

## On the Realization of the Written Congratulation Speech act in Modern Persian

Mohammad Aliakbari

Ilam University

Rezvan Feili

Ilam University

### Abstract

Having noticed the scarcity of the studies on congratulation speech act in Persian, this paper was motivated to explore and categorize the range of strategies used to congratulate one's carrier promotion in Persian newspaper messages. Conducting a corpus study, a total of 200 congratulation messages in eight Persian newspapers were collected in one year period from December 2021 to December 2022. Rigorous investigation of the corpus helped developing a classification scheme, including 18 strategies that Persian speakers often employ while congratulating. Analysis of the data revealed that the addressers in the present research repeatedly exhibited rapport-enhancing behaviors. They demonstrated their empathy with addressees through congratulating, well-wishing and expressing happiness or pride. They also expressed respect through applying varieties of address terms for the addressees and using the expressions which communicate deference. Findings also revealed that through expressing happiness, respect, pride, congratulating, well wishing, using address terms and titles with full formal names, and mentioning the new social status/position, both identity and respectability faces of the addressees were enhanced. Interestingly, the addressers' identity face was also enhanced due to the fact that by applying all those strategies, the addressers can claim a positive social value for themselves during this particular contact.

**Keywords:** speech act, congratulation message, identity face, respectability face, rapport-enhancing behavior

### Introduction

Communicative speech acts have proved to be interesting areas in pragmatics and sociolinguistics. With a more comprehensive view of speech as a form of communication, one may start with the analysis of speech act in terms of its components or functions. This can, partially, make up for the basic limitations of theoretical linguists of the past who considered sentence as the largest unit of analysis, and referential meaning as the only relevant sort of meaning. However, speech acts are considered to be operated by universal pragmatic principles (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969,

1975; Leech, 1983) and to vary in conceptualization and verbalization across cultures and languages (Green, 1975; Wierzbicka, 1985). Due to the great controversy existing among the linguists and philosophers in viewing language universals and the importance of such notions in the formation of a language theory in general and second language acquisition theory in particular (Blum-Kulka, 1983), a good number of empirical studies have been conducted across different languages which have sometimes confirmed the idea of universality of pragmatic principles and on other occasions have ended up in contrary findings to such claims (Wolfson, Marmor, & Jones, 1989; Hymes, 1967; Olshtain & Cohen, 1983; Manes & Wolfson, 1981; Beebe & Cummings, 1996; Hinkel, 1997; Kasper, 2000; Yuan, 2001; Markee, 2002; Rintell & Mitchell, 1989; Duranti, 1997; Golato, 2000; Billmyer & Varghese, 2000; Stock-well, 2002; Boxer, 2002).

Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Patterns (CCSARP) project initiated in 1982 was an attempt to analyze speech acts across a range of languages and cultures aiming at investigating the existence of any possible pragmatic universals and their characteristics (Blum-Kulka & House, 1990). Keeping on with the widespread interest for studying speech act realization by different cultures, Iranian researchers have studied the performance of commissives (refusing) (Allami & Naeimi, 2011; Sadeghi & Savojbolaghchilar, 2011; Aliakbari & Changizi, 2012) and expressives (apologizing) (Shariati & Chamani, 2009; Afghari, 2007). However, despite these initiations, a lot of work has yet to be done, especially, on the face enhancing speech acts such as congratulation.

According to Norrick (1978) “acts of congratulating simply allow the speaker to share in the experience and feelings of the addressee. In this altruistic sense, congratulating is a cordial gesture which strengthens ties between individuals and makes life more pleasant” (P. 286). Accordingly, this paper seeks to contribute empirically to the rich body of available research by exploring the realization of congratulation speech act in Persian. To do so, the present study sought answer for the following research question:

- What congratulation strategies do Persian speakers often employ in their newspaper messages when congratulating one’s carrier promotion?

