

## DISAGREEMENT EXPRESSIONS AS SPEECH ACTS IN CLASSROOM DISCUSSIONS: A CASE FOR IRANIAN EFL LEARNERS

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### ABSTRACT

*This research aimed to examine the use of linguistic markers and mitigation devices in expressing disagreement, as well as the influence of the power, rank, and severity of disagreement on the frequency of different types of disagreement among Iranian EFL students. The study involved 90 participants, including advanced-level students and teachers, who took part in six free discussion classes. The data analysis based on the models of disagreement by Brown and Levinson (1978) and Miller and Spencer-Oatey (2018) showed that most participants expressed disagreement in a softened manner. Female participants predominantly expressed softened disagreement, while male participants expressed aggravated disagreement. In addition, female participants often used positive comments to express disagreement, whereas the males employed judgemental vocabulary and intensifiers. The paper discusses further detailed findings. The results of this study have implications for English instructors, syllabus designers, and English institutes working with EFL learners regarding their use of disagreement strategies.*

*Keywords: Disagreement markers; mitigation devices; politeness theory; severity of disagreement*

### INTRODUCTION

Effective communication plays a vital role in human life, as it enables individuals to convey their intended goals effectively to others. Some scholars describe effective communication as the skill to manipulate language functions (e.g., Leech & Svartvik, 2002). These functions encompass various purposes we achieve through language, such as making statements, requesting, responding, greeting, parting, and more. As John L. Austin (1962) highlights in his seminal work, *How to Do Things with Words*, language is not merely a tool for describing the world but also a means of performing actions, such as making promises, giving orders, or making declarations. It is crucial to acknowledge that these functions cannot be achieved without utilising language forms, which consist of morphemes, words, grammar rules, discourse rules, and other organisational competencies. While forms represent the outward expression of language, functions are the practical utilisation of these forms.

Communication can also be seen as a collection of purposeful and intentional actions. It is not a random occurrence but rather a functional process that strives to bring about some impact or alteration in the listeners' and speakers' surroundings, even if it is subtle or imperceptible (Littlejohn & Foss, 2021). Communication consists of a sequence of communicative or speech acts employed systematically to achieve specific objectives. Researchers have been prompted to investigate communication by considering the impact of utterances, which have consequences for both the creation and understanding of an utterance. Both modes of performance contribute to accomplishing the ultimate goal of communication.

The insights above on language functions highlight the significance of pragmatics in conveying and interpreting meaning. Pragmatic constraints refer to how context influences the understanding and production of linguistic events. On the other hand, acquiring a second/foreign language becomes increasingly challenging when considering the influence of the interaction between pragmatics and social organisation, as well as the intersection of pragmatics and linguistic forms.

The acquisition of communicative competence in any language is influenced by various pragmatic factors, one of which has recently garnered significant attention, namely the influence of sex in language production and comprehension. The differences in speech patterns between men and women have long been observed. In American English, girls tend to use more "standard" language than boys; this trend continues into adulthood (Eckert, 2018). Women tend to use language expressing more uncertainty, such as hedges (Alsaraireh et al., 2023), tag questions (Wijayanti et al., 2022), and rising intonation with declaratives (Dewi et al., 2023), which could suggest a lack of confidence in their statements (Alsaraireh, Wijayanti, & Dewi, 2023). On the other hand, men interrupt more frequently and use stronger expletives, whereas women tend to employ politer forms of expression. Hence, some scholars find that studies on language and gender conducted in English-speaking cultures fail to address the significantly distinct formal patterns of communication between men and women in other languages (Motschenbacher, 2020).

Historically, research on language and gender has undergone various theoretical shifts (McKay, 2005). Initially, Robin Lakoff (1975) challenged the belief that women's language was inferior to men's, instead highlighting its differences. Later, the focus shifted to examining the relationship between language and power, particularly how male dominance in society influences language. However, current research on language and gender goes beyond these previous perspectives by recognising that language is socially constructed in any given context (Cameron & Kulick, 2003). Contemporary constructivist approaches consider gender as just one of many factors that impact communication (Ehrlich et al., 2020).

As part of research on pragmatics in general, examining speech acts has become prevalent in inter-language pragmatics (ILP) studies in the last two decades (Derakhshan & Eslami, 2019; Taguchi, 2019; Rose & Sykes, 2017). Numerous studies, such as by Ajabshir (2019), Moradian et al. (2019)

and Rose and Ng (2020), have provided evidence that incorporating pragmatics-focused activities into the curriculum can enhance language learners' pragmatics competence. Disagreement is a prominent aspect of speech that has received little, if any, attention. Many researchers have touched upon this aspect from different perspectives (Su & Ren, 2017; Taguchi, 2018; Velasco, 2022). However, most of these studies focus on comparing the use of disagreement among two or more languages or within the same language, or the type of oppositional expressions used.

A dispreferred response might seem mild in one culture yet taken as an insult in another. Research on the act of disagreeing has been conducted both within a single language and across different languages. However, only a few studies have specifically focused on disagreement within a single language. As regards non-native speakers' expressions of disagreement, Walkinshaw and Mitchell (2019) find that linguistically, EFL learners' expressions of disagreement are short, simple, and formulaic. In contrast to native speakers (NSs), most of their utterances lack the use of mitigation. Therefore, non-native speakers (NNSs) seem harsh, too direct, and even rude (Kreutel & Bardovi-Harlig, 2018). This study investigated the speech act of disagreement posited by Brown and Levinson (1978), since disagreement is ubiquitous in daily conversations and the patterns and norms of disagreement differ cross-culturally, especially regarding the degree to which interlocutors mitigate or redress their disagreements. According to Brown and Levinson (1978), conflict arises from disagreement and can harm positive relationships between individuals. The authors describe such acts as potentially impolite and note that they may threaten the addressee's self-image, even though conflict is often unavoidable in communication. Disagreement poses a threat to both the addressee's positive (i.e., the desire for one's self-image to be acknowledged, valued, and endorsed by others) and negative images of themselves (i.e., the desire for independence, the freedom to act, and the avoidance of being controlled by others) are all important. Hence, disagreement is a considerably threatening speech act methodically and tactfully used and manipulated by native speakers and thus, language learners encounter challenges in trying to master the norms of disagreement.

The speech act of disagreement becomes significant when examined within the framework of politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Disagreement is considered a face-threatening act (FTA), usually avoided whenever possible. Pomerantz and Heritage (2018) argue that disagreement is undesirable because it can be uncomfortable, unpleasant, challenging, and risky, whereas agreement fosters support and strengthens rapport between individuals. While Derakhshan and Arabmofrad (2018) have shown that linguistic markers and mitigation strategies are crucial to EFL learners' pragmatics competency, the significant role of disagreement as a speech act—particularly across sexes and in contexts involving power and rank dynamics—has been largely overlooked in Iranian EFL classroom discussions. The present study aims to explore the impact of these concepts in EFL classroom discussions in addressing this discrepancy.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

To generate appropriate speech acts, one must possess distinct skills in pragmatics and linguistics, which are crucial to shaping the content and structure of communicative events. Such capabilities are influenced by the discourse and social variables that verify the linguistic resources needed for selecting specific forms of speech acts. Miller and Spencer-Oatey (2018) describe disagreements as follows: Speaker S disagrees when they consider some Proposition *P* uttered or presumed to be espoused by Addressee A untrue and react with an utterance of which the propositional content or implicature is *Not P*. Disagreement occurs when Speaker S responds to a prior belief of Proposition *P* with a view that contradicts *P*, thereby making it both an interactional act and a speech act (Oyama, 2023). Thus, disagreements represent personal opinions, beliefs, and experiences that oppose the interests of another speaker, thereby presenting a threat to the speaker's face. Disagreements are collegial (no intention to attack the speaker), personal challenges (confrontational questions), and private attacks (direct statements) that vary in the degree to which they threaten a speaker's face (Scott & Locher, 2019).

