A Sociopragmatic Study of the Offer Speech Act in Persian

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Abstract

The present study aimed to identify strategies used to realize the speech act of offer in Persian. To do so, 195 male and female native Persian speakers were selected from diverse age ranges, educational backgrounds, and social classes, and were assigned a 36-item Discourse Completion Task (DCT) to elicit the speech act of offer. Thirty field workers also recorded naturally occurring interactions containing the speech act of offer. The responses were coded using 12 categories to determine the strategies used. Factors of age, gender, offer type, social distance, and relative power did not prove to be significantly effective in the choice of the offer strategies. It could be concluded that Persian speakers tend to be more indirect and Locution Derivable, Query Preparatory, and Hedged Imperative are favorite strategies among them.

Keywords: Speech act; offer; Discourse Completion Task (DCT); Field observation

1. Introduction

Offers are categorized as commissive speech acts as the speaker commits oneself to a future action (Searle, 1976). Edmonson and House (1981) highlight the role of offerers by categorizing them as attitudinal illocutions; to be more specific, as a type of "willing" because they engage contexts where the speaker implies his or her intention to perform a future action on behalf of the hearer. Hancher (1979) underlines the role of the hearer as well as the speaker in the realizations of offers and criticizes Searle's (1976) taxonomy for neglecting such an issue. He asserts that offers are more than commissives because the speaker tries to persuade the hearer to accept the proposed action, and therefore directives. He suggests that offers should be considered as partly commissive and partly directive (commissive-directive).

Offers could be categorized as ritual and substantive offers, too (Barron, 2003). In some cultures like eastern countries as well as English, offers are realized through a sequence of offers (reoffers) and refusals. In fact, in such societies, the sincerity condition of offers is not met unless reoffers occur. In such situations, reoffers are attempts to restate the speaker's intentions, and refusals are signs of politeness, hence ritual offers. Substantive offers, on the other hand, refer to those offers in which both sincerity condition and illocutionary intent are communicated in the first offer.

Moving onward on issues concerning face and politeness, Barron (2005) asserts that offers could be a threat to the hearer's negative face due to its partly directive nature. In offering, the speaker makes the hearer to react or accept the action by imposing him or herself, which could be a barrier to the hearer's privacy and freedom of action. Simultaneously, offers could threaten the speaker's positive face in the case of refusals by the hearer. Besides, the speaker's negative face could also be disposed to threat since by commitment to some future act, the speaker is impinging his/her freedom of action too. The speakers, on the other hand, could enhance the addressee's positive face by building up rapport and being positively disposed to the hearer.

Giving offers may be a threat to the offeree's negative face considering their partly directive and partly commissive nature because they persuade and sometimes impose the addressee to accept and behave as the offerer wishes. Therefore, the context, social factors, and relationship between the interlocutors play a significant role in choosing proper strategies in giving offers.

Terkourafi (2001), considering politeness issues, studied a corpus of spontaneous offer and request realizations in Cypriot Greek (cited in Hickey & Stewart, 2005). The research takes into consideration aspects of pragmatics, sociolinguistics, and cognitive linguistics by use of empirical data. A corpus of 105 hours of spontaneous conversational data produced by native Cypriot Greek speakers of both genders and different ages and socio-economic backgrounds were recorded. The transcriptions of the recordings of offers and requests resulted in a body of 2,189 realizations of the speech acts. Variables considered in the investigation of data consisted of the speakers' gender, age, and social class, the relationship of the interlocutors, the context of interaction, and the order of happening of the speech act in the exchange. In addition, some linguistic variables were taken into consideration. She proposed that, politeness is assumed to the extent that particular expressions are conventionalized for some use, and to the extent that such expressions constitute our main resource for achieving politeness.

Much of the research on "offer" has been conducted cross-culturally. In a descriptive study by Yongbing (1998), the speech acts of greeting, complement/response, offer/response, thank/response, and advice/response came to focus on the comparison of English and Chinese. He came to the conclusion that there are huge differences between the two languages in terms of the use of conversational formulas taking patterns and rules constraining speech behavior into consideration.

Barron (2003), in her doctoral thesis, investigated the three speech acts of requests, offers and refusals of offers. The two investigated subtypes of offers were offers of help and hospitable offers. She omitted Gift offers, a frequent type of offer, due to the fact that they are seldom faced with refusals and often accepted. The

participants for such a longitudinal study were three groups of informants including a group of native speakers of German, native speakers of Irish English and a group of Irish learners of German spending 10 months studying in Germany. The number of participants in each group was 30. The research tools for the study were a Discourse Completion Task (DCT), a questionnaire, a prequestionnaire, a postquestionnaire, and an assessment questionnaire. Analyzing the data from the point of view of discourse structure, pragmatic routines and structural modification, she concluded that in discourse structure aspect the frequency of the offer-refusals (reoffers) revealed significant differences between Learners' data and the German native speakers, in terms of reoffers, where the learners were more apt for reoffering in five of six offer situations. Moreover, it was found that the rate of transfer decreased significantly in five of six situations in the course of time, therefore less reoffering in the learners' production, although still higher than the Germans'. Thus, negative pragmatic transfer decreased over the course of time in the target language context.

From the pragmatic routines point of view, Barron's (2003) study revealed that the learners generally relied more on pragmatic routines in the course of time spent in the target language context; such a pattern is a positive move because it leads to an increase in L2 fluency and efficiency in communication. The results also revealed a decrease in the use of non-target like interlanguage routines. However, some increases were observed in false overgeneralizations and creative constructs which in turn mean pragmatic failure.

