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Investigating the Effect of Context (Gender-Homogeneous and Nonhomogeneous Contexts) on Taboo Word Utilization in Persian: A Sociolinguistic Account

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to examine the effect of context—specifically gender-homogeneous and gender-nonhomogeneous settings, on the use of taboo words in the speech of Persian speakers from a sociolinguistic perspective. The research adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methodologies through survey and fieldwork techniques. The theoretical framework is based on the classification of taboo words proposed by Jay and Janschewitz (2008) and Jay (2009). Statistical analyses were conducted using t-tests, chi-square tests, analysis of variance, and Tukey's post hoc test. The findings revealed that, in general, men (68.3%) used more taboo words than women in same-gender contexts. This pattern was also observed in anger situations within homogeneous contexts, suggesting that men, compared with women, are more sensitive in word choice and display greater politeness in mixed-gender contexts ($p < .05$). Furthermore, the interactive effect of gender and context indicated that men and women over the age of 45 used fewer taboo words in mixed-gender contexts than other participants. Overall, the observed differences between men and women in the use of taboo words can be explained through politeness theory (Bucholtz & Lakoff, 2004; Holmes, 2013) and the notion that women generally act as conversational facilitators. These findings contribute to sociolinguistic theory by demonstrating how social variables influence language use in Persian and by offering practical insights for language education and cross-cultural communication.

Keywords: taboo word, gender-homogeneous context, Persian, sociolinguistics

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1. Introduction

Language is a significant tool for communication and the expression of individuals' opinions and views. In addition to conveying information, it serves as a carrier of emotions, beliefs, and social norms. This essential tool is constantly influenced by social variables and serves as a locus for the manifestation of attitudes and psychological foundations. Among these social variables, gender is a major factor that has attracted the attention of many sociolinguists. Examining the presence or absence of a relationship between the functions of various linguistic categories and biological gender, comparing the linguistic features of men and women, and offering explanations regarding the nature of these differences are among the key topics that sociolinguistic researchers have explored. To this end, Lakoff and Bucholtz (2004) identified several categories and characteristics of women's language, including the use of hedges, taboo words, color terms, particular adjectives, tag questions, emphatic stress, indirect speech, and polite forms of language.

Among the features identified by Lakoff and Bucholtz (2004), the use of taboo words and its relationship with gender has been the subject of numerous studies (Jay, 2009; Coates, 2004; Lakoff, 2004; Holmes, 2013; Janschewitz, 2008; Gao, 2013). The findings of these studies demonstrated that men used taboo words in public more frequently than women and employed more offensive language (Jay, 2009, p. 156). In addition to gender, age is another noteworthy social variable that affects the function of this linguistic category. Jay (2009, p. 155) claimed that "swearing was observed in every age group, but the frequency of taboo word usage peaked during the teenage years and then declined."

Alongside gender and age, other factors—particularly context, which concerns the gender composition of conversational participants—also affect the frequency and selection of taboo words (Jay & Janschewitz, 2008). However, this dimension has not yet been studied sociolinguistically in the context of the Persian language. The present study addresses this gap by examining the combined effects of gender and age on the use of taboo words in gender-homogeneous and gender-nonhomogeneous contexts among Persian speakers. In this study, taboo words are defined as words or expressions considered inappropriate or offensive in certain social situations due to cultural, religious, or social norms (Jay, 2009). Gender refers to the social and cultural roles associated with being male or female, extending beyond biological sex. Context refers to the social setting of communication, specifically, whether the participants are of the same gender (gender-homogeneous) or of mixed genders (gender-nonhomogeneous). Accordingly, this study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. Are there differences in the utilization of taboo words between genders in gender-homogeneous and nonhomogeneous contexts?
2. Are there differences in taboo word usage across different age groups in gender-homogeneous and nonhomogeneous contexts?
3. Is there an interaction effect between gender and age on taboo word usage in different contexts?

The frequency and use of taboo words in gender-homogeneous and gender-nonhomogeneous contexts of the Persian language have not been extensively examined. Studying Persian in this regard is important because of its rich literary tradition and the unique sociolinguistic dynamics shaped by Iran's cultural and historical background, particularly the influence of Islamic morality on language use. Moreover, the present study represents the first attempt to investigate the combined effects of age and gender on the contextual use of taboo words, making it both original and significant. The results of this research can contribute to the broader field of sociolinguistics, particularly studies on language and gender. Additionally, they can offer pedagogical insights for teaching the Persian language and culture to non-Persian speakers.

2. Persian Language and the Concept of Taboo

The Persian language belongs to the Iranian branch of the Indo-Iranian languages and is the official language of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Modern Persian is the closest descendant of Middle Persian and Old Persian, which were historically spoken in the Fars region of southwestern Iran (The Editors of *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1998). In terms of grammar, the standard word order in Persian is subject-object-verb (SOV), and the language is written from right to left. Geographically, the Islamic Republic of Iran is located in the southwestern region of Asia and is the second-largest country in the Middle East. Culturally, Iran is a multiethnic nation that includes Turk, Kurd, Azeri, Lur, Arab, and other ethnic groups, each with its own language and distinct traditions. According to data presented by the World Values Survey (WVS), as of 2020, 96.6% of Iranians who participated in the survey identified as Muslim, and 0.1% identified as Christian.

