

Conversational Maxim View of Politeness: Focus on Politeness Implicatures Raised in Performing Persian Offers and Invitations

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Abstract—This study reviewed the criticisms against Brown and Levinson's (1987) claim about necessity of violation of cooperative principles (CP) in giving rise to politeness implicatures. To support these critiques, evidences from Persian offers and invitations were provided from the texts of 10 Iranian movies. As no alternative framework for analysing the content of these implicatures has been proposed so far, the researchers adopted two politeness principles namely 'tact' and 'generosity' maxims as well as the cost-benefit and directness-indirectness scales proposed by Leech (1983) to fill this gap in the area of Persian pragmatics. The results of this study showed that both generosity and tact maxims are the main reasons behind both direct and indirect offers and invitations. Besides, the results showed that cost-benefit scale can explain the politeness implicatures raised in performing these speech acts better than directness-indirectness scale.

Index Terms—politeness implicature, offer, invitation Cooperative Principles (CP), Politeness Principles (PP), Brown and Levinson's theory, Leech's theory

I. BACKGROUND OF STUDY

Since the speech act theory has been postulated by Austin (1962) and refined by Searle (1969), it has been used in wider context in linguistics for the purpose of explaining the language use. However, two stronger discussions come from the arguments about 'universality versus cultural specificity' and 'directness vs. indirectness' of speech acts. Although, the former was important in investigation of these elements, it was not foci of attention as much the latter among the scholars. As O'keeffe, et al. (2011, p. 84) argue the notion of directness and indirectness and the literal and intended meaning have been a chief concern dealt within speech act theory. The common question among these studies is "how indirectness of speech acts is disambiguated in the mind of interlocutors?"

After Austin and Searle, other breakthrough in pragmatics was by the third of trio of philosophers Grice. This Oxford philosopher introduced 'co-operative principles' (CP) and 'implicature' as means of investigating the 'implied meaning' of 'indirect' utterances. Implicature is derived from the verb 'to imply'. As Mey (2001, p. 45) argues etymologically, 'to imply' means to fold something into something else (from the Latin verb *plicare* 'to fold') and implicature refers to something which is left implicit in actual language use.

Grice (1975) postulated that speaker (S) can signal the implicature conventionally (directly) or non-conventionally (indirectly) to the hearer (H). In conventional implicatures, textual resources like conjunctions (*therefore, because, in spite of, etc.*) and grammatical structures (which are conventionally understood) are applied to signal certain relationships between propositions (Baker, 1992, p. 224). For instance in 'it's money that they want' the grammatical structure itself presupposes what is expressed in the subordinate clause, in this case 'they want something' (ibid). On the other hand, for signalling the meaning of non-conventional implicature (conversational implicature) by S and its interpretation by listener, Grice (1975) postulated a set of rules called 'cooperative principles' (CP) (also known as Gricean maxims) namely those of 'quality', 'quantity', 'relevance' and 'manner' which help the interlocutors to work out the conversational implicatures. Based on Grice's (1975) theory, in performing direct speech act, interlocutors observe all these maxims. As Levinson (1983, p. 101) puts it, "these maxims specify what participants have to do in order to converse in a maximally efficient, rational, co-operative way: they should speak sincerely, relevantly, and clearly, while providing sufficient information". However by performing indirect speech acts, interlocutors 'violate' one or more CP in order to give rise to 'conversational implicature'.

In the mid 1970s, the focus of attention within pragmatics switched from attempts to explain ‘how’ language users interpret indirectness of pragmatic meaning towards an explanation of ‘why’ Ss use indirectness at all (Leech and Thomas, 1990, p. 193). To date, the most frequent explanation for being indirect has been the notion of ‘politeness’. There have been many approaches to politeness postulated by many scholars. Some of the main approaches to politeness are social-norm view (normative view of politeness) (Fraser, 1990), the conversational-contract view (Fraser & Nolan, 1981), face-saving view (Brown and Levinson, 1978, 1987) and conversational-maxim view (Lakoff (1973), Leech (1983)). As Fraser (1990) argues, first Lakoff (1973) adopted Gricean maxims in her work to account for politeness and she initially established the foundations of applying CP in explaining this phenomena. After her, in two politeness theories of Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) and Leech (1983) ‘speech acts’ were used as the main elements of analysis of ‘politeness’ was by itself considered as a reason for violation of CP and giving rise to ‘politeness implicature’ (implicature instances where by virtue of implying something politeness arises). These two theories will be investigated in the next sections.