Considering internal modification point of view and more specifically syntactic down grading, it has been found out that non-significant increase in the frequency of the use of downgraders occurred, which were dependent on situations, although the levels of frequency were somewhat similar to that of the German native speakers. Moreover, the complexity of the syntactic downgraders increased over the past period of time towards the German native speakers' norm. This could be regarded as a sign of development in pragmatic competence.

From the cross cultural point of view, the study suggests that ritual offers are a characteristic of Irish English and does not play a role in German offer-refusal exchanges, hence German reoffers are of substantial type. Barron (2003) is up to the present time the most comprehensive cross-cultural pragmatic study on offers. Although it concentrates on the two languages of Irish English as the native language and German as the target language, it provides a good guideline for further researches on offers and of course this study.

Barron (2005), in a comparison of the English used in Ireland and England, investigated offer productions of 54 female English speakers at the average age of 17. The focus of the study was to find out offer sequences in addition to offer strategies

used to produce initiative offers and reoffers. The instruments consisted of a Free Discourse Completion Task (FDCT) used in an earlier study by Barron (2003). It consisted of five situations which elicited hospitable offers and offers of help. The findings revealed that both groups employed a number of turns in order to persuade their addressees to accept their offers. Moreover, both languages used ritual offers in their exchanges consisting of reoffers. Another finding was that there was no significant difference in the linguist realizations of first reoffers. Another finding was that there was a significant difference between the two languages in the use of offer super-strategies, so that the Irish speakers preferred predication of future acts, whereas the English speakers opted for desire.

The speech act of offer is specifically chosen for this study since despite the fact that a great deal of studies have been conducted on both sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic aspects of the Persian language, little research, if any, have focused on the speech act of offer. This study is among the first to tackle the concept of politeness in using the speech act of offer. Politeness which is a variable of *face* (Brown & Levinson, 1987) is constructed upon three aspects of status, solidarity, and degree of imposition. These factors together with the types of offer, age, and gender constituted the focus of attention in order to provide a clear picture of how Iranian Persian speakers attend to their social norms of using language, both L1 and L2.

This study is specifically intended to answer the following questions:

1. What are the major offer strategies used by Persian native speakers?
2. Do factors of age, gender, social distance, and relative power play any role in the speech behavior of the speakers in using the speech act of offer?

2. Method

2.1 Participants

Two hundred Persian native speakers were randomly selected from both genders (97 males and 98 females). With the age range of 18 to 50 (68 between18-30, 71 between 31-45, and 61 above 46), all educated including students, high school graduates, university graduates and postgraduates, so that they represented a proper sample of their speech community.

The ethnographic processes of the study involved selecting 30 male and female field workers (16 females and 14 males). The female field workers were all M.A. students at Yazd University, whereas the male fieldworker population was more varied in terms of degree of education. They were asked to fill in and take accurate note of at least 10 offer productions by native Persian speakers in natural everyday communication, no matter they participated themselves in the interaction or observed it.

Besides recording the offers, the observers were asked to be aware and meticulously take note of factors such as context, gender, the relationship between the interlocutors, age group, educational background of the addressor and addressee. Furthermore, they were asked to check if the interaction involved reoffer or not.

2.2 Instruments

The required quantitative data for the present study was gathered through both a DCT and field observations (in an ethnographic approach) to achieve reliable description of the speech act behavior.

In spite of the fact that naturalness of the data elicited by DCTs is under doubt due to the fact that there may be designed situations asking the participants to assess scenarios unfamiliar to them, the important factor in the quality response is set as cultural unfamiliarity, not position unfamiliarity (Lorenzo-Dus, 2001).

For the present study a DCT was prepared and was checked and modified for authenticity by three Persian native speakers. The DCT started by questions regarding demographic information including gender (male/female), age (under 25, between 26 and 45, above 46).

Thirty six scenarios were formed considering and controlling for the most frequent types of offers (Gift, Hospitable, Help), social distance (close or distant), and relative power (equal, low, or high). The items were developed so that a situation was introduced by a few sentences, and an offer production was required afterwards.

The sentences made up a situation in which a very specific type of offer (Gift, Hospitable, Help) could be produced. Each category of the offer involved 12 situations. The participants were asked to produce offers for each item. A plenty of space was provided after each item so that the participants felt free to produce as much as they think adequate for an offer. They were informed at the beginning of the DCT that their response to each item could be one sentence or more.

Field observation scheme was the next stage of the data collection. In this step, the observers were required to record offers occurring in the interactions they participated in or observed in detail. The resulting gathered data included offers in the interactions of interlocutors such as family members, friends, roommates, neighbors, and half strangers. Considering the variables in the study, the observers (field workers) were asked to note down the actual utterance of offer, situation, gender, approximate age group, educational level, and the relationship between the offerer and offeree.

The quantitative data related to the social variables controlled for in this study was therefore available through the offers produced in the DCT and those recorded in field observations by the field workers.

2.3 Procedure

The DCT was distributed randomly to 200 native Persian speakers from different genders, ages and educational backgrounds. The participants were given plenty of time to fill in the questionnaire at their own pace. This was due to the high number of items in the questionnaire (36 items) and accordingly due to issues related to pressure for immediate response leading to stress and consequently unreliable results. The answer sheets were then checked for invalid ones such as those with any unanswered items.

