

An Exploratory Emic Investigation into Politeness in Persian

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate cultural schemas and sociocultural norms underlying politeness conceptualization in Persian through a 14-item Likert-scale questionnaire which was completed by 150 Persian Native Speaker participants. The questionnaire also included three open-ended questions, which surveyed participants' conceptualization of politeness and required them to impart their views of politeness and ostensible politeness. The results indicate that Persian participants observe rules of politeness in order to appreciate social and cultural norms. They also tend to enhance their own as well as their interlocutor's face. Politeness for Persian speakers is mainly to be approved of and appreciated by their community and to avoid imposition on the hearer in order to maintain and enhance rapport. The results of the study can provide in-depth insights into intercultural and cross-cultural issues by raising awareness in cross-cultural studies.

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1. Introduction

Realizing how people project appropriate degrees of politeness and how they communicate meaning without causing confrontation are important matters. It seems necessary to employ proper linguistic forms to convey the intended meaning and show courtesy in particular social settings. The phenomenon of

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politeness has led to a great deal of empirical research in the last twenty years (Watts, 2003); however, the results indicate that it is still a complicated set of related issues in social interactions. Scholars in the field of politeness are not agreed on what exactly the nature of politeness is.

There are many theories that offer useful insights about politeness, and a successful theory of politeness should offer how members in a society assess different behaviors with respect to in/appropriateness. Watts (2003) asserts that the interpretation of particular behavior as polite or impolite depends on the overall social interaction; it is the flow of social interaction that determines the behavior as polite or impolite. Although politeness is a dynamic concept that shifts moment by moment in interaction with others, people's general tendencies that have already been shaped by the force of the larger trends in society affects politeness in interaction. Watts (2003) says, "it is useful to have a first, rough idea of what (im)polite behavior entails in our own society" (p. 27). Thus, any research on politeness in any culture should take into account what politeness in that culture is. Therefore, researchers should study politeness under the impact of social tendencies and norms in the society at large, which is different from culture to culture. This issue was first argued when scholars criticized Brown and Levinson's (1987) Universal Notion of Politeness on account of the fact that their model was unable to take into account the remarkable variation between cultures. Postmodern models of politeness have attempted to deal with variation within culture by focusing on micro-level politeness in interactions in flux. However, they do not account for the impact of normative politeness or what we call macro-level notion of politeness. Focusing on the discursive nature of politeness is premised on the notion that politeness is not a priori/posteriori concept but it is interpreted in interaction with others. However, a comprehensive model of politeness must assume a rough idea of what

politeness in a particular society is. Politeness can then be more fruitfully investigated if it is studied under the impact of that rough idea of politeness. Therefore, researchers who want to study politeness in different settings in Persian, for instance, require to realize what the notion of politeness entails in Persian so that they are able to explain why a particular act is interpreted as polite or impolite. Researchers in this study aim at studying cultural schemas and sociocultural norms underlying politeness conceptualization in Persian by examining emic or 'insider' understanding of politeness which supposedly contributes to Watts' first-order politeness. It is hoped that this study increases cultural understanding. This study is built on the premise that cultural conceptualizations of politeness originate from cultural schemas which can provide in-depth insights into intercultural and cross-cultural issues.

2. Review of Literature

Investigating the field of politeness has been carried out in two broad theoretical paradigms, namely traditional (classic) paradigm which sprang from Grice's premises of Cooperative principle, and speech act theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Lakoff, 1973; Leech, 1983). The classic theories of politeness draw on classic pragmatic theories of conversational implicature (Grice 1975), speech act theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969) and politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Lakoff's (1973) maxim-based politeness includes two rules of clarity and politeness. Her rule of politeness has three aspects, namely avoid imposition, give your hearer freedom of choice, and create a good feeling in your hearer. Brown and Levinson's (1987) face-based politeness draws on concepts of face, facework, face threatening acts, and social variables that influence the strategies that are used to save face. Face in Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness model is universal, individualistic,

and psychological. While, Matsumoto (1988) asserts that in Japanese culture group face is more important than individual face. Japanese generally understand where they stand in relation to other members of the community. Their maintenance in relation to others depends on their position in the group not their preferred individual position.

In Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness, the concept of face is central. In their theory, there are two kinds of face: positive face which resides in people's desire to be approved by others, and negative face which refers to people's desire to be free from imposition from others. Accordingly, their politeness theory centers around two other concepts of politeness: first, positive politeness that attributes to the hearer's positive face and is achieved when the hearer realizes that his or her desires and wants are similar to the speaker's desires and wants and they are appreciated. Strategies that enhance the rapport and in-group membership between interlocutors help contribute to positive politeness. Negative politeness, on the other hand, involves the speaker's concern about the hearer's sense of freedom and his/her attempts to avoid restricting that freedom. In Brown and Levinson's theory, politeness is observed to avoid threatening face and/or to save face. However, for Leech (1983) acts can be face enhancing as well like compliments. Moreover, Brown and Levinson's model does not account for 'aggressive facework' when interlocutors tend to deliberately attack face and when they perform "threats, insults, put-downs, sarcasm, mimicry, and so on" (Culpeper, 2011, p.12).

Classic politeness theories are inadequate of offering an accurate account of politeness in terms of interaction between the interlocutors, discourse, and multi-functionality of language. Thus, these models of politeness are unable to represent the complexity of interaction in the real world. Hernández-Flores (2008) describes politeness as the "communicative behavior that aims at

achieving an ideal balance between the addressee's face and the speaker's face by confirming their own face wants" (p. 693). She continues,

In order to reach social and communicative goals, people know that respecting, protecting, and valuing the others' face is a requirement. But, at the same time, people have personal bonds to their own face and want to protect and value their own face, too. (p. 693)

To this end, interactants choose strategies that are appropriate in the context to confirm their face. Hence, the speakers attempt to achieve a balance between the other interlocutors' face and their own face in communicative acts. In this approach to politeness, two concepts are central to the description of face: autonomy and affiliation. Hernández-Flores (2008) defines autonomy as the person's wish "to see him/herself and to be seen by the others as someone with his/her own surroundings inside the group" and affiliation as the person's wish "to see him/herself and to be seen by the others as identified with his/her group" (p. 693).

Postmodern views of politeness have been mainly led by social theory to contest the heterogeneity of politeness within and across cultures (Terkourafi, 2005). Unlike traditional views of politeness, postmodern theories of politeness are investigating longer communicative acts of discourse rather than 'single short utterances with single functions, single speakers and single addressees' (Culpeper, 2011, p. 17). Postmodern views also locate politeness in rapport management that resides in hearers' interpretation as well as the speakers' intention. In postmodern views, exchanges are not only cooperative but they are also 'conflictual/antagonistic' (Terkourafi, 2005, p. 241). Postmodern rhetoricians of politeness also highlight that politeness is not always perceived positively, and it can be evaluated as a negative quality

such as "when it is perceived as an attempt to manipulate a situation for one's own benefit" (Terkourafi, 2005, p. 241) or when it is used for claiming power (Watts 2003). Culpeper's (2011) definition of politeness seems to be comprehensive in this regard,

(a) an attitude comprised of particular positive evaluative beliefs about particular behaviors in particular social contexts, (b) the activation of that attitude by those particular in-context-behaviours, and (c) the actual or potential description of those in-context-behaviours and/or the person who produced them as *polite*, *courteous*, *considerate*, etc. (p. 31)

Characterization of politeness may seem insurmountable at first sight because members in a society are in dispute over the definition of the term. However, any research on politeness in any language should address the issue of defining what politeness in that culture entails. Politeness strategies and formulae are "conventionally associated to some degree with contexts in which politeness attitudes are activated" (Culpeper, 2011, p. 31). There are two interpretations of politeness: 'folk interpretation' (Watts, 2003) or 'first order politeness' (Eelen, 2001) and sociolinguistic concept of politeness or 'second order politeness'. Lay conceptualization of politeness in one language cannot be taken as universal scientific basis for all cultures and languages; however, Watts (2003) believes that investigating first-order politeness is "The only valid means of developing a social theory of politeness" (p. 9).

