

Original Article

**Politeness on Instagram: The Employment of Gratitude Speech Act by
Male and Female English and Persian Users**

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Abstract

The present research scrutinized the use of politeness strategies in gratitude expressions of English and Persian users of Instagram. For that purpose, 200 gratitude posts were collected, 100 of which belonged to English users and the other 100 posts were composed by Persian users of Instagram. This investigation also evaluated gender roles in the production of gratitude utterances. Seeking to discover the politeness patterns for each language on Instagram, the data were analyzed based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) taxonomy of positive and negative politeness strategies. The findings suggested some differences in the use of the second (Exaggeration), the fourth (Use of in-group identity markers), and seventh (Presuppose/raise/assert common ground) positive politeness strategies, and the seventh negative politeness strategy (Impersonalizing the speaker and the hearer) between the English and Persian users which might be due to some existent cultural transfer, and regarding the gender investigation, no significant differences were observed between females and males of each language. This is indicative of the idea that Instagram has turned into a distinguished genre of language possessing certain features such as gender-free, direct, and intimate language.

Keywords: Computer-mediated communication, Gender, Gratitude, Instagram, Politeness strategies

1. Introduction

Social networks have progressively turned into the main means of communication worldwide. As Chapelle (2003) put it, such technological instruments are means for taking a record of the language users' interactions. Despite their being suitable sources to gather natural data, social applications have not been utilized comprehensively in linguistic and pragmatic studies (Chapelle, 2003).

Considered recently as a new genre of language (Herring, 2015), the social networking sites have been rarely scrutinized within the field of linguistics (Dynel, 2015). As a well-known and popular mobile application, Instagram enjoys millions of users worldwide. Quite similar to other social network applications, it can be discerned as an accommodating source of input for language-center research, because it includes an enormous amount of linguistically natural data. It seems that speech acts, due to their frequent usage within such social contexts, lend themselves well to be scrutinized in such applications. Due to far-ranging use and popularity of this application among people as well as the availability of an abundant range of natural data for research, the Instagram mobile application was utilized for the purpose of data collection.

Gratitude, as one of the speech acts, is the sense of being thankful in response to a received gift which might not be necessarily tangible; it can be evoked for either a moment of bliss or benefit. Brown and Levinson (1987) asserted that certain expressions of gratitude may connote different notions in one language which might be absent in the pragmatic patterns of other languages.

Adding a new consideration of the nature of speech acts, Leech (1983) perceived politeness as a way to evaluate the speech acts and deemed them from a politeness perspective. For Brown and Levinson (1987), politeness is the attempt the speakers make in order to establish, save, and maintain face during a conversation. They classified politeness under two categories; positive and negative politeness. Positive politeness, in accordance to Brown and Levinson (1987), refers to the redress directed to the hearer's positive *face wants*, while negative politeness is the redressive action directed at the addressee's negative face.

Gender differences concern another aspect to view the use of politeness strategies within gratitude expressions. As it was raised by several studies (Brown, 1993; Kashdan, Mishra, Breen, & Froh, 2009; Ye, Hashim, Baghirov, & Murphy, 2017), females tend to

deploy more *polite* language in comparison to males even within the context of social networking sites. Discerning the language of each gender in social media, this study seeks to observe the choice of politeness strategies deployed by both male and female genders. The reason for including the exploration of gender differences in this study is to discover whether politeness strategies are deployed in the same way by females and males in Instagram, and to shed light on the style and type of strategies used by each gender. In general, it seeks to have a more comprehensive investigation of politeness within the inconstant and fluctuant language of CMC (computer-mediated communication).

Speech acts and their interpretations are culture-bound (Cutting, 2005) and they must be considered separately for each language. Therefore, the current study is a contrastive study comparing the discourse structure of gratitude speech act in English and Persian languages considering the type of positive and negative politeness strategies on Instagram. It focuses on those gratitude expressions which contain politeness connotation in accordance with Brown and Levinson's (1987) categorization of politeness strategies. Although some criticisms have been levelled against Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, it is still deemed as the most reliable way to compare politeness patterns of several cultures. In fact, the framework has been approved by several leading figures. For instance, Kasper (1994) states that the politeness theory of Brown and Levinson (1987) satisfies the criteria for empirical theories, such as explicitness, parsimony, and predictiveness. Janney and Arndt (1993) are other figures who believe that Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory is the most suitable way to observe the cross-cultural differences in politeness asserting that "with respect to the issue of empirical testability, it is important to realize that Brown and Levinson's framework ultimately represents, analyzes and accounts for highly reduced, idealized, *models* of speech activities" (Janney & Arndt, 1993, p. 19) (*italics in original*).

The universality of gratitude and politeness along with their high potential to be deployed in the Internet language was the main rationale to consider them in this study. Besides, despite the handful number of researches conducted on the issue of gratitude speech act and politeness (Al-Khateeb, 2009; Tajeddin & Momenian, 2012; Yoosefvand & Eslami Rasekh, 2014), especially in the context of Iran, it seems that a gap exists in language learners' perception of gratitude and politeness and their use of these concepts among the target language speakers which might root in their lack of attention to the

probable diversities in the behavioral patterns of both their first language and the target language. Such mismatch could obviously be discerned within the context of Instagram where the users can take advantage of numerous opportunities to develop their knowledge of language use.

