

Impoliteness in Power-imbalance and Power-neutral Relational Contexts: Evidence from a Persian TV Drama

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated impoliteness in relational contexts. Interlocutors analyzed the data from a Persian TV drama from two perspectives: intentionality and perception of impoliteness. Two relational contexts were identified: power-imbalance and power-neutral, each comprising two types of impoliteness: reciprocal and non-reciprocal. Reciprocal impoliteness occurred in hostile and conflictual situations where impoliteness was both intended by the speaker and perceived by the recipient as a direct face-attack. In non-reciprocal impoliteness, however, when power imbalance was due to family hierarchy, the recipient of impoliteness remained silent; in other situations, the intentional face-attack was tolerated, unless the recipient's social identity face was directly attacked. In power-neutral situations, impoliteness was not reciprocated when intimacy existed between the interactants. It was neither intended nor perceived as face threatening; however, direct face-attack was reciprocal in hostile situations. The findings of the present study point to the significant role of the relational context in the interpretation of impoliteness.

Keywords: *Impoliteness; reciprocal; non-reciprocal; relational contexts; power-imbalance; power-neutral*

INTRODUCTION

Films and TV dramas provide rich socio-cultural and linguistic data for research studies in these fields since they "deal with thoughts and practical experiences of everyday life" (Lambertz & Hebrok, 2011, p. 40). As Rose (2001) asserts, the film is "an essentially unexplored potential resource for research on discourse and pragmatics" (p.309). The results of her study indicate that "film language appears to be most representative of naturally-occurring speech from a pragmalinguistic perspective" (Rose, 2001, p. 309). Research also suggests that TV series, to a large extent, reflect real-life situations and cultural changes in the lifestyle of people (Ahmad, 2012; Brunson, 2000). Since TV dramas attract a large audience, they are bound to impact society (Gannon, 2009).

TV dramas have been investigated from different perspectives. Cevik (2014), for example, studied Turkish TV dramas from a sociocultural perspective and claimed that they function "as a cultural diplomacy tool" (p. 78), introducing Turkish culture to the outside world, in particular to neighboring countries in the Middle East. This perspective relates to sociopragmatic and speech act studies, including impoliteness, using TV drama data (e.g., Culpeper, 2005; Dzo'ul & Pramono, 2021; Izzani, 2020; Keshavarz, Cetereisi, & Asit, 2020; Khazdouzian, 2018; Haryanti, 2016). Some researchers have also examined TV dramas from the point of view of feminism and the role of women in society (e.g., Ahmad, 2012; Gannon, 2009; Hohenstein & Thalmann, 2019; Lambertz & Hebro, 2011). However, to the best of the present author's knowledge, impoliteness in Persian TV dramas has not been investigated yet. Therefore, to fill this research gap, the present study seeks to analyze the use of impoliteness in a popular Persian TV drama.

Now let us turn to impoliteness, which is the main focus of the present study. Considering the complexity of impoliteness and the variables involved in its use and interpretation, defining it is not straightforward. Therefore, different scholars have defined impoliteness from different perspectives. As Bousfield (2008) notes, "definitions of impoliteness vary amongst researchers working on the phenomenon. They vary even amongst those who have worked together in the past" (p. 30). Culpeper, Bousfield and Wichmann (2003) define impoliteness as "the use of strategies designed to attack face, and thereby cause social conflict and disharmony" (p.1545), while Bousfield (2008) defines it as "constituting the issuing of intentionally gratuitous and conflictive face-threatening acts (FTAs) that are purposefully performed" (p.132). To Culpeper (2005), "impoliteness comes about when: (1) the speaker communicates face-attack intentionally, or (2) the hearer perceives or constructs behavior as intentionally face-attacking, or a combination of (1) and (2)" (p.38). Culpeper (2005) further elaborates on attacks on the face and discusses two types of face: *quality face* and *social identity face*. He defines these two types of faces as "quality face (e.g., attacks on the inadequacy of the contestant in answering the questions) and Social Identity face (e.g., attacks on the contestant's regional accent and job)" (p.40). Similarly, Limberg (2009) views impoliteness as "an intentional form of face-aggravation caused by verbal and

nonverbal means and interactively construed in a particular context" (p.1376). As can be observed, all of these definitions emphasize *intentionality* and *face-threatening* features of impoliteness. However, discursive/relational approaches to impoliteness are not primarily concerned with intentionality; rather, they "focus on the way that discourses inform what speakers think is possible to say, how they view their relations with others and with their communities, and how power impacts on these relations" (Van Der Bom & Mills, 2015, p. 180). In other words, (im)politeness depends on how participants in different contexts and cultures perceive it. For example, suppose in a culture like Arabic (Ghazzoul, 2019), directness is the norm of interaction. In that case, it is not perceived as being impolite by interlocutors, while the same speech act is considered impolite in some other cultures and languages like English. Even within a single society and culture, the same linguistic form may or may not be perceived as impolite depending on the relationship between interlocutors. A case in point is the Persian expression *khæfe sho* 'shut up' in the context of Iran, as will be illustrated in the discussion of the data. Therefore, "it is not self-evident that a particular linguistic utterance is unanimously perceived as (im)polite by everyone involved in the interaction" (Locher, 2006, p. 252). Locher and Watts (2005) have made an interesting analogy by saying "just as beauty is in the eye of the beholder, politeness depends on the individual's perception as well" (p. 29). Locher (2006) further argues that "The discursive approach to politeness recognizes the evaluative and norm-oriented character of politeness by claiming that politeness belongs to the interpersonal level of linguistic interaction" (p.253). The present study aims to encompass both of these features, i.e., intentionality and discursive elements of impoliteness, as will be discussed in the results section.

