

## Applications of Cross-Cultural Studies of Pragmatic Competence

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**Abstract:** *In this paper, the influence of cross-cultural dimensions on the comprehension and production of pragmatic meaning is the center of concern. While the effect of a speaker's primary language and its underlying values and beliefs on the performance of pragmatic meaning may result in misunderstandings and communication breakdowns, positive transfer from the L1 into L2 language use does occur and paves the way for successful communication across languages and cultures. In other words, the emphasis is on multilingual participants who are not primarily learning or studying a language, but rather use it for purposes of communication in a variety of environments.*

**Key words:** *Cross-culture, Pragmatics, Competence, Performance.*

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Cross-cultural pragmatics (CCP) is arguably the subfield of pragmatics that draws the most attention in the modern world where on a daily basis participants interact while not sharing the same native or primary language for communication. Both comprehension and production of pragmatic meaning become quite complicated. A neighborhood in Tehran, for example, has supermarkets where the cashiers use Persian as a second language to communicate with customers, who themselves do not have Persian as their main language. Persian is the lingua franca. The same scenario plays out at the local automobile emissions check agency, where a young Asian mechanic can't quite explain in his rudimentary English the reason a car didn't pass the emissions check. He calls over a supervisor, an African, to explain to the car's owner. The final stage of explanation comes from an official in the office who uses English, also not his primary language. Moreover, "cultural" difference also includes sociocultural dimensions, a term that refers as well to ethnic, group, educational, and other features of people that may influence their language use and nonverbal behaviors. On a daily basis, instances arise that challenge interpretation of participants' verbal and nonverbal behaviors. It is precisely those occasions, when something expected occurs or a conversation goes away, that draw the attention of researchers. CCP thus focuses on illustrating and explaining the reasons for miscommunication and the influences on participants' interactional strategies. Kasper and Schmidt (1996: 258) state that pragmatic competence is "an area of communicative competence which is closely tied to cognitive ability and social experience" in any language, L1 or others.

### 2. A SAMPLE OF CROSS-CULTURAL STUDIES

According to Blum-Kulka (1983), comprehension of a speech act depends on linguistic, sociocultural, and pragmatic knowledge. Even felicity conditions can differ depending on cross-cultural factors. Labov and Fanshel (1977) state that one precondition for requests, for example, is "the hearer must believe that the speaker believes there is a need for action and the request, that the hearer has the ability and the obligation to carry it out and that the speaker has the right to tell the hearer to do so." In other words, Labov and Fanshel contend that felicity conditions are likely to be universal and, further, that there may be neurological evidence of this social action. However, Blum-Kulka (1983) claims that, while these preconditions can only be possible at a very general level, the actual realization strategies of a request vary depending on contextual features, including the values and beliefs of the cultural background of the interactants. She found that a request in Hebrew always involves asking the addressee if they can perform the request:

*Child: Can you fix the needle?*

*Adult: I'm busy.*

*Child: I just wanted to know if you can fix it.*

Thus, a direct questioning of the addressee's capacity to carry out the request is normative in Hebrew, according to Blum-Kulka, while the pragmatic meaning of a commonplace request in American English – Could you pass me the salsa? – does not carry the meaning of inquiring about the addressee's capacity to pass the salsa. It is interpreted as a mitigated speech act of requesting. Clearly, cultural norms are embedded in speech act realization strategies. At issue is the concern to avoid Anglo-American interpretations of cultural models of thought. One scholar who has attempted to address that problem is Wierzbicka (1991). She developed a form of semantic analysis to avoid culture- and language- specific labels based on a shorthand of universal meanings to capture the core features of speech acts. The goal is to illuminate cultural differences while avoiding interpretations that are loaded with a researcher's culturally influenced view. The following is an example of the verb *ask* in English and its semantic core meanings and the functionally equivalent Walmatjari verb. Walmatjari is a Western Australian language; the sentences are created by Wierzbicka (1991: 159).

