Realization of English and Persian Congratulation Strategies in a Computer-mediated Social Network[1]

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Abstract

Language knowledge is not limited to linguistic competence; cultural norms of a society affect the way people communicate. In fact, culture, tradition, and values are realized and manifested through language and the use of units known as speech acts. The current study sought to explore the strategies used by 200 native Iranian speakers of Persian, 50 American native speakers of English, and 48 Iranian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in producing the speech act of congratulations through the social network of Instagram. Participants were asked to comment in response to the post and congratulate the celebrity for their birthday. The content analysis of the congratulations corpus led to the emergence of eight categories of congratulation strategies for Iranian native speakers of Persian (the most frequent one: *statement of congratulations*, n = 80, 58.39%), nine categories for the American native speakers of English (the most frequent one: *use of address terms*, n = 44, 30.34%), and seven categories for the Iranian EFL learners (the most frequent one: *statement of congratulations*, n = 28, 47.45%). Moreover, the results of Chi-square indicated that the three groups were different with regard to certain categories of congratulation strategies. The results can have important implications for EFL teachers and learners as well as textbook developers.

Resumen

El conocimiento del idioma no se limita a la competencia lingüística y las normas culturales de una sociedad afectan la forma en que las personas se comunican. De hecho, la cultura, la tradición y los valores se realizan y manifiestan a través del lenguaje y el uso de unidades conocidas como actos de habla. El presente estudio buscó explorar las estrategias utilizadas por 200 hablantes nativos iraníes de persa, 50 hablantes nativos estadounidenses de inglés y 48 estudiantes iraníes de inglés como lengua extranjera para producir el acto de habla de felicitaciones por medio de la red social Instagram. Se pidió a los participantes que comentaran en respuesta a la publicación y felicitaran a la celebridad por su cumpleaños. El análisis de contenido del corpus de felicitaciones dio lugar a la aparición de ocho categorías de estrategias de felicitación para hablantes nativos iraníes de persa (la más frecuente: declaración de felicitación, n = 80, 58,39%), nueve categorías para los hablantes nativos estadounidenses de inglés (la más frecuente: uso de términos de interlocución, n = 44, 30,34%) y siete categorías para los estudiantes iraníes de inglés como lengua extranjera (la más frecuente: declaración de felicitación, n = 28, 47,45%). Además, los resultados de Chi-cuadrado indicaron que los tres grupos eran diferentes con respecto a ciertas categorías de estrategias de felicitación. Los resultados pueden tener implicaciones importantes para los profesores y estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera, así como para los desarrolladores de libros de texto.

Introduction

Since the advent of the internet, the world has experienced increasing widespread global communication. Thanks to the new online platforms in social networking sites, more and more people with various cultural and contextual backgrounds around the world are able to communicate freely and build new social relationships every day. Over the past decade, this interactive computer-mediated technology has assisted and facilitated the process of sharing information and experiences and also served various educational purposes. To be more specific, within the domain of language instruction, more facilities and learning opportunities are also available to students and teachers (Mason & Rennie, 2008). Moreover, in line with the theory of social constructivism, and its emphasis on the need for negotiation and social collaboration in meaning development (Lantolf, 2006; Vygotsky, 1978), this type of technology and its aids have helped the learners to play a more active role in the construction of their learning experience.

In addition, in the field of Applied Linguistics, the issue of similarities and differences in cultural norms for producing utterances, known as cross-cultural pragmatics, has been brought into the limelight (Blum-Kulka, 1991; Kasper & Dahl, 1991). To put it differently, cultures vary greatly in their interactional styles, and this can lead to preferences for choosing diverse styles of speech act behavior and brings to light the importance of appropriateness of speech. Similarly, according to Vygotsky (1978), learning and sociocultural contexts are intricately related. Hence, it is argued that social and cultural communications can have an impact on

academic achievement and language performance of language learners (Block, 2007; Palovskaya & Lord, 2018).

Nevertheless, different countries and cultures around the world enjoy specific cultural norms and not observing these norms may lead to miscommunication among the interlocutors. In the same way, for a foreign language learner it might be a challenge to learn the target language within this framework of values and norms, and, consequently, to use appropriate verbal utterances to express different speech acts. In this regard, one of these speech acts which has not been extensively researched is the speech act of *congratulating*, especially in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts (Celaya et al., 2019). Against this backdrop and due to the significance of the issue, the current study examined the verbal expressions of congratulating used by Iranian native speakers of Persian, American native speakers of English, and Iranian EFL learners through quantitative and qualitative procedures.

Data were collected from an Instagram-based corpus of a set of birthday congratulations comments by the above mentioned three groups. The comments were read and analyzed iteratively by a group of experts in order to come up with the matches and mismatches between the congratulating notes.

