

## **A comparative study of Gratitude Speech Act between Persian and English Speakers**

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### **Abstract**

This cross-cultural study presents a comparative investigation of the speech act of gratitude used by Persian and English speakers. This study aimed to investigate how native speakers of English and Persian would make gratitude in different situations. To achieve this aim, a discourse completion test (DCT) which introduced eleven natural situations was used and given to the participants of the study. Results indicated that according to statistical analysis of the data in this study, there were differences in the use of gratitude strategies between Persian and English speakers. In addition, Findings revealed that there were significant differences in the use of thanking, positive feeling, repayment and recognition of imposition strategies between Persian and English participants. Possible explanations are provided and the implications of the findings are discussed.

**Keywords:** gratitude, gratitude strategies, speech act, culture, Persian speakers, English speakers

### **INTRODUCTION**

Every language has cultural concepts and contextual usages in a way that its native speakers (NSs) form similar conceptions about the world. Many studies on cultural differences revealed that people with different cultures have different speaking styles. Generally, studies on cultures are divided into two kinds of cross-cultural and inter-language pragmatic studies. Cross-cultural interaction is defined as the face-to-face interaction between people from different cultural backgrounds including empirical studies that investigates various speech acts (e.g., Wolfson, 1981), whereas ILP concentrates on the influence of pedagogical issues on pragmatic development (e.g., Ghobadi & Fahim, 2009).

It is believed that learning a language is indeed learning how to communicate in that language, and a successful communication between interlocutors rests upon proper

speech acts (Zhao & Throssel, 2011). Therefore, successful communication in a target language requires not only the knowledge of grammar and vocabulary but also pragmatic competence and knowledge about the culture of the target language. One important aspect of pragmatic competence is understanding and production of speech acts and their appropriateness in a given situation (Cheng, 2005).

Speakers of English use many types of speech acts intentionally and unintentionally frequently, and therefore, it is important for foreign language learners of English to be able to understand them. Knowledge of speech acts may highly correlate in facilitating communication with speakers of English. Learners need not only to know when to start and terminate their speech but also to know how to make use of their words. It seems the latter one plays a more crucial role in nowadays communications.

Expressing gratitude is one of the speech acts frequently used in interpersonal relationships between language users. Gratitude is experienced when people receive something beneficial or felt when somebody does something kind or helpful. It has been defined as “a sense of thankfulness and joy in response to receiving a gift, whether the gift be a tangible benefit from a specific other or a moment of peaceful bliss evoked by natural beauty” (Emmons, 2004, p. 554). Gratitude is the positive emotion one feels when another person has intentionally given, or attempted to give, one something of value (McCullough, Kilpatrick, Emmons, & Larson, 2001; McCullough & Tsang, 2004).

Studies show that even students with sufficient linguistic knowledge still make mistakes in real life communication with foreigners. These students are good at reading and writing with sufficient knowledge of English grammar and vocabulary, but they fail in communication with foreigners. In such cases, the mistakes they commit are not verbal or grammatical. Instead, these mistakes occur because certain social conventions or rules of interpersonal relationship have been violated (Lihuis & Jianbin, 2010).

Iranian learners of English may fail to use appropriate pattern of speech acts and may not know when it is appropriate to express certain feelings and to what degree such feelings should be conveyed on what occasion, especially in situations where negative feelings are involved, such as complaining. The reason for this is a number of differences between English and Persian in the area of speech acts which may be linked with different cultural values and beliefs. Different cultures may have different means and expressions for communicative intentions; thus, foreign language learners have to figure out what constitutes appropriate speech act behavior in terms of principles of politeness, use of native-like routines, and knowledge of the target social structure and values.

One of the most fundamental parts of pragmatics is speech act. To express themselves, people do not only produce utterances containing grammatical structures and words, but they also perform acts via those utterances. Examples of speech acts include invitations, refusals, suggestions, apologies, compliments, compliment responses and so

on. Expressing gratitude is one of the speech acts frequently used in interpersonal relationships between language users.

It is necessary to learn how to understand and produce language that is appropriate to the situations in which one is functioning, because failure to do so may cause misunderstandings and miscommunications. Expressing gratitude may differ from culture to culture; consequently, identifying these differences may lead to better communication. The current study is an attempt to fill this gap.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Among the researches done on the gratitude speech act cross-culturally, Apte's (1974) study is one of the earliest investigations of expressions of gratitude. He did a comparison of expressing gratitude in Marathi and Hindi to giving thanks in American English and found that "the usage of gratitude expressions in American culture is much more extensive than in South Asian communities" (p. 84). While in American English expressing the thanks for favors, gifts or services is deemed appropriate and anticipated, for Marathi and Hindi giving thanks to family members or close friends for favors breaches the feeling of closeness since it is the responsibility of family members and close friends to assist each other. Apte also indicated that because of the high frequency of use of expressions of gratitude in the American speech community, it has come to be used "more often perhaps in a mechanical rather than in a sincere way" (p. 85).

