Chapter 11

CULTURAL SCHEMAS AS ‘COMMON GROUND’

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The notion of ‘common ground’, or its terminological variants, is of pivotal importance in studies of pragmatics. It refers to knowledge that is assumed to be shared, and is required for the uptake of pragmatic meanings, between interlocutors. Allan (2012) characterises the nature of common ground, and in doing so makes a distinction between two levels of common ground: the universal versus the very restricted. This chapter offers an account of a level of common ground that lies between these two, that is, culturally constructed common ground. The chapter argues that cultural schemas often serve as common ground between interlocutors, in particular for communicating pragmatic meanings. The chapter focuses on the case of the Persian cultural schema of \textit{târof} and reveals how it is associated with the communication of several speech acts among speakers of Persian, including making requests and refusals, as well as offering and accepting invitations. The chapter also shows how unfamiliarity with this cultural schema (and thus lack of common ground) presents a communicative challenge when Persian speakers interact with non-Persian speakers.

1. Introduction

Keith Allan was always a source of inspiration, support and encouragement for me. In this paper I take the opportunity to engage with a topic of interest to Keith, that is, ‘common ground’, and explore it from the perspective of Cultural Linguistics (Palmer 1996; Sharifian 2011). The paper begins by a discussion of the notion of ‘common ground’ (CG) from Allan (2013), followed by a description of the sub-discipline of Cultural Linguistics.

In an attempt to characterise the notion of CG, Allan (2013, p. 2) maintains that ‘[o]ur understanding of linguistic utterances rests on an assumption of CG’. Allan notes that several terms have been used by different scholars to refer to CG in the relevant available literature. He offers a unified definition that captures the substance of all these terminological preferences as follows:
the terms common knowledge, mutual knowledge, shared knowledge, assumed
familiarity, presumed background information and common ground are
describing essentially the same thing, and it is what defines the pragmatic
constituent of communicative competence: the knowledge and application
of how and when to use utterances appropriately that combines with
grammatical knowledge (of semantics, syntax, morphology, phonology)
in the production of utterances to generate a coherent text comprehensible
to its intended audience. (2013:291)

As for the extent to which CG is shared between speakers, Allan argues
that:

Some CG is universal, e.g. knowledge of the sun as a heavenly body that
is a source of light and warmth, rain as (among other things) a source
of fresh water replenishing the earth, the physiological and socio-
cultural differences between the sexes. Some CG is very restricted, e.g.
between a couple who use the Hobgoblin to refer to the man’s first wife.
Usually S[peaker] can readily assess the probable CG with H[earer],
and chooses his or her words accordingly. (2013:286)

In this paper, I offer a level of CG that may be placed between the two
that Allan has identified (i.e., the universal and the restricted) and that is
culturally constructed common ground established through cultural schemas
serving as CG. The paper begins by a brief discussion of the theoretical
framework of cultural cognition and its components cultural conceptualisation
and language, as a preamble to the discussion of cultural schemas. This is
followed by a discussion of the nature of cognitive schemas and cultural
schemas. The later sections focus on the elaboration of the Persian cultural
schema of tārof and provide examples of how it serves as common ground
and how it is verbally instantiated during the communication of pragmatic
meaning among speakers of Persian.

2. Cultural cognition and cultural conceptualisations

I have used the term ‘cultural cognition’ (Sharifian 2008, 2009, 2011) to refer
to a level of cognitive life that emerges from the interactions between the
members of a cultural group across time and space. This view of cognition
is parallel to the ones discussed by several cognitive scientists (e.g., Clark
and interrelated aspects of cultural cognition are language and cultural
conceptualisations.
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Cultural cognition is emergent in the technical sense of the term (e.g., Goldstein 1999). That is, it results from the interactions between parts of a system (here, the members of a group) which is more than the sum of its parts (in this case, more than the sum of the cognitions of the individual members). Like all emergent systems, cultural cognition is dynamic in that it is constantly being negotiated and renegotiated across the generations of the relevant cultural group, as well as modified through the contact that the members of that group have with other cultures.