Concerning impoliteness strategies, Culpepper (1996 and 2005) divided them into five categories: bald on record impoliteness, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness, sarcasm or mock politeness, and withholding politeness. He used the super label strategies instead of politeness strategies; however, the term 'strategy' is used for consistency here. These strategies are summarized below.

In *bald on record impoliteness*, the face-threatening act is performed in an explicit, clear, unambiguous, and concise manner in circumstances where the face of the addressee is attacked. *Positive impoliteness* refers to the use of strategies intended to damage the addressee's positive face-wants, such as ignoring a person's self-image, excluding them from a group, and making them uncomfortable by using inappropriate identity markers (e.g., using professional titles instead of intimate ones, like 'mate'). *On* the other hand, negative impoliteness refers to strategies designed to damage the addressee's negative face wants, i.e., imposing on them or ridiculing and scorning them, thereby causing them embarrassment and humiliation. Culpepper defines *sarcasm* or *mock politeness* as strategies in which the face-threatening act is performed indirectly using politeness strategies that are insincere and contradictory. For example, saying something ironically means just the opposite of what is said, such as 'your office is tidy,' while it is

untidy. Finally, *withholding politeness* refers to a lack of politeness where the listener would expect it. For instance, when the speaker does not apologize for wrongdoing or acknowledge the interlocutor's appreciation.

Now let us turn to the definition of response to impoliteness, which has not received due attention in the literature. As Culpeper, Bousfield, and Bichmann (2003) note, "research on both politeness and impoliteness has tended to overlook what the recipient of face threat or attack does" (p.1562). Of the few studies conducted on response strategies to impoliteness, Culpeper, Boufield, and Wichmann (2003) are perhaps the most comprehensive. Drawing on Culpeper (1996), Harris, Gergen, and Lannaman (1986), Culpeper et al. (2003) state that the recipient of an impoliteness face attack has two main options available to them: either to respond or to remain silent and do not counter face attack.

In other words, the recipient of the face attack may accept the legitimacy of the impoliteness act by the speaker, i.e., they may accept the blame for provoking the act of impoliteness by having done something wrong. In this case, the recipient may or may not apologize. However, if the recipient decides to counter the face-threatening impoliteness, there are two options available to them: they may be offensive or defensive in their responses to impoliteness. As the name implies, the offensive response involves countering a face attack aggressively with a face attack; whereas "defensive strategies primarily counter face attack by defending one's own face"... "such strategies seek to deflect, block or otherwise manage the face attack" (Culpeper et al. 2003, p. 1562). The contribution of the present study to the literature is that it uses data from a Persian TV drama to shed light on the use of impoliteness in two main relational contexts, i.e., power-imbalance and power-neutral, each comprising two types of impoliteness: reciprocal and non-reciprocal. The study will also present data on the two main types of face-attack response strategies, namely defensive and offensive strategies.

RESEARCH METHOD

The present study's design is descriptive qualitative since the discussion of the results is presented descriptively. The data for this study come from a popular Persian TV drama called *Asheghaneh' Romantic'*. It was written, produced, and directed by Manoochehr Hadi and was premiered and aired in 2017. *Asheghaneh* portrays modern changes in Iranian society, particularly the social life and relationship of young people. It is a narrative of a few friends and families and their problems. The story begins with an advertising company run by three close friends: Reza, Soheil, and Peyman. In addition to humor and romantic scenes, there are many arguments, quarrels, and fights in this TV drama that trigger impoliteness. Therefore, it was considered a good candidate for the present study.

Like other TV dramas, *Asheghaneh* consists of a series of televisual stories in different episodes consisting of the succession of events, usually with the involvement of more than

two characters in each scene. Initially, the researcher for entertainment during his leisure time watched *Asheghaneh*. However, being interested in socio-pragmatics, the frequent use of different impoliteness in the soap gave him the impetus to carry out a qualitative descriptive analysis of the data.

