# Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization: The Case of Requests in the Persian and Turkish Speech of Iranian Speakers.

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## Abstract

*This study focuses on realization of requests made by Iranian Persian monolingual and Turkish-Persian bilingual speakers according to the directness categories introduced by Blum-Kulka et al. (1984). At first, a discourse completion test (DCT) was administered to both groups, in order to elicit requests in 10 different situations. Second, a politeness questionnaire was used to measure the perceived politeness in both bilingual and monolingual speakers. The results of the questionnaire showed that, politeness strategies are different in different languages in that, hints have been rated as being neutral area in Persian, but they tend to be close to the more polite area in Turkish in Iran. With regard to gender, a comparison reveals that, there are some differences in the use of certain strategies however, in case of requests, females use less direct strategies in Persian and more direct strategies in Turkish in comparison with males. Also this study also confirms that the socio-economic status of the interlocutors does not affect the kind of strategy used by the two groups.*

**Keywords:** speech act; request; politeness; Turkish; Persian

## 1. Introduction

Interlocutors engage in a negotiation of face relationships, during the course of social interaction (Scollon and Scollon, 2001) and employ different strategies to express a series of communicative acts in conversations like, requesting, complaining, refusing or accepting. Politeness, which is a form of social interaction, is conditioned by the socio-cultural norms of a particular society and can be expressed through communicative and non-communicative acts (Shahidi-Tabar, 2012). Establishing how different intra-cultural sources of variability account for actual use in each language, is needed for establishing the ways in which patterns of politeness differ from one language to another. Therefore, the claims about the universality or diversity of pragmatic principles across cultures and languages should be further investigated in as many new contexts as possible. The present study investigates the linguistic strategies employed by male and female monolingual native speakers of Persian and Persian-Turkish bilinguals, and aims to be a contribution to such a challenge.

More specifically this study addresses the following questions:

1. Are the politeness strategies used by the interlocutors same or different in Iran bilingual context (Persian-Turkish bilingual context)?
2. How direct are female speakers compared to male speakers?
3. Does the socioeconomic status of the interlocutors affect the kind of strategies used by the two groups (low and high socioeconomic status) ?

Empirical work on linguistic politeness has focused on some aspects of pragmatics in Persian and Turkish. Among few studies investigating speech acts in Persian is Salmani's (2008) work on Persian requests. He confirms that, native speakers of Persian use conventionally indirect (CI) strategies in their requestive speech acts. The result from his study coincides with the findings of previous studies in that conventionally indirect strategies are the most preferred strategies in other languages (Blum-Kalka, et al., 1989). According to Salmani (2008) direct requests are very rare, in situations where there is a social distance between interlocutors, however, in situations where there is no social distance, Persian native speakers frequently use direct requests as if they had a potential for expressing camaraderie and friendship. This finding is  also consistent with other studies as well (Wierzbicka, 2003).

In another study, Akbari, Z (2002), investigated "The Realization of politeness principles in Persian". She confirms that, in addition to the relative power of the speaker over the listener, the social distance between the speaker and the listener, the ranking of the imposition involved in doing the FTA, the presence of the audience, the liking factor and the urgency of the act must all be taken into account in social interactions. She also points out that, gender is also salient in an interaction since it is a social construct and it does not exist independently of other social factors. She adds that there is no difference between the two socio-economic statuses in her study.

Also Sofia A. Koutlaki (2002), in a study on tæ☐arof in Persian, indicates that Persian face (šæxsiæt) does not begin and end with one's individual positive or negative face but rather depends on the conformity to establish norms as a result of correct socialization (tærbiæt). The writer confirms that, šæxsiæt is linked to social values and it should be characterized as public face. Among other few studies investigating speech acts in Turkish is Huls's (1989) study on directness. She analyzed the family interaction of both Turkish and Dutch. The result of her study shows that, the Turkish family used imperative forms more frequently in comparison with Dutch families. In other words, the Turkish speakers were perceived to be more direct than the Dutch family.

