

# Intracultural Iranian Persuasion

## The Case of Scholarship Application Letters

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### Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the ways in which rhetorical strategies, as a sub-genre of persuasive discourse, are deployed in scholarship application letters in Iran in Persian and English. To this end, 96 application letters for a fictitious scholarship were written by Iranian university students and were further analyzed according to a framework initially proposed by James, Scholfield and Ypsilandis (1994). Aristotle's taxonomy of logos, ethos and pathos was employed to examine the rhetorical organization or moves in this sample and a mixed analysis with quantitative statistics and qualitative comments was followed. The results showed significant differences in the use of strategies between the two versions of the data collected (Persian and English) in different parts of the letters, such as greetings, openings, self-presentation, and letter closing. On the other hand, it was observed that the most frequently rhetorical appeals selected by the applicants lie under the logos and pathos categories in both Persian and English letters.

**Keywords:** *Application Letters, Intercultural Communication, Persuasive Writing, Pathos, Persuasion, Logos, Rhetoric*

### 1. Introduction

Persuasive writing could be broadly seen in every document one would ever write to be read by another person (Frederick 2012) for a specific purpose. Aristotle's (384-322 B.C.) rhetoric underpinned many studies of persuasive discourse using his three modes of arguments; namely, logos or arguments found in the issue itself, ethos or arguments based on the rhetor's character and reputation, and pathos or arguments that appeal to the emotions of the receiver (Crowley & Hawhee 2004). To date, a number of studies have investigated the application of Aristotelian rhetorical strategies (i.e. ethos, pathos, and logos) in various genres such as political discourse (e.g. Brostein 2013; Erisen & Villalobos 2014; Jay 2006; Mshvenieradze 2013; Samuel-Azran, Yarchi, & Wolfsfeld 2015), meetings (e.g. Clifton & Van de Mierop 2010), social/environmental reports (e.g. Higgins & Walker 2012), vision statements of organizations (e.g. Eryilmaz 2014), crisis communication (e.g. Wang 2016) and academic writing (e.g. Al-Momani 2014; Chakorn 2006; Hamimid 2015). However, as an academic promotional genre (e.g. Bhatia 1993) and a type of persuasive writing, research on scholarship letters remains largely understudied.

Scholarship letters play a crucial role in students' admission process (locally and globally), usually presenting a great challenge due to "their unfamiliarity with the conventions of the genre, its discourse community, and its audience expectation" (Ding 2007:368). Presenting oneself in a suitable manner, through a letter of application (also known as a cover letter) for a scholarship could add to and increase chances of getting educational rewards and advance a career. This is highly dependent on how the applicant implements persuasive linguistic conventions (typically related to a context, situation or audience) in an effectively convincing communication. Indeed, writing an application letter requires the

writer to apply rhetorical strategies to persuade the reader. This study wishes to investigate the details of this essential skill and contribute to the discussion on the topic by a) recording and analyzing the persuasive strategies employed by Iranian speakers intra-culturally when writing in their L1, and b) inter-culturally, when writing in English. In addition to these short-term targets, there is one more; i.e. to assist towards the creation of an international map of persuasion across languages and cultures with data resulting from empirical or experimental research and thus improve understanding between nations.

Research on letters written for various academic genres has been abundant: submission letters (e.g. Shaw, Kuteeva & Okamura 2014), evaluation letters for tenure or promotion (e.g. Hyon 2008), recommendation letters (e.g. Schmader, Whitehead & Wysocki 2007), application letters (e.g. James, Scholfield & Ypsilandis 1992, 1994; Ypsilandis, 1994; Psaltou-Joycey & Ypsilandis, 2000; Henry & Roseberry 2001; Khan & Tin 2012; Rahim & Zainal Arifin 2014; Al Mansur, Al Abbad & Ypsilandis (submitted), and university students' informal requests (Ting 2018). Most studies on persuasive writing, however, encompass an intercultural orientation, while few have examined this topic intraculturally, specifically in the Iranian context. Therefore, the objective of this intracultural study was two-fold: first, by taking a genre-analysis approach into account, the study examined the rhetorical patterns (i.e. moves) in Iranian university students' scholarship letters written in English and Persian, and second, it investigated the use of rhetorical appeals in such letters based on Aristotle's principles of rhetoric, i.e. logos, pathos, and ethos. It was hypothesized that Iranian persuasion would fall into Johnstone's (1989) claim and belong to 'eastern and more religious cultures' and that these language conventions would be also witnessed and transferred when Iranians would write in an L2. Aristotle's suggested framework was selected because of the fact that it provided the foundation of more recent other developments, i.e. those of Connor and Lauer (1985) and Johnstone (1989), and that it provided the ideal framework for the examination of this sample with small numbers of participants, particularly since a statistical analysis was implemented.

