

CULTURAL VALUES AND POLITENESS STRATEGIES IN BRITISH AND PERSIAN FAMILY DISCOURSE

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Abstract

From many perspectives, *politeness* is a universal phenomenon, however, as numerous cross-cultural studies have shown understanding of politeness, as well as politeness norms differ across cultures (e.g. Culpeper, Haugh & Kadar 2017, Leech 2005, 2014, Leech & Larina 2014, Larina 2008, 2009, 2015, Marquez 1999, 2000, Sifianou 1999, among many others). The way people communicate is guided by cultural values which shape their communicative styles. The aim of the study is to explore how the British and Persians understand politeness and how British and Persian cultural values shape the style of interpersonal interactions in the family setting. We analyse the norms and politeness strategies focusing on a few speech acts which are regularly performed in everyday interactions, namely addressing, asking for request, thanking and complimenting. The material for the study was taken from a socio-cultural questionnaire and discourse completion test (DCT) filled in by 100 British and Persian objects as well as ethnographic observations. It was analysed drawing on (Im)Politeness theory, speech act theory, cross-cultural pragmatic and discourse analysis, research on identity construction and the impact of politeness on communicative styles. Our findings confirm that in British culture, privacy, distance and equality are highly valued, while, in Persian culture, people value greatly closeness, age and status. The findings have shown that while the style of children-parents interactions in British context is quite egalitarian and children treat their parents as equals which evidences a low power distance in the British society, in Persian culture there are significant differences between communicative styles in top-down and bottom-up contexts which manifest a considerable index of power distance in the Persian society. This research highlights that norms are negotiable and changeable across cultures and that linguistic politeness strategies are embedded in cultural context and ideologies of conduct.

Keywords: politeness, impoliteness, values, British lingua-culture, Persian lingua-culture, family discourse, communicative style

1. INTRODUCTION

Politeness is a fundamental feature of communication among people, which nowadays attracts a great interest of scientists from various fields, such as sociolinguistics, pragmatics, discourse analysis, intercultural communication and others. Primarily, the main theories of politeness concentrated on illuminating politeness within a particular culture and then, on comparing politeness forms and practices cross-culturally.

Brown & Levinson's (1987) politeness theory based on the notions of face, face-threatening acts and politeness strategies, has given an impetus to politeness research with the focus on the performance of speech acts through interactions. However, among the numerous criticisms of Brown and Levinson's view of politeness, there was a lack of social, cultural, historical, and contextual perspectives. Norms of politeness are characterized by regional, class and gender variations which are permanently reflected in interactions among people. These variations in politeness norms between different cultures lead to questions about

intercultural politeness study field in contrast to the research of popular cross-cultural politeness. (Feng, 2017)

From many perspectives, politeness is indeed a universal phenomenon. This phenomenon as an accepted social norm could be viewed in all cultures. According to Leech (2005), politeness shows itself in distinctive terms in different languages or cultures. But if there were not a common pattern shared by distinctive languages or cultures, applying a word like “politeness” or “face” to distinctive cultures would be meaningless (Leech, 2005). Furthermore, Leech defines politeness as “communicative altruism”, explaining that to be polite is “to speak or behave in such a way as to (appear to) give benefit or value not to yourself but to the other person(s), especially the person(s) you are conversing with” (Leech 2014: 3).

However, despite universal nature of politeness, the actual showing of politeness, the ways through which, representatives of different cultures realize politeness and also the standards with which they judge the (im)polite behaviors differ among cultures. These differences emerge from the original notion of politeness in distinctive cultural contexts. Different cultures cause various perspectives of values and standards which impress the politeness criteria and result in diversities in different aspects (Huang, 2008). As numerous cross-cultural researches have proven, despite universal character of politeness, this phenomenon is culture-specific (e.g. Culpeper, Haugh & Kadar 2017, Haugh & Chang 2019, Leech 2005, 2014, Leech & Larina 2014, Larina 2008, 2009, 2015, Locher & Larina 2019, Marquez 1999, 2000, Rhee 2019, Reiter 1999, 2000; Sifianou 1992, Tzanne & Sifianou 2019, among many others). Differences in social relations and cultural values shape culture-specific understanding of politeness. Blum-Kulka asserts that “systems of politeness manifest a culturally filtered interpretation of interaction” (Blum-Kulka 1992: 195).

