

# Gratitude Speech Act in Instagram: The Emergence of a Particular Genre of Language?<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

The present study investigated the speech act of gratitude in the context of Instagram as one of the most popular social networks. It sought to consider English and Persian users' utilization of gratitude strategies in terms of employment of politeness strategies, intensifiers, interjections, and gender difference. To this end, 200 English Instagram posts along with 200 Persian Instagram posts were investigated. Contrary to previous findings that indicated different performances by English and Persian language speakers in real-life situations, the results of this study, after performing chi-square tests, suggested no significant difference between English and Persian users in terms of their utilization of politeness strategies, intensifiers, and interjections. Regarding gender difference, which addressed the use of both gratitude and politeness strategies for each language, for both nationalities, no significant difference was observed between female and male users within the context of Instagram. The finding may signify the emergence of a new genre of language belonging to social networks in general and Instagram in particular.

**Keywords:** Gratitude, Politeness strategies, Intensifiers, Interjections, Instagram

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## Introduction

Speech acts are attempts language users make to perform specific actions (Ellis, 2008). The ability to perform speech acts accurately signifies appropriate development of communicative competence (Zhao & Throssel, 2011). However, in accordance with interlanguage pragmatics (ILP), comprehension and production of speech acts vary from language to language (Bardovi-Harlig & Griffin, 2005). Expression of gratitude as a speech act is practiced in the routine life of almost every individual and when the interlocutors do not convey these rules in their negotiations, they will confront "pragmatic failure" which hinders communication (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1986, p. 166). Brown and Levinson (1987) proclaimed that in some languages, certain expressions of gratitude encode different notions which might be absent in the pragmatic patterns of other languages.

Many studies have focused on the formulas and strategies of speech acts (Alcón-Soler, 2017; Hong, 2008; Jahangard, Khanlarzade, & Latifi, 2016). However, few of them have considered the less explored areas such as interjections and intensifiers (Morady Moghaddam, 2012). Intensifiers, which are utilized for exaggerating or emphasizing the approval, interest, or sympathy of the speaker, could be regarded as accommodating factors, an analysis of which would indicate the speaker's intention for making use of certain utterance of gratitude (Ito & Tagliamonte, 2003). Along with that, interjections, uttered impulsively to represent the speaker's attitude, emotions, and intention towards the hearer (Jovanović, 2004) could be investigated in gratitude speech acts. Therefore, the analysis of such a cluster of words occupied in the expression of gratitude will reveal more facts and clues about this group of expressive utterances.

Politeness strategies, as another aspect of analyzing gratitude speech act, account for the relationship between the interlocutors and the degree of imposition on the addressee in order to save their face (Brown & Levinson, 1987). For Brown and Levinson, gratitude is categorized as an intrinsically face-threatening act (FTA) which "by its nature runs contrary to the face wants of the addressee and/or of the speaker" (p. 65).

As a new field of inquiry, the language employed in social networking sites has remained an underexplored area in the field of linguistics (Dynel, 2015). Instagram as one of the most recent mobile phone applications enjoys millions of users worldwide. Just the same as other social network applications, it contains practical information for linguistic research since it includes an enormous amount of linguistically natural data. For this reason, the study of speech acts in the naturally occurring data of Instagram can reveal more reliable results in the realm of pragmatics and applied linguistics.

The present study was a contrastive pragmatic analysis of gratitude speech act among Persian and English Instagram users. To this end, Cheng's (2005) taxonomy of gratitude speech act, Brown and Levinson's (1987) stratification of positive and negative politeness strategies, Morady Moghaddam's (2012) categorization of intensifiers, Jovanović's (2004) grouping of English interjec-

tions in accordance with the predominant semantic connotation of their meanings, and Kamyar's (1995) classification of Persian interjections were employed as the frameworks to investigate the two groups' gratitude strategy use in terms of employing politeness strategies, intensifiers, interjections, and gender difference.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Gratitude Speech Act***

Deemed as one of the expressive speech acts propounded by Austin (1962), gratitude is an addressee-oriented phenomenon that culminates in enhancing the hearers' negative face (Brown & Levinson, 1987). The gratitude speech act is assumed to be the reaction of the speaker towards the addressee's favor or advantageous action for her/him that makes the speaker show respect in some way. Brown and Levinson declared that FTAs must be investigated in all languages in order to see whether they reveal the same functions or not.

Conducting a research to study the similitude and dissimilarity between Chinese and English native speakers' expressions of gratitude as an FTA, Cheng (2005) administered a discourse completion test to assess the length of their utterances in terms of their use of strategies. Cheng (2005) discovered that Chinese and English speakers have different preferences for gratitude strategies and the length of utterance. He asserted that Chinese speakers employ more address terms accompanied by their gratitude utterances due to their complicated social status system. Besides, Cheng introduced, in his study, a taxonomy containing eight gratitude strategies that has been utilized in many studies since then.

