

GENDER DIFFERENCES IN INDIRECTNESS OF CONVERSATION: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF MALE AND FEMALE COMMUNICATION STYLES

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Abstract

Being human, we all communicate through language to express our feelings and emotions. It is an observable general phenomenon that most of the time we communicate more than what we express through means of language. Speakers do not usually say what they want to say in exact words, but most of the time they communicate in an indirect way. Indirectness is a way to communicate the motive without explicitly stating it. It is a vital part of communication in every context whether formal or informal and used to save other person's face which can be positive or negative. The purpose of the study is to find out the indirectness of acts in male versus female conversation. It comes under the umbrella of the speech act, which is an action performed by utterance. One of the indirect ways in conversation is the form of an interrogative structure of an utterance. Others are declarative, used to make requests, and interrogative, used to make requests. The current study is quantitative in nature and deals with whether women use more indirectness than men or vice versa. Participants of the study are male and female in the context of an academic institution, with a sample size of 15 male and 15 female students. Data is gathered by administering a questionnaire having 15 statements with direct and indirect options of request, command, and interrogative in formal and informal contexts. This study has highlighted the context that influenced the use of indirectness.

Keywords: indirectness, speech act, face, positive face, negative face, interrogative, declarative.

Introduction

Communication is the fundamental aspect of human being to convey whatever they want to. For communication, language is needed to express one's feelings and thoughts. Conversation happens around us all the time, whether between two people or a group. This communication happens with in social or private settings no matter formal or informal. There are certain rules that we follow unconsciously in communication to have a smooth interaction. Following these rules leads to conveying our purpose in two ways, which are direct and indirect, and this depends on the speaker, in which mode he/she want to communicate.

It is very common in all kind of conversations that people do not always communicate what they want to convey straightforwardly. On the contrary, sometimes people communicate indirectly with gestures, hints, expressions, and indirect utterance structures by using mitigating devices. Since there are variations in people's mood so is the case with the variations in expressing their motive directly or indirectly. These indirect ways of conveying meanings are linked with the violation of Grice Cooperative Principles.

Grice (1975) proposed four maxims which are maxim of quality, quantity, relevancy and manner. When speaker adhere to these maxims then he is to the point and direct in conveying meanings. On the other hand flouting of these maxims would result in the use of indirectness in conversation and speaker can interpret indirect message as well. By adhering to indirectness speaker convey more than he said through conversation. Speaker can be indirect by requesting in an indirect way or by interrogating over a certain issue. The main purpose of this study is to

investigate indirectness of act in male and female conversation. Act is a way of performing an action via utterance or speech. These actions can be done either directly or indirectly. Most of the time people prefer indirect way to convey the intended meaning. Both male and female are in the habit of using indirect mode to convey the message. The reason behind the usage of indirectness can be the need of acceptance in social group or to not annoy the other person. Sometime people do so to show that they are not imposing on listener. Being indirect or direct in conversation also depends on the context.

They adopt the indirect way to save their own public self-image called face and listener positive or negative face. Face is a public self-image of a person which he wants other to recognise. Positive face is the need to be accepted and friendliness and negative face is the need to be independent and having freedom of action. This face is at risk when other people around a person say something annoying and it is called face threatening act. In order to avoid these kind of situations people adopt indirect way to communicate so that other do not feel annoyed and being imposed.

Both male and female often do not use indirect speech with friends instead most of the time they adopt direct approaches like imperatives and declarative. Being direct with friends or close relations show the friendliness and that they are sharing the same values. On the contrary people are more indirect in conveying message when they make request, interrogation for request to strangers and people elder to them. These indirect modes are mostly used when people make request without the tone of command or being imperative. This show the context of deference between people involve in a conversation. There is a widely accepted phenomena that women are more indirect as compared to man in their conversation whether formal or informal. This indirectness also show the level of politeness of conversation because being indirect in giving suggestion or command via request show a degree of politeness. And women tends to be more polite in their formal or informal conversation. This study is mainly of the focus on whether women are more indirect or man and in which scenario they use indirectness.