A. Face-saving View of Politeness

Grice’s assumptions about CP and implicature are regarded as building blocks in politeness theory postulated by Brown and Levinson (1987). Similar to Grice, B&L view communication as a ‘rational activity’ and assume that the nature of talk is based on a rational and efficient foundation that a maximal exchange of information is achieved through communication. Brown and Levinson (B&L) believed that the deviation from CP and giving rise to implicature are done by motivation of ‘politeness’ which is regarded as a rational reason for the S’s irrationality or inefficiency.

By expanding the Goffman’s (1955) notion of ‘face’, B&L distinguished between two kinds of face namely that of ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ faces referring to ‘the positive social value’ and ‘the basic claim to freedom of action and freedom from imposition’ respectively. B&L (1978) constructed their theory of politeness on the premise a set of speech acts called as ‘face-threatening acts’ (FTAs) are intrinsically ‘threatening’ to both positive and negative faces of both H and S. B&L (1987, p. 65-67) categorized a number of super strategies (together with their sub-strategies) of politeness which mitigate the threats that FTAs may have for S or H. These politeness strategies are 1) ‘bald-on record’, 2) ‘positive politeness’, 3) ‘negative politeness’, and 4) ‘off –record’ politeness. The more the FTA threatens S’s or H’s face, the more S will want to choose a higher-numbered strategy (1987, p. 60). Based on their theory, for achieving maximally efficient communication, interlocutors try to observe CP which characterizes rationality of interlocutors and their efficiency of their message. Observing all these CP (maxims) entails being ‘direct’ which is implemented in bald on-record strategy while doing FTA with the rest of three politeness strategies raise politeness implicature due to deviation of CP. B&L (1987, p. 57) state that ‘implicatures of politeness’ would presumably arise in the same way that all implicatures do, namely, on the assumption that what S said was relevant (maximized information pertinent to the context), certain (polite) presumptions would have to be made.

Similar to any theory, B&L’s was not without criticism. One orientation of criticism addresses the notion of ‘politeness implicature’. There exists a series of criticisms on B&L’s claim about necessity of CP violation in raising politeness implicature. Among them, Pfister (2010) in his article “*Is there a need for a maxim of politeness?*” explores whether politeness is to be seen merely as a reason for apparent deviation from conversational maxims and argues that “an utterance is polite even though there is no implicature of politeness” (p.1270). He considers maxim of politeness similar to maxim of quantity and relevance on the ground that it allows for degree and considers it as a continuum. One of the examples by which Pfister is as follows:

[1]

A: *Look, it is sunny!*

B: *You need not take an umbrella with you.*

Pfister argues that in this example S strongly dislikes to go out because the weather is not known yet. Although he has observed all conversational maxims, he implicates “I am sensitive to your desire of not going outside when it is raining”. In this utterance, S wants to be in conformity with the politeness maxim by implicating his desire not to go out when it is raining”. Supporting other scholars, Pfister maintains that ‘politeness maxim’ is needed to explain the ‘content’ of such implicatures which cannot be explained by the definition of politeness implicature in B&L’s theory.

B&L’s claim about correspondence of indirectness (violation of CP) and politeness in giving rise to politeness implicature is criticized by other scholars such as Gu (1990). He argues that formulaic entreaties like *excuse/ forgive/ pardon me* in which bald on-record strategies (in which indirectness are absent) are regarded as polite utterances in Chinese. Discussing about Persian invitations and offers, Eslami-Rasekh (2005, p. 203) also argues “the more forceful and direct you are, the more polite it is”. This reality is completely reverse to what B&L claims about the correspondence of indirectness and politeness.

Review of criticisms against universality of B&L’s framework in investigation of politeness implicature revealed that CP postulated by Grice are not sufficient in explaining politeness implicatures in all cases and in all languages. In the next section, another pragmatic politeness theory proposed by Leech in which speech acts was the unit of analysis of politeness implicature will be focused.

