Gender Differences in the Use of Question in the Context of Iranian Language

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Abstract. Men and women may use different linguistic forms, although they may belong to the same social class. Many studies have been done to investigate the differences in the language use by males and females. In the same line, this study aimed to investigate the use of questions in men and women's speech in Persian society and to find out if there is any difference between males and females in the use of direct and indirect questions. The five Persian movies with a social theme were used as sources for data collection (Hich koja hich kas, Hiss dokhtarha faryad nemizanand, Man madar hastam, Inja bedoone man, and Pole choobi). The statistical procedures were employed for the analysis of the data. The t-test was used to explore whether or not there was any difference between men and women's speech. The findings indicated that there was no significant difference between males and females in the use of direct and indirect questions.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Speech act is a theory about linguistic communication. Steinmann (1982) stated linguistic communication is not merely saying something; it is about a speaker says something in certain situation, with certain intentions, and with the listener's recognition of what is said and of these intentions. There are direct speech acts as well as indirect speech acts. Direct speech acts are those sentences which express by the constructions specifically designed for those acts, for example, an interrogative construction is designed to ask a question. A direct speech act is a plain and ordinary way of saying things. On the other hand, indirect speech acts are those sentences which express by other constructions, for example, one can use an interrogative construction to order someone to open the door. Indirect speech acts are used as linguistic strategies to avoid giving a direct answer or saying a direct request. . Using indirect speech acts incorrectly can lead to communication disruption.

Athanasiadou (1991) stated that question is a speech act which affects the way information is organized. He classified questions in terms of the intentions of their speakers: information-seeking questions, rhetorical questions, examination questions and indirect requests. In information-seeking questions, the speaker requests for information. In contrast, rhetorical questions provide information. In examination type, the speaker does not request information or provide information, but he wants to find out whether the hearer knows the answer. When one asks a question to persuade someone to do something, this question is indirect request. Kearsley (1976) distinguished questions into verbal and nonverbal. He explained that nonverbal questions can be overt and covert. In overt nonverbal questions, gestures such as raised eyebrows are used. On the other hand, covert nonverbal questions are those that we ask and answer ourselves.

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In his taxonomy of question forms, direct and indirect questions are two types of verbal questions. Also, Kearsley (1976) described various functions of questions in terms of echoic, epistemic, expressive, and social control. Echoic questions request for the repetition of a sentence or confirmation such as "what?" or "huh?". The purpose of epistemic questions is acquiring information and this type of questions are subdivided into referential and evaluative types. Referential questions provide contextual information. Evaluative questions are a means of explaining knowledge to other people and use in test situations. Expressive questions convey attitudinal information to the hearer. Social control questions serve the purpose of exerting authority by maintaining control of the discourse.

Spolsky (1989) stated that sociolinguistics is an area of study which investigates the association between language and society, between the use of language and the social structures in which the users of language live. It supposes that human society is made up of many related systems and behaviors, some of which are linguistic. According to this statement, there is a relationship between gender as a social factor and language. Language and gender influence each other.

Many studies have been done to investigate the differences between the ways that men and women use language (Lakoff, 1973; Chang, 2011). It is said that men and woman are different both physiologically and psychologically for example women in comparison to men have better memory. Also men and women live in the same society, there are social differences between them as if each lives in different environment and culture and as a result, they may speak in different ways. Men and women may use different linguistic forms, although they may belong the same social class. Holmes (2013) mentions the Amazon Indians' language as an extreme example, where the language used by a child's mother is different from that used by his father. In this community, men and women speak different languages. Lakoff (1973) in her theories about the existence of women's language mentions that men's language is assertive, adult, and direct, while women's language is immature, hyper-formal or hyper-polite and non-assertive. Dubois and Crouch (1975) criticized Lakoff's claims. They investigated the use of tag questions within the context of a professional meeting and showed that men used more tag question than females did. Women try to keep conversation going, so they ask questions to maintain conversation. Fishman (1978) stated that a question is a way of demanding response as a powerful tool, but women use questions as a way of maintaining interaction which reflects powerlessness of women in society. On the other hand, Tannen (1991) believes that men tend to establish authority in their interaction, while women are more likely to engage in a give-and-take style of conversation.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Numerous studies have been made on the way that men and women use linguistic forms in their conversation (Dubois and Crouch, 1975; Grob, Meyers & Schuh, 1997; Newman, Groom, Handelman & Pennebaker, 2008). Some researchers such as Mulac, Weimann, Widenmann, & Gibson (1988) showed that use of question was more common in women's speech (e.g., " does anyone want to watch movie?"), while men were more directive in their speech and tell statement instead of question (e.g., "let's go watch movie"). Lakoff (1973) stated that using tag questions in conversation showed less assertive and more tentative and fishman (1978) claimed that using questions reflect powerlessness of women. In the same line with them, Cameron, McAlinden and O'Leady (1988) did a study on using modal and affective tag questions. Modal tag questions asked to confirm the speaker's expression, while affective tags indicated the speaker's attitude to hearer. They found out that powerful speakers used affective tag questions