Statement of problem

The reason to conduct this study is to analyse which gender is more indirect in their conversation since we are having the belief that women are more indirect. This will mostly show the indirectness used in requesting and interrogation.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the extent to which males and females use indirectness in formal and informal conversational contexts.
2. To compare the use of indirectness in requests, commands, and interrogatives between male and female participants.
3. To identify contextual factors that influence the choice of indirect versus direct communication styles among genders.

Research Questions

1. Do females use indirectness in conversation more frequently than males in formal and informal contexts?
2. How does the use of indirectness differ between requests, commands, and interrogatives in male and female communication?
3. What contextual factors influence the degree of indirectness in male and female conversational styles?

Operational Definition

Basically, indirectness is to express your thought or emotion in such a way that you convey more than you said and in a way which do not offend the other person's face. Face is the

public self-image of a person. The speaker conveys their motive or message indirectly, in a subtle manner, so that the listener gets the idea of what the speaker wants to convey.

Literature Review

Indirectness

According to Zhang and You (2009), indirectness is a medium by which speaker's meaning is conveyed in an indirect way through utterances and non-verbal gestures in order to accomplish desired goals. They are also of the view that indirectness is a way in which one's intentions are revealed in the other way round. There are variations in viewpoints related to the concept of indirectness but first it is needed to shed some light on the aspects of indirectness in conversation. There are many frameworks for the analysis of indirectness which are Grice's theory of conversational implicature and cooperative maxims, Ervin Goffman's theory of face and Brown and Levinson's concept of face and politeness. These concepts are of great help to understand the concept and usage of indirectness in conversation.

Conversational implicature

Grice (1975) is of the view that in our personal interaction conversational implicature plays a vital role because most often we are inclined to understand what others are saying even when they do not express it in a direct way. Grice put forth a theory called Cooperative Principles to explain that how we are able to imply meanings. These principles explain how in an interaction speakers and hearers interpret meanings. These maxims were rewritten by Levinson in (1983) which are following;

Co-operative principles

Grice's Cooperative Principles provide a framework for achieving smooth, purposeful, and coherent conversation within a specific context. These principles consist of four maxims. The maxim of quality requires speakers to make their contributions truthful, avoiding statements they believe to be false or unsupported by adequate evidence. The maxim of quantity emphasizes providing information that is sufficiently informative for the purpose at hand, but not more than necessary, ensuring that the speaker remains concise and focused. The maxim of relevance requires contributions to be directly related to the topic under discussion, maintaining the coherence of the exchange. Finally, the maxim of manner calls for clarity, precision, and orderliness in expression, avoiding ambiguity, obscurity, and disorder.

When these maxims are followed, conversations tend to be brief, orderly, relevant, and direct. However, the deliberate or unintentional violation of these maxims referred to as flouting or hedging can result in indirectness, where the intended meaning is implied rather than explicitly stated. Such flouting plays a central role in shaping indirect communication. Closely related to this concept is the theory of face and politeness, which further explains why speakers may choose indirectness to maintain social harmony and avoid potential threats to their own or the listener's public self-image.

Face and politeness

Brown and Levinson (1987) describe the theory of face in human conversation in a day-to-day context and explain why we express our ideas, thoughts, and motives in an indirect way. They define the concept of face as public self-image with two dimensions of negative and positive face. Negative face is the desire to be independent and have freedom of action. On the contrary, positive face is the desire to be accepted and being friendly.

Politeness necessarily involves the usage of an indirect way of expressing one's views. It is so because people try to save their own face as well as the hearer's face from being threatened. It is only possible if we add politeness strategies in our conversation. These politeness strategies involve some factors like age, social status, formal or informal context, and the power of one over another. Whenever people encounter a face-threatening situation, they use direct or

indirect ways to communicate, which are on record and off record, respectively, according to Brown and Levinson's point of view (1987).