## 2. Theoretical Background

### 2.1. Genre Analysis of Application Letters

Swales's (1990) analysis of genre is based on moves as a "discoursal or rhetorical unit that performs a coherent communicative function in a written or spoken discourse" (Swales 2004:228-229) and smaller units identified as steps. More attention has been paid to what Swales (1996) described as "occluded genre", which is a communicative event not visible in published sources. Application letters are the example of *occluded genre*, which is gathering a growing body of literature in recent years, e.g. investigation of interpersonal meaning in American, Asian, and European solicited and unsolicited application letters (Purhayati 2016), genre analysis of university application letters (Hsaio 2004), rhetorical moves and their linguistic features in letters of applications for lectureship in Cambodia (Bophan 2008), and studying moves along with their linguistic realizations in the genre of job application letters in Pakistan (Khan & Tin 2012). Some of these studies examined this issue in real situations, most concentrating on job application letters in academia or elsewhere. Comparatively, less has been discussed on applications for scholarship within academic environments, which is the topic of this study.

### 2.2. Rhetorical Analysis of Persuasive Writing

Lack of a single definition for what persuasion in writing is makes it less amenable to an objective measurement (Savolainen 2014). It is widely acknowledged that not only are written or oral languages used as a means of persuasion, but other means of communication are also developed to influence people's values and actions, attitudes and beliefs from simple to more complicated ones, e.g. infants communicate successfully with their parents through the act of crying while adults use several paralinguistic rhetorical structures to deliver the task (Al Mansur, Al Abbad & Ypsilandis, submitted). It may be argued that persuasion would need to be investigated in two broad categories and by different types of experts, i.e. language communication by (applied) linguists, and communication, which may involve paralinguistic or social features, mostly by sociologists. Nowadays, the rhetorical analysis is using an interpretive function to understand communications. According to Selzer (2004:281), "Rhetorical analysis or rhetorical criticism can be understood as an effort to understand how people within specific social situations attempt to influence others through language". In other words, rhetorical analyses are used to examine to what

extent a form of communication is persuasive. As Burke (1969:72) puts it, “Wherever there is persuasion, there is rhetoric. And wherever there is meaning, there is persuasion”. According to Connor and Lauer (1985), persuasive written discourse is the one “which integrates the three appeals in its effort to effect cooperation and identification with an audience (p. 313)”. These three appeals, selected to be adopted in the analysis of this study, are briefly explained below.

In this context, studies on Iranian persuasion remain comparatively small if non-existent. By that respect, this is an initial investigation on the topic, wishing to increase interest and offer the foundations for further discussion and explorations. Nevertheless, by attempting to add qualitative comments where deemed necessary, this study moves away from a purely ethnographic survey.

### **2.2.1. Logical Appeal**

This is persuasion by the logic of argument which refers to the intellect where the audience usually finds certain patterns, conventions and modes of *reasoning* to be convincing and persuasive. The audience relies on reasoning, statistics and facts and figures to make their judgments. Instances of rational appeals in persuasive writing are descriptive, narrative, by classification (including definition), by comparison (including analogy) or contrast, by degree and authority through examples, and writings which provide cause/effect, model and stages in process discussing the means/end, the consequences, and state ideals or principles and information e.g. facts, statistics (Connor & Lauer 1985).

### **2.2.2. Ethical Appeal**

Aristotle defined ethos as the trustworthiness or credibility that the writer establishes in his/her writing. Ethos derives from the Greek word ethico (ἠθικό), which means morals (also virtue). It is a means of persuasion that shows the morals of the speaker to establish more credibility in the minds of the audience and thus, by the moral force, ethics and credibility of the speaker. In order to persuade the audience through credibility (ethos) appeals, writers use firsthand experience, respect for audience’s interests and points of views, refer to writer-audience shared interests and points of view, and state writer’s good character and/or judgment(Connor & Lauer 1985).

### **2.2.3. Pathos (Emotional) Appeal**

Pathos is an emotional argumentation appealing to the audience’s compassion and attempts to evoke their emotions (e.g., anger, fear, sadness, satisfaction, contempt, happiness, and hope). According to Aristotle (1984:91-92), “The emotions are all those feelings that so change men as to affect their judgments and that are also attended by pain or pleasure. Such are anger, pity, fear, and the like, with their opposites”. In order to persuade the audience through affective appeals, writers employ emotion in audience’s situations, raise audience’s empathy, refer to audience’s values, depict vivid pictures, and use charged language (Connor & Lauer 1985).

Table 1 summarizes Aristotle’s codification and framework.