In their contrastive study, Yoosefvand and Eslami Rasekh (2014) examined the use of gratitude speech act among Persian and English speakers through a discourse completion test. The results of their investigation suggested that Persian native speakers make use of more gratitude strategies than do English native speakers and that there exist significant differences in the use of gratitude strategies between Persian and English speakers. In addition, they found that there exist considerable differences in the use of thanking, positive feeling, and repayment strategies between these two nationalities.

### ***Gender Difference***

The issue of gender-related stereotypes about emotional expressions in language was first discussed by Brody (1997) who argued that gender difference in emotional expressions can be traced to social processes, namely heterogeneous gender roles and power imbalance. Additionally, he posited that stereotypes related to women are inaccurate since they are nothing but exaggerations. However, concerning the language of social networking sites, Herring (2015) declared that in the context of computer-mediated communication

(henceforth CMC), females and males tend to make use of different languages. Since the present study intended to scrutinize the language of CMC, the literature review focuses on the gendered use of language within this context.

Guiller and Durnell (2007) compared the language use of both genders in CMC in a Scottish university. They observed that males and females made use of homogeneous language regarding the use of individual linguistic variables. Furthermore, they found evidence bearing that both male and female participants of their study made use of paralanguage to convey their tone.

Ye, Hashim, Baghirov, and Murphy (2017) explored gender differences in 1382 Instagram posts focusing on the use of hashtags. They set two categories for their data: "informative/emotional" and "positive/negative" distinction (p. 11). Following a comprehensive analysis of the data, they came up with the finding that females have the tendency to make use of more emotional and positive descriptions in their hashtags, while men proved to employ more informative and negative descriptions. They justified their findings based upon Rice and Markey's (2009) assertion that female online media users demonstrate more openness and less anxiety and share their emotions on such Internet-based platforms more straightforwardly.

### ***Politeness***

Politeness has been defined differently by several leading figures. Lakoff (1989, p. 102) stated that it is "a means of minimizing the risk of confrontation in discourse—both the possibility of confrontation occurring at all, and the possibility that a confrontation will be perceived as threatening." He suggested three maxims for politeness in order to preserve face during communication: (a) do not impose, (b) give an opinion, and (c) make the addressee feel good. He also established the politeness principles (Lakoff, 1989, p. 107) which were developed by Brown and Levinson (1987).

Brown and Levinson (1987) offered a framework for comparing cross-cultural diversities in politeness. They proposed the notion of "face" to refer to "the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself. It is something that is emotionally invested and that can be lost, maintained, or enhanced, and must be constantly attended to in interaction" (p. 61). They proclaimed that there exist two sets of face: positive and negative face. Positive face pertains to the desire of an individual to be valued and accepted by others, while negative politeness has a bearing on one's desire to be free to act without inhibition. Furthermore, they maintained that positive politeness alludes to the hearer's positive face which refers to the desire of an individual to be accepted and valued, while negative politeness makes reference to partially satisfying the hearer's negative face which pertains to the individual's preference to have freedom of act.

Sahragard (2003) made an investigation of *ta'arof* strategies as crucial aspects of politeness in Persian language. He made use of a cultural script ap-

proach describing such a concept. The findings of the study revealed that ta'arof in Persian is manifested through (a) politeness, (b) respect, (c) being ceremonious, (d) humility, and (e) hospitality. The findings of this study could be of help for further research including the current one since this concept is exclusive to the Iranian culture and can be considered for gratitude speech act as well.

### ***Intensifiers***

One of the foremost studies theorizing about intensifiers belongs to Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, and Svartvik (1982) who described intensifiers from a grammatical aspect. They limited intensifiers to adverbs of degree and emphasis (e.g. rather, even, just, merely, very), quantifiers (enough, much) and finally qualifiers (certain, main, only) (p. 589). Such a classification was used as a great accommodation in the next studies to interpret intensifiers and their syntactic connotations (Rhee, 2016).

Attempting to investigate the usage of intensifiers in a corpus-based study, Ito and Tagliamonte (2003) asserted that there seems to be a growth in intensification across generations. Besides, they examined the most common intensifiers employed in each time period among the speakers of the English language, and the findings revealed that "very" was most frequently used among older speakers, while the younger generation preferred to make use of "really" most frequently.

In his contrastive study, Morady Moghaddam (2012) compared the use of intensifiers and interjections in condolence speech act among Persian and English languages through a move analysis. He categorized intensifiers as: (a) repetition (i.e. Thank you very very much!), (b) multiple intensifiers (i.e. I am so very grateful), (c) implicit intensifiers (i.e. It made me truly happy), (d) explicit intensifiers (i.e. Thank you), and (e) adjectival intensifiers (i.e. My sincere gratitude!). The results of his study indicated that there are significant dissimilarities in the use of intensifiers and interjections in each language.

