

Telephone Conversation Opening in Iran: Males and Females in Focus

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Abstract: *This paper aims to compare the structure of telephone conversation opening in Iran between males and females with particular attention to the "how are you" sequence. Natural data are 30 recorded telephone conversations by both males and females in different age groups. The data are transcribed for analysis to see how these two groups perform their telephone conversation openings. Due to the differences in their nature, there seems some considerable differences will be observed between the males and the females not only in the "how are you" section but also in the selection of words.*

Keywords: *conversation; telephone conversation openings; tarofs (ostensible speech); the 'how are you' sequence; tag-positioned address terms and words of endearment*

1. Introduction

Generally, the beginning of conversations has been of considerable attention in the fields of sociolinguistics, pragmatics, and conversation analysis (Schegloff, 1979; Coulmas, 1981; Schegloff, 1986).

The opening of telephone conversations has been widely studied by different researchers such as Schegloff (1972, 1979), Godard (1977) Lindstrom (1994) and Taleghani-Nikazm (2002).

Schegloff (1972, 1979) analyzed telephone conversation opening in American English and discovered four opening sequences :1)the summons-answer sequence / 2)the identification-recognition sequence / 3)the exchange of greeting tokens / and 4)the "how are you" sequence .And these sequences have been used as a base "template"(Hopper, 1996)for describing telephone call openings in other cultures.

In an investigation of French telephone conversation openings, Godard (1977) found that some differences exist between summons-answer sequences in French versus American telephone openings. According to Godard, Americans interpret the answer to summons as an indication that the channel of communication is open; the French see it as an indication of the answerer's availability to be interrupted in the middle of what s/he was doing, not of her or his availability as a partner in the conversation. French callers thus provide an apology in the opening sequence.

Lindstrom (1990) explored the structure of telephone conversation opening in Sweden and compared the pattern with the one in other communities. She found that "Swedes overwhelmingly self-identify by name over the telephone, like Dutch interactants ;but Swedes also avail themselves of the recognitional resources that have been found within American materials to achieve recognition without explicit name proffer."(p.231)

Taleghani - Nikazm (2002) contrasted "ritual routines" in telephone conversation openings in Iran and Germany. She specifically focused on the ritual "how are you" in both cultures. She described that Iranians after inquiring about one another's well-being, ask about the well-being of their respective families. In the analysis about the German, Taleghani - Nikazm found that German telephone conversation openings do not include the "how are you" sequence. When the German perform a set of "how are you" sequences, they are not reciprocated.

As it was shown, studies on telephone conversation opening have received lots of attention in different cultures. But none of them specifically has focused on a particular gender to see whether any specific differences are observed in the rituals or not. Taleghani-Nikazm (2002) focused on telephone conversation opening in Iran without making any differentiation among different genders. The researchers in this study aim to focus on telephone conversation opening in Iran and make a comparison between males and females in their way of talking on the phone, particularly telephone conversation openings.

Iranian have a prolonged part in their greetings in the opening section. The researchers in this study believe that there are some considerable differences between males and females with regard to this part in both quality and quantity.

2. Research Methodology

The telephone conversation data for the present study are 30 telephone calls recorded by 3 males and 5 females. 12 of the telephone calls are between the males and 18 of them between the females. The participants in this study are middle-class Iranians and are of different age groups (18,20,30,50). The recording was made by them using special software while using their cellphones and sometimes their telephones at home. They were asked to record both the telephone calls initiated by them and the telephone calls they received. These conversations are mostly between friends and sometimes intimate friends.

All telephone call openings of the collected data are transcribed according to the transcription notation developed by Jefferson (1984, pp.-xvi) for conversation analysis.

3. Results

The researchers in this study use Taleghani-Nikazm's study as the base for how Iranians open their telephone conversations. When analyzing the telephone calls recorded by the subjects in this study, the researchers realized that the sequence of telephone call openings in Iran, as Taleghani –Nikazem has said too, is the same as what happens in American telephone conversation openings: First there's the summons-answer sequence, then identification-recognition, after that the exchange of greeting tokens and at last but not the least a series of "how are you" s about each other's well-being such as *Ahvaleh shoma?* (How are you?) *Chetori? Khubi?* (Are you OK?) are exchanged between the co-participants

The investigation of telephone conversation openings between males and females in this study suggests that both these groups react the same in the first three sequences, but the noticeable difference is with regard to the fourth one (the how are you sequence).

In the following there are two sample extracts of two telephone calls. One between two females Nina (N) and Shamim (Sh) and the other is between two males Farhad (F) and Sohrab (S)

[1] *Shamim calls Nina to make an appointment for a meeting.*

Ring?

N Baleh?

N Hello?

Sh Sala:m

Sh Hello

N Sala:m.Ha:le:h [shoma?

N Hello.How are you doing?

Sh [Chetori?=
Sh How are you?

Sh = [Khub hasi?

Sh Are you well?

N [Mamnun mersi

N Thankyou.Thanks

Sh Ghorbane to.

Sh Thanks

Sh Khubi aziz?=
Sh Are you OK,dear?

Sh =bebkhsid mozahemet shodama?

Sh Sorry for taking your time?

N Na baba ,[Che mozahemati

N Oh,no.I'm peased .

Sh [Maman baba khuban?

Sh Are your mother & father OK?

N Bad nisan. [salam miresunan

N They're OK. They've said hello to you
Sh [Ghorbanet salamat bashed
Sh Thanks be healthy
N Shoma mamananetun[khuban?
N Is your mother OK?
Sh [Ghorbanet mersi
Sh Thank you
N Danduneshun behtar shod?
N Did her tooth get better?
Sh Are:.[Ye kam behtare mamnoon
Sh Yeah. It's a bit better
N [Khodaro shokr-khob
N Thank God
Sh Migama nina joon....
Sh Nina, I wanted to say...

