A Comparative Study of Teasing Among English and Iranian Football Fans in Social Networks

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate how Persian and English football fans differ from or resemble one another in terms of their perception of aggressiveness from teasing language on live text commentaries on Facebook. The method employed in this study was comparative and corpus-based. The data for this study consisted of a total of 15 conversational threads including three teasing functions (Boxer & Cortes-Conde, 1997) needed for our questionnaire from two popular British and Iranian fan pages. Fifty two Persian and 56 British participants were contacted through email to receive the questionnaires. Only 30 of each accepted to participate in the study. Two questionnaires comprising three sections of three functions were emailed to the male participants. Due to the rarity of females in the web page belonging to Iranian fans, they were excluded from the research. After the questionnaires were collected, the data was analyzed. The results of the study indicated that, overall, British football fans perceive teasing more negatively than their Iranian counterparts. In details, British football fans interpret biting remarks more aggressive than Iranian football fans. They also perceive nipping remarks more aggressive than their Iranian counterparts, but concerning biting/nipping remarks, British and Iranian football fans do not differ significantly in their perception. The results suggest that culture influences the way fans perceive the teases. In other words, the British perceive teasing remarks more aggressive than their Iranian counterparts since they belong to individualist and independent cultures. Also they are low in dialectic thinking.

Key Words: Teasing; Culture; Fans; Fandom; Football

INTRODUCTION

A football fan is "one whose devotion to a particular club dominates his entire way of life" (porate, 2010, p.280). According to porate (2010), a football fan begins supporting his favorite club at an early ages and would be loyal to it as long as he is alive (porate, 2010, p.277). In fact, he "developes a form of intimacy or love for the club or its specific players" (Giulainotte, 2002, p.36) although, according to Giulainotti (2002), this love is considered unidirectional. He argues that the football fans resemble the fans of leading musicians and actors, and they behave as they do about their celebrities. For example, they collect their biographical snippets, refer to them by their first names, and surround their home or workplace with their images (Giulainotti, 2002, p.36). The immediate achievement, in fact, never changes their mind (porate, 2020, p.285).

A football fan uses different ways to show his solidarity with his favorite club. Gastaldo (2007) argues that a fan may show his support to his favorite team through presence in the setting, joking theatricalizations (that is, nonverbal humorous performance) or verbal provocations (Gastaldo, 2007). Football fans tease each other through the last two ways before, while, and after their favorite team plays against its opponents.

"The richness of the human existence lies in our need and ability to interact with one another and form relationships" (Wright, 2008, p. 12). Indeed, there are different ways individuals employ to reach the goal. The diversity within their interpersonal communication repertoires is reflected in the enormous classifications of social practices used for the achievement of prosocial (positive) and antisocial (negative) goals, many of which are investigated within the field of communication as well as sociolinguistic studies (Wright, 2008). Few of these different methods of engagement reperesent the "degree of complexity and versatility inherent in the unique social practice of teasing within communities in general and in sport fandom in particular" (Wright, 2008, p. 12). Teasing is worth being studied due to its wide influences and uses across individual differences, as well as situational and relational contexts.

Despite the extent of research and attention the social practice of teasing has increasingly garnered to date, theoretical frameworks governing its use and manifestations remain limited (Kowalski, 2007; Mills & Babrow, 2003).

These limitations have been attributed to the complexities within the social practice of teasing. To this point, Kowalski (2007) notes:

> Teasing is an "eye of the beholder" phenomenon in that the interpretation of a tease may differ greatly across teasers, targets, and observers. In light of this, it is difficult to operationally establish when teases have and have not occurred. [Also] because teasing has both positive and negative connotations, it has been a difficult concept to define. This has been further complicated by the fact that teasing shares elements in common with joking, bullying, sarcasm, flirting, and harassment (p. 170).

Like Kowalski (2007), Keltner, D., Young, R. C., Heerey, E. A., Oemig, C., & Monarch, N. D. (1998) vividly illustrate this complexity in their observation that "teasing is paradoxical. [It] criticizes yet compliments, attacks yet makes people closer, humiliates yet expresses affection" (p. 1231). Indeed, these characteristics challenge efforts to adequately examine its practice.

