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From Ta'ārof to Ostensible Speech Acts: A Cross-cultural Analysis of Persian and American Apology Practices

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Abstract

While genuine apologies have been widely studied across various cultural and linguistic contexts, ostensible apologies—those used not to express sincere regret but to maintain social harmony—remain underexplored. These speech acts can lead to misinterpretations and communication challenges, particularly in Persian-American interactions, where cultural expectations around politeness differ significantly. In Persian, ostensible apologies are deeply embedded in the cultural practice of ta'ārof, influencing how politeness and social hierarchy are negotiated. Despite their prevalence, Persian ostensible apologies (POAs) have not been systematically analyzed in relation to their American counterparts. Previous research on ostensible speech acts (OSAs), introduced by Isaacs & Clark (1990) and later refined by Link & Kreuz (2005), primarily focuses on English contexts, leaving a gap in understanding their function in Persian discourse. This study addresses this gap by integrating American English-based OSA features with the Persian meta-implicature framework of ta'ārof, as outlined by Yaqubi (2021). Through a cross-cultural analysis, this research offers a unified framework for interpreting Persian ostensible apologies, emphasizing their implications for intercultural communication, second-language learning, diplomatic discourse, and translation studies. By bridging theoretical and cultural perspectives, this study enhances understanding of Persian-English pragmatic differences and provides practical insights for fostering cross-cultural awareness in academic and professional settings.

Keywords: Ostensible speech acts (OSAs), Persian Ostensible Apology (POA), Intercultural communication, the United States, meta-implicature, ta'ārof, cross-cultural pragmatics, Politeness

1. Introduction

Intercultural communication challenges often arise from differences in the linguistic and cultural realization of speech acts, particularly apologies. These challenges become especially pronounced when it comes to ostensible apologies, as variations in their rules and frequency across cultures often lead to misunderstandings. While previous studies have acknowledged the existence of common politeness features between Persian and English (Yaqubi et al., 2012, p. 68), research has shown that Persian apologies often carry ostensible rather than genuine meanings, which can create communication barriers, particularly in interactions between Iranians and Americans. In her 2010 Book *Among the Iranians,* Koutlaki argued that "if the English use *please* and *thank you* more than any other nation, Iranians must be the uncontested champions of the ostensible apology". In Iranian social settings, particularly formal gatherings, both hosts and guests are expected to extend ostensible apologies for bad food, taking the host's time, and other similar situations. However, in comparable settings, these types of apologies are absent or significantly less frequent among American and European speakers (Leech, 1983).

Eslami (2005, p. 466) further emphasizes that in cultures where hospitality plays a central role, making others feel valued and appreciated through ostensible invitations and apologies is a fundamental aspect of social interactions. To illustrate the complexity of interpreting ostensible apologies, expressions such as *bebaxshin, age doostesh nadāshtin* (sorry if you did not like it) and *sharmande dige qābele shomā ro nadāsht* (I am sorry, it is not worthy of you) were identified in the corpus. Such phrases, while conventional in Persian hospitality, may present difficulties in intercultural communication, as they do not have direct equivalents in English. Koutlaki (1997, p. 82) argues that S is ostensibly apologizing for bad food, lack of comfort, waste of the visitors' time: in short, she presents her hospitality as being worse than what the visitors deserve. These differences highlight the need for a structured framework to facilitate the recognition and understanding of Persian ostensible apologies (POAs) in cross-cultural interactions.

Given the increasing importance of intercultural communication in the U.S., understanding these differences is essential for fostering effective cross-cultural exchanges. Despite the growing awareness of OSAs, research has largely focused on highlighting the differences between English and Persian, without fully considering that the concept of OSAs originally emerged in the U.S. This suggests that their features are also present in American discourse, making it necessary to investigate how these speech acts function in different cultural contexts. By incorporating insights from both Persian and American English frameworks, this study seeks to bridge this gap and develop a comprehensive approach that enhances the identification, interpretation, teaching, and translation of POAs across languages and cultures.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Mapping Apology in Pragmatics

Austin (1962), a British scholar and a key figure in linguistic pragmatics, introduced the concept of speech acts as a tool for philosophical and linguistic analysis. In *How to Do Things with Words*, he distinguished between constatives (statements conveying information) and

performatives (utterances performing actions), leading to the development of speech act theory. His student, Searle (1969), further refined this theory by categorizing speech acts into five types: assertives, expressives, directives, commissives, and declaratives. Apologies were classified under expressives, which convey the speaker's psychological attitude toward a situation (Leech, 1983, p. 106). Speech act theory also influenced pragmatic politeness theories by Brown & Levinson (1978, 1987) and Leech (1983). Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) viewed apologies as a negative politeness strategy, acknowledging the speaker's reluctance to impose on the hearer's negative face—their autonomy and freedom from imposition. Leech (1983) incorporated apologies into his politeness framework, categorizing them as part of the convivial illocutionary function, akin to pardoning. Yaqubi (2012) included apology as one of the sub-strategies of requests as negative politeness.

