Cross-Cultural Investigation into Generic Structure of Dissertation Acknowledgements in English and Persian: Reflections on Politeness Strategies

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Abstract

This contrastive study, in the first place, examined the **generic structure and, in the second place, explored the face theory proposed by Arundale (2006) in 140 doctoral dissertation acknowledgments written by native speakers of Persian (NSP) and native speakers of English (NSE) in 7 disciplines representing soft sciences to find out what discourse genre components writers employ to articulate the communicative purpose of these acknowledgments. The results of the first phase of the study revealed four moves and a number of constituting steps. Careful surveillance uncovered an obligatory** *acknowledging* **move framed by three optional** *resonating, disclaimer* **and** *declaration* **moves. The findings related to the second phase of the study discovered that, approximately, majority of the moves and steps exploited by the two groups function as connection face except for the** *disclaimer* **move voiced as separation face. Persian writers, guided by their different cultural and literacy practices, utilized this move more than English writers. The study provided valuable information about the academic values, socio-cultural practices, and personal identity of the writer encoded in the rhetorical and organizational components of this genre.**

Keywords: acknowledgments, genre, generic structure, politeness, face

1. Introduction

Since three decades ago or so, a great body of research has centered on various academic texts. While the main insights are inherited from studies of

language employed in disciplines such as anthropology (Clifford & Marcus, 1986) and economics (Dudley-Evans & Henderson, 1990), diverse academic genres including theses (Thompson, 2001; Bunton, 2002), research articles (Jalilifar, Hayati, & Namdari, 2012; Swales, 1990; Posteguillo, 1999), textbooks (Hyland, 2000), book reviews (Jalilifar & Ahmadi, 2011; Nicolaisen, 2002), conference papers (Rowley-Jolivet, 2002), and grant proposals (Halleck & Connor, 2006) have been under careful scrutiny. Various approaches have been applied to reveal the overall features of academic discourse as well as the characteristics of particular genres.

Simply stated, these studies can be broken down into two broad categories, regarding the purpose of investigation. The first category zooms in on the stylistic and grammatical features of particular genres including tense and aspect (Burrough-Boenisch, 2003), modality (Vassileva, 2001), adjectives (Soler, 2002), nouns (Flowerdew, 2003), reporting verbs (Thompson & Ye, 1991), and etc. The second category focuses on the macro-organization of academic texts such as abstracts (Hyland, 2000; Samraj, 2005; Martin, 2003; Lores, 2004), introductions (Swales, 1981, 1990; Dudley- Evans & Henderson, 1990; Holmes, 1995), results (Brett, 1994; Williams, 1999), discussions (Hopkins & Dudley-Evans, 1988; Holmes, 1997; Jalilifar, et al, 2012), conclusions (Yang & Allison, 2003; Bunton, 2002), research paper titles (Haggan, 2004; Jalilifar, 2010), and so on. Studies on macro-organization of different academic genres gain their insights mainly from Swales' (1990) seminal work of CARS (creating a research space) model, which "has played a vital role in genre analysis in ESP and on the teaching of academic writing" (Dudley-Evans, 2000, p. 6).

One of the areas in academic settings demanding more investigation by the experts in the field is acknowledgment texts. Acknowledgments are types of academic writings that researchers write with utmost joy and delight. A dissertation acknowledgment is addressed by Hyland (2003) as a "Cinderella" genre signaling that it is "neither strictly academic nor entirely personal" and seems to constitute a peculiar genre of its own (p. 243). According to Hyland (2004), acknowledgments are textual components where writers need to express their gratitude to the ones who helped them appropriately consider the very intricate rules of communication (e.g., the face needs of the other and the self, the social context, representation of the self) (p. 304). Thus, these areas are significant in enabling authors to build a credible scholarly and social character in readers' mind.

Earning the doctorate, the highest academic degree in any university, is a major educational, professional, and personal accomplishment, requiring not only years of diligence and days and nights of time devoted by the writers, but also the assistance, encouragement, support, and favor of others both in academic and moral realms. Acknowledgments in dissertations, as

argued by Hyland (2004), allow students to demonstrate their awareness of central academic values such as modesty and gratitude, establish their credibility, recognize debts, and achieve a sense of closure at the end of what is often a long and demanding research process (p. 304). The acknowledgment sections are, thus, short but important pieces of text. They orient the reader to what the student has done as well as where the student is placed in various scholarly and social networks. These seemingly simple texts need as much attention as other parts of student's texts. Like the table of contents, the acknowledgment sections are often the last thing a student writes, but among the first things an examiner reads (Paltridge & Starfield, 2007), which can help make that first impression a good one (Finn, 2005).

As Finn (2005, p. 118) argues, "first impressions last" in the examination process. A clear and well-written acknowledgment can help make that first impression a good one.

Through acknowledgments, writers explicitly negotiate interpersonal relationships and reflect socio-cultural interactions that have received little attention in the research literature. Notwithstanding these views, as argued by Genette (1997, cited in Giannoni, 2002), this section, unlike the main component sections of the dissertation, does not form an instrumental construction to the dissertation's rhetorical epistemology and stands outside the research record of establishing academic issues due to the assumption that acknowledgments along with prefaces, illustrations, and dedications belong to the paratext category. On the other hand, currently, in the light of numerous studies that have been done (e.g., Eisenstein &Bodman, 1993; Koutlaki, 2000; Kumatoridani, 1999; Ruhi, 2006), we can better talk about the different tendencies of cultures in regard to performing certain acts (i.e., thanking expressions, requests, apologies etc.) in language.

