

UNIVERSITI MALAYA

ORIGINAL LITERARY WORK DECLARATION

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Name of Degree: **DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

Title of Research Report (this work):

GOSSIP, POWER AND SOLIDARITY IN IRANIAN MEN TALK

Field of Study: **SOCIOLINGUISTICS**

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ABSTRACT

Gossip as a private, intimate talk is important in every society since it enhances solidarity and strengthens friendship. The studies on gossip are scarce specifically in the countries such as Iran where gossip is a forbidden activity. Moreover, gossip is attached to women speech as such; men try to avoid it in order to maintain their manhood. The motivation of this study is driven by the fact that in a patriarchal society like Iran, it is expected to observe power play in men speech and any feminine kind of talk like gossip is avoided to preserve their masculinity. This study investigates the way in which men gossip. It explores the functions of gossip and the manners in which Iranian men exert power and use solidarity when they gossip.

Data of this study consist of audio-recorded face to face conversations of 12 Iranian men, forming four groups, which are transcribed based on a modified version of Jefferson's transcription convention (1979). Coates' gossip framework (2011a) is implemented in this study to investigate gossip and manifestation of power and solidarity. In the current study, conversation analysis (CA) is also used to analyze the conversation of the participants. For the purpose of data analysis, both qualitative and quantitative approaches are used.

The overall findings suggest that Iranian men use language cooperatively when they gossip. They gossip about personal and private issues which are not only familiar but also generate common in-group interests. They consider gossip as an intimate activity because it strengthens their relationships. Linguistic features such as topic development, minimal responses, interruptions and epistemic modality are

frequently used as a collaborative endeavor to build on each others' utterances and ultimately achieve solidarity. Another important finding is that power is embedded within cooperative talk amongst the Iranian men in this study. For example, power is frequently observed in high-handed arguments, some boastful comments and dominant interruptions.

In summary, despite the embedded power in Iranian men talk, cooperative attitude is still prevailing and dominant. The male participants establish solidarity by gossiping in private domains and building on each other's utterances to strengthen their friendship. The cooperative attitudes observed among these Iranian men can be the result of the cultural changes in the society. Such changes may be due to the growing understanding about gender equal rights and especially among the young educated generation where patriarchy is not strongly practiced.

This study reveals that although gossip is considered feminine, it can be practiced by men as well. This reaffirms the performativity of gender where people are able to perform and act in a way that is generally attached to the other gender (Cameron, 2011). This study also adds knowledge to the field of language and gender and contributes to the studies on male interaction in single sex groups.

ABSTRAK

Gossip sebagai percakapan intim dan sulit adalah penting dalam setiap masyarakat kerana ianya memupuk solidariti dan mengukuhkan persahabatan. Kajian berkenaan dengan gossip amat jarang dilakukan, terutamanya di negara seperti Iran di mana ia adalah aktiviti terlarang. Tambahan pula, gossip dikaitkan dengan wanita; oleh itu kaum lelaki berusaha untuk menghindarinya supaya sifat kelelakian mereka tidak terancam. Motivasi untuk kajian ini didorong oleh realisasi bahawa dalam masyarakat berunsur patriarki seperti Iran, adalah dijangkakan bahawa percakapan lelaki mempunyai unsur permainan kekuasaan atau *power play* dan apa jua percakapan berbentuk feminin seperti gossip yang dijauhi untuk mempertahankan sifat kelelakian mereka. Kajian ini menyelidik cara kaum lelaki bergossip. Kajian ini meneroka fungsi gossip dan cara lelaki Iran menggunakan kuasa dan menunjukkan solidariti apabila mereka bergossip.

Data untuk kajian ini merangkumi rakaman audio perbualan bersemuka yang melibatkan 12 lelaki Iran dalam empat kumpulan, yang telah ditranskripsi berasaskan versi modifikasi konvensi transkripsi Jefferson (1979). Kerangka gossip Coates (2011a) diimplementasi dalam kajian ini untuk menyelidik gossip dan manifestasi wibawa kuasa dan solidariti. Dalam kajian ini, *Analisis Perbualan* atau *Conversation Analysis* (CA) juga digunakan untuk menganalisis perbualan peserta. Untuk tujuan analisis data, kedua-dua pendekatan kualitatif dan kuantitatif digunakan.

Dapatan keseluruhan kajian ini mencadangkan bahawa lelaki Iran menggunakan bahasa secara bekerjasama apabila mereka bergosip. Mereka bergosip mengenai isu peribadi dan sulit yang tidak sahaja lazim tetapi mencerminkan minat persamaan dalam-kumpulan (*in-group*). Mereka menganggap gosip sebagai aktiviti intim oleh kerana ianya mengukuhkan pertalian persahabatan mereka. Ciri linguistik seperti perkembangan topik, respons minima, celahan dan jeda (*epistemic modality*) kerap digunakan sebagai percubaan kolaboratif untuk membina di atas pertuturan satu sama lain dan akhirnya mencapai solidariti. Suatu dapatan penting adalah bahawa kekuasaan tersemat dalam pertuturan secara bekerjasama antara lelaki Iran dalam kajian ini. Contohnya, kekuasaan sering kelihatan melalui perbalahan terlampau (*high-handed arguments*), beberapa komen bersifat angkuh dan juga pencilan yang menunjukkan dominan.

Sebagai rumusan, walau pun terdapat kekuasaan yang tersemat dalam pertuturan lelaki Iran dalam kajian ini, sikap bekerjasama masih dominan dan lazim. Mereka mempertahankan solidariti melalui gosip dalam domain persendirian (*private domain*) dan membina di atas perbualan satu sama lain untuk memperkukuhkan persahabatan mereka. Sikap bekerjasama ini boleh menjadi suatu manifestasi perubahan budaya dalam masyarakat. Perubahan tersebut mungkin disebabkan pemahaman yang semakin mendalam mengenai persamaan hak gender terutama dalam kalangan generasi muda yang berpelajaran yang kurang mengamalkan patriarki.

Justeru, kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa walau pun gosip dianggap sebagai sifat wanita, ianya boleh dipraktik oleh lelaki juga. Ini mengesahkan performativiti gender di mana manusia boleh melaksanakan dan melakukan sesuatu dengan cara yang kebiasaannya dikaitkan dengan gender yang lain (Cameron, 2011). Kajian ini juga menambah pengetahuan mengenai interaksi berkumpulan sesama lelaki dan seterusnya menyumbang kepada kajian bahasa dan gender.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere thanks to my dearest supervisor, Associate Professor Dr. Hajah Jariah Mohd Jan, for her valuable advice throughout the course of my study. Without her enthusiastic comments and encouragement I could not have completed my study. With the confidence and independence that she had bestowed on me, I was able to accomplish the present thesis in four years despite all the problems I had faced due to being away from my home town and my family. I owe my success to her.

Next, my deepest appreciation goes to my co-supervisor, Associate Professor Siti Rohaini Kassim, who kindly accepted to co-supervise me and hold my hand whenever I needed her help. She gave me the courage to move on despite the obstacles I have faced and I cordially thank her.

I wish to thank all the participants in this study who warmly agreed to cooperate without any hesitations. They assisted me greatly in completing my data collection, sparing their valuable time. My special thanks go to my dear aunt, Tahereh Hakak, my uncle, Reza Yekrangian and my cousin Tara Yekrangian, whose encouragements have always motivated me.

