

# A comparative study of power distribution between adult male and female interactions in Persian/English conversations of social family movies

<sup>1</sup>Elham Bahreyni, <sup>2</sup>Bahman Gorjian\*, <sup>3</sup>Abdolmajid Hayati

<sup>1</sup>Department of TEFL, Science and Research Branch, Islamic Azad University, Khuzestan, Iran

<sup>2</sup>Department of TEFL, Abadan Branch, Islamic Azad University, Abadan, Iran

<sup>3</sup>Department of TEFL, Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz, Ahvaz, Iran

\*Corresponding author: [bahgorji@yahoo.com](mailto:bahgorji@yahoo.com)

**Abstract-**This study investigate linguistic differences between males and females were taken into account. In order to gather the most natural-like data, 10 English and 10 Persian film-scripts with a family and social theme were randomly selected from amongst all the scenarios available in movie guide books. In all, 89,280 utterances were carefully studies and analyzed. The results of the Chi-square analysis showed significant difference between English and Persian movies on the use of linguistic variables. The study revealed that Persian men used more interruptions and question as a controlling strategy more than women; while Persian women used more resources of extended speech in turn-taking, silence, lack of supportive feedback and delayed minimal response. On the other hand, American men used more interruptions and silence in their conversations while American women utilized more extended speech, question as a controlling strategy, lack of supportive feedback and delayed minimal response. The findings of the study did confirm that gender-bound language at least in the six mentioned areas were inspected in this research.

**Keywords-**social family movies, male, female, multimedia

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This study aims to investigate the possible effect of a speaker's gender on conversational style, the occurrence and differences of employing linguistic variables, and the potential preferences for the use of words with intentionally or unintentionally that indicates power. There is indeed a difference in the communicative competence of males and females has been demonstrated in many areas, including tag questions (Holmes, 2001), interruptions (West & Zimmerman, 1983; Zimmerman & West, 1975), minimal responses (Woods, 1988), linguistic hedging devices (Holmes, 2001), topic development (Coates, 1988) and verbosity (Woods, 1988). The explanations for these differences can be categorized as belonging to either what Coates (1988, p. 65) calls the 'dominance approach' or the 'difference approach'. Exponents of the 'dominance approach', such as Zimmerman and West (1991), interpret the differences as reflecting male dominance and female subordination while those who support the 'difference approach', introduced by Maltz and Borker (2000), attribute the variation in communicative competence to different but equal 'sub-cultures' or 'genderlects'.

Cross-cultural studies, meanwhile, with a critical analysis point of view, the pool of the review of literature on gender discursal studies have rarely focused on at least

as far as gender differences in conversations of social family movies of Persian and English languages. Thus research problems will deal with discovering the role of gender in taking superiority or inferiority to participate in the conversations. Although power is an abstract asymmetrical social variable which is difficult to measure, this study aims to investigate gender power distributions in terms of their manifestations through language among males and females in both English and Persian languages. The present study will also compare and contrast gender issues in English and Persian social family movies conversations to determine gender roles cross-culturally.

## 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Conversational dominance is the focus of research by Hughes (1992) which looks at the interaction of the independent variables speakers' gender and expertise. By examining linguistic features such as talkativeness, interruptions, overlaps and minimal responses, she was able to establish that in conjunction the variables of gender and expertise were a good predictor of dominance. In other words speakers who were both well-informed male tended to dominate conversation, talked more and infringed the other speaker's turn more.

Yieke (2002, p.31) describes the workplace situation in Kenya in relation to gender and discourse. The paper identifies discursive practices as obstacles and

discriminative practices that women have to deal with in their upward mobility in the workplace, which has traditionally been a male dominated domain, specifically, topic organization in conversation management and control. The investigation showed how topics are selected and changed within institutional discourse in an asymmetrical fashion that is dependent on gender and/or status. It was found that men raised more topics, changed more topics, women supported men's topics and yet their own topics never went far. He concluded that, both men and women regarded topics introduced by women as tentative, many of these topics were dropped, if ever started. In contrast, topics introduced by the men were treated as topics to be pursued, and they were rarely rejected. The women worked harder than the men did in the conversation, because they had less certainty of success with the topics they raised. The women did much of the necessary work of interaction, starting conversation, and then working to maintain them. Even in situations where women's topics were twice the number of men's, it was always men's topics (despite being fewer), which were taken up as mutual topics. Through 'violations' of the turn taking model, men denied equal status to women as conversational partners with respect to rights to the full utilization of their turns and support for the development of topics. The paper suggested that the power generally assumed by males is reflected in domination of conversational interaction.

