



## “Xaste nabâši(d)” as a culture specific speech act in Persian

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### ABSTRACT

As different cultures have different speech acts and some cases of unsuccessful communication are due to the differences among the cultural patterns of speech acts, knowledge of these speech acts can help people to communicate more successfully. In this regard, the present paper, based on Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory (1987), examines and analyzes “xaste nabâši(d)” speech act in Persian language to come up with the functions it serves in the Iranian Persian-speaking community for those non-Persian speakers who want to speak or learn Persian. For this purpose, some native speakers of Persian language from different ages and different groups were observed in such natural settings as markets, shops, the streets, and parties and their speech was recorded; then the data were transcribed and translated into English, and finally, analyzed qualitatively. The results show that, there are seven major functions of “xaste nabâši(d)” in Persian which are as follows: In literal meaning of "not being exhausted or tired", phatic communication, greeting and sometimes to bid farewell, mitigating request, to state indirectly end of a work or an activity, thanking and blaming. Finally, it is worth noting that we can define politeness in Persian language as using such politeness expressions (“xaste nabâši(d)”) not only for mitigating face threatening act (FTA), but also for indicating face enhancing act (FEA), and having a successful interaction and communication. So incompatible with politeness definition of Brown and Levinson (1987) who consider politeness simply as a means of mitigating FTA, politeness in Persian is defined as FEA too.

### Indexing terms/Keywords

xaste nabâši(d), speech act, politeness, face threatening act, face enhancing act.

### TYPE (METHOD/APPROACH)

Although the study of speech acts is begun in the 1960s, there has been much attention to the study of production and perception of different speech acts during the last 15 years. There are lots of studies carried out on speech acts realization such as thanking (Koutlaki, 2002), complaint (Eslami Rasekh, 2004), apology (Afghari & Kaviani, 2005), gripping (Allami, 2006), invitation (Salmani-Nodoushan, 2006), compliment (Sharifian, 2008 ;Yousefvand,2010), disagreement (Parvaresh & Eslami-rasekh, 2009), Congratulation (Allami and Nekouzadeh, 2011), refusal (Aliakbari and Changizi, 2012), gratitude (Pishghadam and Zarei, 2012), insha' allah (god's willing) and its functions in Persian (Pishghadam and Kermanshahi, 2012), ‘*Bebaxšid*’ (Excuse me) as a Multifunctional Speech Act in Persian (Khodaei, Elyasi and Sharifi, 2014), but so far, there has been no study conducted in Persian to analyze or investigate different functions of “xaste nabâšid” speech act. So, in this paper, we are to examine different functions involved with this high-frequent speech act in Persian.

This study has carried out with some native speakers of the Persian language. About 70 individuals of both genders (male: 27 and female: 43) from different ages (teenagers: 20, young: 30, middle-aged: 20) were observed in natural situations. The participants of this study who belonged to different social classes were observed whenever possible, in shops, at parties, in daily interactions, on telephone conversations, in the streets, etc. The process of data collection continued until saturation happened, it means that until no new function was found, and then some instances were selected to be analyzed.

The process of data collection took around 3 months. Some part of the data was recorded and then transcribed and translated into English, and some part was memorized by the researchers (because there was no access to a recording device at that time or being occasional of the data) and then were transcribed and translated into English, and at last the data were analyzed qualitatively.

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## INTRODUCTION

In order to have a successful communication, it is essential for language learners to know not just grammar and vocabulary but also to be familiar with the pragmatic aspects of the target language. Pragmatics, as Kasper and Blum-Kulka (1993) put it, is the study of people's comprehension and production of linguistic action in context. One aspect of pragmatics which is widely examined is the production and comprehension of speech acts which are the utterances that speakers employ for different functions such as requesting, apologizing, suggesting, etc (Olshtain & Cohen, 1991). The concept of speech act was introduced first by Austin (1962) in his research for finding ways of regarding language as a form of action.