Rhee (2016), in his study, addressed the development of English intensifiers as stance adverbs from a grammaticalization perspective. A semantic analysis demonstrated that, chiefly, intensifiers originate from four semantic categories: "markedness, completeness, emotion, and taboo" (p. 400). He found that in the process of developing, intensifiers prove to lose their particular meanings and cleave to the core categorical notions.

### ***Interjections***

Interjections are defined as natural exclamations of emotion or feeling encoding language and culture-specific meanings reproduced as sounds or certain words (Oh!, Phooey!, God!, Well!, etc.) uttered impulsively to represent the speaker's attitude and intention, and they can be regarded as a part of speech (Ameka, 1992; Jovanović, 2004; Schachter & Shopen, 2007). Ameka, as one of

the pioneering researchers in the realm of interjections, set a typology for interjections dividing them into primary and secondary interjections. He defined primary interjections as words or non-words that can constitute an utterance by themselves and, basically, not get into construction with other words or classes (e.g. Oho! Wow! Gee!). Meanwhile, secondary interjections for him refer to forms belonging to other word classes considering their semantic features, and, at the same time, they are interjections since they occur non-elliptically referring to mental acts (e.g. swear words, Help!, Damn!).

In a study dealing with the context of the Persian language, Vahidyan Kamyar (1995) examined the interjections of Persian. He introduced some characteristics exclusive to the interjections of Persian and divided Persian interjections into emotional (e.g. attention, pleasure, humiliation, exclamation) and non-emotional (e.g. onomatopoeia, verbs, nouns). His study is mostly regarded as a collection of Persian interjections encompassing comprehensive instances to a great extent.

Jovanović's (2004) study was an attempt to systematically scrutinize and classify English interjections. He presented a set of formal characteristics, sentence positions, and meaning implications for these groups of words. He proposed a classification of interjections in accordance with the predominant semantic features of which their meaning is composed. To put it another way, he asserted that the group of interjections enjoying emotional connotation could be further diversified into various emotions which are indicative of anger, joy, pleasure, relief, etc.

### ***Social Networks***

Collot and Belmore (1996), for the first time, put forward the argument that electronic language enjoys a totally new variety which is designated as neither "spoken" nor "written" language. They rationalized their assertion by proposing that deploying such a language, the interlocutors do not usually see or hear each other directly, so the language is not "spoken" (p. 14). They posited that some pivotal features of "written" language are the use of planning and editing strategies that are missing in this variety of language.

Ma (1996) conducted a research to analyze the language of East Asian and North American students who made use of CMC. He declared that while previous research indicated major diversity in the use of "direct" versus "indirect" language in face-to-face communication among East Asian and North American speakers (Yum, 1988), in CMC, East Asian and North American speakers were both disposed to make use of a more "direct" language than they use in real-life setting. He stated that this might be because language speakers feel more comfortable for self-disclosure in such type of communication. To put it differently, Ma suggested that individuals in computer-mediated conversations do not appear to have as high a commitment as when they engage in everyday face-to-face conversations. However, it should be noted that in her recent paper, Her-

ring (2015) has maintained that “internet language” employed in CMC is generalized to mobile technologies as well.

Considering different situations containing the Internet language, Crystal (2006) proposed seven types of language use in the Internet texts: “email, synchronous and asynchronous chat groups, virtual worlds, the World Wide Web, blogging, and instant messaging” (p. 258). He argued that the development of the Internet and social networks would affect the use of language within each speech community. Furthermore, Crystal noted that something exists along with the Internet language (e.g. chat language, email language) which complements the particular pattern of that genre, and he termed it as “Netspeak” (p. 19). He defined it as a type of language representing the particular features of the Internet used by people.

## **Purpose and Significance of the Study**

Language learners’ orientations (knowledge, prestige, and interactions) tend to change over time, reflecting the influence of societal patterns as well as technological developments (Ellis, 2004). It can be surmised that social networks influence many aspects of people’s life rapidly because the rate of technological progress is much more than before. Due to such an expeditious change, applied linguists have to reconsider the meaning of communicative competence in the contemporary age, and adapt it to technological changes (Chapelle, 2003). Therefore, it stands to logic that every aspect of language be studied through the lens of technology to highlight the most recent changes in the use of language. Despite the noteworthiness of the study of language in social networking sites, there has been meager research conducted, especially in Iran, to investigate the use of speech acts in social networking sites. The present study was a contrastive study intending to compare and contrast the discourse structure of gratitude speech act in English and Persian considering four factors: the use of politeness strategies, intensifiers, interjections, and gender differences. Therefore, the following research questions were raised to address these issues:

1. Do Persian and English-speaking Instagram users employ gratitude strategies differently?
2. Do Persian and English-speaking users of Instagram make use of politeness strategies in expressing gratitude differently?
3. Are there any significant differences between Persian-speaking male and female users of Instagram in terms of gratitude expression and politeness strategy use?
4. Are there any significant differences between English-speaking male and female users of Instagram in terms of gratitude expression and politeness strategy use?
5. Are there any significant differences between Persian- and English-speaking gratitude utterances on Instagram respecting the use of intensifiers and interjections?

