The Study of Canadian and Persian Perceptions of (Im)politeness in Intercultural Apology Forms

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Abstract— Academic study of the relationship between language and culture has long been of great importance. Here, politeness or apology is focused. The current study attempts to explore the degree of perceptions of (im)politeness and apology, exclusively, by Canadian and Persian speakers. The study is based on a sample conversation in English and its equivalent translation into Persian in the form of a questionnaire and questions. It is given to Canadian and Iranian male and female students to reveal their gender and cultural differences. This analysis aims to hypothesize that there are cultural and gender differences in the (im)politeness level of perception. The present study provides useful implications in developing conversation materials and learning and teaching conversations for teachers, students, writers and translators.

Index Terms— Canadian perceptions, Persian perceptions, Politeness, Impoliteness, Intercultural forms, Apology forms, Language, Culture

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1 INTRODUCTION

Language has been studied from different perspectives. Based on the functions of language, various classifications have been presented so far [1-8]. Yule (1985:173) was attributed two major functions to language, namely, interactional and transactional functions [9, 10]. Then he was elaborated his idea on language functions in more detail contending that interactional function is meant for expression of emotions and feelings of the writer [11-25]. But Yule was left no room for emotions and feelings in transactional function as he was defined it in the framework of a function purely aimed at conveying information of any kind; i.e. as a vehicle for mere exchange of message between a source and receiver [26, 27].

A text is not free of all ideologies and basis; ideologies that can be hidden behind the words are of great interest for critical discourse analyst. But at least, the interpersonal function of language, even that of scientific discourse which is somehow free from ideologies, is maintained in order to give producer an opportunity to express his own feeling on the proposition put forth [28]. Interpersonal function as a whole consists of all the functions of a piece of text or conversation from the producer's mind into the receiver's mind, or it is deeply rooted in the multifaceted linguistic and cultural experiences of the producer [29-37]. Consequently, linguistic background and cultural traditions of EFL writers play a role in influencing the way these writers produce a text [38-41]. Kaplan (1967:10-16) was introduced contrastive rhetoric as a tool displaying these influences, which are manifested through rhetorical features of written works [42-47].

Then, he was found that students from different native language and cultural backgrounds apply different methods and strategies of rhetoric to propose their ideas and support their arguments [48]. The rhetorical and generic features of different languages, genres or disciplines are displayed and manifested through some linguistic and discourse devices. A broad category of these devices contains what is titled and known in technical terms as "discourse markers" [49-51]. Discourse markers have been under scrutiny by various scholars time and again, from different angles [52, 53].

The current study aims to explore the variables in perceptions of (im)politeness in an intercultural apology with focus on discussion of the cultural and gender differences [54]. As it will be seen, apology as one of the important and frequent aspects of language occurs with high frequency in our daily speech [55]. Everybody in their interaction with people around him/her can't help using apology terms due to some errors or mistakes that happens in his or her speech [56]. The frequency of use of apologetic terms and expressions in all language interactions among different people and even nations makes it an important aspect in language learning and use in order that more focus could be paid on its different forms and functions [57, 58]. On the other hand, due to the close relationship between language and culture, the present study aims to focus on the differences between two cultures of Persian and Canadian in the use of apology terms [59]. The third focused aspect in this study is the differences that are observed in the use of apologetic terms or expressions from the gender viewpoint [60]. Therefore, apology as a widespread aspect of language with a high frequency of use for repairing interactional deficiencies or mistakes deserves to be studied and scrutinized carefully and in details [61]. It should be mentioned, however, that no such research has been done in the past between the Persian and Canadian speakers concerning apology terms [62].

Of course, apologies are one of the many speech acts frequently used in human interactions [63-65]. Numerous studies provided definitions of an apology as well as examining its functions as mentioned before by Yule (1967) [66, 67]. Olshtain

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and Cohen (1993:20) also were claimed that "an apology is called for when social norms have been violated, whether the offences is real or potential" [68]. In addition, Aijmer (1996:81) also was argued that "what seems to be necessary is that the "apologizer" has done something which is annoying or damaging to the person to whom the apology is addressed [69 , 70]. The apologizer now regrets having done the act, and takes responsibility for it by uttering an apology."

Moreover, Robab Fayazi (1997) was conducted an investigation on the "perception of politeness of Iranian and American university students in requested forms" with the aim of investigating and comparing politeness level (degree) of various forms of requested in English as perceived judged by native speakers of English and Iranian students of English in Iran. Whether the subjects' perception varies according to their sex or age was also investigated [71-77]. The current study also is attempted to focus on the role of age [78]. Perception of the two groups was evaluated and similarities and differences were discussed [79, 80]. Analysis of variance was shown no difference in the perception of politeness due to the sex or age of the subjects, except for one situation in the case of Americans [81]. In request forms, American males were perceived requests more polite than American female did [82-85].

