

## A comparative sociopragmatic analysis of wedding invitations in American and Iranian societies and teaching implications

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### *Abstract*

Wedding invitations (WIs), as a uniquely socially and culturally constructed genre, provide a distinct opportunity to compare the sociocultural values of different speech communities as reflected in the textual content and organization of the different moves. Students can be exposed to this genre and its different moves using a genre-based pedagogy. Genre-based pedagogy can be used to provide the learners with an opportunity to study well-known genres in their first (L1) and second language (L2) and to be able to observe the common and distinctive moves from a cross-cultural, cross-linguistic perspective. This study was carried out to investigate the wedding invitations in American and Iranian societies through two complementary approaches: genre analysis and critical discourse analysis (CDA). One hundred wedding invitation (WI) cards (50 from each society) were collected and analyzed comparatively. The findings from the genre analysis showed that the WIs of the two speech communities enjoyed both similarities and differences in their generic moves. Results of CDA indicated that traditional orientation, religious affiliation, masculine power and educational status were the most influential factors affecting WIs in both societies but the intensity of the effect of these factors were not similar in the two speech communities. The results of this study sheds light on sociocultural forces dominating Iranian and American language communities.

**Keywords:** Wedding Invitation, Genre, Genre Analysis, Critical Discourse Analysis, Sociocultural values, cross-cultural differences, American vs. Iranian

### **Introduction**

Available research on the pragmatic competence of L2 learners shows that even advanced-level L2 learners are prone to making pragmatic errors when performing different speech acts (LoCastro, 2010; Ryan, 2015). Research shows that the development of pragmatic competence will take conscious effort, explicit teaching, and persistence. Facilitating learners acquisition of pragmatic competence then should be an important goal of language teaching. Furthermore, L2 teachers are not typically prepared to deal with pragmatics of the

language they teach and the instructional focus has mainly been on structural aspects of language (e.g., Alcon Soler & Guzman, 2010; Bardovi-Harlig, 2001; Eslami & Eslami-Rasekh, 2008, Rose & Kasper, 2001). Teachers who may not feel confident about their knowledge of L2 pragmatics can use other resources such as films (Eslami-Rasekh, 2005, Rose & Kasper, 2001), sitcoms (Washburn, 2001), and also technology (Eslami, Mirzaei, & Dini, 2015). Another powerful strategy proposed by researchers (e.g., LoCastro, 2010, Ryan, 2015) is to involve learners in analyzing

communications, problematic interactions, and genres. Invitations in general and wedding invitations in particular, can provide the best conditions for pragmatic language learning and the best teaching materials. Wedding invitations provide authentic learners with language use, organization of moves, and content that are culturally loaded and rich. In order to be able to use wedding invitations and its genre-based features for instructional purposes, we will gain insights to investigate how they are used in students' first language and culture and compare it with its presentation and use in the target language.

Invitations are considered to be directive speech acts since they attempt to get the hearer to do something (Searle, 1979). At the same time, invitations are considered to be commissive (Searle, 1979) in that they commit the speaker to some future course of action. Invitations can be expressed both in oral and written forms. Clark and Isaacs (1990) stated that a usual and unambiguous invitation includes some fixed sections, such as; reference to time, mention of place, and a request for response. The main factor which makes invitations different from one another is the context of use, i.e., each type of invitation is created in a specific condition.

Invitations, similar to other speech acts are influenced by language user socio-cultural norms and values and thus cross-cultural studies of invitations should enhance awareness of different cultural values and cross-cultural communication. One form of formal invitation which is used by most speech communities is wedding invitation. This type of invitation is usually presented formally and in a written form.

Similar to other types of invitations, social norms and cultural values can influence the presentation of component moves manifested in a typical wedding invitation

card. Therefore, it is valuable to analyze the wedding invitation cards to examine how cultural values are reflected in their textual organization and content. In the present study two complementary and overlapping analytical paradigms have been adopted to analyze and compare WI texts in Persian and American English. Similar to Mirzaei and Eslami's (2013) study, genre analysis and critical discourse analysis were used to analyze the structure of WI texts and the sociocultural values revealed by the choice of different moves and its linguistic realization. Genre analysis was used to identify the generic structure of WIs in the two speech communities of Persian speakers and American English speakers. Critical discourse analysis was used to investigate the effect of social beliefs and values like power and religion on the construction of wedding invitation.