## Methodology

### Corpus

Instagram as one of the most recent social networks was selected to extract and gather the corpus for this study. It was intended to make use of the posts or comments Instagram users compose as gratitude utterances. The data were extracted through hashtag search during which gratitude expressions such as “thank you”, “thanks”, “thnx”, “grateful”, “gratitude”, “thank\_you\_very\_much”, and “thankful” for the English language, and related Persian expressions represented below, were typed:

«ممنون» «مرسی» «متشکر» «تشکر» «ممنونم»

‘Thank you’, ‘Thanks’, ‘Thanks’, ‘Merci’, ‘Thanks’

In this way, related posts were revealed providing the researcher with the opportunity to obtain the required data. Four hundred expressions of gratitude were selected, 200 of which were taken from Persian posts and the other 200 from English ones. These posts included verbal sentences with gratitude connotation, which means that the sentences did not necessarily include the certain aforementioned gratitude expressions. In other words, for the sake of authenticity, only gratitude connotation was sought to be included, with no emphasis on the common verbs or words of gratitude, e.g. *thanks, thank you, appreciate*. Besides, the posts were taken from both formal and informal contexts to be more representative of the language of this particular application. It must be noted that the nationality and gender of the Instagram users were discovered based upon the information that the users had provided in their profiles. Although there exists the risk that the users might hide their real gender or nationality, the researcher tried to check the profile of each user whose post was included in the study before including him/her in the study.

### Instruments

Instagram social application was selected to extract related gratitude posts and comments. Instagram is an application available for mobile phones, allowing its users to post their photos/videos along with captions and hashtags (Lee & Chau, 2018).

Besides Instagram, this study aimed to take advantage of other frameworks. Brown and Levinson's (1987) positive and negative politeness strategies were used to reveal the type of politeness strategies employed more frequently. Their taxonomy of positive and negative strategies contained 15 positive politeness strategies and 10 negative politeness strategies, each indicating one way of expressing gratitude to the speaker in accordance with the relationship between the interlocutors.

Considering the use of strategies for the gratitude expressions, Cheng's (2005) taxonomy was employed. As mentioned earlier, the scheme consists of eight strategies: (a) thanking, (b) appreciation, (c) positive feelings, (d) apology,



(e) recognition of the imposition, (f) repayment, (g) others, and (h) attention getter.

Morady Moghaddam's (2012) codification of intensifiers was utilized to shed light on the type and frequency of such phrases for both languages. It consists of five subcategories: (a) repetition (e.g. thank you very very much!), (b) multiple intensifiers (e.g. I am so very grateful), (c) implicit intensifiers (e.g. It made me truly happy), (d) explicit intensifiers (e.g. Thank you), and (e) adjectival intensifiers (e.g. My sincere gratitude!).

For analyzing the interjections, Jovanović's (2004) categorization of English interjections coupled with Vahidyan Kamyar's (1995) classification of Persian interjections were taken into account. Since interjections are language-specific categories differing from one language to another, it was deemed appropriate to make use of interjection lists specific to each language separately. The English interjections were divided into joy, surprise, pleasure, and wonder. However, since most of the gathered data were expressions of joy and surprise, pleasure and wonder were not included in the categories of this study. Persian interjections, presented by Vahidyan Kamyar (1995), were categorized as 1) those representing appreciation, joy, pleasure, and persuasion, and 2) those indicating exclamation and appreciation. To be in line with the English interjections, these two groups were used under the title of joy and surprise as well.

### ***Data Collection Procedure***

Collecting the required corpus, the researchers intended to search for those posts or comments on Instagram that contained gratitude connotation. Since the present study intended to focus on linguistic patterns of Instagram, it limited itself to verbal representations of gratitude on Instagram, and no nonverbal tools such as stickers or emojis connoting gratitude were included in the corpus. To gather verbal representations of gratitude by the users, a search for the related verbal hashtags was conducted in both languages. In this way, 400 gratitude utterances, 200 in English and 200 in Persian, were adopted to be implemented as the main corpus of this study. Seeking to study the gender difference in the use of gratitude strategies, the researchers aimed to select half of the utterances for each language from male users and the other half from females, culminating in 100 Persian gratitude utterances composed by male users, 100 by Persian-speaking female users, 100 by English-speaking male users, and finally 100 by English-speaking female users. Furthermore, it was intended to select 200 utterances out of those already singled out containing politeness strategies to be analyzed for each language. To put it differently, 100 Persian utterances along with 100 English utterances composed equally by female and male Instagram users (50 by male and 50 by female users) encompassing politeness connotation were sorted out. This was performed because about half of the utterances could not be applied to Brown and Levinson's (1987) taxonomy.

