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Perception of impoliteness in refusal and response to it by native speakers of English and Persian

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Abstract

Impoliteness entails the employment of strategies oriented toward attacking face and bringing about social disruption. Although research on impoliteness has received great attention in the past two decades, how impolite utterances are perceived and what the recipients of impoliteness do in return has remained relatively under-addressed. The current study set out to examine native English and Persian speakers' perceptions of and response to impoliteness in the production of the speech act of refusal. To this end, 90 native English speakers and 120 native Persian speakers were administered a written discourse completion task containing eight refusals that either observed politeness or contained various degrees of impoliteness. The results showed that native Persian speakers did not perceive any of the refusals to be impolite whereas three of the refusals were considered impolite by native English speakers. When reacting to impoliteness in refusals, native English speakers exploited a wider range of strategies than did Persian speakers. The results showed that social distance and power relations were of more significance for Persian speakers than for English speakers in perceiving the degree of impoliteness; however, in responding to an utterance perceived as impolite, English speakers were more likely to adopt offensive strategies to counter impoliteness, including positive and negative impoliteness strategies. These findings indicate both cross-cultural divergence and convergence in the perception of impoliteness and responses to impoliteness.

Keywords: *politeness, impoliteness, speech act, refusal, native English speakers, native Persian speakers*

Восприятие невежливости в речевом акте «отказ» и ответ на нее в английской и персидской коммуникативных культурах

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Аннотация
Невежливость связана с использованием ликоугрожающих стратегий, приводящих к нарушению социального взаимодействия. Хотя в последние два десятилетия исследованию невежливости уделяется значительное внимание, восприятие невежливых высказываний и обратная реакция на них изучаются недостаточно. Цель данного исследования – выявить, как носители английского и персидского языков воспринимают невежливость в речевом акте «отказ» и как реагируют на нее. Для этого 90 носителям английского и 120 носителям персидского языков было предложено задание на завершение дискурса, содержащее восемь отказов, высказанных в вежливой форме либо с разной степенью невежливости. Результаты показали, что носители персидского языка ни один из отказов не посчитали невежливым, в то время как три отказа были восприняты как невежливые носителями английского языка. Реагируя на невежливость в отказе, носители английского языка использовали более разнообразные стратегии, чем носители персидского языка. Исследование показало, что социальная дистанция и отношения власти более значимы для носителей персидского языка, нежели английского; однако при ответе на невежливый отказ носители английского языка проявляли тенденцию к использованию стратегий нападения, включающих стратегии позитивной и негативной невежливости. Полученные результаты указывают как на сходства, так и различия в восприятии невежливости и ответной реакции на нее в разных культурах.
Ключевые слова: *невежливость, речевой акт, отказ, вежливость, носители английского языка, носители персидского языка*

1. Introduction

Impoliteness comes about when a face attack is intentionally communicated by the speaker and/or is perceived by the hearer as intentional (Culpeper 2005, 2011, Mills et al. 2010). According to Culpeper and Tantucci (2021), impoliteness is an evaluative perception of specific in-context-behaviors. This definition suggests that the speaker and hearer construct impoliteness within interactions. Both Culpeper (2011) and Bousfield (2008) maintain that impoliteness comprises the purposeful communication of intentionally face-threatening acts. According to Culpeper (2011), face-threatening acts can be incidental, accidental, or purposeful. Nevertheless, impoliteness in Culpeper's model is a purposeful act communicated in particular social contexts. When performing a face-threatening act (FTA), the

speaker decides on their choice of strategy according to their assessment of the three most common variables affecting the (im)politeness of an utterance: social distance between speaker and hearer, their relative power, and the size of the imposition in the cultural context (Archer et al. 2012). FTAs can occur in various interactions within any culture, but perceptions of these three variables vary across cultures, highlighting the significance of impoliteness arising from FTAs as a notable aspect of any cross-cultural interaction (Haugh 2010, House 2012, Izadi 2022, Litvinova & Larina 2023, Lugman 2022, Tajeddin et al. 2015, Tzanne & Sifianou 2019). Investigating (im)politeness entails scrutiny of emic perceptions of these variables, which in turn can shed further light on how impoliteness is perceived and reacted to in different cultures. Whilst failing to notice these variables can lead to threatening an interlocutor's positive and/or negative face and cause impoliteness, knowledge of such emic perceptions can contribute to pragmatically appropriate cross-cultural communication. As Bousfield (2008) maintains, "studying how and under what conditions impoliteness is generated is an important and worthy object of study", which can reveal how participants in linguistic interactions manage impoliteness; "it will, in effect, show how impoliteness may potentially be countered, controlled and managed" (Ibid: 4).

For successful cross-cultural communication, it is vital to know what the receiver of a face threat/attack does in response. According to Culpeper et al. (2003), the importance of this issue lies in the fact that much can be revealed about how an utterance is to be taken through the analysis of the response to it. Bousfield (2007) likewise argues that traditional approaches to the study of impoliteness fail to allow for "how addressees respond to a producer of a face-threatening utterance" (Ibid: 2185). Against this backdrop, the current research focused on native English speakers' and native Persian speakers' perceptions of and response to impoliteness in the production of the speech act of refusal. Its seemingly inherent face-threatening quality and strong links with sociocultural norms make refusal suited for a cross-cultural study on the perception of impoliteness. The study also explored the variations in the perceptions of and verbal reactions to impoliteness across the two cultures to discover potential cultural differences.