2.1 Politeness in Persian

In line with achieving a rough idea of what politeness entails in different cultures, some studies have been carried out in different cultures. Sifianou

(1992) investigated the perceived politeness by Greek and English participants in their cultures. For both groups consideration for others was an integral part of their definition of politeness. Greek participants expressed their consideration and concern for their interlocutors through displaying intimacy and friendliness. However, the English informants' consideration for their addressee conveyed formality, keeping distance, showing "altruism, generosity, morality, and self-abnegation" (p. 88). Likewise, Rathmayr (1999) studied Russian's metapragmatic evaluations of politeness¹ and discovered that a polite person to the participants was,

Likeable, calm, harmonious, attentive, cultivated, well-wishing, amicable, warm, well-brought up, reserved, disposed towards recognizing her/his mistakes, not gross, not insolent, not rude, positive, someone who always answers letters and who is prepared to listen to the same thing several times. Thus, expression of intimacy and conveyance of friendliness are the Russian's conceptualization of politeness (as cited in Watts, 2003, p. 15).

Koutlaki's (1997) remark about lack of any research on Persian politeness in the literature is true. There are few studies with respect to linguistic aspect but only few on Persian politeness system exist in the literature. Using plural forms of pronouns for first, second, and third person singular; indirect addressing and indirect reference to the speaker; the forms of greetings and farewell are but few studies that have been carried out in terms of Persian politeness (Lambton 1961; Tisdall, 1902). *Ta'arof* or ritual courtesy has been found to play a central role in Persian politeness and to enhance face among interlocutors. The relationship between politeness and ritual courtesy has

been the focus of the study by Hodge (1957) in which he came up with four politeness levels in Persian: familiar, polite, deferential, and royal in terms of the difference between addressing in each level. Assadi (1980), similarly, proposed the same four levels along with some identification of cross-cultural communication problems that may arise out of that. *Ta'arof* (ritual courtesy) and Persian politeness system was also the subject of Koutlaki's (1997) dissertation. She investigated Persian politeness and found that politeness system is very normative and interactants in a Persian community attempt to enhance one another's face. She found that *Ta'arof* is an important act in manifestation of politeness in Persian and it is inherent in Politeness. Eslami (2005) studied ostensible invitations in Persian and found that enhancing the face of both the speaker and the hearer is the main reason for performing this act. Babai Shishavan (2016) also found that Persian speakers use ritual refusals (*Ta'arof*) to observe rules of politeness and enhance the face their interlocutor as well as themselves.

Nwoye (1992) points out that politeness and the relevant themes are culture-bound and relative to cultures. This survey is carried out in the realm of lay conceptualizations of what constitutes politeness and how (im)polite behavior is evaluated in a Persian society. Watts asserts, "if there is a scientific concept which transcends our everyday notions of (im)polite behavior, to call it 'politeness' is not only confusing, it is also misleading ... The struggle over politeness thus represents the struggle over the reproduction and reconstruction of the values of socially acceptable and socially unacceptable behavior" (2003, p.11). This study is supposed to contribute to first-order politeness theory. It investigates the participants' perspective over the concept of politeness and the terms available to Persian Native Speakers to conceptualize it. The concepts of first order and second order politeness are related but they are not the same. Watts (2003) reiterates

that to contribute to the universality of second order politeness, studies on first order politeness or folk interpretation of politeness is required. In order to accomplish the purpose of the study, the researchers investigated politeness in Persian through participants' explicit view of the notion of politeness. Spencer-Oatey (2008) highlights the importance of people's explicit understanding of their choice of rapport management, "unless people talk about them explicitly, they can only be inferred from their choice of rapport-management strategies" (p. 33). Therefore, the researches aim to investigate the formulation of politeness in Persian by examining the participants' insider perception of politeness. The following research questions led the research:

1. What are the main principles in conceptualizing politeness in Persian?
2. Is there any significant difference between male and female Persian Native Speakers in terms of politeness conceptualization?

