

## The Role of Power in Language Use: How the Pattern is Changing in Iranian Families

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### Abstract

The work presented in this article is an attempt made to study communication differences between two generations of Iranians, regarding the role of power. By a comparison of two generations, our observation indicates that this sociolinguistic aspect of language use has changed. For the purpose of this study, two different procedures were used for data collection. First, investigating old movies produced in one decade before the Islamic revolution and new movies, produced in the last decade after the revolution. And second, a questionnaire was prepared which compromised 10 situations. The choices were arranged so that the first choice of each question represented the typical speech of young generation and the third choice was typical speech of the old generation. 25 senior individuals, who were over 50 and 25 young participants, whose ages ranged from 17 to 25 were chosen to answer the questions. The focus of data analysis was to discover patterns of language use in communication between parents and children. The results revealed that most of young participants chose the first choice, showing the reduced effect of power on the use of politeness signals. And most of senior participants chose the third choice in the sense that signs of polite language prevailed. Movie analysis also supported the findings of the first data analysis. It can be concluded that the role of power as a sociolinguistic aspect has decreased considerably in old to young and young to old conversations. Thus, the young generation is not concerned with the face wants that are the desirable behavior by the old generation.

**Keywords:** Power role, young generation, old generation, social relationship, solidarity.

### Introduction

Sociolinguistically, the idea of language change among different generations has been discussed a lot. Hudson (1996), distinguishes among the different styles of speech in childhood (age-grading), adolescence and adulthood which lead to different forms of speech and expression. Fomkin (2007) says if we turn on our TV one hundred years later we would think that we are listening to a completely different language. Hence, language is changing significantly, and sociolinguistic changes are not few and far between. One of the most controversial subjects in this domain is politeness, which will be briefly elaborated on.

Politeness is regarded as the expression of what speaker means to moderate face threats carried by certain Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs) towards another (Mills, 2003). The Politeness theory purports that some speech acts threaten the other's face requirements. It was put forth in 1987 by Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson. They extended this idea from Goffman's (1967) concept of Face in which Positive Face was regarded as the want of self to be thought of as a desirable human being and Negative Face as the desire of not being imposed upon by the others, or the desire to keep their privacy. Besides, according to Grundy (1995, p.135) it is told that the indicators of the need to use politeness contribute to three factors of power, distance and imposition. Imposition includes every action or act which threatens the addressee's autonomy and freedom of action and usually is transmitted in the form of an order. The second one, power is evaluated in terms of numerous factors such as position in society and age and finally, distance implies the evaluation of the other's place in the world, degree of familiarity and/or solidarity towards the addressee. In addition, Hudson (1996) defines the Power as a self explanatory term, but solidarity as hard to define. It concerns the social distance between people, how much experience they have shared, how many social characteristics they share, how far they are interested to share inti-

macies, and other factors (p.122). Wardhaugh (2006) added to the concept of power by mentioning that power changes according to different situations which the person will be present in. moreover, politeness changes can be observed in social and generation alteration.

By bearing the above mentioned facts in mind, in this article it is meant to examine the two sociolinguistic factors (solidarity and power) in relation to politeness. The issue of politeness in speech among parents and children seems to be experiencing a great metamorphosis in Iran. If we inspect two generations' speech (young and old) we can discover some of them. But, it is argued that beside the linguistic factors, some social factors such as change of parents' power role and increase of solidarity can modify the discourse of parents and children which some of its aspects may be reflected in the language use. In the past, it seemed that parents were well respected by their children and they were enjoying a high degree of power in the family, consequently, the solidarity level was not too much. But during the course of time there appears to be a change and decrease of the power role.

Before moving on, it is worth to point out some of the motives behind this language use change. The issue of Power role of parents in relation to their children has been investigated in different cultures like Javanese. The obedience of children in that culture was much like Iran in old days. LeVine (1974) proposed a theory and justified this issue by suggesting that obedience (which stems from power) is a chiefly valued quality in a child in agricultural economies because it is necessary for economic survival as an adult. Hence, the changing attitude towards obedience in poor societies is in agreement with his proposal since obedience becomes more important in traditional agricultural societies when economic survival is in greatest jeopardy. Consequently, the more agricultural culture diminishes and children become more autonomous, polite and obedient language uses change.

Comparing social grouping within each country was shown by Hoffman's study (Hoffman 1988). The same trend was also observed in Kohn's (Kohn 1969) and LeVine's (LeVine 1963) findings. It was demonstrated that the higher the social class, the more likely were the fathers not to expect a child's politeness and compliance.