In an experimental study in cross-sex conversations, Wardhaugh (2000) studied conversational dominance in adult everyday conversations. He stated that men and women come from different sociolinguistic subcultures. They have learned to do different things with language, particularly in conversation, and when the two sexes try to communicate with each other, the results may be miscommunication. The "mhmm" a women uses means only "I'm listening", while the "mhmm" a man uses quite differently tends to mean "I'm agreeing". Consequently men often believe that women always agreeing with them and the n conclude that it is impossible to tell what a woman really thinks, while women get upset with men who never seem to be listening. Wardhaugh (2000, p. 310) conclude that men and women observe different roles in conversing and have different views of what questioning in all about, women viewing questions as part of conversational maintenance and men as request for information.

### 3. RESEARCH METHOD

#### 3.1. Data analysis

According to several gender-based studies which are associated with power-related linguistic features, the following behavioral/linguistic features of power were adopted as: (1) Interruption (Kunsmann, 2002); (2) Extended speech in turn taking (Tannen, 1994); (3) Taciturnity or silence (Tannen, 1994); (4) Use of question as a controlling strategy (Kunsmann, 2002); (5) Lack of supportive feedback (Maybin, Mercer & Hewings, 1996); and (6) Delayed minimal responses (Coates, 1988).

All transcripts of cross-sex conversations of 10 English and Persian social movies investigated in this study were analyzed in terms of the above linguistic features of power. The frequencies and percentages of each linguistic/non-linguistic features of power for each character in each movie were calculated separately. Also, the researchers took advantage of percentage figures to show the distribution of each linguistic item within and between groups. This made it possible for the researcher to make intra/inter linguistic comparison among the male and female characters in regard to the use of linguistic/non-linguistic features of power. Finally, Chi-square ( $X^2$ ) was used as a scale of analysis to show whether the possible differences in the male and female character's use of linguistic/nonlinguistic features of power were statistically significant. The rating process were done by the researcher and ratified by her colleague.

### 4. RESULTS

To determine the different conversational strategies of English and Persian movies, different categorization of linguistic devices along with their frequency and chi-square results were provided. Overall, six important linguistic strategies in cross-sex conversation of English and Persian movies revealed some significant differences in practicing the linguistic properties of these conversations.

The data in the present study could not be used only as raw frequencies because the scripts were of varying length and were not directly comparable, and hence, we could not see whether the observed frequencies were related or independent; therefore, the analysis of the statistics was done using Chi-square to compare frequencies. The results are displayed in the following table where  $X^2$  stands for the *Chi-square* amounts, *df* stands for the degree of freedom, and *P* stands for the level of significance. The results are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1. Results of Chi-square analysis of interruptions among males and females

	$X^2$	df	P
Total Chi-square of Interruptions	7.231	1	.000
Total Chi-square of Extended speech	5.124	1	.000
Total Chi-square of Silence	23.289	1	.000
Total Chi-square of Questions	29.365	1	.000
Total Chi-square of Lack of Supportive feedback	2.965	1	.091
Total Chi-square of Delayed Minimal Response	3.105	1	.059

P&lt;0.05

Critical value= 3.84

#### 4.1. Interruptions

West and Zimmerman (1983, p.59) provide a widely accepted definition of interruption as 'a device for exercising power and control in conversation' and 'violations of speakers' turns at talk'. In mixed-sex pairs, West and Zimmerman found that interruptions were much more likely to come from men. In one study, 96 percent of interruptions were made by the man; in another, 75 percent. As Table 1 shows, the critical value of  $X^2$  with 1 degree of freedom was 3.84 for the 0.05 level of significance. Since the value of Chi-square obtained (7.231) for interruption was greater than 3.84, the difference between male and female's interruptions were meaningful. In other words, there was a significant difference ( $p<0.05$ ) between the interruptions used in male and female power distribution in terms of the frequency of interruption categories. Therefore, the first null hypothesis was rejected. Significant differences were revealed in applying different forms of interruptions and extended speech in English and Persian male-female talk. The most opposition was seen in successful interruption category i.e. intrusive and cooperative. In American movies men used disagreement more than women while Persian men used more Assistance. In the next paragraph some examples of men's interruptions are brought:

The woman was interrupted a total of eleven times, while a man was interrupted only once. Interestingly, it is the other man who does the interrupting;

Andy: The Australian guy...ahh, man...that guy's a riot...that guy's //

Ian: // crazy... that's for sure.