The study attempted to answer these two questions:

1. What typical textual and structural features can be identified in Iranian and American wedding invitation cards constructed by Persian and American English speakers?
2. Which socio-cultural factors influence the construction of wedding invitation genre in the two speech communities?

### Background of the Study

Pioneering research on invitations by Wolfson and his colleagues (1983) identified the essential components of sincere invitations as reference to a time and mention of a place or activity and a request for a response. Although invitations speech acts seem to be simple on the surface, studies on invitations in different cultures have shown that these speech acts may require extended negotiations in everyday conversations (Eslami, 2005, Garcia, 2008).

Wedding invitations are considered to be formal invitations and serve as the formal announcement of the ceremonial event of marriage. As stated by Miller (1984), these socially constructed acts belong to the *homely discourses*. Homely discourses are familiar to everyone and used frequently used in everyday life and thus follow a somewhat pre-determined content and structure. Their specific purpose is to invite others to wedding ceremonies which according to Leeds-Hurwitz (2002) are examples of public rites of passages which all language users are acquainted with.

Despite their potential to reveal cultural and social differences (Mirzaei & Eslami, 2013) and their frequent use in all communities, very few studies have investigated the discursal and organization features of these speech acts. One of the early studies in this area was conducted by Clynes and Henry (2004) aiming to familiarize their students with genre analysis and the different moves evident in Brunei WIs. Their findings showed that over the last forty years WI genre in Brunei Malay has evolved rapidly. As they pointed out, these rapid changes are the consequences of the socio-cultural changes in Brunei after its independence in 1984 and the need for the society to establish its identity as an Islamic Monarchy. As they submit, the contemporary WIs have changed dramatically, and a typical invitation has 16 to 20 moves spread over 5 to 8 pages.

Al-Ali (2006) studied wedding invitation genre in Jordanian community. To do so he asked 45 students at Jordan University of Science and Technology to collect 200 WI cards. The WI cards which he examined were from 1960s to the present. In his study, he also considered regional differences. Through the genre analysis he found that each wedding invitation text had almost eight component moves constructing its

structure. Al-Ali stated that not all of these rhetorical moves were obligatory. The moves included: 1) opening, 2) heading, 3) identifying the inviters, 4) requesting the presence of others, 5) identifying the bride and groom, 6) closing, and 7) Other optional components. Religion and paternalism were found to play an important role in the textual content and discursal organization of WIs. The order of these elements revealed that religion occupies the first position in the WI followed by the tribal power and paternal authority.

In regards to WIs in Iran, there are three noteworthy studies. In an extensive study, Mirzaei and Eslami (2013) investigated the variability dynamics of WIs in Iran. Their data included a corpus of 150 WI cards from different parts of Iran covering the almost one decade (2000-2011). A transdisciplinary approach including genre analysis, variational sociolinguistics, and critical discourse analysis was used to analyze the data and show the structure, the content organization and variability of the data based on socio cultural values and changes that happened during 2000-2011. They demonstrated that religious beliefs and sociocultural values such as ethnicity, education, socioeconomic status, profession, and age influence young couples preference and choice of WI texts and its organization. In another study, Sharif and Yarmohammadi (2013) similarly used genre analysis to identify and characterize the move structures of WIs. They also recognized that the move structure of Iranian WIs reflect the religious beliefs, cultural values, and social norms of the Iranian society. Sadri (2014) examined 100 Iranian WI cards from 1970-2013 within social semiotics framework to identify the changes across time. She extended the scope of previous studies to examine not only the textual features of WIs, but also their non-verbal features such as style, format, size, color, and typography.

Her findings reveal the remarkable changes evident in the nonverbal features of color, size, design, and typography as well as the verbal features (formality, reference terms, text length and mood). Similar to Mirzaei and Eslami findings, Sadri findings show that today sociocultural climate of Iran shows the prevalence of creativity over conventionalization, informality over formality, and solidarity over power.

Although there are some research studies on WIs in different cultures, there is no research study that is comparative in nature and focuses on revealing the sociocultural differences between different communities using the discourse and genre structure of WIs. The present study draws on previous studies and compares the genre structure and textual realizations of WIs between two distinct communities of Persian speakers in Iran and American English speakers in the United States.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Two complementary approaches namely, genre analysis and critical discourse analysis were used in the present study. Genre is used in research to classify or categorize texts according to their content and structure (Bhatia, 2004; Bloor & Bloor, 2007). Recent approaches to genre has shifted the focus on text to discourse practices that are socially bound and context dependent (Foley, 1997, Bhatia, 2004). It should be noted that approaching genre as discourse practice, situates the formal structures of discourse in the wider sociocultural context in which it is constructed (Sarangi & Slembrouck, 1994).