2. Literature review

2.1. The concept of impoliteness

The study of politeness has long been pursued without adequate attention to its closely linked counterpart, i.e. impoliteness (Leech 2014). Brown and Levinson (1987) viewed impoliteness simply as the absence of politeness and thus did not thoroughly investigate what constitutes impoliteness (Mills 2009). Bousfield and Locher (2008), likewise, argued that, notwithstanding a surge of interest in politeness, our understanding of impoliteness has barely improved. The paucity of research on impoliteness can partly be ascribed to the fact that the research largely rests on a view of conversation that stresses the observation of politeness maxims and the tacit acknowledgment of balance between interactants. Such a view

underscores the harmonious aspect of social relations (Spencer-Oatey & Jiang 2003). Claiming that the focus of politeness theories has been on communicative strategies for establishing or maintaining social harmony, Culpeper (1996) proposed that impoliteness exerts the opposite effect. Impoliteness is, hence, identified as the employment of strategies oriented toward attacking face and bringing about social disruption (Culpeper 1996, 2010). There exist occasions, as Mills (2003) and Bousfield (2008) argued, when interactants do indeed attack their interlocutors, and those attacks are occasionally regarded as impolite and sometimes they are not.

Researchers who studied (im)politeness have sought to define the impoliteness phenomenon. Culpeper (1996) and Culpeper et al. (2003) characterized impoliteness as the employment of communicative strategies to attack face and hence to cause social disharmony. Critical of this definition, however, Culpeper (2005) stated that it neglects the role of the hearer and does not reveal what social disharmony entails, and that the occurrence of social conflict is not an essential condition for impoliteness to take place. A clearer definition, according to Culpeper (2005), is provided by Tracy and Tracy (1998), who took face attacks as communicative acts which members of a social community perceive to be purposely offensive. The ambiguity surrounding the speaker's and hearer's roles in the definition prompted Culpeper (2005) to propose a revised definition for this phenomenon: "Impoliteness comes about when: (1) the speaker communicates face-attack intentionally, or (2) the hearer perceives and/or constructs behavior as intentionally face-attacking, or a combination of (1) and (2)" (Ibid: 38). This definition, as Culpeper noted, clarifies that impoliteness is constructed in the interaction between the speaker and the hearer. In most linguistic interactions, he argued, impoliteness encompasses both (1) and (2), suggesting that the speaker purposely causes offense to the hearer, and the hearer recognizes that offense. Bousfield (2008: 72) maintained that "impoliteness constitutes the communication of intentionally gratuitous and conflictive verbal face-threatening acts" which are unmitigated, and the face threat is exacerbated to maximize the face damage.

Based on the above definitions, the key elements signifying truly impolite behavior include the speaker's intention of causing offense and the hearer's recognition of that intended offense. This portrayal of impoliteness, manifested in both Culpeper's (2005) and Bousfield's (2008) definitions, was adopted as the operational definition of impoliteness in this study. Framed by this definition, impoliteness is purposeful behavior that is perceived to be so by the addressee. Furthermore, impolite behavior is unmitigated, particularly where mitigation is required, bringing about a face attack to the hearer. The relevance of this definition to the purpose of the current study is that the participants were requested to picture themselves as the recipients of the impolite acts in the refusals and to evaluate the degree of impoliteness.

2.2. Responses to impoliteness

A major theme in impoliteness, according to Culpeper et al. (2003), is the consideration of what the receiver of a face threat or attack does in return. This, according to Culpeper et al., is important because much can be revealed about how an utterance is to be taken by analyzing the response to it. This is a criticism leveled by Culpeper et al. at Austin's (1990) paper, exploring how hearers perceive and interpret impoliteness. The examination of perlocutionary and face-threatening consequences of impoliteness should, as Culpeper et al. (2003) and Bousfield (2007) maintained, be given precedence in future research. The call for the consideration of the recipient's response to an impoliteness act corresponds to the other chief aim of this study, i.e. the investigation of the response to impoliteness across the two cultures under study.

Theoretically, the recipient of an exacerbated FTA has two options at their disposal**:** to respond or not to respond (e.g., stay silent) (Culpeper et al. 2003). Interactants opting to respond to the impoliteness act have more options open to them, i.e. they can either accept the face attack or they can counter it. In the former case, the recipient may shoulder responsibility for the impoliteness act, thus risking further face damage to themselves. Alternatively, as Culpeper et al. (Ibid) put it, countering the face attack involves a set of strategies that can be examined according to whether they are offensive or defensive. Offensive strategies counter face attacks with face attacks whereas defensive strategies are aimed to counter face attacks by defending one's own face, a pattern proposed by Lakoff (1973). According to Culpeper et al. (2003), these strategic groupings are not mutually exclusive and are best viewed as a scale in that a secondary goal of offensive strategies, for instance, appears to be protecting the responder's face.

Impoliteness has been the subject of several studies examining it in various contexts (see Culpeper & Hardaker 2017, Locher & Larina 2019) including army training (Culpeper 1996), political speeches and campaign debates (Alemi & Latifi 2019, Garcia-Pastor, 2008), workplaces (Mullany 2008, Schnurr et al. 2007), television quiz shows (Culpeper 2005), telephone calls between citizens and police call-takers (Tracy & Tracy 1998), and social media platforms and discourse (Demjén & Hardaker 2016, Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk & Pęzik 2021, Teneketzi 2022, Zidjaly 2019). However, research on the perception of impoliteness and response to it is in its infancy, meaning that comparatively fewer studies have explored the hearers' responses (Farnia & Sheibani 2019, Tajeddin et al. 2015, Xiang et al. 2020).

