




Exploring (non-)ritual patterns of phatic interaction (small talks) at different phases of social encounters in Persian linguaculture

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ABSTRACT

The current interpretive study aimed to characterize the (non-)ritual, phatic clusters of speech acts that conventionally recur around the opening/closing phases of Persian speaking students' social encounters or occur during the core (or 'business') phase of natural interactions as small talk in Persian. The study was conducted in Iran's Persian linguaculture where considerable social-cultural-economic changes have taken place over the last decade or so impacting the form and content of phatic interaction in all sectors of the society. The participants of the study were 97 Persian-speaking university students attending a state-run university located in the southwest of Iran. The students were asked to audio-record their natural interactions in four different social encounters varied based on the standard sociolinguistic parameters of Social Distance and Power (+/-SD, +/-P). We adopted House & Kádár's (2022) pragmalinguistic and speech act-anchored model of phatic interaction to code the (non-)ritual realization patterns of small talks around the opening, closing, and core phases of interaction. The results indicate that small talks which are co-constructed by the Persian interactants at the opening and closing phases of their social encounters are highly ritualized in terms of the speech act types and pragmalinguistic structures employed. Further, interpersonal interchanges which involve differential sociolinguistic P and SD values require more tactfulness and care in adhering to the greeting and parting conventions as more face-threat is potentially implicated. In terms of the medial phase, except for a small number of ostensible realizations of different speech acts such as invites, offers, and apologies, core off-topic phaticity was perceived to be non-ritual and discursive in Persian the interpretation of which heavily relies upon shared sociopragmatic knowledge of the linguaculture.

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KEYWORDS

phatic interaction, Persian, small talk, pragmalinguistics, speech act model

1. INTRODUCTION

The present study deals with small talks that occur in Persian-speaking university students' interactional exchanges with interactants at varied levels of social status (i.e., social distance and social power). The purpose is to investigate the (non-)ritual, phatic clusters of speech acts conventionally recurring around the opening/closing phases of Persian speaking students. Phatic language use includes all types of (non-)ritual speech acts which are typically clustered around the opening and closing phases of an interaction, as well as during the core phase of an encounter (see Edmondson, House & Kádár 2023; Kádár 2017). Seminal studies by sociologists and anthropologists (e.g., Goffman 1971; Malinowski 1936), drew the attention of other scholars to phatic talk. Phatic interaction, as an integral part of social communication (e.g., Holmes 2000; Jaworski 2000) is typically considered to belong to sociopragmatic and sociolinguistic domains. However, as stated by House & Kádár (2022), it is also essential to approach phatic interaction from a language-anchored and bottom-up procedure based on speech act studies. The pragma-linguistic, bottom-up procedure suggested by House & Kádár (2022), is indeed the approach we are using to examine small talks in Persian-speaking students' daily encounters in this study (Figure 1).

Phatic communication is a highly under-researched area in Persian. While phatic talk has been widely researched in English language, research in other languages are scarce. Moreover, phatic interactions may also vary across situations. In a multi-lingual multi-ethnic society like Iran, talking about political and social issues among people regardless of place or time is very common. Needless to say, the articulation of phatic talk varies according to interlocutors' contextual variables (i.e., social power and social distance). This study has limited its scope to the opening and closing part of an authentic conversation occurring between Persian speaking students.

The paper is structured as follows: section two discusses the theoretical background of the study, including literature focused on small talk. In the following section we introduce the purpose of the study the methodology, the corpus of the study, analytical framework and data analysis. Results with a qualitative/quantitative analysis are reported in section four, while a discussion on the findings is provided in section five. Finally, in the last section of this paper, we provide the summary and concluding remarks.

2. PHATIC COMMUNICATION

Any conversation might serve informational and phatic purposes, where the latter refers to some conventional formulaic expressions used in opening, maintaining, and ending a conversation. Malinowski (1923, 149) refers to this form of language used for social purposes as phatic communication, also known as small talk, and describes it as being “aimless, prefatory, obvious, uninteresting, sometimes suspect and even irrelevant” (Coupland 2000, 3). In the Cambridge



dictionary, small talk is defined as “conversation about things which are not important, often between people who do not know each other well”. They are used to create and preserve social connections in their interaction and recognize them as potential communicative partners (Maíz-Arévalo 2017).

Phatic expressions are the links between people’s actual words and the communicative functions of their performance (Coulmas 1979). Small talks are studied by the grammar they characterize (Schneider 1988), the context they occur (Laver 1975) and the topics used in such contexts (Cheepen 1988). The choice of topics and expressions varies cross-culturally as speakers of different languages have ‘preferred ways of saying things’ (Kecskes 2007, 192), and that different pragmatic norms reflect different cultural values (Wierzbicka 1985). According to Crystal (1987), “cultures vary greatly in the topics which they permit as phatic communication. The weather is not as universal a conversation-filler as the English might like to think!” (1987, 10–11).

Schneider (1988) defines small talk as “a form of interaction without real communication” (p. 13) governed by social maxims, in particular politeness. Aligned with Schneider’s statement, Coupland (2000) points out that the ability to engage in small talk is important for social success since “some conversations are perceptively better, whether because they are more practiced or more socially motivated at putting others at their ease or at filling potentially embarrassing conversational lacunae with enabling questions or interesting comment about ‘safe’ topics, for example” (pp. 3–4). Small talk can create and maintain valuable social connections and bring people closer together.

Several studies have examined how small talk is used for social purposes in different contexts such as workplace (e.g., Mak & Chui 2013), service encounters (e.g., Bartlett 2005; Cheepen 2000; Garzaniti, Pearce & Stanton 2011; Wiener, Flaherty & Wiener 2022), and among family or friends (e.g., Blum-Kulka 2000). When used in service encounters, small talk creates “a mutual non-threatening relationship for the duration of the exchanges” between servers and customers (Beinstein 1975, 94). People may automatically engage in small talk in an attempt to open a conversation with others, or they might use small talk as a means of keeping track of others by calling friends or relatives on phone to reduce the social distance (Drew & Chilton 2000). Studies have also showed that small talk is an integral part of a conversation in different cultures such as Maori people in New Zealand (Salmond 1974; Metge 1986, 1995), where the omission of small talk can cause offence (e.g., Metge & Kinloch 1978; Cushner & Brislin 1996, cited in Holmes 2000).

Although small talks are examined in different languages and different contexts, there is a relative lack of studies focused on small talk in Persian language. Our aim is to fill this gap by examining how small talk is realized in natural conversation of Iranian university students’ daily life encounters. The study of small talk across languages can enhance our knowledge of the meaning people attach to communicative functions in their own language.

2.1. Studies on Persian phatic communication

Among the few publications in Persian are Yaqubi et al.’s (2014, 2015) investigation of phatic communication in Persian movies. Other studies (e.g., Derakhshan, Eslami Rasekh & Chalak 2020; Jahanbakhsh-Nagadeh, Feizi-Derakhshi & Sharifi 2020; Jalilifar & Hoseini 2021) focused on functions, strategies, lexical resources or formulaic expressions in speech acts. As shown in



the few studies on this topic (e.g., Kazemi 2019; Khadem & Eslami Rasekh 2012), in Persian, similar to other languages, small talks are used mainly in opening a conversation, such as greetings, or closing a conversation, such as leave-taking. The main goals of using small talks are to create “familiarity, kinship, social hierarchy, group integration, etc.” (Yaqubi, Abdul Rahman & CheOmar 2014). In a study of phatic expressions in Persian, Yaqubi, Abdul Rahman & CheOmar (2014) analyzed Persian expressions according to Nord’s (2008) framework and classified the corpus based on the setting and their (non)conventionality in Persian language. They reported some culture-specific categories such as *ta’arof* which is an Iranian ritual system of politeness, *qorban sadaqe* (expressing emotion in the form of pleading someone), praying expressions as well as (in)formal register markers in Persian.

