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## **Exploring Identity Representation Strategies in English and Persian Political Discourse**

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### **Abstract**

Previous research on identity construction in political and media discourse is mostly limited to the study of strategies employed by politicians in their spoken discourse. However, different political agents, by way of assuming different degrees of power, may employ different strategies for the construction of others' identities. This study is set to investigate how political agents differ in the strategies they employ for the linguistic construction of identities across cultures: English and Persian. A total number of 66 English and Persian texts, produced by three groups of political agents (actors, reporters & researchers) were randomly selected. Then, following Wodak's (2001, 2007, 2009) critical discourse analysis approach, they were analyzed in terms of the quality and quantity of the strategies proposed for positive/negative representation of others. The results of the critical discourse analyses as well as Chi-square tests of statistical significance indicated qualitative/quantitative differences in the type and frequency of discourse strategies employed by English and Persian agents. *Persian agents* tended to be more indirect, covert and anonymous than their English counterparts by using more implicit strategies for other representation. The implications are drawn for material development and designing teaching programs to raise advanced level students' awareness of the relevant discourse strategies for other representation.

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## **1. Introduction**

The last two decades have seen a widespread interest in the linguistic construction of identity and the way it is reconstructed or negotiated to fulfil various discursive, academic, social/interactional and ideological purposes. Such studies, which have been mainly influenced by a Foucauldian and social constructivist approaches focused on identity as a dynamic, flexible and mediated process in various domains of scientific, media and political discourse. Recent identity studies within media discourse have emphasized the multiple nature of identities and the findings seem to demonstrate the fact that the journalists as social actors perform a multitude of identities such as, reporters, interpreters, commentators in a single text or talk (e.g., Apfelbaum, 2003; Douglas, 2009 & Partington, 2003). In the same vein, within political discourse, the multi-layered identities of political agents have been studied by the various positions from which politicians can speak in political interactions, such as their institutional, professional and ideological identities (Bayram, 2010; Bwenge, 2009; Ilie, 2010; Lauerbach, 2006; Qaiwer, 2016; Scot, 2015; Skendery, 2014; Zhong, 2014).

Whereas in most identity studies the multiple nature of identities have been investigated through self-representation, there have also been studies which have investigated the way discourse producers represented other social actors/participants (Augoustinos & Riggs, 2007; Pyykko, 2003; Reisigl & Wodak, 2001; Tekin, 2010; Van Leeuwen, 2008; Wodak, Cillia, Reisigl & Liebhart, 2009; Zhou, 2003). In almost all recent identity studies, scholars have implicitly or explicitly adhered to the view that identity construction and representation in various discourse domains is always associated with relations of power- the fact that it always follows and represents the hierarchical structure or the superordinate-subordinate relationships existing in a society (Duncan, 2003; Fairclough, 1989; Gurevitch, Benett, Curran & Wollacott, 1990; Ivanic, 2008). As was stated by Duncan (2003), when expressing an identity "there is always an issue of power at hand" (p. 150).

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And, according to Ivanic (2008), "the workings of status, prestige and hierarchy will shape how our identities are constructed" (p.6). Finally, Fairclough (1989) maintains that in media discourse, "media producers exercise power over consumers" (p. 49).

Although the hierarchical relations of power play a fundamental role in any discourse type, it is in political discourse that the close interconnection between the two (i.e., language and power) is highly transparent. As is stated by Crawshaw and Tusting (2000, cited in Tekin 2010), in modern democracies power is principally exercised on a discursive level and according to Fairclough (1992), it is essential to understand the various ways in which "power relations are imposed and exercised in language" (p. 168). Within political discourse, different political agents (nationally or internationally, within the borders of a specific country or across cultures) may employ different discourse strategies for other representation, simply because the society they live in imposes an unequal distribution of power resources. As yet, however, no study has been conducted to investigate the relationship between the variation existing in the degree of power assumed by social actors and the discourse strategies they employ across cultures. Assuming that the difference in the relative degree of power in the discourse of different political agents both culturally and cross-culturally is a function of the social role they assume and can be reflected in the strategies they choose for other representations, this study aims at investigating the discourse strategies used in the discourse of three groups of political agents (i.e., actors, reporters & researchers) across Persian and English cultures within the context of Iran and U.S.

This study first present the most recent studies carried out on linguistic representation of others followed by a brief reference to the sociopolitical context of investigation (Iran & U.S). It then explains the method adopted for exploring the discourse strategies, including the data selection and procedures for textual analysis. Section 4 presents the qualitative and quantitative

analyses of the data which will be discussed and interpreted in section 5. The final section of the study presents some concluding remarks and the implications of the study.

## **2. Background**

In a systematic study of representation, Reisigl and Wodak (2001) investigated the racist and discriminatory discourse in spoken and written political discourse to explore the discourse strategies used by social actors to represent participants. Using discourse-historical approach, they focused on five linguistic or rhetorical means involved in positive self and negative other representations, namely nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivation and mitigation/intensification.

