



“How Old Were You in 1989?”: TIKKEH as Implicational Language in a Live Broadcasting Show

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Abstract

The phenomenon of implied language is an inherent element of language used in interactions while following certain purposes. The variants of this umbrella term, i.e., insinuation, innuendo, sarcastic language, etc. have more or less been previously discussed by scholars of pragmatics in English language. Such variants of implicatures are also used in Persian under the titles *TIKKEH*, *MATALAK*, among others. While previous research on *TIKKEH* has discussed the underlying components of the term in everyday conversations among Iranian interlocutors, the present article situates the term within a live broadcasting show in Sports Channel in 2020 in Iran, featuring the interview between two hosts and the president of the Football Federation of the Islamic Republic of Iran, as well as the comments of viewers posted on two opinion forums, reacting to the unrestrained use of implied language by the guest. The research corroborates the findings of [Tayebi \(2018\)](#) on *TIKKEH*, as it is made with the goals of humiliating the addressee, showing off one's shrewdness, leaving the addressee in an undecided situation, taking pleasure in watching the addressee being hurt, and staining the face of the addressee. My data also revealed that interlocutors at times employ *TIKKEH* to evade answering questions or to distract their addressees who they find challenging. Furthermore, it is discussed that the president of FFIRI exercises abundant use of implied language to bond with those viewers whose line of thought run contrary to that of IRIB, thus guarantying his truthfulness and commitment.

Keywords: impoliteness, implied language, *TIKKEH*, live broadcasting shows

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Introduction

Daily affairs oblige human beings to assume linguistic strategies and perspectives in order to either assume their presence and value on their environment or, at least, take control of the situation they are in. To this end, in interactional affairs through language, we usually deal with instances of observing the presence of others or violating their personality. Scientifically speaking, the latter issue has been discussed within the realm of pragmatics under the term linguistic (im)politeness since the 1980s, rising to prominence through [Brown and Levinson's \(1987\)](#) seminal work on politeness and face which refers to a "public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself" (p. 61). Study on impoliteness, however, began with [Culpeper \(1996, 1998, 2005\)](#), which marked the beginning of studies on using language to cause offense and aggression vis-à-vis politeness theories, the development of which owes much to data originally collected from TV ([Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2014, p. 3](#)).

Making use of impolite language in live TV shows is of great importance and is constantly the locus of attention by viewers and researchers. As [Garcés-Conejos Blitvich \(2014\)](#) has noted, "it is not easy to conceive of impoliteness research without bringing forth its symbiotic relationship with television" (p. 1). Within this area, broadcast interviews are locus for interviewers openly questioning the interviewees, thus causing threats to their faces ([Anchimbe, 2009](#); [Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2009](#)). Researchers, including [Tracy \(2008\)](#), have developed the idea of "reasonable hostility," where a norm has been formed around the idea of politicians being questioned openly and experiencing face attacks from interviewers. As [Anchimbe \(2009\)](#) explains, in these situations, "the interviewer is assumed to have a right – a responsibility, even – to threaten the interviewee's political face and the interviewee is expected to allow this to happen without attacking the interviewer back" (p. 97). With this regard, faced with threats to his face, the interviewee, rather than directly engaging in overt use of impolite utterances, is expected to cleverly deal with the threats posed to his face. Violations of formal politeness norms are quite abnormal in these shows, and if not observed, would cause damage to the personal, national, and group face of the interviewee. Nevertheless, while it has been demonstrated that such incidents require participants to avoid attending their self-oriented face needs ([Mahdavi Nejhad et al., 2024, p. 254](#)), there are cases where the interviewee, rather than employing linguistic strategies to save their face, resorts to verbal aggression through impoliteness by acting condescendingly or employing implied language without regarding the cooperative norms of broadcasting interviews. That is to say, it is possible that they utilize strategies in order to cause threats to the face of the interviewer (and thereby viewers) overtly or covertly through patronizing language, regardless of the fact that their language is constantly monitored by the public and would be consequential to their reputation.

With regard to the above explanations, it is common practice to indirectly cause offence to others through employing innuendo or insinuation, each having been thoroughly delved into by [Bell \(1997\)](#) and [Bertuccelli Papi \(2014\)](#), respectively, in the English language. In Persian, however, the latter terms are metaphorically referred to as *tikkeh*, *zaxm-e zabân*, *matalak*, *ta'ne zadan*, *koloft*

goftan, inter aliaⁱ. A review of the available literature on the term shows that, with the exception of one scholarly article published in the journal of Intercultural Pragmatics, almost no research has been conducted on the underlying components as well as functions of *TIKKEH*. Tayebi (2018), however, as an Iranian linguist doing research overseas, has put forward valuable insights into the term in Persian. Locating her research within the realm of (im)politeness, she defines *TIKKEH* as an impolite utterance “almost always made with the intention of conveying an impolite belief with the potential of hurting the addressee [which] can even be much more hurtful than its direct and explicit form” (p. 95). The data provided by her to corroborate and theorize her points regarding the term mostly consist of polylogal interactionsⁱⁱ – where there are more than two or three participants – from instances of naturally-occurring implied interactions in modern Persian (p. 90). My concern, however, is the manipulation of the mentioned terms in a live show in a national broadcasting TV channel, i.e., Sports Channel, in the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (hereafter referred to as IRIB) which aired on 19 December 2022 with the purpose of questioning the president of the Football Federation of the Islamic Republic of Iran (hereafter referred to as P) regarding the status of the national football team.