Furthermore, Yaqubi, Abdul Rahman & Che Omar (2015) used Nord’s (2008) framework of phatic communication in examining the use of expressions of apologies in Persian language in ten Iranian movies and series. Results showed that apology expressions can serve phatic functions in Persian language depending on where they occur in the conversations. These functions include thanking (e.g., *bande rāzi be zahmate shomā nabudam* ‘I didn’t want to trouble you’), mitigating of request/questions (e.g., *bebakhshid ye lahze tashrif miārin?* ‘excuse me, could you come for a second?’), attention signal (*ābji sharmande Felan bekhātere taghire dekorāšion tatilim* ‘Sorry ma’am, at present, we’re closed for the redecoration’). The study has also found some Persian strategies not proposed in Nord (2008) framework (e.g., *āghā bebakhshid poshtam be shomās* ‘excuse me sir, I’m sitting in front of you’). Their study showed that linguistic and culture-specific features of phatic communication vary across languages and cultures.

Yet in another study, Khodaei Moghaddam, Elyasi & Sharifi (2014) explored the function of Persian word *bebakhshid* (excuse me/sorry) among Persian speakers of different age and social groups and reported that the Persian word *bebakhshid* can perform several functions such as apologizing, phatic communication (as a kind of address term), turn taking signal, and making complaints. When acting as phatic communication, *bebakhshid* is used in formal settings where the interlocutors do not know each other and are supposed to make polite communication.

Several studies have also researched Persian telephone opening and closing conversations performing phatic functions. For instance, in her cross-cultural study of the interactional organization of the ritual “How are you” sequence in telephone conversation openings between Iranian and German, Taleghani-Nikazm (2002) found that Iranians expand the “How are you” move to inquire about the well-being of their respective families, while Germans do not perform “How are you” ritual on the phone, and if they do, they are not reciprocated.

In a study of Persian speakers’ telephone-call closing, Khadem & Eslami Rasekh (2012) noted that Persian speakers use conventional patterns at the end of their speech performed by the mutual contribution of speakers involved in the telephone conversation. They use some pre-closing sequences such as *movazebe khodet bash* (take care of yourself), *salam beresoon* (say hello), *khoshal shodam sedato shenidam* (nice hearing your voice), followed by closing sequence. Moreover, their findings showed that Persian speakers refer to various topics in the closing conversation, the most frequent of which is thanking the other party for the telephone call. They added that *ta’arof* (Persian politeness system) is widely used by Iranians, and they apologize many times for calling the other party. The findings also suggested that *salam beresoon* (say hello) is the most frequently used closing sequence in Persian closing telephone conversations. Most of these ritual realizations of different speech



acts used at the opening and closing section of telephone calls can be considered examples of phatic interaction.

In another comparative study, [Kazemi \(2019\)](#) analyzed telephone closing rituals in Persian and English pre-closing and closing exchanges in non-institutional settings. Results revealed that similar to English, Persian speakers use some pre-closing signals such as *bâshe* (ok), *kheili khob* (alright), and *kho(b) bâshe* (ok then), suggesting a closure to a call. However, as [Kazemi \(2019\)](#) noted,

unlike American English in which tokens such as *ok* and *alright* could be used in closing- and non-closing-implicative environments alike, the frequently-used token of *bâshe bâshe* (*ok ok*) can be potentially closing-relevant and the interrogative form *kâri nadâri?* (*Anything else?*) and endearment terms, tied to closedown ritual, regularly warrant shutting calls down, *severely limiting* the possibility of shading the current topic-in-progress and *effectively precluding* the possibility of topicalizing something new, which makes a strong case for their language- or culture-specificity. (p. 45)

Despite the valuable information the few studies done on Persian small talk provide, none of the above-mentioned studies provide a detailed analysis of how small talks take place in naturally occurring conversations among Persian speaking university students. Our study aims to fill this gap by providing a detailed analysis of small talk in Persian natural interactions based on [House & Kádár's \(2022\)](#) analysis framework. We use the proposed typology of speech acts suggested by [House & Kádár \(2022\)](#) and take a pragmalinguistic approach to phatic interaction. As stated by [House & Kádár \(2022\)](#), in this approach the recurring elements of phatic interaction in an encounter are broken down into distinct and finite speech act categories occurring in specific slots of an interaction ([Edmondson & House 1981](#); [Edmondson, House & Kádár 2022](#)). Phatic cluster of speech acts, according to [House & Kádár \(2022\)](#) proposed framework is composed of Remark and Disclose speech acts. When making a Remark, the speaker shows favorable disposition towards his interlocutor ([Edmondson & House 1981](#)) and, in Disclose speech acts, the speaker provides biographic information about himself to let the hearer know him/her better ([Edmondson & House 1981](#)). For example, when the speaker performs the Remark speech act by stating what all participants already know (It's raining hard, isn't it?), the expression of the obvious, serves as a rapport-building device. Furthermore, in addition to prototypical speech acts belonging to the phatic cluster, some other speech acts can also fulfill a phatic function when they move into the phatic position in certain settings. Speech acts with highest frequency in the opening and closing phases of interaction most likely perform a phatic function, have fixed structure, and are highly conventionalized, called also as the 'ritual cluster' ([House & Kádár 2022](#)).

2.2. The study

The current interpretive study aimed to characterize the (non-)ritual, phatic clusters of speech acts that conventionally recur around the opening/closing phases of social encounters or occur during the core (or 'business') phase of natural interactions as small talk in Persian. The study was conducted in Iran's Persian linguaculture where considerable social-cultural-economic changes have taken place over the last decade or so impacting the form and content of phatic interaction in all sectors of the society. In brief, the following research questions guided this study:



- What ritual speech acts conventionally recur in the ‘opening’ and ‘closing’ phases of Persian speakers’ social interactions as phatic talk?
- What other (non-ritual) speech acts can phatically occur during the ‘core’ phases of Persian speakers’ social encounters as small talk?

3. METHOD

3.1. Data and participants

The participants of the study were 37 Persian-speaking university students attending a state-run university located in the southwest of Iran. There were 31 undergraduate students of English Translation as well as TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) majors (aged 19–24) and 6 graduate TEFL students (aged 25–29). They included both genders ($M = 9, 24\%$; $F = 28, 76\%$). The second researcher was the instructor of all the four (under)graduate classes. After explaining the process of audio-recording their natural Persian interactions in different social encounters for research purposes, 37 students consented to the data-collection requirements. They were required to audio-record their natural interactions in four different social encounters varied based on the standard sociolinguistic parameters of Social Distance and Power (+/–SD, +/–P), as will be described below. Explicit instructions in both oral (voice messages in their WhatsApp groups and face-to-face explanations) and written (see the [Appendix](#)) forms were given to the students to ensure participants know how and in what situations to collect the data. The whole process of data collection lasted about 45 days, and all the volunteer students turned in their audio-recorded data plus the transcriptions one week after the final exams in July 2022.

