

Investigating the Relationship Between Gender and Different Strategies of Expressing Complaint in English and Persian Films

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Abstract

The main objective of the present study is to elaborate the contrasts between males and females in their use of different strategies of complaint in English and Persian and ascertain the degree to which independent variables like gender and language affect the application of these strategies during informal communication. Furthermore, it offers comparable corpora which provide a good basis for cross-linguistic comparison of distribution of these functional strategies within the context of Persian and English movies. Therefore, the focus of this study is on the implementation of different strategies of 'complaint' by English and Persian males and females in accordance with Schaefer's classification of strategies of complaint (1982). This research targets at figuring out differences between English and Persian males and females in relation to the application of the previously-mentioned strategies. In addition, in order to gather the most authentic data, four English and four Persian films, dealing with family and social theme, are analyzed with great care. Concerning gender dyads, both in English and Persian, some significant differences are detected. It is of significance to note that with regard to strategies of complaint, cross-language, Persian males and females implement complaining strategies more than English ones, while cross-gender, both in English and Persian, males use these strategies more.

Keywords: Complaint, dyad, strategies of complaint, complaint in English & Persian.

1. Introduction

It seems that every language develops a set of communicative utterances that speakers use regularly to perform a variety of functions, such as: apologies, requests, complaints, refusals, compliments, and others. In this study, the exploration of the relationship between gender and the speech act of complaint is under investigation. In this regard, to limit the area of investigation, the researcher selects the framework of Schaefer's.

1.1 Schaefer's classification of the strategies of "complaint"

Schaefer (1982) classified the discourse components of the complaint into the following categories:

a) **Opener:** an utterance initiating the speech act set but giving no information about the wrong, e.g.:

“Listen, Jimmy.”

b) **Orientation:** an utterance giving the speaker's intent in initiating the complaint but with no detail, e.g.:

“I've been meaning to talk to you about the rubbish you've been leaving outside.”

c) **Act statement:** an utterance which states the problem directly, e.g.:

“This is the fourth time this month you've been really late.”

d) **Justification of the speaker:** an utterance explaining why the speaker is making the complaint and the effects of the wrong on the speaker, e.g.:

“...because I ...you’re making me miss lectures by turning up late.”

e) **Justification of the addressee:** an utterance giving a reason or excuse for the addressee’s having committed the wrong or considering the effect on the addressee, e.g.:

“Is this time particularly difficult for you?”

f) **Remedy:** an utterance calling for some corrective action, e.g.:

“This is going to have to stop.”

g) **Threat:** an utterance stating an action the speaker might take, depending on the reaction of the addressee, e.g.:

“I, err..... could take it higher than just talking to you.”

h) **Closing:** an utterance made by the speaker to conclude the complaint set, e.g.:

“Ok, thanks.”

i) **Valuation:** an utterance expressing the feeling of the speaker about either the addressee or the problem, e.g.:

“It’s really disgusting.”

1.2 Previous work on “complaint”

Olshtain and Weinbach (1985) studied the speech act of complaint as produced by native and non-native speakers of Hebrew. The researchers developed five categories of speech acts that were based on severity of the complaint for a specific scenario, in which one colleague had waited for another colleague, who arrived late to a scheduled appointment. The five categories were: 1) below the level of reproach: “No harm done, let’s meet some other time”; 2) disapproval: “It’s a shame that we have to work faster now”; 3) complaint: “You are always late and we have less time to do the

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job”; 4) accusation and warning: “Next time, don’t expect me to sit here waiting for you”; 5) threat: “If we don’t finish the job today, I’ll have to discuss it with the boss” (p. 202). They found that both groups, regardless of their first language, made use of each strategy, while – at least for this particular scenario – tending to prefer the middle of the scale – disapproval, complaint and accusation – rather than the extremes of the continuum (below the level of reproach and threat), avoiding being either too soft or too confrontational.