My cordial thanks go to my sister Shirin, my uncle Madjid and my nieces Pantea and Parmida who supported me emotionally despite the distance between us. They gave me the strength to complete my thesis by reminding me that family is the most important gift that GOD has given us.

My deep appreciation goes to my parents, Fatemeh Hakak and Ahmad Mohajer, whose love and support gave me the courage to start this journey and pursue it till the end. They have always given me the comfort that they are with me though they were far away. They also hold themselves up bravely for my sake although I knew in my heart that they needed me to be with them. Therefore, this thesis is dedicated to them, specifically to my father for inspiring me the topic of this research.

Above all, I would like to express my love and gratitude to Almighty ALLAH, whose guidance and blessings have helped me throughout my life. I am grateful for the knowledge and strength he gave me to complete this research. I believe that without ALLAH's guidance nothing is possible.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ORIGINAL LITERARY DECLARATION	ii
ABSTRACT	iii
<i>ABSTRAK</i>	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	viii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	x
LIST OF TABLES	xv
LIST OF FIGURES	xvi
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	
1.0 Background of the Study	1
1.1 Statement of the Problem	2
1.2 Objectives of the Study	4
1.2.1 Research Questions	5
1.3 Limitations of the Study	5
1.4 Significance of the Study	7
1.5 Definition of Terms	9
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	
2.0 Introduction	11
2.1 Conversation Analysis	12
2.1.1 Conversation Analysis and Gender	13
2.2 Gender: A Definition	14
2.3 Feminist Linguistic Approaches	17

2.3.1	The Deficit Model	17
2.3.2	The Dominance Approach	18
2.3.3	The Difference Approach	19
2.3.3.1	The Merits and Demerits of Applying the Dominance and the Difference Approach	22
2.3.4	The Social Constructionist Approach	23
2.3.5	The Feminist Approaches Adopted in the Study	23
2.4	Gossip: A Definition	25
2.5	Gossip and its Functions	27
2.6	Gossip and Gender: Is Gossip a Feminine Talk?	30
2.7	Gossip Frameworks	35
2.7.1	Jones vis-à-vis Coates' Gossip Framework	36
2.7.1.1	Setting	37
2.7.1.2	Participants	38
2.7.1.3	Topic	39
2.7.1.4	Functions	39
2.7.1.5	Formal Features	40
2.7.2	Gossip Revised	41
2.8	Power and Language	42
2.8.1	Power versus Solidarity	44
2.8.2	Power and Men	45
2.8.3	Solidarity and Men	46
2.9	Iran and the Dichotomy of Patriarchy and Female Autonomy	50
2.10	Linguistic Features Demonstrating Power and Solidarity	54
2.10.1	Topic of Conversation	54

2.10.2	Topic Development	59
2.10.3	Minimal Responses	64
2.10.4	Interruptions	69
2.10.5	Epistemic Modality	77
2.11	Summary	81

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.0	Introduction	82
3.1	Pilot Study.....	82
3.2	Profile of the Participants	82
3.2.1	The Use of Pseudonyms	85
3.2.2	The Language Used by the Participants	85
3.3	Instrument	86
3.3.1	Setting	87
3.4	Theoretical Frameworks	88
3.5	Methodology	89
3.5.1	Quantitative Method	89
3.5.2	Qualitative Method	90
3.6	Procedure of Data Collection	91
3.7	Transcription	92
3.8	Translation	94
3.9	Data Analysis	95

CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.0	Introduction.....	98
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4.1	Topic of Conversation	99
4.1.1	Topic of Conversation in Group 1	100
4.1.2	Topic of Conversation in Group 2	104
4.1.3	Topic of Conversation in Group 3	108
4.1.4	Topic of Conversation in Group 4	115
4.1.5	Summary	120
4.2	Topic Development	121
4.2.1	Topic Development in Group 1	121
4.2.2	Topic Development in Group 2	127
4.2.3	Topic Development in Group 3	137
4.2.4	Topic Development in Group 4	141
4.2.5	Summary	148
4.3	Minimal Responses	148
4.3.1	Minimal Responses in Group 1	149
4.3.2	Minimal Responses in Group 2	152
4.3.3	Minimal Responses in Group 3	155
4.3.4	Minimal Responses in Group 4	157
4.3.5	Summary	160
4.4	Interruptions	161
4.4.1	Interruptions in Group 1	162
4.4.2	Interruptions in Group 2	167
4.4.3	Interruptions in Group 3	173
4.4.4	Interruptions in Group 4	177
4.4.5	Summary	181
4.5	Epistemic Modality	182

4.5.1 Epistemic Modality in Group 1	183
4.5.2 Epistemic Modality in Group 2	187
4.5.3 Epistemic Modality in Group 3	191
4.5.4 Epistemic Modality in Group 4	194
4.5.5 Summary	197
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION AND FINDINGS	
5.0 Introduction	199
5.1 Gossip among Iranian Men	199
5.2 Functions of Gossip among Iranian Men	202
5.3 The Distribution of Power and Solidarity in Iranian Men Interaction	205
5.4 Socio-Cultural Effects on Iranian Linguistic Behavior	210
5.5 Summary of the Findings	212
5.6 Implications of the study	214
5.7 Recommendations for Future Research	215
REFERENCES	217
APPENDIX A: Transcription Convention	234
APPENDIX B: Transcription of the Conversation in Group 1	237
APPENDIX C: Transcription of the Conversation in Group 2	253
APPENDIX D: Transcription of the Conversation in Group 3	275
APPENDIX E: Transcription of the Conversation in Group 4	301
APPENDIX F: Letter of Consent	315

LIST OF TABLES

Tables	Page
3.1 Profile of the Participants: Groups 1 to 4	83
4.1 Topics Discussed by the Participants in Groups 1 to 4	99
4.2 Distribution of Minimal Responses in Groups 1 to 4	149
4.3 Distribution of Interruptions in Groups 1 to 4	161
4.4 Distribution of Interruptions in Group 1	162
4.5 Distribution of Interruptions in Group 2	167
4.6 Distribution of Interruptions in Group 3	173
4.7 Distribution of Interruptions in Group 4	177
4.8 Distribution of Epistemic Modal Items and Hedges in Groups 1 to 4	182
4.9 Distribution of Epistemic Modal Items and Hedges in Group 1.....	183
4.10 Distribution of Epistemic Modal Items and Hedges in Group 2	187
4.11 Distribution of Epistemic Modal Items and Hedges in Group 3	191
4.12 Distribution of Epistemic Modal Items and Hedges in Group 4	194

LIST OF FIGURES

Figures	Page
2.1 Classification of Interruptions	74

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background of the Study

Conversation is considered a cooperative act (Wardhaugh, 2010) of exchanging utterances between people. It is also an action that occurs on daily bases between both genders. After Lakoff's study (1975) on gender differences in speech, there have been many studies that believe men and women follow different speech styles (Al-Khatib, 1995; Maltz & Borker, 2011). In general, men and women understand and acknowledge language differently. For instance, the way in which women see a compliment is different from that of men. As such, there have always been misunderstandings between men and women on an interactional level.

At the interactional level, women and men look at verbal communication differently too. It is believed that talk is a fundamental part of women's life and that they talk more than men (Coates, 2004). Gossip as an interactional phenomenon is commonly coupled with women, and cannot be eliminated from their speech (Jones, 1980). Regardless of the feminine side of gossip, which is considered weak and useless, it does not pose a positive connotation. However, despite the negative connotation it holds, gossip is widely practiced in different nations and anthropologists believe that it is a fundamental process in everyday life (Davis, 1969) which is not attached to women only. Gossip is an old phenomenon that

primitive societies developed as a survival skill among themselves and later it lost its real value and meaning and judged as a vicious act (Rosenblum, 2007).

