

Gender Differences in Using Hedges and External Pragmatic Modifiers of "Taarof" in Persian Native Speakers' Refusals

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Abstract

This study revealed the effect of gender on distribution of forms and frequency of using two mitigating devices of hedges and ritual politeness "Taarof" in Persian refusals and elaborates on "Taarof" as an external pragmatic modifier of refusals according to the classification of Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper (1989) within the framework of Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory. 62 hours of naturally occurring conversations of adult Persian native speakers were audio recorded, transcribed, and analysed with regard to the social distance and social status of the speakers. 236 refusals were found in the data of which 127 were made by women and 109 by men. A mixed method of quantitative and qualitative analysis is employed to analyse the data. The results revealed that: 1) there is no lexical difference between men and women speakers in employing various structures of Taarof or hedges in refusals. 2) men showed sensitivity to the social status of the addressees by talking less certain with higher status women and employing more other exalting forms of "Taarof" with speakers of higher status. 3) men did not display sensitivity to the social distance of their addressees. 4) Women did not attend to the social status of the addressees in their intimate same-gender interactions. 5) women cared about the social distance of the addressees in their same-gender and cross-gender socially distant interactions. Three categories of expressions of self-degradation, expressions of causing trouble, and expressions of embarrassment were found to be added to the classification of Blum-Kulka et al. (1989).

Keywords: social status; social distance; expressions of self-degradation; expressions of causing trouble; expressions of embarrassment

INTRODUCTION

To maintain and establish a relationship with others, language plays a central role in communications. By using language we perform various types of speech acts such as: offers, apologies, greetings, requests, invitations, compliments, and refusals. In the speech act of refusal a speaker avoids accepting an action proposed by the interlocutor; therefore, it represents a dispreferred type of speech act which needs to be modified by employing various appropriate politeness strategies (Eslami, 2010; Shishavan & Sharifian 2016; Raslie & Azizan, 2018) and suitable pragmatic modifiers of a certain language and culture (Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989; Kayed, Al-Zubi, & Alkaid, 2020).

politeness strategies employed by speakers extremely depend on cultural and social characteristics of the speakers such as socio-economic status, social distance, position of power (Brown & Levinson 1987; Takahashi, 2001; Kasper & Rose, 2003; Shishavan & Sharifian 2016; Valipour & Jadidi, 2014, Kayed, et al. 2020) in addition to personal features of the interactants such as gender, age, and level of education (Lakoff, 1975; Holms 1990; Cameron, 1998; Mohammadpour, 2018). In the Persian language and culture people employ different politeness strategies in their refusals among which Persian ritual politeness statements of "Taarof" seem to be the most common ones (Koutlaki, 2002; Sharifian, 2011; Sharifian & Babaie, 2013; Izadi & Zilaie, 2015; Haghighat, 2016; Pourmohammad, 2018). In the following section I will review the related literature on the concept of "Taarof" and Persian refusals with a focus on some contextual features of gender, social status, and social distance of the interactants.

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

To define the concept of Taarof and hedges in Persian politeness it seems essential to review some tangible point of the concept of politeness in the literature.

Politeness

Politeness is defined as consideration for others, tact, and observance of accepted social usage and practical application of good manners (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Politeness, as a form of linguistic behaviour, is extremely dependent on the value of context (Kasper & Rose, 2003) which is also defined as acting according to the social and contextual norms (Strauss & Feiz, 2013). Therefore, polite behaviour is not necessarily fixed and clear in each culture; this means that what is considered polite or impolite is determined by the contextual features and the communicators' perceptions of one another during interactions (Locher & Bousfield, 2008). This means that politeness system of a language mirrors essential social features of the speakers of that language that shape social relationships among them (Terkourafi, 2011).

Politeness system of different languages could be explained on the basis of Brown and Levinson's (1987) "politeness theory". This theory is based on the earlier notion of 'face' introduced by Goffman (1955) which states that people have a social self-image called "face" that they consciously project and constantly try to protect. In this theory, positive and negative face are elaborated. Positive face is the desire of a person to be accepted by the other members of the society and negative face is a person's desire for freedom of action. In this theory, any act which threatens the positive or negative face of a speaker or hearer is defined as a face threatening act (FTA hereafter) (Brown and Levinson, 1987).

As threats to the face of speakers in social interactions are inevitable, interlocutors use mitigating strategies to show a higher degree of politeness with the aim of decreasing the FTA of some speech acts which are face-threatening in nature such as refusals (Brown and Levinson, 1987).

Politeness and "Taarof" in the Persian language and culture

Koutlaki (2002) states that Persian native speakers perceive politeness as behaving according to the social conventions and being considerate about other's face. However, she argues with the politeness theory of Brown and Levinson (1987) in the sense of face threatening act of offers and expression of thanks in the Persian culture. She elaborates on a very strong social convention in the Persian culture, named "Taarof", which is any offer or invitation must be refused at least once in order for the initiator to insist more. These offers and refusals are vast parts of the Persian politeness, and Persian speakers use them as a face-enhancing act to the face of the addressees. Therefore the acts that have been characterised as FTA by Brown and Levinson should be characterised as Face Enhancing Acts (FEA) when we talk about Taarof in the Persian language (Koutlaki, 2002). From this point of view the literature of Persian politeness recognizes the specific system of Persian politeness named "Taarof" (Beeman, 1986; Assadi, 1980; Rafiee, 1992; Koutelaki 2002, Sharifian , 2011, Haghightat , 2016, Pourmohammad , 2018).

Beeman (1986) defines Taarof as "one of the most prominent pragmatic features in the Persian language and culture meaning "to abase oneself while exalting the other person in order to express politeness"(p.140). This is the all-pervading feature of the Persian culture which is used in their greetings, requests, refusals, invitations, offers, and suggestions as an indispensable feature (Beeman, 1986).

Taarof etymologically is an Arabic word meaning "mutual recognition" which is a "communicative routine" in the Persian culture (Koutlaki, 2010, p.45). Taarof is a politeness system of Iranian culture and is known for its high complexity that affects multiple levels of language structure such as morpho-syntax, formulaic expressions, turn constructions, and other discorsal features (Sharifian, 2011, Shishavan & Sharifian 2016).