Decisions made by P have always been under criticism of media in the country. For instance, he took power of the federation nearly five months before the outset of the FIFA World Cup 2022 with the manifesto of bringing back the former coach Carlos Queiroz as the head coach, while it was Dragan Skocic who qualified the national team for the World Cup. As P won the seat, he dismissed Skocic and brought back Queiroz, known for merely defensive tactics, thus bringing to the mind of people a feeling of dissatisfaction as well as the power of lobby on the part of the newly-introduced president of the federation. Following the group-stage knock-out of Iran from the FIFA World Cup 2022, as the team received six goals in the first game against England and one against the United States in the third game, Iran’s football federation, specifically its president, came under an intense criticism by media and the public. It was against this background that P was invited to a televised show called “2022 Cup” in Sports Channel, the sole national channel fully dedicated to national and international sports news in the country, in order to answer a myriad of questions regarding the status of the national football team and uncertainties regarding its future coachⁱⁱⁱ. From the very outset, the two hosts (hereafter referred to as K and M) tried to convince P that their questions represented those posed by people’s comments as well as football elites. As the interview drew on, finding himself pressed by the questions of the hosts, P began to leverage linguistically-significant strategies in order to take control of the situation, thus attempting to save the face of himself, his colleagues, and that of Carlos Queiroz. The obvious point regarding this live interview was P’s employing of condescending verbal aggression, insinuation, and *TIKKEH*, specifically toward M, the use of which is definitely uncommon in live broadcasting shows. By way of illustration, the following comment posted on <https://www.varzesh3.com> by one of the viewers brings to light P’s “shameless normalization^{iv}” of impolite behavior in a live TV show:

(1)

be vozuh didim mojri-e javân, [M], kâmelan bâ ehterâm va metânat sa'y mikard so'âlât-e xudeš ro bayân koneh, ammâ jenâb-e [P] bâ didi kâmelan az bâlâ sa'y dar taxrib-e šaxsiyati-e in mojri-e xub va javân dâšt.
[We could clearly see that the young presenter, [M], tried to ask his questions respectfully and peacefully. But Mr. [P], condescendingly, tried to damage the personality of this competent and young presenter.]

Apart from exercising patronizing, authoritarian language on the hosts, P makes abundant use of implicatures to convey insinuation or *TIKKEH* on the hosts, specially M who is a young presenter, representing the young Iranian generation values, as opposed to that of K and his far-right tendencies. What makes the present investigation significant is the fact that a reversal of power relations, as well as broadcasting norms, is clearly visible in the above-mentioned show, which is entirely unprecedented in Iran's broadcasting history (Rahbar, 2022).

With regard to P's astute^v employment of *TIKKEH* in this interview, my aim was to cull from among the interactions in this program to apply and test Tayebi's (2018) framework of *TIKKEH* in Persian on the interactions between a top-level manager and his two hosts. With this in mind, holding Tayebi (2018) in center, alongside Bell's (1997) research on innuendo, Bertuccelli Papi's (2014) on insinuation, Culpeper et al.'s (2003), and Culpeper's (2011) on impoliteness at hand, an examination of instances where, how, and why P employs *TIKKEH* will be presented. As it has been hotly debated in the realm of (im)politeness theory, considering whether (im)politeness must focus on the role of speaker or hearer in the evaluation of (im)politeness has been dealt with through second-order and first-order (im)politeness, respectively (Watts et al., 2008). Following Eelen's (2001) call for a discursive approach, however, I hold a view which regards (im)politeness as a "truly interactional phenomena" which is "located in both positions and in neither of them at the same time" (p. 120). As Haugh (2013) notes, holding this third view in examination of (im)politeness regarding "interpersonal evaluations" accentuates the "roles of *participants*, going beyond a general speaker-hearer model of interaction" (p. 61, emphasis added). Further, as Goffman (1981) has postulated, "when a word is spoken, all those who happen to be in a perceptual range of the event will have some sort of participation status" (p. 3). With this in mind, since I do not have access to the hosts' frame of mind to decide whether or not they really have taken offense by P's impolite utterances^{vi}, and as they have not issued any serious commentary regarding their stance toward P's language, while qualitatively analyzing the interactions between P and his hosts, a number of comments contributed after the incident by anonymous viewers of the show under pseudonyms, as well as media and journalists, (whose comments demonstrate that even they have been offended by P's utterances) as side-participants will be analyzed to assess the emotional responses of the Iranian society as whole. This has been inspired by Culpeper (2011, p. 11) who refers to these comments as "retrospective comments," thus regarding them as valuable and rich components to interpreting the perception of impoliteness^{vii} as well as the first order approach adopted where instances of *TIKKEH* are assessed through participants' viewpoints (Garcés-Conejos Blitvich,

2014, p. 3). These comments were extracted from the opinion forums following the news break of the mentioned incident in the websites <https://www.varzesh3.com>, one of Iran's most popular and visited websites covering sports news on both national and international scales, and <https://www.youtube.com>.

All in all, it is believed that by investigating the phenomenon of *TIKKEH* in the Persian language, the present article will widen the scope of research on the term, thus paving the path for further examination of the phenomenon in variegated situations.

Literature Review and Method

Brief Overview of (Im)Politeness

Politeness theory has its roots in the second half of the 20th century as initiated by the “pragmatic turn” in the 1970s. As Locher (2012) has stated, the tendency toward pragmatics was a “reaction to the lack of study of language in use” (p. 37). With the emergence of pragmatics, however, emphasis was put on language in actual contexts as well as communicative competence. With this view, the focus of pragmatics was conferred on “meaning beyond what is said” (Kádár & Haugh, 2013, p. 9). It is within this context that the idea of politeness ensues. In its early days, politeness research “focused on studying linguistic behavior that was aimed at maintaining social harmony” (Locher, 2012, p. 7). Lakoff (1973), Leech (1983), and most importantly Brown and Levinson (1987) can be considered as three influential approaches to politeness^{viii}.

Inspired by Goffman (1981), Brown and Levinson (1987) formed their discussion around the idea of *face* which refers to a person's reputation and public image. Accordingly, they propose a rational model person who assumes to possess positive and negative face, which respectively refer to a person's want that their actions be approved by others and a person's want that their actions not be impeded by others. As they were concerned with social harmony, they proposed that one's face “can be lost, maintained or enhanced, and must be constantly attended in interaction” (1987, p. 66). They deemed threats to one's face as Face Threatening Acts (FTA) and assumed that a rational person usually adopts mitigating strategies (politeness strategies) for a smooth flow of communication to ensue.

