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Research Paper

**The Persian Cultural Pragmatic Schema of
mehmân-navâzi (Hospitality): Rituals and
Linguistic Formulae**

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Abstract

The aim of the present paper was to explore the cultural schema of *mehmân-navâzi* (hospitality) in Persian. An ethnographic approach was utilized to collect data from a number of sources including online and naturalistic data gathered from movies and daily conversations. The constant comparison method (Creswell, 2013) was then employed to analyze the data for the rituals and linguistic formulae used to enact the schema. The results indicated that the rituals in the practice of this cultural schema can be divided into three categories of welcoming, serving, and leave-taking. The examples of linguistic formulae and expressions used in the enactment of the schema revealed that the realization of this schema was closely associated with other cultural schemas underlying many aspects of communication in Persian including *tâ'ârof*, *âberu*, *rudarbâyesti*, *shekastehnafsi*, *adab va ehterâm*, and *tavâzo*'. The findings are then discussed with reference to the implications the study has for intercultural communication and more specifically, cross-cultural politeness research, as well as for teaching English as an international language.

Keywords: Cultural Conceptualizations, Cultural Pragmatic Schema, Hospitality, Intercultural Communication, Persian

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1. Introduction

Cultural schemas, or more precisely cultural pragmatic schemas (Sharifian, 2008b) are cognitive knowledge structures that individuals draw on in communication and interaction within their cultural environment (Nishida, 2005). Being instantiated in different aspects of language, cultural schemas encompass attitudes, beliefs, concepts, knowledge, values, and norms that underpin ways of reasoning across cultures (Sharifian, 2016). They are pools of shared knowledge among the members of a speech community that include semantic and pragmatic meanings (Sharifian, 2016) and enable the interpretation of cultural experiences and expressions (Malcolm & Sharifian, 2002). Put another way, they influence the kinds of inferences individuals make at the level of pragmatic meaning and the kinds of pragmatic devices they employ (Sharifian, 2008). As in the case of the Chinese speech act of greeting, the sentence “Have you eaten?” is not intended to be a genuine question; rather, it is a greeting associated with food and eating (Sharifian, 2016).

Cultural schemas are distributed and imprinted heterogeneously in the minds of the members of a cultural group rather than being equally shared by individuals (Sharifian, 2003). The variability in the distribution of cultural schemas accounts for misunderstandings and provides a ground for evaluating speakers’ communicative behavior (Sharifian & Tayebi, 2017). While relying on shared or assumed cultural conceptualizations is necessary for communication within a group, falling back on one’s in-group schemas in intercultural communication can be a hindrance to successful communication

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of meaning. For instance, Sharifian and Tayebi (2017) indicated how the heterogeneous distribution and divergent interpretations of the cultural pragmatic schema of *tâ'ârof* led to breaches or impressions of impolite behavior on the part of the interlocutors.

That being said about the significance of cultural schemas in intercultural communications, this study seeks to explicate the cultural pragmatic schema of *mehmân-navâzi* 'hospitality' in Persian through an ethnographic approach. The impetus for the current study stems from the researcher's personal experience at an international conference held in Iran in which the place for keynote speakers and panel presenters was separated from that of other participants during the breaks and they were offered more elaborate offerings and servings. While the practice of showing great respect and esteem for guests, especially those of a higher rank, and accommodating their needs to the best of one's ability is a conventional practice of Persian culture representing greater *mehmân-navâzi*, foreign guests and participants questioned the reasoning behind segregating locations in this manner.

Iranians are well-known for having the highest norms for hospitality (Biswas-Diener et al., 2019) which include their utmost efforts to provide comfort and relief to their guests regardless of their economic status (Mehran, 2019). Hospitality is characterized as "an inherent trait of Iranian-ness and an abiding expression of identity" (Yarbaksh, 2018, p. 1) and Iranians are distinguished for their demonstration of 'pure hospitality' which involves welcoming the unknown and unnamed individuals to such an extent that the newcomer may pose a threat or danger to the host (Derrida, 2000b). Although there have been sporadic efforts to address Iranians' culture of hospitality (e.g., Mehran, 2019; O'Gorman, 2007), none of them have explored the issue from a cultural-linguistic perspective. The majority of the existing literature analyze hospitality in Iranian culture as a social value but studies adopting a

linguistic and sociolinguistic lens are non-existent. In this regard, Karrebæk and Ghandchi (2017, p. 38) also assert that “the notion of hospitality is rarely engaged with in socially oriented linguistic work (e.g., sociolinguistics, applied linguistics, linguistic anthropology and ethnography, etc.).”

