

A Socio-Pragmatic Analysis of Women's Speech in Naguib Mahfouz's Walk Palace

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Abstract

This study is a socio-pragmatic study that is related to the branch of linguistic anthropology (culture, language, and society). Thus, the speech of the main female characters of Walk Palace is analyzed and discussed qualitatively and quantitatively. Also, this study discusses the linguistic features that have been attributed to women's language, arguing that women could reach their needs through using language without more intellectual work to determine the linguistic features either verbally or non-verbally that should be used in a certain situation or context. That is why they depend on their social behaviors in the speech community that they acquire from the surrounding social communicative environment.

Introduction

In the late sixties the concept of ethnography of communication was introduced for the first time by Dell Hymes 1960s to study language more deeply from different views. Despite the fact that 'language and gender' has always been an interesting issue both in the academic field and in everyday life, especially when it is claimed that men and women differ in their linguistic behavior. With innumerable

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studies inspired by Robin Lakoff (1975) “Language and Woman’s Place”, it is still acceptable to present a gender-related language use in women's speech. This thesis identifies and classifies women’s speech features of Lakoff (1975) by using Hymes’s (1989) model, which includes many social factors that may influence women’s use of language in Mahfouz’s Walk Palace.

Naguib Mahfouz’s Background

Mahfouz "was the first Arabic language author awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature" (Allegretto-Diulio,2007, p.10). Mahfouz, who began writing when he was seventeen, wrote more than thirty novels, more than a hundred short stories, and more than two hundred articles. His first creative novel *hams āl-junwn (Whispered of Madness)* was written in 1938 and published in 1947. He wrote several novels such as, *āllays wā ālklāb (The Thief and the Dogs)* (1961), *al samman wa āl-kharif (Autumn Quail)* (1962), *thārthara āla ālniel (Small Talk on the Nile)* (1966). Also, he wrote *Miramar* (1967), and *āl thulāthya (1957-1965) (the Cairo Trilogy)*; *bayn āl qaṣrāyn, qaṣr āl shawq, sukkariya (Palace Walk, Palace of Desire, Sugar street)*. In his works Mahfouz has presented the middle class life in the neighborhoods of Cairo, since he “chooses his characters from the people who he knows.” (Salama, 2007b, p. 15)

Walk Palace:

Within Walk Palace Mahfouz presents a Middle Class merchant family during the Egyptian Revolution 1919 against the British colonialism. Allegretto-Diulio (2007, p.12) states

that the Cairo Trilogy “represents the part of Cairo, where the three-generational family saga that runs from WWI to the 1950s with the overthrow of King Farouk I.” The main characters are the parents; Al Sayyid Ahmed Abed Al Gawad and his wife Amina. In addition, they have two daughters Khadija and Aisha, and three sons; Yasin (a son from Al Sayyid Ahmed's first marriage), Fahmy and Kamal.

Literature Review

The studies of language and gender usually explain “the language or speech behavior of women in terms of a deficiency model” (Wadak & Benke, 1998, p. 90). As Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1997) classify in their study the reflection of women's and men's language as follows : “women's language has been said to reflect their conservatism, prestige, consciousness, upward mobility, insecurity, deference, nature, emotional expressivity, connectedness, sensitivity to others, solidarity. And men's language is heard as evincing their toughness, lack of affect, competitiveness, dependence, competence, hierarchy, control.”(p. 90)

In her book, Holmes (2001) divides this list into two groups. Firstly, those “linguistic devices which may be used for hedging or reducing the force of an utterance,” such as fillers, tag questions, and rising intonation on declaratives, and secondly, “features which may boost or intensify a proposition's force” (p. 287).

In addition, linguistic anthropology as part of the linguistic studies opens the way to many sociolinguists who are interested in the ethnography of speaking. Ethnography is a

reference that describes and analyzes culture and it is combined with linguistics that is interested in describing and analyzing language. (Keating, 2001)

Within ethnography of communication researchers aim to understand discourse from the view point of the society members culture as they focus on the way of speaking and language features within it (Bucholtz, 2003).

Theoretical Issues

Lakoff (1975) examines an interrelated group of features (on the lexical, syntactic, and pragmatic levels) to distinguish the speech of women, the way they use language, as her own method. Below are the ten features of women's speech;

1. Lexical Hedges or Fillers e.g. you know, sort of, well, you see.
2. Tag questions, e.g. she's very nice, is not she?
3. Rising intonation on declaratives, *e.g. it's really good!*
4. 'Empty' adjectives, e.g. divine, charming, cute.
5. Precise color terms, e.g. Magenta, aquamarine.
6. Intensifiers such as just and so, *e.g. I like him so much.*
7. 'Hypercorrect' grammar, e.g. consistent use of standard verb forms.
8. 'Super polite' forms, e. g. indirect requests, euphemisms.
9. Avoidance of strong swears words, *e.g. fudges, my goodness.*
10. Emphatic stress, e.g. it was a BRILLIANT performance.

