The Socio-Pragmatics of Greeting Forms in English And Persia

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Abstract

In order to compare English and Persian greeting forms, a model of sociopragmatic contrastive analysis was used. The corpus used for the study comprised of Persian greetings used in naturalistic contexts, and English greetings used in movies and other video or audio media. The analyses revealed two patterns for English greetings and five patterns for Persian greetings. The results and pedagogical implications of the study are discussed.

Keywords: sociopragmatics; tertium comparationis; greetings; speech acts; sociolinguistics; honorifics; pragmatics; contrastive linguistics

Introduction

This study aims at discovering the most frequent verbal and non-verbal behaviors associated with both American English (AE) and Tehrani Persian (TF, hereafter) greetings. It aims at investigating whether these behaviors vary according to relationships between interlocutors in both of these speech communities, and also at discovering the extent to which contrastive analysis can be used in teaching English greeting forms to Persian speaking students. In so doing I will adopt a sociopragmatic approach to contrast the Persian and English (non-) formulaic greeting forms.

Background of The Study

Sociopragmatics refers to the way conditions of language use derive from the social situation. In other words, it involves the study of both the forms and functions of language in the given social setting. The term "linguistic forms" refers to the abstract phonological and/or grammatical characterization of language. "Social functions," however, refers to the role language plays in the context of the society or the individual. For instance, language is used (or functions in such a way as) to

communicate ideas, express attitudes, and so forth. It may also be used to identify specific sociolinguistic situations, such as informality, or varieties of language, such as science or law. The term "situation" is generally used to refer to the extra-linguistic setting in which an utterance takes place. It refers to such notions as number of participants, level of formality, nature of the ongoing activities, and so on.

In any sociopragmatic study, therefore, two sets of categories are to be contrasted: a linguistic category, and a sociological category. In other words, two sets of *tertium comparationis* (TC) are required; a linguistic TC (TCL hereafter), and a social TC (TCS hereafter). This means that the surface social and linguistic conventions of English and Persian are derived from a set of underlying social and linguistic conventions (TCSC, and TCLC). The present study is carried out in such a way as to comply with the model of sociopragmatic contrastive procedure (Yar-Mohammadi, L. 1986, and 1988).
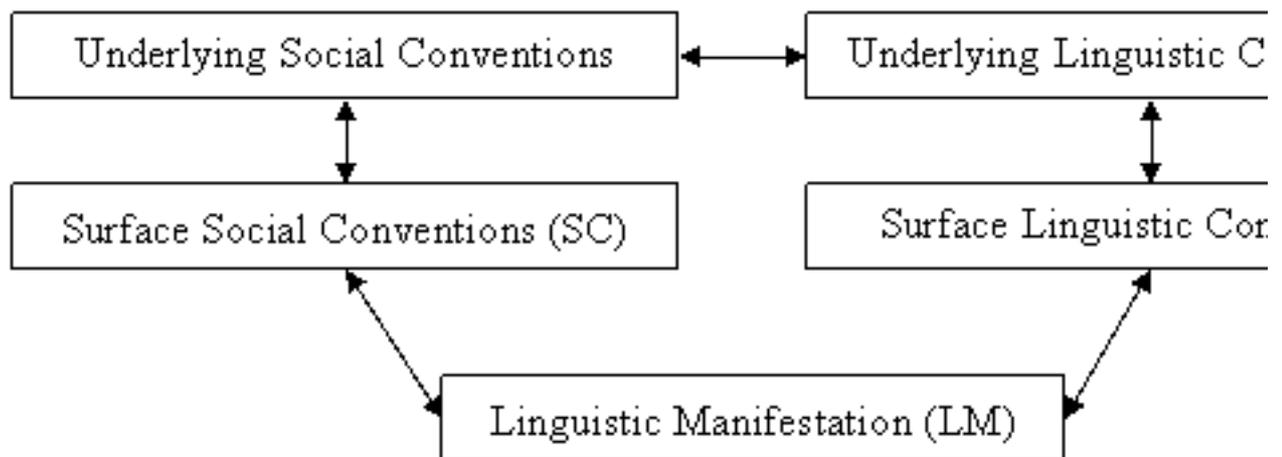

Figure 1. A model of sociopragmatic contrastive procedure.

