A Cross-Linguistic Study of Persuasive Strategies used in Persian and English Languages

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Abstract

The present study aimed to recast the issue of production of speech act of persuasion in English and Persian languages. This study first attempts to analyze the types of persuasive strategies used in English and Persian. To this end, 184 Persian speakers and native speakers of English participated in this study. The participants of this study were all university students. The data was collected by means of a discourse completion test (DCT). The questionnaire consists of 6 items in different contexts close to real life persuasive situations. Chi-square test was used to analyze the data. The participants' responses were analyzed and the influences of gender and culture on the speech act of persuasion were discussed. Results indicate some differences and similarities between Persian and English native speakers in employment of this speech act which provide some pedagogical solution to pragmatic difficulties of English language learners in classrooms and their miscommunications in general.

Keywords: Speech act, persuasion strategies, Persian, English

1. Introduction

Since Hymes (1971) introduced the notion of communicative competence, including both the speaker's knowledge of the linguistic rules as well as the socio- cultural rules for appropriate use, there has been an increasing interest in empirical research in this area and in practical applications of pragmatics studies, especially speech act ones (as cited in Paulston & Bruder,1967, p.56). People in different countries may analyze pragmatics doctrines rather differently from each other, and these differences give rise to great tendency for conducting studies in cross-cultural and contrastive pragmatics (as cited in Farnia, Buchheit & Salim, 2010).These cross-cultural speech act studies have given us a better understanding of what a speaker needs to know in order to perform effectively and appropriately in communication, and the results can let learners be more aware of the interplay of situational, sociolinguistic, and linguistic types of knowledge (Chen & Chen, 2007).

We have different types of speech acts such as apology, compliment, invitation, greeting, promise, etc. One of these speech acts is the speech act of persuasion. Robin Lakoff (1982) defined persuasion as the "attempt or intention of one party to change the behavior, feelings, intentions, or viewpoint of another by communicative means" (as cited in Hardin, 2010, p.155). Therefore, advertising, propaganda, political oratory, court language and religious sermons are examples of persuasive discourse; however, persuasion can also used in daily interactions. Persuasion according to

Searle (1969) is regarded as a directive speech act in which the speaker's intention is to make the hearers to commit him or herself to perform some form of action or in other words, persuasion is an attempt of speaker to match the world with his / her words (as cited in Bu,2010).

Therefore, this study makes a contrastive analysis to find the differences and similarities between Persian and English language in performing this speech act. This study intends to survey the role of gender in the persuasion speech act production as well.

2. Theoretical Framework

The concept of speech act was introduced first by Austin (1960) in his search for finding ways of regarding language as a form of action. Grice's influential articles during the 1957 to 1967 have had a great impact on speech act theory. He formulated the idea that communication does not takes place directly by means of convention but the speaker's intentions and recognizing those intentions by the audience is essential both for speech and other types of communicative acts. Then in his later works he mentioned how various maxims are used by speakers to formulate a universal frame to access high degree of implicitness in conversation and the required relation between meaning and force (Horn & Ward, 2004).

Persuasion according to Brown & Levinson's (1987) politeness theory is categorized as a face threatening act (FTA), and according to Lakoff (1982) it is considered as a kind of imposition from the speaker upon the hearer or as Searle (1969) pointed out persuasion is a kind of commitment or urge for accomplishment of some actions form speaker to hearer. Pragmatic research on speech act of persuasion has been conducted in several fields. One of these fields is analysis of persuasion strategies in courtroom and advertising. Hardin (2001) performed the study on the application of persuasive discourse in Spanish language advertising. This investigation analyzed pragmatic ways in which Spanish try to achieve persuasion in television advertising. The author applies pragmatic models to commercials for products and services from three countries -Chile, Spain, and the United States. The most representative variables included speech acts, indexical, politeness, implicatures, violations of Grice's Maxims, and speaker considerations.