To find sufficient number of impoliteness cases in the TV series, all the 17 episodes were watched by the researcher; however, since the focus of the study was impoliteness, only the dialogs containing impolite utterances were considered for further analysis. Each episode lasted about 50 minutes and was broadcast every Wednesday night. The objective was to identify different types and strategies of impoliteness and responses to face-attacks in the drama's dyadic and/or multiparty interactions, i.e., interactions between two or more characters in a scene, as illustrated in the excerpts below. Accordingly, 11 out of 17 episodes, which provided rich data on impoliteness, were chosen for data analysis. Scenes containing instances of impoliteness were written down, and the interactions were transcribed for data analysis. The researcher based on his native language intuition and linguistic background did the transcription. To present the transcribed text more readable, the use of technical phonetic symbols was minimized, and instead, more use was made of familiar orthographic digraphs (e.g., 'sh' instead of /ʃ/, 'kh' for /x/, etc.). The transcription of original Persian utterances and their idiomatic English translations are provided in the Results & Discussion section below.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The bottom-up analysis of the data yielded two types of relational contexts in which impoliteness occurred: *power-imbalance* versus *power-neutral*. In each of these two situations, two types of impoliteness strategies emerged: *reciprocal* versus *non-reciprocal*. These are illustrated in Figure 1.

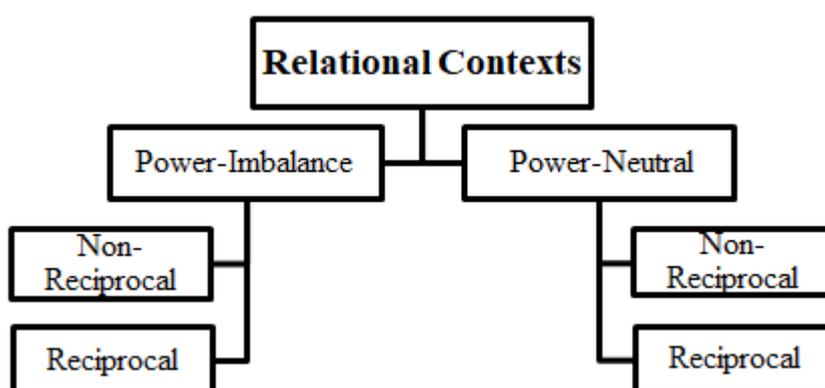


Figure 1. Relational contexts and types of impoliteness

The following Excerpts illustrate these different types of impoliteness and relational contexts.

Non-reciprocal impoliteness in power-imbalance relational contexts

Excerpt 1. Background: Pegah (P), a young gynecologist from an affluent family, routinely scolds and insults her husband, Soheil (S), because she has *high status* (being a doctor) and *wealth* (possessing a luxurious apartment in an affluent region of Tehran, and an expensive villa in the Caspian Sea region), while Soheil does not have any of these privileges. Therefore, his wife has power over him. Soheil once opened up to his close friend, Reza, about his relationship with his wife and said:

S: *un ræʔis-e, dæstur mide, mæn hæm migæm chæshm. mæn shodæm pæræstar yek sæg.*

She is the boss, she issues orders and I obey. I have become her dog's nurse.

Note 1. *chæshm* 'eye' or *ruye chæshmæm* 'on my eye' is a typical Persian expression when one willingly does somebody a favor, or obeys the orders of a superior.

Note 2. The above sentence is a case of reported speech, and not an utterance containing impoliteness.

With this background, now consider how Pegah insults her husband in the following exchanges.

Scenario: Pegah is sitting on the sofa relaxing and watching Dr. Oz's satellite program when Soheil comes home and opens the door seeing that Pegah's dog, Poppet, has made everywhere dirty by leaving mess (excrement) on the floor, but he does not dare to complain directly and openly about it. He says hello, but his wife just ignores him and continues eating her snack without bothering to greet him back. Then, Soheil goes to the kitchen to wash his hands and Pegah gets angry, and the following conversation occurs between them.

P: *æshpæzkhane jaye dæst shostæn nist aqa, hezar dæfe bet goftæm*

I've told you a thousand time that kitchen is not the right place to wash your hands, Sir.

In this utterance, Pegah uses the title 'Sir' in a derogatory fashion; she is contemptuous and scolds Soheil.

S: *væli khune jaye sæg negæh dashtæne*

But a house is the right place to keep dogs.

In this move, Soheil indirectly and sarcastically complains about the dog as he does not dare to criticize his wife openly.

P: *in che tærze hærf zædæne*

How dare you talk to me like this (uttered aggressively and from the position of power indicating that

S has no right to criticize her, even indirectly).

S: *chetori hærf mizænæm. ye negah doroværet bendaz. sæge khune ra be gænd keshide*

(Gently and politely) What did I say. Take a look around you. The dog has made a mess out of everywhere.

P: *bet goftæm papet adæt nædare tænha tu khune bemune. khub qærar bud bebærish mæhd,*

chera næbordish?

I have told you before that Puppet is not used to staying at home alone. Well, you were supposed to take him to the nursery, why didn't you? (complainingly)

S: neresidæm, kar dashtæm Pegah jan, jælæse dashtæm æzize mæn

I couldn't, I was busy dear Pegah, I had a meeting my dear (talking politely and apologetically using endearment terms).

As can be seen, in his defensive response strategy, Soheil tries to manage and deflect impoliteness and attack to his face.

P: bejaye in hærfha ye jaru biar injaha ra tæmiz kon, bæ?d hæm ye tei bekesh

Instead of saying these, bring a broom and clean here, then mop the floor.