Cross-cultural studies reveal that speech acts have different linguistic realizations from one culture to another, and it is the sociocultural context that determines which linguistic realization is the appropriate one in a given situation (Berns, 2006; Kachru & Nelson, 1996). According to Mesthrie and Bhatt (2008), some cases of unsuccessful communication are due to the differences between the cultural patterns of speech acts. Therefore, the communicative competence of a speech community originates from the socio-cultural context and speech acts can be the basic manifestation of communicative competence (Berns, 2006).

As speech acts are inevitable in daily conversation and language learners need to use different speech acts which set for the purpose of communicating in an appropriate manner with native speakers, it is quite essential to scrutinize different types of them and their intercultural similarities and differences.

"xaste nabâši(d)" is one of the polite speech acts which is frequently used in everyday conversations and greetings of Persian native speakers. This expression infers different meanings in different circumstances and contexts, and covers several functions. Thus it is a speech act which does not have an equivalent in English; so it can be considered as one of the cultural speech acts in the Persian language.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

One of the fundamental underlying theories closely connected to the communication strategy is Brown and Levinson's politeness theory. Politeness is an important factor in initiating and continuing a successful interaction in Persian-speaking community. Brown and Levinson (1987) define politeness as mitigating face threatening acts. According to Brown and Levinson, face is defined as "self public image", and has two aspects: negative and positive (1987: 61). Negative face is "the wants of every competent adult member that his action be unimpeded by others", and positive face is "the wants of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others" (1987: 62).

Another important notion related to the comprehension of "xaste nabâši(d)" is that of indirect speech acts (ISAs). According to Yule (2000: 54), based on the structure, we have two types of speech acts: direct and indirect. "Whenever there is a direct relationship between a structure and a function we have a direct speech act, and whenever there is an indirect relationship between a structure and a function we have indirect speech ac" (Ibid: 55).

According to Stapleton (2004: 17), ISAs convey not only the literal meaning of the utterance, but also "the intended force in the speech act". Woods (2006: xii) put it that speech acts do not directly express what the speaker means and when s/he applies an indirect speech act, what s/he means may "deviate from what is literally said". There are different types of indirect speech acts (Cohen, 1996) which are preferred in social interaction, since they are considered as more polite. In Persian, "xaste nabâši(d)" is an indirect speech act which plays different roles indicating different meanings in different contexts.

## RESULTS

From the data gathered in different natural settings seven major functions of "xaste nabâši(d)" were observed in the Persian language. Below, an example is given for each function of "xaste nabâši(d)", which is followed by the English translation of the utterance. The functions are as follows:

### 1- In literal meaning of "not being exhausted or tired"

Context: Father (A) comes back home from work. B (A's son) and C (A's wife).

B: salâm bâbâ! "xaste nabâšid".

Translation:

B: Hi daddy! Don't be tired".

C: salâm "xaste nabâši".

Translation:

C: Hi; "don't be tired"."

In this context A has been at work for a long time so he may be tired, when coming back home, B and C with saying "xaste nabâši(d)" show their polite attitude and respect toward A and implicitly show their awareness of A's inconvenience and trouble. This function of "xaste nabâši(d)" is so common in Persian community.



## 2- As phatic communication

Context:

At the Supermarket: A (customer) and B (shopkeeper)

A: "xaste nabâšid" ye ârde keyk o ye rowqan e sorxkardani bedin lotfan.

B: hatman befarmâyid. Ćize dige?i lâzem nadârin?

Translation:

A: "xaste nabâšid" would you please favor me a cake flour and a bottle of cooking oil please?"

B: "Sure, here you are. Nothing else needed?"

A has entered a supermarket and by saying "xaste nabâši(d)" initiate his speech in a polite manner, though it somehow bears the meaning of not being exhausted, but it mainly functions as an element is for the initiation of a conversation.

## 3- For greeting and sometimes for bidding farewell

Context: At the university. A (student) meets B (his/her professor) in the corridor.

A: salâm, "xaste nabâšid".

B: salâm, mamnoonam.