The differences that are the results of social changes in the society, may lead to different uses of language by different generations. However, studies on the politeness in sociolinguistics mostly inspected these changes and acceptability of them over time, and the difference between two generations was not adequately touched upon yet.

For instance, in studying polite expression (pronouns) Brown and Gilman (1968) analyzed T/V distinction and their pattern of use. They found that the use of the familiar pronoun T and the well-mannered pronoun V in European languages were administrated by two politeness maxims: power and solidarity. If one person has power over another in the degree that he is able to control the behavior of the other, he may give T and s/he receives V. These bases of power can be physical strength, wealth, age, sex, social status and etc. On the other hand, solidarity entails intimacy and "shared fate" and is bidirectional. If the parties are close or intimate to each other, they will equally exchange T or V.

In another study the address system of American English has been analyzed by Brown & Ford (1961/1964) and Ervin-Tripp (1972). According to Brown and Ford's research, the foremost choices in American English are between first name and last name, due to different considerations of intimacy (solidarity) and power. Therefore, it requires the speaker to decide whether the addressee is a "friend or colleague", and whether the addressee is in higher rank or older. Again the address system falls into the pattern of "power and solidarity" and it seems that the mentioned pattern is no longer the same among families

Therefore, it can be claimed that, different pronoun uses are regarded as linguistic signals of the power-solidarity relations between the interlocutors. Such relations can also be regarded as "a special case of a more general phenomenon, concerning the speaker's relation of power and solidarity with the world at large" (Hudson, 1980, p.128) that is of our concern in the present study. The power and solidarity pattern created some norms to be followed in the past, which rules no longer sound applicable nowadays due to social changes.

## Method

This research was carried out during two days in which 50 participants took part. They were divided into two groups. The first group was formed with 25 elders who were over 50 in order to be typical representative of the *old generation*. And the second group included 25 young participants, whose ages ranged from 17 to 25, which were chosen to answer the questions. The questionnaire contained 10 questions each of

which was planned to describe a typical situation in which most people are involved in their ordinary lives. Form among many different situations top ten that people were most likely to deal with in their family relationships, were selected.

Each question had four options which were carefully planned. We followed a specific goal by each choice; in each question the first choice was most typical of young generation behavior. The second choice was more neutral, i.e. a conservative type which this kind of speech doesn't threaten the power aspect and is neither rude nor polite. The third choice was typical of language used by elder generation in interacting with the senior members when they were young. The choice was displaying high degree of power (for parents) and minimum level of solidarity. And finally, the fourth choice was null due to the fact that, the choices may have not been able to cover the possible answers displaying the relationship among the family members. The criteria for formulating the questionnaire was based on an indirect interview with old and young people, in order to understand what kind of relationship was (and is) the most typical in each period. The answers were analyzed and the choices were prepared. It was aimed to choose the most typical speech usage for each generation in the questionnaire. For getting a better grasp of choices, one of the questions is included below. (See the appendix 1).

1-Imagine your father has bought something for you that you don't like it, which of these sentences would express your reaction?

A: Oh what's that? I don't like it.

B: thanks daddy, but I wish you would let me buy it.

C: Thank you father. I am grateful.

D: none of the above

Thereafter, the first day the questionnaires were handed to the elder participants, and they were asked to answer them according to their relationship with their family. The next day the questionnaires were handed to the young participants (*young generation*). And then the answers were analyzed accordingly based on the frequency rate of marked choices for each generation. However, in order to add to the validity of data we used triangulation procedure. The old movies which were produced in the last decade before the Islamic revolution of Iran were compared to the new movies, produced in the last decade after the revolution in order to identify the change patterns. In this regard, the top ten situations were spotted on the movies (old and new) and the conversations were analyzed. For instance, situation one in old movies was compared to situation one in new movies, to see the possible dialogue differences.