As a long time representative of the *dark* (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007) and *offensive* (Kowalski, 2003) sides of human interaction, the use of teasing to achieve antisocial functions is universally agreed upon and likely a predominate perception. That is, There may be a general tendency among individuals to perceive the social practice of teasing as antisocial in nature. "Whether directly or indirectly, all have witnessed the maliciousness attributed to antisocial (cruel) teasing, a behavior closely related to bullying" (Wright, 2008, 14). Such hostility has long been experienced in many various places such as playgrounds, workplace environment etc.

However, teasing also serves many prosocial functions that make it extremely useful toachieving goals regarding issues such as socialization and relational escalation and maintenance. Hence, there are extreme contrasts between the functions of antisocial and prosocial teasing.

Antisocial and prosocial teasing do have some similarities in that they each contain elements of the same three components: ambiguity, humor (Shapiro et al., 1991) and identity confrontation (Kowalski et al., 2001). The similarities and differences between antisocial and prosocial teasing can be difficult to detail due to the challenges to define and operationally establish teasing episodes (Kowalski, 2007; Partington, 2006). Consequently, the limited theoretical developments in teasing research leave many nuances of teasing inadequately explained at best. Cognizant of this fact following their examination of teasing as a means of social influence, Mills and Babrow (2003) assert that "as scholars, we must more clearly and thoroughly sort out [the complexities within teasing]. When we do, we will at last be able to replace simplistic, atheoretical cookbooks with more powerful and principled guidelines and training programs" (p. 284). This charge encouraged the present dissertation research of factors characterizing types of teasing and their outcomes.

Taking into account such complexities, the present research primarily focused on teasing exchanged as live text commentaries in a virtual environment between soccer fans of two different cultures, namely, British and Iranian. The researcher basically tried to focus on the perceptions of teaser targets to figure out the extent to which such teasing can be interpreted as hostile across the two cultures.

All studies, about different behavioral aspects of football fans, one of which is teasing, have been only carried out in stadiums or viewing centers (Adetunji, 2013, Gastaldo, 2005). There appears to be no research to date conducted to investigate teasing in virtual spaces; To fill the mentioned gap, the current study is primarily designed to study teasing among football fans on net; Moreover, unlike the previous studies which have investigated teasing in one culture (Adetunji (2013), the researcher aims to compare teasing between two different cultures; In other words, she is going to compare two renowned football teams of Iran, that is to say Esteghlal and Perspolis, with two noted English teams called Liverpool and Manchester United to investigate the effect of culture on their fans' perception of teasing.

PROBLEM AND PURPOSE

Although many studies have been done about the various behavioral aspects of football fans (Jones, 2000, Giulianotti, 2002, Rahmati, 2003, Pak Nezhad, Derani, 2009, Adetunji, 2013), they have only been carried out in stadiums and viewing centers and no one has carried out such a research in virtual spaces such as face book, instagram etc.   The situation of virtual spaces differs in a large extent from that of stadiums or viewing centers. The reason is that there is not full and effective control over the virtual spaces. It causes fans to feel more comfortable expressing themselves; Moreover, although Rahmati (2003) has confirmed that culture has effect on the aggressive behaviors of football fans, it does not show that the same result will be obtained when we want to investigate the effect of culture on teasing among football fans; Therefore, in this study the researcher is going to investigate the effect of culture on perception of teasing by football fans of both English and Iranian football teams in virtual spaces. This study aims to answer the following question:

> Is there any difference between the perception of teasing by Iranian and English football fans when they tease fans of rival teams in social networks?

METHOD
DATA
The purpose of this study was to examine how Persian and English football fans differ from one another in terms of their perception of aggressiveness from teasing language. Given this objective, the method employed in this study was comparative and corpus-based.

The data for this study comprised a total of 15 conversational threads including three teasing functions needed for our questionnaire from two web pages. Two popular Persian and English web pages, namely www.facebook.com/LfcMu and www.facebook.com/EST.VS.PRS for British and Persian football fans respectively were selected according to the number of fans visiting these sites. To further ensure that the pages were popular enough with soccer fans in each culture, they were compared among 10 other similar top ranking pages and they proved to be most popular among the rest. The Facebook page for the Persian fans received 95,142 total page likes with 1,232 interlocutors commenting and talking on the page. The Facebook page visited by British soccer fans received 96, 601 total page likes with 58,867 interlocutors leaving comments and talking over the page weekly

