

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

As variation in language behavior is the focus of attention in many linguistic studies, variation in the use of speech act can be investigated from different perspectives among which Sociopragmatics is a well-established one. Leech (1983: 11) differentiates between *Pragmalinguistics*, the linguistic end of pragmatics which refers to “the particular resources that a given language provides for conveying particular illocution” and *Sociopragmatics*, the sociological interface of pragmatics, which studies the ways in which the variation of pragmatic performance is found to be under the influence of particular social conditions. Sociopragmatic analyses can be conducted through such culture-specific, ethnographic studies of specific speech acts as the study of request in American English (Ervin-Tripp, 1976) and the study of apologies in German (Vollmer & Olshtain, 1989).

Results emerged from research in the area of Sociopragmatics reveal that some aspects of social relations which play a significant role in variations in speech acts are the degree of social distance and power between interlocutors, although situational factors can interact with them and influence their relative significance. The relative power of speaker and addressee as well as the social distance between them are attended to, for instance, by children as young as two years of age (Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989). Ervin-

Tripp (1982, as cited in Blum-Kulka et al., 1989) finds that imperatives are employed more frequently in instrumental language (attempts to get the hearer to cooperate with or carry out a goal of speaker) by American children when talking to mothers than to fathers. He also adds that young American children give orders to siblings whereas when communicating with a stranger, they make their request politely. Estimates of power and familiarity, as Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) state interact with estimates of imposition in determining choice of linguistic behavior. Children by school age become sensitive to the degree of imposition in making a request; they distinctively distinguish what might be disruptive or difficult from the hearer's view point, and vary their language consequently (Gordon & Ervin-Tripp, 1984).

Many of the issues involved in Sociopragmatics research still need further investigation. It is of great interest, for instance, to investigate the parameters and variables involved in the realization and expression of a given speech act in different languages, and the different distribution of various strategies across social population in different cultures for the realization of speech acts. Hence, despite numerous sociopragmatic studies of actual speech, Labov's (1972a: 184) call for further research still holds:

There is a great deal to be done in describing and analyzing the patterns of use of languages and dialects within specific cultures: the forms of speech events, the rules for appropriate selection of speakers, the interrelations of speaker-addressee, audience topic channel and setting, and the ways in which the speakers draw upon the resources of their language to perform certain functions.

As regards various strategies in different social population for the realization speech acts, there are still many issues to be explored in non-western societies as Iran. In Iran, as a

country where the majority of people are Muslim and the official religion of the country is Islam, the establishing of a good social relationship with other people is of great importance. The key factors, according to Islamic commands and the ethical principles, for the establishment of a good social relationship with other community members are the maintenance of mutual respect and its implementation among people (Soltani, 2010). Courtesy and polite behavior are stressed in Islam, as they can act to save the face of every member of a society. One of the aspects of courtesy and polite behavior which is expressed verbally is linguistic politeness. Language as an important medium of verbal communication should be used discreetly not only in the correct linguistic forms but also appropriately in the social context to express politeness. The Muslims' holy prophet (peace be upon him) says "the best believer is the one from whose language other people are at peace". The way people in Iran use the Persian language to maintain their social relationship and stay in harmony with other community members is an important issue as it is in every other society. This is highlighted when language is used for face-saving purposes as apologizing and making a request. Apologizing is a significant aspect of maintaining a good social relationship as people are, at one time or another, in need of essential forgiveness for their mistakes and misdeeds. Making a request is also important as people are required to make requests in daily communications for different purposes, and they should be careful not to threaten the face of other people when a request is performed. Therefore, the linguistic politeness that are used in Persian to realize apologies and requests strategies, considering the great importance given to the use of language for respecting other people and for establishing a good social relationship among people, are important issues that this study intends to investigate.

1.2 Scope of the Study

Due to the face-threatening nature of speech acts they have been widely investigated in politeness studies. Brown & Levinson (1978) and also Leech (1983) suggest that the modes, in which speech acts are, follow universal principles of co-operation and politeness. This was further supported by Searle (1979) when he claimed that speech acts operate by universal pragmatic principles; however, other scholars have observed that they tend to vary in terms of verbalization across cultures and languages (Green, 1975; Wierzbicka, 1985). Therefore, the realization of two speech acts, namely requests and apologies, was chosen as the focus of the study to see sources of variation in the realizations of apologies and request in Persian.