While early work on politeness revolved around the idea of social harmony, more recent work hinges on aggression, i.e., using language to cause offense, which has been initiated by Culpeper (1996, 2005, 2011). While Brown and Levinson (1987) proposed “off-record” communication as being “vague or ambiguous” or “hinting,” among others, thus regarding impoliteness as “pragmatic failure” or “anomalous behavior” (Culpeper, 2011, p. 6), here, much focus is conferred on impoliteness, i.e., “the use of strategies that are designed to have the opposite effect – that of social disruption” (Culpeper, 1996, p. 350) while concerning “a clash with expectations, particularly concerning behaviors associated with particular contexts (Culpeper, 2011, p. 14). It needs to be mentioned that impoliteness is not merely associated with overtly using taboo or swear words in a given context. The phenomenon can be extended to situations where participants feel offended by *how*

something is said, rather than *what* is said, which is the concern of implicational impoliteness" (cf. Haugh, 2015). Here, Culpeper (2011) speaks of "form-driven" implicational impoliteness, citing terms such as "insinuation," "innuendo," and "snide comments/ remarks," among others, as examples, explaining that they refer to "implicit messages which are triggered by formal surface or semantic aspects of a behavior and which have negative consequences for certain individuals" (pp. 156-157).

TIKKEH and its Status Within (Im)Politeness Theory

The phenomenon of TIKKEH, which is my concern in the present article, is discussed within the same realm mentioned above, i.e., impoliteness implicatures, referred to as an interactional practice "where someone implies something and thereby occasions impoliteness (Haugh, 2015, p. 3). As a dictionary definition of the term in Persian merely hinges on nomenclatures such as sarcasm or irony, what follows is a simple definition of the term in Persian through personal communication, bearing witness to its implicational and situatedness dimensions:

(2)

be nazar-e man tikke ya 'ni bexây ye mas 'aleh ro be kasi begi, vali tori ke nârâhat naše. Masalan gheyr-e mostaghim. albate bastegi be moxâtabet ham dâreh.

[In my opinion, TIKKEH means to intend to share something with someone, but in a way that doesn't irritate them. For example, indirectly. However, it also depends on whom you're talking to.]

In terms of pragmatics, Tayebi (2018) situates TIKKEH within the realm of "impolite belief" proposed by Leech (1983) who deems it as a person's engagement in "linguistic of other behavior in order to pursue competitive or convivial illocutionary goals" (pp. 104-105). With this in mind, Tayebi (2018) defines TIKKEH as "any utterance in which a speaker can potentially convey a negative impolite belief about the hearer(s)," which apart from being "venomous, derogatory and insulting[,] has negative emotional consequences for the hearer(s)" (p. 94). By way of illustration, notice the following utterance by a shop owner (SO) dissatisfied with the work of two of his employees (E2 and E3) while addressing E1 in the presence of all of them:

(3)

SO: *dišab dâštam durbin hâ ro chek mikardam. didam ke cheghadr mohkam dâšti šīseh hâ ro tamiz mikardi. ey kâš hame kârâmaun hamin tor bâšan.*

[Last night I was checking out on the CCTV. I saw how firmly you (E1) were wiping the glasses. I wish all of us would put the same amount of effort into our affairs.]

E1: *omidvâram!*

[I hope so!]

E2: *sokut mikonad.*

[Stays silent.]

E3: *sokut mikonad*.

[Stays silent.]

Following this interaction, with reference to the importance of retrospective comments in evaluating implicational language, all participants were interviewed. E2 claimed that he had felt offended by SO's utterance, thus taking it as an instance of *TIKKEH*, as his sense of job commitment had been threatened by SO, thus implicitly bringing to the fore that he did not show much diligence at affairs of the store. Brother to E2, E3, however, claimed that he had not felt any implicated inference in SO's utterance, which seems to have its roots in his great respect toward SO and the fact that he had always been frank to him. The fact that E1 does not remain silent while uttering "I hope so" shows that he has not been offended since he claimed in interview that he himself had been dissatisfied with E3's lack of commitment at work and had run it by SO previously. However, E1 claimed that upon second thoughts, even he had the thought in his mind that SO might have intended to criticize him, which renders *TIKKEH* as serving multilayered, paralleled purposes. In my interview with SO, he claimed that he had made the implicational inference specifically on purpose in order to criticize E3 and to reinforce solidarity among interlocutors (Bousfield, 2008). What captured my attention is that SO's utterance bears witness to the creativity existent in implicational language, thus engaging all side-participants in a double entendre, while only one of them was meant^{ix}.

Moreover, Bell (1997) and Bertuccelli Papi (2014) have suggested discussions of two types of implied impoliteness markers, i.e., innuendo and insinuation, respectively, which can be read as counterparts of *TIKKEH* in the realm of implicational impoliteness. Bell (1997) defines innuendo as a "non-overt intentional negative ascription, whether true or false, usually in the form of an implicature, which is understood as a charge or accusation against what is, for the most part, a non-present party" (p. 36). Accordingly, innuendo, however, parts with *TIKKEH* in that it intends to cause offence to a non-present party and their belief systems. Insinuation, however, comes closer to *TIKKEH* in that it is "a communicative strategy whereby a speaker intends to make an addressee believe p, but does not want to be held responsible for communicating p" (Bertuccelli Papi, 2014, p. 2).

Characteristics of *TIKKEH*

I adopt the framework proposed by Tayebi (2018) on the phenomenon of *TIKKEH* in Persian while also discussing Bell (1997) and Bertuccelli Papi (2014) in passing. By the word framework in relation to Tayebi's article, I mean the characteristics of *TIKKEH* which need to be distinguished in order for the term not to be mistaken for other similar terms.