A similar study (Marti, 2006) investigated the directness level of Turkish-German bilingual and Turkish monolingual requests. The study showed that, Turkish monolingual speakers preferred more direct strategies compared to Turkish-German bilingual speakers.

## 2. Procedure

In this study a Discourse completion test (DCT) written in Persian with ten scenarios was used as the main tool of data collection. It was administered to 200 participants of whom 180 responded positively. Ninety of the participants were Turkish-Persian bilingual speakers while ninety were Persian monolingual speakers, On the other hand, 120 of them were females while 80 of them were males. A short questioner attached to the test was used to obtain background information on the informants. Only candidates who defined themselves Turkish-Persian bilingual and Persian monolingual speakers were included in the study.

The present study focuses on requests, one of the most investigated speech acts in cross-cultural pragmatics (Blum Kulka et al., 1989; Garcia, 1993; Hicky and Steward, 2005; Rinnert and Kobayashi; 1999; Sifianou, 1992; Marti L.; 2006 etc). This study is also going to investigate the politeness strategy uses between male and female interlocutors and see if there are any differences.

## 3. Theoretical framework

Politeness is best expressed as the practical application of good manners or etiquette. On the other hand, directness is best described by Blum-Kulka et al. (1989:278) as "the degree to which the speaker's illocutionary intent is apparent from the locution". Some linguists such as leech (1983) or Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) believe that, there is a strong relationship between politeness and indirectness. Leech (1983) claims that "the more indirect an illocution is, the more diminished and tentative its force tend to be" (Leech; 1983:108). In other words, the illocution I want you to answer the phone., verbalized by a speaker is perceived to be less polite than Would you mind answering the phone? Because it is more direct (Leech; 1983:108).

Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) pointed out that there have been several attempts to establish a classification of request strategies that would form a universally valid scale of directness. According to them, three major levels of directness for requests can be identified cross-linguistically on theoretical grounds: impositives, conventionally indirect requests, and nonconventionally indirect requests, according to Blum-Kulka Olshtain (1984). A finer scale of nine direct categories, based on these three major levels, was used in the CCSARP (Cross Cultural Speech Act Realization Project) (Blum-Kulka Olshtain, 1984; Blum-Kulka and House, 1989), with nine categories ranging from most direct to least direct as follows:

**Table 1: Blum-Kulka et al's (1984) directness categories (from direct to indirect)**

| | |
|---|---|
| 1. Mood derivative<br>Clean up the kitchen.<br>The menu please. | **جزوتُ بهم بده.**<br>'Give me your notes' |
| 2. Explicit performative<br>I am asking you to move your car. | از شما درخواست میکنم تکلیف محوله رو این هفته انجام بدی.<br>'I am asking you to do your assigned homework.' |
| 3. Hedged performative<br>I must/have to ask you<br>to clean the kitchen now. | باید ازت بخوام که انجام بدی.<br>'I must 'ask you to do it.' |
| 4. Locution derivable or obligation statement<br>Madam you'll have to/should/must/ought to<br>move your car. | 'تو باید اتاق رو تمیز می کردی.<br>'You had to clean the room' |
| 5. Want statement<br>I'd like to borrow your notes for a little while. | **ببین آقای... ازت (از تو) میخوام تکلیف هفته بعد رو این هغته**<br>**انجام بدی.**<br>'Look sir, I'd like to ask<br>you to do your homework one week earlier.' |
| 6. Suggestory formula<br>How about cleaning up the kitchen? | **می خواهی امروز اتاق رو دوتایی تمیز کنیم؟**<br>'How about cleaning up the room together today?' |
| 7. Preparatory or conventionally indirect<br>Can I borrow your notes?<br>I was wondering if you would give me a lift. | **میشه منم (من را هم) برسونید؟**<br>'Can you give me a lift?' |
| 8. Strong hint<br>(Intend: getting a lift)<br>Will you be going home now? | (قصد: به شنونده بفهماند که او را برساند.)<br>شما الان دارید خونه میرید؟<br>(Intend: getting a lift)<br>'Will you be going home now?' |
| 9. Strong hint<br>(Intend: getting the hearer to clean the kitchen)<br>You have been busy here. Haven't you? | (قصد: به شنونده بفهماند که اتاق تمیز نیست.)<br>امروز سرت خیلی شلوغ بوده. مگه نه؟<br>(Intend: getting the hearer to clean the kitchen)<br>'You have been busy here. Haven't you?' |