Zhou (2003) studied English and Chinese spatial deictic verbs (come/go vs. lai/qu) and its association with Us/Them distinctions in the inclusion and exclusion of participants. He arrived at the conclusion that what may be conceived grammatically as differences in physical distance in these deictic verbs can in fact have various interpretations associated with social distance and social identity of the participants. Pyykko (2003) also studied the different functions of first person plural in Russian political discourse. He distinguished between ideological and national *we* and the fact that it could be used by politicians for hidden attitude formation to express solidarity or strengthen authority.

Lauerback (2006) examined the general forms and functions of the British interviews conducted by BBC and ITV channels before and after the election campaign of 1997 to investigate the practice of representation of other's discourse and how this could vary along certain parameters, namely "*who* gets quoted on *which topics* and with *which strategic aims* on the part of the journalists" (p. 197). He concluded that the interview practice did not construct interviewer neutrality and did not create a debate between the

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political parties, but rather highlighted disputes within the parties to personalize political discourse and to offer the audience "a preferred interpretation of the political process" (p. 213).

Augoustinos and Riggs (2007) examined how representations of us/them are embedded in the narratives of dominant white majority and Indigenous peoples in Australia. The results of their analysis of the talks of a white focus group discussions of university students revealed that (a) white Australians justified their sense of belonging as defended territory; (b) Indigenous sovereignty was repressed and (c) white identities are legitimized as 'good people' who hold no relationship to ongoing histories of white violence (p. 125).

Using a socio-semantic inventory, Van Leeuwen (2008) also studied how patterns of 'inclusion'/'exclusion' were used in the way social actors were represented in English discourse. The study, based on school textbooks, was later applied to political discourse, especially immigration phenomenon. Wodak, Cillia, Reisigl & Liebhart (2009) studied Austrian national identity aiming to investigate the macro-strategies of identity construction. They concluded that there was not one Austrian identity but several context-dependent ones and that depending on the social macro-functions, "four distinct macro-strategies could be distinguished: constructive, perpetuation/justification, transformation and deconstructive strategies" (p. 189).

Tekin (2010) studied the positive self and negative other representations in the construction of Turkey in the EU context using French political discourse. His findings indicated that in the French discourse, the Turkish Other was represented as inferior to European Self which was conceived to be more associated with cultural values, norms and traditions rather than a 'particular political sovereign entity' (p.156).

Therefore, representation, as Owens (1992) maintains, "is not, nor can it be neutral, it is an act of, indeed the founding act of power in our culture" (Owens 1994, p.91). According to Foley (2001), it does not reflect an already existing reality because it organizes, shapes and mediates our understanding of reality, emotion and imagination.

Throughout the years, Iran and U.S have experienced a wide political conflict affecting all aspects of their relationships, diplomatic and nondiplomatic. However, the two countries have seen a surge in political conflict especially in the period before and after the reconsideration of the proposal for Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) by U.S. which had a profound effect in the discourse of various political groups in the two countries both nationally and internationally. Therefore, a study of the discourse of these two politically and culturally different groups of political agents by the social roles they assume in their society may reflect meaningful patterns of relationships in the strategies they employ for constructing each other's identities. The purpose of this study is to explore the nature of identity representation strategies and significant differences or similarities in their use by U.S and Iranian political agents.

### **3. Method**

This section is divided into two subsections. The first section deals with the description of the corpus of the study as well as definition of some relevant concepts. The second section explains the procedures for extraction of the two strategies, followed by the results of interrater reliability of the data categorization.

#### **3.1 Corpus**

Defining what constitutes political discourse is not an easy task. As is also maintained by Schaffner (2004), politics is a 'wide and flexible notion' (p. 119). According to Schaffner, there are texts and talks which are political in a

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more narrow or prototypical sense. These include "texts that discuss political ideas, beliefs and practices of a society or some part of it or texts that are crucial in constituting a political community (such as speeches by politicians)" (p. 119). It is in this narrower sense which we define political discourse. A political *actor* is considered to be a person who is professionally involved in the act of politics. A political *reporter* is defined as a person employed by a newspaper, magazine or TV company to gather and report facts about current political events. A political *researcher* is taken to be a person with at least a university degree in Political Science/theory or International Relations who may write on the government policies, as well as general political developments for the country.

To select the target texts, initially through purposive sampling, 330 texts including speeches, columns, and reports published in popular print and broadcast media were randomly selected from well-known Persian and English (American) political actors, researchers and reporters. Out of this pool of data, a random sample of 11 speeches (5 English, 6 Persian), 28 columns (13 English, 15 Persian) and 27 reports (12 English, 15 Persian) were drawn for final analysis.

The data spans the period from 2009 to 2017. Because different texts contained different number of sentences and this could certainly affect the number of strategies extracted, we adjusted this difference by cutting short one text from each category of speeches, columns and reports from the end to make the final analysis more meaningful.