This study seeks to make a contribution to an understanding of Persian culture and language and the way cultural conceptualizations can shape and inform speakers’ linguistic behavior. The study is also intended to increase intercultural understanding, or what Sharifian (2005) refers to as metacultural competence. The significance of such an understanding lies in the fact that discrepancies in cultural schemas, for instance, the absence of a shared understanding of hospitality, or lack of knowledge of the appropriate behavior within this schema can bring about discomfort, offense to the interlocutors, and at times cultural clashes. Moreover, studying the practice of hospitality is fundamental to understanding the interactions and relations of individuals in a community, the moral obligations they have toward the Other, their social roles and identities as insiders or outsiders, as well as for heritage language education (Karrebæk & Ghandchi, 2017). Finally, the study provides insights into the exercise of social face enacted in relation to others (Herzfeld, 1987). As such, the study addresses the following research question:

How is *mehmân-navâzi* as a cultural pragmatic schema enacted in Persian?

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Cultural schemas in Persian

Cultural schema theory explains how individuals develop specific cognitive patterns as a result of their involvement in social and cultural life and how the accumulation of this knowledge over time affects people’s interpretation of their native culture and the outside world (Gao, 2021). Various studies have been undertaken to explore different cultural pragmatic

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schemas in Persian with the aim of unraveling the cultural roots of speakers' pragmatic knowledge. Sharifian (2005), for instance, probed the cultural pragmatic schema of *shekastehnafsi* 'modesty' in Persian speakers' responses to compliments. The findings indicated that Persian speakers heavily drew on the schema when responding to compliments. They tended to negate or scale down the compliment, downplay their own talents or possessions while simultaneously admiring the same traits in their interlocutors, or reassign the compliment to its initiator, his/her family members, or associates. In another study, Sharifian (2008) collected data from Persian-speaking learners of English on the extent to which they called upon *shekastehnafsi* in their L1 and English as an L2. He found that the schema might be enacted differently depending on the context of communication since a speaker might draw on the schema in L2 but not in L1. As such, he concluded that the relationship between language and cultural conceptualizations went beyond 'negative transfer' or 'pragmatic failure'.

A further study was conducted by Sharifian and Jamarani (2011) on the cultural pragmatic schema of *sharmandegi* which is instantiated by the formulaic expression of *sharmandam* 'I'm ashamed'. They found that the schema underlay the instantiation of a multitude of speech acts including expressing gratitude, offering goods and services, requesting goods and services, apologizing, refusing, and accepting offers. They stated that the schema was rooted in the more fundamental cultural schema of *adab va ehterâm* indicating that the person employing such an expression might be making an undue demand or have done something wrong or something not in accordance with the interlocutor's *sha'n* (dignity). Given that Persian speakers enacted the schema in intercultural communication contexts with Australian interlocutors, they asserted that there was a potential for misunderstanding on the part of non-Persian speakers.

Babai and Sharifian (2013) also explicated the cultural pragmatic schema of *rudar-bâyesti*, literally glossed as ‘face-out-of-obligation’. This concept is often reflected in the refusal strategies employed by Persian speakers. It denotes a feeling of distance between interlocutors due to social and relational differences between them or the high degree of respect and esteem the speaker has for another individual. Accordingly, individuals often refrain from enacting face-threatening acts such as refusing offers or invitations. Therefore, they may accept the offer or invitation despite a strong dislike for it in order not to offend the person making the offer. It also has an important bearing on the way a person behaves toward others or represents him/herself to others such as showing hospitality. That is, to extend hospitality, people often present their best to a person with whom they have a high degree of *rudarbâyesti*.

The cultural pragmatic schema of *tâ’ârof* has been subject to analysis by a number of scholars (e.g., Beeman, 1986; Koutlaki, 2002; Sharifian, 2010b; 2014). It is literally referred to as ‘ritual courtesy’ (Beeman, 1986, p. 56) and ‘ritual politeness’ (Koutlaki, 2002, p. 1740). According to Sharifian (2016, p. 510), the purpose of this cultural schema is “to create a form of social space for speakers to exercise face work and also to provide communicative tools to negotiate and lubricate relationships”. The schema is instantiated in conversations in the form of ostensible offers and invitations, repeated rejection of offers, repeated instances of offers, hesitation in making requests, frequent giving of compliments in conversations, and offering a decorative object to others when receiving a compliment on it (Sharifian, 2014). The schema also includes ostensible invitations during leave-taking (Eslami Rasekh, 2005). However, it is most often associated with ostensibly and repeatedly offering goods and services to others (Koutlaki, 2002; Rafiee, 1992; Sharifian, 2016). It involves several rounds of a ‘verbal dance’