## Data analysis

In order to analyze the data, the frequency of answers to each choice was calculated for both groups separately to figure out the distribution of the responses. Then the percentage of marked answers for each choice was calculated, and the results are presented in table 1. The table shows the frequency of choosing each choice. The results demonstrate that most of elders chose the third choice, due to the fact that the relationship within their family in that time was subject to a very high power role for the parents. Therefore, as the results indicate 72.6% percent of the elders had been using a very polite language in order to avoid threatening their fathers' power aspect while only 3.5 % percent of young participants selected the third choice, which seems a significant difference. However, the data analysis for the young generation demonstrated that 67.2% percent of participants selected the first choice which was closer to impolite language use. Again, comparing the choice selection with old generation, no more than 4.1% percent of elders chose the first option that signifies a significant change. The findings of the study points to the fact that there is a gradual disappearance of the parents' power aspect within the family that according to politeness theory is the indication of the loss of Power for the parents. Finally, by calculating the mean score for the frequency of the options for two generations, about 20% percent of both generations in average, used a conservative language (choice number two). The exact data are as follow:

Table1. *The frequency of choosing each choice*

Choices	1	2	3	4

Old generation	4.1%	16.3%	72.6%	7%
Young generation	67.2%	24.9%	3.5%	4.4%

In addition, Figure. 1 crystallizes the results as follow:

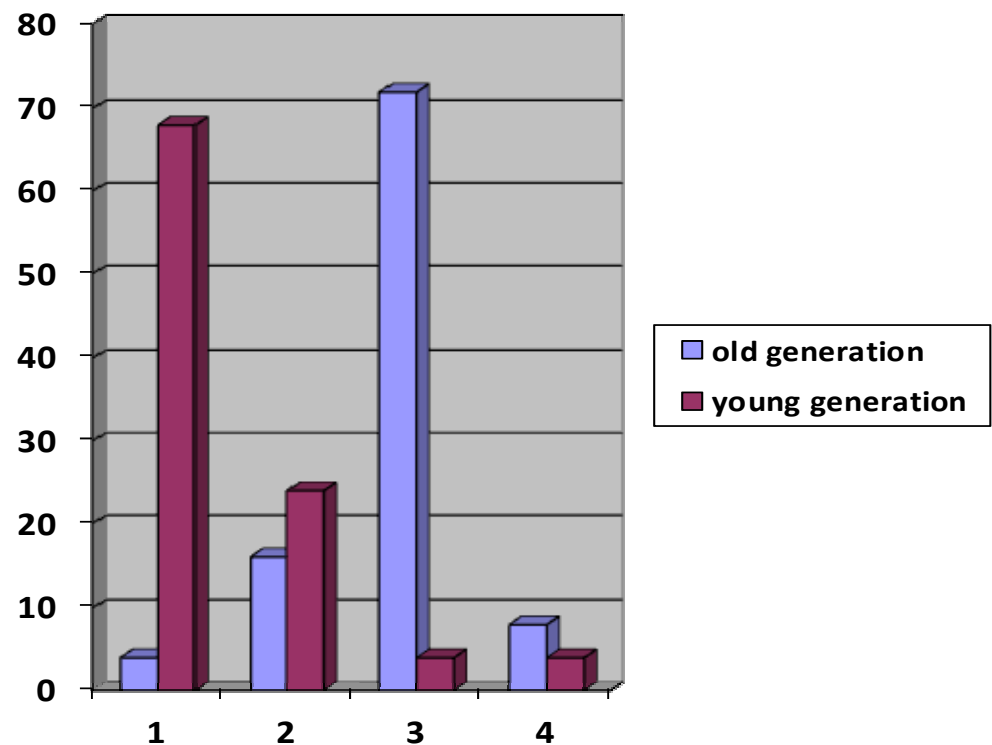


Figure 1. Percentages of option selection for old and young generations

The analysis and comparison of the situations-in old and new movies-has revealed that the polite use of language was more outstanding in old generation, while the young generation was more inclined towards keeping relationships with high degree of intimacy which can be considered as a threat to the Power aspect of parents in the family relationships. The extracts taken from the movies show that in the old movies fathers were enjoying high Power and hence, were well respected, whereas in the after revolution movies the dialogues were indicator of pattern changes and frequent uses of bold expression(a threat to power aspect). In a nutshell, the comparison of the sentences of similar situations in old and new movies has revealed sociolinguistic changes in language pattern and politeness between two generations especially regarding power and solidarity aspects.

## Discussion and Conclusion

The idea of language use change has long been discussed from different aspects. For instance, some scholars scrutinized the issue of address terms such as Leech (1999) who takes into account terms of address as an important formulaic verbal behavior well acknowledged in the sociolinguistic texts while they signal transactional, interpersonal and deictic implications in human relationships. Besides, Afful (2006a) proposes that "terms of address constitute an important part of verbal behavior through which the behavior, norms and practices of a society can be identified".

