

A Comparison Between Male and Female in Their Willingness to Communicate and Use of Socio-cognitive Strategies

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Willingness to communicate illustrates anyone's tendency and wish to commence a communication. Besides, socio-cognitive strategies are used when people want to interact with others and face some difficulties. The aim of this study was twofold. The first aim was to investigate the difference in willingness to communicate between Iranian male and female. The second aim was to distinguish the frequency of socio-cognitive strategies used by Iranian advance students based on their gender. To these ends, 32 advance learners (16 males and 16 females) were given the willingness to communicate questionnaire developed by MacIntyre, Baker, Clément, and Conrod (2001) and the socio-cognitive strategy use questionnaire. The range of the participants' age was 17-23 in both males and females. To analyze the result of the socio-cognitive strategies use, frequencies were counted. The result showed that although there were some similarities and differences between males and females while using socio-cognitive strategies, the differences were more in social strategies than cognitive ones. After collecting the data from the questionnaires and calculating the means of the two groups, an independent sample T-test was run to compute the significant differences between the two groups. The result of the willingness to communicate questionnaire revealed that males had more tendency in communication than females. Also, the result of the socio-cognitive strategy questionnaire showed that both groups are similar in cognitive strategy use, but they are different in social strategy use.

Keywords: willingness to communicate, socio-cognitive strategies, EFL learners, communication apprehension, Oxford's strategy classification system, Triadic Reciprocal Determinism

Introduction

Learning and teaching a foreign language has been always a controversial topic among linguists. There is no doubt that communication is conceived to be the fundamental part of human relationships. Many language-teaching professionals believed that in a real situation or out of an institutionalized context, motivation and language proficiency are not adequate for second language learners to commence or even participate in a conversation. According to Williams and Burden (1997), language teaching and learning processes are among the most important and intricate human endeavors. As the emphasis in L2 teaching has been shifting to communication, studies are needed to guide students' attitude toward communication in second language in different contexts. Willingness to communicate (hereafter WTC) is the learners' tendency to talk to others, which is a psychological issue. This tendency is low in some people and may decrease when the learner

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is in a foreign language setting (MacIntyre, 2007).

Furthermore, strategies are effective ways that the learner uses to perform academic tasks or to enhance social skills. There has been a shift in the area of language learning from teachers and teaching into learning and learners. Corresponding to this change, researches on the role of the learner has enhanced, exactly after the acceptance of a language approach, focusing on the communication (Demirel, 2009). The most outstanding interest in EFL/ESL has been the process of gathering new information on the field of individual differences affecting the process of learning second language. In learning an L2 language learner varies, with some individual differences such as aptitudes, demographic variables, affective variables, learning styles, and learning strategies (Cook, 2001). Among individual differences, the term “learner strategies” generally refers to learners’ consciously selected processes.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose is to re-examine the differences between males and females in their WTC and to compare males and female applying socio-cognitive strategies (SCSs)¹ in communication.

Procedure

To probe the probable difference in WTC and the kind of SCSs used by males and females, the participants were asked to fill up two questionnaires. They were 32 (male and female) advanced EFL at Iran Language Institute (ILI) in Sari. They were assured of the confidentiality and asked to mark the items that described them best. At the onset of the study, legal permission was taken from the academic authorities of ILI. The two groups of EFL students were asked to complete the WTC questionnaire based on their own experience in the real context which aimed to determine student’s tendency in for skills out of a classroom. Next, they were asked to fill up the SCS questionnaire to specify the frequency of social and cognitive strategy used in their WTC. After collecting the data, it was subjected to both descriptive and inferential statistics.

In order to probe the first null hypothesis stating that there is not any significant difference between male and female learners in their WTC, an independent sample *T*-test was run. The descriptive statistics of the participant in their WTC is presented in the following table.

Table 1

Descriptive Group Statistic of Male and Female Students in Their WTC

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
WTC	Male	95.00	11.41928	2.85482
	Female	85.00	15.20088	3.80022

As Table 1 represents, the mean of male students had the $X = 95$ with the $SD = 2.85$ and the female students had the $X = 85$ with the $SD = 3.80$. Indeed, WTC mean in male students was higher than the one in the female students. However, the mean difference by itself could not reveal the significant effect. In so doing, independent sample *T*-Test was run using SPSS 21. The results are presented in the following table.

¹ The socio-cognitive strategy was proposed by Albert Bandura in 1986. It posits that any learned behavior takes place in a social context with a dynamic and reciprocal interaction of the person, environment, and behavior.