Chakron (2006) performed a comparative analysis of persuasion strategies in letters of request written by Thai speakers in English and by native speakers of English in the Thai business context. According to the Aristotelian concept of persuasive rhetoric, the letters of request written by Thai speakers were analyzed and a mixture of logos, ethos and Pathos identified in them. Findings revealed that generally native English speakers used more strong logos. There three rhetorical appeals can be considered as persuasion strategies and result show that Thai speakers and native English speakers have some differences in the preference for persuasion strategies which is rooted in their cultural background. Moreover, Hardin (2010) analyzed the speech act of trying to persuade, among intermediate Spanish learners. He examined the types of speech acts produced by these learners in different persuasive situations. The student's responses in this investigation were compared with some native speaker's responses to see their similarities and differences in producing this speech act. The results show some interesting results about which types of speech acts were mostly preferred by Spanish learners.

3. Purpose of the Study

It seems that most of the previous studies on speech act have been done on different kinds of speech acts such as Request (Belza, 2008), Apology (e.g. Eslami-Rasekh & Mardani 2010), complaint (Salmani-Nodoushan, 2007), compliment (Wolfson, 1981), refusal (Felix-Brasdefer, 2008), among which speech act of persuasion has received scant attention. We did not come across any studies devoted to this speech act in Iran; therefore, we decided to focus our study on this area to determine the

areas of similarity and differences between English and Persian. The present study aimed to address the following questions:

Q1: Is there any significant difference in production of persuasion speech act in English and Persian languages?

Q2: Is there any significant difference between males and females English and Persian native speakers in application of persuasion strategies?

4. Methodology

4.1. Setting and Participants

The participants of this study consist of two groups: native speakers of Persian and native English speakers. Persian speakers group composed of 150 BA and MA students were studying different majors such as Persian literature, history, social sciences, etc, in Ferdowsi University of Mashhad - a university in Iran. As we aimed to explore the gender effect our participant involved 75 males and 75 females aged from 18 to 35. Second group consists of 34 Canadian native English speakers which all of them were students of university. They were studying different majors consisting of 17 males and 17 females aged from 18 to 31.

4.2. Instrumentation

According to Cohen (1996), one of the means to glean the pragmatic data is Discourse Completion Task (DCT) and if it is prepared appropriately, it reveals how respondents activate their pragmatic knowledge (Martinez-Flor, 2006). In this study, research data were gathered via a DCT, in which 6 natural situations were defined elaborately in which participants were required to write what they think they would say in persuasive situations (see Appendix A).

In addition, a second group of participants were asked to fill out the same DCT translated into Persian (See Appendix B), it was designed for the comparison of Persian native speakers responses with those of English native speakers to find the similarities and differences between these two languages. It is worth mentioning that in translating DCT, some minor modifications were made to make the questionnaire appropriate for the Iranian context.

Furthermore, a pilot study was administrated in which 20 learners took apart. Some of the participants were interviewed and were asked to think aloud as well. A team of specialists in L2 were asked to substantiate content validity of the DCT, and consequently based on the feedback of participants; ambiguities and obstacles of DCT were eliminated. Moreover, to reach more reliable data, 2 raters corrected the respondents' replies. The data were gathered from a variety of situations to determine how English and Persian native speakers use persuasive language. The participants responded to 6 persuasive situations in which power relationship among them distributed differently for instance hearer was either of lower status (+power) or interlocutor were of equal status(=power) or the hearer was of higher status(-power).

4.3. Procedure

After collecting the data from English speakers and Persian speakers, for analyzing the data the particular coding system was adopted. The Cross Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP) which is a universally valid scale was used.

The CCSARP (Jalilifar, 2009) was classified in three categories: directness level, internal modification, and external modification. The focus of this study is on directness level of persuasive strategies which was classified as nine-point scale: Mood derivable, Performatives, Hedge performatives, Obligation statement, Want statement, Suggestory formulae, Query preparatory, Strong hints and Mild hints.