Indirectness plays a vital role in lessening the ratio of face-threatening acts, and being indirect shows that you are not imposing your argument on others. Tannen (1989) said that indirectness is always present and unavoidable in daily conversations and interactions. There are various functions indirectness play in a conversation. It is usually used for two purposes: first, to save the speaker's own face (public self-image) if the interaction is not going well, and second, to get the sense of being understood without saying any utterance (Lakoff, 1973, 1979).

Function of Indirectness

In real world, it is obvious that people do not follow any rules for communication and they communicate without any notice of what they should say and what not to. Sometime when speaker's face is at risk then they try not to convey any unfavourable information. Speaker violate the maxims discussed above without any notice. Brown and Levinson (1978) describe the violation of quantity maxim results in detailed description, overstatement and tautologies. For example people would say in response to *what a great garden you have* like *oh! Well, I don't know it's just a garden, you know!*

Violation of quality maxim would result in usage of irony, doubts, contradiction and so on and violation of relevancy maxim would be the use of hints, clues or irrelevant material for a specific subject under discussion. The violation of manner maxim would be like unclear, vague and unimportant kind of conversation without making any sense and coherence.

Indirectness and Gender

Conversation as a medium of conveying desired message across has two main dimensions whether direct or indirect. It is said that men are more direct and women are more into indirect conversation. According to Laura, men are more direct in their communication and boast about their achievements are they also apologize less. On the other hand women are more indirect, modest in their daily life and apologize more (2007). There are many factors which play role for being indirect and these factors are age, power, profession, qualification and many others. Speakers communicate more than what they say or utter, and this usually happens having certain shared linguistic and non-linguistic backgrounds (Searle, 1975). This is important to have same background because then it would be easy to communicate indirectly having the expectation that the hearer will understand what speaker wants to convey. Tannen is of the opinion that women ask more question and share more emotions and whatever they feel with others (1990). Women are more sensitive as compared to men and sometime are more negative when they are in a clash with someone (Tannen, 2003).

Lakoff (1975) argues that women are more polite and indirect and they use more mitigating devices in their conversation like tag questions, request, permission, hedges and so on. She said that men and women have their specific way of communication and women carry more formalities which is obvious in their usage of mitigating devices. Being a female herself Lakoff accept her role as ordinary and being oppressed by societal norms.

The focus of present study is to find out the usage of indirectness and who use it more male or female? Since there is not much work done on this concept or idea so this study would help to analyse this concept that how much this phenomena is true that women are more indirect in their conversation and interaction.

Research Methodology

Study Design

The current study is quantitative in nature to analyse which gender is more indirect in conversation. Who deliver their message in hidden way or in an indirect way?

Setting

Setting chosen for this study was academic settings of Lahore mostly at university level. The reason behind the selection of academic setting was to get variety of participants coming from different background.

Duration of Study

Study was completed in almost in the duration of three months from mid Feb till the end of April.

Sample Size

Participants for the study were selected randomly consisting of male and female both. Sample size was 40 having 20 male and 20 female participants from different programs.

Sampling Techniques

To gather the data, questionnaire was used as a technique. To get the desired material questionnaire was developed having 15 statement related to the research question. Data was analysed manually because only percentage was needed to find out that which gender is more indirect in conversation.

Sample Selection

Though the selection of sample was random but when sample was selected, they were asked that if they do not want to participate they can return the questionnaire. The participants with non-serious behaviour were excluded and the incomplete questionnaire as well.

Data Collection Procedure

Data was gathered by approaching male and female randomly at academic institutes. Survey based questionnaires were administered in participants. They were informed about the purpose of the study and were told to fill it according to their temperament without copying other participants, answers. Guidance was also provided to the students having difficulty in understanding the statements. Incomplete and data with over writing was excluded.

Analysis And Interpretation of Data

Age

Participants selected were around the age of 21-25 years old. The reason for the selection of this age limit was to have a view of youth in the academic settings.

Gender:

To answer the question both male and female were approached. 15 male and 15 female were selected randomly.

Analysis of formal statement

Formal statement were seven in number and every statement containing two options; A and B where former is formal and later is informal way of a saying that statement.

