



A Study of Taboos in Conversation Based on Age& Gender

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the use of taboos in the conversation of four groups (15-30 & 16-50 year –old male, 15-30 & 16- 50 year –old female) in Gachsaran, Iran. To carry out this, somerecruited researchers recorded the voice of these groups as they didn't know and the researcher noted taboos by natural observation. Then the researcher checked the frequency of taboos in obtainedfiles. So Chi-square analysis showed that there was no difference between use of taboos among them. And the age and gender didn't influence theiruse.But kindand manner of their use were different based on space and time. Finally, they usedmore the taboosreferring tothe body parts, functions andsex acts.

Keywords: Taboos, Conversation, Male, Female, Age.

1. Introduction

Most people who speak Persian know the rules of taboo and observe the rules. Breaking the rules may arouse considerable dissatisfaction. The use of a taboo word can lead to a variety of feedbacks, even physical violence or legal action. The penalty for breaking a linguistic taboo can be severe, although perhaps not quite as much today as formerly, for obscenity is still a crime in many jurisdiction, but is hardly likely to cost you your life, as the violation of certain non-linguistic taboos, e.g., incest taboos, might be in certain places in the world (Wardhaugh, 2000, p.234). Peoples of different countries do not agree totally on what taboos are. Acts of human excretion and sexual intercourse are to be avoided in polite conversation. Age and salary should be avoided in English conversation. If they must be mentioned, they should be in a euphemistic way. Therefore, it is important for a foreign language learner to acquaint himself with such knowledge. So this study investigated the use of taboos in the conversation of four groups (15-30-year-old male, 16-60 year –old male, 15-30 year- old female and 16- 60 year –old female). Taking into account the frequency and the type of the taboo, the researcher analyzed differences in their conversation based on their gender and age. In fact, the researcher analyzed the use of taboos regarding the age and gender. This topic was chosen because Jay (2008) concluded that a neuro-psycho-social framework is offered to unify taboo word research. Hadian & Yoosefi (2015) & Soori & Sherafat (2015) believed that in Iran, the males used taboos more than females, so women took taboos more severely than men. Moreover, as the researcher reviewed the related literatures saw that no one studied this topic in Iran. It was therefore worthy investigating the effect of age and gender on the use of taboos in conversation in Iran, Gachsaran. So this research wanted to answer this questions: Was there any relationship among the gender, age and use of taboos in the people's conversation? Was the type of taboos the used like?

2. Literature Review

2-1. Taboo

Taboo is a Polynesian word coming from Tongan word tabu. Capitan James Cook explored the Pacific Islands in the 1770s and observed the Polynesian peoples' behavior. Capitan Cook along with his fellow shipmen recorded the word taboo in the Polynesian peoples' journals as a significant local word standing for forbidden behavior when a thing is not allowed to be eaten, touched, entered or uttered. Perhaps because of this origin, taboo is easily associated with the primitive cultures; but it exists as well as in western contemporary ones (Register, 1996). These days, taboo generally refers to a topic or an activity that people avoid or prohibit due to social, cultural, and religious customs. These words are considered to be offensive, rude, insulting, inappropriate or even bad language. Taboo is a moral or politic restriction that is placed on certain actions by authorities (kings, priests, shahans and etc) of people, which if ignored, will result in specific negative consequences. Examples are numerous in folklore and mythology (Natalie, 2005). English taboo words and expressions refer to body parts, sex acts, bodily functions and products, racist terms, verbal taboos or insults directed at people and family religion, death and unlucky matters. The examples of taboo words concerning body parts are

cock, cunt, dick, prick and balls. Various examples of taboo words on sex acts are: fuck, suck, blow job, bugger and screw. Taboo words on bodily function and products are: shit, piss, crap, and fart. The examples of taboo language on racist terms are: frog, nigger, wop, and dago. The examples of taboo words directed at people are: bitch, bastard, cock sucker, mother fucker, and whore. And the examples of taboo words to do with death, religion and unlucky matters are: Jesus, goddamn, and God. (Jay, 1992, p. 124-131) Persian taboo words are the same as the English taboos except in part of racist terms (Alavi&Karim Nia,2012).