According to Tayebi (2018), situated within the realm of implicational language, the phenomenon of *TIKKEH* possesses a number of general characteristics as follows: a) it is considered "venomous, derogatory, and insulting and has negative emotional consequences for the hearer(s), b) it is made with the "potential of hurting the addressee and can even be much more hurtful than its direct and explicit form,"

and c) an implicational *TIKKEH* is "almost always conveyed rather than communicated and this is done without the speaker *necessarily* aiming/wanting to be held *unaccountable*" for it" (pp. 94-95, italics original). Apart from these features, [Tayebi \(2018\)](#) provides three primary properties of *TIKKEH* including pseudo-overt and non-overt meaning, ascribed intentionality, and goal-orientedness. These goals include criticizing the addressee, humiliating the addressee by bringing to the fore their weaknesses, giving the addressee the impression of one's cleverness, and taking malicious pleasure at watching the recipient being hurt (p. 98). While [Tayebi \(2018\)](#) has investigated instances of *TIKKEH* within diary report forms, online data, and field notes, in what follows I will bring to light instances of implicational language (*TIKKEH*) in a live broadcasting show, i.e., the question-answer sequences between the president of the Football Federation of the Islamic Republic of Iran (FFIRI) and his two hosts, where the latter are constantly targeted by implicational attacks of their guest.

Data and Procedure

The study draws on a 106-minute corpus of interactions in a live broadcasting program on Sports Channel in Iran occurring on December 19, 2022^x. The participants included the president of FFIRI, aged 66, interviewed by K and M, aged 56 and 35, respectively. Drawing on the call for moving beyond dyads in examination of implied impoliteness ([Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2009, 2012](#); [Dobs & Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2013](#); [Tayebi, 2018](#), among others), I adopted a polylogal perspective, thus taking into account the responses of all three participants. Moreover, as the data draw on a live broadcasting program, the need was further felt to take into account the responses of the viewers as side-participants. With this end in view, certain that the hosts took offence at P's language (the post written by K^{xi} and the metapragmatic comment by M in exchange 14 below), I also collected a number of unsolicited comments demonstrating an unfiltered look at the offense taken by the viewers extracted from <https://www.varzesh3.com> and <https://www.youtube.com>. The comments were extracted from the opinion forums following the video and news of the incident in the mentioned websites. With this view, from among 178 comments, as well as the whole interactions between the hosts and the guest, I extracted those instances which I noticed to reveal hints at ideas of (im)politeness, face, implied language, *TIKKEH*, as well as those which were loaded with reactions toward the behavior of P, eventually amounting to 15 instances.

Accordingly, instances of question-answer between the interactants as well as comments by the viewers were carefully transcribed^{xii} and analyzed in a qualitative manner by the researcher in terms of the framework on *TIKKEH* and its constituent parts advanced by [Tayebi \(2018\)](#), as well as innuendo by [Bell \(1997\)](#), insinuation by [Bertuccelli Papi \(2014\)](#), and impoliteness by [Culpeper et al. \(2003\)](#) and [Culpeper \(2011\)](#) in general.

Analysis

Upon surface scrutinizing, we find the interview of K and M with P as fraud with verbal aggression and sarcastic language mostly initiated by P himself.

The most noticeable language strategy employed by P is the phenomenon of implied language or *TIKKEH* throughout the show. The abundance of such instances in the interview has drawn negative criticism on the part of P, leaving him as a totally impolite manager and the interviewers as incompetent at responding appropriately to the offenses caused by P. It goes without saying that P pursues such strategies with the goal of threatening the public face of the interviewers, especially that of M who challenges the president's choices as well as the poor results of the national team. P also attempts to emphasize his own achievements while showing his dexterity at making use of implied language while puzzling the hosts as well as the viewers, and at times even showing that he takes pleasure in making use of such offensive language, which are anathema to democratic behavior on the part of managers and are constantly judged by the public. In what follows, a number of goals in relation to making use of implicational language (*TIKKEH*) assumed to have been pursued by P, and incidentally by the hosts, will be analyzed vis-à-vis the primary properties of the phenomenon in Persian.

Humiliating the Addressee:

As stated by [Tayebi \(2018\)](#), one of the underlying goals behind insinuation or *TIKKEH* is to humiliate the addressee(s). By way of illustration, let us consider the following utterance by P while addressing M:

(4)

P: *xub guš bedid ke haddeaghal, age xodetun befahmid, binandeh ham mifahmad.*

[Listen carefully, at least, if you understand, the viewers would understand too!]

This utterance on the part of P *prima facie* addresses M's faculty of understanding. However, it goes without saying that M's weakness at understanding things is not questionable since presenters go through a complicated process before being recruited (including IQ tests). What P's pseudo-overt intent is aiming here, apart from surface humiliating the young presenter, aims at leaving him and the viewers in a state of indeterminacy. In other words, he proposes something both true and false through implicational language in order to assume an unaccountable stance toward the truthfulness of his statement. It also needs to be mentioned that people's understanding of the ongoing discussion is not dependent on M's understanding, corroborating the fact that P merely uses implied language to uphold certain goals. Moreover, as M reminds him that he is asking the question posed by people, P responds "people understand!" thus implying a *TIKKEH* in order to convey the idea that M is not a capable person at understanding. The following comment from <https://www.varzesh3.com>, however, proves otherwise:

(5)

M, *damet garm. mardom poštetan. unjâ-ei ke gofti futbâli-yâ mifahman xeyli xub bud!* 😊

[Break a leg M! People are behind your back. The part where you said "football fans would understand" was perfect! 😊]

M, however, obviously takes offence at P's use of implied language and attempts to counter P's face attack by situating himself in the group of football fans, thus excluding P, the supposed president of football in the country, from the realm of football:

(6)

be xodâ futâbali-yâ mifahman man chi migam.

[By God, football fans would know what I mean!]

This, however, is again countered by P as he says:

(7)

wâllâ faghat sedâ va simâ-ei hâ mifahman va ye šabake hâ-ei.

[By God, only those from IRIB and a number of channels would understand it!]