3.2. Data-collection procedure

University students taking different classes were invited as volunteers to record their daily conversations in natural situations at different encounters of their daily lives. Before students embarked on data collection, the instructor introduced phatic communication (Small Talk) and shared instances of small talks as they naturally occurred in Persian social interactions. Then, the volunteered students were asked to collect audio-recorded interactional data in their daily encounters.

The researchers shared the written instructions ([Appendix](#)) they had prepared to further clarify the procedures to be followed for data collection. In the instructions, definition of small talk based on the literature (e.g., [Coupland 2014](#); [Kádár 2017](#)) was included and some interactional instances of phatic language use (small talk) were provided. More clearly, the blueprint asked the students to audio-record their social encounters across four different contexts differentiated based on the standard sociolinguistic parameters of Social Distance and Power [+/–SD, +/–P] (see the [Appendix](#)). The contexts comprised the following: (i) on-campus student-professor (class or office) [+P, +SD], (ii) student-workplace/service encounters (e.g., the student and a doctor, bank-teller, shopkeeper, or cab driver) [–P, +SD], (iii) on/off-campus student-student [–P, –/+SD], and the optional (iv) student-parent/sibling/relative social encounters [–/+P, –SD]. The student-family interaction recording was optional as we assumed that some students may not feel comfortable recording their family interactions. The option of student-friend interaction was offered to those



students who did not feel comfortable recording family interactions. Students were asked to get their interlocutors' consent for the recording to be shared for research purposes after the conversations were completed. If the consent was not granted, students were asked to delete the recordings. Student participants were also required to provide demographic information about the interlocutors involved in the interactions, describe the setting of each interaction they audio-recorded, transcribe, and finally translate the recorded talks in English at their earliest convenience. The reason for asking students to transcribe the talks themselves was to avoid probable misunderstanding resulting from the quality of the recordings and due to their familiarity with the situations.

As noted above, about 68 volunteers returned audio-recorded interactional data along with transcriptions out of which the data of only 37 students fully met the criteria of quality of recording and naturalness of the interactions (not elicited). The audio data and the transcriptions were turned in during the second week of July 2022, and two of the researchers, started checking the transcriptions of the interactions and their correspondence or accuracy with their related audio talks. After making some minor needed repairs in the transcriptions and the translations, all the acceptable written data were turned into a connected corpus interspersed with relevant demographic information about the setting and the interactants for each section. The resultant corpus was then subjected to subsequent coding and interpretive analysis.

3.3. Analytical framework

We adopted Edmondson, House & Kádár's (2023) pragmalinguistic and speech act-anchored model of phatic interaction to code the (non-)ritual realization patterns of small talk around the opening, closing, and core phases of interactions in Persian linguaculture. In fact, this model tries to explore different recurring constituents of phatic language use (or seemingly erratic small talks) in a particular linguaculture in terms of distinct and finite categories of speech acts as they occur (or recur) in certain phases of social encounters. The following figure (Figure 1) represents this typology of speech acts based on House & Kádár (2021, 2023).

This approach essentially draws upon the interactional typology of speech act proposed by Edmondson & House (1981) and House & Kádár (2022) in which speech acts are categorized into two main components: substantive and ritual. Whereas the former refers to the more fluid, 'meaningful' parts of social interactions, the latter refers to the ritual, 'structural' elements through which interactants may open or close an encounter. The ritual cluster of speech acts which are mostly frequented in the opening and closing of encounters, such as Greet, How are you, Welcome, Wish-well, and Leave-taking, can particularly perform phatic functions. The archetypes of phatic speech acts in the typology include Remark and Disclosure dynamics whereby the speaker evinces favourable disposition or reveals excessive biographic information, respectively, to build rapport with the hearer. Interestingly, various speech acts, which by default do not 'belong to' the phatic cluster, can also fulfill a phatic function when they 'migrate' into the phatic slot in certain contexts (House & Kádár 2022). In other words, non-ritual attitudinal or informative speech acts may 'transfer' across the higher-order categories in the typology and adopt phatic roles to play in the evolving social encounter. In such seemingly erratic cases, both the



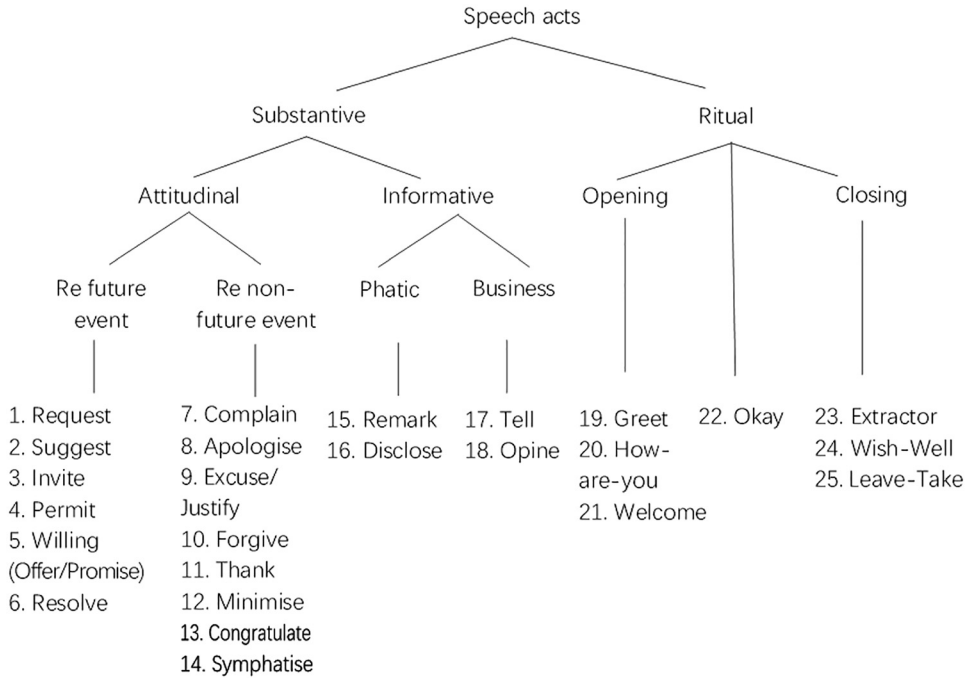


Figure 1. A typology of speech acts (House & Kádár 2023)

participants and the bystanders of an encounter would most probably recognize that phatic interaction is unfolding in time rather than off-topic breaches of politeness or aggressions (House et al. 2021).

3.4. Data analysis

To analyse the corpus and code instances of phatic, following Miles, Huberman & Saldana (2013), a composite holistic-process coding method and a second-order subcoding scheme were adopted to: (i) extract and assign interactional episodes in the data (and each social encounter) holistically as phatic language use, (ii) categorize each observable, conceptual small talk related episode under one of the three phatic processes of opening, closing, and core-building, and, finally, (iii) further indexing and classifying the constructing elements of each small talk as (non-)ritual clusters of phatic speech acts. To this very last end, as noted, a bottom-up speech act-anchored pragmalinguistic approach was employed by drawing upon the aforementioned typology of speech acts (Edmondson & House 1981; Edmondson, House & Kádár 2023). Four virtual online standardization meetings were held between the two coders (Faculty members in applied linguistics) focusing on four different small talk related episodes for each phatic process before coding the data. After pair-coding the corpus, intercoder Kappa Measure of Agreement was examined and found to be 0.78, representing a good estimate of coding consistency.