### **3.2 Data Extraction Procedure**

Following Reisigl and Wodak (2001), we define *discourse strategies* as "a more or less accurate and more or less intentional plan of practices adopted to achieve a particular social, political, psychological or linguistic aim" (p. 73). In Wodak's analytical framework, discourse strategies are defined in terms of

five categories: *Nomination (referential)*, *predication*, *argumentation*, *perspectivation and mitigation/intensification*. Nomination refers to the way political agents nominate or refer to other participants in their discourse. Predication refers to strategies used for ascribing qualities, features or characteristics to evaluate social actors positively or negatively. Argumentation refers to legitimation strategies used to justify positive/negative attributions of social actors. Perspectivation is the perspectives through which discourse producers express their involvement/detachment in discourse. Strategies of mitigation/intensification are those which are used to increase or decrease the tone of utterances (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001).

Because the linguistic manifestation of identity is basically a matter of the relation which is established between the participants selected at each sentence level and the grammatical roles assigned to them by way of selecting various process types, we consider a sentence or T-unit as the level of analysis of our data and identify different participant roles assigned to each and every element functioning naturally or symbolically as to stand for the role of human participant. To extract identity strategies, each individual sentence was analyzed in terms of the five categories specified in our analytical framework. Due to limitation in space, however, this study presents only the qualitative and quantitative analysis of two of the most relevant strategies, nomination and predication. They are considered the most relevant because of the nature of the political discourse dealing to a high extent with the positive/negative discriminatory inclusion/exclusion of participants in the form of nomination or ascription of features to other participants. Below we present the procedures for extracting each of these two strategies along with some actual examples. Sentences included in [ ] are translations from Persian).

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**3.2.1 Nomination Strategy**

To extract nomination strategies, based on Wodak's discourse historical approach (Wodak & Meyer, 2001; Wodak, 2007; Wodak et al., 2009), we classified the major nomination strategies and some means of their realizations used for inclusion and exclusion of social actors as presented in Table 1.

Table 1

*Subcategories of Nomination Strategies, their Objectives and Forms of Realizations*

Nomination strategies	Objective	Means of Realization
•Membership categorization	To classify participants into groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Collectivization</li> <li>•Criminalization</li> <li>•De-spatialization</li> <li>•Dissimilation</li> <li>•Organizationalization</li> <li>•Politicization</li> <li>•Professionalization</li> <li>•Religionization</li> <li>•Spatialization</li> <li>•Mediafication</li> </ul>
•Individualization	To refer to participants individually	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Formal address</li> <li>•Informal address</li> </ul>
•Depersonalization	To use dehumanizing metaphors for naming participants	•depersonalizing metaphors
•Backgrounding	To exclude participants by avoiding naming them	•Passivation
•Suppression	To exclude participants by avoiding naming them	•Nominalization

To identify nomination strategies, we examined the semantic content of the elements chosen to function as participants in each T-unit. Sentences 1-3 are used as examples.

- 1) ...*that **Moscow** meddled in the U.S. election process.*
- 2) ***The government** declined to deport her.*
- 3) ***She** is their puppet, and they pull the strings.*

The discourse producer uses spatialization strategy in 1 (Moscow), organizationalization in 2 (the government), individualization (she) in 3, to refer to Hillary Clinton, respectively. These strategies will be further elaborated upon in section 3.

### 3.2.2 Predication strategy

According to Wodak (2007), predication may be realized as "evaluative attributions of negative/positive traits in the form of implicit/explicit predicates" (p. 662). Among many others, predication can be realized as adjectives, nouns, adjective clauses, relative clauses, participial phrases, explicit denotations, implicit connotations, metaphors, comparisons, allusions, and other rhetorical figures.

To extract predication strategies, we restricted ourselves to the most distinguished features of predicate structures used for positive/negative representation of others; namely, predicative adjectives, nouns and noun phrases which were used to either attribute characteristics to individuals or to provide unique identities for them. The following are examples of attributions:

- 4) *Trump is **different**.*
- 5) *The promises [Trump's promises] were **slogans**.*
- 6) *Because he [Biden] is a **well-known character** in the Washington establishment, the public knows more or less what to expect from him.*

The adjective 'different' in 4, the noun 'slogans' in 5 and the noun phrase 'a well-known character' in 6 are the attributes characterizing the participants 'Trump' in 4 and 5 and 'Joe Biden' in 6. Similarly, the following examples provide unique identities for participants.

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7)[He would have said "I told you London was the Trojan horse of U.S. in Europe".]8)He [Trump] is not Hillary or some other carrier politician.

In sentence 7, the noun phrase identifies London and in 8 the underlined noun Hillary negatively identifies the participant 'he' (i.e., Trump). Following Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar, we named the two devices of predication as 'characterization and identification' (Halliday & Mathiessen, 2014). Characterization describes participants as belonging to a specific category or class, namely, an entity has some class ascribed or attributed to it. In identification, on the other hand, one entity serves to define the identity of another entity/participant. The distinguishing feature of identification clauses is that they are reversible (as in example 8, Trump is not Hillary; Hillary is not Trump).

The next section deals with the results of the qualitative and quantitative analyses of the data and the way the strategies were categorized, quantified and their statistical significance determined. To check for the reliability of the analysis, we randomly selected 20% of the data (i.e., 14 out of 66 texts: 3 speeches, 6 columns & 5 reports) and had a colleague to rate and categorize the strategies. The interrater reliability was computed using Kappa Measure of Agreement for different subcategories of the nomination and predication variables. As specified in Table 2, a moderate to very good agreement existed between the two raters.

