Offers and expressions of thanks as face enhancing acts: tæ'arof in Persian

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Abstract

The article's starting point is a review of Goffman's notion of face and its reformulation by Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) in their politeness theory. It then describes some aspects of social organisation in Iranian society that have a direct bearing on my analysis of Persian face, which consists of two interrelated aspects, šæxsiæt (pride) and ehteram (honour). Using data from two recorded, casual conversations and interviews with native speakers, I focus on offers and expressions of thanks, the main manifestations of Persian ritual politeness (tæ'arof) and demonstrate how considerations for both aspects of face and for both interlocutors are the underlying factors in managing polite communication in Persian (pragmatics, politeness strategies, Persian). © 2002 Elsevier Science B.V. All rights reserved.

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1. Introduction[1]

This paper is based on an extensive study of Persian politeness (Koutlaki, 1997), which examined a variety of data: recordings of informal conversations in Tehran and London, interviews with native speakers, field notes and my intuitions. My study aimed at ascertaining to which extent Brown and Levinson's theory applies to

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Persian and to formulate a framework that would account satisfactorily for the Persian data.

Brown and Levinson (1987) argue that offers are potentially damaging to the hearer's negative face in that they indicate a speaker's wish to make the hearer commit him/herself to whether or not s/he wants the speaker to do something for the hearer, thereby incurring a possible debt that will have to be paid off in the future (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 66). On the other hand, expressions of thanks are detrimental to the speaker's negative face in indicating his/her acceptance of a debt, thereby humbling his/her own face (ibid.: 67).

The vast majority of my data involved acquaintances, friends and relatives; in short, people among whom there are ongoing relationships. The aim of this paper is, therefore, to argue that this view of offers and thanks is not universally valid and to justify this claim through the analysis of the Persian data. In a culture where inter-dependence is the norm in social relationships, native speakers experience offers and expressions of thanks (often functioning as rejection of offers) as having face-enhancing rather than face-threatening properties, because through them speakers express their recognition of and adherence to socially sanctioned rules. It can be argued, therefore, that in the Iranian setting, offers and expressions of thanks have functions reverse to the ones postulated by Brown and Levinson.

2. Method

Wolfson states that long term participant observation of a group to which the researcher belongs is "the very best kind of data collection" (1989: 75) and that some of the best information about language use can be gleaned in this way (1989: 78). She argues that apart from easy access, this method has got the added advantage of preventing self-consciousness in the participants of the interaction under investigation, thus overcoming the observer's paradox (Labov, 1966, 1972; Wolfson, 1986: 690).

Milroy's work (1987) is an example of a successful study based on the researcher's becoming an accepted member of a group as "a friend of a friend". She initially made a contact with an insider of a community, who advised her on who to approach first. In this way, her role was defined as different from that of a researcher, in that the mention of the insider's name guaranteed her good faith. Group members seemed to feel obliged to help her, while she also acquired some insider rights and obligations (1987: 66).

In my study, I was not present in the role of the researcher who assumes the guise of a 'friend', but the other way round: I was the participants' ex-colleague, friend, relative's or friend's wife, who also happened to be doing some research on their language and needed to record the conversations that took place during naturally occurring (i.e. not especially organised) interactions. The fact that ongoing relationships with the vast majority of the participants had existed for a considerable length of time prior to the recording sessions, has, I believe, rendered the "observer's paradox" factor practically negligible.

In London, I recorded dinner and casual conversations of five mutually acquainted families of professional personnel of an Iranian company, male and female in the mid-thirties to mid-forties age range, all native speakers of Iranian Persian. All the informants had in advance given their permission to be recorded, which was taken to apply to all subsequent recording sessions.

In Tehran, the speakers I recorded represented a wider range of backgrounds and ages. They mainly belonged to my husband's circle of extended family, old friends and acquaintances, but they also included two people I had just met. They included, among others, two blacksmiths, a primary school teacher, a civil servant, a few self-employed businessmen, homemakers, a secretary, two university lecturers, a journalist and a few recent university graduates who were not employed at the time. Some recordings of interactions in trade settings were also made; these involved my husband and a friend of his, who is a shopkeeper at the Central Tehran Bazaar, and other shopkeepers, most of whom were the latter's acquaintances, although a few interactions involved total strangers. There were approximately 60 informants recorded in spontaneous conversation in settings ranging from informal dinners, to New Year's visits (an Iranian custom), drop-in visits and a few trade exchanges in the Central Bazaar of Tehran. There was an equal mix of male and female informants from their early twenties to their late sixties.

In addition to the recordings of naturally occurring conversations, I carried out open-ended informal interviews with 20 individual informants and 10 university students from three EFL groups, supplemented by many more on-the-spot conversations with more native speakers. These interviews, conducted in Persian, elicited a lot of useful information on folk views about politeness, which fed into my description of several folk concepts, like šæxsiæt[2] and ehteram (see below). While each question was the starting point of a topic, I made sure that informants felt free to add any points, comments or anecdotes they thought appropriate to the topics under discussion. These conversations did not follow the pattern of the question–response sequence of formal interviews. The starting point was the questions I asked, but soon the interaction developed into informal conversation, often amongst the participants, myself introducing more topics when I thought the previous one had more or less been covered. I decided to do this in order to ensure that other ramifications of the topics I had included in my questionnaire would be brought to my attention and dealt with as appropriate. As in the recorded conversations, my being an 'insider' of most of the groups I used for the interviews was of enormous help in their success, as was the fact that the pairs or groups I interviewed were pre-existing. Thus, I taped interviews with the members of a family after a meal, with some friends while having tea, and the students of an English language class after their lesson.

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[2] The English letters I have used in the transliteration of the Persian text have approximately the same values as in English, apart from the following (descriptions based on Lambton 1954): **x**: voiceless velar uvular with scrape; approximating to ch in the Scottish word loch; **š**: voiceless post-alveolar fricative; corresponding to sh in show; **q**: voiced or voiceless uvular plosive, according to phonetic context- usually pronounced as voiced if between two back vowels. **æ**: as in English hat; **a:** as in English bath.