The results obtained from the field observers were compared with the results gained through the DCTs. The corpus obtained through this part of the procedure of data collection included offers given by friends, coworkers, relatives, family members and neighbors on subjects such as help, hospitability, and gifts.

It should be noted that as suggested by Cohen (1960) to determine interrater reliability, during the coding of the offers and other investigated factors, gathered from the native speakers, a random sample of each body of data was examined by two other raters (one male, one female).

For each part of the corpus, 20% of the data (39 Persian questionnaires, and 60 of the recorded offers in the observation field) was randomly selected and given to the raters. By such a method, one sex-based limit was eliminated through computing an average reliability rate of the two opposite-gender coders.

3. Results

In this study, the corpus of offer productions was coded based on the modified version of the classification used by Barron (2003), itself being a combination of the schemas used by House and Kasper(1981) and Blum-Kulka et al. (1989). According to Barron, eight offer strategies are employed by speakers: (1) Mood Derivable, (2) Hedged Performative, (3) Locution Derivable, (4) Want Statement, (5) Suggestory Formula, (6) Query Preparatory, (7) State Preparatory, and (8) Strong Hint.

Following the analysis of the field observations and the DCT, it was noticed that there are offer strategies not to be placed in any of the eight categories employed by Barron. For example, the Gift offer *ghaabel nadaare* ("*It is not worthy of you*") is a very frequent type of Gift offer strategy not found in the English corpus. Therefore a new category, Formulaic Gift offer was added. In the same line, the category Vulgar expressions like *sag-khor!* ("*Take it, as if a dog took it!*"), which was unique to the Persian offer data was suggested. In the same way, the offer *boro be ketaabkhoone negaah bendaaz* ("*Have a look in the library*"), although could be placed in the category Locution Derivable, would be better analyzed in a separate category of Imperatives as the former was too general and the imperatives constituted a huge body of the Persian data. Moreover, the Persian speakers tended to use requests as a way to offer. Therefore Request was also added to the list of offer strategies employed to code the corpus. The requests in Persian did not always bear the word *lotfan* ("*please*")

to be recognized as request in form as in *khaahesh mikonam bishtar ghazaa bekeshid* ("*Please have more food*").

Subsequently, 12 categories were utilized to code the corpus of offers, namely:

1. Mood Derivable: Utterances in which the grammatical mood of the verb signals the illocutionary force. As in *begzaarid baratoon biyaarameshoon* ("*Let me carry them for you*").

2. Hedged Performatives: Utterances in which the illocutionary force is named, but in which it is also modified by hedging, as in *pishnahaad mikonam age doost daari be ketaabkhoone ye negaahi bendaazi* ("*I offer you to have a look at the bookcase if you like*").

3. Locution Derivable: Utterances in which the illocutionary force is evident from the semantic meaning of the locution, as in *boshghaabeto bede* ("*Give me your plate*").

4. Want Statements: Utterances which state the speaker's desire that the act is done, as in *doost daram ino bedamesh be to* ("*I wanna give this to you*").

5. Suggestory Formula: Utterances which hold a suggestion that an act is done, as in *migam chetore emshab biyaay khooneye maa?* ("*Say, how about coming to our home tonight?*")

6. Query Preparatory: Utterances which question the preparatory conditions of an offer which are customized in every particular language. As in *mikhaayn komaketoon konam?* ("*Do you want me to help you?*")

7. State Preparatory: Utterances which overtly affirm that the preparatory conditions for an offer hold in a conventionalized way; as in *age bekhaayd man mitoonam komaketoon konam* ("*If you want, I can help you*").

8. Strong Hint: Utterances having a partial reference to the objects or elements necessary for carrying out the offer act. As in *morghesh khoshmaze shode* ("*The chicken is tasty*").

9. Imperative: Utterances in which the illocutionary force is conveyed in the imperative form either hedged or nonhedged, as in *bokhor* ("*Eat*").

10. Formulaic Gift Offer: Utterances in which the illocutionary force is conveyed through fixed conventionalized formulaic expressions for performing the act of gift offering, as in *ghaabel nadaare* ("*It is not worthy of you*").

11. Vulgar Expressions: Utterances in which the illocutionary force is signaled by vulgar and rude expressions as in *kooft kon* ("*Eat*") or *sag-khor!* ("*Take it, as if a dog took it*").

12. Requests: Utterances in which the request (directive) form signals the illocutionary force as in *khaahesh mikonam emshab tashrif biyaarid maanzele maa* ("*please come to our home tonight*").

3.1 Underlying Principles of Persian Offers

The observation data confirmed that the three most frequent types of offers in Persian are offers of Help (56.4%), Hospitable offers (23.8%) and Gift offers (19.7%), followed by 2 recorded examples of offers of compensation and only one example of offer of proposal. Although not all of the factors in this study reached the significance level, the contrast apparent from comparing each factor is worth considering.

