

Politeness in Spoken Review Genre: Viva Voce Context

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated linguistic politeness in ten viva voce sessions occurring in two universities in Iran. The model of politeness which was proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987) was drawn upon in the study to analyze academic talk in the review context of viva sessions. Particularly, the study focused on negative politeness strategies, which are used to attend the 'negative face' of the speaker and the hearer, due to the formality of the context. Of the negative politeness strategies which were used, 'give deference', 'hedging' and 'impersonalization' were found to be the most frequent strategies. Type of genre and the institutionality of discourse had a robust impact on almost every instance of talk, including politeness strategy choice. While raising our awareness of academic discourse in Persian, the results of the study could help foster interpersonal communication between the peers and academic members to enjoy a more pleasant social world.

Keywords: Linguistic politeness, viva voce, Persian language, negative politeness, review genre, academic discourse

INTRODUCTION

Politeness research has been in the core of attention for three decades, producing a great deal of literature in Pragmatics, Social Psychology and Sociolinguistics (Haugh, 2007). Establishing and maintaining a solemn interpersonal relationship is crucial

in the daily life of human beings. As such, politeness is used as a means to avoid conflict and establish harmonious interpersonal relationships between social interactants. However, in some speech events in academia, like viva voce sessions, which comprise a great deal of negative speech acts of criticisms, disagreements and face threatening questions, interpersonal relationship might be downplayed due to the more important goal of the discourse. Politeness, therefore, plays even a more important role in such contexts.

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The goal of the interactions in such discourses is not primarily to establish interpersonal relationships between individuals but issues like the business to be done, scholarship to be defended, or meeting a future institutional goal (Locher, 2004; Drew & Heritage, 1992). Mechanisms of politeness are conceptualized variably not only in different cultures but also subjected to different stipulations of discourse.

Since the seminal work of Brown and Levinson on politeness (1978, 1987), the phenomenon has received a great deal of attention. Although a number of politeness studies have challenged the notion of 'face' as a cornerstone of Brown and Levinson's theory in that it is Anglo centric, individualistic and insufficient to be applicable to many non-western societies (Werkhofer, 1992; Matsumoto, 1988; Koutlaki, 2002; Watts, 2003; Mills, 2003; Bravo, 2008), it still provides a comprehensive set of strategies which make it eligible to work as a viable theoretical framework of politeness studies.

Drawing upon Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness, the present study aims at tracing linguistic politeness strategies in stretches of talk beyond the sentence level in academic discussions and arguments in Persian. In particular, the study attempts to answer the following research question: What politeness strategies are used by Iranian Persian speakers in academic talk in *viva voce* context?

The term 'strategy' which is used here is a technical term in Brown and Levinson's model of politeness and refers to the rational

choices speakers make while confronted with face threatening acts. By politeness strategies, we refer only to the negative politeness strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987). The reason for excluding positive politeness strategies is that they are 'approach-based' and are usually employed to claim solidarity (Scollon & Scollon, 2001). Therefore, their frequent occurrences are not expected in formal evaluative discourse. On the other hand, negative politeness strategies are 'avoidance-based' and are present in formal contexts when the relationship between the participants is not close. The formality of the dissertation defense sessions (DDs) speech events is expected to be more amenable to negative politeness strategies.

This study is significant in that it focuses on politeness in contexts which are argumentative in nature and might negatively influence interpersonal relationships. There are a myriad of studies which have been conducted on written aspects of academic discourse, such as research articles and dissertations (Hyland, 1994; 1998). However, the oral aspect of academic discourse, despite the importance it carries in the academia, has not yet received enough attention in discourse studies with a few exceptions (Grimshaw, 1989; Swales, 2004; Recsky, 2005; Flowerdew, 1994; He, 1997). In addition, studies conducted on politeness in oral academic discourse are even fewer.

More importantly, research conducted in academic discourse focuses on the use of English language. While there is no question about the importance of English for academic

purposes in today's academic world, the role of other languages for academic purposes should not be underestimated. Persian language is an official language and a means of instruction in almost all academic institutions in Iran. Despite its wide use in academia, research in the oral aspect of Persian for Academic Purposes (PAP) is tremendously low. The results of the present study can clear the ground for comparison of academic discourses in different linguistic and cultural contexts.

SPEECH ACT, POLITENESS AND THE NOTION OF FACE

Indirect speech act has been associated with politeness in many early studies in Pragmatics. Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987), Leech (1983), and Searle (1976) postulated indirectness as a feature of politeness. Searle (1976) concluded that people tend to be indirect and use indirect speech acts such as disagreement to be polite in their conversation. Similarly, in explaining the violations of Grice's (1975) maxims of quality, quantity, relevance and manner, Leech (1983) linked indirectness with politeness.

