Forging Unity Amidst Diversity: From the Classroom and Beyond

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5 A Study of Direct Request Realization in Male Discourse

MOHSEN SHAHROKHI & JARIAH MOHD JAN

Introduction
It is taken for granted that the primary function of language is communication. It also contributes to other functions, among which social identity formation of the speaker is a crucial one. The creation of the speakers’ identity and conveying such information as class or race is not possible “as much through what we say, as through how we say it” (Sims, 2004). An outstanding part of the social identity human beings possess is the gendered behavioral attributes including gendered verbal behavior as well. Nemati and Bayer (2007:31) state that “although men and women, from a given social class, belong to the same speech community, they may use different linguistic forms. The linguistic forms used by women and men contrast to some extent in all communities”. Gender attributes manifested in the use of language is, therefore, an interesting area in which males and females characteristics can be shed light on. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003:9) in their book Language and Gender state that “gender is embedded so thoroughly in our institutions, our actions, our beliefs, and our desires, that it appears to us to be completely natural”. Although the study of male and female’s language characteristics was not a serious topic, according to Sims (2004), until the publication of Robin Lakoff’s book Language and Woman’s Place in 1975, however the studies on gender have extended to other areas such as politeness, impoliteness, face, speech acts studies, etc. In the area of linguistic politeness the male and female attributes have been investigated with regard to Brown and Levinson’s (1978, 1987) universal theory of politeness (e.g., Holmes, 1995). According to Larina (2008:33) “politeness is tied up with the most basic principles of sociocultural organization and interpersonal relationships within social groups and should be viewed in the context of Social distance and Power distance which are considered the main dimensions of cultures”. Holmquist (2008: 18) reports Labov’s (2001) suggestion that “given the very general interaction of gender with social class, [we should expect] … that the rules by which … [gender] categorization affects language is mediated through [other] social factors”. In other word, gender does not act by itself, but it is the interaction of gender with other variables like class, age, etc. which is influential. As such, the interaction of such social factors as age, educational level, ethnicity, power and distance as influencing variables with various speech acts performed by both males and females have been investigated (e.g., Brown, 1980; Cameron, 1997, 1998a; Chan, 1998; Christie, 2002; Coates, 1999; Culpeper, 2005; Edwards, 1998; Erlich, 1999; Harness Goodwin, 2006; Henley, 1995; Henley and Kramarae, 1991; Holmes, 1995). This study is an attempt to shed light on the Persian male attributes as far as request speech acts are concerned. The study explores the way Persian male speakers formulate the realization of direct requests based on the social power and distance between the interlocutors and with regard to the assessment of the imposition that a request may bear on the hearer. To this end, it investigates the single-sex discourse among Persian male to highlight the male linguistic strategies in single-sex request.

Request speech act
Hassall (2003:1907) reports Searle’s (1969) definition of a request as “a directive speech act which counts as an attempt to get [h]earer to do an act which [s]peaker wants H to do, and which S believes that H is able to do; and which it is not obvious that H will do in the normal course of events or of H’s own accord”. A request can be realized through a head act and supportive moves. According to Blum-Kulka et al. (1989: 275) “head act is the minimal unit which car
which can realize a request; it is the core of the request sequence. The supportive moves are the "peripheral elements and refer to the pre- or post-posed moves or strategies that accompany the head act" (Felix-Brasdefer, 2005:67) and are employed most probably in an attempt to modify the impact of the request.

Felix-Brasdefer (2005:66) believes that "a request is a directive act and pre-event which initiates the negotiation of face during a conversational interaction", since requests have a face-threatening nature according to Brown and Levinson (1987). The hearer's negative face (the desire not to be impeded by others) as well as speaker's positive face (the desire to be appreciated and liked by others) is jeopardized when a request is realized. It is rationally to the interlocutors' advantage to do their best to minimize the probable threat addressed to the face of the parties engaged in any interaction.