<i>ask</i>	<i>japirlyung</i>
(a) I say: I want you to do something good for me (X)	(a) I say: I want you to do something good for me (X).
(b) I say this because I want you to do it.	(b) I say it because I want you to do it.
(c) I think: you don't have to do it. I think you know: everyone has to do good things for some other people.	(c) I think: you have to do good things for me.
(d) I don't know if you will do it.	(d) I think: you will do it because of this.

It is clear from this listing of the semantic features of the two verbs that there are different pragmatic meanings. Specifically, the aboriginal language reflects values attached to kinship rights and obligations. The request speech act (see especially c) indicates that due to the kinship system of Walmatjari people, the request will not be refused, as it might be in English.

### 3. DEFINITIONS

Kasper and Blum-Kulka (1993) defined CCP as the study of linguistic acts by language users from different cultural backgrounds. Within this macrocategory, contrastive pragmatics has been a useful descriptive term for research on specific speech acts (e.g. requests, refusals, compliments) across, typically, English and one other language and culture (e.g. Mexican Spanish). The goal of such contrastive studies tends to target one feature or groups of features of one speech act. Contrastive pragmatics has a fuzzy boundary with interlanguage pragmatics, the study of pragmatic competence development of second and foreign language learners, which focuses on nonnative English speakers' use of and acquisition of pragmatic competence in a second or foreign language.

CCP looks at issues outside class-rooms and concentrates on environments where participants are not explicitly learners, but rather full members of the target language community. Women and men who work in the business world in Europe describe themselves as speaking "continental English," proudly so, with the various accents of their first or primary languages, from Swedish, German, Dutch, Hungarian, or Italian. CCP researchers narrow their studies to comparing two groups of people, one of which comprises the native speaker language use of the target language. They interact with each other in schools, health clinics, courtrooms, universities, and international forums on a regular basis. Thus, it is not possible to consider only a particular language feature of language A with a similar one in language B, or even to compare speakers of language A with those of language B. There is clearly a multiplicity of language features and culturally influenced social actions that raise issues such as comparability of a specific speech act or of displays of politeness across cultures, even regions or generations within one culture.

Studying CCP has several purposes. One is a concern of researchers to build a knowledge base of learners' interlanguages and to advance a more comprehensive theory of that phenomenon. A second goal involves enabling teachers to diagnose weak areas that can then be attended to in actual classroom lessons. A third objective is to help learners evaluate their own interlanguage production and work on self-study activities to improve their L2 skills in resources online, in media centers on campuses, and in libraries.

### 3.1. Values and Beliefs

In the sociolinguistic approach to pragmatics, “culture” is not Culture, with a capital C – that is, the literature, music, and art of one speech community or grouping of people. Rather, it is culture as a reflection of the values and beliefs about the world, held by the members of a community which form, in effect, the substratum of their everyday life. The largely unexamined values and beliefs constrain perceptions, expectations, and assumptions about the role of language and communication in general and the interpretations of language use.

What must be taken into consideration to account for cultural influences on language and related behavior? CCP investigates how human behavior, influenced by participants’ underlying values and beliefs, is translated into instances of language in use. Most researchers in pragmatics have adopted the view that culture does indeed have a role to play in language behavior. Specifically, research has shown that a speaker’s intended meaning, mediated by linguistic symbols, may be interpreted or misinterpreted in cross-cultural contexts due to each interactant’s own norms of interpretation. That is, social actions of speakers mirror the underlying worldview of their primary language. For instance, teachers’ use of praising language in classrooms may be viewed very positively and even as a requirement to encourage and reward students for class participation and the quality of their written work. However, not all teachers and students share this value and belief; constant praising can be interpreted as patronizing, repetitious, and discriminatory behavior, especially if the teacher does not praise all students equally.