Grimshaw (1973) maintains that there exists a set of underlying universal social conventions with socio-culturally specific SC. One such convention is the rule that tells the speakers of a language to *greet each other at the first meeting in a given social setting for politeness purposes.*

The linguistic TC's employed here are Grice's Cooperative Principle (CP) (Grice, 1975, pp. 45-47) and Leech's Politeness Maxims (PM) (Leech, 1983):

Grice's Cooperative Principle (CP) includes:

1. Quality [QL]: Tell the truth.
2. Quantity [QN]: Give the right amount of information.

3. Relevance [R]: Be relevant.

4. Manner [M]: Be clear and brief.

Leech's Politeness Maxims (PM) include:

1. Tact Maxim [TM]: Minimize the cost to the other.

2. Generosity Maxim [GM]: Minimize benefit to self.

3. Approbation Maxim [APM]: Maximize praise of other.

4. Agreement Maxim [AGM]: Maximize agreement between self and other.

5. Sympathy Maxim [SM]: Maximize sympathy between self and other.

Closely connected to the notion of sociopragmatics is the notion of speech act. "Speech Act" is a term derived from the work of the philosopher of language, J. L. Austin (1962). It refers to a theory which analyzes the role of utterances in relation to the behavior of speakers and hearers in interpersonal communication. It is a communicative activity defined with reference to the intentions of the speaker while speaking (or the illocutionary force of his utterances). Several categories of speech acts have been proposed: directives, commissives, expressives, declarations, and representatives.

Once we begin to look at utterances from the point of view of what they do (or the speech-act viewpoint), it is possible to see every utterance as a speech act of one kind or other (that is, as having some functional value which might be quite independent of the actual words used, and of their grammatical arrangements). These acts may not be as explicit or direct as "Out!", "I do", or "We hereby seek leave to appeal", but there can be little dispute that even to say something like "I saw John this morning" is an act; at the simplest level it is an act of telling the truth or not. There is also no reason to assume that every language has the same performatives. We can now return to expressions like "Nice day!", "How do you do?" and "You are looking smart today." These comprise a special kind of speech that is called 'phatic communion'. According to Malinowski (1923), phatic communion is a type of speech in which ties of union are created by a mere exchange of words. In such a communion words do not convey meanings. Instead, they fulfill a social function, and that is their principle aim. What, for instance, is the function of apparently aimless gossip? Malinowski (1923, p. 315) answers as follows:

It consists in just this atmosphere of sociability and in the fact of the personal communion of these people. But this is in fact archived by speech, and the situation in all such cases is created by the exchange of words, by the specific feelings which

form convival gregariousness, by the give and take of utterances which make up ordinary gossip. The whole situations consists in what happens linguistically. Each utterance is an act serving the direct aim of binding hearer to speaker by the tie of some social sentiment or other. Once more, language appears to us in this function not as an instrument of reflection but as a mode of action.

The verbs which are used to indicate the speech act intended by the speaker are sometimes referred to as performative verbs. The criteria which have to be satisfied in order for a speech act to be successful are known as felicity conditions. The speech event is the basic unit of analysis of spoken interaction, i.e. the emphasis is on the role of participants in constructing a discourse of verbal exchanges.

A conversation can be viewed as a series of speech acts—greetings, inquiries, congratulations, comments, etc. To accomplish the work of these speech acts some organization is essential: we take turns at speaking, answer questions, mark the beginning and end of a conversation, and make corrections when they are needed. Hymes (1974) recommends that for every speech act there be an ethnographic framework which takes into account the various factors that are involved in speaking. An ethnography of a communicative event is a description of all the factors that are relevant in understanding how that particular communicative event archives its objectives. For convenience, Hymes uses the acronym SPEAKING for the various factors he believes to be relevant. I will now consider each of these factors briefly.

S stands for settings. The *setting* or scene refers to the time and place (i.e. both the concrete physical and abstract psychological circumstances) in which speech takes place.

P stands for participants. The *participants* include various combinations of speaker-listener, addressor-addressee, or sender-receiver.