2.1.1 Universality versus Culture -specificity of Apology

Austin (1962) and Searle (1969, 1975, 1979) argued that speech acts operate under universal pragmatic principles rather than being culture-bound, a view supported by studies such as Blum-Kulka (1983) and Leech (1983). However, scholars like Green (1975) and Wierzbicka (1997) challenged this claim, asserting that speech acts are verbalized and conceptualized differently across languages based on cultural norms. The Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Patterns (CCSARP) project, initiated in 1982, explored similarities and differences in speech acts across various languages, investigating potential pragmatic universals (Afghari, 2007). Among speech acts, apologies have been a key focus of research, analyzed for their structure, meaning, and function across cultures. Blum-Kulka & Olshtain (1984) sought to identify pragmatic universals in requests and apologies, developing a framework that revealed minimal cross-linguistic variation in five key apology strategies. While some studies (Olshtain & Cohen, 1983; Trosborg, 1987; Blum-Kulka et al., 1989) debated the universality of preferred strategies, Blum-Kulka et al. (1984) emphasized the need for broader research beyond Western languages.This led to numerous studies on apologies in non-Western languages such as Persian, Kurdish, Arabic, Japanese, Korean, and Chinese, with findings both supporting and contradicting the universality of apologies (Afghari, 2007).

2.1.2 Persian Apology Studies

Persian language norms significantly influence cross-cultural differences (Ghanbaran et al., 2014, p. 542). While Persian apology studies indicate universality in the principles of apology production, they also confirm culture-specific variations. These studies fall into cross-linguistic/cross-cultural perspectives (Eslami-Rasekh, 2005; Chamani & Zareipur, 2010; Sadeghi, 2013), interlanguage studies (Farashaiyan & Yazdi Amirkhiz, 2011; Dadkhah Tehrani et al., 2012), and mono-cultural studies (Tajvidi, 2000; Afghari, 2007; Shariati & Chamani, 2010; Author et al., 2015). Some also focus on sociopragmatic or socio-cultural factors such as age, gender, social dominance, and distance (Afghari, 2007; Afghari & Karimnia, 2012; Ghanbaran et al., 2014).

Afghari (2007) employed a controlled elicitation method to categorize Persian apology strategies, analyzing apologetic utterances into three segments: Alerters (e.g., "Mark!"), Head Acts (e.g., "I am sorry I am late"), and Adjuncts (e.g., "I had to go to the hospital"). He tested

the universality of apology structures in Persian using CCSARP's (Blum-Kulka et al, 1989) coding system, concluding that Persian apologies align with English frameworks, with IFID as the most frequent formula (83.8%). Shariati & Chamani (2012) further examined apology strategy frequency, combinations, and sequential positioning. Unlike Afghari (2007), they analyzed apology expressions as integrated formulaic structures. Using 500 naturally occurring apologies via ethnographic observation, their findings aligned with prior studies (Tajvidi, 2000; Afghari, 2007), confirming IFID as the dominant strategy. However, they argued that Persian-specific preferences reflect cultural values, such as using bebaxshid to reduce interpersonal distance and sharmandam as an expression of shame, rooted in Islamic teachings and Zoroastrian principles of "good thought, good talk, and good deed." Shahrokhi & Jan (2012) analyzed Persian male speakers' apology strategies, adopting Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989) framework, similar to Afghari's (2007) approach. Their findings indicated a mix of universal and culture-specific apology patterns. They also identified a new strategy—understanding the offense through humor—which functions as a positive politeness device in Persian, later applied by Afghari & Karimnia (2012). Despite these contributions to Persian pragmatics, most studies focused on linguistic forms and structures while overlooking the functional aspects of speech acts (Yaqubi et al., 2019), in particular, apologies.

Additionally, although researchers acknowledged both real and ostensible meanings, they primarily examined genuine apologies. To address this gap, the study by Yaqubi et al. (2015) explored phatic Persian apologies, which are used not to express genuine regret but to initiate, extend, or conclude conversations. Analyzing 119 apologies in ten Iranian films and series, they categorized them based on Afghari's (2007) framework and Shariati & Chamani's (2010) offense types. These apologies often functioned as politeness markers, mitigating requests, expressing thanks, or signaling attention rather than acknowledging wrongdoing. In line with Yaqubi et al. (2014), they used Nord's (2008) classification to confirm their phatic role and introduced *ehterām* (respect) as a new indicator. The study found that Persian apologies emphasize self-lowering and other-raising (*ta'ārof*), often using lexical substitutions, honorifics, and tu-vous distinctions to reinforce hierarchical relationships. Their formulaic nature creates a mismatch between form and function, complicating intercultural communication and second-language learning.

2.1.3 English Ostensible Speech Acts (OSAs)

Isaacs and Clark (1990) were among the scholars who criticized traditional speech act theories (e.g., Austin, 1962; Bach & Harnish, 1979; Searle, 1969), arguing that they fail to account for ostensible speech acts (OSAs) (p. 493). In their view, OSAs (e.g., invitations, offers, questions, apologies, assertions, congratulations, and compliments) occur when a speaker (S) appears to perform a speech act (e.g., an apology) without being serious, while the addressee (H) also recognizes this insincerity (Isaacs & Clark, 1990; Clark, 1996). Using 156 spontaneous invitations, Isaacs & Clark (1990) demonstrated that not all invitations carry genuine intent; some are extended without the expectation of being taken seriously. They identified five key properties of OSAs: pretense, mutual recognition, collusion, ambivalence, and off-record purpose. They compared OSAs to non-serious language acts, such as play acts, where both parties recognize the pretense. Though their primary focus was ostensible invitations in English,

