

A quantitative study of sex difference among English and Persian speakers

Mahshid Ghanea¹, Mohammad Hasan Ghanea² and Gholam Reza Mohsenzadeh³
1, 2 and 3 are affiliated with Kherameh Branch, Islamic Azad University, Kherameh, Iran.

Corresponding Author's E-mail (e-mail: Ghanea1390@gmail.com)

ABSTRACT

The present article seeks to formulate the differences of male and female characterizations in using a number of discursive structures such as Nominals, passives and address forms in English and Persian. This article also makes a comparison between using these structures in Persian and English. To do so, three English dramas and five Persian dramas and scenarios are selected. In each language, 120 dyads (pairs of speech act) are separately analyzed, 40 male-female dyads, 40 male-male dyads, and 40 female-female dyads. In this case, the frequency of using nominals, passives, first names, imperatives, and tag questions are computed. By using statistical test of nominal data such as chi-square the differences between male and female in using discursive structures are examined to see if the differences are significant or not. Also these differences in male-male interactions as well as female-female interactions are analyzed. This procedure is done both for the English and the Persian data. At the end, the similarities and differences between English and Persian in using nominals, passives and address forms are discussed.

Keywords: English and Persian speakers, sex difference.

INTRODUCTION

Coates (1986) as cited by Montgomery (1995) argues that speech is an act of identifying ourselves as male or female.” Montgomery believes that women and men can be considered as members of two different subcultures. He (1995:166) notes: “The sex differences which stem from anatomy or physiology are filtered through the social construction of gender identity”. Eckert (1989) with reference to the work of Labov (1984) points out that gender like ethnicity, class and age can be considered as a sociolinguistic variable. Wood (1990) emphasizes that there are “distinctions between the speech communities typical of women and men.” In this case, Thorne and Henley (1975:19) argue: “Women who use forms associated with men may be put down as aggressive and “unfeminine”; men who “talk like women” are called “effeminate” and regarded, with disdain”. They believe (1975) that women use more refined, euphemistic, and hyperbolic expression but men intend to use slang and innovation.

Susan Gal (1978) mentions that differences between men’s and women’s speech which have been shown in the works of many researchers can appear at different levels; for example, in syntax and pragmatics (Keenan 1971; Lake off 1975), in lexical items (Swacker 1975), in phonology (Anshen 1969), and in patterns of conversational interaction (Zimmerman & West 1975; bibliography in Thorne & Henley 1975). So, most of the researchers believe that women and men speak differently and their studies support this claim. Lakoff (1975) as quoted by Holmes (1992:314) specifies some of these differences between women’s and men’s language and determines some linguistic features of women’s speech as the following:

- (a) Lexical hedges or fillers, e.g. you know, sort of, well, you see.
- (b) Tag questions, e.g. she’s very nice, isn’t she?
- (c) Rising intonation on declarative, e.g. it’s really good.
- (d) “Empty” adjectives, e.g. divine, charming, cute.
- (e) Precise colour terms, e.g. magenta, aquamarine.
- (f) Intensifiers such as just and so, e.g. I like him so much.
- (g) ‘Hypercorrect’ grammar, e.g. consistent use of standard verb forms.
- (h) ‘Super polite’ forms, e.g. indirect requests, euphemisms.
- (i) Avoidance of strong swears words, e.g. fudge, my goodness.
- (j) Emphatic stress, e.g. it was a BRILLIANT performance.

