PRAGMATIC FUNCTIONS OF FORMULAIC EXPRESSIONS OF EMBARRASSMENT IN PERSIAN REFUSALS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

Maria SHOBEIRY•

Abstract

This study aimed at investigating various pragmatic functions of formulaic expressions of embarrassment (EOE) "Šarmandegy" (being embarrassment) as a form of ritual politeness (Taarof) in Persian refusals within the framework of Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory and face constituting theory of Arundale (2010).76 hours of naturally occurring conversations of Persian native speakers were transcribed, coded, and qualitatively analyzed considering social status and social distance of the speakers. 280 refusals were extracted of which 94 refusals (33.5%) included various variants of EOE. Qualitative analysis revealed that six sematic categories of formulaic structures of Taarof were employed by Persian speakers as mitigating strategies in refusals among which EOE had the highest frequency. Four pragmatic functions of preparator, disarmer, sweetener, and apology were found for EOE among which the EOE with functions of sweetener and preparator were used in formal conversations with addressees of a higher social status. However, the EOE with pragmatic functions of apology and disarmer were found to be used in formal and informal interactions with addressees of different social status and social intimacy.

Keywords: Ritual Politeness; Taarof; "Šarmandegy"; Social Distance; Social Status.

1. Introduction

Formulaic expressions are highly conventionalized pre-patterned expressions in a language which have a routinized fixed form that denote conventionalized meanings (Hallin and Van Lancker Sidtis 2017). They are known for their conventional connotations with respect to specialized usage conditions (Wray 2008; Bladas 2012) which are of distinctive features of predictability and familiarity in various social interactions (Van Lancker Sidtis 2012). The predictability of formulaic expressions is highly connected to the specific

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• PhD Candidate at the University of Tehran, Department of English Studies and Applied Linguistics, maria.shobeiry@gmail.com

communicative settings that trigger using them which is mainly linked to the communicative competence of a speech community (Bardovi-Harlig, 2012).

Expressions of ritual politeness in Persian named "Taarof" encompass all the characteristics of the category of formulaic expressions in linguistics which Persian native speakers routinely employ in performing various speech acts in their daily communications (Koutlaki, 2010). Since the speech act of refusal is perceived as a dispreferred type of speech act, it needs to be modified by employing appropriate politeness strategies which strongly depend on contextual features of the speakers such as social status, social distance, and position of power in a certain discoursal context (Brown & Levinson 1987; Shishavan & Sharifian 2016; Valipour & Jadidi, 2014, Kayed, Al-Zubi, & Alkaid, 2020). One of the most frequently used politeness strategies by Persian native speakers in performing refusals found in my data set was employing formulaic expressions of Taarof as external pragmatic modifiers; therefore, first, I will define the concept of Taarof and review the related literature on it (section 2), then I will describe the main semantic categories of Taarof found in the refusals in this data set (section 6.1.) and finally I will elaborate on the reason of focusing on one specific structure of Taarof named "Šarmandegy" (being embarrassed) and EOE in this paper (section6.1,Table3) and pragmatic functions found for various forms of EOE through qualitative analyses (section 6.2).

2. Review of the related literature

Taarof is defined by Beeman (1986) as "one of the most prominent pragmatic features in the Persian language meaning "to abase oneself while exalting the other person in order to express politeness" (p.140). This pragmatic aspect of Persian is employed by the native speakers in their greetings, requests, refusals, invitations, offers, and suggestions as an indispensable feature (Beeman, 1986). Taarof is also defined as a communicative routine in Persian politeness system which etymologically is an Arabic word meaning "mutual recognition"(Koutlaki, 2010, p.45). It is known for its high complexity that affects multiple levels of language structure such as morpho-syntax, formulaic expressions, turn constructions, and other discoursal features (Sharifian, 2011, Shishavan & Sharifian 2016).

A more functional interpretation of Taarof is made by Miller, Strong, Vinson, and Claudia (2014) as "a set of patterns of joint actions in conversation which involves contribution of all interactants". This functional viewpoint takes the concept of Taarof beyond just simply employing some formulaic expressions of politeness in communication; rather the purpose of Taarof ,from this perspective, is explained as making clear to all interactants the social standing of each speaker with regard to the desired outcome of the conversation after Taarof. This functional approach toward the concept of Taarof illustrates that Persian native speakers employ Taarof to cooperatively share goals of their conversations and moderate conflict of conflicting goals (Miller et al, 2014). This culturally cooperative practice could embody in various forms such as repetitive invitations without sincerely intending to invite the addressee (Koutlaki, 2002), refusals to invitations (Koutlaki, 2002; Sharifian& Babaie, 2013; Izadi & Zilaie, 2015), letting a companion go ahead in different contexts (Izadi, 2016), offering turns of speech (Izadi, 2016), and not accepting money, food , or invitations on the first offer (Koutlaki, 2002).