The degree of the face threat involved in any face-threatening act (FTA) depends on the degree of the following variables as stated by Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987): the social dominance or power distance (P), the social distance (SD), and the ranking of speech act which means the degree of imposition as far as requests are concerned. The social dominance is an evaluation of the interlocutor's power over the other one. It has a ternary value namely (S>H) where the hearer is dominated by the speaker, (S=H) where the speaker is dominated by the speaker, and (S<H) where they are equal in terms of power. Social distance indicates the familiarity of the interlocutors and has a binary value, that is to say the speaker and the hearer either know one another well (-SD) or do not know one another (+SD). The ranking of request means the degree of the imposition on the hearer through the request performed by the speaker. The imposition is evaluated either as high or as low. The weight of any FTA can be estimated, according to Brown and Levinson (1987), by adding the value of these variables. Brown and Levinson (1987), furthermore, suggest taxonomy of strategies that can be employed for performing any FTA to minimize or soften the inherent threat to face.

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**Figure 1** Face-threatening Acts Strategies (Brown and Levinson, 1987)

The strategy number 1 in Figure 1, is the most direct way for performing a speech act. The strategy is employed when there is no or minimal face loss, e.g. promising someone. The strategies number 2 and 3 are performed with redressive action, that is to say "the speaker tries to maintain his/her face as much as possible and at the same time s/he tries to mitigate the potential threat of act" (Marquez-Reiter, 2000:14). The most indirect strategy is strategy
number 4, namely off record strategies. This strategy can be employed when there is a risk of face loss. It is employed because “more than one meaning or intent can be attributed to the act” (Marti, 2006:1839). Finally, when the risk of face loss is too great for a FTA to be performed the strategy employed is not to do the FTA.

To Blum-Kulka et al. directness means “the degree to which the speaker’s illocutionary intent is apparent from the locution” (1989:278). With regard to the directness/indirectness of FTAs, requests are classified theoretically into three levels, according to Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984). The first group is the most direct way of requesting, for instance an order. The second group consists of conventionally indirect requests. Hassall (2003:907) states this group “comprises indirect formulas that are conventionalized in the language as a means of requesting”. The third group, non-conventional indirect requests, is made up of requests which are not performed according to conventional norms of a given language, and consequently call for more inference processing by the addressee in order for him/her to figure out the main intent. The three levels of requests are furthermore consisted of several strategies (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989) illustrated and exemplified in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Directness</th>
<th>Strategies and Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>1. Mood derivable: (D)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leave me alone/ Clean up the kitchen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Explicit Performative: (D)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I am asking you to move your car.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Hedged Performative: (D)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I must/have to ask you to clean the kitchen right now.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Locution derivable: (D)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Madam you’ll have to/should/must/ought to move your car.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Want statement: (D)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I’d like to borrow your notes for a little while.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. Suggestory formula: (CI)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How about cleaning up the kitchen?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. Preparatory (CI)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Could you possibly get your assignment done this week?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. Strong Hint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Intent: borrowing hearer’s lecture notes)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I wasn’t at the lecture yesterday.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9. Mild Hint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Intent: getting a lift home)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I didn’t expect the meeting to end this late.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The request strategies in Table 1 are ordered from the most direct to the most indirect strategies. This study narrowed down the analysis of the data to direct request performed by Persian male to check how directness is formulated in request realization in relation to interlocutors’ distance and dominance as well as the imposition of the request performed.

Methodology

Participants
All 62 undergraduate and postgraduate university student participants of this study were chosen from among Iranian male native speakers. They were doing their studies in a subject not related to languages or linguistics in Iran. Most of them were between 18 and 25 years of age, although data was also collected from participants as old as 45 years of age. The samples
This book Forging Unity Amidst Diversity: From the Classroom and Beyond brings together a comprehensive range of analyses of literacy practices in everyday public life, and links these with fine-grained analyses of classroom dynamics. The public life domain addresses the wide-ranging issues of the gendered discourse of a male-dominated parliament, the discourse of terrorism in political speeches, the discursive dynamics of apology, the intercultural pragmatics of disagreement, the digital divide and the imperative to deal with issues of disability encompassing public and community spaces to the realities of classrooms in which the same range of underlying issues needs to be addressed. The rich experiences extolled by the authors in this book illustrate the benefits of language and literacy programmes that serve as key intermediaries towards achieving unity amidst diversity. The unifying factor in this collection of papers is the shared sense of the significant role of language and literacy in addressing key differences in discourse and identity in a multicultural and globalising world.