Table 2

Independent Sample T-Test of Males and Female Students in Their WTC

		Levene's test for equality of variances		T-test for equality of means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Dif.	Std.	95% confidence interval of the difference	
									Lower	Upper
WTC	Equal variances assumed	0.808	0.376	6.1	30	0.000	29	4.75	19.2	38.70
	Equal variances not assumed			6.1	27.8	0.000	29	4.75	19.2	38.73

In the Levene's test for equality of variances, the sig. is 0.37 (greater than 0.05). It means that the variability in male's score is about the same as the female's score. Put scientifically, that the variability in males and females is not significantly different. At the T-test column, it indicates that with 95% confidence interval of the mean difference, the sig. value is 0.000, which is less than the level of significance ($P < 0.05$). The result indicates that there is a significant difference between male and female EFL learners in their WTC. So, the null-hypothesis has been rejected.

To probe the type of SCS employed by male and females' students, the data were collected and frequencies were counted. Figure 1 presents the social strategy employed by learners.

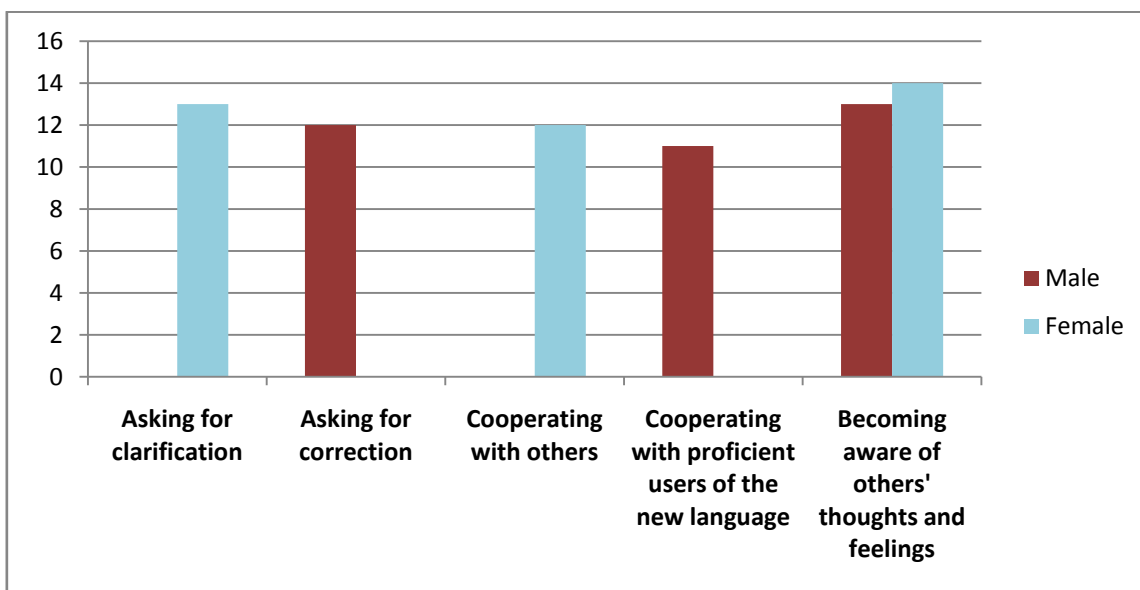


Figure 1. Social strategies used by male and female.

As indicated in Figure 1, asking for correction and cooperating with others were the most frequent social strategy type by male and asking for clarification, cooperating with proficient users of the new language, and emphasizing with others through becoming aware of others thought and feeling were the most frequent social strategy used by female learners.

The same procedure was conducted to uncover the cognitive strategies employed by the participants in their WTC. Figure 2 presents the frequency of cognitive strategy types.