Another study was done by Boxer (1993a) who studied 295 interlocutors, producing 533 indirect complaints. An indirect complaint is defined as a negative evaluation wherein the addressee is not held responsible for the perceived offence (i.e., griping); the expression of dissatisfaction to an interlocutor about a speaker himself / herself or someone / something that is not present. Indirect complaints are frequently employed in an attempt to establish rapport or solidarity between interlocutors (pp. 2-3). Chapter two of his paper “Complaining and Commiserating (1993a)” describes three types of IC (Indirect Complaint) themes (personal, impersonal, other – trivial) followed by six types of IC responses (nothing or topic switch, question, contradiction, joke/teasing, advice/lecture, commiseration). Then, it focuses on what the learner needs to know about complaining and commiserating (147-166). For example, NNSs need to know that commiserating with complaints is important – being supportive. This builds solidarity.

Moreover, Murphy and Neu (1996) applied the speech act set to complaints produced by American and Korean speakers of English. The authors identified the semantic formula as 1) an explanation of purpose, 2) a complaint, 3) a justification, and 4) a candidate solution: request. They found a high correlation between native and non-native speakers when producing three of the four speech act components – explanation of purpose, justification, and candidate solution: request. Native and non-native speakers differed in the production of the second component, the complaint. The American subjects produced a complaint in each instance, i.e., “I think, uh, it’s my opinion the grade was a little low”, whereas most Korean subjects tended to produce a criticism, i.e., “But you just only look at your point of view and uh, you just didn’t recognize my point” (p. 200). Such criticism was reported to have the potential of offending the interlocutor or shutting down the interaction in an American context.

2. Methodology

2.1 Materials

The English films, used in this study, are as follows: “The Nurse Betty”, “The Family Man”, “The talented Mr. Ripley”, and “The Father of the Bride”, and the Persian movies are: “Showkæran”, “Ghermez”, “Do-Zæn”, and “?Ab-o-Atæsh”.

The corpus for the study contains complaining utterances that are generated by male and female movie players. Movies, rather than written texts, are

chosen because they have the potentiality of offering utterances improvised by interlocutors within the context of informal relationship.

Furthermore, the utterances are contrastively studied in order to 1) figure out how the patterns of distribution of complaining strategies differ among different dyads, and 2) specify the tendency among males and females to select a specific strategy. In this study, English and Persian movies are selected randomly with the social and family theme. All the movies are contemporary ones, focusing on family and social issues, representing the two cultures.

In other words, they are typical examples of these two societies, presenting the authentic and enriched sources for analyzing the complaining utterances.

2.2 Data collection

This study followed on-participant observation research which was predicated on the ground of qualitative research design where the investigator used worksheet to record what was in progress in movies. By non-participant, it is meant that the researcher is not involved in the study; rather she just scrutinizes the on-going behavior. Having watched the movies, the researcher identified the complaining utterances. Then she applied the worksheet and pen and inserted these utterances into the worksheet table and classified them according to different strategies and sub-strategies. Table 1. represents the classification of strategies and sub-strategies of the speech act of complaint.

Table 1. Classification of strategies & sub-strategies of ‘complaint’

Strategies	Sub-strategies	Examples
1. Opener		Listen, Jimmy.
2. Orientation		I've been meaning to talk to you about the rubbish you've been leaving outside.
3. Act statement	a) Interrogative	Why are you late?
	b) Declarative	This is the fourth time this month you've been really late.
4. Justification of the speaker		You're making me miss lectures by turning up late.
5. Justification of the addressee		Is this time particularly difficult for you?
6. Remedy		This is going to have to stop.
	a) Declarative statement	You've got to move it.
	b) Interrogative	What're you doing to do about this mess here?
	c) Imperative	Don't put your rubbish in my garden.
	d) Request	Can you please clear it away?
	e) Wish	I hope you can do better in future.
	f) Suggestion	Should we clean the rubbish together?
	g) Advice	It would be better if you can bring John Punctually.
7. Threat		I could take it higher than just talking to you.
8. Closing		Ok., thanks
9. Valuation		It's really disgusting.