(Being annoyed by these orders, S goes to the bathroom and shuts the door)

P: soheil shenidi chi goftæm

Soheil, did you hear what I said? (angrily, shouting and with contempt implying why didn't you follow my order).

Then, Soheil comes to the scene with a broom and dustpan and begins to clean the dog's stool (while still wearing his tie as he did not get a chance to change his clothes).

As observed, this conversation is full of contempt, belittling, and intentional impoliteness on the part of Soheil's wife since she has power over her husband. The exchanges show how defensive Soheil is in trying to deflect and manage the attack to his face. He mildly criticizes his wife for keeping a dog at home, but his wife aggressively and from the position of power says: "How dare you talk to me like this". Being defensive, Soheil says softly and politely: "What did I say. Take a look around you...". Despite this, Pegah orders him to bring a broom and clean the mess, then mop the floor. But when S goes to the bathroom and shuts the door, being annoyed by these orders, Pegah shouts at him and tells him to do what she ordered him to do. Soheil, being in a weak position, tries to tolerate and manage his wife's continuous face attacks to avoid confrontation.

Excerpt 2. In the TV drama *Asheghaneh*, Haj Yunes (a wealthy and religious businessman) frequently attacks the quality and social identity face of his younger son, Reza, even in front of his wife. In one scene, Haj Yunes encourages Reza to close his advertising company and work for him in his enterprise, instead. After Reza politely rejects the offer, Haj Yunes gets upset and says: *lajbazio kale shaq, bara hamine ke darja mizani*

You are obstinate and bull-headed, that's why you do not get anywhere.

Reza who is a grown up man and the father of a child was obviously offended by these remarks, but instead of saying anything that may disrespect his father he looks down and remains silent as a sign of respect. However, his father continues scolding and belittling him indirectly by comparing him with his elder brother, as follows:

dadash mohsento bebin, bahushe ke tuneste khodesho be injaha beresune. motmænenæm ba jorboze'i ke dare tu entekhabat ræi miare

Look at your brother Mohsen. He is smart, that's why he has been able to climb the ladder (implying that you are not intelligent). Certainly, with the potentials that he has he will win the election [for the parliament]

Needless to say, his father's humiliating and belittling remarks are perceived by Reza to be impolite; however, owing to power imbalance due to family hierarchy in Iranian culture, he does not reciprocate face-attacks.

Reciprocal Impoliteness in power-imbalance relations

Excerpt 3. Soheil has taken Poppet, Pegah's dog, out but he loses her. When he comes home empty handed, his wife gets extremely angry and starts attacking him verbally since Poppet is her prize possession.

P: *hæmin ælan miri, gom mishi æz in vila miri birun*

You get lost and leave this villa right away.

S: Pegah (just calling her name with rising intonation, pleading her to stop attacking his face).

However, Pegah ignores his pleading and becomes more aggressive. She holds Soheil by the arm and forces him out of the villa while saying:

P: *æge peidash nækærdi bærnemigærdi. boro gomsho byaresh.*

If you don't find her, you won't come back here. Get lost and bring her back.

S: *nækon.*

Stop it (stop harassing me)

At this moment Soheil asks his guests, Reza and his wife, to go upstairs as he doesn't want them to witness such an unpleasant and aggressive confrontation.

P: *chekar be una dari. bezar hæme befæhmænd cheqædr bi orze'i*

Why do you ask them to go upstairs? Let everybody know how incompetent you are.

S: *jelo mærdom sedato biyar pa'in. mæn dærket mikonæm, asheqesh budi, mifæhmæm, vabæste budi besh. mæge mæn æmdi kærðæm in kar ro? ye juri hærf mizæni engar mæn bordæm sær be nistesh kærðæm. adæm vase ye sæg injuri ba shohæresh hærf nemizæne*

Don't raise your voice in front of other people. I understand you, you loved her, I understand you were attached to her emotionally. I haven't lost her intentionally, have I? You talk as if I have taken her to get rid of her. One wouldn't talk to her husband like this just for a dog.

As can be seen, in these exchanges, Soheil tolerates his wife's impolite behavior and tries to deflect direct confrontation, but she continues attacking his face in front of their guests.

P: *bekhatere je sæg nist. to fekr mikoni bekhatere ye sæge, sæg nist u. to bi ærzeshi, budo nabude u kheili ærzeshe æz to bishtære. to tu zendegi mæn hich færqi nemikoni, væli budo næbude ut u zendegi mæn mikone.*

It's not just for a dog. You think it's a dog-she is not a dog. She is more valuable than you. You are worthless-your existence doesn't make any difference to me, but hers does.

At this point, Soheil, whose social face has been severely damaged and has been badly humiliated in front of his friends, becomes infuriated and starts attacking her back verbally, as follows:

S: *bebænd un dæhæneto*

Shut your [big] mouth.

P: *to dæhæneto bebænd*

You shut your mouth.

S: *dæfe akhærete ke jelo mærdæm intori ba mæn hærf mizæni ha mizæncæm tu dæhænnet sedaye papet ra dærbiari*

It's the last time you talk to me like this in front of others, ha (interjection)! I'll hit you in the mouth so that you'll howl like your dog.