Generally in Iran, gossip is considered feminine and consequently criticized by men because it is regarded as a malicious act done by women (Torab, 1996). It is an activity that women benefit from and enjoy while they have nothing more important to do. As a result, gossip is avoided by men because they want to be considered powerful and important.

In real life situations, based on the researcher's observations, it seems that gossip is experiencing a new era in the private domain of houses and also offices despite the belief that even listening to gossip is an immoral act for Iranians (Sahragard, 2003). It is observed that Iranian men get together to spend their time talking and sharing their experiences. This study tries to evaluate the masculine private world of their talk.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The problem is initially driven from the observation that feminist activists in Iran have prompted the society to experience some cultural changes. Cultural changes in this study refer to the changes in the context of society with respect to some laws, regulations and social rights which subsequently persuade people and specifically men to be more receptive and understanding to women's rights. As a result, the established patriarchal values which are connected to Iranian men (Azari, 1983) are modified positively in social and private confinements. Women, on the other hand, become more conscious about their power and equal social rights. In recent years,

many NGOs have been established and more attention is paid to women's rights in society (Ahmadi, 2006).

Although Iranian men are affected naturally by feminist activities, the number is not plentiful but the younger generation are more open to this feminism (Ansari, 2008). Despite these changes, there are still a lot of examples of males who do not want to easily accept and appreciate these kinds of communities. In other words, they would like to stick to their powerful controlling roles that they have always practiced in society.

Iranian men, due to the power they possess privately and publicly, regardless of the cultural changes, demonstrate their authority even in their speech whether it is a political debate or a friendly chat with a comrade. As it is clear, speech as a realm of conversation is not an exception and patriarchy can be observed in the language of the speakers as well (Bagh Bidi, 1997). Wareing (2004, p. 11) in this regard advocates that "... language actually creates power, as well as being a site where power is performed". However, the power of language without its participants is meaningless.

In a social activity such as gossip which mainly characterizes females' speech, Iranian men like many other men, do not wish to take part or get involved in it. This is regardless of their different social backgrounds, and due to the fear that their talk might ultimately be considered feminine and powerless. Moreover, in patriarchal societies, gossip is considered as an activity that "trivializes the sociopolitical

import of speech and, thus, threatens the male status quo ...” (Sadiqi, 2003, p. 25).

As such, men try to avoid gossip in order to maintain their masculine status.

Nevertheless, it has been viewed by the researcher that when in some case, Iranian men get involved in gossip, they exhibit denial to express that their behavior is not feminine in order to satisfy their fear of being considered weak and subordinate in speech. This paradoxical concept of Iranian patriarchal society which is tackled by cultural changes and the feminine side of gossip has prompted the researcher to conduct this study and evaluate the linguistic values of Iranian men’s gossip. It also tries to unveil the relation between the gossip and the interactants linguistically.

1.2 Objective of the Study

The study aims to look at gossip among Iranian male interactants. It intends to investigate their gossip and the kinds of topics that they gossip about. In addition, the functions of gossip among Iranian male interactants are examined. Furthermore, this study explores the manifestation of power and solidarity amongst men through the manners in which they use linguistic features when they interact. It also considers to what degree their language is affected by the cultural changes in the context of society.

1.2.1 Research Questions

This study aims to answer the following questions:

1. Do Iranian men gossip? If they do, what do they gossip about?
2. What function does gossip ultimately serve in the Iranian male community?
3. How do Iranian men use language to exert power and maintain solidarity in their interaction?
4. How do social and cultural factors affect Iranian men's talk?

1.3 Limitation of the Study

This study focuses on Iranian male face to face interaction and it analyzes the linguistic features employed by them. Although all the participants are Iranians, the language of the data collected is in English. This leads to the first limitation of the present study in which the participants were asked to interact in English rather than their own mother tongue, Farsi. It is mainly because translating a large corpus of spoken data can change the natural flow of any conversation. As such, English is chosen to be the medium of communication among the participants of this study to avoid massive translation where meaning could be lost in the process of translation.

The second limitation deals with the English proficiency of the participants. English, which is the medium language of this study, is considered a foreign language in Iran rather than a second language. Although the English proficiency of the participants among the groups is not the same, all the interactants are able to communicate in English and handle normal discussions. This, however, cannot be

regarded as a shortcoming since their proficiency level adequately enables them to have a natural conversation which is foreign in nature.

Obviously, English as a foreign language is spoken by many Iranians. However, the population of Iranians who are able to speak English is rather limited. It is limited to particular social groups who have lived abroad or worked in a foreign company or by any means have had any contacts with foreigners. Therefore, the third limitation of the present study has to do with the selection of the participants. Most Iranians who are in the middle and high socio-economic levels have access to English. The participants of this study are comprised of men from these levels who are able to interact and converse in English as most Iranians from these social classes do.

Another point to be considered is that the present study could not benefit from the paralinguistic features such as eyebrow raising, hand movements, head nodding and so forth. This directs to the fourth limitation which is the preference of verbal features rather than non verbal elements. As it is apparent, paralinguistic features are important parts of a conversation and may carry various functions. They can even show the conversationalists' active or passive involvements in an interaction (Coates, 2004). This deficiency is principally due to the limitation of data recording mode. The participants did not welcome video recording for preservation of their own privacy. As such, in order to overcome this shortcoming, the participants' voice frequencies such as raised voice (shown by **bold** letters) and emphasis (shown by *italics*) have been considered and benefited to the fullest (see Appendix I).

1.4 Significance of the Study

The first significance of this study relates back to the concept of gossip which needs more attention than it has received so far. It is believed that the literature on gossip is still scarce and more studies in this area should be encouraged (Bergmann, 1993; Emler, 2001). Although after Jones' work on gossip (1980) there are some studies concentrating on this subject, we still need more studies in various social contexts in order to obtain a better understanding of gossip. Moreover, since most works on gossip centers around females and their talk, this study, evaluating gossip in a masculine world of Iranian interactants, creates a challenging situation to look at gossip from a different perspective.

In addition, there is another significant point to be taken into account and it is the untouched area of men and conversation. Mills and Mullany (2011) emphasize that there is no separate language for men to be discovered. Yet, at the same time, they contend that there are specific characters and values attached to men's language in specific contexts in which have not received academic attention till recent years. Many of the works which are done on language and gender are basically on women's speech and it is due to the marginalized role that women have always experienced in powerful masculine society and that is why feminism has focused on women more than men until today. In this regard, Johnson (1997) argues that problematization has always been associated with women in language and normalization with men. It means that men do not have anything to be modified in their language and they can set a standardized example for all the interactants. She also concludes that any changes in gender order would be an attempt in vain as long

as this perception exists. As such, this study helps to put a step towards balancing gender studies.

Furthermore, when a study like the one in hand, focuses on single sex groups, it enables the research to be developed beyond the dominance or oppression frameworks that mixed sex studies usually deal with. Instead, they concentrate more on the perception of gender as an element which is accomplished through people's talk (Coates & Pichler, 2011). Focusing on single-sex talk has another advantage which allows various aspects of femininities and masculinities to be discovered (Coates & Pichler, 2011). In other words, it allows each single-sex interaction to be examined without any discrimination. As such, this study aims to look at men's language in single sex groups in a more challenging perspective, considering the social constructive aspect of gender.