Acknowledgment as a genre is extensively used in academic discourse to express sincere thanks and gratitude for the assistance and contribution received from an individual or an institution, thus establishing an auspicious academic and social credit. Acknowledgments have been of some interest to genre analysts. We can classify the studies on acknowledgments into three groups. The first groupof studies drawson the acknowledgments written by the natives of English (e.g., Ben-Ari, 1987; Cronin, 1991; Davis & Cronin, 1993; McCain, 1991). The second group focuses on acknowledgments written by non-natives of English (e.g., Al-Ali, 2004; Al-Ali, 2010; Hyland, 2003; Hyland, 2004; Hyland &Tse, 2004; Mingwei&Yajun (2010). And the third group centers around the cross-cultural studies on acknowledgments (e.g., Giannoni, 2002; GolpourLasaki, 2011).

Thus, having considered the significance of acknowledgment texts in academic writing and the fact that little, if any, has been devoted to highlight dissertation acknowledgment texts in the Iranian academic context, the

current study, thus, aims to cross-culturally compare and contrast the acknowledgment sections of the PhD dissertations written in English by native speakers of English (NSE) and those written in Persian by native speakers of Persian (NSP) in soft sciences to see if these acknowledgments follow the same generic patterns and to what extent their structure is affected by cross-cultural considerations and literacy practices. The study takes into account the overall structure of acknowledgments in terms of moves or communicative functions and steps or linguistic considerations (Swales, 1990) and politeness strategies (Arundale, 2006) used by the writers across the two languages.

2. Theoretical Frameworks

The values and norms dominating cultures have arisen the interests of many experts working in social sciences, such as sociology, psychology, anthropology and inevitably studies in language as the main tool for communication. To this end, surprisingly, in recent years, studies conducted in social and interactional aspects of language have gained a significant scholastic interests and the number of these studies has increased praiseworthily. In this regard, as more studies targeted specific cultures, it was uncovered that the notion of appropriateness in language differs from culture to culture since different cultures are dominated by different values and norms and these are reflected by different choices of language patterns in communication (Eisenstein & Bodman, 1993; Koutlaki, 2002). On the other hand, as research in the field of genre analysis progressed, academic acknowledgments, part of the academic landscape in monographs, theses and dissertations and even journal articles, since 1990s, began to interest genre researchers (Al-Ali, 2004; Al-Ali, 2010; Ben-Ari, 1987; Giannoni, 2002; Hyland, 2003; Hyland, 2004; Hyland & Tse, 2004; Mingwei & Yajun, 2010). Following the above studies, the present study, thus, is guided by the theoretical framework posited by Swales (1990, 2004), in terms of moves or communicative functions and steps or linguistic realizations.

As an important consideration, past research has provided little direction regarding politeness strategies in acknowledgments. To date, there has been no systematic investigation of politeness features in dissertation acknowledgment texts. Thus, for further analysis, the study takes into account Arundale's (2006) model of politeness to explore how two diverse cultures, Iranian and American, interpret the notion of politeness in dissertation acknowledgment texts.

Due to the critiques of Brown and Levinson (1987) seminal work, in seeking new insights and directions for research on politeness, the current study adopted the model proposed by Arundale (2006). In this model, two radical shifts are involved in developing an alternative conceptualization of

face. One of these is the shift away from Goffman's (1955) view to a relational account of the social self, and hence of face. The other is the shift away from an encoding/decoding to an interactional achievement model of communication. According to Arundale (2006), "these shifts provide a communication framework for constructing theory, and for conducting research on face, facework and politeness, that is distinct from the social psychological framework employed in the previous inquiries" (p. 207). Two broad implications are that theories that employ the alternative framework will provide explanations distinct from Brown and Levinson's, and that research based upon such theories will require different approaches in gathering and analyzing data (Ibid). Taken together, these two major shifts, as with a great body of research, keep asserting that facework and politeness using Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory are no longer productive.

3. Research Questions

Considering the importance of acknowledgments as sections read first by the ones who were with the PhD students throughout this difficult process and maybe by the ones wondering the academic and social network of the authors, the current study cross-culturally compares the doctoral dissertation acknowledgments written by NSP and NSE to unravel differences in cultural and literacy practices in expressing gratitude across the two languages. Accordingly, the following questions stand out:

1. What generic structure specifies Persian and English doctoral dissertation acknowledgment texts in social sciences?
2. Is there any difference in the macro structure of the acknowledgments written by Persian and English students?
3. In what ways are politeness strategies revealed in the acknowledgments written by PhD students?

4. Methodology

4.1 Data

To examine dissertation acknowledgments, two sets of data were collected. The first set included 70 dissertation acknowledgments written by the NSE and the second set comprised 70 acknowledgments written by the NSP in soft sciences. Soft sciences were chosen to be analyzed due to their important role they play in human life. Social sciences or soft sciences study the human aspects of the world. They include an in-depth study and evaluation of human behavior, among them the communication behavior, by using scientific methods in either quantitative or qualitative manner. Consequently, seven disciplines, namely library sciences, literature, history, philosophy, psychology, sociology, and theology were selected for subsequent analyses.

4.2 Procedures

English data were gathered from the database of the Princeton University of America in New Jersey (including doctoral dissertations from different universities of America) as the representative sample of acknowledgments in dissertations written from 2007 to 2011. Selection of these texts was on the basis of their availability to the researcher, in the way that they were chosen and sent by a graduate from Princeton University who was informed of the purpose of the study and given adequate information about how to collect the data. For the Persian data, a series of trips was made to the universities of Ahvaz, Isfahan, Tabriz, Shiraz, and Mazandaran, and samples of acknowledgments in dissertations written within the same time frame were picked from the relevant departments once permission was made from the universities. The disciplines were then coded as displayed in Table 1. In what follows, the proportion of Persian and English acknowledgments along with the universities from which these texts are picked is shown (Tables 1 &2).