Table 2

*Interrater Reliability for Subcategories of Nomination and Predication Strategies*

Strategies	Statistical Properties	
	<i>n</i>	Kappa value
Membership categorization	237	.89**
Suppression	456	.92**
Direct reference	715	.99**
Depersonalization	434	.58*
Predication	303	.79**

*Note.* \* = moderate agreement; \*\* = very good agreement (Pallant, 2007, Kappa Measure of Agreement: .5= moderate; .7= good; above .8 = very good agreement)  
 $p < .001$

#### 4. Results

In this section, we present the results of the qualitative and quantitative analyses of each strategy, followed by a discussion of the findings for each.

##### 4.1 Nomination Strategy: Qualitative Analysis

We performed a qualitative analysis of the data, using Wodak's CDA approach as a guideline, but due to the nature of the data under investigation, we provided our own classification. Overall, four major nomination strategies including membership categorization, direct reference, depersonalization and suppression along with twelve substrategies were identified.

**4.1.1 Membership categorization.** This included 10 dominant subcategories used for including participants into a specific group or class. Below each will be explained along with an example.

- **Collectivization** refers to collective references to others (e.g., people, team) as in example.

9) ...*they are combining to destroy hopes for peace on both sides and increasingly cementing an irreversible one-state reality that most people do not actually want.*

- **Criminalization** refers to others, either involved or not involved in some criminal acts (e.g., gang members, killers, fugitive), as in

10) *Her killer was then released a second time, and he is now a fugitive from the law.*

- **De-spatialization** refers to reference based on local orientations (e.g., Iranians, New-Yorkers). The discourse producer generalizes on the basis of the place a participant is coming from.

11) *[He added "Americans want the nuclear deal (JCPOA) not to be implemented"....]*

In the above example 'Americans' is used to refer to the president of America.

- **Dissimilation** was used to nominate participants by representing them as belonging to an outside category (e.g. outside enemy):

12) *I don't say this lightly, and I sincerely fear that loss of faith in journalism ultimately will cause more harm to the nation than any outside enemy could hope to.*

- **Mediafication** was used to personify and talk about media sources as if they were participants :

13) *The paper (Washington Post) named five women who said they had consensual affairs with Clinton...*

- **Organizationalization** refers to naming participants on the basis of the organization they belong to:

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14) *The Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency* said the efforts were "routine" and no different than the arrests carried out...

• **Politicization** refers to references based on the political party a participant belongs:

15) *It's just like a Democrat to want the feds to pay for it, right?*

• **Professionalization** was used to nominate participants on the basis of their profession or official position:

16) *Threatening to claw back tax credits also might spur some companies to pull back on their research, added Len Burman, director of the Tax Policy Center.*

• **Religionization** refers to references to participants on the basis of their religion:

17) *Parishioners* did not smile as on any other Sunday morning.

• **Spatialization** refers to the use of places, countries, towns, and states for people; i.e. the names of the places are used to refer to a participant living in that place:

18) *When Trump says he spoke..., should China be expected to take what it sees as a grave violation of diplomatic norms.....?*

**4.1.2 Direct reference.** This refers to reference to participants' names, either informally by their first name or formally by their last, first and last name, with a title or without any title (e.g., Donald, Trump, Donald Trump, & Mr. Trump).

**4.1.3 Depersonalization.** This refers to metaphors used to dehumanize social actors. (e.g., dogs used for a specific political party and frogs used for foreign enemies).

19) *The dogs of the Democratic media* were absolutely howling yesterday over sordid, unverified allegations involving Russia,...

20) [...Aren't the U.S. and its allies advertising controversy similar to the frogs delusion mentioned at the beginning of this editorial?]

**4.1.4. Suppression/exclusion.** The most important devices used for excluding participants in our data were anonymization and backgrounding. There were very few cases of passivation (considered in Wodak's approach) used for excluding participants. Furthermore, because both devices (i.e., anonymization and backgrounding) suppress the inclusion of participants, they were categorized under the same category: suppression.

• **Anonymization** refers to the vague use of nouns or noun phrases to refrain from naming participants, as in the following examples.

21) [*...and on this side there are **those** who think that they gave unreal promise to people.*]

22) *Regrettably, **some** seem to believe that the U.S. friendship means the U.S. must accept any policy, regardless of our own interests,...*

The entire text from which example 21 is derived does not make clear who the reference of those is and different readers may think of different participants. In example 22, the implied reference is 'Israel', but it can also refer to other nations.

- **Backgrounding** consists of nominalizations or process nouns which refer to nouns made of processes in order to deliberately background or suppress the actor of an action, as in

23) [***Raising** expectations from post JCPOA in this short period has turned to a means for legitimizing the attack to the JCPOA too.*]

In this example, the reference of raising is not made clear. On the basis of the entire text it can be implied that it refers to a specific political group in the country (i.e., hardliners). But it does not specify the person/s responsible for raising expectations. It should be mentioned that the reference of anonymization, even considering the entire context within which it occurs, is never completely known. However, the reference of a backgrounded feature can be implied considering the total context in which it occurs. But even in this case, different people may not totally agree on its reference.

