

Journal of English Language
Teaching and Learning
Tabriz University
No. 18, 2016

Do Iranians and Americans Congratulate their Friends Differently on their Birthdays on Facebook? A Case for Intercultural Studies*

Ali Jahangard

Assistant Professor, Languages and Linguistics Center, Sharif
University of Technology (corresponding author)**

Neda Khanlarzade

Ph.D. Candidate, Languages and Linguistics Center, Sharif University
of Technology

Ashkan Latifi

MA in TFEL from Languages and Linguistics Center, Sharif
University of Technology

Abstract

Cross-cultural analyses of speech acts are among the hot topics in contrastive studies and up to now various researchers have explored this very issue. Despite the ample studies in this field, the speech act of congratulation, especially the subject of birthday congratulation remains untouched. The study investigates the possible effects of being an Iranian or an American typical Facebook user upon the kind of the category which is drawn upon to send an addressee a birthday congratulation note on Facebook. The data collected are 120 birthday congratulation notes issued by 60 Iranians and 60 Americans on Facebook. Seven dominant categories emerged from the study namely Illocutionary Force Indicating Device (IFID), Blessing Wishes, Divine Statements, Poem and Pieces of Literature, Endearments, Felling Expressions and Compliments. Moreover, the possible significant differences between the two groups within these categories were explored. The paper concluded that, in five categories, the differences between the two groups proved significant where the two categories IFID and Blessing Wishes did not show any significant differences.

Keywords: Cross-cultural analysis, Congratulation speech act, Pragmatics, Facebook

* Received date: 2016/06/04

Accepted date: 2016/11/11

** Email: jahangard@sharif.ir

Introduction

Nowadays teaching and learning pragmatic knowledge have become the integral part of any second language teaching program. Both pragmalinguistic and socio-pragmatic aspects of the L2 culture need to be practiced and learnt in language classes (Leech, 1983; Soler & Flor, 2008; Thomas, 1983). Various studies (*i.e.* Cohen, 2008; Eslami-Rasekh, 2005; Rose, 2005) verified the importance of teaching and testing pragmatic knowledge; ample researches have been devoted to this branch of language studies. Studies concerned with pragmatics can be about speech acts, implicatures or other subparts of this field. Generally, researches on pragmatics can be both acquisitional and comparative; acquisitional studies deal with issues such as the effects of instruction and developmental studies, while comparative studies refer to cross-cultural studies (Soler & Flor, 2008). There are numerous investigations on cross-cultural analyses of various speech acts such as request, apology, compliment, etc. The data in such studies can be collected from Discourse Completion Tests (DCT), role plays, corpora, or through conversation analysis (Soler & Flor, 2008). Due to various disadvantages inherited in DCTs which are the most dominant methods of data gathering in cross-cultural studies, some researchers prefer to collect their necessary data from corpora. Corpora of transcribed spoken interaction are the perfect object of research for various research questions in pragmatics (Schmidt & Worner, 2009). The corpus of this study was a number of birthday congratulation notes on Facebook. It is common knowledge that contemporary technology has penetrated through every aspect of human life. Societies' means of communication has transformed to new levels, as they use various methods of communication; therefore, this study aimed to explore a little part of this issue.

Review of the literature

Cross-cultural studies of speech acts

Cross-cultural studies of speech acts have absorbed the attention of many researchers since mid-20s century. Through these studies, researchers employ comparative methodological approaches to compare the observed characteristics of intercultural communication in two different cultures by highlighting their similar and different

speech behaviors (Stadler, 2013). Such analyses enable researchers to recognize how much pragmatic norms differ across various cultures and languages (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1989; Wierzbicka, 2003). One of the concerns of cross-cultural studies is cross-cultural-studies of speech act which analyze speech acts across different languages and cultures; the process was based on the works of Austin (1975) and Searl (1976). Austin (1975) taxonomy of speech acts includes three levels: illocutionary force, locutionary force, and perlocutionary force. Later, due to some pitfalls in Austin's model, Searle (1976) proposed his own model of speech acts; he revised the previous model and divided speech acts into five categories: (a) Assertive, (b) Commissive, (c) Directives, (d) Expressive, and (e) Declaratives (Searle, 1976).

In analyzing any speech act considering several factors such as degree of power, distance, and the degree of imposition are crucial; these factors are at the heart of the many cross cultural studies (Levinson, 1983). Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1989) in their prominent article *A Cross-Cultural Study of Speech Act Realization Patterns (CCSARP)* analyzed speech acts in several languages and found so many similarities as well as differences among them.