Because expressions of gratitude are essential in American culture, *thank you* is one of the first words that American children are taught at a very early age. Grief and Gleason (1980), researchers of first language acquisition, have pointed out that thanking routines are among the earliest which young English-speaking children are explicitly taught.

Coulmas (1981) has reported study conducted in Europe and Japan. He made the point that both thanking and apologizing are linked to the notion of indebtedness, through gratitude and regret respectively. He noted that in Japanese culture, the concept of gifts and favors focuses on the trouble they have caused the benefactor rather than the aspects which are pleasing to the recipient.

In another study, Hinkel (1994) has reviewed several cultural differences in the implications of expressing thanks, e.g., in South and East Asian languages. Hinkel found that in some languages expression of thanks implies social indebtedness that is not connoted by a thank-you in Chinese or English. In some Arabic cultures, certain forms of thanking establish a social debt while others do not. Gender differences exist as well, e.g., in Hispanic countries.

Intachakra (2004) conducted a study on comparison of speech act of thanks in English and Thai to discuss the pragmatic differences through natural observation. Analyzing

data, he generalized that British English speakers tend to thank each other directly in comparison to Thai speakers due to increased number of strategies. Despite the fact that both cultures have the same communicative goals in expressing gratitude, their thanking strategies are different. He mentioned that Thais cannot express thanks as effectively as British, and they prefer to choose a practical method for expressing gratitude.

Cheng (2005) investigated the similarities and differences between NSs of Chinese and NSs of English in expression of gratitude by examining the length of their utterances and their use of strategies through a discourse completion task questionnaire. The results showed that Chinese and English NSs had different preferences for thanking strategies. There were significantly different in the length of speech and use of strategies. In addition, there was a positive effect of the length of residence in the United States on English learners' pragmatic development. The results also showed evidence of pragmatic influence from L1 Chinese. Moreover, contextual variables, social status, familiarity and imposition, had a significant influence on the length of speech and the use of strategies.

Naito, Wangwan and Tani (2005) surveyed 212 university students in Japan and 284 university students in Thailand, using a multiaspect questionnaire that was designed to investigate cultural similarities and differences in gratitude. The questionnaire included the items involved in hypothetical helping situations: (a) perceived gains of recipients, cost to benefactors, and obligation to help as antecedent variables of gratitude; (b) both positive feelings of gratitude and feelings of indebtedness; and (c) requital to benefactors and increased prosocial motivation of recipients as an outcome of gratitude. In both Japanese and Thai students, positive feelings co-related with facial and verbal expressions of gratitude and increased pro-social motivation. However, the variable of feelings of indebtedness was positively related to increased pro-social motivation only in Japanese male students.

In another study, Nakamura (2005) probed on the cultural differences in the strategies of thanking of NSs of German and Japanese through a Discourse Completion Test as well as a Multiple Discourse Choice Test. The findings illustrated that while the Japanese speakers made use of the thanking and apology expressions in all situations, German speakers mainly utilized thanking expressions in the same situations. Additionally, the study showed that the Japanese NSs had much sensitivity and attention to the situational variables, whereas the NSs of German and the Japanese EFL learners were hardly affected by these variables.

Johansen (2008) investigated gratitude expressions in Norwegian and English. The results indicated that the Norwegian students, when expressing gratitude, consider similar factors as the British and American participants. They consider the size of imposition, the relationship with the hearer, the social distance, the social setting of the conversation and the rights and obligations of the hearer and the speaker. However, the

results also indicated that Norwegians value some of these factors differently from the British and American participants. He also concluded that the length of Norwegian responses was similar to that of American ones. However, the responses given by Norwegians in English were generally longer than both the Norwegian responses and the native-English responses.

Al-khateeb (2009) conducted a study to explore the speech act of thanking as a compliment response by Arab learners of English (Non-native learners of English) in an attempt to bridge the gap between both languages under study in the context of communication. The results showed that Non-native learners of English did not produce target-like responses. They brought about some L1 strategies and expressions, which might result in negative pragmatic transfer and thus communicative breakdown. They literally translated Arabic formulaic expressions, which were not always suitable for the compliment given in English. They intended their responses to be polite but they were not appropriate. He reported that it was obvious that language proficiency did not play a role in producing target-like compliment responses.