Translation:

A: Hello, "xaste nabâšid".

B: Hello, thank you.

Here, A with using "xaste nabâši(d)" greets with his/her professor. This is a short and formal kind of greeting in Persian..

A: "xaste nabâšid".

B: šomâ ham "xaste nabâšid". Translation:

A: "xaste nabâšid".

B: You "xaste nabâšid" too.

In this context A and B are leaving the office and they use this expression instead of saying "goodbye".

## 4- As a mitigating device

Context: In a bank. A (customer), B (bank clerk)

A: "xaste nabâšid, ye fiš be man bedin lotfan.

B: befarmâeid.

Translation:

A: "xaste nabâšid". Give me a bill please."

B: "Here you are."

Since asking others to do something is a face threatening act, A uses "xaste nabâši(d)" to mitigate her/his request and also to initiate her/his speech in a more polite manner.

## 5- As a means to state indirectly the end of a work or an activity

Context: In the classroom. A (instructor), B (students)

A: (is teaching the lesson)

B: "xaste nabâšid" ostâd.

Translation:

A: (is teaching the lesson)

Students: "xaste nabâšid", professor.

Class time is finished, but the instructor is still teaching. The students are tired; besides, they cannot directly point out that the time is finished; therefore, they use the expression "xaste nabâši(d)" to indirectly remind that





time is over; although there is a literal meaning of not being tired in this expression, but its main function here is the request to stop teaching.

Context: The employees of a private company are working and it is lunch time

Company manager: Ladies and gentlemen, "xaste nabâšid". Come back to work at 3.

In this context, the expression is stated by the more strong side. The manager appreciates the employees' efforts and tells them not to be tired; moreover, he announces the end of the work.

## 6- As a means of thanking

Context: At a tailor's shop. A (the tailor), B (the customer)

A: lofvan lebâsetoono prov konin, age irâdi dâre begiram.

B: "xaste nabâšid" xeili qašang šode.

Translation:

A: please try on the dress and tell me if there is a problem.

B: "xaste nabâšid". It's really beautiful.

B is satisfied with the dress, so she uses this expression to express her gratitude to the tailor.

Context: Parents playing with their toddler. A (the husband), B (the wife)

A: "xaste nabâši" azizam, vâqean bačča ro mesle daste gol negah dâšti.

B: vazifast azizam.

Translation:

A: "xaste nabâši", my dear. You really kept the baby like a bunch of flowers.

B: "It's my duty, honey."

In these contexts "xaste nabâši" is used in both its literal meaning and as a means of thanking that shows the awareness of the addressee from the other one effort.

## 7- As a means of blaming

Context: In the kitchen. A (B's daughter), B (A's mother): A breaks a plate while washing the dishes.

B: vâqe?an ke "xaste nabâši".

Translation:

B: You, really "xaste nabâši".

## DISCUSSION

This study was conducted to deeply analyze "xaste nabâši(d)" speech act in Persian, and examine various functions of it, as one of the most frequent and useful politeness expressions in Persian. Considering function 1, it should be said that within the Iranian culture, people usually tell "xaste nabâši(d)" to someone who is doing a job, i.e. a physical or a mental activity or has completed it. Friends, family members, colleagues, etc., usually use "xaste nabâši(d)" during or at the end of a work. Saying "xaste nabâši(d)" is an implication of a message denoting speaker's awareness of the efforts made by the addressee, so it gives a satisfaction feeling to the addressee. In fact by this route, individuals demonstrate their respect towards the addressee and enhance their addressee's face.

In Persian culture, even men expect to hear this expression from their family when they come back home from work and consider it as a sign of respect and honor.

Function 2 is closely connected to Crystal's definition of phatic communication role or speech initiation intercourse. According to Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942), such statements as "God bless you", "Good morning", and also polite mutual statements about health or weather condition are not to interchange ideas or viewpoints, and here language is used to retain the intimacy and the emotional relationship between individuals. Crystal (2010: 10) calls this social language role, which is arisen from basic demand of mankind to reveal friendship, as *phatic communication role* or *speech initiation intercourse*. Sometimes "xaste nabâši(d)" receives function of the speech initiation and as it is considered as a polite expression in Persian, and people use it to initiate a conversation more politely.