The time interval during which the data were gathered was two months from October 1 to November 30, 2017. During this interval, it was attempted to

continue the process of data collection daily and in different hours so that the procedure would be more consistent and reliable. Then, the data were scrutinized to detect gender differences in the use of politeness strategies of each language. Subsequently, the gratitude utterances encompassing intensifiers and interjections were sorted out for either language in order to be exploited for data analysis. As these expressions had not been used with high frequency in the data, 50 gratitude utterances containing intensifiers and 30 encompassing interjections were picked out for the process of data analysis. The reason for selecting this number of intensifiers and interjections was that, within the natural data provided in Instagram application, just as it is discernible in everyday occurring speech as well, the frequency of intensifiers and interjections is obviously lower than expressions containing gratitude; hence, such a decision was made to preserve the authenticity and naturalness of the occurring posts.

### ***Data Analysis***

Cheng's (2005) taxonomy of gratitude strategies, Brown and Levinson's (1987) classification of positive and negative politeness strategies, Jovanović's (2004) classification of interjections in English and Vahidyan Kamyar's (1995) stratification of Persian interjections, and Morady Moghaddam's (2012) ranking of English Intensifiers and their equivalents in Persian were employed to investigate the collected data. Afterwards, the Chi-square test, which is appropriate for analyzing nominal data, was employed to calculate the frequencies and elaborate on the research questions of the study.

## **Results**

### ***The First Research Question***

The first research question addressed the use of gratitude strategies by English- and Persian-speaking users of Instagram regardless of their gender. The results indicated that Persian and English-speaking Instagram users followed somewhat the same pattern in employing gratitude strategies. Table 1 demonstrates the frequencies and percentages of the two groups' employment of these strategies.

Table 1 reveals that English-speaking Instagram users employed thanking (51%) with the frequency of 102, appreciation (5.5%) with the frequency of 11, and recognition of imposition (3%) with the frequency of 6, which reveals that these strategies were used more by them than the Persian users. On the other hand, the Persian users made use of positive feeling (34.5%) 69 times, and attention getter (10%) 20 times out of 200, more than the English-speakers. The two groups made equal use of apology and repayment strategies.

A Chi-square test was conducted to see whether these findings manifested any significant difference between the two groups. The results of the Chi-square test ( $\chi^2 (7) = 7.159, p = .413, r = .133$ ) (Cramer's  $V = 0.133$ ) suggested a

weak effect size, indicating that there was no significant difference between the Persian and English-speaking Instagram users' utilization of gratitude strategies.

**Table 1.**  
*Frequencies and Percentages of Gratitude Strategies Used by Both Groups*

		Strategies								Total
		Thank- ing	Apprecia- tion	Positive feeling	Apology	Recognition of imposi- tion	Repay- ment	Other	Atten- tion getter	
Eng- lish	Count	102	11	48	2	6	7	5	19	200
	% within Group	51.0%	5.5%	24.0%	1.0%	3.0%	3.5%	2.5%	9.5%	100.0%
Per- sian	Count	84	7	69	2	4	7	7	20	200
	% within Group	42.0%	3.5%	34.5%	1.0%	2.0%	3.5%	3.5%	10.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	186	18	117	4	10	14	12	39	400
	% within Group	46.5%	4.5%	29.3%	1.0%	2.5%	3.5%	3.0%	9.8%	100.0%

**The Second Research Question**

The second research question examined the application of politeness strategies by both nationalities. It was found that the Persian and English-speaking users of Instagram are not significantly different in using politeness strategies while expressing gratitude.

**Table 2.**  
*Frequencies and Percentages of Politeness Strategies Used by Both Groups*

		Politeness		Total	
		Positive	Negative		
Group	English	Count	76	24	100
		% within Group	76.0%	24.0%	100.0%
	Persian	Count	82	18	100
		% within Group	82.0%	18.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	158	42	200	
	% within Group	79.0%	21.0%	100.0%	

Table 2 demonstrates the descriptive statistics for the application of politeness strategies by Persian and English-speaking Instagram users. Both English and Persian (76% vs. 82%)-speaking users employed positive strategies more than negative ones (24% vs. 16%). The English-speaking group made use of 76 positive strategies with the Std. residual of -.3 and 24 negative strategies out of the total politeness posts which were 100, and the Std. residual of the negative strategies was .7. On the other hand, the Persian-speaking users made use of 82 positive strategies having the Std. residual of .3 and 18 negative strategies with

the Std. residual of -.7. Standardized residuals lower than +/- 1.96 suggested that there were no considerable differences between the two groups.