There is a vast variety of formulaic structures of Taarof in Persian which should be interpreted as a whole unit and cannot be broken down. In this sense these structures are very similar to idiomatic English expressions with figurative meanings (Van Lancker Sidtis, 2012, Pourmohammadi, 2018).To employ appropriate formulaic structures of Taarof in a certain setting, Persian native speakers attend to the contextual features of a communication such as social status and social intimacy of the involved speakers and the degree of formality of the speech (Koutlaki,2002). Social status is defined as power difference of the speakers and social intimacy is defined as the degree of closeness between the interactants (Miller et al. 2014).Iranian speakers normally tend to use other-raising forms of politeness strategies when communicating with addressees of a higher social status (Koutlaki 1997, p.119). The crucial role of contextual features such as social status and social intimacy in employing appropriate politeness strategies is even more evident in performing the speech act of refusal in that how to say "no" is more important than the negative answer itself (Sadler and Eroz, 2001). Since refusals are dispreferred type of speech acts, Persian refusals almost always include one or more suitable forms of Taarof as a focal expressive politeness feature (Moqadam, 2003, p.12).

Expressive politeness features are encoded linguistic politeness devices such as terms of honorifics, conventional formulaic expressions, and various linguistic tools that reflect the speakers' polite intentions to mitigate the direct illocutionary force or negative effect of certain speech acts such as requests or refusals in

contextually appropriate settings in order to achieve a harmonious rapport in communication (Eelen 2001; Spencer-Oatey, 2005). According to this approach an utterance should not be considered polite per se unless there is people's subjective judgment behind it (Spencer-Oatey, 2005); therefore, politeness is a relative concept which is highly dependent on appropriateness in a certain socio-cultural setting (Holmes, Marra, and Schnur, 2008). These attitudes towards politeness shed light on the notion of face as a group-centered and context-oriented concept (Arundale, 2010) which is chosen as the theoretical framework for data analysis in this study.

3. Theoretical framework

Brown and Levinson's (1987) definition of the concept of face and their theory of politeness is employed in this study to describe the nature of refusals and politeness strategies employed by the participants in this data set. Face is defined as a social image made and maintained by speakers during interactions that can take two forms of "negative face" (when speaker wants to render independence and asks for freedom of action) and "positive face" (when speaker wants to be accepted and desired by the members of a society). In this framework, any act that restrains the positive face or negative face of the interactants are considered as face threatening acts (FTA hereafter). Consequently, politeness strategies are defined as any verbal or non-verbal acts that prevent or reduce the potential threat to the positive or negative face of the interactional parties during communications.

Furthermore, since I needed to consider the effect of contextual features of social status and social intimacy of the speakers in interpreting pragmatic functions of formulaic structures of Taarof in various contexts, I used the face constituting theory of Arundale (2010) as the main theoretical framework for analyzing and interpreting various pragmatic functions of the formulaic structures of embarrassment in this study. Arundale (2010) has a group-centered and context-oriented attitude toward the concept of face expressing that people are realized to build their relationships on the foundation of the concept of face which is created and dynamically maintained by all of the involved interactants with regard to the social conventions and contextual features of communications. Face in this theory is defined as one's understanding of one's connection with and separation from other people which is conjointly constituted by all of the involved interactants in their everyday communications. This realization of the concept of face introduces it as a relational and interactional phenomenon arising in everyday talk.

4. Significance of the study

Lots of studies in the literature of Persian politeness have focused on the concept of Taarof (Koutlaki, 2002; Sharifian, 2011; Miller et al, 2014; Sharifian& Babaie, 2013; Izadi & Zilaie, 2015; Shishavan & Sharifian 2016; Haghighat, 2016; Pourmohammadi, 2018); but there is no study to classify the various sematic structures of Taarof in Persian refusals as is conducted in this research (described in section 6.1). Furthermore, expressions of embracement "Šarmandegy" (EOE) and its variants as the most frequently used form of Taarof found in Persian refusals (described in section 6.1 and Table3) have not been studied in any prior research in the literature of Persian politeness in terms of their pragmatic functions and context of use; therefore this study is an attempt to answer to the following research question:

• What are the pragmatic functions of the formulaic expressions of embarrassment "Šarmandegy" in Persian refusals?