4. RESULTS

4.1. Small talks in opening phase

Descriptive summaries were obtained characterizing the recurring patterns and frequencies of small talk at the three standard phases of social encounters in the dataset where speech act clusters were used for phatic functions. Table 1 depicts the distribution of small talk at the opening of participants' daily encounters in Persian.

The frequencies shown in Table 1, as well as the speech act realizations shown in Table 2 below, clearly reveal that the opening phase of social encounters in Persian linguaculture is highly ritualized drawing upon the ritual speech acts of Greet, How-are-you, and Welcome. In general, what can be gleaned from the audio-recorded social interactions is that the higher the values of the sociolinguistic variables of Power and Social Distance in Persian, the more compulsory the use of ritual, ceremonial opening small talks. To illustrate, the common expressions used by Persian interactants as small talk to open their social encounters are summarized in Table 2 below.

As to the different interactional scenarios, for the potentially face-threatening student-professor situation, for instance, only 16 students (from the total 37 respondents) turned in audio-recorded encounters with their professors. Meanwhile, all the recorded encounters with professors enjoyed some ritual opening small talks encompassing Greet + Addressee + Health Inquiry (e.g., *Salam Ostād, Khaste nabāshid!/khoob hastin enshāllāh?* 'Hello Professor, More power to you!/Are you feeling well, God willing?'). Two of the interactions took place immediately after the class, which represented non-ritual forms of opening address such as Alerter + Preparator-Permit (*Bebakhshid Ostād, mishe ye daqiqe vaqtetoon ro begiram* 'Excuse me/Sorry Professor, can I take your time for one minute'). The following episodes represent two of the audio-recorded encounters in which the opening small talks are underlined.

Table 1. Descriptive summary of small talk in the opening phase

Interactional Context	N	Opening ST		Ritual Greet	Non-Ritual	Ritual Response	Other Responses
		Yes	No				
Student-professor [+P, +SD]	16	16 (100%)	-	14 (88%)	2 (12%)	13 (82%)	3 (18%)
Student-service staff [-P, +SD]	35	32 (91%)	3 (9%)	30 (94%)	2 (6%)	27 (77%)	5 (23%)
Student-student [-P, -/+SD]	37	33 (89%)	4 (11%)	30 (91%)	3 (9%)	29 (88%)	4 (12%)
Student-family/friend [-/+P, -SD]	37	27 (73%)	10 (27%)	24 (89%)	3 (11%)	22 (81%)	5 (19%)
Average	31	27 (88%)	4 (12%)	25 (90%)	2 (10%)	23 (82%)	4 (18%)



Table 2. Persian expressions used in opening small talk

Opening Speech Acts	Persian Utterances	English Equivalents
Greet	<i>Salām!</i>	Hi/Hello!
	<i>Sob/Vaqt bekheir!</i>	Good morning/time!
	<i>Dorood bar shomā!</i>	Peace be upon you!
	<i>Khaste nabāshid!</i>	(I hope you're not tired!) More power to you!
How-are-you	<i>Hālet chetore?</i>	How are you?
	<i>Ahvāle shoma?</i>	
	<i>Ahvālet?/Chetori?</i>	
	<i>Hāletoon khoobe?</i>	Are you good/well?
	<i>Khoobi/Khoob hastid/n?</i>	Are you feeling well?
Welcome	<i>Khosh omadin!</i>	You're welcome! (Or Welcome!)
	<i>Befarmāeid!</i>	Here you are! (Or Come in/Take a seat, please!)
	<i>Moshtāq e didār!</i>	So nice to see you!

- Episode 1: S: Student, P: Professor – Also Head of the Department; Female-Male; In office
- S: *Salām Ostād!*
Hello Professor!
- P: *Salām, Khoob hastin khānome M?*
Hello! Are you feeling well Miss M*?
- S: *Mamnoon Ostād ... Ostād! dar morede tārikhe emtehānāt omadim bā shomā harf bezanim?!*
Thank you Professor ... Professor! we've come to talk to you about the dates of the final exams?!
- P: *Amoozesh tārikhā ro avaz karde ... mā avaz nakardim.*
The Registrar's Office has changed the dates not us.
- S: *Shomā mitoonid kāri konid hālā bargarde sar e hamoon rooz āye avalesh?*
Can you do something to change them back to the prior dates? (... The talk continued)
- * (Only the initials of last names are used.)

- Episode 2: S: Student, P: Professor – Who had a language institute; Female-Male; Immediately after the class, in the hallway
- S: *Ostād, bebakhshid! Barāta'sis e āmoozeshgāh az kojā bāyad shoro' kard?*
Professor, excuse me! Where should we start from to establish a language institute?
- P: *Hm ... az āmoozesh parvaresh ... Bāyad bri darkhāst bedi, tou mantaghe ei ke mikhāy ...*



Hm ... You must first apply to the Education Department in the area where you live ...

S: *Ahā ... bale ... Ya'ni masalan māyi ke alān faregh otahsile licānc mishim hich āzemooni hich taein sathi nemishim...*

Aha ... Right ... It means, for instance, we who now graduate with BA, we are not tested for proficiency...

As the values of P and SD decreased in the other encounters, students showed a tendency to initiate the talks with less ritualized opening speech acts, such as Remark (Student-Passenger: *Che qad garme!* It's so hot!, in a taxi) or Alerter + Request/Permit (Student/Customer: *āqa, mishe oun kif o az nazdik bebinam?* Sir, can I have a close look at that bag? and Shopkeeper: *Salām/Khosh omadin! Mitoonam komakatoon konam?* Hi/Welcome! Can I help you?). Nonetheless, the opening small talk structures for the most part (Average = 88%) remained ritualized employing some form of the Greet speech act. The following examples further illustrate this recurring pattern.

Episode 3: S: Student, St: Staff; Female-Male; In office
 S: *Alām Mr. M ... Bebakhshid, barā porozhamoon neyāz be ye prozhector dārim ... emkānesh hast?*
Hello Mr. M ... Excuse me, we need a projector for our project... is it possible? ...
 St: *Salām, kodoom clās?*
Hi, which class?

Episode 4: S: Student, B: Buffet-Server; Female-Female; Dormitory Buffet
 S: *Salām Khānome N!*
Hello Miss N!
 B: *Salām azizam ... Befarmāeid?*
Hi Sweetie ... You need anything?
 S: *Dou tā tokhm-e-morq mikhām bā panir, age dārid*
 I want two eggs and a cheese, if you have

Episode 5: S: Student, M: Music-Institute Secretary; Female-Female; In office
 S: *Salāam Khanome A ... Khaste nabashid!*
Hello Ms. A, Don't be tired!/More power to you!
 M: *Salām ... Motskakeram*
Hi ... Thank you.
 S: *K am ... Honarjooye Aghāye J ... Sohbat kardam vāse clāssām ā!*
 This is K (Surname with no title), Mr. J's student ... I talked about my classes!
 M: *Ahā ... bale ...*
 Aha ... yes ...



