POSSIBLE GENDER DIFFERENCES IN THE USE OF LEXICAL HEDGES IN SPOKEN COLLOQUIAL ARABIC

AMONG YOUNG MALE AND FEMALE SAUDI ADULTS IN RIYADH

Nouf ALDWEESH & Suha ABDULLAH ALHARBI [*]

King Saud University

aldweeshn@gmail.com / Alharbisuha87@gmail.com

ORCID: 0009-0005-9703-5297 / 0000-0003-3168-3644

Abstract

The current paper examines the possible differences between young male and female Saudi adults in using lexical hedges in spoken colloquial Arabic in Riyadh. All 12 participants (six males and six females) spoke the Najdi dialect, a dialect that is used in the central region of Saudi Arabia. The voices of the selected participants were recorded during debates and assigned to two equal groups of three males and three females each. One group was given four non-controversial topics, and the other group was given four recent controversial topics on gender roles. After data were recorded, transcribed, and analysed, hedges were classified according to Namasaraev's (1997) framework. Frequency was used to point out the differences between the performance of the two groups. The results showed that while discussing non-controversial topics, women utilized more lexical hedges than men, whereas, in the discussion of controversial topics on gender roles, male participants used most of the most hedges that are used in Modern Standard Arabic.

Keywords: lexical hedges, spoken language, Najdi dialect, gender

POSSIBLES DIFERÈNCIES DE GÈNERE EN L'ÚS DE MATISADORS LÈXICS EN L'ÀRAB COL·LOQUIAL PARLAT ENTRE HOMES I DONES SAUDÍS JOVES I ADULTS DE RIAD

Resum

L'article examina les possibles diferències entre homes i dones joves i adults saudís en l'ús de matisadors lèxics en l'àrab col·loquial parlat a Riyadh. Els 12 participants (sis homes i sis dones) parlaven en àrab najdí, un dialecte que es fa servir a la regió central d'Aràbia Saudita. Les veus dels participants

---

[*] BOX 2454, Riyadh 11451, Saudi Arabia.

seleccionats van ser enregistrades durant debats i assignades a dos grups formats per tres homes i tres dones cadascun. A un grup se li van donar quatre temes no controvertits i a l'altre se li van donar quatre temes recents controvertits sobre rols de gènere. Després de registrar, transcriure i analitzar les dades, els matisadors es van classificar segons el model de Namasaraev (1997). La freqüència es va fer servir per assenyalar les diferències en l'actuació dels dos grups. Els resultats van mostrar que mentre es discutien temes no controvertits, les dones van utilitzar més matisadors lèxics que els homes, mentre que, en la discussió de temes controvertits sobre rols de gènere, els participants masculins van fer servir la majoria de matisadors que s'usen en l'àrab estàndard modern.

Paraules clau: matisadors lèxics, llengua parlada, dialecte najdí, gènere

POSIBLES DIFERENCIAS DE GÉNERO EN EL USO DE MATIZADORES LÉXICOS EN EL ÁRABE COLOQUIAL HABLADO ENTRE HOMBRES Y MUJERES SAUDÍES JÓVENES Y ADULTOS DE RIAD

Resumen

El artículo examina las posibles diferencias entre hombres y mujeres jóvenes y adultos saudíes en el uso de matizadores léxicos en el árabe coloquial hablado en Riyadh. Los 12 participantes (seis hombres y seis mujeres) hablaban en árabe neyedí, un dialecto que se usa en la región central de Arabia Saudita. Las voces de los participantes seleccionados fueron grabadas durante debates y asignadas a dos grupos de tres hombres y tres mujeres cada uno. A un grupo se le dieron cuatro temas no controvertidos y al otro grupo se le dieron cuatro temas recientes controvertidos sobre roles de género. Después de registrar, transcribir y analizar los datos, los matizadores se clasificaron según el modelo de Namasaraev (1997). La frecuencia se utilizó para señalar las diferencias en la actuación de los dos grupos. Los resultados mostraron que mientras se discutían temas no controvertidos, las mujeres utilizaron más matizadores léxicos que los hombres, mientras que, en la discusión de temas controvertidos sobre roles de género, los participantes masculinos usaron la mayoría de matizadores que se utilizan en el árabe estándar moderno.

Palabras clave: matizadores léxicos, lengua hablada, dialecto neyedí, género

1. Introduction

Not long ago, linguists took a great interest in the matter of gender and language. Tannen (1990) used the term *genderlect* to describe the difference between men and women's speech, which includes many aspects, one of which is their use of hedges. A large body of data concerning the use of lexical hedges and their relationship to genderlect has been reported. These studies carry substantial importance to the field of sociolinguistic research.

It is generally accepted that Lakoff (1973) was one of the first scholars to explore the relationship between language and gender, by assuming that women's language is inferior to that of men. Lakoff (1972: 271) defined hedges as "words whose job is to make things fuzzier or less fuzzy", claiming that women use hedges more than men. Many investigations into the use of lexical hedges support Lakoff's (1973) claim. Global

research — for instance in Algeria, Indonesia, and Iran — shows that lexical hedges are used more frequently by females when compared to males. In addition, the findings show that both genders differentiate in the purpose for which they are employing hedges in their speech. Females tend to use hedges for the sake of softening their speech and being polite while males tend to employ hedges to assert their speech (Ansarin & Bathaie 2011, Djafer 2020; Dousti & Rasekh 2016, Rosanti & Jaelani 2016, Namaziandost & Shafiee 2018). Nevertheless, in the Saudi context, a considerable amount of research has investigated language and gender (Alqarni 2017) but a very limited number of studies have specifically focused on the use of lexical hedges. Moreover, many modern factors could have transformed Saudi men and women's linguistic features, like the fundamental socio-economic changes that are happening currently, the effect of globalization, and the rise of social media. Moreover, these modern life transitions are a subject of controversy among young adults that could stimulate certain linguistic features during a discussion. Hence, the question remains whether women still use more lexical hedges than men in Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, does the topic of discussion affect young adults' usage of lexical hedges?