Many researchers have studied patterns of disagreement among native English speakers (Maíz-Arévalo, 2020). Edstrom and Fernández (2019) investigated the use of disagreement markers among Venezuelan women and found some cross-cultural differences in how Venezuelan women voice their disagreement compared to Americans. Moyer and De Fina (2017) studied the emergence of disagreement in television discussions. Their findings are based on the analysed examples demonstrating that expressing agreement can be combined with acknowledging or acquiescing to a previous speaker's statement, when 'no' is interpreted as a way to verify information. In one example, a participant responded, 'no, you're right', using 'no' not to disagree but to confirm and validate the previous speaker's point before adding their perspective. He declared that when 'no' is interpreted as a request, it can be more threatening to one's reputation than when it is understood as a way to seek information. Therefore, assigning the latter meaning can help reduce the potential threat disagreement may pose. Cheng and Lam (2018) investigated the management of disagreement in an intercultural conversational corpus between Hong Kong Chinese (HKC) and native speakers of English (NSE). Contrary to common beliefs, the Hong Kong speakers did not shy away from disagreeing with native English speakers. However, they tended to use mitigation devices and redressing strategies when disagreeing with native speakers. Angouri and Marra (2020) examined the disagreement patterns in problem-solving conversations between native English speakers. Their findings are that, contrary to the orthodox view that disagreement results in conflict and negativity, the study participants accepted and did not mark it. The researchers found that young Spanish-speaking individuals exhibited a lower tendency to express disagreement compared to American and Japanese speakers (López Sako & Félix-Brasdefer, 2019). The speakers typically soften disagreements by voicing a point of commonality, such as 'I also condone what you say [,] but...'. Cordella and Huang (2017) observe that in conversations with Americans, Spanish speakers disagree more frankly and directly in

confrontations; however, in American culture, speakers do not voice disagreements as directly. Many other studies have reported on Spanish speakers' direct application of disagreement and lesser use of mitigation devices (Cordella & Huang, 2017; Le Pair & Spencer-Oatey, 2020; Mir & Shardakova, 2019). Graham and Hardaker (2017) have examined the expectations of (im)politeness within an email community to determine how this community negotiates expectations of (im)politeness. The results revealed that in the e-community, the norms for interaction blended in with the norms of (polite) interaction within the computer medium.

For example, in a study on two factors of power and the severity of disagreement in a university setting, Miller and Spencer-Oatey (2018) argue that this model does not hold true. They find that the more powerful dyads use more hedges and mitigation devices than the less powerful ones, and *vice versa*. Furthermore, less powerful interlocutors (students) use fewer redressals of their disagreements than more powerful interlocutors (professors). In an experimental study on the impact of direct instruction with totally different types of applications (content instruction vs applying repetition) of Colombian EFL learners' use of politeness methods, once disagreeing, García-Fuentes and McDonough (2018) find that the procedural repetition group uses significantly higher politeness methods in each discourse completion task and roleplay. Heidari, Heidari, and Chalak (2020) investigated the impact of implementing short stories vs video clips on the advancement of foreign language students' oral production of English speech acts. The treatment in this study encompassed direct instruction of the most commonly employed speech acts across different cultures, including disagreement, request, refusal, apology, and thanking. The analysis found that the learners within the treatment teams outperformed the control group considerably in producing the target speech acts orally. Moreover, the researchers assert that the students exposed to video-mediated instruction displayed higher oral production of speech acts than those receiving instruction through short stories.

As such, there is a widely accepted belief that disagreements related to tasks can enhance critical thinking abilities and, potentially, the decision-making process within a group. To wit, Zhang (2021) utilised qualitative analyses to explore factors affecting L2 learners' pragmatic decision-making. The study investigated the influence of computer-mediated communication (CMC) paired with data-driven instruction—an approach where teaching strategies and materials are informed by authentic language data, such as real-world conversations, corpora, or learner output—on L2 pragmatic ability. The results revealed that the experimental group outperformed the control group on the immediate and delayed post-intervention tests concerning appropriateness and selection, thus indicating a positive and lasting impact of CMC plus data-driven instruction on L2 pragmatic development.

The present research investigated the role of the three power, rank, and severity of disagreement factors in the frequency of linguistic markers of disagreement and mitigation device usage in English free discussion classes. This study seeks to address a deficiency in pragmatics inter-

language research, given that many researchers have investigated the speech act of disagreement, yet relatively few studies have focused on the presence of disagreement markers and mitigation devices. Nevertheless, Miller and Spencer-Oatey (2018) indeed investigated the role of the three power, rank, and severity of disagreement factors in using mitigation devices and politeness markers in face-to-face conversations in university settings. The authors found no correlation between power, rank and the lower frequency of mitigation device usage, contrary to expectations.

The researcher deemed the study necessary since disagreement markers and their correlation with power, rank, and severity have not been investigated in the Iranian context. Moreover, no researcher has explored this issue within free discussion classes, which are apt settings in which disagreements might surface in live, face-to-face interactions. This study is also informative by applying these three factors and the taxonomy by Miller and Spencer-Oatey (2018) to both male and female participants; hence, the results might engender some cross-sex differences in the use of mitigation devices and politeness strategies by the different sexes. In addition to elucidating the effect of these three factors on voicing disagreements, this research sheds light on the patterns of disagreement expressed by the male and female students and teachers, respectively. This aspect is also significant since women in Iran, a collectivist society (Brown, 2000), are expected to be meek and polite, and care about how they look and talk, since they are primarily judged by these two factors. Therefore, women are expected to use more devices to mitigate their disagreements.

The research sought answers to the following two research questions:

*Q1: What are the major disagreement markers used by adolescent English as a Foreign Language learners in classroom discussions?*

*Q2: Are there any gender-induced differences between the disagreement strategies, power and rank used by adolescent English foreign language learners in classroom discussions?*

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Participants**

The current study comprised 90 participants, consisting of 84 advanced EFL students and six teachers. The students were divided into six classes, with 14 students per class (42 male and 42 female). All participants were enrolled at Safir Language Institute (Urmia Branch). Their ages ranged from 18 to 25. The teachers were considered participants, as the researchers also examined their disagreements with the students and *vice versa*.

### **Setting**

This study was conducted at the Urmia Branch of the Safir Language Institute, specifically in the free discussion classes, with an equal number of male and female participants. Among the 90

participants, six were teachers, with an equal distribution of three women and three men. The discussions were based on the book, *For and Against* by L. G. Alexander (1968), a resource for fostering discussion and debate. The book contains chapters with opposing viewpoints on various topics, providing the students with balanced arguments to analyse and discuss. The topics encompassed four different subjects: 1) 'What is your opinion on a man who easily cries when facing a problem?' 2) 'Imagine you are a jury member in a case where a man drove through a red light and caused the death of two people while rushing his pregnant wife to the hospital. How would you judge this man?' 3) Another topic was about getting married and discovering that your spouse is infertile, 'Would you be willing to adopt a child? If so, would you prefer a boy or a girl? Would you inform the child about their adoption?' 4) Lastly, the participants debated which behaviour was worse: smoking in popular places, drinking while driving, or spitting on the pavement. Throughout these discussions, the researcher observed various interactions and disagreements among the participants.

### **Instrumentation**

The primary data collection instrument was tape recordings. The study focused on collecting natural data in an academic setting, specifically to capture instances of disagreement. The researchers recorded interactions between the teachers and students, as well as among the students themselves. Gathering natural data can be challenging because many factors can affect the recording process. However, the audio recordings were made during quiet and calm classes at the institute. In addition, the observer made detailed notes for further analysis. Subsequently, the recorded data were transcribed, and instances of disagreement were identified using the schematic representations of disagreement by Brown and Levinson (1987) and Miller and Spencer-Oatey (2018). Furthermore, the transcription revealed the use of various linguistic and mitigation markers.