E stands for Ends or Purposes. *End* or *purpose* refers to the conventionally recognized and expected outcomes of an exchange as well as the personal goals that participants seek to accomplish on a particular occasion. Hymes observes that the purpose of an event from a community standpoint may not be identical to the purposes of those engaged in it. At every level of language individuals can exploit the system for personal and/or social reasons or artistic effect. Irvine (1974) describes a speech event among the Wolof (a Niger-Congo language of Senegambia), the greeting which is a necessary opening to every encounter, and can in fact be used as a definition of when an encounter occurs. Relative rank determines who greets whom—it is

customary for the lower ranking party to greet the higher ranking party, and there is a proverb "when two persons greet each other, one has shame, the other has glory." However, individuals do not always wish to take the higher status position because along with prestige goes the obligation to contribute to the support of low status persons. For this reason a higher status person may indulge in self-lowering by adopting the opening role. Irvine observed that no one ever asked her for a gift if they had not first managed to take the lower status role in the interaction.

K stands for Keys. By the term *key*, Hymes (op. cit.) means the tone, manner, or spirit in which a particular message is conveyed: light-hearted, serious, precise, pedantic, sarcastic, pompous, etc. The signaling of key may be non-verbal, by a wink, smile, gesture, or posture, but may equally well be archived by conventional units of speech like the aspiration and vowel length used to signal emphasis in English. The Wolof greeting discussed above is normally begun by the lower status speaker and responded by the higher status speaker; there are also paralinguistic features associated with each of these roles, classifiable on the dimension of stress and tempo/quantity.

	STRESS	TEMPO / QUANTITY
NOBEL	s [- high , - loud]	t [- rapid , - verbose]
GRIOT	S [+ high , + loud]	T [+ rapid , + verbose]

Thus the opening greeting normally has the associated paralinguistic features ST; the response st. However, if a speaker wishes to indicate that the status assigned to his role is at variance with his true status, he does this by using an inappropriate stress pattern—a speech style of sT will sometimes be used by a noble who has taken the role of initiator but wants to indicate that (he knows) he is being polite. He is showing defense (initiator role and T) even though he does not have to (s).

A stands for Act Sequences. *Act sequence* or *message content* refers to the actual form and content of what is said: the precise words used, how they are used, and the relationship of what is said to the actual topic at hand.

I stands for Instrumentalities. *Instrumentalities* or *channels* refers to the choice of channel: oral, written, telegraphic, semaphore, or other mediums of transmission of speech. This term also refers to the actual forms of speech employed, such as the language, dialect, code, or register that is chosen.

N stands for Norms. *Norms of interaction and interpretation* refer to the specific behaviors and properties that attach to speaking and also to how these may be viewed by someone who does not share them (e.g. loudness, silence, gaze return, etc.).

Finally, **G** stands for Genres. the term *genre* refers to clearly demarcated types of utterances; such things as poems, proverbs, riddles, sermons, lectures, etc. Conversation openers (e.g., greetings) are often highly ritualized. The definition I propose for a "greet illocution" simply claims that a speaker communicates thereby his awareness that the addressee is present as a potential interactant. The greet act fulfills three functions:

1. Speaker wishes hearer to know that speaker has taken cognizance of hearer's presence.
2. In recognizing hearer's presence via a greet, speaker ratifies hearer's social standing with himself, and implies a readiness on his part for social interaction.
3. It is intended that the greet covers somewhat more ground than the every day term greeting. Further specification is, therefore, possible.

So, greeting indicates continuity of personal relation, and signals the recognition of the other participant as a potential agent in some activity (See Halliday and Hasan, 1985, p.63).

A laboratory study of greetings was conducted by Krivonos and Knapp (1975) to discover the most frequent verbal and non-verbal behavior associated with them, and to investigate whether these behaviors varied according to relationship between interlocutors. All 64 subjects of their study were college-age men who were asked to fill out forms giving information concerning their "scale of acquaintance" with respect to all other participants in the study. With their information in hand, the researchers were able to divide their subjects into sixteen pairs of strangers. Each pair then participated in a task designed to elicit a greeting by one of the members of the pair. All greetings collected in this way were videotaped and transcribed.

The most common verbal greetings involved topic initiation, verbal salute, and references to the interlocutor. Typical non-verbal greetings were found to be head gestures, mutual glances, and smiles. The only non-verbal difference between acquaintances and strangers was that more smiling occurred were participants were acquaintances. Differences between the two sets of subjects manifested themselves

in the fact that verbal greetings were less common among strangers. While the authors regard greetings as ritualized behavior, Krivonos and Knapp (ibid) point out that their results could have been specific to the situation in which they conducted their study.