3. Method

3.1 Pilot Study

The study is based on the insider approach of exploring participants' explicit understanding of the concept of politeness. Since and while there was not any questionnaire available on politeness in the literature for Persian speaking people, the researchers set out to develop one that could best suit the context of the study, that is, to be effectively used to investigate the factors that contribute to politeness definition in a Persian community.

To develop a standardized, context-specific Likert-scale questionnaire for Persian Native Speaker participants, an open-ended questionnaire with ten items was prepared. In general, the following steps were taken in constructing the questionnaire: First, data were collected from 50 Persian Native Speaker teachers who were teaching different subjects from different schools around the area. The open-ended questionnaire required the respondents to answer

questions in relation to (a) their view of politeness, (b) their view of a polite person, (c) their view of an impolite person, and (d) their view of the reasons for observing politeness. On getting the open-ended questionnaire back, based on the participants' responses a Likert-scale questionnaire was developed comprising a pool of 40 five-point items with the responses ranging from 'strongly disagree' (= 1) to 'strongly agree' (= 5). Second, as to the authenticity of the questionnaire, two TEFL experts in Applied Linguistics commented on the questionnaire. Based on their comments, some modifications were made in the general format of the questionnaire and also the content and the structure of some items. Sixteen of the items which were found to be repetitive, unnecessary and inappropriate to the context of the study were eliminated at this stage which left the questionnaire with 24 items. Next, the 24-item Likert-scale questionnaire prepared was pilot-tested with 150 Persian respondents (other than those of the study). The responses were submitted to statistical analyses through SPSS 20 to fine-tune and finalize the questionnaire using such statistical procedures as reliability analysis to establish internal consistency of the responses. Factor analysis (with varimax rotation) was also employed to ensure construct validity of the questionnaire. Cronbach's alpha consistency reliability indicated that the questionnaire enjoyed a good level of internal consistency ($\alpha = .861$). The results of KMO measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.690
	Approx. Chi-Square	917.452
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Df	231
	Sig.	.000

A principal component factor analysis was also run to see how various items of the questionnaire loaded on different factors. The component matrix showed 14 items of the questionnaire had factor loadings over .40. After carefully examining the other items with loadings below .40, the researchers decided that they could be excluded from the questionnaire without influencing the content coverage and reliability; many of those items were repeated with a different diction throughout the questionnaire. The questionnaire thus constructed and validated which was left with 14 items and was ultimately designed to investigate the definition and components of politeness in Persian (see Appendix 1).

3.2 The study

3.2.1 Participants

The sample who participated in the study consisted of 150 adult educated people who hold B.A and M.A. degrees. They were all teachers in Kermanshah, a western province of Iran, and the towns nearby, aged between 24 and 50 (Mean = 37). The participants were 70 females and 80 males.

3.2.2 Instruments and data collection procedure

The Politeness Questionnaire (PQ) already constructed as mentioned in Section 3.1, was distributed by the researchers to 150 Persian native speaker teachers in Kermanshah—attending a nation-wide in-service program which was being held at the time of data collection.

The PQ also contained three open-ended questions for the purpose of triangulation and in-depth contemplation over the issue. The first question required participants to explain why they observe politeness in their everyday life. The second question required them to elaborate on the term *Shaxsiate* (personality/character) because it was one of the terms that had been recurrently used in defining 'politeness'. Question three asked the participants

to recount any experience of ostensible politeness. All the participants were required to answer the questions. The responses to the open-ended part resulted in rich information in terms of interpreting the whole data.