Schnurr et al. (2007) examined how, through interaction with their subordinates, leaders in two ethnically diverse workplaces in New Zealand construct themselves as effective bosses while they also take heed of the politeness norms of their workplaces. Having carefully analyzed meeting openings and the use of contestive humor, the authors found that what was viewed as appropriate behavior in one organizational context and what was considered polite behavior by group members might be perceived as inappropriate and even impolite by members

of another organization. Schnurr et al. concluded that leaders and other organizational members reinforce, maintain, and shape politeness norms by behaving based on the norms developed in their communities of practice. Limberg (2009) investigated verbal threats utilizing a DCT comprising six hypothetical scenarios constructed in a way that the target group could relate to them. The data were obtained from native British sixth-grade students at various high schools in the United Kingdom, who were asked to respond to the threats in every scenario. Limberg found that many responses either complied or failed to comply with the threat. Variable degrees of compliance or non-compliance were observed within each category, but threats uttered by individuals of equal status enjoyed a higher degree of compliance. To explore impoliteness in computer-mediated discourse, Hatipoğlu (2007) examined whether there was a relationship between such factors as national and professional identities, the medium of interaction (i.e., e-mails), and the interpretation of (im)politeness. Hatipoğlu compared whether writers with different cultural backgrounds, while attempting to achieve their goal (i.e., collect conference papers), (dis)obeyed the politeness principles put forth by Brown and Levinson (1987). The findings suggest that doing (im)politeness is an intricate process, which is 'culturally very slippery' (Daly et al. 2004, as cited in Hatipoğlu 2007). Hatipoğlu argued that there is an interface between cultural norms and professional identities and the purpose of interaction, and that various social settings may require different impoliteness principles. Further, when constructing their call for papers for international conferences, Turkish and British writers had to take account of the macro facets, the interactants' relationship to each other, the interactants' relationship to the situation, and the aim to be achieved. In a study of impoliteness strategies used by Iranian and English students in English and Persian Languages, Farnia and Sheibani (2019) elicited responses to different threatening situations and found variations in the use of strategies based on variations in social power in different situations.

Given the above literature, exploring how impoliteness in refusals is perceived by native speakers of English and Persian was the first purpose of the present study. Additionally, the study sought to examine variations in native English speakers' and native Persian speakers' responses to impoliteness. To this end, the following research questions were formulated:

RQ1. How do native Persian speakers and native English speakers perceive impoliteness in the production of the refusal speech act?
RQ2. How do native Persian speakers and native English speakers respond to impoliteness in the production of the refusal speech act?

3. Method

3.1. Participants

The participants consisted of 120 native Persian speakers and 90 native English speakers. The minimum and maximum ages of native English and Persian speakers were identical: 17 and 71, respectively. The mean age of the native English speakers

was 39.06. The mean age of native Persian speakers was relatively lower, i.e. 26.11. The ratio of males to females was 36 to 54 for native English speakers and 53 to 67 for Persian monolinguals.

The Persian participants came from different educational backgrounds to enhance the validity of the results. They were selected through convenience sampling by contacting friends, colleagues, and others who were willing to participate. To recruit a large number of participants, snowball sampling was used by asking friends and colleagues to recruit future participants from among their acquaintances. The native English speakers, coming from various social and educational backgrounds, were contacted via Facebook and LinkedIn. Since Iran is a Persian-speaking context where native English speakers are few and far between, it was not viable to have many native speakers to administer the discourse completion task (WDCT). A request was, therefore, posted in various groups on Facebook and LinkedIn, asking them to fill out the WDCT.

3.2. Data source

The instrument used to collect the data was a refusal WDCT containing eight different situations, where the participants were asked to imagine that their request or apology had been refused. The speech act of refusal was selected as it violates the addressee's expectations and is thus potentially face-threatening and more likely to bring about impoliteness. Concerted attempts were made to detail each situation in the WDCT in such a way that the respondents could easily understand what each scenario required them to do. Thus, each situation was carefully designed so that the respondents could easily understand what triggered impoliteness to enable them to provide appropriate responses.

Central to the design of the WDCT were the three factors of social distance between speaker and hearer, their relative power, and the size of the imposition. Deliberate attempts were made to ensure that the scenarios captured a variety of situations and roles with different social distances. All three types of power relationships were reflected in the situations: interlocutors with equal power, the addressee having more power, or the addressee having less power than the speaker. As to the rank of the impositions of the requests, each situation was prepared to include one of the high, low, or mid-rank impositions. Also, the degree of social distance between the interlocutors varied across the situations.

The participants were asked to evaluate the degree of impoliteness in the refusals, using a 5-point Likert scale with options ranging from *not impolite at all, a little impolite, neither polite nor impolite, somewhat impolite* to *totally impolite*. Next, in a section labeled "*your response to his/her refusal*", the participants were asked to respond to each given refusal as spontaneously as they would in face-to-face interactions. For the native Persian speakers, the same eight situations were translated from English into Persian, paying attention to the subtleties which were lexicogrammatically and culturally important. Below there is an example from situation 5:

Situation 5:
Your father arrives home and sees that you are upset. He notices that you have bumped into his antique vase while cleaning the table and have broken the vase. You apologize to him, but he doesn't accept your apology.
He says: Things don't change back to normal with an apology.
1. Not impolite at all   2. A little impolite   3. Neither polite nor impolite
4. Somewhat impolite   5. Totally impolite
Your response to him: _____

3.3. Data collection and analysis

The WDCT was first administered to several proficient English learners and native English speakers to gain sample refusals. Eight refusals, varying in their degrees of (im)politeness, were selected for the final version of the WDCT. The native Persian speakers were provided with print copies of the WDCT, whereas an online version of the WDCT was prepared for the English speakers on surveymonkey.com, a website particularly designed for creating online surveys and collecting data online. The link to the online WDCT was then posted on two social networking websites, namely Facebook and LinkedIn.