That this may indeed be the case is suggested by a preliminary study of nonformulaic greetings conducted by Marsha Wesler (1984) at the university of Pennsylvania. Basing her findings on an ethnography of her own speech community, Wesler (1984) discovered that in interactions among status equals who were well acquainted, conversations were typically initiated not by a formulaic greeting but by a comment or question related to information shared by the participants. While the study was preliminary in nature, a considerable amount of data was collected and analyzed, leading to a strong indication that social distance and amount of shared knowledge about one another's lives have a strong influence on the frequency with which non-formulaic greetings are used.

Greeting forms could be classified in ways other than the verbal-nonverbal dichotomy proposed by Krivonos and Knapp (1975). Halliday (1979) classifies greetings as time-free and time-bound. English "Hello" and its Persian counterpart "salaam" /sæ'la:m/ are time-free but English "good morning" and its Persian counterpart "sobh bekheir" /sobh be'xêr/ are time-bound.

Sacks (MS) maintains that there are two important features about greetings. Firstly, they occur at the very beginning of a conversation, and cannot be done anywhere else in the conversation; secondly, they allow all the speakers a turn, right at the beginning of the conversation.

e.g.
Hello there, you two.
Hi.
Hi there, ...

There are two major occasions on which a conversation does not open with a greeting. Firstly, conversation between people who do not consider themselves co-conversationalists (for example, strangers). They are not on greeting terms and, therefore, do not exchange a greeting (Coulthard, 1985). The speaker who opens must demonstrate in his first utterance why he is beginning the conversation.

Excuse me. Could you tell me the way to ....

or

Hey. You've dropped your book.

The other conversations which typically do not open with a greeting are telephone conversations. Schegloff (1968) argues that although the person who answers the telephone may say 'Hello' this is not a greeting; it is the answer to summons from the caller embodied in the ringing of the telephone. Following this indication that the channel is open there is often a greetings sequence to begin the conversation properly. Sometimes, if the answerer simply answers with "Hello," there is first a checking sequence to make sure that the caller is talking to the right person.

Statement of the Study Purpose

The key to understanding both Persian and English social and linguistic institutions lies in an understanding of the dynamics of interpersonal behavior. It is through the intricacies of face-to-face interaction that power is negotiated, alliances are made, action is made, and choices of strategy are made. Greeting exchanges involving the use of names or address terms vary enormously in such terms as who speaks first, what a suitable reply is, and even what variety of language may be employed. In one study, Beeman (1974) claimed that the style of spoken Persian is intended to be asymmetrical and restricted. In a research project in (1988), Keshaavarz argued that the sudden shift from power to solidarity in Iran in the face of sociopolitical upheaval in the country soon after the revolution has yielded some interesting changes in the forms of address in Persian. The study covers only post-revolutionary address terms which are somehow embedded in the greeting acts.

It can be safely argued that, if there are important differences in the way greetings work within and between ethnic groups who speak different varieties of the same language, we must expect to find greater differences across speech communities where totally different languages are spoken. A number of studies and experiments have been carried out in different areas of contrastive analysis, but there is, as far as my library research has shown, none in contrasting English and Persian greetings in a sociopragmatic framework. The present study, therefore, aimed at such a comparison between English and Persian greeting forms. In the following sections of this paper different forms of greetings in each language will be presented, compared, and pressed into service in pedagogical contexts.

The Data

The corpus used in this study included 731 exchange units of discourse commonly observed among the middle class urban society members in Iran in a number of social settings. As a result of my inability to observe the English exchange units in real-life live contexts, however, I was compelled to use movies and other audio and video tapes to collect the 622 English greetings used in the present study. The direction of contrast was from American English to Tehrani Persian.

1. English Greeting Forms

Every society has its own particular customs and ways of acting. Over 290 million people live in the United States. These people come from different backgrounds with regional and temperamental differences. Generalizations about American manners and customs are difficult to make. One should remember that when he reads that Americans do this or that or think this or that, not all Americans do so. This holds true with regard to greetings and their exchanges in US community. In the following sections I will point out a few characteristics of the greeting forms that are common enough to be employed in making generalizations. In a time-free and time-bound categorization, English greetings could be displayed as the following:

I. Time-free greetings:

1. How do you do?
2. Hello. How are you?
3. Hi. How are you?
4. Glad to meet you!
5. (It's) Good to see you (again)!
6. (How/Very) Nice to see you (again)!
7. Long time no see you!
8. (Ah, X [any first name or honorific]) just the first person I wanted to see/was looking for/was after.
9. etc.

