

کاوشی در تأثیر جنسیت و موضوع بر کنش گفتاری فراگیران زبان انگلیسی

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چکیده

در سالهای اخیر مقوله آموزش زبان شاهد دگرگونیهای مهمی در عرصه‌های نظری و عملی بوده است که در نتیجه این دگرگونیها، مهارتهای ارتباطی و کاربردی زبان بیش از پیش مورد توجه قرار گرفته‌اند. نمونه بارز این تحولات، رویکرد فعلیت محور به امر زبان آموزی است که در چهارچوب آن ابعاد مختلف رفتار زبانی فراگیران مورد توجه قرار می‌گیرد. از جمله این ابعاد می‌توان به تأثیر ماهیت فعلیت زبانی و گفتار زبان آموزان اشاره نمود. هدف عمده این مقاله بررسی تأثیر متغیرهای جنسیت فراگیر، جنسیت معلم و موضوع گفتار بر کنش گفتاری فراگیران زبان انگلیسی است. جمعیت آماری مطالعه، شامل ۲۰ مرد و ۲۰ زن فراگیر زبان بوده است که تنوع پذیری گفتار آنان از لحاظ روانی کلام، پیچیدگی و درستی دستوری گفتار آنان در ارتباط با جنسیت معلم، جنسیت خود فراگیر و موضوع گفتار بررسی شده است. نتایج حاصل از تجزیه و تحلیل داده‌ها نشان دهنده تفاوت‌های معنادار آماری در موارد زیر است: الف) هریک از متغیرهای جنسیت معلم و نوع موضوع بر روان بودن کلام تأثیرگذار است؛ ب) نوع موضوع در پیچیدگی گفتار زبان آموزان مؤثر است و ج) هر یک از متغیرهای جنسیت معلم و جنسیت فراگیر به طور جداگانه، هر دو عامل اخیر در ارتباط با یکدیگر و هر سه متغیر جنسیت معلم، جنسیت فراگیر و نوع موضوع بر درستی گفتاری زبان آموزان تأثیر دارد. نتایج تحقیق و کاربرد آن در امر فراگیری و آموزش زبان انگلیسی مورد بحث و بررسی قرار گرفته است.

واژه‌های کلیدی

جنسیت، فعلیت زبانی، تنوع پذیری، روانی کلام، پیچیدگی کلام، درستی دستوری.

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Introduction

A central concern in SLA studies over the years has been to elicit and examine samples of meaning-focused language produced by L2 learners. Such a concern rests on the methodological premise “that unless learners are given the opportunity to experience such samples they may not succeed in developing the kind of L2 proficiency needed to communicate fluently and effectively” (Ellis, 2003: 1). This has been argued to be achievable through ‘tasks’ the impetus for which comes from experiential learning paradigm in mainstream psychology (Nunan, 1991) According to this paradigm.

. . . immediate personal experience is seen as the focal point for learning, giving “life, texture, and subjective personal meaning to abstract concepts, and at the same time providing a concrete, publicly shared reference point for testing the implications and validity of ideas created during the learning process” as pointed out by David Kolb (1984: 21). But experience also needs to be processed consciously by reflecting on it. Learning is thus seen as a cyclical process integrating immediate experience, reflection, abstract conceptualization and action (Nunan, 1991: 15).

Adoption of task, in effect, amounted to a turning point that stimulated a wealth of literature in SLA. A major contribution of task to the expansion of SLA research was made when ‘variability’ emerged in examining the relationship between language use, task, and language acquisition (Ellis, 2003). This in turn led to a further expansion of literature by bringing along a wide range of theoretical frameworks and perspectives (Ellis, 1994).

Variability in L2 Production

Within the range of “almost overwhelming” (Wolfram, 1991: 104) theoretical perspectives, sociolinguistic, psycholinguistic, and cognitive accounts of variability have been of a celebrated status. Of the sociolinguistic accounts, *Labovian paradigm*, *dynamic paradigm*, and *social psychological paradigm* are distinguishable. As far as the psycholinguistic framework is concerned, *speech planning* and *speech monitoring* models are highlighted and finally the only cognitive account of variability is Skehan’s *dual processing system*. In what follows, a brief description of each of the models is presented in respective order.