2. Literature Review

Regarded as an expressive speech act (Austin, 1962), gratitude is an addressee-oriented speech act which leads to the enhancement of the hearers' negative face (Brown & Levinson, 1987). It is presumed to be the reaction of the speaker towards the hearer's favor action for her/him that prompts the speaker to act respectfully in some ways.

Cheng (2005) compared Chinese and English native speakers' expressions of gratitude in a research and found out that Chinese and English speakers show different preferences for gratitude strategies. He declared that Chinese speakers deployed more address terms accompanied by their gratitude utterances for their complicated social status system. Besides that, Cheng broached in his study a taxonomy containing eight gratitude strategies which have been used in many studies henceforth.

As gratitude has been examined in several languages and almost every language has reflected a different and unique pattern for face-to-face interactions (Hinkel, 1994; Intachakra, 2004), it might be proved the reverse in more recent and flexible contexts like Instagram.

Yoosefvand and Eslami Rasekh (2014) reviewed the use of gratitude speech act among Persian and English speakers and proposed that Persian native speakers use more gratitude strategies than English native speakers and there exist significant diversities in the use of gratitude strategies between them. They discovered that there exist remarkable differences in the use of thanking, positive feeling, and repayment strategies among these two nationalities.

Brown and Levinson (1987) presented a framework for comparing politeness among several cultures. They introduced the notion of face in order to refer to "the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 61). They further proposed face-threatening acts (FTAs) as a key concept in communication, and defined it as "certain kinds of acts that run contrary to the face wants of the addressee and/or of the speaker" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 65), and they classified gratitude as a

speech act primarily threatening the speakers' negative face. Furthermore, they subcategorized a redressive action, which is the attempt to counteract the potential damage of FTAs, into positive and negative politeness. Positive politeness refers to the hearer's positive face which is, in fact, the desire of an individual to be accepted and valued, while negative politeness refers to partially satisfying the hearer's negative face which pertains to the individual's preference to have freedom of act. Their categorization of positive and negative politeness strategies presents 15 strategies for positive politeness, and 10 strategies for negative politeness with some of the strategies being subcategorized into more branches to suggest more specific usage of the strategies.

Fukushima (2003) studied the concept of politeness in British and Japanese cultures deploying the Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework and discovered that there exist some significant differences between the choice of strategies between British and Japanese subjects. He found that for the case of apology and request speech acts, Japanese students tended to make use of more direct strategies in comparison to the British students.

Crystal (2006), in his investigation, explored seven types of language use on the Internet: "email, synchronous and asynchronous chat groups, virtual worlds, the World Wide Web, blogging, and instant messaging" (Crystal, 2006, p. 258). He claimed that each variety of language, considering their features related to their use in a technological context, along with some characteristics of the users, were emergent. He argued that the development of the Internet and social networks will affect the use of language within each speech community.

Ma (1996) conducted experimental research on East Asian and North American students who used computer-mediated conversations. He claimed that while these groups tended to deploy direct and indirect language in face-to-face interactions differently, they used merely direct language within the context of CMC. He broached that individuals in computer-mediated conversations do not seem to have an as high commitment as when they engage in routine face-to-face conversations. In order to totalize Ma's (1996) assertion, Herring (2015) declared that "internet language" used in CMC could be generalized to mobile technologies as well.

Conducting a research on the characteristics of the Internet language used by Persians, Doostdar (2004) asserted that the Internet language of Persian users encompasses a more various range of features such as more greetings, more exaggerations, small talk, courtesy routines, gossip, and praying for the hearer. However, that might raise the question that do Persian users deploy such cultural patterns on Instagram as well?

Lee and Chau (2017) explored multilingual hashtags on Instagram as discourse of emotions regarding social movements. They assembled nine thousand hashtags which functioned as facts, opinions, or emotions existent in seven hundred posts. Their findings revealed that for those posts expressing opinions or stating facts, a remarkable segment of the hashtags are also affective in function. They declared that the hashtags represented emotions associated with politics, unity, hatred, dissatisfaction, and frustration. In general, the findings proposed that affect is expressed through a certain set of linguistic resources.

Matley (2018) explored two frequent hashtags on Instagram focusing on their politeness connotations. His search for *#brag* and *#humblebrag* revealed that these self-praise hashtags show a clear metalinguistic function as a resource to the illocution of the speech act. He also discovered that they are deployed in a balancing act of face mitigation and aggravation strategies. In general, the study proposes that the hashtags *#brag* and *#humblebrag* act as part of a strategy which negotiates an acceptable level of self-praise and positive self-presentation.

Despite the fact that numerous investigations have touched upon politeness strategies within several cultures (Fukushima, 2003; Matsumoto, 1988; Mohammad Hosseinpur & Mosavi, 2019), a handful number of them have examined the use of these strategies within the context of the Internet or CMC (Vinagre, 2008). The current study seeks to explore the use of politeness strategies within gratitude expressions by male and female English and Persian users of Instagram. The following research questions are asked in the current investigation:

1. What positive and negative politeness strategies do English and Persian users of Instagram employ in their gratitude?
2. What is the role of gender in English and Persian Instagram users' employment of positive and negative politeness strategies?