**Table 1:** Aristotle’s framework (adopted from Bernanke, 2010)

Logos	The appeal to logic, means to convince an audience by use of logic or reason
Pathos	The emotional appeal, means to persuade an audience by appealing to their emotions
Ethos	The ethical appeal means to convince an audience of the author’s credibility or character.

## **3. Method**

### 3.1. Participants

Data were collected from 48 Iranian native speakers of Persian studying English as a foreign language at Payame Noor Universities in Esfahan, Iran. The majority of the participants were female, and their age ranged from 18 to 30. The students were in their second or third year of study (BA in English) at the university. The average language level of the sample was intermediate and lower intermediate. Persuasive strategies or moves were evaluated by three researchers who acted as 'judges' of the type of strategy employed.

### 3.2. Instruments

The instrument was adopted from James, Scholfield and Ypsilandis' (1992) study on persuasive writing adapted to accommodate the Iranian setting. The instrument contained two sections; the first part attempted to elicit personal information about the participants, such as age, gender, language background, the level of language proficiency, and education (independent variables), while the second part introduced a hypothetical scholarship for study visits to the UK. Participants were invited to write an application for the task in order to persuade the committee 'why they believed they were eligible and qualified to be granted the award'. This second part acted as the stimulus for the collection of the main data (dependent variable). The SPSS statistical package (version 22) was employed to calculate descriptive and inferential statistics where appropriate.

### 3.3. Design and Procedure

Participants were provided with the instrument of the study having no instructions as to how to proceed or what to include in their letters and with no restrictions other than the time allocated for the task (two hours). This way, participants were encouraged to express themselves freely and in the way they felt most appropriate for the situation.

The instructions for the writing task were provided in English and Persian. Focus was on the quality and the investigation of this aspect of discourse in an authentic environment (students are familiar with this genre as they often need to produce this type of letters) and in a quasi-authentic setting (where the participants were aware that this was a fictitious scholarship). Data were collected from an initial sample of 66 Iranians, all majoring in English at the university of Esfahan. The two letters (in English and Persian) were completed in two different sessions with a two-week interval.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

Around 132 letters in English and Persian were collected; however, only 96 letters (48 letters in each language) were selected to be coded (72.7%). Those letters which were incomplete or did not follow the instructions were discarded (27.3 rejection rate). To obtain more reliable data, each letter was coded by two raters and further discussed with a third reviewer; (interrater reliability coefficient of 0.9).

The framework proposed by Al Mansur, Al Abbad and Ypsilandis (submitted) was initially adopted and extended for the purposes of the present study. Moreover, Aristotle's taxonomy of logos, ethos, and pathos strategies was drawn upon to examine the persuasive strategies. All the letters were studied separately and examined for identification of recurrent patterns. The unit of analysis was sentence. Initially, strategies are presented according to their placements in the letter with one representative example. At the second stage, frequencies and percentages of the strategies in both languages are offered, followed by qualitative comments for each strategy from the Persian and English corpus and comparisons of similar studies where necessary. At the third stage, a rhetorical analysis, following Aristotle's framework for each possible tactical combination, is presented and a summarized list with examples of each section is then provided. At the final stage, associations between the dependent variables are presented. Table 2 below, presents the strategies identified with one representative example.

**Table 2:** Framework adopted and adapted from Al Mansur, Al Abbad and Ypsilandis, (submitted)

Strategy	Examples
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Direct reference to Allah	In the name of God
Greeting statement(salutation)	Hello, Mr..., sir or madam, dear scholarship committee, etc.
Opening statement	I want to apply for your scholarship
Indirect strategy to show manners	First, I should say thank you to give me permission that I ask you for scholarship study at Tehran University
Self-presentation	My name is XXXX I am 20 and I study English for 7 years. I am a student at Najafabad University and my major is English translation.
Direct request for scholarship	I would be grateful if you could accept me
Indirect request for scholarship	Soafter reading your advertisement for the scholarship, I decided to write this letter and give myself a chance.
Letter closing	sincerely yours, thank you, etc.

After the data were coded, they were entered into SPSS for further descriptive (i.e. frequency) and inferential (i.e. chi-square) analyses.

## 4. Results

The findings are presented in three sections: 1) results of the move analysis based on Al Mansur, Al Abbad and Ypsilandis' framework, 2) results of rhetorical the analysis based on Aristotle's framework, and c) results of the inferential statistics.

### 4.1. Move analysis

Table3 displays a summary of the results pertaining to the move analysis in the English and Persian corpora.

**Table 3:** *Frequency and percentage of the strategies in English and Persian letters*

Strategies	Sub-strategy	English		Persian	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Direct reference to Allah		17	35.41%	22	45.83%
Greetings (salutation)		34	70.83%	46	95.83%
Openings		25	52.08%	12	25%
Indirect strategy to show manners		13	27.08%	15	31.25%
Self-presentation		21	43.75%	34	70.83%

Request for scholarship	Direct request for scholarship	31	64.58%	39	81.25%
	Indirect request for scholarship	5	10.41%	1	2.08%
Letter closing		24	50%	36	75%

Findings are discussed in detail with examples, in the following seven sections.