Labovian paradigm (Labov, 1970), which has been immensely influential in shaping the earliest works on variability (Tarone, 1982, 1983), identified social factors such as social class, age, and gender responsible for inter-speaker, and stylistic factors responsible for intra-speaker variation. As described by Ellis (1994), styles in terms of the Labovian paradigm are

spread along a continuum according to the amount of attention paid by the speakers to their own speech Attention serves as the mechanism through which causative

social factors such as verbal task (in particular), topic, interlocutor, setting or the roles of the participants influence actual performance (Ellis 1994: 122).

The dynamic paradigm (Bailey, 1973; Bickerton, 1975) drawing on language change studies states that varieties of language constitute a Creole continuum. Following this paradigm, inter-speaker variation may be due to the speakers' differential access to varieties, but intra-speaker variation occurs when speakers have access to multiple varieties and depending on the situational factors like topic, purpose, and addressee they choose to employ one variety rather than another.

Social psychological models explain variation in terms of the speakers' attitudes to in-group and out-group members (e.g. Beebe, 1988). *Speech Accommodation Theory* (Giles, 1971) is the most prominent social psychological framework that has motivated accounts of variability in L2 learners' language. Three types of variation in the speech of the speakers are distinguished, namely *convergence* (when the speaker adjusts his/her speech to that of the interlocutor), *divergence* (keeps his/her speech distinct from and dissimilar to that of the interlocutor) and *maintenance* (makes no attempt to change his/her speech). Speech accommodation is determined by the speaker's attitude to the interlocutor(s) and can take place at any levels of language use including lexicogrammatical or discoursal levels (ibid). The appeal of Speech Accommodation Theory lies with the central emphasis it lays on the role of addressee as a predictor of variability (Ellis, 1994).

Speech planning model proposed by Levelt (1989) assigns psycholinguistic sources for variability at several stages of speech production. The stages include a) conceptualizer at which situational factors and communicative purpose shape the speaker's decision as to the variety of language, b) the formulator stage where speech plan is made by opting for internalized lexicon, grammar and phonological rules, c) articulator stage which converts the speech plan into actual speech, and d) final stage which enables the speaker to get feedback of his/her own speech and make phonological and grammatical adjustments (see De Bot, 1992).

Speech monitoring model (Morrison and Low, 1983) resembles the model of language production proposed by Levelt (1989). However, it further distinguishes *macro-level* (involving adjustments in terms of communicative purpose and at sentence level) and *micro-level* monitoring (lexical, syntactic and phonetic adjustments). Morrison and Low (ibid) also propose *pre-articulatory* monitoring which occurs before the phonetic plan is made, and *post-articulatory* monitoring which operates on actualized speech.

Skehan's cognitive approach to variability characterizes modern trends of research in which tasks have become the focus of research in their own right (Skehan, 1998; Robinson, 2003 among others). According to Skehan (1996, 1998) language competence is composed of formulaic lexical expressions and grammatical rules. Speakers operate the 'dual processing system' which enables them to have access to both sources of knowledge. Nevertheless, depending on the communicative pressure or the accuracy demand, they have a varying dependence on lexical and grammatical processing resources (ibid). Noting that in spontaneous production, due to the limitation of attentional sources, learners are more likely to rely on lexical processing, Skehan as quoted in Ellis (2003) proposes that

it may be possible to identify the task conditions and procedures that lead learners to place a differential emphasis on fluency, i.e. performance free of undue pauses, and false starts, complexity, i.e. the use of a wide range of grammatical structures, and accuracy, i.e. the correct use of grammatical structures (Ellis, 1994: 122).

Models and frameworks reviewed so far constitute only a part of the whole picture of theorizing task and variability and a single theory will be far from adequate in accounting for all the dimensions. As Zuenglar (1989: 66) puts it, "one theory will most likely be insufficient in explaining the complexity of performance variation". Ellis (1994: 132) makes a similar point maintaining that "the study of L2 variability calls for a perspective inclusive of both a sociolinguistic and a psycholinguistic perspective". Gender is one of the factors that can inherently be of interest to different perspectives of variability accounts.