Taarof is defined by Miller, Strong, Vinson, and Claudia (2014) as "a set of patterns of joint actions in conversation" which involves contribution of all interactants. This functional viewpoint towards Taarof takes it beyond some formulaic expressions of politeness. From this functional viewpoint, the purpose of Taarof is to make clear to all interactants the social standing of each speaker with regard to the desired outcome of the conversation after Taarof. Persian speakers use Taarof to cooperatively share goals of their conversations and moderate conflict of conflicting goals (Miller et al, 2014). This cooperative practice could embody in various forms such as repetitive invitations without sincerely intending to invite the addressee (Koutlaki, 2002), refusals to invitations (Koutlaki, 2002; Sharifian& Babaie, 2013; Izadi & Zilaie, 2015), letting a companion go ahead in different contexts (Izadi, 2016), offering turns of speech (Izadi, 2016), and not accepting money on the first offer (Koutlaki, 2002). These are some instances of functional uses of Taarof without attending to the fixed formulaic expressions of Taarof in the literature. Interestingly, the attitude towards this pragmatic cultural feature is not always positive among Persian native speakers since all Iranian speakers of Persian from different age, gender, educational, socio-economic, cultural backgrounds use Taarof appropriately according to the context of use but younger users of Taarof and immigrants who have gone through the process of acculturation in western

countries are proven to have negative attitude towards it (Haghighat,2016). On the contrary, older generations are proven to have more positive attitude toward Taarof (Pourmohamady, 2018).

Politeness and gender

Cultural norms can define masculinity and femininity of a certain act in a certain culture (Butler, 1990) which make men and women speakers of a language aware of "particular ways of speaking and acting to produce a variety of effects"(Cameron, 1998, p.272). Women attend to their interpersonal rather than informational goals in their verbal communications (Christie, 2006) and this tendency leads to a higher degree of politeness in their speech in comparison with men (Holmes, Marra, & Schnurr 2008). These differences are displayed in linguistics features of women's English in using "super-polite" linguistic structures such as indirect requests, euphemisms, higher use of hedges and tag forms (Lakoff, 1975).

While women generally tend to use more standard and prestigious form of the words in English than men (Trudgill , 2000), men are seen to stick to vernacular forms and dialect of a language to represent their masculinity or membership to a special community (Holmes, Marra, & Schnurr, 2008, p. 167).Mulac's (2001) study on linguistic differences between men and women revealed that women are more likely to express positive politeness and use mitigating strategies to avoid or minimise the face threatening act of their statements.

Gender difference in linguistic preference and usage of politeness expressions is noticeable in the rate of using honorifics by female Japanese native speakers which is considerable higher than male ones. This implies that Japanese women are expected to be more polite than men in the Japanese culture by using more honorifics and expressions of politeness (Idle, 1982). Similarly, in Jordanian culture, women are expected to be more polite than men by speaking in a certain way to represent their femininity and politeness. They are highly expected to avoid imitating the speaking style of the male speakers (Al-Harahsheh, 2014).

A gender study on the politeness strategies employed by Malay speakers in performing the speech act of refusals showed that male speakers used direct refusals more frequently than their female counterparts and both of them used indirect refusals as the predominant strategy. This reveals that Malay women attend to the positive face of the addressees more than men (Raslie & Azizan,2018).

Gender differences in language use in Iran have been studied by Ramazani (1993) who claimed that despite the equal respect that the society has for women in Iran, they show considerable linguistic efforts to project themselves as more desirable social beings compared to men by employing more politeness strategies. On the contrary, since in other studies it has been proved that there is a counter-tendency of showing respect to women in the Iranian society especially after the Islamic revolution (Afkhami & Friedle,1994, Mir-Hosseini,2002), gender differences in language use in the current society of Iran is a controversial topic with respect to the fact that the Iranian culture is hierarchical and patriarchal. People need to show more respect to the individuals of a

higher social status and women are expected to behave according to their gender (Mir-Hosseini, 2002); consequently, women who immigrate to the western countries feel much more relieved with respect to the negative pressure of Taarof they endured in Iran compared to the male immigrants (Haghighat, 2016).

Hassani, Mardani, & Dastjerdi, (2012) illustrated that the most noticeable linguistic differences among men and women in the current society of Iran is lexical as some words and expressions seem to be specific to one gender. In their results they found some gender-specific words, phrases, and clauses which were never found to be used by the opposite gender such as "*Evâ, Nâzi, ce lus, xodâ margam bede*", which are female used; and "*čakerim, kaf kardam, karetam,*" which were male used. Contrarily, Pourmohamady (2018) showed that gender has no noticeable effect on the lexical choices of Persian native speakers in overall usage of Persian politeness expressions of Taarof.

Hassani et al. (2012) also claimed that despite gender in general is not an influential factor in terms of employing different forms or frequency of politeness devices employed by the interactants, women refuse a request more directly when talking to someone of an equal social status.

Social status and social distance

Social status is defined as power difference and social distance is defined as intimacy and closeness (Miller et al. 2014). In other words social status and social distance are two different features among individuals in a society which are reflected in the politeness strategies employed by them in their communications (Miller et al. 2014, P.18).

Politeness strategies in any language form and maintain social boundaries in communications by indicating a degree of formality and social intimacy between the speakers that is the most appropriate to the given situation (Huang, 2008). This includes linguistic choices that a speaker makes on the basis of contextual features to represent his/her social status and degree of intimacy in relation to the hearer (Miller et al. 2014).

The strong positive correlation found between the level of indirectness of refusals and the social status and social distance of the speakers in the study of Nelson, Carson, Al-Batal, and El Bakari (2002) is another example of the prominence of the two contextual features of social status and social distance in employing appropriate politeness strategies in communications.