However, it was in the politeness theory of Brown and Levinson (1978) that speech act theory came to the fore as closely related to politeness. In fact Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness, used speech act theory as its underlying notion. The second underlying notion of their theory was the notion of 'face'.

Brown and Levinson (1987) define "face" as "the public self image that

every individual wants to claim for him/herself" (p. 67). They borrow the term from Goffman (1967) and use it in their introduction of "politeness" theory. Brown and Levinson then divide 'face' into two aspects: "positive" and "negative". "Positive face" is defined as "the individual's wants of admiration and approval" and negative face is the individual's "wants of freedom from imposition" (p. 61).

According to Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987), some speech acts are intrinsically "face threatening". They are called "Face Threatening Acts" and abbreviated as FTAs. They may threaten the 'face' of the speaker, the hearer or both. Thus production of these kinds of acts brings about more challenge for language users in different cultural settings. Many of the speech acts in viva voce context belong to such category. Criticisms, challenging questions and disagreements are all face-threatening acts since they threaten the "face" of hearer and sometimes the speaker (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 61). Realizations of such speech acts in inappropriate ways may be taken as 'impolite' and damage the hearer and the speaker's face. To avoid threat to each other's face, therefore, people try to 'mitigate' their production of FTAs by using certain strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Face threatening acts are also determined by the context of talk. Based on the three social factors 'Power', 'Distance', and the 'Rank' of the speech act in terms of the degree of the imposition of a given act in a particular context, an individual

evaluates the degree of FTA and then chooses the most appropriate strategy to produce that speech act (Brown & Levinson, 1987). In viva voce contexts, the degree of imposition incurred by the acts of criticism, disagreement and question is very high. Similarly, the 'distance' between the two main participants; that is examiners and the candidates, can be taken as moderate to high. Power relationship, however, is a very influential determining factor in the choice of the politeness strategies. The institutional power of the examiners allows them to sometimes ignore the face of their addressees (candidates) and impose on their freedom of action (Zuraidah & Izadi, 2011). Whereas, the candidates are obliged to be more attentive of the examiner's face.

When the degree of the imposition of the particular act is assessed, then the individual has five choices to make in realizing the given act. Each of these choices is termed a "strategy". These strategies are as follows 1) Don't do the Face Threatening Act (FTA) 2) Do the FTA off-record 3) Do the FTA on record without redress (boldly) 4) Do the FTA on record with redress (positive politeness) 5) Do the FTA on record with redress (negative politeness). It is the latter that falls within the scope of the present research.

The negative politeness strategies are used to satisfy the hearer's desire to be respected or recognized. Brown and Levinson (1987) enumerate ten strategies for negative politeness. These strategies are inclined in attending the speakers and/or hearers' negative face, which is attending

to their freedom from imposition. According to Scollon and Scollon (2001), negative politeness strategies are 'avoidance-based', hence their occurrence is expected in formal talk like viva voce. The negative politeness strategies, which are proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987), are as follows:

1. Be conventionally indirect, as in "Can you please tell me the time?",
2. Questions, hedge, as in "This may not be relevant but..",
3. Be pessimistic, "Could you set the table?",
4. Minimize the imposition, Rx, "I just dropped by for a minute to ask you..",
5. Give deference, as in "Excuse me, sir, would you mind if I close the window?",
6. Apologize, as in "I do not want to bother you, but...",
7. Impersonalize S and H as in "Is it possible to ask a favour?",
8. State the FTA as a general rule, as in "We do not eat with our hands, we eat with knives and forks",
9. Nominalize, as in "Your performance was very good" instead of "You performed well",
10. Go on record as incurring a debt, or as not indebteding H, as in "I'd really appreciate it if you would...".

Out of the 10 negative politeness strategies, 4 strategies (1, 2, 5, and 7) enjoyed the highest frequency in the present research. Therefore, a brief description of them is inevitable in the following lines.

Be conventionally indirect

When there is a clash between the desire to be direct (on-record) and the desire to be indirect (off-record), some compromise between the two is reached in the strategy of conventional indirectness. Indirect speech acts are generally associated with politeness in Pragmatics research. The most well-known exemplar of conventional indirectness is the use of the so called “whimperatives” (Sadock, 1974) to make indirect requests as in ‘Would you please pass the salt?’.