## Review of the literature

Speech acts have long attracted the attention of scholars dealing with social and cultural patterns in language. Many studies have been done on different speech acts such as apologizing (Cordella, 1990; Ruzickova, 1998a, 1998b; Wagner, 1999; Marquez-Reiter, 2000) complimenting (Valdes & Pino, 1981; Yanez, 1990; Cordella & Large, 1995; Ruzickova, 1998a; Alba-Juez, 2000; Lorenzo-Dus, 2001;) thanking (Hickey, 2005) requesting (Garcia, 1992b, 1993; Ruzickova 1998a; Marquez-Reiter, 2000) irony (Haverkate, 1988) joking (Grindsted, 1997) blaming (Garcia, 2009a) condoling (Garcia, 2009b) well-wishing (Garcia, 2009c) arguing (Cordella, 1996; Forbes & Cordella, 1999) refusing (Garcia, 1992a; Cordella, 2007) reprimanding (Garcia, 1996) and inviting (Garcia, 2008). However, few studies have been carried out on congratulating as a form of expressive speech act.

Certain studies considered congratulation as a form of face enhancing acts. Using Spencer-Oatey’s (2005) rapport management theoretical framework, Garcia (2009c) examined Peruvian Spanish-speakers’ behavioral expectations, types of face respected/threatened and interactional wants when congratulating on marriage. Analysis showed that participants’ interactional wants were mainly relational; they exhibited a rapport-maintenance orientation using strategies that, although apparently violating the equity principle,

reflected their interdependent self-construal (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Along the same lines, participants enhanced their own identity and respectability face, and enhanced the interlocutor's respectability face by making her the beneficiary of their concern for her. Gender differences were found, though not statistically significant.

Despite the significance of awareness of cross-cultural and cross-linguistic distinctions in the realization of congratulation speech act, and the reaction that such speech act might trigger in the interlocutors, not due attention has been paid to this face-enhancing act in the Iranian context. Accordingly, the present study attempted to examine the strategies employed in congratulating one's promotion by Persian speakers.

## Methodology

### Corpus

To identify variations in the structure of congratulation messages in Iranian newspapers, 200 congratulation messages printed in eight newspapers namely, Etelaat newspaper, Hamshahri newspaper, Donyaye Eghtesad, Jame Jam, Niroo, Iran, Asre Karoon, Sobhe Karoon have been investigated. This corpus was collected during a period of one year from December 2021 to December 2022. Through a pilot study to decide on the corpus, the researchers noticed the dominance of the written congratulation messages on the birth of new baby, wedding and carrier promotion. Due to the high frequency and the common trend observed in the Iranian present journalism, the decision was made to work on those newspaper messages of congratulation which congratulated people for their carrier promotion.

### Procedure

Along with authors, two assistants with Master degrees in Persian literature helped data collection and analysis. Getting ensured that the assistants were well informed about the subject to accurately follow the data collection and data analysis procedures, the extraction of data was started in early 2021. In the first place 800, messages have been selected from newspapers pages. Then, those messages with identical content and structure have been removed and messages with diverse content and structure have been incorporated. Out of the selected extracts, 200 messages were found appropriate for the purpose of the study. The messages were, then, numbered for the ease of investigation, analysis and interpretation.

### Classification scheme

Since no model or classification scheme was available for Persian congratulation speech act, the authors were forced to figure out the frequent strategies and develop a classification scheme. To do so, every message was screened by the authors as well as the research assistants for the type of the strategies adopted. To validate the model and get ensured about the accuracy of these strategies, one more pilot study was conducted through which the accuracy and accountability of the model was determined. Afterwards, the common strategies were listed. Such a process led to identification of 18 strategies, illustrations of which

and their English translations are presented below. They are numbered for the ease of referencing and discussion.

**Examples of the congratulation strategies employed by the Persian speakers.**

**1. Using various address terms or titles for the addressee**

*"Jenâbe âqâye doctor"* - "Dear Mr. Doctor"

**2. Mentioning the addressee's name**

*"Mohammad Delbari"*

**3. Mentioning the addressee's previous social status/position**

*"riyâsate anjomane muy tâye Iran"*

"President of the Iranian Muay Thai Association"

**4. Expressing happiness**

*"bâ kamâle xorsandi"* - "happily"

**5. Expressing respect**

*"ehterâman"* - "with much respect"

**6. Acknowledging the appointment as deserving**

*"entesâbe bejâ va šâyesteh"* - "the proper and competent appointment of you"

**7. Mentioning the addressee's new social status/position**

*"? ozve hey? at re? iseh fedrâsiyone jahânie muy tây"*

"Member of the administrative board of international Muay Thai federation"

**8. Attributing the success to the addressee's hard work and effort**

*"in movafaqiyat ke hâsele talâš va poštekhâre šomâ ast."*

"This success which is the outcome of your hard work and effort."