As in many other languages, Persian speakers use various types of taboo words, including stigmas, animal similes, sexual expressions, curses, and mockery related to politics and blasphemy (Khaleqi & Imani, 2022). Among these, sexual insults are considered the most offensive (Tajgozari & Sahragard, 2018), while the least frequent taboo words used by Persian speakers involve mockery of politics and blasphemy (Khaleqi & Imani, 2022). Moreover, the use of taboo words among Persian-speaking men and women is sensitive to social context (Hashamdar & Rafi, 2018; Tajgozari & Sahragard, 2018).

For many years, sociolinguists have examined the concept of taboo and its linguistic realization in the form of taboo words from multiple perspectives. However, the constraints of cultural and social norms have often limited direct investigation of this topic, resulting in certain gaps within the literature. This lack of research is especially evident among Persian scholars. Most existing studies on taboo words in Persian have focused on the effect of gender on the frequency of such expressions in literary works or films, while research addressing the practical and contextual use of taboo words in everyday Persian communication remains limited. The following section reviews some of the most prominent studies conducted in this area.

Shakiba (2007) examined the effect of social context on the use of taboo words in the speech of men and women in Tehran. The study categorized participants by gender, age, and educational background, and the findings revealed that men used taboo words more frequently than women, while both men and women in older age groups used them less often. The results also showed that men primarily used taboo words when addressing same-sex audiences, whereas women did not demonstrate such distinctions and generally used taboo words infrequently. The statistical population of this study was limited to men and women residing in Tehran, and other Persian-speaking regions were not included.

Arbab (2013) investigated the common taboo words used by male and female Persian speakers living in Tehran and the differences in their use. The primary aims of the study were to classify taboo words according to their lexical categories, identify gender-based differences in their use, and explore the social variable of context. The findings indicated that men used taboo words more frequently than women and that the types of taboo words employed differed between the two groups (Arbab, 2013, p. 107). However, no significant gender difference was observed in the relationship between taboo word use and context, which contrasts with Jay's (2009) findings that men swore more frequently in public settings than women.

Talebi Dastanabi and Khoshbakht Arani (2016) analyzed and categorized types of taboo words in the dialects of Aran va Bidgol County (Isfahan Province, Iran), examining the effects of variables such as gender, age, marital status, and education in both gender-homogeneous and gender-nonhomogeneous environments. The results indicated that men used taboo words more frequently than women and that single participants used them more often than married participants in both contexts. Meanwhile, the effect of education level on the frequency of taboo word use was not statistically significant. Similar to Shakiba (2007), the statistical population of this study was limited to one province and lacked ethnic diversity.

Hashamdar and Rafi (2018) explored the relationship between social identity and the use of taboo words in situations involving anger. They also examined the relationship between academic education and taboo word use among participants. The findings showed that men with different social identities used taboo words significantly more often than women. In addition, men and women with higher levels of education used fewer taboo words than those without formal education (Hashamdar & Rafi, 2018, p. 623). These findings were inconsistent with those of Talebi Dastanabi and Khoshbakht Arani (2016), particularly in relation to the characteristics of the statistical population.

3. Taboo Words in other Languages

Among non-Iranian researchers, Gao (2013) investigated the use of taboo words in English and, in some cases, compared English and Chinese taboos. The identified categories of English taboo words included bodily excretions, death and disease, sex, four-letter words, discriminatory

language, and privacy (Gao, 2013, p. 2310). The study also suggested the use of euphemisms to reduce the obscenity associated with taboo words.

Saputra and Kusama (2018) sought to identify the types of taboo words produced by four young Indonesian adults on their Instagram accounts and to examine the use of those words. The results revealed six categories of taboo words in Indonesian: sex, death, bodily excretions, body parts, religious topics, and animals. Several of these categories were similar to those identified by Gao (2013) for English. Moreover, the study showed that most of the 63 taboo words “mainly served the functions of demonstrating various emotional situations, stating humor, talking about sexual matters, as well as expressing insults” (Saputra & Kusama, 2018, p. 424).

Alqahtani et al. (2022) analyzed linguistic taboo words used within the Saudi Arabian population. The study examined three aspects of taboo language: the use of taboo words in social contexts, sex-related taboo expressions, and swearing. The sample included 253 Saudi women randomly selected from two age groups. The results indicated that Saudi speakers rarely used taboo words and preferred euphemisms to avoid direct usage. For example, sexual topics that are openly discussed in many cultures are prohibited in Saudi culture. Furthermore, the findings showed that Saudi society is highly sensitive to taboo words that conflict with its cultural and religious values. Nevertheless, younger Saudi women occasionally used such words, suggesting that linguistic change is gradually occurring within younger generations (Alqahtani et al., 2022, p. 561).

The movie *Dallas Buyers Club* was examined by Wene and Ena (2020), who analyzed the reasons that prompted the characters to use taboo words. The findings indicated that five categories of taboo words appeared in the film, with curses being the most frequent. Additionally, the researchers found that humor, psychological state, ethnic identity, and social class were among the main factors motivating the use of taboo words (Wene & Ena, 2020, p. 71).