Upon the Scree Plot and factor analysis, three factors with the highest loading and maximum amount of variance were selected. The rotated factor matrix indicates that six items loaded onto Factor 1, which accounted for 4.42% of the total variance. These items were related to the participants' interpretation of politeness as personality/character, thus they are labeled *personal politeness*. Four items were loaded onto Factor 2 which accounted for 4.13% of the total variance. These seven items were all related to consideration for others, thus, it was labeled *interpersonal politeness*. The items loaded onto Factor 3 were four items, which accounted for 3.39% of the total variance, and they concerned respecting social norm. The items loaded onto this factor were called *social politeness*.

4. Results

4.1 Results Obtained from the PQ

The descriptive statistics of the responses of the participants to all items in the PQ are summarized in Table 3. Drawing on the statistics presented in Table 3, it can be concluded that the main elements contributing to the participants' conceptualization of politeness are associated with factor 3 (i.e., social politeness). The factors with lower mean score that contribute to politeness are related to factor 2 (i.e., interpersonal politeness). Further analysis of the statistics in Table 3 indicates that the last category of politeness conceptualization relates to factor1, namely personal politeness. The descriptive statistics of these factors are presented in Table 4, 5, and 6. Furthermore, content analysis of the participants' responses to the first open-ended question (i.e., Why do you observe politeness in your everyday life?)

revealed that the items found in the Likert-scale questionnaire as defining factors for politeness were also stated by the participants.

Table 3

Descriptive analysis for the Items of the PQ for both Male and Female Participants

Item	Mean	SD	strongly agree	agree	undecided	disagree	strongly disagree
1	1.28	.451	71.5	28.5			
2	1.37	.485	65.6	34.4			
3	1.64	.774	51	38.4	2	8.6	
4	1.60	.724	59.5	37.1		3.3	
5	1.34	.475	72.8	27.2			
6	1.83	.653	49	43	1.3	6.6	
7	1.76	.822	57	36.4		5.3	1.3
8	1.49	.673	59.6	35.1	4	1.3	
9	1.70	.965	51.4	34.9	7.5	4.8	1.4
10	2.75	1.37	22.5	29.1	7.3	28.5	12.6
11	2.16	1.13	38.4	40.4	4.6	8.6	7.9
12	2.07	1.04	35.1	53		9.9	2
13	1.83	.969	39.1	53	1.3	3.3	3.3
14	1.95	1.09	47	31.8	4.6	13.2	3.3

Table 4

Factors Contributing to Social Politeness

	M	SD
1.Politeness is adherence to social values and norms.	2.75	1.37
2.Politeness is respecting the wants and values of the group.	2.16	1.13
3.Politeness is associated with maintaining harmonious relationships.	2.07	1.04

Table 5

Factors Contributing to Interpersonal Politeness

	M	SD
4.Politeness is placing the interlocutor in a higher position by admiring him/her for a quality.	1.83	.653
5.Politeness is showing respect to the hearer by being modest.	1.76	.822
6.Politeness is sympathizing with or showing interest in the hearer.	1.83	.969

Table 6
Factors Contributing to Personal Politeness

	M	SD
1.Politeness is an indication of interlocutors' good character.	1.75	1.09
2.Politeness in an indication of the interlocutors' upbringing.	1.85	.958

4.2 Gender Specific Politeness

With regard to how gender affects conceptualization of politeness the responses were first analyzed in terms of normality by utilizing the Shapiro-Wilk test of normality in SPSS 20, and the researchers were convinced that the data were normally distributed ($\text{Sig.} = .075 > .05$). Thus, a parametric test (i.e., an Independent Samples t-test) was used to identify the overall pattern of differences between male and female participants regarding their conceptualization of politeness. The results of the Independent Samples t-test are presented in Table 7. As the results of the Independent Samples t-test presented in Table 6 ($t = 7.437$, $\text{Sig.} = .000 < .05$) indicate, there is significant difference between Persian male participants and their female counterparts regarding their conceptualization of politeness. In order to compare the responses of male and female participants to individual items of the questionnaire, Pearson χ^2 analyses with Cramer's V were conducted.