Politeness is a culturally constructed concept. Watts (2003) claims that the lexemes *polite* and *politeness* and the terms matching them in other languages may vary in meaning and connotations associated with them (Watts 2003: 14). The conceptualization of politeness also differs across cultures. In Britain it is mostly associated with consideration of others, good manners and linguistic etiquette, based on keeping distance and respecting other’s privacy, while in Greece and Russia with consideration of others through kindness, warmth and friendliness (see Sifianou 1992, Larina 2009, 2020).

The aim of this study is to explore how British and Persian understanding of politeness and polite behaviour differ and how British and Persian cultural values guide communicative behaviour and shape the style of interpersonal interactions. We limited ourselves to the study of the family discourse and explore the norms and politeness strategies in a few speech acts which are regularly performed in everyday interactions, namely asking for request, thanking, and complimenting. First, we will discuss some theoretical issues concerning culture and communication. Further we will present some preliminary results of our research focused on the British and Persian values, understanding of politeness and their impact on everyday interactions in the family context.

2. CULTURE AND COMMUNICATION

The key concept in understanding behavioral differences resulting from differences of backgrounds is culture (Guirdham 1999: 48). This is a subject which has attracted a great amount of attention in both the communication as well as the management literature. There are many and distinct definitions of culture. As early as 1952, Kroeber and Kluckhohn analyzed 160 definitions of this concept and reached to this conclusion that the definitions could be placed into six major categories established on the emphasis given by the author of the definition. A synthesis of all these definitions was summarized into one exclusive definition:

Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts, the essential core of culture consists of traditional (that is historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values, culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other as conditioned elements of further action (Kroeber and Kluckhohn 1952: 181) (Guirdham 1999)

According to anthropologists, the distinction should be made between *Surface culture* and *Deep culture*. *Surface culture* includes the elements which can be perceived by individuals who visit a foreign country by their sensory organs – for instance, different dressing style, dishes or music, gestures and artifacts as well as more exquisite elements such as norms and roles. The elements of this type of culture could be outlined as shared symbols. On the other hand, *Deep culture* is a hidden part of culture which is not accessible directly by the human sensory organs. It includes worldview, language, kinship systems, social organization, as well as other taken-for-granted day-to-day practices which, set a group apart as a distinctive group (Guirdham,

1999: 50).

Cultural factors have considerable impact on communication. The English word “*communication*” is derived from the Latin word “*communicare*” with the meaning of imparting, partaking, sharing or making common. Thus, it means “to share with or to make common, as in giving to another a part or share of your thoughts, hopes, and knowledge” (Jandt 2003:28). Communication and culture are inseparable. As it was stated by Smith (1966), culture is a code we learn and share, and learning and sharing require communication. Jandt (2003) points out the similar ideas, saying that communication can only be understood with an understanding of culture (Jandt 2003: 29). Communication is an element of culture, while culture is a context of communication.

3. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The study pursues three main objectives: (a) to find out how British and Persian understand politeness, (b) to make a comparative social and cultural analysis of British and Persian values which shape the style of interpersonal communication (c) to investigate how these values manifest in interpersonal interactions in the family setting. The data for the analysis were obtained from two questionnaires. The goal of the first questionnaire was to specify and elaborate British and Persian understanding of politeness and reveal the main cultural values on which politeness is based. In the first questionnaire, the British and Persian objects were asked to give definition of politeness, describe a (im)polite person and bring an example of polite and impolite behavior. The questionnaire was sent by email to 100 native British and Persian objects. 32 replies from the British and 30 replies from the Persian respondents came back. The age of the respondents varies from 20 ~ 70 years old. They were British citizens whose native language is English and Iranian citizens whose native language is Farsi. All the representatives are of middle class with the university degree or university students. In both cultural groups we had an equal gender proportion (50% of males and 50% of females).