3. Goffman

Goffman (1959) conceptualised 'face' as a person's "most personal possession and the center of his security and pleasure", which, however, "is only on loan to him from society" and "it will be withdrawn unless he conducts himself in a way that is worthy of it" (Goffman, 1972: 322). In order to maintain face, a person takes into account his/her position in society and normally refrains from carrying out actions or taking part in activities that would be awkward to face up to later (1967: 7). In other words, once a person takes on a self-image expressed through face, s/he is expected to live up to it, refraining from actions that are either above or beneath him/her and often performing other actions that may be costly to him/her. Thus, a person must ensure that the flow of events sustains a particular expressive order, so that what is expressed by these events will uphold the face s/he is projecting (ibid.: 9–10).

An individual will accept such limitations in behaviour because of pride ("from duty to himself", Goffman, 1967: 9) or honour, which, if related to the way the person handles his/her body, emotions and material things, becomes dignity. According to Goffman, "[A]pproved attributes and their relation to face make every man his own jailer; this is a fundamental social constraint even though each man may like his cell". (1967: 9–10).

However, a person is not only concerned with his/her own face; apart from his/her self-respect, s/he is also expected to show consideration for others' feelings at the same time and to make earnest and spontaneous efforts to uphold their faces because of emotional identification with the others and with their feelings (ibid). Goffman repeatedly stresses that the two face orientations, the defensive orientation towards saving his/her own face, and the protective orientation toward saving the others' face will co-exist in practice, even though at any one time one of them may predominate (1967: 14).

These face concerns give rise to facework, which Goffman defines as "the actions taken by a person to make whatever he is doing consistent with face"; he also maintains that facework "serves to counteract 'incidents', that is, events whose effective symbolic implications threaten face" (1967: 12).

4. Brown and Levinson (1987)

Brown and Levinson (1987) postulate that deviations from Grice's Cooperative Principle (1967, 1975) and the four maxims comprised under it, stem from politeness considerations, although they also acknowledge other motivations such as humour, irony, sarcasm and so on. As already mentioned, Goffman's notion of face is central to their model, which postulates that face has two components/aspects, negative face and positive face. Negative face is defined as "the want of every 'competent adult member' that his actions be unimpeded by others" (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 62) and "[the] want to have his freedom of action unhindered and his attention unimpeded" (129), whereas positive face comprises "the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others" (62) and "...[the] perennial desire that his

wants (or the actions/ acquisitions/ values resulting from them) should be thought of as desirable'' (101). Face can be threatened, lost or enhanced in interaction and, following on from Goffman's description of face, every rational person is attuned to maintaining or enhancing an interlocutor's face in order to have his/her face similarly maintained or enhanced.

Goffman's comments on the structured nature of interaction have had an impact on the concept of Face Threatening Acts in Brown and Levinson's theory (1978, 1987). Goffman observes that the pause between interchanges tends to be greater than the pause between turns at talking in an interchange and he argues that this structural aspect of talk is a result of the fact that when a statement is made or a message is imparted, no matter how unimportant, its originator commits him/herself and puts the listeners and him/herself ''in jeopardy''. This essentially means that the originator of the message renders him/herself liable to personal affront if its intended recipients do not listen to him/her or think him/her forward, foolish, or offensive, which will necessitate face-saving action on his/her part against them (Goffman, 1967: 37). In the same vein, Goffman expresses the view that

Greetings provide a way of showing that a relationship is still what it was at the termination of the previous co-participation, and, typically, that this relationship involves sufficient suppression of hostility for the participants temporarily to drop their guards and talk (1967: 41, my emphasis).

This view was the basis of Brown and Levinson's view that all interaction contains instances of talk that carry the possibility of face threat. Since all interaction is full of Face Threatening Acts (FTAs), the motive for polite behaviour is the redress of FTAs through politeness strategies, or mitigating strategies (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 60).

In this framework, offers threaten an addressee's negative face because they put pressure on him/her to let a speaker pursue a course of action that may place an addressee under the speaker's debt. On the other hand, expressions of thanks jeopardise the speaker's negative face in that they are an acknowledgement of his/her acceptance of a debt. Surprisingly, rejections of offers do not feature in Brown and Levinson's framework; however, according to the way other acts in this framework have been analysed, they would fit into the classification of acts threatening a speaker's positive face, in that they might be perceived as reflecting the undesirability of the object of the offer or as a hearer's unwillingness to allow a speaker a higher degree of involvement in his/her own affairs, thereby precluding the possibility of increasing familiarity between the interlocutors.

4.1. Critique of Brown and Levinson's model

Apart from the ordering of face-redressive strategies, the concept of FTAs is an aspect of Brown and Levinson's model that has received criticism mainly because, according to Brown and Levinson, ''some acts are intrinsically threatening to face and thus require 'softening'''(Brown and Levinson, 1987: 24, my emphasis). Communication is, therefore, seen as a minefield full of acts potentially dangerous to face and as ''a fundamentally dangerous and antagonistic endeavor'' (Kasper, 1990:

195). Schmidt characterises the model as "an overly pessimistic, rather paranoid view of human social interaction" (1980: 104), while Nwoye (1992: 311) concludes that if the view of constant potential threat to the interlocutors' faces is always true, "[it] could rob social interaction of all elements of pleasure".

Various researchers of non-Western languages have criticised the ethnocentricity of Brown and Levinson's model. Gu (1990: 241–242) rejects Brown and Levinson's model as inapplicable to the study of Chinese politeness on two accounts. Firstly, Brown and Levinson's concept of negative FTAs does not seem right for Chinese culture, where, other things being equal, offering, inviting and promising are not experienced as threatening the hearer's negative face in impeding his/her freedom. Secondly, according to Gu, the normative aspect of politeness has been completely ignored in Brown and Levinson's framework because their model is based on the interaction between two rational speakers as <u>individuals</u> rather than as members of a society bound by its rules.