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(Sharifian, 2016, p. 515) with one speaker insisting on an offer and the other party rejecting it. Furthermore, individuals are encouraged to accept an offer only after several denials. As noted by Sharifian (2014), distinguishing between genuine and ostensible offers is not easy. Therefore, speakers engage in more *tâ'ârof* to discern the difference.

As one of the most fundamental cultural schemas, *âberu* morphologically consists of 'âb' (water) and 'ru' (face) (Sharifian, 2007; 2011). It shows how one's face is associated with one's social image and "how a person as a whole would appear to others" (Sharifian, 2011, p. 141). According to O'Shea (2000, p. 101), in Persian *âberu* "or honor, is a powerful social force. All Iranians measure themselves to a great extent by the honor they accumulate through their actions and social interrelations". Accordingly, people should maintain their own *âberu* and that of others. It is also associated with polite language and behavior and practicing *adab* (Sharifian & Tayebi, 2017).

2.2. A Sociocultural Perspective on Hospitality

Hospitality refers to the host's concerns for guests' wellbeing and meeting their psychological and emotional needs (Lashley, 2008). The practice of hosting others in one's home is characterized by dimensions such as responsibility for guests, welcomingness, and a lack of perceived imposition (Meagher et al., 2023). The existing scholarship on hospitality reveals that it is a widely discussed topic within the tourism industry, religious studies, and social sciences (e.g., Farmaki et al., 2020; González-Torres et al., 2023; Mei, 2023; Zheng et al., 2023). For instance, from a social science perspective, hospitality is purported to be practiced in all cultures and as Derrida (2002, p. 361) notes, it is a defining feature of culture itself.

Not only is there a culture of hospitality,
but there is no culture that is not also a

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culture of hospitality. All cultures compete in this regard and present themselves as more hospitable than the others. Hospitality – this is culture itself.

Additionally, the desire to offer hospitality to strangers stems from cultural and religious obligations and extends beyond individuals' status or origin (Lashley, 2008). Socio-cultural norms and expectations also define the rituals associated with hospitality (Lashley et al., 2007). That is, while a guest's contribution in the form of gifts or drinks may be interpreted as the host's lack of affordance to serve the guest in one culture, the lack of contributions from the guests may be regarded as their lack of generosity in another (Lashley, 2008).

Although investigations of hospitality from a linguistic and sociolinguistic perspective are few and far between, language serves a key role in the notion of hospitality. Cordeiro (2014) considered language unfamiliarity or incompetence crucial in defining foreignness and described hospitality as “a practice which involves overcoming the foreigner's potential linguistic unfamiliarity, disorientation or even humiliation, and minimizing her/his linguistic anxieties and potentially stressful ‘communication challenges’” (p. 106). By the same token, Derrida (2005) considered language as the “first violence” exerted on guests as hospitality is often requested in a language that the guests are not familiar with. The literature also documents cases where the language gap creates barriers for interactions between hosts and guests in intercultural visits (Cohen, 2004; Edgell & Haenisch, 1995). In line with these efforts, Blue and Harun (2003) introduced the concept of ‘hospitality language’ which refers to all linguistic expressions related to hospitality concerns including expressions of care for visitors and those representing the generosity of the host. They also identified 4 discernable stages for hospitality language including arrival, familiarization,

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engagement, and departure. Although the introduction of hospitality language was carried out almost a decade ago, there still remains a dearth of scholarly research on the topic and as Blue and Harun (2003) caution, hospitality language may not be taken for granted like other areas of spoken language.

2.3 The Cultural Pragmatic Schema of *mehmân-navâzi* in Persian

As a compound word in Persian, *mehmân-navâzi* is made up of the two morphemes *mehmân* ‘guest’ and *navâzi* ‘caressing’. Literally, it can be translated as ‘caressing the guest’ with the closest equivalent in English being ‘hospitality’. While the concept exists in both English and Persian cultures, there are culture-specific ways of lexicalization and conceptualization of the concept which merit attention. *Mehmân-navâzi* is different from hospitality in that it consists of more delicate and subtle linguistic practices, conventions, and rituals which are the focus of the current study.