The results of a Chi-square test ( $\chi^2 (1) = .753, p = .385, r = .061$ ) ( $\Phi = 0.061$ ) also represented a weak effect size, indicating that there was no significant difference between the English and Persian group regarding the application of positive and negative politeness strategies in expressing gratitude speech act.

### Third Research Question

The third research question referred to the use of gratitude and politeness strategies by female and male Persian-speaking users of Instagram. The analysis of the gendered use of language in the context of Instagram among Persian speakers showed that female and male Persian users of Instagram had similar performance.

**Table 3.**  
*Frequencies and Percentages for Gratitude of the Persian-Speaking Group by Gender*

		Gratitude strategies								
		Thanking	Appreciation	Positive feeling	Apology	Recognition of imposition	Repayment	Other	Attention getter	Total
Male	Count	44	4	38	1	0	2	4	7	100
	%within group	44%	4%	38%	1%	0%	2%	4%	7%	100%
Female	Count	40	3	31	1	4	5	3	13	100
	%within group	40%	3%	31%	1%	4%	5%	3%	13%	100%
Total	Count	84	7	69	2	4	7	7	20	200
	%within group	42%	3.5%	34.5%	1%	2%	3.5%	3.5%	10%	100%

**Table 4.**  
*Frequencies and Percentages for Politeness Strategies of the Persian-Speaking Group by Gender*

		Politeness strategies		
		Positive	Negative	Total
Male	Count	37	13	50
	%Within Group	74%	26%	100%
Female	Count	45	5	50
	%Within Group	90%	10%	100%
Total	Count	82	18	100
	%Within Group	82%	18%	100%

Table 3 displays that the male users of Instagram employed thanking (44%) with the frequency of 44, appreciation (4%) with the frequency of 4 and positive feeling (38%) 38 times, which signifies that males used the strategies more than their female counterparts. On the other hand, the female users made more frequent use of recognition of imposition (4%) repeated four times, repayment (5%) with the frequency of five, and attention getter (13%) with the frequency of 13 in comparison to males. The two groups made equal use of apology.

Regarding the utilization of politeness strategies by female and male Persian Instagram users, Table 4 displays that the female group (90%) used positive strategies more frequently than the male group (74%). One can conclude that the two groups did not use different politeness strategies.

Two Chi-square tests were run to explore the differences between male and female Persian Instagram users in terms of gratitude and politeness strategy use. The results of both tests for the use of gratitude strategies ( $\chi^2 (7) = 8.27, p = .309, r = .203$ ) (Cramer's  $V = 0.203$ ) and politeness strategies ( $\chi^2 (1) = 3.32, p = .068, r = .182$ ) ( $\Phi = 0.182$ ) signified weak effect sizes suggesting that there were no significant differences between the male and female participants' employment of gratitude and politeness strategies.

#### **Fourth Research Question**

The fourth research question concerned the use of gratitude and politeness strategies by English female and male users of Instagram. The results revealed that there was no substantial difference between the female and male group in terms of gratitude and politeness strategies use.

**Table 5.5**  
*Frequencies and Percentages for Gratitude Strategies of English Group by Gender*

		Gratitude Strategies								
		Thanking	Appreciation	Positive feeling	Apology	Recognition of imposition	Repayment	Other	Attention getter	Total
Male	Count	45	7	23	0	3	6	3	13	100
	%with in group	45%	7%	23%	0%	3%	6%	3%	13%	100%
Female	Count	57	4	25	2	3	1	2	6	100
	%with in group	57%	4%	25%	2%	3%	1%	2%	6%	100%
Total	Count	84	7	69	2	4	7	7	20	200
	%with in group	42%	3.5%	34.5%	1%	2%	3.5%	3.5%	10%	100%

**Table 5.6***Frequencies and Percentages for Politeness Strategies of English Group by Gender*

		Politeness Strategies		
		Positive	Negative	Total
Male	Count	40	10	50
	%Within Group	80%	20%	100%
Female	Count	36	14	50
	%Within Group	72%	28%	100%
Total	Count	76	24	100
	%Within Group	76%	24%	100%

Table 5 displays that the English male Instagram users employed appreciation (7%) with the frequency of 7, repayment (6%) six times, and attention getters (13%) with the frequency of 13, more frequently than their female counterparts. On the other hand, the female users used thanking (57%) repeated 57 times, positive feeling (25%) with the frequency of 25, and apology (2%) repeated two times, more than men. The two groups made equal use of recognition of imposition.