Similarly, Hill et al. (1986), Matsumoto (1988, 1989) and Ide (1989), in their work on Japanese politeness have shown that Brown and Levinson's work is based on Western ideals of each individual's value and territorial rights and that, therefore, this model cannot account for their data in a satisfactory way. The fact that Japanese is an honorific language means that simple, factual utterances like <u>Today is Saturday</u> will encode the speaker's and the hearer's statuses and their relationship through the appropriate choices of copulas, verbs and other sentence components (Matsumoto, 1989: 208–209). Since in this system, honorifics are used to acknowledge position differences rather than to elevate the addressee (Ide, 1989: 231), loss of face may come about as a result of a failure to understand and act in accordance with the structure and the hierarchy of the group.

In order to accommodate the use of honorifics in Japanese and other languages in the politeness theory, Hill et al., in their study on Japanese and American politeness phenomena (1986: 347–348), postulate two universal aspects of politeness: discernment and volition. In discernment, a speaker conforms passively to politeness forms/behaviour in accordance with the situation, statuses, ages of participants etc., whereas volition allows the speaker more choice from a wider range of possibilities in order to make his/her intentions clear. The authors recognise that the distribution of these two aspects will vary cross-culturally, but they maintain that they both exist to a greater or lesser extent in all languages. An example of choice between formal vs. informal register in English would be <u>purchase</u> vs. <u>buy</u> and <u>dine</u> vs. <u>eat</u> (Ide, 1989: 226).

Thus, according to Hill et al., in Japanese, where the choice of honorific is dictated by the status of the participants, the setting and other factors, the component of discernment occupies a much larger "chunk" than in American English. Conversely, in American English, where originality of expression is valued as an expression of sincerity and the use of formulas is perceived as insincere and uninteresting, the aspect of volition predominates.

Persian is similar to Japanese in the sense that in adhering to societal norms, a speaker enhances his/her own face. It is easy to assume then that in such societies non-compliance with the accepted norms would be perceived as ignorance or lack of

self-control (Matsumoto, 1988: 410), or even as a sign of a deprived background (Beeman, 1986, 85–86; see Section 5.2).

Likewise, Mao (1994), who describes the two components of Chinese face from an emic standpoint, demonstrates how the Chinese concept of face is different from Brown and Levinson's model and challenges its alleged universality. Chinese face consists of <u>mianzi</u>: "prestige or reputation achieved through getting on in life or ascribed (or imagined) by other members of one's community" and <u>lian</u>: "the respect of the group for a man with a good moral reputation"; it is "both a social sanction for enforcing moral standards and an internalized sanction" (Hu, 1944: 45, quoted in Mao 1994: 457). In consequence, Mao argues that the two aspects of Chinese face do not correspond to Brown and Levinson's positive and negative face concept, apart from a limited similarity between <u>lian</u> and positive face. Mao proposes that in order to account for such differences, another interactional construct must be developed, that of <u>relative force orientation</u>. This is defined as:

> an underlying direction of face that emulates, though never completely attaining, one of two interactional ideals, that may be salient in a given speech community: the ideal social identity, or the ideal individual autonomy. The specific content of face in a given speech community is determined by one of these two interactional ideals sanctioned by the members of the community (Mao, 1994: 472).

According to this construct, Chinese face and, as I argue in this paper, Persian face as well, are oriented towards an ideal social identity, or public face, whereas Brown and Levinson's face construct, <u>pace</u> Goffman, describes an individual's self-image. The view of relative force orientation seems like a promising modification to Brown and Levinson's model. However, Mao does not clarify how this face construct fits in with Brown and Levinson's model, nor does he provide any specific illustrations.

In his discussion of the concept of face among the Igbo, Nwoye (1992) states that group face is of paramount importance in that society. A person's anti-social act brings shame, dishonour, or embarrassment not only to himself, but also, perhaps more importantly, to the group to which he belongs or with which he is connected (314), with children's unacceptable behaviour reflecting badly on parents.

Nwoye argues that Brown and Levinson's notion of negative face and the notion of imposition which threatens it do not seem to apply to the egalitarian Igbo society. In Igbo society a very important socially sanctioned behaviour is every member's concern for group interests rather than atomistic individualism (1992: 310). Thus, exchange of hospitality, help, food, loan of tools and other services are part of everyday life, with neither participant experiencing requests for any of the above as impositions (ibid: 319).

Because of this orientation of Igbo society, Nwoye contends that Fraser's (1983) view of a conversational contract is applicable: politeness is seen as a social contract among individual members of the group, in that they behave in the way expected of them and in turn expect similar behaviour from others (1992: 310). Nwoye concludes that in the light of recent research into non-Western politeness, Brown and Levinson's model should be revised, but does not propose any modifications.

In this paper I will demonstrate that in Persian, offers and expressions of thanks, which in Persian sometimes function as rejections of an offer and acknowledgements

of the speaker's expression of regard, have very different functions in simultaneously anointing both a speaker's and an addressee's face (šæxsiæt-see below).

5. Setting the scene: Iranian society

The nuclear family is an all-important unit of social organisation in Iranian society, not only as the minute component of the social edifice, but also as a frame of all kinds of support for its members. Thus, people are seen as belonging to a family rather than standing as individuals, although this does not by any means entail any loss of their individuality: they are known both as members of a family and as individuals in their own right.

In the family setting, duties and obligations are shared by everyone: to help other members emotionally, financially and otherwise in times of need and to maintain the family's (good) reputation is a priority for everyone. In return, each family member can expect the same commitment from the other family members. Beeman (1986: 47) states that family members:

> must be able to further each other's interests and provide for the survival of the family as a whole. For this reason it is to the advantage of the family to have great diversity in its membership in terms of occupations, interests, political connections, life styles and so forth.

One circle further lies the extended family, with paternal and maternal uncles and aunts, cousins, their spouses and their children and sometimes their in-laws. As with the nuclear family, similar rights and obligations, albeit less strong, obtain in the extended family.

Additionally, every member is also personally networked with people from their workplace, university or circle of personal friends. An individual is able to call upon the services of any member of the one network (e.g. nuclear or extended family) on behalf of any member of the other one (e.g. colleagues or friends), with the obligation (mennæt) falling on him/herself, the common member of both networks, to reciprocate the favour in future.

