

“Bebaxshid poshtam be shomās” (excuse me, I’ m sitting in front of you): Towards Identification of Apologies with Phatic Function in Persian Texts

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Abstract

The diversity of languages and the variation in cultures throughout the world make the process of second language learning and intercultural communication difficult. Apologies as inseparable parts of Iranian’s interpersonal relationship create ambiguities for the parties as they are extended with different functions. Interpretation of these elements gets more troublesome when they are used with phatic function owing to the fact that unlike ordinary apologies, they are used when no offence has occurred and by extending them the interlocutors solely intend to open, prolong or end a conversation. Despite their importance, these types of apology have been neglected by the previous Persian speech act studies. Thus in this paper we aim at identifying apologies which have phatic function in a number of Iranian movies. Therefore we initially realize the forms (strategies) of the apologies and also find the indicators of phatic functions which distinguish them from ordinary apologies.

Keyword: apology, function, Persian, phatic, Iranian movie

INTRODUCTION

Since speech act theory has been postulated by Austin (1962) and systematized by Searle (1969), several studies were conducted as attempts to confirm or reject universalities of speech acts across different languages and cultures. From among these speech acts, apologies were center of attention of many researchers (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984; Trosborg, 1987; Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; Afghari, 2007; Shariati & Chamani, 2010). The results of these studies helped in establishment of framework(s) to identify or understand apologies in one or more languages or to question the applicability or sufficiency of previous frameworks for realizing apology strategies in the same or different language.

Similarities and differences of apologies among different cultures have been done by using coding system offered by Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Patterns (CCSARP) project. Blum-Kulka & Olshtain (1984) in supporting the universality of apology strategies among different languages believed that two forms are used commonly among these cultures. These two main forms are as follow:

1. **Using explicit illocutionary force indicating device (IFID):** As Blum-Kulka & Olshtain(1984, p. 206) argue “the most direct realization of an apology is done via an explicit illocutionary force indicating device (IFID), which selects a routinized, formulaic expression of regret”. The examples they provide are *I am sorry, I apologize, excuse me, forgive me, I regret that, pardon me*, etc. This strategy proved to be the most frequent strategy in their study.
2. **Using an utterance which contains reference to one or more elements from a closed set of specified prepositions:** These utterances can be a) an explanation or account of the cause which brought about the offence. e.g. *The bus was late*, b) an expression of the speaker's responsibility for the offence e.g. *You know me, I'm never on time*, 3) an offer of repair e.g. *I'll pay for the damage* and 4) a promise of forbearance, e.g., *this won't happen again* (p. 207).

In line with developments of global speech act realization, abundant of speech acts studies in Persian started to be conducted. Persian apologies were among the most frequent speech acts in the literature which were scrutinized in terms of their universalities and culture-specificities by using CCSARP coding scheme (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984; Olshtain & Cohen, 1983). These Studies had different perspectives such as cross-cultural (Sadeghi, 2013), interlanguage (Farashaiyan and Yazdi Amirkhiz, 2011), mono-cultural studies (Afghari, 2007, Shariati & Chamani, 2010) and sociopragmatic or socio-cultural perspectives (Afghari, 2007). From among these studies Shariati and Chamani through ethnographic method of observation, proposed a set of offence types (2010, p. 1692) which are presented in the following table:

Table 1. Offence types for which apology is used in Persian

Type	Example
Inconvenience	inadequate service or action
Space	infringements on another's personal space
Possessions	damage or loss of properties
Talk	impolite talk or intrusion on another's talk
Time	wasting the time of a person

It is assumed that the apologies performed for the aforementioned offences are considered as genuine or simply speaking ordinary apologies as the interlocutors wants their apology to be taken as serious. However, we propose that apologies can be used in Persian where no offence has been occurred. This type of apology is claimed to have 'phatic' function. Although previous studies on Persian apology, has contributed to realization of the pragmatics structures (forms) of these speech acts to such a great extent, they neglected the 'phatic' function of Persian speech acts in general and

apologies in particular. Before presenting the objective of this study a background of phatic function will be given in the next section.

Phatic function

The term ‘Phatic communion’ was primarily introduced by Malinowski (1936). Later Jakobson (1969) expanded Bühler’s ((1934) Organon model of language and considered phatic as a function of language among other functions namely referential (informative), poetic, emotive (expressive), conative (appellative), and metalingual. He believed that phatic function is to serve as opening, prolonging (maintaining) and closing the communication. Later Nord (2008) in her article *Persuading by addressing: a functional approach to speech-act comparison* used corpus of 300 advertisements from newspapers and journals sold in Germany, Spain and the United Kingdom in order to analyze and compare the conventions of phatic communications in these languages. Based on the result of her study, another series of indicators worked as phatic. She called these indicators of phatic function as ‘defining and shaping the social relationship between the sender and recipient’.