**9. Attributing the success to the addressee's traits and abilities**

*"in dastâvard natijeye tavânâyi va šâyestegie šomâ ast."*

"These achievements are the result of your ability and competence."

**10. Attributing the success to the addressee's experience and correct management**

*"in movafaqiyat barâyande sâlhâ tajrobeh va modiriyate sahihe šomâ ast."*

"This success is the result of your long experience and correct management."

**11. Expressing pride**

*"dastâvarde šomâ mâyeeye mobâhâte mâ gardid."* - "we are proud of your achievement."

**12. Attributing the success to the addressee in person**

*"mâ in dastâvard râ be šomâ tabrik migoyim."* - "We congratulate you on this attainment."

**13. Attributing the success to the group/ company/country**

*"in movafaqiyat râ be šomâ, jâme? eye varzeši va tamâme mardome Iran tabrik migoyam."*

"I congratulate you, the athletic society and all Iranians."

#### 14. Congratulating

*“tabrik? arz nemudeh”* - “congratulation”

#### 15. Expressing directed wish

*“omid ast dar rāstāye pišborde ahdāfe nezāme jomhuriye eslāmi va xedmat be mardom movafaq bâšid.”*

“We wish you all the best in pursuing the goals of Islamic Republic and serving the people.”

#### 16. Well-wishing

*“tofiqe ruzafzun va sarbolandi râ barāye šomâ xâstârim.”* - “I wish you all the best, success and pride.”

#### 17. Mentioning the addresser’s name

*“Hivâ Fathi”*

#### 18. Mentioning the addresser’s social status/position

*“vakile pâyeḥ yeke dâdgostari”* - “judiciary lawyer”

### Results Discussion

Table 1 below presents the frequency and percentage of strategies employed in congratulating carrier promotion in a sample of Iranian newspapers. They are presented in order of occurrence from the most to the least frequency.

**Table 1, frequency and percentage of the employed congratulation strategies**

Congratulation Strategies	Frequency in the Total Corpus	Percentage
Mentioning the addressee’s name	194	97%
Using various address terms or titles for the addressee	192	96%
Mentioning the addressee ‘new social status/position	192	96%
Congratulating	189	94.5%
Mentioning the addresser’s social status/position	176	88%
Well-wishing	146	73%
Acknowledging the appointment as deserving	128	64%
Mentioning the addresser’s name	97	48%
Mentioning the addressee’s previous social status/position	76	38%
Attributing the success to the group/ company/country	52	26%
Attributing the success to the addressee in person	40	20%
Expressing respect	34	17%
Attributing the success to the addressee’s experience and correct management	28	14%
Expressing directed wish	27	13.5%
Attributing the success to the addressee’s hard work and effort	25	12.5%
Attributing success to the addressee’s traits and abilities	21	10.5%
Expressing happiness	14	7%
Expressing pride	11	5.5%

Given the information provided in Table 1, it is evident that the Iranian addressers exhibited culturally-permitted behavior within this specific context of communication. A common feature that was

observed in 97 percent of the messages is to direct the addressee in full name. The data also represent another culturally-permitted behavior which is the simultaneous application of several address terms and titles for an addressee. This strategy was found in 96 percent of the congratulation messages. Such a large percentage implies that it is an accepted norm in the Iranian culture to demonstrate more respect to the addresser (Aliakbari& Toni 2008). Similarly, when addressers congratulated one's carrier promotion, they mentioned the addressee's new social status. It was observed in 96 % of the congratulation messages. Moreover, the element that brought about congratulation is often specified in the messages under discussion. Thus, the act of congratulation has been observed in 94 percent of the messages. The next feature found in 88 % of congratulation messages is stating the addresser's social status or position. Strikingly, the percentage of this strategy was higher than mentioning the addresser's name. It might indicate that the addresser's social status is considered more crucial than his/her name in Iranian context. Another highly employed strategy (64%) is acknowledging the appointment as deserving. By employing this strategy, the addresser indicates that the addressee was qualified for the new position and deserved the promotion. The addressers attributed the new achievement to different factors. These factors are most often classified into three categories, namely the address's hard work and effort, traits and abilities, experience and correct management. Although there were not statistically significant differences among these factors, the last one (experience and correct management) attained the highest percentage (14%) among the three. Perhaps Iranian addressors consider experience and correct management as the predominant factor in determining job promotion.