The values and beliefs from cultural models of thought are embedded in talk both at the micro and the macro level. The list of micro features includes prosodic cues, turn taking, indirectness, nonverbal cues, and speech act realizations. With regard to macro level aspects, researchers look at such pragmatic concerns as interpretation of illocutionary force, perception of politeness, and violations of the CP or maxims. As for production, form/function mismatches and topics that may be taboo in the second language culture may interest communication research experts. The influence of background knowledge may result in individuals’ adhering to the cultural norms of their primary tongue to maintain ethnolinguistic identity. These lists are not exhaustive, but suggestive of the everyday features where culture influences production and interpretation of meaning. CCP examines behaviors that are manifest or overt and others that are latent or covert. For example, an intonation contour that accompanies a phrase may be interpreted only by examining the latent meanings, such as how a particular society conceives male and female roles. The language use may signal that women are expected to use language differently than men. Holland and Quinn (1987) have studied the language use of subcultural groups to understand the conceptual categories of their worldviews. The research shows that young women’s and men’s dating habits in Iran derive from their family backgrounds and mass media depictions of roles in gendered relationships. A well-known work that deals with cultural models of thought is that of George Lakoff (1987), entitled *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things*. Lakoff found that the Australian aboriginal language Dyirbal has a conceptual category, *balan*, which includes the items mentioned in the title of his book. Thus in the Dyirbal model of the world, the items are grouped into the category of “dangerous.” Arabic also includes a category of *haram*, that is, unclean or taboo things; that category or grouping contrasts with *halal*, that is, clean or appropriate.

It is useful to learn how cultural groups perform their values through speech events and language use at the event. They provide important baseline data for comparison studies. Cultures deal differently with values such as authority, individualism and interdependence, secular and sacred aspects of life, trust, spontaneity, and restraint.

Thai people, for example, value dependence, restraint, hierarchy, and separation of public and private life. Thailand is one of many countries where sacred dimensions play a role in daily life. For example, Thai Buddhist monks visit homes early in the morning, begging for food. Families fill their bowls with food. This practice earns the donors “merit” with Buddha. This nonverbal behavior is accompanied with verbal messages in the local language displaying respect for this sacred practice and the monks themselves. In Iran, cooperation and competition are often cited as two values that characterize the differences between male and female interactional patterns. Holmes (2008: 307) includes this example in a discussion about the higher frequency of men interrupting women in conversations; interruptions are evidence of competition. Here is a Persian dialogue between Iranian man and woman.

Woman: maghale-tan be koja resid?

Man: teye do hafteye gozashte kheili natunestam rush kar konam.

Woman: *besiyaar khob. Midunid che-tor un [mitune]*

Man: *[aahaan] chaay meil daarin?*

Woman: *khob bale. Dorost mesle [maghaale man]*

Man: *[mamnun]*

Woman: *motmaennan. Baraatun migam [maale man]*

Man: *[aahaan] vaaghean dust daaram baa-haatun sohbat konam – amaa ajale daaram. Mibinametun.*

Woman: *bale.*

The words inside the brackets are uttered simultaneously and as the data shows, each time, the man interrupts the woman and steals the turn of talk, continuing with the topic he is interested in, rather than hers. This type of information can be helpful for understanding language use and related behaviors in Iran. It must be kept in mind, nevertheless, that CCP is based on generalizations; no country of the world is homogeneous and this fact requires guarding against overgeneralizations, stereotyping, and discrimination. Further, societies and cultures change. Cameron (2000) delves into a recent phenomenon in the U.K., what she calls customer care philosophy. She found changes in the politeness strategies of the language use of sales clerks and others involved in providing customer services in the U.K. Urban areas all over the world exhibit examples of language use that may differ from that of the countryside in multiple ways, from lexical choice to phonological variables and evidence of social distance signaled by choice of address.

This overview of potential sources of discomfort or misunderstandings in cross-cultural contact situations illustrates the difficulties in interpretation of pragmatic meaning in general. What is left unsaid becomes considerably more complex in CCP, and the determination of what is meant from what was said a virtual quagmire. The next section examines one approach to the analysis of causes of communication glitches in cross-cultural contexts.