This coding scheme was classified as nine-point rating scale which includes direct level, conventionally indirect level, and non-conventionally indirect level.

a. **Direct Level**
- Mood derivable: Imperatives are the dominant forms of utterances of this type (for example: lend me the pen.).
- Performatives: are utterances which the illocutionary force is used in them explicitly (for example: leave me alone).
- Hedge performatives: are utterances which the illocutionary force is softening by use of hedging expressions (for example: I would like to ask you to leave me alone.).
- Obligation statements: are utterances which in them obligation is imposed by the speaker to the hearer to perform the act (for example: You should come back early.).
- Want statements: are utterances which include the speaker's needs, desires, wishes, and demands (for example: I want you to move your car.).

b. **Conventionally Indirect Level**
- Suggestory formulae: This utterances use the formulae to suggest the hearer to perform something (for example: How about going cinema tonight? Or let's do it in this way?).
- Query preparatory: This category includes the interrogative or an interrogative –cum-conditional form (for example: Would you mind closing the door?).

c. **Non-Conventionally Indirect Level**
- Strong hints: Utterances which make partial reference or to the act or may indicate reason or support for the desired act (For example: The game is boring.).
- Mild hints: utterances which make no reference to the desired act but it inferred by the context (for Example: Are you busy?).

After collecting the data, responses were analyzed quantitatively based on the CCSARP nine-rating scale. The unit of analysis was head act of utterance or sequence of utterances. The data then submitted to SPSS (version 16) for analyzing the frequency of the responses and Chi-square test was employed. The frequency analysis was performed to identify the proportion and percentage of each type of persuasion strategies employed by English and Persian native speakers.

5. Results

This study intended to perform the cross-cultural study on the speech act of persuasion in English and Persian language, In order to find the type and frequency of strategies employed by English native speakers and Persian native speakers, responses of both groups of participants were analyzed upon *CCSARP*, and the results of occurrence of each category of strategies were calculated and tabulated in Table 1.

Table 1:   Frequency and Percentage of Persuasion Strategies by English and Persian Natives

	English Natives		Persian Natives	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Mood	21	12.65%	373	**24.43%**
Performatives	10	6.03%	118	7.73%
Hedge	35	**21.08%**	171	11.20%
Obligation	12	7.23%	72	4.71%
Want	43	**25.90%**	40	2.62%
Suggest	1	0.60%	26	1.70%
Query	30	**18.07%**	383	**25.08%**
Strong Hint	4	2.41%	123	8.06%
Mild Hint	10	6.03%	221	**14.47%**

As Table 1 demonstrates, regarding the type of persuasion strategies, all the persuasion types were utilized in both languages. However, English and Persian natives revealed diverse frequencies in application of different strategies. The research findings are summarized as below:

English Natives = Want> Hedge >Query> *Mood /Obligation/ Performatives / Mild hint/ Strong hint/ Suggest*

Persian Natives = Query> Mood > Mild hint>*Hedge /Strong hint/ Performatives/ Obligation/ Want/ Suggest*

As the results suggest, English natives utilized Want (P=25.90%), Hedge (P=21.08%) and Query (P=18.07%) whereas their Persian counterparts applied Query (P= 25.08%), Mood (P= 24.43%), and Mild hint (P=14.47) structures as the most common strategies. Persian speakers apply Query preparatory as the most frequent strategy, whereas English natives opt for Want Statement as the most preferred strategy.

Moreover, the least frequently used persuasion strategies in English consist of Strong hint (P= 2.41%) and Suggestory formula (P= 0.60%), whereas Persian language involves Want statement (P= 2.62%), and Suggestory formula (P= 1.70%). Therefore, it can be realized that English and Persian languages demonstrate parallel strategy in application of Suggestory formula as the least preferred strategy while they revealed different patterns in application of Want statement as English people utilize Want statement frequently; Persian speakers use this strategy quite rarely.

To discover whether there is a significant difference between two languages with respect to gender in persuasion strategies, Chi-square test was carried out.