As a central aspect of cultural cognition, language serves as (to use the term used by wa Thiong’o 1986), a ‘collective memory bank’ of the cultural cognition of a group. Many aspects of language are shaped by cultural cognition that was dominant at earlier stages in the history of a speech community. Historical cultural practices leave traces in current linguistic practice, some of which are in fossilized forms that may no longer be analysable. In this sense language can be viewed as storing and communicating cultural cognition. In other words language acts both as a memory bank and a fluid vehicle for the (re-)transmission of cultural cognition and its component parts or cultural conceptualisations, a term that I have used to collectively refer to conceptual structures such as ‘cultural schemas’, ‘cultural categories’ (including ‘cultural prototypes’), and ‘cultural metaphors’ (Sharifian 2011). As mentioned above, cultural conceptualisations and their entrenchment in language are intrinsic to cultural cognition. In the following section I briefly discuss the notions of ‘cultural category’ and ‘cultural metaphor’ and will then elaborate on the notion of cultural schema, and how it can serve as CG.

Cultural categories are cognitive categories that have a cultural basis. Children usually begin by setting up their own categories, but as they grow up, they explore and discover, as part of their cognitive development, how their language and culture categorise events, objects, and experiences. As Glushko et al. (2008: 129) put it:

Categorization research focuses on the acquisition and use of categories shared by a culture and associated with language – what we will call ‘cultural categorization’. Cultural categories exist for objects, events, settings, mental states, properties, relations and other components of experience (e.g. birds, weddings, parks, serenity, blue and above). Typically, these categories are acquired through normal exposure to caregivers and culture with little explicit instruction.

I have used the term cultural metaphors to refer to conceptual metaphors (Lakoff and Johnson 1980) that are culturally constructed (e.g., Palmer 1996;
Sharifian 2011). Several studies have explored cultural schemas and models that give rise to conceptual metaphors, for example through ethnomedical or other cultural traditions (Sharifian et al. 2008; Yu 2009a and b; see also Idström and Piirainen 2012). One way this is manifest is by the differing way organs of the body are associated with emotions and mental life. For example, in Indonesian it is *hati* (‘the liver’) that is associated with love, rather than the heart (Siahaan 2008). Siahaan traces back such conceptualisations to the ritual of animal sacrifice, especially the interpretation of liver organ known as ‘liver divination’, which was practiced in ancient Indonesia. In some languages, such as Tok Pisin (Mühlhäusler, Dutton and Romaine 2003), the belly is the seat of emotions. Yu (2009b) observes that many linguistic expressions in Chinese reflect the conceptualisation of the heart is the ruler of the body. He maintains that the ‘target-domain concept here is an important one because the heart organ is regarded as the central faculty of cognition and the site of both affective and cognitive activities in ancient Chinese philosophy’ (Yu 2007: 27).

### 2.1. (Cultural) schemas and language

Cultural schemas are a culturally constructed sub-class of cognitive schemas. In cognitive psychology traditionally schemas (also known as schemata) are viewed as building blocks of cognition that help organize, interpret, and communicate information (e.g., Bartlett 1932; Bobrow and Norman 1975; D’Andrade 1995; Holland and Cole 1995; Minsky 1975; Rumelhart 1980; Sharifian 2001; Strauss and Quinn 1997). Schema theory has enjoyed considerable popularity under the dominant paradigms of cognitive psychology, in particular within classicism and connectionism (Rumelhart 1980; Rumelhart et al. 1986; Schank and Abelson 1977). Connectionists define schemas as patterns of activation among strongly interconnected units in human memory networks. Rumelhart et al. maintain that ‘[I]t is these coalitions of tightly interconnected units that correspond most closely to what have been called schemas’ (p. 20).

Schemas serve different functions in the interaction between cognition and environment. Taylor and Crocker (1981) have identified seven functions of schemas as follows:

- Providing a structure against which experience is mapped;
- Directing information encoding and retrieval from memory;
- Affecting information processing efficiency and speed;
- Guiding the filling of gaps in the information available;
• Providing templates for problem solving;
• Facilitating the evaluation of experience;
• Facilitating anticipations of the future, goal setting, planning, and goal execution.

The concept of schema underlies terms such as script, frame, global concept, scenario, encyclopaedic entry, plan, etc. in cognitive studies. Several classifications of schemas have also been proposed. Cook (1994) makes a distinction between three types of schema: world schema, text schema and language schema. He uses ‘world schema’ to refer to the schematic organization of world knowledge and ‘text schema’ to refer to “a typical ordering of facts in a real or fictional world’ (p. 15); ‘language schema’ refers to generalized knowledge about the grammar of a language. Derry (1996) identifies three classes of schemas in the literature: memory objects, mental models and cognitive fields. A memory object is ‘a schema type that includes but is not limited to Piagetian logical-mathematical schemes’ (p. 167). She states that mental models ‘represent situational understandings that are context dependent and do not exist outside the situation being modelled’ (p. 167). The definition of 'cognitive field' given by Derry matches a connectionist’s interpretation of schemas, that is, they are distributed patterns of activation that occur in response to external stimuli. It seems that these different schema types are, in fact, no more than different interpretations of the same cognitive entity.