Gender, task and L2 variability

Although addressing gender issues in language education predates SLA, early works were almost invariably preoccupied with the so-called female superiority (see Chavez, 2001; Sunderland, 2000 among others). Another research trend was inspired by pure gender and language studies in which male and female communicative patterns were investigated. For example, Coates (1993) argues that females' communication is cooperative and males' is competitive, hierarchically-oriented which motivated classroom interaction research on male dominance in L2 situation (e.g. Spender, 1982). Concerning other aspects including communicative language use, since "TESOL profession [has] taken too long to examine gender" (Willet, 1996: 344), literature on the relationship between task and gender is particularly scarce.

Robinson (2001, 2003) affiliated with Skehan's cognitive perspective identified three dimensions of tasks that cause variability in the learners' language, namely task complexity, task difficulty, and task conditions. In this triple categorization, task conditions (as interactional factors) divides into participation and participant variables. Gender, in Robinson's (2001) terms, falls in the subcategory of participant variables. O'Sullivan (2000) could show that both males and females tended to produce more grammatically accurate forms in the presence of female interviewers, but their fluency or complexity did not vary. O'Loughlin (2002), nevertheless, in a study on the effect of the gender of the examiner in the oral interview component of IELTS could not find any differences regarding the gender of the examiner neither quantitatively nor qualitatively. Young and Milanovich (1992) suggested that both the interviewers' and the interviewees' gender may be among the factors that bring about variations.

Topic of the task is also one of the influential factors in determining task difficulty or complexity (Brown, Anderson, Shillock, and Yule, 1984; Selinker and Douglas, 1985). In different ways topic of the task can prompt variability, and gender preference of the topic can well be one of them. Gass and Varonis (1986) concentrating on same-sex and opposite-sex dyads, found among other things that "only in male/female conversations is the majority of the conversation devoted to personal topics. In both female/female and male/male groups, the conversation tends to be more objective, dealing with such topics

as past and future university studies, job status, and job description . . .” (Gass and Varonis, 1986: 337). Freed and Wood (1996) raised the issue of topic among the factors that determine the forms that occur in interaction. As Chavez stated, “[t]opics around which tasks are organized may also influence achievement scores of males as opposed to those of females” (Chavez, 2001: 36) and one of the ways in which this can occur is through topic selection. She proceeded to quote several perspectives on gender preferences of speech topic in L1 (Bischoping, 1993; Coates, 1997; Johnstone, 1993). Coates (1997) maintained that men prefer less personal topics than women. Johnstone (1993) concentrating on Midwestern men and women attributed physical and social themes to men’s and community-related topics to women’s stories. Bischoping (1993) endorsed a disappearance of the distinction between male and female preferred topics. Based on these, Chavez (2001) argued that if the differences applied to L2 as well, then performance on tasks would be influenced by the preferences.

Considering the theoretical accounts of variability reviewed above, and also allowing for the “under-researched sites as regards gender and language learning . . . in developing countries, in Africa, Islamic countries . . .” (Sunderland, 2000: 216), the present paper addresses variability in Iranian context by asking the following research question:

What is the effect of participant gender, teacher gender, and the learner-perceived cultural inhibition of topic on the fluency, complexity, and accuracy of L2 learners’ monologic oral L2 performance?

Method

Participants

Participants in the study were 20 male and 20 female sophomore and junior English majors doing their Language Laboratory and Phonology courses at a private-control university in the Northwestern Iranian border town of Salmas. They were selected on the basis of a TOEFL test administration which yielded two equal-sized (one all-male and the other all-female) homogeneous groups. Males’ average age was 20.85 with the youngest and oldest being 19 and 25, respectively. Females’ ages ranged between 20 and 26, and the average age equaled 21.65. Of the males, 12 (60%) spoke Azari, 3 (15%) spoke Persian, and the remaining 5 (25%) were the native speakers of Kurdish. With females, there were 11 (55%) Azari, 1 (5%) Persian and 8 (40%) Kurdish native speakers. (Azari and Kurdish are regional languages serving everyday communication in Iranian context. Persian is used as the official language through which almost everything, especially schooling and instruction, takes place.) They participated in the study as part of the course assessment throughout and near the end of the autumn semester from September 2005 through February 2006 in their respective courses.