What is obvious here is the "offensive-offensive" or "tit-for-tat impoliteness" (Culpeper et al., 2003), where each one of the interactants takes turns to "counter face attack with face attack" (p. 1562). However, this exchange parts with data provided by Culpeper et al. (2003) in that here P and M, instead of making use of overt aggressive language, make use of implied *TIKKEH*, which in Tayebi's (2018) words are more derogatory and biting than its direct form (p. 95). Accordingly, as M excludes P from the circle of football fans, here, through employing implied language, P turns the table on M by implying that the host merely enforces the policies adopted by the organization he works for, rather than having concerns for the national team.

As is shown, finding M a young and ambitious presenter, and having had his face threatened by him previously, P aims to attack M's face by questioning how old he was in 1989. To elucidate the point, notice the following exchange:

(8)

P (*be M negâh mikonad*) *šomâ chand sâletoon budeh 68?*

[Actually, since 1989 I was... (looks at M) How old were you in 1989?]

M: (*ejbâran labxand mizanad*) *do sâl.*

[(forcing a smile) Two years.]

P: *do sâletoon budeh? xob alhamdoellâh. mâ az sâl-e 1368 modir âmel-e bâšgâh budim tâ be emruz.*

[You were two years old? Then, thank God! I have been a club CEO since 1989 to date.]

In Persian, such questions are usually posed by adults or those assuming to have relative power or being superiors addressing inferiors to imply that the latter are not experienced enough or that they are not in the position to question an adult or a superior person, thus indirectly creating a feeling of humility in them. Here, P assumes to draw the attention of the viewers to his experience as well as his

achievements. Having found his status being shaken by M, he employs *TIKKEH* to belittle the young presenter, thus highlighting his own status. P's question here has a pseudo-overt intent which presumably enquires M about his age in 1989; the answer to this question could simply be, two years. However, as [Tayebi \(2018\)](#) puts it, in some instances, "*TIKKEH* is interpreted in light of understandings formed in prior interaction(s) that the offende has held with the offender" (p. 103). Here, it could be deduced from M's negligent expression, as well as his half smile, that he has taken the offence. P's juxtaposition of the fact that he has been a club CEO since 1989 and that M has been a two-year-old then aims to indirectly imply that M is not in the position to question P's decisions and views, thus deterring him from posing further challenging questions.

Giving the Addressee the Impression of One's Shrewdness:

As is seen in my data, there are instances where P makes use of *TIKKEH* in order to show his cleverness and dominance over the situation. In data provided by [Tayebi \(2018\)](#) she has already illustrated an example where the speaker intentionally uses implied language in order to show that he has a good grasp of the situation. Also, Tayebi emphasizes that with regard to this strategy, *TIKKEH* can be discussed on a scale of self-focused to other-focused (p. 98), thus indicating that one may employ this implicational strategy to show their prowess in situations while aiming to achieve goals benefiting themselves, their groups, or their organizations. With regard to my data, there are instances where P openly confesses that he displays such behavior in the studio on purpose, convincing the viewers that IRIB follows certain goals pursued by its hosts. By way of exemplification, notice the following exchange:

(9)

M: *man vâgheiyateš ye kam jâ xordam az barxord-e šoma. hâlâ jâleb-e migin unjâ bâhâtoon sohbat šod, kâš man unjâ umade budam bâhâtun sohbat konam. fekr konam injâ ye kam tahammoletun kam šod.*

[I, to be honest, got a little shocked by your behavior. You just said that someone talked to you there. I wish I were there to talk to you. I think you ran out of patience here.]

P: *na injâ sedâ va simâ... sedâ va simâ ro man ye zareh ruš...*

[No. here, it's IRIB... My feelings toward IRIB are a little...]

With regard to the above exchange, it can be seen that P cleverly makes use of this type of language, i.e., condescending behavior, implicational language, among others, to show off his shrewdness, thus leading to more perplexing of the young presenter, leaving him in an indeterminate zone. A YouTuber has also touched upon the same issue, which is a proof of the effect of P's behavior on the viewers:

(10)

cheghadr herfe-ei do tâ mojri ro sar-e kâr gozâšteh va bâ a'sâbešun bâzi mikoneh...

[How professionally he is pulling the leg of the two hosts and gets on their nerves...]

Leaving the Addressee in a State of Indeterminacy:

As [Tayebi \(2018\)](#) has stipulated, indeterminacy and vagueness are an inherent feature of *TIKKEH* and insinuation (p. 108). Also, [Haugh \(2015\)](#) has asserted that "the relative indeterminacy of implicatures is what allows speakers to be held committed to or accountable for the real-world consequences of what they are taken to be implicating" (p. 89). Accordingly, in our case, through making excessive use of implied language, P leaves M in a state of bewilderment as to whether he really has been the target of his offence or not. This sense of indeterminacy is heightened as P targets IRIB as well, leaving M to think whether P's utterances genuinely target him or IRIB. Moreover, as K argues with P that the young generation expect him to answer such questions, P retorts that he had met a football fan in the same morning, who had asked the same questions, and P confesses that he answered his questions clearly and in peace of mind. This awakens in the hosts the curiosity as to why P takes offence at the same questions posed by them. P's answer that he regarded that person as guileless (*bi šileh pileh*) and the fact that he was not after a certain reply resonate with nuances of *TIKKEH*, thus implying that the hosts *are not* in fact sincere persons and are after taking certain replies from their guests. What matters is the inherent indeterminacy of implied language which renders P unaccountable for his statement^{xiii}. The use of implied *TIKKEH* here, apart from offending the hosts, leaves them in an indeterminate zone where they need some extra effort of mind to decipher it. Moreover, the goal-orientedness of this implied language also obliges the hosts to reconsider their questions and avoid critical questions or those which are not in line with P's line of thought. Therefore, it could be hypothesized that *TIKKEH* is used to deter further face threats from interlocutors in an interaction.