### **3.2. Pragmatic Failure**

Pragmatic failure refers to mistakes in producing and understanding situationally appropriate language behavior. According to Thomas (1983), the inability to interpret intended meaning may be due to regional, ethnic, gender, and class differences within a community and across cultural boundaries. In other words, there are intracultural and intercultural differences. Culturally influenced patterns of behavior not only result in production difficulties, but also incomprehension problems, as listeners tend to interpret others' language use through the lens of their own worldviews. Even within one culture, pragmatic norms differ from region to region. Tannen's studies of New York conversational style (2005) indicate that the machine-gun style questions of some Jewish New Yorkers may communicate positive, solidarity friendliness, a pragmatic norm, whereas Midwesterners or Southerners may regard the speaker as overbearing, nosey, and aggressive.

Another sociocultural feature that is not often recognized is class differences. A recent example in Iran media presented the case of a policeman who attempted to arrest a highly educated professor from a famous Iran university who is also of a different racial background from the policeman. The policemen are stereotypically of middle-class backgrounds while a professor would be in a higher class, despite other characteristics of the individual. The discussion in the media about these dimensions of the two individuals went on for days.

According to Erickson (1984), there are three categories of pragmatic failure. First, at the level of explicit, referential meanings, there can be inappropriate transfer of speech act realization strategies or of expressions from the L1 to the L2 that can be interpreted differently. This is termed pragmalinguistic failure, which involves differences in the linguistic encoding of pragmatic meaning or force. This type is usually due to transfer or interference from the first language and can be observed in the linguistic forms used to, for example, apologize, to enact politeness, or to hedge a request. The differences may arise in the additional phrases that accompany, for example, an apology. Bergman and Kasper (1993) studied speech act by native speakers of Thai and of English as well as nonnative

Thai speakers of English, where they considered such features as the role of contextual factors in choice of apology strategies by those three speaker groups. The apology strategies could vary along several scales: severity of the offense, obligation to apologize, degree of offense to the addressee's face, social distance between the participants, and the need to take responsibility. Bergman and Kasper found differences in the use of apology routines by the three groups in their data collection. In particular, 50 percent of the apology routine use by the Thai nonnative English speakers reflected transfer from Thai apology patterns. Nonnative English speakers may express surprise when they hear Americans use the word "sorry" when giving condolences to someone whose family member has recently passed away.

The second category of pragmatic failure – sociopragmatic failure – refers to mismatches in terms of the implied social meaning of a word, phrase, or speech act. The mismatches derive from divergent assessments of the social aspects of the context of utterance, such as the social distance between the speaker and addressee and the rights and obligations of speakers and listeners. One example involves the assumption that calling a senior faculty member by his first name entitles the graduate student to telephone that person at his home late in the evening or during the weekend.

Third, there can be misattribution or faulty assessment of other participants' intentions, competence, and background knowledge. In this category, the presuppositions underlying speaker meaning need to be unpacked. In the north of England, postal clerks, both male and female, may address their regular customers with "Morning, luv, what can I do for you?" Customers not used to the word "luv" may take offence, seeing the male clerk, in particular, as sexist or too familiar with the woman customer. The effect of misunderstandings of this sort in cross-cultural or regional cultural contact environments is to attribute them to personality flaws (someone may be regarded as rude as the result of her or his personal communication style). Or the discomfort may be due to ethnocultural origins, thereby stigmatizing or stereotyping all members of an ethnic group (Tannen 1986).

### 3.2.1. Pragmalinguistic Failure

In one example of pragmalinguistic failure (White 1993), the speech act realization strategies of Japanese and English requesting behavior were found to cause discomfort, particularly because of the word "please," when used by Japanese speakers of English to make requests. In the case of requests by native speakers of English, the speaker wants the addressee to do something that will benefit the speaker. This is a standard felicity condition for requesting in English.