To address the first research question, the overall distribution of the ratings of impoliteness was analyzed based on descriptive statistics, i.e. the mean and standard deviation for the entire WDCT as well as those akin to every situation on the ratings given by both native English and Persian speakers. To address the second research question, however, content analysis was conducted to discover the patterns of the responses to impoliteness by both native English speakers and native Persian speakers. Each response was read and classified based on the literature on im politeness strategies and pragmatic appropriateness criteria such as directness/indirectness, degree of formality of the context, power relationship between interlocutors, and social distance. The framework which informed the content analysis of the responses was the list of output strategies for positive and negative impoliteness developed by Culpeper (1996) and Culpeper et al. (2003). According to Culpeper (1996), for each politeness super-strategy there is, in terms of orientation to face, an opposite impoliteness super-strategy to attack face rather than promoting or supporting it. Below is an outline of impoliteness super-strategies from Culpeper (1996) and Culpeper et al. (2003):

(1) bold on record impoliteness: the FTA is carried out in a clear, unequivocal, concise fashion in situations where face is not irrelevant or minimized;

(2) positive impoliteness: the employment of strategies devised to damage the addressee's positive face wants;

(3) negative impoliteness: the employment of strategies devised to damage the addressee's negative face wants;

(4) sarcasm or mock impoliteness: in order to perform the FTA, politeness strategies are adopted in an evidently insincere way, and thus they remain surface realizations; and

(5) withhold politeness: stay silent or fail to be polite where politeness is required.

To enhance the reliability of the classification of the responses, the two authors compared notes to codify the responses since some of them were not, at first glance, explicit enough to signify a specific strategy.

4. Results

4.1. Perception of impoliteness

Tables 1 and 2 provide descriptive statistics, including the mean, standard deviation, and standard error for the total WDCT along with those of every single situation on ratings of the degree of refusal (im)politeness given by the two groups of native English speakers and native Persian speakers.

Table 1. **Descriptive statistics of the total WDCT and every situation for native English speakers**

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
S1	1	5	1.99	1.090
S2	1	5	4.19	1.121
S3	1	3	1.02	.210
S4	1	5	2.05	1.089
S5	1	5	3.50	1.309
S6	1	5	2.55	1.285
S7	1	5	1.75	1.081
S8	1	5	4.10	1.283
Total	2	4	2.64	.464

The largest differences in the values of the means obtained for native English speakers' ratings, as displayed in Table 1, were observed in situations 2 ($M = 4.19$), 5 ($M = 3.5$), and 8 ($M = 4.10$). This means that the overall ratings fell within the category of "somewhat impolite" on the scale. The refusals in these three situations are as follows:

> **Situation 2:** The boss refuses a request for promotion and says:
> I would never dare to ask for a promotion if I were you. I mean you have been here only for 3 years.

> **Situation 5:** The father refuses his son's or daughter's apology and says:
> Things don't change back to normal with an apology.

> **Situation 8:** The waiter refuses the customer's apology and says:
> Look what you've done! You ruined my shirt!

Based on the standard deviations, it seems that native English speakers' ratings exhibited a wider range of variation in judging the impoliteness degree in situations 2, 5, and 8, suggesting that the participants did not agree greatly on the degree of impoliteness in the refusals in these situations. However, in the other situations

which involved politely mitigated refusals, variation in the ratings was comparatively smaller.

As Table 2 displays, the largest means for the ratings of native Persian speakers were observed in situations 2 ($M = 2.71$), 6 ($M = 2.56$), and 8 ($M = 3.15$).

Table 2. **Descriptive statistics of the total WDCT
and every single situation for native Persian speakers**

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
S1	1	5	1.81	1.015
S2	1	5	2.71	1.203
S3	1	4	1.12	.471
S4	1	5	2.05	1.248
S5	1	5	2.14	1.271
S6	1	5	2.56	1.419
S7	1	5	1.58	1.042
S8	1	5	3.15	1.482
Total	1	4	2.14	.601

Data presented in Table 2 indicate that the ratings of this group fell between the categories of "a little impolite" and "neither polite nor impolite." In other words, native Persian speakers did not consider any of the refusals to contain a high degree of impoliteness.

4.2. Response to impoliteness

The refusals subjected to content analysis were selected based on whether or not the mean for their respective ratings exceeded 3.5 (the mid-point on the Likert scale), that is they were considered to be impolite by the participants and hence strategies were suggested by the participants to respond to them. Accordingly, the native English speakers' responses in situations 2, 5, and 8 were the only ones meeting this condition. However, the means obtained for the native Persian speakers' ratings did not surpass the point in any of the situations, meaning that they considered none of the situations to be "somewhat impolite" or "totally impolite;" as such, they did not suggest any strategies to react to impoliteness.

Five general strategies with varied sub-strategies, outlined below, were unraveled as a result of the content analysis:

(1) Counter defensively
    a. Be assertive; Defend the request
    b. Abrogation of responsibility
    c. Show insincere or surface agreement
    d. Express limited choice
    e. Accept responsibility
       (i)   Apologize
       (ii) Acknowledge mistake

(2) Counter offensively
    a. Positive impoliteness strategies
        (i)   Use taboo words
        (ii)   Be unsympathetic
    b. Negative impoliteness strategies
        (i)   Threaten or Frighten
        (ii)   Challenge the refuser indirectly (off-record)
        (iii) Challenge the refuser directly (on-record)
        (iv) Use sarcasm to express annoyance
        (v)   Block the hearer by leaving the scene
        (vi) Warn the hearer
(3) Counter by combining offensive and defensive strategies
(4) Stay silent, i.e. do not respond
(5) Politeness strategies
    a. Positive politeness strategies
        (i)   Attend to the hearer's positive face
        (ii)   Offer repair or monetary compensation
        (iii) Express agreement
        (iv) Promise to be careful in future
        (v)   Offer help
    b. Negative Politeness strategies
        (i)   Admit impingement or minimize impingement by thanking

To elaborate, the native English speakers occasionally employed a combination of offensive and defensive strategies in their responses. A number of the participants used only negative politeness strategies. In other words, they admitted their impingement and tried to minimize it by thanking the refuser. Adoption of such strategies would in turn do more

4.2.1. Impoliteness response strategies in situation 2

In situation 2, those respondents who decided to protect their own face did so by being self-assertive and providing the manager with reasons as to why they felt they deserved a promotion. Some respondents chose to be totally polite and defensively counter the refusal even when they perceived the refusal to be highly impolite. Nevertheless, such a strategy would also indirectly exert a potential and probably unintentional effect, i.e. challenging the refuser's idea that the refusee is not worthy of a promotion. In other words, questioning the refuser's position was the upshot, intentional or otherwise, of the refusee's defending their face and being assertive. The following excerpt from a native English speaker (NES) clarifies this point.