This paper will explore the possible differences between young male and female Saudi adults in using lexical hedges in spoken colloquial Arabic in Riyadh. The data have been collected from 12 participants, six males and six females aged 21 to 35, who speak the colloquial Najdi dialect in Riyadh. The method that will be applied in this research is inspired by Namaziandost & Shafiee's (2018) methodology, which is a semi-structured interview divided into two discussion sessions. However, in this paper, the topics for discussion have been changed to suit the participants' culture and interests.

This paper is structured as follows: Section two presents the literature review. Section three introduces the methodology and framework implemented to examine the hedges used by the participants. Section four presents the results, section five discusses them, and section six ends with the conclusion.

2. Literature review

2.1 *Spoken language*

The linguistic system refers to the spoken or oral language used amongst humans, solely referring to verbal utterances that are made through producing sounds from the vocal folds. Tannen (1983) stated verbal language was a type of communication where humans utilize their mouths to produce recognisable sounds. Furthermore, White (2003) argued that people varied in utilizing language. This variation is based on certain features and classifications such as gender, class, age, and ethnic group.

2.2 *Language and gender*

The relationship between language and gender entails many aspects, and one of the aspects that has been excessively explored is women's language, or what could be described as *insert feminine linguistic features*. Robin Lakoff is a well-known figure in this academic field. Gu (2013) believes that Robin Lakoff remains the first person to have confirmed that females' language, specifically their oral speech, differed from men's speech. Additionally, Lakoff (1973) stated that women's language was inferior and powerless. Lakoff's analysis of men and women's language resulted in distinguishing many features especially when both genders were expressing their opinions about something (Holmes 2008). Coates (1988, as cited in Han 2014: 96) indicated that Lakoff described females' linguistic features as being characterized by the following: lexical hedges, tag questions, rising intonation, extreme politeness, repetitive intensifiers such as "just" and "so", and empty adjectives.

A local study was conducted in the Southern region of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on a domestic dialect. The presented findings supported Lakoff's claim about women's linguistic features. Alqarni (2017) explored the linguistic variations of male and female Saudi participants who spoke the Bani Buhair dialect, which represented a rural variety spoken in the south. Two women and three men were involved in a

discussion while the researcher recorded and analysed their speech. The findings — although from a relatively small sample — demonstrated that there were linguistic variations among the two genders in Saudi Arabia; for instance, females used more hedges.

Ansarin & Bathaie (2011) emphasized oral interaction by stating the differences found between males' and females' language use appeared to be centred on interaction in speech. Livytska (2019) declared that differences between genders in language use are found through verbal interaction. However, neither Livytska nor Ansarin & Bathaie explained the reasons behind these differences in men's and women's speech. Tannen (1990), on the other hand, stated that men and women vary in their speech styles because they are distinct and come from different sub-cultures. Thus, no wonder communication between them fails sometimes. As a result, some psychologists have written books that validate Tannen's statement, like Gray's (1992) *Men are from Mars. Women are from Venus*. He explained the variations of communication between genders by using the metaphor of literally two different planets.

2.3 *Language of the younger generation*

Young adults or millennials are those who were born between 1980 and 2000. DeVaney (2015) reported that although millennials were immigrants to the technological era, they were the founders of some of the largest-scale technology companies such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. Moreover, Saratovsk & Feldman (2013) argue that millennials are a motivated age group; they are recognized for their love to communicate and maintain their social relationships with one another. The reason behind this particular age group's social motivation and communicative nature is that millennials' lives consist of a mixture of classic and modern life. Furthermore, Nippold et al. (2017) conducted a study in the US amongst forty young adults which aimed to investigate the syntactic complexity in the participants' spoken language. The researchers used an interview as their instrument and found the participants' syntactic complexity was higher during the narrative task and critical thinking task, which

showed the age groups' talkative and analytic habits. However, the researchers did not consider gender a factor or variable in their study. Therefore, they did not determine whether syntactic complexity was higher among female participants than male participants, or vice versa.

2.4 *Hedges*

According to Lakoff (1972: 271), hedges are "words whose job is to make things fuzzier or less fuzzy". Another definition of hedges explains that they are "words or phrases used to indicate that we are not really sure that what we are saying is sufficiently correct or complete" (Yule 2010: 148). Hedges have been investigated in both written and spoken contexts. Ansarin & Bathaie (2011) conducted a research project to investigate the differences between male and female authors' writing styles by specifically observing the use of lexical hedges in their research articles. The researchers analysed 130 articles, which constituted an adequate sample. The results showed that female authors' articles were more hedged than male authors' articles. However, the research method was a corpus word count that counted all the hedges without analysing each hedge to investigate the reasons behind its more frequent use among females.

As for using lexical hedges in a spoken context, most of the studies used the instrument of discussion and semi-interviews to investigate the phenomenon. A study was conducted in Indonesia to examine the matter by Jaelani & Rosanti (2016). They defined lexical hedges as "words or sounds used to lessen the impact of an utterance. They can be adjectives or adverbs and sometimes can consist of clauses" (Rosanti & Jaelani 2016: 31). The two researchers observed the difference between females and males in using lexical hedges by using the descriptive-qualitative method. Data were gathered from 30 EFL students at the Ibn Khaldun University in Bogor, with an equal number of participants representing each gender: 15 females and 15 males. The participants were recorded during a debate in which they were called upon to express their opinions, while the researchers analysed their speech, specifically their hedges, using the framework of Namasaraev (1997). The results showed that female

participants employed more lexical hedges than males, specific fillers such as "hmm", "uhh", "you know", while male participants were not very productive in the use of hedges. The methodology used by the researchers was well suited to the aim, and it explained why Namaziandost & Shafiee (2018) were inspired by it. They conducted a study in Iran with the same aim and employed the same methodology. However, the study in Iran had 40 participants: 20 females and 20 males, and five discussion sessions. The results showed that females did indeed use more hedges, and the results were the same as the ones presented by Rosanti & Jaelani (2016). Furthermore, Dousti & Rasekh (2016) carried out a study, once again with the same aim and employing the same methodology, that investigated the use of hedges in Iran. However, in this study, the researchers presented the reasons behind the use of hedges. The researchers reported that women used more hedges than men for the sake of being polite and friendlier while men employed hedges to assert and confirm their opinions.