A review of the existing literature in this field revealed a gap in the empirical investigation of the use of taboo words in colloquial Persian, which the present study seeks to address. Furthermore, none of the previous studies examined the combined effects of age and gender on the use of this linguistic category in gender-homogeneous and gender-nonhomogeneous contexts. Accordingly, given the originality of this research and the preference for studying colloquial language over other linguistic forms and styles, analyzing taboo words from this perspective is both significant and innovative. In addition, the findings of the present study can contribute to the expansion of linguistic research, particularly in sociolinguistics, gender-related studies, and translation studies, and offer pedagogical insights for teaching the Persian language and culture to non-Persian speakers.

4. Theory

According to the *Cambridge Dictionary*, a taboo is “a subject, word, or behavior avoided for social or religious reasons.” Taboo is a relative concept that varies across societies and even among different social classes within the same community. Some people use the term *curse* to refer to taboo

words, while others call them *offensive* or *bad language*. As noted by Battistella (2005, p. 72), bad language can be classified into several categories, including epithets (e.g., different types of swearing, such as *bitch*), profanity (religious insults), and vulgarity or obscenity (referring to bodily excretions or sexual topics). In another classification, Jay (2009, p. 154) categorized English taboos into nine groups: sexual, blasphemy (insulting religion), impurities, animal similes, gender-based, racial and ethnic insults, insults toward social deviants, physical and mental insults, vulgarity and obscenity, slang, and ancestral allusions.

Various factors influence the frequency and use of taboo words, among which gender is one of the most significant. The use of taboo words has traditionally been associated with masculine behavior, and men's use of such language is generally perceived as more acceptable than women's (Johnová, 2011, p. 25). From a psychological perspective, "men's and women's compromising strategies differ, and these differences affect the frequency of taboo word use. For instance, cultural norms for expressing anger vary between men and women: men are more likely to swear when angry, whereas women tend to perceive swearing in anger as a loss of self-control and believe that cursing threatens interpersonal relationships" (Jay & Janschewitz, as cited in Bird & Harris, 2008, p. 271). According to Jay (2000, p. 166), three general patterns characterize men's and women's swearing: (1) men swear more frequently than women, (2) men's vocabulary of curses is broader than women's, and (3) men tend to use more offensive taboo words.

Beyond gender, age is another important social variable influencing the use of taboo words. As mentioned in the introduction, Jay (2009) claimed that the use of taboo words is more common among younger individuals and becomes less frequent with age. McEnery's (2006) study of English revealed that the use of taboo expressions peaks around the age of 25 and then gradually declines. Furthermore, the perceived intensity of bad language correlates with age: as people grow older, they tend to use taboo expressions of lesser strength (McEnery, 2006).

Context is also a critical variable in the use of taboo words. Swearing behavior is influenced by several factors, including "the conversation topic, the relationship between the speaker and listener (gender composition and social status), and the sociophysical setting of the discourse (private or public location)" (Jay & Janschewitz, 2008, p. 272). Findings from field research by Jay and Janschewitz (2006) revealed that the use of taboo words and swearing depends on the gender of both the speaker and the listener. Accordingly, men and women use taboo words at similar overall frequencies; however, men employ more offensive expressions, particularly in masculine contexts. Jay (2009) further noted that men tend to use more taboo words in public and gender-nonhomogeneous environments than women.

Thus, the present paper aims to investigate the effect of gender and age of Persian speakers on the context of the usage of taboo words, emphasizing the gender of the participants of the conversation employing Jay and Janschewitz (2006-2008) and Jay (2009), and to provide the related explanations.

5. Method

The present study is descriptive-analytical in nature and was conducted using field research and a survey method. It employed both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The qualitative components were based on the frameworks proposed by Jay and Janschewitz (2006, 2008) and Jay (2009) regarding the contextual use of taboo words, while the quantitative component involved descriptive and inferential statistical analyses to examine the significance of correlations between gender, age, and context.

A researcher-developed questionnaire was used to collect data on the daily speech of Persian speakers. The instrument consisted of items measuring the likelihood of using taboo words in various social contexts, including situations involving same-gender and mixed-gender audiences as well as instances of anger. It included sections in which participants rated the probability of using taboo words on a five-point Likert scale and identified applicable contexts. The validity of the questionnaire was confirmed by eight university professors from diverse disciplines, including sociology, psychology, linguistics, and English language and literature. The reliability of the instrument was measured using Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = .90$). The questionnaire was electronically designed and randomly distributed among 523 Persian speakers, of whom 264 were female and 259 were male. The participants represented diverse regional and social backgrounds, providing a broad sample of Persian speakers across Iran. Information on participants' academic fields was not collected, as it was not relevant to the purpose of the study. The participants were categorized into the following age groups:

15 to 25 years: 108 participants

26 to 35 years: 167 participants

36 to 45 years: 125 participants

Older than 45 years: 123

5.1. Participants

During the implementation of the questionnaire, participants were asked in one section to indicate the likelihood of using taboo words in particular situations based on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "definitely true" to "definitely false." In another section, they were asked to select the situations in which the use of taboo words was possible. Although the researchers acknowledge that recording natural speech in real-life settings would be the ideal method for studying colloquial and everyday speech, several considerations must be taken into account: (1) the use of taboo words is highly sensitive to context, that is, it is affected by factors such as gender composition, social setting, and conversation topic. Therefore, most speakers generally refrain from using such words in public, or when they do, they tend to employ less offensive equivalents; (2) the researcher's presence in situations where taboo words are used would act as an intervention, potentially altering participants' natural speech. To examine taboo language more accurately, the use of tools and procedures that preserve both researcher and participant anonymity enhances the

validity of the findings. This approach also helps mitigate the “observer’s paradox,” thereby reducing the influence of observation on participants’ natural language use.