2-2. Background Research

Stenström, Andersen , &Hasund (2002)&Graddol& Swann (1989) argued that significant differences were noted in male and female frequency and use of proscribed/taboo language, and were characterized as follows: (1) perception of a double standard of usage by both males / females; (2) differing expectations regarding the incidence of such language by both males / females; (3) differing reasons attributed for the usage and/or avoidance of such language; and, (4) distinct contrast in the language chosen in bi-/multi-lingual contexts for proscribed/ taboo language by males and females. Gao (2013) investigated all the major varieties of English taboo and said that Perhaps one linguistic universal is that no social group uses language quite at random. Euphemistic and roundabout ways of avoiding using taboo words are offered to deal with the situations. Jinyu(2014) concluded that the most significant difference between human beings is the gender difference, so people of different genders from either physiology or psychology in the use of language will have their own gender characteristics, which leads to the gender differences in language. Clemence&Chimininge(2015) established that taboos, totems and sacred places have been used as mechanisms to foster a sustainable use of the environment by the Karanga. It noted that among the karanga people, an unconscious appreciation of certain environmental taboos, totems and sacred places inform an esoteric environmentally based knowledge that is meant at a sustainable use of nature's resources. Kristin & Timothy (2013) found that the time children enter school they have the rudiments of adult swearing, although children and adults differ in their assessments of the inappropriateness of mild taboo words. So swearing habits are changing over the years.

Augenblick&Bodoh-Creed (2013) showed there are equilibria in which certain traits are taboo and not discussed in any equilibrium. We provide examples of equilibria with taboos and argue that traits that are rare and sensitive are more likely to be subject to taboos. Finally, we discuss extensions to the model, such as allowing non-verifiable messages, mediated conversations, alternate privacy preferences, and unstructured conversations. Chen (2012) found some taboos are permanent; some are newly shaped; some are weakening; and some have even totally disappeared. The introduction of Chinese taboos in different aspects of life and their tendency of development should hopefully provide help for those from the rest of the world to overcome cultural barriers in relation with the Chinese people. violations of rules of speaking are often interpreted as bad manners since the native speaker is unlikely to be aware of sociolinguistic relativity.” Taboos are indispensable part of language rules and violation of such rules can probably be interpreted as provocations or confrontations. It is hoped that the exemplification of

such taboos in China would be able to serve as a visitors' guide for cross-cultural communication therein. Like other elements of culture, they are also in constant change, as the world keeps its pace of development. Kristin & Timothy (2015) said that There was little sex-related variability in taboo word generation, and no sex difference in taboo lexicon size, no overall sex difference in taboo word generation was obtained. Taboo fluency was positively correlated with the five personality traits: Neuroticism, openness, negatively correlated with agreeableness and conscientiousness and suggest that, with the exception of female-sex-related slurs, taboo expressive and general pejoratives comprise the core of the category of taboo words while slurs tend to occupy the periphery, and the ability to generate taboo language is not an index of overall language poverty. Jay (2008) said that swearing is positively correlated with extraversion and type hostility but negatively correlated with agreeableness, conscientiousness, religiosity, and sexual anxiety. The uniquely human facility for swearing evolved and persists because taboo words can communicate emotion information (anger, frustration, more readily than non-taboo words, allowing speakers to achieve a variety of personal and social goals with them (utility). Parents tend to swear more with their male children, whereas they monitor their speech with their female ones.