[2] Sohrab (S) calls his classmate and friend Farhad (F) to ask about some books Farhad was supposed to take for him:

Ring?

→**F:** Salam Sohrab.
F: Hi Sohrab
S: Salam aleikom.[Khubi?
S: Hello there. Are you well?
F: [Chetori?Khubi?
F: Are you well?
S: Salamati?(0) Khab budi?
S: Are you OK? Were you sleeping?
F: Na:::h.Khab Koja?
F: Oh no
S: Az sar-e kar key umadi?
S: When did you go back from work?
F: °Ye do saati ha:s°.
F: About two hours ago.
S: Miga:m(0) ketaba ke goftam...
S: O, about those books...

As it was shown above, the first part of both extracts was the summons-answer sequence, then identification-recognition (these conversations are on the cellphone, and their numbers are saved, so it didn't happen like the telephone calls at home), after that the exchange of greeting tokens and then a series of "how are you" s about each other's well-being. In some situations that numbers are saved and the callee is aware of the identity of the caller, "identification-recognition" part and the "greeting" part are joined together (shown by →in extract [2]).

In extract [1], in addition to asking about each other's wellbeing, the participants even ask about the wellbeing of their families .While in extract [2], they only ask about each other's well beings.

One noticeable difference between these two groups was that females seem it necessary to answer the questions regarding their well beings and their families, they consider it part of being more polite toward others, but the analysis of telephone calls in Iran between males indicates that males more than the females try to evade the rituals in their conversations. They only ask about each other's wellbeing but occasionally about their respective family members .They sometimes even do not provide any answer to the questions about each other's well beings. In fact they tend not to extend their greetings and the "how are you sequence" and and not to have long conversations and quickly go toward the reason for the call.The answer to the questions about the respective familily members are mostly mamnoon , salam miresunand (thanks , they have sent hello to you).

Men tend to be more direct, while in contrast tarofs (ostensible speech) are a lot more common between females. In most of the calls, when the level of intimacy is a little low, they apologize for having called and having to take the time

of the other party. Apology part is shown by ► in extract one. In extract [1] apology for having called has preceded the "how are you" section. It can sometimes follow it.

Sometimes even the kinds of words these two groups use are different. In most of the telephone conversations between the males it is observed that the greeting word hello is mostly Salam aleikom (Hello there) which is a little bit formal and lack the kind of intimacy the words such as salam (hi) has. The other expression which was more common between the males was the expression Eradat darim (I am at your service) while the use of such this expression was zero between the females.

[3] A telephone conversation between Sohrab(S) and Ardalan(A), two men:

- Ring?
S Alo::?
S Hello?
A Salam aleykom.=
A Hello there.
A chetori?
A Are you OK?
S eradat darim
S I am at your service
A chetori agha[khubi?
A How are you doing sir? Are you well?
S [che khabar?
S What's new?
A ° Salamti° .man mosafaratam
A Health. I'm on a trip

Another one was the use of tag-positioned address terms and words of endearments which was common between the females. The expressions such as Azizam(dear), shamimjun(Shamim, dear), Khalejun(dear aunt),....while such these terms were the least common between the males.

In the analysis of recorded telephone calls, there were some telephone calls between the females that were only for the purpose of asking about the other party's wellbeing, especially the times the caller had missed the callee, but such these telephone calls were not observed between the males and in most of the calls between the males there was a special purpose for calling.

4. Discussion

In order to fulfill the purposes of this paper, the researchers selected a group of males and females and they were asked to record their telephone conversations. In the analysis it was observed that both two groups observe the same rituals, but some considerable differences were seen between these two groups.

Men do not exchange a series of "how are you" sequences about their respective families; while in contrast women due to their long talk in the how are you section have longer conversations.

These differences can be justified by what Tannen (1990) in his book "You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation" has talked about the differences between men and women. Tannen (1990) observed that males use conversation to negotiate their status in the group and keep people from pushing them around, while in contrast, females use conversation to negotiate closeness and intimacy.

Because of what Tannen says, the kinds of vocabularies, the length of their conversations, and even the questions about each other's well-being are different from men. They are more sensitive and try to be more polite. Caldwell & Peplau (1982) believed that women's same-sex friendships are more intimate than those of men. Williams (1959) found that women's friendships are affectively richer. Powers & Bultena (1976) explored that women have more "intimate friends" than do men.

The researchers believe that these findings are good justifications for the kinds of differences which were observed between the males and females and their ways of opening a telephone conversations. Women extend their telephone calls by asking about each other's family members to maintain their friendship relations and get more intimate to others.

In order to fulfill that purpose they sometimes even call to show the other party that she has missed her. While such these conversations are uncommon between the men because as Lewis(1978) says, men have difficulty with emotional intimacy. They are emotionally inexpressive (Balswick & Peek, 1971; Komarovsky, 1967).

5. Conclusion

After comparing the norms in opening telephone conversations in Iran between males and females, the researchers explored that males, due to their nature, tend to have shorter conversations .In their conversation on the phone after identification and recognition are achieved, they only ask about each other's well-being and do not go further to ask about the well-being of their respective families. They quickly go toward the reason for the call and keep it short .But women on the other hand tend to stick closely to the rituals in order to be more polite. They have longer conversations and at the same time use some sentences to keep their intimacy such as asking questions about the well-being of each other's families .women tend to maintain their friendship by using some tag positioned address terms and words of endearment to be more polite and the same time get more intimate.

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