Table 1. Proportion of Persian doctoral dissertation acknowledgments

Discipline	No of acknowledgments	Proportion of acknowledgements from universities
Lit	10	Mazandaran (6) & Esfahan (4)
Lib	10	Ahvaz (6) & Shiraz (4)
His	10	Tabriz (10)
Psy	10	Tabriz (10)
Phil	10	Ahvaz (3), Esfahan (4), & Shiraz (3)
Soc	10	Esfahan (10)
Theo	10	Esfahan (5), Tabriz (3) & Ahvaz(2)

Lit (Literature), Lib (Library sciences), His (History), Psy (Psychology), Phil (Philology), Soc (Sociology), Theo (Theology)

Table 2. Proportion of English doctoral dissertation acknowledgments

Discipline	No of acknowledgments	Proportion of acknowledgements from universities
Lit	10	Boston(7) & Ohio (3)
Lib	10	Florida (6) &Capella (4)
His	10	Temple (5) & Oklahoma (5)
Psy	10	Florida (5) & Chicago (5)
Phil	10	Capella (5), & Cincinnati(5)
Soc	10	Oakland (4), Texas (4) & Arizona (2)
Theo	10	New York (3), Duke (4) & Brandeis (3)

In the first stage, 30 acknowledgments from the two languages were selected and piloted; that is, we started independently by identifying the generic

features of the texts in terms of recurring patterns or moves, working our way up towards developing a framework for description of the texts (Table.3). The communicative function of each sentence, as the unit of analysis, was identified. The reliability of the framework was calculated applying the Cronbach's α which is a statistic used to determine the internal consistency. Cronbach's alpha increases as the inter-correlations among the items included in the analysis increase. Alpha coefficient ranges in value from 0 to 1. The α revealed to be 0.741 signaling an acceptable level as asserted by Nunnaly (1978) indicating 0.7 to be an acceptable reliability coefficient. Then, once full agreement was made on the method of analysis, all the texts were coded and analyzed accordingly (e.g., *P. ACK. Soc. No. 1* stands for Persian acknowledgement in sociology).

Our generic analysis of acknowledgments helped identify four moves and a number of constituting steps. The first move, *resonating move*, is a writer-oriented move through which the writer comments on his/her research experience. Note the following examples, one from Persian and one from English sample texts.

1) *Kar-e tâhghighiâmridoshvarvâtâklifi shag âst.(P. ACK. Soc. No. 1)*
   (Conducting research is a hard and burdensome task.)
2) *A dissertation is never the work of just one person. (E. ACK. Theo. No. 3)*

The second move extracted, as we went on analyzing acknowledgments, was *acknowledging move* which is participant-oriented through which the writer accredits and thanks different sources of assistance. This move, which seems to be an obligatory one because of its presence in all of the piloted texts, was divided into four sub-steps. The first sub-step was *acknowledging divine sources* including God, martyrs and self-sacrifices. Following are two examples of this sub-step from both languages.

3) *Pârvârdegar ra shakerâmke be mântâvan dad ta pâsâz se sal tâlash in pâzhuhesh ra be payan beresanâm. (P. ACK. His. No. 5)*

(I thank God who empowered me to finish this research after three years attempting.)
4) *I would first like to give thanks to the Ineffable Presence I often call God. (E. ACK. Psy. No.6)*

The second sub-step of acknowledging move was *acknowledging committee members* in which, as it can be seen in the following examples, the writers are thankful for any kind of intellectual help they received from members in the academic community such as dissertation advisors, committee members, and senior academics. Here, academic members are thanked for their ideas, insights, feedback, or critical analysis. It should be noted that for confidential reasons real names of instructors are replaced with pseudo ones.

5) *Bâr khod lazem midanâm âzhâmey-e âsatid-e goruh-e fâlsâf-e daneshgah-e Esfâhan be vizhe doctor Mohâmmâd Âli Ezhei, doktor Mehdi Dehbashivâ doctor Yusef Shaghol ke saliani dâr mâhzâreshan danesh amukhtâm tâshâkkor konâm. (P. ACK. Phil. No. 8)*
(I must thank all instructors of Philosophy Faculty of Esfahan university, most notably Dr. Mohammad Ali Ezhei, Dr. Mehdi Dehbashi and Dr. Yusef Shaghol whom I learned from for many years.)

6) *I would like to express my profound appreciation to my dissertation committee. The committee chair Dr. Rosalie Romano was more than my teacher and adviser; she was also my source of strength and encouragement. (E. ACK. Lib. No. 7)*

The third sub-step of acknowledging move was *acknowledging non-committee members* including family members, classmates and/or friends who the writer thanks for their patience, understanding, sympathy, encouragement, friendship and care, as shown in the following examples:

7) *Anjam-e in pâzhuhesh bedun-e yariha vâ fâdakarihay-e bi dârigh-e hâmsârâm behich ruy momken nâbud. Behtârin dorudhay-e khod ra tâghdim-e ou mikonâm. (P. ACK. His. No.6)*
(Doing this study would not be possible without the unsparing help and devotion of my wife. I dedicate my best salutations to her.)

8) *To our brilliant son Marcus, who at 2 ½ years old knows all kinds of letters (including P, H, and D), and to our sweet Natalia, who was nestled close to my heart as I wrote the last chapter - thank you both for giving everything meaning. (E. ACK. Lit. No.5)*

The last sub-step of acknowledging move was *acknowledging institutions* through which the writer expresses appreciation to the institutions, associations and organizations that supported him/her financially and helped him/her to get access to required data. In what follows, we have presented two examples for this sub-step.

9) *Âz dâst ândârkaran-e daneshkâd-e âdâbiat vâ olum-e ensani be khater-e hâmkari-e sâmimaneshan tâshâkkor mikonâm. (P. ACK. Lit. No.8)*
(I appreciate the personnel of the faculty of Literature and Humanities for their sincere collaboration.)