In an intercultural study, Nishida (1999) extracts eight primary types of schemas for social interactions as follows:

• Fact-and-concept schemas: these are schemas that include factual information such as ‘The capital of Australia is Canberra’ and conceptual information such as ‘A room has walls’.
• Person schemas: these are schemas that include knowledge about types of people, including their personality traits, represented by sentences such as ‘John is taciturn’.
• Self schemas: these are schemas that include knowledge about the social self and the individual self.
• Role schemas: these are schemas that include knowledge about achieved and ascribed social roles and the expected behaviour associated with these roles.
• Context schemas: these are schemas that include knowledge about situations and appropriate behaviour associated with them.
• Procedure schemas: these are schemas that contain knowledge about the appropriate sequences of events in common situations.
• Strategy schemas: these schemas include knowledge about problem-solving strategies.
• Emotion schemas: these schemas contain information about affect and evaluation. Emotion schemas are in fact activated through their association with other schemas.

Thus some of the schema types discussed in the literature are labelled by content. A major problem with this kind of labelling is its possibility of leading to further categories *ad infinitum* since human experience is unlimited in scope. Another potential problem is labelling the same content or experience differently and therefore coming up with taxonomies of schemas that may prove to be overlapping or redundant.

As mentioned earlier, cultural schemas are the sub-class of cognitive schemas abstracted from people’s cultural, and therefore to some extent shared, experiences. They differ from schemas abstracted from an individual’s idiosyncratic experiences. Cultural schemas enable individuals to communicate cultural meanings and serve as CG between interlocutors. In cognitive psychology, cultural schemas are located within individuals’ cognition, albeit they are shared across a cultural group. However, within the framework of cultural cognition (Sharifian 2011), cultural schemas also have a collective life at the emergent level of the cognition that characterises a cultural group. I refer to this as the macro-level. Although speakers usually operate on the basis of shared cultural schemas, in reality (at the micro-level) they may share some but not all components of a cultural schema. This pattern of schema sharing may be diagrammatically presented as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 shows how a cultural schema may be represented in a *heterogeneously distributed* fashion across the minds of individuals. It schematically represents how members may have internalised some but not all components of a macro-level cultural schema that has been developed at the level of cultural cognition. It also shows how individuals may share some but not all elements of a cultural schema with each other. It is to be noted that the individuals who internalise aspects of a cultural schema may not be those who are viewed as insiders by the cultural group as a whole, but those ‘outsiders’ who have somehow had contact and interaction with others who have internalised aspects of these cultural schemas.

Cultural schemas are instantiated in many aspects of language. Palmer (1996) maintained that ‘[i]t is likely that all native knowledge of language
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and culture belongs to cultural schemas and the living of culture and the speaking of language consist of schemas in action’ (p. 63). Cultural schemas capture encyclopaedic meaning that is culturally constructed for many lexical items of human languages. Take an example of the word *privacy* in a variety of English such as American English. The pool of knowledge that forms a web of concepts that define *privacy* in relation to various contexts and factors is best described as the cultural schema of *privacy*. The cultural relativity of this schema is reflected in complaints that some speakers from one cultural group make about members of some others, such as, ‘They don’t understand the meaning of privacy’.

Cultural schemas may also provide a basis for pragmatic meanings. Knowledge that is assumed by culturally constructed CG, and which underlies the enactment and uptake of speech acts is largely captured in cultural schemas. In some languages, for example, the speech act of ‘greeting’ is closely associated with cultural schemas of ‘eating’ and ‘food’, whereas in some other languages it is associated with cultural schemas that relate to the health of the interlocutors and their family members. Making inferences by interlocutors about the knowledge of how to appropriately greet the hearers is based on the general assumption of shared cultural schemas, and therefore CG. A mechanism of this sort is necessary for making sense of the enactment of speech acts. In short, cultural schemas represent pools of knowledge that

*Figure 1. Diagrammatic representation of a cultural schema (from Sharifian 2011).*
provide the basis for a significant portion of semantic and pragmatic meaning in human languages, providing a substantial basis for the CG that exists between the members of a cultural group. The following section presents an example of a Persian cultural schema that serves as CG between speakers of Persian when communicating pragmatic meanings.

