

Gendered-Based Use of Maxim of Quantity in Iranian Spoken Discourse: A Case of Closing Conversation

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Abstract

The aim of the present study was to examine the use of maxim of quantity by Persian male and female speakers in different contexts to close their conversations. Thirty males and females randomly were selected to serve as the subjects of the study. A questionnaire including three different situations was employed in order to gather the data. The respondents were expected to end the conversations provided in three natural situations in the questionnaire. The analysis of the results showed that Iranian male and female speakers employed the maxim of quantity differently in different contexts regarding the formality features. The findings revealed that male speakers used more maxim of quantity in informal contexts whereas female speakers used more maxim of quantity in formal contexts to end their conversations.

Keywords: Maxim of quantity, spoken discourse, closing conversation

1. Introduction

Grice (1975) proposes that participants in a conversation obey a general Cooperative Principle which is expected to be in force whenever a conversation unfolds: "make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged" (p.45). One of the maxims of the cooperative principle is the maxim of quantity. The maxim of quantity can control linguistics performance. Speakers are assumed to provide as much information as required and no more. Listeners are expected to provide clear and succinct explanation (Engelhardt, Baily, Ferreira,

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2006). "This maxim is related to the way speakers try to make their contributions as informative as they possibly can, giving sufficient information, no more no less" (Leech,1980, p.11; Levinson,1983, p.106). According to Levinson (1983), it has two dimensions, "first it is preparing as full information as it is needed, and second the information should not be more than required. In different situation this maxim add information to make the utterance meaningful. The second dimension of this maxim is concerned with how people communicate and share information which is not more than it is necessary" (p.106). If the interlocutors explain a lot, the maxim of quantity will be violated.

As noted by (Al-Hamadi J. Muhhamed, 2009), Maxim of quantity a) Super-maxim: be-informative, b) Sub-maxims: 1) make your contribution as informative as required (for current purpose of the conversation). Do not make your contribution more informative than is required. Moreover, gender is a factor that can affect the use of maxim of quantity. Social context can be another factor that can affect this maxim, for instance, formality can influence the use of maxim of quantity in spoken discourse.

2. Literature Review

A wide spectrum of researchers have investigated the Gricean maxim of quantity; however, research on the use of maxim of quantity by Iranian in speaking has been minimal. Zhu (2009) studied the Gricean maxims in spoken English teaching that can support the aim of "communicative competence". Engelhardt, Bailey & Ferreira (2006) investigated that speakers and listeners of English in USA are moderately Gricean. Keshvardoost (2014) stated that Grices's cooperative principles was used more often in political news than sports news.

Foroughi and Lotfi (2013) in their article studied the Gricean maxim of quantity in academic text which were written by both Iranian and native English speakers. They investigated 30 articles which were written by Iranian authors, 10 of them in Persian, 10 of them in English (by the same author) and the remainder were written by native English authors. They found that the Persian articles violated the maxim more frequently than the articles written by the native English speakers. However, the English articles written by English and Persian authors had no significant differences.

Sobhani and Saghebi (2014) investigated the violation of cooperative principles and four maxims in Iranian psychological consultation. The data was collected by recording conversations

between a male psychotherapist and his patients during their therapy sessions. Jia (2006) stated that "... cooperation is essential for a conversation to take place. In order to make a conversation go on successfully and smoothly, the speakers on both sides should hold a cooperative attitude" (p.88).

Hadi (2013) suggested Grice's Cooperative Principle (CP) has played a historically important role in pragmatics because this theory separated pragmatics from linguistics. She suggested "we should be careful interpreting what is meant by "cooperation" in Grices's CP. Her notion is different from the everyday notion of cooperation" (p.71). By analyzing the conversation it's concluded that within the conversation the psychiatrist will find it necessary to understand the non-cooperative attitudes of the speakers and their violation of one or more CP maxims (Sobhani, Saghebi, 2014). It is obvious that what speakers try to convey is related not only to the words they use but also to how listeners interpret the message. In some cases, it is difficult for patients to share their inner feelings so they try not to tell the truth by talking about irrelevant stories. In such cases the psychiatrist try to keep the connection by violating conversational maxims.