#### **4.2 Nomination Strategy: Quantitative Analysis**

The frequency and percentage of various categories of nomination strategy are presented in Table 3. Strategies with very low frequencies (less than 2 percent) across all categories of Persian and English data were excluded from further analysis.

Table 3  
*The Frequencies and Percentages of Subcategories of Nomination Strategy Used by English and Persian Political Agents*

Strategy Type	Political Agents					
	P/Act.	E/Act.	P/Res.	E/Res.	P/Rep.	E/Rep.
Spatialization	229 27%	60 7%	88 17%	5 0%	98 25%	16 4%
De-spatialization	4 0%	48 5%	3 0%	10 1%	10 2%	5 1%
Politicization	30 3%	55 6%	40 7%	24 4%	35 8%	38 9%
Organizationalization	39 4%	36 4%	45 8%	31 6%	47 11%	48 12%
Religionization	31 3%	6 0%	2 0%	2 0%	1 0%	3 0%
Mediafication	2 0%	1 0%	21 4%	16 3%	19 4%	1 0%
Collectivization	29 3%	81 9%	23 4%	56 11%	28 7%	40 10%
Professionalization	27 3%	53 6%	95 18%	40 7%	79 20%	103 26%
Dissimilation	1 0%	7 0%	5 0%	3 0%	1 0%	9 2%
Criminalization	3 0%	17 2%	5 0%	3 0%	0 0%	6 1%
Depersonalization	11 1%	1 0%	21 4%	4 0%	1 0%	0 0%
Anonymization	94 11%	72 8%	73 14%	39 7%	21 5%	12 3%
Backgrounding	182 21%	82 9%	85 16%	9 1%	27 6%	9 2%
Direct Reference	73 8%	83 9%	109 21%	264 52%	182 46%	316 80%
Total sentences	841	841	501	501	393	393

Note. P = Persian; E = English; Act. = actors; Res. = Researchers; Rep. = Reporters

The subcategories of nomination strategy listed in Table 3 were classified under four general categories, based on their degree of transparency of reference. Direct reference which employs explicit reference to social actors' names can be conceived as the most explicit whereas suppression (backgrounding and anonymization) by suppressing the names of the participants as the most implicit, with 'membership categorization' and depersonalization falling in between. 'Membership categorization' classifies the participants by including them into various groups and includes the first ten subcategories specified in Table 3 above. Depersonalization either groups participants metaphorically as belonging to nonhuman creatures or classifies nonhuman creatures as belonging to human creatures. Table 4 presents the percentages of each of these categories for different political groups.

Table 4

*Percentages of Explicit and Implicit Nomination Categories Used by English and Persian Political Agents*

Strategies	Political Agents					
	P/Act.	E/Act.	P/Res.	E/Res.	P/Rep.	E/Rep.
Direct Reference	8%	9%	21%	52%	46%	80%
Membership Categorization	47%	43%	65%	38%	80%	68%
Depersonalization	1%	0%	4%	0%	0%	0%
Suppression	32%	18%	31%	9%	12%	5%
Total Sentences	841	841	501	501	393	393

*Note.* Percentages have been obtained based on the frequencies in Table 3

### 4.3 Nomination strategies: Discussion of findings

In this section, we present a discussion of the most important findings related to each sub-category used by different Persian and English political groups.

#### 4.3.1 Direct reference/Actors. As far as political actors are concerned,

Persian and English actors used almost the same percentage of direct reference (8%, 9%). An analysis of the nature of their use, however, shows that Persian and English actors used it for qualitatively different purposes.

Persian actors used direct reference to a large extent for thanking and positive

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evaluation of participants. But English actors used them for positive and negative evaluations (especially criticizing) of others' actions/activities:

24) *[I should take this opportunity to thank and appreciate Dr. Ahmadinejad, the respected president for selecting me as the servant of this revolution.]*

25) *We must abandon the failed policy of nation building and regime change that Hillary Clinton pushed in Iraq,...*

The underlined participant in 24 is used for appreciation, but in 25, for criticism.

**4.3.2 Direct reference/Researchers.** Persian researchers tended to use a much lower percentage of this strategy than English researchers (21%, 52%). However, Persian researchers used it to a large extent for positive evaluation of those in power (e.g., the leader of the country, the president) and in a few cases for negative evaluation (criticizing) of those with a rather equal position (e.g., other researchers, commentators or reporters). They also used it for personal authorization of their claims. In contrast, English researchers used it mainly for positive and negative evaluation of others.

26) *[The fact that Rouhani brings to attention one of the potential capacities of constitution... can lead to improving national security.]*

27) *[Besides Fisher, other officials too referred to the continuation of SWIFT sanction in post JCPOA.]*

In these examples, Rouhani is referred to for his positive action and Fisher as personal authorization for supporting the writer's claim.

**4.3.3 Direct reference/Reporters.** Persian reporters like Persian researchers used a much lower percentage of this strategy than English reporters (46%, 80%). The nature of its use by both Persian and English agents was qualitatively the same. Both groups used it largely for quoting others either to report a fact/event or to support a claim.