P: *to qalat kardi.*

You dare to.

S: *ahmaq.*

Idiot!

P: *to qælæt mikoni. hich qælæti nemituni bekoni*

You dare to. You can't do a damn thing.

S: *æhmæq*

Idiot!

P: *æhmæq to?i, bædbækht to hærche dari sædaqe sære mænu khanævadæm dari*

You are idiot, you miserable thing, whatever you have is because of me and my family.

S: *chekar kærdin baray mæn*

What have you done for me?

Then, Pegah insults his father and family, which is the red line for Soheil, so he becomes inflamed, picks an expensive vase from the table and throws it on the floor to break, walks in the kitchen like crazy, and uses rather offensive language calling her names while yelling at her.

S: *kesafæte ashkal. sæd dæfe goftæm esme pedære mænu næyar æhmaq, bi sho?ure næfæhm, mæn asheqe to budæm ke bahat ezdevaj kærdæm, zæbun næfæhm.*

You filthy jerk. I have told you a hundred times not to mention my father's name idiot. Fathead, moron, I was in love with you that's why I married you (not for your wealth), you idiot.

As the above exchanges illustrate, Pegah repeatedly uses bald-on-record face-attacks. Soheil, on the other hand, is first defensive and does not want to reciprocate impoliteness due to power imbalance. Instead, he tries to calm her down and deflect confrontation, but when she starts attacking his social identity face in front of his friends, he becomes furious and reciprocate impoliteness regardless of his weaker position.

Non-reciprocal Impoliteness in a power-neutral relations

The following Excerpts exemplify cases of non-reciprocal impoliteness in a power-neutral relations.

Excerpt 4. Three close friends and partners, Reza, Soheil and Peyman, are having a serious talk in their advertising company. However, Peyman is not a serious person and always uses his sense of humor. In the following utterance, Reza, who is upset with Peyman as he keeps talking and getting on Reza's nerves, utters the following impolite sentence:

R: *khæfe khun migiri ya mikhai ta shæb hæmintor mozækhræf begi.*

Will you shut up or you want to talk nonsense until evening?

The Persian expression *khæfe khun gereftæn* 'shut up' is potentially offensive and impolite, which may provoke confrontation. However, given the intimate relationship between the interlocutors, Peyman does not perceive this utterance as impolite. Similarly, the intention of the speaker (Reza) is not to genuinely attack the face of his friend.

Excerpt 5. Mahmud is angry about the people (a singer and his crew) his fiancée has invited to his villa since they have made a mess of the place before they arrived there. He wants them to leave, but Hedye (his fiancée) tries to change his mind by using affectionate language:

H: *eshqæm, bemunæn* (while looking at him pleasingly)

My love, let them stay please.

M: *ey morde shur un cheshmato bebære* (while he accepts)

I approve because of your beautiful eyes.

H: She smiles and is pleased to hear this, instead of getting upset.

In Persian, expressions like *morde shur heikal/cheshmato bebære*, which means 'damn you', are offensive and are heard in quarrels and arguments. However, in the above exchange it is taken as a compliment by the hearer (Hedye) given their romantic relationship.

(Note: In Islamic countries, when someone dies his/her body will be washed, as part of a religious ceremony. This is similar to baptism in Christianity)

Excerpt 6. In this scene, Peyman, while answering a telephone call from his girlfriend uses an offensive term, as follows:

alo eshqe mæn, tule sæg, halet chetore?

Hello my love, how are you puppy?

Traditionally, it is extremely impolite and offensive to call or refer to someone as a dog on religious and cultural grounds. This metaphor is normally used in confrontations and fights as it provokes hostile reactions. However, in this case the intention of the speaker is not to insult his girlfriend, rather to utilize the animal metaphor to show his affection. Similarly, his girlfriend is unlikely to be offended by being called a puppy given that keeping puppies at home and showing

affection towards them has become popular amongst the affluent and younger generation of Iranians, a practice that is still not approved of by the older generation, in particular religious people.

Excerpt 7. In this Excerpt, Soheil is complaining about his close friend's being bad-tempered, as follows:

che mærgete Reza, æz sobh shodi borje zæhre mar, æz hæme chi bæhane migiri.

What the hell is wrong with you Reza, since this morning you've become so bad-tempered, you nag about everything.

Reza's reaction: He does not take offence and remains silent thinking about the project they are discussing.

In Iranian culture, words and expressions associated with death are considered taboo and are avoided unless people are angry with one another. The Persian expression *che mærgete*, like other expressions such as *boro bemir* 'go and die/go to Hell', is impolite and is avoided under normal circumstances; however, owing to history of friendship between the interlocutors it is not intended nor is it perceived as impoliteness. Of course, the English translation of this expression (What's wrong with you?) sounds quite normal and is not considered impolite; however, when we consider such expressions in the context of Iran we will find that they are indeed offensive and in cases of genuine impoliteness they provoke quarrels and fights.