they proposed that other speech acts—including offers, questions, apologies, assertions, congratulations, and compliments—belong to the broader category of OSAs, often functioning as politeness rituals (p. 506). Expanding on this, Link & Kreuz (2005) further investigated OSAs in *Comprehension of Ostensible Speech Acts*. They critiqued Isaacs & Clark (1990), arguing that while Isaacs & Clark identified common characteristics of OSAs, they did not empirically test whether these features helped listeners recognize speech acts as ostensible. Link & Kreuz (2005) experimentally examined how individuals identify OSAs and outlined seven characteristic strategies distinguishing them from genuine speech acts, namely: (1) S violates the preparatory conditions for the speech act, (2) H solicits the speech act, (3) The speech act is socially motivated rather than genuinely necessary, (4) S does not persist or insist on the speech act, (5) S is vague, (6) S hedges the speech act, and (7) The speech act is delivered with inappropriate cues.

2.1.4. English Ostensible Apologies

Isaacs & Clark (1990) illustrated *English ostensible apology* with an example: when an army officer orders a private to apologize for a minor infraction, the private may say *"I apologize"* without truly feeling remorse. Both the private and the officer recognize the apology as a mere formal gesture, reinforcing authority rather than conveying genuine regret (p. 504). Later, Link & Kreuz (2005) refined this concept by reinterpreting the strategies of ostensible apologies and proposed the following features for them:

Table 1. English Ostensible Apologies' Features

Feature	Sub-feature
S violates the preparatory conditions for the invitation	the act for which S is apologizing was not H's best interest
	S believes that the act was not against H's best interest
S doesn't persist or insist on the invitation.	

2.1.5 Persian Ostensible Apologies (POAs)

Following Isaacs & Clark (1990), several Iranian scholars analyzed speech acts with ostensible meanings, including invitations (Eslami-Rasekh, 2005; Salmani Nodoushan, 2005), offers (Salmani Nodoushan, 2005; Yaqubi, 2018, Yaqubi, 2020, Yaqubi, 2021, Yaqubi & Abdul Rahman, 2021), refusals (Babai Shishavan & Sharifian, 2013; Babai Shishavan, 2016), and apologies (Koutlaki, 2010; Saberi, 2012; Yaqubi, 2018). These studies identified *ta'ārof* as a key cultural ritual shaping Iranian polite communication.

Koutlaki (2010) linked POAs to Iranian politeness norms rooted in *ta'ārof*, using the terms ostensible apology and *ta'ārof* apology interchangeably. She examined culture-specific speech acts such as offers, refusals, compliments, and apologies, categorizing *ta'ārof* apologies as

expressions of deference, humility, and cordiality. She compared Iranian ostensible apologies to the English "thank you," which is not always an expression of gratitude, arguing that Persian apologies often serve broader functions, including expressions of humility (*tavāzo*), hospitality (*mehmān navāzi*), and respect (*ehterām*). She identified *bebaxshid* as the most frequent lexeme, used ritualistically rather than genuinely. These apologies appear in various contexts, such as leave-taking, hosting, and even monetary transactions. Saberi (2012) expanded Koutlaki's framework, categorizing POAs into culture-specific situations (CSS), including apologizing in 1) offering a present: when offering a present to somebody, the speaker apologizes, communicating the idea that the present is not worthy of the receiver, 2) host's apology for bad food: when the host or hostess apologizes to the guests for not providing good and delicious food, 3) apology for doing a service or favor: when expressing gratitude and indebtedness for a favor or service, 4) host's apology for inconveniences: when the host or hostess may apologize to the guest for the probable inconveniences and lack of comfort, and 5) guest's apology for trouble: when the guest apologizes to the host or hostess for their trouble.

According to Yaqubi & Abdul Rahman (2021, p. 4), "difficulties in understanding or identifying the culture-specific notion of *ta'ārof* have been the focus of mono-cultural and cross-cultural pragmatic studies that have investigated the intricacies of interpretation of the negative meaning of these speech acts for both native and non-native speakers of Persian. As a key element of Persian social interaction (Eslami-Rasekh, 2005), *ta'ārof* governs politeness, humility, and generosity but poses challenges in intercultural communication and translation (Azarmi & Behnam, 2012). Yaqubi (2018) examines the challenges of subtitling *ta'ārof* apologies in Persian-English translations, focusing on their cultural underpinnings. She analyzes how key cultural norms—*adab* (politeness), *ehterām* (respect), *mehmān navāzi* (hospitality), *tavāzo* (humility/modesty), and *shekaste-nafsi* (self-breaking)—shape POAs. Studying 80 *ta'ārof* apologies from Persian films, she identifies the main obstacles subtitlers face in recognizing and conveying these speech acts. Her findings reveal that Persian apologies often serve as politeness strategies rather than genuine regret, making them highly context-dependent and difficult to translate. She highlights how subtitlers rely on linguistic and visual cues—such as conversational context, speaker-hearer exchanges, and non-verbal signs—to interpret and translate these apologies.