Though not reaching the significance level, a large body of recorded offers happened between close (intimate) people from the social distance point of view including family members, friends and roommates (see Table 1):

Table 1. *Distribution of Offers Across Social Distance*

Topic	Close	Distant
Help	67.3	32.7
Gift	76.7	23.3
Hospitable	70.8	29.2
Total	70	30

The males and females were significantly different ($p < 0.05$) regarding the types of offers they used, meaning that although the males gave more gift offers. Women had a higher recorded percentage of help offers and hospitable offers. Moreover males and females were not significantly different in receiving offers (see Table 2):

Table 2. *Distribution of Offers Across Gender*

Topic	Offerer's Gender		Offeree's Gender	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Help	64.8	53.2	43.3	56.7
Gift	65	35	46.7	53.3
Hospitable	43.1	56.9	52.8	47.2
Total	49.5	50.5	46.2	53.8

Regarding the age of offerers in the observation data, there was a significant difference ($p < 0.05$) between the three age groups considering offer types. The youngest group tended to give more help offers (53.8%), whereas the middle group (31-45) tended to give more gift offers than the other two groups. The third group consisting of people in their middle ages had the least records in the three types of offers (14.9%). Such a result is found considering the age of offerees and the frequency and types of offers they received. Although it may be expected that the

people in middle ages and older receive more offers, surprisingly it was the youngest group which received offers the most (56.1%). This is followed by the second group. The reason behind such a finding might be the age of the field workers, all in their in twenties and consequently being exposed to conversations happening between people of their own age (see Table 3):

Table 3. *Distribution of Offers Across Age Groups*

Topic	Offerer's Age			Offeree's Age		
	18-30	31-45	+46	18-30	31-45	+46
Help	53.8	35.7	10.6	53.8	35.1	11.1
Gift	40	46.7	13.3	68.3	25	6.7
Hospitable	37.5	36.1	26.4	51.4	37.5	11.1
Total	47.1	38	14.9	56.1	33.1	10.2

An extra task in the field observation stage of data gathering involved noticing whether Persian speakers reoffer when they encounter a refusal in the first round of offering. Interestingly, it was noticed that the Iranians reoffer in a significant way ($p < 0.05$) in situations where the first offer is refused.

This is much more obvious in hospitable offers (70.8%) in which the offeree often waits for the second round of ritual reoffers to accept the act. In addition, social distance affected the rate of reoffers in a significant way ($p < 0.05$), in that people reoffer more in situations where the level of intimacy is higher (see Tables 4 and 5):

Table 4. *Distribution of Offers Across Reoffer Possibility*

Topic	Yes	No
Help	60.2	39.8
Gift	56.7	43.3
Hospitable	70.8	29.2
Total	62	38

Table 5. *Distribution of Reoffer Possibility Across Social Distance*

Social Distance	Yes	No
Close	66.5	33.5
Distant	51.6	48.4
Total	62	38

It is worth noting that the age of the offerers and the type of offers did not affect the rate of occurring reoffers in the data in a significant way.

In the next section, the analysis of offers strategies clarifies new findings about the common offer strategies among Persian speakers based on the results of a close analysis of Persian DCTs.

3.2 Persian Offer Strategies

Based on a corpus of 7,020 offers gathered through the DCT, this section deals with the distribution of offer strategies with respect to offer types of relative power, social distance in addition to age and gender of offerers. A general picture of the range and frequency of all offers is taken into consideration in Figure:
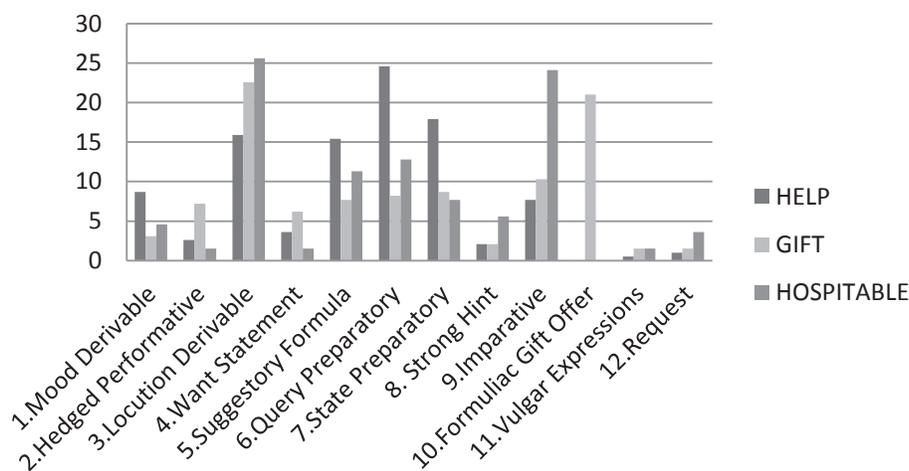

Figure 1. Distribution of Offer Strategies Across Offer Types

As it is clear from Figure 1, three strategies of Locution Derivable, Query Preparatory and Imperative strategies accounted for half of the offers (about 50%) produced by the Persian speakers with Locution Derivable taking the lead. The ranking is followed by Query Preparatory and Imperative (about 28% together). In general, it could be said that the Iranians did not show a tendency for imposing themselves on their addressee while offering. They would rather be indirect, giving the choice to the addressee or downtoning the commitment they are going to accept. Even though the category Imperative was the third most frequent strategy used by the Iranians, it was often hedged to reduce the effect of endangering their addressee's negative face.