More importantly, this study challenges the stereotypical masculine behavior that previous researchers have attached to American and European societies. In spite the fact that these characteristics bear some similarities across cultures, it is of importance to identify how they differ among various cultures and social settings. As Philipsen (1975) rightly mentions, talk cannot be valued everywhere and in all social contexts equally. For this reason in this study, masculine stereotypical behavior will be re-examined in a totally different social context which is new and untouched. The patriarchal background of the interactants in this study makes it different, yet significant since most of the studies that consider masculine behavior are conducted in less patriarchal communities.

This research ultimately helps the overall findings of talk in natural settings. It will not only add more knowledge to the previous researches but also presents more insight into men's speech. It also aids the overall knowledge of gossip and adds more to the area since it targets men in a different social community than the previous studies.

1.5 Definition of Terms

There are some key elements which are repeatedly mentioned in the present research. Because there are various definitions for each term, it is aimed to present the most appropriate explanations which are personalized best to match the purpose of this research. The terms are as follows

Gender is a rather relative term; referring to a performative social construction which is characterized by a set of repeated acts performed in particular ways by people in a society (Butler, 1990; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003).

Gossip is an enjoyable personal trivial talk among small groups of friends which does not trigger much interest for the people out of that group community and serves various functions (see Section 2.4).

Linguistic Features / Formal Features refer to different elements of language in conversation such as topic, topic development, minimal responses, overlaps, interruptions and epistemic modality which conversationalists employ to interact (see Section 2.10).

Power indicates the dominance of a person over another to get and maintain that power within the context (see Section 2.8).

Cooperation / Collaboration refers to a situation when speakers support each other in a conversation to highlight their solidarity (Cheshire & Trudgill, 1998).

Competition refers to a situation when speakers try to compete with each other to emphasize their hierarchical positions, their individuality (Cheshire & Trudgill, 1998) or their interest.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the background literature on the related issues in the field of language and gender and its connection with conversation. The feminist framework applied in this study is a combination of dominance, difference and social constructionist approaches. This chapter also presents the gossip frameworks exhibited in the literature and subsequently unfolds the framework applied in this study. It also explains how the existing frameworks are tailored for the purpose of this study.

A description of the linguistic features which are utilized in the present research will be outlined and their connection to power and solidarity will be discussed. This connection enables the present research to conduct a detailed analysis of the data in order to find an explanation for the attitudes on which these features are built on.

Further, this chapter provides an overview of Iranian society and the ways in which women and men are viewed. It also shows the changes that have been done in the context of society in terms of women's movements and their social activities. It also describes how feminist's movements have affected the Iranian society.

2.1 Conversation Analysis

In everyday life, conversation plays a fundamental role in transferring information, ideas and even feelings. People can even learn and practice who they are through verbal communication. Mey (2001, p. 136) describes conversation as "...a way of using language socially, of 'doing thing with words' together with other persons". It can be inferred that conversation is not only a set of words uttered by people in isolation. The social connection that it creates has a great value in everyday life.

The pioneer of CA, Harvey Sacks and his collaborators, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974) have worked on conversation and its elements in relation with society. They believe that natural observation is essential in dealing with details of social interaction. In general, they consider conversation within the scope of social interaction, not just a separate entity without respecting the social interactional values among the interactants. However, it is essential to say that CA emerged in essence from Harold Garfinkel's interest in common-sense everyday activities. Then he came up with a kind of social analytic style which he called ethnomethodology.

McIlvenny (2002), considering Schegloff's work (1991), emphasizes the social construction of talk and asserts that talk can be regarded "...as a reflexive performative practice, a 'doing' which effects actions and constitutes social scenes (McIlvenny, 2002, p. 129). In this regard, it can be suggested that CA considers talk as an action in a social setting.

Paul Ten Have (2007, p. 4) believes that “*Conversation* can mean that people are talking with each other, just for the purpose of talking, as a form of *sociability*, or it can be used to indicate any activity of interactive talk, independent of its purpose”. Although Have explains conversation without respecting its purposes, it emphasizes the sociability of talk. Moreover, it does not limit the talk into some specific purposes. Since conversation is connected directly to sociability, conversation analyses (CA) is simply defined as a study of talk-in-interaction and not talk in isolation.

According to Kitzinger (2002), CA does not work only on talk as a set of words combined to make language per se. CA is interested in talk as an action and in what the interactants do with talk. In other words, CA tries to discover how conversation works and in doing so, it needs to look at the interactants’ manner when they communicate.

2.1.1 Conversation Analysis and Gender

Conversation analysis has been used in various fields such as linguistics, sociolinguistics, language and gender studies, applied linguistics, communication science and so on. Celia Kitzinger (2002) in defense of CA’s applicability in gender studies, emphasizes the performativity of gender (see Section 2.2), asserts that CA is “... a useful technique for understanding how, in our ordinary, mundane interactions, we produce the social order we inhabit-in other words, how we ‘do’ power and powerlessness, oppression and resistance” (2002, p. 62). In this regard, she makes evidence that CA lets the analysts deal with inequalities as well as equalities by quoting from Schegloff (1999).

Although she considers CA approach suitable for gender studies, she argues that CA is not suitable for some studies where the sex differences are only in focus. Also, CA is not appropriate in “essentialist feminism” (Kitzinger, 2002, p. 62), where for instance, the aim is to find out the stereotypical characteristics of females’ talk and relating them to women’s inferior status in society.

Conversation Analysis is included in the analysis framework of the present study since the main concern in this study is talk-in-interaction and its relation with gender is also accounted. This research tends to evaluate power and solidarity within face to face informal interaction. Accordingly, since CA allows inequalities, exclusion and oppression as well as equalities, it is deemed to be an appropriate framework in order to evaluate face to face conversation among Iranian men interactants.

2.2 Gender: A Definition

It is believed that gender is not an unavoidable outcome of one’s sex and cannot be simply judged as a necessary element in individuals’ identity whether personal or social (Weatherall, 2002). Yet, the fact that gender is an essential social entity is in everyday life cannot be disregarded (Holmes & Marra, 2004; Holmes & Meyerhoff, 2003). In the same token, Risman (2004) emphasizes the connection between gender and society and concludes that the social structure of gender has enabled the scholars to analyze and explain how gender is included in different aspects of society. However, the paradoxical nature of gender has made it difficult for the researchers to come to a conclusion about its nature.

As studies in the field of gender expanded, the focus shifted logically from sex to gender as a construction. Judith Butler (1990) produces a different explanation of gender which is known as performativity. By performativity she means that being feminine or masculine does not merely mean what we are or what we have. Instead, it relates gender directly to what we do and it is not a fixed identity. She believes that gender needs to be acknowledged repeatedly in the face of society. In doing so, a set of performative acts which are acceptable and normative in a cultural frame of a society are performed. Subsequently, these performative acts define masculinity and femininity.

Cameron (2011) finds the performative model, which is proposed by Butler (1990), a functional model in language and gender. She asserts that speech can demonstrate who people are in society. People achieve their identity as a proper and acceptable man or a woman by the way they talk and communicate in the face of society. According to feminist linguists, language is "...a social means through which identity and gender are constantly negotiated" (Sadiqi, 2003, p. 277). In other words, people reaffirm their identities and perform masculinity and femininity through the linguistic variation they apply. That is closely related to what this study tries to do. It attempts to find out how a particular gender, male interactants herein, reveals gender differentiation and identities by performing in an interaction.

