cognitive and the social rejecting the dualistic view of the mind and body dominant in western thinking.

It should be noted that the concept of the 'mind' is conceived of differently in different cultures, that the dualistic view of the mind and body, dominant in western thinking, should not be used as a framework to describe concepts in languages other than English, and that a deeper cultural understanding is required to find out the meanings underlying such concepts. Levisen and Jogie (2015) suggest that "[t]he Trini *mind* is a moral construct of personhood, revolving around 'good' and 'bad'. By contrast, the Anglo *mind* is a cognitive construct, revolving around 'thinking' and 'knowing' (Levisen & Jogie, 2015, p. 189). Furthermore, in contrast to Anglo English, they found no evidence of dualism within the Trini (Trinidad language). The mind has a moral orientation in Trini while in English it has a cognitive orientation that is equal to 'knowing' and 'thinking'.

Conceptual differences can be observed within different varieties of English and cultures. Bromhead (2011) studies the concept of 'the bush' in Australian English within the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) and explains how concepts assume different meanings that mainly depend on the physical and cultural features of the adopted country and elegantly vary from their original meaning while retaining very few original components of meaning.

Furthermore, it is notable that the meaning underlying words and concepts even within a

single language have very fine meaning components which can be described by using NSM. Goddard, Taboada, and Trnavac (2017) investigated the semantics of evaluative adjectives within the framework of NSM and classify them into five groups: First-person thought-plus-affect (wonderful), experiential (entertaining), experiential with bodily reaction (gripping), lasting impact (memorable), and cognitive evaluation (excellent). The Semantic Metalanguage is used to describe these adjectives in terms of the affect, the physical, mental, and social experience, and duration (both short and long) that they engender in speakers of English.

Goddard (2009, p. 41) meticulously analyzes the concept 'serious' and its relevant collocation 'take' in 'take someone/yourself seriously' within the NSM framework trying to disclose its multiple, very fine layers of meaning in Australian English, which supports the view that concepts within a different variety of English mainly originating from the same mother and land are conceptualized differently once its speakers move to a different land and develop new cultural values. He suggests that Australians do not take things very seriously even in contexts where there is a high demand for seriousness, which clashes with the general mainstream Anglo cultural value that regards the self as ordinary while the newly adopted Australian value "proscribe[s] the appearance of wanting special and better than other people.

Since Iranian interaction routines make up a considerable portion of this study, we need to have an understanding of their social characteristics. Iranian interaction is generally characterized by two aspects: the internal and the external, the former referred to as "*baten*" "is the seat of man's strongest personal feelings" (Beeman, 1986, p. 11). It provides the utmost privacy and a safe haven for the individual to outpour those feelings on appropriate occasions. However, the latter is labeled as the "*zaher*" defined as "the realm of the relatively unpredictable and likewise the realm of controlled expression. It is the realm of politesse and of proper conversation and beha-

avior, where one's true feelings must be held in check, where a proper public face must be put on one's words" (Beeman, 1986, p. 11). Based on these two dichotomous contexts, Iranians adopt different identities that are contradictory to the true character of the individual. This especially holds true with the latter (external, *zاهر*) where the individual takes identities that may be cunning and misleading.

Wierzbicka (1986) emphasizes that language and culture are closely interrelated. Therefore, language learners should be familiar with the general norms and language behavior of the speakers of the target language. Cultural clashes and communication breakdowns are inevitable but can be minimized by providing insights into the subtle cultural discrepancies and the target value systems. This endeavor is justified on the ground that today there is a remarkable emphasis on intercultural communication and the use of English as a lingua franca (ELF) which is mainly used by a large number of non-native speakers throughout the world. In addition, this topic has been scantily researched in Iran. This study will provide a platform for other interested researchers to continue to explore language phenomena within the wake of cross-cultural differences, especially in Persian and English. Therefore, given the aforementioned facts, the present study tries to investigate the communicative routines in English and Persian within a different perspective which no researcher has yet undertaken. As mentioned before, the purpose of this study is not only to describe compliment, request and invitation speech act patterns within the framework of cultural scripts but also to delve into the deeper level of compatibility between the interior and exterior of the aforementioned speech acts in both English and Persian conversational routines. In particular, the current study sought to investigate the following questions:

- 1) Is what Persian and English speakers utter in words (at the surface level) compatible with what they think, feel, and want?

