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1. Introduction

Politeness, as a central mechanism for managing Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs) like apologies and requests, constitutes a core concern in pragmatics. While Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory has provided a foundational framework, contemporary research emphasizes context sensitivity and cautions against treating politeness as a fixed cultural attribute. Within this landscape, Persian and Finnish represent two typologically and pragmatically under-compared languages. Extant research on Persian highlights indirectness and ritualized practices like *ta'ārof*, whereas studies on Finnish emphasize brevity, restraint, and respect for autonomy. However, systematic comparison using naturally occurring data is lacking.

This study addresses this gap through an exploratory comparative analysis of apology and request strategies in Persian and Finnish. Three research questions guide the study: (1) How are apologies and requests realized in the selected data? (2) What politeness strategies are employed in each dataset? (3) What context-sensitive tendencies emerge? The study tests three hypotheses: Persian speakers will demonstrate a greater tendency toward Positive Politeness; Finnish speakers will show a dominant inclination toward Negative Politeness; and these differences will reflect cultural values—closeness in Persian contexts versus autonomy in Finnish contexts.

2. Literature Review

The study of politeness is rooted in Goffman's (1967) concept of *face* and was systematized by Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory, defining *positive face* (desire for approval) and *negative face* (desire for autonomy). Research within Persian pragmatics consistently identifies a strong orientation toward positive politeness and relational maintenance, linked to collectivistic values. Eslami Rasekh (1993) and Salmani Nodoushan (2006) establish that Persian speakers favor strategies expressing solidarity and empathy, interwoven with *ta'ārof*, a ritualized system blending deference and intimacy (Sharifian, 2005). Koutlaki (2021) examines *ta'ārof* in service encounters.

Conversely, research on Finnish politeness highlights a contrasting profile aligned with individualistic norms. Lehtonen and Sajavaara's (1985) foundational work characterizes Finnish interaction by a preference for negative politeness, realized through verbal economy and restraint. Leppänen (2019) confirms the prevalence of conditional structures (e.g., *voisitko* "could you") as primary negative politeness devices. A critical gap in the literature is the absence of direct comparative research between Persian and Finnish, underscoring the novelty of this study.

3. Methodology

This study adopts an exploratory, qualitative-dominant comparative design. The dataset comprises 40 naturally occurring instances of apologies and requests (20 Persian, 20 Finnish). Persian data were recorded through participant observation in Tehran (June-September 2023). Finnish data were collected during fieldwork in Finland (August-October 2023) with assistance from two native speakers.

Sampling criteria required: (1) the interaction contain an apology or request; (2) spontaneous occurrence in public settings; (3) clearly identifiable speech acts; (4) ethical protocols with anonymization. Data were collected through audio recordings (10-60 seconds) and field notes. Analysis employed Brown and Levinson's (1987) categories as heuristic tools, following a qualitative micro-analytic approach.

4. Results and Discussion

The analysis reveals a fundamental contrast in how face-saving mechanisms are realized in Persian and Finnish.

Persian: The Expansive Logic of Connection. Persian data demonstrates a strong inclination toward strategies that blend politeness types through *ta'ārof*. Communication follows an additive logic where layers of verbal mitigation reinforce relational warmth. Persian apologies employ external justifications to foster shared understanding while emphasizing the hearer's autonomy. For instance, «ببخشید که دیر رسیدم، ترافیک خیلی سنگین بود» ("Excuse me for being late, the traffic was very heavy") seeks empathy by attributing fault externally. More complex is «پوزش می‌طلبم، اگر اجازه بدهید جبران کنم» ("I request your pardon; if you permit, I will compensate"), which uses a conditional clause placing redress in the hearer's hands while offering repair constitutes positive facework. Requests are systematically softened: «اگر فرصت دارید، می‌توانم چند دقیقه از وقتتان استفاده کنم؟» ("If you have time, may I use a few minutes of your time?") employs conditionality and minimization of imposition.

Finnish: The Reductive Logic of Discretion. Finnish data exhibits consistent preference for negative politeness realized through concise logic, minimizing social friction. Finnish apologies are succinct, focusing on factual mitigation: "*Anteeksi myöhästyminen, liikenne oli todella paha*" ("Excuse my being late, the traffic was really bad"). Repair is offered as a question: "*Olen pahoillani tästä virheestä, voinko hyvittää sen jollakin tavalla?*" ("Can I compensate for it somehow?"), fully ceding agency to the hearer. Requests employ modal interrogatives: "*Voitko lähettää tämän lomakkeen minulle tänään?*" ("Can you send this form to me today?") transforms imposition into a question of ability.

Comparative Interpretation. Persian acknowledges and transforms imposition into relational moments; Finnish preemptively minimizes imposition. Persian may diffuse agency through external justifications; Finnish tends toward clear personal ownership of fault ("*minun virheeni*"). Persian solidarity is verbally rich; Finnish solidarity is actional and tacit, demonstrated through understated compliments ("*Hyvää työtä*"—"Good work"). Persian politeness operates on a logic of connection, affirming interdependence, while Finnish politeness operates on a logic of discretion, respecting individual sovereignty.

5. Conclusion

This exploratory study has examined apology and request strategies in 40 naturally occurring interactions in Persian and Finnish. The analysis suggests that Persian speakers employ layered mitigation strategies blending positive and negative politeness through *ta'ārof*, characterized by linguistic elaboration and relational orientation. Finnish speakers show a consistent preference for structurally simpler forms of negative politeness, prioritizing non-imposition and autonomy.

These findings must be understood as context-sensitive tendencies rather than fixed cultural attributes. The exploratory nature, modest sample size, and absence of systematic demographic controls preclude generalization. Intra-cultural variation was observed: not all Persian speakers employed elaborate *ta'ārof* to the same degree; situational factors modulated strategy selection in both languages. Methodologically, the study demonstrates the continued utility of Brown and Levinson's framework as a heuristic tool while acknowledging its limitations in capturing the synergistic integration of facework in *ta'ārof*.

Limitations include: applying a Western-developed framework to culturally embedded practices; exclusive focus on apologies and requests; and challenges in translating culture-specific concepts. Future research would benefit from larger samples, inclusion of other face-threatening acts, and engagement with alternative frameworks including discursive politeness (Watts, 2003) and cultural schema theory (Sharifian, 2011). Within its limitations, this research advances understanding of the interplay between language, culture, and social interaction, with implications for intercultural communication and language pedagogy.

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Masoumeh Yazdan Panah is an independent researcher and author with a PhD in Linguistics from Azad University and a specialization in Applied Linguistics. Her scholarly work examines linguistic trends across Europe and addresses contemporary challenges within the discipline. Through her independent research, she has contributed to ongoing academic discussions in the field. She is also the author of nine published books, reflecting her extensive engagement with linguistic scholarship and research.



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