Upon guests’ arrival, it is customary for hosts to step outside their home beyond the doorstep to welcome the guests. This ritual is often carried out with all members of the host family standing in a row and welcoming the guests while burning *esfand* seeds (Syrian Rue), which is believed to ward off the evil eye from the guests. In addition, if the guests are highly positioned and valued, the hosts may sacrifice a goat or sheep to prohibit unfortunate events for the guests. At the doorstep, the hosts urge the guests to first enter with several expressions of *tâ’ârof* and this continues for all the entries until the guests are settled in their place. Additionally, the visitors are accommodated in the best part of a room specifically designated for them which is meticulously prepared and adorned with luxurious furniture and other amenities. As such, guests are precluded from sitting in the lower parts of the room which lead to the exit door. They are instead requested to sit in the upper part of the room. As the guests are seated, care is taken to ensure

that the space is as comfortable as possible for them. Therefore, they may be provided with additional cushions to aid their comfort.

Not only are the guests welcomed on several occasions during their stay, but they are also greeted extensively with linguistic expressions associated with the guests' health and affairs as well as those of their associates and family members (Sharifian, 2016). During the guests' stay, the members of the house, and in particular, the youngest members are reminded to meticulously monitor their behavior and words in order to avoid offending the guests. Accordingly, they behave respectfully toward each other as well as the guests. If the guest leaves the room temporarily, the hosts rise on their feet upon his/her rejoining. Furthermore, the guests enjoy such a high societal rank and respect that it is perceived as impolite by Persian speakers to turn their back to the guests or to stretch their feet in front of them. Along similar lines and in accordance with Islamic religious thoughts, guests are considered as God's beloved bringing *rahmat* 'God's mercy' and *barekat* 'blessing' to the host's house. As such, Iranians believe that *dar khoone hamishe bâyard be rouye mehmân bâz bâshe* 'the door of one's house should be always open to guests'. In some parts of the county, doors are left open until midnight suggesting that they are always welcoming and open to visitors.

Owing to the high status the guests hold, they are served and catered to first, with a substantial portion of the food and offerings being allocated to them. To serve the guests in the best way, elaborate food, fruit, and drinks are prepared which are designed and decorated in an appealing way on the *sofreh* (a cloth spread on the floor to serve the meal). Arab (2022, p. 13) views the practice of sharing food around the *sofreh* as "the building block of the ethno-epistemology of sociality in Persian". In a similar vein, Yarbakhsh (2018, p. 8) considers it as "the taken-for-granted cultural landscape in Iran". Furthermore, it is customary for hosts to offer multiple rounds of tea, meals,

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fruits, and other offerings. For instance, when the first cup of tea is consumed, the second and third refills are offered with insistence. By and large, as noted by Yarbakhsh (2018), *sofreh* and ‘open door’ are key symbols of hospitality in Persian. The concept of an ‘open door’ denotes that “‘even if our *sofreh* is empty, our door is open’ to share some *nān o namak* (‘bread’ and ‘salt’) with guests” (Arab, 2022, p. 13).

Upon departure, guests are requested to extend their stay for another meal or day. However, if guests are about to depart, they are presented with gifts and handicrafts typical of the region along with some provisions for their journey including food, drinks, and fruit. Departures are typified by the hosts stepping outside their home and accompanying the guests for a short walk which is referred to as *badraghe* ‘accompanying’. Diverse expressions of gratitude and appreciation are extended to guests for their visit and they are asked to convey the hosts’ regards to their associates including family members.

The rituals surrounding *mehmân-navâzi* are manifold and the specifics can vary from one region to another. However, what is referred to above constitutes the common core schema which comprises giving status and providing comfort to visitors (Boudou, 2012). Moreover, the practice of schema is not limited to family members or close friends but extends to strangers as well.

3. Methodology

3.1 Data Source

As we aimed to provide rich data from diverse contexts and including a variety of individuals as hosts and guests (with different social ranks, degrees of familiarity, ages, etc.), the data were collected from multiple sources: 1) communicative data from naturally occurring *mehmân-navâzi* encounters, 2) interviews with 18 individuals from different age groups, educational and

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social backgrounds regarding *mehmân-navâzi* rituals and the specific formulae utilized in each ritual (welcoming, serving, leave-taking). Interviews were employed as they are believed to more closely mirror the use of language in real communicative situations (Sharifian & Jamarani, 2011), 3) online data including tourists' logs recounting their experiences of how they were treated as guests in Iran in conjunction with advertisements, quotations, video clips, and posts on social media. The use of online data has the advantage of covering a wide range of pragmatic, contextual, and cultural factors (Sharifian & Tayebi, 2017) considering that the experiences come from a range of educational, cultural, geographical, and social backgrounds and their diverse relationships, 4) historical and religious documents as well as Persian literature depicting how guests are represented in literary texts and Islamic thoughts, 5) a corpus of 5 movies that feature examples of *mehmân-navâzi*, notably, *Mehmân-e-mâmân* (Mommy's Guest).