- 2) Can the speech-act differences between Persian and English be compared and contrasted in the terms of the semantic Metalanguage?

METHODS

Participants

To obtain the most relevant information, it was decided that a purposeful sampling should be done. A total of 21 students participated in this study. They were MA students studying at Imam Khomeini International University in Qazvin and Vali-e Asr University in Rafsanjan, Kerman. Out of 14 students at Imam Khomeini International University, 13 students were majoring in Applied Linguistics and one of them in Linguistics (9 females and 5 males). Out of 7 students studying at Rafsanjan University, 6 students were majoring Applied Linguistics and one English Translation Studies (5 females and 2 males). Their ages ranged from 24 to 40 ($M=27.5$, $SD=2.6$) and they were from different socio-cultural backgrounds. Their mother tongue was mostly Persian. Their BAs were in Applied Linguistics, Translation Studies, or in few cases English literature.

Materials

The data was collected through a validated researcher-made questionnaire containing both structured and unstructured items. Out of 12 items, the questionnaire contained 10 scenarios that provided the respondents with situations, one item focused on the respondents 'views on the importance of the knowledge and teaching of pragmatics in communication'. The last item tapped into what else the respondents thought should have been included in the questionnaire. The items on the questionnaire were discussed in a focus group of three Ph.D. students including the researcher and two university professors as co-authors. The items were revised, refined and modified on the basis of the suggestions made by the group. For the English conversational routines, some dyads were adopted from the English plays while for the Persian ones, typical res-

ponses given by the respondents provided the basis for the analysis.

Instruments

The NSM contains a set of primes which are considered to be universal and existent in all natural languages and cannot be further defined. Even if defined, they will be rendered into circular terms which are vague and unhelpful in our analysis (Wierzbicka, 2003). The primitives proposed by Wierzbicka (1991), consisted of 27 semantic primes while the number of primes increased up to about 60 in 2003 version. This addendum appears in Wierzbicka's revised work (2003). What she thinks is a prime basically has to do with their semantic status rather than a pragmatic one. For example, in Persian we have two personal pronouns "tu" and "shoma" meaning "you" in English which are used as informal and formal address forms, respectively. The fact these two forms are used in different contexts and addressed to different people is mainly governed by pragmatic considerations and power relations between the interlocutors involved. However, they cannot be defined into further semantic elements, hence, taking a prime status (See Appendix A).

However, the indefinable lexical items are not sufficient. There is a need for a set of universal syntactic patterns referred to as "atomic sentences" put together with "atomic elements" (lexical indefinables) to form the Natural Semantic Metalanguage. According to Wierzbicka (2003, p. 15), "[in] searching for universal grammatical patterns, therefore, we should not look for any universals of form; rather, we should look for universals of combinability". The following list includes the universal semantic primes in the 2003 version (Wierzbicka, 2003):

Substantives: I, YOU, SOMEONE, PEOPLE, SOMETHIN/THING, BODY
 Determiners: THIS, THE, SAME, OTHER
 Quantifiers: ONE, TWO, SOME, ALL, MUCH/MANY
 Evaluators: GOOD, BAD
 Descriptors: BIG, SMALL

Mental predicates: THINK, KNOW, WANT, FEEL, SEE, HEAR
 Speech: SAY, WORDS, TRUE
 Actions, events, and movements: DO, HAPPEN, MOVE
 Existence and possession: THERE IS, HAVE
 Life and death: LIVE AND DIE
 Time: WHEN/ TIME, NOW, BEFORE, AFTER, A LONG TIME, A SHORT TIME, FOR SOME TIME, MOMENT
 Space: WHERE/PLACE, HERE, ABOVE, BELOW, FAR, NEAR, SIDE, INSIDE, TOUCHING (CONTACT)
 Logical concepts: NOT, MAYBE, CAN, BECAUSE, IF
 Intensifiers, augments: VERY, MORE
 Taxonomy, partonomy: KIND OF, PART OF
 Similarity: LIKE

Using these semantic and a limited set of syntactic patterns provides a basis (independent of any cultures throughout the world) for describing communicative interaction routines in all languages within an insider's perspectives Wierzbicka (1991). For example, if we have such semantic primes "I", "want", "you", "do", and "something", we may describe all forms of request patterns by putting them into a simple syntactic pattern, "I want you to do something".