Hedging

A hedge is a particle, word or phrase that modifies the degree of membership of a predicate or a noun phrase to a set. In the majority of cases, hedges in the data were used to downgrade the degree of threat which is incurred to the negative face of the addressee. In fact, these hedges display the low commitment of the speakers to the propositional content of their utterances (Hyland, 1998; Brown & Levinson, 1987). Brown and Levinson distinguish three kinds of hedges: hedges on illocutionary force, hedges addressed to Grice’s (1975) maxims and prosodic/kinesic hedges. The latter is not the concern of the present research. The first two, however, are a bit described:

Hedges on illocutionary force function as satisfying speaker’s want “DON’T ASSUME H IS ABLE/WILLING TO DO A”. The second subcategory of Hedges include hedges that address Grice’s (1975) maxims: Grice’s cooperative principle entails four maxims: Quality, Quantity,

Manner and Relevance. For example, as maxim of quality pledges the speaker to the truth of the proposition, quality hedges may suggest that the speaker is not taking the full responsibility for the truth of his utterances.

Apart from its function as politeness, hedging is also a feature of academic discourse. Studies on both written (Hyland, 1998) and spoken (Recsky, 2005) modes of academic discourse have characterized academic discourse with hedging. Therefore, the frequent occurrence of this strategy is expected in the present research. Moreover, the context of review, which constitutes face threatening speech acts, warrants even a higher frequency. The more face threatening an act is, the more likely it is hedged. As demonstrated in Zuraidah & Izadi (2011), the examiners in the viva sessions tended to use myriad of hedging devices in their realization of criticisms, although they were assigned a pre-established source of power as representatives of their institutions (Heritage, 2005; Drew and Heritage, 1992).

Give deference

Give deference equals giving *ehteram* in Persian. The strategy ‘give deference’ (*ehteram*) involves humbling self and raising addressee. By putting self in lower position and putting the hearer in upper position, the speaker gives the hearer positive face and conveys that the hearer is socially superior. In many languages, including Persian, ‘deference’ is linguistically realized through the use of ‘honorifics’, which renders both deferential and humiliating forms of deference into language (Jahangiri, 2000).

This strategy will be more elaborated in the next section.

Impersonalize S and H

One way of indicating that S does not want to impinge on H is to phrase the Face Threatening Act (FTA) as if the agent were other than S, or at least possibly not S or not S alone, and the addressee were other than H, or only inclusive of H.

Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) claimed that the notion of face with its two aspects of positive and negative, as well as the individual's face wants is universal. However, the individuality which is embedded in Brown and Levinson's model is not supported in many non-Western cultures, including Persian (Eslamirasekh, 2004; Koutlaki, 2002, 2009). Conformity to social conventions seems to be a stronger motivation for politeness than the individual desires to attend to his/her interlocutor's face in many non-western collectivist cultures (Ide, 1989; Mao, 1994; Koutlaki, 2002, 2009).

Recent studies on politeness (Mills, 2003; Watts, 2003; Locher, 2004; Bravo, 2008) perceive politeness as a socio-cultural script and are based on the notion that politeness behavior (whether verbal or non-verbal) needs social approval and social consensus because culture determines politeness norms. Mechanisms of politeness may, therefore, vary not only across but also within cultures (Eelen, 2001; Mills, 2003; Watts, 2003). The reason is that various cultures have their own standards with respect to politeness.

Lakoff and Ide (2005) argue that politeness as well as languages in various cultures has many common elements, universally applicable although unique in their own way. The reason is that regardless of the culture, the concept of politeness involves showing the individual's compliance to social norms and expectations. This is the reason why each culture has its own distinctive politeness system although many cultures often share similar features. Therefore, the cultural and social values or customs need to be a consideration in studying politeness in speech acts, on the grounds that, as Eelen (2001) notes, the distinction between polite and impolite is not universal but based on the dominant social norms.

The present study adopts Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory and model of politeness. The theory introduces a comprehensive set of strategies to analyze politeness. While face attendance has been questioned to be the (at least the only) incentive for politeness in many long-standing critiques of Brown and Levinson, the association of many of the politeness strategies proposed by them to politeness norms in many cultures and languages is hardly a matter of question. Five important strategies, which are closely knitted to the concept of *ædæb* (politeness) in Persian, are 'give deference', 'hedging', and 'apologize', 'be conventionally indirect', and 'impersonalize S and H'. One could think of *ædæb* as at least one (if not the only) motivation for these strategies.

Furthermore, the methodological applicability of Brown and Levinson's model makes it viable compared to more recent theories of politeness (Haugh, 2007). However, the study is circumspect about the universal generalizations inherited in the politeness model of Brown and Levinson. Socio-cultural values of Persian are meticulously attended to in this study so that the study might not be dismissed by criticisms which are leveled at the universality of Brown and Levinson's model.

POLITENESS IN THE PERSIAN LANGUAGE

The term *ædæb* can be taken as the rough equivalent for 'politeness' 'courtesy' and 'tact'. *ædæb* is highly valued among Iranians, since it is closely linked to their family breeding (Koutlaki, 2009, 2002). Persian language is a manifestation of the great value its speakers assign to polite verbal and nonverbal behavior. A rich variety of lexicon and syntactic forms referring to and reflecting the speakers' respect toward the addressee is a reason for this claim. According to Jahangiri (2000: 176), "the polite form [of Persian language] reflects a part of the cultural identity of the Iranian people and the social structure in which they live."