10) *Thanks are also due the Salahdin Kurdish Community Center and the Center for Refugee and Immigrants in Nashville. (E. ACK. Soc. No.2)*

The third move was *disclaimer*, assumed to be optional due to the fluctuation in frequency of its application, which levels the field for writers to accept the responsibility of possible errors and weaknesses of the work. Note the following examples:

11) *Dâr payan hârgune nâghs vâ kasti dâr neveshtar hazer ra be natâvaniha vâ mâhdudiathay-e elmie khodâm mârbut midanâm. (P. ACK. Soc. No.7)*

(Finally, it should be mentioned that the deficiencies and errors of the present study are due to my knowledge debilities and limitations.)

12) *Ineffable as it is, I feel sure that this metempsychotic transformation took far more than a pinch of time, and resulted less from any internal faculty of mine than it did from the brilliant and sustained efforts of my teachers. (E. ACK. Theo. No.4)*

The last move was *dedication* in which the writer dedicates his/her dissertation to someone including family members, friend(s), and/or divine sources. Here, writers offer a tribute to people who have made a special contribution to their lives beyond the confines of the research context (Hyland, 2004, p. 322), as revealed in the following examples.

13) *Dâr payan in payan name ra be ruh-e pak-e pedârâm, be madârâm vâ bâradârhayâm tâghdim mikonâm. (P. ACK. Lit. No.7)*

(Finally, I dedicate this dissertation to the pure soul of my father, my mother and my brothers.)

14) *This dissertation is dedicated to my father, Mario Pattuelli, whose intelligence, strength, and beautiful soul continue to inspire me. (Lib. E. ACK. No.5)*

Table 3 illustrates the framework that was derived from our bottom-up analysis in the piloting stage.

Table 3. Researcher-made move structure of acknowledgment texts

1. **Resonating move**	**Writer's comment on his/her research experience**
2. **Acknowledging move** 2.1. Acknowledging divine sources 2.2. Acknowledging committee members 2.3. Acknowledging non-committee members 2.4. Acknowledging institutions	**accrediting and thanking individuals and institutions** thanking God, martyrs and self- sacrifices thanking advisor(s), reader(s) and/or referees for academic assistance and/or data access thanking family members, classmates and/or friends for moral help and/or data gathering thanking supporting institutions, associations and organizations for financial support or data access
3. **Disclaimer move**	**asserting the responsibility for probable weaknesses and deficiencies of the theses/dissertation**
4. **Dedication move**	**dedicating the thesis/dissertation to family member(s), friend(s) and/or divine source(s).**

In the second phase, following the critiques of Brown and Levinson (1987) and guided by Arundale's face theory (2006), the current study scrutinized the politeness strategies in acknowledgments. According to Arundale (2006), "Connectedness" in relationships indexes a complex of meanings and actions that may be apparent as unity, interdependence, solidarity, association, and congruence between the partners (p. 204). Connectedness is always linked reflexively with "separateness", which indexes meanings and actions that may be voiced as differentiation, independence, autonomy, dissociation, and divergence (Ibid). Thus, our study continues in this tradition by highlighting rhetorical characteristics adopted by native writers across English and Persian.

In the piloting stage, we found that majority of the sentences employed in the texts function as connection since they were written aiming at making unity and interdependence between students and their relational partners. In other words, preliminary analysis indicated that sentences applied in the acknowledgments to acknowledge participants and to dedicate the dissertation to someone function as connection. Note the following example taken from the English corpus.

15) *Firstly, I would like to thank my dissertation sponsor, Dr. Mitchell*
    Schare. Your constant encouragement, wisdom, humor, and advice have
    been paramount in allowing me to push through my fears. (E. ACK. Psy.
    No.9)

As seen in the example, the writer tries to show the congruence between his sponsor and himself and also make strong association with his sponsor since he describes him as a wise person encouraging him to overcome fear. In other words, the writer wishes to be ratified, approved of, and liked by the sponsor. Thus, according to Arundale's (2006), this sentence functions as connection.

The only exception in acknowledgment texts functioning as separation was the part in which the writer accepts the responsibility of probable weaknesses and deficiencies of the dissertation and exonerated others from them. The following Persian example illustrates separation.

16) *Dâr payan motâzâkker mishâvâm ke kastiha, nâvaghes vâ eshkalat-e*
    payannameh be ohdehy-e injaneb mibashâd. (P. ACK. Lib. No.3)

   (Finally, it should be mentioned that I am responsible for faults,
deficiencies and errors of the dissertation.)

As inferred from the above example, the writer tries to shoulder any weaknesses of the dissertation and acquit others, that is to show his freedom of action and freedom of imposition. Thus, it can be concluded that, in this section of acknowledgments, the aim of the writer is to show his dissociation from others.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 Generic structure of acknowledgements

Results from the analysis of the acknowledgments revealed both qualitative and quantitative variations between the Persian and English texts. For example, Move 1,being obligatory, was present in more than 65% of the acknowledgments in both groups. This is in stark contrast with Al-Ali's (2004) decision about the peripheral nature of this move to the genre's main communicative purpose as it occurred in only 8% of the student corpus (p. 38).Karakaş's (2010) findings also located this move in only 6% of Turkish dissertation acknowledgments. With regard to Move 2, both groups appeared to have conventionalized this move, being a constant rhetorical feature of the acknowledgments (reaching 100% of all texts), which means that all writers consistently used this move and considered it as a mandatory function. The literature recognizes that Move 2 is often an obligatory component in dissertation acknowledgments (AL-Ali, 2004; Giannoni, 2002; Hyland, 2004; Hyland & Tse, 2004; Mingwei & Yajun, 2010). Move 3 proved to be the most omitting and marginal one due to its low frequency in the corpora which is in favor of what was asserted by Al-Ali (2004) and Hyland (2004), introducing this as a peripheral move (Table 5). However, *Shouldering responsibility* occurred in less than 30% and *Dedicating the dissertation* occurred in less than 35% of the corpora, though these steps often do not occur together.