- Episode 6: S: Student, M: Mom; Just arrived back home; Male-Female
- S: Salām māmān!
Hi Mom!
- M: Salām azizam ... khobi?
Hi Sweetie! ... Are you good?
- S: Khoobam ... Merci!
I'm good ... Merci!
- M: Payāmi ke barāt fereštādām o didi? Dar mourede ...
Did you see the SMS that I sent to you about ...

One noticeable pattern for opening intimate talks [–P, –SD], while at home or hanging out with friends, was that no ritual speech acts were used to break the silence or shift the topic. Still, in most cases, one of the following forms were used to alert, attract attention, or simply prepare the hearer for the topic shift: an Address Term (e.g., the hearer's first name or first name + the sweetener *Joon*, meaning *Sweetie/Honey*) or the Alerter *Migam!* I say.

4.2. Small talks in closing phase

Similarly, the closing small talk in Persian linguaculture is so highly ritual that any breach of the acceptable patterns would convey lack of propriety and even display of displeasure or aggression. Table 3 characterizes the recurring patterns of closing small talks in Persian as well as their pertinent frequencies at the end of the social encounters in the corpus.

As shown in Table 3, almost every interpersonal encounter in Persian linguaculture is expected to be collaboratively brought to a smooth end through small talk on parting. More clearly, the ritualized speech acts of Extractor (e.g., *Bishtar az in mozāhemtoon nasham!* Let's not bother you anymore!, *Khob, man bāyad beram!* 'OK, I should be/get going!'), Thank (e.g., *Mamnoon/Kheili mamnoon/Tashakkor/Sepās* 'I'm very grateful/Thanks'), Wish-Well (e.g., *Dastetoon dard nakone* 'May your hands never get pain/Wish you health', *Salem bashid* 'Stay healthy'), and Leave-Take (e.g., *Bā ejazatoon/Khodā hāfez/Khodā negahdār* 'With your permission/God keep you safe/Goodbye') are commonly used in various forms or combinations depending on the social settings and the interlocutors. The phatic pragmalinguistic structures used as small talk to close social encounters in Persian are categorized in Table 4 below.

To further illustrate, in a [+P, +SD] encounter with a professor, for instance, a student-interactant, after tacitly alerting the intention or the need to terminate the talk and leave (e.g., *Ostād, kheili vaghtetoon ro gereftam/kheili estefādeh kardam* Professor, I took much of your time/I've benefited a lot from your insights), might opt for various combinations of the three speech acts of Thank + Wish-well + Leave-take to close the encounter, for instance:

- use all the three, e.g., *Kheili mamnoon Ostād! Dastetoon dard nakone, Bā ejazatoon!* 'Thanks so much Professor, Wish you health', (with your permission)/Goodbye!
- employ a two-tier parting move, Thank/Wish-well + Leave-take, e.g., *Sepāsgozāram Ostād, Khoda negahdār* 'Thank you Professor, Goodbye', or
- use the Extractor + Leave-take speech act, e.g., *Chashm Ostād, Khoda hāfez shomā,* OK Professor, God keep you safe/Goodbye.



Table 3. Recurring patterns of small talk in closing phase

Interactional Context	<i>N</i>	Closing ST		Ritual (Wish-well or Leave-take)	Non-Ritual	Ritual Response	Other Responses
		Yes	No				
Student-professor [+P, +SD]	16	16 (100%)	–	16 (100%)	–	14 (88%)	2 (12%)
Student-service staff [–P, +SD]	35	34 (97%)	1 (3%)	34 (100%)	–	33 (97%)	1 (3%)
Student-student [–P, –/+SD]	37	37 (100%)	–	36 (97%)	1 (3%)	36 (97%)	1 (3%)
Student-family/friend [–/+P, –SD]	37	37 (100%)	–	33 (89%)	3 (11%)	35 (95%)	2 (5%)
Average	31	31 (99%)	– (1%)	30 (96%)	1 (4%)	29 (94%)	2 (6%)



Table 4. Persian small talk utterances used in closing phase

Closing Speech Acts	Persian Utterances	English Equivalents
Extractor (Closing Alerter)	<i>Kheili vaghtetoon rogereftam!</i>	I've taken much of your time!
	<i>Sepās/Kheili mamnoon az vaghti ke gozāshtid/n!</i>	Thanks/Very grateful for your time!
	<i>(Kheili)Khosh gozasht!</i>	I've had a wonderful time!
	<i>Kheili mozāhemetoon shodam!</i>	I've put you in much trouble!
	<i>Bishtar az in mozāhemtoon nasham!</i>	Let's not bother you anymore!
	<i>Bāyad beram dige!</i>	I've gotta go!
	<i>Khob, man bāyad beram!</i>	OK, I should be/get going!
Thank	<i>Mamnoon!</i>	I'm grateful!
	<i>Kheili mamnoon!</i>	I'm very grateful!
	<i>Tashakkor!</i>	Thanks!
	<i>Sepās!</i>	Thanks!
Wish-well	<i>Dastetoon dard nakone!</i>	May your hands not get pain/ Wish you health
	<i>Sālem bāshid!</i>	Stay healthy!
	<i>Movafagh bāshid!</i>	Be successful!
	<i>Pirooz bāshid!</i>	Be victorious!
	<i>Salam beresoon!</i>	Give regards!
Leave-Take	<i>Ba eājāzaton!</i>	With your permission!/ God keep you safe/Goodbye!
	<i>Khodā hāfez!/Khodāfez!</i>	God protect/bless/Goodbye!
	<i>Khodā negahdār!</i>	God protect/bless/Goodbye!
	<i>Be omide didār!</i>	Hope to see you again!/ See you!/So long!
	<i>Mi binamet(oon)!</i>	See you!/So long!
	<i>Movāzebe (knodet) bāsh!</i>	Take care!
	<i>Felan!</i>	Until then/Bye now!

In response, the hearer equally has a range of pragmalinguistic structures available to choose from and 'phatically' close the talk or the encounter while still maintaining the face and the relationship for future interactions, such as, *Khāhesh mikonam* 'Not at all', *Khosh āmadin* 'You're welcome!', *Be omide Khodā* 'Godspeed', *Khodā hāfez/Khodā negahdār* 'Goodbye/Bye', or *Salām beresoon* 'Give regards'. Two student-professor closing small talks are presented below:



- Episode 7: S: Student, P: Professor; Male-Male; In office
 (...) (Closing the talk)
 S: *Ba'd ... shenide boodam ke barnāme 3D ye Blender az Python estefādeh mikoneh, doroste?*
 Then ... I also heard that the 3D Program called Blender uses Python, is that right?
 P: *Bale ... hhh* (mild laughter, probably signaling the time to leave)
 Yes ... hhh.
 S: *Kheili ham ā'li ... Mamnoon ke veghtetoon o be man dādin!*
Super. Thank you for giving me your time!
 P: *Khāhesh mikonam ...*
You're welcome ...
 S: *Khodā negahdār!*
Goodbye!
 P: *Khodā negahdār!*
Goodbye!
- Episode 8: S: Student-Project Coordinator, P: Professor; Female-Male; After the class in the hallway walking down the stairs
 (...)
 S: *Ba'd ... mā ... māle (falters) har kesy o tou ye poushe jodā bezāram?!*
 Then ... I should put ev ... everyone's in a separate folder?!
- P: *To ye poushe jodā barā khodesh bezār ...*
 Put it in a separate folder for him/herself ...
- S: *Ba'd on yeki porozzeh chi? Porozzeh ei ke marboot be hamin clāss e?*
 Then, how about the other project? The one related to this class.
- P: *Inam jodā midam dige behetoon*
 I'll give it to you separately too.
- S: *Bāshe mamnoon*
OK, thanks.
- P: *Khāhesh mikonam ... Khodāfez!*
Not at all ... God keep you safe!
- S: *Khodā negahdār!*
Goodbye!

