

## **Gender Differences in Using Discourse Markers in Narrative Discourse: Case Study on Persian-Speaking 11-Year-Old Tehrani Children**

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### **Extended Abstract**

#### **1. Introduction**

Psychologists often consider gender differences as inherent characteristics of a person, not as a social or contextual subject. Many consider gender differences as a part of the genetic structure of mankind. Others also believe that social forces influence the behavior of people in order to reveal gender-specific behavior (Escalera, 2009). Limited research has been done on the child gender differences in the use of language. Only two studies, Kyratzis and Ervin-Tripp (1999), and Escalera (2009), explicitly examined gender differences in using discourse markers. Scholars suggest that there has been no research in the field of gender differences in the use of discourse markers in Persian so far.

The study of discourse markers has always been of interest to the researchers. Norrick (2001) believes that discourse markers do not create meaning, but direct the listener in a certain direction. Therefore, discourse markers can be deleted with no change in the meaning, although by deleting them, the power or the force of utterance will be less clear. According to him, discourse markers in narrative discourse have also another role. For example, discourse marker “well” is used as a sign of rejection of presupposition which is raised by another speaker, and it is clear that this is far from its adverbial meaning.

#### **2. Theoretical Framework**

Hansen (1998) describes discourse markers by using five concepts: grammaticalization, instructional semantics, polysemy, relevance theory, and conversation analysis. In this paper, by using Hansen's approach, we describe some of the discourse markers in the narrative context used by the subjects of this research, and we will study some of the functional roles of these discourse markers by referring to examples from corpus obtained from the subjects of this research. Then, following scholars such as Schourup (1985) and others, we will consider the core meaning of each discourse markers.

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### 3. Methodology

The present research is a quantitative and descriptive study which is done on the 11207-word narrative corpus from children's storytelling. This research was conducted in Day and Bahman 1395 and Farvardin 1396 on 39 monolingual Persian-speaking Tehrani children (mean age of the all subjects was 11.57). 20 stories in creating test and 20 stories in retelling test were told by the boys. Also, 19 stories in the retelling test and 16 stories in the creating test were told by the girls participated in this research.

In the oral creating test, the children told the story of *the loss of my little sister in the park* for the examiner. Since the number of discourse markers, especially complex discourse markers such as (causal, contradictory, etc.) was low based on the data from the experimental group, the retelling test was also designed. In the retelling story test, the story entitled *The fox that didn't understand* was selected, which has a number of complex discourse markers (e.g., such as, well, but, so). *The fox that didn't undrestand* is published by Porteqal Publishing and is written by Farhad Hasanzadeh. The examiner read the story in a group and showed them pictures of the book while reading. After a short period of time, the examiner asked each subject to retell the story that the examiner had defined for them individually. The stories which were told by the subjects in both tests were recorded by a voice recorder for later analysis, then written on papers, and typed on Word software environment; finally, the discourse markers were extracted and tagged based on the standards raised in Hansen approach (1998).

### 4. Results and Discussion

Different kinds of simple discourse markers as well as the total number of narrative discourse markers used by eleven-year-old Persian-speaking girls and boys were calculated and descriptive statistics (including frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation) of the used discourse markers in narrative corpus of eleven-year-old Tehrani girls and boys in both retelling and creating story test were presented. The difference between the performance of girls and boys in this study in using discourse markers between the two groups was significant only in using discourse marker "well".

### 5. Conclusion and Suggestions

Data analysis revealed that, in total, boys by using 349 discourse markers performed better than girls that used 314 discourse markers. But, this difference was significant only in using discourse marker "well" and there was no significant difference in using other discourse markers. The data of this research also revealed that girls used more diverse types of discourse markers with a total of 25 types in comparison with boys with a total of 20 types of discourse markers. Perhaps this is because of the girls' interest in narrating the story as well as conversation with their peers at break time at school or other contexts. The boys were playing in the school yard rather than talking.

The data analysis also showed that discourse markers representing simple function like “b[?d, b[?de and v[?” with frequencies of 369> 90> 74 had the highest frequency of usage by the subjects of this study. This can be explained by the iconicity principle which, according to Debir-Moghaddam (1389), is a universal phenomenon in the language, not a specific language feature. Haiman (1980) introduced the iconicity principle. According to this principle, the sequence of the elements of the sentence is consistent with the sequence of events in real world. Hence, the use of the three above-mentioned discourse markers which indicates the sequence of events in the story, was more than that of the other discourse markers used by the children of this study. It seems that the children of this study had almost the same level of storytelling skill in both sexes. Goodwin (2001) believes that context is not important in gender differences, but that the skill of children is important to predict which group performs better. Therefore, in the future research, by teaching storytelling skill to children and having control group, we can investigate the effect of education, reading story books, and communication with peers and adults on the growth of types and numbers of discourse markers in narrative and other contexts.

**Keywords:** Discourse Marker, Gender, Coherence, Narrative Discourse, Persian-Speaking children

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