

Interpersonal Metafunction of Gender Talk in ELT Classrooms

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Abstract:

In systemic functional approach to interpersonal metafunction, Halliday defines clause as a unit of exchange, with two main constituents called Mood and Residue. Mood (sometimes called Modal element) which is the main element of clause in process of meaning exchange realizes selection of mood in clause, and it is composed of Subject and Finite. Subject is invested with modal responsibility whereas finite realizes primary tense and modality. Drawing upon theoretical framework outlined above, present research explores interpersonal metafunction of gender talk in ELT classrooms. Objective is to determine different clausal structures (Declaratives, Integratives, Imperatives and Exclamatives) used by interlocutors with different genders using Azeri as their mother tongue, Farsi (Persian) and English as their second and foreign languages respectively. This research uses oral form of teacher-student interaction in classroom context as its corpus. About twelve hours of oral conversation between students and teachers from eight randomly selected classrooms are recorded and transcribed, resulting to 3288 clauses. Our findings show that dominant Mood used by both genders is declarative of third person simple present tense causing the process of meaning exchange to be one-sided and partial. Reconstructing clausal structures used by different genders in ELT classrooms may result into students' high language proficiency in bilingual context of situation.

Key Words: systemic functional grammar, interpersonal metafunction, aspect, gender talk, bilingual context of situation.

1. Introduction

Language teaching has always been the point of concern for most of researchers in the era of new and even traditional studies on language. These researchers have studied different language teaching methods with various and even sometimes opposite perspective to provide fast and meanwhile simple methods. Advancing methods such as grammar-translation, direct, audio-lingual and the other ones is the result of studies performed by this group of researchers, although in most of them, gender variant has less been concerned. Meanwhile some of the performed researches are related to language teaching in bilingual areas. Tabriz (Capital city of East Azerbaijan Province. Iran) is considered as a bilingual city since its informants use Azeri as their mother tongue and Farsi (Persian) as their second language. In this research, different kinds of clausal structure (Declaratives, Integratives, Imperatives, and Exclamatives) used by males and females in ELT classrooms are studied on the basis of Hallidayian systemic functional grammar from interpersonal metafunction perspective to show the way through which meaning is exchanged between interlocutors. It may be touchable to enhance meaning exchange among

students of ELT classes with different genders in bilingual context of situation, causing high level of language proficiency by reorganizing different types of clausal structures.

According to Dabir Mogadam (2004: 65), nowadays language is studied throughout three main Formal, Functional and Cognitive approaches. In functional approach of language study, syntax is considered much less important than language communicative function. According to Johnstone (2008: 78), the first academic studies on language function dates back to Prague School and studies of Vilem Mathesius in 1926s. Givon (2001: 257) states, advancing Functional Sentence Perspective by Mathesius may be considered the most important step in this process in which the natural order of words in a sentence is shown as Topic \wedge Comment. According to Meshkatudini (2002: 111), the second step in studying language function relates to London School and studies of John Robert Firth in 1930s. According to Seuren (209: 82), Firth studies meaning of language forms in the context of situation. Barber et al (2010) state, Firth considers meaning as function in context in which not only words and sentences but also sounds have meaning. After Firth, studying language with functional approach followed by scholars such as M.A.K. Halliday. Having advanced Scale and Category in 1960s, Halliday introduced his second grammar named Systemic Functional. In Systemic Functional Grammar, Halliday (1985:11) considers text analysis as discourse one. He states linguistic analysis can explain why one text may be appropriate or inappropriate for some specific purpose. According to Christie (2002:21), text and specific combination of register is a condition of cultural context. Choices from language in relation to situational context are considered as selection from register and specific selection of language depends on specific selection from components of situational context. These components are field of activity, tenor and mode. According to Halliday (1985:12), each of these components relates to three functions of ideational, interpersonal and textual. Relating to interpersonal metafunction, Eggins (2004:144) states, using language, one of the processes occurred in conversation is creating communication among people speaking or may speak in the next turn-taking. According to Halliday (1985: 69), during a conversation, speaker may give something to addressee or ask something from him. Subsequently he introduces two speech acts of giving and demanding. Noticing nature of transferred material related to two mentioned speech acts, he introduces four speech functions called offer, demand, information and question.