Amongst the variety of speech acts, requests were chosen since they are the method used in 'polite' societies to get someone to do something (Green, 1975). In Brown and Levinson's terms they are face-threatening acts since hearers can interpret them as impingements on their freedom of action and thus speakers might hesitate to make a request for the fear of risking loss of 'face' (1987). Accordingly, speakers tend to employ a variety of strategies to try and make sure their requests will be granted; such strategies will inevitably reflect the expression of politeness.

Apologies were chosen since when apologizing, the speaker admits that a social norm was violated and that s/he was to some extent part of its cause. Therefore, apologies involve a certain loss of 'face' for the speaker and at the same time a kind of 'support' for the addressee. Although these two speech acts are rather different in that requests are 'pre-event acts' and apologies usually 'post-event acts', they were also selected for

consideration because of their frequency and because people tend to use them as tools for judging societies as more or less 'polite' than others. Also, the fact that a pre-event speech act was chosen along with a post-event one will help us obtain a more balanced picture, one before and one after the event.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

Drawing on the assumption that the diversity in the realization of speech acts in context may derive at least from three different variables, namely contextual (situational) variability, cross-cultural variability and individual variability, these variables have been named as the motivators of diversity in the realization of speech acts (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984).

Contextual (situational) variability refers to systematic differences in the realization patterns of speech acts, depending upon the social constrain embedded in the situation. Social Distance (SD), along with Social Dominance (P) or Power classified as context-external variables, and Ranking of a Request and Seriousness of an Apology classified as context-internal variables implicate contextual (situational) variability. The Social Dominance is an evaluation of the interlocutor's power over the other participant. It has a ternary value namely (S>H) where the hearer is dominated by the speaker, (S<H) where the speaker is dominated by the hearer, and (S=H) where they are equal in terms of power. Social Distance, as another context-external variable, indicates the familiarity of the interlocutors and has a binary value, that is to say the speaker and the hearer either know one another well (-SD) or do not know one another (+SD). As regards context-internal variables, the ranking of request means the degree of the imposition on the hearer

through the request performed by the speaker. The imposition is evaluated either as high (H) or as low (L). The seriousness of an apology, as the other context-internal variable, indicates how severe an apology should be performed with regard to the corresponding offence; and it is evaluated as either high (H) or low (L).

Cross-cultural variability looks at the variations in the realization of different speech acts among members of different cultures with regard to cultural norms and rules. It aims at highlighting the similarities and differences across cultures as far as speech act realizations are concerned.

The individual variability includes the important role played by individuals within the same society as regards the continuous variation in speech act realization patterns (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984). This variability depends on personal variables, such as gender, age or level of education.

It follows that, due to the above-mentioned variables, the realization patterns of speech acts might be different systematically as much as social constraints influence the context of the realization of speech acts. For instance, making a request from someone from the opposite sex might be expressed by less direct terms compared to when a request is expressed in single-sex interactions. Moreover, the modes through which a request can be communicated may range from direct mode to conventional indirect and non-conventional indirect modes according to individual, situational and cultural variables. On the other hand, apologies may be phrased like an expression of apology, an explanation, an acknowledgment of responsibility, an offer of repair and a promise of

forbearance as semantic formulas, because situational, individual and cultural variables may influence the preference of each strategy by the speakers.

Therefore, the study intends to achieve the following objectives: 1) it addresses the availability of universal aspects of politeness theory in general and manifestation of politeness principles in the realization of Persian apology and request strategies in particular. 2) The study sets out to explore the influence of context-internal and context-external variables on the realization of apology and request speech acts in Persian, and 3) to shed light on the single-sex interactions among Persian men to highlight males' apologies and requests attributes as well. With regard to the above-mentioned objectives, the study formulates the questions in the following section to be sought and answered.

1.4 Research Questions

This study explores the realization of request and apology speech act realization strategies, modifications of request internally and externally, and internal and supportive apology intensifiers which are all investigated and presented with regard to social dominance and social distance relation between the interlocutors. In this regard, the influence of context-internal variables namely imposition of requests and seriousness of an offence will be investigated on request and apology speech act realization strategies, modifications of request internally and externally, and internal and supportive apology intensifiers as well. As such, the research questions to be addressed are formulated as follows.