3. Method

3.1 Design and Context of Study

The current study was quantitative in nature and corpus-based as well. In other words, it made use of objective measurements using computational techniques. It sought to gather the data through collection of naturally-occurring Instagram posts containing gratitude connotations.

3.2 Corpus

In order to extract and gather the required data, Instagram as one of the most recent and popular social networking sites, was selected as the source for data collection. Data collection was conducted in the way that those Instagram posts containing gratitude connotations were extracted using hashtag search. An advantage of using hashtag search for gratitude posts lies in its quality of being subject-centered, revealing all posts with gratitude connotation rather than being necessarily dependent on the use of such words in gratitude expressions.

The research took advantage of convenient sampling, including those posts which enjoyed the required features for this research e.g., being composed by native speakers, encompassing gratitude connotation, etc. Furthermore, for the purpose of collecting posts for each language, the search was conducted using related hashtags for each language. It was intended that the posts be collected merely from the native speakers of English (the English native contexts were selected from countries where English is the native language e.g., England, US, Australia) and Persian (the Persian native speakers were selected from Iran) and in order to make sure about the native language of the users, the researcher checked their bio information in their pages or visiting their posts, she made sure about their native language, and then recorded the required data.

The participants' age did not matter for the research, hence their age ranged from 10 to 70. It was sought to deploy gratitude expressions belonging to different types of relationships e.g., lovers, friends, family members, colleagues, etc. The hashtag search was conducted in a way that for the English language, for instance, the hashtags of *thank you*, *thanks*, *thnx*, *grateful*, *gratitude*, *thank_you_very_much*, and *thankful* were deployed, and simultaneously, related Persian expressions represented below, were typed for Persian language:

ممنون، مرسى، متشكر، تشكر، ممنونم

I thank you, Thanks, Thanks, Merci, Thanks

The number of posts selected for politeness analysis was 200; 100 for each language, and for the use of politeness strategies by each gender, for the English language, 50 of the posts were composed by English female users, and the other 50 belonged to English male users. Such holds true for the Persian language, as well. It is required to mention that the research included only one gratitude post from every individual who was included in this study.

3.3 Instruments

In order for such an analysis to be conducted, Instagram social application was utilized. Instagram is considered as an application available for mobile phones providing the chance for its users to post their photos/ videos besides captions. Instagram users are provided with the opportunity to search their favorite topic utilizing a hashtag which is a keyword prefixed by a hash (#) sign comprised of either one word (#happy) or a string of words (#fightfortherighttobefree) (Lee & Chau, 2017).

In order to investigate the use of politeness strategies, the posts were incorporated into Brown and Levinson's (1987) taxonomy of positive and negative politeness strategies by the researchers. Positive politeness strategies, as proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987), are 15 strategies some of which encompasses a number of subcategories. Politeness strategies predominantly oriented toward the positive face of the hearer, intend to keep the close and friendly relationship between the interlocutors. Negative politeness strategies, seeking to orient toward negative face inclined towards not threatening the freedom and negative face of the addressee, include ten diverse strategies with their subcategories assisting the speaker to keep the negative face of her/his addressee. The positive politeness strategies introduced by Brown and Levinson (1987) are presented in the following table:

Table 1

Positive Politeness Strategies Introduced by Brown and Levinson (1987)

Positive Strategy	Explanation
Number 1	Notice, attend to listener (his wants, interests & needs)
Number 2	Exaggerate (interest, approval, sympathy with listener)
Number 3	Intensify interest of listener
Number 4	Use of in-group identity markers: 1) usage of address forms 2) use of in-group language or dialect 3) use of jargon 4) use of contractions and ellipsis
Number 5	Seek agreement
Number 6	Avoid disagreement
Number 7	Presuppose/raise/assert common ground: 1) gossip and small talk 2) point-of-view switch 3) personal center- switch: The speaker to the hearer 4) time switch 5) place switch 6) avoidance of adjustments of reports to the hearer's point of view 7) presuppose manipulations:

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Presuppose knowledge of the hearer's wants and attitudes 2) Presuppose the hearer's values are the same as the speaker's values 3) Presuppose familiarity in the speaker-hearer relationship 4) Presuppose the hearer's knowledge
Number 8	jokes
Number 9	Assert or presuppose the speaker's knowledge of and concern about the listener's wants
Number 10	The speaker may claim that whatever the listener wants, the speaker wants for him and will help him to obtain
Number 11	Be optimistic
Number 12	Include both the speaker and the listener in the activity
Number 13	Give (or ask for) reasons
Number 14	Assume or assert reciprocity
Number 15	Give gifts to listener (goods, sympathy, understanding, cooperation). (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 102)

For the negative politeness strategies, Brown and Levinson (1987) circumscribed 10 strategies, again some of which were split into further sub-branches. The negative politeness strategies are demonstrated in Table 2:

Table 2

Negative Politeness Strategies Introduced by Brown and Levinson (1987)

Negative Strategy	Explanation
Number 1	Being conventionally indirect
Number 2	Questioning/hedging
Number 3	Being pessimistic
Number 4	Minimizing the imposition
Number 5	Giving deference
Number 6	Apologizing: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) admit the impingement 2) indicate reluctance 3) give overwhelming reasons 4) beg forgiveness
Number 7	Impersonalizing the speaker and the hearer: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) performatives 2) imperative 3) impersonal verbs 4) passive and circumstantial voices 5) replacement of the pronouns "I" and "you" by indefinites 6) pluralization of the "you" and "I" pronouns 7) address terms as "you" avoidance 8) reference terms as "I" avoidance 9) point of view distancing
Number 8	Stating the FTA as a general rule
Number 9	Nominalizing
Number 10	Going on record to incur a debt or to not indebt the listener. (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 131)

3.4 Data Collection Procedure

For the purpose of collecting the required corpus, it was sought to search for posts or comments on Instagram which had a gratitude connotation. It was intended to extract 200 gratitude utterances in general which contained politeness strategies to be analyzed for each language. In other words, 100 Persian utterances plus 100 English utterances having politeness connotation were separated out in the way that the 100 posts for each language contained 50 gratitude sentences expressed by females along with 50 uttered by male users. After incorporating the data into Brown and Levinson's (1987) classifications of positive and negative politeness strategies, the frequency of each strategy, regardless of the gender of the users, within each language was calculated, and then, the use of such strategies with a concern for the gender of individuals was determined.

3.5 Data Analysis Procedure

In order to scrutinize the type of positive and negative politeness strategies employed in each language, Brown and Levinson's (1987) taxonomy was utilized. For that purpose, the gratitude utterances of both nationalities were categorized in accordance to the aforementioned taxonomies, and the data were compared between the nationalities to observe the most frequent strategy deployed by each group. For gender differences, the gratitude utterances of each language were analyzed so that a pattern for the gendered use of positive/negative politeness strategies was to be discovered.

Then, the data were entered into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software, and afterward, the frequency of each strategy was determined. In order to analyze the data, a chi-square test which is standardly selected for nominal data, was deployed to demonstrate the significance of the difference between the types of strategies used in each language.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Results

The first research question of this investigation addressed the use of each positive and negative strategy by English and Persian users of Instagram. In fact, this research question sought to compare the use of each strategy by each nationality and find out whether English and Persian Instagram users prefer to deploy different positive and negative politeness strategies in expressing gratitude in social applications.

In order to be incorporated into SPSS software and be compared, the data had to have one condition: The frequency of each category must be more than zero. It means that each category under investigation must have the frequency of $X > 0$; otherwise, the calculation of the significant differences would be incorrect. Hence, considering the frequency of the data for positive politeness strategies, it can be deduced that the third (intensify interest of listener), fifth (seek agreement), sixth (avoid disagreement), ninth (assert or presuppose the speaker's knowledge of and concern about the listener's wants), tenth (the speaker may claim that whatever the listener wants, the speaker wants for him and will help him to obtain), eleventh (be optimistic), twelfth (include both the speaker and the listener in the activity), thirteenth (give or ask for reasons), and fourteenth (assume or assert reciprocity) strategies were incalculable due to the fact that one nationality had not deployed those certain strategies at all.

It should be taken into consideration that the numbers given to the strategies in the current research are in accordance with Brown and Levinson's (1987) numbering of positive and negative politeness strategies introduced in their book. Only the further subcategorizations of some strategies have not received numbers by Brown and Levinson (1987), have been numbered in the current research, and the numbering is represented in the literature review section.

For negative politeness strategies, it could be inferred that negative politeness strategies No.1 (being conventionally indirect), No.2 (questioning/hedging), No.3 (being pessimistic), No.4 (minimizing the imposition), No.8 (stating the FTA as a general rule), and No.9 (nominalizing) could not be incorporated into the calculation software for the existence of zero in their frequencies. For the aforementioned strategies, no comparison and tables would be drawn.

For positive politeness strategies, taking into consideration the above limitation, this research investigated strategies No.1 (notice, attend to a listener), No.2 (exaggerate), No.4 (use of in-group identity markers), No.7 (presuppose/raise/assert common ground), No.8 (jokes), and No.15 (give gifts to a listener). In order for the differences in the frequencies to be significant, the asymptotic significance (or asymp. sig.) must be smaller than 0.05.