Crosby and Nyquist (1977) report an empirical study of Kriedberg (1975) which indicates that males use more imperative forms than females. The percentages of imperative sentences are: 38.33% for fathers, 19%

for mothers, 11% for male teachers, and 2% for female teachers. Regarding using titles, West and Zimmerman (1985:105) claim:

Titles are used to distinguish married women from single ones (e.g., Mrs. Vs. Miss...); ...Even occupations and organizational titles have segregated the sexes into distinct categories of existence (e.g., actor and actress, waiter and waitress, policeman and policewoman, Congressman and Congresswoman), with modifying markers tagged to exceptions to the rule (e.g., woman doctor, male nurse, woman lawyer, male secretary)

They mention topic of talk is different between two sexes. Women talk more about people, s personal lives but men, s topic of talk focus on more instrumental matters. Another difference between men and women is that women use more pitch variability, more correct pronunciation, and more variable intonation. Montgomery (1995) explains that women use fewer taboo forms but their conversation including more gossip. And, Risch (1987:353) considers that all researchers predict: “women are socially and linguistically conservative and therefore more likely to use standard or prestige forms.”

Lakoff as confirmed by Kramer (1975:48) finds that women use more compound requests e.g. “ Will you help me with these groceries, please?” which are more polite compared to “Come help me ”. Montgomery (1995) refers to Goodwin’s study (1980) which reveals that boys tend to use more direct command but girls change their commands to inclusive suggestion-e.g. Let’s ask her.

Thorne and Henley (1975:24-5) note that according to Kramer (1974) women’s speech is “weaker and less effective than the speech of men”. It is also “emotional, vague, euphemistic, sweetly proper, mindless, endless, high pitched and silly”. They offer that females speech is more polite, correct, formal, prestigious and proper than of males.

Holmes (1992) explains that there are four reasons why women use more standard forms: 1) they try to acquire the social status, 2) people expect better behavior and standard speaking from women, 3) subordinate group (women) should be more polite in order to protect their face and not to offend superiors (men), and 4) women use standard speech because they tend to provide a formal context and situation.

Regarding the differences between male and female in ways of speaking, Kramer (1975) discusses that the vocabulary of women differs considerably from that of men. The following words are used more frequently by women: nice, pretty, darling, charming, lovely, cute, honey, oh dear and precious. He believes that there are some words and phrases which men pronounce but women just understand and they never use them. Also, women have some words and phrases which belong to their realm. Kramer (1975:44-6) mentions that, for example, in the United States “women perhaps know but do not use swear or curse words in the same context or with the same frequency as men.” Another example is that males use more “in” instead of “ing” than female. Fasold (1984, 1990) refers to the point that the sex of both the speaker and the addressee can influence the form of speech. For example, females talk more easily to each other and their speech often has fewer hesitations in comparison with female-male interaction.

Holmes (1992:330) interprets that the differences between men and women's speech result from different "socialisation and acculturation patterns." What we expect from another sex may result in some miscommunication and misunderstanding because we belong to one group and we learn one pattern of talking. In this case, we can say polarized thought and language are associated with the different worlds and languages of men and women. What a woman thinks or says differ from those of a man.

Because women and men have some dissimilar rules for talk, often misread each other's meaning and misunderstand each other's motives. This frequently leads to frustration, hurt, and tension between people who care about each other and misjudgments of people speaking in public setting. Further, learning to use different styles of communication allows women and men to be more flexible and effective in their interactions with each other.

Pecheux as quoted by Gill Seidel (1985:46) believes: “In linguistic term, a ”discursive process“ is described as the system of substitutions, paraphrase, synonymy, and metonymy between the signifiers.”And, a structure resulting from discursive process is called discursive structure. The following discursive structures are studied in this article:

Example:

— — Picketing — —
↓

Example:

hunting

And, in Persian the suffix “an” attaches to the past stem of the verb to generate gerundive nominal which is identical to infinitive form of the verb.

Example: “foruxt” (sold) + “an” → “foruxtan” (selling)

Some English nominals are formed by the combination of the stem of the verb and the following suffixes: “ion, ment, al, ure, th, and Ø”

Example: explain + “ion”	→ explanation
Move + “ment”	→ movement
Refuse + “al”	→ refusal
Mix + “ure”	→ mixture
Grow + “th	→ delivery
Start + “Ø”	→ start

In Persian, some nominals are constructed by adding the suffixes “esh, aar, e, and Ø” to the stem of the verb.