Literature Review

Theoretical background

During the past decades, the area of Interlanguage Pragmatics (ILP) has gained momentum in the realm of language education and applied linguistics. Bardovi-Harlig (2013, p. 68) defines ILP as "How-to-say-what-to-whom-when." Yule (1996) states that ILP is the study of the contextual meaning produced by speaker and, in this regard, sometimes more is meant than what is actually said. Within the domain of ILP, researchers have mostly used speech acts, defined as the actions which are implemented and performed through words and sentences (Yule, 1996), to investigate pragmatics from different perspectives (Celaya et al., 2019).

The theory of speech acts was first proposed by Austin (1962) and later developed by Searle (1979). It considers language use as the performance of a specific action, doing something through words, or having others do things for us (Hoffman, 2003). Based on the initial classification of speech acts by Austin (1962), there are five major categories of speech acts, namely: (1) Verdictives, (2) Exercitives, (3) Commissives, (4) Behabitives, and (5) Expositives. According to Austin's (1962) classification, the congratulations speech act lies in the category of behabitives, which is the expression of joy or pleasure, or more precisely, an act of communicating pleasure, approval, or praise to one another. Searle (1975) classifies speech acts into five categories which are as follows: (1) Representative; (2) Directive; (3) Commissive; (4) Expressive; and (5) Declarative. Accordingly, congratulations falls into the expressive category of speech acts and should be considered as an illocutionary speech act, as the speakers intend to express their own psychological attitude toward a specific situation.

Previous studies on the speech act of congratulations

As more and more researchers have become interested in cross-cultural studies concerning different speech acts, several research studies have been carried out on the speech act of congratulations in diverse contexts. One of the most significant studies is the cross-cultural study done by Elwood (2004) on 135 American and Japanese students. They wrote their responses to seven pieces of Written Discourse Completion Test (WDCT) based on the topic of good news. The answers were collected both in English and Japanese. The results highlighted the different congratulation strategies of the American and Japanese students. Whereas the responses from the Japanese group accompanied some sort of envy, the responses from the American group usually came with a question for more information concerning the good news. In one of the most recent studies, Celaya et al. (2019) investigated the speech act of congratulating in an EFL context with a focus on younger learners. To be more specific, they analyzed the impact of age, proficiency level, and first language pragmatics on 49 Spanish EFL Learners' production of the speech act in the context of school where no special instruction on pragmatics is provided. They used WDCT to collect the data and their results showed that those learners who were younger and less proficient used congratulation categories which mainly focused on themselves and did not include the interlocutor. On the other hand, older and more proficient learners made more active use of those congratulation categories which involved the interlocutor.

In the Iranian context, Dastjerdi and Nasri (2012) explored the cross-cultural differences in the production of congratulation strategies among 142 American native speakers of English, Iranian native speakers of

Persian, and Syrian native speakers of Arabic. The instrument used was Discourse Completion Test (DCT) which included ten situations of offering congratulations. The analysis of the collected corpus indicated that the most frequent strategy type among all the participants were *illocutionary force indicating device (IFID)* and *offer of good wishes*. Also, Jahangard et al. (2016) analyzed birthday congratulation comments posted on Facebook by 60 Iranians and 60 Americans. The results of their study revealed seven congratulation categories, namely (1) illocutionary force indicating device (IFID), (2) blessings, (3) divine statements, (4) poems and pieces of literature, (5) endearments, (6) expressions or feelings, as well as (7) compliments. They further reported a significant difference between the American and Iranian birthday congratulation strategies. Similarly, Pishghadam and Morady Moghaddam (2011) reported significant difference between Persian and English congratulation strategies observed in 50 Persian and 50 English movies. Based on the model proposed by Elwood (2004), they reported a new set of six congratulation categories: (1) *offering congratulations*, (2) *mentioning the occasion*, (3) *blessing*, (4) *expressing feelings*, (5) *divine statements*, and (6) *complimenting*.

As can be seen there is scant literature on the speech act of congratulation (Celaya et al., 2019), especially in the EFL context of Iran, and among those with largely different cultures of first and second languages. Moreover, according to Ishihara and Cohen (2010), a great portion of pragmatics has been devoted to the spoken language, and appropriate written language has been largely neglected. Therefore, the purpose of the current study is to explore the cross-cultural variations and the strategies that native speakers of Persian, native speakers of English, and Iranian EFL learners employ to produce the speech act of congratulation in a computer-mediated social network as well as the existence of any significant differences in the applied strategies. Based on the purpose of the study outlined above, this study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. *What strategies do native speakers of Persian, native speakers of English, and Iranian EFL learners employ to produce the speech act of congratulations in a computer-mediated social network?*

2. *Is there any significant difference in the strategies used by native speakers of Persian, native speakers of English, and Iranian EFL learners in their production of speech act of congratulations in a computer-mediated social network?*

Method

Participants

Three groups of participants took part in this study. They were as follows:

<u>Group one:</u> The first group included 200 female and male native speakers of Persian who responded to a birthday post followed by a picture on the social network of Instagram. This group, selected based on convenience sampling, mainly consisted of university students.