The phenomenon of hedges has also been a matter of interest among linguists in the Arabic world. Djafer (2020), like the previous studies, undertook a study to examine the use of lexical hedges among male and female EFL students. This study was conducted in Algeria and the sample consisted of four males and four females. Djafer (2020) used the focus group and observation method and found that females used more hedges than the male participants; however, the difference was not significant. The study's key finding was that all the participants employed hedges to express uncertainty and hesitation. Djafer (2020) presented different findings than the previously mentioned studies although the sample size was considerably smaller than the previous studies that investigated the same phenomenon (i.e., the use of hedges among genders). Moreover, data collected from eight participants were not nearly enough to indicate a significant difference among genders.

The results from all the international studies mentioned above — i.e., those conducted in Iran, Indonesia, and Algeria — were similar. Those previous results supported Lakoff's claim (1972) that females are characterized by their handling of lexical hedges, and that this represented a peculiarly feminine linguistic feature. Additionally, there is a lack of research in Saudi Arabia that assesses the differences in

the use of spoken lexical hedges between females and males. Alqarni's (2017) study, although not completely dedicated to the use of lexical hedges, reported that females used more hedges than males. The hedges only appeared in the findings as a feature of females' speech. Therefore, a very limited number of studies in the Saudi context discuss the linguistic variations in the use of spoken lexical hedges between genders, specifically among today's youth, who provide linguists with invaluable insight into the most significant linguistic features of the language as it is spoken today.

2.5 *Hedges in debates*

In a debate, a debater utilizes hedges to indicate his/her point of view. This could justify the need for employing them when dealing with recent controversial topics about gender roles. Yuyun & Putri (2016) conducted a study on argument in a university-level debate during the discussion of both subjective and objective topics. The researchers stated that in subjective debates the linguistic feature of hedges could be recognized in the use of qualifying verbs such as "believe", "think" and "appear". Also, modal auxiliary verbs tend to appear in the discussion of subjective topics, for instance: "will", "can", "might", and so on. Moreover, Francis et al. (2002) declared that employing hedges in discussions makes a claim more acceptable to the audience. Tannen (1990) mentioned that women tended to use more hedges in discussions. This tendency was due to their politeness, not a lack of confidence, nor did it show that they were vulnerable. Furthermore, arguments and discussions are seen as an art or a skill a person can have or gain. According to Ketcham (1917) argumentation — whether written or spoken — is seen as the art of convincing others. Newman et al. (2008, as cited in Bacang et al. 2019: 220) found that females used more hedges than males but there was no significant difference. Moreover, Namaziandost & Shafiee (2018), and Rosanti & Jaelani (2016) concluded that, in spoken debates about general topics like sports, females used more hedges than males.

To summarize everything that has been presented so far: it would be fair to state that most of the presented studies above had similar results. These results indicate that women use more hedges than men. Although in some of these studies the

significance was not noteworthy, they still concluded that women used more hedges, and employed longer utterances during discussions. Tannen (1990) justified women's tendency to use hedges as a mark of politeness, while Lakoff (1973) stated that women's language is inferior and powerless. However, with the radical socioeconomic changes happening in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia, there might be recent effects on gendered language, especially among the younger generation. Therefore, the question of whether females use more lexical hedges than males remains topical and therefore worthy of investigation.

3. Methodology

3.1 *Research questions*

This research was designed to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What lexical hedges are frequently used by young male and female Saudi adults in Riyadh?

RQ2: Is there a significant difference in terms of using lexical hedges related to the topic of conversation between young male and female Saudi adults in Riyadh?

3.2 *The goal of the study*

This study aims at exploring the possible difference between young male and female Saudi adults in using lexical hedges in spoken colloquial Arabic in Riyadh.

3.3 *Statement of the problem*

One of the most remarkable features of humans has been their linguistic system. This system distinguishes us from other species. Producing these oral words or sentences can provide us with much information about our characteristics as individuals. For example, men and women might utilize language differently (Shazu

2014). According to Tannen (1990), men and women vary in their speech because they are different species, in other words, they are dissimilar biologically and psychologically. Gender and language have been studied in multiple fields such as sociolinguistics and psychology. The study of gender and language by linguists means investigating "the relationship between language and gender" (Gu 2013: 248). Imagine a discussion between a group of men and women on a controversial topic like mixed work environments. It would be fascinating to observe from a linguistic point of view how each gender expresses their ideas and opinions through verbal utterances. According to Gu (2013), in sociolinguistics, there are two notable approaches to language and gender that explain the concept presented in the question above: the 'Dominance approach' and the 'Difference approach'. The Dominance approach argues that women have an inferior social position in society and that men dominate women. Under this approach, unlike women, males are presented to be linguistically powerful. The Difference approach, on the other hand, denies this claim. It states that genders are different biologically and socially, but equal in status.

Furthermore, one of the observed areas in gendered language studies is the pragmatic use of lexical hedges. Lexical hedges are "words or phrases used to indicate we are not really sure that what we are saying is sufficiently correct or complete" (Yule 2010: 148). According to Lakoff (1972), it is commonly recognized that females employ lexical hedges. Shafiee & Namaziandost (2018) reported that two decades' investigations into the use of hedges among genders were reflected in the literature. However, there is consistently something new to include, especially when exploring new perspectives, or old perspectives from new angles. For instance, when observing language and gender one should shed light on the role of the speaker's age. According to Tagliamonte (2016: 3) "language amongst the young generation is greatly influenced by the social forces that control their lives such as their growing independence, their widening circle of contacts, their urge to be distinct from their parents, and their strong identification with their peers". Alqarni (2017) reported that very limited research has been conducted in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia about gender and language, not to mention the added variable of age. This may be due to Saudi Arabia's 2030 vision, which could have had a possible impact on gendered

language among the younger generation in the Kingdom. For that reason, this research will adopt a Difference approach.