5. Method
5.1. Data and participants

76 hours of audio recorded naturally occurring conversations of Persian native speakers constitute the data of this study which were transcribed, coded, and qualitatively analyzed. Most of the recordings were face to face interactions and some of them were phone conversations of 21- 65 year- old Persian native speakers who were friends, family, and colleagues of mine who gave me their written consents to be audio recorded in Tehran and Kermanshah for the period of 6months for the purpose of this study. Some of the conversations took place in intimate and some in formal contexts from which a total of 280 refusals were extracted. The speakers in the recordings were of different levels of social status from each other. The transcription system of the audio data is based on the Persian transcription system convention of Iran's Altas of Language International Website.

5.2. Data analysis and coding scheme

The analysis of the transcribed data included manually extracting formulaic statements of Taarof in refusals, categorizing all of the expressions of Taarof based on their semantic structures, and finally analyzing various pragmatic functions of the formulaic EOE and its variants in different settings. The reason to focus on the formulaic EOE in this study among the other structures of Taarof found in refusals was the highest frequency of their occurrence in comparison with the other structures of Taarof in refusals in this data set(frequency of occurrence of EOE 94 out of 280 refusals in total , shown in Table 3).

To achieve the purpose of this study, I coded the transcribed data in 2 separate steps. First I coded all of the refusals which accompanied a form of formulaic expression of Taarof based on the semantic categories of Taarof. Through this procedure I found six main semantic categories of Taarof in this data set which is discussed in detail in section 6.1. After calculating the frequency of occurrence of each semantic category of Taarof, I realized that the EOE had the highest frequency of occurrence in Persian refusals. The next step was to code the refusals which included an EOE with two sets of labeling system; firs, social distance and social status of the speakers were coded (shown in Table1); and second, pragmatic functions of various forms of EOE were coded according to the classification of Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper (1989) on external pragmatic modifiers (shown in Table2). Table 1 illustrates the labeling system for social status and social distance of the speakers in this data set.

Table 1. *Coding scheme for social status and social distance*

Situation summary	Status	Distance
A friend refusing another friend's invitation/request/suggestion	equal	close
A student refusing his/her teacher's invitation/request/suggestion	lower	distant
A worker refusing his/her boss's invitation/request/suggestion	lower	distant
Spouses refusing each other's invitation/request/suggestion	equal	close
A boss refusing his/her subordinate's invitation/request/suggestion	higher	distant
A teacher refusing his/her student's invitation/request/suggestion	higher	distant
A mother refusing her adult son/daughter's invitation/request/suggestion	higher	close
A son/daughter refusing their mother's invitation/request/suggestion	lower	close
A father refusing his adult son/daughter's invitation/request/suggestion	higher	close
A son/daughter refusing their father's invitation/request/suggestion	lower	close
A shopkeeper refusing a customer invitation/request/suggestion	equal	distant
A customer refusing a shopkeeper's invitation/request/suggestion	equal	distant

Table2 illustrates the coding scheme for pragmatic functions of EOE based on Blum-Kulka's et al. (1989) classification of external pragmatic modifiers.

Table2. *Coding scheme for pragmatic functions of EOE in refusals*

External pragmatic modifier	characteristic
Preparator	utterances used to lead the hearer to the refusal
Sweetener	compliment or positive remarks paid for the hearer before refusals
Disarmer	shows the refuser's awareness of the offence of the refusal
Grounder	the reason behind the refusal
Apology	all expressions used to express apology

6. Results

6.1. Sematic categories of Taarof found in the refusals

Six main semantic categories of formulaic structures of Taarof were found in the data of this study that participants employed as mitigating devices to reduce the FTA of their refusals.

1) Expression of embarrassment (EOE) such as: Šarmandatam (I feel embarrassed), Bâ arze šarmandegy (with expressing my embarrassment), Šarmandeye mohabbatetam(I feel so embarrassed in returning your kindness), mâ ro šarmande mikonid (you make us feel embarrassed(as shown in example1.