Similarly, *borje zæhre mar* 'the tower of venom' is a negative comment given to ill-tempered people. Though not as offensive as the first expression, under normal circumstances the hearer will not appreciate such a comment and will get upset.

Excerpt 8. In a scene of the TV drama, Peyman tells his guest, Soheil, to leave and go to his house:

pasho boro khunatun

Get up and go home.

In Iranian culture, it is extremely impolite to tell a guest to leave and go to their house. However, considering the intimate relationship between the speaker and the address, Soheil does not get upset and just ignores what Peyman has said and remains seated.

Reciprocal impoliteness in power-neutral relations

Excerpt 9. In a scene of the soap opera, Reza has a confrontation with Gisu, whom he thinks has a clandestine relationship with his affluent and so-called pious father, as the following exchanges illustrate.

R: *bebækhshid khanom. mishe chænd læhze væqtetun ra begiræm*

Excuse me, Ma'am. May I take some of your time?

G: *nækheir*

Nope!

As can be seen, in the first exchange, Reza approaches Gisu in a courteous manner, but the latter withholds politeness. This is perhaps rooted in family education in Iran since girls are advised not be friendly with strangers. However, R is persistent and in the next move she assures her that his purpose is not to do her any harm in order to attract her cooperation:

R: *mæn mozahem nistæm, kari hæm be karetun nædaræm. fæqæt mikhæstæm bahatun hærf bezænæm*

I don't want to bother you, and I don't want to interfere with your affairs. I just wanted to talk to you.

G: *che hærfi, mæn ba foma hærfi nædaræm*

What about? I don't have anything to talk about with you.

Then, she opens the car door again trying to get in, but Reza prevents her and says:

R: *miduni mæn kiæm. mæn pesære haj yunesæm, hæmunke bækhætæk shodi tu zendegish, hæmunke bærash khab didi*

Do you know who I am? I'm Haj Yunes's son, whom you've attached yourself to, whom you have plans for.

G: *haj yunes kie? boro peje karet*

Who is Haj Yunes? Get away!

R: *chænd ruze eine saye donbaletæm. midunæm bash qærar mizari, tu sherkæt, resturan, tu park. dige bash koja miri? karet ine, næ?*

I've been following you just like a shadow during the last few days. I know where you Meet with him, in his office, restaurant, in parks. Where else do you go with him? That is your job, isn't it? (implying she is a prostitute)

Listening to Reza's accusation, Gisu gets furious and slaps him in the face, and says:

G: *khæfe sho*

Shut up!

After this face-attack, she opens the door and gets in the car, but Reza goes to the other side quickly and opens the door, and says:

R: *boro qolabeto jaye dige bendaz, ævæzi u næve dare*

Go and try your chance somewhere else you jerk, he has got grandchildren (and then he leaves angrily).

As can be seen, in this Excerpt there is a gradual transition from politeness to direct impoliteness due to confrontation and mood change. First, Reza approaches Gisu in a polite manner and asks if he can talk to her. He uses the courtesy expression *bebakhshid khanom* 'excuse me Madam', and then asks her permission to talk to her for a few seconds. However, since women normally do not trust strange men, particularly when they invade their private zone (as Reza gets

very close to her when she wants to get in her car), Gisu says she does not want to talk to him. However, since Reza does not want to give up they start attacking each other's face deliberately to the extent that Gisu slaps him in the face when he accuses her of having relations with his father. As can be seen, cases of impoliteness are intended by the speaker to be face-threatening and perceived by the interlocutor so.

Excerpt 10.

After Mahmood accuses Reza of helping his wife to take his assets and run away, Reza gets furious and shouts while pushing Mahmood away:

chera chertopert migi mærdæ hesabi, boro har qælæti doost dari bekon

Why are you talking nonsense, you idiot? Get lost and do whatever damn thing you want to do.

At this bald on record face-attack, the bodyguards attack Reza and beat him up. Then, Reza shouts and tells Mahmood angrily to take his contract and get lost:

...mituni [qarardad ra] bærdari beri gureto gom koni-ælbæte bæd æz tæsfie hesab

You can take it [the contract] and get lost, of course after paying the rest of your due.

Then, the tall bodyguard insults Reza, and Reza says:

boro gom sho baba

Get lost you.

Note that the Persian word *baba* 'father' is used in a derogatory sense here. Together *boro gom sho baba* means 'get lost or go fly kite', which is intended and perceived as a case of bald-on-record impoliteness used only in provocative confrontation.

After further confrontation and being beaten by Mahmood's bodyguards, Reza says angrily:

æge ælan guretun ra gom kærdin ke hich, vægærnæ khodæm zæng mizænæm be polis

You get lost right away or else I'll call the police myself.

As can be seen, in this quarrel scene, Mahmood, who wrongly assumes that Reza and his friends have to do with his wife's swindling him out of his money and possessions, enters the scene aggressively and furiously to the extent that not only he and his men attack Reza's verbally, but also his bodyguards beat Reza up. Impoliteness in such cases is to be anticipated as the situation and mood of the speakers call for it and the recipient of impoliteness, in this case Reza, responds with offense and aggression. Needless to say, Mahmood's intention in calling on Reza's company is to deliberately insult and attack his face for the reasons explained above, hence the intentionality aspect of this speech act. Discursively-speaking, Mahmood's face-threatening intention is clearly and easily perceived by his interlocutor, Reza, who is provoked to engage in this face-threatening act and counters face-attack with offense and aggression.