2.2 Meta-Implicature of Ta'ārof

Several studies have linked *ta'ārof* to cultural schemas such as *adab* (politeness and respect), *mehmān navāzi* (hospitality), and *tavāzo* (humility), which shape social interactions in Persian (Yaqubi, 2021; Yaqubi & Abdul Rahman, 2021). However, a key focus of Yaqubi's analysis was on *shaxsiat* (face). Unlike Yaqubi et al. (2016), which primarily examined the implicature of Persian offers and invitations, the innovative aspect of Yaqubi (2021) lies in the application of *meta-implicature* to reinterpret *ta'ārof*, particularly in *ta'ārof* offers. Building on Leech's (1983) argument regarding the pragmatic paradox of politeness, Yaqubi extended this framework by incorporating *meta-implicature* to explain the underlying logic of *ta'ārof* exchanges, particularly *ta'ārof* offers. She argues that when extending *ta'ārof* offers, the speaker (A) initially conveys the implicature (implied meaning) of generosity or politeness. However, the addressee (B) may recognize that the offer is made purely out of politeness rather

than genuine intent, leading to a *meta-implicature* that "A does not actually expect B to accept the offer." This recursive layer of meaning mirrors Leech's (1983) "game of conversational ping pong," where both participants navigate politeness conventions through refusals and renewed offers. By applying *meta-implicature* to *ta'ārof*, Yaqubi sheds light on how these exchanges are structured not merely by politeness but by a culturally embedded understanding of sincerity and social hierarchy, offering a refined explanation of how *ta'ārof* functions beyond conventional politeness theories.

Despite the extensive body of research on *ta'ārof*, no previous studies have applied either the revised version of ostensible speech act features proposed by Link and Kreuz (2005) or the concept of *meta-implicature* by Yaqubi (2021) to the identification, interpretation, and analysis of Persian OSAs such as invitations, refusals, apologies, congratulations, or compliments. This study seeks to address this gap by integrating theoretical frameworks to develop a more comprehensive understanding of how POAs function, distinguishing them from genuine apologies while exploring their pragmatic and cultural underpinnings. By doing so, this research contributes to the broader field of Persian pragmatics and intercultural communication, facilitating better comprehension and translation of POAs across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

3. Method

3.1. Identification of POAs

The identification of POAs in this study was carried out in three sequential stages to ensure a systematic and comprehensive analysis. First, apology strategies were identified using an integrated framework based on previous research, including Blum-Kulka & Olshtain (1984), Olshtain & Cohen (1983), Trosborg (1987), and Blum-Kulka et al. (1989), following Afghari (2007). This provided a structured methodology for categorizing various apology strategies in Persian. Second, to confirm that the apologies under analysis were ostensible rather than genuine, the study adopted Shariati & Chamani's (2010) classification of offence categories. These categories were used to ensure that the apologies examined did not stem from actual transgressions requiring sincere remorse. Third, Saberi's (2012) conceptualization of POAs was applied to further differentiate ostensible apologies from genuine ones, ensuring that they aligned with Persian politeness norms. The combination of these three stages enabled a rigorous identification process, allowing the study to effectively distinguish POAs from genuine apologies while providing deeper insights into their cultural and pragmatic functions.

3.2. Interpretation of POAs

The study adopts the ostensible apology features proposed by Link & Kreuz (2005) (cf. Table 1) and the five features outlined by Isaacs & Clark (1990), along with the concept of *meta-implicature* by Yaqubi (2021), to interpret the complex meaning of POAs. Additionally, key Persian cultural schemas (Yaqubi 2018; Yaqubi 2021), particularly *shaxsiat* (face), are integrated into the analysis to capture the nuanced social and pragmatic dimensions of these apologies.

3.3. Data Collection

This research builds upon the same corpus used in Yaqubi (2018), which consists of 80 *ta'ārof* apologies collected from the soundtracks of four subtitled Iranian feature films and four Iranian TV films broadcast internationally. However, unlike previous studies, this research does not aim to quantify or qualitatively categorize POAs. Instead, its focus is on illustrating various examples of POAs and demonstrating how the interpretative framework—including the features proposed by Isaacs & Clark (1990), Link & Kreuz (2005), and the concept of *meta-implicature* by Yaqubi (2021)—can be applied to analyze their meaning within Persian cultural and linguistic contexts.

This study is intentionally qualitative in nature, focusing on the intricate and culturally embedded aspects of POAs rather than their frequency or distribution. Given that POAs are context-dependent and deeply tied to Persian politeness norms, a qualitative approach is the most suitable methodology for capturing their nuanced meanings. Unlike quantitative studies that seek to generalize findings across large datasets, this research prioritizes an in-depth exploration of *ta'ārof* apologies through interpretative frameworks, including ostensible speech act features (Isaacs & Clark, 1990; Link & Kreuz, 2005) and meta-implicature analysis (Yaqubi, 2021). By illustrating examples from Persian host-guest interactions, the study provides a detailed account of how these apologies function in real-life discourse. A numerical representation of apology strategies would not capture the underlying pragmatic intentions or the culturally specific rules guiding their use. Instead, this qualitative approach ensures a richer, more accurate understanding of POAs within Persian sociocultural contexts, making it particularly valuable for intercultural pragmatics, second-language learning, and translation studies.