5.1.1 Move 1: Resonating

The *resonating move* is the opening part where writers comment on their experiences while writing their dissertations. It acts as an introduction to the main body of the acknowledgments (i.e., the *acknowledging move*). In this move, writers, by sharing their personal experience and showing the relationship between this private experience and the research process, create a more personal text, which, in turn, allows them both to elevate the value of the received help from the acknowledgees and the value of their own expressions of thanking(46 occurrences in each group).

Cramer-test revealed that the examined groups do not employ the resonating move in statistically different frequencies (sig< 0.05, see Table 6). It seems that writers in both cultures are inclined to present themselves as the owners of their dissertations and let others know about the difficulties they encountered during the complex process of writing a doctoral dissertation. Here, we can point to the "self-enhancement" style of communication offered by Ting-Toomey (1999). He argues that the self-enhancement verbal style reflects the vaunting of people when they perform an exhausting task.

Thus, we might claim that both NSP and NSE are culturally more apt to use a language of self-enhancement. Indeed, English and Persian writers exploited this move to reflect on both the struggles they were involved and accomplishments they achieved in conducting their study. In other words, they wished to let others know the arduous task of writing a doctoral dissertation as well as the understandings they gained following the accomplishment of the study. Generally, within achievement domains, if people succeed in an important task, they may become proud of their ability or accomplishment. Pride is a manifestation of self-esteem and is acceptable as celebration and sharing of one's worthy accomplishments with others. Thus, many writers display their authorship of the dissertations by inserting a resonating move to comment on research experiences and the difficult journey they have had.

5.1.2 Move 2: Acknowledging

The *acknowledging move* is the main body of acknowledgments due to its presence in all texts (Table 4). The authors sometimes begin this move by an introductory thanking statement in which they introduce the acknowledgees. Then, they start offering their thanks to every person/group of people individually (e.g., the divine sources, supervisors, co-supervisors, instructors, colleagues, family members, etc.). Thus, this is usually, the longest part of the acknowledgments. Table 4 presents the distribution of the sub-moves appearing in the acknowledging move.

Table 4. Frequency of acknowledging move in Persian and English acknowledgments

	Persian (%)	English (%)
2.1. Acknowledging divine sources	56 (80)	4 (5.71)
2.2. Acknowledging committee members	70 (100)	70 (100)
2.3. Acknowledging non-committee members	48 (68.57)	64 (91.42)
2.4. Acknowledging Institutions	30 (42.85)	45 (64.28)

5.1.2.1 Acknowledging divine sources

This step allows writers to sincerely thank different divine sources including God, martyrs and self- sacrifices who have given spiritual assistance to writers in accomplishing their theses/dissertations albeit God is most appreciated and thanked in Persian acknowledgments and other divine sources are rarely appreciated.

In examining this sub-move, our analysis revealed that while NSE employed it in only 5.71% of their dissertation acknowledgments, NSP included this step in 80% of their acknowledgments (Table 4). Note examples 3 and 4 stated above.

The value of Cramer-test for this step was 0.000 (sig< 0.05, see Table 6) signaling a statistically meaningful difference in utilizing this step between NSP and NSE. Frequently cited in Persian, acknowledgments are assumed to be influenced by religion to the extent that in the Iranian Muslim society, there is no separation between religion and social life. This step usually embodies a form of gratitude to Allah (God) who is believed by Muslims as the source of inspiration, strength, and confidence, making the completion of the task possible. This is compatible with what was discovered by Al-Ali (2010), emphasizing this sub-move as an obligatory section in Jordanian Arabic dissertations. The importance of religion can be signaled by the large number of verses, scriptures, and hadiths (quotations narrated from prophet Mohammad and spiritual leaders) stressing thankfulness, most notably to God in Islam. This centrality comes from what is stated explicitly in the Holy Quran:

If you are grateful, I [your Lord] will add more (favors) unto you; but if you showingratitude, truly My punishment is terrible indeed. (Quran 14:7)

Being predominantly a Muslim society, Islamic laws and practices play a vital role in one's personal and social life in Iran. Although the Iranian writers are of different ethnic groups, they have assimilated an Islamic identity with their ethnic identity. According to Watts (1987, cited in Faruqi, 2005, p. 17), ethnic and religious identities can be assimilated in the case of Islam. Thus, it is likely to argue that Islamic values influence the Iranians' socio-cultural practices in one of the basic features. In such a deeply-rooted religious context in which religion is believed to have the upper hand, gratitude, most notably expressed towards God, is given much importance and emphasis, and so it is a habit among most Muslims to thank God for His blessings and bounties. Since in the Islamic culture everyone is usually assumed to start work by the name of God and finish it by thanking God, so it is quite naturalif such a step recurs even in dissertation acknowledgement.

5.1.2.2 Acknowledging committee members

Being present in all texts in both languages, English and Persian acknowledgments demonstrated full-agreement on this sub-step (Table 4). Al-Ali (2004) and Golpour Lasaki (2011) also found this sub-step as a mandatory part in Arabic and Persian dissertation acknowledgments respectively. Supervisors are always mentioned before the committee members and other academics, as shown in the following excerpts.