<u>Group two:</u> The second group included 48 (25 female and 23 male) intermediate and advanced EFL learners. These participants responded to a researcher-prepared task and were asked to congratulate the birthday of two famous Iranian figures.

<u>Group three:</u> The third group included 50 native speakers of English (both male & female). They were from the United States of America and responded to a birthday post accompanied by a related picture posted on Instagram.

Data collection

The data for the current study were collected from an Instagram-based corpus of a set of birthday congratulations' comments posted on this social network by Iranian native speakers of Persian (in Persian and later translated into English) and American native speakers of English (in English). Moreover, a third set of data were collected from the Iranian EFL learners who responded to a devised task which elicited birthday congratulations responses (in English). In the case of Iranians, Persian and English congratulations were collected about the birthday of Mohammad Reza Golzar (a famous Iranian actor, singer, television host, and model). Also, in the case of American participants, English birthday congratulations were collected with regard to the birthday of Samuel Jackson (a famous American actor and producer)

Data Analysis

Both quantitative and qualitative analyses were employed in this corpus-based analysis. In the qualitative phase, the corpus was carefully reviewed iteratively by the researchers to understand the main types and

number of congratulation strategies used by the participants, based on the taxonomy of congratulation strategy proposed by Elwood (2004) with some minor modifications to suit the purpose of the current study. That is, we used the Elwood's (2004) taxonomy as a base and model to give us some insight and guide us in naming the different congratulations strategies, but the naming protocol we opted for is not an exact match and differs from this model. After conducting the initial analysis of the strategies, and to ensure the reliability of the classification scheme, we invited three independent raters, who hold Ph.D.'s in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL), to independently analyze and codify the strategies. These raters were all professors of Applied Linguistics and had more than 20 years of teaching experience, and also had a background on research in the field of pragmatics. Later, the matches and mismatches between the researchers and the aforementioned independent raters were calculated through Holsti's (1969) coefficient of reliability, which showed the number of matches and agreements in the total number of ceded items. The results showed that the observed value was 0.87, a sign of an excellent agreement and proved the consistency of the inter-rater's coding results. Then, in the quantitative stage of data analysis, the frequency counts of the congratulation strategies were fed into SPSS and the statistical procedure of Chi-Square was run, in order to find any possible significant difference between the congratulations productions of native speakers of Persian, native speakers of English, and Iranian EFL learners.

Results

Results of research question one

The first research question is concerned about the kind of strategies native speakers of English, native speakers of Persian, and Iranian EFL learners employ to produce the speech act of congratulations in a computer-mediated social network. After creating a pool of responses to the birthday announcement status of popular people for the groups in the study, the utterances used by native Persian speakers were coded into eight categories, by EFL learners into seven categories, and by American native speakers into nine categories.

Native Persian Speakers

As shown in Table 1, native Persian speakers employed eight kinds of strategies to congratulate a popular Iranian figure on his birthday. The most and least frequent strategy types were statements of congratulations (n = 80, 58.39%) and requests for information (n = 8, 5.83%), respectively.

	Types	Frequency	Percentage
1	Statements of congratulations	80	58.39%
2	Expressions of happiness	49	35.76%
3	Offers of good wishes	25	18.24%
4	Expressions of affection	20	14.59%
5	Expressions of humor and sarcasm	20	14.59%
6	Use of address terms	14	10.21%
7	Compliments	13	9.48%
8	Requests for information	8	5.83%

Table 1: Congratulation strategies used by native Persian speakers

The strategy of *statements of congratulations* mainly dealt with the direct statement of congratulations for the birthday. Table 2 shows some examples of congratulation statements used by native Persian speakers and their English translation. It must be noted that some of the Persian examples throughout this study were written using the English alphabet, as appeared in the social network. Interestingly as can be seen, in some cases the participants replicated or repeated some vowel or consonant in their words (e.g., تولدت ممممممبببببباااررررککک) in order to intensify and strengthen their congratulations. This is in fact what is also observed in Persian spoken language and among friends usually. However, it seems that in this case, Iranians did not consider a very different procedure for congratulating someone of a different social status. This may be justified based on their desire to be both polite and kind. They may not have thought that they might need a different formal style of speaking to congratulate formally.

	Persian	English translation
1	تبریک	Congratulations
2	مبارک با تاخیر	Happy birthday with some delay
3	تولد تولد تولدت ممممممببببببااااررررککک	Happy birthday!!! (with exclamation and emphasis)
4	مباارک	Congratulations!!
5	تولدت مبارک	Happy birthday

Table 2: Examples of statement of congratulations produced by native Persian speakers

The next frequent category was *expressions of happiness* with a frequency count of 49 (35.76%). The strategies in this category were related to the happiness of the people who noticed the birthday of the particular person. Table 3 shows some examples of *expressions of happiness* used by native Persian speakers and their English translation. According to the frequency count, this form of birthday congratulations is also a dominant type used by Persian native speakers. It is worth mentioning that a congratulating speech act is inherently a polite one and is connected with positive illocutionary force. In the same lines, Leech (1983, p. 104) uses the term "convivial" to refer to them. This is further related to "behabitives" and "expressives" in Austin (1962) and Searle's (1979) classifications, respectively. It has been noted that this speech act is used by interlocutors in order to express feelings and attitudes.