The questionnaire data were subsequently analyzed using statistical tests to assess the significance levels and relationships between gender, age, and taboo word use. All responses were valid and complete, with no missing or irrelevant data. The data distribution was considered normal according to the central limit theorem and the large sample size. Therefore, parametric tests, including the *t*-test, chi-square test, analysis of variance (ANOVA), and Tukey’s post hoc test, were applied. Independent *t*-tests and chi-square tests were used to examine the effect of gender on taboo word use across different situations, and mean values were calculated to determine the magnitude of these effects. To compare the influence of age on the use of taboo words across contexts, a one-way ANOVA was performed, as there were more than two age groups. Tukey’s post hoc test was then conducted to perform pairwise comparisons among the age groups to examine age effects. Similarly, ANOVA was employed to assess the interaction effect of gender and age on the use of taboo words. The results of these analyses are presented and discussed in the following section.

6. Results and Discussion

The effect of context on the use of taboo words was assessed by examining the likelihood of taboo word use among female and male Persian speakers across different ages and situations. Table 1 presents the results of the chi-square tests comparing the number of female and male respondents in each situation.

Table 1

The Rate of Using Taboo Words by Persian-speaking Men and Women in Different Contexts

situation		gender		Total	Chi-Square	p-value
		female	male			
1) When the audience/people are of the same gender.	n	20	43	63	8.397	.004*
	%	31.7%	68.3%	100.0%		
2) When the audience/people around me are of the same gender and we are close.	n	95	117	212	2.283	.131
	%	44.8%	55.2%	100.0%		
3) When I have a close relationship with the audience/people.	n	86	63	149	3.550	.060
	%	57.7%	42.3%	100.0%		
4) When I’m angry.	n	48	50	98	.041	.840
	%	49.0%	51.0%	100.0%		
5) When I’m angry and the audience/people are of the same gender.	n	53	81	134	5.851	.016*
	%	39.6%	60.4%	100.0%		
6) I use taboo words in any context regardless of the gender of the audience/people.	n	5	4	9	.111	.739
	%	55.6%	44.4%	100.0%		
7) I never use taboo words, no matter what the situation is.	n	76	45	121	7.942	.005*
	%	62.8%	37.2%	100.0%		

According to Table 1, 63 participants reported that they use taboo words when the addressee or other individuals present are of the same sex (gender-homogeneous contexts). As shown in the

table, the chi-square test indicated a significance level with p values lower than .05 ($p < .05$). Therefore, it can be concluded with 95% confidence that men's and women's behaviors in such situations differ: men (68.3%) use taboo words more frequently than women (31.8%) in gender-homogeneous contexts. A considerable number of participants ($n=212$) stated that having an intimate relationship with a same-sex addressee increased the likelihood of using taboo words, and 149 participants believed that such intimacy alone was sufficient to justify their use.

The state of anger—regardless of the type of relationship with the addressee or their gender—was identified by 98 participants as a situation in which they might use taboo words. No significant difference was found between male and female participants in this regard. However, the use of taboo words by men and women when angry in gender-homogeneous contexts showed a statistically significant difference ($p = .01 < .05$): men (60.4%) were more likely than women (39.6%) to use taboo words under such conditions. Among the 121 participants who stated that they never use taboo words, 62.8% were female. This finding aligns with the results of Lakoff (1975) and Holmes (2013) and supports the notion that women tend to be more polite than men. The small proportion of participants (9 out of 523) who reported not considering the gender composition of those present when using insulting expressions suggests that most respondents were attentive to context when employing taboo language. The next section presents the results of the second part of the questionnaire (Table 2) to further clarify the relationship between gender and context.

Table 2

The Average Validity of Measures Related to the Context of Taboo Words in Women's and Men's Speech

	gender	n	average	SD	t	df	p-value
1) When I'm angry, I may use any taboo words, no matter what the context is.	female	264	1.61	.851	-4.846	489	.000*
	male	259	2.03	1.083			
2) My close friends think I'm a polite person.	female	264	3.88	1.136	-0.809	512	.419
	male	259	3.96	.978			
3) People around me believe that my catchphrases are impolite and rude.	female	264	1.78	.994	-3.025	521	.003*
	male	259	2.03	.958			
4) I don't use taboo words under any circumstances.	female	264	2.57	1.181	-.369	521	.713
	male	259	2.61	1.181			
5) I feel comfortable in the company of people of the same sex and I use any taboo words.	female	264	2.20	1.113	-4.858	521	.000*
	male	259	2.68	1.159			
6) In the presence of the opposite sex, I am careful to choose my words and I am more polite.	female	264	4.16	.988	-4.949	458	.000*
	male	259	4.52	.655			

