

LANGUAGE IN INDIA

Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow

Volume 12 : 6 June 2012

ISSN 1930-2940

Managing Editor: M. S. Thirumalai, Ph.D.

Editors: B. Mallikarjun, Ph.D.

Sam Mohanlal, Ph.D.

B. A. Sharada, Ph.D.

A. R. Fatihi, Ph.D.

Lakhan Gusain, Ph.D.

Jennifer Marie Bayer, Ph.D.

S. M. Ravichandran, Ph.D.

G. Baskaran, Ph.D.

L. Ramamoorthy, Ph.D.

Assistant Managing Editor: Swarna Thirumalai, M.A.

Gender Difference in the Employment of Various Stereotypes on Iranian English Weblogs

Hamed Barjesteh, Ph.D. Candidate

Reza Vaseghi, Ph.D. Candidate

Hanie Hashemi, B.A.

Bahar Pourshahian, M.A.

Seyed Ali Rezvani Kalajahi, Ph.D. Candidate

Abstract

Cultural stereotype plays an essential role in developing and preserving gender differences, and that speech stereotypes in particular serve to characterize the way that native speakers perceive how males and females normally talk. This paper investigates stereotypes about on-line gender difference in Iranian English weblogs.

It is hypothesized that men and women use different social and linguistic styles in on-line weblogs.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 6 June 2012

Hamed Barjesteh, Ph.D. Candidate , Reza Vaseghi, Ph.D. Candidate, Hanie Hashemi,
B.A., Bahar Pourshahian, M.A. and
Seyed Ali Rezvani Kalajahi, Ph.D.Candidate 99

The researchers quantitatively analyzed a number of English weblogs written by Iranians. One fourth of all used weblogs were managed by female and other weblogs were run by male.

Results of analysis of data were presented in two parts. Comparisons are made between adult and teenager male female. The results indicated that the use of so-called gender-dependent features as 'hedges', 'tag question' mostly attributed to female language and 'harsh comments' mostly attributed to male language has been resistant to change among higher age group even in computer mediated communication, namely, weblog communication. However, it is witnessed a remarkable change on use of aforementioned features in language of teen.

Key words: Computer mediated communication, Gender, Weblog communication, Iranian English weblogs

Introduction

New communication technologies are often invested with users' hopes for change in the social order. Thus the Internet is said to be inherently democratic, leveling traditional distinctions of social status, and creating opportunities for less powerful individuals and groups to participate on a par with members of more powerful groups. Specifically, the Internet has been claimed to lead to greater gender equality, with women, as the socially, politically, and economically less powerful gender, especially likely to reap its benefits.

Text-based computer-mediated communication, with its lack of physical and auditory cues, makes the gender of on-line communicators irrelevant or invisible, allowing women and men to participate equally, in contrast with traditional patterns of male dominance observed in face-to-face conversations (Danet 1998; Graddol and Swann 1989). As a network connecting geographically dispersed users, the Internet empowers women and members of other traditionally subordinate groups to find community and organize politically in pursuit of their own interests (Balka 1993).

The World Wide Web allows women to self-publish and engage in profitable entrepreneurial activity on a par with men (Rickert and Sacharow 2000). Of course, men, too, stand to benefit from anonymous communication, common-interest group formation, and the commercial potential of the Web. The difference is that for women, the Internet purportedly removes barriers to participation in domains where barriers do not exist - or at least, do not exist to the same extent - for men.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 6 June 2012

Hamed Barjesteh, Ph.D. Candidate , Reza Vaseghi, Ph.D. Candidate, Hanie Hashemi, B.A., Bahar Pourshahian, M.A. and Seyed Ali Rezvani Kalajahi, Ph.D.Candidate 100

A paradigm known as "technological determinism" (Markus 1994) - tends to overlook the fact that the development and uses of any technology are themselves embedded in a social context, and are shaped by that context (Kling et al. 2001). Does the Internet alter deeply rooted cultural patterns of gender inequality, or do those patterns carry over into on-line communication? Is Internet technology inherently gender-neutral, or does the fact that it was created by men result in an in-built structural bias that perpetuates male advantage?