Table 6 also shows that the male group utilized more politeness strategies (80%) with the frequency of 80, compared to the female group (72%) who used the strategies 72 times. It can be inferred that there is no remarkable difference between the two groups' application of positive and negative politeness strategies.

Two Chi-square tests were administered to shed further light on the possible differences between the two groups regarding the application of gratitude and politeness strategies. The results of both tests for gratitude ( $\chi^2 (7) = 10.66$ ,  $p = .154$ ,  $r = .230$ ) (Cramer's  $V = 0.230$ ) and politeness strategies ( $\chi^2 (1) = .493$ ,  $p = .482$ , and  $r = .070$ ) ( $\Phi = 0.070$ ) did not manifest any strong effect size, implying that there were no significant differences between the male and female group.

### ***Fifth Research Question***

The fifth research question concentrated on the application of intensifiers and interjections across both languages. The findings revealed that there are no significant differences between Persian and English gratitude utterances on Instagram.

Table 7 manifests the frequencies and percentages for the English and Persian Instagram users' application of intensifiers (repetition, multiple, implicit, explicit, and adjectival) and in expressing gratitude. The English-speaking Instagram users exceeded in performance the Persian-speaking group in repetition (20% vs. 18%) with the frequency of 10 vs. nine, multiple intensifiers (6% vs. 4%) with the frequency of three vs. two, and explicit intensifiers (48% vs. 32%) being repeated 24 vs. 16 times. On the other hand, the Persian-speaking group exceeded the English-speaking group in implicit (34% vs. 24%) repeated

12vs. 17 times and adjectival (12% vs. 2%) with the frequency of six vs. one intensifiers

**Table 7**  
*Frequencies and Percentages of Intensifiers by Both Groups*

		Intensifiers					Total
		Repetition	Multiple	Implicit	Explicit	Adjectival	
English	Count	10	3	12	24	1	50
	% within Group	20%	6%	24%	48%	2%	100%
Persian	Count	9	2	17	16	6	50
	% within Group	18%	4%	34%	32%	12%	100%
Total	Count	19	5	29	40	7	100
	% within Group	19%	5%	29%	40%	7%	100%

**Table 8.**  
*Frequencies and Percentages of Interjections by Both Groups*

		Interjections		Total
		Joy	Surprise	
English	Count	4	26	30
	%Within Group	13.3%	86.7%	100%
Persian	Count	11	19	30
	%Within Group	36.7%	63.3%	100%
Total	Count	15	45	60
	%Within Group	25%	75%	100%

As with the interjections, Table 8 exhibits that the English-speaking group employed more surprise (86.7% vs. 63.3%) with the frequency of 26 vs. 19, while the Iranian users used joy (36.7% vs. 13.3%) repeated four vs. 11 times, more than the English-speaking group. The findings suggest no significant differences between the two groups.

The results of the Chi-square tests for intensifiers ( $\chi^2 (4) = 6.28, p = .179, r = .250$ ) (Cramer's  $V = 0.250$ ) and interjections ( $\chi^2 (1) = 3.20, p = .074, r = .230$ ) (Cramer's  $V = 0.230$ ) did not signify a strong effect size, and suggested that there were no significant differences between the English- and Persian-speaking Instagram users' employment of intensifiers and interjections.

## Discussion

This study was an attempt to compare and contrast the use of gratitude strategies respecting the use of politeness strategies, intensifiers, interjections, and gender differences between English- and Persian-speaking Instagram users. The findings revealed no significant difference in the use of Instagram language across the two languages and genders.

The results showed that both English- and Persian-speaking Instagram users followed somewhat the same pattern of gratitude strategies in their hashtags and comments. In contrast with Yoosefvand and Eslami Rasekh's (2014) investigation of gratitude strategies between English and Persian speakers in real-life situations, this study suggests a similar use of gratitude strategies between Persian and English speakers. The reason for such a discrepancy might pertain to the divergent contexts of these investigations; while speakers in real-life situations tend to follow certain pragmatic patterns of their own language, they may act quite differently in social networks (Ma, 1996). Since Instagram, as one of the most prominent social media, can exert influence on the use of language by individuals (Crystal, 2006), it can be surmised that individuals worldwide are drawn to use similar patterns of discourse in social applications even at the cost of their sense of national distinctiveness.

Considering Baron's (1984) assumption of homogeneous use of language in CMC that was generalized to mobile technology language (Herring, 2015) as well, one can argue that the somehow comparable language use of the English and Persian-speaking Instagram users in this study might be a consequence of the social effects of anonymity experienced in this application.