3. Data Analysis

The first subsection aimed at presenting the frequency of the implementation of strategies of complaint by Persian and English males and females. To do so, the frequencies of using different strategies of complaint by Persian and English males and females were counted in accordance with Schaefer's classification of strategies of complaint (1982). The second subsection dealt with the result of the chi-square for analyzing the data. The results of the analysis of data have been shown in related tables. Furthermore, the dyads used by Persian and English males and females were divided into four groups (female-male, female-female, male-male, male-female) and the utterances were codified; for example, M-M = 1, M-F = 2, F-M = 3, F-F = 4, while 'M' stood for 'male' and 'F' stood for 'female'. Then, the frequency of dyads used for different strategies were obtained. Table 2. represents the comparison of distribution of different strategies of complaint among different gender dyads in English and Persian.

Table 2. Comparison of distribution of complaining strategies among different gender dyads in English & Persian

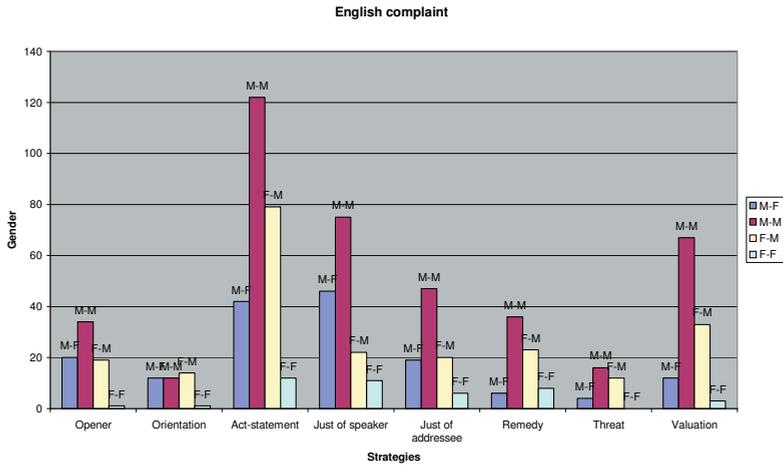
G S	Gender dyads in English				Total	Gender dyads in Persian				Total
	M-F	M-M	F-M	F-F		M-F	M-M	F-M	F-F	
Opener	20	34	19	1	74	29	22	29	7	87
Orientation	12	12	14	1	39	10	3	7	1	21
Act-Statement	42	122	79	12	255	200	94	202	36	532
Justification of speaker	46	75	22	11	154	119	39	132	20	310
Justification of addressee	19	47	20	6	92	70	8	33	1	112
Remedy	6	36	23	8	73	89	32	91	26	238
Threat	4	16	12	0	32	31	13	26	8	78

S: Strategy

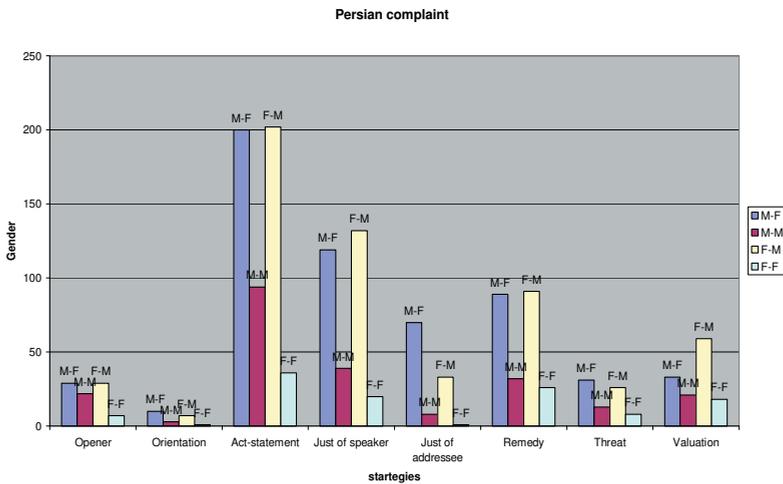
G: Gender

The total number of complaining utterances produced by English males and females were 836 and those produced by Persian males and females were 1509. Totally, 2345 utterances have been investigated in this study.

