She Talks, He Talks: Gender, Indirectness, and Length

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Abstract

This paper aimed at exploring whether men and women were different with regard to the use of indirectness and length in Persian. Moreover, it investigated to extract the range of directness and indirectness strategies used by males and females in particular situations. To achieve the aforesaid goals, the data were grouped by means of the use of written discourse completion tasks (DCT), with fifteen situational settings. The results indicated statistically significant differences between the groups on using length. The findings of this research verified gender-bound language at least in fifteen areas and the corpus investigated in this study. Besides, the findings of this paper showed that women use an indirect communication pattern. Women also prefer using sentence length.

Keywords: gender-bound language, directness, indirectness, length

INTRODUCTION

For many years, we have seen a change of focus in ESL/EFL linguistic researches and learning theories from a structural approach to communicative or pragmatic researches (Canale & Swaine, 1980; Widdowson, 1987, cited in Ghaleb, 2003). This is demonstrated in the theoretical background of a number of language learning strategies like communication strategies concerned with many different researches on speech act behavior.

Likewise, this research article aims at investigating this crucial perspective of their communicative competence in Persian via request. With respect to the aforesaid discussion and owing to the goal this study, the questions of interest are: Are males' utterances in response to the questions longer than females'? Are females more indirect in their answers than males?

Indirectness is one of the most important features that relates to formulating requests in particular situations (Felix-Brasdefer, 2005). He also explored indirectness in requests made by Mexican University students, considering pragma-linguistic information

employed during a request sequence in both formal and informal conditions. He organized five situations in which requesters and requestees had various social distance and power in each. The situations were classified according to hierarchy, deference, and solidarity. He discovered that interlocutors that are more distant expressed requests more indirectly. Felix-Brasdefer (2005) summarized that only the close relationship between numbers of the same peer group leads to the use of direct strategies. Salmani Nodoushan (2008) in his study of indirectness in the requests among the native speakers of Persian suggested that in situations where there is social distance between interlocutors, direct requests are not happening very often. However, in situations where there is no social distance, Persian native speakers frequently use direct requests.

Felix-Brasdefer (2005) conducted a study to examine the notions of indirectness and politeness in speech act of requests, including head acts and external modifications, among Mexican university students in role play situation. The subjects of the study were ten NSs of Mexican Spanish included four male and six females. The data of the study was collected through an open-ended role-play. The findings of the study show that NSs of Mexican Spanish prefer to use conventional indirectness strategies by means of "query preparatory" when making request in situations which display +Power or +Distance, whereas prefer to use directness strategies when the relationship between the interlocutors was closer (-Distance). Also the study proves that there is no relation between indirectness and politeness as observed by Brown and Levinson's (1987) and Leech's (1983). The findings of the study show that direct requests are situation-dependent and seem to be that the expected behavior among Mexican subjects in a solidarity system (-Power, -Distance). Also the findings of the study are consistent with other studies which found the directness in German and Polish cultures should not be considered impolite, but rather should be seen as a way of expressing closeness and affiliation.

METHOD

Participants

The total of 70 participants had a hand in this study. 35 male native speakers of Persian and 35 female native speakers of Persian. The age range of the respondents varies from 18 to 26. At first, a language background survey was administered to make sure that subjects were proper informants. The participants were the students of English translation at Islamic Azad University Tehran South Branch, Iran. The respondents were asked to answer 15 questions. The material used in this study was a questionnaire given to the students in order to collect data naturally. It is worth mentioning that none of the participants were informed of the questions before.

Instruments

The instruments used in this study were a survey study and Discourse Completion Test (DCT). Survey study contained 9 questions covering background of their Persian. Upon

conducting the DCT in this article, 15 situations were given to respondents in written form based on their relative power and social distance. All participants were required to complete this Discourse Completion Test (DCT).

Procedures

Participants were required to put themselves in real situation and to act that in each situation they would in fact, say something they were required to write down what they would say. The situations depicted in the role-play represent the distinction made between social groups and persons on the basis of biological, physiological, and sociocultural factors, as sex, age, or ethnicity, resulting in the assignment of roles and status within a society that show everyday occurrences of the type is going to look familiar to Persian native speakers.