*Could you please open the door for me? My hands are full.*

A request can be a face threat for the addressee, that is, an imposition. That possibility typically causes the speaker to use a form of mitigation to do redressive action. Moreover, a request is not deemed to be successful if the addressee is the beneficiary. For instance, an office worker who received a box of chocolates as a gift may share the present with her colleagues by saying: "Have a chocolate" or "help yourself." She wouldn't add "please." If she did, her colleagues would assume she wanted them to help her eat the chocolates to avoid breaking her diet! So the word "please" correlates with a benefit to her. However, it is common for Iranian speakers of English to use the word "please" in English when they would use *lotfan* in Persian. *Lotfan* is normally translated as "please" even though the two words are not functionally equivalent. *Lotfan* can be used with speech acts of requesting, inviting, giving permission, and offering. In the case of invitations and offers, the speaker wants the addressee to do something that benefits the addressee; in other words, the addressee obtains something she/he wants. Consequently, an Iranian speaker of English may use "please" inappropriately with invitations and offers, transferring from Persian.

Have a seat; please [*Lotfan befarmaaid benshinid*]

Due to the transfer from the first-language strategies, the Iranian speaker causes a pragmalinguistic mismatch. One can argue that there is no serious misunderstanding in such a case, particularly in informal contexts with conversational partners of the same social status. The implicature of the English speech act realization is that the superior is being treated as a subordinate, thus threatening his face needs to be acknowledged as the director of the program. Felicity conditions can be tricky across cultures and social roles.

Another everyday context where pragmalinguistic mismatch arises is regarding the form of address for waiters and waitresses in restaurants throughout the world. In Mexico, *joven* (young person) is

used even with older servers; in Japan, at noodle shops, *onisan* (little brother) or *onesan* (little sister) is common. In the United States, clicking one's fingers or whistling would result in no service at all as most American service personnel would be insulted by a signal they would consider "rude." In Peru, clapping to get the attention of a waiter, however, is the norm.

### 3.2.2. Sociopragmatic Failure

Mismatches are more likely when interlocutors do not share the same sociocultural background. Social situations may be viewed differently across cultures. Also, some events may be culture-specific: a Buddhist ordination ceremony for a young man in Thailand has no counterpart in another part of the world. A corollary is that the linguistic and nonlinguistic behaviors vary and reflect the values and beliefs about the event as it is defined by the culture in which it is embedded.

Sociopragmatic failures come up in the context of job interviews in cross-cultural situations that are highly charged as such gate-keeping events require that an interviewee respond to questions according to the expectations of the interviewer. If the interviewee has difficulty with the language and, in addition, does not share the same expectations about job interviews, there are likely to be unpleasant consequences. Roberts, Davies, and Jupp (1992: 42–8) claim, specifically, that interviewees may not be able to "read between the lines" to correctly interpret the interviewer's covert meanings. Anglo-American interview style, for example, requires candidates to sell themselves, whereas interviewees from a different sociocultural background may shy away from such explicit self-presentation. Here is an example of part of a job interview in London, with A, the English interviewer, talking with B, a bilingual man from Iran, with near-native proficiency in English, but with different expectations about job interview discourse. In line 7, A asks B to make some positive comments about his work at his current place of employment. However, B misinterprets the question and it appears that he wants to get the job with A's company out of personal desires and not because he would find the new company better in ways that would make him a desirable employee. "The candidate's honesty combined with rather different assumptions about how personal to be or how to present one's commitment and worth, set the interview off on the wrong footing"

In essence, B could not interpret the pragmatic meaning of line 7 because he did not share the same view of the function of interviews in this different sociocultural context. Consequently, B did not produce the expected sociopragmatic meanings of emphasizing his positive qualifications that might have gotten him the bus driver job.

A: . . . why do you actually want to leave? It's a nice steady job

1. B: Well, the thing is um you know it's better to change the jobs and get other jobs I was very interested in working for L\_\_ Transport you know right at the beginning so . . . because I couldn't get the job I had to take the R\_\_
2. A: Uh huh so did you actually apply to us before for a job?
3. B: I applied once very I . . . once when I came here you know a long time ago
4. A: And what happened then . . . at that stage?
5. B: Well um I failed the test [chuckles]
6. A: For a guard and you failed the test at that stage OK and since then you've worked as a process operator what do you think L \_\_ Buses is going to offer you that R\_\_ don't offer you?