B. Conversational-maxim View of Politeness (Leech, 1983)

Although the theory of implicature played an influential role in analysing the intended meaning of speech acts, it was questioned by many critiques such as Lakoff (1973), Leech (1983), Kingwell (1993), Davis (1998), Kallia (2007), Pfister (2010), etc. for the lack of explaining the ‘reason’ behind being indirect in utterance and also lack of maxim of ‘politeness’ among other maxims. Grice himself in his work argued that maxim of politeness should be added to CP; however, he did not explain it. He wrote:

There are, of course, all sorts of other maxims (aesthetic, social, or moral in character), such as “be polite” that are also normally observed by participants in talk exchanges, and these may also generate nonconventional implicature (Grice, 1975, p. 47)

The objections to CP have been on the ground that they cannot be regarded as evidence of real language use. For example, Larkin and O’Malley (1973) argue that conversational constraints such as those of the CP do not work because the majority of declarative sentences do not have information-bearing functions. Keenan (1974) is among those critiques that reject universality of CP as he believes that there are many communities in which CP cannot be applied. By contrast, Leech (1983) comes to defend CP and maintains that no claims have been made that the CP apply in an identical manner to all societies (p. 80). However, despite of his supporting of Grice’s CP, Leech postulates that CP in itself cannot explain why people are often so indirect in conveying what they mean (1983, p. 79). Thus, for compensating the insufficiency of CP in investigating this indirectness, he postulated a set of politeness maxims or principles (PP) namely those of ‘tact’, ‘generosity’, ‘approbation’, ‘agreement’ and ‘sympathy’.

According to Ogiemann (2009, p. 10) “PP is seen as the reason why a particular content or form is preferred over another”. It is important to note that based on what Leech believes PP is not just an ‘additional’ maxim added to CP, rather it is regarded as a necessary complement which rescues the CP from serious trouble. He argues in being polite one is often faced with clash between the CP and PP so that one has to choose how far to ‘trade off’ one against the other (p. 83)

As Leech (1983, p. 16) maintains “cooperation and politeness are largely regulative factors which ensure that one conversation is under way and it will not follow a fruitless or disruptive path”; however, he maintains that “PP has higher regulative role than CP: to maintain the social equilibrium and the friendly relations which enable us to assume that our interlocutors are being cooperative” (p. 82). Leech (1983, p. 105) explained how politeness affects the Searle’s (1969) speech acts by explaining his classification of illocutionary functions which as he believes are associated with PP. His proposed illocutionary functions are competitiveness (impositives), convivial, collaborative and conflictives. Leech believes that the first two categories related to politeness, while last two categories are neutrally polite and impolite respectively. The following table shows the correspondence of Leech’s categories of illocutionary functions with Searle’s (1969):

TABLE 1.
CORRESPONDENCE OF LEECH’S (1983) CATEGORIES OF ILLOCUTIONARY FUNCTIONS WITH SEARLE’S (1969) SPEECH ACTS

Leech’s Illocutionary Functions	Searle’s speech acts	Politeness Principles
Competitives (Impositives)	Directives: recommend, order, request, advice, invitation (added by Leech)	Tact, Generosity
Convivials	Commissives: Promise, vow, offer, refusal Expressives: thank, congratulate, pardon, blame, compliment, condole	Tact, Generosity Approbation, Sympathy
Collaboratives	Assertives: claim, boast, complain, suggest, state	-
Conflictives	Declaratives: threaten, accuse, reprimand	-

Leech not only investigates ‘how’ polite a given illocution is, but ‘why’ a particular device contributes to a particular illocutionary goal. He believes that tact and generosity maxims deal with cost-benefit scale. He defined these two maxims as follow:

Tact maxim: (a) minimizes cost to other (hearer) or third party), (b) maximizes benefit to other

Generosity maxim: (a) minimizes benefit to self (speaker), (b) maximizes cost to self.

As the table 1 shows Leech maintains that Searle’s ‘directives’ (impositives in his word) and ‘commissives’ are performed for upholding these maxims. Based on this scale, the utterance “*have another sandwich*” upholds tact maxims while “*peel the potato*” violates it.

The other scale he proposed is directness-indirectness scale. He believes that the degree of indirectness correlates with the degree to which H is allowed the option of not performing the intended action, e.g. answering phone. Leech believes negating statement like ‘*would n’t you?*’ and ‘*could n’t you?*’ are intentionally used more than *would you* and *can you* in polite conversations in English. As forms which implies the denial of a positive proposition persuades the addressee to do the action. As an example he believes that CP can be violated at the sake of upholding tact maxims and leads to politeness implicature i.e. ‘S is tactful’. Although (similar to B/L’s theory (1983)) in his theory Leech draws on the notion of indirectness in raising politeness implicatures, he argues the content of the ‘direct’ polite speech acts in explaining the politeness implicature. To support his idea, he maintains that in some cases of observing tact maxim in English language, S may use direct illocution rather than indirect illocution in order to put H in the position to not say ‘no’. This is the reverse idea with Brown and Levinson who believe that politeness will not be raised in the case of direct speech acts. Leech (1983) believes that in proposing the action which is beneficial to H, S will operate an

illocution toward the positive outcome by restricting H to say ‘no’. This kind of illocution (offers, invitation, etc) has persuasive emphasis to give benefit to H. The example Leech sets is “*you must have another sandwich*”.