Procedure

The items were given to the selected participants and they were asked to fill out the questionnaire. To obtain complete and valid information, the researcher was present in the session to brief the respondents and provide guidelines if necessary. To avoid researcher bias, it was emphasized that the participants should provide answers which they thought were appropriate.

Data Analysis

As mentioned before, the Semantic Metalanguage framework which was proposed in 1991 and revised in 2003 provides the basis for analysis in this work. The scenarios will be presented

and described using cultural scripts. Then the cultural scripts proposed for Persian communicative interaction routines and the English ones are compared and contrasted. It should be noted that due to a lack of access to native speakers of English, the cultural scripts for the English routines are mainly adopted from Wierzbicka's work (Wierzbicka, 1991). Of the 10 scenarios given in the questionnaire, only 3 were selected for analysis due to similar themes. However, the relevant information from all the scenarios was used and appropriately distributed in the data analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Invitation (ta'arof)

1. Situation: This is lunchtime. You are not prepared to receive guests. Unexpectedly, you meet a friend who is passing by the door of your house.

On meeting a friend unexpectedly, most of the participants made use of this expression:

“بفرمایید. ناهار آماده است. در خدمت باشیم.”

This exchange is roughly rendered into English as “come in. The lunch is ready. We are at your service”.

Based on the participants' views and responses, the following cultural scripts are suggested:

- a) I want you to do something
- b) I'm sure you won't do this
- (c) I can't let you know what I feel, think and want. If you know this, you will feel bad towards me.

Component (a) describes the request (*befar-maeed*) made by the inviter. Component (b) describes the nature of the encounter which is unexpected and indicates that the host is not ready to receive any guests. This is simply an example of “*ta'arof*” roughly meaning compliment which most of the participants thought contained an element of insincerity in Persian. Component (c) indicates that the inviter does not want the invitee to know the fact that he is reluctant to receive guests at this time, and that if he knows, it could adversely affect mutual relationships. This is a characteristic of Iranian communicative interac-

tion routines whereby the speaker of Persian may tend to hide their true feelings. This is never considered immoral. An elegant distinction is made between ‘fact’ and ‘truth’ in Wierzbicka's work (2006) (Wierzbicka, 2006, p. 45). Facts are obtained through empirical research and logic the truth of which can rarely be challenged. They are usually associated with knowledge which manifests in “I know something”. However, truth is believed to be an entity the veracity of which can be open to question and doubt. She stresses that “[i]n contemporary culture, “truth” is no longer seen as essential, at least not in interpersonal relations, as the expression white lies testifies”. She exemplifies compliments in which a guest may say to the host, “that was delicious” which may be untrue without lying because they simply offer a compliment rather than a piece of information. In fact, the implement is intended to ‘make some feel good’ rather than ‘make someone know something’.

In response to the inviter, the invitee makes excuses to reject the invitation. He might say:

“مزاحم نمیشم. ناهار خوردم. شاید به وقت دیگه.”, which roughly means “I won't bother you. I have eaten lunch already. May be some other time”. This portion of the interaction can be described in terms of the following cultural scripts:

d) I would say: I won't do this because I know something about it is not true.

Component (d) reveals that the invitee is expected to reject the invitation. In contrast, an English interaction routine of this type could probably start by saying “why don't you come in and have a cup of coffee with me?” The invitee may either reject or accept the invitation. The words uttered usually match with the truth. There is no discrepancy between *zاهر* and *باتن*. This interaction routine can be described by the following cultural scripts:

- a) I want you to do something
- b) I'm not sure you will do this
- c) I can let you know what I think, feel and want

Component (a) starts with an imperative or a whimperative which is semantically rendered in

this way. Component (b) proposes that native speakers of English are considered to be autonomous agents in decision making. Component (c) shows the compatibility between words and someone's true feelings.

Compliment (ta'arof)

Suppose you sing well. To compliment on your voice, someone says:

باور کنید وقتیه صدای شما گوش می دم میرم تویه " حالو هوای دیگه ای. واقعا صدای زیبا و دلنشینی دارید. This exchange roughly means: "your voice is so beautiful and pleasant. When I listen to your voice, I'm extremely absorbed".