In an Iranian context, Farina and Suleiman (2009) did a pilot study and examined the speech act of gratitude among Iranian English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners through handling a written DCT to ten people and also examined whether EFL learners' L2 pragmatic competence was towards or away from the target language as the level of proficiency increases. The findings of this study suggested that language proficiency did not affect EFL learners' use of strategies when expressing gratitude in the English language. Iranian and American respondents' used the same type of strategies in responding to the fourteen item questionnaires; however, they differed in the frequency of use of these strategies. American respondents resorted to fewer strategies in expressing gratitude in comparison with Iranian respondents.

Rezvani and Özdemir (2010) examined NNSs' production of speech acts of gratitude in an EFL context, specifically how Turkish and Iranian advanced speakers of English expressed gratitude in terms of strategy use and length of speech. The results of the study revealed that both Turkish and Iranian speakers of English employed most frequently similar strategies for expressing gratitude. In terms of length of speech the native English respondents were the least verbose speakers, whereas the Turkish and the Iranian respondents seemed to elaborate more to enhance the gratitude across various situations. The findings of the study supported the research to date in that the graduate Turkish and Iranian candidates' production of gratitude speech acts and related length of speech still exhibited some inadequacy as compared to the baseline data provided by the NSs of English.

Long (2010) also analyzed the use of apology strategies in Japanese gratitude situations by gathering data on the basis of an open ended questionnaire to see the difference in using expressions in different situations with various interlocutors. He noted that two factors affected using apology: regret and expectedness. The researcher claimed that

apology was used to recognize the relationship boundaries and further explained that children acquired these negotiations of role relations gradually through socialization process.

Another study conducted by Ahar and Rasekh (2011) investigated the effect of social status and size of imposition on the gratitude strategies of Persian and American speakers. Findings of their study showed that there were differences between the strategies that were employed for expressing gratitude in Persian and English languages. Persian NSs reacted more sensitively both to social status differences and to the size of imposition. While they changed their responses according to the size of imposition, and the American NSs did not change their strategy selections according to these variables frequently since they used simple thanking almost exclusively. English learners intended their responses to be polite but they were not appropriate to the social norms of American society. Persian participants responded considerably to each social variable in their native language, in their foreign language it seemed that they didn't notice these variables and just reacted to the size of favor by adding intensifiers.

Farashaiyan and Hua (2012) investigated the gratitude strategies of Iranian EFL learners with their Malaysian ESL counterparts. Data were cumulated from 20 Iranian and 20 Malaysian postgraduate university students having the same language proficiency through a DCT questionnaire. The results revealed significant differences in communicative ways of Iranian and Malaysian postgraduate students reflecting insights into understanding the differences in cultural values and norms in two non-western cultures and also showed that the pragmatic performance of the students is pertinent to certain factors other than language proficiency because the participants had more or less the identical level of language proficiency, but in certain situations they dealt with the same thanking situations to some extent differently. Iranian students responded in a polite way but their responses were not appropriate based on the social norms of American society.

In a similar vein, Pishghadam and Zarei (2011) investigated the realization of speech act of gratitude by Chinese, Persian EFL learners and English NSs in order to help EFL learners become familiar with rules and patterns dominating the speech act of gratitude in target language to communicate appropriately. Results revealed that although thanking is regarded as the most favorite strategy among all three groups, there are significant differences in the ways Persian and Chinese learners of English, and also NSs of English use the speech act of thanking. The findings indicated that thanking is regarded as the favorite strategy among all three groups. Chinese EFL learners used thanking strategy more than Persian EFL learners and English NSs.

## **THE PRESENT STUDY**

The review of the literature on cross-cultural studies shows that expressing gratitude may differ from culture to culture. However, it is an area of intercultural pragmatics that has not been sufficiently explored for this topic. It was, therefore, deemed essential to

further explore this fact and collect additional evidence. Consequently, in an attempt to fill in these gaps in the existing literature, the current research sought to examine the differences between Persian and English speakers with regard to the gratitude speech act. Thus, to fulfill the purpose of this study, the following questions are raised:

- What are the common gratitude strategies used by Persian speakers?
- What are the common gratitude strategies used by English speakers?
- How do Persian and English speakers differ in the expression of gratitude?

## **METHOD**

### **Participants**

Two groups of subjects participated in this study and these subjects were confined to undergraduate and graduate students. One group was composed of 80 Iranian Persian speakers, 40 female and 40 male, at Kermanshah Islamic Azad University, aging from 22 to 30. All participants were NSs of Persian. Therefore, they showed homogeneity in terms of age, education, profession and most importantly native language. The other group included 35 English participants, studied by Cheng (2005), regarded as the baseline data. They were graduate students whose age ranged from 22 to 41 and studied science and humanities at the University of Iowa in China.