The address term changes which were framed in the politeness theory proposed by Levinson & Brown (1987) were subject to studies in Japanese by different scholars (Matsumoto & Yoshiko, 1988; Fukuda & Asato, 2004; Haugh & Michael, 2004). And also in English Brown and Gilman (1968) analyzed T/V distinction and its pattern of use. Majority of the studies are in line with some changes in language use during the course of time. The source of the changes is sometime mere linguistic (fromkin, 2001) and sometimes in one way or another, social. In other words, the modifications stem from some changes of norms in the society (LeVine, 1963; Kohn, 1969). But, the study of language change was often narrowed down to consideration of change in one aspect of language: lexis, semantics or syntax, and phonology. However, the social changes of norm in relationships (power and solidarity) were also subject of change in the time passage.

This phenomenon could be observed in the language use of different generations as was investigated in this article. In line with the present study's findings Lebov who pioneered language change studies explicates that language change can be readily observed today in spite of the expansion and homogenization of the mass media. (lebov, 2001). The results are also in agreement with politeness changes happening in Japan, when there is a high degree of solidarity (a social factor). The Japanese society can be thought of like a ladder. At the top are those of the highest social standing and then below them are the common people. From the bottom of the social ladder upwards, the Japanese language changes in subtle and sometimes noticeable ways. Changes with Standard Polite language in middle is comprised of verbs, grammar, and nouns. One would speak in a way to make the listener or object more honored and the speaker lower and humbler.

In some situations the social distance among the people disappears and the language becomes simpler, rougher, and even rude to some. Simple forms of verbs and adjectives are used more often. Vulgar or taboo words appear more frequently and honorifics are rarely seen, if at all (Carrol, 2001).

Besides, the historical changes of language support the politeness pattern change in English which concurs to the article's findings. According to Wardhaugh (2006) nowadays English only uses one level of grammatical politeness. When speaking to someone, you always use the form "you". It can be used while speaking with your little sister, and also with the queen (though in this case you may also use "Your Majesty" or "Your Royal Highness"). English used to have two levels of politeness, thou and you. However, over time, "thou" became less and less used, until it disappeared entirely. This may be due to the fact that the form of power of the rulers has changed over time and no longer the expressions such as 'your majesty' which enjoy a high degree of power, are socially appropriate.

In a nutshell, regarding the social aspects of power and solidarity, a similar form of change seems to have happened among Iranian families. In the past the old generation encountered a very high power role for parents. The type of relationships in their period (as they were young) was considerably different from the young generation in these days. The father was mostly obeyed by the other members of family in the last decades. The use of language on the behalf of children was so carefully observed, in order not to threaten the father's power role, while the young generation, now regarded as youth in the country, is displaying a low power role for the fathers as it can be seen in the data analysis. There is a considerable difference in use of language. One of the possible explanations of decreasing power role of the fathers for young generation could be the increase of solidarity maxim in the family relationships as mentioned by LeVine (1963).

Children easily use words and sentences that their fathers would never think of, before their parents. As it was demonstrated in the data analysis the difference in the choice selection for young generation was indicating a pattern of language use change which may stem from different social factors including power and solidarity. Therefore, the process of language change and the possible sociolinguistics factors contributing to it, need to be more comprehensively investigated in future.

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## Appendix

1-Imagine your father has bought something for you that you don't like it, which of these sentences would express your reaction?

A: Oh what's that? I don't like it.

B: Thanks daddy, but I wish you would let me buy it.

C: Just you would thank your father, and did not show your dissatisfaction.

D: None of them

2- With which of these pronouns you call your father?

A: Tu (means you but is used for elation ships with high intimacy, close relationship and somehow equal power state).

B: Shoma (means you, but shows less intimacy and unequal power state).

C: Mostly (tu) but sometimes (shoma)

D: None of them

3: imagine your father, want you to do something for him and you are out of time, which of the following sentences are your response.

A: I don't have time, you yourself go.

B: Is it possible that you do it? You know I am running out of time

C: Sure dad, I'm going.

D: None of them

4: How do you request for money?

A: I'm out of money dad, I need some bucks

B: Daddy, can you give me some money?

C: These days I'm short of money father

D: None of them

5: You want to ask your father to buy something for you on his way home. How do you propose this request?

A: Don't forget to buy it for me, on your way home daddy

B: Dad, please buy it for me on your way home?

C: Father, I was wondering if you could buy it for me on your way home

D: None of them

6: Imagine your father want you to do for him something illogical, what would be your response? And how do you show your objection?

A: When the donkeys fly I will do it dad.