This is the situation in which someone compliments the singer's voice. In Iranian compliment routines, "self-lowering and the other raising" are very common (Beeman, 1986). Self-praise is not appreciated and considered to be an indication of arrogance and selfishness. The following cultural scripts can be suggested to describe this scenario:

- a) I want to say something good about you. I would say: your X is very good
- b) I want you to feel good towards me.

Component (a) indicates that the first speaker admires and thinks well of the addressee's good quality, hence, raising the other. Component (b) indicates that compliments are intended to bring about good feelings and congeniality between the interlocutors.

In response, the addressee could probably say: "نظر لطف شماست. صدای من چندان هم خوب نیست" which means "it is very kind of you. My voice is not that good". This interaction routine can be described in terms of the following cultural scripts:

- a) I think the same
- b) I would say: it is not good. Something about you is good
- c) I can't let you know what I think, feel or want. If you know this, you will feel bad towards me

Component (a) shows that the addressee is pleased by the compliment internally. Component

(b) is an example of self-lowering common in Iranian compliment responses. However, the denial simply shows up in the words uttered. The second part of the component can be described as "deflection" which means the addressee redirects the praise to a different quality of the speaker. Component (c) means that self-praise is not appreciated in the Iranian culture, hence, controlling one's true feelings.

A: thank you, Dr. Lyman. I feel it has been an honor. You are the smartest man I've ever met.

B: the smartest?

A: Really, you are.

B: oh, yes. I am terribly smart.

(Inge, 1955, p. 213)

The short exchange above is an example of how the compliment routines are used in English. The following cultural scripts can be used to describe this interaction:

- a) I want to say something good about you. I would say: your X is very good.
- b) I want you to feel good for me.

Components (a & b) are similar to the ones given in Persian. They are used to show the purpose and semantics of compliments in English.

- a) I think the same
- b) I would say: it is good
- c) I can let you know what I think, feel and want.

What the addressee says is described in terms of the components given (a, b, & c). Component (a) is similar to the one given Persian indicating that the speaker is pleased with the compliment. Component (b) shows that the addressee agrees to the praise indicating that self-praise is acceptable in the English culture, which stands in sharp contrast to the Iranian culture. The last component suggests that there is no discrepancy between the words uttered and the addressee's feelings, which represents a point of difference between the Iranians and the English speakers whereby Iranian speakers hide their true feelings.

In the following interaction, the addressee agrees with the compliment to some extent but points to some flaw in the object rejecting full agreement:

چه چادر قشنگی داری!
جنسش خوب نیست فقط رنگ و رو داره.

This interactional routine can be described within the following cultural scripts:

- a) I think something about you is good
- b) I think the same
- c) I think it is good I don't want to say: very good
- d) It is not good for me to say what I feel or think, and want
- e) if you know this you could feel something bad towards me

Component (a) in the Persian interaction postulates that the speaker is asserting praise to the addressee, the meaning implicit in all compliment routines. Component (b) shows that the addressee implicitly agrees with what the speakers say, which is the discrepancy between what is uttered and what goes on in the mind. Acceptance of praise is not the norm in Iranian culture and language. Nevertheless, component (c) implies that there is some tacit agreement yet not full agreement. Components (d & e) propose that Iranians usually tend to hide their true feelings and thoughts when being complimented. Of course, this is the common norm in Iranian culture and the Persian language. As one of the respondents said, there is a hail of uncertainty over this generalization because the interpretation depends on the interlocutors, the intimacy level of relationship, and the context where the interaction routine occurs (level of formality). Nevertheless, the norm exists and is prevalent in Iranian culture. As time goes by and cultural norms go through changes, this norm may be subject to change too. Therefore, internal feelings, considered impolite within the Iranian cultural norm, might be expressed more clearly in the future. This can go through further research to be empirically tested in another study.

In contrast, the following English interactional routine will be compared to the Persian one given above:

A: I think your Chev. (car) is running beautifully.

B: Well, thank you. It is OK.