II. Time-bound greetings:

A: Daily formal greetings

1. **Morning**: Good morning.

2. **Afternoon**: Good afternoon.

3. **Evening**: Good evening.

4. **Day**: Good day.

5. **Night**: Good night.

B: Seasonal (in)formal greetings

1. Happy new year!

2. Happy Anniversary!

3. Happy Easter!

4. Happy birthday (to you)!

5. Many happy returns (of the day)!

6. (A) merry Christmas (to you)!

7. Many happy returns (of your birthday)!

Except on official occasions such as reception of distinguished guests, American society has a certain amount of informality. The informality is seen in customs of introductions and greetings. On most occasions one need not be particularly conscious of social status. Americans generally ignore it. In spite of the informality, however, there are rules of good manners and social patterns that should be followed.

There are rules for introducing people to each other. A younger person is generally introduced to a woman, a guest to the host or hostess, and a person to the group. For instance, one would say, "Mrs. Gray, this is my younger sister Janet." Or "Margaret, may I present Mr. Bradly?" and then one adds "Mr. Bradly, this is my friend Margaret Hoskins from Chicago." In any case, one must make sure that each person knows the surname of the other. The usual reply to an introduction is "How do you do?" or "How do you do? I am pleased to meet you." Adding the name of the person just introduced is also common: "How do you do, Mr. Bradly?"

The custom of shaking hands in the United States varies in different parts of the country and among different groups of people. It is somewhat difficult to make a set rule. Shaking hands is more likely to be reserved for formal occasions. When men are introduced, they generally shake hands. Women shake hands less frequently. Two women meeting each other for the first time do not shake hands unless one is an especially honored guest. If a man and a woman are being introduced, they may or may not shake hands. Usually the woman extends her hand first. If an American does not shake hands when he meets an old acquaintance, he is not judged to be impolite.

He may be paying him the compliment of considering him a member of his own group.

When a person meets an acquaintance on the street, the most common greeting form in the United States is "Hello." It is uttered on most formal occasions and often on quite formal ones. More formal greetings are "Good morning," "Good afternoon," and "Good evening."

Quite often any greeting (except "How do you do?") is followed by the question "How are you?" Only occasionally the addressor really wants to stop and learn about your health. He simply asks the question to show friendly concerns about you and to keep "Hello" or "Good morning" from seeming too short. If a person does have time to explain how he is, he is not supposed to do so. An individual may be going through great mental and physical pain and still reply to the question by saying "Just fine. How are things with you?" This habit can result in a rather ridiculous situation. When a patient comes to see a doctor, the receptionist may ask "How are you?" The patient may answer "Just fine," when it is quite obvious that if this were true, he would not be at the doctor's office. Yet, in spite of all the informality, America is not completely devoid of customs that show consciousness of social distinction. For example, one is likely to use somewhat more formal language when talking to superiors. While the less formal "Hello" is an acceptable greeting for an employee (when greeting his employer), the employee is more likely to say "Hello, Mr. Ferguson," whereas the employer may reply "Hello, Jim" or even "Hi, Jim."

And last but not least is the kissing-the-cheek custom which is not so common among Americans. Hand kissing is only observed in *absolutely formal situations on certain occasions* (my italics). After all:

2. Persian Greeting Forms

Greeting in Persian could also be divided into two major subcategories: time-free, and time-bound. The following list is an attempt at manifesting the major classes of greetings in Persian:

I. Time-free Persian greetings

   1. sæ'la:m (?æ'leikəm) [Hello/Hi]

2. ?æ'leikəm-ə-sæ'la:m [Hello/Hi] (Said by the hearer in return)

3. (?æz mo'la:qa:t ba: shomaa/mo'la:qa:t-e-sho'ma:) xoshbæxt-æm. [Glad to meet you]

II. Time-bound Persian greetings

A. Daily formal greetings

1. Sobh (-e sho'ma:) be'xeir. [Good morning]

2. Zohr (-e sho'ma:) be'xeir. [Good noon]

3. Ru:z (-e sho'ma:) be'xeir. [Good day]

4. ?æsr (-e sho'ma:) be'xeir. [Good afternoon/evening]

5. Shæb (-e sho'ma:) be'xeir. [Good night]

B. Seasonal (in)formal greetings

1. Tævælod/-æt/-e sho'ma moba:'ræk. [Happy birthday to you.]

2. ?i:d-æt/-e sho'ma:/-eta:n moba:'ræk. [Happy your feast]

3. Sa:l-e no (-eta:n) moba:'ræk. [Happy New Year]

When a person meets an acquaintance on the street, the most common form of greeting in Iran is "sæ'la:m." It is said on most (in)formal occasions. More formal greetings are "sobh be'xeir," "?æsr be'xeir," etc. The formal greeting "?æz mo'la:qa:t ba: shomaa/mo'la:qa:t-e-sho'ma: xoshbæxt-æm" is normally used when one is introduced to a stranger.