Table 7
Independent Sample t-test

		t-test for Equality of Means								
t	df	Sig. (2- tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference					
					Lower	Upper				
7.437	.007	-5.992	148	.000	-8.761	1.462	-	11.650	-	5.871

The results indicate that female participants in the study pay more attention to interpersonal politeness compared to social and personal politeness; while, for male participants, politeness means paying greater attention to social norms and values. In Tables 8 and 9, the result has been provided.

Table 8

Percentage of politeness factors for Women

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid social	14	17.5	20.0	20.0
interpersonal	43	53.8	61.4	81.4
personal	13	16.3	18.6	100.0
Total		87.5		
Missing System	70	12.5	100.0	
Total	10	100.0		
	80			

Table 9

Percentage of politeness factors for Men

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Social	43	53.8	53.8	53.8
interpersonal	25	31.3	31.3	68.8
Personal	12	15.0	15.0	100.0
Total	80	100.0	100.0	

4.3 Results Obtained from the Three Open-ended Questions

Upon content analysis of the data obtained from the open-ended questions, common patterns and recurring themes were identified and coded. The frequency of the themes and subthemes were analyzed and tabulated.

4.3.1 Question 1: Why do you observe politeness in your everyday life?

Table 10 shows that the most recurring reasons for which the participants observe politeness in their daily life is adherence to social norms. As shown in Table 10, the participants who answered the first question seemed to observe politeness mainly to appreciate social (46.3%) and interpersonal

(34.2%) factors. Individuals follow the prevalent social conventions and norms in order to be polite and avoid offense. Norms such as respecting older and higher status interlocutors, avoiding making fun of interlocutors, keeping a straight face, avoiding challenging interlocutors, and respecting the hearer's distance. Thus, behavior is polite if it adheres to the values of the society and is evaluated positively by the participants; otherwise, it is impolite and unacceptable. Interpersonal strategies of Persian politeness resides in three principles of *deference*, *humility*, and *cordiality* (adapted from Koutlaki, 1997). People stick to these principles when they interact with each other in order to manage rapport and enhance face. To adhere to *humility* principle, speakers place themselves in a lower position compared to the hearer to show respect to the hearer. The *deference* maxim involves showing the appropriate level of politeness through attributing relative status to the hearer by praising him/her for success, accomplishment, expertise etc. The *cordiality* principle entails showing interest and concern for the hearer's needs by expressing sympathy and agreement to achieve mutual solidarity. The third main category of conceptualizing politeness involved personal characteristics (i.e., participants believed that politeness was a manifestation of the interlocutors' personality or character). The participants in the study tended to draw on individuals' personality to define politeness.

Table 10
Politeness Conceptualization

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	social politeness	69	45.7	46.3	46.3
	interpersonal politeness	51	33.8	34.2	80.5
	personal politeness	29	19.2	19.5	100.0
	Total	149	98.7	100.0	
Missing	System	2	1.3		
Total		151	100.0		

4.3.2 Question 2: What is your conceptualization of *Shaxsiate*/Personality?

Proper manner is the factor that has received the highest frequency as shown in Table 11 according to the content analysis of the participants' responses. As indicated in Table 11, the analysis of the participants' responses to this question show that the participants are more likely to equate personality with proper manner (40%). Upon analyzing the second open-ended question, it became evident that most of the participants construe personality or *shaxsiate* as a collection of personal qualities such as upbringing, education, status, wealth, family, adherence to societal norms, and proper manner. Therefore, when an individual is polite, s/he possesses one or more of these qualities. This contrasts Watts's (2003) view that politeness does not reflect one's character because people play it out, but politeness is similar to good manners. Many of the informants also associated politeness with good personality which may be the result of good upbringing. Individual characteristics of politeness such as humility, generosity, nobility, cheerfulness, truthfulness, respectfulness, dignity, helpfulness, having a good sense of humor were also found among the informants' responses.