Since everyone occasionally depends upon others for hospitality in a strange town, for services and for loan of goods that s/he cannot procure for herself, the notion of mennæt (obligation) is a potent one in Persian. (cf. the ''cardinal principle'' of Balance in Chinese politeness in Gu, 1990: 239) and it becomes therefore clear that Persian is a debt-sensitive culture, like the Japanese (Matsumoto, 1988: 409). In Iranian society, however, social debt is not felt as a burden on an individual's shoulders, but as a basic ingredient of everyday interaction. (cf. Sifianou, 1992: 40–43 for a similar description of social relationships amongst Greeks, and Sifianou (1993) on the notion of imposition).

5.1. About tæ'arof (ritual politeness)

Etymologically, tæ'arof is an Arabic word meaning ''mutual recognition'', thus indicating that tæ'arof functions as a tool for negotiating interactants' relationships.

Aryanpour and Aryanpour (1976: 306–307) define tæ'arof as "compliment(s), cere-
mony, offer, gift, flummery, courtesy, flattery, formality, good manners, soft tongue,
honeyed phrases, respect" and renders tæ'arof kærdæn (to do tæ'arof) as "to use
compliments, to stand upon ceremony, to make a present of, to speak with courtesy,
to use honeyed phrases (soft tongue)".

The dictionary quoted above illustrates the entry with the following examples
(translations and glosses as given in the dictionary, emphases mine):

> tæ'arof bemoq'e xošayænd æst: A timely compliment is pleasing.
> tæ'arof-ra kenar begozarim væ sadeh hærf bezænim : Let us put ceremonies aside
> and speak plainly.
> xeili be u tæ'arof kærdæm : I showed him much courtesy.
> be jaye ezhare ædæb tæ'arof (cærb zæbani) kærdæn: to use flattery in place of
> politeness.
> tæ'arofat-e diplomatik : the diplomatic formalities.
> u ædæme ba tæ'arof æst: He is a man of good manners.
> tæ'arof qalebæn xeili delpæzir æst: Soft words (honeyed phrases) are often very
> pleasing.

These examples exemplify positively perceived meanings of the word (e.g. "com-
pliment" as token of goodwill, "courtesy", "good manners") as well as negatively
perceived ones (e.g. "flummery", "flattery", "ceremonies" in the sense of empty
formalities). In the absence of a direct lexical equivalent in English, the researchers
who have studied tæ'arof have glossed it as "ritual courtesy" (Beeman, 1986: 56),
"expressed courtesy" (Bateson et al., 1977: 270) and "polite verbal wrestling"
(Rafiee, 1992: 96). From the above, it becomes clear that tæ'arof is a very complex
concept, carrying different meanings in the minds of native speakers and baffling
anyone endeavouring to describe it.

As Hymes states, "one good ethnographic technique for getting at speech events, as
at other categories, is through words which name them" (1962). Similarly, Gumperz
(1972: 17) adds that

> members of all societies recognize certain communicative routines which they view
> as distinct wholes separate from other types of discourse, characterized by special
> rules of speech and nonverbal behavior... these units often carry special names.

Tæ'arof is one such "communicative routine". From the discussions I have had
with native speakers, it transpired that no discussion of Persian politeness can ever
hope to be complete without much more than a passing reference to tæ'arof, which
is a central concept in Iranian interaction and which is felt to be indispensable in all
communication by native speakers.

Interestingly, the dictionary entry I referred to above did not give "offer" as one
of the main meanings of tæ'arof, which is how Bateson et al. and Rafiee have also
described tæ'arof. The meaning of tæ'rof as "offer" also figured prominently in the
interviews with native speakers, from which I will now present some views.

A very strong social convention in Iranian society is that any offer or invitation
must be refused at least once and often more than once as a matter of course,

resulting in the initiator's stronger insistence (cf. Rubin, 1983: 14). Examples of such refusal have occurred in the conversational data: after a refusal, the person who made the offer may say tæ'arof nækon ('don't do tæ'arof' i.e. 'take it') or tæ'arof mikoni? ('are you doing tæ'arof?' i.e. 'do you refuse because it is expected of you?').

In this context, it was mentioned that some speakers are so insistent in their offers that they become tiresome because the guests' refusals may be genuine. In spite of this, such insistence is seen as a sign of consideration for their guests and of concern for the guests' needs. The phrase ye tæ'arofe xoškoxali kærd (lit. 'a tæ'arof dry-and-empty did', i.e. 'he did tæ'arof plainly or made an offer only once') is intended as a criticism of a speaker who did not appear to be insistent enough and consequently, for not exhibiting the expected cordiality and respect.

5.2. The Persian concept of face (folk terms)

In this section I will describe two folk terms from a native speaker's point of view, basing my description on the information collected from informal ethnographic interviews, on some extracts from recorded interactions, and on my field notes, all collected during fieldwork in Tehran (spring, 1994). Given the importance of examining how a certain usage is experienced by native speakers, I decided to use native speakers' intuitions as a valid source of cultural insights. In this way, I, as a non-native speaker of Persian, endeavoured to break out of the constraints of my own cultural background which might impose a less accurate interpretation on the data.

The two interrelated concepts of Goffman's pride and honour mentioned above interestingly correspond to the two main components of the Persian concept of face, šæxsiæt and ehteram. Šæxsiæt is a complex concept which could be rendered as 'personality', 'character', 'honour', 'self-respect', 'social standing'. A person's šæxsiæt is mainly dependent on the way s/he behaves and his/her educational background and is often perceived as related to the socialisation and upbringing she has received. Thus, a polite person is characterised as bašæxsiæt (lit. "with-šæxsiæt") whereas a person who will not observe the expected codes of behaviour and will behave in a way that may be perceived as offensive by her interlocutors is usually characterised as bišæxsiæt (lit. "without-šæxsiæt"). A person who verbally elevates an interlocutor beheš šæxsiæt mide (i.e. gives him/her [the interlocutor] šæxsiæt [honour, respect]), at the same time also showing his/her own šæxsiæt. A person's šæxsiæt is perceived as indicative of a person's self-respect: the more polite a person is, the more šæxsiæt s/he has. In other words, a person who wants to keep up his/her own šæxsiæt will also try to maintain his/her interlocutor's šæxsiæt too.