Attending to the interlocutors' social status in Japanese politeness is traceable in Japanese speakers attempts to reduce the imbalance of social status by thanking, apologizing, formulating linguistic expressions to downplay their own credit and increase the addressee's credit to create equality (Ohashi,2010). This is called "*wakimae*" in the Japanese culture meaning to behave verbally and non-verbally according to the Japanese social conventions on the basis of social status and place of the interactants (Idle, 1989, p.230).

In Persian, social status and social distance directly affects the ways a speaker employs politeness strategies to communicate with an addressee of a higher or lower status (Koutlaki,2002). Iranian speakers normally tend to use other-raising forms of politeness

strategies when communicating with addressees of a higher status (Koutlaki 1997, p.119).

Speech Act of refusal and Taarof

Speech act of refusal includes negative answers to requests, invitations, suggestions, offers, and the like which is categorized in two main classifications of direct and indirect (Beeb, Takahashi, & Uliss-Weltz, 1990). A very distinctive feature of the speech act of refusal is the potential threat that refusals make to the "face" of the addressee (as described in section 2.1). Due to the face threatening nature of the speech act of refusal, communication problems/breakdowns are very likely to happen in performing them if an appropriate form of politeness strategies is not employed by the speakers (Sadler & Eroz, 2001; Fazeli, 2005,). In general, how to say "no" is more important than the answer itself; therefore, in order to avoid communication problems, it is expected from the speakers to use the most effective forms of politeness tools in any language to achieve the best results in communications (Sadler and Eroz, 2001).

One of the most common politeness devices in the Persian language ,as described in section 2.2 , is Taarof which is a "communicative routine" in the Persian culture to the point that performing any forms of refusals without using an appropriate formulaic structure of Taarof is somehow uncommon (Koutlaki, 2002). Taarof is a focal politeness feature in the Persian culture and most of Persian refusals include one or more forms of Taarof as a face-enhancing device in order to mitigate the FTA of them (Fazeli, 2005). Formulaic expressions of Taarof are fixed in form and cannot be broken down into individual words; therefore, they are interpreted as a whole unit which is very similar to idiomatic English expressions with figurative meanings (Van Lancker Sidtis, 2004, Pourmohammadi, 2018). The indispensable role of Taarof in Persian refusals has been studied by Moqadam (2003) from the perspective of directness according to the taxonomy of (Beeb et al, 1990). She illustrates that direct refusals are not common in the Persian culture, especially in formal interactions, and they almost always include one or more suitable forms of Taarof (Moqadam, 2003, p.12).

The following is an example of a direct refusal to an invitation in a formal context performed by a woman (refuser) to a man (inviter) of a higher social status extracted from my data in which the refuser uses two expressions of Taarof consecutively to reduce the FTA of her refusal.

Example 1.

- *xeily lotf dârid, vali bâ arze šarmandegi, nemitunam!*

You are so kind to me, but I should express my embarrassment, I cannot!

Taarof +Taarof + I cannot.

In Moqadam's(2003) research , indirect Persian refusal statements were the forms of refusals in which the speaker implied a negative response in a polite way which were also found to accompany one or more suitable forms of Taarof. Example 2 is extracted from my data including an indirect refusal to an invitation to a get-together performed by a female speaker (refuser) to a female inviter of a higher social status.

Example 2.

- *bebaxšid, kam sa'âdatam, ey kâš mitunestam bahâ tun biâm*

I'm sorry, I don't have the honour to come with you, I wish I could come.

Apology +Taarof +Wish statements

In the following sections, first I will elaborate on the various lexical structures of Taarof and hedges found in my data then I will analyse the frequency of hedges and Taarof in refusals of men and women Persian speakers in their same-gender and cross-gender interactions and ,finally, I will talk about Taarof as an external pragmatic modifier in Persian politeness in detail.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Taarof is a highly complex system of Persian politeness (Sharifian, 2011) whose nature and function can be exquisitely explained within the framework of politeness theory proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987) which is taken as the major theoretical framework in this study. Brown and Levinson's theory is based on Goffman's concept of face (1975) stating that speakers project and maintain a self-image in their social interactions named "face" which can take two forms of "negative face" (when speaker wants to render independence and asks for freedom of action) and "positive face" (when speaker wants to be accepted and desired by the members of a society). Consequently, politeness is questioned in performing any speech acts when positive face or negative face of the speakers or addressees is threatened (Brown & Levinson, 1978, p.60). In this framework, politeness strategies are defined as the verbal and non-verbal actions used to save the face of the interactants as much as possible. The main focus of this study is on the role of Taarof and hedges as two mitigating tools for reducing the face threatening act of refusals within this theoretical framework.

The significance of the study

There are lots of studies in the literature of Persian politeness focusing on the concept of Taarof (Koutlaki, 2002; Sharifian, 2011; Miller et al, 2014; Sharifian& Babaie, 2013; Izadi & Zilaie, 2015; Shishavan & Sharifian 2016; Haghighat,2016; Pourmohammadi,2018);but there is no study to show the role of Taarof as an external pragmatic modifier with a mitigating function to the FTA of Persian refusals with considering the contextual features of social status, social intimacy, and gender of the speakers.

There is also no lexical or semantic-pragmatic classification for various structures of Taarof and Persian hedges in the literature as I have done in this research. Furthermore, since the results of the study on refusal strategies of Jordanian Arabic speakers conducted by Kayeb, Al-Zubi, and Alkayid (2020) led to adding a subcategory of "religious expressions" to the external pragmatic modifier classification of Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper (1989), categorizing expressions of Taarof as external pragmatic modifiers in Persian refusals seemed very motivating since there has not been such classification in Persian politeness in the literature prior to this study.

Besides, since hedges and Taarof were the most frequently used devices found in the refusals in my data, I studied the distribution of forms and frequency of using them together as mitigating devices in this study.

Therefore, this study is an attempt to answer to the following research questions

1. What is the difference between men and women Persian speakers in employing different structures of Taarof and hedges in performing refusals in interactions with addressees of a higher, equal, or lower status?
2. What is the role of social intimacy in distribution of form and frequency of Taarof and hedges between men and women Persian speakers in performing refusals?
3. Where is the place of formulaic expressions of Taarof as external pragmatic modifiers in the classification of Blum-kulka et al. (1989)?