Briefly summarize, it can be said that, the above strategies are employed according to the degree of face threat that a person might encounter. According to Brown and Levinson, face threat amount assessment depends on these variables: power of the speaker, social distance (between the interlocutors), and rank. By adding these values, one is able to calculate the weight of and FTA (Face threatening acts), according to them.

### 3.1 The instrument

As it was mentioned, a Discourse Completion Test (DCT) written in Persian-the only official language, spoken in Iran- with ten scenarios was used as the main tool of data collection. With regard to the DCT, five situations were taken from the CCSARP and translated into Persian and the rest were taken from Marti .L (Marti .L, 2006). Two of the situations were redesigned to meet Iranian culture. The test piloted with 20 male and female native speakers of Turkish and Persian. Summary of situations in DCT of the present study is shown in Table 2, below.

**Table 2: Summary of situations in DCT**

| | |
|---|---|
| S1. Kitchen | Student-student |
| | Student asks flat mate to clean the kitchen |
| S2. Notes | Student-student |
| | Student asks a flat mate to clean the kitchen |
| S2. Notes | Student-student |
| | Student asks another student foe course notes |
| S3. Extension | Student-teacher |
| | Student teacher for an extension (to hand in a project) |
| S4. History Teacher | Teacher-student |
| | Teacher asks student to give a presentation one week earlier |
| S5. Guest | Host-guest |
| | Host asks guest to leave because of dinner invitation |
| S6. Secretary | Student-secretary |
| | Student asks secretary for a piece of paper |
| S7. Change | Informant without a specific role-grocer |
| | The informant asks the shopkeeper to change a bill |
| S8. Lift | Informant without a specific role-a couple who are neighbors |
| | The informant asks the couple who live on the same street for a lift |
| S9. Book | Student-teacher |
| | Student asks teacher to borrow a book |
| S10. Help | Student-student |
| | Student asks classmates to denote money for charity in class |

## 3.2 Situation and parameters

Situational variations in the CCSARP, Marti (2006), Shihidi-Tabar (2012) and the present study have been focused on the concepts of social distance and dominance. However, it should be mentioned that, terms of dominance and social distance were difficult to define and to apply in some situations of this study. For example, in Situation 5, where a host is asked to request a guest to leave, it was too difficult to determine what the power relationship might have been. Regardless of the power relationship in Iran (especially Turkish) context, informants of this study DCT believe that "guests are Allah's Hæbib (friend)". Marti (2006) believes that, the guest situation that she had included in her test, might be vague in terms of power relationship, and therefore leave more room for the informants' interpretation of the situation. In contrast, situation like Situation Change (7), where the informant is asked to request a grocer for some change, may show a more rigid role where the power relationship between the grocer and the informant would be more easier to determine. Needless to say, these complexities need more attention.

## 3.3. Politeness assessment questionnaire

The main objective of proposing politeness assessment questionnaire was to investigate how polite request strategies with different directness levels were perceived the informants. The test was piloted once with 20 male and female native speakers in Tehran University and Science and Research Branch of Islamic Azad University.
Every directness level was represented by at least one request strategy in the politeness assessment questionnaire of this study. For instance, hints such as, Sounds, you were busy today said to a flat mate, who had left the kitchen dirty, is the most indirect strategy, while give me some change said to a grocer is the least indirect strategy.

## *4. Results*

In this part of the study, the results of DCT analysis are presented.

### 4.1. Turkish and Persian Informants

For understanding the politeness differences between Turkish and Persian speakers, an independent-Sample T-Test is used which it's result is shown in Table 3.