Graph 1. Comparison of distribution of complaining strategies among different gender dyads in English



Graph 2. Comparison of distribution of complaining strategies among different gender dyads in Persian



4.Results and Discussion

In this subsection, concerning the distribution of complaining strategies among different gender dyads, the findings of the study displayed interesting results.

However, the results of the analysis of data have been divided into three sections, namely, ‘same-language cross-gender’ section, ‘cross-language same-gender’ section, and ‘same-language same-gender’ section, and they have been rescanned to treat the following null hypotheses of the study.

4.1 ‘Same-language cross-gender’ section

a)There is no significant difference between Persian males and females with respect to the use of strategies of complaint in terms of patterns of distribution.

Table 3. Comparison of X² between Persian (males & females) and also English (males & females) with respect to the use of complaining strategies

S \ G	Persian Males	Persian Females	X ²	P≤	English Males	English Females	X ²	P≤
	Σ	Σ			Σ	Σ		
	Opener	51	36	2.58	NS	54	20	15.62
Orientation	13	8	1.19	NS	24	15	2.07	NS
Act-statement	294	238	5.89	.05	164	91	20.89	.05
Justification of speaker	158	152	.11	NS	121	33	50.28	.05
Justification of addressee	78	34	17.28	.05	66	26	17.39	.05
Remedy	121	117	.06	NS	42	31	1.65	NS
Threat	44	34	1.28	NS	20	12	2.00	NS
Valuation	54	77	4.03	.05	79	36	16.07	.05

The findings of the above table showed that Persian males used two complaining strategies including act-statement and justification of addressee more since they liked to state the problem directly and gave reasons for the addressee's having committed the wrong. Unlike Persian males, Persian females used more valuation on account of the fact that they liked to express their feelings about either the addressee or the problem. They couldn't hide their feelings while complaining; consequently, the first null hypothesis regarding act-statement, justification of addressee as well as valuation was dismissed.

In addition, according to the above table, statistically, no meaningful difference has been observed between the two groups of Persian males and females in relation to the use of complaining strategies containing opener, orientation, justification of speaker, remedy, and threat.

b) There is no significant difference between English males and females with respect to the use of strategies of complaint in terms of patterns of distribution.

By administrating the chi-square formula which targeted at providing decisive answer to the question whether the differences between English males and females in accordance with using the complaining strategies were so tangible or not, it was clear that the X^2 values attributed to opener, act-statement, justification of speaker, justification of addressee, and valuation were far more than the minimum value of X^2 at .05 level of significance; therefore, the second null hypothesis could not be verified and it indicated

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that English males liked to initiate the speech act of complaint more than English females. Also, they liked to state the problem directly, explain why they were making the complaint, justify themselves, and give some reasons for the addressee's having committed the wrong. Hence, they liked to express their feelings, while complaining, about either the addressee or the problem.

4.2 'Cross-language same-gender' section

c) There is no significant difference between English and Persian males with respect to the use of strategies of complaint in terms of patterns of distribution.

Table 4. Comparison of X^2 between English & Persian males and also English & Persian females with respect to the use of complaining strategies

G S	Persian Males	English Males	X^2	P \leq	Persian Females	English Females	X^2	P \leq
	Σ	Σ			Σ	Σ		
Opener	51	54	.08	NS	36	20	4.57	.05
Orientation	13	24	3.27	NS	8	15	2.13	NS
Act- statement	294	164	36.9	.05	238	91	65.6	.05
Justification of speaker	158	121	4.90	.05	152	33	76.5	.05
Justification of addressee	78	66	1.00	NS	34	26	1.06	NS
Remedy	121	42	38.2	.05	117	31	49.9	.05
Threat	44	20	9.00	.05	34	12	10.5	.05
Valuation	54	79	4.69	.05	77	36	14.8	.05

The results of the chi-square in the above table have been represented that there was a meaningful difference between Persian males and English males because Persian males had a greater tendency to use act-statement, justification of speaker, remedy and threat than English males whereas English males tended to use valuation more than Persian males. In other words, Persian males, while complaining, liked to state the problem directly, explain why they are making the complaint, justify themselves and state the corrective action for terminating the complaint more than English males, and in the last resort, they threatened the addressee to observe his/her reaction. Another noteworthy difference was that English males, while complaining, tended to express their feelings, about either the addressee or the problem, and used the expressions like “It’s disgusting or I hate you” more than Persian males.