3.4 *Significance of the study*

A plethora of research has been conducted on gender and language, especially on specific areas of language such as using lexical hedges amongst genders, as mentioned previously in the statement of the problem. Nevertheless, this research was conducted to enhance awareness of the possible differences among young male and female Saudi adults in terms of using lexical hedges. Using hedges in spoken colloquial Arabic among young male and female Saudi adults is a rewarding aspect to be studied as it adds to the body of literature resulting from the national research. Moreover, this research modestly adds to the academic fields of sociolinguistics and pragmatics. Young adults are the target of this study due to Saudi Arabia's 2030 vision, which saw the country embark on drastic changes in social and legal norms and regulations. These changes, that underpin and support individual freedom and gender equality, have possibly reshaped the lives of young Saudi adults including their language, which is a linguistic phenomenon worth exploring.

3.5 *Design of the study*

To achieve the study's goal and to satisfy the statement of the problem and research questions; a descriptive-qualitative approach was selected. This approach was employed as an attempt to explore the possible differences between young male and female Saudi adults in using lexical hedges in the spoken Najdi dialect, a colloquial form of Arabic. Furthermore, the chosen method was applicable and well suited to the nature of this research.

3.6 *Participants*

Twelve young Saudi adults who live in Riyadh participated voluntarily in this study: six males and six females. To ensure their homogeneity, all participants' socioeconomic status was middle class, as participants of each group were related to one another. They were all native Arabic speakers; they spoke the colloquial Najdi dialect, and their ages were between 21 and 35.

3.7 *Instrument*

Semi-structured interviews were used as an instrument in this study. This method was inspired by Shafiee & Namaziandost (2018) who used semi-structured interviews divided into five discussion sessions. However, in this research, topics for discussion were changed to suit the participants' culture and interests. Also, due to a shortage of time and the current COVID-19 situation, the discussion sessions were limited to two sessions and eight topics, four topics per session. Each session lasted forty minutes, and the discussion time was equally distributed among the topics. The topics were carefully chosen to observe the emergence of hedges depending on the subjectivity of the topic. One group was assigned four non-controversial topics which included social media, tourism, the year 2020, and trade (see Appendix 1). The other group, in contrast, was assigned four recent controversial topics on gender roles which included women driving, mixed work environments, cooking, and family responsibilities (see Appendix 2). Classification of the data followed the framework of Namasaraev's (1997) nine categories of hedges (as shown in Appendix 3).

3.8 *Data collection*

Data were obtained by giving the participants the discussion topics mentioned above. The researchers requested permission from the participants to record their utterances and required them to sign a consent form (see Appendix 4). The two groups were equally constituted. One group was given four non-controversial topics, while the

other group was given four recent controversial topics on gender roles, as was mentioned earlier.

3.9 *Data analysis*

After data were recorded, transcribed, and analysed, hedges were classified according to Namasaraev's (1997) framework. The researchers used frequency to determine the differences between the performance of the two groups. Moreover, data were coded on the first attempt as shown in Appendices 5 and 6 for recent non-controversial and controversial topics on gender roles respectively. Then, to achieve reliability, a linguist intercoder was consulted. In terms of external validity, some studies on the topic follow a similar method, for example, Namaziandost & Shafiee (2018), Jaelani & Rosanti (2016) and Dousti & Rasekh (2016). For internal validity, the study collected data from an equal number of the two genders, who live in Riyadh, within the targeted age group. The researchers also controlled for other variables that might affect the study like class and overall health. The participants were healthy both physically and mentally, and socially they were from the middle class. Furthermore, the participants were native Arabic speakers who spoke the colloquial Najdi dialect. They were briefed about the thrust of the research but not the use of hedges so as not to unduly influence the results.

3.10 *Evaluation and limitation*

The procedure was evaluated by including recent controversial topics on gender roles. After recording the first non-controversial topics with the first group, preliminary results showed limited hedges. This step was taken to extract more data from the participants and explore whether controversial topics on gender roles played a role in emerging hedges. Furthermore, due to a shortage of time and to the current COVID-19 pandemic, the number of sessions, time per session, and the number of participants

were reduced. However, the amount of time for both sessions and groups were equally assigned.

4. Results

The first and the second tables below demonstrate the data for lexical hedges for the recent controversial topics on gender roles. Tables three and four represent the data for lexical hedges for the non-controversial topics. Hedge types are illustrated in the tables according to their rank in Namasaraev's (1997) framework.

1.1 Lexical Hedges as Modal Auxiliary Verbs	Female	Male	1.2 Lexical Hedges as Lexical Verbs	Female	Male
Can be	4	7	It appears	4	3
Could be	-	2	I believe	3	-
Will be	2	11	I think	3	3
Might be	-	2	Total	10	6
Total	6	22			
1.3 Lexical Hedges as If Clauses	Female	Male	1.4 Lexical Hedges as Adverbs	Female	Male
If true	-	2	Apparently	-	1
If anything	1	2	Conversely	4	4
Total	1	4	Presumably	-	1
			Probably	-	5
			Certainly	2	-
			Total	6	11

Table 1. Data for the controversial topics group

The results as shown in Table 1 above illustrate those male participants used more Modern Standard Arabic hedges than female participants in three categories: lexical modal auxiliary verbs (1.1), if clauses (1.3), and adverbs (1.4), while females surpassed them in one category only: that of lexical verbs (1.2). Furthermore, modal auxiliary verbs were the category most frequently used by the male participants (22 times) when compared to female participants (6 times), whereas young female adults

used slightly more lexical verbs than their male counterparts (10 times as opposed to 6 times), in (1), for example, *it appears to change*, and *I think that*.