In order to examine or analyze the speech events, Hymes (1989) provides a list of sixteen terms that could be combined in every letter of the term "SPEAKING" in which he indicates that these eight letters make it easy for human's memory to remember and memorize them:

- 1- **(S)** refers to both *Scene and Setting*.
- 2- **(P)** refers to the *Participants*; (who are speaking and who are they speaking to?)
- 3- **(E)** refers to the *Ends*.
- 4- **(A)** refers to the *Act Sequence*; This is divided into two points; 1. Message Form. 2. Message Content.
- 5- **(K)** refers to the *Key*:
- 6- **(I)** refers to the *Instrumentalities*;
 - Channel or mode of discourse (verbal, non-verbal, physical).
 - Forms of speech.
- 7- **(N)** refers to the *Norms*;
 - Norms of Interpretation.
 - Norms of Interaction.
- 8- **(G)** refers to the *Genres*:

By genres Hymes means "categories such as poem, myth, tale, proverb, riddle, curse, prayer, oration lecture, commercial, form letter, editorial, etc." (p.61).

Janet Homes (2001,p.12) shows four social factors that affect the speaker's utterance. She divides these social factors to the four elements (**Participants, Setting, Topic, and Function**). Beside these four elements of social factors, she states four social dimensions to analyze any dialog these are;

- A *social distance scale* deals with participant relationships. (Intimate (high solidarity) or distance (low solidarity)).

- A *Status scale* deals with participant relationships. (Superior (high status) or subordinate (low status)).
- A *Formality scale* is related to the setting or type of interaction. (Formal (high formality) or informal (low formality)).
- Two *Functional scales* are related to the purposes or topics of interaction. (Referential (high information content / low information content) or affective (low affective content / high affective content)).

Analysis:

Women with Women dialogs:

Dialog 1, Scene 24 (pp.397-400)

After knowing the arrival of three female strangers to visit Amina to see her daughter, Khadija rushes to her bed room to prepare herself and asks Aisha's help saying;

اختاري لي أحسن فستان.. أحسن فستان بلا استثناء.
āikhtāri li aḥsan fūstān... aḥsan fūstān bilā āistithna'.
"Pick out the best dress for me . . . absolutely the best one."

Aisha responds;

ما الداعي إلى هذا الإهتمام؟... زائرة؟! من؟!
mā āldā'ey ilay hadhā ālaihtimām?... zā'airh?! man?!
"Why are you in such a state? . . . Is there a visitor? Who?"

Khadija replies in a faint voice,

ثلاث سيدات... ثم وهي تضغط على مخارج اللفظ... غريبات.
thlāth sayidāt... thum wa hya taḍghaṭ 'aly makhārij āllafz... gharibāt
"Three ladies. . . ." With special emphasis, she added, " <u>Strangers</u>"

Aisha heads for the armoire to select an appropriate dress. She was laughing and saying,

فى الجوشى .. إن الفرحة يشم كالروائح الذكية ...

fī āljaw shay' .. inā ālfarah yusham kaārawa'h āldhakyah

"There's something in the air. . . . A wedding smells like pure perfume."

Then Aisha cries out in astonishment and happiness;

آه... هل يفهم من هذا أن... ياله من خبر!

āah ...hal yufham min hadhā ān...yālahu min khabar!

"*Oh!* . . . Should we understand from this that . . . *Oh*, what news!"

Khadija says:

أف... أف... ملعون الذى أرسلهن!

āuf...āuf...mal'awn ālladhy ārsalahn!

"My, oh my . . . I could curse the man who sent them."

She adds laughing;

لا تدعى له حتى نتأكد أنه من نصيبنا... أه ياربي كم أن قلبى يدق!

lāa tad'āy lahu hatta natakad ānhu min našibana...āh yārabyi kam ān qalbyi yadaq!

"Do not pray for him till we're sure he's ours. . . . Oh, how my heart is pounding. . . ."

At the end after Aisha finishes her work Khadija begins to murmur,

أحسنت يداك، منظر حسن أليس كذلك؟... هذه خديجة حقاً... جلت حكمتك يارب

āhsant yadāk, manẓar hasan ālays kadhlk?...hazih Khadija haqān...jallt hikmatk yārab.

"Bless your hands. I look good, do not I? This is the true Khadija. .. O Lord, may Your wisdom be exalted.