As shown in Table 2, there was a difference between men and women in their use of taboo words when in an angry mood, regardless of the gender composition of the people present (whether gender-homogeneous or gender-nonhomogeneous). The independent t -test indicated a significance level with a p value lower than .05 ($p < .05$). The calculated means showed that men ($M=2.03$) were less concerned about context than women ($M=1.61$) when angry, and their likelihood of using taboo words in such situations was higher. Furthermore, men tended to use more impolite slang than women across different contexts. Based on these results, it can be concluded

with more than 95% confidence ($p < .05$) that men and women differ significantly in their use of taboo words in gender-homogeneous contexts, with men using them more frequently. According to Table 2, men appear to be more cautious about word choice than women when members of the opposite sex are present (gender-nonhomogeneous contexts), which makes their speech more polite. This finding confirms that context influences the use of taboo words. The next section discusses the relationship between age and context and presents the corresponding statistical results.

6.1. The Effect of 'Age' on the Context of the 'Taboo Word' Utilization

Table 3 presents the results obtained from the chi-square test to examine the number of participants of the four age groups in different situations.

Table 3

The Rate of Using Taboo Words by Persian-speaking Men and Women in Different Contexts

situation		Age group				Total	Chi-Square	p-value
		15-25	26-35	36-45	+45			
1) When the audience/people are of the same gender.	n	8	16	23	16	63	7.159	.067
	%	12.7%	25.4%	36.5%	25.4%	100.0%		
2) When the audience/people around me are of the same gender and we are close.	n	57	82	47	26	212	30.604	.000*
	%	26.9%	38.7%	22.2%	12.3%	100.0%		
3) When I have a close relationship with the audience/people.	n	50	53	21	25	149	22.141	.000*
	%	33.6%	35.6%	14.1%	16.8%	100.0%		
4) When I'm angry.	n	16	34	25	23	98	6.735	.081
	%	16.3%	34.7%	25.5%	23.5%	100.0%		
5) When I'm angry and the audience/people are of the same gender.	n	23	43	41	27	134	10.00	.019*
	%	17.2%	32.1%	30.6%	20.1%	100.0%		
6) I use taboo words in any context regardless of the gender of the audience/people.	n	0	0	4	5	9	.111	.739
	%	0%	0%	44.4%	55.6%	100.0%		
7) I never use taboo words, no matter what the context is.	n	12	27	34	48	121	22.240	.000*
	%	9.9%	22.3%	28.1%	39.7%	100.0%		

Statistical analysis indicated that the frequency of taboo word use in situations 1, 4, and 6 did not differ significantly among the four age groups. However, because the significance level for the homogeneous context involving intimate addressees had a p value lower than .05 ($p < .05$), it can be concluded with 95% confidence that age groups exhibited different behaviors in this context. Specifically, participants aged 26–35 used more taboo words in these situations than those in other age groups. In addition, participants aged 15–25 and 26–35 used 33.6% and 35.6% more taboo words, respectively (regardless of gender), when interacting with individuals with whom they had intimate relationships compared with participants from other age groups. According to Table 3, 39.7% of individuals older than 45 reported never using insulting expressions under any circumstances, indicating the heightened contextual sensitivity of this group.

The following table presents the mean ratings of statements related to context across age groups, providing a clearer view of the relationship between age and context.

Table 4*The Average Validity of Measures Related to the Context of the Use of Bad Words in Different Age Groups*

	Age group	N	average	SD	F	p-value
1) When I'm angry, I may use any taboo words, no matter what the context is.	15-25	108	1.72	.936	.951	.416
	26-35	167	1.82	1.014		
	36-45	125	1.78	.980		
	45+	123	1.93	1.030		
	Total	523	1.82	.994		
2) My close friends think I'm a polite person.	15-25	108	3.63	1.181	7.427	.000*
	26-35	167	3.80	1.021		
	36-45	125	4.05	1.015		
	45+	123	4.21	.960		
	Total	523	3.92	1.060		
3) People around me believe that my catchphrases are impolite and rude.	15-25	108	2.05	1.080	7.442	.000*
	26-35	167	2.10	1.013		
	36-45	125	1.83	.957		
	45+	123	1.59	.788		
	Total	523	1.90	.984		
4) I don't use taboo words under any circumstances.	15-25	108	2.05	1.017	27.878	.000*
	26-35	167	2.44	1.170		
	36-45	125	2.54	.988		
	45+	123	3.32	1.169		
	Total	523	2.59	1.180		
5) I feel comfortable in the company of people of the same sex and I use any taboo words.	15-25	108	2.73	1.165	12.671	.000*
	26-35	167	2.66	1.210		
	36-45	125	2.35	1.094		
	45+	123	1.95	.982		
	Total	523	2.44	1.160		
6) In the presence of the opposite sex, I am careful to choose my words and am more polite.	15-25	108	3.97	1.080	10.448	.000*
	26-35	167	4.32	.845		
	36-45	125	4.44	.712		
	45+	123	4.56	.679		
	Total	523	4.33	.858		

Table 4 shows that the accuracy of the statements differed among the tested age groups in all conditions except the first. These differences were statistically significant, as the ANOVA results for each of the five situations indicated p values lower than .05 ($p = .00 < .05$). After confirming the significant effect of age on the use of taboo words across different contexts, Tukey's post hoc test was conducted to examine group differences in statement accuracy more precisely. Tables 5 and 6 present the results obtained from this analysis.