4. Analysis

4.1. Host's Apologies

In Persian culture, hosts frequently extend ostensible apologies (*POAs*) to guests, not as admissions of fault but as expressions of *ta'ārof*, reinforcing *ehterām* (respect), *tavāzo* (humility), and *mehmān navāzi* (hospitality). These apologies elevate the guest's status, while the guest is expected to reject them, maintaining social harmony. Here is an example of POAs for bad hospitality or inconvenience taken from Lizard (2004):

[1]

Context: A group of people in a small city is hosting a preacher (guess) to preach for them. They have prepared a cozy place for him to stay.	
Character	Persian Soundtrack
Host	*In-am mahal-e sokunat-e shomā* [this also][place of][inhabitation of][you] These are your quarters
	Hajāqā dige bayad bebaxsh-id [haji] [anymore][must][forgive] Haji You must forgive us

	dar had-e vose-mun bud [in] [limitation of][our capability][it was] It was what we could afford
Guest	*Bahbah estedā mikon-am che jāye xub-i* [wow] [request] [I do] [what][place of][a good] Wow, don't mention it, what a good place
	Vaqean zahmate faravani keshid-in [really] [trouble][too much][you had] You have put up a lot of efforts indeed

Keeping in mind that both parties are observing *adab* (politeness) to maintain *shaxsiat* (face) of both the host and the guest and more specifically, the tact maxim, i.e., *ehterām* (respect), the following stages show how this interaction takes place:

An apology is made by the host.

1. The host observes the *ehterām* rule to maintain his *shaxsiat*.
2. The apology is favorable to the guest.

Therefore:

3. The host politely implicates that he wants the apology to occur.

The guest declines the apology made by the host.

4. The guest maintains his *shaxsiat*.
5. The apology is unfavorable to the host.

Therefore:

6. The apology politely implicates that the host does not actually want the apology to occur.

In this conversation, the host apologize to the guest even though no offense has occurred. This is done to uphold *adab* (politeness) and, more specifically, *ehterām* (respect), *tavāzo* (humility), and *mehmān navāzi* (hospitality) maxims, preserving both his *shaxsiat* and that of the guest. However, the guest declines the apology. The host can infer from the guest's response that although the apology is favorable to the guest, he refuses it to maintain his *shaxsiat*. From the implicature of (3), the guest may infer that the host is *bā-adab* or *mo'addab* (polite), *bā-ehterām* or *mohtaram* (respectful), *bā-ezzat* (honorable), *mehmān navāz* (hospitable), and *motevaze* (humble). The direct politeness implicature from the apology suggests that "the host wants to apologize for an offense," but the assumption that the apology is meant seriously is unfavorable to the host. Since the host apologizes out of politeness rather than genuine remorse (i.e., the act for which the host is apologizing was not against the guest's best interest), a *meta-*

implicature arises: “It is only because the host is being polite (*he is doing ta’ārof*) that he implicates he wants to apologize.”

The paradox of *ta’ārof* is evident in the implicatures of (3) and (6). However, due to shared knowledge of *ta’ārof*—including context and essential cultural norms—the *meta-implicature* is easily recognized. The host does not persist or insist on the apology, confirming its intended meaning. In fact, the host’s pretense is mutually recognized by both the host and guest. Therefore, the guest colludes with the host in responding kindly with “*Ested’ā mikonam*” (I beg you not to say it), which fulfills the host’s expectations. If the guest were to ask, “Do you really mean what you say?” the host would be unable to respond with a simple "yes" or "no" (*ambivalence*), reinforcing the ostensible nature of the exchange.

This type of apology also appears in other situations within the corpus, such as apologizing for taking the guest’s time, preparing food (e.g., *bebaxshid dam kardane chāy tul keshid* – "Sorry, it took a long time to brew the tea"), ensuring the guest’s comfort in their sleeping or seating arrangements, or expressing regret over the guest not having an enjoyable time (e.g., *bebaxshid behetun xosh nagozasht* – "Sorry, you did not have a good time with us"). Extending such apologies implies *ehterām* (respect) or *ezzat* (esteem) and makes the guest feel that *be mā ezzat gozasht* (literally, "he showed esteem to us").

Ostensible apologies were used in the case of bad food by the hosts as well. In such situations, the host is expected to to do *shekaste-nafsi* i.e., downgrade the quality of the *pazirāyi* (treating) in general and the food in particular in order to fulfill the requirements of *ta’ārof* i.e. hospitality or humility. Here is an example of this type of POAs taken from *Lizard* (2004):

[2]

Context: The conversation happens at the end of lunch between a guest and host.	
Character	Persian Soundtrack
Guest	*Elāhi shokr* [God][thank] Thank God
	xeili vaqt bud qazāy-i be in tuppi na-xorde bud-im [very][time][was][a food][to][this][good][we had not eaten] I had not had such a good chow in a big time
Host	***Dige bayād bebaxsh-id Hājāqā,*** [any more][must][forgive me][Haji] You must forgive us Haji
	mese daspoxt-e xuna-tun na-bud [like][cooking of][your house][was not] It was not good as what you eat at home
Guest	*Ested’ā dār-am* [beg] [I have] Don’t mention it

Keeping in mind that both parties are observing *adab* or politeness (for saving *shaxsiat* or face

of host and guest) and more specifically the tact maxim, i.e., *ehterām*, the following stages show how this interaction takes place:

An apology is made by the host.
1. The host is observing the *ehterām* rule to save his *shaxsiat*.
2. The apology is favorable to the guest.

