GENDER DIFFERENCES IN THE APPROPRIATENESS OF ADVICE-GIVING AMONG IRANIAN EFL LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT
This study investigates the differences in the perceptions of the appropriateness in advice giving in English between Iranian Persian English as a foreign language (EFL) male and female learners. Data were collected through an adopted version of a Multiple Choice Questionnaire (MCQ) by Hinkel (1997). The questionnaire involves a series of questions with regard to advice giving or opting out to a peer acquaintance (equal status) and an instructor (higher status). The result of the study illustrated that both groups perceived the social distance in the situations with peer acquaintance (equal status) and instructor (higher status) differently. The learners also differed in the types of advice they used as the appropriate choice. For Iranian Persian EFL male learners, in both situations (peer acquaintance and instructor) they preferred indirect advice rather than the other three options which are hedge advice, direct advice and opting out. On the other hand, for Iranian Persian EFL female learners, they selected hedge advice in both peer acquaintance and instructor situations as compared to the other three options (direct advice, indirect advice and opting out). The study concluded that Iranian Persian EFL learners should be provided with programs that improve the awareness on different appropriate conversational strategies in English language. The findings of this study are expected to be beneficial in cross-cultural and cross-gender comparison studies.

KEYWORDS: Speech act, Advice-giving, Gender

INTRODUCTION
In communications, the speakers’ behaviour and selection of certain words are particular based on several factors such as social distance between the speaker and the hearer, social status between the speaker and the hearer, gender, and the complexity of situations. Many studies of pragmatic awareness have conducted on different speech acts such as apology (Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989; Eslami-Rasekh & Mardani, 2010), refusal (Beebe et al., 1990; Vaezi, 2011) and request (Blum-Kulka & House, 1989; Jalilifar, 2009). Those studies have contributed to revealing the differences between native speakers (NSs) and non-native speakers (NNSs) and
to better understanding of the use of appropriate linguistic forms in different languages and cultures and further to avoiding communication breakdowns. Yet, not many studies were conducted on the speech act of advice (Hinkel, 1997; Matsumura, 2001; Bordería-García, 2006; Chun, 2009, Al-Shboul et al. 2012), and in Iranian context, to the researchers’ best knowledge, there has been no investigation of giving advice conducted on Iranian Persian EFL learners. Consequently, it seems to be useful of examining how the speech act of giving advice is perceived in English by Iranian Persian EFL learners at University Kebangsaan Malaysia (henceforth, UKM) that would contribute in cross-cultural and cross-gender comparison studies. In other words, this study focuses on gender as the main focus to investigate the differences of the advice speech acts’ realizations between Iranian Persian EFL male and female learners at UKM. The researchers aimed to reveal how gender can influence speakers’ perception of advice giving. The reason for selecting English in the present study refers to the fact that English is the medium of instruction for Iranian Persian EFL learners in Malaysia and is also a language that is frequently needed in their everyday interaction. Hence, more attention should be paid to pragmatic competence of the Iranian Persian EFL learners rather than their grammatical competence.

THE SPEECH ACT OF ADVICE
Unlike other speech acts such as refusals, apologies, and requests, the speech act of giving advices has not yet been explored adequately (Bordería-García, 2006; Chun, 2009). Accordingly, very few definitions of what advice giving entails are available. For example, Searle (1969) stated that advice giving is a type of speech act which the speaker believes will benefit the hearer. He added that by advice giving, the speaker is doing the hearer a favour because it is not clear to both of them that the hearer will do the act without the advice being given. Searle distinguished between advice and request as advising is more like telling on what is the best for his/her rather than what s/he should do. Another definition was given by Brown and Levinson (1987) who described advice giving as an “intrinsically face threatening act” (p. 65), where the speaker indicates that s/he does not mean to avoid obstructing the hearer’s freedom of action. Nevertheless, Brown and Levinson observe that the degree to which advice is a face-threatening act differs among cultures based on several factors such as social status and social distance between the interlocutors, gender, complexity of situations, and the politeness strategies considered appropriate in a particular culture. Once again, this study focuses on gender as the main focus to investigate the differences of the advice speech acts’ realizations between Iranian Persian EFL male and female learners at UKM.