28) *Sen. Jeff Sessions, picked for attorney general, said he's against any outright ban on immigration by Muslims,...*

29) *His secretary of state candidate, Rex Tillerson, took a relatively hard line on Washington's dealings with Russia, even though Trump.....*

In these examples, *Sessions* is used to report a fact and Tillerson is used to support a claim stated earlier in the text that some of Trump's Cabinet selections contradicted the policy stances espoused by their soon- to-be-president.

**4.3.4 Membership categorization/Actors/Researchers.** Persian and English actors used almost the same percentage of this subcategory (47%, 43%). In contrast, Persian researchers used a higher percentage of this sub-category than English researchers. The highest percentage for Persian researchers belongs to professionalization (18%), but for English researchers belongs to collectivization (11%). Persian researchers tended to name those in power by their professions (e.g., President Rouhani, foreign minister Zarif) which is more or less related to a belief in Iranian culture for humbleness and respect to powerful others by not naming them directly, but using their official profession. It is a sort of pragmatic strategy for saving others' face.

**4.3.5 Membership categorization/Reporters:** Persian reporters used a higher percentage of membership categorization than English reporters (80%, 68%). The highest percentage for Persian reporters belongs to spatialization (25%) but for English reporters belongs to professionalization (26%). The interesting point is that unlike Persian reporters, English reporters used a very low percentage of spatalization (4%). However, both Persian and English reporters use professionalization for the same purpose, as an identifying predication strategy to introduce known politicians and quote from them.

**4.3.6 Depersonalization/Actors/Researchers/Reporters.** Both Persian and English actors used a very low percentage of this strategy (1%, 0%). Persian and English reporters, however, almost did not use it (0%, 0%). It is not unrealistic for the genre of reporting not to use this strategy because subjective dehumanizing representation of others does not correspond with a genre which is expected to provide objective information. In contrast, Persian

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researchers used 4% of this subcategory unlike English researchers who almost used none. Besides, Persian researchers tended to use the more implicit options of this category as the following examples demonstrate:

30) [*The head of the frogs had seen foreign enemies.*]

31) [*Diplomatic wolves of enemies from the other side told that no nuclear agreement is better than agreement...*]

32) [*Kayhan's artillery will be targeted against him.*]

In these sentences the references of 'head of the frogs', 'diplomatic wolves of enemies' and 'Kayhan artillery' are not explicitly referred to. But in the context in which they occur one may imply that they are used to refer to U.S, U.S. and its allies and Kayhan newspaper's editor in chief, respectively.

**4.3.7 Suppression/Actors:** Persian actors used a much higher percentage of suppression than English actors (32%, 18%). Suppression strategy contributes to hiding information and exclusion of participants. However, as is also stated by Fairclough (2003), the information which is missing from a text is as important as what is in a text. A detailed investigation of the nature of this strategy reveals the fact that, Persian actors use 'suppression' when criticizing or expressing negative attitudes towards some foreign participants or opponents who are internationally considered to be in a more powerful and superior position than themselves (e.g., U.N Secretary General, IAEA inspectors and U.S government) as in:

[*When sanctions begin, hatred from those imposing sanctions begins too.*]

1) [*Creating a region free from nuclear weapons is of crucial importance.*]

2) [*Today's antiWesternization is a reaction to the yesterday's colonialism.*]

3) [*Some countries were involved in its coming into existence [extremism] but are now a failure in fighting with it.*]

In these examples, the underlined process nouns in 33-35 and the vague noun phrase in 36 do not make it quite clear what the relevant participants are. But in the context in which they occur, one can imply that they refer most probably to U.S and Iran in 33, Israel in 34, Iran and its allies in 35 and U.S

and Israel in 36. In contrast, English actors used suppression to refer to participants from various social positions and not merely the powerful others.

**4.3.8 Suppression/Researchers:** Like Persian actors, Persian researchers used a higher percentage of suppression than English researchers (31%, 9%). Persian and English researchers used 'backgrounding' subcategory of suppression for rather different purposes. Persian researchers used backgrounding largely for criticizing participants in power and thereby seeming to refrain from naming participants in a more politically powerful position, as are the case in the following examples:

4)[Unfaithful discriminations and corruption of those in power threatens our citizens more than anything else.]

5)[Insistence on highlighting differences about resistance ..... is one of the important reasons of failure to confront the enemy.]

6)[Instead of keeping secrets, it was said that 'America was the chief, 'the treasury is empty',...]

In the above examples, the underlined process nouns refer to actions of powerful politicians within the country. However, English researchers used 'suppression' strategy, not merely for referring to actions of those in power, but also for other people in a less powerful position (40-43).

7)And she closed with this: "Deportations cannot come soon enough. TRUMP 2016-2024".

8)Another terrorist attack would put things in perspective, all right, but our survival ultimately depends on our willingness....

9)Similarly, the salacious allegations he faced yesterday packed a potential to seriously wound him before he takes office.

10)They hit back forcefully, with press secretary Sean Spicer calling publication of the allegations "disgraceful" and...