PARTICIPANTS
In this study, one of the real challenges faced by the researcher was to reach the population of online interlocutors as the respondents could not be physically present to be interviewed or followed up in a systematic way. However, the page moderators were contacted via email and requested to share the emails of active participants so that the questionnaires can be sent to them. Finally, 52 Persian and 56 British participants were contacted via email to receive the questionnaires. By the time all the questionnaires were collected, only 30 British male participants had sent their responses ranging in age from 18 to 30 years old, being members to official banter page for Liverpool and Manchester United fans at: www.facebook.com/LfcMu, a widely visited website on Facebook by the fans of the two most popular soccer teams, Manchester united and Liverpool. Many of the attendants in the web pages did not return the answer. The reason why the research excluded the females from the whole group of participants is the rarity of such cases in the web page belonging to Iranian fans. Also, age was not a variable for us because we assume that teasing can be interpreted by all ages.

The Persian version of questionnaire was sent to 52 Persian participants, out of whom 30 male respondents returned the questionnaires with completed responses ranging in age from 19 to 32 years old who were members of www.facebook.com/EST.VS.PRS, which is one of the most frequently visited web pages by many of soccer fans supporting either Persepolis or Esteghlal as their favorite soccer team.

As the number of respondents reached thirty in each group, it could be considered a statistically sound sample size to perform parametric tests such as t-tests, which was used to analyze the data collected (Hatch & Farhadi , 1981).

INSTRUMENTS
Two instruments were employed in the present study. One of them was a questionnaire**.** The major proportion of the data for this study was collected via three sets of teasing exchange supplemented by two questionnaires. Both questionnaires comprised 3 sections representing 3 functions, namely, biting, nipping, and biting/nipping, each including 5 relevant teasing languages. Cronbach's alpha as the measure of internal consistency was used to evaluate the reliability of the questionnaires and to figure out if the questions in the two surveys reliably measure the perception of aggressiveness. In order to evaluate the feasibility of the questionnaires and to improve their designs, prior to the administration, one questionnaire for each group was designed. After answering the questionnaires by randomly selected commentators, the ambiguous teasing languages were removed and the final questionnaires were designed. As the two groups of participants spoke different native languages, similar common themes of teasing with the same set of functions in two languages of English (Appendix B) and Farsi (Appendix A) were designed. Each group received the questionnaire in their own native language containing authentic teases extracted from the fan pages on Facebook . Based on our definition in the literature review, three sets of teasing exchanges were given in each questionnaire with separate functions of 1) nipping, 2) nipping/biting and 3) biting which were sent via email to the participants. These participants were required to rank their perceptions on each teasing set on a semantic differential scale from 1, being the least aggressive/non-serious intent to 5, being most aggressive/ serious intent (Appendix C & D).

Although there were other scales to measure attitudes such as Likert scale, a semantic differential scale was adopted for a number of reasons. Osgood and colleagues (1962) report many exploratory studies in which the semantic differential was used to assess attitudes. In contrast to the Likert, the respondents do not have to take an agree/disagree position on the question to gain an agreement level, you simply ask the respondent for their response without any pre-judgment compared to two different value extremes. In addition, we can gain the same emphasis on extremes that you can from a Likert type question by using various values between the two choices (Osgood, *et al.*,1957) .

As already stated in the previous chapter, the continuum developed by Boxer and Cortes- Conde (1997) formed the basis of our coding formula and the questionnaire development for this study. However, as there was almost no teasing exchange in the sets of data which could be purely regarded as bonding, such category was excluded from the range of my enquiry in this research. The first category under analysis, then, included those "nipping" exchanges which seem to have intended to create a bonding within the whole online community of fans on the webpage. The second category covered those teasing exchanges which were framed in a way that could be regarded as playful or malicious by the target as indicated by contextual clues and the outcome of the teasing practice. The third category, biting, included the exchanges which were marked by certain words and markers which conveyed a sense of antagonism with no reservations made to soften the message so that it could possibly be conceived of as a non-threatening tease.