It is important to note that although the closing phase of social encounters in Persian is highly conventionalized using a ritual cluster of speech acts, as demonstrated in Table 4, there is still some considerable variability in terms of the intensity of the 'pre-leave taking' Extractor (e.g., House & Kádár 2023) plus Wish-well/Thank speech acts as well as the number of parting or Farewell moves employed by interactants. That is, as the sociopragmatic values of the social settings decrease and familiarity or intimacy increases, interlocutors seem to use less elaborate closing moves (lower number of moves) or a jaunty parting (e.g., in friendly settings among the youth, *Felan!* Bye for now! or *Aqa ma raftim!* Guys, we're gone!). The following are closing extracts from different settings in the corpus.



- Episode 9: D: Doctor, P: Patient; Female-Male; In office
(...)
D: *Khob, pas barātoon hamoon capsule e ... Cefexim ro minevisam ... roozi ye dooneh masraf konin, 10 tāsham kāfiye, ba'dd eee ... dā, dārooye Antihistāmin barāye hasāseyatetoon va ye ghatreye ee Cloridsodium ham barā gereftegi e binitoon eee dige hamin een dāroohā ro estefāde konin ... enshāllā moshkeleton bartaraf mishe*
So, I prescribe you Cefixime to use once a day and 10 days is enough ... Antihistamine for your allergy ... for your nose congestion a Nasal Spray ... I think Sodium Chloride is OK. Use these drugs ... I hope you get better so soon.
P: Motshakeram, mamnoon!
Thanks, much obliged!
D: Khāhesh mikonam!
Not at all!
- Episode 10: S: Student, F: Friend; Female-Female; On campus, just after the exam, talking about the History course
(...)
F: *Na midooni khoobe... ba'zi vaghtā bedard mikhore, age chizāye jālehtar toosh bezāran, na een chizā*
No you know sometimes it comes of use if they include more interesting things in it, not these things
S: *Are khob ... kheili kesel konandeas*
Yes right ... it's so boring.
F: *Are ... hāalāa eshkāal nadāare, dige majboorim bekhonimesh ?? majbooriye*
Yes, but no problem, we must study it ... it's compulsory.
S: *āre dige ejbāriye bāyad bekhonimesh ... bāshe azizam ... mibinamet ... felan man bāyad beram*
Yes, it's compulsory we must study it ... OK my dear ... I've gotta go ... See you later.
F: Bāshe, khodāfez
OK, God keep you safe.
- Episode 11: S: Student, M: Mom; Female-Female; Leaving home
S: Māmān, man bāyad bram ... kāri nadāri?
Mom, I should get going ... Anything to be done?
M: Bāshe azizam! ... movāzebe khoddet bāsh!
OK Honey! ... Take care!
S: Bāshe khodāfez!
OK, God keep you safe!
M: Khodā behamrāt!
Godspeed!



In the last episode, a mother's parting moves brim with affection and prayers for her daughter's safety, which is basically rhetorical at this phase, a discursive feature which currently characterizes most of intimate child-parent and family leave-takings discourses in Persian linguaculture.

4.3. Small talk in core phase

Contrary to the highly ritualized small talks at the opening and closing phases of social encounters, the core (or 'business') phatic interchanges within interpersonal interactions in Persian are dynamic and emerge based on macro (i.e., sociocultural) and micro (i.e., contextual) changes in the situation. Therefore, it might be a type of simplism to encapsulate the fluidity of core-based phaticity during social interactions in terms of generalizable figures or fixed recurring patterns. Further, it is equally futile to try to impose any order, in terms of frequency or pragmalinguistic structures, on the use or emergence of discursive small talk chit-chats across diverse social settings. Nonetheless, it would be valuable to explore what speech acts, sequences of talks, or themes may be discursively 'migrating' into phatic slots in interpersonal contexts in a particular linguaculture (House & Kádár 2022). Table 5 represents the types of speech acts and related functions that were used by the interactants in the social encounters transactional talk for phatic purposes. These speech acts are used to build or maintain rapport, engage in gossiping, seek or maintain companionship, avoid taciturnity, affirm politeness, establish common ground while maintaining focus on the main topic, scaffolding other main actions such as bargaining, or offering 'phoney' invitations, etc.

As seen in Table 5 as well as the following extracts, the inspection and coding of the corpus yielded an interesting observation in term of the discursivity and ubiquity of small talk distributed at the medial stage of most sustained-for-a-while social encounters in Persian in the form of chit-chatting, gossiping, socializing, and rapport-building. It can be argued that any subject of common interest or any cause of common concern, associated with the situation or the shared activity, can seamlessly give rise to non-serious small talk in Persian, as evidenced in our data. For instance, one of the pervasive themes that is highly frequented in small talks in the modern society of Iran is showing dissatisfaction with socioeconomic status quo, the perceived need to curb inflation, or the nationwide desire for (social) reform. Therefore, just a slight dissatisfaction stimulated by any interactional or transactional element in context may provide interactants with a shift frame to engage in chit-chatting or social talks about inflation or even politics. The following episode represents an example, in which the parts functioning as phatic talk are underlined.

- Episode 12: S: Student, C: Cashier; Male-Male; In Supermarket
(...)
S: *Shokolāttā chand shodan?*
... How much are the chocolates?
C: *Eenā ... kilo 225 ... ghābel shomāram nadāre!*
These ... 225k per kilo ... No value!
S: *Ghablan chand boodan?*
How much were they before?
C: *Ghablan 170.*
Before, 170k.



Table 5. Persian speech acts used as small talks during encounters (core phase)

Speech Acts	Persian Utterances	English Equivalents	Functions	Topics
Complain	<i>Man 225k tomān pool bedam vāse inā?</i>	I have to pay 225k for these?!	- Grumbling about a common cause	Inflation
Remark	<i>Vāy Otoboose kheil khoob bood ... Hāl kardam ... Az in jadidā bud ... Kooler dāsh.</i>	Wow ... the bus was great ... I really enjoyed it ... It was new ... It had an air conditioner.	- Chit-chat/Maintaining rapport - Favorable disposition	Public Transportation
Opine	<i>Masalan, dāneshgā ke miri, chizi mesle āmoozeshgāh yādet nemidan, khodeti o khoedt o bāyad beshini bekhooni ...</i>	For instance, when you go to university, they don't teach you things the way they teach it to you in an institute, you are on your own and you have to sit and study	- Social talk/stating views - Assuming an informant role	Education
Invite/Offer	<i>Ghābeli nadāre! Bezār bāshe! Mehmoone mā bash! (Ritual)</i>	No value/Let it be/Be my guest	- Ostensible Invite/Offer (<i>Ta'arof</i>) - Politeness marker	Transaction
Reminder	<i>Ye chand ruze pish omadam goftin ke nadārin engār</i>	I came a few days ago and I believe you said that you didn't have it	- Maintaining transactional relationship - Assuming customership	Shopping
Congratulate	<i>Vāy, che ghadr vasile komak āmuzeshi khoobi dorost kardi ... Eyval ... Damet garm</i>	Wow, what a good instructional aid you've made! Bravo!/High five!	- Social talk/Praise - Building/boosting rapport	Achievement
Sympathize	<i>Cheshmāt varam dāre?! Be nazar khāb alood miāi. Dorost nist?</i>	Your eyes look puffy?! ... You seem really sleepy, Isn't that right?	- Expressing phatic concern - Class warm-up/Establish harmony	Health