### **Procedure**

In this study, the researchers observed classes that engaged in free discussions, similar to real academic settings. These discussions covered various topics, using the for and against approach to stimulate disagreement naturally, seeking to gather the most realistic and natural data. The participants expressed their opinions adequately during the six recorded sessions held in six different classes. The researcher took detailed notes during the lecture portion of the classes, documenting the exact words used in any exchanges to be fully immersed in the class environment and capture as much situational and linguistic information as possible. Six teachers conducted the lessons, of whom three held M.A. degrees, two held PhD degrees, and one was a certified B.A in the field. All teachers had over five years of teaching experience. The topics of the lessons depended on what the students were studying during the term. The main goal of the lessons was to engage students in discussions, which resulted in the production of numerous linguistic markers that were recorded for analysis.

Each session lasted for one hour, and a total of 90 subjects (45 females and 45 males) participated in the study. The purpose of the study and the responsibilities of the participants were clearly explained to all, and their oral consent was obtained. In addition, the researcher transcribed the collected data and analysed all the markers of disagreement within the classroom discourse, finding that the use of linguistic markers and mitigating devices to soften disagreement was highly significant. Both male and female participants expressed disagreement; specifically, 14.7% of male disagreements occurred between teachers and students, while 47.05% took place among students. Among the female participants, 18.18% of disagreements were between teachers and students, and 39.39% occurred between students. Table 1 presents the precise distribution.

Table 1: *The precise distribution of disagreement*

| Gender | Total | T to S | S to S | S to T |
|--------|-------|--------|--------|--------|
| Male   | 102   | 14.70% | 47.05% | 38.2%  |
| Female | 102   | 18.18% | 39.39% | 42.42% |

Note: T to S = Teacher to Student; S to S = Student to Student; S to T = Student to Teacher

## DATA ANALYSIS

In the data analysis, speaking turns represented the basic unit of talk. The researchers mainly employed frequency counts and percentages regarding performance insofar as their varying politeness strategies and the linguistic markers of disagreement. It was important to describe the linguistic forms objectively to identify linguistic markers of disagreement easily and unambiguously. In addition, the data analysis method had to deal with disagreements over several turns, some of which were not adjacent. The analysis process applied the Schematic Representation by Brown and Levinson (1987), whereby disagreements were categorised into three sub-groups: 1) Softened disagreement (e.g., asking questions instead of making statements, prefacing statements with phrases like 'I think' or 'do not know', and using words like 'maybe' or 'not exactly' to make the disagreement less direct); 2) neither softened nor strengthened disagreement (e.g., speakers opposing the previous statement by using linguistic forms such as negative words or phrases like 'yes' or 'no'); and 3) aggravated disagreement, called 'verbal shadowing' (Miller & Spencer-Oatey, 2018), referring to examples of more intense forms of disagreement, such as rhetorical questions like 'who cares?', intensifiers such as 'totally', the use of accusatory pronouns

like 'you', or the inclusion of judgemental words. These categories were subdivided into various linguistic or mitigation markers. Table 2 and Figure 1 present the precise taxonomy of disagreement.

Table 2: *Brown and Levinson's Schematic Representation*

|                                           |                                                    |                                                     |
|-------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| Softened disagreement                     | Positive politeness                                | Polite comment, Humour                              |
|                                           |                                                    | Inclusive 1 <sup>st</sup> person, Partial agreement |
|                                           | Negative politeness                                | Questions, 'I think' / 'I don't know'               |
|                                           |                                                    | Downtoners, Verbs of uncertainty                    |
| Disagreement not softened or strengthened | Contradictory statement                            |                                                     |
|                                           | Verbal shadowing                                   |                                                     |
| Aggravated disagreement                   | Rhetorical questions, Intensifiers,                |                                                     |
|                                           | Personal, accusatory 'you', Judgemental vocabulary |                                                     |

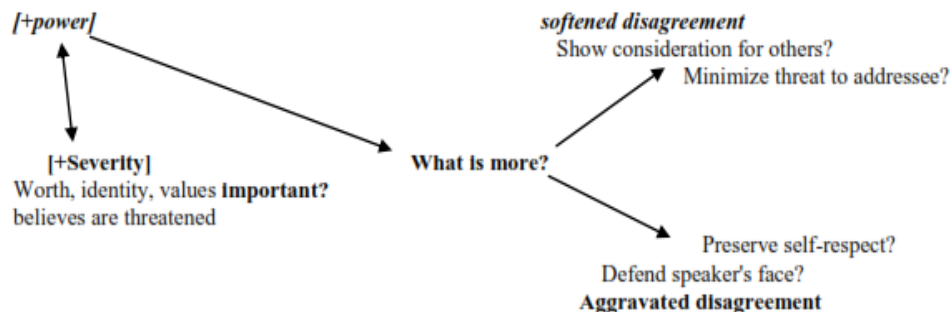


Figure 1. *Schematic representation (Miller & Spencer-Oatey, 2018)*

## RESULTS

The data analysis utilised the framework by Brown and Levinson (1987). This framework categorises disagreement into three groups: softened disagreement, disagreement without any softening or strengthening, and aggravated disagreement. These categories are further divided into various linguistic markers of mitigation, as illustrated in Figure 2. The researchers quantified the descriptive data based on frequency and percentage.

### Distribution of disagreement types

Figure 2 illustrates the results of various disagreement strategies within different situations. Of the 204 turns of the disagreement, 52.9 per cent (N = 108) informed their disagreement in softened form, 10.3 per cent (N = 21) applied the second type of disagreement of neither softened nor strengthened, and 36.8 per cent (N = 75) applied aggravated disagreement, as seen in the examples below:

S: *We have other problems; natural and financial problems maybe the men cry.*

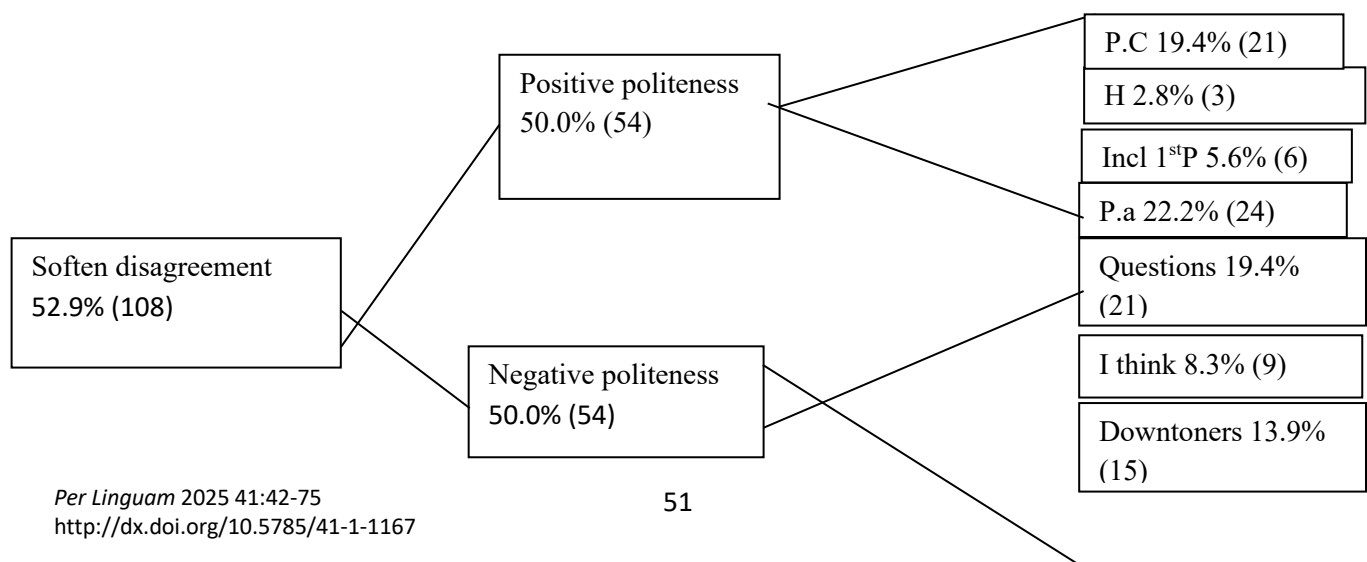
S: *But I think they don't cry for financial problem.* (Softened disagreement)

S: *We can't let our children to have a free relationship with a different sex. It's against our religion.*

S: *I can't accept. It's not related to religion* (Neither softened nor strengthened)

S: *When you are sad drink become happier* (sic).

