

The Study of Verbal Communication Strategies in University Teacher-Student Discourse

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Extended Abstract

1. Introduction

Communication in different verbal and nonverbal modes forms the core of our life. In the communication process, humans use a set of communication strategies based on their position and skills that depend on a variety of factors, such as the social status, age, level of education, and the type of culture of people. Among these specific linguistic strategies, one can mention the choice of pronouns, subject changes, hedges (such as perhaps), short questions, interruption, silences, and late responses. Some of these specific communication strategies are likely to be used by in the interaction between the teacher and the student at university. This research seeks to find out what kinds of verbal strategies in the university environment are commonly used by professors and what types of verbal strategies are used by students in the university environment and whether gender is involved in the implementation of these strategies.

2. Theoretical Framework

Lakoff (1975), in a general division, divided the verbal strategies into two groups of supportive strategies and aggressive strategies. Honorific terms that include polite phrases, sentences and words such as "Lady", "Sir.", "gentleman" "Please," and so on, are supportive strategies. Hedges such as "I think", "I believe", "maybe", "I guess", and so on which indicate the uncertainty and doubt of the speaker are another kind of supportive strategy. Also, some short / tag questions like "Do not you?", "it's true?" which indicate that the respondent is relatively uncertain about the subject and requires confirmation by others, is in some way an indication of respect and support in verbal communication. Acknowledgments, such as "yes", "ok", "well," and so on, whose use reflects the interest and willingness of the audience to continue the discussion, is another group of supporting phrases in the discourse. In contrast, aggressive strategies are strategies such as speech interruption, delay in response, or overlap in speech through which the speaker has sought to stabilize their domination. Silence is also one of the things individuals may use in a conversation, and when one uses silence in interaction with others, it can be considered as an aggressive strategy.

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3. Methodology

The research community is composed of all instructors and students working at the Islamic Azad University of Ayatollah Amoli in Amol. In this research, a mixed method is used and the required data are obtained by two methods of questioning and recording the voice of instructors and students when interacting with one another. These data were collected over a period of approximately six months. A questionnaire consisting of a ten Likert scale questions on the verbal strategies was distributed among 50 male and female instructors and 50 male and female students at different faculties of Islamic Azad University, Ayatollah Amoli Branch. Also, forty communication situations have been recorded in the hallways, corridors, and classrooms of the university. By transcribing and categorizing the conversations recorded in these forty conversation situations, the communication strategies used by individuals were identified and analyzed.

4. Results and Discussion

The findings of the research showed that professors mainly use aggressive strategies. On the other hand, there are differences in the kind of aggressive strategies male and female professors use. While male instructors use interruptions in speech more than their female colleagues, female instructors have outstripped male teachers in using the verbal strategy of pause or silence. Generally, there is no significant difference in the use of verbal strategies among male and female teachers. This means that both male and female teachers are the same in terms of the use of verbal strategies, despite a negligible statistical difference. In other words, in this case, the factor of social power and social status has overturned the factor of gender. Students mainly show their respect and support by using supportive strategies such as hedges that are symptomatic of doubt and short/tag questions, among which hedges that indicate doubt are found among female students more than male ones. This research suggests that there is a significant difference between male and female students in terms of verbal strategies. That is, gender plays a decisive role in the use of verbal strategies among male and female students, while the same gender factor in the application of communication strategies by university professors is not very determinative.

5. Conclusion and Suggestions

The results of this study confirm the research achievements of Mohammadi Asl (2010) that claims in formal and in managerial positions, the linguistic authority is not much influenced by the gender factor, and the feminine language is as dominant as the masculine language. Also, the results of this study are consistent with the findings of Deborah Tannen (1984). According to Tannen's theory, language differences between men and women are not due to an imbalance in power, but because of different criteria that exist in the given verbal interactions, and each gender has its weaknesses and powers. However, the results obtained in this study are not consistent with the Lakoff's theory. According to Lakoff (1973), women use linguistically specific features that indicate their disability against men. It seems that acceptance of this theory depends on considerations of many factors,

and without considering other influential variables such as education, social status, occupation, and specialization of individuals; one cannot arrive at generalizations about the relation between language and gender.

Keywords: Professor-student Interaction, Verbal Communication Strategies, Aggressive Strategies, Supportive Strategies

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