Considering genres as social and pragmatic constructs and focusing on their communicative purpose to achieve socially recognized goals (Swales, 1990), sheds lights on the complex dynamics underlying communicative actions and the multifaceted relationships between discourse and

sociocultural values of speech communities. Investigating cross-cultural differences in how genres are realized by considering genres as a reflection of how social identities are constructed and social relations are practiced, should provide important insights on how the social, cultural, and religious values of different communities are different or similar.

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) was the second approach used in this study. CDA is used to explain the discursive relations that generic variability demonstrated in the data. As stated by Fairclough (2010), CDA not only makes the connection between textual properties and social processes and ideology visible, but also uses a critical lens to do so. This approach aligns well with research focusing on social and cultural differences between speech communities since it deconstructs values and ideologies that lead to the verbal and non-verbal choices language users make in crafting their WIs.

A multidisciplinary approach was used in this study to describe rhetorical structures of the WIs as a genre, and to establish links between textual features and sociocultural values of the two speech communities under study. No comparative study has been conducted on WI discourse among Iranians Persian speakers and American English speakers. This study tries to fill this gap and probe into how sociocultural and religious values are realized through and reflected in WI genres of two culturally distinct societies.

### **Methodology**

#### *Participants and Data*

Data included 100 WI cards from Iranian (50) and American (50) couples. All the Iranian couples were from Isfahan and all the American couples were from Texas. Using convenient and purposeful sampling,

for the Iranian sample, one of the researchers asked her relatives and friends to provide her with their WI cards. For the American data, one of the researchers asked her students to provide her as many invitations cards as they could collect from Texan couples. From the data set (150) that met the age and date criteria, 50 of the invitation cards was randomly selected and used in this study. The couples were also requested to provide the researchers with their demographic information which included questions about the marriage date of the couples, their age, their commitment to the religion, their socioeconomic status and their traditional or modern positionality on a scale of 1 (highly modern) to 5 (highly traditional). The age range of the couples was between 20- 34 years old and the invitation cards were from 2003-2013.

#### Data Analysis

As stated above the data was analyzed using two analytical approaches of genre analysis and critical discourse analysis. Genre analysis, was used to analyze the generic structure of WI cards in the two societies using preexisting frameworks of genre analysis in general (Bhatia, 2004; Swales, 1990) and genre analysis of WIs in particular (Al-Ali, 2006; Mirzaei & Eslami, 2013).

Both, the vertical and horizontal organization of the WI texts was examined in the analysis. The vertical and horizontal text arrangements indicate the number of surface level features of the texts, and more importantly, the hierarchical order of the rhetorical moves. To explore the most frequent manifestations of the moves, the percentage of each manifestations was calculated.

After finding the surface generic features of the cards, the analysis process was complemented with CDA proposed by

Fairclough (2010) to explore the implicit and hidden socio cultural forces affecting different presentation of each component moves of the ritualized WI. CDA is mainly concerned with exploring the effects of factors like dominance, power and ideology in discourse which can't be easily recognized by people in the ordinary social events. Through CDA, researchers link the micro analysis of the text to the macro relations of power, dominance, equality and ideology underlying this social practice.

After analyzing the data through both approaches, the results were compared to examine if there were any differences regarding the genre component moves and more importantly, if sociolinguistic variations can be linked to intrinsic sociocultural values and ideologies of the two speech communities.

#### Results

Textual analysis of Iranian WI cards in relation to their vertical position indicated seven component moves which are as follows: Opening, heading, couples names, ceremonial text, inviters names, situating the wedding and other optional moves. Figure .1 shows an image of a typical Iranian WI card issued in 2013 (1392).