#### **4.1.1. Direct Reference to Allah**

In Iran, the typical opening in most formal letter-types is through the religious expression “In the name of Allah”. Almost every formal communicative event regardless of the channel starts with this religious opening (i.e. a talk at university, TV news, wedding invitation cards). In other words, beginning the formal spoken and written speech with such and similar expressions reflects the norms in the formal Iranian discourse. However, to open informal letters with religious expressions might insulate the religious beliefs of the writers or his pretention to be a believer. This religious opening was witnessed in 35.41% of the letters in English and in 45.83% of the letters in Persian. The findings show that although it is not expected to start letters in English with a reference to Allah, one third of these Iranian EFL learners transferred this strategy when writing in English and half used it in Persian. The other two-thirds of the sample did not contain this ‘cliché’ when participants wrote in English, probably in order to show their awareness of the different cultural values surrounding the L2. It is also interesting to notice that in more than half of the cases, the participants did not use this religious opening even when writing in Persian. Arguably, the majority of those who used it in Persian transferred in English, while those who did not use it at all in their L1 did not also use it in the L2.

#### **4.1.2. Greetings (Salutation)**

Some expressions, such as *با عرض سلام و ادب و احترام* (ba ærze sælam væ ædæb væ ehteram) literally *Hello and Respect*, are used in Persian at the beginning of formal letters as another form of salutation. In case the addressee is known to the writer, the salutation will be extended to include the title and last name of the addressee. If, on the other hand, the addressee is not known yet, the position s/he holds is referred. In this case, the salutation can configure the job status only. In Western cultures, however, salutations in most cases simply start with “Dear X”. As shown in Table 3, greeting statements were used in 70.83% and 95.83% of the English and Persian letters respectively, of either form. In addition, a closer inspection of the data showed that in the 34 English letters starting with greetings, the expected English form occurred 11 times, while a transfer of the Persian letter opening was found in the rest of 23 cases. In other words, 23 participants started their English letters with the expression *Hello* which is not as formal as the situation required. These results may be explained by the fact that these participants did not possess the expected greeting structure of an English formal letter. Alternatively, it could be posited that they did not realize the formality of the situation or even that they were not aware of the pragmatic differences between the two greetings (*Hello* and *Dear X*). At this stage, this finding cannot be further clarified and the possibilities remain as a hypothesis for further studies.

#### **4.1.3. Opening Statement**

As usually required in application writing, the opening statement is a declaration by the applicant thereby explaining the reason for writing. Often, it is supported by a reference number which the applicant is expected to report in his/her letter or refer to the vacancies in a call/advertisement for which the letter is written. In this sample, opening statements were used more frequently in English letters (almost double as much) than in Persian. Some examples from each language are presented below:

##### **Examples from the English corpus**

a) I saw your advertisement in a newspaper and I want to take part in your scholarship.

b) I heard about a scholarship study at UK and I want to write my reasons about taking this scholarship.

Although the English language works mostly with understatement or at least with less direct statements, the examples above might have been considered very direct when written in English. Again, this is an instance that could be explained by either the subjects' lack of linguistic input or their inability to recognize the formality required in this situation (same as above). The frequent use of opening statements in the English corpus compared to the Persian, however, might indicate that participants considered writing an opening statement more necessary in English letters than in Persian.

#### **Example from the Persian corpus**

با توجه به شرایط مناسب شما برای بورسیه و همچنین کشوری که زبان مادری آن انگلیسی است تصمیم به شرکت در این بورسیه را دارم.

*a) I decided to apply for this scholarship because of the scholarship appropriate conditions and the native language of the target country.*

#### **4.1.4. Indirect Strategy to Show Manners**

A few indirect strategies were found in several occasions (see Table 3 for details). These were incorporated either at the beginning or toward the end of the letter and included thanking notes, showing politeness. These expressions may function as indirect persuasive strategies in an effort by the applicant to show manners. These statements appeared in 13 letters in English (27.08%) and 15 letters (31.25%) in Persian. This may well be interpreted as another case of transfer. Some examples from each corpus are presented below:

#### **Examples from the English corpus**

a) Thank you for giving me this situation to follow my dreams

b) Thank you for giving me this chance and opportunity

These examples show that participants attempted to show manners and to positively impress the recipient (as in the study by James, Scholfield and Ypsilandis, 1994). Example (a) was considered as an 'emotional blackmail' by the English natives of the above-mentioned study, since it implies that if the participants do not receive the scholarship, their dreams will be ruined. This example corroborates the ideas of James, Scholfield and Ypsilandis (1992), who suggested that such examples encompassed a violation of Grice's (1975) second maxim of politeness: give the hearer (reader) options. In addition, in example (b), the participants seem to be thanking the recipient for something s/he has not yet done. According to James, Scholfield and Ypsilandis (1992), the findings violate another Grice's maxim of politeness in that the speaker should not impose on the hearer (reader). In other words, "a native speaker would be unlikely to thank the recipient in advance since this would imply that s/he is absolutely confident of the panel's favorable consideration" (James, Scholfield & Ypsilandis 1992:187). Therefore, these results would be expected to instigate a pragmatic failure as it has been reported in the study mentioned above.

#### **Example from the Persian corpus**

با سپاس فراوان از شما اساتید محترم جهت تهیه و اعطای این بورسیه

*a) With appreciation a lot from you [second person plural] professors honorable for preparing and granting this scholarship.*

Notice that, in the Persian corpus, participants express their respect to the committee as well as thanking them 'for the opportunity to apply for the scholarship'. However, the expressions of showing respect to the committee were not registered in the English corpus, possibly displaying awareness of the target language pragmatics.

#### **4.1.5. Self-presentation**

This part was dedicated to the presentation of oneself where information about the applicant was offered. This strategy was used considerably more frequently in the Persian letters (70.83%) and less in the English (43.75%). The difference in the size of the occurrence could be explained in participant's lack of attention to self-presentation rather than a gap of knowledge. Some examples from each corpus are presented below:

#### **Example from the English corpus**

a) My name is X (name of applicant). I am 20 and I study English for 7 years. I am a student at Najaf Abad University and my major is English translation.

#### **Example from the Persian corpus**

اینجانب\*\*\* دانشجوی رشته مترجمی زبان انگلیسی متولد سال 1373، اهل و ساکن اصفهان می باشم.

a) *This is XXX (student's name), student of English language translation, born in 1994, and living in Esfahan.*

Both English and Persian examples are similar in expressions except that in the English corpus, the presentation of oneself is more direct using the first personal pronoun, while in the Persian version, the presentation takes the form of a formal impersonal introduction e.g. 'I am, My name is' versus 'This is', implying that the participants showed awareness of the difference between the two languages.

#### **4.1.6. Request for Scholarship**

Participants expressed their requests in two basic formats:

A) Through requests expressing a *direct* appeal to the recipient examples *b* and *c*, below) or desires expressed in the form of a direct wish (example *a*) and through *indirect* requests asking for the scholarship in an indirect manner. Direct requests were significantly more than the indirect in both letters (English and Persian). Examples of English direct requests are as follows:

#### **Examples from the English corpus**

a) I would be grateful if you could accept me

b) Would you mind if I asked your group to choose me as an applicant for scholarship

c) I hope you will accept my request

Notice that in example *a* the request is expressed in an affirmative mode while in *b* in a more polite inquiring fashion. However, in both cases these persuasive strategies would not be accepted in English because of being unsuitable for a situation of this type, stating the obvious (all applicants are writing in the hope of winning the scholarship).

#### **Examples from the Persian corpus**

a) لطفا درخواست من را بپذیرید.

a) *Please accept my application.*

b) در آخر عاجزانه از شما درخواست می کنم که این فرصت را به این دانشجوی تشنه یادگیری بدهید و اینجانب را در رسیدن به اهداف خود یاری نمایید.

b) *At the end, I humbly beg you to grant me this scholarship, thereby helping me achieve my goals.*

In the Persian examples *a* and *b*, the request is expressed in an alarming direct manner as the applicant is almost begging the committee for a favorable decision, something that was not registered in the English

versions. This, again, is an example in which the participants show their knowledge of the target language values. In particular, example *b* is not supposed to be transferred to English as this would constitute a significant failure by violating Grice's (1975) maxim of politeness, in which the participants attempt to impose their opinion on the recipient while leaving him/her no options (an emotional blackmail).

B) Through the following *indirect* requests.

### Examples from the English corpus

a) After I read your advertisement for the scholarship, I decided to write this letter and give myself a chance.

b) I wish I hear good news from you,

c) I thought it might be a good idea to choose someone for the scholarship who really interested in English language.

Example (a) seems to be a violation of the Gricean maxim of quantity regarding redundancy in speaking/writing. In other words, the speaker/writer should be as informative as required and not state more than what is necessary. Example (b) is colloquial and thus inappropriate for such a situation in English. In example (c), the applicant seems to be advising the committee on what criteria to base their selection and thus violates the applicant/awarding body margin. It may be hypothesized that some applicants have tried to transfer the persuasive move registered in Persian, example (a) below, to English in a more delicate style. This shows that they find themselves in an in-between interlanguage stage towards the acquisition of the pragmatics related to this speech act.