In the previous dialog the two sisters are talking about the outfit of Khadija and the three ladies who are visiting their house. Thus, according to the SPEAKING characteristics of Dell Hymes; 1. *The setting*; is in the girls' bedroom during the usual coffee hour. 2. *The scene*; is a casual enthusiastic conversation 3. *The discourse participants* are Khadija the addresser and Aisha the addressee. 4. *Ends*; -Intention: Khadija's first utterance indicates that she wants to inform Aisha about the importance of the event as well as to reflect her happiness and anxiety of appearing unbeautiful in front of the ladies. -Effect; Khadija successfully grabs the attention and the help of her sister Aisha, who looks surprised and happy. 5. *Act Sequence*; the talk is supportive and full of laughter notes and fun. 6. *Key*, as illustrated before, the key refers to the tone, the spirit and the manner of the discourse .In like a manner, the tone of the speech is funny and friendly which appears by both verbally and non-verbally (Aisha's laughter and Khadija's intonation). 7. *Instrumentalities*; in transmitting the message both the speaker and the receiver use only oral and paralinguistic cues such as gestures and intonation. 8. *Norms of Interpretation and Interaction*; this excerpt shows the norms of turn taking and how the two sisters interact together and share understanding in a good acceptable way. 9. *Genres*; this conversation shows optimistic and hopeful expectations about the future of Khadija's engagement to someone.

Now at this level, it is important to notice that due to the intimate relationship between the two sisters, and the importance of the information they are dealing with, this type of social circumstances can be classified according to Janet Holmes's social dimensions under the *social distance scale* (intimate high solidarity), the *formality scale* (informal low formality) and the *functional scale* (referential high information scale).

Moving forward to the characteristics of women's speech, the utterance "Oh! "أه... هل يفهم من هذا أن... ياله من خير!"

. . Should we understand from this that . . . *Oh*, what news!" that Aisha utters to respond to what has just been said by Khadija, reveals the emotion of surprise and it convinces Khadija that Aisha is really happy of hearing such good news. Over all that, "اه" and "يا" "Oh" are identified as **emphatic stresses** that strengthen the meaning of the utterance. In addition Khadija uses this device to reflect her anger, worry, complaint and dissatisfaction of the engagement ways and how the ladies will look at her in every way saying "اف...اف" which can be classified as **lexical fillers**. As well deep inside her mind Khadija was unsure and hesitant of their opinion about her since she thinks that she is not beautiful and has a big noise.

Also, Khadija emphasizes the word "غريبات\strangers" which is a **raising intonation** here and also can be an **emphatic stress** that reflects her worry, happiness and confusion at the same time. As well as the use of the utterance "the best dress ...*absolutely* the best dress" here through repeating the noun phrase and strengthening it with the use of the **intensifier** "absolutely" emphasize the meaning of the utterance itself and the seriousness of the whole event. Moreover, it reflects her intention of wearing the best and appropriate dress and only the best one.

Again, within "اه...ياربي / Oh my god" Khadija shows her emotion and she uses as usual the polite and soft words. In this regard, it is very important to note that the use of the device of **avoidance of strong swear words** reflects her social dimensions such as the religious bringing up and her polite behavior.

The intensive use of **tag questions** by Khadija reflects the potential negative criticism of herself and her family. Both the tag question "I look good, do not I? / منظر حسن أليس كذلك" and the following **intensifier** "really / حقا" consider as signs of her hesitation and the lack of confidence. Likewise, "really" is a device for emphasizing the meaning of the utterance. Thus,

Khadija is trying hard to convince herself of the beautiful face she has. Undoubtedly, the tag here is soft and serious and needs a response of confirmation from the hearer. At the end, the use of the **empty adjective** "الروائح الذكية" reflects the happy feelings of Aisha toward her sister through using an adjectival phrase that considers a metaphor.

The mutual knowledge between the two sisters helps in continuing and succeeding the conversation. Meriel Bloor and Thomas Bloor (2007, pp. 17-19) assure that the participants can lose contact and their conversation will break down in case, there is no shared knowledge of communication. This mutual knowledge is innate that "everyone absorbs the established values of their own social groupings and follows the practices they have learnt (more or less unconsciously) in matters such as age, authority, gender, race, and so on." And, these values serve as their ideology. Actually, this mutual knowledge will appear several times in the following dialogs not only in women's dialogs with women but with men too, and if it is not existing women will try hard to push the subject through using definite features of speech.

Women with Men Dialogs:-

- **Dialog 2; Scene 20** : (pp.389-390)

When Amina tells her husband about Fahmy's intention to marry Maryam, he gets angry. Here, she produces many features of 'Women Language' in the following context;

سيدي يعرف جارنا الطيب السيد محمد رضوان..؟

sāidy ya 'arf jāranā ālṭāyb ālsāid muhammed rḍwan...?

"Sir, you know our good neighbor Muhammad Ridwan?"

She continues:

راجل فاضل مثل سيدي واسرة كريمة وجيران ولا كل الجيران...

rājul fāḍil mithl sāidy wa āusrātūn karimh wa jirān wlā kul āljiran...