Takahashi and Beebe (1987) investigated the sequencing and content of semantic formula of the speech act of refusal. Tang and Zhang (2009) analyzed the speech act of compliment response among Australian English and Mandarin Chinese speakers through evaluating their responses to the written discourse completion task. Recently, cross-cultural studies of speech act have become prevail in Iranian context as well, for instance, Eslami-Rasekh (2004) discussed the differences between English and Persian speech act of apology and their face-keeping strategies, which were not unrelated to their diverse cultural norms. Finally, it has been revealed that Persian speakers are more sensitive to contextual factors and change their face-keeping strategies according to them; whereas, English speakers normally employ only one apology strategy and intensify it based upon that specific context.

In another cross-cultural study of Persian and English, Salmani-Nodoushan (2006) explored ostensible and genuine invitation norms. The result of his analysis showed that properties of ostensible

invitations in these two languages are fairly similar and there were just nuance variances in terms of the degree. On the other hand, significant differences in producing a speech act among Iranian and native English speakers have been shown by Eslami-Rasekh, Jafari and Mehregan (2012); they concluded that Persian and American English speakers' complaints are significantly different, since Persian speakers tend to use direct complaints more often compared to American English speakers. Such differences were also observed in Pishghadam and Sharafadini's study; they found high degrees of variation in a contrastive analysis between English and Persian suggestions in different settings. They also remarked gender as a significant factor in their analysis (Pishghadam and Sharifadini, 2011).

Congratulation Studies

Typically in happy events such as birthday, weddings, or special holidays people express their happy feelings to each other. According to Elwood (2004), congratulation is considered as an expressive speech act within Austin's (1962) category. Searle (1969) claimed that for expressing congratulation to someone several criteria have to be present, for example, the event should be pleasant, it has to be related to the hearer, and the speaker should be happy about the event. Wierzbicka (1987) also proposed a cultural script for expressing congratulation which is not much different from Searle's criteria (*see* Wierzbicka, 1987, p. 229). Moreover, Bach and Harnish (1979) categorized congratulations under their acknowledgement category; and finally, Leech (1983) categorized congratulations as convivial and put them under his approbation maxim.

There are other aspects of congratulation that have been scrutinized during the previous studies. Coulmas (1979), for instance, discussed the participants' situational frames, setting, and other contextual factors among English and Japanese congratulation expressions. Issacs and Clark (1990) referred to the issue of sincerity in congratulation; they mentioned the concept of ostensible congratulations. Allami and Nekouzadeh (2011) also investigated congratulation considering Elwood's categorization; they analyzed positive politeness strategies in Iranian contexts. They proposed Illocutionary Force Indicating Device, Offer of Good Wishes, and Expression of Happiness as prevailing moves in Persian

congratulations. Moreover, use of strategies such as Giving gift to listener , Exaggeration and In-group identity marker have been observed dominantly as positive politeness moves that Iranian people mostly made in happy events.

Besides the studies mentioned, there are also cross-cultural studies which extended their investigation to two or more languages. For example, Elwood (2004) analyzed this speech act across Japanese and American Speakers through DCTs and proposed the following components:

1. Illocutionary force indicating device (IFID)
2. Expressions of happiness
 - a. Expressions of personal happiness
 - b. Statements assessing the situation positively
3. Request for information
 - a. Specific questions
 - b. General requests for information
4. Expression of validation
 - a. Statements indicating the situation was warranted
 - b. Praise
 - c. Statements of prior certainty (Elwood, 2004, p. 358-359).

She concluded that Americans employed more questions and Japanese used more self-related comments.

Cheng and Grundy (2007) analysis of congratulation among the Chinese and Americans revealed that congratulation is more explicit among Americans than the Chinese, since Americans put the Illocutionary Force Indicating Device at the beginning of their utterances, while the Chinese do the reverse. Can (2011) explored the different conceptualizations of congratulation in British and Turkish cultures through by means of corpus analysis. She showed various differences and similarities between these two groups regarding their congratulation productions.

Although the speech act of congratulation has not been analyzed much, there are several cross-cultural studies in Iranian context which investigated congratulation among Persian and English speakers. Pishghadam and Morady Moghadam (2011) worked on 100 Iranian and American movies and analyzed congratulation expressions in

them. They altered Elwood's (2004) congratulation strategies and managed to extract some steps such as: (1) offering congratulation, (2) mentioning the occasion, (3) blessing wish, (4) expressing feeling, (5) divine statements, and (6) complimenting as dominant moves in congratulation conceptualization. They also showed that congratulation utterances differ significantly across these two languages.