Moreover, an explanation as to why P answered the lay man's questions while he had problems with answering the same questions posed by the hosts might lie in his view of as well as his defensive stance toward IRIB. As [Garcés-Conejos Blitvich's \(2014\)](#) discussion of impoliteness in television makes it clear, according to their comments regarding disputes in TV talk shows, for many YouTubers "it was not the behavior per se that was deemed appropriate, rude, and so on, but the person carrying out such behavior" (p. 3). The following comment by a YouTuber regarding the case of P is noticeable:

(11)

ettefâghan P xub javâbešun ro dâd. in do nafar haghešun-e.

[Quite the contrary, P answered them back in the best way possible. It serves them right.]

This comment illustrates the fact that even if P's behavior has occasioned indignation among a large number of viewers, yet there are people whom do not take offence at his words, as they deem IRIB and its hosts as liars, promoters of the government's policies, etc. Extending this argument to the case of P, it could be argued that his excessive use of implied language originates from his interpersonal expectations as well as relational histories ([Tayebi, 2016, 2018](#)) he has previously shared with IRIB managers and presenters, especially his interview with a host in

Channel 3 regarding the case of Mark Wilmots, where he was openly criticized for using media as a shield against his actions. Accordingly, it could be argued that P evaluates the hosts' questions as face-threatening, even if they have been posed by people, because he deems the hosts as looking for a chance to entangle him.

Taking Malicious Pleasure in Watching the Addressee Being Hurt:

As maintained by Bertuccelli Papi (2014) regarding the nastiness of insinuation, there are cases where insinuations involve the “speaker’s malicious pleasure over the negative effect the message will have on the interlocutor” (p. 7). In the same vein, according to Tayebi (2018), one of the goals behind implied *TIKKEH* is “the mere malicious pleasure that the speaker takes in watching the recipient of the implied impoliteness being hurt” (p. 98). These discussions bear witness to the importance of taking into account the fact that implicational language might be used with the personal aim of pleasing oneself while watching others being hurt by one’s venomous words. With regard to our case in this research, there are instances where P makes use of *TIKKEH* while confessing that he uses this language purposefully. The following exchange provides a case in point:

(12)

M: *nokteh-i ke hast in-e ke xob be har hâl aghâye keyruš seh doreh bud. ye doraš ke šomâ migid yek seri masâel-e digar-i ham budeh ke manam motavajeham bâvar konid.*

[The point is that Mr. Queiroz was our coach for three terms. In one term, you just mentioned that we’ve had a number of problems, which, believe me, I do understand!]

P: *(vasate harf-e M miparad) alhamdolellâh ke motavajeh šodid. man xeyli xošhâlam migoooy man mifahmamâ. man xodam xeyli khošhâlam.*

[(interrupts M) Thank God you understand! I’m so delighted you said you’d understand. I myself am so delighted.]

M: *xob. xodâ ro šokr ke šomâ xošhâlid.*

[Well, thank God you’re delighted!]

P: *(be K negâh mikonad) in ke šomâ migoy man mifahmam xodeš xeyli xoobeh dige (ârâm mixandad).*

[(looks at K) That you said you’d understand is itself so good then (chuckles).]

With regard to the above exchange, P states that he is delighted to find M claim that he has understood P’s point. However, speaking from a prosody-oriented perspective, it could be argued that he is making use of implied *TIKKEH* to humiliate his addressee. In fact, his chuckling as well as employing falling intonation while repeating his utterance and looking at K (avoiding M’s eyes^{xiv}) show that he is taking pleasure in deriding M. The implied language here “triggers the suspicion that what is put forward is actually a distractor and that something else is going on in the speaker’s mind” (Bertuccelli Papi, 2014, p. 2), as if M has deficiencies at understanding things. The important point following this exchange is that M not only does not return P’s impolite language, but also ignores it, thus

practicing what Culpeper et al. (2003, p. 1567) has referred to. By ignoring P's face attack, in fact M astutely assumes that he did not take or that misunderstood the meaning behind P's pseudo-overt intent, thus countering his attack through a defensive strategy which might be more hurtful to P, than having overtly returned his attack. These examples are also evidence on how complicated and sensitive a case of implied *TIKKEH* might be and how it is managed within every day interactions in Persian.

Another case in my data where P employs implied *TIKKEH* with the goal of deriving malicious pleasure is where K enquires him about the case of Mark Wilmots, a case over which P had previously had a controversial debate with a presenter on Channel 3. Let us consider the following exchange between P and K:

(13)

K: *hâlâ, parvande-ye wilmots kojâs âghâ? (tekrâr mikonad) wilmots!*

[Now, where is the case of Wilmots, Mister? (repeats) Wilmots!]

T: *tu jib-e maneh.*

[It's in my pocket.]

K: *na, manozuram in-e ke be kojâ resideh?*

[No. I mean, which point has it arrived to?]

When it comes to questioning the status of something or a project, it is a common method in Persian to literally ask, "Where is it?" or "which point has it arrived to?" However, a prevalent response to such questions, especially when it comes to evading a clear-cut answer, pulling someone's leg, or making fun of someone is to respond by saying: "It's in my pocket!" It needs to be mentioned that such use of the utterance is mostly common among peers or people of lower-class, which renders it quite unusual to be used by a high-profile manager in a live broadcasting show. Regarding our own case, P, rather than sticking to a clear answer regarding the case of Wilmots, merely touches on the surface layer of meaning, thus retorting that it is in his pocket. At this point, K reformulates his question, thus ignoring the face attack occasioned by P, leaving him in a dead-end where he is unable to further inflict face attacks or respond. Following P's explanations regarding the mentioned case, through a face-saving strategy, K maintains: "Then Wilmots' case is not in your pocket! It is in the archives!" This strategy on the part of K is a tit-for-tat strategy inflicted upon P's face in order to convince him as well as the viewers that he only understood the surface level of meaning conveyed by P, i.e., that the case is in his pocket. This, however, is inferred by P to be an example of implied language, the use of which presumably is more hurtful to him than having been responded by, for example, "OK, then the case of Wilmots is resolved!" Moreover, that K has been offended is evident as, in a later interview, K expressed his disappointment regarding P's utterance^{xv}. Also, as for our case which is malice included in P's statement, minutes later, following K's statement that the case is in the archives, P makes a mimicry of his previous statement to assert that he has made it intentionally.