At the same time, the Internet is undeniably transforming social behavior as more and more people go on-line. In the early 1990s, estimates placed the number of female Internet users at 5 per cent (Sproull 1992, cited in Ebben and Kramarae 1993); females now make up slightly more than half of all Web users (Rickert and Sacharow 2000). What are the effects of millions of girls and women entering what was, until very recently, a predominantly male domain?

A lot of researches tried to find the answer to the question of 'whether- and if so, how- gender and power relations are affected in and through the Internet communication. The whole body of these researches shows that 'gender is invisible or irrelevant on the Internet' or 'the Internet equalizes gender-based power and status differentials'.

Gender differences in on-line communication tend to disfavor women. In mixed-sex public discussion groups, females post fewer messages, and are less likely to persist in posting when their messages receive no response (Broadhurst 1993; Herring 2003). Even when they persist, they receive fewer responses from others (both females and males), and do not control the topic or the terms of the discussion except in groups where women make up a clear majority of participants (Herring 1993, forthcoming; Herring, Johnson, and DiBenedetto 1992, 1995; Hert 1997). The lesser influence exercised by women in mixed-sex groups accounts in part for why women-centered and women only on-line groups are common (Balka 1993; Camp 1996), whereas explicitly designated men-only groups are rare.

Politeness is one common means through which gender is cued in asynchronous CMC. Women are more likely to thank, appreciate, and apologize, and to be upset by violations of politeness; they more often challenge offenders who violate on-line rules of conduct (Smith et al. 1997), and predominantly female groups may have more, and more strictly enforced, posting rules designed to ensure the maintenance of a civil environment (Hall 1996; Herring 1996a). In contrast, men generally appear to be less concerned with politeness; they issue bald face-threatening acts such as unmitigated criticisms and insults, violate on-line rules of conduct, tolerate or even enjoy "flaming," and tend to be

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 6 June 2012

Hamed Barjesteh, Ph.D. Candidate , Reza Vaseghi, Ph.D. Candidate, Hanie Hashemi, B.A., Bahar Pourshahian, M.A. and Seyed Ali Rezvani Kalajahi, Ph.D.Candidate 101

more concerned about threats to freedom of expression than with attending to others' social "face" (Herring 1994, 1996a, 1999).

Some evidence suggests that women participate more actively and enjoy greater influence in environments where the norms of interaction are controlled by an individual or individuals entrusted with maintaining order and focus in the group. Thus women-centered groups whose moderators place restrictions on the number or nature of messages that can be posted, particularly when contentious (challenging, insulting, etc.) messages are discouraged, tend to flourish, with large, active memberships and widespread participation (Camp 1996; Korenman and Wyatt 1996). Female students also participate more - sometimes more than male students - in on-line classrooms in which the teacher controls the interaction, even when the teacher is male (Herring and Nix 1997; Herring 1999).

Moreover, an inherent tension exists between the conventionally masculine value on agonism and the conventionally feminine value on social harmony. The contentiousness of male messages tends to discourage women from participating, while women's concern with politeness tends to be perceived as a "waste of bandwidth" by men (Herring 1996a), or worse yet, as censorship (Grossman 1997; cf. Herring 1999). This tension does not inherently favor one gender over the other - each value system potentially constrains the other. In Internet discussion groups, however, where civil libertarian values have traditionally constituted the dominant ideological context, and where few structures are in place to sanction anti-social behavior, aggression tends to prevail over less aggressive behaviors. In a number of documented cases, repeated aggression from disruptive males has forced women-centered on-line forums to disband, move elsewhere, and/or reconfigure themselves with strict rules and regulations regarding acceptable participant conduct (Collins-Jarvis 1997; Ebben 1994; Reid 1994).