### **Instrument (DCT)**

As for the purpose of this study, the mean of eliciting gratitude strategies was a DCT which was a modified version of DCT designed by Eisenstein and Bodman (1993). Varghese and Billmyer (1996) remarked that advantages of using DCTs in pragmatics studies are well known and DCT surpasses all others in ease of use. Beebe and Cumming (1985) suggested that DCTs provide the opportunity to gather a large corpus of data, on a wide range of difficult-to-observe speech behaviors, in a short time. DCT also provides stereotypical responses for a socially appropriate response.

The DCT used in this study consisted of eleven separate paragraphs describing various real life situations. The participants were asked to express their response(s) to each described situation, in the provided blank space after each of the paragraphs. These eleven scenarios varied on the contextual factors of interlocutor familiarity and social status. Familiarity (i.e., social distance) and social status (i.e., power) were selected because they have been identified as the salient factors that affect speech behavior in cross-cultural pragmatics research (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

The DCTs were distributed among the participants. At the beginning, the instructor explained the format of the DCT to ensure that participants clearly understand the instructions. She encouraged the participants to answer the questions and emphasize that their responses would be kept confidential, and they are just for conducting this research. They were given enough time, as long as they wished to complete the DCT carefully. Participants were supposed to read each situation and picture themselves in

the situations and respond accordingly. They wrote down as many words or utterances as they wanted to express their gratitude towards the speaker.

### **Date analysis**

After the collecting the data via DCTs, responses were coded based on the gratitude strategies scheme proposed by Cheng (2005). Afterwards, the coded data were entered into the SPSS statistical program and both descriptive and inferential statistics were analyzed. The frequencies, percentages, and Chi-square tests were used to analyze the data.

### **Gratitude strategies taxonomy**

Cheng's (2005) taxonomy was based on 8 strategies for the expression of gratitude. The taxonomy of thanking is elaborated below:

#### *1) Thanking*

Participants say "thank you" in three ways:

- a. thanking only by using the word "thank you" (e.g. Thanks a lot! Thank you very much!)
- b. thanking by stating the favor (e.g. Thank you for your help!)
- c. thanking and mentioning the imposition caused by the favor (e.g. Thank you for helping me collect the papers.)

#### *2) Appreciation*

- a. using the word appreciate (e.g. I appreciate it!)
- b. using the word "appreciate" and mentioning the imposition caused by the favor (e.g. I appreciate the time you spent for me.)

#### *3) Positive feelings*

- a. by expressing a positive reaction to the favor giver (hearer) (e.g. You are a life saver!)
- b. by expressing a positive reaction to the object of the favor (e.g. This book was really helpful!)

#### *4) Apology*

- a. using only apologizing words (e.g. I'm sorry)
- b. using apologizing words and stating the favor or the fact (e.g. I'm sorry for the problem I made! )
- c. criticizing or blaming oneself (e.g. I'm such a fool!)
- d. expressing embarrassment (e.g. It's so embarrassing!)

#### *5) Recognition of imposition*

- a. acknowledging the imposition (e.g. I know that you were not allowed to give me extra time!)



- b. stating the need for the favor (e.g. I try not to ask for extra time, but this time I need it!)
- c. diminishing the need for the favor (e.g. You didn't have to do that!)

#### 6) *Repayment*

- a. offering or promising service, money, food or goods (e.g. Next time it's my turn to pay!)
- b. indicating indebtedness (e.g. I owe you one! )
- c. promising future self-restraint or self-improvement (e.g. It won't happen again!)

#### 7) *Others*

Expressions that do not belong to the above strategies are categorized as other strategies. There are four subcategories under the other strategy:

- a. here statement (e.g. Here you are!)
- b. small talk (e.g. Your face is very familiar to me but I can't remember where I saw you. What do you study?)
- c. leave-taking (e.g. Have a nice day!)
- d. joking (e.g. Don't forget to pay again next time)

#### 8) *Attention getter*

In the thanking situations, attention getter and address term are likely to occur in the same utterance. The alerters include:

- a. attention getter (e.g. Hey, Hi, Well)
- b. title (e.g. Dr., Professor! Sir!)
- c. name (e.g. John, Mary)

## RESULTS

The aim of this study was to investigate gratitude strategies used by Persian and English speakers based on the respondents' culture. The study attempted to provide an inter-lingual comparison of gratitude strategies between Persian and English. This comparison was made based on the data from a DCT in two Persian and English versions. For this purpose, this section reports the results of the analysis of Persian and English gratitude expressions.