2 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Obviously, one of the major skills of any language is speaking which is classified as a productive skill by scholars such as Chastain (1988). Speaking has received much care and attention from both students and teachers. Also many people from different backgrounds such as economic and commercial sectors seek to learn speaking skill of other languages. Even many ordinary people from different unions including taxi and bus drivers, truck drivers going abroad, social workers, hygienic workers and people from different professions are interested in learning conversation. As a result, focus on conversional strategies, in general, and apology and politeness, in particular, is critical so that him or her can cope with the damage caused by either side of the conversation or to compensate for it.

Clearly, the first and most important skill or aspect of language in interaction among different nationalities is conversation. Because speaking, or in a more general meaning, interaction is the first skill that interactors face. And it is clear that most foreign and second language learners and acquirers have, indeed, serious difficulties and problems in interaction with native speakers of the foreign or second languages (here, in particular, it is English). These difficulties have different roots and causes, and as a result, they are need to different solutions. Also, these difficulties and deficiencies are related to various aspects of language such as sociological aspect, and so on. This study aims to focus on the cultural differences between Canadian English speakers and Persian speakers with emphasis on the level or degree of use and perception of (im)politeness in intercultural apology forms.

This study can pave the way for understanding the cultural aspects of language learning that is seriously felt to be empty in learning English by Iranian students, almost in all levels of language pedagogy in Iran, that is, at elementary school, sec-

ondary school, high school and college or university levels. In fact, this aspect, namely, the cultural aspect of language learning or acquisition, would have negative impacts on the learners if it is not presented suitably in learning or acquisition process. These learners would stick to their own cultural perceptions and this will lead to negative interference on the side of the first language culture. Another advantage of present study is that it causes the researcher to focus on different forms of language elements regarding cultural phenomena and politeness aspect of them and to present a good classification of them. That is the case in most cases that linguistic elements in real or contextual situations have been presented in a scattered form and have not been classified or delivered at the same place. So students usually do not have a clear understanding of the number of apology elements and their use. They are presented one at a time and one at a place, not in a good categorized form.

Due to the importance of the studying subject, as it was mentioned before, Brown and Levinson (1978,1987) has remained the most seminal and influential starting point for cross-cultural and cross-linguistic contrastive pragmatics. Yet, it has also provoked countervailing arguments from some other scholars like Ide (1989, 1993), pointing out a western bias in their overemphasis on face-threat and their assumption of individualistic and egalitarian motivations, as opposed to the more-group-centered hierarchy-based methods of Eastern societies. Therefore, this led to the question in this article: Is there an East-West divide in politeness? This article argues in favor of the conclusion that, despite differences, there is no East-West divide in politeness.

So based on above discussion and reasons, it seems that a subject like politeness, particularly, the topic of this investigation as "the study of Canadian & Persian perceptions of (im)politeness in intercultural apology forms " deserves to be studied carefully and deeply in order to produce good results and understanding of the influential parameters across cultures and genders for learning new languages, either foreign or second languages. These achievements and understanding could be a solution to the problem of lack of knowledge regarding the inter-cultural and gender differences.

3 CONCLUSION

Scientific study may be played a vital role in achieving the desired goals. Because of the complexity and multi-dimensionality of language phenomenon and its complex structure and different aspects, it is clear that it should be studied suitably and properly in order to obtain some important results. Academic papers clearly want, as part of generic purpose, to inform others from findings and theoretical conclusion. The rhetorical persuasive dimension, however, is also present and it is interestingly seen in the differentiation of the functions of conversation section in conventional reports of empirical research. Introduction and discussion sections in such reports are the most obviously useful ones, because these need to justify the topic and the results. The reader needs to be persuaded and convinced after reading the results and conclusions that are valid. The fact that even the most conventional empirical reports have introduction and discussion sections

shows that rhetoric is necessary to scientific discourse study and, in particular, here, the conversation across cultures. If the purpose is really to inform, then only the descriptive sections those dealing with methods and results, would be needed, and perhaps if the title is not informative enough, possibly also a sentence stating the purpose of research would be enough. Bearing these conventions in mind as an aspect of academic investigation for the EFL and ESL students could be very useful, helping him or her to realize speaking problems related to linguistic, cultural and gender aspects of languages in general and Canadian English speakers and Iranian Persian speakers, here, in particular. Such types of investigations can identify the cultural differences and also differences in gender and the results of the study can be helpful in learning and teaching languages. The results of this study or similar studies can be beneficial to different groups including: language teachers and language learners at different levels and also to the language pedagogy from the cultural and gender differences points of view. On the other hand, due to intermixing cultures and worldwide relations among people and nations all over the world, the necessity of such investigations is multiplied, especially regarding cross-cultural studies such as Persian speakers and English speakers, which their number is seldom. Finally, the present study intends to provide a quantitative account of the (im)politeness, in particular, apology terms across two cultures, namely, Canadian English speakers, and Iranian Persian speakers in one hand, and gender differences on the other hand, in terms of degree or level of use or frequency of use, with the hope that the results will be useful in teaching and learning foreign and second languages.

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