Although the form and function of Persian offers and invitations have been sporadically studied in the area of interlanguage pragmatics and intercultural studies (Eslami-Rasekh, 2005; Salmani Nadoushan, 2005; Allami, 2007) no study has been conducted which investigates the politeness implicatures raised in performing these speech acts. Although Iranian ritual politeness system (*ta’arof*) and the notion of Persian face (*aberu*) were the focus of attention of some studies (Koutelaki, 2002; Sharifian, 2007) in which they criticized the universality of Brown and Levinson’s (1987) politeness theory, however, to date, no study has discussed (in) applicability of this theory or violation of CP in explaining politeness implicatures in performing Persian speech acts. Furthermore, no alternative pragmatic politeness theories have been developed for discussing how these implicatures are inferred in the context. Thus, this study sets out to fill these gaps in the field of Persian pragmatics. The conceptual framework and the methodology applied in this study will be explained in the following section.

II. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

In this study, politeness implicatures raised in performing Persian invitations and offers were analyzed. To this aim, Leech’s concept of tact and generosity maxims (cf. Table 1) were adopted to explain the reasons behind giving rise to politeness implicatures in performing these two speech acts.

Based on the previous works (Gu, 1990; Pfister, 2010), we hypothesized that using both direct and indirect invitations and offers give rise to implicatures in Persian. Therefore the researchers identified both direct and indirect offers and invitations.

The conceptual framework in identification of these elements was Allami’s (2007). Allami used this framework for the identification of Persian offers and argued that the framework itself was a combination of the schemes used by House and Kasper (1981) and Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) in the identification of request. The reason behind the adoption of Allami’s framework for invitation was that both invitation and offers are considered as types of request.

The corpus of the study included 52 Persian offers and 76 invitations collected from 10 Iranian movies made between the years 1390 (2011) and 1393 (2014). The reason behind this choice was the themes of the films which were establishment and maintenance of interpersonal relationships and also abundances of offers and invitations.

III. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The result of the study revealed that violation of CP cannot be determining criteria for explaining politeness implicatures raised in performing Persian invitations and offers. This idea can be supported by evidences of direct invitations from the corpus. Here is an example:

[1]

Context: B (he guest) is about to leave the party while A (the host) tries to insist on B to stay for dinner

- A: *Kojā hālā sare shabe xanum? Ye xorde bishtar bemunid*
Where now on night-is lady? A bit more stay-you-PL
(Where do you go? It’s so early to leave now madam. Please stay longer)
[*ye qazāye kārgari peidā mishe dore ham boxorim*]
A food labour find will be around each eat-we
(We can provide a simple food to eat together)
- B: [*In harfā chie? Be zahmat mioftin*]
This words what is? to effort fall-you-PL
(don’s say that. We will bother you)
- A: [*E shab mimundin dige*]
eh night stay-you-PL too
(Oh, please Stay tonight)
- B: [*Bazām miāym pishetun*]
Again too come-we to-you
(We will come to visit you again)
- A: [*Man nemizāram ke shomā shām naxorde berin*]
I not-I that you-PL dinner not-eaten go-you-PL
(I don’t allow you to go without dinner)

In Persian, invitations and offers, as important polite speech acts should be performed with maximum efficiency in order to avoid the addressee to think that the invitation is insincere or not genuine. In this example, although the host uses direct speech acts “*I don’t allow you to go without dinner*”, by uttering which CP violation has not occurred, politeness implicatures ‘A is tactful’ or ‘A is generous’ will be generated in the mind of B as based on the definition of tact and generosity maxims by Leech, A maximizes benefit to B or A maximizes cost to self respectively. Lack of CP violation in this example confirms the Pfister (2012) arguments about insufficiency of investigation of CP in investigation of politeness implicature.

Analysis of the data revealed that in performing direct offers interlocutors uphold tact and generosity maxims without violation of CP. Here is an example of direct offer extracted from the corpus:

[2]

Context: A is an old lady who is the host and is offering fruits to her guest (B).