(Inge, 1950: 33)

The speaker in this conversation is assigning praise to the addressee's car. Yet, the addressee agrees with the speaker to some extent expressing doubt over the quality of the car. The following cultural scripts can be suggested for this communicative interaction:

- A: a) I think something about you is very good
B: b) I think the same
c) I think it is good I don't want to say: very good
d) I can say what I think and feel, and want
e) If you know this you won't feel bad towards me

Component (a) describes the meaning inherent in all compliment expressions regardless of any language. Component (b) indicates that in English there is only a single value system denoting that what is uttered is compatible with one's thinking. Component (c) is the expression of doubt which scales down the praise to some extent. It is notable that components (a & c) are similar in both English and Persian. However, component (b) is superficially similar but should be interpreted with regard to components (d & e) whereby native speakers of English do not hide their actual feelings and thoughts when being complimented. Besides, it is not rendered impolite either.

Requests

These cultural scripts may be prescribed for this request pattern:

Situation: suppose that you are assigned a term paper. You are too busy to meet the deadline. You might ask a friend of yours to help you with the introduction and review of the literature.

سرم خیلی شلوغه. باید خیلی زود مقاله رو تموم کنم. اگه میشه برام مقدمه و پیشینه تاریخی رو بنویس. جبران می‌کنم.

This exchange roughly means: I'm too busy. I need to complete the article very soon. If possible, write the introduction and review of the literature for me. I'll make it up.

This interaction can be described in terms of the following cultural scripts:

- a) I want you to do X
- b) I'm sure you will do this
- c) If you don't do this I will feel bad towards you

Component (a) describes the meaning implied in request patterns in all languages. Component (b) implies that the speaker expects the addressee to comply with the request and does what is requested. According to Beeman (1986), there is some sort of cultural interdependence among Iranians whereby once they make a request, they expect that the addressee comply. Component (b) suggesting an 'expectation for compliance' also exists in Algerian and Singaporean cultures where the people in Algeria are native speakers of Arabic while in Singapore, the nation also uses a variety of English which widely differs from Anglo English. Besides, the English and Singaporeans have very little in common in terms of cultural values though the latter is remarkably exposed to Anglo cultural values (Dendenne, 2017; Wong, 2004). Component (c) shows that no compliance brings about bad feelings and may also adversely affect friendly relationships.

In response to the request made above, a Persian speaker could say:

ای کاش می تونستم کمکت کنم . باور کن سرخودم هم
"شلوغه. کارهای عقب افتاده زیاد دارم".

This exchange roughly means: "I wish I were able to help you. Believe me, I'm too busy. I have got overdue tasks".

The following cultural scripts may be prescribed for the exchange:

- a) I wouldn't say: I don't want to do it.
- b) I would say: I can't do it. I don't want you to feel bad towards me
- c) It is not for you to know what I feel, think and want or you will feel bad towards me

Component (a) implies the addressee wants to comply with the request. But he/she can do it, an argument suggested by component (b). In the meantime, he/she does not want to ruin the relationship and makes (false or true) excuses refus-

ing the request in an indirect way, which is a very common formula in Iranian culture. Component (c) indicates that the request could be thought of as an imposition, and the addressee tries to hide his/her true feelings. If true feelings and intentions are revealed, they may ruin their relationships.

- A: would you talk to him? He'd like you, Pop. You know the way you could talk.
- B: you're on. We'll drive right back.
(Miller, 1949, p. 206)

This exchange is an example of a request pattern where the first speaker makes a whimperative construction. Whimperative constructions are indirect forms commonly used to regard the autonomy of the native speakers of English. That is, the addressees are free to act and are not compelled to comply with the requests made by the addressors (Wierzbicka, 2003). This interaction can be described using the following cultural scripts:

- a) I want you to do X
- b) I'm not sure you will do this
- c) If you don't do this, I won't feel bad towards you

Component (a) represents the meaning suggested in all request patterns, which is similar to the one given in Persian. Component (b) suggests that the requestee is free to act and does not have to comply with the request made. Component (c), closely related to (b), shows that if the addressee does not comply with the request, it may not affect relations as badly as it may for Iranian speakers.

In response to the request, the speaker has the option of compliance or no compliance. He is free to act. The following cultural scripts can be suggested for this exchange:

- a) I would say: I will do this or I won't do this
- b) I know you won't feel bad towards me
- b) I can say: I think this. I feel this. I want this

Component (a) implies that the addressee is free to decide whether to comply or reject the request, supporting autonomy as a respected val-

ue in the Anglo culture. Component (b) indicates that rejecting the request will not damage the relationship. The last component suggests that speakers of English do not exert self-control over their true feelings.