The data were grouped into the categories of direct and indirect use of request strategies and the frequency and percentage of each was computed. Chi-square test was administered so as to establish whether the differences in the frequency of strategies made by respondents were statistically significant.

RESULTS

The first research question focused on whether women prefer to express their request with using more words, repeating the same things differently or not.

The results of the analysis for each question have been depicted in table 1 below.

Table 1. The Length of Participants' Answers

The Length of Women's Answers			The Length of Men's Answers		
	1	320		1	140
	2	205		2	103
	3	120		3	85
	4	260		4	74
	5	120		5	50
	6	83		6	65
	7	120		7	70
	8	175		8	115
	9	195		9	85
	10	250		10	100
	11	160		11	65
	12	145		12	53
	13	140		13	73
	14	150		14	38
	15	135		15	85

By looking at table 1, we can infer that women prefer to request using more utterances than men to save the addressee's face and be more polite.

The second research question maintains that are women more indirect than men in their answers. The results are tabulated in table 2 and 3.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for the Degree of Indirectness of Women's Answers

Questions	The Number of indirect Answers by Females	Percentage
1	31	88.57
2	31	88.57
3	33	94.28
4	28	80
5	23	65.71
6	29	82.85
7	17	48.57
8	31	88.57
9	26	74.28
10	21	60
11	11	31.42
12	18	51.42
13	28	80
14	24	68.57
15	14	40

$\overline{X}$=69.52

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for the Degree of Indirectness of Men's Answers

Questions	The Number of indirect Answers by Males	Percentage
1	25	71.42
2	9	54.28
3	25	71.42
4	17	48.57
5	11	31.42
6	19	54.28
7	10	28.57
8	17	48.57
9	12	34.28
10	17	48.57
11	8	22.58
12	10	28.57
13	13	37.14
14	15	42.85
15	11	31.42

$\overline{X}$=43.61

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The findings of this paper show that women use an indirect communication pattern of modest request, which substantiates consideration and politeness with regard to others. This research indicates that men have a strong preference of using the answer as a direct communication of request. Furthermore, it shows that women believe that implicit requests are popular, if not more popular, than the explicit ones. We hope that this paper will provide a beneficial insight in to second/foreign language learning. Moreover, the

results of this paper are in line with the results of Brown and Levinson (1987) and Lakoff (1973).

Based on the aforementioned results, we reach a conclusion that there is a significant difference between males and females' polite behavior and this difference has its origin in culture. In a nutshell, females were more polite than males. Moreover, culture itself systematizes with many co-cultures and we regard gender culture as co-culture. Their sense of identity and their sense of place in culture and society are bound up in the ideological history of relationships between males and females. Concurrently, gender difference in polite behavior varies from one to another. Context has a notable role in forming the communication behavior of the gender groups. Hence, polite behavior of disparate genders cannot be explored independent of context (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Lakoff, 1973).

As mentioned earlier, this paper aimed at exploring whether men and women were different with regard to the use of indirectness and length in Persian. Moreover, it investigated to extract the range of directness and indirectness strategies used by males and females in particular situations. In fact, the focus of this research is to explore the relationship between effectiveness in communicating ideas and politeness. The findings, though small in scale, have highlighted important feature of politeness. They reveal that effectiveness in communicating ideas and politeness are two related skills of a language. That is, as learning progresses, L2 learners acquire pragmatic and linguistic knowledge.

The results also show that although effectiveness in communicating ideas and politeness are related, they are not one single skill (Bardovi-Harlig & Taylor, 2003). Some learners have both but others do not. That is, there are learners who are capable of communicating their ideas effectively; however, they lack pragmatic knowledge. This gap emphasizes the significance of explicit instruction in increasing the pragmatic ability of the students. Bardovi-Harlig and Taylor (2003) stated that "teaching pragmatics by increasing the pragmatic knowledge of the learners enables them to use and interpret socially approximate language in a particular situation" (P. 87). Other work that highlights the role of instruction in politeness, awareness, by Watts (2003), and pragmatic awareness development in the second language by Kasper and Rose (2002).

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