METHODOLOGY

A mixed method of quantitative and qualitative analysis is employed to analyse the data of this study. The structures of the transcribed data are qualitatively analysed to abstract various forms and semantic categories of ritual politeness and hedges in Persian refusals. Furthermore, statistical procedures and quantitative analysis are used to determine the frequency of using various forms of Taarof and hedges in the data.

Data

The data for this study came from audio recorded naturally occurring daily conversations. Some of them were face to face and some were phone conversations. Participants were 21 to 65- year- old Persian native speakers who were friends, family, colleagues of mine whose daily conversations were recorded during 18 months. They were in different positions of social status and social intimacy from each other. All the participants gave me their written consents on being audio recorded for the purpose of this study. It was a 62- hour audio recorded data most of which were recorded in Tehran and some in Kermanshah. The audio data is transcribed in accordance with the Persian transcription system convention of Iran's Atlas of Language International Website.

The structural analysis of the data

The structural analysis of the transcribed data encompassed manually extracting statements of Taarof and hedges, categorizing them in terms of their semantic-pragmatic functions and lexical categories, and calculating the frequency of using various structures of Taarof and hedges across speakers of different social status and social intimacy in same-gender and cross-gender interactions.

Forms of hedges in refusals found in the data

The hedges found in the data included number of adverbial clauses of decreased certainty such as: *Ehtemâlan* (perhaps), *Be ehtemâle ziyâd* (probably), *Ye jurâyî* (somehow), *Šayad*

(maybe), *Tâ haddi* (to some point), *Hodudan* (to some extent), *momkene* (maybe) as illustrated in examples 3.

Example3.

- *[Šayad] agar fardâ berim be jâye emruz behtar bâše.*

[Maybe] it would be better to go tomorrow instead of today

Another common type of hedges is first person verbal expressions of decreased epistemic certainty, such as: *Fekr mikonam ke* (I think that), *Gamun konam* (I assume), *Tasavoram bar ine ke* (I suppose that), *Hads mizanam ke* (I guess that), *hes mikonam ke* (I feel that) as displayed in example 4.

Example4.

- *[Hads mizanam] fardâ natunam biâm con qarâre mehmun vâsam biyâd.*

[I guess] I can't make it tomorrow because I am supposed to have some guests.

There were two forms of non-verbal expressions of decreased certainty in the data including: "*be nazaram*" (it seems to me that) and "*be gamunam*" (to my best guess) as illustrated in example 5.

Example5.

- *[Be nazaram] sare kelas naraftan âsibeš az nomreh nagereftan bištare, man miram.*

[It seems to me that] not going to the class would be more detrimental than not earning the passing score, so I am going!

Another form of hedges found in the data was request for permission with the pragmatic function of decreasing the degree of certainty such as: *agar movâfeq bašin* (if you agree), *Agar ejâze bedin* (if you let me) as shown in example 6.

Example6.

- *Šoma lotf dârid vali agar ejâze bedin ye ruze dige xedmat miresim.*

You are very kind, but if you let me, I will visit you on another day.

The last form of the hedges found in the data was impersonal expressions of uncertainty such as: *Behtar be nazar mirese ke* (it seems better that), *Mese inke* (it seems that), *mitune ke* (it can be) as demonstrated in example 7.

Example7.

- *In râbete behtar be nazar mires ke zudtar tamum še.*

It seems to be better for this relationship to get over any time soon.

Forms of "Taarof" in refusals found in the data

The forms of "Taarof" found in the data can be divided into following categories:

Expression of embarrassment such as: *Šarmandatam* (I feel embarrassed), *Šarmandeye mohabbatetam* (I feel so embarrassed in returning your kindness) illustrated in example 8.

Example 8

- *Xeily dust daštam biâm vali [šarmandatam] ke nemitunam.*

I really liked to come but [I feel so embarrassed] that I can't.

Expression of Self-sacrifice such as: *Qorbâne šoma* (I can be sacrificed for you (plural)), *Qorbunet* (I can be sacrificed for you (singular)), *Qorbâne mohabbatet* (I can be sacrificed for your kindness) as shown in example 9.

Example 9.

- *[Qorbune mohabbatet], ešâllâ ye vaqte dige miâm pišet.*

[I can be sacrificed for your kindness]; I will come to your place some other time.

Expression of appreciation such as: *Mohabbat dêrid* (you are very kind), *Lotf dêrid* (you are very sweet) as in example 10.

Example 10.

- *[Lotf dêri] azizam, vali man aslan gorosne nistam.*

[You are very sweet] but I am not hungry at all.

Expression of causing trouble such as: *Hamiše mozâhemim* (we always bother you), *Zahmatet midam* (I make trouble for you) as illustrated in example 11.

Example 11.

- *[Mâ ke hamiše mozâhemim] vali alan xeily kêr dêram.*

[We always bother you] but I have a lot of things to do at the moment.

Self-degrading types of "Taarof" such as: *Nokaretam* (I am completely at your service), *Câkeretam* (I am your servant), *Moxlesam* (I am your servant), *Kucike šomayim* (we are nothing compare to you), *Xeily moxlesim* (I am completely at your service), *Nokare šomâ ham hastim* (we are completely at your service), *Xedmat az mâst* (I have to serve you) as illustrated in example 12.

Example 12.

- *[Moxlesetam hastam] vali alân vasate emtehânâye terme.*

[I am at your service] but now is just in the middle of the semester exams.

Other-exalting forms of "Taarof" such as: *Etxyâr dêrid* (you have all the permissions), *Tamannâ mikonam qorbân* (I beg you my superior), *Amr amre šomâst* (your words are my words), *Bozorgvârid* (you are honourable), *Sâheb extyârid* (you have all

the permissions), *Sarvare mâyin* (you are my superior), *Azize mâyi* (you are my dear) as exemplified in example 13.

Example 13.

- *Šomâ bozorgvârid gorbân, vali benazarm panjšanbe behtar bâše.*

You are the superior here, but it seems to me that Thursday could be better.