S: *You shouldn't do something like that.* (Aggravated disagreement)



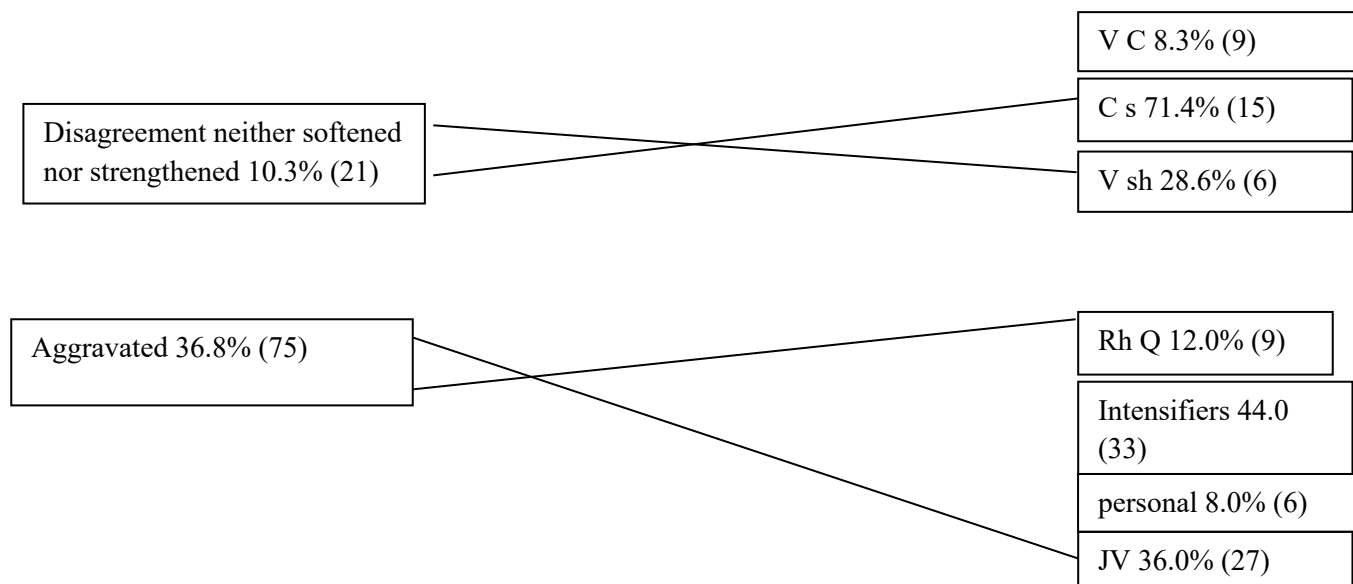


Figure 2. The distribution of various disagreement strategies and linguistic markers

### Distribution of softened disagreement: Linguistic markers

In softened disagreement, of the 108 turns, half of the interlocutors, 50 per cent (N = 54), applied positive politeness as linguistic markers. However, from the total of 54 turns, 22.2 per cent (N = 24) interlocutors and 19.4 per cent (N = 21) applied the partial disagreement and positive comment, respectively, within the positive politeness way as linguistic markers; 5.6 per cent (N = 6) applied positive politeness in an inclusive first-person form; and 2.8 per cent (N = 3) applied humour. The following detailed interaction displays the teacher and student applying humour and positive comments in their discourse:

**T:** *Can you give your kindness to your mate as your child?*

*Nazy (student): That is true. But it is different.*

*Nayyer (student): I think Nazy, it is right. Most men believe that their wife should just care for him.*

Notably, both Nayyer (female) and Nazy (female) applied positive comments in their utterances.

### Distribution of linguistic markers: Negative politeness

Of the total of 54 turns, 19.4 per cent (N = 21) applied negative politeness in question forms; 13.9 per cent (N = 15) applied downtoners, like ‘maybe’ or ‘sort of’; and 8.3 per cent (N = 9) applied

phrases like, ‘I think’, ‘I do not know’ and verbs of uncertainty. The following example details the interlocutors’ use of negative politeness:

*Araz (student): I judge according to the law.*

*Hiva (student): I think in all situations we should not pass the red light, and I do not think the duration of red lights in our country is more than two minutes. So, we can wait, and we should not pass.*

### **Distribution of second type disagreement markers: Neither softened nor strengthened**

Of the total of 21 turns, 71.4 per cent (N = 15) applied contradictory statements and 28.2 per cent (N = 6) applied verbal shadowing, as seen in the following interaction between teacher and student:

**T:** *What is your idea about being a judge?*

*Nader (student): I prefer not to judge.*

### **Distribution of third type disagreement markers: Aggravated disagreement**

Of the 75 turns, 44 per cent (N = 33) applied intensifiers (words or phrases used to add emphasis or strength to a statement, often to convey urgency, importance, or emotional intensity); 36 per cent (N = 27) and 12 per cent (N = 9) applied judgemental vocabulary and rhetorical questions (often used to challenge or provoke thought), respectively. The example below demonstrates the use of rhetorical questions and intensifiers in an interaction between the students:

*Nader: Really? Can you decide in that situation logically? Suppose?*

*Hiya: I do not know exactly.*

*Nader: Come on! But we are speaking about real situations.*

Nader’s question, ‘*Can you decide in that situation logically? Suppose?*’ is a rhetorical question, used to emphasise the complexity of the situation rather than to seek a direct answer. In addition, Nader’s use of ‘*Really?*’ and ‘*Come on!*’ represents intensifiers that add emotional emphasis and urgency to his statements.

### **Distribution of various disagreement strategies and linguistic markers**

According to Tables 1 and 2 below, the interactions between the high-power and low-power participants in this study are as follows:

In 52.9 per cent of turns (N = 108), 23.5 per cent (N = 48) of interactions between students with the same rank of power applied softened disagreement, and 20.6 per cent (N = 42) of turns between students and teacher also applied softened disagreement. However, 7.4 per cent (N = 15) of interactions between low- to high-power interlocutors applied the second type of disagreement, i.e., neither softened nor strengthened. Of 75 turns, 19.1 per cent (N = 39) of interactions among students with the same rank of power, and 11.8 per cent (N = 24) between students and teachers with a low rank of power, applied aggravated disagreement, as seen in the examples below:

*Nasibeh: ...so I can't stand a man who is sentimental.*

*Sara: But I think the men are more sentimental than the women.* (Softened disagreement)

**T:** *Drinking is not a good thing.*

*Vahid: It's definitely a good thing.* (Disagreement not softened or strengthened)

*Hosein: I pass the red light; the killing of people is not important.*

*Bita: ...I mean, come on, that's against our conscience.* (Aggravated disagreement)

Table 1: *Distribution of various disagreement types between high power (teacher) and low power (students)*

|                                                                 |                                                                                 |                                                                                                                 |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Softened disagreement<br>52.9% (108)                            | Positive politeness<br>50.0% (54)                                               | Polite comment<br>P.C 19.4% (21)<br>Humour<br>H 2.8% (3)                                                        |
|                                                                 |                                                                                 | Inclusive 1 <sup>st</sup> person<br>Inclusive 1 <sup>st</sup> P 5.6% (6)<br>Partial agreement<br>P.a 22.2% (24) |
|                                                                 | Negative politeness 50.0% (54)                                                  | Questions<br>19.4% (21)<br>'I think'<br>8.3% (9)<br>'I don't know'                                              |
|                                                                 |                                                                                 | Downtoners<br>13.9% (15)<br>Verbs of uncertainty<br>8.3% (9)                                                    |
| Disagreement neither softened<br>nor strengthened<br>10.3% (21) | Contradictory statement<br>71.4% (15)                                           |                                                                                                                 |
|                                                                 | Verbal shadowing<br>28.6% (6)                                                   |                                                                                                                 |
| Aggravated disagreement<br>36.8% (75)                           | Rhetorical questions<br>12.0% (9)<br>Intensifiers<br>44.0 (33)                  |                                                                                                                 |
|                                                                 | Personal<br>8.0% (6)<br>Accusatory 'you', Judgemental vocabulary.<br>36.0% (27) |                                                                                                                 |

Table 2: *Distribution of various disagreement types per interaction type between high power (teacher) and low power (students)*

| Disagreement types                | T-S        | S-S        | S-T        | Total        |
|-----------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|--------------|
| Softened disagreement             | 8.8% (18)  | 23.5% (48) | 20.6% (42) | 52.9% (108)  |
| Neither softened nor strengthened | 1.5% (3)   | 1.5% (3)   | 7.4% (15)  | 10.3% (21)   |
| Aggravated disagreement           | 5.9% (12)  | 19.1% (39) | 11.8% (24) | 36.8% (75)   |
| Total                             | 16.2% (33) | 44.1% (90) | 39.7% (81) | 100.0% (204) |

Note:

T-S: teacher to student

S-S: student to student

S-T: student to teacher

### Distribution of linguistic markers: Softened disagreement in various interactions

Table 3 details the distribution of the first type of linguistic markers among the interlocutors with various ranks of power.