The Purpose of the Study

Many variables may moderate the relationship between gender and CMC. Dramatic differences in context certainly may obscure or speciously highlight results. The context of Internet discussion groups and weblogs is one in which membership is usually large, members probably do not know all others in the group (especially if there are a large number of "lurkers", i.e. members who read messages but do not write responses and therefore are not visible in the text-based discussion), and the task is not to produce a specific result, but rather to generate ideas and discuss them. This paper is to investigate stereotypes about on-line gender styles in Iranian English weblogs. It is hypothesized that men and women use different social and linguistic styles in on-line

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 6 June 2012

Hamed Barjesteh, Ph.D. Candidate , Reza Vaseghi, Ph.D. Candidate, Hanie Hashemi, B.A., Bahar Pourshahian, M.A. and Seyed Ali Rezvani Kalajahi, Ph.D.Candidate 102

weblogs. They use different patterns of politeness or hedges, for example, which are two of several patterns of communication leading to gender dominance.

Research Questions

1. Do Iranian men and women use different distinctive styles in their computer mediated communication (CMC)?
2. Do these styles vary according to different age groups?

Methodology

To gather enough data, the researchers, quantitatively analyzed a number of English weblogs written by Iranians, a directory of which is available in appendix. 25 percent of all these blogs were managed by females and the other blogs were run by males. Both males and females interacted with each other in all blogs in English written form. All parts of the weblogs were probed, but one of the most interesting part for the researchers was the 'comment' part of the blogs in which every body, male/female or young/adult, was able to express his/her own opinion. Blogs were selected for analysis because they provide a rich sample of the ways in which language and gender interact. This interaction can help us determine power relationship between male and female in the Internet.

It is important to note that claims made in this study are based on findings from Iranian English web logs, i.e. no Persian blogs were addressed for analyses. In addition, the users' Islamic Iranian socialization and education probably influence their English production because English is their second language and it is to some extent influenced by their first language, too. The major factors which were probed here were only 'gender effect' and 'two age groups: teenagers & adults'. All the other factors, like the purpose of the communication; the social class of the participants; the communicative needs of the interactions; and the on-line enforced regulations of the blogs, were controlled in the present study. For ethical purposes, only publically displayed messages were analyzed. In order to be more precise, the researchers only focused on three language features- hedge, tag question, and harsh command.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data in this study, the researchers made use of frequency counts. Frequency counts were used to show the frequency of 'hedges', 'tag questions' and

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 6 June 2012

Hamed Barjesteh, Ph.D. Candidate , Reza Vaseghi, Ph.D. Candidate, Hanie Hashemi, B.A., Bahar Pourshahian, M.A. and Seyed Ali Rezvani Kalajahi, Ph.D.Candidate 103

'harsh comments' as found in the English utterances produced by Iranian males and females in two age groups namely 13-20 & 25- 37. Also, the researchers took advantage of percentage figures to show the distribution of each linguistic item within groups.

Findings and Results

Results of analysis of data will be presented in two parts. In the first part, comparisons are made between males and females in 13 to 20-year-olds and in the second part between males and females in 25 to 37-year-olds.

Table 1. The result of comparisons between males and females in 25 to 37-year-olds

	Female	Male
Hedge	68%	32%
Tag question	56%	44%
Harsh command	24%	76%

Table 2. The result of comparisons between males and females in 13 to 20-year-olds

	Female	Male
Hedge	51%	49%
Tag question	53%	47%
Harsh command	48%	52%

The results indicated that the use of the so-called gender -dependant features as 'hedges', 'tag questions' mostly attributed to female language and 'harsh comments' mostly attributed to male language has been resistant to change among higher age group even in computer mediated communication, namely weblog communication. However, we witness a remarkable change on use of aforementioned features in language of teens. This may be the harbinger of a modification in the use of language as a tool of dominance in the next generation.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 6 June 2012

Hamed Barjesteh, Ph.D. Candidate , Reza Vaseghi, Ph.D. Candidate, Hanie Hashemi, B.A., Bahar Pourshahian, M.A. and Seyed Ali Rezvani Kalajahi, Ph.D.Candidate 104