LITERATURE REVIEW
A large body of literature have illustrated that while speech acts are universal, the socio-pragmatic rules leading the appropriate enactment of any given speech act vary greatly among cultures and languages. There are some studies have been focused on advice giving in various contexts. For instance, Kuo (1996) investigated how gender emerges as a strong variable with respect to both the occurrence of advice giving as well as the form and style of this speech act. The findings of the study illustrated that female speakers were more likely to give advice to their
same-sex interlocutors and they use various linguistic devices, sentence containing auxiliary models or hedge, and justifications with advice forms to convey advice. However, only 4 instances of advice are found in all-male conversations and, either seriously or jokingly, they are all in imperative form.

In another study, Hinkel (1997) conducted a study on cross-cultural differences of advice giving in terms of production collected by discourse completion test and perception collected by Multiple Choice Questionnaire (MCQ). The participants were 40 Chinese and 40 American native speakers. Hinkel split up the two groups in terms of males and females. The findings of the study revealed that one of the most significant differences between the Chinese with regard to collective self and Anglo-American individualism lies in the Confucian and Taoist precept of interdependence with others which is in contrast with cultural values emphasizing personal autonomy. Therefore, this study is significant since it compared the two different instruments which were a discourse completion test and multiple choice survey questionnaires to elicit participants’ perception in the framework of advice-giving studies.

Matsumura (2001) investigated a quantitative approach of second language socialization in terms of learning the rules for advice giving among Japanese and Canadian learners. The result of the study showed that the former group started lower in pragmatic performance than the latter but then suppressed them. Moreover, the study illuminated the variance of the perception of social status in both groups. This study is significant because it provides an important longitudinal analysis of how the pragmatic competence on advice giving developed over time. However, Matsumura did not specify what caused such important development of pragmatic competence with regard to cultural differences between Canadians and Japanese. In addition, Matsumura used only one method for the study of perception.

Bordería-García (2006) focused on cross-cultural differences in the productions and perceptions of advice giving. In the one hand, the result of the study illustrated that there is not any significant difference in the perceptions of appropriateness of non-conventionally indirect, conventionally indirect, and direct forms of advice by the native speakers of Spanish and the native English. On the other hand, the findings of the study revealed that these issues differed in the oral productions with the Spanish speakers showing a significant preference on giving direct advices. This study is significant for the reason that it is one of the speech act studies which looked at the concept of pragmatic transfer in the framework of advice.

Chun (2009) conducted a study on cross-cultural differences in the speech act of giving advice by Korean speakers and Canadian English speakers. The findings of the study indicated that there was a major difference between Canadian and Korean learners with regard to the social distance. The Canadian learners were less dependent on social distance compared to the Korean learners. The Canadian learners tended to give advice considerably less frequently to peers and superiors compared to the Korean learners. Therefore, this study is significant because it broadened the conventional framework of the existing two cultural types of individualism and collectivism in the Korean and Canadian contexts.
Recently, Al-Shboul et al. (2012) conducted a study focusing on the perceptions of the appropriateness in advice giving in English between American English native speakers and Jordanian EFL students. The findings of the study showed that two group of the respondents had the same perception of the social distance in the situations involving peer acquaintance and instructor. On the other hand, they were different in terms of the types of advice they showed as the appropriate choice. This study is significant since it is one of very small number of Arabic Advice studies that investigated the speech act of advice as recognized by Jordanian Arabic learners of English as a foreign language.