Examples:

“Kush” (try) + “esh”	→ “kushesh” (trying)
“Raft” (went) + “aar”	→ “raftaar” (behavior)
“? Andish” (think) + “e”	→ “? Andish” (thinking)
“Pardaaxt” (paid) + “Ø”	→ “pardaaxt” (payment)
“? Esfahan?” (Divulge, reveal) = “? Esfahan? Kardan”	
“Raft-o? Aamad (coming and going) = “raft-o? Aamad kardan”	

B. Passive structure

The subject is placed after the verb or is omitted from the sentence.

Example: He was invited.

C. Address form

According to Fasold (1984:1), “...address forms are the words speakers use to designate the Persian they are talking to while they are talking to them.”

People use first name, last name (with title), and tag question in order to address others. Also, they may use imperative or request form to address others and ask them to do things.

There are other forms of naming such as short form of the first name, second-person pronoun, first name + last name, nickname, title only, and so on which are not used as much as those mentioned above.

The data presented in this article were obtained from the following

English and Persian dramas: 1) “Laburnum Grove” by J. B. Priestly (1955), 2) “When We Are Married” by J. B. Priestly (1955), and 3) “Pygmalion” by Bernard Shaw (1965), 4) “Amiz “Ghlamdun” by Akbar-e Radi (1999). 5) “Eshqaal” by Bhraam-e Beizaaie (1990), 6) “Vokaala-? E Moraafe-? E” by Mirzaa Fatah Ali-e

Akhund aide (1971), 7) “motevalled-e Maah-e Mehr” by Ahmad Rezaa Darvish (2001), and 8) “Showkaraan” by Behruz-e Afkhami (2001).

The selection of drama in the present study is due to the fact that among literary works, dramas are the nearest work to everyday conversations. So, most of the dialogues selected for these studies are typical of face to face interactions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This part which deals with the analysis of the data and its results consists of: 1) Analysis of English data, 2) Analysis of Persian data, and, 3) Contrastive Analysis.

What is important here to mention is that the address forms are also divided into three subcategories –i.e. first names, imperatives and tag question- whose functions are not the same. For example, imperative forms represent direct asking but the first names, tag questions, nominal, and passives are almost used by those who like to use indirect and implicit speech. So, in computing Chi-Square tests the total of first names, tag questions, nominals, and passives are taken into consideration and just the percents of imperative forms are presented. The following list shows the abbreviations of this part:

N=nominal P=passive A=address form
FN=first name I=imperative TQ=tag question
T=Total of N, P, FN, and TQ D.F. =degree of freedom

1. Analysis of English Data

1.1. The Male and female Interactions

The frequency of using linguistic features, in male and female interactions for the English data, is presented in the following table. The obtained results imply that females use more nominals, passives, and address forms. The total numbers of these structures in both sexes are used to measure the Chi-Square test. The degree of freedom for this study is one (D.F. =2-1).

And, the critical value of Chi-Square with 1d.f. is 3.84 at .05 levels. All that's left to do is to compare the critical value of Chi-Square (3.84) with the result of Chi-Square test (7.0488). So; it shows that the differences between two sexes are significant. And, there is a significant relationship between linguistic features and the sex. Also, this becomes clear if we look at the differences of two groups in using imperative forms. Regarding this point, 80% of imperative verbs are used by men and just 20% used by women.

Table 1: Discursive structures of the dialogues between male
And female speakers in English

Features	N	P	AF	T
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			<u>EN</u>		<u>I</u>	<u>TQ</u>
Number (Male)	5	2	4	4	1	12
Percent				80		29.3
Number (Female)	10	4	11	1	4	29
Percent				20		70.7

Chi-Square=7.488 D.F. =1 critical value=3.84

The difference is significant.

