

## GENDER DIFFERENCES IN LANGUAGE USE AN ANALYSIS OF SIMIN DANESHVAR'S SAVUSHUN

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### Abstract

Language is an inherently social phenomenon which provides insights into how men and women's language use can affect their social worlds. Their meaningful words reflect differences in the way they think about the world. Men's and women's language use are considerably different in some languages, for example different pronunciations of certain speech sounds or grammar structures. The inquiry into the relationship between gender and language and the existing differences in the way men and women use language have been a major focus of interest since long ago. In this research, gender differences of language use in Persian society were examined in an Iranian social novel named Savushun by Simin Daneshvar. The study was conducted on the basis of eight differences put forward by Robert Lawrence Trask which were proposed in his *Language the Basics* in 1995. Examining Simin daneshvar's Savushun demonstrates that men's and women's language use differ from each other in accordance with most of the differences mentioned by Lawrence. In addition, some of the novel gender differences such as promising, praying and cursing are transparently evident in this novel which have roots in Iranian culture and religion and can be regarded as a new category.

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**Keywords:** Sociolinguistics, women's language use, men's language use, gender differences

### Introduction

Language has a very complicated system which is a pattern for the structure of the society. Not only do people use language to express their thoughts and feelings, but also they're given different identities and become able to describe their communications through

using language. Due to the fact that language is a social phenomenon, it is strongly influenced by social and cultural factors such as gender, age, educational level, social level and so forth. Discovery of the existing relationship between language and linguistic variations is commonly provided through the examination of linguistic and social differences. An explosion of research can be recently seen on the existence of differences between men's and women's language use, and it is considered as one of the principal issues of linguistics.

The conducted researches have indicated that men's and women's language are significantly different from each other. These distinctions can be appraised from different aspects. In other words, although women possess their own language standards, they may change them based on some other characteristics such as social class, social situation, age, educational level and so forth. For instance, the way a female professor or doctor talks is totally different from the way a saleswoman talks. The present study aims to assess the existing gender differences of language use in Persian society based on the Trask's theory.

### **Review of Literature**

Not only has gender distribution affected the whole events which happen in the society, but also it has altered the way men and women use language. There are various theories apropos of gender differences in language use. For example, Ralph Fasold wrote a book named *The Sociolinguistics of Language* in 1990 in which he examined the influence of social interaction on language use. The theory of 'the sociolinguistic gender pattern' was also examined and explained in this book which is a tool to illuminate the existing linkage between gender relations in a particular society and suggested different gender frameworks. On the basis of this theory, different gender frameworks are in accordance with their social status and can be classified apropos of their application. He suggests that women use a higher proportion of standard variants than men especially in formal contexts, since it allows them to sound less local and to have a voice; therefore, they become able to protest against the traditional norms which place them in an inferior social position to men. It also can be the consequence of this fact that women are more aware of linguistic characteristics and frameworks, so they try not to use very explicit and direct statements which are accompanied with a kind of 'violence' and 'toughness' and mostly related to males (Fasold, 1990, p.2).

Aitchison J. (1998) has accomplished another research which claims that women are more conservative when they talk by replacing imperatives or direct sentences with questions. For example if a woman is asked 'what time are we going to have the dinner?', she will answer 'is it at 8?' instead of 'it's at 8'. However, this style of talking is specific to the weak people who are afraid of provoking arguments and outrage. Women tend to use more

standard forms that men and it is commonly alleged that women speak more correctly than men, but the real reason of this way of talking is still under question and only some justifications have been proposed which can be right to some extent. For example, women are under pressure in patriarchal societies and are expected to be ladylike, so they have to behave more politely than men. Some people believe that talking properly is considered a part of their personality and associated with their femininity. It can be also the influence of child-rearing responsibilities which make women talk in a way that they can be good patterns for their children's improvement in the future. In addition, women mostly choose those jobs which need more communication skills rather than physical expertises (Aitchison, 1990, p. 182).

Hash Chide (1981) has done a research in which he states that there are some differences between men and women in expressives and declaratives. Women pay more attention to the love feelings. According to 'The Standard Theory' put forward by Chide, the gender differences are associated with specific emotional beliefs which differ between men and women. Expressive and declarative speech acts create some rules and standards that people judge their own feelings or others' based on them. The way people manage their feelings is strongly linked to the cultural standards, for example men have to control their feelings and avoid being upset, and women have to prevent from being furious. They state that men and women are different just in the way they express their feelings, but they are similar in experiencing them. They believe that women express their anger more verbally, but men do it behaviourally.

Another sociolinguistic theory, which is named 'structural theory', has been suggested by Kamper. Emotional feelings such as security and happiness and the level of their achievement are mostly dependent upon the social causes; therefore, it can be concluded that those who possess higher position and power in the society can experience more security and delight. So, more negative feelings may be reported about the American women, since they are at lower level in proportion to men.