Data collection procedures

At the very outset, a criterion had to be established to identify culturally ‘inhibiting’ task topic. For this purpose, an operational definition was presented as follows:

Culturally inhibiting topic is by definition a topic which is not an explicitly moral, religious, social or political taboo, but remotely and by extension it may be associated with one or more than one of them following the norms of the society in question. The speakers as members of the social community are, therefore, likely to avoid expressing their ideas openly and straightforwardly when talking about it in interpersonal language use.

With the definition in hand, the next step was to substantiate the least culturally inhibiting topic (LCIT) and the most culturally inhibiting topic (MCIT) to be used as prompts in the experiment. This step involved several stages. At stage one, one appropriate level book was chosen out of three conversational English series with the longest record of use in Iranian context, i.e. *New interchange 3: English for international communication* (Richards, Hull and Proctor, 1997), *Spectrum: A Communicative Course in English-Level 5* (Warshawsky, Rein, and Frankfurt, 1999) and *Headway: Upper intermediate* (Soars and Soars, 1983). Another selection involved randomly picking out 5 general topics of the speaking activities/themes out of each of the three books. Conversations or speaking activities with similar themes and those explicitly provocative regarding religious (Islamic) norms, e.g. dating, were excluded from selection. The resulting 15 general topics included: *Vacation, Past Experiences, Describing Family, Music, City and Population, Transportation, Love and Marriage, Diet, Health Problems, Good and Bad News, Likes and Dislikes, Plans, Predicting Future, Shopping, and Free time*. Then these topics were presented to the 40 (20 male and 20 female) participants who were asked to number the topics from the least inhibiting (1) to the most inhibiting (15) on the basis of the operational definition. Therefore, for each topic there were 20 numerical values of ratings by males and 20 by females ranging from 1 to 15. The mean rating of each topic by males and by females determined the least and most culturally inhibiting topics strictly following the learners' own reactions to them. Figure 1 clearly illustrates the fact that to the participants (regardless of their gender), the least culturally inhibiting topic (LCIT) was 'city and population' while the most culturally inhibiting (MCIT) was 'love and marriage'.

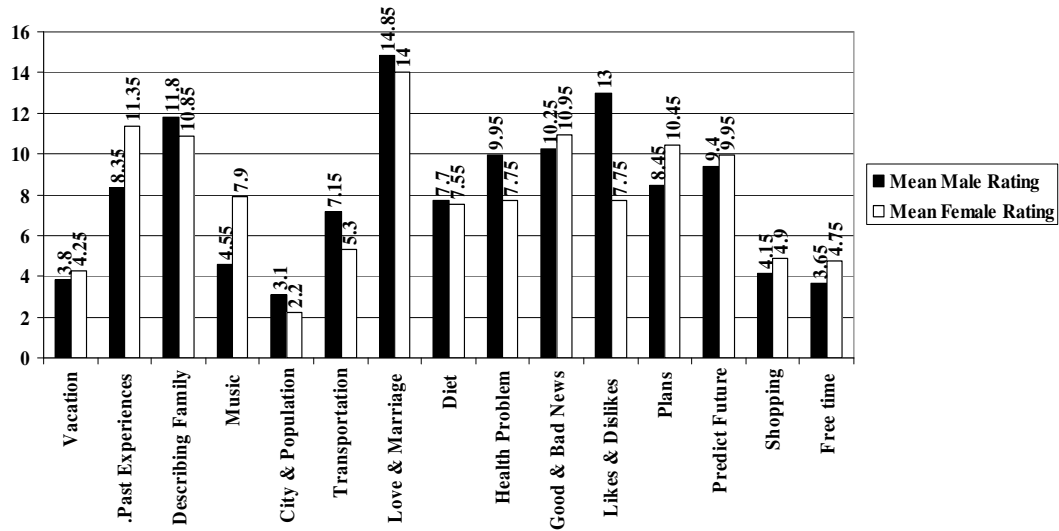


Figure 1. Mean rating of the topics by male and female participants.