Table 5*The Two-by-two Comparison of Age Groups in the Validity of Measures Related to the Context of Taboo Words (1)*

	First age group	Second age group	The difference between the first and second age groups	p-value
2) My close friends think I'm a polite person.	15-25	26-35	-.167	.565
		36-45	-.418*	.012
		45+	-.582*	.000
	26-35	15-25	.167	.565
		36-45	-.252	.174
		45+	-.415*	.005
	36-45	15-25	.418*	.012
		26-35	.252	.174
		45+	-.163	.604
	45+	15-25	.582*	.000
		26-35	.415*	.005
		36-45	.163	.604
3) People around me believe that my catchphrases are impolite and rude.	15-25	26-35	-.050	.976
		36-45	.214	.331
		45+	.453*	.002
	26-35	15-25	.050	.976
		36-45	.264	.097
		45+	.502*	.000
	36-45	15-25	-.214	.331
		26-35	-.264	.097
		45+	.239	.211
	45+	15-25	-.453*	.002
		26-35	-.502*	.000
		36-45	-.239	.211

As shown in Table 5, the accuracy of the second statement differed significantly among the four age groups ($p < .05$). The negative mean difference for the 15–25 age group compared with the two oldest groups indicates that the second statement had a lower degree of accuracy for the youngest participants than for the older ones. In other words, this group used taboo words and impolite expressions more frequently in private contexts, regardless of gender composition. Additionally, the statement was more accurate for individuals over 45 than for those aged 26–35. Pairwise comparisons among age groups revealed that participants aged 15–25 and 26–35 used more impolite expressions than those in the older groups.

The results also showed that the statement “I won’t curse under any circumstances” differed significantly across all age groups, as the significance level for Tukey’s test indicated a p value lower than .05 ($p = .00 < .05$). The positive mean difference among the three younger groups compared with participants over 45 years old suggested that older individuals refrained from using taboo words regardless of context. Table 6 presents the details of these differences.

Table 6*The Two-by-two Comparison of Age Groups in the Validity of Measures Related to the Context of Taboo Words (2)*

	First age group	Second age group	The difference between the first and second age groups	p-value
4) I don't use taboo words under any circumstances.	15-25	26-35	-.397*	.019
		36-45	-.498*	.003
		45+	-1.271*	.000
	26-35	15-25	.397*	.019
		36-45	-.101	.865
		45+	-.874*	.000
	36-45	15-25	.498*	.003
		26-35	.101	.865
		45+	-.773*	.000
	45+	15-25	1.271*	.000
		26-35	.874*	.000
		36-45	.773*	.000
	15-25	26-35	.067	.963
		36-45	.379	.051
		45+	.780*	.000
5) I feel comfortable in the company of people of the same sex and I use any taboo words.	26-35	15-25	-.067	.963
		36-45	.313	.088
		45+	.713*	.000
	36-45	15-25	-.379	.051
		26-35	-.313	.088
		45+	.401*	.026
	45+	15-25	-.780*	.000
		26-35	-.713*	.000
		36-45	-.401*	.026
	15-25	26-35	-.351*	.004
		36-45	-.468*	.000
		45+	-.589*	.000
	26-35	15-25	.351*	.004
		36-45	-.117	.640
		45+	-.238	.080
6) In the presence of the opposite sex, I am careful to choose my words and am more polite.	36-45	15-25	.468*	.000
		26-35	.117	.640
		45+	-.121	.665
	45+	15-25	.589*	.000
		26-35	.238	.080
		36-45	.121	.665

As shown in Table 6, all age groups, except the oldest group (individuals over 45 years), used taboo words in gender-homogeneous contexts. Another finding from the pairwise comparison indicated that participants aged 26-35, 36-45, and over 45 were more attentive to word choice in gender-nonhomogeneous contexts than participants aged 15-25. In other words, the influence of context on politeness was weaker among individuals aged 15-25 than among those in the older groups. The following section discusses the relationship among context, gender, and age in the use of taboo words. Table 6 presents the combined comparison of the two variables, gender and age.

6.2. The Concurrent Effect of 'Age' and 'Gender' on the Context of the 'Taboo Words' Utilization

The Results obtained from examining the factors 'gender' and 'age' under the effect of context of the taboo word utilization showed that except in the fourth situation (angry mood), the relationship between these factors had significant differences in every condition, as the obtained significance level for chi-square test had a p-value lower than 0.05 (p-value<0.05). Table 7 demonstrates the accurate results of this test in different situations based on the number of votes by the participants in each condition.