17) Dâr ebteda lazem midanâm âz ostadane ârjmândâm jenab-e aghay-e doctor Mâhmood Abbasi va jenab-e aghay-e doctor Milad Râghâmi ke dâr tamam-e mârahel-e tâhghigh rahnâma vâ gereh goshay-e elmi vâ ejrai-e mân budând, sâmimaneh tâshâkkor vâ sepas gozari nemayâm. (P. ACK. Soc. No.7)

(At first, I see it a necessity to sincerely thank and appreciate my respectful instructors Excellency Dr. Mahmood Abbasi and Excellency Dr. Milad Raghami who were directors and solvers of my scientific and executive problems in all steps of the study.)

18) Thank you to my committee members, especially my chairperson David Owen and my committee members Drs. Dave Gerard, Alex Davis, and Martin Black. (E. ACK. Psy. No.6)

Despite full quantitative agreement between the acknowledgments in English and Persian, a subtle difference in the quality of thanking was yielded. Persian writers employed more compliments than Americans to accredit committee members. For instance, referring to the above example (No.17), the writer, by utilizing the compliment of *"ostadane ârjmândâm jenab-e aghay-e doctor Mâhmood Abbasi va jenab-e aghay-e doctor Milad Râghâmi"* (i.e. *respectful instructors Excellency Dr. Mahmood Abbasi and Excellency Dr. Milad Raghami),* is deferential to the committee members. This can be attributed to the pervasive place and vital role of compliments *(Taarof* in Persian*)* in Iranian culture as a sign of politeness (Behnam & Amizadeh, 2011, p. 76) which might sometimes go to the point of extreme obsequiousness. In fact, *"Taarof"* involves uttering polite and respectful statements to please and welcome somebody.

Complimenting as one pragmatic feature plays an important role in the establishment of rapport between people, in particular, of different cultures. The patterns of giving and receiving compliments—like any speech act—vary among different languages and cultures. "*Taarof*" has been addressed as a backbone of Persian politeness system (Koutlaki, 2002; Nanbakhsh, 2009; Sharifian, 2007), and it seems to be dominant in the majority of interactions between Iranians in different settings. The meaning and the concept of "*Taarof*" is broad and multidimensional. Offers and expressions of thanks, as two aspects of "*Taarof*", have been claimed by Koutlaki (2002) as the main manifestation of Persian ritual politeness (pp. 1740-1742). Thus, the performance of "*Taarof*" in Persian acknowledgments is a means to indicate the speakers' adherence to the societal norms of politeness.

5.1.2.3 Acknowledging non-committee members

In examining acknowledging non-committee members, we found that while Persian writers insert this sub-move in 68.57% of their dissertation acknowledgments, English writers employ it in 91.42 % of their acknowledgments (see examples 7 & 8). The Cramer-test showed a statistically meaningful difference between the two groups in applying this step as NSE made more use of the step than NSP (Table 6). This difference can be attributed to allocation of a dedication page in Persian dissertations to dedicate the work to and thank favorite people, most notably parents. The

number of the students who used this page was surprising. All the Persian students used this step in a separate page and most of them dedicated their dissertations to and thanked their own family while few English students had this page separately in their dissertations.

In addition to statistical differences, two qualitative variations were also uncovered in exploiting this step by the English and Persian writers. Firstly, NSP used more heartfelt and cordial expressions to thank individuals. Secondly, in acknowledging non-committee members, Persian writers only relied on generally magnanimous thanking vis-a-vis specific thanking exploited by English writers. Note the following examples:

19) *Hâmchenin bâr khod vajeb midanâm ke âz kolliy-e âsatid-e geranmayey-e goruh-e tarikh-e daneshgah-e Tâbriz ke salha khushe chin-e khârmân-e daneshe shan budeâm sâmimaneh sepas gozari mikonâm vâ baray-e anha arezuy-e sâlamâti darâm. (P. ACK. His. No. 2)*

(Also, I see it a necessity to sincerely thank all instructors of history department of Tabriz University whom I learned from their immense knowledge for many years and I wish them success.)

20) *Thank you, Caroline Carpenter, for your amazing support and for bringing me into the digital 21ˢᵗ century. (E. ACK. Soc. No. 3)*

In light of what Wierzbicka (2003) maintains, cordiality can be defined as the readiness of the members of some society to express their emotions openly and spontaneously as well as to favor intimate contacts with certain individuals (e.g., family members) even to the extent of what might be seen as imposing one's will on other or invading their autonomy (cited in Królak & Rudnicka, 2006, p. 130). As the above examples suggest, contrary to the English text, the Persian writer employed more cordial statements to appreciate his instructors by applying the adverb of *"sincerely"* as well as by wishing them good luck. These offers are perceived as expressions of cordiality and warmth of feeling to demonstrate sincere and positive inter-personal relationships. Overall, Iranian people always tend to make cordial ties with their relational partners to show their politeness. Certain linguistic devices used in Persian reflect cordiality in communication. Cordiality can be seen in almost every speech of Iranians to the extent that even a simple daily act like greeting could ground a cheerful and a cordial face-to-face encounter. Generally, Iranian people, even children, display ad-hoc cordiality and good sentiments in relation with others. Here, in writing the doctoral dissertation, writers utilized devices such as praising and cordial compliments to thank their favorite people who tolerated many difficulties and encouraged writers to accomplish the study well.

The other qualitative difference was that while Persian writers just relied on bare thanking without mentioning the specific received assistance

and service, English writers thanked non-committee members by pointing to the kind of assistance or service they received from them. As Persian example 19 suggests, the writer refrained from citing the kind of received help and only named the people to be acknowledged but, drawing on example 20, the English writer not only named the people to be thanked but also mentioned the kind of service or support they received (i.e. *for your amazing support and for bringing me into the digital 21st century*).