Dastjerdi and Nasri (2013), in their study, focused on English, Persian, and Arabic; they analysed a number of American, Iranian and Syrian people on congratulation by means of DCTs. They also altered Elwood's model and proposed the following strategies:

- I. Illocutionary force indicating device (IFID)
- II. Expression of happiness
 - a. Expression of personal happiness
 - b. Statements assessing the situation positively
- III. An offer of good wishes
- IV. Request for information
- V. Sweets
- VI. Self-related comments: an expression of envy and longing
- VII. Joke (Dastjerdi & Nasri, 2013, p. 18).

Besides, they found culture as an important factor and proposed that the content of the semantic formula will also change due to cultural differences; they added Sweets as a congratulation strategy which was absent in Elwood's model, since asking for sweets is a part of Iranians' and Arabs' cultures in special and happy occasions. They also analyzed the shift of semantic formula across these three languages and found different patterns of distribution in varying situations.

As it has been shown in the aforementioned cross-cultural studies, congratulation strategies vary across different contexts, but none of the previous studies managed to analyze congratulation confined to one specific occasion such as birthday.

Research Questions

This study aims to analyze novel ways of issuing congratulation, that is, birthday congratulations on Facebook. With the advent of social networks and media, various rituals such as condolence and

congratulation are not, any more, expressed as they used to be. Therefore, it is important to become familiar with this type of lifestyle and new modes of communication and probe its various aspects.

In the present study an attempt was made to answer the following questions:

1. What are the various birthday congratulation strategies and their frequencies among Persian and American-English speakers?
2. Is there any significant difference among Persian and American-English speakers use of birthday congratulation strategies?

Method

Corpus

Facebook as a well-known social network is the place from which we extracted and gathered the corpus for the present study. The data of the study include 60 examples of Persian and 60 examples of American birthday congratulation notes on Facebook. The notes cover novel congratulation notes in both formal and informal contexts; they include notes from friends, acquaintances, family members and co-workers. The data collected from Facebook do not seem to suffer from DCTs shortcoming of not being reliable due to their artificiality and inconsistencies.

Procedure and Data analysis

The collected congratulation notes were analyzed based upon their contents. Various strategies were extracted from the notes; besides, their frequency and percentage were also calculated. The strategies were categorized based upon previous studies taxonomies (Elwood, 2004; Pishghadam & Morady Mogahdam, 2011). Therefore, this study enjoys both qualitative and quantitative research methods as an appreciation of the philosophy of pragmatism. The Chi-Square test was run to specify whether the differences among the frequencies of categories between the two groups, i.e., Iranians and Americans, were significant or not. As the results were on a nominal scale (count data) representing the frequencies of choice, the researchers drew upon the Chi-Square test. According to Field (2009), there is a number of assumptions which should be taken notice of in order to utilize the Chi-Square test. First of all, the data should be independent. That is, the Chi-Square test will be meaningful if each participant in the study

provides just one answer that contributes to only one cell. This assumption is not violated in the current study. Hinton, Brownlow, McMurray, and Cozens (2004) argue that this assumption is the key assumption of the Chi-square test. According to the second assumption, the expected frequencies should be larger than 5, this assumption is, as well, addressed aptly for most categories in the current study. For the two categories which have cell frequencies less than five, we preferred to run the Fisher's Exact Test because as Hinton et al. (2004, p.285) put it;

"The Continuity Correction is produced automatically by SPSS for a 2×2 table, which performs a Yates correction. This is a conservative adjustment and the use of this correction is controversial and often not recommended. We advise the use of Fisher's Exact Testing analyzing a 2×2 table with a cell frequency less than five."

As the two aforementioned assumptions were addressed in the study, the standard Chi-Square test was run for most of categories and the Fisher's Exact Test for the two other categories to specify whether or not there were any significant differences between the results obtained from birthday congratulation notes on Facebook with regard to the two groups cultures as Americans and Iranians.

Results

This study aimed to identify and analyze various moves in birthday congratulation notes on Facebook among Iranian and American speakers. To fulfill this end, 120 samples of Persian and American birthday congratulation notes were scrutinized carefully. Therefore, considering Elwood's (2004) and Pishghadam and Morady Mogahdam's (2011) categories of congratulation as our yardstick, 7 categories of moves were extracted from the corpus of English and Persian congratulation notes on Facebook which are presented in Table 1. It is important to note that Endearment and Poem and Pieces of Literature strategies were not mentioned in the previous studies and are added by the authors. Some of these categories such as Endearment, Divine Statements, or Poems or Pieces of Literature were absent or rarely employed by Americans, and Compliments strategy was absent in Persian congratulation notes.