-A:
 [bāyad yek portoqāl boxorid]
 must one orange eat-you-PL
 (You have the authority, I did not see (you eating), you must have one orange
 [porteqālāsh abdāreh]
 oranges its juice are
 (the oranges are juicy)
 -B:
 [Xeili mamnoon, chashm]
 Very indebted eye
 (Thanks a lot, ok)

In this example, although A is using direct offer ‘you must have one orange’, the politeness implicature ‘A is tactful/ generous’ is raised in the mind of B. This example supports Leech’s idea of beneficial speech acts which are performed directly (cf. Section 1.2).

Based on the analysis of the data, the researchers concluded that politeness implicatures are raised in performing Persian indirect offers and invitations as well. This may happen when S makes negative statement/ question which will put the addressee in a situation in which saying no is difficult. Here is one example of an indirect:

[3]:

A is a poor old woman who is invited to a luxurious party. She brought her simple food to the party and insists the other guests (including B and C) to try her food first.

-A: [Shomā az in shāmi-ha-ye man ne-mixorin?
 You-PL from this kebab-s-of I not-eat-you-PL
 (won’t you eat these kebabs I made?)
 [xeili tamiz doros kard-am dastam pāk boode]
 very clean make did-I hands-I clean was-it
 (I made it in a clean way, my hands were clean)
 -B: [Daste shomā dard nakone,
 Hand you-PL pain not-have-it
 (thank you)
 [daspozte mash maryam harf nadare]
 cooking mash maryam word not-have-it
 (Thank you, Maryam’s cooking is great)
 -C: [Bale]
 Yes
 (Definitely!)
 -A: [Naxordin gozāshthin kenāre boshqābātan]
 Not-eat-you-PL Put-you-PL beside plate-s-you-PL
 (You have n’t taken yet, you have put them in your plates)
 -C: [Mixorim]
 Eat-we
 (We will take)

In this conversation A uses negative statements such as “won’t you eat these kebabs I made?”, etc. in order to persuade the guests to eat them. Leech explains why negative questions like *won’t you* are more polite than positive question than *will you* in offers. Leech believes that the negative question is a question about a negative proposition, which itself implies the denial of a positive proposition. The intended meaning of A’s utterances can be spelled out as follows: ‘I hope and expect you to help yourself with my kebabs, but it appears you do not like them as you have put them in your plates, is it really so?’ Leech calls such statements ‘disbelief in that belief’ as a way of showing politeness (tactfulness) to persuade the H to i.e. accept the offer. In this example the maxims of quality and quantity have been violated for the sake of upholding tact maxim and consequently politeness implicature raised in the mind of B and C is ‘A is a tactful’.

Means-end analysis of the politeness implicature raised in performing offers and invitations has been given below:

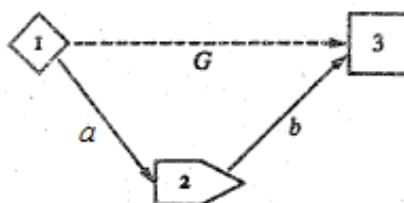


Figure 1: Politeness Implicatures Raised in Performing Offers and Invitations

- 1: Initial state: A wants B to accept the offer/ invitation
- 2: B and C understand that A is polite (The offer gives rise to the implicature ‘A is tactful/ generous)
- 3: B and C considers A as polite/generous

- G: Goal of attaining (B and C consider A as polite /generous person)
 a: A's action of offer/ invitation
 b: B's acceptance of offer

IV. CONCLUSION

Analysis of these three examples showed that violation of CP cannot be criteria for analysing politeness implicatures in performing Persian offers and invitation. In other words, despite of B & L 's claim about correspondence of indirectness and politeness, the researchers came to this result that both direct and indirect invitations and offers give rise to politeness implicature in Persian.

From the analysis of the data, the researchers concluded that Persian offers and invitations are performed to uphold PP. This can occur with/ without violation of CP.

To the best knowledge of the researchers, no one has applied Leech's (1983) theory in investigation of politeness implicature raised in performing Persian speech acts. Result of the study revealed that this theory is more applicable in analysing these implicatures. Besides, The result showed that although directness-indirectness scale can be applicable in analyzing the degree of politeness in Persian, Leech's cost-benefit scale is more suitable for explaining the content of these implicatures.

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