The movie portrays a poor family who have nothing at home to serve their guests, a nephew who is an officer and his newly-wed wife. The guests who intend to pay a short visit to the host family, the officer's aunt, decide to stay for dinner when they are faced with the host father's insistence. The host family, together with the help of neighbors and friends, does their best to collect items and ingredients for dinner. Accordingly, every neighbor plays a part to collect ingredients from their own or their parents' home. In addition, the neighbors come together to assist the host mother in cooking and preparing different meals using the collected items. Eventually, they come up with a variety of foods and drinks at the dinner party which are served not only to the guests but also to all the neighbors around the *sofreh*.

3.2 Data Analysis

The constant comparison method (Creswell, 2013) was utilized to analyze the conversations, verbatim accounts of interview data, field notes, and other

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data collected from online resources, movies, and documents. First, the compiled data was read several times to familiarize ourselves with it. Second, a list of rituals related to *mehmân-navâzi* was extracted from the given data. The rituals were then subsumed under more general categories which could encompass the majority of the data. The identified categories included welcoming, serving, and leave-taking rituals. Next, the linguistic expressions and formulae (i.e., a fixed system of linguistic formulae and expressions which are repetitively used (Netz, 1999)) for each ritual were extracted from the pool of collected data and examples of more representative and illustrative expressions were selected to elucidate each ritual. Finally, the cultural conceptualizations underlying each ritual and the accompanying formulae were examined.

4. Results

In this section, first, the rituals of the pragmatic cultural schema of *mehmân-navâzi* will be presented and next, the linguistic formulae and expressions associated with each ritual will be described.

4.1 Welcoming rituals

In Iranian culture, guests are adored and valued on different occasions during their visit. To begin with, guests are warmly welcomed upon their arrival by all the members of the host family outside home or at the doorstep and as they are settled in with warm greetings and expressions such as the followings:

- (1) Ghadam ranje kardid (Your steps were in pain; You took the trouble to come).
- (2) Ghadam roo cheshm-e mâ gozâshtid (Your steps are on our eyes; you are most welcome).

Given that one's eyes are regarded as the most precious part of their body, Persian speakers award their most precious possession to their guests who have taken the trouble to come to visit. It indicates that the guests enjoy a high value and are treated with honor and respect.

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(3) Khâneye mâ ro roshan kardid (you made our home bright).

(4) Safâ âvardid (you brought pleasure and happiness).

(5) Cheshme mâ ro roshan kardid (you brought light to our eyes).

In addition to the conception that guests are conceived to bring blessings, flourishing, and pleasure to the hosts' home, these formulaic expressions consider light for the guests' presence where they not only enlighten the hosts' home but also bring vision (light) to their eyes. In consequence, upon the guests' departure, Persian speakers in the eastern parts of the country (Khorasan province) commemorate the guests with expressions such as *târikaye mehmân toun ro dârid* 'How do you feel about your guest's darkness' where they inquire about the host's feelings as a result of the guests' light being lost. In these situations, the formulaic expression used in response to this query is *roshanâei-ye shomâ kam nashe* 'May your light not be lost' praying for the inquirer's light to be long-lasting. In some cases, the hosts may utilize linguistic formulae to express their astonishment, honor, and pride in the guests' visit.

(6) Râh gom kardid (You must have lost your way).

(7) Âftab az kodoum taraf daroumade (where did the sun rise?).

(8) Sari be faghir fogharâ zadid? (What made you pay a visit to the poorest of the poor?)

In the first sentence, the host expresses his surprise by saying that the guests must have lost their way which led them to the host's home. In the second sentence, the host complains about not having seen the guests for a long time by likening the guests' visit to an extraordinary and unexpected event, akin to the sun rising from another side. In the third sentence, the host expresses gratitude for the guests paying them a visit and humbles himself to the poorest of the poor who have the honor and pleasure of hosting such

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precious guests at home. Taken together, in these sentences, the hosts reveal their surprise at the guests' visit as they do not view themselves deserving such a favor from the guests. It stems from the high status they consider for guests and on the contrary, the lower societal ranking they hold for themselves. Accordingly, they express their gratitude for the guests honoring them with a visit.