A person's manifestation of *ædæb* is an indication of good family breeding and well-acquired socialization skills (Sharifian, 2007, Sahragard, 2003). Similar to what has been reported to be the working motivations for polite behavior in Eastern societies like Japanese (Matsumoto, 1988; Ide, 1989)

and Chinese (Mao, 1994), *ædæb* in Persian is also a socially oriented linguistic or nonlinguistic behavior (Terkourafi, 2005), the good effects of which return to the individual. For example, saying "hello" to a senior is considered a social duty of a younger participant in many subcultures/communities of practice, and a manifestation of *ædæb*.

The conformity to this social responsibility on the part of a younger participant who says "hello" to an older or superior person is rewarding. The least reward one could think of is that people develop positive judgmental attitude toward that person, which in turn would enhance his/her face and his/her family's face, not to mention the face of other communities of practice that he/she belongs to. This could be taken as the least motivation for 'strategic' manifestation of politeness as well, provided that a person deliberately appears *moæddæb* (roughly polite), being aware of its good effects. The more strategic use of *ædæb* is, however, when in some instances sales people drag heedless passers-by to their shop and turn them into customers using *ædæb* as a tool, as it is evident in Koutlaki's (2002) data.

Closely knitted to the concept of *ædæb* is *ehteram*, meaning deference, respect, honour, pride and reverence. This concept reflects Brown and Levinson's negative politeness strategy "give deference". Respecting others (especially seniors) is highly valued among Iranians (Beeman, 1986; Koutlaki, 2002, Sahragard, 2003). The motive for it comes from two sources:

First is the teachings of religion and morality which encourage its followers to have and show respect towards others (Sahragard, 2003), hence an altruistic incentive. The second incentive for respecting others is egotistical. As a social being one needs to 'keep his/her own respect' by respecting others; that is, one is respected as long or as much as he/she pays respect to other members of the society.

Ehteram is a "duty" of social being towards his society (Goffman, 1967: 9; Koutlaki, 2002: 1742), which is realized through, inter alia, appropriate address terms, greeting with a senior, conformity to '*taarof*' (ritual politeness) and attending to one's *shaxsiat* (face). Persian language reflects a rich variety of lexicon and syntactic form referring to and reflecting the speakers' respect toward the addressee is a reason for this claim. According to Jahangiri (2000), "the polite form reflects a part of the cultural identity of the Iranian people and the social structure in which they live" [of Persian language](p. 176). For example, in Persian the substitution of second person singular pronoun /to/ for the plural pronoun /shoma/ and the word /*jenab (e) ali or hazrate ali* (meaning your Excellency), in a typical interaction, when irony, sarcasm and the like are not intended, reflects the humility of the speaker while respecting the addressee (Jahangiri, 2000:, pp.182-185).

The concepts of *ædæb* and *ehteram* is closely related to *shaxsiat*. *Shaxsiat* (honor, social standing) can be viewed as the relational aspect of one's personality, which is constructed in his/her relationship

with others. People's *shaxsiat* depends on their social behavior, family breeding and level of education. It is a non-metaphorical parallel term for *aberu* (face) in Persian (but cf. Koutlaki, 2002, for a different view). People use the two terms interchangeably in their metapragmatic talk. For example, '*my aberu went*' is the same as '*my shaxsiat smashed*', both can be glossed as 'I lost my face'. Therefore, giving somebody *shaxsiat* means attending to his/her *aberu*, and vice versa. Giving *ehteram* to people is one way to attend to their *shaxsiat* and the speaker's own *shaxsiat*. It also has implications for the *shaxsiat* (face) of both the speaker and the hearer's family (public face) (Spencer-Oatey, 2005).

Persian language is replete with different forms of 'honorifics' which are manifested in grammar and lexicon to indicate giving *ehteram* to the addressee. Grammatical honorifics in Persian include the use of plural pronoun (plural form of T/V) to address a singular addressee and a referent, plural form of the verb to implicate a singular person to agree with plural (respected) subject, and switching the second person to the third person pronoun to refer to the addressee. One important feature of Persian language is the honorifics that involve using the deferential alternative of neutral verbs and nouns. A conspicuous way to give deference in Persian is through the employment of lexical forms of the same verb, e. g. "*goftan*" (say) which implicate abjecting 'self' and raising 'other'. For example, '*goftan*' (to say) is the neutral verb. The elevated form of *goftan* (to say) is

farmudan (to command) and is used for high status or respected addressee, whereas the downgraded form is *arz kardan* (to petition) and is used for self (Beeman, 1976).