The above only scratches the surface of what we still need to learn about gender differences in speech production and communication. Farris (1991:201) aptly states that cultural stereotypes play a crucial role in developing and maintaining gender differences, and that speech stereotypes in particular serve to characterize the way that native speakers perceive how men and women normally speak. These stereotypes reinforce what is expected of speakers and the roles they play in society. Much is yet unclear as to the degree to which speech stereotypes reflect actual language use, and to what extent the two diverge. We also do not have a clear idea of what cultural differences may exist with respect to how well stereotypes accurately reflect gender differences in language use. I suspect that there may be stronger pressure in the environment for individuals to conform to social expectations, such that stereotypical behavior as cultural norms may dictate language behavior to a greater extent in Iranian society than in western, English speaking countries.

=====

References

Balka, Ellen 1993. Women's access to on-line discussions about feminism. *Electronic Journal of Communication* 3(1). <http://www.cios.org/www/ejc/v3nl 93.htm>

Broadhurst, Judith 1993. Lurkers and flammers. *Online Access* 8(3): 48-51.

Camp, L. Jean 1996. We are geeks, and we are not guys: The systems mailing list. In Lynn Cherny and Elizabeth R. Weise (eds) *Wired_Women*. Seattle: Seal Press, pp. 114-25.

Collins-Jarvis, Lori 1997. Discriminatory Messages and Gendered Power Relations in on-line Discussion Groups. Paper presented at the 1997 Annual Meeting of the National Communication Association, Chicago.

Danet, Brenda 199. Text as mask: Gender and identity on the Internet. In Steve Jones (ed.) *Cybersociety 2.0*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, pp. 129-58.

Ebben, Maureen & Kramarae, Cheris 1993. Women and information technologies: Creating a cyberspace of our own. In H. Jeanie Taylor, Cheris Kramarae, and Maureen Ebben (eds) *Women, Information Technology, and Scholarship*. Urbana, IL: Center for Advanced Study, pp. 15-27.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 6 June 2012

Hamed Barjesteh, Ph.D. Candidate , Reza Vaseghi, Ph.D. Candidate, Hanie Hashemi, B.A., Bahar Pourshahian, M.A. and Seyed Ali Rezvani Kalajahi, Ph.D.Candidate 105

Ebben, Maureen 1994. *Women on the Net: An Exploratory Study of Gender Dynamics on the soc. women Computer Network*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign.

Farris, Catherine S. 1991. The gender of child discourse: same-sex peer socialization through language use in a Taiwanese preschool. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 1.2:198-224

Graddol, David & Swann, Joan 1989. *Gender Voices*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Grossman, Wendy M. 1997. *Net.wars*. New York: New York University Press, <http://v\mm^.nyupress.nyu.edu/netwars.html>.

Hall, Kira 1996. Cyberfeminism. In S. Herring (ed.) *Computer-Mediated Communication: Linguistic, Social and Cross-cultural Perspectives*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, pp. 147-70.

Herring, Susan C. 1993. Gender and democracy in computer-mediated communication. *Electronic Journal of Communication* 3(2). <http://www.cios.org/www/ejc/v3n293.htm>. (Reprinted in Rob Kling (ed.) 1996: *Computerization and Controversy*, 2nd edn. New York: Academic Press, pp. 476-89.)

Herring, Susan C. 1994. Politeness in computer culture: Why women thank and men flame. In Mary Bucholtz, Anita C. Liang, Laurel A. Sutton, and Caitlin Hines (eds) *Cultural Performances: Proceedings of the Third Berkeley Women and Language Conference*. Berkeley, CA: Berkeley Women and Language Group, University of California, pp. 278-94.

Herring, Susan C. 1996a. Posting in a different voice: Gender and ethics in computer-mediated communication. In Charles Ess (ed.) *Philosophical Perspectives on Computer-Mediated Communication*. Albany: State University of New York Press, pp. 115-45.