(1) *It's true that I've only been here for 3 years but if you look at my work, you'll know I have completed various key projects this year (say what they are) / I have achieved my budget goals / I have increased profits by X%.* [NES 62]

NES 62, attending first to the refuser's positive face wants, shows agreement with the manager. He then, by offering several reasons, goes on to prove his valuable role to the company, thereby attempting to defend his own face. By doing so, he is also indirectly challenging the manager for only considering the number of years spent at the company. The employee's self-assertiveness to maintain face seems to be an off-record, peripheral attack on the refuser's positive face wants.

Many of the respondents who questioned their interlocutor's position did so without raising a question contrary to Bousfield's (2008) argument that "challenges are always issued in the form of a question" (Ibid: 132). Lachenicht (1980), in his classification of negative face-damaging strategies, subsumed *challenging indirectly* under negative aggravation. The researchers, following Lachenicht, labeled the instances in which the respondents used the challenge strategy without asking a question as *off-record* or *indirect challenge*.

In response (2), NES 52, by recourse to *off-record challenge,* seems to be implicating that the manager (the refuser) is wrong in evaluating her staff's position based only on the years spent at the company. Thus, the response seems to have incorporated criticism as an underlying component.

(2) *I don't think you should measure my value by my time spent at the company.* [NES 52]

Similarly, in response (3), NES 7 apologizes (negative politeness strategy) twice while seeming to be indirectly challenging the manager's judgment by stating that "I feel I'm doing a great job and thought I would contribute more to the company by being in a different role".

(3) *I'm sorry you feel that way but I feel I'm doing a great job and thought I would contribute more to the company by being in a different role. I'm sorry you took offense to it.* [NES 7]

In response 4, the participant indirectly takes issue with the manager (i.e. off-record challenge) and argues that, unlike them, the respondent considers three years to be long enough to allow for an impartial judgment of one's value to the company.

(4) *Three years is a long time to go nowhere.* [NES 36]

Response (4) can be considered a stronger form of off-record challenge as the idiom "go nowhere" seems to be a booster, implying that the respondent deems herself worthy of a salary raise. Having been uttered in the form of a general statement of FTA (a mild criticism), the challenge is off-record.

Similar to NES 38, several other respondents used on-record challenges by posing a direct rhetorical question (see response 5).

(5) *How long would I have to work to get a promotion? And isn't quality better than quantity?* [NES 13]

The response above calls into question the manager's stance that the interlocutor should not have dared to ask for a promotion due to insufficient years

of service. This corresponds with Bousfield's (2008) characterization of challenge as involving a challenging question directed at the hearer to "question h's position, stance, beliefs, assumed power, rights, obligations, ethics, etc." (Ibid: 132).

Some respondents expressed surface agreement with the manager and did not pose any challenge whatsoever, suggesting their unwillingness to defend their face regardless of the damage inflicted by the refusal (see response 6).

(6)   *Ok. I understand. Thank you for your time.* [NES 26]

In response 6, the respondent first gives the interlocutor (the manager) a gift (i.e. understanding), while trying to make her feel good (a positive politeness strategy) by thanking her. NES 26, in a note under his response, wrote that being deeply offended by the refusal, he would curse at the manager in sheer frustration but only in his head. Despite his resentment about the refusal, presumably, to placate the manager, NES 26 expresses surface agreement rather than saying anything that might agitate the hearer.

The following excerpt (response 7) shows the participants' use of offense.

(7)   *What the hell. I quit.* [NES 11]

Here, NES 11 counters the refusal offensively and directly threatens (a negative impoliteness strategy) the manager to leave the company. Aa s mildly offensive phrase, "what the hell", according to Culpeper (2005), is a positive impoliteness strategy.

Attempting to justify the request for promotion to restore one's threatened face was a recurrent pattern in the responses. Response (8) is an illustration of such a strategy.

(8)   *I am surprised you would think that, after having had no salary increase in 3 years my pay level does not reflect or allow for inflation and the increase in the price of living. It is a perfectly reasonable request.* [NES 60]

NES 60 points to the living and economic conditions which, in his view, sanctions a salary increase. His last statement, i.e. "it is a perfectly reasonable request", clarifies the respondent's true intention (i.e. defending the request) while intensifying his effort to defend his positive face by using a booster like "perfectly".

4.2.2. Impoliteness response strategies in situation 5

The recipient of an FTA can, in theory, either respond or stay silent (Culpeper et al. 2003). The latter was seldom adopted in response to situation 5. While classifying the response, the researchers put politeness strategies under a separate category. The decision was made based on Culpeper et al.'s (2003) argument that defense strategies predominantly defy a face attack by defending one's own face rather than attending to the h's face wants. Hence defensive strategies are distinct from positive or negative politeness strategies.

In their responses in situation 5, only 11 native English speakers chose to counter the impoliteness offensively by either a direct or an indirect challenge (see response 9).

(9) *Dad, I was cleaning and I made a mistake, are we going to harp on this? You are making me feel like a jackass.* [NES 3]

A couple of superstrategies seem to be at work in response (9). The use of an appropriate identity marker, i.e. a positive politeness strategy, implicates the close social distance between the interlocutors. Although assuming responsibility for his mistake, the respondent, by posing a rhetorical question, directly challenges the refuser (i.e. offensive). Yet, the verb "harp on" carries a negative denotation, suggesting that the refuser is annoying. The refuser continues to criticize the refuser for overreacting. The word 'jackass', a mildly offensive term, is taboo language, thus functioning as a positive impoliteness strategy, indicating the refusee's annoyance. However, the offensive term was never directed at the refuser, most probably because of the refuser's higher power position. Rather, directed at the refusee herself, "jackass" can imply that the refuser is making a big deal out of the incident.