An advantage of applying this model to language and gender according to Cameron (2011) is that; this model believes in variability of gender identities which ultimately reveals the behaviors that made those identities; as such, it can be suggested that people may use various ways of speaking to maintain and show

variety of effects and produce different identities within different contexts. It means that people selectively perform gender variously in different situations. Cameron (2011, p. 252) firmly asserts “People *do* perform gender differently in different contexts, and do sometimes behave in ways we should normally associate with the ‘other’ gender”. In this regard, Cameron and Kulick (2003) declare that the relation between language and gender is affected by the social roles and identities that people play in society.

Generally speaking, the connection between gender and interaction reveals that gender is a socio-cultural entity that both males and females build their masculine or feminine identities through their interaction (Holmes & Marra, 2004). In another example of identity and linguistics, Holmes (2004) concludes that language choices are connected to the identity of the speakers and the person who is in charge. For example, in a study by Meân (2001) entitled *Identity and discursive practice: Doing gender on the football pitch*, it is found that the male referees practice their masculine identity by powerful and aggressive expressions that they utter. As such, there is a direct connection between the features that interactants employ and the identity they play in society.

In the present study, the term *gender*, is referred to as an entity which is performed by the interactants in a social context. This characterization is borne out of the fact that social identities of the conversationalists and the performative nature of gender are both equally important in comprehending gender. Apparently, the present research is not trying to identify gender per se, but hopes to present some

characteristics of male talk in order to broaden the notion of gender identities in general.

2.3 Feminist Linguistic Approaches

The feminist approaches in language field were born out in the first place in order to criticize male power and provide explanatory reasons to rationalize the discrimination in power distribution. Four main approaches were proposed in different eras, each carrying a hope to broaden the field and make a new path for both genders especially women. The first approach is the *deficit model* (Lakoff, 1975), the second is *dominance approach* (Spender, 1980), the third is referred to as *difference approach* (Gumperz, 1982) and the last is the *social constructionist approach* or *dynamic approach* (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003). In the following sections all these approaches and their concepts will be discussed and reviewed.

2.3.1 The Deficit Model

Robin Lakoff (1975) is the pioneer of the deficit model which emphasizes that the linguistic features that women use to communicate are inferior and deficient. Lakoff, in her research (1975), found some linguistic elements which are commonly used by women namely *women's language*. The term refers to the devices that women prefer to use in their conversation such as tag questions, empty adjectives, hedges, intensifiers, hypercorrect grammar, super polite forms, exclusion of humor in their speech, speaking in *italics* and the use of women's interest-confined words. Lakoff concludes that these devices are favored by women only by the virtue of the authority and the subversion which are imposed on women by men in society. She

also believes that the devices women use are mitigating and weakening in nature and they lack power. On the contrary, the language used by men is linguistically powerful and resembles authority.

Although, Lakoff's model (1975) shed some lights into the study of language and gender; it could not satisfy the needs of researchers in this field. The main criticism her work received was that it lacks empirical data since her study was mainly based on her own observation and intuition. For instance, O'Barr and Atkins (2011) proved that Lakoff's model for women's language is not definite and the features she has considered women's language can be used by men in subordinate positions as well, as such, they cannot be restricted to the women only. Due to these reasons, sociolinguists looked for another approach to enable them to explain and rationalize their findings based on a more scientific model and that is when the *dominance approach* comes into existence.

2.3.2 The Dominance Approach

The dominance approach emerged with the rising popularity of feminism in general. It was the time that every asymmetry was considered unfair and the issue of women suppression and men dominance was widespread (Cameron, 1996). Dale Spender (1980) in her work illustrated that women are suppressed by men in every aspect of life including language and that is how dominance approach was established.

This approach proposed the terms powerful and powerless to refer to men and women's language respectively. 'Powerless language' is a term used by O'Barr and Atkins (2011) as a replacement for women's language coined by Lakoff (1975). It shows that every asymmetry has a root in male dominated society where men and women practice power and submission. There are numerous works that have applied this approach as their framework such as West and Zimmerman (1983) on interruption, Leet-Pellegrini (1980) on dominance, gender and expertise and Fishman (1980) on women's insecurity in conversations as well as her other work on heterosexual couples' conversation (1983).

However, this approach like the previous one was not without a flaw. The main problem has to do with the overly used dominant explanation framework for every irregularity. It correlated every asymmetry to power of men and powerlessness of women in society. Sociolinguists needed a more positive outline to base their studies on, especially the one that does not confine them only to ascendancy and oppression. That was the time when difference approach came to existence and helped the researchers to look at the differences between male and female's speech in a more positive way.

2.3.3 The Difference Approach

The difference approach distances away from dominance and tries to be more positive in the explanation of the linguistic variations between genders. Gumperz (1982) the founder of this approach considered the differences between genders as cross cultural miscommunications which naturally exist in every society between the interactants. In other words, this approach looks at the subcultures that both

genders achieved their linguistic patterns (Coates, 1989). The difference approach has provided the opportunity for the researchers to consider women's talk out of the subordinate framework and acknowledge the strengths of women's speech more than before (Coates, 2004). As a result women's cultural values in talk began to show their existence and independence.

The difference in conversational style among genders can be explained through *Collaborative* and *Competitive speech styles* (Cheshire & Trudgill, 1998). In Collaborative style, women work together to build the conversation upon shared meanings. Men usually fail to build conversations cooperatively while females work together to keep a conversation going and establish a friendly atmosphere and strengthen their solidarity.

While, on the other hand, men follow a competitive style where men do not merely show their hierarchical positions but also demonstrate their individuality. It is mainly due to the fact that men come from a different culture from women where competitive concept is favored over cooperation and as a result, they do not show much tendency to cooperate.

Grice (1975) has previously used the word 'cooperativeness' in a more general view and emphasized the fact that conversations do not occur if the participants, men or women, do not cooperate and agree to communicate through conversations. This idea is very general comparing to the feminists' idea about cooperativeness; however it demonstrates that cooperation exists naturally in every interaction.

It is also argued that competition and cooperation should not be located against each other in an interaction otherwise it creates a problem in our interpretations (Cameron, 2011). Cameron clearly claims:

“Participants in a conversation or other speech event may compete with each other and at the same time be pursuing a shared project or common agenda (as in ritual insult sessions); they may be in severe disagreement but punctiliously observant of one another’s speaking rights (as in a formal debate, say); they may be overtly supportive, and at the same time covertly hoping to score point for their supportiveness.”(Cameron, 2011, p. 258).

As a result, it is logical to acknowledge both cooperation and competition as the characteristics of gender talk and that the presence of one of them does not automatically exclude the other.

Coates (2004) explains that the difference approach is not suitable for the studies that examine mixed talk. She gives evidence that when it comes to men’s speech, one cannot disregard power. The studies which have applied this approach as their framework suggest that difference approach is more person-oriented compared to the other approaches. It literally means that both genders, especially females apply this approach deliberately whenever they believe that it fits their interaction. There are numerous works which have used difference approach as their basis such as Maltz and Broker’s study (2011) on cultural difference and miscommunication and Tannen’s books (1990a, 1992) on existing differences among genders and the subsequent misunderstandings.