METHODOLOGY

Data and Participants

The data of the study comprise of ten audio-recorded PhD viva voce sessions in Humanities /program department in two universities, namely, the Isfahan University and Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz, Iran (?). The participants of the study comprise 45 Iranian PhD candidates and academics of both genders participating in viva sessions acting as supervisors, readers and examiners. A viva voce in Iran is an open oral examination in the presence of an audience including the candidate's supervisory committee, graduate studies deputy, dean/head of the department, internal and external examiners, other interested students and even the candidate's friends and family members (cf. Swales, 2004, for US defenses). The event lasts about two hours, and is typically held in a large colloquium. The present research analyzes talk in post-presentation sections canonically known as Q-A sections.

The viva sessions were held at two Iranian universities in 2010. These universities are Isfahan University and Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz. The whole data resulted in 25 hours and 12 minutes of talk. Out of this number, 10 hours and 25 minutes which were dedicated to the question-answer (Q-A)

section of the viva sessions were selected for analysis. The data represented four disciplines; namely, Education (3 sessions), Social Sciences (3 sessions), Geography (2 sessions) and Linguistics (2 sessions). What is referred to as the Q-A section of viva sessions is the sequences of talk after the candidates' presentations. They mainly include questions and answers, criticisms, disagreements and academic discussions and arguments.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data, first, the audio-recorded data were transcribed. As the unit of analysis was speech act, the different speech acts were identified. Then, the linguistic utterances were close-read to find out in which strategy of negative politeness strategies they can be categorized. In other words, they were coded and classified to indicate any of the negative strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987). In case an utterance could be codified under more than one strategy, it was put under as many strategies as it realized. The negative politeness strategies, which are originally ordered from number 1 to 10 in Brown and Levinson (1987), are as follows: (P- stands for negative politeness.) In the paper, the negative politeness strategies are referred to by P- and their numbers; for example, P-1 stands for negative politeness strategy number 1.

P-1. Be conventionally indirect, as in "Can you please tell me the time?",

P-2. Questions, hedge, as in "This may not be relevant but..",

- P-3. Be pessimistic, “Could you set the table?”
- P-4. Minimize the imposition, Rx, “I just dropped by for a minute to ask you...”
- P-5. Give deference, as in “Excuse me, sir, would you mind if I close the window?”
- P-6. Apologize, as in “I do not want to bother you, but...”
- P-7. Impersonalize S and H as in “Is it possible to ask a favour?”
- P-8. State the FTA as a general rule, as in “We do not eat with our hands, we eat with knives and forks”
- P-9. Nominalize, as in “Your performance was very good” instead of “You performed well”
- P-10. Go on record as incurring a debt, or as not indebting H, as in “I’d really appreciate it if you would...”

To ensure the reliability of the coding, inter-rater reliability was used; that is, another Persian speaker expert in politeness checked the coding. For all the coding an agreement was reached and minor issues were resolved, by referring to third rater.

RESULTS

The study deals with politeness strategies which are commonly used by Iranian Persian speakers in Q-A part of viva sessions. To this end, linguistic utterances were identified, coded and categorized based on negative politeness strategies categorization of Brown and Levinson (1987). The total number of identified negative strategies was 908, as shown in Table 1.

Give deference

A glimpse at Table 1 reveals that negative strategy number 5 (P-5), that is, “give deference” has remarkably higher frequency in the data (f=360), followed by P-2, “hedges” (f=269), and this is something which was not unexpected. Variation in the realization of deference through ‘honorifics’ was observed in the data: Especially, two kinds of honorifics were frequent:

Grammatical honorifics

In the majority of cases, these plural address terms were accompanied by a plural verb, as in example 1. However, exploitation of this subject-verb agreement was also present; that is, plural subject with singular verb (example 1). With few exceptions, almost

TABLE 1
Frequency and percentage of the negative politeness strategies

NPS	P-1	P-2	P-3	P-4	P-5	P-6	P-7	P-8	P-9	P-10
F	75	269	32	12	360	10	100	32	0	18
%	8.25	29.62	3.52	1.32	39.64	1.10	11.01	3.52	0	1.98

NPS = Negative Politeness Strategies

F = frequency

% = percentage

all of the utterances in the present study involved plural form of the second person plural to address a hearer and third person plural to refer to the referent.

Example 1: V4: Social Sciences

Supervisor to candidate:

baraye inke vaghtetoon gerefte nashe shoma nazaratetoon ro akhare sar javab bedin

In order to save your (plural) time, you (plural) provide (plural) your (plural) answers at the end

Example 2: V5: Education

Supervisor to Graduate Studies deputy:

aghaye doctor farmayeshi nadarnd?

Mr doctor don't they have any commands?