Another defense strategy in the responses was abrogation, which, according to Culpeper et al. (2003), acts to ward off the FTA. Culpeper et al. characterize this defense strategy as "the abrogation of personal responsibility for the action(s) or event that caused the interlocutor to issue a face damaging utterance in the first place" (p. 1565). One example can be seen in response (10).

(10) *It was an accident.* [NES 21]

NES 21 only employs the abrogation strategy to defensively counter the face attack and abdicate responsibility for the mishap by expressing a lack of intent. Yet, given the specific context, it seems socially advisable for the refusee to be sympathetic with the refuser who has lost something valuable. The sole employment of the abrogation strategy might, therefore, represent the impoliteness super-strategy of "withhold politeness," which is defined as "the absence of politeness work where it would be expected" (Culpeper 1996: 357).

NES 55 (see response 11), unlike NES 21, combines the abrogation strategy with two politeness strategies, namely the use of appropriate identity markers (positive) and the expression of regret (negative). The latter, boosted by an intensifier (i.e. really), serves to offer sympathy to the refuser to placate him.

(11) *Dad, it was an accident I'm really sorry.* [NES 55]
(12) *I am sorry, it was an accident! I will try to have it fixed or replaced.* [NES 28]

Similarly, NES 28, in a defensive move in response (12), first apologizes (negative politeness), then uses the abrogation strategy to express a lack of intent, disclaiming responsibility for the unfortunate incident. The respondent, by offering compensation, tries to respect the refuser's positive face.

Response 13 exemplifies the strategy of combining both offensive and defensive strategies. NES 21, in uttering the first sentence, seems to be defending her face by stating that she has already apologized and that she has a limited choice ("there's not much else I can do"). Acknowledging that their strategic groupings are not mutually exclusive, Culpeper et al. (2003) claim that offensive strategies have the secondary objective of defending the responder's face whereas defensive strategies may serve the secondary objective of attacking the instigator of the impoliteness act. In view of this, as the first three utterances in response (13) hint at the refusee's desperation, it could be claimed that it is somewhat offensive too because of the implication that the refuser is overreacting.

(13) *Look, I apologized, there's not much else I can do. It was an accident. Do you want me to pay for it? Or are you going to hold it against me forever?* [NES 21]

The utterance "it was an accident" demonstrates the use of the abrogation strategy to evade responsibility for impoliteness and defend face. The last utterance, a rhetorical question directed at the refuser, seems, given the context, to be indicating that the refusee is taking offense by challenging the refuser. The adverb of time ("forever") seems to imply that the refusee is indirectly criticizing (off-record) the refuser being excessively affronted.

4.2.3. Impoliteness response strategies in situation 8

The strategy of staying silent was never used in response to the refusal in situation 8. Accepting responsibility for the impoliteness and deploying defensive strategies, by contrast, prevailed in the native English speaker data. Responses (14) and (15) are revealing.

(14) *I'm really sorry. It was a stupid accident.* [NES 71]
(15) *I'm really sorry, but it was unintentional.* [NES 36]

NES 71's response to the refusal illustrates how some of the native English speakers rely on defensive strategies to manage the face attack and restore their lost face. In response (15), the respondent first apologizes and then opts to point out that the mishap was only an accident (lack of intent). Note that when accepting the face attack, as Culpeper et al. (2003) maintain, the recipient may acknowledge responsibility for impoliteness issued in the first place. They consider apologizing as a possible alternative open to an impoliteness recipient wishing to assume responsibility, with the caveat that such an option brings about further face damage to the responder (Culpeper et al. 2003). Thus, it can be safely claimed that, presumably to minimize the face damage inflicted by the apology, both NES 71 and NES 36 express lack of intent (defensive).

(16) *May I speak to the manager*? [NES 26]

Response (16) is another instance of an offensive strategy. NES 26 seems to be exploiting a negative impoliteness strategy, namely threaten or frighten the

hearer. Given the context and the blunt refusal, the utterance, seemingly a very polite request to have a word with the manager, could also suggest an imminent complaint to the manager about the waiter's abrupt manner. On this account, this request can be viewed as indirectly threatening the refuser.

Response 17 demonstrates how some of the respondents employed positive politeness to attend to the refuser's face. NES 27 accepts responsibility for the mistake by apologizing to the refuser. She then, in what seems to be an attempt to placate the aggrieved party, attends to the waiter's positive face and offers monetary compensation to have the waiter's shirt cleaned.

(17) *I am sorry. I will pay for the cleaning.* [NES 27]

Some respondents tried to calm the aggrieved party with their promise to be more careful in future. On the other hand, none of the respondents addressed the refuser's negative face, preferring instead to attend to the refuser's positive face, i.e. his want for compensation or at least sympathy. Also, nowhere in the data were positive politeness strategies exclusively employed. They were invariably combined with one or more of the above-mentioned strategies.