This can be argued to be due to cultural differences existing between these two groups.

Table 1 *Cross-cultural Categorization of Birthday Congratulation Notes between American and Iranian Speakers*

Categories	English Examples	Persian Examples
Illocutionary Force Indicating Devices (IFID)	<i>Happy Birthday</i>	تولدت مبارک (<i>Happy Birthday</i>)
Blessing Wishes	<i>Wishing you a healthy and very happy day</i>	امیدوارم به همه آرزوهای قشنگت برسی (<i>I hope you achieve all your beautiful wishes</i>)
Divine statements	<i>God bless you</i>	خدا همیشه پشت و پناحت باشه (<i>May God always support you</i>)
Poems or pieces of literature	(<i>Absent</i>)	آرزویم همه سرسبزی توست (<i>My sole wish is that you'll be all green</i>) تنت وسالم و روحت شاداب (<i>Your body sound and your soul clean</i>) آنچه شایسته توست خواهانم (<i>Wish you whatever's the best</i>) دل یکدانه توسبزو بهاری، روزگارت خوش باد (<i>May in your beloved heart be always summer and lush, your days delightful</i>)
Endearments	<i>One amazing lady</i>	دوست عزیز و خوب و مهربانم (<i>My kind, nice and dearest friend</i>)
Feeling expressions	<i>I love you so much</i>	دوستت دارم برای همیشه (<i>I love you forever</i>)
Compliments	<i>love your work, you've got a fantastic gift</i>	(<i>Absent</i>)

The first category named Illocutionary Force Indicating Devices (IFIDs), proposed by Elwood (2004), refers to the statements which directly indicate our intended speech act which is congratulation. The second category 'Blessing Wishes' which are used by the participants the most refers to expressing good and happy wishes to the addressee.

Divine Statement is the third category which was mentioned in Pishghadam and Morady Moghadam (2011) study, at this level, the addresser asks for God's Blessing for the addressee. This category

sometimes overlaps with blessing wishes in Iranian context through examples such as *انشاءالله همیشه شاد باشی* (*May you be always happy*). The Fourth category is Poems or Pieces of Literature which is occasionally used by Iranian speakers. Through this strategy which was absent in previous studies, the addresser quotes a pleasant piece of literature and dedicates it to the addressee. The fifth category is Endearment which was added to the previous categorization of congratulation. Through endearment, the addressee uses sweet title terms for addressing the addressee. The sixth category is Feeling Expressions, as the name speaks for itself, by this strategy, the congratulator refers to his/her pleasant feelings about the addressee. Finally, the last category is Compliments, mentioned by Pishghadam and Morady Moghadam (2011), which is somehow different from Endearment in that Compliment typically refers to decent characteristics or achievements of the addressee. Examples of compliment are abundantly observed in congratulation notes to famous people and celebrities. The frequency of use and percentage of the aforementioned categories are presented in Table 2 and Figure 1.

Table 2 *Numbers and Frequencies of Various Strategies of Birthday Congratulation Notes between American and Persian Speakers*

	IFID	Blessing wishes	Devine statements	Poems/ Literatures	Endearment	Felling Expressions	Compliments	Total
American	55	41	2	0	11	13	14	136
Persian	60	47	11	8	34	4	0	164
Percentage American	91.7%	68.3%	3.3%	0%	18.3%	21.7%	23.3%	
Percentage Persian	100%	78.3%	18.3%	13.3%	56.7%	6.7%	0%	