2.1 Lexical Hedges as Adverbs of Frequency	Female	Male	*2.2 Lexical Hedges as Fillers*	Female	Male
Always	1	1	I mean	27	3
Sometimes	3	0	Yeah	21	12
Never	-	2	Well	10	12
Total	4	3	Uhh	20	4
			Uh	9	6
2.3 Lexical Hedges as Probability Adjective Nouns	Female	Male	Uhm	2	3
Likely	2	6	Like	9	11
Certain	-	3	Total	98	51
Total	2	9			

Table 2. Data for the controversial topics group

Table 2's results show that females utilized more fillers (2.2) than males; the total frequency for females was 98 times in (2), for instance, *yeah.* While that for males was 51 times. Furthermore, lexical hedges as probability adjective nouns (2.3) were employed more by young male adults in (3), for instance, than young female adults. However, the use of adverbs of frequency (2.1) was broadly equal — female frequency was four times and male frequency was three times.

3.1 Lexical Hedges as Modal Auxiliary Verbs	Female	Male	3.2 Lexical Hedges as Lexical Verbs	Female	Male
Can be	-	-	It appears	1	2
Could be	2	1	I believe / I think	10	4
Must be	1	2	Total	11	6
Total	3	3			
3.3 Lexical Hedges as If Clauses	Female	Male	3.4 Lexical Hedges as Adverbs	Female	Males
If true	8	2	Apparently	2	1
If anything	6	3	Presumably	2	1
Total	14	5	Probably	6	2
			Certainly	3	1
			Total	13	5

Table 3. Data for the non-controversial topics group

Results in Table 3 above show a noteworthy difference between the two genders' use of hedges where lexical verbs (3.2) are concerned. This includes lexical verbs in (4), for example, *I believe*. In the category of if-clauses (3.3), *if true* was used additionally by female participants. However, the two genders used hedges as modal auxiliary verbs (3.1) equally, the frequency for each gender being three times.

4.1 Lexical Hedges as Adverbs of Frequency	Female	Male	4.2 Lexical Hedges as Fillers	Female	Male
Always	5	2	I mean	15	3
Sometimes	2	1	Yeah	18	10
Never	1	3	Well	9	10
Total	8	6	Uhh	3	6
			Uhm	3	3
4.3 Lexical Hedges as Probability Adjective Nouns	Female	Male	Total	48	32
Likely	1	-			
Total	1	-			

Table 4. Data for the non-controversial topics group

Table 4 shows that female participants employed more lexical hedges as adverbs of frequency (4.1) than males, in (5) for instance *always,* as well as more probability adjective nouns (4.3), in (6) for example *likely*. Moreover, the highest frequency in the use of hedges was in the category of fillers (4.2), in (7) for instance *I mean* and *yeah,* where males utilized them 32 times, while females employed them substantially more often 48 times.

5. Discussion

Previous research has found that males and females have diverse linguistic features. In addition to that, the current research assumed that in the past in Saudi Arabia, women were more seen in terms of Lakoff's (1973) claim that they were vulnerable, and men were more dominant. However, the new Saudi Vision 2030 drove

numerous changes to Saudi culture, which led to gender equality and women empowerment. The researchers believe that the Saudi Vision 2030 could have had a possible recent effect on gendered language, particularly on younger generations' linguistic features. After analysing the results of the study, it seems justified to conclude that there have indeed been some notable changes regarding gender and spoken language.

To further demonstrate, the findings of the non-controversial topics illustrated that those women utilized more lexical hedges than men. Furthermore, the hedges most frequently used by female participants in both topics (controversial and non-controversial) were 'fillers' in (8), for instance *well, yeah,* and *I mean*. This result is similar to that of Rosanti & Jaelani (2016) and Namaziandost & Shafiee (2018). The findings showed that women used more lexical hedges to be polite and friendlier, which was also found by Dousti & Rasekh (2016). Despite the similarities, results from this research have differed because boosters were also utilized more frequently by women. Many linguists might interpret this phenomenon of women being politer as a sign of being powerless, which supports Lakoff's (1973) Dominant approach, possibly due to past patriarchal traditions. As stated in the methodology section, the participants in the current research were family members. Therefore, gender might not comprise a factor, and females' politeness could be explained as a sign of familial and cultural respect. The phenomena could also be explained according to the Difference approach as a result of women being more learned and socially refined than men, which is reflected in their speech. Tannen (1990) stated that by doing so, women try to achieve solidarity, friendliness, and agreement during discussions.

Moreover, as for results during controversial topics on gender roles, female participants used more personal language during the debate. This result was in line with the findings of Keroes (1990), which stated that females used more personal language in the discussion. The male participants used most of the hedges in Modern Standard Arabic in (9), for example, adverbs and modal auxiliary verbs, which resembled the results of Francis et al. (2002). Nevertheless, when discussing controversial topics on gender roles, women used more lexical verbs than men in (10),

for example, *I think it is the best.* As for the male participants, they used certain hedges during controversial topics, such as modal auxiliaries in (11), for example, *it will change* and probability adjective nouns in (12), for instance *likely*. They additionally used If clauses in (13), for instance, *if he has a leader personality,* and adverbs in (14), for instance *probably*. In a similar vein, Yuyun & Putri (2016) stated in their results that in subjective debates some linguistic features could be recognized, like lexical verbs and modal auxiliary verbs. Consequently, it could explain the results of the current research, namely that men used specific hedges more than women when discussing such topics. The recent controversial topics on gender roles were usually subjective, based on (or influenced by) personal feelings, experiences, and opinions. Regarding adverbs of frequency, the results among both genders were relatively equal; men used the adverbs of frequency three times and women four times.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this research aimed to explore the possible differences in utilizing lexical hedges between young male and female Saudi adults based on the topic of discussion. A sufficient amount of research in the field already indicated convincingly that both genders spoke differently and that women utilized more hedges than men. This study sought to test whether results that agreed with past research findings would change depending on the topic of discussion. Results demonstrated that there was indeed a change in the way men and women utilized hedges and that the topic of the speech was an influential factor. Results of prior research presented that the topic of discussion played a role in the use of lexical hedges. The findings of this study revealed that during recent non-controversial topics on gender roles, young female adults utilized all the types of lexical hedges more than men. However, in recent controversial topics on gender roles men used more hedges, such as modal auxiliary verbs, while women used more fillers in both types of topics, controversial and non-controversial. However, this research had several limitations: due to time constraints and the current

Covid-19 pandemic, the number of sessions, time per session, and the number of participants were all reduced.