**Figure1: An Iranian wedding invitation card issued in 2013 (1392).**

The textual pattern of an Iranian WI from the corpus is shown in table 1 below. As shown, the WI text begin with a reference to God's name (more or less ritual). The second move indicates the type of the ceremony (engagement or wedding) and is followed by the third move which indicates the couple's names (the order can vary). The

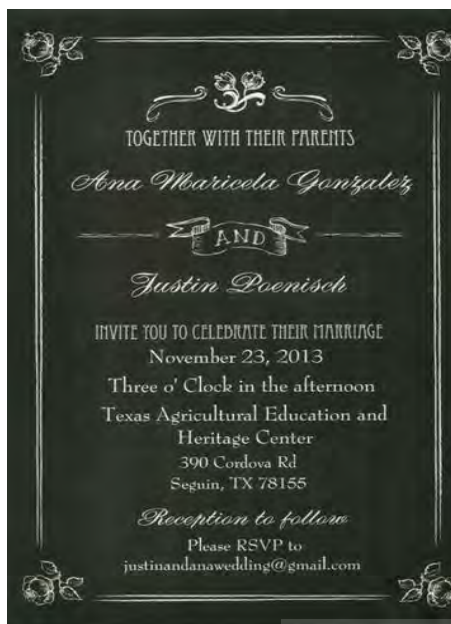
fourth move is the ceremonial text, the most prominent part of the invitation text, which reveals the highest amount of variety and can be in prose or poetry. Inviter's names is the next move. Again there is variety in who the listed inviter(s) could be and the choice of names and its organizational arrangement has sociocultural significance. In the next move the date, time, and location of the ceremony is specified. Optional moves could include reference to the use of cameras by guests or other ceremonial texts.

**Table 1: Textual pattern of Iranian wedding invitations**

Move component	Move presentation
<b>Opening</b>	<i>Be Name Mehr Afarin</i> ( In the name of the creator of love)
<b>Heading</b>	<i>Jashne Aroosi</i> ( Wedding ceremony)
<b>Couples' names</b>	<i>Sara va Ali</i> ( Bride first name and groom's first name)
<b>Ceremonial text</b>	<i>Baraye amadanat aseman be zamin baran hediye midahad. Montazerim</i> ( For your arrival the sky gives rain as a gift to the earth, we are waiting)
<b>Inviters' names</b>	Haj Mahdi Mohammadi(Groom's father), Haj Mohammad Ali Atayee ( bride's father)
<b>Situating the ceremony</b>	<i>zaman: panj shanbeh 22/1/1387 az sate 7-11 shab be sarfe shirini va sham</i> (Time: Thursday from 19-23 at night to serve sweets and dinner) <i>Makan: Bolvare Atashgah, Talare Atashkadeh.</i> (Atashgah boulevard, Atashkadeh Wedding Hall)
<b>Optional moves</b>	<i>Lotfan sabte lahzat ra be ma beseperid.</i> (Please kindly leave recording of the events for us)

Analysis of the American WI cards revealed six component moves: inviters names, invitation text, couples names, situating the ceremony, announcing the reception

(continuation of the wedding ceremony) and optional moves. Figure. 2 shows an example of one American WI card issued in 2013.



**Figure.2 Image of a typical American wedding invitation card issued in 2013.**

As can be seen in table 2, American WIs seem to be shorter and simpler and include less number of moves compared to the Persian WIs.

**Table 2: Textual pattern of American wedding invitation cards**

Component moves	Examples
Inviters' names	<i>Bill and Sarah Achgill and John and Allen Dickson</i>
Invitation text	Request the honor of your presence at the ۴۴.
Couples' names	Cynthia Marie Achgill And Kenneth Duane Dickson
Situating the ceremony	Saturday, June thirtieth 2013 at two o clock in the afternoon, Shirley Acres 217 Woerner Rd, Houston, TX 77090
Reception	Reception to follow
Optional moves	Rsvp, Ceremonial text

### *Opening*

Following genre analysis of the invitation cards, CDA was used to analyze discursive and sociocultural process that have shaped the sociolinguistic variability between the two speech communities. The component moves and their sociolinguistic variability in each community is presented below.

Opening was used in almost all the Iranian invitation cards and occupied the first vertical move. The analysis revealed that almost all the Persian WIs start with referring to God, reflective of the Iranian s socio-religious orientation (Mirzei & Eslami, 2013). This move was present in WI cards from both groups of couples (modern and traditional). The language used for this move could be Arabic or Persian. Most of the modern couples opted for Persian versions and the traditional ones for the Arabic version. The same pattern was observed in relation to the level of religiosity.

Data analysis showed that 56% of the openings were Persian phrases referring to God (e.g., *Be name hasti afarin*, *Be name khaleghe eshgh*, *Be yadash va be yariyash*) and about 28% of the cards opened with the sentence *Ya Ali goftim o eshgh aghaz shod* (the first Imam of shiete). Finally, 16% of

the cards were opened with Arabic phrases such as *Hoval mahboob*. Table 1 shows some of the most usual phrases which were used in the Iranian wedding invitation cards as the opening.