Ehteram (near equivalents 'honour', 'respect', 'esteem', 'dignity') establishes the positions and statuses of the interactants with respect to one another and is shown through the adherence to the established norms of behaviour according to the addressee's position, age, status and interlocutors' relationship (cf. Goffman, 1967: 9 "duty to wider social units"). Ehteram is shown among others through the use of appropriate address terms, conformity to the rules of ritual politeness (tæ'arof) and other conventions.

I would argue that these two 'sides' of face differ in that šæxsiæt has its root in the individual and his/her background and is largely unalterable, although it must be

attended to in interaction, while ehteram is a more dynamic concept, flowing from the speaker to the addressee, and may or may not always be given. This is reminiscent of Goffman's earlier quoted view that:

...while [a person's]...social face can be [his] most personal possession and the center of his security and nature, it is only on loan to him from society; it will be withdrawn unless he conducts himself in a way that is worth it (1967: 10).

However, I must stress that ehteram is almost ever-present in Iranian interaction and it is often, although not always, dependent upon a person's šæxsiæt. In other words, a speaker addressing an interlocutor of a high (perceived) šæxsiæt (social position or educational background) will show a high degree of ehteram too, but this does not mean that a person of a lower šæxsiæt (social standing) will not receive ehteram at all. In fact, I postulate that ehteram is one of the basic motives behind polite behaviour.

Also, a person attends to his/her own šæxsiæt through showing ehteram, verbally and non-verbally, not only to an interlocutor but also to any other people present, which shows how the face needs of all participants in a given situation are attended to at the same time.

Thus, politeness rules dictate that a speaker attend to an addressee's face through treatment according to the latter's age, position, social standing and the relationship obtaining between them. This is achieved inter alia through the use of expressions of desirability of the addressee's company, demonstration of concern about his/her comfort and welfare and show of interest in his/her affairs. Thus, in Persian, non-conformity to established norms is very likely to result in a face-threatening situation for one's interlocutor, because the use of an inappropriate linguistic form on the part of a speaker may be perceived as trying to establish a different relationship from the one an addressee feels appropriate or desirable (cf. Beeman, 1986: 73–77).

It could be argued that šæxsiæt is similar to Brown and Levinson's notion of positive face, but there are also some very important differences. Brown and Levinson conceptualise positive face as a person's individual want to be desired, respected and liked, and to have her wants shared by others. In an Iranian setting, giving šæxsiæt to an addressee has to do with society's injunctions about paying face, and also with group face wants. Behaving in line with societal values is of paramount importance; as a result, loss of face can come about if a speaker is seen behaving or becomes known to have behaved in an unacceptable way, because this lapse in behaviour is perceived as detrimental to a speaker's social standing and indirectly to his family's public face and is bound to incur society's criticism, which directly damages his/her face.

Brown and Levinson would account for this lapse as detrimental to a speaker's positive face because their face construct is based on individual and not group values. In contrast, in Persian, individual and group values are equally important. An indication of the importance of family values, politeness, honour and their relationship with each other is found in three terms of abuse, which, according to Beeman (1986: 85–86), are near synonmys.

- bi-ædæb ['without manners'—connotes not only social appropriateness but also a lack of all of those refinements that separate humans from animals.

- bi-šæræf ['without honour'—connotes a lack of honour and respect for one's family.
- bi pedær væ madær ('without a father and mother').

Beeman maintains that these expressions denote that an individual who is perceived as unable to conform to societal norms of behaviour is also dishonourable; these negative traits must have come about through the lack of appropriate upbringing and of a socialisation the individual should have had from his/her family, but presumably had not, the result being the individual's inability to function in a socially acceptable manner (1986: 85–86). This view illustrates the close connection between the central role of the family in somebody's socialisation, the way s/he will attest to this socialisation through her behaviour and the social standing s/he will attain as a result of it. The importance of maintaining individual and group face is obvious.

6. Data and analysis

Iranians are aware that refusals of food and drink may often be tæ'arof, and, therefore, feel obliged to insist further, telling their interlocutor not to do tæ'arof, (which is just another way of doing tæ'arof!), as in the following extract:

Extract 1
Context: A (male, early thirties) and D (his wife, late twenties, non-native speaker) are visiting their friends B and C. A has just said that it is high time they went home, when C, the hostess, offers them some more fruit. B is the host:

A: næ dige ma yævaš yævaš berim dige
        (no more we slowly slowly we-to-go more)
        No, thank you, we'd better be going.

C: ye mive boxorin
        (one fruit you-PL-eat)
        Have a fruit first.

A: næ dige motšæker, næ dige xeili mæmnun
        (no more thankful, no more very obliged)
        No, thank you very much.

B: baba šoma ye sa'æt vaistadin
        (you-PL one hour are-standing)
        But you've been standing there for an hour!

C: cera, tæ'arof mikonin?
        (why, do you stand on ceremony?)
        Why, are you doing tæ'arof?

A: næ baba, ce tæ'arofi...næ mæn ælan hænuz gelum–
   (no, what tæ'arof...no, I now still my-throat
   No, of course not...no, my sore throat is

   dorost hessabi xub næšode
   (completely well not-became.)
   not completely well yet.

C: xob ye moz boxorin, ye moz- mive zærærdar nædarim.
   (well a banana you-PL eat.A banana- fruit harmful we-not have)
   Well, have a banana—the fruit we've got is not harmful (for the throat).

   sibo moz.–
   (apple and banana)
   only apples and bananas.

   (to D) šoma šir mixori biaræm ya miri xune?
   (you-PL milk you drink I-to-bring or you-SING-go home)
   (to D) Shall I bring some milk for you or will you have some at home?

D: næ dige mersi
   (no more, thanks)
   No, thank you.

C: cai næxordin, cai mixorin hosein aqa?
   (tea you-PL not-ate, tea you-PL-eat, hosein-Mr?)
   You haven't had any tea, would you like some, Mr Hossein?

A: næ xeili motšæker, ma dige bayæt bolænd šim
   (no very thankful, we more must get up-)
   No, thank you very much, we really must be going–

   kotæmo bepušæm.
   (my coat I-put-on)
   let me put my coat on.