1. What request strategies do Persian male native speakers use with regard to context-internal and context-external variables?

2. How do Persian male speakers modify request strategies internally with regard to context-internal and context-external variables?
3. How do Persian male speakers modify request strategies externally with regard to context-internal and context-external variables?

As for apology speech acts, the following questions were proposed to be answered through the analysis of data collected.

4. What apology strategies do Persian male native speakers use with regard to context-internal and context-external variables?
5. How do Persian male speakers intensify apology strategies internally with regard to context-internal and context-external variables?
6. How do Persian male speakers intensify apology strategies through supportive intensifiers with regard to context-internal and context-external variables?

1.5 Significance of the Study

Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory is an attempt to claim for universal characteristics shared by different languages as far as politeness is concerned. The analysis of strategies employed in request and apology speech acts of Persian male native speakers can be an investigation to see whether it can provide supporting evidence to Brown and Levinson's (1987) universal theory. To see whether Iranian male interlocutors observe principles of politeness theory can be the starting point of the study. Wolfson (1984: 236) states that the study of rules and patterns of a given speech community will provide "empirical evidence of cultural norms and rules". What strategies are employed by Iranian speakers to avoid rude and awkward impressions evoked by inappropriate

requests and apologies are worthy of attention and need to be investigated so that Persian culture norms and rules can be shed light on from a sociopragmatic perspective. Therefore, the contribution of this study to the literature on the universal concepts of politeness and face across different cultures and societies in general, and to the operationalizing of these concepts in Persian culture given the cultural, situational, and individual specifications that these concepts are subject to in Persian in particular, can be one of the significances of this study.

The other significance of the study concerns the pedagogical significance. Research on cross-cultural communication and second language teaching have pointed out the need for including patterns of naturally occurring talk in the foreign/second language classroom resources (Holmes & Brown, 1987; Golato, 2002). David (1999) stresses making advanced language learners aware of cross-cultural variations in communication is the language teacher's responsibility. She adds that examples of different speech acts can be used to sensitize the learners to cross-cultural ramifications of a range of speech acts (ibid: 19). The researcher, as an academic dealing with English language instruction, believes that this study can pave the way for a comparative analysis of apology and request behavior of Persian native speakers and those of the English native speakers which can bring about pedagogical insights and implications. Such studies, it is hoped, will provide some practical suggestions of pedagogical value with the preparation and development of teaching materials for English language education in the Persian context as well.

1.6 Definition of Terms

To highlight the various terminologies which are referred to throughout the course of this study, definitions of the significant terms are provided in this section as an introductory section. Although some of the terms have been reported with various definitions in the literature, however, this study adopts the definitions which fit the theoretical framework of the study best.

- *Sociopragmatics* refers to the sociological interface of pragmatics, which studies the ways in which the variation of pragmatic performance is found to be under the influence of particular social conditions (Leech, 1983).
- *Politeness* is the social values claimed by every one of us that engage in any interaction for approved social attributes (Goffman, 1967).
- *Face* is the self-image that all competent adult members of a society present to others.
- *Positive Face* refers to a person's wish to be desirable to at least some other who will appreciate and approve of one's self and one's personality.
- *Negative Face* refers to a person's desire to be unimpeded by others, to be free to act without being imposed upon.
- *Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs)* are those acts which run contrary to the addressee and the speaker's both positive and negative face.

- *Context-internal Variables* are a type of contextual variables which in this study refer to Imposition of Request and Seriousness of Apology with regard to the corresponding offence.
- *Imposition of Request* is a context-internal social variable and refers to the degree of imposition a request may have on the requestee.
- *Severity of Offence* is a context-internal social variable and refers to the seriousness of an offence which may give rise to an apology.
- *Context-external Variables* are another type of contextual variables which refer to Social Dominance and Social Distance in this study.
- *Social Dominance (Power)* refers to the relative social power of one of the interlocutors on the other one.
- *Social Distance* refers to the degree of familiarity between the interlocutors.