B: Dad? Is there any possibility of not doing it?

C: Sure dad, if you want, it will be done.

D: None of them.

7: can you express your feeling toward your dad, with expressions such as (sweet daddy, nice dad, I missed you dad)?

A: Yes

B: Just some times

C: No

D: None of them

8: imagine you are eating lunch, and you have objection to the food, how will you express it?

A: What the hell is that?

B: I'm not hungry. I will eat something later.

C: Without saying anything, you will keep eating.

D: None of them.

9: Image your father wants to use one of your personal things, and you are so fussy about it, what is your reaction to him?

A: It's mine, no chance to use it.

B: Sorry dad, if you could, not to use it.

C: Thus you don't like it; you will hand it to him, and express no objection.

D: None of them.

10: how do ask your father to do something in a public place?

A: Go there daddy and do it for me.

B: Please do it for me daddy.

C: If was wondering, if you could do it for me please.

D: None of them.

1-فرض كنيد پدرتان براي شما چيزي خريده است كه شما آن را دوست نداريد. عكس العمل شما در قالب کدام يك از اين جمله ها بيان مي شود؟

1-آخه اين چيه خريدي؟ ازش خوشم نمياد

2-مرسي بابا. ولي كاش ميذاشتي خودم مي خريدم

3-فقط تشكر مي كرديد و اصلا ناراحتي خود را ابراز نميكنيد.

4-هيچكدام

2-هنگامي كه ميخواهيد پدرتان را مورد خطاب قرار دهيد از کداميك از اين ضمماير استفاده ميكنيد؟

1-تو 2-بيشتر (تو) ولي گاهي هم (شما) 3-شما 4-هيچكدام

3-فرض كنيد پدرتان از شما درخواست انجام كاري را ميكند و شما هم وقت نداريد. جواب شما در قالب کداميك از اين گزينه ها مي باشد؟

1-من وقت ندارم. خودت برو 2-ميشه خوت بري؟ من خيلي كاردارم آخه

3-چشم پدر. الان ميرم 4-هيچكدام

4-طريقه ي در خواست شما براي پول چگونه است؟

2-بابا يكمي بهم پول ميدي؟

4-هيچكدام

1-پول بده بابا. بموم شده پول هام

3-بابا دستم خيلي خاليه.

5-مي خواهيد از پدران درخواست كنيد سر راه بازگشت به خانه چيزي براي آنان بخرد. اين را چگونه بيان ميكنيد؟

1-بابا داري ميايي حتما پادت باشه اينو برام بخري

2-بابا بي زحمت سر راه اينو برام بخر. مرسي

3-بابا ميخواستم خواهش كنم سر راه اينو برام بخرينش

4-هيچكدام

6-فرض كند پدرتان كاري غير منطقي از شما ميخواهد. و شما ميخواهيد با او مقابله كنيد. اعتراض خود را چگونه ابراز ميكنيد؟

1-عمر ا اين كارو بكنم 2-بابا ميشه اين كارو نكنم؟

3-پدر اگر شما مي خواهيد چشم انجامش ميدم 4-هيچكدام

7-آيا مي توانيد با واژه هايي چون (بابا جون. باباي خويم. بابا دلم برات يه ذره شده) نسبت به پدرتان ابراز علاقه كنيد؟

1-بله 2-فقط گاهي اوقات

4-هيچكدام

3-خير

8-فرض كنيد سر سفره غذا هستيد و به غذا اعتراض داريد. چگونه بيانش ميكنيد؟

2-من الان سيرم. بعدا يه چيزي مي خورم

4-هيچكدام

3-بدون اعتراض غذايتان را مي خوريد.

1-آخه اين چيه؟ اه



9-فرض كنيد وسيله ي شخصي اي داريد كه نسبت به آن حساس هستيد. و پدرتان مي خواهد از آن استفاده كند. عكس العمل تان را با كداميك از اين

جمله ها بيان مي كنيد؟

1- ماله منه نبايد ازش استفاده كني 2- پدرميشه از اين استفاده نكنيد؟

3- علارغم ميل باطني ميگويد "چشم" "بفرماييد" 4- هيچكدام

10- طريقه ي درخواست انجام كاري از پدرتان در يك مكان عمومي يا پيش ديگران چگونه است؟

1- بابا برو اين كار رو بكن 2- بابا لطفا اين كار رو بكنيد

3- پدر جان اگه امكانش هست اين كار رو بكنيد 3- هيچكدام