As it is mentioned above, the appropriateness of advice giving differs among various cultures, moreover, most of the studies have been done on advice giving so far, did not focus on gender as a main variable. Based on the literature no specific studies have been conducted on advice giving among Iranian Persians context. Thus, it would be beneficial to examine how the speech act of advice giving is perceived in English by Iranian Persian EFL learners at UKM that would contribute in cross-cultural and cross-gender comparisons.

THE STUDY
This study aims to investigate gender differences in the perceptions of the appropriateness of advice giving in English between Iranian Persian EFL male and female learners. It also aims to give interpretations of these salient differences between the two groups. It is mainly based on the variable of gender and how it can influence speakers’ perception of advice giving. The concept of gender is used to explain socially constructed categories in terms of sex. It has been argued that gender influences speakers’ communication styles. Sukyadi and Ayu (2011) pointed out that language and gender focus on the language characteristics used by men and women: how gender stereotyping works in their preference of language styles. Wardhaugh (1992) also discussed gender as one of the characteristics that influenced people’s communication. Results from these studies indicated that men and women normally use different linguistic styles. They describe women’s speech as being different from that of men. According to Brend (1975) Women are found to employ certain patterns associated with surprise and politeness more frequently than men. Moreover, Lakoff (1975) stated that women may answer a question with a statement that employs the rising intonation pattern associated with making a firm statement. It is because they are less sure about themselves and their opinions than men are. In the present study, the researchers tried to reveal the differences of the appropriateness of advice giving in English between Iranian Persian EFL male and female learners. Thus, the related research question emerged from the literature is if there are any differences between Iranian Persian EFL male and female learners’ perceptions of the speech act of advice giving.

METHODOLOGY
Participants
The sample included 40 postgraduate Iranian Persians EFL learners in UKM. The participants involved 20 females and 20 males who were in the 25-34 year old age bracket majoring in PhD degree. All the participants were Iranian Persians monolingual who were sharing the same
cultural background. Based on the participants’ scores in international English language testing system (IELTS) and test of English as a foreign language (TOEFL), the participants’ level of proficiency in English was intermediate.

**Instrument and Procedure**

A multiple choice survey questionnaire (see Appendix) adopted version of Hinkle’s (1997) was used for the purpose of this study. The questionnaire involves eight situations that required advice giving or opting out: four included statements addressed to the social superior and four to the peer acquaintance. Each situation was accompanied by three MC selections in random order: (1) direct advice involving the model “should,” (2) hedged advice using “need to” or other softeners or hedging advices, lexical hedging (“may be, I think”), or questions, and (3) indirect comment including no advice or suggestions. The fourth selection was an explicit choice for opting out that remained constant for all selection. Examples of direct advice, hedge advice, and indirect comments are illustrated in (1) to (3), respectively:

1. You shouldn’t order the hamburger. I had it here before, and it was really greasy.
2. May be it’s not a good idea to order a hamburger. I had it here before, and it was really greasy.
3. I had a hamburger here before, and it was really greasy.

The questionnaires were distributed among the participants in UKM campus. They were given instructions on how to answer the questions and no time limitation for answering the questions was mentioned in order not to make the participants stressed or in a hurry so that they could answer the questions carefully and patiently. In addition, the researchers welcome any questions from the participants in case they would face any difficulties while answering the questions.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

The research question of the present study was formulated to find out if there are any differences in the perception of the speech act of advice giving between Iranian Persian EFL male and female learners. Hence, the results showed the existence of cross-gender differences between the two groups of participants. In general, Iranian Persian EFL male and female learners perceived the social distance in the situations with peer acquaintance (equal status) and instructor (higher status) differently. They also differed in the types of advice they utilized as the appropriate choice. For Iranian Persian EFL male learners, in both situations (peer acquaintance and instructor) they preferred indirect advice rather than the other three options which are hedge advice, direct advice and opting out. On the other hand, for Iranian Persian EFL female learners, they selected hedge advice in both peer acquaintance and instructor situations as compared to the other three options (direct advice, indirect advice and opting out). This is in accordance with findings from Kuo (1996) where female speakers were more likely to give advice to their same-sex interlocutors and they use various linguistic devices, sentence containing auxiliary models or hedge, and justifications with advice forms to convey advice. On the other hand, only 4 instances of advice are found in all-male conversations and, either seriously or jokingly, they are all in imperative form. In addition, Baca (2011) found that the interlocutor openly commented on his preference for more female-like advice, which he seemed to associate with greater care and
concern for all parties involved. These comments could indicate that when giving advice, the interlocutor expected that females would differ from males in their interpersonal communication style.