To further enrich the analysis on request patterns in English and Persian, the following interactional dyads in English and Persian are compared and contrasted in terms of cultural scripts:

A: ...And I will just take a small piece of cake, Richard, to show there is no ill-feeling.

B: Help yourself.

A: Thanks.

(Joyce, 1983: 50)

This interaction describes a context in which the speaker declares he will have some cake himself. By using the expression "help yourself", the host implies that the guest may go ahead and have the thing being offered. There is no insistence on the part of the host. In fact, compliance is not taken for granted. The guest acts at will and does not want his action to be controlled by the host's wishes. The English communicative interaction can be described in terms of the following cultural scripts:

- A: a) I want you to do X
- b) I say this because I want you to do it
- c) I don't know whether you will do it
- d) I don't want you to say if you will do it

Component (a) suggests that the verbal request is realized in a pure imperative. Component (b) proposes that a request is being made, the meaning of which is implicit in both imperative and whimperative constructions. Component (c) postulates that the addressee does not have to comply with the speaker's wish. Component (d) is basically the outcome of component (c) because of the fact that the freedom to act at will on the part of the addressee requires no response and justification.

The following conversation routine from Persian will illustrate the point satisfactorily:

خواهش می‌کنم بفرمایید این کیک چندان خوب هم نیست.
اقتلا یک کیک میل بفرمایید

زیاد میل ندارم. حالا که اصرار می‌کنید به کم می‌خورم

This interaction can be described within the following cultural scripts:

- A: a) I would want you to do X
- b) I say this because I want you to do it
- c) I think you will do it because of this
- d) I want you to say you will do it
- e) It is not good for you to know what I think, feel, and want
- f) It is not good for me to say what I feel or think
- g) If you know what I want, think, or feel, you could feel something bad towards me

Component (a) spells out that the offer is realized in a whimperative construction, hence, the use of the expression:

خواهش می‌کنم بفرمایید.

Note that the host is using the expression above to mitigate the force of the imposition being made. That there is a request being made is suggested by component (b). Component (c) postulates that the host expects the guest to comply with his wish. Component (d) posits that some verbal response is required on the part of the addressee denoting ostensible reluctance. This also represents etiquette manners in Iranian culture. Component (e) and (f) suggest that both interlocutors try to hide their true feelings, thoughts, and wishes. Component (g) indicates that self-restraint is an indication of politeness in Iranian interaction routines. Therefore, concealing one's true feelings, wishes and thoughts are highly desirable. Stating that the guest does not have any appetite for the food offered does not mean that he is revealing his true feelings, thoughts, and wishes.

Throughout the analysis, an attempt was made to answer the first research question: compatibility of what is uttered with what is happening in the mind. Both The Trini (Trinidad) mind and Iranian mind are the seat of judging 'good' and 'bad' which especially manifests itself in Iranian interaction routines. That is, we want others to

think well of us. So we tend to use discourse routines which might not be rational and contradicts the truth. Unlike the Trini mind which has a moral orientation rather than a cognitive one (Levisen & Jogie, 2015), the Iranian mind has a moral, social, and cognitive one. This very fact is mainly realized in the following recurring component: “I can’t let you know what I feel, think, and want”. It means that Iranian speakers take utmost care in their compliment and request interactions to conceal their true feelings, thoughts, and wants so as not to offend others while simultaneously trying to maintain and reinforce social relations. Besides, they consciously produce communicative discourses that are not in harmony with their feelings, thoughts and wants, hence, the existence of a cognitive orientation in the Iranian mind. This view also supports the Vygotskian sociocultural stance that the mind and body (physical entities) are closely related, and that human beings interact with the reality and try to modify it by using a variety of discursive structures (Johnson & Golombek, 2016).

An attempt was made to describe the communicative interaction routines in English and Persian. Nevertheless, in regard to the analysis, the following explanation is in order: despite the availability of different procedures, studying the pragmatic aspect of language is very difficult because it is not easy to exactly know the intentions of speakers. Richards (2015), talking about the demerits of the functional syllabuses, argues that there is no direct relationship between form and function and that meaning is negotiated through interaction. The discourse produced by speakers has a volatile nature, is continuously constructed and reconstructed through the negotiation of meaning.