Example 1

• Xeily dust dâštam hamrâhetun bâšam vali šarmandaam ke gereftâram.

I really liked to accompany you but (I feel so embarrassed) that I am swamped.

2) Expression of Self-sacrifice such as: Qorbâne šoma (I can be sacrificed for you (plural)), Qorbunet (I can be sacrificed for you(singular)), Qorbâne mohabbatet, (I can be sacrificed for your kindness), Qorbân lotfe šomâ (I can be sacrificed for your kindness)as illustrated in example 2.

Example 2

• Qorbune lotfe šomâ , in hafte nistim vali ešâllâ be zudi ye barnâme mizârim dore ham jam mišim.

(I can be sacrificed for your kindness); we are not available this week but we will reschedule any time soon to get together.

3) Expression of appreciation such as: Mohabbat dârid(you are very kind), Lotf dârid(you are very sweet) as in example3.

Example 3

• Lotf dârid , vali man meil nadâram.

(You are very sweet) but I have no appetite.

4) Expression of causing trouble such as: Hamiše mozâhemim (we always bother you), Zahmatet midam (I put you in trouble) as demonstrated in example 4.

Example 4

• Mâ ke hamiše mozâhemim vali in hafte vâgeqn kâram ejâze nemide.

(We always bother you) but my work just won't let me this week.

5) Self –degrading types of "Taarof" such as: Nokaretam(I am completely at your service),Câkeretam(I am your servant),Moxlesam (I am your servant), Kucike šomayim(we are your inferior), Nokare šomâ ham hastim (we are completely at your service), Xedmat az mâst (we have to serve you) as shown in example 5.

Example 5

• Xedmat az mâst vali in hafte mâro moâf befarmâyid.

(I should be at your service) but please exempt me this week.

6)Other -exalting forms of "Taarof" such as: Extyâr dârid (you have all the permissions),Tamannâ mikonam qorbân (I beg you my superior),Bozorgvârid (you are honourable),Sâheb extyârid (you have all the permissions),Sarvare mâyin (you are my superior), as in example 6.

Example6

• Šomâ bozorgvârid, vali man ejâzeye nadâram etelâ'âte xosusiye moštaryhâro ro bayân konam.

 (You are the superior), but I don't have the right to disclose clients' personal information.

Table 3 shows the frequency of each of the abovementioned categories of Taarof in the Persian refusals found in this data. As demonstrated in numbers and percentage, the EOE notably have the highest frequency of occurrence in this data set. This was the main reason to focus on pragmatic functions of EOE among the other structures of Taarof for the purpose of this study.

Table3. *Frequency of expressions of Taarof in Persian refusals (total refusals=280).*

Semantic structure of Taarof	Number of Taarof in total refusals #	Percentage of Taarof in total refusals %
1. **Expression of embarrassment**	94	33.5
2. **Expression of Self-sacrifice**	27	9.7
3. **Expression of appreciation**	44	15.8
4. **Expression of causing trouble**	46	16.4
5. **Self –degrading types of "Taarof"**	21	7.5
6. **Other -exalting forms of "Taarof"**	48	17.1
Total	280	100

6.2. Pragmatic functions of the expressions of embarrassment (EOE)

Pragmatic function of an utterance is the meaning that a speaker wishes to convey to the addressee which is not necessarily the meaning of the individual words being articulated (Alco´n, & Pitarch, 2010). In

comprehending the pragmatic function of an utterance we need to consider who is speaking to whom, when, and, more importantly, the circumstance under which the conversation is taking place (Alco´n, & Pitarch, 2010, P.14). Considering these descriptions, to analyze the pragmatic functions of the EOE in this study, all the coded refusals including a form of EOE "Šarmandegy" (being embarrassed) are qualitatively analyzed according to the context of the speech and the social status and social intimacy of the speakers.

The followings are four main pragmatic functions found for the EOE in Persian refusals in this study.

6.2.1. EOE as preparator

A preparator is an utterance that a refuser states to convey that a refusal will follow his/her statement (Blum-Kulka et al.1989). Example 7 illustrates an EOE as a preparator in a formal context at a workplace of a travel agency between A (the main manager of the agency) and B (an office worker). In this conversation B is refusing A's offer to drive her home late after work which in my coding system B is coded as a lower status refuser in a socially distant position. In performing this refusal, B begins her turn with an expression of appreciation to enhance the face of the addressee as a dynamic face saving process; then she precedes her refusal with the EOE " bâ arze Šarmandegy" (with expressing my embarrassment) to prepare the addressee for a negative answer.