The second questionnaire was aimed at discursive data collection. It was designed in the form of DCT (Discourse Completion Task). The British and Persian objects were given a short description of eight situations with the specification of the setting and family relationship between the persons and asked to complete the dialogues in a way they find most natural. The questionnaire was designed to elicit requesting, response to request, thanking, response to thanking, and complementing. It has been sent by email to overall 200 native British and Persian people.

As we have not finished the process of empirical data collection, in this paper we will present some preliminary results which we obtained drawing on Politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987, Watts, 2003, Leech 2014), cross-cultural pragmatics (Wierzbicka 2003/1991), and communicative styles theory (Larina 2009, 2015). We focus on the following research questions:

1. How do British and Persian people understand politeness?
2. What cultural values are in the core of British and Persian politeness?
3. How do British and Persian communicative values and politeness strategies manifest in everyday interaction in the family setting and shape British and Persian communicative styles?

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Understanding of Politeness

4.1.1 British Politeness and Values

The analysis of the responses obtained from the British objects show that most of them define politeness as:

- a) showing respect to people in manners and in words
- b) respecting privacy and keeping distance
- c) respecting independency and personal autonomy
- d) respecting equality of rights
- e) being reserved
- f) respecting other people's feelings

Based on the answers, the most emphasized phrases in the British objects' definitions of politeness are:

“having a respectful behaviour and manner toward people” [M/61/London/doctor], “respecting people” [M/47/London/civil engineer], “showing good behavior and manners to people” [F/23/London/student at King’s College London], “treating with respect to others” [F/28/London/French teacher at kindergarten], “showing respect to people” [M/59/London/employee] and “showing a high regard for people” [M/44/London/civil engineer]. Therefore, it could be concluded that British people stress obviously on “showing respect to people”, or, in other words, “treating people with respect” as the most common definition of politeness. Many of the respondents have indicated that to show politeness and to be polite one should say polite words often. In their opinion, saying “please” and “thank you” often in daily conversations shows respect to other people and facilitates social interactions. Among polite words, they also mentioned the apologizing phrase “(I’m) sorry” which is used in many occasions, e.g. “when one interrupts someone”, “when one is late to an appointment” or even “when one has booked a seat on a train or flight and somebody has occupied their place mistakenly”. A careful study of the answers revealed that “(I’m) sorry” to the British is not per se a phrase for apologizing, but also it is a polite behavioral strategy for making respectful social interaction with other people.

A significant number of the British respondents have defined politeness as “respecting people’s privacy and keeping distance”, “respecting people’s personal space” [F/59/London/theater director], and “respecting people’s privacy” [F/31/London/financial accountant at industrial food Co., Ltd.]. They have stated that ignoring people’s privacy is an absolute impolite behavior and manner. Judging by the examples provided by the British participants, British people like to determine and maintain some space as a personal zone around them. They believe that every person is supposed to have a non-observable bubble around him/her which should be respected by others. It means that standing too close and touching someone seems non-appropriate in British culture (except the most intimate situations when someone intends to show his/her closeness, deep and friendly feelings). Such type of behavior is conceived impolite as it contradicts British value of privacy and strong orientation to keeping boundaries of privacy. Therefore, it could be concluded that British people emphasize “keeping people’s privacy” and “NOT breaking the boundaries of others’ personal space” in defining politeness.