"Taarof as a pragmatic modifier in Persian Refusals: Pragmatic modifiers

A pragmatic modifier is defined as a linguistic device which “softens the impact of some unpleasant aspect of an utterance on the speaker or the hearer” (Danet, 1980, p. 525). Pragmatic modifiers are classified into two main categories of internal and external modifiers (Blum-Kulka, 1987). Internal pragmatic modifiers include the lexical and grammatical devices used inside the head act, while external pragmatic modifiers are used outside the head act (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989). External modifiers are additional statements with the function of support to the head act to set the proper context for it in a statement, i.e. to indirectly modify its illocutionary force either by mitigating or by aggravating it (Woodfield, 2012). The classification of pragmatic modifiers in this study is based on the classification of Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) which is shown in figure 1.

Figure 1. Classification of pragmatic modifiers of Blum-Kulka et al. (1989)

Pragmatic modifiers	
Type	Characteristics
1. External modifiers	Utterances that occur before or after the head acts.
a. Perpetrators	Utterances that the speaker uses to lead the hearer onto the issue he/she is going to raise.
b. Sweeteners	Compliments or positive remarks paid for the hearer before or after the refusal.
c. Disarmers	Used to show the speaker’s awareness of the offense.
d. Grounders	The reasons behind the refusal
f. Apology	All expressions used to express apology
g. Religious markers	Religious expressions used before or after refusal speech act.
2. Internal part of the speech act itself	Syntactic or lexical mitigating devices located within the speech act
a. Syntactic modifiers	Syntactic devices used to reduce the effects of the offensive act.
Past tense	
Interrogative	Interrogative structures
Passive voice	
Conditional structures	All devices that provide conditions
b. Lexical modifiers	Lexical and phrasal choices used to mitigate the force of utterance.
Downtoners	Sentence modifiers which are used by the speakers to reduce the impositive force of his or her criticism.
Consultatives	Optional devices explicitly consulting the hearer’s opinion.
Politeness markers	optional elements like ‘please’.

According to this classification, mitigation in refusals is achieved through the use of external modifiers as follows:

1. Preparators refer to utterances that the speakers use to prepare the addressees for the refusal.

Example 13 is extracted from a conversation between two male close friends in my data in which the refusal is performed to an invitation to study together by one of them

Example 13.

- *Miduni ke saram xeily šoluqe , câkeretakam, bezâr ye vaqte dige*

You know that I have being swamped these days, I am at your service [Taarof], leave it for another time.

In this example [*Miduni ke saram xeily šoluqe* = you know that I've being swamped these days] is acting as a preparator external pragmatic mitigating device.

In this example the self – degrading expression of Taarof [*câkeretakam*=I am at your service] is also functioning as an external pragmatic mitigation device which reduces the FTA of the refusal which cannot fit into any of the groups of the current classification; so this category should be added to the existing classification of pragmatic modifiers of Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) as a new category named "expressions of self-degradation" with the function of pragmatic mitigation in Persian refusals.

2. Sweeteners refer to compliments or positive remarks paid for the addressee before or after the refusal.

2.1. The following is an example of Taarof with the pragmatic mitigating function of sweetener and the structure of expression of appreciation in my data.

Example 14.

- *Hamiše be mâ mohabbat dârid, in dafe ham kutâye mâro bepazirid.*

You are always so kind to us [Taarof], please accept our excuse this time again.

Another form of Taarof which could be fit in the category of pragmatic modifiers of sweetener is the expressions of self-sacrifice which was very frequent in my data set.

Example 15.

- *Qobunet beram, bezâreš ye veqte dige.*

[I can be sacrifice for you] leave it for some other time.

In this example, the refusal is extracted from a conversation between two socially intimate women of an equal social status in which the Taarof expression of self-sacrifice has a pragmatic mitigating function to the refusal and gives a positive remark to the addressee so it can be categorized as sweeter in this classification.

Other exalting expressions of Taarof which were also very frequent in my data could also be categorized in the class of sweetener pragmatic modifiers since they give a positive remark and a compliment to the addressee as a mitigating device to the FTA of the refusal especially in interactions with addressees of a higher social status or socially distant interactants.

Example15 is a refusal in a work-place conversation between a man boss and a woman subordinate in which the woman is refusing her boss's offer to drive her home in a very

quick sentence beginning with an other exalting expression of Taarof (*Xeily bozorgvarid*= you are very gracious person) right before her refusal.

Example15.

- *Xeily bozorgvarid, ba taxi miram.*

[You are very gracious person] I'll take a taxi.

For the pragmatic modifiers of disarmers, grounders, and apologies according to the classification of Blum-Kulka et al. (1989), I did not find any forms of Taarof in my dataset to match the qualities of the defined modifiers so I am explaining them in brief as follows.

3. Disarmers are the utterances and expressions to show the offense of the refusals.
4. Grounders give reasons, justifications, or explanations about the refusal and can precede or follow the refusal statement.
5. Apology refer to all the utterances which refer to apology to mitigate the FTA of refusals.

Example16 is a part of a phone conversation between two socially equal intimate women speakers from my data which embraces all of the abovementioned external pragmatic modifiers.

Example16.

- *Midunam tanha xâhi bud. Vali vâqean câreyi naradam! Bebaxš. Šarmandam, Nemitunam emšab biâm pišet*

I know you are going to be alone [disarmer]. But I have no other choice [grounds]. Sorry! [apology] . I feel so embarrassed [expression of Taarof] I cannot come to your place tonight [refusal].

In example 16, the Taarof expression of embarrassment of *Šarmandam* (I am so embarrassed) is having a mitigating pragmatic function to the FTA of refusal but it cannot fit into any groups of external pragmatic modifier classification of Blum-Kulka et al. (1989);therefore there need to be a separate category added to this classification as "expression of embarrassment" in Persian refusals. Similarly, Taarof expression of causing trouble *hamiše zahmat midim* (we always put burden on you) , *mâ ke hamiše mozâhemim* (we are always bothering you) are found in my data with a mitigating function to the FTA of refusals as an external pragmatic modifier which also need to be added to the existing classification of Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) The following is an example to illustrate this fact.