Table 3: *Distribution of linguistic markers of softened disagreement in various interactions*

| Linguistic markers                        |                                  | T-S        | S-S        | S-T        | Total        |            |
|-------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|--------------|------------|
| Softened disagreement positive politeness | Positive comment                 | 0          | 5.6% (6)   | 13.9% (15) | 19.4% (21)   | 50.0% (54) |
|                                           | Humour                           | 0          | 2.8% (3)   | 0          | 2.8% (3)     |            |
|                                           | Inclusive 1 <sup>st</sup> person | 2.8% (3)   | 0          | 2.8% (3)   | 5.6% (6)     |            |
|                                           | Partial agreement                | 2.8% (3)   | 5.6% (6)   | 13.9% (15) | 22.2% (24)   |            |
| Softened disagreement negative politeness | Questions                        | 8.3% (9)   | 11.1% (12) | 0          | 19.4% (21)   | 50.0% (54) |
|                                           | ‘I think’                        | 2.8% (3)   | 2.8% (3)   | 2.8% (3)   | 8.3% (9)     |            |
|                                           | Downtoners                       | 0          | 8.3% (9)   | 5.6% (6)   | 13.9% (15)   |            |
|                                           | Verbs of uncertainty             | 0          | 8.3% (3)   | 0          | 8.3% (9)     |            |
| Total                                     |                                  | 16.7% (18) | 44.4% (48) | 38.9% (42) | 100.0% (108) |            |

From a total of 50 per cent (N = 54) of turns, the majority, 22.2 per cent (N = 24), applied positive politeness by using partial disagreement, whereby 13.9 per cent (N = 15) represent interactions between student and teacher. However, a total of 19.4 per cent (N = 21) of interactions applied positive politeness by using positive comments, of which 13.9 per cent represent interactions between student and teacher.

In addition, from a total of 50 per cent (N = 54) turns, the majority, 19.4 per cent (N = 21) applied negative politeness by using questions, of which 11.1 per cent (N = 12) represented student-to-student interactions; 13.9 per cent (N = 15) applied downtoners ('sort of', 'maybe'), of which 5.6 per cent (N = 6) and 8.3 per cent (N = 9) represent interactions between student and teacher and students, respectively. Notably, the majority of student-to-student interactions at 44.4 per cent (N = 48) and the majority of student-to-teacher interactions at 38.9 per cent (N = 42) applied softened disagreement, as seen in the examples below:

Positive comment:

**S → T:** *It's not a problem, that's ok, but a person who drinks should control his behaviour.*

Inclusive pronoun:

**T → S:** *Well, we don't need even to say that. Let's just assume that many of men have lots of problems but they don't cry.*

Partial agreement:

**S → T:** *While that is true, no doubt, but we should tell the child he/she was accepted.*

Humour:

**S1:** *I sometimes spit on the street.*

**S2 → S1:** *Trucks??* [General laughing]

Negative politeness:

**S → S:** *Maybe some of the men cry for their love, but I think this is not logical.*

Question:

**T → S:** *Really? How can you get married with another wife again?*

Downtoner:

**S → T:** *That's not entirely true; all of the people don't obey the rules and are smoking at the popular places.*

Verb of uncertainty:

**S → S:** *But that seems like the opposite of what you would expect at the beginning.*

### **Distribution of the second type of disagreement: Neither softened nor strengthened**

Table 4 below shows that the total of 71.4 per cent (N = 15) of turns applied a contradictory statement, of which 42.9 per cent (N = 9) arose from statements from student to teacher, and from a total of 28.6 per cent (N = 6) of turns that applied verbal shadowing, 28.6 per cent (N = 6) occurred with a statement from student to teacher or from a low rank of power to a high rank of power. Notably, the majority of statements from student to teacher, i.e., 71.4 per cent (N = 15), applied the second type of disagreement of linguistic markers, namely disagreement neither softened nor strengthened, as seen in the examples below:

Neither softened nor strengthened disagreement:

**S1:** *Maybe the women can judge better than the men.*

**S2 → S1:** *But I didn't see any woman who can judge.*

Verbal shadowing:

**T:** *Passing the red light isn't important.*

**S → T:** *It's definitely important.*

*Table 4:* Distribution of the second type of disagreement: neither softened nor strengthened.

| Linguistic markers                             |                         | T-S          | S-S          | S-T           | Total          |
|------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|----------------|
| Neither softened nor strengthened disagreement | Contradictory statement | 14.3%<br>(3) | 14.3%<br>(3) | 42.9%<br>(9)  | 71.4%<br>(15)  |
|                                                | Verbal shadowing        | 0            | 0            | 28.6%<br>(6)  | 28.6% (6)      |
|                                                | Total                   | 14.3%<br>(3) | 14.3%<br>(3) | 71.4%<br>(15) | 100.0%<br>(21) |

### Distribution of the third type of disagreement: Aggravated disagreement

Table 5 presents that of 75 turns, the majority, 44.4 per cent (N = 33), applied intensifiers in the aggravated disagreement, in which 24 per cent (N = 18) and 20 per cent (N = 15) were statements from student to teacher and among students, respectively. Thus, 52 per cent (N = 54) of interactions between students with the same rank of power, 32 per cent (N = 24) of utterances from student to teacher with a low rank of power, and 16 per cent (N = 12) of utterances from teacher to student with a high rank of power, applied aggravated disagreement:

Aggravated disagreement:

Rhetorical question

**S:** *Why can't we cry every time we want to cry? Do the people look strangely?*

**T → S:** *How do the people look strangely? You are free people.*

Intensifier

**S → S:** *I don't care about that at all!*

Accuracy/Imperative

**S → S:** *...I say to prove your opinion; you have to give some reasons.*

Judgemental vocabulary

**S → S:** *...Come on, I mean, that's a dirty action!!*

Table 5: *Distribution of the third type of disagreement: Aggravated disagreement*

| Linguistic markers      |                        | T-S        | S-S        | S-T        | Total       |
|-------------------------|------------------------|------------|------------|------------|-------------|
| Aggravated disagreement | Rhetorical questions   | 8.0% (6)   | 4.0% (3)   | 0          | 12.0% (9)   |
|                         | Intensifiers           | 0          | 20.0% (15) | 24.0% (18) | 44.0% (33)  |
|                         | Personal accusatory    | 4.0% (3)   | 4.0% (3)   | 0          | 8.0% (6)    |
|                         | Judgemental vocabulary | 40.0% (3)  | 24.0% (18) | 8.0% (6)   | 26.0% (27)  |
| Total                   |                        | 16.0% (12) | 52.0% (39) | 32.0% (24) | 100.0% (75) |

### Distribution of disagreement strategies across sexes

Table 6 presents the distribution of 204 turns of disagreement strategies as follows: from a total of 102 turns by female participants, 30.9 per cent (N = 63) and 14.7 per cent (N = 30) applied softened disagreement and aggravated disagreement, respectively. However, from a total of 102 turns by male participants, 22.1 per cent (N = 45) and 22.1 per cent (N = 45) applied softened disagreement and aggravated disagreement, respectively, as shown in the examples below:

*Reza: I pass the red light for taking my wife to the hospital.*

*Mahsa: Your thinking is respectful, but also you should be careful.* (Softened disagreement)

*Fazzad: ...The women aren't good drivers.*

*Maryam: They are definitely good drivers.* (Neither softened nor strengthened disagreement)

*Nasibeh: If my husband was infertile, I would get a divorce.*

*Javad: ...I mean, come on, that's ridiculous.* (Aggravated disagreement)

Table 6: *Distribution of disagreement strategies across sexes*

| Sex    | Softened disagreement | Neither softened nor strengthened | Aggravated disagreement | Total        |
|--------|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------|
| Female | 30.9% (63)            | 4.4% (9)                          | 14.7% (30)              | 50.0% (102)  |
| Male   | 22.1% (45)            | 5.9% (13)                         | 22.1% (45)              | 50.0% (102)  |
| Total  | 52.9% (108)           | 10.3% (21)                        | 36.8% (75)              | 100.0% (204) |

### Distribution of linguistic markers across sexes

Table 7 represents the distribution of linguistic markers across sexes as follows: From a total of 204 turns, the majority of female participants applied softened disagreement; 30.9 per cent (N = 63) at 16.2 percent (N = 33) applied positive politeness, 14.7 per cent (N = 30) applied negative politeness, 4.4 per cent (N = 9) applied neither softened or strengthened disagreement, and 14.7 per cent (N = 30) applied aggravated disagreement. From the total of 204 turns, the majority of male participants at 22.1 per cent (N = 45) applied softened disagreement; 10.3 per cent (N = 21) applied positive disagreement, and 11.8 per cent (N = 24) negative politeness; 5.9 per cent (N = 12) applied neither softened nor strengthened disagreement; and 22.1 per cent (N = 45) applied aggravated disagreement.

Softened disagreement:

Positive politeness

**T:** *Neda, could you adopt a crippled child?*

*Neda: Maybe by adopting a crippled child, I may help him or her, but I want to enjoy my life... and you know, keeping a crippled child is very difficult. (Positive comment)*

Negative politeness

*Babak: The people get used to smoking.*

*Hasan: But I think some people, not all of them. (I think)*

Neither softened nor strengthened disagreement:

*Shahram: No problem, because she is young and she doesn't know anything about these things much more.*

*Sahel: But I know. (Contradictory statement)*

*Leila: It's not a reason for crying.*

*Omid: It's definitely a reason for crying. (Verbal shadowing)*

Aggravated disagreement:

*Sexda: At first, let's start with drinking, which is very important over the.. other cases.*

*Yaser: Other cases...aren't important in society? They're important too. (Rhetorical question)*

*Axda: A man who cries very soon is weak-kneed.*

*Soheti: No way! It's wrong. I cry very easily. (Intensifier)*

*Azad: ...I think to strengthen your claim you must be logical. It should be much stranger to be...sentimental as a man. (Accuracy/imperative)*

*Samaneh: Come on, I mean, maybe someone puts their whole life in one packet, and one stealer steals it. (Judgemental vocabulary)*

Table 7: *Distribution of linguistic markers across sexes*

| Disagreement types                             | Linguistic markers        | Female         | Male           | Total           |
|------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|----------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Softened disagreement                          | Positive                  | 16.2%<br>(33)  | 10.3%<br>(21)  | 26.5%<br>(54)   |
|                                                | Negative                  | 14.7%<br>(30)  | 11.8%<br>(24)  | 26.5%<br>(54)   |
|                                                | Total                     | 30.9%<br>(63)  | 22.1%<br>(45)  | 52.9%<br>(108)  |
| Neither softened nor strengthened disagreement | Contradictory statement   | 2.9% (6)       | 4.4% (9)       | 7.4% (15)       |
|                                                | Verbal shadowing          | 1.5% (3)       | 1.5% (3)       | 2.9% (6)        |
|                                                | Total                     | 4.4% (9)       | 5.9% (12)      | 10.3%<br>(21)   |
| Aggravated disagreement                        | Rhetorical questions      | 0              | 4.4% (9)       | 4.4% (9)        |
|                                                | Intensifiers              | 8.8% (18)      | 7.4%<br>(15)   | 16.2%<br>(33)   |
|                                                | Personal accusatory 'you' | 0              | 2.9% (6)       | 2.9% (6)        |
|                                                | Judgemental vocabulary    | 5.9% (12)      | 7.4%<br>(15)   | 13.2%<br>(27)   |
|                                                | Total                     | 14.7%<br>(30)  | 22.1%<br>(45)  | 36.8%<br>(75)   |
| Total                                          |                           | 50.0%<br>(102) | 50.0%<br>(102) | 100.0%<br>(204) |

### Distribution of disagreement strategies within various interactions across sexes

Table 8 presents the distribution of disagreement strategies within various interactions across sexes as follows:

From a total of 102 turns, the majority of female participants' disagreements at 20.6 per cent (N = 42) were in utterances from student to teacher and student to student. From a total of 102 turns, the majority of male participants' disagreements at 23.3 per cent (N = 48) occurred during interactions between students with the same rank of power, and 19.1 per cent (N = 39) from students to teachers with a low rank of power.

Table 8: *Distribution of disagreement strategies within various interactions across sexes*

| Sex    | T–S        | S–S        | S–T        | Total        |
|--------|------------|------------|------------|--------------|
| Female | 8.8% (18)  | 20.6% (42) | 20.6% (42) | 50.0% (102)  |
| Male   | 7.4% (15)  | 23.3% (48) | 19.1% (39) | 50.0% (102)  |
| Total  | 16.2% (33) | 44.1% (90) | 39.7% (81) | 100.0% (204) |

### Comparison of disagreement strategies across sexes

Table 9 below shows that from 108 turns, 22.2 per cent ( $N = 24$ ) of female participants applied softened disagreement in utterances from student to teacher and between students; from 102 turns, 25 per cent ( $N = 27$ ) of male participants applied softened disagreement in interactions between students with the same rank of power and in 13.9 per cent ( $N = 15$ ) of utterances from students to teachers. However, 28.6 per cent ( $N = 6$ ) of female participants' statements from students to teachers and 42.9 per cent ( $N = 9$ ) of male participants' statements from students to teachers applied neither softened nor strengthened disagreement. Twenty (20) per cent ( $N = 15$ ) of female participants' interactions between students with the same rank of power, 16 per cent ( $N = 12$ ) of utterances from students to teachers, and 32 per cent ( $N = 24$ ) of male participants' interactions between students applied aggravated disagreement.

Softened disagreement:

**T → S:** *While that is true, no doubt. But judging is a tough job.*

Neither softened nor strengthened:

**S:** *None of the men cry!*

**S → T:** *Yes, they cry.*

Aggravated disagreement:

**S1:** *We can allow having a girlfriend/boyfriend.*

**S2 → S1:** *...I mean, come on, that's burlesque.*

Table 9: Comparison of disagreement strategies across sexes

| Disagreement types                             | Gender  | T-S           | S-S           | S-T           | Total           |
|------------------------------------------------|---------|---------------|---------------|---------------|-----------------|
| Softened disagreement                          | Females | 13.9%<br>(15) | 22.2%<br>(24) | 22.2%<br>(24) | 58.3%<br>(63)   |
|                                                | Males   | 2.8% (3)      | 25.0%<br>(27) | 13.9%<br>(15) | 41.7% (45)      |
|                                                | Total   | 16.7%<br>(18) | 47.2%<br>(51) | 36.1%<br>(39) | 100.0%<br>(108) |
| Neither softened nor strengthened disagreement | Females | 0             | 14.3%<br>(3)  | 28.6%<br>(6)  | 42.9% (9)       |
|                                                | Males   | 14.3%<br>(3)  | 0             | 42.9%<br>(9)  | 57.1% (12)      |
|                                                | Total   | 14.3%<br>(3)  | 14.3%<br>(3)  | 71.4%<br>(15) | 100.0%<br>(21)  |
| Aggravated disagreement                        | Females | 4.0% (3)      | 20.0%<br>(15) | 16.0%<br>(12) | 40.0% (30)      |
|                                                | Males   | 12.0%<br>(9)  | 32.0%<br>(24) | 16.0%<br>(12) | 60.0% (45)      |
|                                                | Total   | 16.0%<br>(12) | 52.0%<br>(39) | 32.0%<br>(24) | 100.0%<br>(75)  |