In contrast to the findings gained through the field observation (natural data), the investigated factors of age, gender, social distance, and relative power proved not to be significantly effective in the choice of offer strategies. The offer strategies did not spread evenly across different types of offers. This could be seen in Figure 1. People mainly give offer of help using Query Preparatory (24.6%) through utterances like *mikhaay baraat zang bezanam?* ("*Do you want me to ring the bell for you?*") or *ejaaze midid too jam aavariye mataaleb komak konam*? ("*Do you allow me to help*

you in gathering the sources?").The next frequent offer strategy in this category was State Preparatory (17.9%) with utterances like *man mitoonam chand ta ketaab behet gharz bedam* ("*I can lend you a couple of books*"). This was followed by Suggestory Formula like *chetore emshab tashrif biyaarin manzele maa, khaanevaadeam khoshhaal mishand* ("*How about coming to our home tonight, the family would be happy*") and Locution Derivable like *manam khoob maashin mishoorama!* ("*I also wash cars well!*") at roughly the same rate (15%). See Table 6 below:

Table 6. *The Frequency and Percentage of Each Offer Strategy Used in Persian DCTs*

Offer Strategy	Frequency	Percentage
Mood Derivable	396	5.6
Hedged Performative	252	3.6
Locution Derivable	1548	22.1
Want Statement	252	3.6
Suggestory Formula	756	10.8
Query Preparatory	1080	15.4
State Preparatory	792	11.3
Strong Hint	252	3.6
Imperative	972	13.8
Formulaic Gift Offer	504	7.2
Vulgar Expressions	72	1
Requests	144	2.1
Total	7020	100

Moving to Gift offers, Locution Derivable (22.6) and Formulaic Gift offer (21%) were the main offer strategies chosen by the participants. Examples of the former strategy are *baraaye khodet* ("*It's yours*") and *dige in postero nemikhaam* ("*I don't want this poster any more*"), whereas *naaghaabel ast* and *ghaabel nadaare* ("*It's not worthy of you*") are examples of the latter strategy. Following the two strategies, Imperative like *begiresh* ("*Take it*"), whether hedged or not hedged, was the next frequent strategy for giving Gift offers.

Considering hospitable offers, Locution Derivable and Imperative (25.6% and 24.1%, respectively) were the most occurring offer strategies used by the Persian speakers. Examples are *in raa khaanoomam pokhte-haa!* ("*This one is cooked by my wife!*") for the former and *boro ye aab mive biyaar bokhorim* ("*Fetch us some juice*") or *tashrif biyaarid daakhel montazereshoon bemoonin* ("*Come in and wait there for her*") for the latter. Of course, most of the Imperative offers (directives) in the data were hedged exploiting polite verbs, second person plural, or by way of using mitigators and down graders as in the last example or the following: *khoshmazast, age jaa daari baazam bokhor* ("*It's delicious, eat more if you are not still full*"). The next two categories were Query Preparatory (12.8%) as in *aab miive mikhori yaa chaai?* ("*Do you like juice or tea?*") which was mainly used to address a close or intimate

person, and Suggestory Formula (11.3%) as in *nazaret chiye ke biaay too sohbat konim?* ("*What's your idea about coming in and taking?*").

Distance and power are two factors affecting the relation between speakers. People may be close or distant from the social distance point of view. They may be family members, roommates, close friends, or classmates on the one hand, or be total strangers, employees, workers or colleagues on the other. Looking from another aspect, people may be of a higher status towards their addressees like a boss, older family member, or a teacher. They might be of a lower status as a young family member, student or employee. They may also be of an equal status with regard to their addressees as a neighbor, friend, or siblings of the same age. The offers investigated in this study did not show a significant sensitivity to the factors mentioned above. Figure 2 below shows the effect of social distance in choosing offer strategies. Three strategies of Locution Derivable, Query Preparatory and Imperative comprised more than half of the offers in both distant and close relations. In distant relations the participants tended to be more indirect and use more Locution Derivable (23.1%) whereas in close situations they favored Query Preparatory (16.4%) and Imperative (14.9%) more than in distant situations. Such a difference was insignificant, however. Following the above mentioned strategies, in close relations Suggestory Formula (13.3) and State Preparatory (10.8%) were the next favorite strategies. Vulgar expression (1.5%) was the least frequent one in giving offers. Such a pattern was also evident in distant relations, with the difference that State Preparatory outnumbers Suggestory Formula (12.3 vs. 11.3). As could be expected, Want Statement is more applied with people in close relations because the offerer would feel freer to ignore their addressee's negative face (4.6% vs. 2.6%).
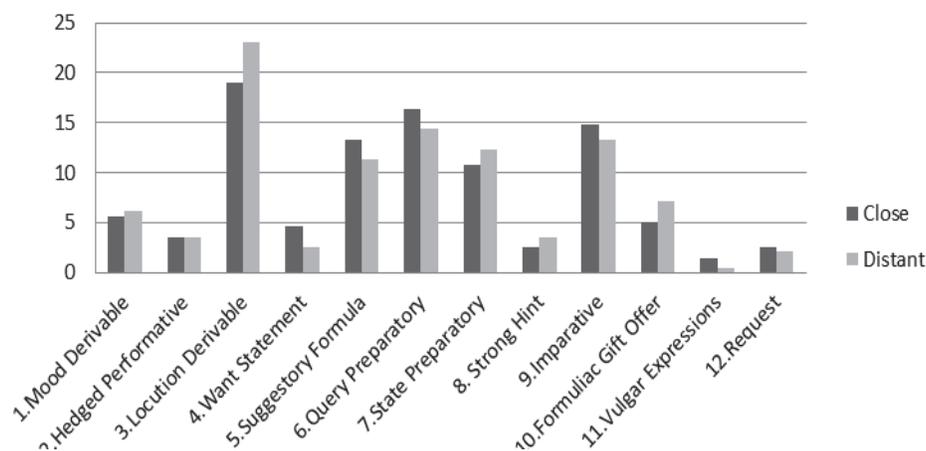