2.3.3.1 The Merits and Demerits of Applying the Dominance and the Difference Approach

It is worth mentioning that according to Johnson (1997), both the difference and the dominance approaches bear some shortcomings. The first point she reveals is “problematization of women” (Johnson, 1997, p. 10) in both approaches. To her, difference approach has over-stereotyped masculine power and difference approach, on the other hand, overemphasized speech in all-female groups and takes away the opportunity of knowing more about male verbal behavior. Problematization has paled everything else and resulted in poor knowledge of male speech or in more general sense masculinity.

The second point she calls upon is that these two approaches discuss gender concept based on a binary opposition. It connotes that because men and women are different from each other subsequently a divergent in their speech is expected. She rationalizes

“...the two sexes are still drawing on the same linguistic resources. Ultimately, there must be some degree of similarity or overlap in the speech of men and women, otherwise it would be impossible to envisage a situation where they could ever communicate” (Johnson, 1997, p. 11).

In the same vein, Coates (1989) considers both approaches valuable and believes that both are in need when it comes to explaining the difference between both sexes in terms of their communicative behavior. Nevertheless, she asserts that the difference approach provides a better explanatory framework for the researches which are basically on same-sex interaction.

2.3.4 The Social Constructionist Approach

In this approach, gender is given a different perspective from being a social category. It is considered a social construction "... as the means by which society jointly accomplishes the differentiation that constitutes the gender order" (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003, p. 14). It basically means that gender is the result of what we do in society. This approach believes that people construct gender by how they behave and what they do in daily basis. Gender is not a social category which is simply granted to people by society.

In the studies that consider gender as a social construction in linguistic variations, gender is not a fixed entity to be treated as a variable but it "... is *accomplished* in talk every time we speak" (Coates, 2004, p. 7). This viewpoint enables us to "... determine the range of linguistic resources available for exploitation in interaction" (Holmes, 2004, p. 846). It also allows researchers to explore gender repeatedly in linguistic field.

2.3.5 The Feminist Approaches Adopted in the Study

The deficit model is not used by the researchers in this field anymore due to its single dimensional look on gender. As a result, it is not applicable in the present study either. Considering all the perspectives of the dominance, the difference and the social constructionist approaches, it is concluded that this study benefits from all these approaches on its own accord. For instance, it seems that the difference approach is the most applicable approach for the purpose of this study. It is due to the fact that the natural differences between genders are handled more positively in this approach. Furthermore, the function of the linguistic features which are used in

this study can be explained by this approach more clearly. Another distinctive aspect of this approach is that it enables this study to explain the function of gossip among the male participants in a more positive way since gossip is mainly connected to cooperation.

Nevertheless, this study also benefits from the dominance approach in order to explain the powerful elements observed in men's talk. Coates (2004) mentions that when a study is on mixed talk among women and men, power is an element which cannot be overlooked at all. The present study does not examine mixed talk but it focuses and analyzes male talk in a male dominated society. As such, it is deemed that the dominance approach and the concept of power assist to create a better analysis of the talk among the male participants in this study. Moreover, in this regard Coates (1989) assumes that incorporation of the difference and dominance approaches is valuable in the process of explaining the results.

The other point to be mentioned is that the social constructionist approach is automatically practiced in this study. It goes back to the fact that in the present study, gender is considered a social construction which is achieved through our speech and not a fixed identity in society.

In differentiating between these approaches, Coates (2004) believes that the distinguishing lines between these approaches are rather narrow and that researchers may benefit from more than one approach at the same time.

2.4 Gossip: A Definition

Understanding the concept of gossip has real world implications (Foster, 2004) and it seems tricky to delineate gossip concept but to start; Webster dictionary relates the word *gossip* back to the Middle English, literally meaning *godsib* or *godsipp*. The definition shows that the word is something related to godparent or sponsorship which indicates that gossip as its first meaning, did not have a negative connotation as it has in the present time. The existence of gossip as Radin (2002) points out, relates back to the primitive era of human. It is clear that gossip has always been practiced among human beings and across a vast range of cultures (Besnier, 1989; Brenneis, 1984; Cox, 1970) and undoubtedly will be present as long as communication is taking place. As Davis (1969) believes gossip is a part of organizational life that cannot be avoided.

In a study by Cameron (2011, p. 253) gossip is defined as

“...discussion of several persons not present but known to the participants, with a strong focus on critically examining these individuals’ appearance, dress, social behavior and sexual mores.”

She explicitly defines gossip as an immoral act of talking behind absent parties. Levin and Arluke (1985) have proposed that gossip concerns not only the third parties who are not present at the time of speaking but also the third parties who are also present at the time when they are being gossiped about. Bergman (1993), however, disputes that the third party who is the subject of the gossip must be absent at the time of speaking because of the negative connotation that he has attached to gossip. In his classification, gossip bears a negative image.

Pilkington in her study (1998) brings forth a categorization of gossip. She supposes that a piece of talk should have the following characteristics to be vulnerable to be considered gossip. She identifies gossip in terms of some general features and presents them as follows (Pilkington, 1998, pp. 255-256)

- a. Gossip is focused on the personal rather than global, private rather than public.
- b. Gossip is widely regarded as trivial yet is valued by individuals.
- c. Gossip is entertaining and enjoyable.
- d. Gossip occurs in a sympathetic environment, among friends and intimates not strangers.
- e. There is probably an upper limit on the size of a group involved in gossip; the lower limit is two.
- f. The smaller and closer the group the more personal and probing the gossip will be.
- g. Gossip is ephemeral and has limited interest outside the participating group.

By this explanation, it can be generally inferred that gossip is associated with friendship and personal matters. The private talk which is exchanged between friends can signify the intimate world of gossip where interactants enjoy indulging themselves in private issues. In the same vein, Holmes (2008, p. 310) emphasizes that gossip is a "...kind of relaxed in-group talk that goes on between people in informal contexts"

In order to define the concept of gossip for this study, it seems that Pilkington's explanation (1998) fits best for the purpose of this study. As a result, in the present study, gossip is identified as an enjoyable private talk among friends in small groups about personal issues and experiences. This explanation is then used for the analysis accordingly. However, gossip cannot be separated from its function and Pilkington's definition (1998) embraces some functions of gossip as well. So in the following section, gossip is explained more in terms of the function it serves in order to create a better image of the concept.

2.5 Gossip and its Function

In general, gossip is considered a pejorative *small talk* or *idle talk* (Emler, 1994). However, some researchers such as Gluckman (1963) deem that gossip is hardly lacking a purpose. Gossip certainly carries some functions and the functions vary vastly from exchanging different information (Dunbar, 1996; Suls, 1977) such as warning people about various social threats (Rosenblum, 2007), to establishing a friendship (Rosnow, 2001), or simply entertaining communicators (Gluckman, 1963; Rosnow & Fine, 1976).

Rubin (1972) believes that gossip is the language of closeness and intimacy. It means that people who gossip want to achieve and strengthen their intimacy and friendship with one another and it is mainly due to the private nature of gossip which creates intimacy (Pilkington, 1998). It demonstrates that gossip can bring the members of a community closer to each other while they are enjoying their trivial talk (Gluckman, 1963).