Table 2: The Results of the Chi-square for the Strategies Selected by English Males and Females

	Observed N		Expected N		df	x^2	Sig
	Male	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**			
Mood	18	3	10.5	10.5	1	10.714	.001*
Performative	7	3	5.0	5.0	1	1.600	.206
Hedge-performative	11	24	17.5	17.5	1	4.829	.028*
Obligation	12	12	6	6	1	.000	1.000
Want statement	19	24	21.5	21.5	1	.581	.446
Suggest	-	1	-	1.0	-	-	-
Query	11	19	15.0	15.0	1	2.133	.144
Strong hint	1	3	2.0	2.0	1	1.000	.317
Mild hint	4	6	5.0	5.0	1	.400	.527

Table 2 exhibits a significant difference in application of two strategy types, namely Mood derivable (x^2=10.714 p<.05) and Hedge-performative ((x^2=4.829, p<.05). As Table 2 exhibits, in the first case men indicated more frequency than women and their frequency (N=18) was more than often expected (N=10.5); and in the second case, women revealed more frequency (N=24) which means that gender has a crucial role in production of persuasion strategies by English native speakers.

Table 3: The Results of the Chi-square for the Strategies Selected by Iranian Males and Females

	Observed N		Expected		df	x^2	Sig
	Male	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**			
Mood	238	135	186.5	186.5	1	28.442	.000*
Performative	68	50	59.0	59.0	1	2.746	.098
Hedge-performative	50	121	85.5	85.5	1	29.480	.000*
Obligation	29	43	36.0	36.0	1	2.722	.099
Want statement	19	21	20.0	20.0	1	.100	.752
Suggest	15	11	13.0	13.0	1	.615	.433
Query	163	220	191.5	191.5	1	8.483	.004*
Strong hint	53	70	61.5	61.5	1	2.350	.125
Mild hint	100	121	110.5	110.5	1	1.995	.158

Moreover, regarding the persuasion strategies selected by Persian native speakers, Table 3 shows male and female differences were significant in three persuasion types, namely Mood derivable (x^2=28.442, p<.05), Hedge-performatives (x2=29.480, p<.05), and Query preparatory (x^2=8.483 , p<.05). Male participants employed Mood derivable (N= 238) more frequently than the expected frequency (N= 186.5), whereas their female counterparts used Hedge-performatives (N= 121) and Query preparatory (N= 220) more often than their expected frequencies (N=85.5, N= 191.5).

6. Discussion

This study first aimed to investigate the similarities and discrepancies between English and Persian native speakers in employment of persuasive strategies, and in the next step it is intended to discover whether there is any significant difference between participants in their selection of persuasion strategies with respect to gender.

Regarding the first aim of the study, findings of this study confirm previous findings in Persian (Eslami-Rasekh, 2004; Eslami-Rasekh et al, 2010) as well as those of other languages (Al-Khateeb, 2009; Belza, 2008; Wolfson, 1981; Yu, 2005). Although in our study both groups utilized all the persuasive strategies, they differed in their frequencies, Persian speakers utilized Query preparatory and Mood derivable and Mild hint as the most preferred strategies where as in English Want statement and Hedge-performatives regarded as the most dominant strategies. The frequent use of Query preparatory which includes interrogative –cum-conditional form by Persian speakers is consistent with findings of Allami &Naeimi, 2010) and (Jalilifar, 2009) that there is a priority for indirect and embedded communication in the Iranian culture. The overuse of Want statements and Hedge-performatives strategies by English speakers show the dominance of direct strategy types. These findings reveal the fact that Iran belongs to high-context culture in which indirectness and vagueness are prevalent, whereas Canada belongs to low-context culture in which directness and accuracy are appreciated (Würtz, 2005).

According to (Hong, 1999) the use of Mood derivable or imperatives in most cases signal that a speaker has power over the hearer. We can explain the overuse of Mood derivable strategy or imperative forms by Persian speakers on the basis of the category provided by Scollon and Scollon (2001). As cited by Eslami-Rasekh et al. (2010) according to this category, Iranian culture has the hierarchal structure in which social hierarchy is assumed as a natural construction and social order should be maintained among the interlocutors, whereas American culture moves on the basis of a deference politeness system. In American society interlocutors share the equal social level and it is believed that they should have equal rights, but in Iranian culture power is a key factor which determines the ways of interactions among people.