### Persian results

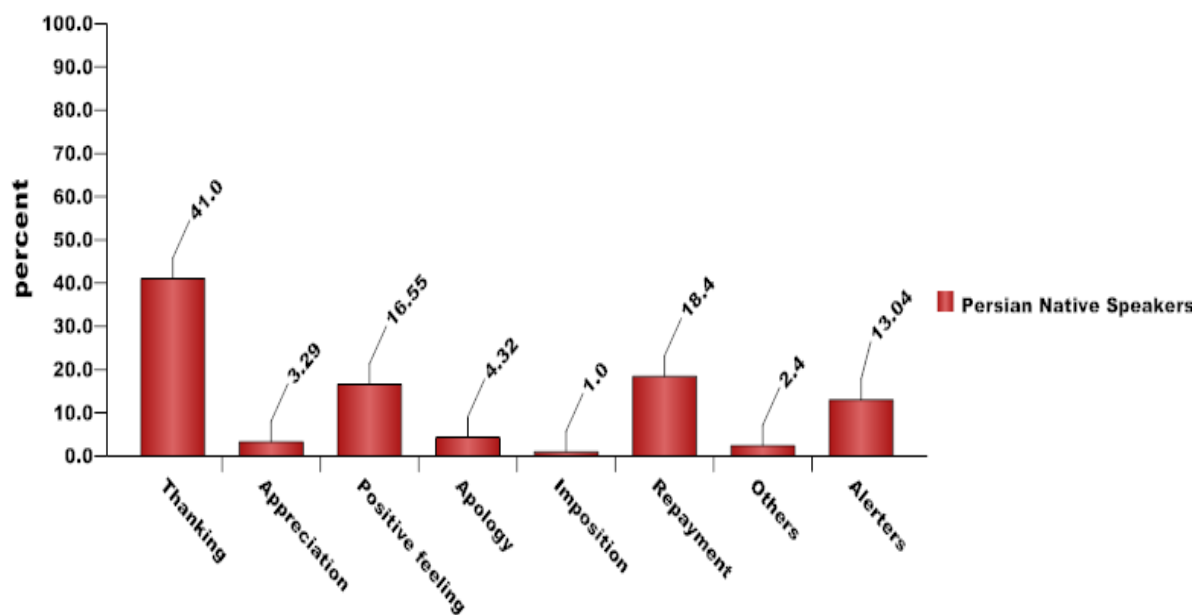
In order to investigate the first research question, the frequencies of the gratitude strategies among Persian participants are reported in Table 1 and Figure 1.

As shown in Table 1, among the eight categories, "thanking" strategy occurred most frequently accounting for 41% of the whole responses. The second strategy with the highest number of responses was "repayment" composing 18.40% of responses. The third strategy with respect to frequency was "positive feeling" which accounted for

16.55% of the responses. “Alerter” was the fourth most frequently used strategy for NSs of Farsi composing 13.04% of responses. The fifth strategy in order of frequency was “apology” that accounted for 4.32% of responses. The sixth one was “appreciation” composing 3.29% of the responses. “Other” was the seventh most frequently used strategy which composed 2.40% of responses. “Recognition of imposition” with the frequency of 1% was the least frequently used strategy among the other seven ones.

**Table 1: Frequency of gratitude strategies among Persian speaking participants**

Gratitude Strategies	Female Number	Male Number	Total Number	Percentage
Thanking	350	247	597	41
Appreciation	42	6	48	3.29
Positive feeling	157	84	241	16.55
Apology	33	30	63	4.32
Recognition of imposition	9	5	14	1
Repayment	166	102	268	18.40
Other	16	19	35	2.40
Alerter	101	86	190	13.04
Total	874	582	1456	100



**Figure 1. Frequency of overall strategy use for Persian NSs**

Figure 4.1 shows the overall distribution of the thanking strategies produced by Persian speakers. This figure also shows that Persian speakers use *Thanking*, *Repayment* and *Positive Feeling* strategies more than other strategies.

Based on these results, each strategy does not carry equal weight. The strategy that carries the most weight is thanking strategy. Therefore, it can be concluded that the

general tendency of Persian speakers in gratitude is “thanking”. The summary of the results obtained is shown below:

*Persian speakers:* Thanking > Repayment > Positive feeling > Alerter > Apology > appreciation > Other > Recognition of imposition

**Table 2: The results of the chi-square for the expressions of gratitude selected by Persian participants**

Strategies	Observed N	Expected N	Chi-Square	Df	Sig.(p)
Thanking	597	182.0	1456.989	7	.000
Appreciation	48	182.0			
Positive feeling	241	182.0			
Apology	63	182.0			
Recognition of imposition	14	152.0			
Repayment	268	182.0			
Other	35	182.0			
Alerters	190	182.0			

Table 2 shows the results of Chi-square test. Analyzing the results of Chi-square, Table 4.2 exhibits that there is a significant difference in using *Thanking*, *Positive feeling*, *Alerters*, and *Repayment* strategies ( $\chi^2 = 1456.989$ ,  $p < .05$ ). It describes that thanking strategy (observed N=597) is employed more often than expected (N=182.0) which means that participants used thanking strategies more than other strategies. Table 2 also revealed that participants used repayment strategy (observed N=268) more than expected (N=182.0) and also participants used positive strategy (observed N= 241) more than expected (N= 182.0). The results of Chi-square also shows that participant used alerter strategy (observed N=190) more than expected (N= 182.0).