Besides, British objects have put emphasis on “respecting independency and personal autonomy” as a definition of politeness which partly coincides with respecting privacy. Based on the British participants’ responses, making an offer to keep someone company, help or give a hand to someone in order to do things together in some situations might be conceived by British people as an impolite behavior. According to the respondents’ statements, the reason lies in the British people’s belief in their own personal abilities, talents, capabilities as well as initiatives. Therefore, receiving such offers from someone might be interpreted as patronizing which draws their independency and autonomy under question and doubt. It might give someone the feeling of lack of competence and inability to arrange personal affairs on their own.

Some of the British respondents have indicated that they view politeness as “respecting equality of rights” as well as “respecting equality of privileges” among individuals in society which reflect one of the most important British cultural values. Thus, British understanding of politeness is seriously characterized as “respecting people” as well as “dignifying people’s individual and social rights”.

As our findings show another characteristic of British politeness refers to “emotions in communication”. A number of the British objects have stated that politeness is “being reserved” and “behaving conservatively” [F/37/London/teacher at high school]. Some of the definitions of politeness were more specific: “being reserved in presenting opinions” [F/40/London/police officer], “being reserved in expressing agreements and disagreements” [F/21/London/ student at London Business School]. Thus, British respondents characterize politeness as “being reserved” and “treating people conservatively in expressing opinions consisting of agreements and disagreements”. They believe that hiding personal feelings as well as NOT displaying their emotional experiences in public is an important characteristic of polite behavior. According to the examples which have been provided by British participants, avoiding crying at funeral as well as guffawing when hearing something funny contribute to the above conclusions. Meanwhile, some of the British objects believe that politeness is “being considerate of other people” and “being considerate of people’s feelings and concerns” [M/35/London/computer engineer], [F/37/London/teacher at high school], [M/42/London/interior designer].

Thus, our results show that the British definitions of politeness are consistent with the English values, including “equality”, “independency”, and “privacy”. In interpersonal interactions, they also value “social etiquette” and “manners” as a manifestation of polite behavior in this culture. In other words, from their perspectives, sticking to social etiquettes constitutes the most principal part of British politeness.

4.1.2 Persian Politeness and Values

The analysis of the Persian objects' responses shows that most of them define politeness as:

- a) respecting elder people
- b) respecting parents and grandparents
- c) honoring persons in a higher status such as teachers and seniors
- d) respecting social etiquettes
- e) maintaining solidarity and keeping contact
- f) being extraverted

Persian people consider "*respecting elder people*" as an absolute definition of politeness. Based on these responses, the most emphasized phrases in the Persian participants' definitions are: "*respecting elder people*" [M/25/Tehran/student at Tehran University], "*having good behavior and manners with elders*" [F/50/Bojnourd/retired teacher from high school], "*honoring elders*" [M/52/Tehran/managing director at Ring Khodro Pars Co., Ltd.] and "*holding elders in a high esteem*" [M/37/Tehran/computer engineer at Mapna Co., Ltd.]. With delving more into the presented definitions of politeness by the Persian objects, we can see that "*respecting elder people*" constitutes the most principal part of politeness in this culture. In fact, Persian people emphasize explicitly the importance of "*treating elder people with great respect*" as an absolute definition of politeness in this culture.

Our findings also show that a significant number of Persian objects have indicated "*respecting parents and grandparents*" as definition of politeness. Here are some examples: "*having a respectful behavior and manner with parents and grandparents*" [F/35/Tehran/nurse at Iranmehr hospital], "*respecting parents and grandparents*" [M/41/Tehran/commercial manager at Golrang Co., Ltd.] and "*holding parents and grandparents in a high regard*" [F/23/Tehran/employee at electrical communications center]. In other expressions, having respectful and honorable behaviors and manners with parents and grandparents have reserved a great part of politeness definitions in this culture.