Regarding the second aim of the study, for Iranian and Canadian participants gender proved to play a significant role in the production of persuasion strategies. Therefore, our study is in line with Yousefvand (2010) and Salmani-Nodoushan (2007) who revealed significant variations between Iranian males and females in their speech act performances. Our study is in line with Rashidi and Sammahnejad `s (2006) findings in which they assert that age, sex, and power are critical factors in human interactions. The results show that men mostly prefer to use mood derivable strategy in the form of imperatives, whereas their female counterparts revealed more frequency in employing Hedge performatives and Query statements. In fact, Mulac, Bradac, and Gibbons` (2006) findings espoused the differences in language use between males and females, claiming that male language features are as more direct, concise, personal, and active, whereas female language features are perceived as more indirect, elaborate, polite, and sentimental. Men's speech is more assertive and direct than that of women (Lakoff, 1973, 1975, as cited in Crosby & Nyquist, 1997). Therefore, our findings are in contrast with those of Allami (2006), Ahangar, and Amou Ali Akbari (2007), who regarded gender as an insignificant factor.

The study results can be discussed in terms of several implications: first, language and culture are intertwined, both affecting each other (Kuo & Lai, 2007). In fact, language learners should know that their behavior or intonation patterns may be perceived differently by the other cultures, and in order to have effective communication they should be familiar with proper cultural behaviors. Therefore, culture must be considered as an essential component of second language learning and teaching. Second, Since pragmatic transfer in persuading speech act by Iranian learners of English can cause breakdown in communication, it is necessary to investigate how Iranian language learners perform this speech act in order to know how learners` culture-specific background can affect their preference for application of the persuasive strategies in English. Third, the findings of this study suggest that incorporating cultural materials into curriculum of foreign language learners can be beneficial in terms of language skill, raising cultural awareness and motivating students to learn language.

This study investigated the directness level of speech act of persuade and did not consider internal modification and external modification parts of CCSARP; therefore, further study is needed to address these issues. More studies also can investigate the effect of social power and social distance on interlocutors' responses in the application of persuasive strategies.

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Appendix A

This questionnaire consists of two parts; in the first part you are required to answer to some questions about yourself; and in the second part you are required to answer to some persuasive situations. Please try to respond to these questions as carefully as you can.

Age: E-mail Address:

Sex: male□ female □ University:

1. Course of study at university:
2. What is your mother tongue? English □ Persian □ (If English ,please go to the next part)
3. Years of study at university: Freshman □ Sophomore □ Junior □ Senior □ BA□ MA□ PHD □
4. How many years have you studied English in classes?
5. Which level are you studying? Beginner□ Elementary □ Intermediate□ Advanced□

Please read the following descriptions of situations and respond in the space provided. Do not spend a lot of time thinking about what answer you should provide instead; respond as naturally as possible and try to write your response as you feel you would say it in the situation. Your completion of this questionnaire will also help to ensure the success of this study and is therefore highly appreciated.

1. You really have to take this course in order to graduate, but you found that the course is already closed. So, you decide to persuade the professor, whom you don't know, to

allow you to take this course. What would you say to persuade her/him to permit you to participate in this course?

I would say:

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2. You have a paper due in one of your classes next week. However, you will be very busy this week and don't have any time to write it. You go to your professor's office to persuade him/ her for more time to write the paper. What would you say?

I would say:

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3. You were absent in the last Tuesday English class which you are enrolled in. So you decide to borrow your friend's notes to catch up with the rest of the class. What would you say to persuade her/him to lend you the notes?

I would say:

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4. It's 7:00 a.m. and you want to go to work. You have to leave your daughter alone because her baby sitter is late. You decide to persuade your friend, who lives in the neighborhood, to take care of your little daughter in the meanwhile. What would you say?

I would say:

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5. You have a bill that needs to be paid urgently. Although you have the money, you do not have the time to make the payment. You know that your little brother goes into town daily. You decide to persuade him to pay the bill on your behalf. What would you say?