However, no significant difference has been found between Persian and English males in the implementation of three complaining strategies, namely, opener, orientation and justification of addressee.

a) There is no significant difference between English and Persian females in the use of strategies of complaint in terms of patterns of distribution.

According to table 4., it was demonstrated that there was a significant difference between Persian and English females in the implementation of complaining strategies such as opener, act-statement, justification of speaker, remedy, threat, and valuation. The results indicated that the

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observed values of X^2 were far more than the minimum level of X^2 at .05 level of significance; consequently, the fourth null hypothesis regarding these six complaining strategies was rejected. It led to the fact that Persian females were more argumentative and quarrelsome than English females; so, in this ground, the culture and language have been two leading factors among females regarding the use of complaining strategies.

Nevertheless, there was no difference between English and Persian females in the use of complaining strategies such as opener and Justification of addressee.

4.3 'Same-language same-gender' section

The following table represents the frequencies and calculations of the chi-square of complaining strategies within gender dyads.

Table 5. Comparison of complaining strategies among gender dyads in English & Persian

S \ G	English Males		English Females		Persian Males		Persian Females	
	X^2	$P \leq$	X^2	$P \leq$	X^2	$P \leq$	X^2	$P \leq$
Opener	3.63	NS	16.2	.05	.961	NS	13.4	NS
Orientatio n	.000	NS	11.2	.05	3.76	NS	4.50	NS
Act- statement	39.0 2	.05	49.3	.05	38.2	.05	115. 7	.05
Justificatio n of speaker	6.95	.05	3.66	NS	40.5	.05	82.5	NS
Justificatio n of addressee	11.8	.05	7.53	.05	49.2	.05	30.1	.05
Remedy	21.4	.05	7.25	.05	26.8	.05	36.1	NS
Threat	7.20	.05	0	NS	7.36	.05	9.52	NS
Valuation	38.2	.05	25.0	.05	2.66	NS	21.8	.05

As table 5. showed, the calculated value of X^2 of complaining strategies including act-statement, justification of speaker, justification of addressee, remedy, threat, and valuation, were far more than the expected value of X^2 at .05 level of significance; consequently, this indicated that English males used these complaining strategies more while communicating with 'males' than with 'females'. In the same way, this table indicated that English females implemented complaining strategies comprising opener, orientation, act-statement, justification of speaker, justification of addressee, remedy and valuation, more while interacting with 'males' than with 'females'. So, in this ground, it can be concluded that it is more frequent for a female to complain when the addressee is a male.

The results of the chi-square in the above table showed that there were significant differences among Persian males, in the application of strategies such as act-statement, justification of speaker, justification of addressee, remedy, and threat when they complained to females, in comparison to males.

By the same token, the observed values of X^2 , derived from complaining strategies among Persian females, showed that Persian females implemented all complaining strategies more while interacting with 'males' than with 'females'. Hence, it could be concluded that, contrary to English, in Persian, the opposite gender dyads used complaining strategies more; that was to say, Persian males applied complaining strategies more while interacting with 'females' than with 'males', and correspondingly, Persian females applied complaining strategies more when they complained to males than to females.

5. Conclusion

By extending the area of comparison across the ‘same-language cross-gender’ section, relating to the implementation of complaining strategies, it is verified that the application of opener, act-statement, justification of speaker, justification of addressee, and valuation are more widespread among English males than females. In addition, in this regard, Persian males apply act-statement and justification of addressee, while complaining, more than females, whereas valuation is a complaining strategy which is found to be more prevalent among Persian females than males.

Moreover, studies within the ‘cross-language same-gender’ section show that Persian males apply complaining strategies such as act-statement, justification of speaker, remedy, and threat more than English males while English males use valuation more than Persian males. Furthermore, it is verified that the applications of complaining strategies comprising opener, act-statement, justification of speaker, remedy, threat, and valuation are more widespread among Persian females than English females.