Following Halliday, Lock (1996: 175) refers to minor function called Exclamation in which attitude of speaker on present condition is expressed.

Table 1. Speech Functions

Function in Exchange	Type of Exchange	
	A) Services and Objects	B) Information
A) Giving	Would you like this teapot? «Offer»	He is giving her the teapot. «Information»
B) Demanding	Give me that teapot. «Demand»	What is he giving her? «Question»

Speech functions each is reflected in different clausal structures. Information, question, demand and exclamation are expressed through Declarative, Integrative, Imperative and Exclamatives clauses respectively (Halliday, 1985: 74), whereas According to Lock (1996:176), this is just offer which has not any specific mood and as Halliday (2002:272) states, it can be expressed throughout different moods. Halliday (1985:71) states, in studying Declarative and Integrative clauses and different responses to them, interpersonal meaning is expressed throughout just a specific grammatical component in the clause. He calls that part of the clause Mood. According to Lavid et al (2010:229), Mood is composed of elements by which different types of interaction is performed between interlocutors. According to Halliday (1985:72), Mood is composed of functional elements of subject and finite in which subject approves or disapproves argument whereas finite shows primary tense and aspect. Halliday (1985:75) introduces another meaning component called Polarity, calling it Modality in relation to proposition and Modulation in relation to proposal.

Here some of the most recent studies done on interpersonal metafunction considering gender variant are discussed.

Mehrabi (2006) studies the role of gender in interpretation of silence in discourse. This research shows whether the gender of conversing people and the gender of the population employed in the research has any effect on interpretation of silence or not. Mehrabi studies implicit meaning which silence can impose on speaker or listener's mind on the basis of iconicity functionalism in which just one function may be considered for each form in order to differentiate between silence and omitted words. Having collected data throughout questionnaire from 120

people between 20 to 35 years old selected from Tehran (Capital of Iran), speaking in Persian with higher education, researcher categorizes the results in three parts of gender-dependant interpretation, gender-independent interpretation and personal interpretation, emphasizing the effect of gender on interpretation of silence. In another study, Dasturi and Bastani (2007: 5-30) study the effect of gender on discourse in two contemporary translations of Quran, showing the meaning system that the democratic system has created. In this research, democratic system has been considered as a discourse with ideological function holding some micro-discourses inside it, causing cultural, social and even biological realities not to be presented in an unbiased light. This research approves the opposition of two meaning systems, as two translators have tried to insist on their favorable discourse significant, deconstructing and misrepresenting discourse significant of the other. In another research, Allaei et al (2010: 211-228) have studied exchange of meaning in humanity science textbooks on the base of Hallidayian systemic functional grammar from the viewpoint of interpersonal metafunction. It is concluded that the authors of these books have just transferred new information by using declarative clauses in high frequency, preventing mutual interaction between writer and reader. In this research, three textbooks of Samt publication have been selected, so that each of them has been reprinted more than three times and the date of printing is after 2002.

2. Materials and Methods

In this research, two populations, each consisting of four classes of male and female students, are employed randomly. 15 to 25 year old language Learners are participating in intermediate level of English language learning classes. Classes the whole are of the same duration (90 minutes for each class) and hold in the afternoon. Data used in this research is oral conversation between teachers and students. Conversations are recorded by a MP4 voice recorder from the beginning of the class to the end of it without any change in them. Since the duration of each class is 90 minutes, about 12 hours of conversation has been recorded. Having all the recorded conversation transcribed, 3288 clauses are obtained.

3. Results and Discussion

In this research, 3288 clauses used in English classes are studied; among which 1868 clauses belong to males whereas 1420 clauses are used by females. In below table, frequency of different types of clausal structure is shown.