Herring, Susan C. 1996b. Two variants of an electronic message schema. In S. Herring (ed.) *Computer-Mediated Communication: Linguistic, Social and Cross-cultural Perspectives*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, pp. 81-106.

Herring, Susan C. 1998. Virtual gender performances. Talk presented at Texas A&M University, September 25. Herring, Susan C. 1999: The rhetorical dynamics of gender harassment online. *The Information Society* 15(3): 151-67. Special Issue on *The Rhetorics of Gender in Computer Mediated Communication*, edited by Laura J. Gurak.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 6 June 2012

Hamed Barjesteh, Ph.D. Candidate , Reza Vaseghi, Ph.D. Candidate, Hanie Hashemi, B.A., Bahar Pourshahian, M.A. and Seyed Ali Rezvani Kalajahi, Ph.D.Candidate 106

Herring, Susan C. 2002. Computermediated communication and the Internet. In Blaise Cronin (ed.) *Annual Review of Information Science and Technology* 36. Medford, NJ: Information Today Inc./American Society for Information Science and Technology, pp. 109-68.

Herring, Susan C. (2003). Who's got the floor in computer-mediated conversations? Edelsky's gender patterns revisited. In Susan Herring (ed.) *Computer-mediated Conversation*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

Herring, Susan, Johnson, Deborah, and Dibenedetto, Tamra 1992. Participation in electronic discourse in a "feminist" field. In Kira Hall, Mary Bucholtz, and Birch Moonwomon (eds) *Locating Power: Proceedings of the Second Berkeley Women and Language Conference*. Berkeley, CA: Berkeley Women and Language Group, University of California, pp. 250-62.

Herring, Susan, Johnson, Deborah, and Dibenedetto, Tamra 1995. "This discussion is going too far!" Male resistance to female participation on the Internet. In Kira Hall and Mary Bucholtz (eds) *Gender Articulated: Language and the Socially Constructed Self*. New York: Routledge, pp. 67-96.

Herring, Susan and Lombard, Robin 1995. Negotiating gendered faces: Requests and disagreements among computer professionals on the Internet. Paper presented at GURT pre-session on Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis, Georgetown University, Washington DC, March 8.

Herring, Susan and Nix, Carole 1997. Is "Serious Chat" an Oxymoron? Academic vs. Social Uses of Internet Relay Chat. Paper presented at the American Association of Applied Linguistics, Orlando, Florida, March 11.

Hert, Philippe 1997. Social dynamics of an on-line scholarly debate. *The Information Society* 13: 329-60.

Kling, Rob, McKim, Geoff, Fortuna, Joanna, and King, Adam 2001. *A Bit More to TT: Scientific Communication Forums as Socio-technical Interaction Networks*. Center for Social Informatics Working Papers. Bloomington, IN: Center for Social Informatics, <http://www.slis.indiana.edu/csi/wp01-02.html>

Korenman, Joan and Wyatt, Nancy 1996. Group dynamics in an e-mail forum. In Susan Herring (ed.) *Computer-Mediated Communication: Linguistic, Social and Cross-cultural Perspectives*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, pp. 225- 42.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 6 June 2012

Hamed Barjesteh, Ph.D. Candidate , Reza Vaseghi, Ph.D. Candidate, Hanie Hashemi, B.A., Bahar Pourshahian, M.A. and Seyed Ali Rezvani Kalajahi, Ph.D.Candidate 107

Markus, M. Lynne 1994. Finding a happy medium: Explaining the negative effects of electronic communication on social life at work. *ACM Transactions on Information Systems* 12(2): 119-49.