In consistent with ‘same-language same-gender’ section, it is noticed that English males implement complaining strategies such as act-statement, justification of speaker, justification of addressee, remedy, threat, and valuation more while complaining to ‘males’ than to ‘females’, whereas Persian males, besides the strategy of valuation, apply them more while complaining to ‘females’ than to ‘males’. In addition, this fact is noticeable that Persian females use all complaining strategies more while complaining to ‘males’ than to ‘females’. By the same token, it is worthy to note that English females implement opener, orientation, act-

statement, justification of addressee, remedy, and valuation more while complaining to 'males' than to 'females'.

In sum, some noteworthy differences occurred among males and females, both in Persian and English. Finally, in relation to the use of complaining strategies, both in English and Persian, males are more prone to apply these strategies than females in cross-gender part. In addition, in cross-language section, it is obvious that, among males, Persian males apply complaining strategies more than English ones, and among females, Persian females implement these strategies more than English ones. So, it is concluded that in Persian, both, males and females, complain more.

6. Suggestions and Pedagogical Implications

The findings of this study can be of help to those who are involved in cross-sectional fields of study and turn a leaf in modern linguistic debate over transactional as well as intersectional norms of communication in Persian and English. Translators can find the results of this study useful by becoming fully aware of nuances among complaining strategies in English and Persian. In addition, the findings of the present study yield useful and effective suggestions and pedagogical implications to be considered by language researchers, EFL teachers, EFL learners, text-book writers, curriculum designers, sociolinguists, and sociologists. Moreover, studies of complaining strategies broaden the readers' minds and lead them to pay attention to modern methodological trends in language teaching and encourage them to apply or learn methods that not only put the emphasis on semantic linguistic knowledge but also concentrate simultaneously on expanding pragmatic linguistic knowledge in order to enhance their language proficiency.

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Furthermore, the findings of this study can be used for awakening the readers to the politeness principles and giving hints to the learners how these norms of politeness vary in different cultures. It is pedagogically beneficial for teachers and learners to know how they can operationalize the authentic language including the previously-mentioned strategies within different contexts with respect to particularities of the situation. Failure to use the proper strategy not only can be a violation against conversational principles but also is deemed as a departure from politeness principles.

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Appendix I

English Film-Scripts

Complaint: ‘The Nurse Betty’ film-script

1. Charlie: Are you out of your mind? (valuation)
2. Wesley: Why did you shoot him? (act-statement)
3. Roy: You can’t do this, (justification of addressee)
4. Roy: I’m the press, I have rights!! (justification of speaker)
5. Charlie: There were five, damn it! (valuation)
6. Ellen: Shut up, Merle. (remedy-imperative)
7. Ballard: That’s the dumbest thing I’ve ever heard. (valuation)
8. Charlie: Don’t you talk about Betty like this. (remedy-imperative)
9. Charlie: You never use that word again, got it? (remedy-imperative)
10. Betty: Why are you doing this to me? (act-statement)
11. Wesley: You believed that dumbshit trucker. (justification of addressee)
12. Charlie: You need to remember who you are talking to... (threat)
13. George: Why am I doing this to you? Isn’t this what you wanted? (act-statement)
14. George: You drove me nuts with this for three days! (justification of addressee)
15. Rosa: Why isn’t anybody helping us? (act-statement)
16. Rosa: Hey, you little shit! (opener)
17. Rosa: If I had a gun, I’d shoot you right now! (threat)
18. Rosa: Are you crazy? (valuation)
19. Betty: Listen to me! If I don’t do this, he’s dead! (justification of speaker)
20. Betty: It was disgusting. (valuation)