Gender	Clause Type				Subject			Tense			Polarity		
	Informative	Question	Imperative	Exclamation	First Person	Second Person	Third Person	Past	Present	Future	Positive	Negative	Modality
Male	1446	269	153	0	347	506	1006	149	1620	99	1676	108	82
Female	888	353	179	0	259	430	731	317	1007	96	1192	118	110

Table 2. Analysis of clausal constructions

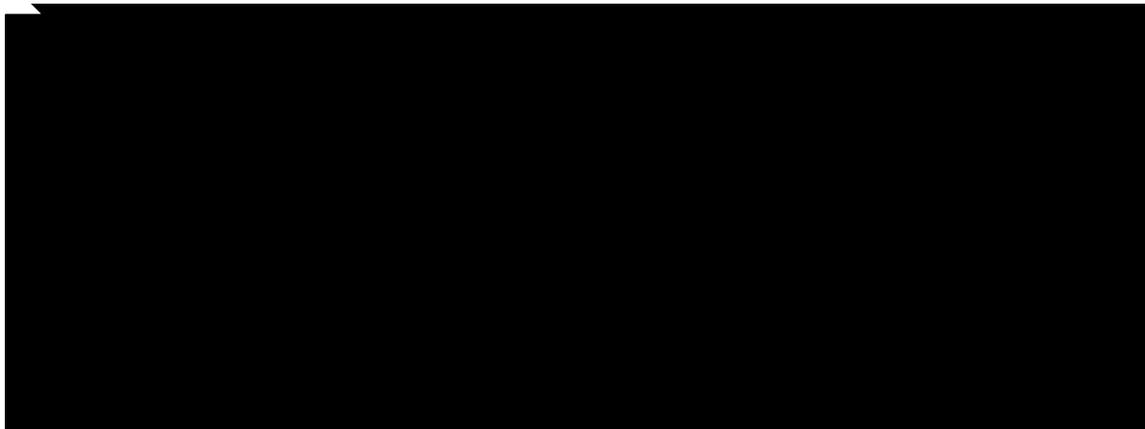


Diagram 1. Frequency of Different Clausal Constructions and Speech Functions

As above table shows, mood of most clauses used by males and females in classroom discourse are declarative and dominant Mood is declarative of third person simple present tense. According to Golfam (2006:45), informants use Declaratives to talk about realities and explain their mental pictures. In Declaratives, speakers intend to express information to the addressee. In fact exchange process of meaning in this kind of clauses is one-sided and in its least active form. In interaction between teacher and student in this research, the process of exchange is one-sided in both genders, in which speakers just provide new information. As the above table shows, both genders have used less Integratives in comparison with Declaratives. Golfam (2006:45) states that Integratives are structures by which the speaker directs the route of the transferring information from listener to himself. In other words, on contrary to Declaratives in which information is transferred from the speaker to the listener, in Integratives, the speaker tries to create motivation in listener in the related discourse topic to receive specific information. According to Alaei et al (2010: 211-228), in Integratives, the route of interaction is two-sided and active. In Integratives, addressee can refer to his mind, providing an answer to the question or

express his unawareness on it. We think that using Declaratives in high frequency will cause language learners' proficiency to be much more less. Using Integratives for declaratives may increase two-sided relation between speakers of both genders in class, enhancing level of meaning exchange and development of language learning in bilingual context of situation.

According to Golfam (2006:49), Imperatives are clauses by which the speaker demands addressee to do something. In Imperatives, addressee is involved in the process of meaning exchange, being able to approve or disapprove it. We should bear in mind that most of the times, response to Imperatives is not verbal and for this reason, it has not any important role in meaning exchange between speakers in comparison with Integratives. As the above table shows, Imperatives are used with low frequency in classroom discourse in this research. On the other hand, Exclamations are functionally noticeable and highlighted reflection of an object or an event in mental processing of the speaker. In Exclamatives, the relation between speaker and listener is one-sided. In this research, males and females have not used any Exclamatives. Reconstructing clausal structures used by different genders in ELT classrooms may result into students' high language proficiency in bilingual context of situation. That is, using Integratives for declaratives may make interlocutors take part much more in classroom discourse, causing interpersonal meaning to transfer more.

The only difference is in the number of clauses used by males and females. Males use much more clauses in comparison with females. Males are more inclined to produce clauses. This may be related to social status of each gender and its effect on speech production in the context of class. Males have higher social and occupational position, while females are employed in low ranked positions in the society and this ends to unequal speech production which is overtly observed in the context of class.

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