- A: Yani man 225 toman pool bedam vāse eenā?
It means I pay 225 Toman money for these?!
- C: Dige sharmande! ... bāazār ouzāsh kharābe!
Sorry ... the market's terrible.
- S: Chize arzoontari dārid be man bedid?
Is there something cheaper you can get me?

In Episode 12, the public awareness of high inflation, the prevalence of grumbling about it during most service transactions across the country, and other contextual clues prevented the cashier's misinterpretation of the customer's apparently conflictive comment in terms of displeasure with the chocolate or himself. His reference to 'market' in reply suggests that he aptly read it as a complaint about the rapidly rising prices, in general. Interestingly, although core-based small talks are largely non-ritual in Persian, there are medial instances in social encounters when interactants feel sociopragmatically obliged to engage in ostensible inviting or offering behavior, namely *ta'arof* in Persian (e.g., [Eslami 2005](#)), and use stock phrases such as *Ghābeli nadāre* or *Mehmoone mā bāshid*, meaning 'No value' or 'Be my guest'. These ostensible phatic patterns are (and should be) appropriately dismissed or declined by the respondent (through thanking). The following episodes further demonstrate the use of other substantive (non-ritual) speech acts for phatic effects at the medial phase of the social encounters in Persian.

Episode 13: S: Student, F: Friend; Male-Male; Meeting at On-campus Cafeteria (...)

- S: M, che khabar dige? ... ghazāye self? (laughter)
M, What's up? ... The refectory food? (laughter)
- F: Ghazāye self ke besheddat eftezā bood ... keifeyatesh
Refectory food ... was really awful ... its quality.
- S: Azād bood yā doulati?
Was it not-subsidized or state-subsidized?
- F: Azād bud ... habergerāsh ke aslan mokhalafāt nadāshht ...
Not-subsidized, and the burger didn't have any topping and ...

Episode 14: S: Student, F: Friend; Female-Female; Arriving in Campus (...)

- S: Een otoboos jadide bud ... Otoboos jadide ... Otoboosi ke mioumad
dāneshgāh ... Cheghadr khoob bood ... hāl kardam ā! ... Nou bood, kooler
dasht ...
This new bus ... The new bus ... The bus that came to the university ... It was
very good ... I really enjoyed it ... It was new ... It had air-conditioning ...
- F: Āre, cooler az hame chi behtare.
Yes, air-conditioning is better than everything.
- S: Az enna bood ke ... az een bozorgā ke ... kootāhe pāyinesh ... kheili khoob
bood (chuckling) hāl kardam
It was one of those that ... Of these big ones that ... Its bottom/floor is
low... It was very good ... I really enjoyed.



In Episodes 13 and 14, student-student chit-chatting small talks function simply as time fillers (e.g., Holmes 2000; Jin 2018) or silence filling strategy (Jaworski 2000) and, also as rapport-maintenance or co-construction of socio-relational frames. Similarly, in the following off-campus extracts, student-oriented phaticity efforts are evident on the sideline of transactional or professional encounters.

- Episode 15: S: Student, SM: Salesman; Female-Male; In the Grocery/Shop
(...)
S: ... *Kare bādom zamini mikhāstam.*
... I want peanut butter.
SM: *Cheghadi mikhāyn?*
How much do you want?
S: *Andāze ye 30 tomān.*
About 30 Toomans.
SM: *33 shod?!*
This is 33 Toomans?!
S: *Kheili mamnoon ... Ye chand rooz pish omadam goftin ke nadārin ... bār naiomade ... ba'd dige tool keshid tā beyām ...*
Thank you so much ... I came a few days ago and you said that you didn't have it ... freight hasn't come ... then, it's taken me some days to come again ...
SM: (back-channeling) *Bāremoon tamoom shod ... bale ... Ramzettoon?*
Our freight had finished ... yes ... Your (ATM) code?

In Episode 15, the student reminds the salesperson of their previous acquaintance and hints at her confidence in the purchase (i.e., both the product and the price), thereby tacitly demanding customer-level care and service, a type of win-win bond which usually forms between a vendor and a regular customer in Iran.

- Episode 16: S: Student working as a teacher in an institute, C1 & C2: Colleagues; Female-Female; Break Time
(...)
S: *Vāy, cheghadr vasile komak āmoozeshi ye khoobi dorost kardi! ... Eival! ...*
Damet garm!
Wow, what a good instructional aid you've made! Bravo! High five!
C1: *Merci!*
Merci!
C2: *Chejoori azesh mikhay estefāde koni?*
How do you want to use it?
C1: *Masalan, migam ...*
For example, I tell ...



- Episode 17: (T: Teacher in an institute; S: Student; Female-Female; Beginning the Afternoon Class)
 (...)
 T: *Che khabar? ... Benazar khābālood miay, dorost nist?*
What's up? You look sleepy, right?
 S: *Bale.*
Yes.
 T: *Cherā? ... Chi shode?*
Why? ... What happened?
 S: *Sob ye emtehān dāshtam ... Darse dini ro chetor be Englisi migān? Aslan onā een darsā ro dar dabirestān yā kālej dāran? ... Fekr nemikonam?!*
In the morning, I had an exam ... How do they say theology in English? ... Do they have such courses in high school or college at all? ... I don't think so!?
 T: *Albate ke een darsā ro dāran ... Khob. cheghadr zamān bara lecturet neyāz dāri?*
Sure, they have these courses too ... Good, how much time do you need for you lecture?

Finally, Episodes 16 and 17 represent instances of students' simultaneous off-campus small talks while working as language teachers in private institutes. In Episode 16, the student tries to enhance collegial ties by talking about a colleague's self-made instructional tool by realizing the congratulation speech act. Similarly, in Episode 17, a teacher maintains camaraderie with her student by commenting about a probable problem, and, this way, tries to use small talk as a breather or a warm-up frame for subsequent activities.