5.1.2.4 Acknowledging institutions

In acknowledging institutions, writers first cite the institutions and then acknowledge them for their assistance and collaboration. Qualitatively, no variation was noticed between the two groups though they showed different degrees of application. The frequency of this step in Persian texts was 42.85% while in English this step reached 64.28%. However, the Cramer-test revealed that the difference was not statistically meaningful (p<0.05, see Table 6). The quantitative difference might be attributed to lack of sufficient collaborations of Iranian institutions and organizations that one appeals help from. In an oral interview with some of the doctoral students who were completing their dissertations, questioning them about the quality of collaboration of Iranian organizations with the students in doing their theses/dissertations, they complained about the organizations' insufficient collaboration. In administrating the current study, we even witnessed that the library staff of some universities did not cooperate in printing the acknowledgment texts of the dissertations we needed for data analysis.

5.1.3 Move 3: Disclaimer

Disclaimer provides the opportunity for writers, on the one hand, to absolve supervisors and advisors of blame for any weaknesses in the dissertation and, on the other hand, assert their ownership of the product. Careful scrutiny revealed that this move is used more frequently by the NSP (i.e., 25.71%) than by the NSE (i.e., 7.14%). Note the following examples taken from the corpora.

21) *Dâr payan hâr guneh nâghs vâ kasti dâr neveshtar-e hazer ra be natâvaniha vâ mâhdudiâthay-e elmi vâ ejrai-e khodâm mârbut midanâm vâ omidvarâm khanândegan-e gerami vâ ândishmând ba enekas-e anha be injaneb mâra dâr behbud-e keifiy-e resale yari resanând. (P. ACK. Soc. No.7) (At the end, it should be mentioned that the deficiencies and errors of the present study are due to my knowledge debilities and limitations. I hope that the opulent and intellectual readers assist me in qualitative mprovement of the dissertation by recalling me of these deficiencies.)*

22) *Finally, I should confess that I am the only responsible for the eaknesses of this thesis. (E. ACK. Phil. No. 9)*

Results showed that the difference is statistically significant (Table 5). The argument for the difference comes from "*Shekasteh-nafsi*" (i.e., modesty in English) in the Iranian culture by which a person downgrades him/herself and raises the position of the relational partner. This self-lowering (e.g. "*my knowledge debilities and limitations*") and other-raising pattern is the commonest strategy in Persian (Kariminia & Afghari, 2011, p. 33; Beeman, 2001, p. 41) to the extent that "*Shekasteh-nafsi*" is considered as a sign of politeness in Iran. Sharifian (2005) introduces the cultural schema of *"Shekaste-nafsi"* as a sign of politeness in Persian. He compared compliment responses in Anglo-Australian and Persian and concluded that Persian speakers largely practice the schema of *"Shekaste-nafsi"* (modesty) in their responses while Anglo-Australian speakers do not use a similar schema.

5.1.4 Move 4: Dedication

In fact, the writers who included this move feel they have something of great value to offer, if only symbolical, for the addressee as a reward for a unique effort. Our scrutiny manifested that NSP operate this step in 32.85 % and NSE utilize it in 35.71 % of their acknowledgment texts. Cramer-test revealed no statistically significant difference in the frequency of occurrence of this step between the two groups. The only difference in this panel was that majority of thanks were given to parents in Persian acknowledgments. This high frequency, on the one hand, can be explained with reference to religious affiliations, as the first thing that Allah (God) enjoins upon man is to show gratitude to Him and to one's parents as He says:

Show gratitude to Me and to thy parents: to Me is (thy final) goal. (Quran 31:14)

On the other hand, presence of thanks in Persian acknowledgements can be justified by referring to the concept of *"Ehteram"* which, as argued by Azarmi and Behnam (2012), is the most pivotal aspect in human relations among Iranians (p. 81). In fact, it is most readily replaced with other concepts suggesting politeness. Any polite behavior can be grounded in *"Ehteram"*. Since in Persian culture a great emphasis is placed on *Ehteram* for *"bozorgtar"* (i.e. elderly) parents are so respected by their children. In the hierarchical society of Iran, the elderly, most notably parents, are treated very respectfully and they are privileged by a high position among the family members. Table 5 illustrates the Cramer-test results of the generic structure of acknowledgment texts written by NSP and NSE.

Table 5. Cramer test (V^2) of move structure of acknowledgments in Persian and English

Move	Sig
1. Resonating	1.000
2.1. Acknowledging divine sources	0.000
2.2. Acknowledging committee members	1.000
2.3. Acknowledging non-committee members	0.001
2.4. Acknowledging institutions	0.011
3. Disclaimer	0.003
4. Dedication	0.722

*p ˂ 0.05

5.2 Analysis of the politeness strategies in acknowledgments

In light of the face model proposed by Arundale (2006), the results indicated that connection face is dominant (about 80% occurrence) in both languages and separation face only occurred in less than 5% of all texts (Table 6). The remaining 15% of data, surprisingly, proved to be neutral since they did not appear to include a sign of either connection or separation categorized by Arundale (2006). As such, they were removed from statistical analysis of politeness strategies.

Table 6. Frequency of face in Persian and English acknowledgments

	Persian (%)	**English (%)**
Connection	227 (78)	208 (80.30)
Separation	18 (6.18)	5 (1.93)

Occurring in 78% of the Persian texts and more than 80% of the English texts, connection face prevailed over all moves and steps, except *shouldering responsibility*. The value of Cramer-test revealed to be 0.210 (sig< 0.05), illustrating no statistically significant difference between the two groups. The main motivation behind writing this genre, as held by AL-Ali (2010), is to produce texts that plausibly reflect interaction with different audiences in terms of exchange of materials, information, support, and advice (p. 2). Note the following examples:

23) *Dâr nâhayât bayâd sepas-e bikâran-e khodâm ra be hâmsar-e mehrâban vâ bagozâshtâm tâghdim konâm ke dâr tey-e hâsht sal tâhsilat-e mân dâr mâghate-e karshenasi-e ârshâd vâ doktora, sâkhtihay-e fâravani ra ba bordbari tâhâmmol nemud. Resaley-e doktoray-e khodra be ishan tâghdim mikonâm. (P. ACK. Soc. No.7)*