In this example, many researchers would not consider this an interruption at all, but rather a sign of active listenership, and not threatening to the current speaker's turn (Coates, 1988, p. 110). In the lengthy excerpt below, several examples are shown in which the woman is interrupted. Double slash marks indicating the interruption, while square brackets indicate overlapping:

#### 4. 2. Extended speech in turn-taking

The turn-taking procedure enables conversation to continue without everyone talking at once, as studies by Sacks (1974) have shown. It is sometimes claimed, though, that women break the rules of the turn-taking procedure less frequently than men do, and conversely, are interrupted more than men are. Of importance, however, is to examine this claim in relation to the context of the conversation. Not all simultaneous speech is a fight for power, and overlaps can indeed create connections and solidarity between two speakers. The critical value of  $X^2$  with 1 degree of freedom was 3.84 for the 0.05 level of significance. Since the value of Chi-square obtained (5.124) for extended speech was more than 3.84, the difference between male and female were meaningful. It means that conversation which is

structured by a set of conventions one of which is called turn-taking at talk used by women more than men. Turn-taking basically regulates when it is appropriate to speak, for how long and when to finish and end the turn—or leave the floor, as it is also called—between conversation partners. Women send out cues as to when they are coming to the end of their turns or when they want to take the floor. It is, therefore, necessary that women recognize conversational cues in order to avoid overlaps, interruptions or silence.

#### 4.3. Taciturnity or silence

The result of obtained frequency in both data showed that Persian female characters are less talkative than American females and men respectively. American males and females are the same in the use of silence but Persian men and women are contradictory in the use of silence. The critical value of  $X^2$  with 1 degree of freedom obtained for extended speech ( $X^2=23.289 > X^2=3.84$ ) was more than 3.84; the difference between male and female were meaningful.

#### 4. 4. Use of question as a controlling strategy

English and Persian conversations were analyzed and the statistical results revealed a very strong preference in using information-seeking questions. In the case of using questions all characters both males and females used at the same rate, but in Persian men preferred using rhetorical questions more than others while Persian women preferred information-seeking questions. American men and women utilized both type of questions nearly in similar way.

The difference between male and female dialogues was meaningful. In Persian, considering the kind of questions, direct and indirect politeness strategies in questioning were practiced especially by women. To show the high degree of respect, the word *xaheshmândâm* (please) was used in most Persian movies. There was a significant difference ( $X^2=29.365 > X^2=3.84$ ) in employing questions by men and women.

#### 4.5. Lack of supportive feedback

Although the use of lack of supportive feedback is seen to be in the same rate but American women supported other's conversation less than other groups. Contrary to American women, American men supported others more than Persian ones. Since  $X^2=2.965$  with  $df=1$  was less than the critical value=3.84, there was not a significant difference between male and female.

#### 4. 6. Delayed minimal responses

In most English movies minimal responses were considered as misunderstanding while in Persian, one of the fundamental basics in conversation and the frequent strategy used in all Persian movies was to show respect to the addressee by using the most frequent minimal

responses, delayed minimal response was observed mostly in women's conversation both in American and Persian movies. The Chi-square results of this linguistic feature were not significant. The critical value of with 1 degree of freedom was 3.84 for the 0.05 level of significance. Since the value of *Chi-square* obtained for extended speech was greater than  $X^2$  (3.105), the difference between male and female were not meaningful. Both men and women used this category in the same rate which shows that both male and female are almost equal in this category.

## 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

As has been shown in the previous chapters on distinctive features of female and male talk, communication across the sexes, i.e. between adult women and men is likely to fail because cross-sex participants interpret linguistic choices and practices differently. The study has uncovered that women and men try to interact as equal partners in mixed-sex conversation in which, however, women, in fact, do not play the same role. Striking differences in male and female contributions to mixed-sex interactions have been found to exist. Findings in this exploratory study show some support for the proposition that language use can differ between genders. Concerning the research question of the study on the differences between men and women in American and Persian movies, the results revealed that dominance is exhibited through male control of macro-institutions in society; it is also exhibited through male control of at least a part of micro-institution. One of the controlling mechanisms in micro-institutions is related to the strategy of interrupting more often than women, male dominance can be established in conversation. Thus turns are claimed, topics are initiated and maintained by men or abandoned by women. While males initiated more interruptions than females in this study, there was a clear ranking in their power lines. In Persian films male dominance is exhibited by being more powerful.