### Distribution of softened disagreement across sexes

Table 10 shows that from a total of 108 turns, 63 were by female participants, 22.2 (N = 24) per cent of interactions between students and utterances from student to teacher applied softened disagreement; from a total of 45 turns by male participants, 22.2 per cent (N = 24) interactions between students and 16.7 per cent (N = 18) of utterances from student to teacher applied softened disagreement, as seen in the examples below:

Softened disagreement:

Positive politeness

**S → T:** *The kind of explanation you're giving is acceptable in some ways, but I believe that the man shouldn't cry for every problem.* (Positive comment)

**T:** *You mean you haven't any problem with drinking, yeah?*

*Reza:* *Well, we don't even need to do that. Let's just assume that you drink while driving and kill one of your family members.* (Inclusive pronoun)

Mihd: *Not in the middle of the street, in the place where no one sees me.*

Naser: *Trucks?* [general laughter] (Humor)

Mohsen: *Ambivalence, not extrovert or introvert.*

Rahman: *While that is true, no doubt, being able to cry is a good thing in some situations.*

(Partial agreement)

Negative politeness

Mina: *We have other problems, such as natural or financial problems; they may cry.*

Sahel: *But I think they don't cry for financial problems.* ('I think')

T: *Do you ever squizz on the pavement?*

Mina: *Yes, sometimes.*

Mehdi: *Middle of the street?* (Question)

S → T: *That's not entirely true; I myself don't cry for financial problems.* (Downtoner)

S → S: *But that seems like the opposite of what you would expect at the beginning*

Table 10: *Distribution of softened disagreement across sexes (F = Female, M = Male)*

| Linguistic markers  |                                  | T-S |   | S-S |    | S-T |  | Total |      |
|---------------------|----------------------------------|-----|---|-----|----|-----|--|-------|------|
| Positive politeness | Positive comment                 | F   | 0 | 6   | 12 | 18  |  | 19.4% |      |
|                     |                                  | M   | 0 | 0   | 3  | 3   |  |       | (21) |
|                     | Humour                           | F   | 0 | 0   | 0  | 0   |  | 2.8%  | (3)  |
|                     |                                  | M   | 0 | 3   | 0  | 3   |  |       |      |
|                     | Inclusive 1 <sup>st</sup> person | F   | 0 | 0   | 3  | 3   |  | 5.6%  | (6)  |
|                     |                                  | M   | 3 | 0   | 0  | 3   |  |       |      |
|                     | Partial agreement                | F   | 3 | 3   | 6  | 12  |  | 22.2% |      |
|                     |                                  | M   | 0 | 3   | 9  | 12  |  |       | (24) |
| Negative politeness | Questions                        | F   | 9 | 6   | 0  | 15  |  | 19.4% |      |
|                     |                                  | M   | 0 | 6   | 0  | 6   |  |       | (21) |
|                     | 'I think'                        | F   | 3 | 3   | 0  | 6   |  | 8.3%  | (9)  |
|                     |                                  | M   | 0 | 0   | 3  | 3   |  |       |      |
|                     | Downtoners                       | F   | 0 | 6   | 3  | 9   |  | 13.9% |      |
|                     |                                  | M   | 0 | 3   | 3  | 6   |  |       | (15) |
|                     | Verb of uncertainty              | F   | 0 | 0   | 0  | 0   |  | 8.3%  | (9)  |
|                     |                                  | M   | 0 | 9   | 0  | 9   |  |       |      |

|       |   |       |       |       |        |        |
|-------|---|-------|-------|-------|--------|--------|
| Total | F | 13.9% | 22.2% | 22.2% | 58.3%  | 100.0% |
|       |   | (15)  | (24)  | (24)  | (63)   | (108)  |
|       | M | 2.8%  | 22.2% | 16.7% | 41.7%  |        |
|       |   | (3)   | (24)  | (18)  | (45)   |        |
|       | T | 16.7% | 44.4% | 38.9% | 100.0% |        |
|       |   | (18)  | (48)  | (42)  | (108)  |        |

### Distribution of the second type of disagreement across sexes: Neither softened nor strengthened

Table 11 shows that a total of 28.6 per cent (N = 6) of female participants' utterances from student to teacher and 42.9 per cent (N = 9) of male participants' interactions applied neither softened nor strengthened disagreement (the second type).

**T:** *Do you agree with adopting a child?*

Shitin: *I agree. Also, in my opinion, a girl is better than a boy for adopting.*

Mekuy: *But a boy is better than a girl.* (Contradictory statement)

**T:** *What's your opinion about judging? I think there is a significant difference between men and women.*

Sepideh: *There is no difference between men and women, definitely.* (Verbal shadowing)

Table 11: *Distribution of second type of disagreement across sexes*

| Linguistic marker                              |                         |   | T-S   | S-S   | S-T   | Total  |        |
|------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|---|-------|-------|-------|--------|--------|
| Neither softened nor strengthened disagreement | Contradictory statement | F | 0     | 3     | 3     | 6      | 71.4%  |
|                                                |                         | M | 3     | 0     | 6     | 9      | (15)   |
|                                                | Verbal shadowing        | F | 0     | 0     | 3     | 3      | 28.6%  |
|                                                |                         | M | 0     | 0     | 3     | 3      | (6)    |
| Total                                          |                         | F | 0     | 14.3% | 28.6% | 42.9%  | 100.0% |
|                                                |                         |   |       | (3)   | (6)   | (9)    | (21)   |
|                                                |                         | M | 14.3% | 0     | 42.9% | 57.1%  |        |
|                                                |                         |   | (3)   |       | (9)   | (12)   |        |
|                                                |                         | T | 14.3% | 14.3% | 71.4% | 100.0% |        |
|                                                |                         |   | (3)   | (3)   | (15)  | (21)   |        |

**Distribution of the third type of disagreement: Aggravated disagreement across sexes**

From a total of 75 turns, 30 turns by female participants at 20 per cent (N = 15) within student-to-student interactions (Table 12) and 32 per cent (N = 24) of male participants applied aggravated disagreement (Table 14), as seen in the examples below:

Fateme: *I don't like to see a sentimental man.*

Enrad: *Even you don't want to see a sentimental man? Oh my God?* (Rhetorical question)

Hossin: *I think a child limits us. We can't have a plan for the future.*

T: *No, no, no. No way!* (Intensifier)

T: *Do you agree with him?*

Hamid (student): *Come on, killing other people because of saving our family's life is not logical, and it is against our conscience. I mean, we should stop behind the red light.* (Judgemental vocabulary)

Nader: *It's something that happens; we can't do anything about it. So, I think to strengthen your claim, you have to use insurance.* (Accuracy/imperative)

Table 12: *Distribution of aggravated disagreement across sexes*

| Linguistic markers      |                           | Sex | T-S   | S-S   | S-T   | Total  |          |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|-----|-------|-------|-------|--------|----------|
| Aggravated disagreement | Rhetorical questions      | F   | 0     | 0     | 0     | 0      | 12.0%    |
|                         |                           | M   | 6     | 3     | 0     | 9      | (36)     |
|                         | Intensifiers              | F   | 0     | 9     | 9     | 18     | 44.0%    |
|                         |                           | M   | 0     | 6     | 9     | 15     | (33)     |
|                         | Personal accusatory 'you' | F   | 0     | 0     | 0     | 0      | 8.0% (6) |
|                         |                           | M   | 3     | 3     | 0     | 6      |          |
|                         | Judgemental vocabulary    | F   | 3     | 6     | 3     | 12     | 36.0%    |
|                         |                           | M   | 0     | 12    | 3     | 15     | (27)     |
| Total                   |                           | F   | 4.0%  | 20.0% | 16.0% | 40.0%  | 100.0%   |
|                         |                           |     | (3)   | (15)  | (12)  | (30)   | (75)     |
|                         |                           | M   | 12.0% | 32.0% | 16.0% | 60.0%  |          |
|                         |                           |     | (9)   | (24)  | (12)  | (45)   |          |
|                         |                           |     | 16.0% | 52.0% | 32.0% | 100.0% |          |
|                         |                           |     | (12)  | (39)  | (24)  | (75)   |          |

## **DISCUSSION**

This study examined the roles of three variables—power, rank, and disagreement—in the frequency of linguistic markers of interlocutors' usage disagreement and mitigation devices in English free discussion classes. Most students with the same rank of power applied softened disagreement in the form of positive comments, partial agreement, and questions during interactions. However, when comparing male and female participants' disagreements with teachers, most of the latter applied softened disagreement, mainly by using positive comments, whereas the former applied aggravated disagreement in the form of intensifiers and judgemental vocabulary. Teachers with a high rank of power primarily used different forms of softened disagreement and contradictory statements when disagreeing with students.