Request to look at the book

Gender	Percentage
Male	40%
Female	46%

The result of first statement shows that woman are more indirect when they are having a formals context as compared to males. The percentage of females is 46% and 6 % more than males.

Request to get the notes back

Gender	Percentage
Male	20%
Female	60%

The result of this statement which is request in nature shows that again females are more indirect and they selected the option B which is an indirect way of requesting. Males on the other hand are direct and only 20% chose the option B.

Request to repeat the concept

Gender	Percentage
Male	53%
Female	73%

The result of this statement are also in favour of males that they are more direct in requesting and female on the other hand are more indirect and 73% chose the indirect way of requesting.

Statement not to drag the chair

Gender	Percentage
Male	53%
Female	53%

The statement of not to drag the chair in the library got similar results. Both gender selected equally and both are indirect in conveying the message.

Asking for library building

Gender	Percentage
Male	46%
Female	60%

The results of this statement shows that females are inclined to indirectness in asking for the library building and male are rather direct in this matter. 60% females select the B option.

Request to get a pen

Gender	Percentage
Male	60%
Female	53%

The result of this statement is different because here males are indirect as compared to females because 60% males chose indirect option and 53% female chose indirect which less than males is.

Asking not to make noise in the class

Gender	Percentage
Male	46%
Female	13%

Here again, males took an indirect way of conveying the message not to make noise in the class. Females on the other hand, chose the direct way and only 13% selected the indirect way.

Analysis of informal statement

In order to get the result of informal situations, informal statements were added to the instrument and these were eight in number each having two options; A and B. A was for the direct way and B was for the indirect way of asking or saying a statement.

Asking to pay the bill

Gender	Percentage
Male	26%
Female	20%

The results of this statement show that both gender chose the direct way of conveying the message. But here males chose indirect way of saying which 26% as compared to females is.

Asking to clean the room

Gender	Percentage
Male	13%

Female	13%
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The results show that both genders took the indirect way of conversation equally, but the percentage shows that they were direct in giving the command.

Asking for a glass of water

Gender	Percentage
Male	20%
Female	46%

Here, the result show that females chose indirect way which is 46% and only 20% males chose the indirect way. Again in an informal setting both gender chose direct way than indirect way.

Asking to close the window

Gender	Percentage
Male	13%
Female	53%

The result of this statement show that female again took indirect way and the percentage is 53 and only 13% males took indirect way. Here males are more direct.

Asking not to speak loud

Gender	Percentage
Male	46%
Female	53%

The result of this statement indicates that females chose an indirect way of conveying the message of not speaking loudly, which is 53%. On the other hand, males are more direct.

Asking not to stand in front of T.V

Gender	Percentage
Male	33%
Female	46%

Here in an informal setting females chose indirect way of conversation and the percentage is 46%. On the contrary, only 33% males chose option B.

Asking to switch off the light

Gender	Percentage
Male	20%
Female	26%

In this statement, both genders chose a direct way of conveying the message, and only 20% males selected option B, which is the indirect way.

Asking for time

Gender	Percentage
Male	13%
Female	26%

The result of this statement shows that both genders took mostly the direct way of conveying the message, but females who chose the indirect option are 26% which is more than males.

Discussion

The data which is gathered by the usage of questionnaire containing 15 statements was to find out which gender is more indirect in their way of conversation in formal and informal situations. Since it is accepted phenomenon that females tend to be more indirect and convey more message than actually saying it. Participants were selected randomly male and female. Indirectness is associated with the way of speaking where speaker tends to avoid any threat to listener face and by doing so he/she also save his/her own face. Most of the time indirectness in conversation is used when speaker is unfamiliar with the listener and wants to be independent of his action. This is also used when speaker do not wants to impose himself on listeners rather

give them freedom of action that what they think is best for them. The results of current study reveals a variety of temperaments of both genders.