Another instrument was a web page. To construct specific corpora rich in a teasing language that would allow the researcher to appraise the perceptions of interlocutors across the two cultures, Facebook as a social network service was chosen as the most popular opinion platform showing all the necessary features characteristic of a genre as defined by Bhatia (2004). Social network services in general, and Facebook in particular, show several distinctive features that can be characterized by reference to their users' orientation to the following aspects: (i) Interactional versus transactional function of the language, (ii) interpersonal versus ideational meaning, (iii) dialogic orientation and implementation, (iv) frequent use of appraisal resources, including attitude, (meanings of affect, judgment, and appreciation), together with engagement and graduation, (v) construction of a virtual identity, by the weaving of power and solidarity relationships Bhatia (2004, p. 22). Therefore, two online web pages, namely www.facebook.com/EST.VS.PRS and www.facebook.com/LfcMu were selected. To ensure the popularity of these two pages, a comparison was made between them and 10 other similar top ranking pages and they proved to be most popular among the rest. Some features of them are shown in the following table.

Table 1. *Features of the Two Persian and English Online Web Pages*

Name	Main Interest	Likes	Posts	Launch
www.facebook.com/EST.VS.PRS	football	95,142	1,232(weekly)	2010
www.facebook.com/LfcMu	football	96,601	12,576(weekly)	2010

Having decided on the linguistic corpora, the next step was taken based on a selective sampling of available teasing exchanges on both websites. In a selective sampling of data when dealing with a corpus, we have only selected the conversation threads which reflected the three categories developed by Boxer and Cortes-Conde (1997). The selective sampling from the corpus turned out 22 conversation threads at our initial attempt (Appendix E & F). In order to make sure of the face validity of the items put in the questionnaires three linguistic professors were asked to review and odd out the items which were more likely not to fit the three definitional categories we have already chosen for reference. Having consulted with the professors, 7 items were singled out to make sure that the remaining 15 items exactly reflect the categories defined. To further clarify on the types of conversation threads and the definitional categories they match one example for each category is provided below.

EX 1. Teasing language of "Nipping"

"you waited from 1967 to 1993 to get a pl title = 26 years ... know your team history kid"

As it can be perceived, the teaser in this example tries to correct a friend with a teasing tone by using the word '*kid*" pointing that he had to get a better glimpse of the team he supports before making big claims about its accomplishments in Premier League. This teasing type would match the nipping definition as it only aims at correcting a behavior in a soft way without targeting identity of the other interlocutor.

EX 2. Teasing language of "Nipping/Biting"

"just screenshotted your post james cos ur gonna look a dick after u get beaten to nil on Monday"

In this example of a teasing exchange, it can be inferred that James is being invited to a bet because the interlocutor believes his claim about his dreams about winning is soon going to be disillusioned after the game. Such type of teasing is not too soft to fit the nipping category; neither is it too aggressive to match the "biting" category as it does not directly question the identity or ability of the opponent, thus, falling into out "nipping/biting" classification

EX 3. Teasing language of " Biting"

"the last time liverpool won the league,the queen was still a virgin"

In this teasing thread, the language used intends to put down the confidence of the opponent or the fans by reminding them of their incompetence to succeed in even one game in such a long time anyone can barely remember, to the time when Queen Elizabeth was not yet married. Such a teasing language falls into our biting category as it aims directly at questioning the fan's competence or confidence fans or their favorite team to accomplish a task.

Appling the same principle, 15 items were selected to be placed in the questionnaire to elicit responses on the levels of aggression/impoliteness across the two cultures.

PROCEDURE

To collect the teasing conversation threads which carried the exact teasing functions, the two fan pages on the Facebook were analyzed and 22 conversational threads were extracted from both websites. For the purposes of the face validity of our questionnaire, the 22 item were shown to three linguistic professors to make sure that they reflect the nature of teasing items before they were presented to the respondents. For each group, Iranian and British fans, 5 scenarios of teasing exchange were chosen for each category of nipping, nipping/biting and biting. This means that 15 exchanges were finally chosen out of 22 exchanges in each language, namely, English and Farsi. There is no hard and fast rule for the minimum number of items to measure a single dimension of a scale. However, in many research studies in social sciences, a 12 item scale can suffice to produce reliable results as long as alpha coefficient reaches a minimum of 0.7, which was the case with both sets of questionnaires we have developed. The participants were each given a questionnaire in their own native language to mark each teasing remark from a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being the most playful/polite in one extreme to 5 being the most malicious/impolite at the other end of continuum. Then, for each category of teasing a mean was calculated. For the last stage, the mean scores of all informants achieved on each group were compared and T- tests were run to see if the mean scores of participants in the two groups showed a significant difference in terms of perceptions of aggressiveness across the two sample cultures.