When expressing congratulation, the addresser may make a directed wish for the addressee. Though making use of this strategy may undermine the addressee's identity face (Wardhaugh, 1985; Brown & Levinson, 1987 to mention only a few), it can be argued that the possible negative effect of this strategy on addressee can be compensated by the overwhelming number of strategies that enhance the addressee's face such as well-wishing, congratulating, expressing pride, using various address terms or titles, expressing happiness, expressing respect, and acknowledging the appointment as a competent one.

In this study the addressers demonstrated their empathy with addressees through expressing happiness, expressing pride, congratulating, and well-wishing (strategies 4, 11, 14, and 16). In accordance to Spencer-Oatey's (2005), the above mentioned strategies have been classified as respecting the empathy component because they communicate the sharing of feelings and concerns for the addressee. Moreover, addressers were found to express respect by applying various address terms or titles for addressee and using the expressions that communicate deference e.g. "*jenâbe âqâye doctor* " - " Dear Mr. Doctor " and "*ehterâman* " - " with much respect " (strategies 1 and 5). As Spencer-Oatey's (2005) stated, these strategies are classified as respect component since they appreciate and acknowledge the appointment as deserving and respect the new social status/position of addressee.

Further analysis of the data revealed that speech act of congratulation enhances both sides face as a whole. In fact, when congratulating, the addresser enhances the identity and the respectability face of the



addressee. The addressee's identity face is enhanced when the addresser employs expressing happiness, respect and pride, acknowledging the appointment as a competent one, congratulating and well wishing (strategies 4, 5, 11, 6, 14 and 16). Besides, the addressee's respectability face is also enhanced through the addressors' use of various address terms and titles for the addressee, mentioning the addressee's name and his/her new social status/position (strategies 1, 2, and 7).

Through mentioning the addresser's name and the social status/position at the end of the message the respectability face of the addresser is enhanced as well. According to Goffman (1967) the addresser identity face is enhanced because by applying all those strategies in Table 1, the addresser can claim a positive social value for himself/herself in this particular contact.

### Conclusions

The present study aimed at exploring and describing congratulation strategies in Persian, through examining a corpus of 200 congratulation messages that was printed in the newspapers. It examined the form and frequency of congratulation strategies and identified variations in the structure of congratulation messages in Iranian newspapers which are significant in terms of enhancing addressers' and addressees' respectability face. Analysis of the data indicated that in general the Iranian addressers exhibited rapport-enhancing behaviors. They utilized a series of strategies or behaviors that demonstrated respect toward addressees. In so doing, the act of congratulation enhances the addressee's respectability and identity face. These acts are prescribed or culturally-permitted behaviors within the context of this situation. Moreover, addressors employment of strategies no 17 and 18 with high frequency level indicate that, while congratulating others, Iranian speakers do consider their own identity and respectability face as well.

Findings of the present study can be helpful to the learners of Persian language and those Persian speakers who purport the appropriate employment of the formal forms of congratulation. Moreover, the results of the study may be compared and contrasted with that of similar studies in other languages with the aim of discovering similarities and differences in the realization of congratulations across languages in order to promote Persian learner's knowledge of the appropriate use of this speech act. Undoubtedly, knowledge of the appropriate employment of congratulation speech acts on the part of the interlocutors can be effective in their motivation to learn the proper strategies in the second or foreign languages the study to care about their own and their interlocutors' respectability and identity face. Besides, the classification scheme developed according to the findings of the present study can contribute to the universal classification of the congratulation strategies. It is also expected that the findings of this study add a new dimension to research regarding congratulation messages and, thus, providing new insights into this field of study.

Additionally, a number of limitations need to be acknowledged regarding the present study. To arrive at more definite conclusions on the congratulation strategies in Persian, the results of this research need to be supported by a larger corpus and further research. Moreover, as Meier (1998) suggested, the pragma linguistic knowledge provided by such studies remains at a descriptive level, and more studies are needed to find in-depth explanations for the congratulation behaviors. Therefore, further research is

warranted to examine this behavior with reference to other social variables like age, gender, and interlocutors' social class. Similar studies can also address contextual factors including social distance, power differentials, and formality of situation. Investigating the congratulation responses, and utilizing DCT or role-plays for data collection are other aspects which may be of interest for researchers.

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