Example 7

A: târyik šode. Mixây miresunamet.

 It has got dark out there. Do you want me to drive you home?

B: xeily mamnunam. Vali bâ arze Šarmandegy bâyad bemunam kârharo tamum konam.

Thank you so much for the offer but (with expressing my embarrassment) I need to stay here and finish the work.

As the data of this study revealed, in the Persian language when an answer to an offer, invitation, or suggestion begins with the formulaic EOE " bâ arze Šarmandegy" (with expressing my embarrassment) the addressee automatically expects a refusal; therefore, it can be concluded that this structure pragmatically functions as a preparator to Persian refusals. Moreover, the important pragmatic realization of this formulaic structure is implying the social distance and higher social status of the addressee in Persian refusals; meaning Persian native speakers were not found to use this variant of EOE as a preparator in refusing an intimate addressee or an addressee of a lower or equal social status.

6.2.2. EOE as apology

To describe the pragmatic function of apology of EOE in Persian refusals, I discuss the context of the example 8 in detail to illustrate how it is comprehended in the context of use. Example 8 is extracted from a conversation between three intimate friends ,coded as equal status in the data , who are talking about the upcoming birthday party of another friends of theirs. The conversation is about planning to go to the party while one of them refuses to go since she has problems with not having a caretaker to look after her one-year old son for the party night while she is extremely reluctant to take her baby to the party because of the probable problem of smoking there. A is insisting B to go to the party; while B is strongly refusing A with preceding her refusal with the EOE of "šarmandam" as an apology to mitigate the FTA of her refusal.

Example 8

A: Bâbâ nahâyateš do sâate. biyâreš bâ xodet. Vali hatman biâ. Bavar kon xeily bade to nabaši.

Come on! it's gonna be maximum two hours. You can bring him with you. Just come. It'll be really bad if you aren't there.

B: šarmandam , xeily ham šarmandam, vali unjâ sigâr mikešan. Jâye bache nist.

(I feel so embarrassed). (I really do feel so embarrassed); but people smoke cigarettes there. There is not a good place for a baby.

It should be added that the pragmatic function of apology for EOE has also been found in socially distant and formal communications as demonstrated in Example 9.

Example 9 is extracted from a conversation between a language teacher (A) and an office assistant (B) in a language school in which A is of a higher social status than B. They are socially distant and the context of communication is completely formal. A is asking B to reschedule his classes for a week and B is refusing A's request by beginning her refusal with an EOE with the pragmatic function of apology. The only difference that was noticeable between formal and informal settings in employing this structures was using

plural terms (šarmanadtunam) as honorifics to emphasize the formality of the context and higher social status of the addressee.

Example 9

A: Momknene nobabte kelâše man ro bendâzid âxare hafte. Došanbe nemitanm in sâat sare kelâs bâšam.

Could you please reschedule my classes to the weekend for this week? I cannot attend the class on Monday at this time.

B: šarmanadtunam. Emkâneš nit. âxare hafte kelâs xâli nadârim.

(I feel so embarrassed). It is impossible. There is no empty class on the weekend for this week.

6.2.3. EOE as disarmer

Disarmers in refusals are statements to show the potential offense to the face of the addressee which act as a mitigating device (Blum-Kulka, et al .1989). Example 10 is demonstrating the context in which EOE is functioning as a disarmer in refusal.

Example 10

A. Miše bahašun sohbat koni. šayad razi šodan?

Could you please talk to him? He might accept your request.

B: šarmandat mišam vali vâgean našodaniye. Javâb nemide.

(I will be embarrassed) but it is really unlikely. He will not accept our request.

In this example A and B are close friends who are talking about a third person (C) whose consent about a problem is very important for A. In this conversation A is asking B to talk to C and persuade him to give his consent. B knows that what A is requesting is impossible to be accepted by C and also he is aware of the threat of his negative answer to A; therefore, he precedes his refusal with the EOE of " šarmandat mišam" (I will be embarrassed) to convey that he is aware of the hurt of his refusal to A; then he proceeds his utterance by the statement of unlikeliness of C's acceptance as "Vâgean našodaniye" (it is unlikely for C to accept our request) to give a logical reason for his refusal to mitigate the FTA of it.