The high esteem and respect that Persian speakers hold for guests is also evident on other occasions throughout their visit. For instance, having welcomed the guests outside home, the hosts often negotiate with the guests and urge them to first walk inside the house at the doorstep and this ritual is rehearsed for all other entries before the guests are settled in their places. It is regarded impolite by Persian speakers to pass an entry before the guests. Linguistic expressions illustrative of this ritual include not only exchanges of *tâ'ârof* but also swearing.

(9) Khâhesh mikonam Shomâ aval befarmâeed.
Aslan nemishe. Bad az shomâ. (I urge you to
walk in first; it's not possible at all, after you).

(10) Befarmâeed to ro khodâ. tâ'ârof nakonid.
(Swear to God, here you are. Don't do tâ'ârof).

4.2 Serving rituals

Regarding the preparation of foods and other servings, hosts dedicate a significant amount of time to preparing a diverse array of offerings including tea, sweets, nuts, and fruits. Additionally, an attempt is made to set an elaborate *sofreh* with a variety of foods, drinks, and appetizers made of rice, various meats, and vegetables. Conventionally, foods, beverages, and other servings are artfully arranged in stylish dinnerware sets and containers which are often reserved specifically for guests. The concern with the generosity of the hosts and elaborate offerings is represented in the Persian speakers' saying that *Sofrehye rangârangi andâkhtand az in var tâ oun var* (A colorful *sofreh* was spread from here to there).

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The more varied the servings, dishes, and beverages are on the table or *sofreh*, the more the hosts are considered to have practiced positive face or *âberu* (face and reputation). The other facets of *âberu* include the host family observing courtesy and politeness not only in relation to the guests but also in relation to each other, in order not to offend the guests. Accordingly, the hosts tend to apologize for anything that might be perceived as *zesht* (ugly and awkward), such as the host family needing to leave the guests temporarily, discussing their personal problems, or anything that could potentially embarrass the closer guest in front of his/her company. These rituals, accompanied by the hosts dressing in their fanciest clothes, extra cleanliness and decoration of the house, preparing extensive servings and other delicacies to treat the guests are often known as *sang-e tamâm gozâshtan* (putting the heaviest stone: doing one's best to serve the guests and make them feel comfortable). However, the prototype interpretation of this formula refers to a *sofreh* which is elaborate, large in size, and covered with a variety of colorful foods and beverages. Moreover, as the social status of the guests increases, more weighting is added to the servings, verbal exchanges containing *tâ'ârof*, and other rituals.

However, regardless of the guests' societal status, they are assigned a high rank which is instantiated in many aspects of the host-guest relationship. This includes the guests being the first to be served and to start eating the meal, a substantial portion of the meal being provided to the guests on the *sofreh*, making everything on the *sofreh* accessible to the guests, and offering the guests more food and drinks by bringing the food to their front and inviting them to add to their plates. The hosts may also take the initiative to replenish the guests' plates as they are about to finish their initial serving. In addition, the hosts indicate that they are completely at the service of the guests by fulfilling their needs and accommodating their requests, or by

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making the necessary provisions for them in advance (preparing sleepwear, beds and cushions, clean towels, etc.). There are often frequent formulae encouraging the guests to feel comfortable helping themselves to meals and other supplies. Examples include:

(11) Ghâbele shomâro nadâre, befarmâeed (It's not worthy of you; here you are).

(12) Manzele khodetoune rahat bâshid (Consider here as your home and feel free).

More specifically, the guests are invited to help themselves to whatever on the *sofreh* by referring to the individual dishes using expressions such as:

(13) Azin torshi befarmâeed khodam dorost kardam. (Help yourself to these pickles; I've made them myself).

(14) Ghorme bekeshid shomâ ke hichi nakhordid. (Have more Ghorme (a kind of stew with small pieces of meat and fresh vegetables; you didn't eat anything).

(15) In salad ke dast nakhorde cherâ nemikeshid? (The salad has been left untouched; why didn't you have any?).

The cultural rationale behind multiple rounds of offering food and services is that the guests may also tend to refuse the offer out of *adab* 'politeness' (Sharifian, 2004). At the end of the meal, the hosts also apologize for any shortcomings and inadequacies acknowledging that the quality of the food may not have met the guests' expectations.