For the purpose of collecting the data, arrangements were made to attend to task performances by having every individual participant at a time speaking to the male and female teacher on LCIT (i.e. *city and population*) and MCIT (i.e. *love and marriage*) in the language laboratory (see Table 1). Each participant was given a 2-minute planning time before, and a 5 minute speaking time, both constant across all participants, and all four performances for each participant. The male teacher in the experiment was the second author, and the female teacher was a departmental staff member and course lecturer with whom the participants were already acquainted. The time gap between the two performances with male teacher and those with female teacher was 4 weeks to meet the course schedule. Teachers as addressees merely gave the topics and initial directions refraining from any feedback, or verbal interaction during the monologues. In order to eliminate uncontrolled planning, and preparation effects, arrangements were also made so that the participants who finished with their task performance could not see the ones who were waiting for their turn. The spoken protocols of the participants elicited on the four speaking events were digitally recorded.

Table 1. Experimental design of the study

	Male teacher (addressee)		Female teacher (addressee)	
	Monologic talk on <i>population</i>	Monologic talk on <i>marriage</i>	Monologic talk on <i>population</i>	Monologic talk on <i>marriage</i>
Male participants	N= 20	N= 20	N= 20	N= 20
Female participants	N= 20	N= 20	N= 20	N= 20

Data Analysis

The recorded data files of the participants' speech were converted to an appropriate format and analyzed with Cool Edit Pro Version 2.0 which proved especially helpful with detecting pause lengths and marking out T-unit boundaries. Then, the recorded protocols were transcribed and coded for fluency, complexity and accuracy by two independent raters.

Fluency: The ratio of meaningful words per pause (WPP) was calculated for gauging fluency. Since there are no well-defined, universally agreed-upon criteria on pause, different local criteria are employed. 'Pause' in this study following Crookes (1986) was operationalized as non-phonation in interclausal or intraclausal position longer than 0.60 seconds, false starts, occurrence of interword or intraword suprasegmental hesitation markers such as *mum*, *uh*, etc. (also known as filled pauses), and intraword vowel stretched longer than 0.60 seconds. In obtaining the fluency measures, repetitions, inaudible or fragmented words, unsystematic occurrence of disruption or distortion of speech by non-linguistic vocal sounds (such as coughing, sighing, etc.) as well as the words containing these occurrences word medially were ignored. Coding for fluency did not include aspects of grammatical accuracy or mispronunciation as long as they were not meaningfully distinct. Kappa coefficients (as indices of inter-rater reliability) of the number of words and the number of pauses turned out to be 0.91 and 0.83, respectively.

Complexity: For establishing complexity of speech, different word occurrences (Types) were divided by total word occurrences (Tokens) and the result multiplied by 100. It is also known as Type-Token Ratio (TTR) (see Richards, Schmidt, Platt and Schmidt, 2003). Coding for complexity disregarded sentence fragments, repeated words, incomplete clausal units, and interclausal or intraclausal interjections. The inter-rater reliability levels (indicated by kappa coefficient) were 0.90 and 0.83 for the types (i.e. the number of different works) and for the tokens (or works), respectively.

Accuracy: The general approach is to obtain the percentage of error-free T-units to the total number of T-units. T-unit is defined as "one main clause plus whatever subordinate clauses, phrases, and words happen to be attached to or embedded within it" (Menhert, 1998: 90). Kappa coefficient for the error-free T-units was 0.94 and the total number of T-units was 0.81. Repetitions, fragments, and clusters of indistinct propositional link with the adjacent clausal units were left out of consideration.

Results

Fluency

2×2×2 Repeated Measure Mixed Factorial ANOVA results Table 2 showed significant variations in fluency of the speech addressed to the male teacher vs. the speech addressed to the female teacher. Mean Word per Pause (MWPP) values were 4.55 and 5.50, respectively. Also, fluency varies across topics, that is MWPP about 'city and population' was higher (5.67) than that about 'love and marriage' (4.39).

