

A qualitative study of gender dominance among Persian speakers

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ABSTRACT: The role of language in representing and reforming reality is the concern of critical discourse analysis which also attempts to analyze the sources of inequality in social relations. Wherever there is a power relationship or inequality of one side, language is a means of control which can be analyzed based on critical discourse and different words and structures are powerful tools for controlling people's perceptions and beliefs. The present study qualitatively reveals that the relations of different sexes are much like the power relations which are controlled by discourse and linguistic features. It is an attempt to make it clear how linguistic elements and discourse structures explicitly and implicitly function in classifying reality, in producing, reorganizing, and enforcing certain ideas, in persuading and influencing other's views and in controlling relation of power. The methodology is generally based on the classifications and categorizations of the texts as well as transformational rules. Also, the three dimensional framework of critical discourse analysis is taken into account. The article also aims at discovering the way male and female interact ideologically with a number of discursive structures such as: nominals, passives, and address forms in Persian language. So, it focuses on the social as well as grammatical aspects of nominals, passive structures and address forms. It is attempted to determine which of the sexes use more transformations to reorganize the experience and to have an indirect and implicit speech.

Key words: Gender dominance, language, Persian

1. INTRODUCTION

Sexism in language system: Crosby and Nyquist (1997) believe that women use more empty adjectives (e.g. 'divine', 'charming') and tag questions. Regarding empty adjectives, they (1997:313-4) maintain: "Not only are these adjectives meaningless but in contrast to male adjectives (e.g. 'great', 'terrific'), they are noticeably devoid of any connotation of power. " They continue that by using tag questions women making a statement and avoid make an assertion. Fasold (1984) asserts that tag question usage represents an example of uncertainty of women.

Some scholar believe that male/female speech difference reflect different roles as well as unequal position. As stated by Eckert (1989), also Deuchar (1988) conducts some research on the area of language difference and dominance. She makes an argument that using standard language with more conservative linguistic behavior and more politeness structures by women is a strategy for maintaining and protecting the face of powerless sex (female). So, this kind of speech is not due to the fact that women have a higher social class or they are more powerful but it may indicate that women use more standard speech to compensate their subordination. With respect to dominance and difference, Hudson (1996:102) raises the following questions: "Do language discriminate against women? More precisely do the ways in which language allows us to refer to male and female discriminate against females?" . Regarding dominance of one variable in language, Lakoff (1973) and Schulz (1975) as noted by Thorne and Henley (1975:15) claim: The male is associated with the universal, the general, the subsuming; the female is more often excluded or is the special case. Words associated with male more often have positive connotation; they convey notion of power, prestige, and leadership. In contrast, female words are more often negative, conveying weakness, inferiority, immaturity, a sense of the trivial. Terms applied to women are narrower in reference than those applied to men, and they are more likely to assume derogatory sexual connotation which overshadow other meanings.

Thorne and Henley (1975: 15) explain: "This derogation and overgeneralization, Schulz observes, is related to the process of stereotyping and is also present in other situations of dominance, e.g., racial and ethnic situations." They believe: "Language helps enact and transmit every type of inequality, including that between the sexes." An example of unfavorable tendency toward female is the word "mistress" (versus master) which as a noncore word has unfair connotation meanings for women. Wood (1999)

supposes that language is not neutral, for example there are more than 220 derogatory terms for women but only 22 for men. Also, Alma Graham (1975:61) says that women's titles of honor such as: queen, madam, mistress, and dame (as noncore words) have some derogatory and degraded meanings, whereas men's title such as prince, king, lord, and father "are exalted and applied to God for even God is thought of as a male and is called Him."

To summarize the discussion of sex differences in language use and to put it in a nutshell, it is concluded that there are two approaches in studying these differences. The first is difference or cultural approach which explains just the sex differences in speech behavior but the second is dominance or power-based approach which suggests the differences between men and women's speech with respect to power. Uchida (1992:547,557) views: a... the "difference/cultural" approach, which treats women and men as having different but equally valid rules of conversation, ... stating that power has little to do with what happens in conversation between socially equal females and males... and the "dominance/power-based" approach, which focuses on male dominance and sexual division of labor in talk.

With respect to language, mind, and gender, Uchida expresses that language is not neutral. Ehrlich and King (1994:60) assume: "... language serves as an ideological filter on the world: language shapes or constructs our notion of reality, rather than labeling that reality in any transparent and straightforward way". They continue that language organizes the world and functions differently toward dominated and dominant groups.