(16) Kamo kasri boud be bozorgavâriye khodetoun bebakhshid. (Forgive any shortcoming out of your generosity).

(17) Chizi nakhordid. Noushe jân. (You didn't eat anything. Bon appetite!)

(18) Sharmande agar ghazâ khoub naboud. (I'm ashamed the quality of the food was not very good).

4.3 Leave-taking Rituals

The leave-taking ritual is called *badraghe* meaning accompanying in Persian. Before the guests' departure and upon their announcement to leave, the hosts request the guests to extend their stay, particularly if the guests' departure is at a time close to mealtime. Expressions include:

(19) Kolbeye darvishiye mâ ghâbele shomâro nadaâre shab pîshe mâ bemounid (Our humble cottage is not worthy of you. Stay with us tonight).

(20) Ye loghme noono mâst peidâ mishe dore ham bokhorim. (We can find a grab of bread and yogurt to eat together).

Out of *tavâzo'* (modesty or humility), the hosts describe their house using lower-order words to emphasize that the guests' *sha'n* (dignity and value) surpasses their possessions and having the guests' company would be an honor for the hosts. In the second sentence, too, the hosts offer to share everything they have with the guests to enjoy their company even if it's just a simple meal. All in all, expressions of such nature imply both the hosts' great modesty and courtesy as well as their readiness to provide everything at their disposal for the guests' comfort and company. As the guests prepare to leave, the hosts extend courtesy and *tavâzo'* by pairing the guests' shoes and placing them in front of the guests. At the doorstep, verbal exchanges take place where the hosts express their gratitude and appreciation for the guests' visit and invite them for future visits. They also convey their regards to the guests' associates and family members through exchanges such as the followings:

(21) Kheili khosh âmadid, az didane shomâ khoshhâl shodim, zahmat keshidid (You are most welcome; we got extremely happy to see you; you put yourself into trouble).

(22) Bâz ham in varâ tashrif biârid. (Pay us more visits).

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(23) Be khâle bachehâ salâm beresounid (Say hello to the aunt and others).

Furthermore, *badraghe* is often performed with the hosts stepping outside the doorstep to accompany the guests and waiting for the guests to walk away before the hosts close the door. Additionally, a bowl of water is poured after the guests to wish for their safety and health while they are on the way. The linguistic expressions typical of *badraghe* include *dar amân-e khodâ* (May God protect you); *safar bikhatar* (Have a safe trip) and *safar be salâmat* (Have a healthy trip).

5. Discussion

This paper aimed to explore the cultural pragmatic schema of *mehmân-navâzi* in Persian. The examples of linguistic formulae and expressions accumulated from different social contexts revealed that the realization of this schema is closely associated with other cultural schemas underlying many aspects of communication in Persian including *tâ'ârof*, *âberu*, *rudarbâyesti*, *shekastehnafsi*. Through extensive use of *tâ'ârof*, the hosts repeatedly request the guests to first walk inside at the entries, offer them more food and drink, urge them to feel at home, ask them to extend their stay, etc. In this case, *tâ'ârof* is described as “a subtle dance of communication, in which the participants step back and forth repeatedly, never taking over the stage.” (Mehran, 2019, p. 157). According to Koutlaki (2010), *tâ'ârof* is a polite style of communication resulting from religious teachings which emphasize generosity and hospitality. It is practiced to indicate deference, humility, and cordiality towards the interlocutor. In other words, the liberal use of *tâ'ârof* is an indicator of hospitality (Sharifian, 2014) where the more *tâ'ârof* the hosts engage in, the more hospitable they are perceived to be. As an underlying construct affecting almost all aspects of social life in Persian culture, *tâ'ârof* itself is deeply interwoven with other highly-valued notions of *adab* (politeness) and *ehterâm* (respect) where people go to extra lengths

to display polite behavior and avoid offending others (Sharifian & Tayebi, 2017).

Tâ'ârof is also closely linked to *rudarbâyesti* in that the more *rudarbâyesti* one has with guests, the more they accomplish *tâ'ârof*. In other words, the higher degrees of *rudar-bâyesti* with the guests which often denote the guests' higher social status and rank, or lack of a close relationship with them, entail adding more weighting to the practice of *mehmân-navâzi* including *tâ'ârof* exchanges (Babai & Sharifian, 2013; Sharifian, 2016). However, irrespective of the guests' societal ranks and positions, the use of expressions indicated that, out of *tavâzo*, the hosts tend to exhibit a significant amount of "self-lowering" of themselves and "other raising" of the guests (Beeman, 1986). Examples included using lower-order words to describe their homes, accommodations, quality of food and servings, as well as offering all their possessions to ensure guests' comfort and satisfaction.