Figure 2. Distribution of Offer Strategies Across Social Distance

Regarding relative power, comparing the frequencies of the strategies employed by the Persian speakers is rather contradictory and confusing. The most applied strategy in all three power situations of the offerer being lower, equal, or higher was Locution Derivable at roughly the same rate (21.5% vs. 21% vs. 21.5, respectively). This could be explained through the tendency of Iranians to be indirect. This strategy is followed by Query Preparatory for status higher (19.3%) and status equal offerers (13.8%). Lower status offerers, however, tended to apply imperatives (13.8%) as the second common strategy. One may not expect a person of a lower status to give offers using imperative, even in a hedged way. Query Preparatory (12.8%) and State Preparatory (12.3%) were the next in this group. The Persian speakers of the higher status used more imperatives (whether hedged or not) when giving offers compared to the people of equal and lower status (15.9% vs. 11.8% and 13.8%, respectively). Interestingly, the third most frequent strategy used by the status equal participants was Suggestory Formula (12.3%) followed by Imperative (11.8%). The People of higher and lower status applied Suggestory Formula almost at the same rate (11.3 % vs. 11.8%). See Figure 3 for more details:
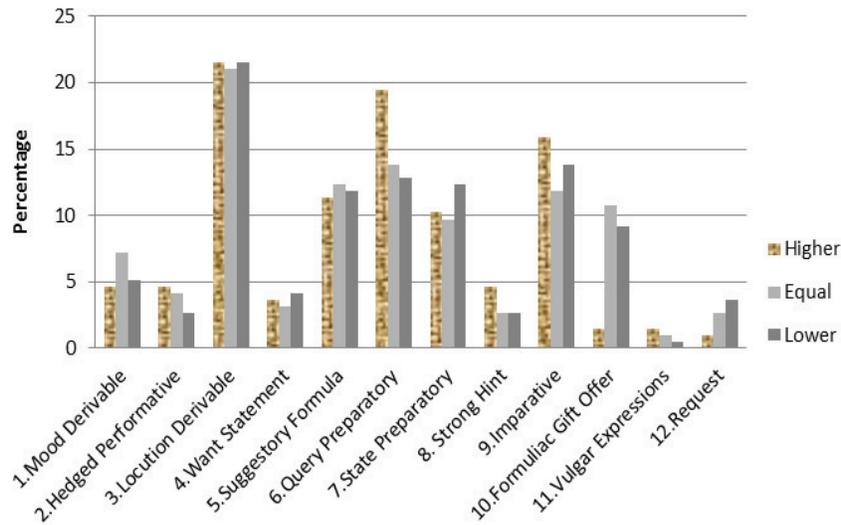

Figure 3. Distribution of Offer Strategies Across Relative Power

Moving away from the abovementioned social factors and toward the personal properties of age and gender, differences related to trends of applying different strategies were found. As Figure 4 indicates, the females surpass the males in applying Locution Derivable (23.2% vs. 19.3%), Query Preparatory (17.3% vs. 14%) and State Preparatory (12.5% vs. 9.7%) and Strong Hint (4% vs. 2.5%), whereas the males showed a tendency to make more use of Suggestory Formula (12.3% vs. 10.1%), Imperative (16.8% vs. 11.7%), and Request (3.2 vs.1.8). The other strategies had a nearly similar trend of use in the males and females:
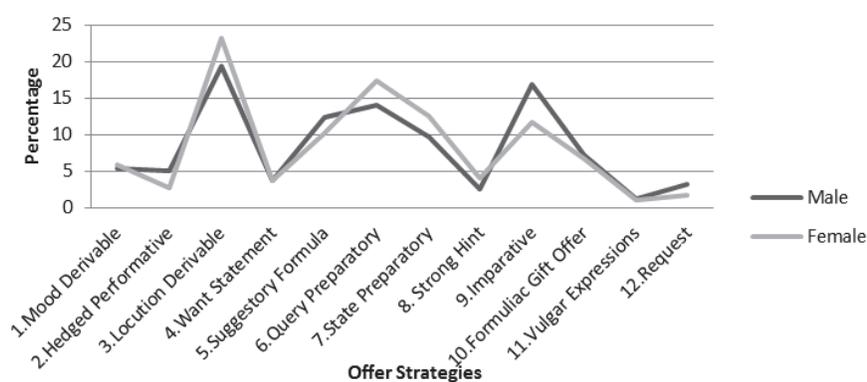

Figure 4. Distribution of Offer Strategies Across Gender

Considering the offer types in the speech behavior of the two genders, it was found out that in help offers, the females used Query Preparatory as the first offer strategy (26.5%) followed by Locution Derivable (17.6%), State Preparatory (16.7%) and Suggestory Formula (14.7%). In giving hospitable offers, they applied Locution Derivable (27.5%), Imperative (19.6%) and Query Preparatory (14.7%) as the most popular strategies. With regard to Formulaic Gift offers, the most occurring strategies were Locution Derivable (24.5%), Formulaic Gift offer (20.6), followed by Query Preparatory and State Preparatory both at the same rate (10.8%). See Figure 5:
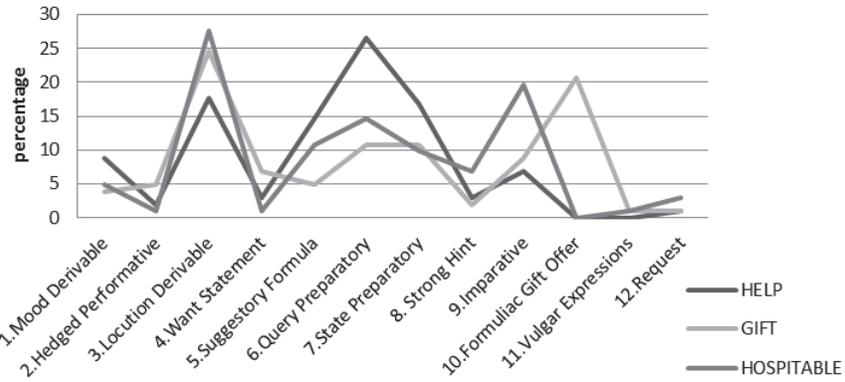
Figure 5. Distribution of Offer Strategies Used by Females Across Offer Types