Since a teacher in Persian culture, as well as in Muslim culture as a whole, is a highly respected person, it was not surprising to see frequently "*respecting teachers and seniors*" as a definition of politeness among the Persian responses. The most typical phrases in these definitions are: "*paying a considerable attention and respect to teachers and seniors*" [F/32/Tehran/commercial expert at Ranas-e Sabz Co., Ltd.], "*treating with respect teachers and seniors*" [F/39/Tehran/French teacher at Shaparak kindergarten] and "*being kind and respecting to teachers and seniors*" [M/48/Tehran/financial expert at insurance Co.]. It is interesting to note that these politeness definitions were not given by schoolchildren or students, but by people of middle age and even older. Indeed, respecting elders (parents, grandparents and also a person in a higher status such as a teacher, senior or boss) constitutes the most principal part of politeness in Persian culture.

As our findings indicate a considerable number of Persian objects have emphasized on "*respecting social etiquettes*" as a definition of politeness. One of the most vivid manifestations of respecting social etiquette among Persian people is enshrined in the specific politeness system which is known as "*Taarof*" in Iran. The participants believe that sticking to this strict Persian politeness system is one of the most important criteria in order to be recognized as a polite person. They explain that "*Taarof*" is a collection of compliments, courtesy, stating kind sentences and treating with great respect to people. In other expressions, "*Taarof*" is standing on ceremonies obsessively.

According to the Persian participants' responses, there are some examples of Iranian "*Taarof*" politeness system. For instance, in an evening gathering, after serving tea and cakes, host(-ess) expresses freely his/her happiness and satisfaction about spending pleasant time with guest(s) and insists persistently on keeping them for dinner. Although host(-ess) had not planned beforehand to keep guest(s) for dinner. This type of manner which in this case has been formed in "*insisting greatly for keeping guest(s) in order to have dinner without previous plan and announcement*" is called "*Taarof*" in Persian culture. As another example, one of the Persian objects has illustrated a situation in which someone asks his/her friend to lend him/her something for instance a favorite book or dress. In such situation, for person who stands on the principles of "*Taarof*" politeness system, even if this demand contradicts his/her personal interests, saying NO and rejecting others' request(s) will not be construed as polite behavior or manner.

The examples above evidence another influential value in interpersonal communication in Persian culture which is "*maintaining solidarity and keeping contact*". The relations are built on the principle of

interdependency which manifests in helping and supporting each other. In this culture, it is totally polite, if you offer to keep somebody company or extending a helping hand towards others in order to do things together. In fact, this type of behavioral orientation in Persian politeness system is conceived as an obvious manifestation of respectful feelings, courtesy and goodwill towards other people. According to the examples mentioned by Persian objects, it is polite, if someone gives food and drink to a new neighbor who has just moved to the building and has not settled down yet. Some examples show that helping a blind person to pass the road, helping a woman to carry a shopping basket or heavy bag, helping someone to patch a flat tire, helping elders to get on or off the bus or train are instances which confirm the above characteristics of politeness in Persian culture

It is also typical of the Persian people to share their problems with others being open and extraverted. As our respondents stated, they are used to holding weekly family gatherings in which their happy experiences as well as problems are discussed. Their happy experiences would give the feelings of satisfactions and pride to their family members while their problems and difficulties would make them aware that their help and advice is needed. Some of them pointed out that holding monthly gatherings of friends has also the same emotional importance for Persian people. This type of Persian behavior refers to one of the most important Persian religious instructions on consulting others especially elders, parents, grandparents or seniors in order to get their advice and find the most logical and practical solution for a problem. This popular type of behavior once again shows that elders – parents, grandparents as well as seniors – are highly appreciated and respected in this culture because of their worthy experiences which have been accumulated over the years. Such behavior is not considered invasion of privacy, but it is viewed as a goodwill, a sincere and cordial token of politeness in this culture. In fact, Persian objects have stressed that they are used to revealing their emotions, both positive and negative, which they experience in their life on occasions of joy and adventures as well as sorrow and grief. Thus, data show that Persian people are totally used to expressing and showing their feelings and emotions explicitly and conventionally. At the same time this is the best strategy for being polite and paying respect to people in this culture.