3. Methodology

The participants of this study was four groups of people (15-30-year-old male, 16-50 year –old male, 15-30 year- old female and 16- 50 year –old female) which the recruited researchers recorded their voice while they didn't know. More over the researcher noted every taboos heard of these groups by personals observation. So the researcher collected more than 100 acoustic files and 300 cases of taboo notation by personal observation and evaluated them based on their taboos frequencies separately. Using Chi-square statistics, he evaluated taboo frequencies of each group to see what was the difference among the frequencies of these groups and which group used taboos more than others.

4. Finding

To describe the variables descriptive statistical analysis were used.

Table1: Frequency of taboo use in four categories

Groups of people	Frequency of Taboo use
Male (15-30 year-old)	300
Male (16-50 year-old)	230
Female (15-30 year-old)	350
Female (16-50 year -old)	210

The data represented so far, was just some raw information which needed to be analyzed and processed by a statistical value. The best scientific statistical procedure for hypothesis testing of this study was Chi-Square. Chi-Square was employed to see if there was any significant difference in the use of taboos among the mentioned groups and to see which group has the greatest statistical value, which is directly related to the hypothesis.

Table 2: Gender * Taboo Cross tabulation

Count		taboo				Total
		210	230	300	350	
gender	male	0	1	1	0	2
	female	1	0	0	1	2
Total		1	1	1	1	4

This table shows that both males and females use taboos equally.

Table 3: Chi-Square Results

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	4.000 ^a	3	.261
Likelihood Ratio	5.545	3	.136
Linear-by-Linear Association	.054	1	.816
N of Valid Cases	4		

a. 8 cells (100.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .50.

Table 3 was mostly concerned with the results of the "**Pearson Chi-Square**" row. It could be seen here that $\chi(1) = 4.000^a$, $p = .261$. In this table, the reported significance was (.261). Since the P-value (.261) is more than the significance level (0.05), This meant that the difference is accidental and there is no relationship between variables (gender and taboos), so the null hypothesis cannot be rejected. There was no difference between the use of taboos and the gender of people. And there is no statistically significant association between Gender and use of taboos in conversation that is, both males and females equally use taboos in their conversation. Thus, it concludes that the gender hasn't any effect on taboo use in conversation.

Table 4: Age * Taboo Cross tabulation

Count		taboo				Total
		210	230	300	350	
age	15-30	0	1	1	0	2
	31-50	1	1	0	0	2
Total		1	1	1	1	4

This table shows that two groups of age (15-30 and 31-50) use taboos equally.

Table 5: Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	4.000 ^a	3	.261
Likelihood Ratio	5.545	3	.136
Linear-by-Linear Association	2.651	1	.103
N of Valid Cases	4		

a. 8 cells (100.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .50.

Table 5 was mostly concerned with the column indicating the level of significance. In this table, the reported values were $\chi(1) = 4.000^a$, $p = .261$. The reported ($p = .261$) was more than the Significant level. This meant there was no relationship between variables (age and taboos), so the null hypothesis cannot be rejected. And there was no difference between age and taboo use in conversation. So the alternative hypothesis was rejected and null hypothesis was confirmed.

5. Discussion & Conclusion

This study sought to investigate the use of taboos through the conversation of four groups of people (15-30-year-old male, 16-50 year –old male, 15-30 year- old female and 16- 50 year –old female) based on their frequency. It was intended to know whether the age and gender of people affected their use of taboos. At last these were the results of the study: The frequencies of taboos

in the conversation of them were identical, and there wasn't any major difference among taboo use in the conversation of these groups. So the age and gender hadn't any effect of their use. But kind and manner of their use were different based on space and time. Finally, they used more than the taboos referring to the body parts, functions and sex acts.

