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Invitations in Farsi: An analysis of their turn formats and sequential organizations[☆]

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Abstract

This conversation analytical study examines two formats of invitations in everyday interaction in Iran. Invitation is a common social activity in which one party gets the other party to join an activity that may be beneficial to both. The study focuses on instances of invitations in everyday Farsi telephone conversations and investigates their turn design formats and the interactional contexts in which particular formats of invitation commonly occur. The analysis of 32 instances of invitations made in informal telephone conversations between close friends and family members suggests two distinctive grammatical constructions that speakers use to compose invitations in the data corpus. The study shows the relationship between the particular grammatical format of invitation and the interactional and sequential environment in which they are delivered. When invitations are delivered as the reason for call, speakers typically use the imperative construction *pāsho biā X* ('get up and come X') or *biā X* ('come X') in a multi-unit turn, whereas with invitations that are locally occasioned in the interaction and are not the reason for the call, speakers formulate a construction using the auxiliary verb *khâstan* ('want') such as *mikhâi pāsho biā injā* ('do you want to come here'). The interactional placement of the invitation seems to be consequential for the selection of one of the turn formats. The study suggests that in a context when the invitation to join an activity is pre-planned and is to occur in the immediate future, it seems that an imperative and its accompanied elements in the turn convey an insistence and immediacy in getting the invitee to accept the invitation. On the other hand, in situations in which the invitation is occasioned by the recipient's particular circumstance, which is revealed through the immediate prior talk, the auxiliary construction displays the inviter's interest in the invitee's desire to take part in the invited activity that has just emerged. It seems that the this particular construction conveys a lesser degree of commitment/pressure on the invitee to accept the invitation. In addition, the imperative format turn and *do you want to X* including the follow up talk contain elements that demonstrate speaker's orientation to dimensions such as cost and benefit of the social action.

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1. Introduction

Action formation and recognition, which is a speaker's design of turn-at-talk and the action its recipient ascribes to it, have become a major line of research in recent years in conversation analytic and interactional linguistic inquiry (Couper-Kuhlen, 2014; Curl, 2006; Curl and Drew, 2008; Drew and Couper-Kuhlen, 2014; Heinemann, 2006; Kendrick and Drew, 2013, 2014, 2016; Levinson, 2013; Zinken and Ogiemann, 2013). This research stream has proposed a number of principles that shape a speaker's selection of a particular linguistic form and the recipient's interpretation of the action that

[☆] The term Farsi is intentionally used here to specifically refer to the Persian language that is spoken in Iran.

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turn is designed to implement. For example, recent cross-linguistic research on the action of requesting has shown that the selection of a specific linguistic form, for example, imperative (*do X*) or interrogative (*Can you do X?*) is tightly related to its sequential positioning and the temporality of the practical action (i.e., here and how) in interaction (see Rossi, 2012 for Italian, Zinken and Deppermann, 2017 for German and Polish). In addition, social dimensions such as entitlement of the speaker (requester) and contingencies (related to the service or object requested) have been illustrated to be relevant in the speaker's choice of a particular request form (e.g., Curl and Drew, 2008; Craven and Potter, 2010; Nolan and Maynard, 2013; Vinkhuyzen and Szymanski, 2005; Wootton, 1997). In terms of action ascription, it has been proposed that a participant's deontic status, in other words, their right to decide about the future in regard to a particular action, is relevant in recognizing the action the turn implements (Stevanovic, 2011; Stevanovic and Peräkylä, 2012). Focusing on the connection between frequent occurrences of specific grammatical constructions and directive-commissive actions, Couper-Kuhlen (2014) highlights the contribution of grammar in action ascription by illustrating that recurrent specific linguistic forms of requesting (e.g., *will/would you X?*, *can/could you X?*) as opposed to other actions (e.g., suggestions and proposals) provide their recipient cues for ascribing that particular action to the turn early in the interaction. These current studies on action formation and ascription, in particular the fast-growing body of research on requests, recruitment and imperatives (Drew and Couper-Kuhlen, 2014; Kendrick and Drew, 2014; Sorjonen et al., 2017), show that the same specific linguistic format may have ascribed different actions to it by virtue of its location within a larger sequence and of the ongoing activity and other interactional dimensions. The following study is in line with the above-mentioned conversation analytical research in that it examines how specific linguistic formats in their particular sequential placement including relevant social factors are recognized and interpreted as an invitation. The findings presented in this paper demonstrate that similarly to the languages already researched, there is a connection between the grammar format and action in the less commonly studied language and interaction of Farsi.

In her paper on grammar and action ascription in directive-commissive actions (directives: requests, proposals, and suggestions; commissives: offers and invitations), Couper-Kuhlen (2014) illustrates that factors such as agency, costs, and benefits become relevant for the recipient's interpretation of whether the initial turn is a "Proposal*" or an "Offer*", or a "Request*" (Couper-Kuhlen, 2014: 628–632). In other words, matters such as who carries out the future activity, who is going to bear out the costs, and who will benefit from the future activity are dimensions based on which participants distinguish between a Proposal*, an Offer*, and a Request*. In the case of Proposals*, Self (the action initiator) and Other (the recipient) are the agent and beneficiary of the advocated future action; whereas in Offers* Self is the agent of the future action and Other is the beneficiary of the future action, and in "Requests*" the Other is the agent of the future action and only Self benefits from the action. Invitations have been classified by Searle (1969, 1976) as commissives and are part of the directive-commissive family proposed by Couper-Kuhlen (2014). Similar to the other initiating actions in the group, there are features that distinguish them from the other members of the family, for example, from Proposals*. We can say that invitations are action types in which the speaker advocates for a joint activity in the future for the benefit of the recipient and Self, and at a cost of the Self/initiator. This paper aims to provide a conversation analytic examination of particular Farsi linguistic construction of turns and their interactional placement including other relevant dimensions that are understood by their recipient as an invitation in everyday interaction among Iranians in the data corpus. The study focuses on invitations delivered in telephone calls in two interactional contexts: (1) invitations that are the reason for calling and (2) invitations that have been occasioned locally by the recipient's prior talk and reporting. Concentrating on invitation turn design and their specific grammatical features, the analysis suggests that invitations may have different linguistic forms depending on the interactional environment in which they are produced. In situations in which the invited occasions are pre-planned and are the reason for the telephone call, they are typically delivered in the form of an imperative, such as *pâsho biâ injâ* ('come over here'), whereas invited activities that have been occasioned by some prior talk (in that phone conversation) are typically delivered in the indicative form using the construction of *mikhâi X* ('do want you to X'). The study provides an analysis and discussion of these alternative linguistic constructions and their sequential contexts, which are understood by their recipient as an invitation to follow a course of action with them.

2. Previous studies on invitation among Iranian speakers of Farsi

Invitations have been of particular interest to researchers whose work focuses on politeness and politeness strategies because they express at the same time affection or fondness for the recipient, but also involve a sense of commitment to provide a course of action that is beneficial to the recipient (for example, Bella, 2009; Félix-Brasdefer, 2003; Garcia, 1999; Eslami-Rasekh, 2005; Wolfson et al., 1983). Invitations in Farsi have also been studied in a similar line of linguistic pragmatic work (Eslami-Rasekh, 2005; Salmani-Nodoushan, 2006; Mirzaei and Eslami-Rasekh, 2013). Working with collected data through field work observations and participant observations of natural use and written discourse, these studies discuss how types of invitations, whether genuine or ostensible, and their linguistic formulations are shaped by the sociocultural beliefs and values of Iranian culture. In contrast, the present study provides an empirical

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