Therefore,
3. The host politely implicates that he wants the apology to occur.

The guest declines the apology made by the host.
4. The guest saves his *shaxsiat*.
5. The apology is unfavorable to the host.

Therefore,
6. The guest politely implicates that he does not want the apology to occur.

Normally, these apologies are extended after the guest's expression of gratitude and are mutually recognized by both the host and the guest. In this conversation, out of *ta'ārof*, the host engages in *shekaste-nafsi* (self-breaking) to show humility and apologizes to the guest to uphold *adab* or, more specifically, the *ehterām* maxim and to preserve both his own *shaxsiat* and that of the guest, even though it results in the guest's declination of the apology. Although the host knows that the reason for the apology is not necessarily in the guest's best interest, or that the act was not against the guest's best interest, he understands that failing to engage in *ta'ārof* or self-breaking would make the guest feel uncomfortable, i.e., *madyun* (indebted).The host can infer what the guest means, assuming that although the apology is favorable to the guest, he declines it to save his *shaxsiat*. From the implicature of (3), the guest may infer that the host is *bā-adab* or *mo'addab* (polite), *bā-ehterām* or *mohtaram* (respectful), *bā-ezzat* (with honor), *mehmān navaz* (hospitable), and *motevaze* (humble). The direct implicature (politeness implicature) from the apology is that the host wants to apologize for an offense. However, assuming that the host has actually committed an offense is unfavorable to the host, and recognizing that the host apologizes purely for politeness may lead to the *meta-implicature* that "it is only because the host is being polite (he is engaging in *ta'ārof*) that he implicates that he wants to apologize." The paradox of *ta'ārof* is evident in the implicatures of (3) and (6). However, due to shared knowledge of *ta'ārof*, i.e., the context of a long tablecloth filled with various foods as well as the guest's gestures, such as sucking his fingers in appreciation, the intended meaning of the apology is confirmed.

Additionally, the shared knowledge of *ta'ārof* and the co-text—such as the lack of persistence from the host in the conversation—indicates that these apologies are ostensible, meaning the host only pretends to be genuine. The host's pretense is mutually recognized by both the host and the guest. Therefore, the guest colludes with the host by responding with "*Ested'ā daram*" (I beg you not to say it), fulfilling the host's expectations. If the guest were to ask, "Do you really mean what you say?" the host could not simply respond with "yes" or "no," reflecting the *ambivalence* of *ta'ārof*.

4.2. Guests' Apologies

Guests are also expected to apologize for creating *mozāhemat* (disturbance). Utterances in the corpus by guests include "*bebaxshid mozāhemetun shodim*" (sorry we disturbed you), "*bāese zahmat shodim*" (we caused trouble for you), and "*hesābi sharmandamun kardin*" (you really made us ashamed). Normally, these types of apologies function as expressions of gratitude for the host's efforts and are extended upon the guest's arrival or departure. The absence of such apologies implies *bi-adabi* (impoliteness) and, more specifically, *bi-tavāzo-i* (lack of humility) on the part of the guest toward the host. POAs occur in the case of offering a present. Normally in such cases the offerer is expected to downgrade the present in order to show his humility. In the following example taken from the tele-film *Birds of a Feather* both types of apologies i.e., guests' apologies for inconveniences to host and apology for offering a present are given:

[3]

Context: In this conversation upon entering the house the guest offers a gift to the host	
Character	Soundtrack
Guest	***Bāese zahmat shodim*** [reason-of][bother][we-became] We disturbed you
Host	*xahesh mikon-am befarmāy-in* [beg][I do][command-you-pl] Don't mention it, please come in
Guest	*: ghabel-e shomaro na-dar-e* [worthy][you-pl][it does not have] It is not worthy of you
Host	*chera zahmat keshid-in?* [why][bother]you did?] Why did you bother yourself?
Guest	*xahesh mikon-am che zahmat-i* [request][I do][what][bother] Don't mention it, what bother?
Host	*Motshaker-am mersi* [thankful-I am][thank you] Thank you
Guest	***Bebaxsh-id*** [forgive me] Forgive me
	Dast-e shoma dard na-kon-e mamnun [your][hand][pain][doe not have][indebted] Thank you

Keeping in mind that both parties are observing *adab* (politeness) for saving *shaxsiat* (face) of both the speaker (S) and hearer (H), and more specifically the tact maxim, i.e., *ehterām*, the following stages illustrate how this interaction unfolds:

An apology is made by the guest.

1. The guest is observing the *ehterām* rule to save his *shaxsiat*.
2. The apology is favorable to the host.

Therefore,

3. The guest politely implicates that he wants the apology to occur.

The host declines the apology made by the guest.

4. The host saves his *shaxsiat*.
5. The apology is unfavorable to the guest.

Therefore,

6. The host politely implicates that he does not want the apology to occur.

Normally, these apologies are extended upon the guest's arrival at the host's home as an expression of gratitude. In this conversation, out of *adab*, the guest displays humility and apologizes to the host to uphold the *ehterām* maxim and to preserve both his own *shaxsiat* and that of the host, even though it results in the host declining the apology. Although the guest knows that the reason for apologizing is not necessarily in the host's best interest, or that the act was not against the host's best interest, he understands that failing to engage in *ta'ārof* (self-breaking) may cause the host to perceive him as *porru* (bold or impudent).