and powerless speakers never employed affective tags. Also, Mulac, Studley, and Blau (1990) examined 96 schoolchildren and found that boys offered their opinions more than girls do.

But recent findings did not replicate previous findings. Mulac, Seibold and Farris (2000), studied 36 females and 50males manager that gave professional criticism and they found that men in comparison to women asked more questions. In other study by Thomson and Murachver (2001), they invetigated the e-mail communication of men and women. Their findings indicated that men and women asked questions equally likely. Chang (2011) examined the use of questions by professors in lectures. The results of his study showed more gender similarities than differences in the use of questions.

Tag questions turn a declarative statement into a question, it shows that speaker appears uncertain and assertive. Studies indicate that women use more tag questions than men (Crosby & Nyquist, 1977; McMillian, Clifton, McGrath, & Gale, 1977; Preisler, 1986). Holmes (1984) found women leader used more tag questions than did men leaders. In another study conducted by Carli (1990), it was found that women used more tag question than man in both same sex and mixed sex pairs. But Grob, Meyers and Schuh (1997) did a research on sex differences in powerful/powerless language. The results showed no significant differences between males and females in the use of interruptions, hedges, and tag questions. A comparative study was conducted by Nemati and Bayer (2007). They analyzed 6 English and 8 Persian films- scripts to find gender differences in the use of linguistic forms. The findings did not show any significant differences in the use of intensifiers, hedged and tag questions between two groups.

Because of these opposite results, researchers are still uncertain whether men or women use more questions in their speech. In this study, the researcher will investigate use of questions in the speech of men and women in Persian society in Iranian social films to show how questions are used in the speech of Iranian men and women. The reason why film is selected as the target genre is because it involves natural speech of people. The following research questions are the basis for this study:

1.Is there any significant differences between males and females in the use of direct questions and indirect questions?

2.What kind of questions (information seeking, interrogative, rhetorical, and indirect) are used in the men and women's speech?

3.What is the function of question in men and women's speech?

3. METHODOLOGY
3.1. Instrument

In this study, the researcher used Persian films as sources for data collection because data collected from film are very close to natural data. The following films were used in this research: 1- Hich koja hich kas (nowhere no body), 2- Hiss dokhtarha faryad nemizanan (hush girls don't shout), 3- Man madar hastam (I am a mother), 4- Inja bedoone man (here without me) 5- Pole choobi (wooden bridge). The selected films have social and family theme.

3.2. Data Collection and Data Analysis Procedure

The researcher watched the selected movies and wrote the text of conversations (scenarios) of them. Then researcher read all the scenarios to collect the relevant data. Then, the total number of utterances in each film was counted and the utterances were produced by men and women were separated. Then questions in the utterances of men and women were marked. The

questions categorized according type and intention of their speakers (Athanasiadou, 1991): information-seeking questions, rhetorical questions, examination questions and indirect requests.

This study used descriptive statistics and t-test statistical procedures for the analysis of the data. T-test was used to find whether the differences were meaningful or not between men and women in using direct and indirect questions.