In a study by Herskovits (1937) - cited in Gluckman (1963) - it is found that gossip is helpful in maintaining the morals of a community. Further, the people who are involved in gossip can learn some moral lessons in life but there are some researchers who disagree with this concept since they consider gossip a forbidden activity (Oakley, 1985; Schein, 1994; Wert & Salovey, 2004). In another study, Herskovits (1947) - cited in Gluckman, (1963) - not only believes that gossip is an unavoidable part of human being but also puts a step forward and investigates gossip and its cultural functions. He discloses the influence of people's point of views and attitudes on the expansion of gossip and this shows the close relation between gossip and culture.

The social function of gossip is mentioned in many studies. For example, Gluckman (1963, p. 308) believes that gossip functions as a facilitator in maintaining "... the unity, morals and values of social groups". Eggins and Slade (2005) consider gossip as a talk in which solidarity is constructed and social identities are discovered. In the same vein, Cameron (2011) states that gossiping gives the opportunity to the in-group members to show their solidarity by criticizing out-group people. It explicitly shows that gossip is more than a set of words talked about present or non present third parties. It, however, carries some values which are shared between the gossipers (White, 1994).

James West, in his study (1945), demonstrates the close connection between gossip and community life. He considers gossip as an inevitable feature of each community. In other words, he believes that it is the gossip which holds the community together. In the same token, Wert and Salovey (2004), emphasizing the

role of gossip in societies, assert that one of the reasons that people gossip is because of the social connection they are involved in. Without gossip, people may feel lonely and left-out from social groups. In addition, they believe that gossip is not just a set of babbling words without serving any functions; nonetheless, gossip is purposeful and plays an inherent part in social ties and ultimately in maintaining healthy society. Similarly, Noon and Delbridge (1993) contend that gossip makes the interactants' social bonds stronger. As it is apparent, the socio-cultural function of gossip is so vast in communities that cannot be disregarded because people periodically satisfy their social needs via gossip.

Another related function of gossip is the credit that it gives to group membership. Gossip is considered a visa or a passport to a group membership according to Gluckman (1963). In order to be a member of a group community, one has to be able to take part and participate in the gossip of that group. If a person is able to be engaged in the gossip of a group, it shows that he or she is accepted and approved by the other members of that group community.

Gossip is also related to status and power of people. It appears that powerful parties, due to their high status, are expected to be the target of gossip. Talking about the people in high status and position provides a privilege for the gossipers as they can show their connection to the powerful parties (Pilkington, 1998). Moreover, in terms of power demonstration, Kurland & Hope Pelled (2000) believe that being a gossip can simply show a kind of power over the other interactants. Therefore, it is implied that gossip and power are interconnected in which the gossipers are at higher positions than the rest of the people in an interaction due to their knowledge

or their connection with the people being gossiped about. Thus, the other function of gossip is power expression. Alizadeh (2009) believes that less powerful people gossip about powerful people in order to find a release and ultimately counterbalance the unfairness.

By far, it is inferred that no one can gossip without having a purpose. It demonstrates that all the interactants who are involved in gossip aim to achieve some socio-cultural values. Nonetheless, since gossip plays an important role in every community, the functions that gossip serve might differ from one social context to another. In the present study for instance, the function of gossip is significant as gossip is taking place in an Iranian society where gossip might be performed and practiced differently from the other cultural communities. The manner in which the social factors and cultural background of an Iranian community may affect the function of gossip is yet a remarkable point to be investigated in this study.

2.6 Gossip and Gender: Is Gossip a Feminine talk?

The label *gossip* is commonly associated with women in the domain of language (Jones, 1980). It is believed that women are the ones who always gossip and it is an inevitable part of their conversation. Coates (2000) considers gossip a friendly talk among female friends which can also be called *small talk*. However, Gluckman (1963), the anthropologist, does not judge gossip as sexist. It means that the way he considers gossip, does not bear any gender specificity. It is generally inferred that gossip is a social activity which is performed by both women and men specifically in everyday life basis (Cameron & Kulick, 2003).

The first researcher who considered females and gossip linguistically is Deborah Jones (1980) who focused on sociolinguistic aspects of gossip. She also managed to relate gossip to women's oral culture in their speech community. More importantly, she has based her analysis on setting, participants, topic, form and function and she ultimately considers gossip a feminine talk (see Section 2.7.1).

The idea that women gossip more than men is confirmed in a study by Levin and Arluke (1985) where women spend more time on gossiping. In their study, women included private issues while men use neutral topics as to keep their distance from private domains. Nevertheless, they ultimately argue that if gossip is only explained through derogatory aspects, then there is no difference between men and women in their study and both genders used negative and positive gossip in the same degree.

Deborah Tannen in her book *You just don't understand* has explained "The impression that women talk more freely and too much in private situations is summed up in a word: gossip" (Tannen, 1990a, p. 96). She has also mentioned that gossip embraces intimacy and friendship among women who seek for companionship more than men. According to her, being engaged in gossip and details of their own lives and others', give women a sense of involvement which means intimacy and care. Leaper and Holliday (1995) relate women's tendency towards gossip to their interest in solidarity and cooperation. Men, on the other hand, do gossip but disguise it by talking about sports or political issues rather than the personal matters. Yet, it does not mean that men do not feel the need of being involved with the others through talk.

In general, it is complicated to categorize the equivalent of females' gossip in a masculine domain (Holmes, 2008) because men handle gossip tactfully by avoiding personal talks and unimportant details. Tannen (1990a) believes that men's interest in details of politics, sports and other news is equivalent to women's interest's in personal matters. Also, men feel the sense of being left out if they are not involved in the world's news just like women, when they are not dealing with personal details.

Tannen (1990a) asserts that men enjoy gossiping and talking about politics and sports because they feel that they are part of something. In general, she distinguishes gossip into two spheres, *talking about* and *talking against*. Naturally, *talking against* is irritating and disturbing because it involves a negative talk about the other people who are not present at the time of speaking. This kind of gossip brings the participants closer and assists them to ultimately establish and strengthen their relationships. However, it has been long argued that Tannen's book *You just don't understand* (1990a) does not contain a sociolinguistic value. It is mainly due to the fact that her main focus in her book is on gender relationship with respect to language, while sociolinguistic studies focus particularly on language within the social context and various influential variables such as gender.

In a study by Cameron (2011), focusing on men' talk, she has found out that male speakers do talk about the other people, mainly the men who are not present at their community. They talk about the third parties who seem or appear to be gay in order to enhance and reinforce their heterosexual characteristics. They do this by making jokes and criticizing their friends who seem less masculine than them. As such, she

concludes that men do not always exchange information; they can be involved in a kind of talk which is generally known as gossip. They may, however, indulge themselves in *rapport talk* which is a stereotypical element of women's talk. She argues further that when we refer to men's talk as *rapport* or *gossip* in that particular circumstance, it does not necessarily mean that they have adopted a feminine style of speech. On the other hand, it shows the performative aspect of gender which has characterized their speech (see Section 2.2). It can be argued that by the virtue of flexible nature of gender identity, women and men can naturally choose the kind of talk which is more appropriate in certain contexts.

In order to distinguish the reason why men avoid gossip, Cameron (2011), considering social function of gossip, argues that there is this cultural meaning associated to gossip which considers it a feminine activity. That it is perhaps the reason why men try to avoid gossip or at least ignore it to protect their masculine aspect of their talk. She concludes that men in her study gossip about the absent parties and talk about the gay side of those absentees in order to lift their masculine behavior and maintain their heterosexual masculine identity.