In another research which was conducted by Mohsen Jan Nezhad, gender differences in language use were investigated based on the period of time which was allocated to the men's and women's speech. It helped the researcher to see how much time is spent on talking by men or women in different situations. This research has been done to evaluate the prevalent hypothesis that 'women talk more than men' and has proved that men and women are different in allocating time for talking apropos of the topic about which they are speaking. The linguistic corpus which was determined to assess was consisting of eight following

groups: politics, economics, sports, society and culture, medicine, religion and history, art and literature, family and education.

Neda Hedayat also accomplished a research in which she appraised different styles for expressing various kinds of speech acts such as requests between men and women. She has examined six approaches (direct requests, indirect requests, implicatures, warnings, supportive demands and internal variables) which men or women apply at the time of requesting something and has concluded that men use more direct sentences rather than women.

### **Data Analysis**

Robert Lawrence Trask's theory has been applied to investigate if there is any difference between men's and women's language use in Iran in proportion to English societies. According to Trask (1995, p. 61), a few of the differences which have been reported are as follows:

1. Women are said to make frequent use of a number of admiring terms rarely used by men: divine, cute, adorable, thrilling, and others.
2. Women are said to make finer discriminations than men in certain areas, such as colour terms.
3. Women are said to use more tag questions than men, as if to seek confirmation.
4. Men are said to swear much more than women, especially in the previous generations.
5. Men interrupt far more than women.
6. Women use more baby-talk than men.
7. Very generally, women's discourse is cooperative, while men's is competitive. It means that women in conversation usually try to sympathize with one another and to support and admire the ideas and contributions of others. Men, in contrast, tend to outdo one another, to score points and to top what the others have said.
8. Women are more likely than men of the same social group to use (overt) prestige forms, and are likely to report themselves as using more prestige forms than they actually do. Men do just the opposite: they use fewer prestige forms, and they report themselves as using even fewer than they do use.

Based on the aforementioned differences, different male and female characters of Savushun were examined. It should be pointed out that all these differences do not occur the same times as each other; therefore, some of them are more common and some of them rarely happen. As Trask himself warned some of these differences are controversial. The following examples have been derived from Savushun by Simin Daneshvar:

### **Difference 1**

Total number: 15

*Ezzatoddowleh: I answered, “May God protect you”*

Difference 1 which was mentioned by Trask varies to some extent in Iranian culture. Iranian women express admiring terms through prayers to show their respect, emotion and feelings towards other people. Due to the fact that Iranian women grow up in a different culture from English women, instead of some words such as cute or adorable which were told by Trask, they say prayers to request God earnestly to help other people.

Iranian women try to express their affection through prayers, compliments and praises as Ezzatoddowleh did it in the above sentence. In this way, they can be more accepted in the Iranian society and it can be regarded as a difference between Iranian and English societies.

### **Difference 2**

Total number: 29

*Along the side of the bread, “congratulations” was written over and over in saffron and nigella seeds. Zari thought, “What an oven they must have needed! What a mound of dough! How much flour they must have used!”*

In the above sentence, it can be seen that Zari pays much attention to the details of baking bread. It is one of the specific characteristics of Iranian women who focus on the details. In this novel, not only do female characters note trivial issues and details in their conversations, but also they do it in their dreams and subconscious.

### **Difference 3**

Total number: 15

*Zari said: I kept it until you come and see it with your own eyes. Did you see it?*

*The girl said, “it lasts two years, doesn’t it?”*

The third difference which has been mentioned by Trask is mostly seen through repetition or tag questions in this novel. Female characters repeat some sentences or ask tag questions to seek confirmation owing to the fact that they lack self-confidence. For example, in the above sentence, Zari repeats the whole sentence indirectly by asking the question “did you see it?”, and she tends to hear the following answer: “yes, I saw what you kept”; therefore, it implies a tag question.

### **Difference 4**

Total number: 28

*Kolu asked Zari whether he can find that damned in the Jewish quarter or not.*

The achieved results of this novel examination indicate that men swear much more than women. They express their fury and hatred through swearing or execrating. Women

show their abhorrence through cursing and appealing God to bring misfortune to their enemies instead of swearing, since curse is the polite and indirect form of imprecation. For example, if a woman says, “bad luck to you, I hope you die sooner”, she curses instead of execrating and asks God to take her revenge on her enemy. So, the fourth difference which was adverted by Trask can be attested through these examples.

#### **Difference 5**

Total number: 17

*Without paying attention to Hamid, Sohrab replied to the aunt, “they’re all rumours”*

In the fifth difference, it is said that men interrupt far more than women. Flaunting their superiority can be one of the reasons; they interrupt the women’s speech to dominate the conversation and show their strength. In this novel, not only do men interrupt others, but also they even interrupt themselves which means they leave their sentences unfinished and fragmented, so the hearer can guess the rest of the sentence. In addition, men can threaten women with these unfinished sentences, for example, if a man says, “if you don’t obey me promptly, I have to ...”. This sentence can be considered as a threat.