After the completed questionnaires were collected, for each category of teasing, a mean was calculated. For the last stage, the mean scores of all informants achieved on each group were compared and T-tests were run to see if the mean scores of participants in the two groups showed a significant difference in terms of perceptions of aggressiveness across the two sample cultures.

RESULTS

To ensure that the questionnaires designed on a five-point semantic differential scale had the expected reliability, Cronbach's alpha was used as the most common measure of internal consistency. Alpha coefficient ranges in value from 0 to 1 and may be used to describe the reliability of factors extracted from dichotomous , that is, questions with two possible answers or multi-point formatted questionnaires or scales. The higher the score, the more reliable the generated scale is. Nunnaly (1978) has indicated 0.7 to be an acceptable reliability coefficient but lower thresholds are sometimes used in the literature.

In order to figure out whether the questions in the two surveys reliably measure the same latent variable which is the perception of aggressiveness, a Cronbach's alpha was run on a sample size of 30 soccer fans on a fan page of Facebook for each sample population. The Cronbach's alpha obtained for the Persian scale and the English scale turned out to be 0.86 and 0.79 respectively, which were both at an acceptable level to make the claim that both scales had the desired rate of internal consistency (Nunnaly,1987).

To evaluate the overall difference in the mean perception of aggressiveness/politeness between the two groups, the total means were compared to capture a holistic picture of the two groups of soccer fans in a virtual environment. Assuming equal variances, the independent sample t-test was conducted to measure the statistical difference. The results in Table 4.1 show that our original hypothesis is supported with alpha level set at 0.05, limiting the type one error or falsely accepting the null. (t critical=2.00, 58=df, p =.044). This can be construed that the British fans coming from a western background are more likely to interpret a teasing remark in a virtual environment more aggressive than the Iranian soccer fans with an eastern background in a similar virtual context.

Table 1. *T-test Results on the Overall Perception of Aggressiveness*

	Mean	SD	N	T-Test	P value
Iranian Fans	47.84	7.91	30	2.05	.044
British Fans	51.67	6.47	30		

The overall mean and standard deviation of Iranian fans are 47.84 & 7.91 respectively, while those of British fans are 51.67 & 6.47 respectively. It indicates that,overall, the British soccer fans are more likely to interpret teasing remarks more aggressive than their Iranian counterparts.

To fine tune the process of comparison of outcomes, t-tests were initially run to measure the difference on the three previously defined subscales of "Nipping", Nipping/Biting" and the "Biting" as separate classes of intentions for teasing language.

For "nipping" subscale, as shown in Table 2, the alpha level is set at 0.5 limiting Type I error or falsely accepting the null, the hypothesis is thus supported confirming that the British soccer fans significantly perceive nipping remarks more aggressive than their Iranian counterparts (t critical=2.00, 58=df, p =.048).

Table 2. *T-test Results on the Nipping Subscale*

	Mean	SD	N	T-Test	P value
Iranian Fans	14.68	2.46	30	2.01	.048
British Fans	16.10	2.99	30		

The mean and Standard deviation of Iranian fans are 14.68 & 2.46 respectively, while those of British fans are 16.10 & 2.99 respectively. It shows that the British soccer fans significantly perceive nipping remarks more aggressive than their Iranian counterparts.

As shown in Table 4.3 For the "Nipping/Biting" subscale, with the alpha level set at 0.05, the t-test was conducted to evaluate the differences between the means of the two groups. Although the British participants demonstrate a higher mean than the Iranian respondents, the statistical difference between the mean was not shown to be significant. (t critical=2.00, 58=df, p =.664). This would mean that when confronted with ambitiously worded teasing language in the absence of paralinguistic markers, Iranian and British soccer fans interpretations of teasing do not significantly differ.

Table 3. *T-test Results on the Nipping/Biting Subscale*

	Mean	SD	N	T-Test	P value
Iranian Fans	17.40	3.46	30	0.43	.664
British Fans	17.77	3.05	30		

The mean and Standard deviation of Iranian fans are 17.40 & 3.46 respectively, while those of British fans are 17.77 & 3.05 respectively. It shows that Iranian and British soccer fans interpretations of teasing do not significantly differ in the absence of paralinguistic markers.