	Persian	English translation
1	منم ۱۲فرودینم بزنین قدس فرودینا	Cheers, I was born on Farvardin 12th too.
2	همه فروردینیاااااا همه عشق همه دوست داشتنیاا	All being born in Farvardin are nice and lovely people
3	عزیزم منم1فروردینم....	Honey, My birthday is the 1st of Farvardin
4	hoooooorA 😋😋😋😋😋😋	Cheers

Table 3: Example of expression of happiness produced by native Persian speakers

The next frequent category was *offering good wishes* which occurred 25 times (18.24%). As the label shows, in this category, people offer wishes of health, success, and happiness to the person celebrating the birthday. Table 4 shows some examples of *offering good wishes* used by native Persian speakers and their English translation. As illustrated, in many cases the presence of the expression "*If God wishes*" was observed. In Persian, it is pronounced as *Ishalaaa* and written as ایشاالله. This is in fact rooted in the religious and cultural beliefs of the Iranians who are generally Moslems. This is a culturally specific expression used mostly to show belief in God's will in the success of people.

	Persian	English translation
1	Ishalaaa 1000 saal ba salamati bashin	I wish you 1000 years of healthy life.
2	تولدت مبارک و ارزووی موفقیت ❤️	Happy birthday and I wish you success.
3	ishallah sali por poolo por barkato ,por az eshgh dashte bashin ***	Wish you a year full of money, prosperity, and love.
4	صدساله بشی ایشاالله	Wish you live to be 100 years old.
5	همیشه شاد باشی	Wish you everlasting happiness.

Table 4: Example of offering good wishes produced by native Persian speakers

The fourth category identified as the category of *expressions of affection* was used twenty times by native Persian speakers. Here, people showed their affection through emotions and excitement. Use of such words as عشق (love), نازنین (cutie), عزیز (Dear), (cutie) were common in the utterances. Table 5 shows some examples of *expression of affection* used by native Persian speakers and their English translation. This may remind us of Venderveken (1999) who also noted that people use the speech act of congratulating to display their internal beliefs and feelings.

	Persian	English translation
1	عزیزمی!	My honey!
2	asheghetam manam	Love you too
3	Fadat nazam	Love you my cutie
4	eshghe maniiii	You are my love

Table 5: Example of expressions of affection produced by native Persian speakers

This category had the same frequency count as the following category: *expressions of humor and sarcasm.* This category also had a frequency count of 20 times. People used sarcastic expressions in reference to the birthday of the famous figure in Iran. As shown in Table 6, some examples of *expressions of humor and sarcasm* used by native Persian speakers and their English translation.

	Persian	English translation
1	Jay man khali bood!	Did you miss me there!
2	خیلی باحالی, تولدتو ب خودت تبریک میگی ؟؟؟ خخخ!	You are so cool, do you say happy birthday to yourself??? LOL!
3	تولد ۹۹ سالگیت مبارك	Happy 99th birthday
4	37sale sheee	Hope, you become 37 years old.

Table 6: Example of Expressions of humor and sarcasm produced by native Persian speakers

The sixth category was the category of *Use of address terms.* This category had a frequency count of 14, which was similar to the category statement *of congratulations*, but with a direct address to the person. Table 7 shows some examples of *Use of address terms* used by native Persian speakers and their English translation.

	Persian	English translation
1	آقای گلزار شما همه چی دارین قیافه تیپ هیکل خونه ماشین وپول زیاد فقط یه زن میخواید که همه ی اینا رو خرج کنه! 😊😊😊	Mr. Golzar, you have everything; you are handsome and rich and have a car and money, and a house. What you lack is a wife who can spend all of these! 😊😊😊
2	تولدت مبارک محمدرضای عزیزم!	Happy birthday my dear Mohammad Reza!
3	تولدتون مبارک اقای گلزار!	Happy birthday Mr. Golzar!

Table 7: Example of use of address terms produced by native Persian speakers

As seen in the examples, each statement included the name of the addressee. The next category which had a frequency count of 13 was the category of *compliment*, which dealt mainly with expressions that conveyed some kind of compliment. Table 8 shows some examples of *compliment* used by native Persian speakers and their English translation.

	Persian	English translation
1	Toie shahkare khelghat	You are the masterpiece of God
2	تولدتووون مبارک بهترین سوپر استاررر	Happy birthday to the best superstar
3	Bahali	You are so cool
4	تولدت مبارک ستاره بهترین بازیگر ها	Happy birthday the star of the best actors
5	Khoshgel tarin pesare donya tavalodet mobarak	Happy birthday the most beautiful boy in the world.