Table 2. ANOVA table for fluency as a factor of participant gender, teacher gender, and topic

Source	Tests of Within-Subject Contrasts			
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F
Teacher gender	35.34	1	35.34	30.78**
Teacher gender × Participant gender	3.69	1	3.69	3.21 ns
Error (Teacher gender)	43.63	38	1.14	
Topic	66.17	1	66.17	63.41**
Topic × Participant gender	2.64	1	2.64	2.53 ns
Error (Topic)	39.65	38	1.04	
Teacher gender × Topic	0.16	1	0.16	0.37 ns
Teacher gender × Topic × Participant gender	0.079	1	0.79	0.18 ns
Error (Teacher gender × Topic)	16.24	38	0.42	
Tests of Between-Subject Contrasts				
Participant gender	0.24	1	0.24	0.07 ns
Error	117.65	38	3.09	

** Significant at $p < 0.01$; ns = not significant

Complexity

As far as complexity is concerned, ANOVA (Table 3) established significant differences in terms of topic. MTTR (Mean Type-Token Ratio) as a complexity index proved significantly higher in speech about 'love and marriage' (61.89) as opposed to the speech about 'city & population' (54.07).

Table 3. ANOVA table for complexity as a factor of participant gender, teacher gender, and topic

Source	Tests of Within-Subject Contrasts			
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F
Teacher gender	0.44	1	0.44	0.00 ns
Teacher gender × Participant gender	68.34	1	68.34	0.63 ns
Error (Teacher gender)	4090.93	38	107.65	
Topic	2390.81	1	2390.81	22.53**
Topic × Participant gender	381.95	1	381.95	3.60 ns
Error (Topic)	4030.85	38	106.07	
Teacher gender × Topic	229.08	1	229.08	3.71 ns
Teacher gender × Topic × Participant gender	18.25	1	18.25	0.29 ns
Error (Teacher gender × Topic)	2342.50	38	61.64	
Tests of Between-Subject Contrasts				
Participant gender	356.67	1	356.67	1.81
Error	7472.29	38	196.63	

** Significant at $p < 0.01$; ns = not significant

Accuracy

Statistical analysis illustrated in Table 4 demonstrated significant differences in MPEFTU (Mean Percentage of Error-Free T-Units) depending on a) participant gender (Male = 61.94, Female = 70.55), b) teacher gender (Male = 68.79, Female = 63.70). The interaction of the gender of participants and that of teachers involved significance in variations whereby female participants talking to the male teacher showed the higher accuracy (MPEFTU = 75.21) than all possible teacher-student gender pairs. Finally, the

interaction of all three independent variables led to the finding that a) females talking to the male teacher about 'love and marriage' produced a higher quantity of MPEFTU, and b) males speech about 'city and population' addressed to the male teacher contained more MPEFTUs than that addressed to the female teacher.

Table 4. ANOVA table for accuracy as a factor of participant genders, teacher gender, and topic

Source	Tests of Within-Subject Contrasts			
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F
Teacher gender	1037.90	1	1037.90	8.65**
Teacher gender × Participant gender	717.11	1	717.11	5.97*
Error (Teacher gender)	4557.36	38	119.93	
Topic	88.55	1	88.55	0.69 ns
Topic × Participant gender	87.63	1	87.63	0.68 ns
Error (Topic)	4873.16	38	128.24	
Teacher gender × Topic	63.06	1	63.06	0.49 ns
Teacher gender × Topic × Participant gender	1061.57	1	1061.57	8.34 **
Error (Teacher gender × Topic)	4835.28	38	127.24	
	Tests of Between-Subject Contrasts			
Participant gender	2989.56	1	2959.86	11.26 **
Error	262.74	38	362.74	