### 3.2.3. Misunderstood Intentions

The third type of cross-cultural pragmatic failure involves mismatches of expectations and intentions at a more macro level. Both pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic glitches concern linguistic features and communication strategies, such as the performance of speech acts. A classic book in the field of pragmatics that focuses on this third type is Tannen's *That's Not What I Meant* (1986). The subtitle is "How conversational style makes or breaks relationships." In Part II, she elaborates on conversational strategy use in relationships that are based on divergent presuppositions. On the topic of indirectness, she states: "Many people, especially Americans, tend to associate indirectness with dishonesty and directness with honesty, a quality we see as self-evidently desirable" (p. 57). Yet, upon analysis of American spoken language, it becomes clear that Americans do practice indirectness, despite the belief. The presupposition that Americans value directness is not sustained.

There are several reasons participants do not always “mean what they say.” Speakers use this strategy intentionally to soften messages to maintain rapport with others. It is a form of politeness to avoid conflict and to signal camaraderie and membership in the same group. Honesty can damage others’ feelings, be insulting, and break boundaries between people who prefer less encroachment. The motivations for use of directness or indirectness can differ cross-culturally and across ethnic groups. One cross-cultural example concerns a secretary in a university office in Japan who used English to greet a visiting professor from the United States.

*Secretary: oh, you look like you’re ready to go to the beach*

An icebreaker, showing her desire to be friendly in a way she may have seen Americans do elsewhere. What made this indirect comment particularly difficult to interpret was the social distance between the two: a secretary, especially one virtually unknown to the professor, would not be expected to make such a comment in the U.S. Moreover, the professor knew that the general practice in Japan is to deny or avoid compliments and thus she assumed that the secretary was criticizing her attire. Yet, in the professor’s culture, secretaries don’t criticize people with higher status. A “correct” interpretation is impossible to arrive at due to the mixture of cultural norms and assumptions about the appropriacy of this indirect use of language.

### 3.3. Listener Behavior

One aspect of interactional talk is the relative lack of attention given to the role of the listener in the co-construction of meaning in conversation. Yet it is important not only cross-culturally, but also within a pluricultural society. A more recent study of Iranian students and their teachers in an English for academic purposes program and mainstream university classes demonstrated how the Iranian students’ use of silence as a form of listenership display led too often to the teachers’ perceptions of their lacking competence, being shy, or lacking a commitment to study. Thus, the display of listenership is a particularly sensitive feature in CCP whether one is concerned with communication across cultures within one speech community or across geopolitical boundaries.

The case of listener behavior across cultural boundaries was the focus of studies by both U.S. and Japanese researchers: LoCastro (1987, 1990), and Maynard (1986). Their research questions centered on (1) how frequently verbal and nonverbal listener cues were used in Japanese talk compared with American English talk; (2) the functions of the listener cues across the two cultures; and (3) the location of the occurrence of the cues in the stream of talk.

This greater sensitivity to an overt demonstration of conversational harmony and the existence of a folk linguistic term for it, i.e. *aizuchi*, contrasts with Anglo-Americans’ lesser awareness of this behavior. However, even in the U.S., lack of overt attention on the part of a listener while talking will cause the speaker to stop talking, seek eye contact with the listener’s eyes, and then resume talking or not resume talking if there is no eye contact or gaze returned.

Given that the listener responses help the speaker monitor whether or not the interlocutors are following the talk, lack of responses or asynchronic responses by the listener signal that the talk is not being understood or that something has gone awry in the interaction. In addition, the timing is important. They are expected to occur more frequently in Japanese talk than in American English, and thus, when a Japanese speaker of English is interacting with an American in English, transfer from the L1 practice may be noticeable. Needless to say, the less frequent cue pattern in English is also likely to be transferred to the talk of an American speaking in Japanese. Frequency and timing are both important cross-culturally.