Table 8: Example of compliment produced by native Persian speakers

And finally, the least frequent and oddest category was that of *requests for information.* This category had a frequency count of 8 and utterances within it were in the form of questions. However, these utterances had sarcastic meanings as well but due to the grammatical structures which were interrogative forms, they

were categorized separately. Table 9 shows some examples of *requests for information* used by native Persian speakers and their English translation.

	Persian	English translation
1	ببخشید تولدتون کی هست؟؟؟؟؟؟	Sorry, when is your birthday?????
2	الان دقیقا چند ساله شدین ؟ وقت زندگی عادی دارین ؟ چرا یه همسر براخودتون انتخاب نمیکنین ، خسته نشدین ؟ (یکی که سنشم به شما بخوره)	How old are you exactly? Do you have a normal life? Why don't you get married? Marry someone who matches you in terms of age.
3	میشه بپرسم ارزوی شما چیه	May I ask you what your dream is?
4	از تو خوشبخت تر هم تو ایران هست؟؟؟؟ تو اصلا آرزویی داری؟؟!!؟؟؟ خوش بحالت	Is there anyone happier than you in Iran? Have you got any dreams? Lucky you!
5	ملیکا رو یادته؟ همونی که میخواستی بگیریش!	Do you remember Melika? The one you wanted to marry!

Table 9: Requests for information produced by native Persian speakers

English Speakers

As depicted in Table 10, English Speakers employed nine kinds of strategies to congratulate a popular American figure on his birthday. The most frequent strategy was *use of address* terms which was produced 80 times by English speakers. Utterances within this category included direct address to the American figure (Samuel Jackson) referring to his birthday. Some examples of address terms used by English Speakers were as follows:

- *Hbd Mr. Jackson love your movies keep them coming.*
- *Happy birthday brother Jackson over the years you have managed to become a real icon enjoy your 21st birthday my brother*
- *I didn't know. Happy belated birthday Sammy man!*
- *Happy Birthday Mr Jackson you still got it*
- *Happy Birthday Mr Jackson and I hope is all kinds cussing in hateful 8*

	Types	Frequency	Percentage
1	Use of address terms	44	30.34%
2	Expressions of congratulations	39	26.89%
3	Expressions of gratitude	23	15.86%
4	Offering good wishes	15	10.34%
5	Use of mock impoliteness	12	8.27%
6	Expressions of affection	8	5.51%
7	Humor	2	1.37%
8	Requests for information	1	0.68%
9	Suggestions for celebration	1	0.68

Table 10: Congratulation strategies used by native English speakers

As the above examples show, each statement contained the name of the person or title plus name. All of them extend congratulations for Mr. Jackson's birthday. The next most frequent strategy to congratulate was strategy of *expressions of congratulations*. This strategy has a lot in common with the strategy of *use of address terms* except that no direct address is made to the person. What follows are some example of this strategy:

- *Yessss we love you Happy birthday.*

- *I'm late but it's my honor, Happy Birthday Iconic civil rights procurer. I appreciate the silent steps, and ur smiling face. Ameen, Amen Amon on this (belated possibly) joyous breath of life day.*
- *You know you are loved! Happy birthday!*

As evident in the above examples, all of them were expression of congratulations and the only difference with previous strategy can be attributed to the lack of the name of the person and his title. *Expressions of gratitude*, which had a frequency count of 23, was the next category as a way for congratulating a birthday for Americans. For instance, the following examples can be considered both as an *expression of gratitude:*

- *Happy birthday Samuel love your roles in so many movies*
- *Happy birthday brother Jackson over the years you have managed to become a real icon enjoy your 21st birthday my brother*
- *You are very loved Mr. Jackson. Keep doin what you do. Happy Birthday.*

In the utterances seen above, the bold-faced words are indications of gratitude. People showed their respect and gratitude for Mr. Jackson's movies that brought them good moments. Wishing good things for Mr. Jackson was another way Americans extended their congratulations for his birthday. This category was labeled *offering good wishes* and it had a frequency count of 15. As the label shows, people expressed good wishes along with the congratulation statements. What follows were some examples for this category of congratulation strategies used by English Speakers:

- *Wishing Mr. Samuel Jackson a very Happy Birthday and many more!!!! Happy Holidays to you and your family!!!!*
- *Happy Birthday Samuel, may your day be full of many blessings!*
- *Happy birthday Mr Jackson, hope you're having a great day/night* 🎂

As seen in the above examples, the bold-faced words offered good wishes for Mr. Jackson. The next category dealt with the *use of mock impoliteness* in response to hearing about Mr. Jackson's birthday. This category had a frequency count of 12 and contained slang words and phrases that are not considered polite, namely:

- *Yo, BAD MO--ERF---ER!! Have a damn good Birthday, old man! Love you for your dirty language in all ya fu---n movies and the awesome Blues u played through dat old Peavey in Black Snake Moan..."Hell no nigga, I don't give a goddamn!!" Respect ya old nigga, u da best! God bless ya fu--in more years! And do keep the old Southern Blues alive, dude!! By the way, do you kiss your mo--er with that mouth, old man??? Hehehe... Lots of love, nigga!*

As the examples clearly show, there were several instances of the use of slang words in the quote. However, this does not mean that the person hated Mr. Jackson as he complimented him too. Actually, that man respected Mr. Jackson, but he used a lot of slang in his words which can be attributed to his personality or the community or the specific group he is associated with.