Table 11
Personality/Shaxsiate

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
innate quality	20	13.3	13.3	13.3
upbringing	25	16.7	16.7	30.0
societal norms	20	13.3	13.3	43.3
proper manner	60	40.0	40.0	83.3
other	25	16.7	16.7	100.0
Total	150	100.0	100.0	

4.3.3 Question 3: What are some situations in which you have noticed ostensible politeness?

Content analysis of the responses to this question has been summarized in Table 13. The results show that when politeness is displayed to exercise power on the hearer, or when the speaker tries to achieve some materialistic goals, or when politeness is to go through rituals, participants consider it ostensible politeness.

Table 13
Ostensible Politeness

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid power	30	19.7	24.0	24.0
materialistic goals	50	32.9	40.0	64.0
flattering	20	13.2	16.0	80.0
rituals	25	16.4	20.0	100.0
Total	125	82.2	100.0	
Missing System	27	17.8		
Total	152	100.0		

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The description of politeness in this study was based on an enquiry into Persian Native Speakers' insider view of this concept through their explicit perception of what politeness is. Conceptualization of politeness varies with respect to different interpretations of individuals in a society, because interlocutors' interpretations of politeness and a polite person are different across cultures and even within one community. Sharifian (2011) believes that cultural conceptualizations are distributed heterogeneously across the minds of members in a cultural community. Thus, it is necessary to discover people's overall tendencies toward the notion of politeness in different cultures. First order politeness in Persian everyday stance has three levels of social, interpersonal, and personal. The results of the study indicate that individuals' polite behavior is affected by the value that they put on any of the

social, interpersonal, and personal factors. The overall tendency of the participants was to appreciate social conventions; however, their tendency varied based on their gender. Female participants' attention to interpersonal aspect of *deference*, *humility*, and *cordiality* shows that they tended to equate politeness with other-consideration more than male individuals. For male participants appreciating social norms was more important than interpersonal or personal conceptualization of politeness. This difference may spring up from their different psychological characteristics. For participants in the study, in general, enhancing the speaker as well as their interlocutor's face and observing rules of politeness were main concerns. They drew on the fact that it was important to show care and consideration and to avoid offence in their interaction in order to observe politeness.

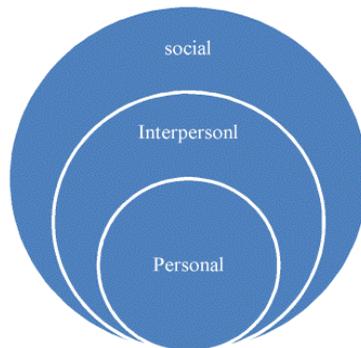


Figure 1. Relationship between layers of politeness

Categorization of politeness into three levels of social, interpersonal, and personal helps make the notion of politeness easier to catch. The three layers of politeness are not unrelated nor are they linear. An individual who has a good personal character and cares for interpersonal relationships and adheres to the values of society can successfully judge the gravity of each situation s/he encounters and is able to employ his/her knowledge of these levels to

show courtesy and politeness. It could be argued that politeness is the outcome of interaction between social conventions, individual's interpersonal evaluation, and personal tendencies toward politeness. Interlocutors should have sufficient knowledge on the significance of these factors for successful interaction with others. The results of the study are supposed to shed light on the concept of politeness to develop a more comprehensive theory of second order politeness; such a theory should be powerful enough to include social, interpersonal, and personal factors.

Politeness for Persian participants in the study was to be approved and appreciated by their interlocutors in the community and to care for their interlocutors. This is very similar to findings of Eslami (2005), where she found that enhancing the face of both the speaker and the hearer is the main reason for performing ostensible invitations in Persian. In this study, participants indicated that they were concerned about their sense of belonging to their community by sticking to interpersonal politeness rather than standing alone as individuals. For the participants in the study, in-group involvement, maintaining rapport, and caring for the hearer were important concerns. This is in line with and very similar to findings of Babai Shishavan (2016), where she found that the main factors motivating the production of ritual refusals (*Ta'arof*) in Persian are observing rules of politeness and enhancing the face of the speaker as well as that of the interlocutor.