**Table 3: Politeness differences between Turkish and Persian speakers.**

| Group | Numbers | Mean | Significance | Sig(P) | Difference mean | Same/Different |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Turkish | 90 | 6/8045 | 0/05 | 0/00 | 1/40898 | Different |
| Persian | 90 | 5/3956 | | | | |

As it can be seen in Table 3, Sig (P) is smaller than 0/05. It means that Iranian Turkish bilingual speakers prefer a relatively high level of indirectness, in comparison with Iranian Persian monolingual speakers; as a result they prefer to choose utterances that are more indirect when they want to make a request. In other words, Iranian speakers seem to prefer to use different strategies in making requests regarding to their language. For an instance in Note Situation a Persian informant said the following sentence:

(1): فا ط ل و تاتَ ش ادّا ی رض ق ده ب

Please give (me) your notes.

This sentence is categorized as Mood derivative which is the most direct strategy proposed by Blum-Kulka et al (1984), on the other hand a Turk informant in the same situation used example (2):

(2): Səlam. Olar dünən ki cüzvəni mənə verəz?
Hello. Is it possible to give (your) yesterday notes?

This sentence is categorized as Preparatory or conventionally indirect which is more indirect than Mood derivative according to Blum-Kulka et al (1984), as can be seen in table 1.

Briefly summarized, Marti (2006) confirms that, no significant differences could be found between the Turkish monolinguals and the Turkish-German bilinguals, on the other hand, as far as the collected data of this study is concerned, Iranian Persian monolingual and Persian-Turkish bilingual speakers seem to prefer to use different strategies in different situations for making requests. In other words, it could be concluded that, politeness strategies used by the interlocutors may be different in one bilingual context (like Persian in Iran) or same in another bilingual context (Turkish in Turkey).

### 4.2. Male versus female requestive acts

The main objective of proposing this part is to investigate the results of the DCT and compare the informants according to their gender. In Tables 4 and 5 , the politeness differences between male and female speakers of both Persian and Turkish informants are presented.

**Table 4: Politeness differences between male and female speakers of Turkish.**

| Group | Numbers | Median | Significance | Sig(P) | Salient group |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Female | 55 | 12/80 | 0/05 | 0/00 | Male |
| Male | 33 | 19/89 | | | |

As it can be seen from Table 3, Sig (P) is smaller than 0/05. It means that Iranian Turkish bilingual male speakers prefer a relatively high level of indirectness, in comparison with Iranian Turkish bilingual female speakers; as a result they prefer to choose more indirect utterances when they want to make a request. In other words, Iranian Turkish male and female speakers seem to prefer to use different strategies in making requests regarding to their gender. For an instance in Book Situation a Turkish female informant said the following sentence:

**(3): Olsa, kitabızı mənə əmanət verın.**

If possible, lend me the book for a short time.

On the other hand a Turk male informant in the same situation used example (4): Bir müşkülə yemişəm, eliə bilsəz kömək elə yin.

I have a problem. If you can, help me.
Sentence 3 is categorized as *Preparatory or conventionally indirect* which is more indirect than sentence 4 which is categorized as *hints* according to Blum-Kulka et al (1984).

**Table 5: Politeness differences between male and female speakers of Persian.**

| Group | Numbers | Median | Significance | Sig(P) | Salient group |
|-------|---------|--------|--------------|--------|---------------|
| Female | 65 | 17/07 | 0/05 | 0/107 | ---- |
| Male | 47 | 11/19 | | | |

As it can be seen from Table 3, Sig (P) is more than 0/05. It means that Iranian Persian monolingual male speakers prefer a relatively equal level of indirectness like, Iranian Persian monolingual female speakers; as a result they prefer to choose the equal (in)direct utterances when they want to make a request. In other words, Iranian Persian monolingual male and female speakers seem to prefer to use the same strategies in making requests. For an instance in Book Situation a Persian female and male informants said the same sentences as the following sentences:

Male:(5): **اگه امکان داره، کتاب را به مدت کوتاهی به من قرض دهید.**
If you don't mind, lend me the book for a short time.