As shown in Table 2, there is no significant difference in using appreciation, apology, recognition of imposition and other strategies. Based on the results of the Chi-square, it can be inferred that thanking, repayment, positive feeling and alerters strategies are the common strategies which are used more than the others by Persian speakers.

### English results

The second research question addressed the gratitude strategies used by English speakers. In order to investigate this question, the frequency of the gratitude strategies among English participants are reported in Table 3 and Figure 2.

Based on the results in Table 3, as in the Persian results, the majority of English gratitude expressions fell under the *thanking* strategy with 35% of total responses. For English speakers, *alerters* and *repayment* strategies share the same percentage of 13% and *appreciation* and *positive feelings* strategies share the same percentage of 12%.

**Table 3: Frequency of gratitude strategies among English Speaking participants**

Gratitude Strategies	Number	Percentage
Thanking	274	35%
Appreciation	94	12%
Positive feeling	96	12%
Apology	52	7%
Recognition of imposition	46	6%
Repayment	103	13%
Other	21	3%
Alerter	106	13%
Total	792	100%

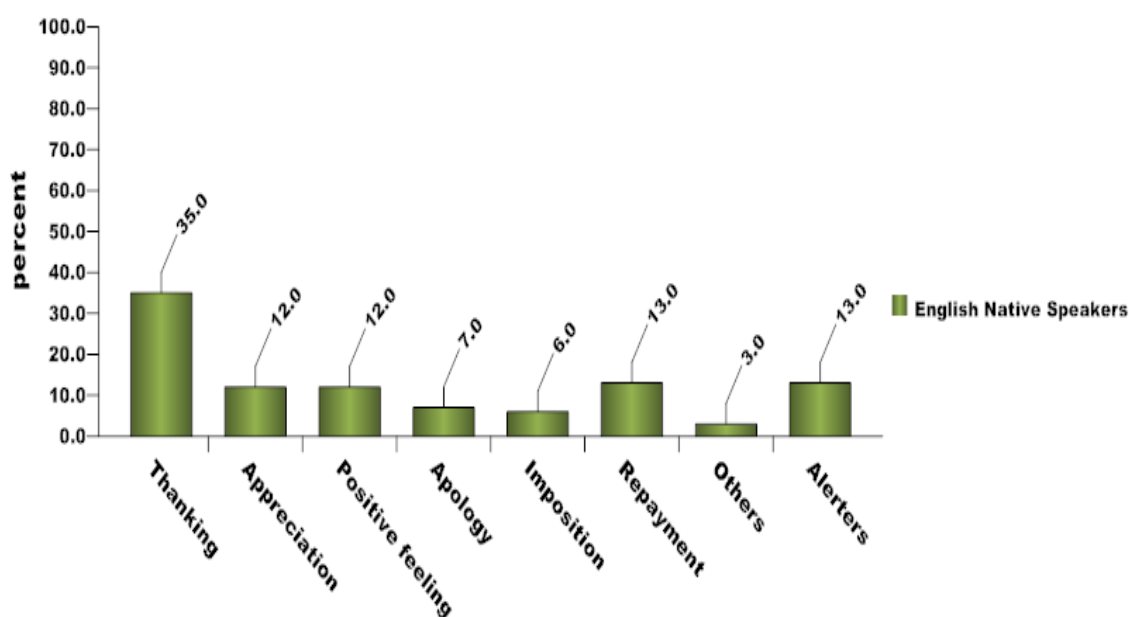
**Figure 2: Frequency of overall strategy use for English NSs**

Figure 2 shows a descriptive demography of thanking strategies in English native participants. As indicated in Figure 2 *thanking* is the most frequently used strategy for English participants. *Alerters* and *repayment* strategies share the same percentage of 13%. In addition, *appreciation* and *positive feelings* strategies share the same percentage of 12% too. Moreover, participants used fewer *apology* and *recognition of imposition* strategies. The summary of the obtained results is shown below:

*English Speakers:* Thanking > Repayment = Alerter > Appreciation = Positive feeling > Apology > Imposition > Other