For the males, Query Preparatory (24.7%), State Preparatory (18.3%), Suggestory Formula (15.1%) and Locution Derivable were the most applied strategy in giving help offers. In hospitable offers, in contrast to the females, the most frequent strategy was Imperative (29%) followed by Locution Derivable (23.7%) and Suggestory Formula (12.9%). Considering Gift offer, as can be recognized from Figure 6, the males used Formulaic Gift offer almost at the same rate as Locution Derivable (21.5% vs. 20.4%) which were followed by Imperative (12.9%). One could conclude that compared to the males, the females tend to be more indirect in giving offers:
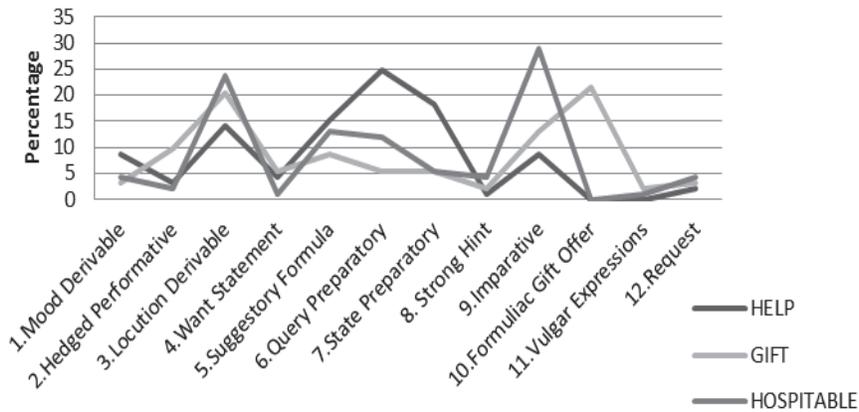

Figure 6. Distribution of Offer Strategies Used by the Males Across Offer Types

The factor of age also affected the type of offer strategy among the participants, albeit none of the three groups proved to be significantly effective. The participants who were in the age range of 18-30 applied various offer strategies much more uniformly compared to the other two groups. The variety of situations and their different roles in different contexts may be a reason for such a pattern. Comparing the three groups, it can be seen that the middle group 31-45 opted for the strategies of Locution Derivable (22.2% vs. 19% in the 18-30 group and 21.7% in the +45 group) and Imperative (14% vs. 13.3% and 13.7%, respectively). The difference is, however, meager and not significant. The second frequently used strategy is Query Preparatory which is used at almost the same rate in the three groups (15.3% in the youngest and oldest group, 15% in the middle group). Suggestory Formula and State Preparatory were the next strategies common in the three age groups. Figure 7 shows the trend of applying strategies in the three age groups:
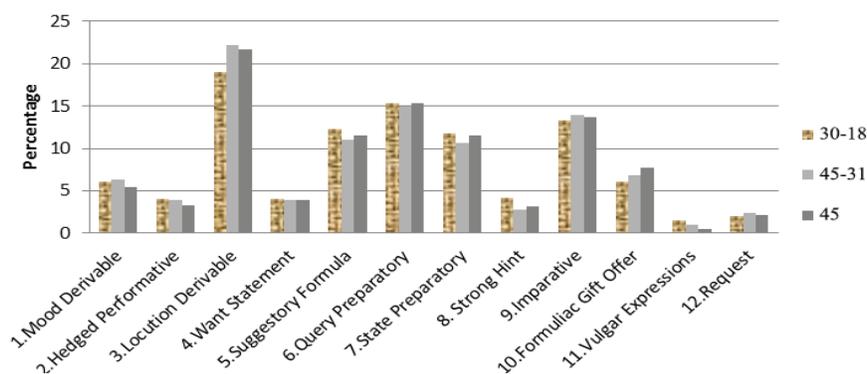

Figure 7. Distribution of Offer Strategies Used by the Males Across Age Groups

4. Discussion

The first research question asked about major Persian offer strategies. As the findings reveal, the most favorite strategy among the Persian native speakers was Locution Derivable followed by Query Preparatory, Imperatives, State Preparatory and Suggestory Formula, respectively. Vulgar expressions, Formulaic Gift offers, Requests and Imperatives were among the strategies specific to Persian offers. In general, it can be assumed that Persian speakers try to avoid imposing themselves on their hearers by being somewhat indirect or making use of hedging devices as in Locution Derivable and Imperatives. They also tend to give the choice to their addressees as in using Query Preparatory or Suggestory Formula. The frequent use of Locution Derivable may be the result of the speakers' tendency to observe both negative face and positive politeness issues, and, therefore, being less direct in conveying their meaning. Query Preparatory as another major strategy highlights the

generosity maxim proposed by Leech (1983), as it maximizes the cost to the speaker and at the same time maximizes benefit to the hearer (tact maxim). Surprisingly, Imperatives ranked the third in the records of the Persian speakers. However, such utterances were often hedged or used in specific contexts where the speaker was of a higher status or power. Such a speech behavior can cause threats to the hearer's negative face. Moreover, tact maxim is minimized. To soften such an effect, they resort to hedges and mitigations.