I would say:

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6. You are the owner of a big bookstore. It is the beginning of the semester, and you are very busy. Today you want to extend business hours by an hour. So, you decide to persuade your clerk, whom you know quite well, tostay an extra hour more. What would you say?

I would say: …………………………………………………………………………………….
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Appendix B

این پرسشنامه شامل دو بخش می باشد.در قسمت نخست به چند سئوال مربوط به خودتان ودرقسمت دوم به 6 موقعیت توصیف شده که در مورد نحوه" راضی کردن "در زبان فارسی می باشد پاسخ می دهید.

جنسیت : مرد ☐ زن ☐ دانشگاه :

سن : رشته تحصیلی دانشگاهی :

مقطع تحصیلی دانشگاهی : سال اول ☐ سال دوم ☐ سال سوم ☐ سال چهارم ☐ لیسانس ☐ کارشناسی ارشد ☐
ا
لطفا موقعیتهای ذیل را بخوانید و خود را در آن موقعیتها تصور کنید وبه آنها پاسخ دهید. لطفا" زمان زیادی را صرف فکر کردن در مورد جوابهایتان نکنید و آنچه را در عمل فکر می کنید در آن موقعیت بیان خواهید کرد بنویسید. پاسخ درست شما به این سئوالات موفقیت این تحقیق را تضمین می نماید بنابراین از توجه و دقت شما دررابطه با پاسخ دادن به این پرسشنامه بسیار متشکرم.

1-شما بایدیک درس را بگذرانید تا بتوانید فارغ التحصیل شوید، با اینکه مجبور به گذراندن این درس هستید ولی متوجه می شوید که کلاس درس مزبور پر شده است بنابراین تصمیم می گیرید استاد درس که اصلا نمی شناسید راراضی کنید تا اجازه انتخاب این درس رابه شما بدهد. در چنین موقعیتی به او چه خواهید گفت ؟

2- هفته آینده آخرین مهلت تحویل مقاله یکی از درسهایتان است اما شما خیلی گرفتارید و نمی توانید مقاله را بنویسید. به اتاق استاد خود می روید تا او راراضی کنید تا به شما زمان بیشتری برای نوشتن مقاله بدهد در چنین موقعیتی به استادتان چه خواهید گفت؟

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3 - شما سه شنبه هفته قبل در کلاس درس زبان که درآن ثبت نام کرده اید غیبت داشتید.بنابراین تصمیم می گیرید تا جزوه دوستتان را قرض بگیرید تا ازبقیه کلاس عقب نمانید.در چنین موقعیتی به دوستتان چه خواهید گفت تا او را راضی کنید جزوه اش را به شما قرض دهد؟

4- ساعت هفت صبح است و می خواهید به سر کار بروید. مجبورید دخترتان را در خانه تنها بگذارید چون پرستار او هنوز نرسیده است.بنابراین تصمیم می گیرید دوستتان که در همسایگی شما زندگی می کند را راضی کنید تا در این فاصله مواظب دختر کوچکتان باشد در چنین موقعیتی به دوستتان چه خواهید گفت ؟

5- قبضی دارید که باید فورا"مبلغ آن را واریز کنید.با اینکه پول دارید ولی وقت ندارید تا شخصا" پول را واریز کنید واز طرفی می دانید که برادر کوچکترتان هر روزبرای انجام کارهایش به شهر می رود . بنابراین تصمیم می گیرید او را راضی کنید تا به جای شما پول قبض را واریز کند. در چنین موقعیتی به او چه خواهید گفت ؟

6- شما کتاب فروشی بزرگی دارید.اول سال تحصیلی است و کتاب فروشی بسیار شلوغ است. شما می خواهید ساعت کار فروشگاه را یک ساعت افزایش دهید و تصمیم می گیرید حسابدار خود که به خوبی می شناسید را راضی کنید تا یک ساعت بیش تردر فروشگاه بماند.در چنین موقعیتی به او چه خواهید گفت؟