**Table 1. Typical opening move phrases**

Phrases	English Translation
Be name khaleghe eshgh	In the name of the creator of love
Be name mehr afarin	In the name of the creator of kindness
Be name peyvand dahandeye ghalbha	In the name of the connector of the hearts
Be name hazrate eshgh	In the name of his majesty of love
Be name afaridegare zibayee ha	In the name of the creator of the beauties
Dar partove mehre yazdanb	In the light of God's kindness
Be name hasti afarin	In the name of the creator of existence
Ya Ali goftim o eshgh aghaz shod	We said O! Ali and love began
Hoval mahboob	He is the beloved

Furthermore, our analysis showed that modern couples used Persian opening moves twice as much (68.8%) compared to traditional couples (33.3%). Similarly, traditional couples used phrases referencing Imam Ali's name in 44% of the wedding invitation cards compared to a much lower percentage of this phrase used by modern couples (18.7%). Interestingly, the level of religiosity was reflected in the use of different phrases for the opening move as well. The couples with lower level of religiosity showed more preference for the use of Persian openings (66.6%) compared to the ones with higher level of religiosity (40%).

### Heading

The second vertical component of Iranian wedding invitation cards is used to specify the type of marriage ceremony (engagement or wedding) which would be held by the

couple's families. In almost all of the cards this component was presented by a two word heading: *Jashne Aghd* or *Jashne Aroosi*. Almost 86% of the collected Iranian cards included this move. The level of variability was the least in this move compared to the other WI moves. A few of the cards opted either to very casual or to highly formal pre-fabricated texts similar to what has been presented in Mirzaei and Eslami (2013, p. 110). An example of a highly formal and religious heading is shown below.

*Example: Ba sepa va setayesh khodavandegare eshgh ra ke tophighe tamassok be Ali ebn abi talleb va khandanash ra nasibe ma gardanid, jashne aroosiye azizaneman x va y....*

[with a gratitude to and worship of the god of love who helped us to be the followers of Ali- the son of Abi taleb- and his family, the marriage of our dear x and y...]

Opposite to the grandiose style used in some of the WI cards such as above, some very casual and informal ones such as the example below were used as well.



*Example: To ro khoda pashin beyain, vaseye jashn, AROOSEYEH!*

[Swear you to God, dress up and come, for a party, It's Wedding]

The majority of the formal headings were used by the traditional and religious couples (70%) and the informal and casual ones were mainly used by modern couples with low level of religiosity (75%). This move did not exist in the American WI cards we examined in our data set. However, Eslami, Ribeiro, Snow, and Wharton (in-press) findings showed 13% of their wedding invitation cards from American English speakers had openings (a quote referring to God, friendship, love, and passion).

### *Couple's Names*

This move is generally composed of the groom's and the bride's name. However, there is substantial variation in how their names (first, full, title) are mentioned and the position each component occupies

horizontally and vertically. Furthermore, variations are indicative of sociocultural positioning and social values. Interestingly, in 56% of Iranian WI cards the bride's name was mentioned before the groom's. This percentage was much higher in the American data (80%). Furthermore, in most of the Iranian cards the couples were introduced only with their first names (78%). In contrast, in more than half of the American WIs (52%), couple's full name was used. In only 22% of the Iranian WI cards the bride and the groom were introduced with the titles, *Aghaye* (Mr.) and *Dooshizeh* (Miss).

As can be seen in Table 2 and 3 traditional and religious couples rarely used the couple's first name whereas modern and couples with low levels of religiosity used the first name prevalently. A similar pattern was revealed for the American WIs (tables 4 and 5).

