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The image of self and social force in relationships among Persians

Keywords: abreu, harfe mardom, negative evaluation, face, relational connection and separation, envisioning

In Iran one's image of the 'self', reflected in the metaphor aberu (lit. water of the face) is closely linked to a social force reflected in the metaphor harfe mardom (lit. people's talk) (Sharifian, 2007; Izadi, forthcoming). Understanding the complexities of interpersonal relationships would not be possible without reference to these interwoven concepts. In this paper, drawing upon discursive-pragmatic approaches, I delineate the interconnection between the two metaphors of aberu and harfe mardom and show how they affect interpersonal relationships. I delimit the broad concept of interpersonal relationship to relational connection and separation, one of the three dialectics of Relational Dialectic Theory (RDT) proposed by Baxter and Montgomery (1996) and its implementation to Linguistic Pragmatics by Arundale (2010, 2013) within the Co-Constituting Model of Human Communication (CMHC).

Harfe mardom reflects people's negative evaluation of a one's particular conduct which is generally expressed in gossiping behind him/her. Introspective consideration of significant others' reflexive evaluations on one's behavior constitutes an important predictor in determining how one should behave in Iran. Individuals are aware of the potential gossip that their conduct (linguistic or nonlinguistic) may create among those who know them. To avoid these negative evaluations, therefore, they must either refrain from a conduct which is prone to harfe mardom or to conceal it from those whose negative evaluations are to be avoided. Harfe mardom has a strong implication for one's aberu. As individuals co-construct their relationships in their daily interactions, they are cognitively capable of 'envisioning' future potential interactions (Arundale, 2013). Therefore, in concerning about harfe mardom, they build an image of 'self' (abreu) by envisioning the consequence of their conduct on their potential connection with and separation from significant others. Connection and separation are more precisely construed by Iranians as close bonding and differentiation, which are not only co-constituted in interactions, but also envisioned to be co-constituted. And aberu, which is closely interrelated with harfe mardom, is a crucial determinant in the imagined and real construction of close bonding and differentiation.

References

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