Below, the only Persian indirect request is presented:

امیدوارم این بورس به کسی تعلق بگیرد که واقعا به زبان انگلیسی علاقه مند بوده و قصد تحصیل علم را به درستی داشته باشد.

*a) I hope this scholarship to be granted to someone who is really interested in English language and has an effective plan for pursuing his studies.*

In this example, the author of the letter again seems to be violating the borderline between an applicant and a committee by advising the committee on what to base their selection upon. The fact that this strategy appears in L1 and the L2 may be another clear instance of language transfer.

### 4.1.7. Letter Closing

Formal letters usually end with a concluding part and, in the case of application letters, the writer typically asks for further notification of the final results. This closing remark appeared in 50% of the English letters and in 75% of the Persian letters. Similar to the *Greetings* part above, these findings could be attributed to the unfamiliarity of participants with the appropriate closing remarks and the way they are expressed in English.

### Examples from the English corpus

a) Thank you for reading my scholarship and thank you to give me that chance.

b) I would be grateful if you could accept me; Yours faithfully

· Examples from the Persian corpus

امید است که بتوانم یکی از کاندیدان این امر باشم و درخواست این بنده حقیر را بپذیرید. با سپاس فراوان (a)

a) I hope I would be one of the candidates and you accept my request. Thanks a lot

Again, this is a clear case of language transfer from Persian into English, which would cause pragmatic infelicities in English, similar to the study of James, Scholfield and Ypsilandis (1992).

## 4.2. Rhetorical Analysis

This section presents the results relating to the analysis of the persuasive strategies by using Aristotle's taxonomy that appeared in the main part of the letters (logos, ethos, and pathos). Table 4 demonstrates the distribution of strategies across the corpus.

**Table 4:** *Rhetorical analysis of Persuasive Writing based on Aristotle Appeals*

	English Corpus		Persian Corpus	
Logos	10	20.83%	13	27.08%
Pathos	9	18.75%	8	16.66%
Logos+ Pathos	27	56.25%	25	52.08%
Pathos+ Ethos	1	2.08%	1	2.08%
Ethos+ Pathos+ logos	1	2.08%	1	2.08%

As shown in Table 4, logos and pathos were used more frequently than ethos. In more details, the findings showed that the participants used logos in 20.83% and 27.08% of the English and the Persian letters, respectively. Moreover, they used pathos in 18.75% of the English letters and 16.66% of the Persian letters. Notice that the percentages do not differ significantly and thus it may be concluded that applicants maintain an almost similar persuasive tactic in both letters, which supports the transfer hypothesis. Likewise, the findings showed that the participants used logos proceeded by pathos in 56.25% of the English letters and 52.08% of the Persian letters. Furthermore, pathos followed by ethos was employed in 2.08% of the English and the Persian letters. Finally, ethos followed by pathos and logos were used in 2.08% of both languages.

In sum, in their scholarship application letters, Iranian students adhered to logos and pathos as their main tactics of persuasion. A possible explanation for this might be that Iranian students considered stating reasons and stirring up people's emotions as a means of gaining the scholarship. A number of additional strategies have been identified in the analysis of the argument parts and are presented in Table 5.

**Table 5:** *Strategies adopted by students in Scholarship application letters*

Strategies of persuasion
Making a good impression
Making promises
Seeking sympathy
Expressing ability
Stating facts
Expressing hopes and dreams

These strategies are categorized according to the Aristotle's three-category framework of persuasion. They are presented in Table 6 and discussed in the following sections.

**Table 6:** *Acts in each persuasive technique to add power to the Scholarship application letter*

Pathos	Logos	Ethos
Making a good impression Seeking sympathy Making promises Expressing hopes and dreams	Stating reasons	Explaining ability

#### 4.2.1. Logos Appeals

*Stating facts:* Logical appeals were mostly expressed with reference to the applicants' educational background, teaching experiences, etc. Examples from English and Persian corpora are as follows:

a) I think I am suitable for giving the scholarship because of some reasons. One of them is about my ability to speak English. Other one is about my listening comprehension. I am able to understand English audio and video.

بنا براینکه به صورت اختصاصی در رشته زبان انگلیسی فعالیت داشته و در مواردی نیز تدریس و ترجمه دارم (b)

b) *Because I have been particularly involved in English language learning and, at times/occasionally, teaching and translating.*

#### 4.2.2. Pathos Appeals

*Serving the society/Showing altruism:* a statement was expressed by a declaration 'to serve the country and the people once the study is over', possibly to create a positive climax in his favor and show altruism (concern for the welfare of others). In addition, these statements aim to show some social ethos to the recipient and may be grouped equally well in either of the two categories. Examples from the English and the Persian corpora are as follows:

a) I want to be a good and useful person in my society and nothing can stop me from my purpose.