Sherafat & Soori (2015) found that Iranian EFL female learners took taboo words more severely. So gender difference plays a key role in offensiveness or inoffensiveness of English taboo. Talley & Huiling (2012) Considering the use of proscribed/taboo language in Taiwan, claimed that women's language differs markedly in act, frequency, reason and content from that of men's. Kristin & Timothy (2013) concluded that the time children enter school they have the rudiments of adult swearing, although children and adults differ in their assessments of the inappropriateness of mild taboo words. So swearing habits are changing over the years. Kristin & Timothy (2015) said that there was little sex-related variability in taboo word generation, and no sex difference in taboo lexicon size, no overall sex difference in taboo word generation was obtained. Taboo fluency was positively correlated with the five personality traits: Neuroticism, openness, negatively correlated with agreeableness and conscientiousness and suggest that, with the exception of female-sex-related slurs, taboo expressive and general pejoratives comprise the core of the category of taboo words while slurs tend to occupy the periphery, and the ability to generate taboo language is not an index of overall language poverty. Habibovic (2010) concluded that females' frequency of taboo usage is higher than the males. And showed that females do not only swear more than males but also rather show a better understanding of and have different attitudes towards English taboo language.

Schippers (2013) taking into account the effect that variables such as nationality, social class and gender might have on the expletive (swear word) usage in the examined material suggested that the difference in opinion between traditional sociolinguistic studies, in which the differences between male and female speech have often been highlighted, and where female speech has been characterized as politer, aiming for standard language and avoiding expletives, while modern feminist critics argue that these are stereotypes perpetuated through the ages which have little support of empirical evidence. But the women are less prone to use expletives than men. Possible reasons for this included group identity and social class. Bamman, Eisenstein, & Schnoebelen (2014) offered a new perspective on how gender emerges as individuals position themselves relative to audiences, topics, and mainstream gender norms. Thus it can't classify the gender into two exact categories (male and female) based on their taboo use. The stereotype of male swearing is alive and well in modern Polish literature. It is merely a reflection of the actual use of spoken language (Wolanski, 2013). Parents tend to swear more with their male children, whereas they monitor their speech with their female ones. On the other hand, women were the only ones who reported using significantly more profanity than men. Further, even if these women were more likely to swear more than men, they actually considered it to be more offensive than men did, which could be perceived as a sign of a voluntary excessive use of profanity from women (Gauthier, 2013). Male students more frequently used taboo words in

their conversation than female students. Although it demonstrated that females like males have attitude to use taboos in their conversation too (Hadian&Yoosefi ,2015).

Taboo was a broad discussion across all the countries specially in Iran because of religious, ethnic, moral, and special customs. People were so sensitive about taboos that no one could tell some of taboo words even in isolation since the taboos were taboo for them. In Persian/Gachsaran, acts of human excretion and sexual intercourse were also taboo as in English and other cities in Iran, but they were more tolerant in talking about age and salary, which are often openly said even in serious public talk or conversation. But using some taboos for so long time caused that they became so frequent and widespread and the people didn't consider them as taboos any more. As a result of taboo frequency, some taboos lost their ugliness. Moreover, taboos are a part of language, and the language is dynamic, so by passing the time, it is changing so. Evaluating the collected files, the researcher found that every group (male or female) at every age had their own special view about taboos. Some of the words that a group considered as taboos, the other groups were very open to them and it was a usual word for them. Every group used the words that were taboo for other group but not for themselves. Therefore, their age and gender hadn't any effect about their taboo use. Because of their attitudes, the sort of taboos they used were different. So that today boys/men and girls/women shared swearing and taboo equally and all of them used their own taboos. The manner of their use was interesting. The 15-30 year-old groups (male and female) used swearing words as humor and greeting. Since their treat were agreeableness and openness toward the taboos. But the 31-50 year-old groups were very purposeful in this way, they used them when they were angry as profanity and malison. The youths used euphemism and converted the taboos in classic Persian to show them more eminently because they thought that the taboos lost their effect by passing the time and the repetition so they tried to preserve the emotional effect of them not to remove their ugliness. Therefore, the study concluded that the nowadays all people used the taboos equally, and the age didn't the effect of frequency of taboo use but effect the sort of it by passing the time. At end, by using taboos they could convey their purpose and emotional feeling that the other words couldn't do properly.

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