Table 7

The Rate of Using Taboo Words in Different Contexts by Persian-Speaking Men and Women in Different Age Groups

	gender		Age group				Total	Chi-Square	p-value
			15-25	26-35	36-45	+45			
1) When the audience/people are of the same gender.	female	n	6	4	8	2	20	10.077	.018*
		%	9.5%	6.3%	12.7%	3.2%	31.7%		
	male	n	2	12	15	14	43		
		%	3.2%	19.0%	23.8%	22.2%	68.3%		
2) When the audience/people around me are of the same gender and we are close.	female	n	36	32	21	6	95	13.835	.003*
		%	17.0%	15.1%	9.9%	2.8%	44.8%		
	male	n	21	50	26	20	117		
		%	9.9%	23.6%	12.3%	9.4%	55.2%		
3) When I have a close relationship with the audience/people.	female	n	38	32	7	9	86	16.950	.001*
		%	25.5%	21.5%	4.7%	6.0%	57.7%		
	male	n	12	21	14	16	63		
		%	8.1%	14.1%	9.4%	10.7%	42.3%		
4) When I'm angry.	female	n	11	19	11	7	48	6.564	.087
		%	11.2%	19.4%	11.2%	7.1%	49.0%		
	male	n	5	15	14	16	50		
		%	5.1%	15.3%	14.3%	16.3%	51.0%		
5) When I'm angry and the audience/people are of the same gender.	female	n	11	19	11	7	48	14.486	.000*
		%	11.2%	19.4%	11.2%	7.1%	49.0%		
	male	n	5	15	14	16	50		
		%	5.1%	15.3%	14.3%	16.3%	51.0%		
6) I use taboo words in any context regardless of the gender of the audience/people.	female	n	4	1	-	-	5	-	.046*
		%	44.4%	11.1%	-	-	55.6%		
	male	n	0	4	-	-	4		
		%	0.0%	44.4%	-	-	44.4%		
7) I never use taboo words, no matter what the situation is.	female	n	11	23	23	19	76	21.491	.000*
		%	9.1%	19.0%	19.0%	15.7%	62.8%		
	male	n	1	4	11	29	45		
		%	0.8%	3.3%	9.1%	24.0%	37.2%		

According to Table 7, female participants aged 36-45 used taboo words in gender-homogeneous contexts more frequently than those in other age groups. A similar pattern was observed among 23.8% of the male participants in the same age group. Moreover, in homogeneous

and intimate contexts, the likelihood of using taboo words was higher among women aged 15-25 (17%) and men aged 25-36. The results also showed that the use of taboo words by female participants aged 15-25 and male participants aged 26-35, solely due to having a more intimate relationship with the addressee, regardless of the gender composition of the context, was greater than that of individuals of the same gender in other age groups. Female participants aged 26-35 used taboo words more frequently than other women when angry in gender-homogeneous contexts, whereas the likelihood of taboo word use under similar conditions was higher among men over 45.

The very small number of respondents in the sixth situation (four men and six women) indicated that context was a critical factor for many men and women in word choice. Among the questionnaire respondents, men and women over 45 who stated that they do not use taboo words under any circumstances outnumbered their counterparts in younger age groups.

Tables 8 and 9 present the concurrent relationship between gender and age and the accuracy of the statements examined in the sixth section of the questionnaire.

Table 8

The Validity of the Measures Related to the Context of Taboo Words in Persian-Speaking Women and Men among Different Age Groups (1)

	gender	Age group	average	SD	n	F (sex*age)	Sig (sex*age)
1) When I'm angry, I may use any taboo words, no matter what the context is.	female	15-25	1.66	.883	77	.631	.595
		26-35	1.62	.825	87		
		36-45	1.60	.799	62		
		45+	1.53	.951	38		
		Total	1.61	.851	264		
	male	15-25	1.87	1.056	31		
		26-35	2.04	1.152	80		
		36-45	1.97	1.107	63		
		45+	2.12	1.017	85		
		Total	2.03	1.083	259		
2) My close friends think I'm a polite person.	female	15-25	3.68	1.197	77	.264	.851
		26-35	3.79	1.069	87		
		36-45	4.10	1.097	62		
		45+	4.16	1.151	38		
		Total	3.88	1.136	264		
	male	15-25	3.52	1.151	31		
		26-35	3.80	.973	80		
		36-45	4.00	.933	63		
		45+	4.24	.868	85		
		Total	3.96	.978	259		
3) People around me believe that my catchphrases are impolite and rude.	female	15-25	2.05	1.180	77	2.036	.108
		26-35	1.87	.925	87		
		36-45	1.53	.863	62		
		45+	1.39	.718	38		
		Total	1.78	.994	264		
	male	15-25	2.03	.795	31		
		26-35	2.34	1.055	80		
		36-45	2.13	.959	63		
		45+	1.68	.805	85		
		Total	2.03	.958	259		