4. RESULTS

In this section, the main purpose is to explore any significant difference between males and females with regard to the use of questions. First, Descriptive statistics were employed to identify what kind of questions are used in the men and women's speech. As shown in Table 1, the most frequently used question with respect to mean scores was information seeking questions. The rhetorical questions ranked the second. The interrogative and indirect questions ranked the third and the fourth, respectively.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

	Man madar hastam		Hiss dokhtarha faryad nemizanand		Hich koja, hich kas		Inja bedoone man		Pole choobi	
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. deviation	Mean	Std. deviation
Information seeking	9.8889	6.86375	5.6667	3.88526	5.2857	4.02738	4.4500	2.30503	7.7143	7.40508
rhetorical	8.6667	5.74456	4.0000	3.33809	5.5000	5.24404	4.4500	0.51042	5.3571	5.28579
interrogative	1.8889	0.92796	1.0667	0.96115	0.6429	1.15073	1.4000	0.50262	2.5714	2.44050
indirect	1.6667	1.11803	1.0667	1.16292	0.7143	1.13873	.8000	0.41039	1.1429	1.23146

In next step, an independent sample t-test was computed to find any difference between men and women's speech. Table 2 showed the results of t-test. The results in the table 2 indicates that the differences between the groups under study was not significant because of all of the values were far above significant value, $p < .05$.

Table 2. Independent Samples T-Test

		Man madar hastm		Hiss dokhtarha faryad nemizanand		Hich koja, hich kas		Inja bedoone man		Pole choobi	
		df	Sig. (2=tailed)	df	Sig. (2=tailed)	df	Sig. (2=tailed)	df	Sig. (2=tailed)	df	Sig. (2=tailed)
Information seeking	male	7	0.000	13	0.394	12	0.955	9	0.022	12	0.889
	female	6.975	0.000	10.588	0.378	10.570	0.952	3.317	0.116	11.328	0.851
rhetorical	male	7	0.297	13	0.883	12	0.802	9	0.257	12	0.868
	female	7.000	0.191	12.385	0.881	11.817	0.772	7.810	0.230	8.111	0.848
interrogative	male	7	0.818	13	0.450	12	0.063	9	0.128	12	0.532
	female	4.024	0.824	13.000	0.446	4.877	0.161	3.996	0.231	5.237	0.560
indirect	male	7	0.563	13	0.515	12	0.093	9	0.956	12	0.101
	female	5.000	0.415	10.758	0.527	4.988	0.198	8.980	0.949	4.351	0.193

In "Man madar hastam", there was a meaningful differences between men and women's speech in using information seeking questions. ‹but in other four remaining movies no

meaningful differences have been found between men and women use of question so we can ignore this exception.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this research was to explore whether or not there was any difference between men and women's speech with respect to using questions. In this study, more similarities than differences in the use of questions between two groups of under study were found. The findings seems to support studies which showed more gender similarities than differences in the use of questions (Mulac, et al., 2000; Thomson & Murachver, 2001; Chang, 2011).

As it was mentioned earlier, Fishman (1978) claimed that use of questions in women's speech showed powerlessness of them. On the other hand, Mulac et al. (2000) found that men in comparison with women asked more questions. The finding of present study rejects Fishman (1978) and Mulac's et al. (1990) findings. The results was in line with what Nemati and Bayer (2007) reported concerning the uses of tag questions in the speech of men and women. A similar findings was also found by Chang (2011) who investigated the use of questions by professors in lectures. The results of t-test confirms that there was no significant difference between men and women's with regard to the use of questions.

The findings also revealed that both men and women use all kinds of questions (information seeking, rhetorical, interrogative and indirect request) in their speech. Lakoff (1973) believed that women tend to use more question than men. Similarly, Mulac et al. (1988) stated that use of question was more common in the women's speech and men used statement instead of question, the findings indicated that men and women employed questions in the same way.

Although, study by Carli (1990) was shown that women tend to use more tag question than men, the obtained results did not confirm Carli's findings. Lakoff (1973) claimed that women as compared with men use more indirect request than men because women are non-assertive and more polite. She also believed that women employed greater tag questions because they have less confidence. As table 1 indicated the present findings, there were no differences between men and women in the use of tag question and indirect request.

There is still a lot to be done with respect to gender differences and language. Sociolinguistics try to explore a list of gender differences. It suggests that future research should investigate the different use of certain linguistic forms by different genders or their different styles, etc. We hope these findings lead to a better understanding of the different uses of men and women's speech.

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