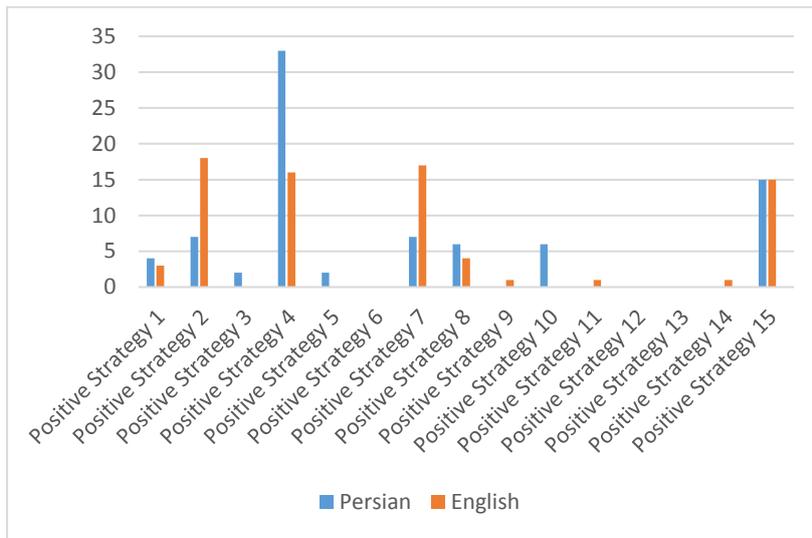


Figure 1. Frequencies of the use of positive politeness strategies by both nationalities.

With respect to strategy No.1 which is to notice and attend to the listener, the frequency of the strategy for English users of Instagram was 3. Simultaneously, Persian users deployed it 4 times. After running a chi-square for the results which is represented in Table 4, an asymptotic significance of 0.705 was discovered for the data. Hence, the difference in the use of positive strategy no.1 between English and Persian users is not significant. The frequencies and standardized residuals of the aforementioned positive and negative politeness strategies were manifested in Table 3, and the Chi-square tests related to these positive and negative politeness strategies were represented in Table 4.

Table 3

The Frequencies and Standardized Residuals of Positive Politeness and Negative Strategies by both Nationalities

	Observed N			Expected N		Residuals	
	English	Persian	Total	English	Persian	English	Persian
PS# 1	3	4	7	3.5	3.5	-.5	+.5
PS# 2	18	7	25	12.5	12.5	+5.5	-5.5
PS# 4	16	33	49	24.5	24.5	-8.5	+8.5
PS# 7	17	7	24	12.0	12.0	+5.0	-5.0
PS# 8	4	6	10	5.0	5.0	-1	+1
PS# 15	15	15	30	15.0	15.0	0.0	0.0
NS# 5	5	11	16	8.0	8.0	-3.0	+3.0
NS# 6	1	4	5	2.5	2.5	-1.5	+1.5
NS# 7	10	2	12	6.0	6.0	+4.0	-4.0
NS# 10	4	1	5	2.5	2.5	1.5	-1.5

PS: Positive Strategy NS: Negative Strategy

Table 4

Chi-square Test for Positive and Negative Politeness Strategies by both Nationalities

Strategy	Chi-Square	Degree of Freedom (DF)	Asymptotic Significance (Asymp. Sig)
PS# 1	.143 ^a	1	.705
PS# 2	4.840 ^a	1	.028
PS# 4	5.898 ^a	1	.015
PS# 7	4.167 ^a	1	.041
PS# 8	.400 ^a	1	.527
PS# 15	.000 ^a	1	1
NS# 5	2.250 ^a	1	.134
NS# 6	1.800 ^a	1	.180
NS# 7	5.333 ^a	1	.021
NS# 10	1.800 ^a	1	.180

PS: Positive Strategy NS: Negative Strategy

For positive politeness strategy No.2 which is to exaggerate interest, approval, or sympathy with the listener, the English Instagram users made use of the strategy 18 times, while the frequency of this strategy among Persian users was 7. As Table 4 represents, the asymptotic significance (Asymp. Sig.) for this strategy was 0.028, so the difference is significant.

The next positive politeness strategy to discuss is the fourth one concerning the use of in-group identity markers. The English users deployed the strategy 16 times, and the Persian users of Instagram made use of it 33 times (Table 3). The calculations represented the asymptotic significance of 0.015 (Table 4) which alludes to conclude that the difference in the use of in-group identity markers among the English and Persian users of Instagram is significant.

As for positive politeness strategy No.7 that is to raise a common ground, in accordance to Table 3, the English Instagram users used the seventh positive politeness strategy more frequently than Persian users (17 vs. 7). As Table 4 suggests, the asymptotic significance is 0.041 which reveals a significant difference in the use of the strategy among the nations.

Considering the eighth positive politeness strategy, the use of jokes, as Table 3 indicates, the strategy was deployed by the two groups almost in the same way. Table 4 suggests no significant differences due to the fact that it represents an (asymp. sig. of .527) which is not considered significant.

The last calculable positive strategy is the fifteenth one which suggested giving a gift to the listener (goods, sympathy, understanding, cooperation), was used equally between the Persian and English groups. Table 4 indicates (the asymp. sig. as 1) which is suggestive of equal use and lack of difference.

After entering the negative politeness strategies into SPSS software, it was discovered that the calculable negative strategies were strategies No. 5 (giving deference), 6 (apologizing), 7 (impersonalizing the speaker and the hearer), and 10 (going on record to incur a debt or to not indebt the listener) because other strategies contained a frequency of zero in at least one side. The frequency of the use of the negative politeness strategies between the two nationalities is represented in Figure 2.