Example 17 is a Part of a phone conversation between two socially equal women who were socially distant from each other in which one of them is refusing the other's invitation to a friendly afternoon get-together. She uses the Taarof expression of causing trouble in the beginning of her refusal to reduce the FTA of the next part of her utterance which is expression of promise for future acceptance as an indirect refusal.

Example 17.

- *mâ ke hamiše mozâhemim, hatman dafeye bad xedmat miresim.*

We are always bothering you, next time we will come to your place.

Refusals in the data

A total number of 236 refusals were found in the data including 127 refusals made by women and 109 made by men. Some of them involved several "Taarof" and hedges together and some just included one or two types of hedges or "Taarof" individually. No refusal was found in this dataset without hedges or Taarof.

DATA ANALYSIS

To achieve the purpose of the study first I considered the frequency of using hedges and Taarof by male and female participants in their same-gender (s-g) and cross-gender (c-g) interactions then I elaborated on the distribution of forms of hedges and Taarof in the data.

Quantitative results

Male speakers

Table1 shows the frequency of using hedges and "Taarof" in intimate interactions of the male participants with addressees of equal, higher, and lower status in which s-g indicates same-gender interaction and c-s indicates cross-gender interaction.

Table1. Male Refusals in Intimate Interactions

	s-g			c-g		
	Hedges	"Taarof"	# of interactions	Hedges	"Taarof"	# of interactions
Equal status	5	16	14	12	15	11
Higher status	3	11	9	18	2	19
Lower status	9	7	10	6	8	7

Looking at Table1, it seems to be clear that male speakers used Taarof with male addressees of equal and higher status more frequent than they did with addressees of lower status while the frequency of using hedges with the male addressees of lower status was considerably more than it was with the addressees of higher or equal status. However, they used almost similar amount of Taarof and hedges in interaction with female addressees of equal and lower status but they used a considerably more amount of Taarof than hedges with addressees of higher status. (Chi-square = 11.8, P-value= 0.002).

Social status of the male speakers

Table2. Male Refusals in Intimate Interactions Concerning Social Status

	s-g		c-g	
	Hedges	"Taarof"	Hedges	"Taarof"
Equal & lower status	14	23	18	23
Higher status	3	11	18	2

Statistical analysis on the frequency of Taarof and hedges in s-g interactions with the addressees of lower & equal status and higher status did not show a significant difference (Chi-square =1.2, P-value= 0.26) but they tended to use Taarof more than hedges specially with the male addressees of higher status. On the other hand, there was a noticeably significant difference between using hedges and Taarof in their c-g interactions (Chi-square =11.8, P-value= 0.0005). They tended to use similar amount of Taarof and hedges with the female addressees of equal and lower status but they used significantly more amount of Taarof than hedges with the addressees of higher status.

Table3. Male Refusals in Distant Interactions

	s-s			c-s		
	Hedges	"Taarof"	# of interactions	Hedges	"Taarof"	# of interactions
Equal status	3	4	3	9	7	8
Higher status	4	4	4	10	18	11
Lower status	3	4	4	8	8	9

Table3 shows the frequency of using hedges and Taarof in male distant interactions with the interlocutors of equal, higher, and lower status. The statistical analysis on the frequency of Taarof and hedges in c-g interactions with addressees of different level of social status did not show a significant difference (Chi-square =1.9, P-value= 0.3) and by looking at the frequencies in the s-g interactions it is clear that there is not a noticeable difference.

Social intimacy of the male speakers

Table4. Male Refusals Regarding the Social Intimacy

	s-s		c-s	
	Hedges	"Taarof"	Hedges	"Taarof"
Intimate	16	34	36	25
Distant	10	12	27	33

Analysing Table 4, which shows the frequency of using Taarof and hedges regarding the social intimacy of the speakers, revealed a noticeably significant difference in the frequency of using hedges and Taarof in male intimate s-g and male intimate c-g interactions (Chi-square=8.05, P-value=0.004). They used more Taarof than hedges in s-g intimate interactions, but more hedges than Taarof in c-g intimate interactions. However, the frequency of using hedges and Taarof was not statistically significant in distant interactions (Chi-square=.0001, P-value= 0.9).

Female speakers

Female refusals in intimate interactions

Table5. Female Refusals in Intimate Interactions

	s-g			c-g		
	Hedges	"Taarof"	# of interactions	Hedges	"Taarof"	# of interactions
Equal status	14	20	16	15	8	13
Higher status	11	13	11	13	5	13
Lower status	6	7	5	10	5	8

Table 5 illustrates the frequency of using hedges and Taarof in intimate interactions of women with addressees of higher, equal, and lower status. The results of analysis revealed that there was a significant difference between the frequency of using hedges and Taarof in their s-g and c-g interactions (Chi-square = 7.386, P-value = 0.006). They used noticeably a greater number of hedges in interaction with men but they used Taarof more than hedges in s-g interactions with the addressees of equal status. Additionally, the frequency of using Taarof and hedges did not show a difference in their s-g interactions with addressees of higher and lower status (Chi-square = 3.5, P-value = 0.06).

Female refusals in distant interactions

Table 6. Female Refusals in Distant Interactions

	s-g			c-g		
	Hedges	"Taarof"	# of interactions	Hedges	"Taarof"	# of interactions
Equal status	7	12	9	8	10	9
Higher status	11	8	9	7	5	6
Lower status	6	15	11	7	5	7

As it is shown in Table 6, women tend to use more "Taarof" than hedges in s-g interaction with addressees of equal and lower status. But the frequency of using Taarof and hedges in women's c-g and s-g interactions did not demonstrate a significant difference (Chi-square = 6.01, P-value = 0.4). Furthermore, the frequency of using hedges and Taarof in their s-g (Chi-square = 3.7, P-value = 0.1) and c-g (Chi-square = 0.7, P-value = 0.6) interactions statistically did not prove to be different.