1.2. The Male and Male Interactions

The following table shows the frequency of discursive structures in male and male English interaction. And, the obtained Chi-Square (.0303) indicates that the differences between the two groups are not significant. Also, the percents of using imperative forms for both two groups which are the same confirm this point.

Table 2: Discursive structures of the dialogues between male and
Male speakers in English

Features	N		P		AF		T
							<u>EN</u> <u>I</u> <u>TO</u>
Number (First S)	6	4	6	2	1		17
Percent				50			53.1
Number (second S)	5	4	6	2	1		16
Percent				50			48.5

Chi-Square=.0303 D.F. =1 critical value=3.84

The difference is not significant.

1.3. The Female and Female Interactions

The obtained data -i.e. the frequency, the Chi-Square test, and the percent- from the Table 3 indicates that there are not significant differences in using discursive structures where two side of interaction are females.

Table 3: Discursive structures of the dialogues between female
And female speakers in English

Features	N	P	AF	T
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	<u>EN I TQ</u>					
Number (First S)	10	2	3	0	3	18
Percent				50		48.6
Number (second S)	11	2	3	0	3	19
Percent				50		51.4

Chi-

Square=.0270 D.F. =1 critical value=3.84

The difference is not significant.

2. Analysis of Persian Data

2.1 The Male and Female Interactions

In this part the result of the Chi-Square test (9.5294) obtained from Table 4, reveals that male and female differ significantly in using discursive structures. Also, the percent of males using imperative forms are three times greater than those of females.

Table 4: Discursive structures of the dialogues between male and Female speakers in Persian

Features	N	P	AF	T
	<u>EN I TQ</u>			
Number (Male)	5	1	2	12 0 8
Percent				75 23.5
Number (Female)	16	6	4	4 0 26
Percent				25 76.5

Chi-

Square=9.5294 d.f.=1 critical value=3.84

The difference is significant.

2.2. The Male and Male Interactions

The evidence presented in the following table implies no differences between two sides of interactions in using discursive structures when both groups are males.

Table 5: Discursive structures of the dialogues between male and
Male speakers in Persian

Features	N	P	AF	T
				EN I TQ
Number (First S)	12	3	1 2 1	17
Percent			50	54.8
Number (second S)	11	3	0 2 0	14
Percent			50	45.2

Square=.2903 D.F. =1 critical value=3.84

The difference is not significant.

2.3 The female and Female Interactions

In this part, the results obtained from Table 6 indicates that there are no significant differences between female and female in using discursive structures.

Table 6: Discursive structures of the dialogues between female
And female speakers in Persian

Features	N	P	AF	T
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	<u>EN I TQ</u>					
Number (First S)	13	2	4	7	0	19
Percent				50		51.4
Number (second S)	11	2	5	7	0	18
Percent				50		48.6

Chi-Square= .0270 D.F. =1 critical discourse

The difference is not significant.

3. Contrastive Analysis

From the above discussion, we can draw some conclusions about divergences in speech patterns between male and female. In this case, it was found that there are some significant differences between male and female in using discursive structures in each language under consideration. If we compare the results obtained from Table 1 -e.g. Chi Square- with those of Table 4, it will become clear that in both English and Persian the sex and discursive structures have the close relationship with each other. That is, the differences between male and female are significant for each language.

Also, when two sides of interactions belong to the same sex, no differences can be seen. This is evident if we compare Table 2 with table 5 or Table 3 with Table 6. We also come to this conclusion that the speakers of English and Persian almost have the same discursive system. The pedagogical importance for teaching the differences are obvious. The finding of the study which are obtained through the contrastive analysis of English and Persian discursive structures, make English students have a better understanding of the differences between English and Persian use of these structures. However, characterizing differences between two groups in using different structures make them communicate effectively.

These differences may be present within a language or between different languages. So, different ethnic and social groups, different classes, professional group-e.g. lawyers and doctor- and people with various religions and levels of education can be the concern of other studies.

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