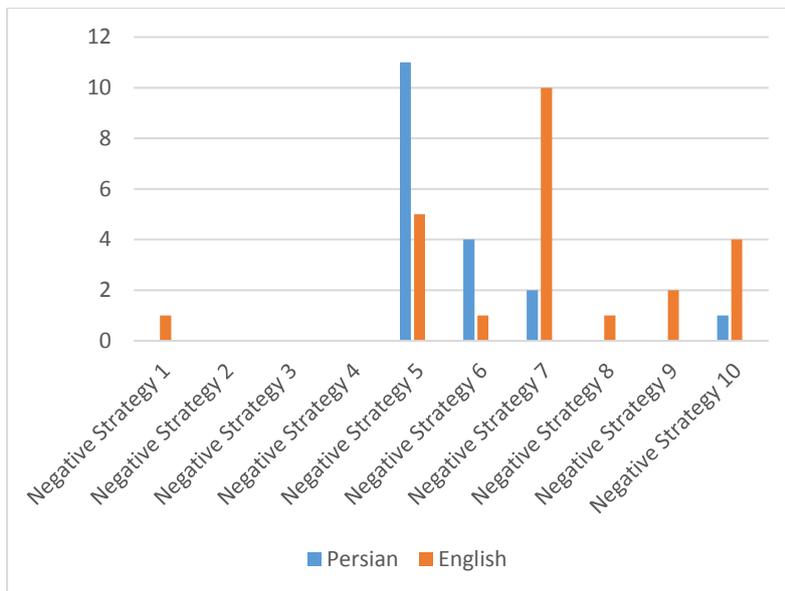


Figure 2. Frequencies of the use of negative politeness strategies by both nationalities.

The first negative politeness strategy discussed in this section is the fifth strategy which is to give deference. It has the asymp. sig. of .134 which is suggestive of no significant difference (Table 4). Although the strategy was used more frequently by the Persian users, the difference was not of significant difference.

For the next calculable negative politeness strategy which is the sixth one, the frequency was 1 for English users and 4 for the Persian group (Table 3). The chi-square test also revealed no significant difference, since it suggested an asymp. sig. of .180 (Table 4). Therefore, the strategy was employed similarly between the two nationalities.

The seventh negative politeness strategy, however, proved to be significantly different. It was used by the English group 10 times, and only 2 times by the Persian group (Table 3). The asymp. sig. was .021 which is smaller than .05 and hence, significantly different (Table 4).

The final politeness strategy investigated for the first research question is the tenth. It was used without much difference between the two groups (Table 3). The asymp. sig. was .180 (Table 4), and therefore, the strategy use was not significantly different between English and Persian users.

The second research question of this investigation addressed the use of politeness strategies among genders for each language. Since all of the strategies for both languages were not used significantly different, the frequencies and standardized residuals for each language were represented in separate large Tables indicating all the strategies for each language.

Table 5

The Frequencies and Standardized Residuals of the English Genders

	Observed N		Expected N		Residuals	
	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males
PS# 1	1	2	1.5	1.5	-.5	+.5
PS# 2	1	2	1.5	1.5	-.5	+.5
PS# 4	10	6	8.0	8.0	+2.0	-2.0
PS# 7	8	9	8.5	8.5	-.5	+.5
PS# 8	2	2	2.0	2.0	0	0
PS# 15	10	5	7.5	7.5	+2.5	-2.5
NS# 5	3	2	2.5	2.5	+.5	-.5
NS# 7	6	4	5.0	1.0	+1.0	-1.0
NS# 9	1	1	1.0	1.0	0	0
NS# 10	3	1	2.0	2.0	+1.0	-1.0

PS: Positive Strategy NS: Negative Strategy

According to Table 5 which is representative of the frequency of the use of the strategies among the English users of Instagram, it can be deduced that the genders made

use of somehow similar strategies. However, more precise information about the significance of the differences between the strategies is represented in Table 6.

Table 6

Chi-square Test for Politeness Strategies of the English Genders

Strategy	Chi-Square	Df	Asymp. Sig.
PS# 1	.333 ^a	1	.564
PS# 2	.333 ^a	1	.564
PS# 4	1.000 ^a	1	.317
PS# 7	.059 ^a	1	.808
PS# 8	.000 ^a	1	1.000
PS# 15	1.667 ^a	1	.197
NS# 5	.200 ^a	1	.655
NS# 7	.400 ^a	1	.527
NS# 9	.000 ^a	1	1.000
NS# 10	1.000 ^a	1	.317

PS: Positive Strategy NS: Negative Strategy

This Table indicates the results of the chi-square test for each strategy among English females and males. As suggested, no asymp. sig. is smaller than .05, and therefore, it can be deduced that none of the strategies were employed differently by English genders.

Considering the gendered use of language for Persian Instagram users, Table 7 manifests the frequency of each politeness strategy by females and males. According to the table, again no significant difference between the two genders was observed.