Quite often any greet (except "?æz mo'la:qa:t ba: shomaa/mo'la:qa:t-e-sho'ma: xoshbæxt-æm") is followed by one of the following questions concerning how the addressee is (which are, as far as possible, arranged hierarchically from the most formal to the least formal; this arrangement is not definite since each form might be used for different functions.):

1. ?æh'va:l-e/ha:l-e jæna:b'a:li che'tor-e? [How is your excellency]

2. ?æh'va:l-e/ha:l-e shæ'ri:f che'tor-e? [How is your excellency] (with less

formality)

3. ha:l-e ta:n/sho'ma: che'tore? [How are you?] (plural you)

4. 'ha:l-e-t che'tore?   [How are you?] (singular you)

5. che'tori? [Are you OK?]

6. 'ha:l-o-ru:ze'ga:r-et che'tore? [How is it going?]

What is more interesting about the Iranian people is their maintenance of politeness through certain honorifics and phrases in informal conversations. The most common methods of maintaining politeness include the choice of personal pronouns, and the use of honorific titles.

A: Personal pronouns: The first person singular subject pronoun "mæn" (or I) is used only sparingly in Persian face-to-face interactions. "Bæn'de" (meaning "your servant") is used in place of "mæn" if the speaker wishes to indicate humility towards a person of equal or higher rank. The use of second person plural subject pronoun "sho'ma" (meaning "you" plural) for the second person singular "to:" (meaning "you" singular) is common when reference is being made to a person of equal or higher rank. The pronoun "to:" is used only in reference to children, intimate friends, and servants. The word "jæna:b'a:li" or "hæzræt'a:li" or "sær'ka:r" (your highness/excellency) is often used in place of "sho'ma:" in reference to status equals or people of higher ranks.

B: Honorific titles: The most usual honorifics are "xa:'nom" (meaning Miss or Mrs) and "?a:'qa:" (meaning Sir or Mr.). The surname of the individual being addressed will follow the honorific title. Job titles like "doc'tor" (meaning "doctor" or "PhD"), "mohæn'des" (meaning "engineer"), and so on are often used together with the addressee's surname. When the individual being addressed are of higher ranks, the job titles are used together with the general honorifics xa:'nom or ?a:'qa: in the following order: General honorific + (ye) + Job title + addressee's surname (e.g., ?a:'qa: ye dok'tor Hasani or xa:'nom dok'tor Hasani). Titles that refer to military personnel or religious people (or clerics) are also used when appropriate. With military titles, the word "jæ'na:b" is very often used (e.g., jæ'na:b sar'hang Hasani [meaning colonel Hasani]). With religious titles, the word "hæz'ræt" is often used (hæz'ræt hojætoles'la:m Hasani).

The custom of shaking hands in Iran varies in different parts of the country and among different groups of people. When men are introduced, they generally shake hands. Women shake hands less frequently—although in recent years handshaking behavior is spreading among Iranian college and teenage girls as a result of access to satellites and Internet cam-chats. Until recently, two Iranian women who met for the first time did not shake hands unless one was an exceptionally honored guest. Even today, in most cases, when a man and a woman are being introduced for the first time, they almost never shake hands—due to their religious beliefs; however, this habit is gradually giving way to handshaking behavior between men and women especially when they meet in private places where there is no government surveillance. The same holds true with regard to kissing-the-cheek custom. Hand kissing is only done when a male religious follower visits his religious leader.

Results and Discussion

A pure contrastive analysis of English and Persian greetings shows that the Persian greeting system lacks "Good evening." Likewise the English greeting system lacks "zohr-e sho'ma: be'xeir" meaning "Good noon."