Reid, Elizabeth M. 1994. Cultural Formations in Text-Based Virtual Realities. Master's thesis. University of Melbourne, Australia, [http:// v\mm^ee.mu.oz.au/papers/emr/index.html](http://v\mm^ee.mu.oz.au/papers/emr/index.html)

Rickert, Anne and Sacharow, Anya 2000. *It's a Woman's World Wide Web*. Media Metrix and Jupiter Communications, [http:// v\mm^mediamatrix.com/data/ MMXI-TUP WWW.pdf](http://v\mm^mediamatrix.com/data/MMXI-TUPWWW.pdf)

Smith, Christine B., McLaughlin, Margaret L., and Osborne, Kerry K. 1997. Conduct controls on Usenet. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 2(4). [http:// v\mm^ascusc.org/jcmc/vol2/issue4/ smith.html](http://v\mm^ascusc.org/jcmc/vol2/issue4/smith.html)

Sproull, Lee 1992. Women and the Networked Organization. Presentation to Women, Information Technology and Scholarship Colloquium, February 12, 1992, Center for Advanced Study, University of Illinois.

=====

Appendix

A directory of English blogs written by Iranians

■ a glinting glimpse from above the wall ■ A journalist from Iran ■
Adventures of Mr. Behi ■ Bingala ■ BroodingPersian ■ Carry me ■ Chackavak ■ Chiz
Burger ■
Cyber Architect ■ Damn ■ DDMMYYYY ■ Designest ■ Editor: Not myself ■ Eloy ■
Eyes Wide Shut ■ Faith Today ■ Forbidden ■ Geek Style ■ Gloria ■ H. Aghvami's
Weblog ■
How I learned to stop worrying and write the blog ■ I am an Iranian daughter ■
I Learn English ■ Inside exploration ■ Inside Iran ■ Interesting and Odd ■ Iran News
Blog ■
Iran Votes 2005 ■ Iranian Diaries ■ Iranian girl ■ Iranian Teacher ■ Iranian Teacher
XP ■ IranVisitor ■ Kaveh, observations of Tehran life ■ Lady L ■ Lost for
words ■ Maktoob ■
Mani on Wordpress ■ Mansour Nasiri's Photoblog ■ Maziar Online Activities ■

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 6 June 2012

Hamed Barjesteh, Ph.D. Candidate , Reza Vaseghi, Ph.D. Candidate, Hanie Hashemi,
B.A., Bahar Pourshahian, M.A. and
Seyed Ali Rezvani Kalajahi, Ph.D.Candidate 108

Me Myself and Ehsan■ Melancholy Man■ Mirage■ My Lucid Dreams■ My Stories■ Narges■
Nima Mofid■ observations of Tehran life■ online time■ Out on the Loom■
Personal Opinion■ Planet Rodmania■ Plate■ Play Next■ Reporter:Myself■ Scarecrew■
Scientific Methods■ SleepWalker■ Sleepwalker Eye■ So What you think?■
Society & Economy■ Stranger in Iran■ SudiVerse■ Swallow■
Sweet Hallucinations Of A Psycho■ Tech Guru■ Tehran online■ Tehran Pacer■
Tehran Post■ Tehran Post■ The Biggest Step■ The Land of persia■ The Lonely Rave■
The Lonely Shepherd■ The Minority Report■ The Remains of the Day■
The seven towns of love■ This is not a blog■ Thoughts and Ideas■ To Cross The Styx■
To Write or Not To Write■ Under Underground■ Ve Ri Tas■ View from Iran■
Words are never enough■ Z-LOGS■ ZiZi Daily

Hamed Barjesteh, Ph.D. Candidate

Reza Vaseghi (Corresponding author)
Ph.D. Candidate in TESL
University Putra Malaysia
Serdang Selangor
Malaysia 43400
r.vaseghi@hotmail.com

Hanie Hashemi, B.A.
Bahar Pourshahian, M.A.

Seyed Ali Rezvani Kalajahi, Ph.D. Candidate
ali.rezvani85@gmail.com

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 6 June 2012

Hamed Barjesteh, Ph.D. Candidate , Reza Vaseghi, Ph.D. Candidate, Hanie Hashemi,
B.A., Bahar Pourshahian, M.A. and
Seyed Ali Rezvani Kalajahi, Ph.D.Candidate 109