**Table 2: Modernity and Couples' Names (Iranian vs. American)**

	Iranian			American			
	First Name	With Title	Total	First Name	Full Name	Bride's First Name & groom's Full Name	Total
<b>Modern Couples</b>	32 (100%)	0 (0%)	32	11 (52.38%)	7 (33.3%)	3 (14.28%)	21
<b>Traditional Couples</b>	7 (38.8%)	11 (61.2%)	18	1 (4.34%)	17 (73.9%)	5 (21.7%)	23

**Table 3: Religiosity and Couples' Names (Iranian vs. American)**

	Iranian			American			
	First Name	With Title	Total	First Name	Full Name	Bride's First Name & groom's Full Name	Total
<b>Low Religious</b>	30 (100%)	0 (0%)	30	11 (55%)	8 (40%)	1 (5%)	20
<b>High Religious</b>	9 (45%)	11 (55%)	20	1 (4.54%)	14 (63/3%)	7 (31.8%)	22

Similar to Mirzaei and Eslami (2013) and Sadri (2014), in contemporary Iranian WI cards, the use of first names (more casual style) for both groom and bride and the public display of Iranian women's names are now common practice and reflective of social and economic mobility of women in Iran.

### ***Ceremonial Text in the Iranian Wedding Invitations***

The highest degree of the sociolinguistic variability was evidenced in this move. The texts used in this move showed different emotional intensity embodying love and affection. The texts were mostly in the form of Persian prose or poetry selected from Persian literature or prevalent fixed texts used in modern Persian. Sometimes the texts were composed by the couples themselves. Ceremonial texts were found in 90% of the Iranian dataset. In 52% of the invitation cards the couples chose modern Persian poetry (neo-poetry) as the ceremonial text of their WI.

*Be Khorshid sepordeam har sobh be ou begoo doostat daram.*

*I told the sun to tell her every morning "I love you".*

Some couples (30%) chose classical Persian poetry mostly from Hafez.

*Saghi be noore bade barafrooz jame ma, motreb begoo ke kare jahan shod be came ma, ma dar piyale akse rokhe yar dide im, ey bikhbar ze lezate shorbe modame ma.*

[O wine-bearer brighten my cup with the wine, O minstrel say good fortune is now mine. The face of my Beloved is reflected in

my cup. Little you know why with wine, I always myself align.].

In a small number of the cards (8%) neither the classical poetry, nor the new one had been used. Instead, couples chose different ways to present their ceremonial text.

The examples presented are a strong indication of the modern couples reflecting their inner feelings and affection and their resistance to use routinized and traditional pre-fabricated texts. A detailed account and several more examples similar the one we have presented above can be found in Mirzaei and Eslami (2013) and Sadri (2014). The actual invitation is typically embedded in this move. However, its presentation differs in the two groups. Iranian couples used ceremonial text at the heart of their WI cards, then invited their guests through a brief sentence. On the other hand, American couples didn't use any ceremonial text in their invitation and directly invited their guests through one simple sentence.

American: *You are cordially invited to the marriage ceremony of .....*

Iranian: *Cheshm be rahe hozore shoma hastim*

[We are forward to receive you]

### ***Inviters' Names***

The inviters of the Iranian weddings were mostly the couple's fathers (48%). In some cases the couple's parents were mentioned as the inviters (28%). What is important to note is that there was no explicit reference to the names of the couple's mothers. This indicates the prevalence of paternal authority in the Iranian society. Furthermore the name of the groom's father occupied the more prominent right-hand column horizontally. In a number of cards the couple's family names were put as the

inviters of the wedding ceremony (24%). Overall analysis of this move with its variety of realization patterns showed a high level of paternal authority in Iranian WI texts. Most of the traditional and religious couples used only their father names in their WIs. Table 5 and table 6 show different presentation of Iranian inviters names

regarding modernity and religiosity. Couples father as inviter was used most frequently by traditional (77.8%) and religious (70%) couples. Conversely, couples last names as inviters was used more frequently by modern and less religious couples (31.25% and 33.3%), than traditional and more religious couples (11% and 10%).

**Table 4: Modernity and Inviters' Names (Iranian vs. American)**

Inviters Names	Iranian				American				
	Couples Family Names	Couples Parents	Couples Fathers	Total	Couples Parents	Couples + parents	Couples	Brides Parents	Total
Modern	10 (31.25)	12 (37.5)	10 (31.25)	32	6 (28.5)	1(4.8)	14 (66.7)	0 (0)	21
Traditional	2 (11.1)	2 (11.1)	14(77.8)	18	18 (78.2)	1 (4.34)	1 (4.34)	3 (13.04)	23

**Table 5: Religiosity and Inviters' Names (Iranian vs. American)**

Inviters Names	Iranian				American				
	Couples Family Names	Couples Parents	Couples Fathers	Total	Couples Parents	Couples + parents	Couples	Brides Parents	Total
Low Religious	10 (33.3)	10 (33.3)	10 (33.3)	30	5 (25)	2 (10)	13 (65)	0 (0)	20
High Religious	2 (10)	4 (20)	14 (70)	20	17 (77.4)	1 (4.5)	3 (13.6)	1 (4.5)	22