(Finally, I must dedicate my endless thanks to my generous wife who tolerated eight years of difficulty with patience during my MA and PhD education. I dedicate my dissertation to her)

24) Finally, I owe my deepest gratitude to my family who has endured this long journey with me, frequently without understanding what I was even studying. Both my parents and my in-laws have been helpful in spending summers with grandchildren so I could write. (E. ACK. Phil. NO. 6)

As the above examples suggest, the aim of the writers is to express relational connection. For instance, in 23, the writer tries to show the congruence between and make a strong association with his wife and himself by first depicting the difficulties they faced and then dedicating the dissertation to her to be thankful for her tolerance. Or in 24, the writer tends to indicate the interdependence and unity between his family members, most notably his parents, with first expressing gratitude then delineating the difficulties they experienced during the long journey of writing his dissertation.

Separation occurred in more than 6% of the Persian and less than 2% of the English acknowledgements. Our analysis disclosed that all sentences and phrases utilized in the *shouldering responsibility* step function as separation since the writer tries to exempt academic characters from the possible errors of the dissertation. In other words, here, the writer exonerates his instructors from the deficiencies of the dissertation and attributes them to his knowledge disabilities and, by this, the writer shows the dissociation and divergence between his instructors and himself as well as his autonomy in committing possible errors, as noted in the following examples.

25) Dar payan motazakker mishavam ke nokate ehtemaliy-e mosbat-e in resale be khatere rahnamaihay-e daghigh-e asatid-e arjmandam budeh va bandeh masule kastiha, navaghes va zafhay-e an mibasham. (P. ACK. His. No. 4)

(Finally, it should be mentioned that the possible positive points of the dissertation are due to the precise directions of my opulent instructors and I am responsible for any inadequacies, faults and weaknesses of it.)

26) Any weak point in the current study must be attributed to my knowledge limitations or my carelessness. (E. ACK. Lib. No. 6)

The Cramer-test revealed to be 0.003 (sig< 0.05), showing a statistically significant difference in applying separation face. Attributing goofs to oneself to achieve face in the sense of relational separation can be justified by reference to the *"Shekaste-nafsi"* schema, a subcategory to the cultural schema of *Adab*(politeness/respect) in Persian (Sharifian, 2008, cited in Shirinbakhsh & Eslami Rasekh, 2012, p. 3). In Persian, one may draw upon the schema of *"Shekaste-nafsi"* to gently evade compliment, so

that it does not make the listener feel inferior and also it does not make the speaker feel arrogant. In fact, it is used in line with the policy of "self-lowering and other-raising" (Beeman, 2001, p. 41) which is counted as the manifestation of *Adab* (politeness/respect) in speech among Persians.

6. Conclusion

This study revealed that though the academic rules, regulations, and conventions might constrain writers' choice of thanking expressions to more uniform patterns of thanking across cultures (Al-Ali, 2010; Hyland, 2003; Hyland, 2004), the social and cultural background of writers still have a bearing on their language choices (Hatipoğlu, 2007).

The difference between the generic features of the Persian dissertation acknowledgements and those written by English students could not simply be a matter of language aptitude. The real reasons might lie in the deep-rooted cultural, religious, mental and academic environment where they were brought up. Acknowledgements are only a minute manifestation of such influences during the completion of academic dissertations.

Overall, the findings of the current study exhibited that, on the one hand, NSP are more religiously affected due to their high employment of *acknowledging divine sources* in their acknowledgments. On the other hand, they seem to be more audience-sensitive in their choice of thanking expressions than NSE to the extent that distribution and quality of thanking expressions in relation to their addressees change more in Persian than they do in English. Findings rendered from the study uncovered that, compared to English writers, NSP writers exploit more compliments (*Taarof* in Persian) as well as more cordial statements to thank those who provided them with moral, academic and/or financial assistance. In more general sense, the results implied that NSP rely on more affective and emotional strategies of thanking than NSE in commitment to their acknowledgees. These differences can be justified by referring to what was asserted by Sell (1991) believing that people in different cultures can never feel the same thing exactly (p. 14). In a nutshell, what is included in acknowledgments shows a predisposition to resort to the socio-cultural values which can be attributed to the ideology that characterizes Iranian and American societies.

Since acknowledgments are addressed to multiple audiences of heterogeneous groupings. This type of genre gives a valuable chance for writers to present themselves as thankers, indebters, and academics having a professional and social identity. Thus, in light of what was argued by Ben-Ari (1987, p. 79), it is often wise to raise dissertation writers' attention to the appropriate wording and staging of these "special textual constructs" whose formation is governed by conventions which are different from those

of the main text. Consequently, instructors might prepare acknowledgement texts of different disciplines and ask students to identify the generic and rhetorical patterns so that they become aware of their organization and staging.

In addition, the previous discussions are obviously significant regarding the management of relations, rapport, and face in cross-cultural communication. As the grounds for cross-cultural communication get more in number, the concern for politeness across cultures gets bigger. The studies, of which the current study is a modest sample, aim in this respect to shed some light on the communicative behaviors of the cultures in certain acts to reduce the risk of possible infringement of rapport between interlocutors. Thus, Iranian students should be explicitly informed of cultural discrepancies so as to meet various social norms and expectations.

In this study, we examined generic structure and politeness strategies exploited in the dissertation acknowledgments written by NSP and NSE. In addition to this, further research can address the lexical scope, thanking order, and thanking patterns in acknowledgments in order to be able to draw a more detailed picture of the linguistic choices of writers while addressing their acknowledgees.

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