Female refusals considering social distance

Table 7. Female Refusals Regarding Social Distance

	s-s		c-s	
	Hedges	"Taarof"	Hedges	"Taarof"
Intimate	31	40	38	18
Distant	24	45	22	20

As Table 7 reveals, women showed to use more Taarof than hedge in their s-g intimate interactions and more hedges than Taarof in their c-g intimate interactions. This difference was proved by the statistical analysis (Chi-square = 7.3, P-value = 0.006). On the other hand, they seemed to tend use more Taarof than hedge in their distant s-g interactions while it was not the case in their distant c-g interactions. Unexpectedly, this difference was not statistically proved (Chi-square = 3.3, P-value = 0.06).

Female refusals considering social status

Table 8. Female Refusals Regarding Social Status

	s-s		c-s	
	Hedges	"Taarof"	Hedges	"Taarof"
Equal status	21	22	23	18
Higher status	22	21	20	10
Lower status	12	22	17	10

Table 8 shows the frequency of using hedges and Taarof in female interactions with the addressees of lower, equal, and higher status. Looking at the Table, women showed to use noticeably more amount of hedges than Taarof in c-g interactions with the interlocutors of higher status which was not the same in their s-g interactions (Chi-square=12, P-value= 0.0004). Moreover, they used more "Taarof" than hedge in s-g interactions with lower addressees and more hedges than "Taarof" in c-g interactions with lower addressees which statistically proved to be significant (Chi-square =4.6,P-value= 0.03). But the frequency of using hedges and Taarof in s-g and c-g interactions with equal addressees does not show a significant difference (Chi-square=0.4,P-value= 0.5).

Distribution of forms of "Taarof" in the data

The followings are sections elaborating on distribution of forms of Taarof in men's and women's refusals found in my transcripts.

Distribution of forms of "Taarof" in men's refusals

Male participants' interactions used self-degrading types of "Taarof" (as described in section 5.1.1.2.5) with singular verbs and pronouns with the highest frequency in intimate same-gender interactions with addressees of equal status as a sign of intimacy in order to mitigate the FTA of their refusals.

Example 18 shows an interaction between two socially intimate male speakers. In this example B prefaces his refusal with the self-degrading "Taarof" *moxlesetam* (I am your servant).

Example18.

A : migam age tunesty zohr biâ injâ nâhâr bâ ham bâšim.

(If it is possible for you, come here to have launch together.)

B : moxlesetam, bâbâ kêr amânamo boride, bezâr ye vaqte dige.

(I am at your service, the load of work is driving me crazy, leave it for some other time.)

Men were found to use plural forms of verbs and pronouns in interaction with male speakers of a higher status to show the social inequality. Using plural verbs and pronouns even with self-degrading Taarof makes them not function as a sign of intimacy; rather it works as a sign of social distance. This is shown in example 18 where A is in higher status than B, and B uses the self-degrading Taarof "*kucike šomâ ham hastim*" (I am your subordinate (plural)) with the plural pronoun "you" and verb as an indicator of status discrepancy and also as a mitigating device for his refusal.

Example 19:

A: Râmin jân, miše lotfan mâšine mano Pârk koni?

(Dear Râmin, could you please park my car?)

B: kucike šomâ ham hastim âqâ ("Taarof"), vali lotfan mano az rundane mâšinetoon moâf konin.

(I am your subordinate (plural) but please exempt me from driving your car.)

Men did not use self-degrading forms of Taarof in interaction with women of any levels of social status. Instead, they frequently used expressions of embarrassment (described in section 5.1.1.2.1), expressions of self-sacrifice (explained in section 5.1.1.2.2), and expressions of appreciation (cited in section 5.1.1.2.3) in interaction with women as a face –enhancing device in order to mitigate the FTA of their refusals.

Male speakers also used expressions of embarrassment (described in section 5.1.1.2.1) and other exalting forms of Taarof (cited in section 5.1.1.2.6) with plural verbs and pronouns most frequently in socially distant interactions. This serves to enhance the face of the hearer and also acts as an indicator to the social distance. This is illustrated in example 20 which is an interaction between two male colleagues who are socially distant. Here, B employs the Taarof expression of embarrassment "*bâ arze šarmandegi* (I am so ashamed about this) before his refusal to mitigate the FTA of it.

Example 20:

A : *Ali âqâ miše lotfan šoma bâ modire sâxtemun sohbat konin?*

(Mister Ali, could you please talk to the manager of the building?)

B : *vâllâ bâ arze šarmandegi in hafte Tehrân nistam.*

(I am so ashamed about this (Taarof) but I will not be in Tehran this week.

There was no evidence of using self-degrading types of Taarof in men's interactions with distant interlocutors (men or women) of any levels of social status.

Men also used other exalting forms of "Taarof" (described in section 5.1.1.2.6) in communication with socially distant women of higher status which were not found in their interactions with socially distant men of higher status.

It is shown in example 21, where B is a man who is of lower status than his female addressee (A). He used 2 different forms of other-exalting Taarof *extyâr dêrid* (You have my permission for anything), *amr amre šomâst* (whatever you say that would be it) successively before his refusal in order to enhance the face of A to reduce the FTA of his refusal.

Example 21:

A : *âqâye Musavi mixâstam ejâzeye sânz ro begiram emšab piše mâ bâše?*

(Mister Torfe, I wanted to ask for your permission for Sanaz to stay with us tonight)

B : *extyâr dêrid , amr amre šomast xanum , vali tasavor mikonam mâdareš moškel dêšte bâše.*

You have my permission for anything (Taarof), whatever you say that would be it (Taarof) but I guess (hedge) her mother would have problem with that.

Distribution of forms of "Taarof" in women's refusals

While the male speakers in this study used various structures of Taarof depending on the social factors, this was not the case with the female speakers in that, they were found to use the same forms of Taarof with addressees of different social status and social

intimacy. They frequently employed the expressions of embarrassment (described in section 5.1.1.2.1), expressions of self-sacrifice (described in section 5.1.1.2.2) and expressions of appreciation (explained in section 5.1.1.2.3). In order to indicate the social status.