برای رسیدن به هدف خود یعنی خدمت به جامعه و آموزش صحیح به دیگران خواهان این بورسیه می باشم (b)

b) *I am seeking this scholarship to achieve my goals, that is, serving my society and teaching others appropriately.*

These examples may be interpreted as an attempt by participants who used it to favorably influence the recipients' decision and create a positive effect on that their decision would not only make a difference in the applicants' life but also in the entire Iranian society.

*Seeking sympathy:* another way to favorably impress the reader was to seek sympathy for their financial situation in order to convince the committee to get the financial aid.

a) I try hard to travel to the UK and other English speaking countries to continue my study, but it is very hard for me because I have not enough money for this.

اینجانب در خانواده ای زندگی می کنم که دارای وضع مالی متوسط بوده و از عهده پرداخت مخارج سفر من به خارج از کشور برنمی آیند (b)

b) *I come from a middle-class family that cannot afford the expenses to send me abroad.*

Making a direct reference to their financial background in both letters is one more example of cultural transfer which however would have been perceived in British English as a type of emotional blackmail as in James, Scholfield and Ypsilandis (1992).

*Making promises*: the participants occasionally made promises (in both letters), should they have been awarded the scholarship. In these statements, they show their determination 'to succeed' in order to favorably impress the recipient.

a) I promise if I am chosen for the scholarship, I will try my best to succeed.

(b) من این فرصت تکرار نشدنی را هدر نخواهم داد و از اعتمادی که به من خواهد شد بهترین استفاده را خواهم کرد.

b) *I will not lose this unique opportunity and will do my best to make most of it.*

Examples(a) and (b) are clear cases of the transfer of cultural values which would not carry the same weight in the target L2.

*Expressing hopes and dreams*: In these statements, the applicant shares his/her personal feelings with the recipient to create a common ground or build familiarity with him/her.

a) After I finished my study, I want to come back to my country and to teach English to people who interested in English language.

(b) این یک موقعیت عالی برای رسیدن به درجات بالایی علمی بوده و می تواند در آینده شغلی و تحصیلی من نقش موثری ایفا کند و باعث پیشرفت من شود.

b) *This is a great opportunity to achieve the highest level of education and can play a vital/central/pivotal role in my future success through furthering my future career and promoting the progress of my studies.*

The opinion of the judges in the two above statements differed: a) the Iranian side considered statements (a) and (b) as evidence of pathos arguments while the Greek side saw statement (a) as an attempt by the applicant to show a noble motive for requesting the scholarship and thus considered it Ethos.

### 4.2.3. Ethos Appeals

*Expressing egocentric claims of ability*: There are instances of ethos by referring to their ability to be legible to get the scholarship.

a) English is an international language, so I think everybody needs to learn the language and I have the ability to use this opportunity to improve my English language.

(b) من دانشجویی سخت کوش و با استعداد هستم و می خواهم از این فرصت برای تقویت زبان انگلیسی خود استفاده کنم.

b) I am a studious student, and I have the ability to use this opportunity to improve my English language.

Both these examples can be seen as either arguments of logos or ethos appeals expressing respect of the target language and attempting to gain respect by claiming ability in a rather egocentric manner.

### 4.3. Associations between the dependent variables

The data were further analyzed for inferential statistics (i.e.chi-square test), the result of which is presented in Table 7.

**Table 7:** Results of chi-square test

Strategy	Sub-strategy	Df	Sig.
Direct reference to Allah		1	.29

Greetings (salutation)		1	.01*
Openings		1	.00*
Indirect strategy to show manners		1	.65
Self-presentation		1	.00*
Request for scholarship	Direct request for scholarship	1	.06
	Indirect request for scholarship	1	.09
Letter closing		1	.01*

There were statistically significant differences in the use of *Greetings*, *Openings*, *Self-presentation*, and *letter closing* in the two English and Persian corpora. Two alternative interpretations might account for the observed differences: a) the participants attempted to accommodate to what they thought it was expected in the target L2 culture and thus decided to express themselves in a different manner, and b) the participants did not possess the necessary linguistic repertoire to express themselves and thus adopted a much simpler version when writing in the L2. In particular, differences in *greetings* and *letter closing* were attributed to the possibility of the participants not being familiar with the relevant structures of the English language and thus not possessing adequate knowledge in this area to express themselves sufficiently in the L2. The difference is then recognized as the *lack of knowledge* of L2 language functions.