Lexical honorifics

Grammatical honorifics are usually in tandem with lexical honorifics in Persian to convey enough respect to the addressees. Lexical honorifics, themselves are of two types; address terms and verb/noun forms.

The common address terms in vivas are 'aghaye/khanom doctor' (Mr./Mrs. Dr), 'aghaye/khanom docor+last name', *jenab (aghaye)+Doctor (Sir Mr Dr), sarkar khanom doctor (lady Mrs Dr), jenab (aghaye)+Doctor+last name, jenab (last name), 'aghaye+lastname' and khanom+last name.* The last three address terms were used by academic members to address candidates. Sometimes, PhD candidates were also addressed 'doctor' by committee members.

Another way to raise the addressee and lower self which was rife in the data of the present study is the use of specific lexicons that function as abjecting self and elevating the addressee. The use of plural pronoun 'shoma' to address a singular person does not always give adequate deference to the addressee. More deferential terms and words are needed. Referring to self as 'bandeh' (slave) or 'haghir' (humble) and addressing the interlocutor using terms like 'jenabali/hazrate ali' (your Excellency) are two typical examples (Keshavarz, 1988):

Example 3: V1: Linguistics

Examiner to candidate:

Bandeh hich eddaie nadarm ke in nokati ke arz mikonam khedmatetoon sahii bashe

This slave (I) have no claim that the points I'm making are correct

"Arze man injast" (my petition is that) is a respectful and modest way of saying "my point is that" (Beeman, 1976) and 'hamantor ke shoma khodetoon ham farmoodid' (as you (pl) yourselves (pl) commanded) is used to elevate the addressee by not saying as you yourself said:

Example 5: V2: Social Science

Examiner to candidate:

na na arze man injast ke...hamantor ke shoma khodetoon ham farmoodid

No no my petition is that...as you (plural) yourselves (plural) commanded (plural)

Questions, hedges

Hedges are the second most prominent feature of talk in academic discourse. In the data of the present study, 269 instances were identified. Some indirect speech acts are conventionalized to the extent that there can be no doubt about what is meant. In Persian, there are particles and words which downgrade/upgrade the propositional content of the utterances. Two examples of hedging on illocutionary force in the data are as follows:

Example 6: V1: Linguistics

Examiner to candidate:

onvanetoon ba oon zironvanesh ghadri nahamahange va az do jense

Your (plural) title and its subtitle are a bit disharmonious

Example 7: V3: Social Sciences

Examiner to candidate:

barkhi az gooyehatoon dar meghyasini nist ke betooneh be shoma javab bedeh har chand be shoma yek javabi mideh vali in pasokh ha be ehtemale ziad gheire vaghei khahad bud

some of your (pl) items are not able to give you (pl) proper answers, they might give you an answer, though. But the answers will most probably be unreal.

Hedges on illocutionary force of the utterances can also be encoded in adverbial clauses, especially 'if' clauses. Usually speakers use 'if' clauses to put conditions on the volitional acts predicted in the speech acts, as in example 8:

Example 8: V8: Geography

Examiner to candidate:

ye seri nokati ro man inja yaddasht kardam age ghabel estefade hast anjamesh bedid

I have jotted down some points here, do them if they are useful

Example 9: V1: Linguistics

Examiner to candidate:

man nazare khodam ro sarahatan migam ghesmate review za'eefeh

I'm just giving my own opinions candidly, the review section is weak

Impersonalize S and H

There were 100 instances of this strategy in the data, which can be encoded in three ways: The most salient examples of 'impersonalization' are 'passivization and hypothesization' of the sentences. The data are replete with utterances like "it would have been much better if", or 'the methodology section still required much more work' to avoid pointing the criticism directly to the addressee:

Example 9: V8: Geography

Examiner to candidate:

Dar ghesmate pishineh tahghigh on tor ke bayad o shayd adabiat naghde nashode va bishtar kar ha gozaresh shodeh

In the literature review section, the literature has not been critically reviewed in the real sense of it, and it has more been reported.

Another way to impersonalize is to replace the pronouns 'I' and 'you' with indefinites. In the following example, an examiner avoids a sentence like 'you should explain' by replacing it with 'the reader should understand'.

Example 10: V3: Social Sciences

Examiner to candidate:

man be shoma hagh midam ke az chehel ta ghom chahar ta ro entekhab konid amma ye jaie khanande bayad befahme ke chera oon chahar ta ro entekhab kardid

You have the right to choose four ethnic groups out of forty, but the reader must somewhere understand why you have chosen these four.

Shifting point of view from 'you' to 'I' and 'we' is another impersonalization strategy, as in the following example. This strategy was not present in Brown and Levinson model of politeness, but its occurrence was considerable in the data.