On the other hand a Persian female informant in the same situation used example (6):
(6): **اگر میشه، کتابتون رو یه مدت به من قرض بدید.**
 If you don't mind, lend me your book for a short time.

### 4.3. Socioeconomic

The main objective behind embarking on proposing this part, is to investigate the results of the DCT and compare the informants according to their socioeconomic status. In Tables 6 and 7, the politeness differences between two groups are shown according to socioeconomic status.

**Table 6: Politeness differences of Turkish speakers according to socioeconomic status.**

| Group | Numbers | Median | Significance | Sig(P) | Same/Different |
|-------|---------|--------|--------------|--------|----------------|
| High | 54 | 16/52 | 0/05 | 0/249 | Same |
| Low | 36 | 12/14 | | | |

As it is clear, Table 3, shows a Sig (P) more than 0/05. It means that Iranian Turkish bilingual speakers with high socioeconomic status prefer a relatively equal level of indirectness like Iranian Turkish bilingual speakers with low socioeconomic status; as a result they prefer to choose the equal (in)direct utterances when they want to make a request. In other words, both groups seem to prefer to use the same strategies in making requests.

**Table 7: Politeness differences of Persian speakers according to socioeconomic status.**

| Group | Numbers | Median | Significance | Sig(P) | Same/Different |
|-------|---------|--------|--------------|--------|----------------|
| High | 50 | 16/53 | 0/05 | 0/401 | Same |
| Low | 40 | 13/73 | | | |

As it can be seen from Table 3, Sig (P) is more than 0/05. It means that Iranian Persian monolingual speakers with high socioeconomic status prefer a relatively equal level of indirectness like Iranian Persian monolingual speakers with low socioeconomic status; as a result they prefer to choose the equal (in)direct utterances when they want to make a request. In other words, both groups like Turkish informants, seem to prefer to use the same strategies in making requests.

According to the findings of the study, in answer to the first question " Are the politeness strategies used by the interlocutors same or different in Iran bilingual context (Persian-Turkish bilingual context)?", it could be said that, Iranian speakers (at least informants of this study) seem to prefer to use different strategies in making requests regarding to their mother tongue. It means that, politeness strategies are different in different languages in that, for instance, *hints* have been rated as being neutral area in Persian, but they tend to be close to the more polite area in Turkish. In other studies like Marti (2006) and Blum-Kulka's study this point is mentioned as well. In Marti's study, the strategy rated as the most polite, seems to be the *explicit performative* (Marti, 2006) and in Blum-Kulka's study, the strategy rated as the most polite seems to be the *preparatory*.

The second question was " How direct are female speakers compared to male speakers?".

The findings of this study confirms that, Iranian Turkish male and female speakers seem to prefer to use different strategies in making requests regarding to their gender, on the other hand Iranian Persian monolingual male and female speakers seem to prefer to use the same strategies in making requests. In other words, there are some subtle differences in the use of certain strategies however, in the case of requests, females use less direct strategies in Persian and more direct strategies in Turkish in comparison with males. This finding of the study is coincides with Fasold (2006) that confirms: "Expectations about how men and women tend to speak (that is, gender norms) vary across cultures, as do norms regarding the use of indirectness".

Finally, in answer to the third hypothesis, " does the socioeconomic status of the interlocutors affect the kind of strategies used by the two group (low and high socioeconomic status)? ", it should be mentioned that, as far as the collected data is concerned, no significant difference between the two groups can be seen. The main reason for this finding, may be that, most of the informants of the present study subjects are university students, and they seem to prefer to use forms that are used by educated people, not the forms they actually use in other informal situations. In spite of this fact, some weak traces of socioeconomic status in few situations, especially applied by males for making requests, were seen.

## 5. Implications of the study

This work has focused on identifying cultural differences. The results of the present study cannot be generalized to all native speakers of Iranian Persian and Turkish. It is also conceivable that politeness may differ among participants of different ages, educational level, and other dialects of Persian and Turkish spoken in Iran. These are important issues to consider in a comprehensive account of politeness, and are left open for future research.

### Acknowledgments

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