Table 7

The Frequencies and Standardized Residuals of the Persian Genders

	Observed N		Expected N		Residuals	
	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males
PS# 1	3	1	2	2	+1	-1
PS# 2	5	2	3.5	3.5	+1.5	-1.5
PS# 3	1	1	1.0	1.0	.0	.0
PS# 4	21	12	16.5	16.5	+4.5	-4.5
PS# 7	2	5	3.5	3.5	-1.5	+1.5
PS# 8	3	3	3.0	3.0	.0	.0
PS# 10	1	5	3.0	3.0	-2	+2
PS# 15	9	6	7.5	7.5	+1.5	-1.5
NS# 5	3	8	5.5	5.5	-2.5	+2.5
NS# 6	1	3	2.0	2.0	-1.0	+1.0

PS: Positive Strategy NS: Negative Strategy

Table 8 represents the results of the chi-square test for the Persian female and male users of Instagram. Taking a look at the Table, it can be recognized that none of the strategies had an asymp. sig. of less than .05, and therefore, it can be claimed that both genders in Persian made use of the same positive and negative politeness strategies.

Table 8

Chi-square Test for Politeness Strategies of the Persian Genders

Strategy	Chi-Square	Df	Asymp. Sig.
PS# 1	1.000 ^a	1	.317
PS# 2	1.286 ^a	1	.257
PS# 3	.000 ^a	1	1.000
PS# 4	2.455 ^a	1	.117
PS# 7	1.286 ^a	1	.257
PS# 8	.000 ^a	1	1.000
PS# 10	2.667 ^a	1	.102
PS# 15	.600 ^a	1	.439
NS# 5	2.273 ^a	1	.132
NS# 6	1.000 ^a	1	.317

PS: Positive Strategy NS: Negative Strategy

To sum up, with regard to the first research question which addressed the use of each politeness strategy among English and Persian users of Instagram, it was discovered that except for some of the strategies that proved to be deployed differently among the English and Persian group, other strategies were used almost similarly. For the investigation of the gendered use of language, the findings suggested similar use of strategies by genders in both of the languages.

4.2. Discussion

This study was an attempt to investigate the use of politeness strategies within the context of Instagram as one of the most recent social networking sites. It sought to scrutinize the employment of politeness strategies among English and Persian users, and along with that, an investigation of the gendered use of language was intended. The results suggested no significant difference between Persian and English users of Instagram in terms of politeness strategies and the gendered use of language, except for positive politeness strategies 2 (exaggerate), 4 (the use of in-group identity markers), 7 (presuppose/raise/assert common ground), and the seventh negative politeness strategy

(impersonalizing the speaker and the hearer) which proposed difference in the use of politeness strategies by English and Persian users of Instagram.

In general, the results indicated that, regardless of gender, 76% of the English users made use of positive politeness strategies and 24% of them preferred negative strategies in the expression of gratitude, while the Persian users deployed 82% positive politeness strategies and 18% negative ones. The findings are to a large extent, in congruence with Brown and Levinson's (1987) notion that politeness is universal. To be specific, the different deployment of the aforementioned strategies might have several justifications which will be discussed further.

As put forward earlier, the second positive politeness strategy broached by Brown and Levinson (1987) concerns exaggeration in revealing emotions such as sympathy, interest, and approval. The difference in the use of such strategy among English and Persian users could emanate from the different cultural patterns existent within each language. As mentioned by Ma (1996) and Herring (2015), despite their certain behavioral patterns which are discernable in face-to-face interactions, speakers of different languages tend to make use of some strategies which are exclusive to CMC.

This can be applied to this research in the sense that while English speakers prefer *indirect language* and negative politeness in their routine interactions in real life, signs of tendencies to use *direct language* as well as positive politeness strategies (in this case exaggeration) within this context has been revealed by them. In other words, the English users of Instagram tended to use language patterns within the Instagram context that differ from their routine life. About the less use of exaggeration by the Persian users, the findings are in contrast with Doostdar's (2004) assertion that Persians seem to use more exaggeration in CMC.

For the fourth positive politeness strategy which concerned the use of in-group identity markers, Persian users of Instagram seemed to make more frequent use of these markers, like names or address terms; hence, a significant difference between the two nationalities was observed. This could be justified with a reference to Koutlaki's (1997) assertion that in the Persian language, an individual is mainly evaluated and judged by the actions of other members of the in-group. Therefore, it can be concluded that in the Persian language which rates in-group relations highly, more frequent use of in-group markers is expected rather than English language which is inclined towards individualism.

In respect to the dissimilarities in the use of the positive politeness strategies, it can be referred to Yu (2003) who declared that such distinctness stems from the role of culture in the speech act performance of the language speakers. To put it differently, some cultural patterns which shape the dominant identity of a nation seem to exist even in new genres which are intended to blur the cultural barriers of different languages (Blum-Kulka, 1987). For example, the gregariousness of the Persians is an indicator of Persian culture worldwide and hence, it can be discernible in them as soon as they start to either talk or write.

As the results suggest in this research, following the Persian cultural pattern which attaches a high significance to the satisfaction of the group rather than the individual, Persian speakers have revealed the tendency to make a more frequent use of the fourth positive strategy which is relevant to their interactions within the groups of people. This is in accordance to Yoosefvand and Eslami Rasekh's (2014) research which discovered more expressions of positive feelings among Persian speakers. However, more investigation and research is demanded for the proving of this statement in the context of social media.