The implied participants in 40 is 'Trump', in 41, 'terrorists', in 42, 'those opposing Trump's presidency, in 43, 'democrats or other groups of people'.

**4.3.9 Suppression/Reporters:** Persian reporters used a higher percentage of suppression than English reporters. However, the suppressed elements were used by both groups in their direct or indirect quotations from others:

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- 11) [*Yesterday, Mogherini in her speech.....said the request for a European look at a foreign policy which combines hard and soft power has increased.*]  
12) "Attempts to capitalize on moderation within this regime, under whatever pretext or circumstance, are investments in a mirage."

In these examples, the reporter is quoting from Mogherini in 44 and a specific political party in 45.

#### 5.4 Predication Strategy: Qualitative Analysis

On the basis of Wodak's CDA approach and Halliday's systemic functional grammar, we performed a qualitative analysis of the predication strategies and categorized them into two types: identification and characterization.

**5.4.1 Identification.** This refers to the way a political agent qualifies a social actor by providing him a unique identity through using an identifying noun or embedded noun phrase, as are the case in the following examples:

- 13) *It hasn't helped that Republican...have convinced their constituents that the media are the enemy.*  
14) *But it is no secret that...in the White House, if only because she is the devil they know.*  
15) [*The ministry of foreign relations as the only guardian of foreign relation system is assigned for the purposeful implementation.....*]

In these examples, 'the media' in 46, she (i.e., Clinton) in 47 and ministry of foreign relations in 48 have been given unique identities by the underlined identifying nouns (enemy, devil) and noun phrase (the only guardian of...).

**5.4.2 Characterization.** This refers to characterizing a social actor by classifying her/him as member of a category or as possessing a specific attribute. This is linguistically realized by the attributive options within relational clauses used to characterize entities, namely, attributive nouns/noun phrases and adjectives.

- 16) *Trump's conservatism was more marketing ploy than deeply held conviction.*  
17) *As I meet members of the cabinet I'm puzzled because many of them sound reasonable...*

The underlined sections in examples 49 and 50 use attributive nouns (ploy & conviction) and adjective (reasonable) to qualify the participants.

### 5.5. Predication Strategy: Quantitative Analysis

The frequency and percentage of the two categories of predication strategy used by Persian and English political agents are presented in Table 5.

Table 5

*The Frequencies and Percentages of Predication Strategies Used by Persian and English Political Agents*

Strategy Type	Political Agents					
	P/Act.	E/Act.	P/Res.	E/Res.	P/Rep.	E/Rep.
Characterization	461	279	279	213	212	118
	54%	33%	55%	42%	53%	30%
Identification	203	77	74	63	116	69
	24%	9%	14%	12%	29%	17%
Total sentences	841	841	501	501	393	393

As can be observed, all Persian political groups used a higher percentage of both characterization and identification strategies than English agents. The only similarity can be found in the use of identification by Persian and English researchers (14%, 12%).

### 5.6 Predication Strategy: Discussion of the Findings

A discussion of the findings related to each subcategory of predication strategy follows.

**5.6.1 Characterization and identification/Actors:** Persian actors used a much higher percentage of characterization (54%, 33%) and identification (24%, 9%) than English actors. Besides, they used them for qualitatively different purposes. Characterization and identification were used by Persian actors largely for attributing and ascribing more or less personal and subjective features to nonpersonal entities (places, organizations or political parties), suppressed elements (process nouns) as well as abstractions, as is illustrated by the following examples.

18)[Considering Iran's ***confidence-building and transparent approach*** in this regard, if the other parties too have determination and flexibility...]

19)[Middle East is ***the center of most important, most sensitive and most complex developments*** in the world.]

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20) [London was the U.S Trojan horse in Europe.]

21) [Authoritarianism and self-interest is the source of racism, discrimination and oppression.]

The underlined sections in the above examples, identify such nonpersonal participants as Iran in 51, Middle East in 52, London in 53 and the abstract nouns authoritarianism and self-interest in 54 by assigning subjective qualities. English actors, on the other hand, used these strategies largely for assigning subjective features to specific known individuals or groups, as in:

22) *These (laid-off factory workers) are the forgotten men and women of our country.*

23) *She (Hillary Clinton) is trigger-happy and unstable when it comes to war.*

In the above examples, the underlined sections identify workers in 55 and Clinton in 56. It is worth mentioning that nonpersonal entities allow for a higher degree of implicitness.

**5.6.2 Characterization and identification/Researchers:** Persian researchers used a much higher percentage of characterization than English researchers (55%, 42%). However, both groups used almost the same percentage of identification (14%, 12%). Qualitatively, Persian researchers mainly used these strategies for ascribing subjective features to nonpersonal entities unlike English researchers who largely used them for assigning subjective features to specific known participants.

**5.6.3 Characterization and identification/Reporters:** Persian reporters, similar to Persian actors and Persian researchers used a higher percentage of characterization (53%, 30%) and identification (29%, 17%) than English reporters. Given that a reporting genre is expected to focus on facts and factual events, an overuse of characterization/identification by Persian agents seems to be related to the fact that Persian reporters, more than a tendency to express facts as explicitly as possible, favor to ascribe features (positive/negative) without being revealed about this.