The next strategy used for birthday congratulations was expressions of affection in which Americans clearly convey their affection through using emotionally loaded words and phrases. This category had a frequency count of 8, such as:

- *You are very loved Mr. Jackson. Keep doin what you do. Happy Birthday.*
- *MAD respect for you, Mr. Jackson! I hope your birthday was sensational! Hugs!*

The above examples illustrate that some people preferred to make their statement more emotional through the use of *Love*, *MAD respect*, *Hugs*, etc. Use of *humor* was another strategy employed by the English Speakers as a way to congratulate, but this strategy was used only twice in the whole corpus. These two examples are as follows:

- *Big fan of your movies. Happy day and may the force be with u lol*
- *I love you more than any other human being in this world. Sorry boyfriend.*

As seen in the last example, the person said that she loved Mr. Jackson more than anybody else and said sorry for this, because it meant that she loved Mr. Jackson more than her boyfriend. This utterance had a humorous tone, but actually she was congratulating and showing affection to Mr. Jackson.

The last two strategies used by English Speakers were requests for information and suggestions for celebration. These two strategies occurred only once which probably meant they are marginally used by Americans. Similar to native Persian speakers, requests for information had the least frequency occurrence for English Speakers as well.

- *Will we see more of u on agents of shield?*
- *I will celebrate your birthday Samuel L. Jackson by going to see h8ful eight opening night.*

In the examples above, the first statement is an example of *requests for information* and the second one is an example of *suggestion for celebration*.

EFL learners

As can be seen in Table 11, the most frequent strategy used by the EFL learners were *the statements of congratulations* with a frequency count of 28 (47.45%). Some examples showing this strategy used by Iranian English learners were as follows (needless to say that they expressed congratulations in English):

- *Congratulations*
- *Happy birthday*
- *Happy birthday*
- *My warmest congratulations on your 38th birthday*

	Types	Frequency	Percentage
1	Statements of congratulations	28	47.45%
2	Expressions of humor and sarcasm	9	15.25%
3	Offers of good wishes	8	13.55%
4	Use of address terms	6	10.16%
5	Compliments	6	10.16%
6	Requests for information	1	1.69%
7	Expressions of affection	1	1.69%

Table 11: Congratulation strategies used by Iranian EFL learners

The next frequent category was *expressions of humor and sarcasm*, which had a frequency count of nine followed by category *offers of good wishes* with frequency count of eight. These two strategies had somehow similar frequency count, indicating that Iranian EFL leaners had an equal preference for using these two kinds of strategies as ways of congratulating. Following are examples for these two strategies:

- *But you're not good enough for acting*
- *OMG, 38*
- *Have a nice moment in your life and be successful in your profession.*
- *I wish that you have a good future.*

In the examples stated above, the first two examples illustrated the ways Iranian EFL learners expressed humor and sarcasm, and the last two examples showed how they offered good wishes. *Use of address terms* and *compliments*, which were the fourth and fifth categories of congratulation strategies by EFL learners respectively, also had a similar frequency of 6. What follows are some examples showing *use of address terms* and *compliments* strategies by Iranian EFL learners:

- *Happy 38th Birthday M. Golzar!!!*
- *Happy birthday to you dear Golzar*
- *Good looking*

- *He looks younger. Anyway, happy birthday*

As the first two examples clearly show, EFL learners directly addressed Mr. Golzar along with the congratulation statement. And in the last two examples they used a compliment as a way of reacting to hearing about Mr. Golzar's birthday. Finally, *requests for information* and *expressions of affection* were the least-used strategies by Iranian EFL learners with equal frequency count of 1. This means that Iranian EFL learners tend to have the least preference for this type of strategy to express for birthday congratulations, such as the following:

- *Photoshop?!*
- *The best memorabilia for those whom we love in our mind … happy birthday dear* ❤️ 😌

In the examples above, the first one shows the use of the request for information which is indicated by the question mark (?). It actually asked Mr. Golzar if the posted photo was a genuine one or had it been trimmed by some kind of software (*Photoshop*). Finally, in the last example that showed how Iranian EFL learners expressed affection, the use of the word *memorabilia* was an indication of compliment for Mr. Golzar.