For further research, a larger amount of data is recommended. In addition, it is advisable to control for other factor factors that might affect the results, such as kinship among participants. Ideally, the duration of discussion sessions should be longer. The findings of the current research are of great value to the field of sociolinguistics as they help people — especially linguists — understand the changes in the language of society's youth. This is essential because language reflects thoughts and understanding; what shapes the present can help us shape the future we aspire to in better ways.

To sum up, after answering the research questions stated at the outset, another research question emerged and remained unanswered: Is there a relationship between controversial topics on gender roles, on the one hand, and Saudi men using Modern Standard Arabic hedges, on the other? This led to the research problem statement in §3.3 that there is always something new to include in research when exploring perspectives from various angles.

References

ALQARNI, M. (2017) "Linguistic gender-based variation in Bani Buhari dialect", *Dialectologia*, 23, 25-60.

<https://www.raco.cat/index.php/Dialectologia/article/download/366599/460521/>

ANSARIN, A. A. & M. BATHAIE (2011) "Hedging as an index of gender realization in research articles in applied linguistics", *Iranian Journal of Applied Language*, 3(2), 85-108.
<http://doi.org/10.22111/ijals.2011.1010>

BACANG, B. C., R. M. RILLO & E. O. ALIETO (2019) "The Gender Construct in the Use of Rhetorical Appeals, Hedges, and Boosters in ESL Writing: A Discourse Analysis", *Asian EFL Journal Research Articles*, 25, 210-224.

DEVANEY, S.A. (2015) "Understanding the millennial generation", *Journal of Financial Service Professional*, 69(6), 11-14.

<https://www.scirp.org/(S(lz5mqp453edsnp55rrgjct55))/reference/ReferencesPapers.aspx?ReferenceID=2035957>

D<small>JAFER</small>, R. (2020) *Investigating gender differences in the use of lexical hedges among Algerian EFL students: The case of third year students at Biskra University*, Master's thesis, Biskra University].

<http://archives.univ-biskra.dz/bitstream/123456789/16068/1/Djafer_Rokia.pdf>

D<small>OUSTI</small>, M. & A. E. R<small>ASEKH</small> (2016) *"*ELT students' gender differences in the use of hedges in interpersonal interactions: A mixed method approach applied", *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Language Research,* 3(1), 217-231.

<https://jallr.com/index.php/JALLR/article/view/248>

F<small>RANCIS</small>, B., J. R<small>OBSON</small> & B. R<small>EAD</small> (2002) "Writers of Passage: Stylistic features of male and female undergraduate history essays", *Journal of Future and Higher Education*, 26(4), 351-362.

G<small>RAY</small>, J. (1992) *Men are from Mars, women are from Venus*, New York: HarperCollins.

G<small>U</small>, L. (2013) "Language and Gender: Differences and Similarities", in *Proceedings of the 2013 International Conference on Advances in Social Science, Humanities, and Management (ASSHM-13)*. Atlantis Press, 247-250.

<https://www.atlantis-press.com/article/10624.pdf>

H<small>AN</small>, V. N. (2014) "The relationship between language and gender: Language a case of study in Vietnamese", *Global Journal Interdisciplinary Social Science*, *3*(3), 96-99.

<https://www.longdom.org/articles/the-relationship-between-language-and-gender-a-case-study-in-vietnamese.pdf>

H<small>OLMES</small>, J. (2008)[3] *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics,* USA: Pearson Education Limited.

K<small>EROES</small>, J. (1990) "But what do they say? Gender and the content of student writing*", Discourse process*, 13(2), 243-257.

K<small>ETCHAM</small>, V. (1917) *The theory and practice of argumentation and debate*, New York: Macmillan.

<https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/62583>

L<small>AKOFF</small>, G. (1972) "Hedges: A study in meaning criteria and the logic of fuzzy concepts", *Journal of Philosophical Logic*, 2(4), 458-508.

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0x0010nv>

L<small>AKOFF</small>, R. (1973) "Language and women's place", *Language in society*, 2(1), 45-80*.*

<https://web.stanford.edu/class/linguist156/Lakoff_1973.pdf A

LIVYTSKA, L. (2019) "The use of hedging in research articles on Applied Linguistics", *Journal of Language and Cultural Education*, 7(1), 35-53.

<https://doi.org//10.2478jolace-2019-0003>

NAMASARAEV, V. (1997) *Hedging in Russian academic writing in sociological texts*, Moscow: Publishing Company.

NAMAZIANDOST, E. & S. SHAFIEE (2018) "Gender differences in the use of lexical hedges in academic spoken language among Iranian EFL learners: A comparative study", *International Journal of Research in English Education*, 3(4), 63-80.

<http://ijreeonline.com/article-1-130-en.html>

NIPPOLD, M. A., M. W. F. KASPAR & L. M. VIGELAND (2017) "Spoken language production in young adults: Examining syntactic complexity", *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research*, 60(5), 1339-1347.

ROSANTI, E. D. & A. JAELANI (2016) "The use of lexical hedges in spoken language by female and male students", *Electronic Journals of UIKA Bogor*, 16(1), 29-39.