Although not frequent strategies among the native Persian speakers, Vulgar expressions, Formulaic Gift offer, and Requests are among the strategies used by the Persian speakers. Using requests and formulaic expressions are along with the tact maxim as they maximize the benefit to the offeree. From another perspective, Formulaic Gift offers are safe and conventional strategies for offering gifts, hence, observing politeness issues, tact, and generosity maxims at the same time. Vulgar expressions, on the other hand, are used in contexts where the speaker wants to build solidarity with the hearer and, therefore, moves towards enhancing the hearer's positive face. In such a situation, both generosity and tact maxims might be seem under question when looked at the surface of the utterance, while, indeed, because of the commissive nature of offers both the maxims should be observed.

The second research question asked about the role of intervening variables of offer type, social distance, and relative power as well as age and gender in determining the type of offer strategies used by Persian speakers, to which the answer to all factors is negative.

In order to give offers of help, the Persian speakers used Query Preparatory as their first favorite strategy followed by State Preparatory and Locution Derivable, and Suggestory Formula almost at the same rate. Vulgar expressions rated the least as a strategy used for giving offers. The high rate of using Query Preparatory is in line with the patterns Barron (2003) cites to be used in English. Such a fact might be the result of the speakers' desire not to impose themselves on their addressees and respect their negative face. State Preparatory, as the second strategy, also reflects the wish to be indirect and to respect the hearers' negative face. Locution Derivable and Suggestory Formula as other favorite strategies are also used to be less direct in giving offers.

For Formulaic Gift offers, the most frequent strategies were Locution Derivable and Formulaic Gift offer to a high extent and then imperative followed by State Preparatory, Query Preparatory were rated the most. Besides the fact that in giving offers tact and generosity maxims are observe, Gift offers strengthen the force of such maxims as speakers minimize benefit to themselves (at the same time maximize cost to themselves) and maximize benefit to hearers; (at the same time minimize cost to the hearer). As mentioned before, Formulaic Gift offers are safe ways

to give Gift offers with respect to observing the hearer's negative face and the speaker's positive face.

Hospitable offers made use of Locution Derivable and Imperatives at a very high rate and Query Preparatory and then Suggestory Formula to a lower extent. Again no significant difference was found in the use of hospitable offer strategies by the Persian native speakers. Want Statements and vulgar expressions were amongst the lowest frequencies for this type of offer. Needless to say, the high frequency of hedged imperatives is to build solidarity with the hearer although such a behavior seems a threat to the hearer's positive face.

Moving away from offer type and towards the factor of social distance, the difference between the choices of strategies was not very much, meaning that the natives of Persian did not change their strategies in giving offers when facing a person of a distant or close status. Locution Derivable, State Preparatory, and Formulaic Gift offers were among the participants' choices in offering to a person of a distant relation. Such a reaction can be interpreted as their conservations of addressee's negative face. As could be expected, Vulgar expressions were used at a very low rate when addressing a person of a distant relation. In building and boosting rapport with a person of a close relationship, that is to say to respect the hearer's positive face, Persian speakers make use of Vulgar expressions which are signs of solidarity between the people of a same group.

Social status, as another intervening factor in this study proved not to be a decisive factor in the choice of offer strategies among the Persians. Query Preparatory and Imperatives were used the most with the speakers of a higher status. Interestingly, the higher status speakers used Formulaic Gift offer to a much less extent compared to those of an equal or lower social status. The people of the same social power showed a higher rate of using Mood Derivable compared to the other two groups. Request, on the other hand, was used more by the people of lower status as it shows their desire to appear humble and their respect for conservations related to face and negative politeness issues.

Moving on to the factor of gender, as, no significant difference was found in choosing offer strategies. The males made much more use of Imperatives and Suggestory Formula, whereas the females used other strategies to a wider extent. Interestingly, both males and females used Vulgar expressions at the same rate. In general, it can be concluded that females are more conservative with respect to their addressee's negative face and try to impose themselves to a lesser extent compared with males.

The factor of age also did not prove to be decisive in the choice of offer strategies by the Persians. Moreover, the difference between three age groups proved

to be meager. The only strategy used to a lesser extent by the oldest group compared to other two younger groups was Vulgar expressions. The possible reason behind such a fact may be the older people's reluctance to be a threat to their addressees' negative face or their unfamiliarity with some new Vulgar expressions. From another point of view, the youngest group's more use of such expressions may be for the purpose of building solidarity with their interlocutors. In the same line of thought, their lower frequency of using locution derivable compared to other two groups can be interpreted as their less reservations for observing face issues.

5. Conclusion

The present study was conducted with the aim of contributing to the existing literature on research on speech acts. To achieve such a goal, certain sociocultural factors including age, gender, social distance, and relative power came under investigation. The Persian offers were selected for the reason of the lack of sufficient literature on this particular speech act.

In spite of the fact that certain social and linguistic requirements necessitate the use of speech acts, different cultural boundaries cause the speakers to vary in their perception and production of speech acts in different situations. In fact, there are no precise rules for the proper use of speech acts in various cultures. On the other hand, to be successful in communication, it is necessary to be able to perform well in different social contexts with different interlocutors. Such a need motivates close penetration into cultures in order to identify the areas of cultural similarities and differences.

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