First portion of the questionnaire was based on the statements which were related to formal situation having two options in every statement. The reason to do this was to find out which statement would both gender choose if they were happened to be in a formal context. The finding revealed that females were more indirect in their approach compared to males. They choose the options which were in an indirect way having the use of mitigating devices. Furthermore, they even select the option that shows the statement in a hidden way, like Do you know the way to the *library*. This show that women like indirectness if they are in a formal setting. On the other hand, males tend to be direct in formal settings and most of the time they choose the option that is direct in nature. Only in two situation males chose the indirect way of conveying the message. So, this show that women are more indirect in conversation if they are in a formal context.

The reason behind the indirectness of conversation in a formal setting is being unaware of people or the notion of giving others freedom of action. The phenomenon that females tend to be more indirect seems logical and true because the result shows related findings. Might be this is because that female are more conscious about their own and other person's face. They do not want to offend other by direct way of communication. So, they tend to use an indirect way whenever they have to command, request, or ask a question in a formal setting. The male gender is not as conscious as female.

Second portion of the questionnaire was based on the statements having informal context. Each statement having two option; one direct and one indirect revealed the finding that people tend to be direct if the context is informal be at home, with friends, with colleagues etc. findings show that females chose direct way of conveying the message and this is because of the context. On the other hand, males again select the direct way to convey what they want to convey. The ratio of indirectness in an informal context is low because people usually know that to whom they are speaking.

This highlight the fact that there is the presence of friendliness and familiarization. Furthermore, this also show that both genders use direct way of communicating because they have some kind of familiarization with people they are talking and they no longer need to save their face from getting threatened. They are at ease that is why they selected the direct manner for commanding, requesting and even asking a question. So these findings shed light on the fact that females tend to be indirect in a formal but direct in an informal situation. On the other hands male do not bother that whether they are in a formal or informal context and would convey their motive they think is best.

Conclusion

After the analysis of data set, the finding revealed that the phenomena attached to females that they are more indirect in conversation is somehow true. Besides this, it is also worth noticing that male also use indirectness when they were facing a formal context though it was lesser then females. Females use more indirect way at giving commands, requesting and asking question. They did so because they are conscious about their own and other person's face. Male on the other hand, are different in the usage of indirectness. They have used indirect way in two or three statements more than females but still they are not as much indirect as females. And in the informal context they used direct way of communication in a great number.

On the whole, it is obvious that females tends to be more indirect in formal context but direct in informal context. This is not the case with males because are not as conscious as females and tend to use direct way whether it is a formal or informal context.

Recommendations

This study is conducted to find out which gender is more indirect in the usage of conversation by giving commands, requests and asking question and the findings revealed that females tend to be more indirect. This study is conducted in a limited time with limited number or participants. More authentic data can be gathered with the increase in the sample size. Instrument used had limited statement and that can also be increased to get a variety of responses and beside questionnaire, interview can be added to get more authenticity

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Questionnaire

Age: _____ Gender: _____

Select the option that you would use according to your temperament.

1: Which statement would you select in a conversation in a formal setting/context?

- A: I like this book. Can I have a look at it? B: Can I get your book for a moment?
A: When will you return my notes? B: Kindly return my notes, I need them now.
A: Repeat the concept. B: I did not get the concept.
A: Do not drag the chair in the library. B: Avoid dragging the chair in the library.
A: Where is the library building? B: Do you know the way to the library?
A: Kindly give me a pen. B: I have lost my pen, do you have any extra?
A: Stop making noise in the class. B: Is it a classroom or a fish market?

2: Which statement would you use in an informal setting/context?

- A: Who is going to pay the bill of lunch? B: Please pay the bill because I don't have enough money.
A: What time is it? B: Do you have the time?
A: Clean your room. B: Your room seems so messy to me.
A: Bring me a glass of water. B: Do you have water because I am very thirsty now.
A: Close the window, it's cold. B: Don't you think it's getting cold inside?
A: Please do not speak loudly. B: I am feeling a headache because of the loud voice.
A: Get aside, I am watching TV. B: Do you have to stand in front of the TV?
A: Please switch off the light. B: I cannot sleep if light is on.