Leaving a Lingering Effect of Staining the Addressee:

While revealing fundamental differences with innuendo as discussed by Bell (1997), *TIKKEH* comes close to the latter term in that it “has an inherent perlocutionary effect of staining the target by creating a lingering suspicion or doubt by bringing about an irrevocable change in the recipient’s belief system” (p. 54). The same can be applied to implied *TIKKEH*, where the use of which in my data is presumed to be exploited by P with the purpose of damaging the reputation enjoyed by the two hosts. Such a goal behind making use of *TIKKEH* differs from the above instances, which are usually made for personal tendencies or affecting the person of the addressee(s), in that it follows certain goals on a scale of social to national, especially when it comes to shows which are televised. It needs to be added that the use of such language might have such deteriorating effect on the recipient in that even a denial or retraction would harden the effect yet more (Bell, 1997, p. 54). With this regard, notice the following climactic exchange nearly at the end of the show, where M overtly makes use of the metapragmatic label “*MATALAK*” to describe P’s language. Here, K questions P on the content of the questions posed by the person who met P by chance the same morning. What follows is P’s evaluation of that person:

(14)

P: *bardāšt-e man hadde aghal in bud ke xeyli bi šileh pileh bedoon-e in ke aslan donbâl-e ye javâbe xassi bâšeh, vâghe’an mixâst faghat rowšan šeh.*

[I evaluated him as a sincere person who did not seek a certain answer. He was really after a clear understanding of the matter.]

M: *miše šileh pileh hâ-i ke dar mored-e man dârid ro begid man xodam bedunam? Eškâl nadâre injâ. man fekr mikonid cherâ soâl miporsam?*

[Would you please clarify me why you would regard me an insincere person? No problem! Why would you think I ask you questions?]

P: *aslan sedâ va simâ mage miše kesi tu šileh pileh dâsteh bâše?*

[Can by any means an insincere person be found in IRIB?]

M: *na xob jeddi begin, êškâl-i nadâre. dar mored-e xodam ro dâram migam.*

[No. seriously, tell me! No problem! I’m saying, mention that which is about me!]

P: *âghâ sedâ va simâ daraje yek-an!*

[Mister, those from IRIB are top-notch!]

M: *na. matalak nagin. dar mored-e xodam begin.*

[No, don’t say a *MATALAK* (*TIKKEH*). Mention that which is about me!]

The language adopted by P at the beginning of this exchange is fraud with implied language from which M takes offence and to which openly responds. Here, P attributes three features to the person who met him: that he was a sincere, guileless person, that he was not after a certain answer, and that the person genuinely wanted to be convinced by a clear answer. The important point here is that, with regard to the relational aspect of the interview of P whose face has been threatened by the hosts hitherto, here he exploits implied language (*TIKKEH*) three times in a row,

thus leading to M's taking and responding to it. When P asserts that the person in question was a guileless person, with regard to "their own relational and social reference" as well as the "nature of the relationship" (Tayebi, 2018, p. 105) they have developed from the beginning of the show, M presumably takes the pseudo-overt intent of P's utterance as containing a non-overt message, i.e., *TIKKEH* or *MATALAK*, as he openly mentions it. Therefore, by ascribing intentionality to P's implication, M evaluates P's utterance as containing the message that he, as well as IRIB, is not sincere and that whose job involves asking certain questions and deriving certain responses from the guests. Here, the offence has been taken, as P evaluates those from IRIB as top-notch and with M's use of *xodam* (myself), indicating that he insists on P explaining why he deems the host an insincere person, thus making it clear that the young host is fed up with the implied and indirect language of the guest which constantly targets IRIB, rather than directly addressing the person of M. However, P's *MATALAK* or *TIKKEH* seems to have taken its toll on IRIB, heightening the negative view of people toward IRIB, as the following comment by a YouTuber shows:

(15)

P gofteh mage tu sedâ va simâ šileh pileh dârim. 😊

[P has said he wonders if there are any insincere persons in IRIB. 😊]

With regard to my own discussion, that is the staining effect of *TIKKEH* on the recipient, it could be argued that in exchange (14) above, M responds to P's face-threat as he finds it an indirect derogatory and stinging remark to his person as well as the organization he works for. However, one level further, M's use of *xodam* is indicative of his concern that P's excessive use of implicational language might have a lingering effect on his reputation, as the denigrative effect of *TIKKEH* is much more hurtful than its direct form, thus having devastating consequences, especially on the mindset of the viewers. The following comment by YouTubers is indicative of the stain left on the face of the two hosts, judging them as unqualified for such an interview:

(16)

M vâghe'an bi khâye hast.

[M is a totally incompetent person!]

Or:

(17)

ye âdam-e bâ urzeh peydâ našod javâb-e ino mohkam bedeh.

[No qualified person was found there to firmly answer this guy (P) back.]

Conclusion

Implicational language is a prevalent phenomenon in everyday interactions among people, employed following certain purposes and empirically discussed within the realm of pragmatics and linguistic impoliteness. Apart from endeavors by scholars who have drawn attention to insinuation, innuendo, and sarcastic language as tentative and real-world metapragmatic representations of implied language, in

this paper I narrowed down the scope of research to a subtype of this umbrella term, i.e., *TIKKEH*. The term has already been introduced to the community of research by [Tayebi \(2018\)](#). However, the present paper parts with the latter in that it focuses on examination of *TIKKEH* in a live broadcasting show in Iran between the president of the Football Federation of the Islamic Republic of Iran and his two hosts, foregrounding their interactions as well as a number of comments posted on two opinion forums by the viewers.