#### **Difference 6**

Total number: 8

*Zari said, “you can’t con me. I bet he is John the Baptist”*

In the above sentence, Zari uses more baby-talk. She says “con” instead of any other formal and serious word. If a man wants to say such a sentence, he may use “defraud”. This characteristic of women’s language use can be to attract others’ attention and stimulate their pity in order to fulfill their needs.

#### **Difference 7**

Total number: 37

*She said to Zari, “Why do you bother yourself so much? Your face has become too thin.*

*The aunt said, “don’t worry, they will come back.”*

As it can be seen in the above examples, women’s discourse is cooperative. It means that women in conversation usually try to sympathize with one another and to support and admire the ideas and contributions of others. This difference is transparent and easily understandable in Iranian culture. Women tend to confirm each other and even if they cannot do anything, they express their feelings through curses and prayers. For instance, the following sentence indicates the speaker’s attitudes and feelings toward another woman’s enemy:

*Ezzatoddowleh said, “I wish that he will be punished and retaliated by God because of his tyrannical behaviour toward the poor children.”*

Men, in contrast, tend to outdo one another and their discourse is commonly competitive. The following sentence can be an example of this difference:

*“You said the people in your city are born poets. You can see that the people of Ireland are the same.”*

Not only do men tend to score points and to top what the others have said, but also they try to top others' countries.

### **Difference 8**

Total number: 8

*Aboldqasem Khan said, “I went to a place to get rid of the honourable clients.”*

Women are more likely than men of the same social group to use (standard) prestige forms, and are likely to report themselves as using more prestige forms than they actually do. Men do just the opposite. They use fewer prestige forms, and they report themselves as using even fewer than they do use. In the above example, “get rid” can be an evident of this difference. By and large, men are mostly more like to use expressions, idioms and colloquial speech than women in this novel.

### **The opposite of Trask's differences**

Despite the sentences which approved the introduced differences by Trask, there are some sentences in Savushun which are the opposite of Trask's differences. Total numbers of these examples are as follows:

The opposite of difference 1: 4

The opposite of difference 2: 3

The opposite of difference 3: 6

The opposite of difference 4: 16

The opposite of difference 5: 5

The opposite of difference 6: 0

The opposite of difference 7: 0

The opposite of difference 8: 0

According to the obtained results of the investigation into the gender differences in Savushun by Simin Daneshvar, it can be concluded that most of the introduced differences by Trask have occurred in differences 2, 4, 5 and 7. Owing to the fact that this novel can be considered as a speech community of Persian speakers, it can be said that men are more likely to use inappropriate words or even imprecations. Men interrupt much more than women, no matter the addressed are a man or a woman. This difference may be caused by the way they were brought up in a patriarchal society, so it is natural that they always try to

appear in a position superior to others and dominate the conversation through interrupting others' speech. In the difference 2, it can be noticed that women pay more attention to the details than men and this characteristic has been even internalized in their minds. The difference 7 had also a high frequency. It indicates that men's discourse is mostly competitive and they tend to outdo one another. This difference can be also associated with their childhood and the patriarchal society in which they grew up. They try to surpass each other especially in the communities in which some women present.

### **Conclusion**

Language and gender are controversial topics which have newly been of much interest in the study of linguistics. At first, it may be conceived that men's and women's language use are the same or they vary just in vocabularies, but through an accurate assessment, we can evaluate the extent to which men and women use language differently due to the fact that language is a social phenomenon. In this article, the existing gender differences in Simin Daneshvar's *Savushun*, which is an Iranian novel, were appraised by applying eight differences proposed by Robert Lawrence Trask in his *Language the Basics* in 1995 to see whether these differences only occur in English societies or they may happen in other communities as well.

*Savushun* was considered as a speech community in Iran and eight differences of Trask's theory were applied in it. The achieved findings demonstrate that some of the Trask's differences are more frequent than others in Iran. For instance, the differences 2, 4, 5 and 7 have a high frequency in proportion to other ones. Therefore, it can be concluded that women are more conservative and polite in their speech than men. The reason of this difference can be women's attempt to be more popular and accepted in the society. In other words, they try not to force their views on other people and are more conservative to preserve their social status and make good impressions. Iranian women's language is more likely than men's to include curses instead of imprecations. Besides Trask's differences, this difference, which is an expressive speech act, can be regarded as a new category that is closely associated with each country's culture and the period of time in which people live. The other difference which is so noticeable is the fifth difference which shows men interrupt much more than women, no matter the addressed is a man or a woman. By and large, the present study supports this hypothesis that the introduced differences by Trask exist both in English and Iranian societies, and the root of all these differences can be traced in their distinct gender which appear differently in their language use. Finally, we can conclude that although the most common differences are those which were put forward by Trask, some other elements



such as culture, religion, beliefs, education, etc. can be influential in gender differences at language use.

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