3. Persian cultural schema of târof

Târof is a cultural schema that underlies a significant part of everyday social interactions in Persian (Sharifian 2010) and serves as CG in the communication of several speech acts, including requesting goods and services, making refusals, and accepting offers and invitations. Several authors have noted the significance of the notion of târof in Persian, as a communicative strategy (Asdjodi 2001; Assadi 1980; Eslami Rasekh 2005; Hillmann 1981; Hodge 1957; Koutlaki 2002). The instantiation of the cultural schema of târof in conversations may be in the form of ‘ostensible’ offers and invitations, repeated rejection of offers, repeated instances of offers, hesitation in making requests, giving frequent compliments, etc. Often all the parties involved in a single conversation can make use of a combination of these realisations, in varying degrees. It is often not easy to tease out genuine offer and compliments from târof, and so speakers constantly ask each other not to engage in târof, in order to find out if the communicative act is a genuine one. The following excerpt, from the author’s personal data, reveals the instantiation of this cultural schema in a conversation in Persian:

L: Miveh befarmāyin
Fruit eat:polite.form
‘Please have some fruit’

S: Merci sarf shodeh
thanks I have.had
‘Thanks, I have had some’

L: Khabesh mikonam befarmāyin, ghābel-e
shomā ro1– nadâreh

1 The morphemes o and ro in expressions like khodesho or Cheshm-am ro are the spoken form of rā, which is a DO-marker postposition in Persian. rā can be used in Persian as a definiteness marker, a specificity marker and a topicalisation marker. For more information see Dabirmoghadam (1992) and Shokouhi and Kipka (2003).
beg I do eat:polite.form worthy-of
you do marker it.is.not
‘Please have some, they are not worthy of you’

S: Sāhābesh ghābel-eh, dast-e-toon dard
nakoneh, its.owner worthy-is hand-of-your pain
doesn’t
‘You are worthy, thanks’

L: Torokhodâ befarmâyin, namak adâreh
for.God’s.sake eat:polite.form salt doesn’t.have
‘For God’s sake please have some, it has no salt’

S: Târof nemikon-am, tâzeb shâm
khord-im târof don’t-I just dinner
had-we
‘I don’t do târof, we just had dinner’

L: Ye doonehportaghâl beoonjâhâ nemikhoreh
one orange is not.too.much
‘One orange wouldn’t be that much’

S: Chashm, dast-e-toon o kootâbnemikon-am
okay hand-of-your short will.not-I
do marker
‘Okay, I won’t turn down your offer’

A Wikipedia page dedicated to the cultural schema of târof defines it as ‘a Persian form of civility emphasizing both self-deference and social rank’ and observes that:

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2 This expression is associated with a traditional cultural belief that if you eat something that contains salt you will be indebted to the person who gave the food/fruit to you.

T’aarof also governs the rules of *hospitality*: a host is obliged to offer anything a guest might want, and a guest is equally obliged to refuse it. This ritual may repeat itself several times before the host and guest finally determine whether the host’s offer and the guest’s refusal are real or simply polite. It is possible to ask someone not to t’aarof (‘t’aarof nakonid’), but that raises new difficulties, since the request itself might be a devious type of t’aarof. At times t’aarof can lead to one performing a task that one does not want to perform. For instance, if one friend offers a ride to another friend only because they are being polite, they may become stuck in the situation if the friend agrees to get the ride. Of course if one was going by the rules of t’aarof, one would refuse the offer many times before accepting.