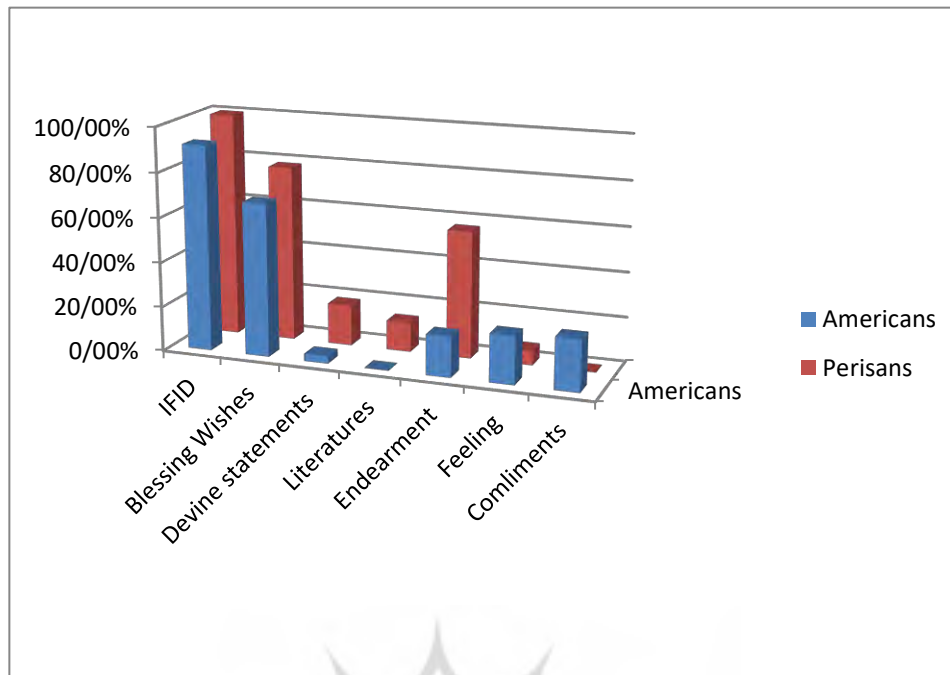


Figure 1. Frequency of use of congratulation categories between American and Persian speakers

As it is obvious (see Table 2 and Figure 1), IFID and 'Blessing Wishes' are the dominant categories in both groups while Compliments in Persians and use of Divine Statements as well as Poem or Pieces of Literature as congratulation notes are rare among Americans.

However, in order to specify whether or not the differences were, statistically speaking, significant, a Chi-Square test was run. According to the data, the following results emerged. According to Table 3, the result of the Fisher's Exact Test $p > .05$ clearly shows that there is no significant difference between Iranians and Americans when it comes to the use of IFID strategies as a means to issuing birthday congratulation notes. The reason why the Fisher's Exact Test was preferred over Pearson Chi-Square was that 2 cells had expected counts less than 5 (Hinton et al., 2004).

Table 3 *Chi-Square Tests of "IFID" Category in American and Iranian Birthday Congratulation Notes*

Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	5.21 ^a	1	.02	
Continuity Correction ^b	3.33	1	.06	
Likelihood Ratio	7.14	1	.00	
Fisher's Exact Test			.05	.02
Linear-by-Linear Association	5.17	1	.02	
N of Valid Cases	120			

a. 2 cells (50.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.50.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

As Table 4 shows, there is no significant difference in the patterns of use of 'Blessing Wishes' for birthday congratulation notes on Facebook between Iranians and Americans as the results show $\chi^2=1.53$, $df=1$, $p>0.05$.

Table 4 *Chi-Square Tests of "Blessing Wishes" Category in American and Iranian Birthday Congratulation Notes*

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	1.53 ^a	1	.21		
Continuity Correction ^b	1.06	1	.30		
Likelihood Ratio	1.54	1	.21		
Fisher's Exact Test			.30		.15
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.52	1	.21		
N of Valid Cases	120				

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 16.00.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

According to Table 5, there is a significant difference between the patterns of use of 'Divine Statements' between Iranians and Americans on Facebook as a birthday congratulation strategy because $\chi^2=6.98$, $df=1$, $p<0.05$.

Table 5 *Chi-Square Tests of “Devine Statements” of Category in American and Iranian Birthday Congratulation Notes*

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	6.98 ^a	1	.00		
Continuity Correction ^b	5.52	1	.01		
Likelihood Ratio	7.61	1	.00		
Fisher's Exact Test				.01	.00
Linear-by-Linear Association	6.93	1	.00		
N of Valid Cases	120				

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 6.50.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

According to Table 6, the Fisher's Exact Test $p < .05$ shows that there is a significant difference between the patterns of use of 'Poems or Pieces of Literature' as a birthday congratulation note strategy between Iranians and Americans on Facebook. The reason why the Fisher's Exact Test was preferred over Pearson Chi-Square was that 2 cells have expected counts less than 5 (Hinton et al., 2004).

Table 6 *Chi-Square tests of “Poems or Pieces of Literature” Category in American and Iranian Birthday Congratulation Notes*

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	8.57 ^a	1	.00		
Continuity Correction ^b	6.56	1	.01		
Likelihood Ratio	11.66	1	.00		
Fisher's Exact Test				.00	.00
Linear-by-Linear Association	8.50	1	.00		
N of Valid Cases	120				

a. 2 cells (50.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 4.00.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

According to Table 7, there is a significant difference between the patterns of use of 'Endearment' as a birthday congratulation strategy

on Facebook between Iranians and Americans due to $\chi^2=18.80$, $df=1$, $p<0.05$.