The findings of this study are in line with Ma's (1996) statement that although Asian individuals may use a more "indirect" language in face-to-face communication, in the Internet language, both Asian and American users make use of "direct" language. It is fair to conclude that since the most frequent gratitude strategies for both languages were "explicit thanking", the users, especially Persian speakers whose language follows Asian pragmatic patterns, tended to utilize a more "direct" language just as do other nationalities.

Another probable reason for the findings concerns the idea of social networking applications such as Instagram enjoying a particular language (Herring, 2015), drawing their users to deploy particular patterns of language use and behavior which are exclusive to them, regardless of their mother tongue patterns.

Regarding the utilization of politeness strategies in the gratitude expressions, the results indicated no noteworthy difference between English and Persian users of Instagram application. This finding is in concord with Brown and Levinson's (1987) statement that the use of politeness strategies is universal for all languages. Such a compatible relationship might propose that Brown and Levinson's (1987) assertion could be generalized to social networking sites as well, and concerning the realm of Instagram, their rules may apply to both English and Persian.

Another reason for the similar linguistic performance of English- and Persian-speaking users could be the opportunity that Instagram bestows upon its users. Instagram users can act anonymously without the fear of being judged and disdained by others, and they can reveal more self-disclosure on CMC than in face-to-face communication (Ma, 1996). According to Androutsopoulos (2006), code choice and code alteration in CMC can be considered to be re-



sources for the construction of social identities which might be deliberately adjacent to particular groups other than the individual's real community. It can be inferred that in accordance with the identities the Instagram users prefer to have, they might purposefully opt for those politeness strategies that are more affable and do not encompass restrictions obliged by the conventions of the real world.

Inspection of the role of gender in the use of gratitude and politeness strategies across English- and Persian-speaking male and female Instagram users was another concern of this study. The findings did not demonstrate any significant difference between male and female Instagram users. This finding is in line with those reported by Guiller and Durndell (2007) and Huffaker and Calvert (2005). Guiller and Durndell assert that in the context of mobile technologies, the language used by the two genders does not differ significantly. They maintain that the way female and male users express themselves in social networking sites seems to be indistinguishable. Huffaker and Calvert state that regarding the case of identity-disclosure and language use in social networks, females and males manifest an equal degree of their identity and make use of similar linguistic patterns. Such consistency could imply that as the users of the Internet start to feel less restricted in the context of social media, they tend to express more of their true identity and usually employ a direct and free style of language.

This result, on the other hand, does not concur with some other studies (e.g., Brown, 1990; Fogel & Nehmad, 2009; Herring, 2000; Yoosefvand & Eslami Rasekh, 2014). For example, Brown claims that females appear to act more politely using negative politeness which means the use of a more formal language in the required situations. In the same vein, Fogel and Nehmad assert that in social networking sites, females tend to have more concerns about privacy and identity disclosure and, hence, employ a more restrictive language bound by the social and cultural barriers in comparison to male users.

The contrasting results between these studies and the finding of this study might be due to the various contexts of the studies. Social networking sites possess a degree of anonymity which culminates in more gender equality in either self-representation or the use of language (Herring & Stoerger, 2014), while in real-life situations, some barriers exist hampering the free representation of the self or language, especially for females. It seems that the unique genre of Instagram provokes its users to move toward an equal and communal Web-based communication which blurs gender differences in language use (Crococo, Cramer, & Meier, 2008). This might be a clue why females on Instagram make use of a more direct and free language (just as do males), and the results show meager diversity among female and male users.

Exploring the use of intensifiers and interjections in the gratitude expressions of the English- and Persian-speaking users of Instagram suggested no remarkable difference between these two groups. This finding, at least partly, does not correspond to Kaplan's (1966) theory of cross-cultural patterns of thought. According to Kaplan, cultural thought patterns of languages differ re-



the process of language learning without paying attention to the direct rules of language. The contrastive analysis rendered in this research can benefit the teachers by directing them to introduce these patterns to language learners and assist them in proceeding with language learning beyond the environment of the classroom, and experience incidental learning in a new context with characteristics that have been discerned and investigated.

Curriculum developers can take advantage of this study to incorporate online language teaching and learning in the syllabus benefiting from its unique language which blurs the boundaries of language and gender. Therefore, they can develop a widespread educational program viewing individuals in their sense of alacrity to learn, with no concern about other discriminatory factors such as gender, race, and language.

Finally, it should be noted that this study did not include nonverbal tools such as emojis or stickers used to communicate the meaning of gratitude, and only verbal exclamations were deployed. In the same vein, the nationality and gender of the Instagram users were specified based upon the information that the users had provided in their profiles. Moreover, Instagram as one of the most recent social networks offers several multimodal facilities with pragmatic value for the study of speech acts, and speech acts are not so straightforward as few verbal expressions. Due to feasibility considerations, this study could not take care of them. Interested researchers can conduct complementary and follow-up studies to come up with more comprehensive and sound findings.

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