The Urban Dictionary defines *târof* as follows:

A Persian word for a custom that is ONLY applied in the Iranian culture. It is a way of denying your will to please your counterpart, however the will is only denied because of the custom and not to please the counterpart. But there are situations where tarof persist upon a request to make the counterpart genuinely satisfied. Tarof often causes misunderstandings between both parties and is a source for awkward situations in a social setting.4

The general aim of the cultural schema of *târof* is to create a form of social space for speakers to exercise face work and also to provide communicative tools to negotiate and lubricate social relationships. It also affords a chance for interlocutors to construct certain identities and images of themselves. For example, liberal use of *târof* can be used by hosts to portray themselves (either to themselves or to others) as very hospitable. Persian-speaking society traditionally revolves around social relations. Almost all forms of social institutions in Iran, from marriage to employment and business, hinge upon social relations. Usually a person’s ability to exercise and respond to *târof* appropriately has a significant bearing on their social relationships. Beeman (1986) characterises personal relations in Iran as an art that requires sophisticated verbal skills. For many Iranians living outside Iran, the cultural schema of *târof* is closely associated with their identity as an Iranian. Maghbouleh (2012) reports of a US summer camp for Iranian-heritageyouth, called the ‘*t’aarof* Tournament’, that makes a sport of *târof* rituals. She observes that by participating in this summer camp and engaging in

the cultural performance of *târof* these second-generation young Iranians are provided with a chance to construct an Iranian ethno-national identity which serves as a ‘powerful source material for group affinity and belonging in diaspora’ (Maghbouleh 2012: 1).

Several authors have noted the absence of the Persian concept of *târof* in English. They have used various labels to describe it, including ‘ritual courtesy’ (Beeman 1986: 56), ‘communicative routine’ (Koutlaki 2002: 1741), ‘ritual politeness’ (Koutlaki 2002: 1740), and ‘polite verbal wrestling’ (Rafiee 1992: 96). Koutlaki observes that *târof* ‘is a very complex concept, carrying different meanings in the minds of native speakers [of Persian] and baffling anyone endeavouring to describe it’. Beeman (1986: 196) maintains that ‘*te’arof* is the active, ritualised realisation of differential perceptions of superiority and inferiority in interaction. It underscores and preserves the integrity of culturally defined roles as they are carried out in the life of every Iranian, every day, in thousands of different ways’. Some non-Iranian writers have naively described *târof* as ‘insincerity’ or even ‘hypocrisy’. For example, de Bellaigue (2004: 14) states that ‘[y]ou should know about *ta’aruf*. In Arabic *ta’aruf* means behaviour that is appropriate and customary; in Iran, it has been corrupted and denotes ceremonial insincerity. Not in a pejorative sense; Iran is the only country I know where hypocrisy is prized as a social and commercial skill’. Learners of the Persian language also often find it a challenge to learn this cultural schema and to apply it in an appropriate manner according to context. For example, an American learner of Persian observes that:

Ta’arof has a built-in set of phrases and specific conditions in which these phrases are used. The challenge for a student of Persian, let alone a non-Iranian student of Persian who did not grown up ta’arof-ing (like me), is knowing when to ta’arof and when to not. For example, some months ago I invited an Iranian friend (who may or may not be an editor of this blog) to my home and offered him something to drink. He refused my offer and I figured that was that. Big mistake. I later learned that my friend was in fact rather thirsty, but he, being the polite Iranian that he is, did not ask me again for something to slake this thirst. 5

Although the word itself is Arabic in origin, the root of the cultural schema of *târof* dates back to Pre-Islamic Persia, especially to the teachings of

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Prophet Zartosht (Zarathushtra) (Asdjodi 2001; Beeman 1986). The core principles of Zoroastrian religion are ‘good words’, ‘good thoughts’ and ‘good deeds’, which are known in English as the three Gs. The use of ‘good words’ words in Zoroastrian religion is not merely a virtue but a kind of prayer. It is also a pivotal part of one’s identity as a Zoroastrian. At least part of the intention of using ‘good words’ is to break the human tendency to egotism by always elevating others vis-à-vis the self. It should also be emphasised that this use of ‘good words’ is not just a matter of verbal display but should be backed by ‘good thoughts’. That is why I refer to the whole system as a cultural schema rather than just a set of linguistic strategies. In other words, târof is a conceptual system, which feeds not only into speech but also into behaviour, as ‘good deeds’. O’Shea (2000: 122) observes that târof in Persian has both physical and verbal manifestations. She notes that ‘the former consist of activities such as jostling to be the last through the door, seeking a humble seating location, or standing to attention on the arrival or departure of other guests’. Assadi (1980: 221) also observes that ‘Tü’arof is a generic term which denotes a myriad of verbal and non-verbal deferential behaviours in Persian’ (emphasis added).