Table 1: MCQ Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Direct</th>
<th>Hedge</th>
<th>Indirect</th>
<th>Nothing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Peer acquaintance</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Unreliable car</td>
<td>M 11 (55) F 10 (50)</td>
<td>M 5 (25) F 7 (35)</td>
<td>M 4 (20) F 3 (15)</td>
<td>M 0 (0) F 0 (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Academic course</td>
<td>M 3 (15) F 1 (5)</td>
<td>M 5 (25) F 9 (45)</td>
<td>M 12 (60) F 9 (45)</td>
<td>M 0 (0) F 0 (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Repair shop</td>
<td>M 3 (15) F 5 (25)</td>
<td>M 5 (25) F 8 (40)</td>
<td>M 12 (60) F 7 (35)</td>
<td>M 0 (0) F 0 (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Library</td>
<td>M 4 (20) F 0 (0)</td>
<td>M 7 (35) F 17 (85)</td>
<td>M 7 (35) F 0 (0)</td>
<td>M 2 (10) F 3 (15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instructor</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Library</td>
<td>M 3 (15) F 0 (0)</td>
<td>M 3 (15) F 12 (60)</td>
<td>M 8 (40) F 4 (20)</td>
<td>M 6 (30) F 4 (20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Illness</td>
<td>M 5 (25) F 8 (40)</td>
<td>M 8 (40) F 9 (45)</td>
<td>M 5 (25) F 3 (15)</td>
<td>M 2 (10) F 0 (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Restaurant</td>
<td>M 4 (20) F 10 (50)</td>
<td>M 4 (20) F 5 (25)</td>
<td>M 12 (60) F 5 (25)</td>
<td>M 0 (0) F 0 (0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: frequency count is listed in each cell, with percentages provided in brackets

More specifically, Iranian Persian EFL male learners chose the options of direct advice more than females did in three out of four situations with peer acquaintance (see Table 1). In other words, they were more direct in the situations of Unreliable Car, Academic Course, and Library. However, Iranian Persian EFL female learners selected direct advice option more frequently than Iranian Persian EFL male learners did in the Repair Shop situation. Although their reflections were varied in the options of choosing direct advice between Iranian Persian EFL male and female learners, these differences seemed to be negligible. For instance, in the Unreliable Car situation, both Iranian Persian EFL male and female learners chose the option of direct advice in the mostly same frequency at 11 and 10 respectively. On the other hand, the differences between males and females seemed to be notable in the Library situation as 4 out of 20 males used the option of direct advice while none of the females selected that option. This is in accordance with Kuo (1996) where male speakers use the form of imperative in all instances of advice conversation.

Iranian Persian EFL female learners selected the options of hedge advice more than males did in the all situations with peer acquaintance. For example, in the Library situation the differences between males and females were noticeable as 17 out of 20 females selected hedge options for the situation while only 7 out of 20 males chose the same option. These particular results agreed with those found in Kuo (1996) where female speakers were more likely to provide advice
sentence containing auxiliary models or hedge, and justifications with advice forms to convey advice. However, Iranian Persian EFL male learners chose the options of indirect advice more than females did in all situations with peer acquaintance. For instance, 7 out of 20 males selected indirect options in the Library situation while none of the females selected the option. This may be attributed to the fact that while giving advice may be considered as a face-threatening in conversations among male speakers, who either avoid doing it or choose to do it boldly, it is positively affective for women, who resort to a variety of stylistic and linguistic means to maintain equality and rapport.