Summing up we may conclude that Persian politeness involves respecting elder people (parents and grandparents), honouring persons in a higher status (such as teachers and seniors), maintaining solidarity and keeping contact and being extraverted. Therefore, our results show that the Persian definitions of politeness are consistent with the Persian values of “*respect to age and status*”, “*solidarity and contact*” and “*interdependence*”. In interpersonal interactions, they also value “*social etiquette*” as a manifestation of polite behavior. Sticking to social etiquettes specifically Persian strict politeness system as “*Taaroof*” constitutes the one of the most important part of politeness in this culture.

4.2. Family Discourse Analysis

In our analysis of family discourse, we have focused on a few speech acts, which were elicited by the designed situations. These speech acts were requesting, response to requesting, thanking, response to thanking, addressing and complementing. Since the discourse completion test (DCT) is still under filling, here we present some preliminary results which, however, are consistent with our ethnographic observations and the revealed differences in British and Persian politeness. The comparative analysis has showed that in British families the communicative styles in top-down contexts (parents to children) and bottom-up contexts (children to parents) do not reveal significant differences, while in Persian families, the styles of communication in top-down and bottom-up contexts are rather different. We will illustrate this tendency with the examples of requesting and thanking.

Our findings show that request in British families in both asymmetrical contexts are made indirectly through questions with modal verbs (1-2). Imperative form in our data where not used.

- (1) Dad, could you please help me with my homework? (son to his father)
- (2) John, could you please help me to clean the garage this weekend? (father to his son)

However, in Persian families the form of request depends on the context. According to our findings, as well as our ethnographic observations, children addressing their parents perform request indirectly and in an extra polite manner through long indirect utterances (3-4):

- (3) May I ask you to help me with my homework?” (Mishe azatoon bekham dar takalif komakam konid?)
میشه ازتون بخوام در تکالیف کمکم کنید؟
- (4) Could you please do me a favor and give me some money to buy a birthday gift to my friend? (Mishe loft konid va baraye kharide hadiye tavalode doostam pool be man bedin?)

میشه لطف کنید و برای خرید هدیه تولد برای دوستم پول به من بدید؟

Parents in the conversation with children prefer direct style. In most cases their request is formulated without “please” or “may”. It is often made in an imperative form (5-6):

- (5) Your room needs to be tidied up (Otaghet bayad moratab she)
- (6) Tidy your room up. (Otaghet ro tamiz kon)

اتاققت باید مرتب شه.

اتاققتو مرتب کن.

Responses to requests have also revealed some interesting differences. In British families, they are friendly and unofficial as in the situation below in the father’s response to the request of his son for some money for buying a birthday present (7-8):

- (7) Sure. How much do you need?
- (8) I will give you money next week.

According to our data British children responding to their parents’ request can offer an option or even refuse, as for example in the situation of father’s request to clean the garage (9-10).

- (9) Unfortunately, I cannot do it this week as I have planned for a picnic with my friends beforehand.
- (10) Not this week, but next week. Is it OK?

The types of responses to request in Persian families again depend on the context. The responses from parents towards children are friendly as in the situation of request for money for buying a birthday’s present (11), but the responses from children towards parents are more emphatic, as in the situation of request to tidy up the room (12).

- (11) Yes. How much do you need?
- (12) Sure. I will do it by all means.

باشه. چقدر پول نیاز داری؟

چشم. سریع انجام میدهم.

Responding to their parents’ request Persian children demonstrate less independence and more obedience to their parents in comparison with their British counterparts. Instead of negotiating their parents’ request, they demonstrate their permanent willingness to immediately react to it. As our results show, they often use the word “*chasm*” which is a polite affirmative word in the Persian language for showing respect to someone as soon as performing his/her request(s) without hesitation.