In addition, the functions of listener responses can differ as well. Researchers have found listener behavior in general may signal (a) attentiveness, (b) understanding, (c) agreement, and (d) continuation of the talk (see Schegloff 1982). As noted above, expected listener displays let the speaker know the listener is being attentive to what the speaker is saying. In addition, beyond attentiveness, the listener may wish to demonstrate agreement with the content of the speaker’s talk or at least understanding of the content of the talk. Understanding and agreement are not the same thing; there are instances when the listener wishes only to signal understanding while not wanting to display agreement for a variety of reasons. As a continuer, listener behavior cues tell the speaker to continue talking as the listener does not wish to take a turn at talking. However, the cues are indeed ambiguous and there are likely to be more than one cue and one function for any one instance. Then, the context serves to disambiguate the listener’s pragmatic meanings.

Tannen (1986) suggests that Americans are more likely than Japanese to expect listeners to show agreement with the content of the speaker's talk. The use of indeterminacy can be intentional or due to lack of proficiency in the target language. Eslami-Rasekh (2005) looked into invitations in Persian and English to learn how to distinguish genuine from non-serious invitations. International students from many countries complain that, when an American says "let's have coffee together," they cannot understand whether the invitation or suggestion is "real." The same complaint can be heard, however, in England from American exchange students!

Eslami-Rasekh (2005) used a data set of unplanned Persian invitations and an interview data set to describe features of the two types of invitations in that language. Her comparison data of English invitations was from Isaacs and Clark (1990). She used their framework for data collection and analysis for her study. Eslami-Rasekh's results point out several features:

- The structure of non-genuine invitations in Persian is more complex than those in English.
- Features of non-genuine invitations are present in the English ones.
- Those same features, while present, in invitations in Persian are not adequate to allow a distinction to be made between non-genuine and genuine invitations.
- Invitations that could be categorized as genuine in English could be classified as non-genuine by Persian speakers.
- Persian speakers are likely to use a greater number of non-genuine invitations in their daily lives as a form of ritual politeness (*ta'arof*).

This list of descriptions of Persian vs. English non-genuine and genuine invitations paints a picture of the indeterminacy of enacting the speech act of inviting others to have coffee or to attend a special event together. One striking feature of the Persian acts is the higher frequency of non-genuine invitations. Ritual politeness or courtesy is found to be highly frequent in many cultures, ranging from Japanese to Persian to African languages in multiple circumstances. Here are some examples from Eslami-Rasekh (2005: 457):

*Maen ta'arof nistaem, jedi migoem, biya tu:* [I am not *ta'arof*, I am serious, come in].

*Ye ta'arofe xosko xaliyaem naekaerd:* [S/he did not even make an empty *ta'arof*].

In the first example, the person speaking is trying to convince a guest outside her/his door to come in and that the invitation is genuine. It is not offered only out of politeness. The second example is a complaint about a person who did not make even an empty gesture to excuse some action. Clearly these examples demonstrate the extent to which ritual politeness is part of the sociopragmatic norms of Iranian discourse. It is not that American interactional norms have no means to engage in ritual politeness. Flattery and complimenting are often forms of ritual attention to face needs of the addressee in American culture.

### 3.4. Pragmatic Transfer from L1 to L2

It seems that according to the research the use of indirectness by the Iranian informants in their interlanguage of English, which leads to a cultural clash between them and Americans, particularly in situations that are apt to be conflict-ridden. It shows that while the Iranian immigrants transferred pragmatic strategies from their L1 into their interlanguage to avoid conflict, the Americans, who tend to see conflict as a "normal part of human relationships" (p. 286), prefer to address the conflict directly, resolve it, and move on. CCP, then, seeks to identify instances of gaps in the knowledge of the L2 in user language. According to Kasper and Blum-Kulka (1993), the main reasons for difficulty in enacting pragmatic knowledge derive from either insufficient knowledge of the target language and its communicative practices, or problems in accessing it with automaticity in a real-time, interactional context.