In a cross cultural research, which was done by Yuanxiu (2012) the speakers of English and Chinese were compared in using Grices' cooperative principles theory. It was found that Grice's CP cannot apply to the Chinese language since for English language it can be used in some situations. Only the Chinese language users were in conformity with maxim of relevance.

In spite of these researches noted above and some others, the effect of Iranian gender differences for accounting the maxim of quantity has not been investigated. Therefore, this study can shed light on this area. This study will answer the following question:

- 1) Is there any gender-based differences in the using of maxim of quantity to close the conversation?

3. Method

3.1. Participants

Thirty Iranian native speakers, including 15 males and 15 females who were randomly selected participated in this study. Their age ranged between 20 and 30 years old.

3.2. Instruments

A questionnaire which consists of 3 situations was presented to the participants to state how they react and end the conversation in different social situations (i.e. friends, colleagues, and family members).

3.3. Data Collection Procedures

The participants were asked to complete the questionnaire based on the scenario presented. They were asked to write the words or phrases they would use in closing the conversation in similar natural settings.

3.4. Data Analysis

The participants' responses were collected and analyzed. The responses of the male and female subjects were then contrasted as to the way they closed the conversation in each scenario related to the maxim of quantity (i.e. they would explain more or talk briefly to end their conversations).

3. Results

The participants were supposed to read 3 scenarios and to write how they would close their conversations in the following situations.

Situation 1

You have not heard of one of your friends for a long time. You call him/her to have a long talk. He/she tells you there is an emergency that he/she must deal with. How do you end your call? Do you have a long explanation or wrap it up directly to put an end to the conversation? What sentences will you use?

In this case that there is a relationship between two friends, their reactions are as following:

Table 1

Frequency of using the Maxim of Quantity when two friends talk

	Briefly speaking	explaining
Male	100%	0%
Female	67%	33%

To compare male and female speakers, Table 2 determines that males were more brief when talking to their friends than females, males observed the maxim of quantity while females violated it.

Situation 2

You are talking with your colleague and it is now the end of your work day or shift. Your partner/friend is waiting for you in your work place because the two of you have an important appointment. Now you must put an end to the conversation. How do you do it? Do you have a long explanation to wrap it up or do you directly end the conversation? What sentences will you use? Table 2 demonstrates the frequency of each group.

Table 2
Frequency of using Maxim of Quantity when two colleagues talk

	Briefly speaking	Explaining
Male	80%	20%
Female	33%	67%

In this situation, males were more direct and speak briefly. Females are less direct and comparing to males, females used explanation more.

Situation 3

You are in your doctor’s office and you are waiting that get your turn. A person who is waiting to see a doctor is besides you. You are talking to each other. After a few minutes you know that her/his turn is coming and you have to end the conversation. Do you have a long explanation to wrap it up or do you directly end it? What sentences will you use?

This situation which shows the reaction of males and females toward strangers. There is no need for preparation to terminate the conversation. Their reactions are the same.

Table3
Frequency of using Maxim of quantity while meeting a stranger

	Briefly speaking	explaining
Male	100%	0%
Female	100%	0%

As it can be seen in the Table 3, both male & female speakers closed the conversation with a stranger without explaining more to make an excuse or find a reason to wind up the chat. In this case, both male and female had considered and observed the maxim of quantity.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Sperber & Wilson (1986) consider Grice's Cooperative principle and maxims as norms which communicators must know in order to communicate effectively. Davies (1997) elaborates on CP and state that when you produce or receive an utterance, you assume that it has the right amount of information. So, if an utterance does not appear to match this model, you don't assume that the utterance is non-sense rather you suppose there is an appropriate meaning which should be inferred. In Grice's terms, a maxim must be flouted or violated intentionally.

This study indicated that Iranian males did not explain more when they wanted to close the conversation while females tried to explicate in the same cases. Considering the maxim of quantity; male's speech supported it (because they spoke briefly) whereas female's confabulation violated this maxim in different situations. The research done by Hiedari, Eslami-rasekh, Simin, (2014) supports the findings of this study in that the level of the female's politeness is higher than the male's. As a result, it can be referred to as our cultural norm that explaining more can be a sign of politeness rather than a quick direct closing.

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