In American WIs, in most cases, the couple s parents were the inviters of the ceremony (52%). In those cases the name of the bride s parents came first. In some of the cards the couples, together with their parents were the inviters of the ceremony (10%). In a group of WIs (30%), the couples were the inviters themselves. In 8% of the cards only the bride family was the inviter of the ceremony. Similar to the Iranian data set the couple s fathers gained the prominent

position in the cards. However, contrary to the Iranian WIs in which in about half of the cases (48%) only the couple s fathers were the inviters, this did not exist in the American data. The parents were listed as the inviters in about half of the American WIs but fathers name occupied the first in the sequence, (e.g., Mr, and Mrs. Miller). Therefore the effect of masculine power dominating this component in the American dataset was not as strongly evident as in the Iranian cards. Similar to Iranian WIs, as

shown in tables 4 and 5, the level of modernity and religiosity effected the realization pattern of this move in American WIs as well. In general the traditional and religious couples listed couples parents as the inviters much more frequently than the modern ones (78.2 vs. 28.5) and listed the couples as the inviters less frequently compared to the modern ones (4.34 vs 66.7).

#### *Examples from American data:*

*Dr. and Mrs. Robert Wesley Clark (Bride' Parents) and Mr. and Mrs. Paul Sweitzer (Groom' Parents)*

*Together with their parents Ana Maricela Gonzalez and Justin Poeniseh*

*Michael and Maryann invite you to their wedding ceremony.....*

#### *Examples from Iranian data:*

*Dr. Ali sarami va Banoo (Bride' Parents)*

*Dr. bahram vahid va Banoo (Groom's Parents)*

*Iranian: Saeed Shafiee (Brid's Father)*

*Mohammad Jabal Ameli (Groom's Father)*

*Iranian: Sadeghi Groom's Family)*

*Bahrani (Bride's family)*

#### **Situating the Ceremony**

This moves includes the date, time and the place of the ceremony. This component naturally was present in almost all WIs and it was presented similarly in both groups in the present study. The different components of this move were independently represented on the vertical axis. The date and type of reception of the wedding celebrations were generally introduced including the time, the type of reception and date. The dates were generally arranged around weekends. Moreover, the use of religious holidays was more prevalent among the traditional and religious couples. Following the time and reception information, the place was mentioned (address). The type of reception,

which was mentioned in most of the Iranian WI cards (*Be sarfe sharbat va shirini*) (Juice and sweet will be served) was not present in the American WI cards.

Most WIs in the American data set included a second part to the ceremony (reception). Reception typically follows the wedding ceremony (e.g., *Reception immediately following the ceremony*) and is held in clubs, wedding halls and gardens.

#### **Optional Moves**

The last part of the Iranian and American WI cards include one or more optional moves. None of the optional moves were similar in the two groups of the cards. In Iranian WI cards request for not bringing any types of camera was the most frequent optional move. This rhetorical move was found in the cards that belonged to religious families. The other optional move was the name and telephone number of the publisher of the cards. Moreover, wishing happiness for the couples is another optional component in the Iranian cards.

*Lotfan az avardane har gooneh doorbine filmbardary va akkasi khoddari konid.*

[Please kindly avoid bringing any types of film or photograph cameras]

The optional moves in American dataset were different from the Iranian ones. Asking the guests to confirm their attendance in the couples marriage website or in the cards attached to the WI cards was one of the optional moves.

*Please RSVP by April seven at Freyandcarreker.ourweddiog.com*

RSVP (Repondez sil vous plait) means please respond either way whether you are able to make it or not.

A few American couples used some literary, emotional sentences in their WIs which was similar to the ceremonial text written in Iranian WIs.

### Discussion and Conclusion

The main focus of this study was to analyze and describe the structure and content of wedding invitations used in American and Iranian communities. The findings indicate that the wedding invitations have specific generic moves that are not difficult to identify. However the number of moves differ in each group and the Iranian WIs exhibit considerable variation in the content of different moves especially the ceremonial text move.