Upon analysis, while we expected P's face to be threatened by the criticism of the hosts due to the poor results of the national team, it was P himself who mounted attacks on the face of the hosts, causing emotional burst among the public viewers. Also, the guest was found to be a recurrent practitioner of implied language for the following purposes, introduced by [Tayebi \(2018\)](#): humiliating the addressees, showing off his dexterity at making use of language, leaving the addressees in an indeterminate zone, taking malicious pleasure at watching the addressees being hurt, and staining the face of the addressees and the organization they work for. My data, apart from confirming the reliability of the mentioned framework, have provided some other benefits drawn from employing *TIKKEH*, which is incumbent upon further research to be delved into. According to the metapragmatic comments of the viewers, speakers might employ *TIKKEH* to distract the addressee(s), thus deterring further face attacks, or they may employ it in order to evade providing clear and accurate answers to the questions they are asked. Furthermore, it was found in my data that in times of using *TIKKEH*, interlocutors usually avoid looking their addressee(s) in the eye, taking advantage of making eye contact with other participants to further show their unaccountability for their utterances. With regard to the goals followed by P in exploiting *TIKKEH*, a clear explanation of the motivation behind his use of implied language as well as impoliteness is as follows: as discussed by [Garcés-Conejos Blitvich \(2009\)](#) regarding impoliteness in television, in contrast to politeness which is inherently leveraged to maintain rationality and harmony, impoliteness use reflects "true emotions" and "lack of restraint," thus "strategically used to construct the message as truthful." As such, P resorts to such use of language in order to build a sense of trust and truthfulness with the viewers. With this being implemented, he paves the way for many viewers to identify with him, as a portion of Iranian population deems IRIB and its policies as deficient and unreliable. Upon using such language by a high-profile manager, apart from bonding with these viewers, P convinces them that he seeks to bring about change and that he is "invested emotionally in the problem" ([Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2009, p. 287](#)).

However, these findings need to be further delved into through qualitative and quantitative research. Moreover, other metapragmatic counterparts of *TIKKEH* in Persian that carry componential similarities to the phenomenon and their discrepancies are subject to further scrutiny in future.

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Author's Biography



Mohammad Hossein Mahdavi Nejhad received his B.A. and M.A degrees in English Language and Literature from University of Qom and Malayer University, respectively. In 2021, Mahdavi Nejhad joined the Department of English and Translation, Imam Reza International University, Mashhad, Iran, as a Sessional Lecturer. His most recent publications include *"Mastering the term of art": Linguistic Avoidance in David Mamet's Oleanna*, JALDA, 2024, *"I can't tell you exactly who I am": A Deleuzian Reading of F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*, Litera, 2025, and *"I wear a cross at school and church and an Allah necklace while praying": Becoming and Deterritorialization in Selected Works of Zoya Pirzad*, Asian and African Studies, 2026. Mahdavi Nejhad's fields of interest include 19th and 20th century English and American fiction, modern Persian fiction, Deleuzian vitalist-inspired philosophy, post-humanism, pragmatics, and linguistic (im)politeness.

ⁱ I regard these terms as holding essentially similar resonances in Persian, thus all referring to malicious and derogatory language made with the intention of stinging the addressee(s).

ⁱⁱ For more on polylogal and dyadic interactions, see Kerbrat-Orecchioni (2004).

ⁱⁱⁱ It needs to be explained that P is conspicuous for abstaining from showing up in live TV shows. This seems to have intensified following his presence two month earlier in a TV program called "Futbal-e Bartar," where he was harshly criticized for the scandalous and unsuccessful contract he signed with the former Belgian coach, Mark Wilmots, lasting merely for four months, and the heavy cost it inflicted on national capital, bringing the federation to the brink of bankruptcy. It also needs to be mentioned that it was P himself who chose to show up in Sports Channel, rather than in Channel 3.

^{iv} For more on the term, see Wodak, Culpeper, and Semino (2020).

^v The term astute has been employed to remind that, agonizing as it is, impoliteness should not be regarded as purely negative, as it is made through creative effort of mind, thus a constructive aspect of human interaction and sometimes even a practical solution (Garcés-Conejos Blitvich 2012, 2014; Culpeper 2011).

^{vi} That the hosts have actually taken the offense implied by P's implied language is out of question. This can be inferred from K's post (<https://www.varzesh3.com/news/1861052>) in which he expresses his criticism of P by referring to an old Persian saying: "adab-e mard beh ze dolat-e ust" which can be literally translated as 'one's politeness is worthier than his [sic] status and belongings,' witnessing to the fact that the hosts have already perceived and interpreted P's utterances as containing impolite behavior (TIKKEH) targeting their faces.

^{vii} It needs to be clarified that Culpeper (2011) contends that retrospective comments "often take the shape of long discussions by participants and/or observers about whether X counts as impolite" (p. 11).

^{viii} Due to considerations of space, only Brown and Levinson's (1987) seminal work will be touched upon, as it is the most followed and controversial theory of politeness, and postmodern or discursive critiques of this work (Eelen 2001; Locher and Wats 2005; Mills 2003) are not mentioned here.

^{ix} For a discussion of creativity in implicational language, see Culpeper (2011).

^x The video of the televised show can be accessed at <https://telewebion.com/episode/0x53df64b>, <https://telewebion.com/episode/0x53df896>, or <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PXyTZifn9X4>.

^{xi} The post can be accessed at <https://www.varzesh3.com/news/1861052>.

^{xii} As P is originally from Isfahan province, central Iran, he makes use of accented language occasionally. Therefore, transcriptions of his utterances do not completely comply with the standard Persian today.

^{xiii} The exchange is available below in (14).

^{xiv} One important point regarding the contextual use of TIKKEH is that interlocutors most often avoid looking at the eyes of their intended addressee(s), thus maintaining eye contact with other participants. A good example occurred in exchange (3) above where SO implied a TIKKEH toward E3 while addressing E1.

^{xv} The video can be accessed at <https://video.varzesh3.com/video/270411>.