SARATOVSKY, K.D. & F. D. FELDMAN (2013) *Cause for change: The why and how of nonprofit millennial engagement*, Jossey-Bass, A Wiley Imprint.

SHAZU, I. R. (2014) "Relationship between gender and language", *Journal of Education and Practise, 5*(14), 93-100.

<https://www.iiste.org/Journals/index.php/JEP/article/download/12994/13307>

TAGLIAMONTE, S. A. (2016)[1] *Teen Talk: The Language of Adolescents*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

TANNEN, D. (1983) "Oral and literate strategies in spoken and written discourse", *Language*, 58, 79-96.

TANNEN, D. (1990) *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation,* New York; William Morrow Paperbacks.

<https://deborah-tannen-npmr.squarespace.com/s/1983Oral-and-Literate-Strategies-in-Spoken-and-Written-Discourse.pdf

WHITE, A. (2003) *Womens' usage of a specific linguistic functions in the context of casual conversation: Analysis and discussion,* England: University of Birmingham.

<https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-artslaw/cels/essays/sociolinguistics/White5.pdf>

YULE, G. (2010)[4] *The Study of Language*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

YUYUN, I. & S. A. PUTRI (2016) "Arguments in university-level debating: Subjective or objective", *Journal of Language and Literature,* 16(1), 29-35.

Appendix 1

السياحة

- متى كانت اخر رحلة سياحية؟ ووين كانت؟
- ليش اخترت تدفع الفلوس بالمكان هذا؟
- وش رأيك بالسياحة الداخلية بالمملكة مثل العلا والطائف؟

سوشال ميديا

- وش رأيكم بتصويرسوشال ميديا لهذه الأماكن العلا والطائف وتجارب وصورهم؟
- وش موقفك من السوشال ميديا هل أنت مع أو ضد وليش؟

- سنة 2020
- ماذا تعني لك 2020؟ اوصف كيف كانت السنة بالنسبة لك؟
- اوصف فترة الحجر؟ وهل كانت تجربة سلبية أم إيجابية؟
- وش تعلمت من 2020؟
- وش توقعاتك الشخصية 2021؟
- وش أجمل فترة زمنية وأصعب فترة زمنية ولماذا؟
- كيف العمر يغير الأنسان؟

التجارة

- فيه مثل يقول أن التجارة لها أهلها لذا هل تعتقد أن التجارة والمشاريع ضربة حظ أم لها استراتيجية؟

Appendix 2

وظيفة المراءة

- ما رأيك بعمل المراءة في بيئة مختلطة؟
- هل تنصح فيه؟ وضح لماذا؟
- من وجهة نظرك ماهي أفضل وظيفة للمرأة؟
- هل تعتقد أن وضع المرأة المادي يعتبر مبرر لشغل أي عمل؟

القيادة

- هل القيادة فن ولا مهارة تكتسب؟
- متى برأيك تكون المراءة قادرة 100% على القيادة بالمملكة؟ أعني ببراعة ومن دون حوادث.
- دايما يقولون عشان تتعلم لازم تنزل الشارع وتسوق عشان رهبة الشارع تختفي، بس ليه في حال ارتكاب المراءة خطأ يلغى هذا المبرر وتُلام على مهاراتها؟

الطبخ

- زمان كانت كلمة طبخ مربوطة بالنساء فقط وكانت ترمز للدونية. إما حالياً فأصبح هنالك مجموعة من طباخين رجال معروفين بهذا المجال، كما أنه أصبح مصدر رزق كبير لأغلبهم. فبرأيك ما سر هذا التغير؟
- من أبرع بالطبخ الرجل أم المراءة؟
- هل لازم الكل يتعلم مهارة الطبخ؟

المسؤولية:

- من يتحمل المسؤولية أكثر الرجل أم المراءة؟ ولماذا؟
- على من تقع مسؤولية نفقة البيت؟
- هل المراءة مسؤولة على العمل والمساعدة في نفقة البيت؟
- على من تقع مسؤولية تربية الأبناء؟

Appendix 3

Classification of Hedges

Type	words	Sample Sentences
Modal auxiliary verb	will must, might, can come up should come could, would, may	such a measure might be more sensitive to changes in health after a specialist treatment.
Lexical verb	appear, believe, assume, tend, suggest, estimate, think, argue, speculate, indicate, propose, suppose.	in spite of its limitation, the study appears to have a number of important strengths.
Probability adjective noun	possible, likely, unlikely, clear, definite, certain, probable, assumption, claim, probability, miscibility, estimate, suggestion	we estimate that one in five marriages end in divorce.
Adverb	practically, resembling, clearly, probably, Conversely, possibly, perhaps, definitely, certainly, virtually, apparently, completely.	There is perhaps a good reason why she chose to write in the first person.
Adverb of frequency	often, occasionally, journaling, usually, sometimes, normally, frequently, always, rarely, never, Seldom.	sometimes it could produce in a lot profit.
If clause	if true, if anything.	if true our study contradicts the myth that men make better managers than women.
Compound hedges	seems reasonable, looks probable, maybe suggested	Such compound hedges can be double hedges (it may be suggested that; it seems likely that; it would indicate that; this probably indicates); treble hedges (it seems reasonable to assume that); quadruple hedges (it would seem somewhat unlikely that.
Fillers	you know, you see, by the way, sort of, well, hmm, uhm, uhh, uh, huh, all I know, I mean, yeah like.	you know, it can help them to fulfil the daily needs.

* (Namasaraev 1997: 153)

Appendix 4

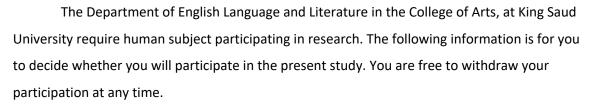| Features	F. Arabic version	M. Arabic version	F	M

Consent Form

Department of English Language and Literature, College of Arts

Riyadh, King Saud University

ENG 503: Research in Applied Linguistics

March 11, 2021

Dear participant:

The Department of English Language and Literature in the College of Arts, at King Saud University require human subject participating in research. The following information is for you to decide whether you will participate in the present study. You are free to withdraw your participation at any time.