Example 11: V9: Geography

Examiner:

Shoma oomadid har chi model budeh inja avordid khob man avval bayad biam az khodam beporsam har kodom az in model ha be che dardi mikhoreh ...

You have used all models here well I first should ask myself what each of these models are here for...

Be conventionally indirect

This strategy is the first strategy of negative politeness in Brown and Levinson's (1987) model of politeness. The data of the present study favored the distribution of 75 instances of conventional indirectness which made it the fourth prominent strategy used by the participants. Examples found in the data are:

Example 12: V9: Geography

Examiner to candidate:

Bakhshi az ettela'ati ke dar fasle 7 conclusion avordid natayej e tahghighe shoma hastand

Part of the information you're providing in chapter 7 conclusion is your results

Although this sentence looks like an assertion, it indirectly conveys a criticism of a candidate that he has made a mistake in deciding in which chapter the given information should appear. Similarly in the following example, the examiner is indirectly criticizing the work as ignoring the aspectuality of the language.

Example 13: V1: Linguistics

Examiner to candidate:

Man kamtar didam ke kari dar erteбат ba modality anjam beshe vali daresh aspectuality ghayeb bashe

I have not seen many cases of work that is done on modality but lacks the aspectuality.

Other negative politeness strategies were not so salient in the data, and hence are not discussed here. However, one important

finding of the study is the frequency of overlaps between the strategies. In the majority of the times, the utterances could ambivalently be codified under more than one strategy (see the following example).

Example 14: V 9: Geography

Examiner to candidate:

man chand nokteye moshkhas ro zekr mikonam agar ghabele estefadast anjamesh bedid'

I just mention some clear points: if they're useful, do (pl) it)

In this example, we see that the speaker uses at least 5 strategies to realize his preface to criticism: First, he minimizes the imposition to H (P-4) by referring to his comments as '*chand*' implying that the critical comments are not many. Second, he uses 'hedging' in the same utterance (*chand*) and (P-2) by referring to his criticisms as 'some points' and hence downgrades it. Also, another hedging is that he assigns his so called points an attribute '*moshakhas*' (clear), which is a hedge addressing to Grice's maxims. The speaker uses another hedge which is in the form of an adverbial (if) clause, by which he also expresses pessimism (P-3). Finally, by using the plural form of the verb '*anjamesh bedid*' (do (pl) it), the examiner also uses the strategy 'give deference' by using the plural form of the verb, which is an indication of paying respect to addressee through elevating him.

DISCUSSION

'Give deference' and 'hedges' were the most frequent strategies in the data. The equivalent of deference, *ehteram* is a highly valued concept among Iranians and is strictly observed by Iranian people especially in formal contexts. Persian language is the real manifestation of a variety of honorifics which denote *ehteram* to addressee (Jahangiri, 2000). *Ehteram* has direct implication for attending to *shaxsiat* (face) of both the speaker and the addressee (Spencer-Oatey, 2005). Moreover, *ehteram* to the addressee brings back the same or even more *ehteram* on the part of the hearer to the speaker, and this is the mechanism that social interactions work in the Iranian society in general and in academic discourse in particular.

While 'deference' (*ehteram*) is common in many types of the interactions among Iranians, its pervasiveness in academic discourse is even more vivid. It seems safe to argue that in the formal contexts, participants claim more distance than solidarity and the 'deference' strategy is a favorable means to claim such a distance; that is, this prominence of negative politeness strategy can be justified by the stipulations of academic discourse. Moreover, academic society is built on mutual respect, and the social expectations of academics regarding *ehteram* is very high. Behaving contrary to this expectation runs the risk of damaging the professional face of all academic members (Spencer-Oatey, 2007).

As demonstrated by some examples extracted from the data, even in the context

of thesis evaluation, much caution was used by the participants to pay as high amount of *ehteram* as possible through a host of honorifics which are a conspicuous feature of Persian language. Despite the fact that examiners usually favor institutional power (Heritage, 2005) over the candidates, we still see them observe the rules of *ehteram*. The simplest reason one could think of for giving *ehteram* even from a more powerful party to the less powerful is the indication of *ædæb* (politeness). Regardless of power differential, breaching the norms of *ehteram* from any party brings about evaluations of impoliteness. In fact, the collocation of *ehteram* with *ædæb* (politeness) in Persian denotes a significant interconnection between the two concepts.

One of the salient characteristics of academic discourse is hedging. It is no wonder why the data favored a high number of hedging instances. The high occurrence of this strategy is closely related to the type of discourse which influences talk. Research in both written (Hyland, 1998) and spoken (Recksy, 2005) modes of academic genre has characterized this genre as being associated with ‘hedging’. The kind of hedging which has been repeatedly reported in research in academic discourse is the ‘downgraders’ (Hyland, 1998). Downgraders function as representing the speaker/writer’s low commitment to the propositional content of his/her utterances. Although, the purpose behind this hedging has not always been ‘politeness’ and ‘face’ issues, and many a time it is the epistemic stance of the speaker/writer that urges him/

her to hedge his/her propositions, politeness has been proved to be at least one concern which triggers hedging.