Table 9

The Validity of the Measures Related to the Context of Taboo Words in Persian-Speaking Women and Men among Different Age Groups (2)

	gender	Age group	average	SD	n	F (sex*age)	Sig (sex*age)
4) I don't use taboo words under any circumstances.	female	15-25	2.12	1.038	77	.234	.873
		26-35	2.52	1.190	87		
		36-45	2.71	1.062	62		
		45+	3.39	1.175	38		
		Total	2.57	1.181	264		
	male	15-25	1.87	.957	31		
		26-35	2.36	1.150	80		
		36-45	2.38	.888	63		
		45+	3.28	1.171	85		
		Total	2.61	1.181	259		
5) I feel comfortable in the company of people of the same sex and I use any taboo words.	female	15-25	2.56	1.118	77	.294	.829
		26-35	2.30	1.132	87		
		36-45	1.98	1.016	62		
		45+	1.58	.889	38		
		Total	2.20	1.113	264		
	male	15-25	3.16	1.186	31		
		26-35	3.06	1.173	80		
		36-45	2.71	1.054	63		
		45+	2.12	.981	85		
		Total	2.68	1.159	259		
6) In the presence of the opposite sex, I am careful to choose my words and I am more polite.	female	15-25	3.75	1.114	77	4.545	.004*
		26-35	4.15	.971	87		
		36-45	4.42	.801	62		
		45+	4.55	.724	38		
		Total	4.16	.988	264		
	male	15-25	4.52	.769	31		
		26-35	4.51	.636	80		
		36-45	4.46	.618	63		
		45+	4.56	.663	85		
		Total	4.52	.655	259		

The information presented in Tables 8 and 9 indicates no significant difference in the accuracy of the first five statements between men and women across the various age groups, as the p values for these statements were higher than .05 ($p > .05$). Nevertheless, the results showed that men and women over 45 were more polite in gender-nonhomogeneous contexts than participants in younger age groups and used taboo words less frequently.

The differing behavior of men and women in gender-homogeneous and gender-nonhomogeneous contexts demonstrates speakers' sensitivity to the gender composition of their addressees or audiences. However, it is necessary to explore the reasons behind such sensitivity. In this regard, Battistella (2005, p. 72) considers the question "What is bad about bad language?" to be fundamental. According to Battistella (2005), opposition to the public use of profanity is largely based on the idea of protecting listeners, with the common assumption that those who require such protection are women and children. He refers to a case in which a man was fined 100 dollars for

violating Michigan's 1897 Act, which prohibited swearing in the presence of women and children. Apparently, the notion that men should refrain from swearing in front of women stems from a nineteenth-century moral code.

The sensitivity of both women and men to context can also be understood in relation to the importance of privacy. As Rachels (1975, p. 326) notes, "Privacy is a necessity to maintain multiple social relationships with different individuals; therefore, it is of great importance to us. In most cases, our different social relationships require certain behavioral patterns." Thus, the use of taboo words in different contexts is influenced by the nature of one's relationships and the corresponding social norms. This suggests that taboo words are not merely linguistic expressions but also social and psychological indicators of identity, attitude, and emotion. The findings of this study therefore contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex and dynamic role of taboo words in human communication and culture.

7. Discussion

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the sociolinguistic dynamics of taboo word use in Persian, confirming and extending previous research. Consistent with Jay's (2009) results, the present findings indicate that men use more taboo words than women, particularly in gender-homogeneous contexts (68.3% vs. 31.7%). This pattern aligns with societal norms that associate masculinity with assertiveness and linguistic permissiveness (Jay, 2009). However, men's greater sensitivity to word choice in mixed-gender contexts, where they exhibit more politeness, suggests conformity to social expectations of respect and harmony when interacting with the opposite gender, thereby supporting politeness theory (Bucholtz & Lakoff, 2004). Women's lower use of taboo words, especially in mixed contexts, reflects Persian sociocultural expectations of female modesty and highlights gender asymmetry in language use (Tajgozari & Sahragard, 2018).

From a cultural standpoint, Iran's Islamic context strongly influences language practices, with pronounced taboos against words related to sexuality and blasphemy due to religious teachings emphasizing modesty and sanctity. This cultural backdrop likely contributes to the lower overall use of taboo words among women and older participants, who may be more attuned to these social expectations. While this study treated taboo words as a general category, future research could examine specific subtypes, such as sexual or religious taboos, to determine whether gender differences vary by category, as suggested by previous studies (Gao, 2013).

With respect to age, the results indicate that the use of taboo words is higher among younger adults (15–35 years), particularly those aged 26–35, and declines with age, consistent with global trends (Jay, 2009). Participants aged 15–25 were less sensitive to context, using more taboo words regardless of gender composition, which aligns with Jay's observation that swearing peaks during younger adulthood. Older participants (over 45) exhibited greater restraint, especially in mixed-gender contexts, possibly due to stronger adherence to social norms with age.

Overall, these findings contribute to sociolinguistic theory by illustrating how gender, age, and context interact to shape linguistic behavior in Persian. They also offer practical implications for teaching Persian as a second language, emphasizing the importance of understanding contextual appropriateness in effective communication. By focusing on Persian, with its distinctive cultural and linguistic features, this study adds to the global understanding of sociolinguistic variation and the interplay between language, culture, and social norms.

8. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that gender and age significantly influence the use of taboo words across different social contexts among Persian speakers. Men tend to use more taboo words in same-gender contexts, particularly when angry, while both genders exhibit greater restraint in mixed-gender settings, with older participants (over 45) showing the highest level of caution. These findings emphasize the importance of considering social variables in linguistic research and have practical implications for language education, where understanding contextual appropriateness is essential. The study also highlights the influence of Iran's Islamic cultural context on language use, particularly the stigmatization of sexual and blasphemous expressions. Future research could investigate specific categories of taboo words and their variations across regions or social groups within Iran to further deepen sociolinguistic understanding.

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