The seventh positive politeness strategy, asserting common ground, seems to be deployed differently, however. The English users of Instagram have represented a tendency to raise a common ground in their expressions of gratitude. It is in concord with Ma's (1996) assertion that within the context of CMC, both English and Asian languages represent a more frequent use of positive politeness strategies. However, there seems to be a difference in the type of positive strategies that they have preferred.

The frequent deployment of raising common ground as the seventh positive politeness strategy is in accordance with Vinagre (2008) who discovered that in the context of CMC, English speakers employ the seventh positive politeness strategy as the second most common positive politeness strategy. This reveals their interest in this strategy, which might be due to some shared cultural background between them to mention a common ground. Considering the seventh positive politeness strategy, the findings disagree with Doostdar's assertion, again. He believed that Persian users deploy more common ground issues in their communication in order to raise the sense of solidarity and closeness.

The only negative politeness strategy which was used differently between the two nationalities was the seventh which concerns impersonalizing the speaker and the hearer through an avoidance to mention "you" and "I" directly. According to the findings, the English users of Instagram seem to use this strategy more frequently than the Persians.

Such a difference could stem from the linguistic structure of the English language which necessitates the existence of the pronoun in a sentence, while in Persian, the sentences are allowed to be formed without the subject pronouns (because in Persian, there are two pronouns existent in a sentence; free personal pronoun and bound personal pronoun. While the free personal pronoun is omissible, it is not allowed grammatically to remove the bound pronoun which is added to the verb as a suffix). Such a difference in the grammatical structure of the two languages might be the reason why the speakers seem to use this strategy in a non-identical manner, while in the reality both groups do not use the pronouns directly. For the Persian language, that is because the speakers convey the pronouns in the form of a suffix.

Another justification for the divergent use of the four politeness strategies among English and Persian users could be relevant to the gratitude speech act. Since the current investigation considered gratitude speech act, and taking into account Doostdar's (2004) assertion that within the cultural patterns of Persian language, gratitude expression encompasses more aspects which are culture-specific and non-existent in English culture, the probability exists that other speech acts are more congruent with English culture and, hence, less complicated for them. In other words, in case another speech act was to be scrutinized in the sense of the use of politeness strategies, there is a possibility that the speech act might have been used similarly between the nations.

In general, except for these four strategies that are surmised to be due to the transfer of cultural patterns from real life to the context of CMC or other explanations, other strategies were used almost the same way by both nationalities. This could be representative of the features of this new genre that has blurred most –not all– of cultural boundaries between languages (Crystal, 2006; Herring, 2015; Ma, 1996).

With respect to the gendered use of language for Persian and English Instagram users, as the results indicated, no significant difference was observed for all of the politeness strategies. Such a finding was expected due to numerous studies which addressed this issue, especially within the context of CMC (Guiller & Durndell, 2007; Herring, 2015). This could be suggestive of the idea that due to the anonymity that the social networking sites render, gender differences could be claimed to be blurred in such contexts (Herring & Stoerger, 2014). To put it differently, while in real-life situations, some gender barriers seem to exist hampering the representation of their true face

(Yoosefvand & Eslami Rasekh, 2014), females and males show fewer signs of gender differences within the context of CMC (Guiller & Durndell, 2007).

The findings in this regard are in congruence with Huffaker and Calvert's (2005) assertion that within the context of CMC, females, and males manifest an equal degree of identity disclosure and deploy similar linguistic patterns regardless of gender. Such identity disclosure takes place due to the anonymity of genders and the absence of gender stigmas, chiefly attached to females.

5. Conclusion and Implications

The findings of the current investigation suggested almost the same use of politeness strategies in gratitude expressions of English and Persian Instagram users. However, three of the positive strategies and one of the negative ones were deployed differently which could be mostly discerned as results of cultural transfer or exclusive features of CMC. Considering the genders of both English and Persian groups, again no certain differences were observed in the sense of their language use. In general, even accepting the differences in the use of some positive and negative strategies could not hamper concluding that the context of Instagram enjoys certain characteristics that have turned it into a genre (Ma, 1996). The genre possesses features such as gender-free, direct, and intimate use of language in communications.

The results could be evaluated accommodating in reaching a profound understanding of the Internet language, since as raised by Herring (2000) and Stockwell and Harrington (2003), the language of CMC has proved to be remarkable in developing target language proficiency, especially English language for the wide use of it as lingua Franca within the context of social media. Furthermore, the investigation of politeness strategies within such a context could be representative of the socio-psychological features of Instagram users in the realm of discourse analysis.

Considering the implications of this study to the language learners, the study can benefit them by providing them with frequent politeness strategies existent in each language and hence, providing them with the opportunity to draw an analogy between the two languages with a focus on the type of politeness strategies used. That will culminate in their understanding of the pragmatic and structural diversities that are existent in the target language, and therefore draw them to make a more pertinent use of the target language. It

is suggested that more speech acts be investigated in the realm of Instagram to discover whether the genre is unique in its nature or such holds true merely for gratitude speech act?

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