Excerpt 11. Having lost the car race to a young lady named Hedye (H), being in a fighting mood, Peyman (P) gets off his car and approaches H and her race partner and tells them:

(Note that in Iranian culture, it is against the dignity of a man to be defeated by a woman).

P: *yebār dige inja bebinæmeton ...*

If I see you here once more. (threatening them, while being interrupted by H's friend)

H's friend: *oh kheili dari zer zer mikoni ha*

Oh, you're talking a lot of nonsense ha.

P: *bebænd un gale ra*

Shut your big mouth.

H's F: *boro baba*

Go fly kite/Get lost!

The Persian expression *zer zer kærdaen* has a much more negative load than 'talking nonsense' in English as it is considered very rude and is used in confrontations and clashes, especially among the youth.

Similarly, the expression *bebænd un gale ra* 'Shut your big mouth' is extremely rude. In this expression, 'a big mouth' is derogatorily compared to a 'shoe cover', which is normally big and loose (compared to shoes). This metaphor is used in skirmishes as it usually provokes a fight.

Also the expression *boro baba* 'get lost or go fly kite' is another rude expression and if it is used in arguments it is considered provocative.

As mentioned before, the bottom-up analysis of the data yielded two distinct relational contexts: power-imbalance and power-neutral. Two main types of impoliteness emerged from each of these two contexts: non-reciprocal and reciprocal. The analysis of the data shows that power relationship is a key factor affecting both politeness and impoliteness, as also asserted by Mills (2009), and Watts (2003). As the above excerpts show, in an asymmetrical relationship, the superior normally takes advantage of his/her status, and exercises power to attack the face of those in a weaker position. This finding supports the results of other studies such as Bousfield and Locher (2008), Culpeper (1996), and Khatib and Lotfi (2015). Khatib and Lotfi (2015) found "a positive direct relationship between impoliteness and power in the Persian questionnaire suggesting that when the speaker has more power over the interlocutor, he/she uses more impoliteness strategies and when the speaker has less power, he/she uses less impoliteness strategies" (p. 55). In the same vein, Culpeper (1996) claims that "a powerful participant has more freedom to be impolite, because he or she can (a) reduce the ability of the less powerful participant to retaliate with impoliteness (e.g. through the denial of speaking rights), and (b) threaten more severe retaliation should the less powerful participant be impolite" (p. 354).

Analysis of Excerpt 1 above reveals that the character, Soheil, did not reciprocate impoliteness, and instead tried to deflect his wife's offensive behavior due to power imbalance. As explained in the Results Section, his wife, Pegah, had power over him as she was affluent and enjoyed *high status* as a physician, while Soheil did not have any of those privileges. This finding is in line with those of studies based on Western dramas (e.g., Bousfield, 2008; Culpeper, 1996;

Laitenen, 2011). For example, Bousfield (2008) reports that a restaurant owner and head chef in a TV drama, Gordon Ramsay, frequently berated members of his staff, but they often chose not to respond to his face-attacks due to their weaker power position.

Another example of non-reciprocal impoliteness in power-imbalance relations is in the case of family hierarchy in Iranian culture. In the TV drama under discussion, Haj Yunes (the father) frequently attacks the quality and social identity face of his younger son, Reza. Owing to his superiority as a father he has the option of using different abusive terms to intimidate and offend his son since, unlike his elder son, he has ideological differences with him. Reza's response options, on the other hand, are rather restricted since in Iranian culture children are expected to respect their parents even if they are the target of verbal abuse and offensive behavior. In one occasion, Reza's father even slapped him in the face, and instead of showing any aggressive reaction, he looked down and remained silent, a behavior that is unlikely to occur in the Western culture. Therefore, it can be concluded that the conceptualization and realization of impoliteness, particularly with reference to family hierarchy, is culture specific.

As mentioned above, Reza's response options were restricted. This finding supports Bousfield and Locher's (2008) assertion that "impoliteness – whether understood as intentional face-aggravation or not– is inextricably tied up with the very concept of power because an interlocutor whose face is damaged by an utterance suddenly finds his or her response options to be sharply restricted" (p.8-9).

Power-neutral situations in this study also led to both non-reciprocal and reciprocal impoliteness. The Persian utterances that were used in Excerpts 4 through 8 are potentially impolite in Iranian culture. However, given the intimate relationship between interlocutors, such face-attacks were not perceived as being genuine and impolite, hence they were not retaliated. This finding supports Locher and Watts' (2005) assertion that a seemingly impolite request like "Oi! Pen!" can be quite appropriate among friends. As they say, "...if the relationship between speaker and addressee is such that this form of behavior is interpretable as good-humored banter, it is likely to be perceived as perfectly appropriate to the social situation" (p.7). Based on this, they use the metaphor "politeness, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder" (p. 21), emphasizing the hearer's perception in the interpretation of politeness.