C: ye mive boxorin berin- bezær xanum mozešo boxore.
   (a fruit you-PL-eat you-PL-go.let lady banana-of-her to eat.)
   Have a fruit and then go. Let your wife finish off her banana.

   dæhonime hala.
   (ten-thirty is now.)
   It's only ten thirty.

C repeatedly offers refreshments while A refuses them. C's utterance 5 directed to A 'tæ'arof mikonin?'('are you doing tæ'arof?', i.e. 'is this a tæ'arof refusal?') indicates the speakers' awareness of tæ'arof conventions. According to Iranian convention, the first response to an offer is almost always a refusal which along with any subsequent refusals are followed by more insistent offers. These offers are perceived as expressions of cordiality and warmth of feeling, even when the object of the offer is unwanted.

So strong are tæ'arof conventions that in the course of the ethnographic interviews an informant reported cases that some hosts offer food with such insistence that they become genuinely tiresome, whereas another said that some guests may leave the dinner-table half-hungry because they were not offered food with sufficient insistence and, therefore, were unable to help themselves to as much food as they wanted.

Offers of food and drink are obligatory in everyday interaction and it is interesting how early these habits are instilled in children in Iranian culture, as in many other cultures:

Extract 2
Context: Mother C (early forties) to 3-year-old son who is eating sweets in the presence of a female visitor.

bia be xale jun tæ'rof kærdi?
(come to auntie-dear tæ'arof you-SING did?)
Have you offered some to auntie?

Nwoye (1992: 321), in his study on face in the Igbo of Nigeria, writes that children are taught to share their food with other people, even if only as a ritual. It is only designed to teach adult forms of behaviour when food must be shared with anyone who happens to be there. An absence of such an offer is equivalent to a serious breach of etiquette and results in an adverse reflection on the person who failed to issue it.

Ad hoc offers of putting up for the night are not uncommon among relatives or friends, especially if the guests have some way to go, or if it is late at night. In any case, at the end of a late visit, some hosts will issue perfunctory offers of putting up for the night, which usually are formulated as 'šæb bemunid' ('you-PL stay the night') or 'šæb nemimunid?' ('won't you-PL stay the night?').

A male informant reported that his wife's paternal aunt (amme), who is unmarried, always offers to put him up for the night when he pays her a visit, even though they both know that the offer must and will be refused. It is, however, clear to both that the offer has a phatic function despite practical and social constraints; in other words, what may seem as perfunctory or disingenuous at instrumental level is a genuine expression of cordiality and warmth at social level.

The following extract features insistent offers and refusals between two close friends.

Extract **3**
Context: This recording was made in London. H (male, early thirties) is returning to B (male, early forties) some money he had borrowed. The arrangement about the

money had been that since H could only withdraw a limited amount from the cash dispenser on a Saturday evening, B would withdraw as much as he could do too, so that H could pay for a second-hand car on the same day and, as soon as the banks opened on Monday morning, H would return the money he had borrowed. This conversation takes place on Monday evening.

H: bezær mæn..(TAKES OUT MONEY) ta færamuš nækærdæm
                      (let I... until forget not-did)
                      Let me...er**...**(TAKES OUT MONEY) before I forget.

B: aqa vel kon tora xoda
                      (sir leave by God)
                      Leave it, really.

H: næ næ xaheš mikonæm.
                      (no no request I-do)
                      Please.

B: be vallahe nemixam
                      (by God I-not-want)
                      I don't need it now, really.

H: xaheš mikonæm
                      (request I-do)
                      Please.

B: Nemixam
                      (I not-want)
                      I dont need it.

H: pænjai hæm bærat gereftæm æz bank
                      (fifty-pound note too I took from bank)
                      I even got it in fifty pound notes for you.

B: næ nemixam axe
                      (no I-not-want)
                      But I don't need it I say!

H: mæn..mæn goftæm be šoma ke- be jane xodæm be xoda–
                      I I-said to you-PL that- by soul of-me by God)
                      I told you...I swear by God–

                      mæn ino qælbæn migæm- šoma 'eine bæradære mæni–
                      (I this-ACC from-heart I say- you-PL like brother mine-are)
                      believe me, I speak from the heart, you are like my brother

ægær inja... **ægær mæn læng** bemunæm yæ'ni- migæm–
(if here...if I lame am left that-is- I say)
if I am pinched for money here, I say

tænha kesi ke mæn mitunæm...begæm yæ'ni xodæm–
(only person that I can...I to-say that is myself)
you are the only person I can [ask]-

rahætæm šomai...inæm æz in.
(comfortable-am you-PL-are...this too from this.)
that is I am comfortable with...so that's sorted.

Although the arrangements for the return of the money had been clear, up to this point, B vehemently refuses to accept the money. The reason for his refusal is to show that he puts his friend's needs first, in case H was finding it difficult to repay him so quickly. On the other hand, H also repeats his offer with insistence because he knows that B's refusals are tæ'arof and that in the end he will accept the money. Both interlocutors are keen to project certain desirable qualities which enhance their and the other's face: H wants to show appreciation of the loan and punctuality in repaying it and B wants to show his generosity towards his friend and stress that for him money is unimportant. The length of the extract indicates the importance of face negotiation between participants.

As a result of H's insistence, B is persuaded to take the money and count it, finding it more than what he gave the night before. H explains that this is for the dinner out they had had the night before and for which B had paid.

B: boro aqa jun
          (go sir-dear)
          Leave it, man!

H: e' e' næ vallah be xoda!
          (what? no by God [ARABIC] by God [PERSIAN])
          Oh, no, it can't be!

B: næ c: be hæzræte- aqa fek kærdi-
          (no by saint- sir thought you-SING-did)
          No, I swear-you'd better think again!

H: næ be jane xodæm
          (no by soul of-me)
          No, by my soul-

B: fek kærdi- fek-
          (thought you-SING-did- thought)
          that's what you think!

H: næ mašin- ræftim širinie mašin–
            (no car- we went sweet-of-car–)
            No, that was a treat [from us] to celebrate the purchase of the car.