Unlike peer acquaintance situations, Iranian Persian EFL male learners’ frequency choices of direct advice were less than females in 3 out of 4 instructor’s situations. In other words, Iranian Persian EFL male learners’ frequency choice of direct advice was more than females merely in Library situation. As it is illustrated in Table 1, in the Library situation none of the females used the option of direct choice while 3 out of 20 males selected direct advice option. Therefore, Iranian Persian EFL female learners were more direct in the situations of Illness, Book Store, and Restaurant. According to Fishman (1978) formal features that characterize women’s speech such as asking question aims to ensure reaction. In contrast, men’s speech is marked by features (e.g. statement) than do little insure to further talk. In the present study, it would be seen that Iranian Persian EFL female learners viewed giving direct advice as a matter of friendliness, rapport-building, concern, sincere interest, and solidarity towards their instructor.

 Iranian Persian EFL female learners chose the options of hedge advice more than males did in the all instructor’s situations. Although their selections were different in the options of choosing hedge advice, these differences seemed to be unimportant in the situations of Illness, Book Store, and Restaurant. For example, in the Illness and Book Store situations, both Iranian Persian EFL male and female learners chose the option of hedge advice in the mostly same frequency at 8 (males) and 9 (females). However, the differences between males and females seemed to be significant in the Library situation as 3 out of 20 males used the option of hedge advice while 12 out of 20 females chose that option. As previously mentioned by Kuo (1996), female speakers are more likely to give advice to their same-sex interlocutors and they use various linguistic devices, sentence containing auxiliary models or hedge, and justifications with advice forms to convey advice. On the other hand, only 4 instances of advice are found in all-male conversations.

Finally, in the all instructor’s situations (Library, Illness, Bookstore and Restaurant) Iranian Persian EFL male learners selected the indirect options more than females did. For example, with regard to the Restaurant situation 12 males out of 20 selected the option of indirect advice while 5 out of 20 females selected the same option. One could argue that the reason that males selected indirect advice more than females is evolutionary pressure has made status more important for males. Thus, since status matters relatively less for females, they can select direct advice more. This is in accordance with Juhana (2011) in her study of the use of apologizing speech acts realization by male and female students. She explained that a common reason as to why apologies are difficult is because an apology causes loss of status. She added one could argue that the reason women apologize more than men is due to evolutionary pressure has made status more
important for men, because men need status to compete for mates. Therefore, as status matters comparatively less for women, they can apologize more.

According to the findings of this study, school curriculum should consider the differences between male and female learners in the area of speech act. For instance, providing examples of how male and female learners differ in terms of advice giving. The researchers would like to highlight that school curricula in EFL contexts should focus not only on structures and vocabulary but also on the sociopragmatic aspects of the language. Moreover, English teaching and learning in Iran have to give emphasis to not only linguistic competence but also pragmatic competence. Iranian Persian learners who aspire to study in an English speaking country should be careful about the language transfer phenomena and they ought to be alert of the appropriateness of giving advices to the speakers of the target language, English, to avoid misinterpretation of intent and cultural understanding among the two groups of speakers.

CONCLUSION
The findings of the study revealed how the speech act of advice giving is perceived in English among Iranian Persian EFL male and female learners. The present study illustrated that Iranian Persian EFL male and female learners differed in the perception of advice giving as well as the types of advice they used as the appropriate choice. Although this study answered the research question, further research on advice giving in the context of Iranian Persian EFL learners need to be conducted with regard to the production of advice giving and cross-cultural differences in advice giving. The findings of this study may be limited to the following considerations. More research is needed to support the current findings including a bigger number of participants with different social groups. Thus, the findings of this study cannot be generalized to other groups due to the small sample size. Moreover, the procedure of data collection is exclusive to merely using one instrument which is Multiple Choice Questionnaire to obtain the necessary data needed to answer the research question. Therefore, the data analysis is based on the nature of the data collection and the instrument used to conduct this study. Finally, and probably due to the fact that the questionnaire was not piloted with the participants of the present study, the researchers were not able to obtain estimates about the expected response rates, data quality, the validity and comprehensibility of the questionnaire. Hence, the questionnaire should be piloted with a similar group of people to the intended participants in order to make necessary adjustments to administrative aspects of the study such as the time needed to complete the questionnaire.