The guest can infer what the host means, assuming that although the apology is favorable to the host, he declines it to save his *shaxsiat*. From the implicature of (3), the host may infer that the guest is *bā-adab* or *mo'addab* (polite), *bā-ehterām* or *mohtaram* (respectful). The direct implicature (politeness implicature) from the apology is that the guest wants to apologize for an offense. However, assuming that the guest has actually committed an offense is unfavorable to the guest, and recognizing that the guest apologizes purely for politeness may lead to the *meta-implicature* that "it is only because the guest is being polite (he is engaging in *ta'ārof*) that he implicates that he wants to apologize." The paradox of *ta'ārof* is evident in the implicatures of (3) and (6).

However, as a result of shared knowledge of *ta'ārof*, i.e., the valuable gift brought by the guest, as well as the important rules of *adab*, such as *ehterām* between the host and the guest, the *meta-implicature* is understood. In addition to the shared knowledge of *ta'ārof*, the co-text—such as the lack of persistence in apologizing for arriving at the house and presenting the gift—indicates that these apologies are ostensible, meaning the guest only pretends to be genuine. The guest's pretense is mutually recognized by both the guest and the host. Therefore, the host colludes with the guest by responding kindly with:

"xāhesh mikonam, befarmāyid, chera zahmat keshidid? Motshakker-am, mersi, dast-e shoma dard nakon-e, mamnun"

(I beg you, please come in, why did you trouble yourself? Thank you, thanks, may your hand not ache, I appreciate it), fulfilling the guest's expectations. If the guest were to ask, "Do you really mean what you say?" the host could not simply respond with "yes" or "no," reflecting the *ambivalence* of *ta'ārof*.

5. Discussion and Concluding Remarks

Through the analysis of apologies, the researcher noticed the important role of cultural rules, which are essential in working out the meta-implicatures of Persian OSAs. The importance of these rules was confirmed by previous studies (Yaqubi, 2018; Yaqubi, 2021).

As cited in Behnam & Amizadeh (2012, p. 66), *ta'ārof* has deep roots in the Iranian tradition of treating guests better than one's own family and being great hosts (Rezaei, 2006). This concept is also related to *ta'ārof* and, more specifically, *mehmān navāzi* (hospitality) and Persian OSAs such as invitations, offers, and apologies. Apologies for bad food and other perceived offenses in the corpus were extended by the host to the guest to show *mehmān navāzi* as well as to demonstrate that they care about the guest or portray themselves as highly hospitable (Sharifian, 2011). The corpus confirmed that, to observe this maxim, the host needed to practice *shekaste-nafsi* or *tavāzo* to be seen as polite.

Another cultural concept related to *ta'ārof* is *shekaste-nafsi* and *tavāzo*, which mean self-deprecation or humility. These concepts were the underlying factors motivating the characters to extend POAs in the corpus. Koutlaki (1997, p. 78) argues:

> "Under the maxim of humility, a host/ess will offer fruit or sweets to a guest saying *qābele ta'ārofi nist* ('it's not worth offering', i.e., it's not good enough for the guests), thus presenting her hospitality as inferior. It may be that the speaker does not believe this to be the case at all, but the operation of the humility maxim is so strong that she must present it as such."

Beeman (1986) believes that in practicing *ta'ārof*, people put themselves in lower or inferior positions while their addressee is placed in a higher or superior position. Sahragard (2003) argues that self-lowering strategies are evident in showing *tavāzo* or modesty. Similarly, in the corpus, *tavāzo* was shown to be the motivation behind using these strategies in performing most of the apologies through *shekaste-nafsi*. To exhibit *tavāzo*, the characters downgraded possessions, food, and wealth. Analysis of the apologies in the corpus showed that persistence is seen as a sign of consideration for their guests and concern for the guests' needs.

Analysis of the results revealed that POAs in the corpus were mainly extended in party settings between guests and hosts, as well as in the case of offering a present. However, some ostensible apologies, which were used as alerters, softeners, or disarmers, were categorized as POAs by Saberi (2012). Some examples of these apologies in the corpus based on his definitions are:

- **Alerter**: *Babaxshid da zemn in labe marz o gomrok ke migan kojas?* (Excuse me, can you tell me where the border and the customs house is?) (Lizard, 2004)
- **Softener/Disarmer**: *Abji sharmande, felan bexatere taghire decorasion tatilim* (Sorry, mom! We're closed for the redecoration!) (Music Box, 2007)

Although similar to POAs, these apologies have a phatic function, they are not used in the position of a head act or adjunct to a head act (Afghari, 2007) (cf. 2.3), meaning they cannot

be regarded as speech acts. Therefore, while all *ta'ārof* apologies have a phatic function, not all apologies with a phatic function qualify as *ta'ārof* apologies. Yaqubi et al. (2015) comprehensively focused on Persian apologies with phatic functions, which brilliantly illustrate this distinction.