EOE as disarmer were also found in formal contexts with socially distant addressees of a higher social status and the only difference in the usage style of the participants in formal and informal contexts was found to be employing plural terms as honorifics to convey the higher social status and social distance of the addressees.

6.2.4. EOE as sweetener

Sweeteners are compliments or positive remarks stated before or after refusals to mitigate the FTA of them (Blum-Kulka, et al .1989). In this study two variants of EOE including "mâ ro hamiše šarmande mikonid" (you always make us feel embarrassed by your kindness) and "šarmandeye mohabbatetunim" (we feel embarrassed in retuning your kindness) were found with the pragmatic function of sweeteners which both were used in formal contexts in communications with socially distant speakers of a higher social status. Example 11 is illustrating the sweetener pragmatic function of the EOE extracted from a phone conversation in which A is inviting B to her place for a barbeque get-together. They are socially distant and the context of conversation is completely formal in which A is the supervisor of B at her workplace.

Example 11

A: mâ in jome montazere šomâ azizân hastim. Tašrif biyârid xošhâl mišim.

We will be waiting for you this Friday. Come to our place (honorific terms) we will become happy.

B: mâ hamiše šarmandeye mohabatatunim, agar ejâze bedid dafeye bad xedmat miresim.

(We always feel embarrassed in returning your kindness), with your permission, some other time we will come to your place.

In this example, A makes an invitation by using honorific terms "Tašrif biyârid" (which is beyond the scope of this paper) to indicates politeness and social distance of the speakers. B also uses very formal style of language in refusing A who is in a higher social status than her. What is obvious in this conversation is that B uses the EOE of "mâ hamiše šarmandeye mohabatatunim" (we always feel embarrassed in returning your kindness) as a sweetener or a positive remark to A to reduce the FTA of her refusal and maintain A's face.

7. Discussion

Since refusals are face threatening acts in nature (Brown and Levinson 1987), one of the most common politeness strategies that Persian native speakers use as a face-saving maneuver to their addressees is employing various formulaic structures of Taarof in performing refusals (Beeman, 1986; Koutlaki 2002) among which expressions of embarrassment (EOE) were found to have the highest frequency in this study. Analyzing data from the framework of face-constituting theory of Arundale (2010) revealed that Persian native speakers attend to the contextual features of speech by dynamically maintaining the face of one another with regard to the position of power and the degree of intimacy of the speakers demonstrated in employing appropriate forms of Taarof in general and EOE in particular in their refusals.

According to the definition of Spencer-Oatey (2005), EOE are interpretable as expressive politeness features in this research for which four main pragmatic functions of preparator, apology, disarmer, and sweetener were found.

The pragmatic function of preparator of the specific variant of EOE " bâ arze Šarmandegy" (with expressing my embarrassment) (as described in section 6.2.1) was found only in refusing addressees of a higher social status in formal contexts. Similarly, two variants of EOE including "mâ ro hamiše šarmande mikonid" (you always make us feel embarrassed by your kindness) and "šarmandeye mohabbatetunim" we feel embarrassed in retuning your kindness) with the pragmatic function of sweetener were also found to be used only in formal conversations between socially distant speakers in refusals to the addressees of a higher social status. These results show that face is a context-oriented and group-centered concept for Persian native speakers which is dynamically maintained in accordance with the contextual features of speech and the degree of formality of various contexts which play a pivotal role in indicating the structure of politeness devices used in maintaining face during communications. The EOE with the pragmatic functions of apology and disarmer were found to be used in both formal and informal contexts in interactions with addressees of different levels of social status. The only strategy employed by the participants to display the higher social status of the addressees was employing plural terms and honorific terms to attend to the formality of the context.

8. Conclusion

Six main sematic structures of Taarof are found to be used as mitigating strategies to reduce the FTA of the refusals in this study (described in section 6.1) among which formulaic expressions of embarrassment (EOE) had the highest frequency in this data set.

Formulaic EOE were found to have four pragmatic functions of preparator, disarmer, sweetener, and apology among which the EOE with the pragmatic functions of sweetener and preparator were found to be used in formal conversations with addressees of a higher social status.

However, EOE with the pragmatic functions of apology and disarmer were found to be used in both formal and informal contexts in interactions with addressees of different levels of social status and social intimacy. In this case, only using honorific plural terms were the indicator of the social distance of the speakers in formal communications.

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