Furthermore, this study demonstrates the intricate nature of the variables that influence the selection of linguistic markers for different types of disagreement in real-life situations. Although factors like power dynamics, severity, rank, and social contexts generally influence the choice of markers, it is evident that the specific topic of disagreement, the social distance between interlocutors, and the context within which the disagreements occur make it difficult to predict the specific linguistic or mitigation markers they would employ. The opposite power relationship between teachers and students can account for some differences in linguistic markers of disagreement usage, albeit not predictively. In this study, teachers used more contradictory statements as a linguistic marker when disagreeing with their students. It means they applied the second type of disagreement, neither softened nor strengthened, to improve the addressees' face by encouraging them actively instead of passively. However, the distribution of disagreement types demonstrated that the majority of teachers applied softened disagreement. This factor can be linked to their professional role as educators: if teachers disagree too strongly, students can feel intimidated and become reluctant to participate. Therefore, softened disagreement helps maintain a supportive atmosphere, ensuring that conversations flow smoothly and students feel encouraged to express their ideas. Generally, the severity of disagreement plays a part in interlocutors' decisions to be politer in a difficult situation by choosing softened disagreement to mitigate the threat within that situation. Choosing aggravated disagreement occurs because the addressee's power is viewed as a challenge to personal or professional identity.

The detailed findings in the previous section demonstrate that the results are consistent with Brown and Levisohn (1987), namely that factors of power and rating can be used to understand somewhat how disagreement is expressed in the raw data, even though these factors cannot be treated as practical factors, nor are they sufficiently useful to express disagreement overall. Based on the degree of imposition by Brown and Levinson (1987), the severity of disagreement could produce two contrasting results: in one, politeness is increased to lessen face threat to the addressee; in the other, face threat to the speaker outweighs considerations of the addressee's face, leading to aggravated disagreement (Miller & Spencer-Oatey, 2018). However, face maintenance concerns

are not responsible for how disagreement was applied to serve pedagogical aims, particularly when disagreement was employed as part of the elicitation series. However, the results align with Miller and Spencer-Oatey (2018) since the less powerful interlocutors (students) used redressing disagreements less often than the more powerful (teachers). By nature, the one who possesses greater knowledge and skill (the teacher) typically has the right to disagree with the students, especially when they make errors due to a lack of knowledge or skill. In contrast, students may not feel empowered to disagree openly, as they perceive themselves as not on the teacher's level of knowledge or authority. As a result, students might view disagreement as a potentially face-threatening act that could challenge the teacher's expertise. In addition, they might have concerns about potential consequences, such as how their disagreements could be perceived, even though professional educators are expected to manage disagreements constructively and without bias, particularly in assessments. While these concerns might exist in the students' minds, it is important to emphasise that ethical teaching practices prioritise fairness and objectivity, ensuring that disagreements do not influence grading or other professional evaluations. In addition, the findings of this research are consistent with Cook-Gumperz and Szymanski (2001), given that the majority of the female participants applied softened disagreement in most of their interactions, and they are as understandable as males; they can also express their opinions as males do.

Nevertheless, the findings of this research contrast with Maryanty (1997) since the interlocutors with a high rank of power did not apply downtoned linguistic markers; they primarily applied questions when disagreeing with a low power (a student). Maryanty (1997) finds that the 'reason-giving' strategy is mostly used when a lower status disagrees with a higher status; rather, a higher status mostly uses 'downtoned suggestion' when disagreeing with a lower status. The scholar also finds that female interlocutors use 'reason-giving' and 'downtoned suggestion' with female respondents, while male respondents use 'refusing to cooperate' towards interlocutors of the opposite sex. Hence, this study presents new aspects not dealt with in previous studies across sexes. The results of this research have implications for learning material designers, who can apply the findings to emphasise teaching language functions and politeness principles in an organised way. Studies on inter-language pragmatics, specifically pragmatic development of disagreement on one hand and politeness strategies on the other, are rare, thereby posing pedagogical implications within Iranian EFL contexts. It suggests some sensitivity in producing appropriate disagreement across varying social situations, especially considering various social distances. The results also emphasise introducing authentic spoken data into foreign language classrooms. Importantly, all students should strive to learn the syntactical, semantical, phonological, and morphological aspects of language essential for successful communication in a foreign language. Thus, how the speakers of one language with a different background use a language or the code of politeness is crucial. If a speaker is unaware of these politeness codes, they may encounter some misunderstandings and even miscommunications.

As regards pedagogical implications for EFL learners, they can be applied by syllabus designers to emphasise teaching politeness strategies and disagreement forms in syllabi and curricula. Language teachers should pay sufficient attention to disagreement as a part of their curriculum when teaching a foreign language. The study foresees that other English institutes would benefit from the findings and pedagogical implications of this study on Iranian EFL students' realisation of disagreement strategies.

## CONCLUSION

From naturally occurring expressions of disagreement in a natural setting, this study provides empirical evidence of factors, like the power and rank affecting disagreement choice, albeit in complex ways that emerge through the particularities of context. Therefore, future research should produce and validate educational materials to facilitate L2 practitioners in integrating pragmatics into their curriculum and classes, where little investigation and attention have been given historically. Moreover, the study highlights that using specific, direct instruction and providing life-like and authentic contexts can have a good influence on the oral production of speech acts. As a final remark, these results have vital implications for EFL instructors and second- and foreign-language course designers who are integral to advancing the standard of language instruction. Accordingly, the results might also be helpful for language learners who feel that learning speech acts in general is far-fetched and boring. In conclusion, these findings add to the growing body of literature that facilitates our understanding of the connection between pragma-linguistic and socio-pragmatic knowledge and competence.

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## APPENDIX A

### APPENDIX A

S-T= Student speaking to teacher

T-S= Teacher speaking to student

S-S= Student speaking to student

*Positive politeness*

Positive comment

S-S but also we should care when we pass the red light.

Inclusive pronoun

S-P... it is according to the rule of God.

Partial agreement

S-S while that is true, no doubt my wife is pregnant and I should...

Humor

S-S he said nothing. He said a light is your own.

*Negative politeness*

I think

S-S I think in all situations we should not...

Questions

S-S do you think a child is a problem?

Down toners

S-T ~~no~~ that is not entirely true (...)

Verbs of uncertainty

S-S you know in ordinary situation maybe I do not accept but if I could not find any child...

*Aggravated disagreement*

Rhetorical questions

T-S is not it important? Really? For ~~example~~ you may kill two people.

Intensifiers

S-T not at all. I cannot let my husband to have another wife.

Accusatory/ imperative you

S-T it is something that happened and we cannot do anything about it. So, I think to strength your claim you have to use insurance.

Judgmental vocabulary

S-S come on, I mean couples should understand each other before having a child.

*Disagreement neither softened nor strengthened*

Contradictory statement

S-T ... but unfortunately most of the men in Iran are like a boy.

Verbal shadowing

S-S I think there is no difference between man and woman definitely.