## 5.7 Statistical Significance of the Differences

To test the statistical significance of the differences in the frequency of the strategies employed by Persian and English agents, we run several Chi-square tests of independence. The variables tested for statistical significance appear in Table 6. The Table presents the statistical characteristics of the analyses including Chi-square values ( $X^2$ ), probability levels ( $p$ ), number of cases ( $n$ ) as well as the effect sizes (Cramer's  $V$ ) for each of these variables across language and political agents.

Table 6

*Result of the Chi-square Tests of Statistical Significance for Different Subcategories of Nomination and Predication Strategies*

Variables	Statistical Properties				
	$n$	$X^2$	$P$	$df$	Cramer's $V$
Direct reference	1027	15.35	<.001	2	.12
Membership categorization	1863	16.61	<.001	2	.09
Suppression	705	10.13	.006	2	.006
Depersonalization	38	.57	.75	2	.12
Characterization	1562	5.78	.05	2	.06
Identification	602	14.65	<.001	2	.15

*Note.* An effect size (Cramer's  $V$ ) of .07= small; .21= medium and .35 = large (Gravette & Wallnau, 2004, cited in Pallant, 2007). The effect size for all variables was small.

As can be observed, Persian political agents acted significantly different from English agents in all subcategories of nomination (except depersonalization) and predication strategy. According to Gravetter and Wallnau (2004, cited in Pallant, 2007), an effect size (Cramer's  $V$ ) of .07 is considered small; .21, medium and .35, large. On the basis of this criterion, the effect size for all significantly different variables in this study (with Cramer's  $V$  above .08 & below .21) indicates a medium effect size (except characterization which indicates a small effect size).

## 6. Discussion

Overall, Persian political agents tended to be more anonymous, implicit, indirect and subjective in comparison to English agents in their representation of others. One explanation for this phenomenon is the sociopolitical context

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within which they are operating. Given that power resources are not distributed equally in different societies, different political groups within a society may, due to societal pressures, face some sort of controversy between what and how they wish to say or represent and what and how they are allowed to say from a specific position. Because the political context of a country like Iran may not allow for the free and equal operations of all political groups and imposes restrictions on their discourse, it is not odd for the political agents to be as indirect, anonymous and implicit as possible in their representation of others.

A second explanation is a socio-pragmatic one and related to a sort of ritual politeness and the pragmatic phenomenon of saving others' face through losing and sacrificing one's own face, characteristic of Persian speakers. It signifies a desire for humiliation and a strategy to respect for others' social status to maximize communicative effectiveness. This feature of interactional pragmatics, referred to as *Taarof* (compliments) in Asian culture has been the topic of investigations in many pragmatic studies (including among them Eslami, 2008; Miller, Strong, Vinson & Brugma, 2014; Tan & Farashaiyan 2015). To the extent that Persian agents use implicitness as a strategy to represent equal others (equal in their relative social distance as themselves) or those lower in social status than themselves this can be a plausible explanation. However, because in most cases they use implicit strategies for those in power (national or international), but explicit strategies for others in an equal or lower position, the first explanation seems more plausible.

The final interpretation of this phenomenon is related to Persian agents' underlying tendency to remain impartial and innocent in politically challenging issues, a discourse strategy employed due to the specific situation the social actors are operating. This may arise out of a tension to express

what they believe to be ideologically true and what they consider to be appropriate in the specific context (political discourse) they are operating. Therefore, the speech strategy of political correctness or avoiding utterances and actions that can marginalize and offend certain groups of people (Szilagyi, 2016) may be another justification for the covert discourse strategies used by Persian political agents. However, Political correctness has been recently challenged because of its association with censorship or violence of free speech as well as deception and obsession leading to tolerance of irrational, harmful and abnormal ideas and actions (Szilagyi, 2016).

All this means that the construction of identity for others transcends a mere consideration for the immediate context, participants and even genre to which a text belongs, but relates to higher actual or perceived relations of power within and across cultures, the ritual, social conventions characteristic of the specific culture the discourse producers are operating as well as a tendency arising out of a desire to remain innocent and not to offend others.

## **7. Conclusion**

As was stated before, the discourse strategies employed by different political agents in the two languages were quantitatively and qualitatively different though this difference was quantitatively more outstanding. The preference for the consistent or overuse of one substrategy to the suppression of others across cultures may be associated with the degree to which a person intentionally or unintentionally decides to be transparent, open, vague or opaque due to the distance felt in relationships of power. Whatever the explanation for such linguistic behavior, the implications of the findings of this study for advanced Persian EFL learners, especially Political Science students and developing appropriate teaching programs cannot be ignored. The differences in the patterned ways of representing others across cultures

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can influence others' communication with and interpretations of our discourse. Second language acquisition research and theory needs a deeper understanding of the cultural differences in the quality and quantity of the identity representation strategies employed by social actors. In the same vein, designing programs and developing materials for Political Science ESP learners may demand awareness raising techniques with regard to the way these learners interpret English political discourse or their own construction of others' identities in their English discourse.

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