However, they employed plural forms of the verbs and pronouns in their refusals as a pragmatic marker of social distance in same-gender and cross-gender interactions with addressees of higher status which is not my concern in this paper.

It is interesting that in all of my data, women never used the extremely self-degrading types of "Taarof" that were common in men's speech.

DISTRIBUTION OF FORMS OF HEDGES IN THE DATA

Both men and women the most frequently used adverbial clauses of decreased certainty (described in section 5.1.1.1.1), first person verbal expressions of decreased certainty (explained in section 5.1.1.1.2), and non-verbal expression of decreased certainty (cited in section 5.1.1.1.3), with all types of interlocutors to reduce the certainty of their refusals to mitigate the FTA of it.

We see a non-verbal expression of decreased certainty in the example 21, in an intimate interaction between a couple, where the man (B) uses a non-verbal expression "*be nazaram* (it seems to me that)" in order to reduce the directness of his refusal.

Example 21:

A: *Navid ešqam ye meqâdr pul mixâm barâye tavalode Mehdi kâdo begiram*

Navid, dear, I need some money to get a present for Mehdi's birthday.

B: *benazaram_ age gol bebarim xeily behtare*

It seems to me that (hedge) it would be better to get him some flowers.

Hedges in the form of a request for permission (described in section 5.1.1.1.4) were only found in distant interactions. An instance is given in example 22, an interaction between two socially distant male speakers, in which A is of a higher status than B. In this case, B prefaces his refusal first with the expression of embarrassment of Taarof *šarmandam* (I feel embarrassed) then continues with the request for permission hedge of "*agar ejaze bedi* (if you let me)" .

Example 22.

A : *mehmun dârim Mohammad jân miri cand kilo mive begiri?*

(We are supposed to have some guests Mohammad, so could go get some fruit?)

B: *šarmandam ("Taarof"), agar ejaze bedi (hedge), faqat širini migiram.*

(I feel embarrassed ("Taarof"), If you let me (hedge) I will just get some sweets)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As a functional politeness system in Persian Taarof goes beyond some formulaic expressions of politeness rather it serves the purpose of making clear to all interactants the social standing of each speaker with regard to the desired outcome of the conversation after Taarof (Miller et al., 2014). Additionally, preferred formulaic structures of Taarof and general lexical choices are claimed to be different between men and women Iranian Persian speakers due to the gender discrimination against Iranian women for centuries in the history (Mir-Hosseini, 2002; Hassani et al. 2012; Miller et al., 2014). The results of my study highly contradicts the previous studies on the differences between men and women speakers on the overall lexical choices of politeness structures in that among 62 hours of naturally occurring recorded conversations no lexical difference was found between men and women speakers in employing various structures of Taarof or hedges in refusals. I should also add that self-degrading types of Taarof were found to be used only by men speakers which were not very frequent in my data. Therefore, my results support Pourmohamady's (2018) study who also proves that there is no noticeable effect of gender on the lexical choices of Persian native speakers in overall usage of Persian politeness expressions of Taarof.

In terms of the frequency of using Taarof and hedges with regard to the social status and social intimacy of the speakers this study showed that men are sensitive to the social status of the addressees as they tend to talk less certain (by employing noticeably a greater amount of hedges) in interaction with higher status women. They also were found to use more other exalting forms of "Taarof" in interaction with male and female addressees of higher status. This part of the results supports Koutlaki's (2002) statements that in Persian, social status directly affects the ways a speaker uses politeness strategies to communicate with an addressee of a higher or lower status. Iranian speakers normally tend to use other-raising forms of politeness strategies when communicating with addressees of a higher status (Koutlaki 1997, p.119).

However, men did not show sensitivity to the social distance of their addressees as there was no significant difference in the frequency of using Taarof and hedges in their cross-gender and same-gender distant interactions.

A very challenging finding of this study to the previous literature of Persian politeness is that in the same-gender intimate interactions of women speakers the social status of the addressees was not found to be a significant factor. This means that the frequency of using Taarof and hedges in women's intimate interactions with other women of higher, equal, and lower status was not significantly different.

In socially distant interactions, on the other hand, women were found to attend to the social status of the addressees as an important factor in their both same-gender and cross-gender interactions. They were found to use more "Taarof" in interactions with socially distant women of equal and lower status and more hedges in interactions with men of a higher social status to save the positive face of them. This finding is a support to the findings of Mulac's (2001), and Raslie and Azizan (2018) on women's attempts to

express positive politeness to save the positive face of the addressees in performing socially distant refusals.

Furthermore, very similar to al Kayed et al's (2020) results which led to adding the category of "religious expression markers" to the external pragmatic modifier classification of Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper (1989) in the Jordanian Arabic culture, three subcategories of expressions of self-degradation, expressions of causing trouble, and expressions of embarrassment in Persian politeness should be added to this classification as external pragmatic modifiers in Persian refusals.

CONCLUSION

The final outcome of this study could be summarized in the following sentences:

- 1) There was no lexical difference between men and women speakers in employing various structures of Taarof or hedges in performing refusals.
- 2) social status of the addressees was an important feature the to men speakers as they were found to perform refusals with less certainty in interactions with women of a higher status and employ more other exalting forms of "Taarof" and expression of appreciation with men and women of a higher social status.
- 3) Social distance was not an important factor for men speakers as no difference was found in the form or frequency of using Taarof and hedges in their socially intimate or distant interactions.
- 4) Unlike men, social status was not an important feature for women speakers in their intimate same-gender interactions in that they used almost the same forms and frequency of Taarof and hedges with socially intimate addressees of different levels of social status.
- 5) Social distance was found to be a determining factor in women's same-gender and cross-gender interactions since they used other exalting forms of Taarof, expressions of self-sacrifice, expressions of appreciations, expressions of causing trouble with considerably large amount of hedges in refusals with socially distant addressees even with addressees of an equal or lower social status.
- 6) Three categories of expressions of self-degradation, expressions of causing trouble, and expressions of embarrassment should be added to the external pragmatic modifier classification of Blum-Kulka et al. (1989).

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