Persian Film-Scripts

Complaint: 'Do-Zæn' film-script

1. Hasæn: bebin..(opener)
2. Hasæn: ?æge ye dæfeye dige ?æz ?in qælæta bekoni mi-koshæmet. (threat)
3. Hasæn: ?æge ye dæfeye dige bahash bebinæmet ba ?in suræteto birixt mi-konæm...(threat)
4. Freshteh: mærdikeye ?ævæzi...(valuation)
5. Ro?ya: bæche por-ru.....(valuation)
6. Hasæn: ?oy ?ævæzi...(valuation)
7. Hasæn: mæno ?æz ?otobus piyadeh mi-koni?....(act-statement)
8. Freshteh: hey behesh hichi ne-migæm, por-ru-tær mi-shi..(act-statement)
9. Ro?ya: to divune?i! (valuation)
10. Pedær: boro ?un væsayeले sab-mordæto jæm kon. (remedy-imperative)
11. Freshteh: boro dæst ?æz sære mæn bærdar. (remedy-imperative)
12. Ahmæd: ?esme shoma hæmishe tu xoneye ma da?va rah mi-?ændaze..
..(justification of addressee)
13. Pedær: mæn ?emshæb hær doye ?ina-ro mikoshæm....(threat)
14. Pedær: bebor ?un sedaye næhseto.....(remedy-imperative)
15. Hasæn: næ.... mæn gonah-kar nistæm...(justification of speaker)
16. Hasæn: bæ-r-migærdæm..... mi-koshæmetun....(threat)
17. Freshteh: mæsxæræs,.....mæno mi-bære mi-yare.....(valuation)
18. Ahmæd: hesabesho mi-resæm.....(threat)
19. Ahmæd: ?un dustet.....Ro?ya.....mæn ?æz ?un bædæm mi-yad..(valuation)
20. Freshteh: ?æz ?in xone motenæfferæm.(valuation)

Appendix II

Table 6. Comparison of distribution of subordinate complaining strategies among different gender dyads in English

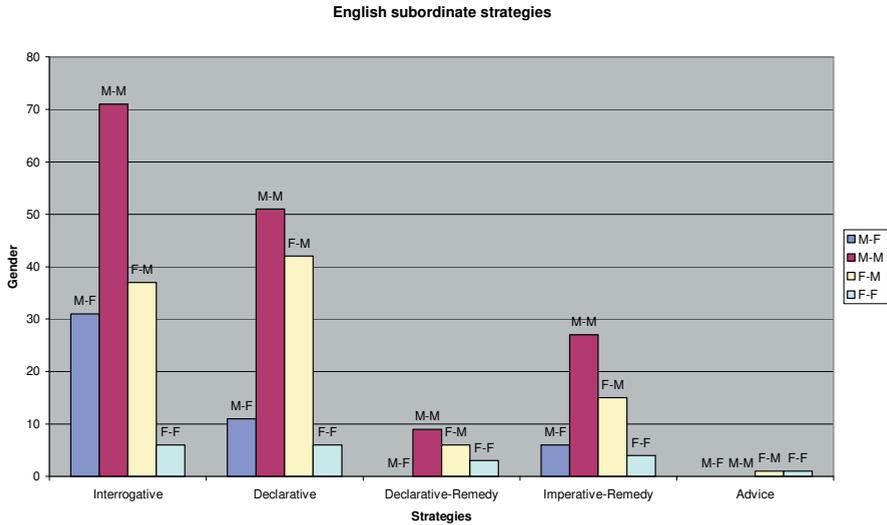
G \ S	M-F	M-M	F-M	F-F	Total
Interrogative	31	71	37	6	145
Declarative	11	51	42	6	110
Declarative-remedy	0	9	6	3	18
Imperative	6	27	15	4	52
Advice	0	0	1	1	2
Total	48	158	101	20	327

Table 7. Comparison of distribution of subordinate complaining strategies among different gender dyads in Persian

G \ S	M-F	M-M	F-M	F-F	Total
Interrogative	120	58	118	13	309
Declarative	80	37	85	23	225
Declarative-remedy	4	2	6	1	13
Imperative	82	29	80	23	214
Advice	3	0	4	2	9
Total	289	126	293	62	770

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Graph 4. Comparison of distribution of subordinate complaining strategies among different gender dyads in English



Graph 6. Comparison of distribution of subordinate complaining strategies among different gender dyads in Persian