The development of the notion of gender pushes forward the changes in education. The role of teachers and students has changed together with teaching attitude, methodology, and teaching aid devices. In this respect, accepting women or men as a teacher create a supportive atmosphere in the classroom. In addition to the learner's emotional, cognitive abilities and social differences, their sex—a biological variable—also influences the development of second language skills (Chastain, 1988). But a distinction is made between sex and gender. Sex constitutes biological distinction, while gender is a social one (Ellis, 1994), gender role varies across cultures. Sex is one of the biological variables affecting foreign language learning, in this way, exploring male and female linguistic behavior seems to be essential for learning second or foreign language.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Gorjian, B., Pazhakh, A. R., & Parang, K. An investigation on the effect of critical thinking (CT) instructions on Iranian EFL learners' descriptive writing: A case of gender study. *Advances in Asian Social Science*, 1(1), (2012), 114-118.
- [2] Gorjian, B., Pazhakh, A. R., & Naghizadeh, M. Comparative study of conjunctive adverbials (CAs) in native researchers' (NRs) and non-native researchers' (NNRs) experimental articles. *Advances in Asian Social Science*, 1(2), (2012), 224-247.
- [3] Gorjian, B., Alipour, M., & Saffarian, R. The effect of multisensory techniques on reading comprehension among pre-intermediate EFL learners: The case of gender. *Advances in Asian Social Science*, 1(2), (2012), 192-196.
- [4] Chastain, K. *Developing second-language skills: Theory and practice*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc. (1988).
- [5] Coates, J. Introduction to part 2. In J. Coates & D. Cameron (eds.) *Women in their speech communities* (pp.63-73). Harlow, Essex: Longman. (1988).
- [6] Ellis, R. *The study of second language acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. (1994).
- [7] Holmes, J. An introduction to sociolinguistics. London: Longman. (2001).
- [8] Hughes, S. Expletives of lower working class women. *Language in Society*, 21, (1992), 291-303.
- [9] Kunsman, P. Gender, status and power in discourse behaviour of men and women. *Linguistic on line*, 5, (2002), 1-25.
- [10] Maltz, D.N., & Borker, R.A. *A cultural approach to male-female miscommunication*. New York: Longman. (2000).
- [11] Maybin, J. & Mercceer, N. & Hewings, A. (1996). *Using English*. London: Routledge.
- [12] Sacks, H., Schegloff, E. A., & Jefferson, G. A simplest systematics for the organization of turn-taking for conversation. *Language*, 50, (1974), 696-735.
- [13] Tannen, D. *Gender and Discourse*. New Yourk: Oxford. (1994).
- [14] Wardhaugh, R. *An introduction to sociolinguistics*. Oxford: Basil Blackwall. (2000).
- [15] West, C. & Zimmerman, D. Small insults: a study of interruptions in cross-sex conversations between unacquainted persons. In B. Thorne, C. Kramarae, & N. Henley (eds), *Language, gender, and society*, (pp. 102-117). Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House. (1983).
- [16] Woods, N. Talking shop: sex and status as determinants of floor appointment in a work setting. In J. Coates, & D. [3] [17] Cameron, (eds) *Women in their speech communities* (pp.141- 157). Harlow, Essex: Longman. (1988).
- [18] Yieke, F. Language and discrimination: A study of gender and discourse in workplaces in Kenya. Unpublished PhD Thesis. University of Vienna, Austria. Newbury House. (2002).
- [19] Zimmerman, D. & West, C. Sex roles, interruptions and silences in conversation. In B. Thorne, & N. Henley (eds) *Language and sex: difference and dominance*, 105-129. Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House. (1975).
- [20] Zimmerman, D. & West, C. Women's place in everyday talk: Reflections on parent-child interaction". *Social Problems*, 24(5), (1991), 521-529.
- [21] Zhang, Y., & Wu, L. Weights optimization of neural network via improved BCO approach. *Prog., Electromagn. Res.*, 83, (2008), 185-198.
- [22] Zhang, Y., & Wu, L. A novel algorithm for APSP problem via a simplified delay pulse coupled neural network. *Journal of Computational Information Systems*, 7 (3), (2011 a), 737-744.
- [23] Zhang, Y., & Wu, L. A hybrid TS-PSO optimization algorithm. *Journal of Convergence Information Technology*, 6 (5), (2011 b), 169-174.
- [24] Zhang, Y, Wang, S, Wu, L., & Huo, Y. Multi-channel diffusion tensor image registration via adaptive chaotic PSO. *Journal of Computers*, 6 (4), (2011), 825-829.

[25] Zhang, Y, Wu, L, Wei, & Wang, S. A novel algorithm for all pairs shortest path problem based on matrix multiplication and pulse coupled neural network. *Digital Signal Processing*, 21 (4), (2011), 517-521.



**Bahman Gorjian** obtained his PhD in TEFL from Research and Science Center of Khorasgan University in Isfahan Province. In 2006,

he was appointed Assistant Professor at TEFL Department, Abadan Branch, Islamic Azad University, Abadan, Khuzestan Province, Iran. He is currently working within several research areas covering TEFL, applied linguistics, psycholinguistics, individual differences and teaching and testing EFL. He can be reached at:

[bahgorji@yahoo.com](mailto:bahgorji@yahoo.com)

Cell phone: 00989161310917