5. Discussion

The first research question aimed to explore how native English speakers and native Persian speakers perceive impoliteness in the production of refusals. In none of the eight situations, the mean of the ratings exceeded the mid-point of 3.5 for the native Persian speakers, indicating that they did not consider any of the refusals impolite. However, the mean of the native English speakers' ratings for situations 2, 5, and 8 passed the midpoint. The two closely linked cultural schemas of *ta'arof* (ritual politeness) and *ru-dar-bayesti* (feeling of distance-out-of-respect) in the Persian language, seem to best explain the difference in the Persian and English speakers' perceptions of impoliteness in situations 2 and 5. As Sharifian and Tayebi (2017) hold, differences in the social and relational status of interlocutors can give rise to the schema of *ru-dar-bayesti,* imposing an obligation on interactants to show a certain degree of respect and politeness towards individuals with certain roles and positions. The greater the degree of sociocultural distance between interlocutors, the more respect should the person in a higher power position be accorded. Still, *ru-dar-bayesti*, according to Sharifian and Tayebi, can also extend to more intimate relations like that of a father and a son. Sharifian (2011) observed that when they interact with a more socially powerful interlocutor within a formal relationship, Iranians feel more *ru-dar-bayesti* and are more likely to adopt indirect refusal strategies. While practicing *ru-dar-bayesti*, the distance felt by Iranians tends to make them hesitant about performing an FTA (Babai Shishavan & Sharifian 2013). Sharifian and Tayebi (2017) characterize *ru-dar-bayesti* as a state or feeling triggering *ta'arof*, suggesting, as Babai Shishavan and Sharifian showed, a higher degree of *ru-dar-bayesti* leads to a stronger need to practice *ta'arof*.

Situation 2 was carefully designed to represent a formal relationship with a large difference in power relations. Because of the formality of the relationship and the higher position of the refuser (the employer), native Persian speakers were likely to feel more *ru-dar-bayesti*, which could explain why they generally did not consider the employer's blunt refusal highly impolite. Feeling a high degree of *ru-dar-bayesti*, an overwhelming majority of Persian participants avoided impoliteness strategies altogether and instead employed negative politeness strategies in their responses in situation 2. The fact that, rather than an abrupt 'no', the manager provided a reason for the refusal of the promotion could also explain why Persian speakers did not perceive the refusal impolite. This is because, as Sharifian (2011) and Babai Shishavan and Sharifian (2013) put it, for Persian speakers providing reasons and explanations is an effective strategy to mitigate the face-threatening effects of refusals.

In situation 5, the cultural conceptualizations of role schemas, defined as "knowledge structure that people have of specific role positions in cultural group" (Augoustinos & Walker 1995, as cited in Sharifian 2011: 9), could account for why Persian speakers generally did not find the refusal impolite. Cultural conceptualizations, according to Sharifian (2011: 5) "are developed through interactions between the members of a cultural group and enable them to think, more or less, in one mind." Knowledge about obligations and responsibilities between children and their parents is incorporated into the associated role schemas (Ibid). Nishida (1999) held that role schemas encompass "knowledge about social roles which denote sets of behavior that are expected of people in particular social positions" (Ibid: 758). In Iranian culture, parents are deeply revered, and family ties are highly respected. This is, by no means, to imply that English speakers do not respect their parents, but it could be argued that because of their cultural beliefs and religious teachings, Iranian people, compared with Westerners, tend to pay their parents more respect. In other words, because of the Persian speakers' knowledge about their social roles vis-à-vis their parents, most of them did not perceive the father's harsh refusal as impolite. This finding is also in line with Bolivar's (2008) statement that politeness and impoliteness are viewed as social behavior that can be positively or negatively evaluated based on the perceptions of roles and role relations in situations.

While many native English speakers deployed positive impoliteness strategies such as *using taboo words* or *being unsympathetic* with the father (the refuser), none of the native Persian speakers pursued such strategies. However, a small number of Persian respondents perceived the father's refusal to be highly impolite. Sharifian's (2011) argument that cultural conceptualizations are not "static knowledge that is equally shared by the members of a cultural group" (Ibid: 11) and that "members of a cultural group usually possess various degrees of knowledge/awareness of their cultural conceptualizations" (Ibid) can explain why some Persian monolinguals did not share the majority's judgment about the degree of impoliteness in situation 5.

As the findings showed, the native English speakers generally tended to combine strategies rather than employing individual ones in response to the impolite refusals. Bousfield (2008) argues that it is difficult to discuss "the realization of individual impolite output strategies without reference either to other impolite output strategies, or even of the ways of combining strategies for specific effects" (Ibid: 143). Bousfield further offers two sound reasons for this, arguing that individual strategies seldom occur discretely with merely one unequivocal meaning when the context and co-text are taken into account. Second, individual strategies frequently attack or threaten the interactants' both positive and negative face. The combination of different strategies, similar to Bousfield's study, prevailed in the native English speakers' responses. The deployment of an individual strategy in isolation rarely occurred in the data. Moreover, the two response options, i.e. offensive-offensive and offensive-defensive, identified by Culpeper et al. (2003), were observed in the responses elicited from the native English speakers. Culpeper et al. did not witness any clear examples of the offensive-offensive pair because, as their argument goes, traffic wardens "do not in their particular socio-discoursal role have the legitimate power to respond to the impoliteness of car owners with clear, unambiguous impoliteness" (Ibid: 1563). Culpeper et al., therefore, argue that the response options available to participants are limited by the social context wherein the interaction takes place. This can explain why, in the current study, the offensive-offensive option was observed only in response to the refusals perceived by participants to be highly impolite (except for situation 2). The respondents presumably felt they had legitimate higher power to counter the impoliteness of the refusers with impoliteness. Yet, in situation 2, an employee's request for promotion was rather abruptly turned down. The respondents (employees) were in a far lower position compared with their interlocutor (the manager). With the future of their job in the managers' hands, they probably deemed it unwise to counter the manager's abrupt refusal with direct, unambiguous, and clear impoliteness. Most native English speakers thus responded to impoliteness more warily, either using defensive strategies and trying to manage their own face or opting not to say anything and let the impoliteness pass. They decided, for instance, to politely ask the manager for feedback or an appointment to discuss their promotion. Some of the respondents also accepted responsibility for the impoliteness issued in the first place and apologized to the refuser which, in turn, as Culpeper (2005) points out, would result in more damage to their own face.