In the case of Persian language, Yaqubi, et al., (2014) used Nord’s (2008) indicators of phatic function to categorize the types of phatic expressions in Persian. Furthermore, they categorized these expression based on the setting and the previous or next (speech) acts in the concerned context as well as their (non) conventionality in Persian language. They also presented culture-specific type of phatic expressions which were absent in the Nord’s (2008) framework. These expressions were claimed to be manifestation of *ta’arof* (Iranian ritual system of politeness), *qorban sadaqe* (expressing emotion) and also praying expressions as well as (in) formal register markers in Persian. The following table shows their categorization of Persian phatic expressions:

Table 2. Categories of Persian Phatic Expressions

Formulaic Situation-based	Setting-based
	Action-based
Non-conventional	<i>Qorban sadaqe</i> markers
Prefabricated	Praying
	False friends
	Persian praying
	Formal/informal register markers
	<i>Ta’arof</i> markers

Persian Apologies with Phatic Function

It can be claimed that similar to other languages, not all apologies are used to express true feeling of the interlocutors in Persian. In other words, unlike other ordinary apologies, by extending them the interlocutors intend to perform an action, apologies with phatic function are used for other specific purposes such as avoiding silence, establishing communication, politeness, etc.

In their article Khodaei Moghaddam et al., (2014) examined and analyzed '*bebaxshid*' (Excuse me) speech act in Persian language. They proposed a set of function including 'phatic communication' for this speech act. The example they set for this type of speech act is as follow:

Context: At the Dentist's: A (Patient) and B (Secretary)

A: *bebaxshid sā'at do nobat dāshtam* (Excuse me; I've got an appointment at 2 o'clock).

B: *bale befarmāyid beshinid* (Yes, please take a seat) (p. 642-643).

They argued that "In this context, A makes use of "*bebaxshid* to start the conversation and it does not indicate making an apology, whatsoever" (ibid). This study throws light on the multi-functionality of the expression *bebaxshid*, which as previous studies on Persian apologies show constitute the most frequent type of apology strategy (request for forgiveness) (Afghari, 2007; Shariati & Chamani, 2010). Despite the fact that they filled a gap in the literature of Persian pragmatics, they did not expand or generalize the phatic function of the expression *bebaxshid* to those cases where apologies are used for opening, prolonging and closing the conversation. Review of the previous studies will show that no study has been conducted which investigate Persian apologies with phatic function. Therefore study aims at filling this gap by answering the following questions:

- 1) Which strategies (pragmatic structures) are used in Persian apologies to open, prolong and close conversation?
- 2) Which linguistic patterns In Persian apologies are used to shape the role relationship?
- 3) Which indicators are used in these apologies to mark their phatic function?

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

In this study we used 10 Iranian movies and series as the corpus of our study. Strategy types applied by Afghari (2007) were adopted to realize the apology strategies in Persian. Totally 412 apologies were found in the corpus. The offence types proposed by Shariati and Chamani (2010) were adopted to exclude genuine apologies. Using this category of offence types, 119 apologies with phatic function were filtered out of the collected data. Nord's (2008) classification of indicators of phatic function was used to confirm their phatic function and also to categorize them based on the indicators used.

RESULTS

Based on the results of the study, 119 Apologies were mainly used with four different strategy types namely 'lack of intent' (LOI), statement of offence (STO), expression of regret (EOR) and request for forgiveness (RFF). Apologies identified in the movies were categorized based on the indicators of phatic sub-function. These apologies were only used for opening and shaping the role relationship. The indicators of the opening sub-functions were 'thank', 'mitigate request/ assertion/ question' (wee adopt this concept

from Khodaei Moghaddam (2014)), ‘attention signal’ and others (these indicators will be explained in discussion section). The following table shows the sub-function, indicators, apology strategies as well as one example for each category:

Table 3. Persian Apologies with Phatic Function

Phatic-sub-functions	Indicators	Apology strategy	Example	Frequency
Opening	Thank	LOI	<i>bande rāzi be zahmate shomā nabudam</i> (I did n’t want to trouble you)	24
		STO	<i>xeili zahmat keshidin</i> (we bothered you so much)	12
	Mitigate of Request/assertion/question	RFF	<i>bebaxshid ye lahze tashrif miārin?</i> (excuse me, could you come for a second?)	47
	Attention signal	EOR	<i>ābji sharmande Felan bexātere taghire dekorāšion tatilim</i> (Sorry mom We’re closed for the redecoration)	10
	Others	RFF+STO	<i>āghā bebaxshid poshtam be shomās</i> (excuse me sir, I m sitting in front of you)	26
Total				119