Table 7 *Chi-Square Tests of "Endearment" Category in American and Iranian Birthday Congratulation Notes*

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	18.80 ^a	1	.00		
Continuity Correction ^b	17.20	1	.00		
Likelihood Ratio	19.49	1	.00		
Fisher's Exact Test				.00	.00
Linear-by-Linear Association	18.65	1	.00		
N of Valid Cases	120				

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 22.50.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

As Table 8 shows, there is also a significant difference between the patterns of use of 'Feeling Expressions' as a strategy of birthday congratulation on Facebook between Iranians and Americans because $\chi^2=5.55$, $df=1$, $p<0.05$.

Table 8 *Chi-Square Tests of "Feeling Expressions" Category in American and Iranian Birthday Congratulation Notes*

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	5.55 ^a	1	.01		
Continuity Correction ^b	4.38	1	.03		
Likelihood Ratio	5.80	1	.01		
Fisher's Exact Test				.03	.01
Linear-by-Linear Association	5.50	1	.01		
N of Valid Cases	120				

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 8.50.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

According to Table 9, there is a significant difference between Iranians and Americans when it comes to the patterns of use of 'Compliments' as a means to expressing birthday congratulation on Facebook because $\chi^2=15.84$, $df=1$, $p<0.05$.

Table 9 *Chi-Square Tests of "Compliments" Category in American and Iranian Birthday Congratulation Notes*

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	15.84 ^a	1	.00		
Continuity Correction ^b	13.66	1	.00		
Likelihood Ratio	21.26	1	.00		
Fisher's Exact Test				.00	.00
Linear-by-Linear Association	15.71	1	.00		
N of Valid Cases	120				

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 7.00.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

As the results indicate, Iranians and Americans used significantly different strategies of birthday congratulation on Facebook with regard to categories Divine Statements, Poems or Pieces of Literature, Endearments, Feeling Expressions, and Compliments. The only categories within which the patterns of use were not different between the two groups were IFID and 'Blessing Wishes'.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study aimed at understanding the various strategies that Iranian Persian speakers and American English speakers employed whilst producing birthday congratulation notes on Facebook as one of the prevalent social networks. With regard to the first research question, the themes that were extracted from the analyzed data are seven themes which are, as well, partially, alluded to in a number of studies such as Elwood (2004) and Pishghadam and Morady Mogahdam (2011). The themes which emerged can be categorized as 1. Illocutionary Force Indicating Devices (IFID), 2. Blessing Wishes, 3. Divine Statements, 4. Poems or Pieces of Literature, 5. Endearments, 6. Feeling Expressions, and 7. Compliments. Taking notice of research question number two, according to the results of the Standard

Chi-Square and Fisher's Exact Test, it became apparent that Iranian and American Facebook users employed significantly different patterns of use to congratulate their addressees on their birthdays within the categories of Divine Statements , Poems or Pieces of Literature , Endearments , Feeling Expressions , and Compliments but not when they acted within the categories of IFID and Blessing Wishes . Persian speakers customarily preferred to express their birthday congratulation notes firstly by sugaring their addressees via various endearment strategies and kind words and then employing the IFID which was at the heart of their statements followed by Blessing Wishes . Of course, this combination of moves is not rigid, and can be easily altered based upon contextual factors and interlocutors' relationship, for example, if the speakers were very close, the addresser used Feeling Expression strategies or in some cases, for the sake of making the note more sophisticated they used a short Poem or Piece of Literary note. On the other hand, Americans did not employ Endearments as much as Iranians did, but they gave compliments more generously, especially when their addressees were famous people or specialized in something.