Another situation which also manifests some stylistic differences between British and Persian family discourses, is thanking. Here we can also observe some culture-specific differences. As our findings show, in British families, thanking from parents towards children and from children towards parents is performed more or less with the same frequency and in the same way. Meanwhile, in Persian culture, it is not so conventional that parents thank their children frequently and when they do so, their thanking of children is very short and simple as in the situation of thanking for tidying up the room (13). Children, by contrast, thank their parents frequently, elaborately and intensively in order to show their politeness to parents as in the situations of getting help with homework as well as getting the money for buying a birthday’s present (14-16).

- (13) That’s ok. Good
- (14) It is really kind of you.
- (15) Thank you very much. It shows your kindness.

باشه. خوبه.

واقعا محبت می کنید.

خیلی ممنونم. این مهربونی شما رو می رسونه.

- (16) Do not mention it. It was my duty (ghabeli nadare. Vazifam bood.)

قابلی نداره. وظیفم بود.

To intensify their gratitude to parents for their kindness, Persian children use complimentary polite phrases such as “that is really kind of you”, “how could I appreciate you”, “it shows your favour” and “you are always kind to me” (in vaghean mehrabani shomaro neshoon mide, chetor mitoonam mohabatetoono jobran konam, in lotf shomast, shoma hamishe be man mohabat darid).

این واقعا مهربونی شمارو نشون میده، چطور میتونم محبتتونو جبران کنم، این لطف شماست، شما همیشه به من محبت دارید.

In this way Persian children emphasize their respect to parents

5. CONCLUSION

In this paper we explored British and Persian concepts of politeness. We aimed at highlighting how British and Persian understand politeness, what cultural values shape this understanding and explore how communicative values and politeness strategies manifest in everyday interactions in the family setting. For that purpose, we designed two questionnaires (a sociocultural one and a discourse completion task) which provided us with empirical data.

Our findings obtained through contrastive analysis have shown that British understanding of politeness include: (a) showing respect to people in manners and in words, (b) respecting privacy and keeping distance, (c) respecting independency and personal autonomy, (d) respecting equality of rights, (e) being reserved, (f) respecting other people’s feelings. These characteristics of politeness are consistent with the English values, including “equality”, “independence”, “privacy and distance”. Persian understanding of politeness consists of: (a) respecting elder people, (b) respecting parents and grandparents, (c) honouring persons in a higher status (such as teachers and seniors), (d) following social etiquettes, (e) maintaining solidarity and keeping contact, (f) being extraverted. These characteristics of politeness are consistent with the Persian values of “respect to age and status”, “solidarity and contact” and “interdependence”.

The discursive analysis of everyday interactions in the family setting has provided us with interesting results, which confirm that in communicative behaviour people are guided by their cultural values and notion of politeness. The findings have shown that while the style of children-parents interactions in British context is quite egalitarian and children treat their parents as equals which evidences a low power distance index (Hofstede 1991) in British society, in Persian culture there are significant differences in communicative styles in top-down and bottom-up contexts which manifest considerable power distance in Persian society. In Persian families children apply more formal speech acts towards parents, their style is more indirect and elaborate. To show respect towards their parents and being polite, they use longer complimentary utterances and emphasize great respect and gratitude to parents. This type of behavioral tendency in Persian culture emerges from Persian religion and belief that parents are to be highly respected and appreciated.

Thus, our findings is another confirmation of Anna Wierzbicka’s statements: “(1) In different societies, and different communities, people speak differently. (2) These differences in ways of speaking are profound and systematic. (3) These differences reflect different cultural values, or at least different hierarchies of values. (4) Different ways of speaking, different communicative styles, can be explained and made sense of, in terms of independently established different cultural values and cultural priorities”. (Wierzbicka 2003: 69).

In this paper we presented our preliminary results. In order to have more detailed results, concerning preferable politeness strategies and features of communicative styles in British and Persian lingua-cultures we are going to continue our qualitative as well as quantitative analysis.

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