Results of research question two

The second research question sought to investigate any significant difference in the strategies used by native speakers of English, native speakers of Persian, and Iranian EFL learners in their production of speech act of congratulations. Accordingly, the statistical technique of Chi-square was run on the frequency data. Due to the fact that in some categories Chi-square assumption that "No more than 20% of the expected counts are less than 5 and all individual expected counts are 1 or greater" (Yates et al., 1999, p. 734) was not met, Likelihood Ratio was reported instead of Pearson chi square. In Table 12, comparisons violating chi square assumptions across the three groups of the study were marked Violated. For those categories that Chi-square could not be performed across the three groups, results of Likelihood Ratios were reported.

Condolence Strategy	Chi-Square Test	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Chi-square Cell assumption
Statements of congratulations	Pearson Chi-Square	28.33	2	.00	
Expressions of happiness	Pearson Chi-Square	27.08	2	.00	
Offers of good wishes	Pearson Chi-Square	9.16	2	.01	
Expressions of affection	Likelihood Ratio	5.51	2	0.06	Violated
Expressions of humor and sarcasm	Pearson Chi-Square	7.56	2	.02	
Use of address terms	Pearson Chi-Square	1.55	2	.00	
Compliments	Likelihood Ratio	9.91	2	0.007	Violated
Requests for information	Likelihood Ratio	0.70	2	0.70	Violated
Use of mock impoliteness	Likelihood Ratio	44.99	2	1.69	Violated
Expressions of gratitude	Likelihood Ratio	92.04	2	1.03	Violated
Suggestions for celebration	Likelihood Ratio	3.54	2	0.16	Violated

Table 12: Results of Chi-square Test on frequency count of congratulation strategies between the participants

According to the results of Chi-square and Likelihood Ratio, there were significant differences among the participants of the study in terms of the use of congratulation strategies of *Statements of congratulations*, *Expressions of happiness*, *Offers of good wishes*, *Expressions of humor and sarcasm*, *Use of address terms*, *Expressions of affection*, and *Compliments* as ways to express a birthday congratulations.

Discussion

The main goal of the current study was to explore the use of the speech act of congratulations by three different groups of participants namely, Iranian native Persian speakers, native English speakers, and Iranian EFL learners in a computer-mediated social network. By and large, the findings showed that there were both similarities and differences among the three groups. Moreover, the results of our study support

Hymes's (1972) theory of communicative competence and brings the interrelationship between language and contextual issues to the fore. To be more specific, the theory of communicative competence deals with issues, such as speech situation or event, speech act, and also the components of speech events. The term communicative competence was proposed first to account for both referential and social meaning of utterances. After the publication of *The ethnography of communication* by Gumperz and Hymes in 1964, a great number of sociolinguists have tried to discover and understand the rules of communicative competence which enable the speakers to produce and understand socially appropriate utterances.

Moreover, the theory of pragmatic competence, which is regularly associated with the name Morris (1938) and Grice (1975), supports the findings of the current study. Pragmatics highlights the role of social context and social meaning of utterances and moves away from the linguistic meaning. According to pragmatics, speakers of various communities encapsulate their meanings through different patterns of language use. In line with these theories, differences in congratulation strategies can be linked to differences in the cultural norms of participants of the study which forced them to produce different or similar strategies, but with a different frequency of use.

With regards to the first research question and the type of congratulation strategies used by native speakers of Persian, Iranian EFL learners, and native English speakers in a computer-mediated social network, the responses to a birthday post on Instagram led to a corpus of various congratulation strategies. The content analysis of the congratulation corpus led to the emergence of eight categories of congratulation strategies for Persian speakers, seven categories for EFL learners, and nine categories for American native speakers of English. The type of congratulation strategies found in this study were to some extent similar to the findings of some previous studies. As in the studies done by Elwood (2004), Allami and Nekouzadeh (2011), Dastjerdi and Nasri, 2012, Ghaemi and Ebrahimi (2014) Nasri et al. (2013), the results of the current study also showed that the categories of *statements of congratulations* and *expressions of happiness* were among the most frequent strategies.

Similar to previous studies (e.g., Dastjerdi & Nasri, 2012), this study showed that there were both similarities and differences among English native speakers and non-native speakers in terms of expressing congratulations. As to the similarities, frequency count of congratulation strategies revealed that the strategy of *statements of congratulations* was among the most frequent strategies used by Persian speakers, Iranian EFL learners, and American native speakers while *requests for information* was among the least frequent congratulation strategy. These similarities can be attributed to the membership of people of various cultures to a unified global community. In the same vein, Yashima (2002) expanded the notion of "integrativeness" to refer to such international stance. She defines it as an interest and willingness toward traveling or working overseas and being ready to cooperate with people of different cultural backgrounds (Yashima, 2002). Moreover, as Ushioda (2006) argues, because we are living in a global community, it would be meaningful to associate oneself to an external reference group. Moreover, the broad network of mass media and internet have brought many cultures close to each other and provided the ground for more interaction and shared global culture. However, our results run counter to the findings of Hofstede (1984) and Pishghadam and Morady Moghaddam (2011) which reported that English speakers tend to express feeling more than their Persian counterparts. In our study, Iranian Persian speakers used the strategy "expression of affection" in 14.59% of cases, compared to the 5.51% use of the native English speakers.