### 3.5. Pragmatic Markers

Note that the label for this category of linguistic items varies; studies discuss "discourse markers," "pragmatic markers," and "interpersonal markers" some-times interchangeably. Schifffrin (1988) in *Discourse Markers* provides a list of discourse or pragmatic markers in American English, with commentary and textual examples, as well as a definition often cited in research work on this topic of pragmatics. The basic definition states that pragmatic markers have three features. They are



grammatically optional and independent of the utterance; if they are removed from an utterance, the meaning remains the same. They are also “semantically bleached,” that is, they have little or no propositional meaning. Finally, they carry out textual and interpersonal functions. Aijmer and Simon-Vanderberger (2006) discuss a cross-linguistic approach to discourse markers in *Pragmatic Markers in Contrast*. The volume includes contributions that are based on corpora to investigate the functions of several pragmatic markers in natural discourse across European languages.

It goes without saying that pragmatic markers are likely to be universal and present in all languages. Studying Chinese discourse markers in oral speech, Liu (2009) collected data on fourteen such markers in the speech of ten native Mandarin speakers who were doing graduate work at an American university. As Liu explains, *wo juede* is translated as “I think”, and can occur at the start of an utterance, in the middle, and at the end. It functions as an interpersonal marker to communicate to the listener that it is only his opinion and he does not presume that the listener will or should share his view of the teacher.

Another way of interpreting the function of *wo juede* is to see it as a politeness marker. Netsu and LoCastro (1997) earlier studied instances of use of the Japanese verb *~ to omou*, translated as “I think.” It appears with high frequency in both spoken and written texts in Japanese.

The two studies cited above clearly point to evidence of L1 transfer of pragmatic markers, resulting in interlanguages that mismatch the expectations for English language discourse. They are important features of everyday talk as they occur frequently and tend to appear with noticeable prosodic features, and in predictable locations in utterances. They signal a variety of pragmatic meanings, such as friendliness and camaraderie, respect for an addressee’s potentially contrary point of view, and mitigation of bad news and uncomfortable moments. Yet, nonnative speakers find learning about pragmatic markers difficult, particularly in a foreign learning environment. Moreover, signaling status differences through language use varies cross-culturally; not all societies value overt expression of such differences.

Thus when to use pragmatic markers and how to use them are learning tasks problematized outside of constant and appropriate exposure to their use in the stream of L2 speech. The wrong intonation contour can have a different meaning from the one intended, resulting in misunderstandings.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

CCP studies have concentrated on users of a second/foreign language rather than learners per se. However, the nonnativeness of those users reflects many aspects of their earlier acquisition of a second/foreign language. Adult speakers of second/foreign languages find efforts to move towards more native-like language use hampered by numerous factors: inadequate time available to study, formally or informally; lack of teachers trained to work with adults at advanced stages; and materials published solely for lower proficiency learners. The issue of exposure comes up, particularly with pragmatic competence development. Thus, in the typical domains of people’s lives – home, work, and outside activities – there needs to be an immersion degree of exposure to the new language and the community for pragmatic competence to develop. Classroom instruction in pragmatics for adult users of the new language needs to include, consequently, opportunities to learn about pragmatics, conversational routines, and other dimensions of communicative competence. Tailored instruction by teachers trained for working with adults can go a long way in helping them integrate the everyday learning “on the street” in their new communities with formal instruction where they get help to become the more competent speakers they may wish to be.

This paper reviewed the important field of CCP, starting with the first phase where the focus was on pragmatic failure, typically when learners of new language miscommunicated in the target language due not only to their proficiency level, but also transfer of use from their first or primary language into second or foreign language. Further, CCP has moved beyond seeing misfires or communicative glitches as evidence of failure to a perspective that studies differences, for instance, in requesting speech acts that may arise due to divergent cultural beliefs and practices of the participants. Cross-cultural differences are not per se negative. Rather than a deficit view, that nonnative speakers produce defective language use, the modern stance of difference fosters an inclusive view, avoiding judgment and discrimination. Learners and teachers of languages need to understand the domain of cross-cultural pragmatics (CCP) to facilitate our understanding of how people comprehend and communicate meaning beyond what is said.

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