As shown in Table 4, for the "Biting" subscale, with the alpha level set at 0.05, the t-test was run to measure the differences between the means of the two groups of soccer fans. Aligned with our original hypothesis, the British participants scored a higher mean than the Iranian respondents with the statistical difference between the mean being significant (t critical=2.00, 58=df, p =.011). This can be inferred that the British soccer fans interpret the teasing more aggressive when the biting tease is perceived to have to do with their identity and functions to question their abilities.

Table 4. *T-test Results on the Biting Subscale*

	Mean	SD	N	T-Test	P value
Iranian Fans	15.76	3.25	30	2.63	.011
British Fans	17.80	2.73	30		

The mean & standard deviation of Iranian fans are 15.76 & 3.25 respectively, while those of British fans are 17.80 & 2.73 respectively. It shows that the British soccer fans significantly perceive biting remarks more aggressive than their Iranian counterparts.

DISCUSSION

Results of scores on perception of verbal aggression scale for a sample of 60 Iranian and British soccer fans were analyzed to determine the levels of aggression perceived by the fans within their own culture when they are faced with the teasing language in a virtual text commentary environment. *The research hypothesis for the study assumes that the Iranian soccer fans perceive verbal play of teasing as less aggressive than British soccer fans.*

To be even more precise with the teasing type of the language used by the teaser among fans in both culture, the continuum developed by Boxer and Cortes- Conde's (1997) was adopted which ranges the teasing perception from nipping ,as having a bonding nature, to biting as a more seriously intended teasing which targets the identity of the recipient. The following are the key finding on the results for each type of teasing.

Differences on report of perception among British and Iranian soccer fans on the whole scale. a final t-test was run to compare the overall mean for both groups on their overall perception of aggression expressed by teasing exchanges in a live text commentary in the virtual environment. Paralleled with our original hypothesis, the results brought further proof indicating that the overall mean of British participants (M=51.67) was higher than that of the Iranian counterparts (M= 47.84) which was statistically even significant with alpha set at .05.

Since no research has been done yet comparing the effect of culture on British and Iranian teasing, the researcher has tried to refer to a few similar studies being conducted in the recent years to justify the results.

Based on self-construal theory, individuals from independent cultures (mainly western) tend to value self-differentiation and think of themselves as independent of relationships, while people from interdependent societies tend to fulfill their social role well and look for closeness with others (Cross, Bancon & Morris, 2000; Chen, 2011); hence, regarding teasing, in interdependent individuals' view, it is a " prosocial activity that brings individuals closer, while independent individuals would see teasing as a comment, or critique on flows of the unique self" (Chen, 2011, p.9); in other words, people from interdependent cultures regard teasing and criticism as necessary interactions which encourage closeness between relationships, while individuals from independent societies do not have the same view. That could be a reason why people from British cultures representing independent cultures are less tolerant of teasing than their Iranian counterparts which represent interdependent cultures.

This result can be further justified based on individualism-collectivism. In fact, people from collectivist cultures support more interdependent self-construal and those from individualist cultures endorse more independent self-construal (Triandis, 1995). As Campos, keltner, Beck, Gonzaga & John (2007) showed in their study, European Americans enjoyed being teased the least than did Asian Americans. As the European Americans reported in the questionnaires, they had the tendency to less laughter as well (Campos, keltner, Beck, Gonzaga & John, 2007). These researchers believe that it can be rooted in the European individualistic and Asian collectivistic cultures. In fact, European Americans have the tendency toward "positive self- differentiation which is threatened by teasing" (Campos, et al, 2007); Additionally, "to communicate the playful intentions of a tease, teasers use "off-record" markers that convey affiliation intent and reduce the hostility of the provocation" (Campos et al, 2007); otherwise, it may result in more aggressive perception of teasing by the target. Considering British and Iran as part of individualistic and collectivistic cultures, respectively, the researcher has concluded that, overall, British fans perceive teasing more aggressive than their Iranian counterparts due to their individualistic nature of their culture which is influenced by the shortage of 'off-record' markers in a virtual environment.

Another reason could refer to dialecticism. As Chen (2011) argues Eastern interdependent people have a higher degree of dialecticism than people from western cultures. Consequently, Eastern people have a greater tolerance of emotional complexity then people from western cultures; in other words, people from Eastern cultures are more tolerant of teasing than western people. They are more able to accept both positive and negative sides of teases, while people from western cultures are more sensible to teases and consider opposing emotions and ideas as inherently contradictory (peng & Nisbett, 1999); hence, it can be concluded that, overall, British fans react more aggressively to teases than Iranian counterparts since they are less tolerant of emotional complexity than Iranian fans.