Findings of the study also indicate that Persian participants are more concerned about the face of the group rather than individual values, which is in line with non-Western perception of politeness (Ide et al., 1992; Matsumoto, 1988, 1989). For Brown and Levinson (1987), positive face is based on personal values; however, for Persian participants in the study, the values of the community are more important than the personal values. Individual's desires and needs are in accordance with the needs and wants of

the community. In fact, politeness in Persian is normative. In order to achieve approval from their interlocutors, interactants have to pay attention to social and cultural considerations. This emic exploratory study revealed that the majority of participants equated politeness with observing normative conventional standards that the society dictates.

The last open-ended question in the questionnaire required the participant to recount an experience in terms of exercising ostensible or 'nonaltruistic' politeness (Watts, 2003, p. 82). The main category in this respect was observing politeness for materialistic or instrumental goals i.e. the interactants exercised politeness to achieve their instrumental goals. Politeness was also considered ostensible when it was displayed to flatter a higher status interlocutor or to perform unnecessary and redundant rituals. This is similar to postmodern views that politeness is not always positive rather it can be evaluated a negative quality such as "when it is perceived as an attempt to manipulate a situation for one's own benefit" (Terkourafi, 2005, p. 241) or when it is used to exercise power (Watts, 2003).

The results of the analysis of the participants' answers to the questionnaire revealed that for Persian Native Speakers, politeness implies respecting social and cultural norms along with consideration and care for the interactants' *shaxsiate*/personality. The results indicate that facework that is performed based on the societal values accompanied by the wants of individuals underlies the notion of politeness for Persian participants in the study. Politeness is manifested in a Persian culture as adherence to social norms so that the interlocutor is accepted into the community. Politeness for participants was equal to be approved and appreciated by the members of the group to which they belong. Members of the group should also avoid imposing on one another in order to show politeness. Politeness should be studied on the basis of three layers of socio-cultural, interpersonal, and

psychological/intrapersonal. Politeness is the result of interaction between these layers. The participants have a set of conventions to consider when they interact with others at socio-cultural level plus their evaluation of the culture of the immediate context in which the interaction occurs. Meanwhile, these are not sufficient for a successful communication of thoughts; the participants require drawing on their good judgment to observe rules of politeness. These issues require further research in different cultures. The results of the study are applicable in raising awareness in cross-cultural studies. The results are also valuable in the process of language learning which is highly integrated with cultural consideration.

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Appendix 1: Politeness Questionnaire

Politeness is adherence to social values and norms	1	2	3	4	5
Politeness is respecting the wants and values of the group.	1	2	3	4	5
Politeness is associated with maintaining harmonious relationships.	1	2	3	4	5
Politeness is an indication of interlocutors' good character	1	2	3	4	5
Politeness is placing the interlocutor in a higher position by admiring him/her for a quality.	1	2	3	4	5
Politeness is showing respect to the hearer by being modest	1	2	3	4	5
Politeness means keep your social distance.	1	2	3	4	5
Politeness is sympathizing with or showing interest in the hearer.	1	2	3	4	5
Politeness means proper manner.	1	2	3	4	5
Politeness is displayed through proper social manner.	1	2	3	4	5
Politeness means to be tactful.	1	2	3	4	5
Politeness means to be caring and understanding.	1	2	3	4	5
Politeness means to be appreciated by the group	1	2	3	4	5
Politeness in an indication of the interlocutors' upbringing	1	2	3	4	5

Note. Gender: Male \triangle Female \triangle Age.....

Strongly disagree1 disagree2 neutral3 agree4 strongly agree

Appendix 2: Topics for Open-ended Questionnaire on Politeness Perception

1. What does the word politeness mean to you?
2. What is your definition of *shaxiate*/personality?
3. Do remember a time when you noticed politeness which was ostensible?