Additionally, the enactment of *mehmân-navâzi* revealed how the schema was intertwined with the practice of positive politeness and courtesy. For instance, hosts tended to express *sharmandegi* 'I am ashamed' for the less-than-worthy-of-you quality of the meal even though they had invested a considerable amount of time and effort in preparing the food and its quality was deemed acceptable (Sharifian & Jamarani, 2011). The aim of such habitual acts was to devalue the hosts' attempt to serve the recipient and to imply a higher *sha'n* (dignity) for the guests. Positive politeness was also demonstrated by the hosts refraining from doing anything which could be perceived as *zesht* (awkward and ugly) by the guests whether in relation to the guests themselves or in their interactions with other family members. Sharifian and Tayebi (2017) refer to this courtesy or politeness as '*adab*' and describe it as the cultural schema underlying Persian speakers' interpretation of (im)polite behavior. In effect, they consider *adab* as the overarching

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macro-structure which encompasses the lower-level cultural schemas of *shekastehnafsi*, *tâ'ârof*, *sharmandegi*, *rudarbâyesti*, and *âberu* and maintain that the speakers' interpretation of (im)polite behavior depends on how these cultural schemas are practiced in interaction.

Moreover, the realization of the schema was related to *âberu* or what is referred to by Brown and Levinson (1987) as positive face since the hosts' best attempts to practice *mehmân-navâzi* were hinged on greater *âberudari* (keeping face). In this sense, better *mehmân-navâzi* was interpreted as a way to enhance both the hosts' and the guests' face and dignity. This is largely due to Persian speakers' ways of thinking in which individuals' value is bound to their relationship with 'other selves' rather than being tied to the individual 'self' typical of the Western pattern of thought (Ahmadi & Ahmadi, 1998, p. 110).

Overall, the encoding of the schema in different ways suggests the high degree of esteem the hosts hold for the guests which is not necessarily based on the hosts' interpretation of the guests' societal ranking or hierarchy, but stems from concerns with politeness (Sharifian & Jamarani, 2011). Furthermore, the study results confirm Beeman's (1986) observation that the quality of social life in Iran differs significantly from that of other countries including its close neighbors. He describes such relations as an art involving complicated skills.

6. Conclusion

Drawing on a discursive approach, the study examined the rituals, conventions, and linguistic formulae associated with the cultural pragmatic schema of *mehmân-navâzi* in Persian culture. It illustrated how various cultural norms and schemas are intertwined in the realization of this schema. The study has implications for intercultural communication and more specifically, cross-cultural politeness research since the enactment of the

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cultural schema of *mehmân-navâzi* can give rise to misunderstandings among non-Persian speakers in international communication. It may result in the problem that the intended function of *mehmân-navâzi* is perceived as too strong or awkward by the receivers. For example, Sharifian and Jamarani (2011) and Sharifian and Tayebi (2017) reported that the hosts' apologies for the food not being of high quality were interpreted by Anglo speakers as fishing for compliments and out of place. By the same token, given that perceptions of (im)polite language are linked to cultural conceptualizations (Sharifian & Tayebi, 2017), failing to adhere to the cultural schema appropriately may be perceived as face-threatening (Brown & Levinson, 1987) and may be interpreted as indifference and disrespect by Persian speakers. Accordingly, awareness of the cultural differences in the realization of this schema can prevent misunderstandings and discomfort.

The study also contributes to teaching English as an international language, which involves using English as a tool for communication among speakers of different language backgrounds (McKay, 2002). Given that the interlocutors with different language backgrounds may draw upon their cultural schemas in different ways while using English, courses on meta-cultural competence (Sharifian, 2008) are essential where the aim of such courses is to enhance learners' awareness and foster positive attitudes toward the cultural systems associated with the use of English as an international language.

That being said about the importance of cultural schemas, more research is required to explicate not only the way the cultural schema of *mehmân-navâzi* is enacted in other cultural groups and in English as an international language but also how other cultural conceptualizations and schemas are linked to speakers' linguistic behavior.

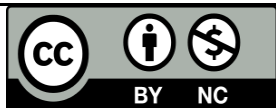
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