B: mašin- širinie mašin æslæn–
            (car- sweet-of-car at all–)
            celebrate the car? What–

            æz in hærfa nædarim- mixad sære maro šire–
            (from these words we-not have- he-wants head-of-us syrup)
            are you talking about? [JOKINGLY] He's trying to cheat me!

H: e' næ injuri nækon–
            (no, this way not-do)
            Don't be like this!

B: bemale- boro aqa...boro–
            (to-smear- go sir ... go–)
            Come off it, man!

H: næ vallah e' æziæt nækon šoma
            (no by God tease not-do you-PL)
            No, really, don't fool me around.

B: ma širini doros– mæn širini dorost hessabi mixam bo::ro:–
            (we sweet prop– I sweet proper I want-leave off–)
            I want a proper celebration, not just like that–

H: næ vallah širinie tævællode–
            (no by God sweet-of birthday-of–)
            No, really, it was to celebrate–

            ciz // 3 syll //
            (what)
            the birthday of... [HIS WIFE]

B: boro aqa. næ bebin dašte baš dašte baš dašte baš–
            (go sir. no look have have have–)
            Leave it. Look, keep it for now–

H: næ næ næ næ næ nemixam.
            (no no no no no I-not-want)
            No, I don't need it.

B: mæn bæ'dæn hessab darim.
            (I later account we-have)
            we'll sort it out later.

H: næ dige inæm værdarin šoma mæn rahæt bašæm jeddi migæm–
                  (no more this-too take you-PL I comfortable to-be really
                  No, really, I want you to take this too, so that I
                  may feel more comfortable, I mean it

B: næ vallah
                  (no by God)
                  I swear I won't have it.

H: næ be june mæn be šoma goftæm axe.
                  (no by soul-of me to you-PL I-said)
                  No, by my soul, I told you, didn't I.

B: næ   bebin dige bebin ah: dige–
                           (no   look more look... more–)
                           No   tell you what..there...–

          æslæn hici ah::..ah:..ah:..–
          (at all nothing...)
          that's the end of it- I don't want to hear anything more about it...there.

   (B Takes the money he had lent A but refuses to take the £20 note, which H wants
to give him for the dinner out they had had together the night before.)

H: næ ah ah hæm nædare næ næ næ næ be xoda
                  (no 'ah' too not-has no no no no by God)
                  No, and don't 'there' me either.

B: guš kon // 2 syll //
                  (listen)
                  Just listen...

H: xob baše hala con mixaim- pæs cera šoma?–
                  (OK let-it-be now because we-want- but why you-PL?)
                  Keep it for now so that we can do that again-why should you pay?

                  bia næ næ næ næ be xoda næ e'... ino–
                  (come no no no no by God no ...this-ACC–)
                  have it no, no I swear...you keep this-

B: //2 syll //

H: negærdar pæs ta bæ'd dobare ciz konim. næ ino æslæn šoma–
                  (keep then so later again what we-do. no this at-all you-PL)

<u>now so that we can go on an outing together again.</u>
<u>You should have taken this in the first place.</u>

(B takes half of the money he paid for dinner)

H: xeili mæmnun behærhal...motšæker æz hæme ciz...mæmnunæm.
               (very obliged anyway...thankful from all things...obliged-am)
               <u>Thanks for eveything anyway.</u>

In this situation, which is not untypical, interlocutors resort to strong insistence, often oath-taking that they do not want to accept the offer made, which leads to more insistence until finally ostensibly reluctant acceptance ensues. Native speakers do not consider it polite to appear too eager to accept an offer of food or service and one is generally expected to refuse at least once, often more than once. The same goes for the person who offers the food or the service: s/he is expected to offer it at least once and if they want the offer to be taken up more than once.

Apart from 'social' settings, ritual offers and ritual refusals also feature in the setting of trade exchanges. Extract 4 is similar to Extract 3 in that it involves a similar understanding between the participants. Here, J, even though an acquaintance of S, is present in the role of a customer, so the understanding is that S will provide goods and will receive money for them.

Extract 4
Context: this extract was recorded in the Central Bazaar of Tehran, where J is a shopkeeper. He is now escorting his friend H and H's wife while they are doing some shopping. They are in a shop belonging to one of J's acquaintances. The extract starts when H and his wife have chosen what they want. S is the shopkeeper.

J: jærime næqdi kon maro
               (fine cash you-SING do-IMP us)
               <u>Give us a cash fine</u> (i.e. tell me how much it is)

S: baše baba, cizi nist
               (be-it INTERJ, nothing it-is)
               <u>That's alright, it's nothing really</u>.

J: qorbunet beræm
               (sacrifice-of-you-SING I-go)
               <u>Thank you very much.</u>

S: boro jæfær jun
               (go-IMP Jafar soul)
               <u>Leave it, my dear Jafar.</u>
               (J says something incomprehensible to H)

S: jæfær jun boro
(Jafar soul, go)
<u>Dear Jafar, leave it</u> (i.e. it's alright, don't pay anything).

H: aqa gorbunet
(sir, sacrifice-of-you-SING)
<u>Thank you, sir</u>.

J: fædat šæm
(sacrifice-of-you-SING may-I-become)
<u>Thank you very much</u>.

S: vallah, bedune tæ'rof
(by God, without ceremony)
<u>I swear, I mean it</u>.

J: æli jun bebin...æz mæqaze xodemun darim mibærim dige
(Ali soul look...from shop-of ourselves we-take)
<u>Look, my friend Ali...it as if it is our own shop</u>!

S: boro jæfær aqa
(go-IMP Jafar sir)
<u>Leave it, Mr Jafar</u> !

H: aqa, qorbane šoma, xeili mæmnun.
(sir, sacrifice-of-you-PL, very obliged)
<u>Thank you, sir, this is very kind of you</u>.

S: qabele šomaro nædare
(worth-of-you-PL not-has)
<u>They are not worthy of you</u> (i.e. you can have them for free)

J: qorbunet beræm, xeili mæmnun.
(sacrifice-of-you-SING I-go, very obliged.)
<u>Thank you very much, that's very kind of you</u>.
(S reduces all the prices as he calculates)

S: hezaro punsæd
(thousand five-hundred)
<u>Fifteen hundred</u> (tomans [Iranian currency])

J: xoda behet bærekæt bede, qorbunet beræm.
(God to-you-SING blessing may-give, sacrifice-of-you-SING I-go)
<u>May God bless this money, thank you very much</u>.
(H gives S the money)

S: qabeli nædare aqa
                (worth not- has sir)
                It's not worth anything, sir (i.e. you can keep the money).