Both English and Persian greetings are normally begun by the interlocutor of lower status and responded to by the interlocutor of higher rank, but in some cases (especially in an intimate atmosphere) the interlocutors do not follow this rule. In other words, it is quite natural for the interlocutors to utter their shares simultaneously, or if with a latency, to use the same lexical items (e.g., A: Hello. B: Hello).

The reason for this apparent license is that the second greeting is not a reply to the first; both are reactive responses to the sudden availability of the participants to each other, and the point of performing these little rituals is not to solicit a reply or to reply to a solicitation, but to act an emotion that attests to the pleasure produced by contact.

This study showed that there is evidence of a difference in the structuring of conversation openings in English and Persian. As the following analysis shows, the English greeting pattern is either A or B; the Persian greeting pattern, however, is one of the A to E patterns:

A: English and Persian

X: greeting

Y: greeting + enquiry after X's health

X: answer enquiry + enquiry after Y's health

Y: answers enquiry

B: English and Persian

X: greeting

Y: greeting

X: enquiry after Y's health

Y: answers enquiry + enquiry after X's health

X: answers enquiry

C: Only Persian

X: greeting

Y: greeting + enquiry after X's health

X: answers enquiry

e.g.,

X: sæ'la:m

Y: ?æ'leikəm-ə-sæ'la:m. Ha:l-e sho'ma: che'tore?

X: be lotf-e sho'ma:

D: Only Persian (among friends)

X: greeting + enquiry after Y's health

Y: answers enquiry + enquiry after X's health

X: answers enquiry

e.g.,

X: sæ'la:m. che'tor-i?

Y: xeili mæm'nun. to che'tor-i?

X: xubam. mam'nun.

E: Only Persian (among very close people)

X: greeting + enquiry after Y's health

Y: greeting + answers enquiry

e.g.,

X: sæ'la:m. che'tor-i?

Y: sæ'la:m. 'mersi; 'xubæm.

In my observations, it became apparent that Iranians tend to value the modesty maxim a lot. In other words, they try to go by the rule that tells them: "Minimize praise of self and maximize dispraise of other." This is apparently contrary to the customs in the United States. The following examples illustrate the difference between Tehrani Persian and American English:

Example 1:

Persian

The situation is that Ahmad (a university student) greets Mr. Razavi (the door-keeper of the College) who is much older than Ahmad.

Ahmad: sæ'la:m ?a:qa:-ye Razavi. xub hæs'tid?

[Hello, Mr. Razavi. How are you?]

Mr. Sharif: sæ'la:m. no'kæret-æm.

[Hello. I am your servant.]

English

The same situation in America. David greets Mr. Hudson.

David: Morning, Mr. Hudson.

Mr. Hudson: Morning, David. How are you?

David: Fine. And you?

Mr. Hudson: Fine. thanks.

Example 2:

Persian

Ali and Ahmad, two classmates, meet each other in the classroom after the weekend.

Ali: sæ'la:m, Ahmad. che'tor-i?

[Hi. How are you?]

Ahmad: sæ'la:m. qor'bunet-æm, Ali jun.

[Hi. Thanks a lot, dear Ali!] (Ahmad's Persian response literally means that he wishes to sacrifice himself for Ali)

English

The same situation in the United States.

Fred: Hello, John.

John: Hello, Fred. How are you?

Fred: Thanks. And you?

John: Fine. Thank you.

Conclusion and Pedagogical Implicatons

The present study implies that Iranian EFL learners, due to their native language SCs, usually learn and tend to use only the polite forms of English greetings which may not necessarily be the least marked forms. Learners know they must choose language forms appropriate to a wide range of sociolinguistic variables. This may give them the feeling that, by choosing the polite forms, they refrain from making any great social

blunder. However, this is not the case when the addressee is of a different age, sex, status, etc. This fact also holds true in multilingual contexts. The polite form might easily be judged as a sign of hostility or on-purpose distancing. The result will, no doubt, be what Thomas (1983) calls "pragmatic failure."

Iranian EFL learners seem to violate social-appropriateness norms in ways that indicate a transfer of social norms from their native language. They also seem to fail to realize their speech acts effectively by either extending or overgeneralizing the potential illocutionary force of shared and non-shared strategies to inappropriate contexts or by failing to follow the usage conventions of the target language—in the realization of language-specific strategies. It, therefore, seems important that in the textbooks designed for Iranian EFL learners a part be included that concerns itself with this aspect of the English language.

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