This study aimed to focus on the analysis of norms within the framework of the Semantic Metalanguage in both English and Persian. Although the exceptions were not of great concern, most of the respondents emphasized that the level of intimacy could influence the interpretations of interaction routines. A few respondents argued that

there is not much discrepancy between “*zaher*” (the exterior) and “*baten*” (the interior) depending on the level of intimacy. Even the level of insincerity, sincerity, and imposition, related to request patterns, should be decided on the basis of the context, the people and even extralinguistic factors. A few respondents contended that even the tone of voice could reveal the level of sincerity, insincerity, and imposition.

Regarding the conspicuous differences between the Iranian and the Anglo culture, one of the respondents related a story that sounds interesting. He wrote of his family’s stay in the United States where his father had invited an American in the neighborhood to his house, the American had accepted the invitation without standing on ceremony. This episode supports the fact that the concept “*ta’arof*” could sometimes contain an element of insincerity and is intended to show politeness and good feelings. It should be noted the word “*ta’arof*” roughly meaning “compliment” in English was highly frequent in the questionnaire. Many respondents used such expressions as “*ta’arof nakon*”, “*ta’arof nadarim*” and “*chera ta’arof mikoni?*” roughly meaning “don’t stand on ceremony”, “we do not stand on ceremony”, and “why do you stand on ceremony?”. It seems that most Iranian speakers conceive of this communicative speech act as an entity which contains an element of insincerity.

A few participants, a very small number, agreed to the existence of cultural norms in Persian communicative routines. However, they said they would not feel compelled to stick to them; a point also supported by Wong (2004) with respect to the speakers of Singapore English. Thus some of the responses contradicted the norms common in Persian. Relevant to the concept of norms are rules and regularities. The rules discovered by a linguist usually refer to those which are used to describe grammatical sentences. If frequent, they are called “rules”, categorical and most often applicable to an unlimited number of sentences. However, there may be a few exceptions not compatible with the rules which invalidate them. The discourse analyst is interested in

discovering regularities rather than rules. If a phenomenon has a high frequency of occurrence in the analysis, it is considered regularity. The discourse analyst works with non-categorical data. Therefore, they are subject to more exceptions (G. Brown, Brown, Brown, Gillian, & Yule, 1983). One hundred percent of confirmability is not possible. This also holds true with the data analysis in this study.

CONCLUSION

This study could have some teaching implications. Today the purpose of language teaching is to enable language learners to function communicatively, hence, the importance of pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic competence. Pragmalinguistics refers to the linguistic resources or options for conveying communicative acts or interpersonal meanings. The use of these options is influenced by the social context, the participants and power relations. This social aspect is associated with sociopragmatics. Thus, sociopragmatics is defined as the social perceptions and factors underlying the interpretation and use of communicative acts. These two aspects of pragmatics are significant in that we need pragmalinguistic resources and options to strengthen or weaken the force of a speech act while the knowledge of sociopragmatics helps speakers select the option (s) which suit a particular context and are likely to be the most successful (Soler & Flor, 2008). Semantic Metalanguage is similar to paraphrasing which contains simple language and can be used as a tool for clarifying and raising awareness in learners of cross-cultural differences.

Due to cross-cultural differences, chances are that miscommunication occurs during the interaction. Thomas (1983) identifies two sources of miscommunication: pragmalinguistic failure relates to the inability of speakers to select the appropriate forms and functions available in language while sociopragmatic failure has to do with the knowledge of which option(s) to use to

produce the most significant effect given such considerations as the social rules, the context, the participants and power relations.

This descriptive discourse study can have some pedagogical implications for EFL teachers and learners in helping them become more sociopragmatically aware and try to give a boost to their cross-cultural knowledge specifically regarding the speech acts (compliment, request and invitation speech acts) which were studied in this research. Teachers, in particular, should try to incorporate the direct instruction of the sociopragmatic and sociocultural discrepancies between Persian and English based on their analyses using the natural Semantic Metalanguage framework.