The results of the chi-square indicated that American and Persian speakers were different in every categories except for the categories of IFID and Blessing Wishes , the existence of these two categories were also proved in previous studies (Allami & Nekouzadeh, 2011; Dastjerdi & Nasri, 2013; Pishgahdam & Morday Moghadam, 2011). With regard to category IFID , the similarity between the patterns of use in the Iranian and American Facebook users' congratulation notes can be attributed to the very fact that language as a tool for communication enjoys three forces, proposed by Austin (1962), one of which being illocutionary force of language . As such, it would be highly likely for such a pattern-of-use similarity to emerge between these two groups due to such a universal force of language as discussed in Austin's philosophy of language. Nevertheless, it should not mislead one to hurriedly conclude that such a similarity can be reduced to such a force such as the illocutionary force of language use where, among different cultures, the ratio of use of different possibilities and strategies of even the same concept can unboundedly vary due to the inherent creativity which is an inseparable component

of human languages. The researchers appreciate time to suggest that any interpretations of any cultural activities within any social milieu should take account of the possibilities for cultural borrowing and negotiation along with the issues of linguistic colonization and imperialism as a probable substitutive explanation for what that can be provided by a universalist philosophy of language such as Austin's. Whether the pattern of similarity found between the two groups in the category of IFID can be attributed to a universal feature of language, the other aforementioned factors such as linguistic colonization, or a combination of the two is in want of further research and more exploration. The similarity disclosed between the two groups in the category Blessing Wishes can be, as well, argued to be characteristic of the universal feature of reciprocal grooming apparent in higher primates' social life (Wilson, 1980) which is exercised and practiced in both nonverbal and in this case verbal forms in our species or, anew, to the issues aforementioned and discussed in terms of cultural transfusion and cultural transmission or linguistic colonization and linguistic imperialism. Again, whether it is a combination of the two or a result of one of the proposed likely causalities is in need of further research and exploration.

The researchers would like to argue that the differences between the two groups in the category Divine Statements could be attributed to the epistemological and ontological differences between the two societies as secular and traditionally religious ones as it has been shown in Pishghadam and Morady Moghadam (2011) study. It can be argued, as well, that the differences between the two groups with regard to Poems or Pieces of Literature can be accounted for if we hypothesize that the two societies value literature and its appliance differently as a means to daily use and usage. The categories Endearments , Feeling Expressions , and Compliments can be argued to be significantly different between the two groups due to the notion that if we, anew, hypothesize that the underlying social structures and societal values are significantly different between the two societies with regard to such social constructs as intimacy, friendship, the value of complimenting others, truth versus insincerity, and trustworthiness then it will not render us surprised at the differences between these three categories.

Finally, it is urgent to note that this study has just scratched the surface of the cross-cultural analysis of congratulation; much more investigation is needed in order to propose any rigid suggestions in this respect. Birthday congratulations are just a small part of the concept of congratulation and due to the fact that this study only analyzed birthday congratulation notes on Facebook, it cannot be generalized to other contexts. Nevertheless, the results of such studies as this can be of use when we understand that with referring to the outcome of such studies, people from various cultures and languages can more appropriately communicate at a level of minimum pragmatic misunderstanding and embarrassment. The differences existing between Americans and Iranians conceptualization of this speech act show that there is a need for teaching pragmatic knowledge to the L2 learners, specifically to those who have limited access to the authentic samples of the target language for studying and ample opportunities for real communication in EFL settings. We hope that studies of this kind will help material developers and EFL teachers become aware and take more notice of such cultural subtleties which are undoubtedly crucial to successful language learning and the development of communicatively competent learners in the future of this profession. Besides, this study can be an incentive which encourages further research to be of a more localized nature when it comes to cultural studies and their specificities. Following Lave and Wenger's (1991) notion of situated learning, it is then of utmost importance to dissect any learning situation as far as possible so as to become more aware of its measures, demands, and specificities which is not attainable unless we narrow down and localize our zone of study as much as possible on condition that we do not become unable to see the forest for the trees. The researchers would like to suggest the term situated corpus analysis for this type of research. As a result, it can prove helpful methodologically to those teachers who are interested in studying different categories which are used to perform different types of speech acts with regard to both sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic issues not in the real world but, this time, in the virtual world of the Internet with its own linguistic specificities, trends, and demands.