**Table 4: The results of the chi-square for the expression of gratitude selected by the whole English participants**

Strategies	Observed N	Expected N	Chi-Square	Df	Sig.(p)
Thanking	247	99.0	334.394	7	.000
Appreciation	94	99.0			
Positive feeling	96	99.0			
Apology	52	99.0			
Recognition of imposition	46	99.0			
Repayment	103	99.0			
Other	21	99.0			
Alerters	106	99.0			

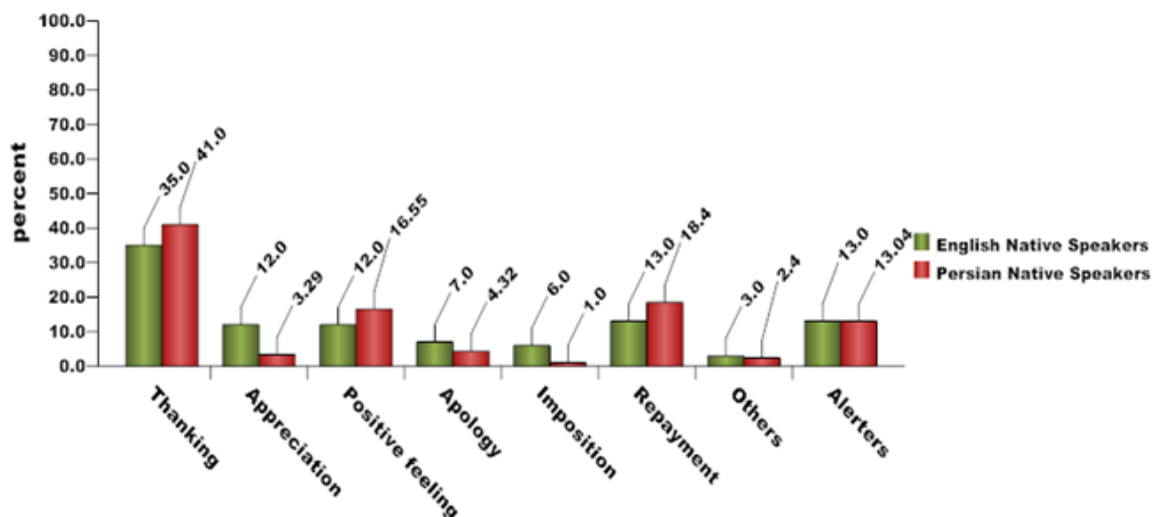
Analyzing the results of Chi-square ( $\chi^2 = 334.394$ ,  $p < .05$ ), shown in Table 4, there is a significant difference in using *Thanking*, *Alerters* and *Repayment* strategies. It describes that thanking strategy (observed N=247) is employed more often than expected (N=99.0) which means that participants used *thanking* strategies more than other strategies. The results of Chi-square also revealed that English participants used *repayment* strategy (observed N=103) more than expected (N=99.0) and also participants used *alerter* strategy (observed N=106) more than expected (N= 99.0). It also describes that there is no significant difference in using *appreciation*, *apology*, *recognition of imposition*, *other* and *positive feeling* strategies.

All in all, based on these results, it can be inferred that *thanking*, *repayment* and *alerters* strategies are the most common ones used by English speakers.

### Comparison of strategies used by Persian and English native speakers

The third research question addressed the difference between Persian and English speakers with regard to gratitude strategies. In order to answer this question results are reported in Figure 3 and Tables 5.

Figure 3 shows the overall distribution of the strategies produced by NSs of Farsi and NSs of English. The findings displays that *thanking* is the most frequently used strategy by both NSs of Farsi and NSs of English. However, NSs of Farsi use this strategy more than NSs of English. As Figure 3 shows *appreciation* and *positive feeling* are the second most frequently used strategies for NSs of English while *repayment* is the second most frequently used strategy for NSs of Farsi. The results show that NSs of English and NSs of Farsi shared approximately the same percentage expressing *alerters* strategy. The results also show that NSs of English use *apology*, *recognition of imposition* and *other* strategies more than NSs of Farsi. Moreover, the least frequently used strategy (*other*) by both English (3%) and Persian (1%) speakers was the same, 21 and 35, respectively.



**Figure 3: Frequency of overall strategy use for English NSs and Persian NSs**

Since numbers of Persian and English speakers were not the same, to compare the frequencies of gratitude strategies, we needed to weigh English speakers frequencies by 60/35. Then the chi-square test was used.