You will be asked to discuss several general unbiased topics. For example, trade, 2020-year, social media, and traveling. Also, some biased topics like women driving, cooking, mixed work environment, and family responsibility, your voice will be recorded. It is one session, and it will last approximately 40 minutes. We are interested in studying the relationship between language and gender. This information is important, because it will help us to complete this research and pass this course. We assure you that your name will not in any way be associated with the research findings. The information will be identified only through a code number. If you would like additional information concerning this study before or after it is completed, please contact us by Mail. Thank you very much for your time and we appreciate your interest and cooperation.

 Sincerely,

Nouf Aldweesh & Suha Alharbi

MA students at English department

Alharbisuha87@gmail.com   aldweeshn@gmail.com

I give you my permission to participate in the above-described research study.

…………………………………… (Participant Name & Signature)   ……….. (Date)

Appendix 5

Data as Lexical Hedges as Modal Auxiliary Verb (noncontroversial topics group

Can be	يمكن	يمكن	-	-
Could be	تصير انه – ممكن	ممكن تكون	2	1
Must be	اكيد انه - لازم	لازم	1	2

Lexical Hedges as Lexical Verb (noncontroversial topics group)

Features	F. Arabic version	M. Arabic version	F	M
It appears	زي ما تشوفون - الظاهر	يبدو انه - الظاهر	1	2
I believe / I think	شخصيا – انا عن نفسي – احس - أتوقع	انا اشوف – احس - اعتقد	10	4

Data as Lexical Hedges as If Clause (noncontroversial topics group)

Features	F. Arabic version	M. Arabic version	F	M
If true	لو صدق - شدعوة	لو صحيح - لو صدق	8	2
If anything	ترا	للمعلومية - ترا	6	3

Data as Lexical Hedges as Adverb (noncontroversial topics group)

Features	F. Arabic version	M. Arabic version	F	M
Apparently	والله عاد الواضح – مبين انه	اللي متوضح	2	1
Presumably	لو	فرضاً – لو	2	1
Probably	يجوز انه – يمكن	يمكن	6	2
Certainly	أكيد	اكيد	3	1

Data as Lexical Hedges as Probability Adjective Noun (controversial topics group)

Features	F. Arabic version	M. Arabic version	F	M
Likely	الأكثر انه	-	1	-

Data as Lexical Hedges as Adverb of Frequency (controversial topics group)

Features	F. Arabic version	M. Arabic version	F	M
Always	دايم – سبحان الله!	دايم	5	2
Sometimes	احيانا - مرات	احيانا	2	1
Never	ابدا	ابدا	1	3

Data as Lexical Hedges as Fillers (controversial topics group)

Features	F. Arabic version	M. Arabic version	F	M
I mean	اقصد – انا أقول - يعني	قصدي – صيدي - يعني	15	3
Yeah	ايه – يا عيني عليك – ايوة - بالضبط	نعم – اييه - أي	18	10
well	طيب	طيب	9	10
uh	اء	اء	3	6
uhm	امم	اها	3	1

Appendix 6

Features	F. Arabic version	M. Arabic version	F	M
Can be	أنا بامكاني- غير قادر-يقدر- ماتقدرين	تقدر- أقدر- بقدر- ماتقدر	4	7
Could be	-	ممكن تكون	-	2
Will be	بعد 3-4 سنين أنا **ماراح**	ستتغير-حتتغير- بتكون - حيكون - بيكون	2	11
Might be	-	ربما تكون	-	2

Data as Lexical Hedges as Modal Auxiliary Verb (controversial topics group)

Features	F. Arabic version	M. Arabic version	F	M
It appears	بادية تتغير- بدينا نشوفها	بدأت	4	1
I believe	أنا أشوفها أنها أفضل- أنا من وجهة نظري-أنا أشوف التدريس	-	3	-
I think	أنا أشوف يعني	أتوقع- أنا أشوف المراءة عندها حب الأبتكار بالطبخ- ءء أنا أشوف	3	3

Data as Lexical Hedges as Lexical Verb (controversial topics group)

Features	F. Arabic version	M. Arabic version	F	M
If true	-	إذا كان الشخص عنده قوه- إذا عنده شخصية قيادية	-	2
If anything	إذا منع الزينة	إذا كان فيه بكرة- إذا بكرة صار فيه	1	2

Data as Lexical Hedges as If Clause (controversial topics group)

Features	F. Arabic version	M. Arabic version	F	M
Apparently	-	واضحة	-	1
Conversely	العكس – عكسي	على العكس- بعكس	4	4
Presumably	-	فرضاً	-	1
Probably	-	ربما - ربما يكون	-	5
Certainly	لابد أنه في يوم من الأيام- أكيد	-	2	-

Data as Lexical Hedges as Adverb (controversial topics group)

Features	F. Arabic version	M. Arabic version	F	M
Likely	ممكن	ممكن - برضوه	2	6
Certain	-	مهارات معينة2- أكلات معينة	-	3

Data as Lexical Hedges as Probability Adjective Noun (controversial topics group)

Features	F. Arabic version	M. Arabic version	F	M
Always	دائما	دائما	1	1
Sometimes	أحيانا – بعض الأحيان- يطبخ مرات	-	3	-
Never	-	أبداً	-	2

Data as Lexical Hedges as Adverb of Frequency (controversial topics group)

Features	F. Arabic version	M. Arabic version	F	M
I mean	أنا أقول	أنا أقول	27	3
Yeah	آيوه - آييه - أي	نعم – اييه - أي	21	12
Well	طيب	طيب	10	12
Uhh	اءه	اءه	20	4
Uh	اء	اء	9	6
Uhm	أمم	أمم	2	3
Like	مثل	مثل	9	11

Data as Lexical Hedges as Fillers (controversial topics group)