The next possible reason could be the long history of hooliganism in the UK which dates back to 1960 and has given it the title of the leader of hooliganism in the world (Dunning, 2000). Further, Rahmati (2003) claims that the British show more aggressive behaviors than their Iranian counterparts in stadiums. It can influence the way they perceive teasing in a virtual environment; in other words, the degree of politeness of a specific tease may be the same, but the British fans may perceive it more aggressive than do Iranian fans due to their negative background.

The last reason may be racist teasing which is common in the English society. If a tease is against a black footballer, it may be reacted in a very aggressive way by a black target, while such kinds of teases are not popular in the Iranian culture.

To be able to make stronger claims on the extent to which such results can be generalized, further scrutiny and replicating research will be needed. However, with the limitations we had in this study with time as well as the sizable number of participants who were actually cooperative and the amount of care they have taken in their responses, the current results can be considered valid in its own right.

Differences on report of perception among British and Iranian soccer fans on the "nipping exchanges". For the set of nipping threads, the mean score of British participants, (M= 16.10), are shown to be higher than the Iranian counterparts (M=14.68) and proved to be statistically significant. Such result is in line with our original hypothesis which predicted higher levels of perceived verbal aggression in teasing exchanges among the more independent

western culture that values self differentiation (Cross, Bacon & Morris 2000). However, the scarcity of similar studies on fans teasing language and associated perceptions is reason for us to cautiously generalize the results.Thus, for making stronger claims on nipping exchanges and the potential perceptions of such kind across cultures; we would need detailed research in this area.

Differences on report of perception among British and Iranian soccer fans on the "nipping biting" exchanges". In this study, the corpus was filled with ambiguously worded teasing exchanges that would require more inside information on the context and the conditions of opponents and a history of antagonism between the teams. In addition, the absence of non-linguistic clues and off record markers made it even more daunting to label a commentary as purely "nipping" or strictly "biting" by definition. Thus, our second set of teasing language included teasing threads that could be simply picked up as both nipping and biting by the teasing target in any given culture. The results turned out that the mean score of British participants was higher (M= 17.77) than their Iranian counterparts on (M=17.40) on "nipping/biting" threads. However, the difference was not statistically significant to allow for any further conclusions in line with our hypothesis. A possible explanation for this could be the lack of contextual clues and other linguistic off record markers that would play an important role in our perception of the intents in verbal plays as pointed in research by Keltner et al. (2001).

Differences on report of perception among British and Iranian soccer fans on the "biting exchanges". For this set of exchanges which mainly included those teasing threads with a clear malicious intention, the mean score of British fans (M= 17.80) proved to be substantially higher than the mean score obtained for Iranian soccer fans (M= 15.76). Such statistically significant difference surely substantiates existence of a sharp sensitivity to a set of teasing remarks that targets the identity or ability in a western culture that has been reported to be less tolerant of sacrificing their own image for the sake of the whole group as suggested by Kowalski and colleagues (2001). Such results suggests that as the teasing exchanges become more intensive in targeting the ability and identities of the British community, the more likely it is for the British fans to perceive the remarks as inflammatory and malicious.

CONCLUSION

The current research was a small contribution to the limited empirical research in the area of teasing language. The study, however, was probably the first seeking to establish a basic definition which was founded on perception of the teaser target and not the intent of the teaser. To reach the goal, the teasing exchange of two British and Iranian football fans on virtual text commentary environment was investigated to find out whether or not there were any significant differences in the perception of teasing between two cultures. The results of the study indicated that there were differences in the perception of teasing between two different cultures. In other words, British football fans are more likely to interpret teasing remarks more aggressively than Iranian counterparts. The same results went for the nipping remarks. Concerning biting/nipping teasing the result was different. It showed that the interpretations of teasing by the football fans of two different cultures do not significantly differ in the absence of paralinguistic markers. To put it simply, overall, the British football fans perceive teasing more negatively than Iranian counterparts. If backed up by future research, the results can have even more practical aspect in banning or allowing free expression of teasing in stadiums which is now a hotly debated issue in many sport arenas.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST
The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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