**Table 5: The Chi-square test for gratitude strategies between Persian and English NSs**

Strategies	Language	Observed N	Expected N	Chi-Square	df	Sig. (p)
Thanking	Persian	597	533.5	15.116	1	0.000
	English	470	533.5			
Appreciation	Persian	48	104.5	61.095	1	0.000
	English	161	104.5			
Positive feeling	Persian	241	202.5	14.64	1	0.000
	English	164	202.5			
Apology	Persian	63	76.0	4.447	1	0.034
	English	89	76.5			
Recognition of imposition	Persian	14	46.5	45.430	1	0.000
	English	79	46.5			
Repayment	Persian	268	222.5	18.609	1	0.000
	English	177	222.5			
Other	Persian	35	35.5	.014	1	0.905
	English	36	35.5			
Alerter	Persian	190	186.0	.172	1	0.678
	English	182	186.0			

*A. Thanking*

Results of the chi-square test show that there is a significant difference in the use of the thanking strategy between Persian and English speakers ( $p=0.000>0.05$ ).

### *B. Appreciation*

Results of the chi-square test show that there is a significant difference in the use of the appreciation strategy between Persian and English speakers and frequency of appreciation strategy was significantly greater in English than in Persian speakers ( $p=0.000<0.05$ ).

### *C. Positive feelings*

Results of the chi-square test show that the positive feeling strategy frequency was significantly greater in Persian than in English speakers ( $p=0.000<0.05$ ).

### *D. Apology*

Results of the chi-square test show that the apology strategy frequency was not significantly different between Persian and English speakers ( $p=0.034>0.05$ ).

### *E. Recognition of imposition:*

Results of the chi-square test show that there is a significant difference in the use of the recognition of imposition strategy between Persian and English speakers and its frequency was significantly greater in English than in Persian speakers ( $p=0.000<0.05$ ).

### *F. Repayment*

Results of the chi-square test show that the repayment strategy frequency was significantly greater in Persian than in English speakers ( $p=0.000<0.05$ ).

### *G. Other*

Results of the chi-square test show that there is no significant difference in the use of the other strategy between Persian and English speakers ( $p=0.905 >0.05$ ).

### *H. Alerters*

Results of the chi-square test show that there is no significant difference in the use of the thanking strategy between Persian and English speakers ( $p=0.687<0.05$ ).

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

Findings of this study revealed that thanking was regarded as the favorite strategy by both English and Persian speakers. In addition, results of the current study showed that Persian NSs used thanking strategy more than English NSs. Besides, repayment and alerter strategies are the second most frequently used strategies for NSs of English while repayment is the second most frequently used strategy for Persian NSs. In the case of alerter strategy, English NSs and Persian NSs shared approximately the same percentage in use of this strategy. English NSs use apology, recognition of imposition

and other strategies more than Persian NSs. Moreover, the least frequently used strategy by both English and Iranian speakers was other.

The use of thanking, repayment and alerter as the first and second most frequently used strategies, by NSs of English can be attributed to respondents' cultural values. As a 'super-egalitarian' society (Wierzbicka, 1991), americans believe that all people are equal and should have same rights and opportunities. According to Apte (1974), the value of egalitarianism has been suggested as the cause of frequent thanks in daily interactions in the United States, and therefore, people explicitly acknowledge gratitude toward everything that is done for them with verbal thanks. However, the Iranian society is traditionally non-egalitarian and has a firm sense of social hierarchy and strong awareness of status differences.

There are significant differences in the use of thanking, positive feeling and repayment strategies between Persian and English participants. Persian speakers use these strategies more than English speakers. The differences in the ways Persian NSs and English NSs use the speech act of thanking are due to the differences in their cultural backgrounds. Persian speakers used positive feeling strategy more than English speakers; it might be due to maintaining their own face.

Regarding the implications, contrastive studies on speech acts, like the current research, can help learners be aware of the gaps existing between first language and second or foreign language. These gaps may result in miscommunication. In this case, if teachers become familiar with these differences, they can enhance their learners. Moreover, when a non-native language learner is not aware of the sociopragmatic similarities and differences between his/her native and target languages, negative outcomes of transfer will most probably occur. In order to avoid this negative effect, the solution seems to be in the material providers' hand. The sociopragmatic points of difference should be first discovered and then devised in the syllabus, and teaching materials to pose the learners indirectly with the aimed points.

Key recommendations for future research can be summarized as follows. First, further research like this is needed to provide a better understanding of expression of gratitude in Persian. This study focused on participant's who were selected from among undergraduate and graduate M.A students majoring in English teaching. Future research can also be done in private language institutes with younger participants. In Iranian language institutes many modern language textbooks have appeared and are taught as an attempt to incorporate socio-cultural information as an integral part of language use. Therefore, one can examine the gratitude strategies used by learners who have more background knowledge of pragmatics in institutes and to discover the extent to which these learners transfer their L1 pragmatic patterns into L2 productions. Finally, further studies on the influence of social power, curriculum, educational background, age or social distance on the use of gratitude speech act can be conducted between Persian and other languages like English.



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