H: xeili mæmnun, qorbane šoma.
                (very obliged, sacrifice-of-you-PL)
                That's very kind of you, thank you.(i.e. no, thank you)

S: aqa, jane mæn
                (sir, soul-of-me)
                By my soul (I swear), sir.

H: xeili motšækeræm æz lotf-e-šoma
                (very thankful-I-am from kindness-of-you-PL)
                Thank you for your kindness.
                (S tries to return some of the money but J insists that he take it.)

S: bezær baše
                (let be)
                Leave it.
                (S pushes some of the money into J'S hand and J finally takes it)

J: dæstet dærd nækone.
                (your-SING-hand pain not-do.)
                Thank you.

H: xeili mæmnunæm, qorbane dæste šoma
                (very obliged-am, sacrifice-of hand-of you-PL)
                Thank you very much, thank you.

S: xaheš mikonæm, xoda behetun bærekæt bede.
                (request I-do, God to you-PL blessing may-give.)
                Please, may God bless you.

In Iran it is common for a shopkeeper to nominally refuse payment with the formulaic expression qabeli nædare ("it's not worthy of you", as in utterances 12 and 16), but this is never meant literally. Such ritual refusals serve a dual purpose : they anoint the speaker's face (šæxsiæt) because they show generosity and sincerity but they also enhance the addressee's face in that she is presented as a person of high standing (šæxsiæt) through the show of ehteram (respect). As one of my informants said, this practice is to ensure that the customer will shop there again, even if the prices are slightly higher than elsewhere.

In the above extract, the number of ritual (tæ'arof) refusals is higher than one would expect in any standard trade exchange where the interlocutors are total strangers. This is because more attention must be paid to the interlocutors' face for two reasons. Firstly because S and J are acquaintances and secondly because J,

accompanying his friend H does a favour to both of them: he brings some custom to his acquaintance S and by doing that also ensures that his friend H will buy good quality goods at the right price.

All three interlocutors are quite clear from the outset that this is the setting. However, S feels he must refuse payment with more insistence than usual [see utts.(2), (4), (5) in (8) he even swears to God he means it]. All this insistence enhances his face in showing generosity and hospitality, J's face in front of his friend H in showing J a lot of ehteram and, of course, H's face in being shown ehteram.

After each of his refusals, J and H repeatedly thank him with various expressions of gratitude of which Persian abounds, all translated in English as "thank you". The function of these expressions is a refusal and not an acceptance of S's offer, as one might think: J and H thank S for showing them the expected ehteram and elevating their šæxsiæt. It should also be noted that this refusal does not damage S's face in any way but is the expected and appropriate response to S's offers.

S obviously feels that accepting payment too easily will damage both his and J's face: he will appear a man too hardened by profit considerations to show ehteram and J will think that S only sees him as a source of profit, leaving out the human element. This is clearly unacceptable to both of them, so J's utterance (9) "It is as if it were our own shop" is meant to encourage S to quote a price perhaps with a good discount and not much profit. S still refuses twice more (10),(12), adds up the prices (14) and adds another two refusals as H actually gives him the money (16), (18), which makes 8 refusals in all.

In parallel with Extract 3, both A in Extract 3 and J in Extract 4 succeed in doing what all parties in both exchanges expect will happen: H has to repay the money he borrowed and S has to accept payment for the goods he sells, because this is how people make a living. However, according to tæ'arof conventions, B and S refuse the money with a lot of insistence in order to show their generosity and regard, and A and J insist on paying because they want to show their concern for their interlocutors' needs and avoid causing them inconvenience.

Both extracts are very good examples of how tæ'arof (aptly rendered as "polite verbal wrestling"—Rafiee, 1992) stems from considerations of the Persian folk notion of face. In our case, the interactants attended to each other's faces, thus also securing the smooth continuation of their relationships: warm friendship between A and B and future business between S and J. Brown and Levinson's model would account for such data only partially and to an unsatisfactory degree, because it would only ascribe one function (attending to either the speaker's or the hearer's positive or negative face) to any one act. It would not recognise that every offer and refusal enhance both interlocutors' faces, and thus misses out on half of the face-work underway in these extracts.

7. Conclusion

Politeness is experienced by Persian native speakers as behaving according to social conventions and attending to an individual's personal and group face wants.

Persian face (šæxsiæt) does not begin and end with one's individual positive or negative face wants but depends mainly on one's conformity to established norms as a result of correct socialisation (tærbiæt) and is conferred by society on people on the above condition.

I maintain that because šæxsiæt is linked to social values, it should be characterised as public face, as opposed to the concept of private face rooted in the individual's wants, according to Brown and Levinson. The concept of public face is in line with the closely-knit ties that exist both among the members of the nuclear and of the extended family (the circle of friends and acquaintances), in that unacceptable behaviour reflects badly on one's entire family.

Verbal behaviour like tæ'arof, formality, other speech acts examined elsewhere (Koutlaki, 1997), and non-verbal behaviour, such as rising as a sign of respect when a newcomer enters a room, all attend to H's public face but also, very importantly, to S's public face at the same time. This study demonstrates that face is two-sided: an individual goes to certain lengths to maintain his/her face, but at the same time s/he is also expected to invest a lot of effort in preserving others' faces (cf. Goffman, 1967; Tracy and Coupland, 1990a,b).

I postulate that in settings involving friends, relatives and acquaintances, the motive behind politeness manifestations in Persian is maintenance of both interactants' faces (šæxsiæt) through showing ehteram and that therefore acts that have been characterised as FTAs (Face Threatening Acts) by Brown and Levinson should be characterised as Face Enhancing Acts in Persian. In addition, their dual function of enhancing the face of both interlocutors at the same time should also be recognised. In Penman's words, there is "the need to always allow for the possibility of multiple goals in discourse" (1990: 37).

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