Two websites have discussed târof metaphorically in terms of ‘war’, ‘dance’ and ‘game’. Taghavi likens târof to war due to the repeated exchanges that take place between interlocutors, during which they constantly make offers, reject offers, make compliments, etc. The Persian Mirror webpage views târof as ‘a verbal dance between an offerer and an acceptor until one of them agrees’. On the same webpage târof is considered as an art that ‘in the end becomes a ritual or a game that both participants are aware of playing’. The weblog of an Iranian residing in the US characterizes târof as ‘A lie is no longer considered a sin when hospitality is the intention’ and remarks that ‘Those of us who have lived in the West for decades may feel westernized, but when it comes to Ta’arof, we remain Persians’. A Google search with the word ‘taarof’ yielded a large number of weblogs and webpages where speakers of Persian try to explain what târof is for non-Persian speakers. The following are examples of excerpts from such weblogs:

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ok, so the concept of taarof is something my friends and I discuss all the time, and how North Americans do not have this concept at all.\textsuperscript{11}

It is a cultural phenomenon that consists of refusing something even though you might want it, out of politeness. On the giving end, it is offering something... to be polite... but not really wanting to give it away.\textsuperscript{12}

Don’t waste your time trying to find out what ‘taarof’ means in English. You HAVE to be an Iranian to understand that, it’s not a ‘word’ to be translated, it’s a whole dictionary on its own!\textsuperscript{13}

Since English does not have an identical cultural schema for \textit{tārof}, speakers of Persian English may use words such as ‘compliment’ or ‘courtesy’ to refer to it. They may also use the original Persian word in their English for intracultural communication with other speakers of Persian. Interestingly, the website of the Iranian Singles Network has a section under every person’s profile with the title ‘having etiquette/\textit{tārof kardan}’, where the members are asked to specify the extent to which they like or exercise \textit{tārof}.\textsuperscript{14} As can be seen here, \textit{tārof} is translated as ‘etiquette’. Other words that may be used in Persian English to capture the concept of \textit{tārof} are ‘formal’ and ‘formality’. Consider the following example from a movie which was broadcast on Jame-Jam Satellite Channel:

(Speaker A is talking to speaker B at the door of B’s house)

\begin{quote}
A: \textit{Biā too} (meaning ‘Come in’) \\
Subtitle: ‘Come in’. \\
B: \textit{Mozâhem nemisham} (meaning ‘I won’t bother you’) \\
Subtitle: ‘I won’t trouble you’. \\
A: \textit{Tārof nakon} (meaning ‘don’t do tārof’”) \\
Subtitle: ‘Stop being formal’. 
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{11} http://persianculture.wordpress.com/2008/12/24/taarof/ (accessed 30/09/2012).
\textsuperscript{12} http://www.plexusinstitute.org/blogpost/656763/120250/You-think-communication-is-complex-Try-Taarof (accessed 30/09/2012).
\textsuperscript{14} http://www.iraniansingles.com/ (accessed 30/09/2012).
B: *Na jooneh to, bâyad beram* (meaning ‘no, really I have to go’)

Subtitle: ‘Thanks, I have to go’.

In light of the observations made so far in this chapter about târof, it is clear that it is not intrinsically a display of formality. In fact the above exchange does not reflect a formal conversation. Both speakers are using singular forms to address each other, which is one characteristic of a familiar style. If the conversation had been formal, they would have used plural forms: *biâyin* ‘come:pt’ instead of *bià* ‘come:sg’, *nakonin* ‘don’t.do:pt’ instead of *nakon* ‘don’t.do:sg’, and *shomâ* ‘you:pt’ instead of *to* ‘you:sg’. Overall, it should be clear from the examples presented in this section that unfamiliarity with the Persian cultural schema of târof, and therefore absence of common ground, on the part of non-Persian speakers could lead to significant miscommunication with speakers of Persian, when the parties speak either English or Persian.

4. Concluding remarks

In this paper I have made an attempt to show how cultural schemas can serve as common ground between interlocutors coming from the same cultural background, in particular when communicating pragmatic meanings. Often such cultural schemas are grounded in cultural traditions that are themselves grounded in fundamental worldviews such as religion. The paper elaborates on the case of the Persian cultural schema of târof and reveals how this cultural schema underlies the enactment of several speech acts among speakers of Persian and how unfamiliarity with this cultural schema presents a challenge for non-Persian speakers. As mentioned earlier, although the degree to which this schema is shared across the community of Persian speakers varies from one individual to another, speakers usually operate on the basis of the assumption of shared knowledge or ‘common ground’.

 References