So, if a language presents two ways of referring to male and female, then it will make people have a different understanding of each of sexes and make them behave differently toward each of them. Also, Wood (1999) suggests that verbal communication expresses, reflects and shapes cultural view of gender in the following ways.

First, language defines gender and shapes our perception. When we use language to name objects and people or to describe feelings and emotions, we neglect several aspects and emphasize other aspects. This is because language cannot describe all aspects of things or concepts. That is, by using language we change the reality and describe some particular abilities. For example, language is used to refer to male's activity, experience, skill and power but female's appearance, beauty and their relationship with their husbands or children are emphasized and considered as norms. Key (1975: 18) writes "Man Does, Woman Is". Another example of language defining gender is male generic language, which includes males and females, but in especial situation it refers only to men. The words mankind, mailman, postman, milkman, clergyman, foreman, salesman, storeman, spokesman and businessman are examples of noun in male generic language (as Alma Graham refers to it as Manglish). According to Henley (1989) as stated by Wood (1999:108): Male generic language reduces awareness of women and tends to result in

perceiving women as excluded or exceptions to the rule. This affects comprehension of language, views of personal identity and perceptions of women's presence in various spheres of life.

Wood (1999) argues that when language refers to men more than women, it implies that men are considered as standard sex because when we name something we think that. It is important, and it should exist, but we do not name those things-we want to ignore.

The second implication of language with respect to gender, as Wood (1999) points out, is that language is used to organize, classify and generalize perceptions. Symbols allow us to translate concrete world into language and this abstracting, slanting and polarizing thought and reality cause stereotyping. Stereotyping is a kind of generalization in a wrong way. For example, we say all women are not interested in sports or they do not like sports at all. Or, women are emotional but men are rational. Key (1975: 11) attributes the following statement to the Pythagoras: "There is a good principle, which has created order, light, and man; and a bad principle, which has created chaos, darkness, and woman."

In sum, we can say most of the scholars believe that language abstracts, slants, polarizes, generalizes, organizes, and classifies thought and reality and these show the influence of language on perception especially one's perception and understanding of different genders.

2. METHODS

Data: The data for the present study will be interactions extracted from and three dramas in Persian. Forty male- female dyads (pairs of speech act), will be analyzed. The Persian dramas chosen are: 1) "Eshqal" by Bahram-e Beizaie (1990) "Motevalled-e Mah-e Mehr" by Ahmad Reza Darvish (2001), and 3) "Showkaraan" by Behrouz-e Afkhami (2001).

It is notable to say that the participants in the dialogues have usually an equal relation of power and they belong almost to the same social status such as husband and wife suitable to examine the role and effect of gender.

Proedure: The three discursive structures under study -i.e. nominals, passive structures and address forms will be related to the underlying ideological frameworks -i.e. the attitudes toward each sex and the relevant existing power structures among the dyads specified in the data. In this case, the model introduced by Hodge and Kress (1979) developed by Fairclough (1995) will be followed and then relevant contrastive qualitative description will be provided. So, 40 male-female dyads will be studied. Also, the results of the analysis of interaction of discursive structures with male-female characterizations which are ideologically loaded will be provided and the results of contrastive analysis will be explained.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Persian Data:

1. Ideological Structures: In this part, women are socialized into feminine community. They are dependent, emotional, passive, superficial, and submissive. But men are socialized into masculine community and are authoritative, independent, reliable, and assertive. For example, in dialogues number 28 and 29, both Sima and her father believe that a woman should be supported by her husband or her father. In number 7, Mahtab considers herself as a poor woman when she calls herself “za?ife”. And in number 34 the male speaker believes that men should control their wives. So, it seems that there is a bias tendency toward females.

2. Discursive Structures

A. The Male Speakers

a. Nominals

Number 7 “doruq” (lying), “ ja?l-e ?emzaa?” (forging), and “tohmat” (accusing) are nominalized to reduce the relations of the agents and the verbs. This is done by deleting the actors. In number 24 “ravabet” (relationship) is a nominal without reference to agent to generalize the meaning of the verb. Number 28 the speaker uses the nominal “didan” (to see) in order not to delete the information about the participant but to give special emphasis to the process.

b. Passive Structures

In number 2 “gozaarsh shode” (was reported) is passive and it is not clear who the reporter is.

c. Address Forms

The first name “mahtab” occurs in number 9 and 15 where the speaker has a close personal relationship with the addressee.