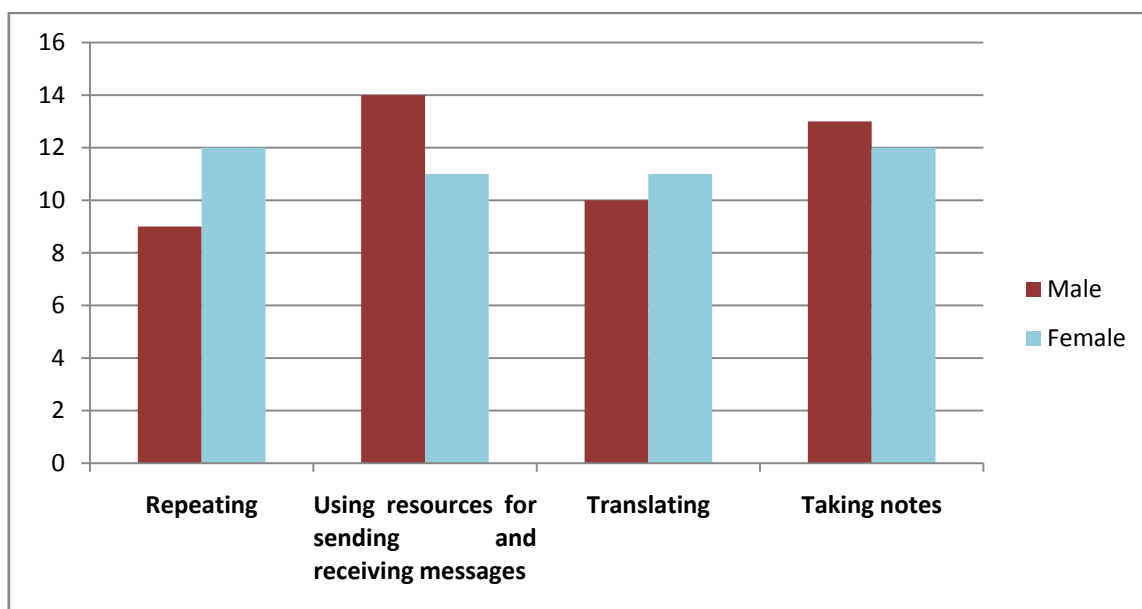


Figure 2. Cognitive strategies used by male and female.

As indicated in the above figure both groups practice through repetition, use resources for sending and receiving messages, analyze and reason through translating, and take notes in creating a structure for input and output. The findings revealed that there were both similarities and differences in applying the strategies in their WTC. However, it seems that more differences could be seen in cognitive strategies than social ones. To answer the last research question stating the most and the least SCT type, the data are summarized in the following table.

Table 3

The Frequency of Social and Cognitive Strategy of Iranian EFL Learners

Social strategy	Becoming aware of others' thoughts	27
	Asking for clarification	17
	Cooperation with others	17
	Asking for correction	15
	Cooperating with proficient users	15
	Developing cultural understanding	5
Cognitive strategy	Using resources for sending and receiving messages	25
	Taking notes	25
	Repeating	21
	Translating	21
	Getting the idea quickly	7
	Recognizing and using formulas and patterns	5
	Analyzing contrastively	5
	Highlighting	5
	Formally practicing with sounds and writing systems	2
	Recombining	2
	Practicing naturalistically	2
	Reasoning deductively	2
	Analyzing expressions	2
	Transferring	2
	Summarizing	2

As indicated in Table 3, the most social strategy used by male and female is becoming aware of others' thoughts and feelings when they want to show their emphasis with people in their willingness to communicate. However, the least social strategy applied by the participants is developing a cultural understanding for emphasizing with others. Additionally, the most cognitive strategies were using resources for sending and receiving messages and taking notes for creating structure in the learning process. Formally practicing with sounds and writing systems, recombining, practicing naturalistically, reasoning deductively, analysing expressions, transferring, and summarizing were the least cognitive strategies used by the subjects.

Conclusion

Females use more socio-cognitive strategies than males in their WTC, but, it cannot be concluded that females have more capability in communication. In the Iranian context, most common assumptions about the communication skills and competence of females and males vastly oversimplify the complex set of behaviors that constitute such competence. We grow up learning that some behaviors and attributes are male-identified (hence thought of as masculine) and some behaviors and attributes that are female-identified (feminine). We grow up watching males as a president, an ambassador, or even a teacher speaking in higher situational places. Thus, it causes more females' isolation and makes them less willing to communicate. Yet, being capable in communication is different from having adequate ability in performing a communication. Both genders have communication competence, but when it comes to performance, males tend to show more ability in performing communication. This controversy does not lie in the participant's cognitive strategies in their WTC. It can be concluded that the strategies learners use in their learning process are similar despite the main differences in employing a social strategy. A straight forward conclusion for the present study is that every student should provide an opportunity to participate in classroom discussions. Put it in other word, teachers should minimize perceptual mismatches and debilitating factors in language learning and maximize learning opportunities for students' WTC.

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