On the other hand, in power-neutral contexts in which interlocutors had no history of friendship they reciprocated impoliteness fiercely attacking each other's face, as illustrated in Excerpts 9 through 11. In such cases, impoliteness is both intentional by the speaker and is perceived as being offensive by the listener. Contrary to this finding, Culpeper et al. (2003) did not find reciprocal impoliteness, or offensive-offensive pairs, as they call it, in their study presumably because the nature of their data was different from the present study. They explain lack of offensive-offensive pairs in their data as not being surprising since as they state, "whilst a clamper has the power to ticket, clamp or even tow away an owner's illegally parked vehicle, they do not

in their particular socio-discoursal role have the legitimate power to respond to the impoliteness of car owners with clear, unambiguous impoliteness” (Culpeper et al., 2003, p.1563). This points to the significant role of relational context. The examples of reciprocal impoliteness in power-neutral situations found in Asheghaneh were cases of aggressive quarrels and fights where the role of power, if any, is not acknowledged.

As illustrated above (Section 3.2), when there is a mood change there is a shift to impoliteness disregarding power relation. However, although in such cases, power and status are no longer acknowledged, the weaker interlocutor may opt for reconciliation and avoid confrontation until he is pushed and forced to resort to impoliteness, as exemplified in Excerpt 3. Initially, Soheil tried to be patient and calm down his wife, who had power over him, by using polite and affectionate expressions, but since she continued attacking his social identity face in front of his friends (face-threat witnesses) he became enraged and attacked her verbally. Although the face-threat witnesses in this scene of the soap opera had a passive role and remained silent during the dispute between the couple their very presence affected Soheil’s reaction to his wife’s face threats. Mueller and Pillar’s (2013) study also confirms the impact of face-threat witnesses on participants’ reaction to impoliteness.

The fact that the characters in excerpt 3 were a young couple shows that even family members may fiercely attack each other’s face pinpointing and highlighting the weaknesses of one another. This is in line with Birchler et al.’s (1975) finding (cited in Culpeper 1996, p. 354) that “even in happy marriages spouses were typically more hostile towards each other than strangers. In a familiar relationship one has more scope for impoliteness: one may know which aspects of face are particularly sensitive to attack, and one may be able to better predict and/or cope with retaliation that may ensue”. Similar to this finding, Pegah and Soheil deliberately highlighted each other’s weaknesses in order to intensify the degree of face-attack.

CONCLUSION

A general conclusion drawn from the present study's findings is the realization that people do not live in a philosopher's paradise to observe norms of politeness all the time. They may lose their temper, get angry, and sometimes engage in quarrels and fights in real-life situations. In such hostile situations, individuals deliberately and explicitly disrespect others and attack each other's faces, as the reciprocal cases of impoliteness in the drama illustrated. Based on the present study results, it can be concluded that the interpretation of impoliteness depends mainly on two main factors: the speaker's intention and (b) the perception of the addressee, whether s/he perceives of the utterance as being impolite or not. However, the interpretation of impoliteness varies according to relational contexts. As mentioned earlier, an identical utterance like *khafe sho* "shut up", which is potentially a face-threatening act in Persian, is not considered to be impolite among intimate friends. The data also point to the significance of the power relationship. As the results

show, the speaker who has power over the addressee may intentionally attack their face, whereas the interlocutor who is in a subordinate position may try to manage and deflect impoliteness instead of retaliating impoliteness. However, when one's *social identity face* is attacked, the inferior may no longer tolerate impoliteness. In the case of the married couple (Pegah and Soheil), we saw that Pegah continuously attacked her husband's *quality face* when they were alone without being concerned about impoliteness being retaliated owing to the power that she had over him. However, when she started attacking his social identity face in front of others, he could not tolerate it anymore and attacked her face severely. From this, it can be concluded that impoliteness is co-constructed by interlocutors; hence responses to impoliteness should be discussed in the light of what triggers them. In the case of the preceding example, Soheil's retaliating face-attack was mainly triggered by the presence of the witnesses, in addition to his wife's impolite behavior.

The data analysis also shows that in cases of face-attacks, individuals have different options to respond to impoliteness. Some of these response strategies seem universal, and others are culture-specific. For instance, in quarrel scenes, face-attacks are universally expected to be retaliated and responded with face-attacks. In such hostile situations, the face of both interlocutors is significantly at stake. Some other strategies seem to be culture-specific. As illustrated above, in the case of family hierarchy in Iranian culture, impoliteness is tolerated. The person whose face has been attacked by a superior (e.g., one's father) may remain silent as a sign of respect.

It must be remembered that the findings of the present study are restricted to cases of impoliteness in a TV drama and are not generalizable to other genres and discourse types, such as political debates, academic discussions, and the like. It must be acknowledged that (im)politeness is a rather complex phenomenon; therefore, in the analysis and interpretation of impolite utterances, one has to consider different parameters and different contexts. Since the conceptualization of impoliteness may vary from culture to culture, a cross-cultural investigation of impoliteness is suggested for further research.

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