In the following dialogues, direct forms of request are used by the speakers of higher rank. Number 1 “dexalat nakon” (don’t interfere), 8 “pasho jam?-o jur kon (gather together), 9 “pasho”(stand up), 11 “dad nazan” (don’t shout), 12 “to hamin ja bemun” (stay here), 13 “goftam hamin ja mimuni ta bargardam” (stay here until I’ll be back), 14 “bas kon” (stop it), 16 “boro rahatam bezar” (let me be at ease), 17 “boro...boro” (go...go) and “boro” (go), 34 “birunesh kon” (send her out), and 35 “birunesh kon” (send her out) all are used in the situation where the speaker explicitly asks the addressee to do or not to do something.

In number 8 “bayad berim” (we should go), 10 “bayad tahammol koni” (you have to tolerate), and 15 “to bayad beri” (you have to go) indicate that the addressee is under the obligation of doing something.

B. The Female Speakers

a. Nominals

In number 4 “dust dashtan” (to love), is a nominal. The change from verb to noun entails specific meaning changed into general meaning. In numbers 2 and 9 the speaker uses the nominal “fesq-o fojur” (debauchery and libertinism), and “bordān” (taking), to blame the agent indirectly. Number 3 “koshtan” (to kill), and number 5 “rabete” (relationship), are expressed in nominal form in order to reduce the effect of explicit addressing.

In numbers 18 and 22, “bargashtan” (to return), and “sabr kardan” (waiting), are nominalized. The speakers (who are females) use this kind of nominalization to be more polite and to ask the addressees (who are males) to do things for them without causing any offence. The speaker in number 23 uses the nominals “?ozrxahi” (to excuse), and “?ebraz-e ?ehsasat” (to express feeling) to refer to the action of her husband indirectly. In number 26 “telefonhayē” (to make telephone), is used with the agent deleted to make a general statement and to provoke the addressee implicitly. In number 27 nominals “xarid” (buying), and “poxt -o paz”(cooking) omit some of the information about the verb. In dialogues number 31, 32, “gashtan” (searching), and “tekrar” (repetition), are nominals. Although in these nominals the agents are clear, nominals are used to emphasize the action.

Number 37 “gashtan” (searching) is a nominal with agent associated with all in a relational sentence. Number 38, “qeybat” (to backbite) is nominalized and the agent is less topicalized.

b. Passive Structures

In number 25 “masraf mishe” (is consumed) is used in passive form to delete the agent and emphasize the action. In number 33 “gerefte” and “borde?and” are used without any reference to the agent. It should be noted that although these two verbs are active, they are used without mentioning the actor and don’t differ from their passive forms which are “gerefte shode ?ast” and “borde shode ?ast”. So, they can be considered as semi-passive verbs.

Number 34 “zendani shode” (is imprisoned), “sar be nist shode” (is perished) and “sar be nist mishavand” (are perished) are passivized and the emphasis shift from actor to the affected.

c. Address Forms

The use of first names “peyman” and “daniel” in numbers 1, 3, 13, and 15 implies an intimate and informal situation.

Although in numbers 14, 16, and 27 “dad nazan” (don’t shout), “biyar” (bring), and “boro” (go) are presented in imperative form, they are used for the benefit of addressees.

The speaker in number 22 uses the question form of “chera jeddi harf nemizani” (why don’t you talk seriously) as an indirect request.

CONCLUSION

The following conclusions are drawn based on the analysis of the data gathered in this study: First, the results obtained show that the discourse analysis involves a manifestation of several aspects of culture, society, and reality. So, discourse can not only be analyzed and characterized in terms of an isolated codes and abstract verbal object but it requires analysis in terms of its relations to the contexts of actual use and to the social patterns and views. The study shows the way in which attitudes and prejudices of a society toward different sexes can be reinforced by language use. It has identified that Persian language through their vocabularies and structures slant toward different groups especially male and female. So, if we know attitudes and ideologies of a community as well as structures of its language, we will be able to have a better understanding of others, we can interpret the full meaning of their message, and we will have the ability of controlling them by using more implicit strategies in our speaking. What politicians, journalists, and skillful writers or speakers do in order to persuade people to do things, in order to arouse certain desire in people, in order to put temptation in people's ideas, and in order to allure them to do certain behavior.

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