Religious affiliation, masculine power, and traditional orientations were more noticeable in the Iranian WIs compared to the American ones. In all of the Iranian WI cards the couples fathers were introduced before their mothers indicating the existence of paternal authority in the presentation of Iranian WIs. Moreover, religious affiliation and traditional orientation were influential factors on the level of formality, the choice of names and its public presentation, the order of name arrangement, and the content of opening and ceremonial texts. In the cases where the couples were religious and traditional, the groom and the bride were introduced with the titles Mr. and Miss. Furthermore; it was found that most ceremonial texts in the Iranian dataset revealed a modern tone of discourse presentation and word choice. This fact is related to the Iranian couples preference to be distanced from strict and fixed discourse which had dominated WI genre in the past.

Similar to the Iranian WIs, analyzing the American dataset revealed that masculine power, traditional orientation and religious affiliation were somewhat effective factors on the content and structural arrangement of

different moves. The influence was much less noticeable compared to the Iranian WIs though. For instance, the effect of paternal authority was evident on introducing the inviters of the ceremony who were mostly the couple parents. In all of the American cards the couple s fathers names preceded their mothers names. Moreover, the effect of traditional orientation and religiosity were seen in the presentation of American couple s names. Religious and traditional couples preferred using their full names in their WIs.

The findings reveal that compared to American WIs with a simple design and adherence to established conventions, the Iranian WIs mainly exhibit tendency toward creativity in the use of wedding invitations contents and its structural components. The differences evident in casual vs. formal style of language, use of Persian rather than Arabic language to refer to God, use of bride s name, use of first name for bride and groom, the romantic tone of the ceremonial texts and openings reflecting the influence of modernity and the level of religiosity of the couple was much more marked and noticeable in the Iranian WIs than in the American ones.

In both speech communities the level of modernity and religiosity was effective on the presentation of the inviters of the ceremony. However; the analysis of the data revealed that the effect of these factors was more evident on the construction of Iranian WIs than the American ones. The predominant reference to God in the Iranian WIs indicates the strong role of religious beliefs in the Iranian culture and the fact that in Iran religion is interwoven in everyday life practices and activities (Mirzaei & Eslami, 2013; Sadri, 2014, Zarei & Sadri, 2012).

It can be concluded that the effect of aforementioned sociocultural forces were not the same on WI genre in the two speech communities. For instance, whereas the presentation of the inviters in the Iranian cards was affected by masculine power, commitment to religion, level of traditionality and educational status, in American WI this component mostly was influenced by paternal authority and traditional orientation of the families. In sum, the comparative study of speech acts can provide insights on the cultural and social differences in different societies. Moreover, as the findings show, the study of wedding invitations can provide a rich source for investigating the sociocultural values of different societies. Furthermore, as shown in this study, the WIs should be considered as dynamic entities that not only are shaped by the sociocultural values of its users, but also can shape and change the cultural values of the society as language practices can change language users mindset and perspective.

The study has implications for teaching of pragmatics in L1 and in L2. Learners in foreign language context do not have easy access to authentic materials that are pragmatically rich. Thus, teachers must not only provide learners with authentic, accurate, and appropriate materials to facilitate their pragmatic development, they must also give the learners information about the norms and raise their awareness about the cross linguistic variations. Using wedding invitation cards as teaching materials and a useful source of input can raise the consciousness of the students about genres, moves, and how genres are socially and culturally constructed. Wedding invitations as discussed in this paper are one of the homely genres that are used frequently in every culture. Using examples of authentic language use such as wedding invitations as teaching materials can remove

the responsibility of being the sole supplier and interpreter of pragmatic language use from teachers (Washburn, 2001) and provide the students the opportunity to become data collectors, researchers, and discourse analysts and learn from realistic and stimulating examples. Wedding invitations as a culturally and socially rich genre can provide the teachers with valuable teaching material for teaching pragmatics of the language use and the learners with research skills and analytic abilities to dissect the explicit and implicit messages conveyed through the content of each move and arrangement of content in different moves and in different discourse types.

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### Appendix: Demographic Questionnaire

1. Year married:
2. Bride's age when married:
3. Groom's age when married:
4. Level of education attained by bride at time of marriage:
5. Level of education attained by groom at time of marriage:
6. On a scale of 1-5 (1 low, 5 high), how would you assess your commitment to your religion?
7. At the time of marriage on a scale of 1-5 (1 highly traditional, 5 highly modern), how would you assess yourself on a continuum of traditional vs. modern.
8. On a scale of 1-5 (1 very low, 5 very high) how would you assess your socioeconomic status?

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