Due to the nature of qualitative research, this study has a number of limitations. The results cannot be generalized because the sample was small and did not go through randomization either. Of course, it was decided that a purposeful sample be selected so that it would provide an in-depth understanding of the cross-cultural differences. Nevertheless, the selection of a much larger sample and a variety of triangular procedures could provide more convincing results. There are many areas in Persian which can be explored within the framework of the Semantic Metalanguage. The request patterns, compliment response routines, and gossips can be selected as topics for further research incorporating into the work such variables as the level of intimacy, age, gender, and a variety of role relations. In addition, the Semantic Metalanguage can be used as a tool for delving into untranslatability to describe and explain cases which are governed by sociocultural considerations.

As the concluding remarks, that the intentions of speakers cannot be easily generalized is true. Nevertheless, as far as the general norms are concerned, there is not much controversy, and they are uniformly accepted by almost all members of a speech community.

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Appendix A
Pragmatic Knowledge Questionnaire

Personal information

Name and surname (optional):

Education:

Age:

Email (optional):

Gender:

Cellphone No (optional):

Major:

Dear respondents

The information that you provide will be solely used for a research project. Care will be taken so that confidentiality is ensured. The following items ask you what you think about cultural norms in Persian. Would you be kind enough to answer the questions in detail? You may respond in either English or Persian.

1. Situation: This is lunchtime. You are not prepared to receive guests. Unexpectedly, you meet a friend who is passing by the door of your house. To be polite,

- a. what would you say to invite him/her as the host?
- b. How would you respond as the guest?
- c. Is there any sincerity in this interaction?

Comment:

2. Suppose you sing well. To compliment on your voice, someone says:

"باور کنید وقتی به صدای شما گوش میدم میرم تو یه حال و هوای دیگه ای. واقعا صدای زیبا و دلنشینی دارید."

- a. Which one is true as a norm in Iranian culture?
- a. I think so (agree with this person).
- b. I don't think so (disagree with this person).

Comment:

- c. How would you respond?

3. If someone says as a compliment, "از هر انگشتان یک هنر میریزه" meaning "each finger led an art" in English, which one is true as a cultural norm in Persian?

- a. I would say it is not true but feel or think otherwise. I can't let you know what I really feel and think. The expression of disagreement appears in words at the surface. However, my true feelings are hidden.
- b. I would say it is true and am sincere about my feelings. In fact, I can let you know what I feel and think. Expression of agreement appears in words at the surface. And my true feelings are revealing.

Comment:

4. Is it true that in Iranian compliments, speakers usually hide their feelings?

- a. It is not good for me to say what I really think and feel or you will feel bad towards me.
- b. It is good for you to know what I really think and feel. If you know this, you won't feel bad towards me.

Comment:

5. Situation: suppose you have a terrible cold and must stay in bed. You ask your friend to drop by the drugstore on the way to work and get you some medicine. You say:

"حالم خوب نیست. آگه زحمتی نیست تو مسیر اداره برای من این دارو رو از داروخانه بگیر."

Which is true as a norm in Iranian culture?

- a. This someone is free to do me a favor or he/she may choose not to do it. (Independent)
- b. I expect them to do me a favor. Otherwise, I won't feel good about them. (Dependent).

Do you think there is a sense of cultural interdependence (expectation) in Iranian culture?

Comment:

6. When you are asked to do someone a favor, which is true as a norm in Iranian culture?

- a. I think it an imposition but I can't let them know what I feel and think (insincerity).
- b. I do not think it an imposition and I will do it by all means. I can let them know what I really feel and think (Clear, sincere feelings).

Comment:

7. In offering tea as a host, if he/she said in a pure question form, "شما چای میل دارید؟" that means "would you like tea?"

How would you feel like the guest?

What would you say when offering food to a guest?

8. Situation: suppose that you are assigned a term paper. You are too busy to meet the deadline. You might ask a friend of yours to help you with the introduction and review of the literature.

How would you make the request?

How would you reject the request?

9. Situation: enjoying the company of your friend, you might say:

A: "ما که از مصاحبت با شما سیر نمیشیم. چقدر خوش سخن و خوش مشرب هستید"

We do not get tired of your company. How pleasant and eloquent you are!

How would you respond?

10. Situation: someone says, "You are beautiful/handsome".

How do you think a Persian and an English speaker respond to this compliment?

How would you respond?

11. Have you ever studied the differences between compliment routines and request patterns in English and Persian at the university or elsewhere? How effective do you think this knowledge can be in communication?

12. What points do you think should have been included in the questionnaire?