Another important reason for the high occurrence of hedging in the data of the present study is the realization of face threatening speech acts. The more face-threatening an act is, the more strategies are likely to be employed to soften it. Expressing critical views on a scholarly work, disagreements, challenging and defending are among those acts which require a great deal of mitigation on the part of the speaker. Many a time these speech acts are intrinsically face threatening for the candidate and by implication for his/her supervisory team. Hedging, therefore, can be used as a remedial linguistic device to soften the harsh effect of such negative speech acts on the interpersonal relationship between members of an academic society.

Hedging the utterances by an examiner can be taken as his desire not to fully pledge to his propositions, lest there might come a defensive response from the candidate or his/her supervisors. However, as one important incentive for hedging, the desire to attend to the face of the addressee(s) and by implication to his own face can hardly be denied. Concomitant with this desire, there may be a want for conforming to not only the social norms (by giving *ehteram*), but also to the norms of academic community of practice, which is more universal than Iranian social norms.

Two other frequent strategies in the data were ‘impersonalization’ and ‘conventional indirectness’. Similar to what was discussed

about hedging, these two strategies have close veering on the ‘institutionality’ of the discourse. Members of academic community have to be critical of each other’s work in order to survive (Tannen, 2002). Reviewers in a thesis evaluation context have to be critical, as they explicitly state a disclaimer in their introduction to their talk. As such, at times, they try to distance the work from the author, thereby criticizing the work rather than the author, to keep their fellow academic member’s face. In Persian, this strategy also works as to respect (*ehteram*) the addressee and hence giving him/her *shaxsiat*; that is, attending to his face. ‘Impersonalization’ could also convey the contention that the examiners criticize the work, regardless of the author, even if the author is themselves, although disintegrating the work from its author is not always feasible. Similarly, by employing ‘conventional indirectness’, the participants avoid directly imposing on their interlocutor’s face. This is especially the case here, as the speech acts in focus involve a great deal of imposition to the face of the addressee(s).

CONCLUSION

The study attempted to explore how politeness is expressed through language in spoken academic discourse, using the model of politeness proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987). The findings of this study can be a good contribution in understanding the politeness norms of Iranian society in general, and academic discourse in particular. The four prominent strategies

in the data can be attributed not only to the politeness features of Iranian society, but also to the culture of academic discourse. Specifically, hedging and impersonalization are supported to be the universal features of academic discourse. In the context of thesis review, which entails intrinsically face threatening acts of criticisms and disagreements, using politeness strategies are promising factors in softening the bitter effect of the given acts, hence fostering interpersonal relationship between the social members. Pedagogically, theorists, curriculum developers and practitioners in the field of Teaching Persian for Academic Purposes may benefit from the findings of this study in their research and practice.

The more important implication of the study, however, is for politeness theory. First and foremost, applying Brown and Levinson’s (1987) model to the natural data poses considerable problems in coding the utterances as realizing a strategy. As was shown in example 14 in the results section, many a time, an utterance could be codified to encode more than one strategy. Therefore, a model which explains the dynamicity of language seems required to be applicable to natural data.

While face management can be a good motivation for politeness, in Persian, there seems to be an equally robust motivation for that, which is ‘social indexing’ (Terkourafi, 2005). It is possible for an Iranian to appear polite to demonstrate his/her understanding of and abiding by the social ethics and norms of his/her society to establish his/her and his/her interlocutors status in the

structure and hierarchy of the group (cf. Ide, 1989; Matsumoto, 1988; for similar discussion in Japanese). Generally, almost all studies on non-western languages and cultures have advocated the prominence of “social indexing” (Terkourafi, 2005) over ‘face saving’ or “conflict avoidance” (Leech, 1983; Ide, 1989; Matsumoto, 1988; Mao, 1994), although politeness might have implications for face management (Spencer-Oatey, 2005).

Politeness may still have other motives like self-display. Polite language behavior in Persian is closely linked with circumlocutionary and flowery language. Mastery over such a language requires a dexterity which is frequently associated with high education. Academics are such highly educated people who must show that dexterity in language through polished verbal behavior to self-display and hence establish their social position. As such, politeness can be viewed as a distinctive feature of academic identity.

Further research is required to touch upon different aspects of relational phenomena such as face and politeness. Future studies are suggested to draw upon more dynamic and discursive models for analyzing the issues and focus on more social variables like power, gender, age and level of education. Also, it is suggested that the oral aspect of academic discourse be compared with its written aspect to find any similarities or differences.

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