REFERENCES


Appendix

An Adopted Version of Hinkle’s (1997) Multiple Choice Questionnaires (MCQ)

Instructions:

Eight situations are described in the items below. Following the description of a situation, you will find a multiple choice selection of three possible statements, A, B, and C. Choose the statement (or question) that you think would be the most appropriate to say in the situation. If you think it would be appropriate to say nothing, choose option D.

When you are responding to the questions, please keep in mind the following imaginary student: N H is a student in your department. You have similar interests in your majors. You have talked to N H several times in the department lounge.

Also, please keep in mind the following imaginary college instructor: There is an instructor in your department with whom you have similar professional interests. You have talked to this instructor several times in the department lounge.

Situations

1. You see the instructor working in the library very late in the evening. The instructor looks tired. What do you think would be appropriate to say in this situation?

   A. You should not work so hard. It’s very late
   B. Why do you work so hard? It’s very late
   C. I’m going home soon. It is very late
   D. Nothing

2. N H’s car breaks down frequently. N H is planning on driving it to New York to see some relatives. What do you think would be appropriate to say in this situation?

   A. I think it may be risky for you to take such a long trip in this car
   B. Taking such a long trip in this car may be risky
   C. You should not take this car for such a long trip. It may be risky
   D. Nothing

3. N H is considering taking a course. You have heard that the course is really difficult. What do you think would be appropriate to say in this situation?

   A. I’ve heard that this course is really difficult
   B. It’s better not to take this course. I’ve heard it’s really difficult
   C. You shouldn’t take this course. I’ve heard that it’s really difficult
   D. Nothing

4. You and the instructor in a Bookstore. The instructor is considering buying an expensive book. However, you think that another store may sell the book at a lower price. What do you think would be appropriate to say in this situation?

   A. You should buy the book at the other store. This store has high prices
   B. This store has high prices
   C. May be, it’s not a good idea to buy the book here. This store has high prices
   D. Nothing
5. **N H** is thinking of taking a car to a *Repair Shop* downtown. However, you know of a shop on the corner where you have taken your car. What do you think would be appropriate to say in this situation?

A. I usually take my car to the shop on the corner. It’s closer  
B. You should take your car to the shop on the corner. It’s closer  
C. It’s better to take your car to the shop on the corner. It’s closer  
D. Nothing

6. You and the **instructor** are in a *Restaurant*. The **instructor** says something about ordering a hamburger. You ordered a hamburger in this *Restaurant* before and, in your opinion, it was really greasy. What do you think would be appropriate to say in this situation?

A. You shouldn’t order the hamburger. I had it here before, and it was really greasy  
B. May be it’s not a good idea to order a hamburger. I had it here before, and it was really greasy  
C. I had a hamburger here before, and it was really greasy  
D. Nothing

7. You see **N H** working in the library very late in the evening. **N H** looks tired. What do you think would be appropriate to say in this situation?

A. Why do you work so hard? It’s very late  
B. You should not work so hard. It’s very late  
C. I’m going home soon. It is very late  
D. Nothing

8. You see the **instructor** working in the department office. The **instructor** looks ill and clearly doesn’t feel very well. What do you think would be appropriate to say in this situation?

A. You look like you don’t feel well  
B. You should go home. You look like you don’t feel well  
C. May be, it’s better to go home. You look like you don’t feel well  
D. Nothing

*Thank you for your time and effort!*