"He is a fine man like you, sir. It's a good family and they're

exceptional neighbors...”

She adds: With trembling voice,

ليس إلا انه يتسأل، مجرد تساؤل يا سيدي و الامر لك...

lāys ālāa ānhu yātsāl, mūjrad tāsāwl ya sāidy wa ālāmr lāk...

"All he did was asking. It was just a question, sir, with the decision left entirely to you. . . .",

لا تجشم نفسك نفسك مشقة الغضب يا سيدي.. و لكنه جاني بحسن فرأيت أن أعرض الأمر عليك، و مادام هذا هو رأيك سأبلغه إياه.

lāa tājšhm nāfsk mshāqt ālghaḍb ya sāidy.. wa laknhu jāny bihusn farāyt ān ā'arḍ ālāmr 'alyk, wa mādām hādhā hwa rāyk sāūblghh ayāh..

"Do not burden yourself, sir,..... He came to me with the best of intentions; so I thought I would present the matter to you. Since this is what you think, I'll tell him.

First, according to the model of SPEAKING: 1. *The setting* is at home in Al-Sayyid Ahmed's room. 2. *The Scene*; is the feeling of uncertainty. 3. *The participants*: the addresser is Amina, and the speaker and addressee is Al-Sayyid Ahmed. 4. *Ends*: -- *Intention* is to present and try to convince her husband about Fahmy's intention to marry Maryam.—*Effect*, her husband gets angry and refuses such a rude request. 5-*Act Sequence*: The content of the speech is declarative and serious from his side, but it is unassertive and soft in tone from her side. 6-*Key*: the tone is sharp and sarcastic from his side, where as the tone is formal and soft from her side. 7-*Instrumentalities*: The channel of communication is oral and serious. 8- *Norms of Interpretation and Interaction*: It shows woman subjection to her husband decision and how much she fears his strong reactions. Because she grows up in her father's house who teaches her how to accept what her husband orders or says without interjection. According to Slama (2007a, p.98) "Amina is a model of applying thoughts and principles she

learnt in her father's house". 9- *Genres*: This scene implies that the parents suffer the actions of the children, and this dialog is a type of affirmative dialogs.

Second, according to Holmes's Social dimensions: This is a mix between the *formality scale* which shows formal ways of speaking to her husband instead of using informal styles of talking and *status scale* that shows his superior and her subordinate role.

Amina uses **lexical hedges** such as "رأيت/I thought" and "يعرف/you know" to reflect her hesitation and uncertain. She uses these linguistic devices to weaken the form of her utterance, in this situation where Amina is in fact perfectly certain of what she is saying. She uses hedges "as an apology for making an assertion at all." (Lakoff, 2004, p.79)

Further, Amina respects her husband more than usual that is appeared in the way she uses the title **super polite form** "سيدي" four times just in three sentences. If anyone does not know the relationship between them as a husband and wife, he might think that they are a master and a servant. Despite that Amina uses the **adjectives** "الطيب / الفاضل" to describe their neighbor, but in fact she does not know the man well.

Since, Amina speaks in a very soft and polite form, as the writer narrates by using the word "murmured", it can follow the super polite characteristic of Lakoff's (1975) women's speech features. She also uses strong **intensifier** "إلا" to softness her speech and gives the control of talk and decision to her husband or master as she calls him. So far, the research explains that many types of women's speech used by the characters of the Trilogy in women with women dialogs have different jobs in women with men dialogs, such as hedges and polite forms. Beside that women's use of such linguistic features depend on the social factors and dimensions of the speech events.

Conclusion:

Hymes' speaking factors help in knowing the techniques which control the speech as a whole or the turn taking actions. Obviously in the study, some linguistic features work as a sign for stop talking and encouraging the addressee to respond. Women's communicative competence helps them to save their turn and use the right moment of speaking and valuing the turn-taking either intentionally or not.

One more result, in the previous discussion chapter the researcher examines the participants (speaker and addressee) occupational status as a mother, a daughter, a husband, a son, or a police officer beside the settings and ends (effect – intention) of the conversation elements have great influences on how women control the other elements of the SPEAKING model (norms – instrumentalities – act sequences – key – genres).

Hedging is a sign of their lack of confidence, and sometimes is a sign of trying to engage the addressee in the conversation to be more affective. Also, the use of adjectives in Walk Palace can be divided into two types: the complimentary adjectives (positive adjectives) and negative adjectives. In spite of women in this era prefer to intensively use super polite forms (titles) and intensifiers especially with their husbands. On the other hand, they do not use a large number of rising intonations on declarative or tag questions. In the Arab community, giving respect titles is a strong sign of social good behavior of women during the 19th c. between a wife and her husband because their relation is very sacred.

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