5. DISCUSSION

The current study adopted House & Kádár's (2022) speech act-anchored pragmalinguistic approach to explore the patterns and dynamics of small talk at the opening, core, and closing phases of university students' social encounters in Persian linguaculture in Iran. It was found that students' daily social encounters in diverse sociolinguistic contexts are ritualized at both opening and closing phases. That is, irrespective of power relations or the social distance involved in a social setting, Persian interactants prefer to use a cluster of conventionalized Greet, How-are-you, and Welcome speech acts to open their daily encounters. Nonetheless, much variability is seen across interlocutors or contexts in terms of the number of speech acts used, the number of moves and turns, and the pragmalinguistic structures employed to realize each speech act in the opening phase of interactions. In general, it can be said that the higher the levels of the sociolinguistic variables (+P, +SD), the more ritualized and prefabricated the opening frames and ritual expressions of interpersonal encounters. In other words, all three conventional speech acts (i.e., Hello, How-are-you, and Welcome) as well as other sweetener 'ritual frames', for instance, address terms such as *Ostād* Professor or *Bābā Joon* Dear Grandpa (e.g., Kádár & House 2020), would potentially be exchanged as small talk sequences in unequal/power encounters with, say, a professor or a grandfather. On the other hand, when interactants are engaged in less formal encounters, they tend to opt for a smaller number of speech acts, (e.g., only *Salām* Hi or just *Khoobi?* Are you fine?)



to enter discursive interchanges. Although minimal, there is still some form of ritual opening drawing upon Greet or phatic Health inquiries.

In terms of closing, similarly, almost all interpersonal encounters in Persian (about 99% in the dataset) which contain an opening or a medial business phase, end with extractor pre-closing moves, signaling the intention to leave, and use ritualized, phatic parting to smoothly and collaboratively close the encounters. Again, the sociopragmatic requirements of power relations, social distance, and imposition involved in the context would indicate whether interactants would opt for *Kheili mozāhemtoon shodam!* I've bothered you a lot! (+P, +SD) or *Man dige bāyad bram!* I've gotta go now! (−P, −SD) as extractors. The most ritualized forms of closing in Persian, like English, recur at the very last parting moves, namely, Thank and Leave-take speech acts. An encounter parting would be considered impolite or even aggressive unless it is signaled by some form of *Mamnoon/Sepās/Tashakor* Thanks or *Ba ejāze/Khodā hāfez/Felan* 'Goodbye/ Bye'. The slight ritualization difference between opening and closing phases would emanate from the fact that, contrary to the incidental or here-and-there nature of entering into an interpersonal encounter, the ending of a conversation or encounter is at least tacitly planned and mainly intentional. Therefore, more face-threat is involved in closing an ongoing interchange than opening, for instance, an unexpected encounter, which is essentially mitigated by sticking to conventions and ritualized frames mutually.

Finally, as to the core phase of the interpersonal encounters, diverse speech acts were evidenced to migrate into small talk slots, as [House & Kádár \(2022\)](#) put it, to help interactants simply chit-chat or engage in social talks around certain themes such as inflation (while bargaining), on-campus canteen food, or amenities of a luxury bus. Medial business small talks were found to perform different discursive, relational functions, including but not limited to, establishing or maintaining rapport, expressing favourable disposition, gossiping, realizing ostensible/ceremonial behavior, or affirming politeness. Except for enumerating a few functions or themes which would potentially trigger phatic interaction at the medial business phase of social encounters, no recurring patterns or frequency figures could be drawn from the hardly-representative corpus that would sufficiently characterize Persian linguaculture. We could, therefore, safely conclude that the speech act clusters used for core-small talk purposes are non-ritual in terms of both typology and pragmalinguistic structures. More clearly, various substantive speech acts might be discursively employed by interactants on the spur of the moment, not to transmit factual information, but rather phatically to maintain the encounter flow. To recap, notwithstanding the emergent nature of medial small talk, there were a few instances where conventionalized, ostensible invitation or offering patterns, called *Ta'arof* in Persian ([Eslami 2005](#)), were realized through throwing in some ritual, formulaic pragmalinguistic exchanges solely for relational management, standing on ceremony, or marking politeness (e.g., *Ghābeli nadāre* Don't mention it, *Bebakhshid poshtam be shomāst* Sorry my back is toward you). Apart from that, part and parcel of medial phatic interaction in the dataset was perceived as non-ritual and dynamic.

6. CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that, like English, small talks which are co-constructed by Persian interactants at the opening and closing phases of their social encounters are highly ritualized in



terms of the speech act types and pragmalinguistic structures employed. Further, interpersonal interchanges which involve differential contextual variables of power and social distance values require more tactfulness and care in adhering to the greeting and parting conventions as more face-threat is potentially implicated. That is, any (un)deliberate breach of the interpersonal opening or closing rites may convey lack of propriety, rudeness, or offense on the part of the interlocutors. In terms of the medial phase, except for a small number of ostensible use of invites, offers, and apologies, core off-topic phaticity was perceived to be non-ritual and discursive in Persian, the interpretation of which, heavily relies upon shared sociopragmatic knowledge of the interlocutors involved in the interaction. By sticking to the phatic opening or closing norms as well as staying tuned to medial on-key small talks, interactants can cooperatively contribute to the success of an interpersonal encounter. In brief, in [Laver's \(1975\)](#) sense, the relevance and value of small talk relates to the whole interaction.

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Appendix

I. Instruction:

1. We are counting on your kind, helpful collaboration to collect natural samples of Persian ‘small talks’ in different face-to-face transactional-interactive contexts in which you, as an Iranian student, are one of the interlocutors/partners.
2. After you consider the definition and examples of small talks’ given below, please try to record interactions in different contexts (identified below) in which various small talks may occur in the course of your normal, transactional/professional talks.
3. Finally submit your recordings (3–4) along with the relevant bio information needed.

Interactional Contexts:

- Campus/Classroom/Dorm ► e.g., Student–Student/Classmate/Friend
- Campus/Classroom/Lab/Office ► e.g., Student–Professor/Office Clerk



- Home/Family ► e.g., Student–Parents/Siblings
- Workplace/Transactional/Professional practice ► e.g., Student–Doctor/Bank/Shopkeeper/Driver

Small Talks: In day-to-day normal communication or interactions at university/home/workplace, ‘small talks’ occur as minor/off-topic, informal/non-serious, and intimate talks in the sideline of the core/on-topic, transactional/professional talks to open the talks, maintain the flow of the interactions, to convey a sense of humor, construct relationships, produce positive facework/impression, or simply to close the talks.

- such as ritual greetings, conventional reference to the weather, enquiry about the health of family members, sports, economy, movies, politics, etc.
- ‘gossips’, ‘(chit-)chats’ and ‘time-out talks’, etc.

Examples:

Extract 1: Context: **Diana** enters **Sally's** office at the beginning of the day to collect mail

Diana: *good morning Sally lovely day*

Sally: *yes don't know what we're doing here we should be out in the sun*

Diana: *mm pity about the work really*

Sally: *how are your kids?*

Diana: *much better than goodness any mail?*

Extract 2: (from a solicitor/lawyer to a female client with a small baby who had attended his chambers seeking legal redress against a runaway husband)

Lawyer: ... that means the mum's not going to crack or something

Mother: that's right

Lawyer: ... *and mums do, don't they*

II. For each recorded talk, (i) provide the needed bio information given below, and (ii) translate & transcribe the talks:

Talk-Number:

- **Who** are the interlocutors/interactants? **Student (You) &**
- Their **Gender**? (e.g., Female & Male) **.....**
- Their **Age**? (e.g., 23–about 45) **.....**
- **Where** was the Context? (e.g., Professor's office) **.....**
- **What** was the main **Purpose** of the whole talk? (e.g., Project Submission) **.....**

III. Please Translate and Transcribe:

First, the whole talks, & Then, **boldface** the parts you think a Small Talk occurred.

.....