Taking function 3, it must be mentioned that every language and culture has its specific ways of greeting and interaction. In fact individuals with their membership in a particular community, acquire the automatic sequences of patterns that have become as routines and are necessary for everyday social interaction. "xaste nabâši(d)", is one of these routines used by people particularly either as a short form of greeting and for hasty visits (e.g. two colleagues who are crossing the corridor of the office say this expression to each other) or as a



farewell instead of to say goodbye in formal context. This function is usually put by two speakers who are socially equal; or by a speaker to the one who is of a higher degree of strength and social rank.

Another function of this expression is for mitigating a request and also for initiating an interaction. Using this expression as a request and direct demand may put pressure on others to do something and thus threaten their face; therefore, some expressions are used to soften the imposition that Yule (2000,63) call them "mitigating devices". "xaste nabâši(d)" in Persian in some context plays such a function and individuals by using this expression decrease the probable threat of their speech.

The fifth function is to display indirectness. Brown and Levinson (1987) admitted that the more indirect the speech would be, the more polite it would be considered. Since politeness and respect are the two main axes of Persian speakers communication, the Persian speakers try to state their requests and intentions in a more indirect manner. In some contexts, "xaste nabâši(d)" functions as an indirect request to stop a work or an activity in a formal context, when the strength degree between speakers is considered. It sometimes is used by a speaker with a lower degree of strength and sometimes vice versa.

Considering function 6 it should be noted that the Persian language enjoys several expressions and idioms for appreciation, all of which are not necessarily considered as direct thanking terms and expressions as "mamnoon" (*thanks*) and "dastet dard nakone" (*don't ache your hands*). Cheng (2005) has suggested eight thanking strategies that only two of them are direct thanking strategies, and the six other strategies are indirect techniques of thanking. "xaste nabâši(d)" in Persian is one of these indirect strategies which is classified in the category of *the recognition of imposition*. Using this expression as thanking has connotation of the awareness of speaker from the degree of imposition enforced to addressee. Also, speaker thanks addressee for the efforts he has made. Otherwise by using this expression speaker implies awareness of efforts made by addressee, and thanks him/her. These two (appreciation and awareness) enhance addressee's face. It is worth mentioning that this statement is said by the one who receives the favor to the one who does the favor, and usually the power and social distance is not considered as an important factor in its application.

The last function of "xaste nabâši(d)" which is more common in informal contexts is blaming. As blaming someone is considered as an FTA, individual avoid doing it, but in occasional situation and when there is a close relationship between the two speakers, they may use "xaste nabâši(d)" to blame the addressee. This is an indirect strategy for blaming and the intensity of it changes based on the context and the situation and usually is said from a person with a high position to the addressee having a lower status. This blaming strategy is used when an individual could not do an act successfully.

## CONCLUSION

In summary, it should be mentioned that functions 1,3,and 6 are employed to maintain and enhance the addressees' face by being respectful and grateful to them. The functions 2,4, and 5 are used before doing an FTA in order to decrease negative face threatening act, and are therefore considered as negative politeness strategies. Function 2 is the fifth strategy (give deference), function 4 is the fourth strategy (decrease the imposition degree) and function 5 is the first strategy (be indirect) of negative politeness and the last function of "xaste nabâši(d)" is an indirect strategy (8<sup>th</sup> strategy :be ironic).

Finally, it is worth noting that we can define politeness in the Persian language as using such politeness expressions ("xaste nabâši(d)") not only for mitigating face threatening act (FTA) ,but also for face enhancing act (FEA) and successful interaction and communication. So incompatible with politeness definition of Brown and Levinson (1987) who consider politeness simply as a means of mitigating FTA, politeness in Persian is defined as an FEA, as well.

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