* Significant at $p < 0.05$; ** Significant at $p < 0.01$; ns = not significant

Discussion and Conclusion

Fluency

The study could demonstrate that participants talked more fluently to the female teacher than to the male teacher which can be attributed broadly to 'interlocutor' effect in Labovian paradigm (Labov, 1970), dynamic paradigm (Bailey, 1973; Bickerton, 1975), Speech Accommodation Theory (Giles, 1971). Following Levelt (1989), teacher's gender can be an instance of situational factor in conceptualizer stage, and can be associated with lexical adjustment at micro-level and pre- or post-articulatory monitoring (Morrison and Low, 1983). This finding brings together females' cooperative communicative patterns (Coates, 1993) and fluency of spontaneous production (Skehan 1996, 1998). This finding receives general support from Robinson (2001), and Young and Milanovich (1992), but is refuted by O'Sullivan (2000) and O'Loughlin (2002). Moreover, significantly higher fluency was found regarding the topic which is one of the causative social factors in Labovian paradigm (Labov, 1970) mediated by the attention and a situational factor in dynamic paradigm by Bailey (1973) and Bickerton (1975). General support to this finding is lent by Freed and Wood (1996), and Chavez (2001), Brown et al. (1984), and Selinker and Douglas (1985).

Complexity

As far as complexity is concerned, a higher complexity was found on MCIT. In other words, participants' speech was more complex when they talked about 'love and marriage' than when they talked about 'city and population'. In addition to being compatible with Labovian paradigm, dynamic paradigm, Freed and Wood (1996), and Chavez (2001) Coates (1997), Skehan's (1996, 1998) cognitive model specifically contributes to interpreting more complexity on culturally inhibiting topic. A plausible line

of argument would be that since talking on 'love and marriage' is inhibiting to the participants, they are more likely to experience communicative pressure to pick words. Also, if interest is taken to lead to familiarity and thereby complexity of production, this finding is confirmed by Bischooping (1993) who argues for disappearance of gender-specific interest in topic.

Accuracy

One of the primary findings in this study on accuracy was that females were in general more accurate than males. If accuracy can be equated with superiority in language, a higher accuracy of females can be attributed to the conventional female superiority in language capacity (Chavez, 2001). Other supportive accounts are the triple categorization by Robinson (1996, 1998), Freed and Wood (1992), etc. Accuracy was found to vary significantly depending on the teacher's gender.

Participants tended to produce a more grammatically correct L2 when addressing the male teacher. This emphasizes the interlocutor effect in prompting learner attention (Labov, 1970), situational factors in dynamic paradigm (Bailey, 1973; Bickerton, 1975), and in Levelt's (1989) speech planning model, and participant factor as source of variability in Robinson (2001, 2003). In particular, it seems to be consistent with Morrison and Low (1983) who proposes syntactic adjustments at micro-level. Higher accuracy in addressing the male teacher is refuted by O'Sullivan (2000) who suggested the opposite and O'Loughlin (2002) who failed to bear out any differences, whatsoever.

Higher accuracy was also found in the interaction of teacher gender and participant gender. Results indicated that female participants talking to the male teacher spoke more accurately than in any other teacher participant pairs. General frameworks of variability (i.e. sociolinguistic, psycholinguistic, cognitive) and claims by Freed and Wood (1996), Selinker and Douglas (1985), Robinson (2001, 2003), Young and Milanovich (1992) apply to all three of the findings above. On the other hand, all three are rejected by O'Loughlin (2002) who dismisses any such differences. More importantly, the three findings go against those presented by O'Sullivan (2000) who claims a higher accuracy with the female interviewer.

Accuracy in this study was also reported to vary due to interaction of participant gender, teacher gender and topic. Concerning the four significant differences, as in the case of the interaction of the participant and teacher gender (see above), all the generalizations presented by the perspectives or studies about the relationship between gender and variability are relevant. Also, like all other findings in this study, O'Loughlin (2002) could not give support to accuracy differences. This tendency on the females' part can be due to the male addressee which following Skehan (1996, 1998) may have offered the greatest communicative pressure and led to higher accuracy. The findings by Gass and Varonis (1986) on topic preference can lend support to some of the findings above. Assuming that preferring personal topics in opposite-gender dyads and objective topics in same-gender dyads may lead to automaticity and thereby accuracy of production.

Findings bear implications for language teaching in general, classroom practice, oral language testing and syllabus design within which gender must be taken into account as a predictor of quality and quantity of interaction, engagement in task, input, output, feedback, and many other dimensions of language learning and teaching process.

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