References

- Allami, H., & Nekouzadeh, M. (2011). Congratulation and positive politeness strategies in Iranian context. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 1 (11), 1607-1613.
- Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to do things with words*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Austin, J. L. (1975). *How to do things with words* (Vol. 367). Oxford University Press.
- Bach, K., & Harnish, R. M. (1979). *Linguistic communication and speech acts*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- Blum-Kulka, S., & Olshtain, E. (1984). Requests and apologies: A cross-cultural study of speech act realization patterns (CCSARP). *Applied Linguistics*, 5(3), 196-213.
- Can, H. (2011). Türkçetebrikler: E-posta grup mesajlar na bir bak . In C. Sa n- im ek and C. Hatipo lu (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 24th National Linguistics Conference* (pp. 121-131). Ankara: METU Press.
- Cheng, W., & Grundy, P. (2007). Thinking for writing. In P. G. Blitvich, M. P. Cruz, R. G. Morón & L. F. Amaya (Eds.), *Studies in Intercultural, Cognitive and Social Pragmatics* (pp. 2-36). UK: Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Cohen, A. D. (2008). Teaching and assessing L2 pragmatics: What can we expect from learners? *Language Teaching*, 41(02), 213-235.
- Coulmas, F. (1979). On the sociolinguistic relevance of routine formula. *Journal of Pragmatics* 3, 238-266.
- Dastjerdi, H. V., & Nasri, N. (2013). A cross-cultural study of speech acts: situational aspects of congratulations in English, Persian and Arabic. *Global Journal of Foreign Language Teaching*, 1(1), 15-22.
- Elwood, K. (2004). *Congratulations: A cross-cultural analysis of responses to another's happy news*. [Retrieved July 25, 2010, from <http://dspace.wul.waseda.ac.jp/dspace/handle/2065/6097>]
- Eslami, Z. R. (2004). Face-keeping strategies in reaction to complaints: English and Persian. *Journal of Asian Pacific Communication*, 14(1), 179-195.

- Eslami-Rasekh, Z. (2005). Raising the pragmatic awareness of language learners. *ELT journal*, 59(3), 199-208.
- Eslami, A., Jafari, D. S., & Mehregan, M. (2012). How do you react to the breakdown after it happens? Do you complain about it?: A contrastive study on the complaint behavior in American English and Persian. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 47, 34-40.
- Field, A. (2009). *Discovering statistics using SPSS* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications Inc.
- Hinton, P. R., Brownlow, Ch., McMurray, I., & Cozens, B. (2004). *SPSS explained*. London and New York: Routledge: Taylor and Francis Group.
- Issacs, E., & Clark, H. (1990). Ostensible invitations. *Language in Society*, 19, 493-509.
- Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Leech, G. (1983). *Principles of politeness*. London: Longman.
- Matsumoto, D., & Juang, L. (2008). *Culture and psychology*. Belmont: Thomson
- Levinson, S. C. (1983). *Pragmatics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Pishghadam, R., & Morady Moghaddam, M. (2011). Towards a contrastive pragmatics analysis of congratulation speech act in Persian and English. *The Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 4(2), 130-155.
- Pishghadam, R., & Sharafadini, M. (2011). A contrastive study into the realization of suggestion speech act: Persian vs. English. *Canadian Social Science*, 7(4), 230-239.
- Rose, K. R. (2005). On the effects of instruction in second language pragmatics. *System*, 33(3), 385-399.
- Salmani-Nodoushan, M. A. (2006). A comparative sociopragmatic study of ostensible invitations in English and Farsi. *Speech Communication*, 48(8), 903-912.
- Searle, J. R. (1969). *Speech acts: An essay in the philosophy of language* (Vol. 626). Cambridge University Press.
- Searle, J. R. (1976). A classification of illocutionary acts. *Language in Society*, 5(01), 1-23

- Schmidt, T., & Wörner, K. (2009). EXMARaLDA^v Creating, analyzing and sharing spoken language corpora for pragmatics research. *Pragmatics*, 19(4), 565-582.
- Soler, E. A., & Martínez-Flor, A. (2008). Pragmatics in foreign language contexts. In E. A. Soler and A. Martinez-Flor (Eds.), *Investigating pragmatics in foreign language learning, teaching and testing* (pp. 3-25). Toronto: Multilingual Matters.
- Stadler, S. (2013). Cross-cultural pragmatics. *The Encyclopedia of applied linguistics*. Retrieved from <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/9781405198431.wbeal0289/full>
- Takahashi, T., & Beebe, L. M. (1987). The development of pragmatic competence by Japanese learners of English. *JALT Journal*, 8(2), 131-155.
- Tang, C. H., & Zhang, G. Q. (2009). A contrastive study of compliment responses among Australian English and Mandarin Chinese speakers. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 41(2), 325-345.
- Thomas, J. (1983) Cross-cultural pragmatic failure. *Applied Linguistics*, 4(2), 91-112.
- Wierzbicka, A. (1986). Does language reflect culture? Evidence from Australian English. *Language in Society*, 15, 349-373.
- Wierzbicka, A. (1987). *English speech act verbs: A semantic dictionary*. New York: Academic Press.
- Wierzbicka, A. (2003). *Cross-cultural pragmatics: The semantics of human interaction*. Mouton de Gruyter, Berlin.
- Wilson, E. O. (1980). *Sociobiology: The abridged edition*. London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.