Mills (2003) argues that, to the participants, "allegations concerning impoliteness are generally indicative of a disparity in the judgment of status, role, or familiarity and thus perhaps a disparity in the participants' evaluation of their position in the particular Community of Practice" (Ibid: 268). Indeed, the content analyses of situations 2 and 8 pointed to an agreement with Mill's perspective. In situation 8, aside from the large social distance between the interlocutors, the refuser (a waiter) was not on an equal social footing with the respondents having a higher power position. The main reason why native English speakers considered

the refusal to be highly impolite was that, as mentioned in some of the respondents' side notes, the waiter was there to serve and respect the customer and was not supposed to berate the customer. Second, working in a restaurant, the waiter should expect some occasional spills. However, despite perceiving the refusal in situation 8 as highly impolite, several native English speakers responded defensively or apologized for the incident, meaning that they accepted responsibility for the refuser's impoliteness. This choice of strategy, even when the impolite refuser was in a lower power position, could arise from the participants' perception that countering impoliteness with impoliteness would only aggravate the situation. Thus, to put an end to impoliteness and continue being cooperative in the interaction, they opted to placate the aggrieved party or defend their own face.

Many of the strategies Culpeper (1996) suggested as possible means to convey impoliteness simply did not appear in our data. For instance, only two (i.e. *Use taboo words* and *Be unsympathetic*) of the positive impoliteness strategies predicted by Culpeper were employed by participants. By comparison, negative impoliteness strategies were more widely used by participants, yet there were also some strategies that did not occur in the participants' responses. Moreover, in some cases, we adopted one variant (i.e. *Threaten*) suggested by Bousfield (2008) on the similar strategy of *Frighten* proposed by Culpeper (1996). This was because some responses involved a well-disguised, off-record threat implicating signs of a negative reaction by the respondent to the impolite person. Additionally, following Bousfield's (2008: 127) argument that "where criticism is a component part of another strategy is where the 'Challenge' impolite strategy occurs", all the instances wherein the participants employed a veiled criticism underlying their strategies were subsumed under the strategy of challenge on/off-record.

Culpeper et al. (2003) argue that the recipient of a face attack may accept the face attack by taking responsibility for the impoliteness act by, for instance, apologizing. While this was never observed in their data, in this study, quite a few of the participants opted to apologize for the original request. Further, some others chose to counter the impoliteness act defensively by acknowledging that it was their own mistake to have made the request. Such instances were labeled to acknowledge *mistakes* and regarded as countering face attacks defensively. All the instances wherein participants countered impoliteness by either apologizing or admitting their mistake in making a request were classified under a discrete defensive strategy, namely, *accept responsibility*. Interestingly, participants also used politeness strategies to counter impoliteness. Such strategies were reported neither in Culpeper (1996) nor in Culpeper et al. (2003), which could be because impolite utterances used in the WDCT were not as grave as the impoliteness encountered in Culpeper's studies. Therefore, participants may have sought to diffuse the impolite situations by politeness and attention to the refuser's positive and negative face wants. Employing positive politeness strategies would imply that respondents accept the face attack and try to ameliorate the situation by being polite to the refuser to resolve the conflict.

6. Conclusion

The current study investigated native English speakers' and native Persian speakers' perceptions of and responses to impoliteness in the speech act of refusal. In their perceptions of impoliteness, native Persian speakers displayed a higher impoliteness threshold as none of the eight refusals were evaluated to be highly impolite. Native English speakers' ratings, however, demonstrated that three of the refusals (situations 2, 5, and 8) were highly impolite. The findings show that native English speakers and native Persian speakers adopt different criteria when rating the degree of the impoliteness of a speech act. It seems that native Persian speakers are far less strict in judging the degree of impoliteness as they did not perceive the refusals containing even offensive impoliteness strategies to be highly impolite.

There is evidence to suggest that Persian respondents, in deciding on the impoliteness degree of the refusals, display some sensitivity toward the social power of the refuser. Culpeper et al. (2003) hold that the response options open to participants in an interaction are determined by the social context in which the interaction occurs. The social context includes the socio-discoursal roles the participants assume for themselves. Therefore, it could be concluded that the socio-discoursal roles of the participants in an interaction might also affect their perceptions of (im)politeness. The results also show that the (in)formality of the relationship between the interactants can also bear relevance to native Persian speakers' perceptions of impoliteness. From the findings, it can be concluded that native Persian speakers do not perceive refusals to be highly face-threatening when their relationship with the refuser is of a formal nature. The (in)formality of the relationship between the speakers in certain contexts, however, seems to be less relevant to native English speakers' perceptions of impoliteness.

The study aimed to shed light on the native English speakers' and native Persian speakers' perceptions of impoliteness in the production of refusals. Yet, the complex nature of such a phenomenon as the perception of impoliteness necessitates the careful examination of a range of underlying variables. To this end, investigating the perception of impoliteness in other speech acts and analyzing people's perceptions of the concepts of face and FTAs across other cultures and L1 backgrounds should be undertaken in future research on impoliteness. Also, we drew on WDCT as a data collection source due to the large sample size. In other studies, real-life samples of reaction to impoliteness and its relevant strategies could be investigated.

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Сведения об авторах:
Зиа ТАДЖЕДДИН – профессор прикладной лингвистики Университета Тарбиат Модарес, Иран. В сферу его исследовательских интересов входят педагогический дискурс, педагогическое образование и прагматика иностранного языка. Он (совместно с Т. Фэррелом) является редактором серии книг *Studies in Language Teacher Education* издательства *Springer*, соредактором двух международных журналов: *Applied Pragmatics* и *Second Language Teacher Education*. Автор статей, опубликованных в рецензируемых журналах, среди которых *Journal of Language, Identity and Education, International Journal of Applied Linguistics, Language and Intercultural Communication* и др., соредактор трех монографий.
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