On the other hand, the insignificant differences spotted in the frequencies of the *reference to Allah*, *indirect strategy employed*, and *request for scholarship*, though different in terms of the percentages, could be attributed to transfer of the L1 language systems to the L2. Despite being statistically insignificant, these differences may lead to a serious pragmatic failure between the author and British natives of the language.

## 5. Conclusion and Discussion

The purpose of the current study was to examine the persuasive strategies used by Iranian students when writing application letters in Persian and English for scholarships in an intracultural environment.

The initial hypothesis was partially supported by the evidence in that several cases of language conventions transfer were witnessed. The findings revealed instances of pragmatic transfer from Persian to English, e.g. when writing a formal letter of scholarship application, where language learners did not appropriately use the expected structure 'Dear X' and started their letters instead with a form of the ordinary Persian formal letter opening greeting *hello and respect*, or in modes of self-presentation and pathos letter closing. These examples come in support of Fitzmaurice's (2000) statement in that, "both literary and linguistic perspectives on the language of letter focus on the discourse produced by writer of the letter and his world". Iranian persuasion proved also to be highly influenced by the Islamic religion. In more details, the use of direct reference to Allah (i.e. In the name of God) before the opening and at the top of the letters demonstrated the effect of Islamic cultural values. These findings are in line with Al-Momani's (2014) study which contained similar openings. A prayer such as "May God protect you to serve justice" [translation from the original article] was regarded as "a cliché in all types of formal letters" (Al-Momani 2014:711). Notice that in no instance, these religious conventions were transferred to the L2. With regard to Aristotle's rhetorical appeals, the findings showed that *logos* and *pathos* were frequently used in both Persian and English letters. Use of *pathos* strategies confirms Johnstone's (1989) hypothesis and is typically expected by Eastern societies. On the other hand, the noticeable use of *logos* argumentation (quasi-logical persuasion) which appeared extensively in most letters designated that

cultures are not stable and are moving towards a universal mode of expression. This is in contrast to earlier claims of analogical persuasion being the feature of oriental cultures.

The two corpora also contained several attempts of accommodation to what the applicants thought was expected to be used in the target L2 culture. In these, the subjects decided to express themselves in a different manner than in the L1 letters and significant differences were registered in the greetings, openings, self-presentation, and letter closing sections.

These applicants, English language learners, seemed to show that they are in an interlanguage stage on route to acquire target language norms. On the other hand, the cases of clear language transfer signify that when applicants are not made aware of the differences or when they lack the necessary linguistic means at their disposal, they succumbed and transfer their L1 cultural linguistic norms.

With regard to the section where a reference to Allah was recorded (almost half of the participants of the sample in Persian and one-third in English), a question may arise as to whether this finding would show evidence of cultural change for those who decided not to use it. It is our view that these findings may not be extrapolated at this stage, as a) the sample size was too small to allow the generalization of findings, and b) the findings may be somewhat attributed to the unfamiliarity of the participants with genre structures of this kind. It may be concluded, however, that application writing may need to become part of the school curriculum to familiarize and raise students' awareness of the details of this genre both in Persian and perhaps in English, a language that is today considered to be a lingua franca.

The findings of this study have a number of practical implications. First, with regard to application letters, teachers may encourage students to analyze different types of application letters, increase their awareness of diverse styles commonly used in different languages. Students equipped with genre knowledge and prepared for authentic writing tasks in different academic contexts may become aware of the consequences of the impact of their strategies and style; however, it should be left to them to decide how to proceed to the final selection. This, in turn, is likely to enhance chances of success and their writing quality. Second, these dataset findings are in accordance with Kuo's and Lai's (2007) claims in that the language and culture are interwoven mutually, affecting each other. Language learners may be encouraged to immerse themselves into a second language culture in addition to the structures of their own language. Third, in order to teach writing of different types of application letters, ESP practitioners may need to increase their awareness of not only the discussed range of features, but also consider where they are to be used and for what purposes (Henry & Roseberry 2001).

One of the shortcomings of this research is that the findings are obtained from an analysis of only 48 application letters. In effect, this study serves as the first step into this area of persuasive writing and thus it would seem necessary to conduct more research into this field complemented with interviews with participants to clarify whether their selections are conscious or these are the result of gap in their knowledge or it is an attempt to accommodate to the L2 culture. An interview with the participants would also provide invaluable introspective data to clarify the reasons of the strategy selection (as suggested by Al Mansur, Al Abbad and Ypsilandis, (submitted)) although this is missing at this stage and it could be investigated in a future study. Clearly, a larger sample size would also be more representative of the student population. Finally, it is hoped that the present study would act as a trigger for further research in the area of genre analysis and would provide adequate information towards the construction of a typology of persuasiveness globally. The findings of these efforts would assist academic students to increase effectiveness and efficiency in writing their applications.

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