Analysis revealed that the ostensible strategies proposed by Link & Kreuz (2005) (cf. table 1) were partly applicable for interpreting these apologies. While the sub-strategy of "the act for which S is apologizing was not the addressee's best interest" and "S believes that the act was not against the addressee's best interest" were applicable in all cases, the sub-strategy "S doesn't persist or insist on the apology" was applicable only in some cases. In other words, while the lack of persistence and motivation signals the ostensible meaning of apologies—confirming Eslami's (2005) results about Persian ostensible invitations—persistence and motivation in POAs in the corpus did not necessarily signal their genuine meaning.

Isaacs and Clark (1990) describe ostensible apologies in English as cases where the speaker extends an apology without genuine remorse, often to uphold social or hierarchical expectations. They use the example of a private ordered by an officer to apologize, highlighting that both parties recognize the apology as a formality rather than sincere regret. The private's response maintains respect for authority, and the officer acknowledges it, demonstrating collusion in upholding the social structure. However, this definition does not align with *ta'ārof* rules and is not applicable to POAs. In other words, in the corpus, apologies that did not fulfill the requirements of *ta'ārof*, such as *shekaste-nafsi*, *ehterām*, *mehmān navāzi*, or *tavāzo*, were excluded from the list of POAs. Here is an example of this type of apology taken from *The Sixth Person* (2011), in which a conversation occurs between a colonel and a major. The major has made a mistake and is being blamed by the colonel, and as a result, he extends an apology. However, this apology is not extended out of *adab* (politeness) or *ta'ārof* but out of obligation and fear of authority. Although the four ostensible features—pretense, collusion, mutual recognition, and ambivalence—are evident in these apologies, they cannot be included in the category of POAs.

Similar Yaqubi (2021), which focused solely on cultural concepts related to Persian *ta'ārof* offers and applied Leech's (1983) meta-implicature framework, this study expands the analysis of POAs (*ta'ārof* apologies) in host-guest interactions. However, unlike Yaqubi (2021), to achieve a more comprehensive interpretation, this study incorporates elements from Link & Kreuz's (2005) revised framework of OSAs, along with the five original properties of OSAs proposed by Isaacs & Clark (1990). These additions refine the analytical model, enabling a more nuanced understanding of how Persian ostensible apologies function within monocultural or intercultural communication.

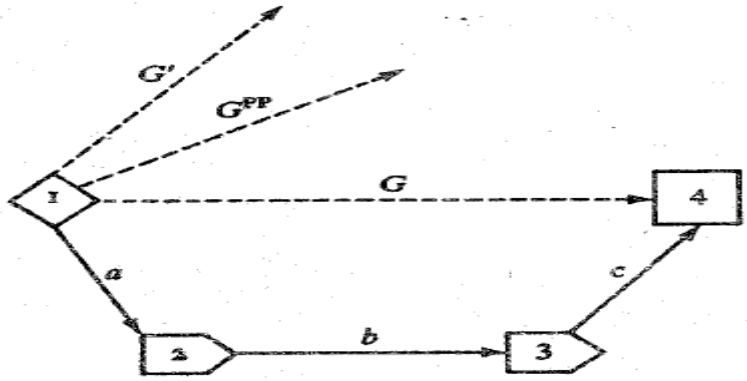

Figure 3. Model of analysis of meta-implicatures raised in POAs

1: S (guest or host) pretends to be polite and show his/ her politeness i.e., *adab* and more particularly *etherām,* and/or *tavāzo* (and *ezzat, mehmān navāzi* in the case of being host)
2: H (guest or host) understands that S is doing *ta'ārof* (Meta-implicature) because of:

- Mutual recognition
- Collusion
- Ambivalence
- Off-record purposes
- Reason for the apology is not necessarily in the H' best interest, or that the act was not against the H's best interest

3: S considers H as polite (*shaxsiat* of H is saved or enhanced).
4: H considers S as polite (*shaxsiat* of S is saved or enhanced).
G: Saving or enhancing *shaxsiat* of S and H.

G^{pp}: Goal of fulfilling *ta'ārof* requirements: H considers S as polite i.e. *moadab. mohtaram, ,* and/or *motavāze* (*mehmān navāz and bā ezzat (with honor)* in the case of being host)

G': Further goal(s): i.e. fear of being considered as impolite i.e. *bi-adab, porru (rude), nā-Mohtaram* (irrespectful), *qeire-samimi* (unfriendly), or *maqrur* (proud) (*xasis* (stingy) in the case of being host) or fear of violating of the addressee's *ezzat*
a: S's apology accompanied by *shekaste-nafsi* or persistence.
b: H's refusal/non-acceptance of apology.
c: Silence or showing *tavāzo*

According to Eslami (2005, p. 453), "over the years of my intercultural experiences in the United States and observation of other Iranian/American interactions, I have witnessed that Iranians sometimes take Americans' genuine invitations as ostensible (not intended to be taken seriously) and therefore reject them, while Americans may take Iranian ostensible invitations as genuine and accept them." Therefore, the interpretation of Persian OSAs, particularly apologies, is crucial for effective intercultural communication. Misunderstandings in this area can lead to unintended social discomfort, misjudgments of sincerity, and communication breakdowns between Persian and American speakers. It is hoped that the findings of this study

will contribute to a deeper understanding of POAs, facilitating more accurate interpretation, teaching, and translation of these speech acts. By providing a structured framework that integrates both Persian and English-based theories of OSAs, this research aims to bridge linguistic and cultural gaps, promoting smoother cross-cultural interactions in both social and professional settings.

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