This study also investigated the linguistic patterns in Persian apologies which are indicators of sub-function of ‘shaping the role relationship’. Some of these indicators have been presented in the following table

Table 4. Indicators of shaping the role relationship in Persian apologies

Sub-function	Indicator	Example	Frequency	
Shaping the role relationship	Pronominal substitution	<i>-Bande</i> (slave)	21	
	(in)formal register	Verbal substitution	<i>-zahmat dadān</i> (to bother) <i>-tashrif āvordan</i> (to come) <i>-ejāze dādan</i> (to allow)	50
		Tu-vous system	<i>-shomā</i> (Plural you) <i>Bebaxshid</i> (forgive me)	75
	Address form	<i>-āqa</i> (sir) <i>-ābji</i> (sister)	28	
Total			174	

As the table 4 shows 174 different indicators of the phatic sub-function of shaping the role relationship has been used in Persian apologies. In the following section the results will be analyzed and discussed.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Analysis of the data revealed that the Apologies found in the corpus were used both in head act and adjunct to head act positions (see Afghari, 2007). Most of the apologies with phatic function had formulaic structures such as *rāzi be zahmate shomā nabudam* (I did not want to trouble you). Besides these conventional utterances, there were non-conventional apologies which based on the indicators used in uttering them as well as the situation in which they were used could be interpreted as phatic.

Despite of the fact that the preparatory condition of apology (Searle, 1969; Link & kreuz, 2005), was violated in all cases, the intensifier *xeili* (very much) such as in *xeili zahmat keshidin* (we bothered you very much) was used in 25 apologies. Besides as table 3 shows 26 out of the 119 apologies were in combination which shows that the interlocutors in the movies emphasized on the content of their apologies. It shows that phatic function of apologies relies more on the contextual factors rather than linguistic strategies.

Result of the study showed that *bebaxshid* (request for forgiveness) were used in 47 apologies. It confirmed the previous studies (Afghari, 2007; Shariati & Chamani, 2010) who believed that this strategy constituted the most frequent strategy in their corpus.

Regarding the indicators of opening sub-function, in some of the cases, the expression *bebaxshid* was proved to be indicator mitigate request/ assertion/ question. This indicator (more specifically as mitigate request) had been previously proposed by Khodaei Moghaddam et al, (2014) to be one of the functions of *bebaxshid* in Persian.

Analysis of the data also revealed that 26 of the indicators of opening sub-function were not proposed by Nord (2008). In this paper, we propose the indicator of *ehterām* for this group of apologies such as in the case of *āghā bebaxshid poshtam be shomās* (excuse me sir, I m sitting in front of you). Koutlaki (2002, p. 1742) equals “*ehterām* to ‘honour’, ‘respect’, ‘esteem’, ‘dignity. The results of Sahragard’s (2003) study suggested that any verbal or non-verbal act performed out of respect can be considered as *ehterām*. By using natural semantic metalanguage (NSM) method, he reflected two components for this concept namely 1) I have to do or say something good to others and 2) if I don’t do it, people can feel something bad (p. 409).

Analysis of the indicators of the sub-function shaping the role relationship revealed that lexical (pronominal and verbal) substitutions occurred in extending apologies with phatic function. Beeman (1986) considers both of these two mechanisms as two core principles of doing *ta’arof*. He argues that in doing *ta’arof*, the speakers put themselves in lower (inferior) position while their addressee will be in higher (superior) position. This kind of inequality includes ‘self-lowering’ and ‘other-raising’ of status will happen temporarily in different settings.

Address forms as well as *tu-vous* forms were also used to indicate the relationship between the speaker and the hearer involved in the conversations. *tu-vous* forms were prominent in pronouns and verbal ending.

This study threw light on the mismatch of form and function of apologies in Persian. Finding of the study indicated that although strategies used in some apologies with phatic function are common with ordinary apologies, they are differentiated by specific indicators of phatic function. In this study we proposed that for analyzing the Persian apologies with phatic function, the indicator of *ehterām* should be added to the list of Nord’s (2008) opening sub-function.

Linguistic and cultural-specific features of phatic communion vary across languages and cultures, Therefore further studies in larger scales should be conducted to analyze the phatic functions of other speech acts to avoid difficulties of interclutlural communication or second language learning.

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