The second research question probed significant differences in the strategies used by the three aforementioned groups. The result of statistical analysis revealed that there were significant differences among the participants in terms of using *Statements of congratulations*, *Expressions of happiness*, *Offers of good wishes*, *Expressions of humor and sarcasm*, *Use of address terms*, *Expressions of affection*, and *Compliments* as ways to express birthday congratulations. For example, the strategy of *use of address terms* was the most common one used by Americans, whereas it was a much less common strategy employed by the Iranian Persian speakers and Iranian EFL learners. This conflict can be explained on the grounds that speech acts are different in conceptualization and verbalization in different cultures and languages (Green, 1975; Wierzbicka, 1985).

Elwood (2004) has reported the same difference mentioned in the use of congratulation strategies. He reported that there was less use of *offers of good wishes* among the Americans, whereas the Japanese participants intended to use fewer *expressions of happiness* and *requests for information*. Pishghadam and Morady Moghaddam (2011) also reported that a significant difference existed between the Iranian Persian speakers and Native American English speakers with regard to the congratulation strategies. Their results

indicated that English speakers had an inclination toward self-expressive comments. In the same lines, the previous studies by Allami and Nekouzadeh (2011) and Dastjerdi and Nasri (2013) also revealed that the American English speakers and Iranian native Persian speakers were different in their application of congratulation strategies. In contrast, the current study is incompatible with Reyes (2011) who found that congratulation strategies were similar across second language Spanish learners from different language and cultures.

One of the functions of language use is the interactional function of language which provides the ground for maintaining social relations (Yule, 1985). Due to the fact that social events requiring congratulations are shaped by the cultural norms of societies, it is quite common and natural to expect differences in congratulation strategies across cultures. In accordance with the results of the current study, several other researchers also reported similar cross-cultural discrepancies in terms of different speech acts, namely apologies (Eslami-Rasekh, 2004), complaints (Salmani- Nodusahn, 2006), invitations, (Afghary, 2007), as well as requests and refusals (Jalilfar, 2009).

Conclusion and Implication

The main objective of the present study was to investigate the congratulation strategies among the three groups of participants, namely Iranian native speakers of Persian, American native speakers of English, and Iranian EFL learners in the context of the social media of Instagram. The results revealed both similarities and differences among the three groups in terms of the use of congratulation strategies. Our findings showed that the Iranian native speakers of Persian mostly used *statements of congratulations* and *expressions of happiness* strategies to congratulate. Similarly, the Iranian EFL learners mostly congratulated through *statements of congratulations* and *expressions of humor*. Unlike the first two groups, the strategies used by the American native speakers of English included *use of address terms* and *expressions of congratulations*.

The findings of the current study have a number of pedagogical implications. First and foremost, with regard to the findings and the observed differences, EFL teachers need to be more cautious of the phenomenon of negative pragmatic transfer when teaching English speech acts. It needs to be taken into account that majority of the studies conducted on second language learners 'sociolinguistic competence showed that sociolinguistic competence is influenced by many factors some of which are duration of dwelling in the target language, speaking environment, instructional environment, and language proficiency (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998; Dossey et al., 2020; Niezgoda & Rover, 2001; Schauer, 2006; Trentman, 2017). To put it differently, even many advanced EFL learners are not successful in fulfilling communication with native speakers because they do not have the necessary appropriate pragmatic understanding according to different social contexts (Blum-Kulka et al. 1989). This is more notable in the EFL contexts of some countries like Iran. That is to say majority of the people in Iran do not have any contact with native speakers of English. Moreover, the country does not see many international tourists. Due to these points, the main corridor through which people can communicate with speakers of other languages is the Social Media and Iranian English learners are not an exception.

This brings to the fore the significance of explicit instruction on the appropriate use of speech acts. Respected EFL teachers in Iran and other countries may directly use the results of the current study to raise EFL learners' awareness with regard to the observed discrepancies in the use of a congratulation speech act. Speech acts can be regarded as the reflection of the cultural standards, values, and norms in a society which may indeed differ greatly among speakers from diverse language backgrounds. The presence of these discrepancies may lead to a great deal of misunderstanding and breakdowns in communications. In addition, syllabus designers and materials developers can utilize the findings of the present study to raise the students' consciousness of speech act performance in English. This is truly important as most teachers and learners use the textbook as the main roadmap in the process of language learning. It is advised that materials' developers enrich English textbooks with some notes and exercises on different speech acts to increase the learners' abilities in effective communication.

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