Pilkington (1998), however, does not judge that men merely avoid gossip in order to protect their masculinity. She puts it in another way and asserts that the reason men try to avoid or ignore gossip is the intimate nature of this kind of talk. Intimate talk is mainly associated with triviality. On the contrary, the activities which are practiced in large scales such as politics and sports receive more credit and attention for being more important. Johnson and Finlay (1997), however, argue that men's tendency to talk about the topics such as football is mainly due to the fact that they

would prefer to practice their masculinity and ultimately establish "... a sense of in-group solidarity" (1997, p. 142). Interestingly, men do not include women in those talks to persevere their masculine world. They ultimately assert that men do gossip, however, their talk is almost never considered gossip in the context of society.

Another reason that men avoid gossiping according to Tannen (1990a) is that since gossip is a private and personal activity, men try to escape it in order to protect their vulnerability. In this regard she states

"And exchanging details about public news rather than private news has the advantage that it does not make men personally vulnerable: The information they are bawtering has nothing to do with them" (Tannen, 1990a, p. 111).

It appears that any personal and private talk that might make men vulnerable is then boycotted by them. It is due to the reason that men do not intend to allow the others to enter into their private world in order to protect their masculine world.

It is obvious that both genders gossip but differently with different purposes. For example, men gossip about the topics in a more public context in order to avoid personal experiences (Coates, 2004), while women gossip about their personal matters (Jones, 1980). Thus, it can be concluded that gossip is not only a feminine activity and men gossip as well except for the fact that they assume that the nature of their gossip is different from that of women's. Men believe that they discuss more important masculine issues with their male friends and therefore their talk cannot be regarded as gossip. They ultimately try to deny the fact that they gossip

(Rosenblum, 2007). The conflict between the concept of gossip and men's denial has created a paradox. This study subsequently tries to deal with this issue and find out if Iranian men get involved in gossip and what purpose they ultimately try to follow.

2.7 Gossip Frameworks

In the following sections two gossip frameworks are going to be discussed and analyzed. One of them was proposed by Jones in (1980). Her research has changed the study of language and gender forever as it considers sociolinguistic elements in gender domain. The other framework is Coates' research in (2011a) on gossip and women and its connection to cooperation and solidarity. Coates' paper is an extended study of Jones' work to investigate her claims about gossip and female talk empirically.

The present study uses and benefits from Coates' gossip framework but since Jones' study on gossip was the fundamental basis of Coates' research, thus, cannot be ignored. In the following sections, both of them will be discussed and compared. It is essential to state at this juncture that Coates' gossip framework is tailored to best fit the needs of the present study and will be discussed accordingly (see Section 2.7.2).

2.7.1 Jones vis-à-vis Coates' Gossip Framework

Deborah Jones's gossip work (1980) is one of the foremost studies in language and gender on women's language in their own feminine domain. In 1980 based on her own experience as a female, she conducted a research on females' oral culture in female groups. She (1980, p. 194) has identified gossip as:

“... a way of talking between women in their roles as women, intimate in style, personal and domestic in topic and setting, a female cultural event which springs from and perpetuates the restrictions of the female role, but also gives the comfort of validation.”

She also describes gossip as a specific kind of female's style and explains that the word *gossip* used in her study is more detailed than the general meaning which is used in society. As a result, the elaboration confines the concept of gossip to women's talk in a female speech community.

Jennifer Coates' paper *Gossip revisited: language in all-female group* (2011a), which is inspired by Jones' paper (1980), is another distinctive work on gossip. Although Jones' work has some sociolinguistic values, it lacks empirical data as it is based on her own experience as a member of a female speech community. Coates looks analytically at Jones' study and acknowledges her work on women and sociolinguistics, however, she expands the sociolinguistic aspects of Jones' work and describes at length the formal features used by female interactants. Coates argues that Jones' explanation of setting, participants and topic is rather weak and over-strong and needs to be attended and studied more carefully. However her main concern is the function of gossip and the formal features which are used by women.

Coates in her paper aims to achieve three main goals. The first aim is to find out whether her study which is empowered by empirical data supports Jones' general claims about gossip. The second aim is to set up the formal features that are typical in all female speech community and the final aim is her concern to describe solidarity and cooperation in terms of female gossip.

2.7.1.1 Setting

Ervin-Tripp (1964) uses the word *setting* to refer to time and place and describes that verbal behavior is signified by:

“... the relations between the setting, the participants, the topic, the functions of an interaction, the form, and the values held by the participants about each of these” ((Ervin-Tripp, 1964, p. 192), cited in (Jones, 1980, p. 194)).

Jones (1980) and Coates (2011a) both use this model to describe time and place of gossip. Jones argues that both the cultural and physical settings of gossip are not without limitation and it generally echoes the restrictions which are imposed on women in life.

As for the place of gossip, Jones believes that gossip is mainly performed in the feminine places which are associated with women. These places range from hair salons and supermarkets to kitchens and homes. Coates however believes that more attention must be paid to the private domains of women's talk since the partition between private and public domain can have significant effects on the linguistic behavior of the interactants.

To explain the time of gossip, Jones asserts that women snatch time from their domestic works where they serve their feminine roles as housewives, mothers and alike. As a result, gossiping is more like knitting. She exemplifies it well by comparing it with knitting because gossip, according to her, can be taken up and then put down, like knitting needles. Coates, however, argues that the time of gossip is not necessarily snatched and the time that women gossip does not suit the criterion of 'snatched' in many cases.

Nevertheless, it can be generally argued that the setting that Jones uses is rather confined and unjustified which cannot be applied to naturally occurring conversations. Because women simply meet and converse in various settings as Coates believes. As a result, setting for females' speech is much broader than what Jones' discusses.

2.7.1.2 Participants

The participants in Jones' study are all females and she believes that gossip is a feminine "...talk between women in our common role *as* women" (Jones, 1980, p. 195) with sharing mutual experiences as women. This mutual experience provides the opportunity for them to establish a cooperative relationship. The participants in Coates study are all female friends as well who meet regularly to support each other in various levels. As such, it can be inferred that the participants in both studies value cooperation in a similar manner.

2.7.1.3 Topic

Jones believes that the topic in women's gossip rotates around the subjects of their own domestic fields such as cooking, cleaning, the wifely role and so on. Females' topics are mostly about feminine chores because the society expects them to be knowledgeable in these fields. Although Coates find this claim too overwhelming, she agrees with Jones that gossip is connected to personal experiences. Coates argues that women in her study talk about various topics.

2.7.1.4 Functions

According to Jones (1980, p. 196) the functions of gossip can be classified in four main categories:

- a) house-talk (information exchange on domestic household chores)
- b) scandal (judgmental comments about other people)
- c) bitching (complaints about their social inferior roles)
- d) and chatting (intimate talk on mutual self-disclosure).

Coates, however, chooses to describe the functions of gossip before the formal features while Jones explained the features first and then the functions. Coates rationalizes this difference by mentioning that her aim is to explain and interpret the formal features of women's language through the functions they bear. She argues that the functions that Jones has come up with for female gossip are not strong enough. Instead, she uses the term function to refer to the goal of the interaction in all-female group. In this regard, Coates (2011a, p. 202) asserts "All-women conversation, like most informal interaction between equals, has as its chief goal the

maintenance of good social relationships”. According to her in any informal interaction, notably among equal members, the main goal is gaining and maintaining social ties and friendship.

2.7.1.5 Formal Features

Jones has conducted her research based on her own experience as a woman in a feminine environment. Apparently, her research does not have any empirical data and due to this reason the formal features in her study are rather vague. The features she has mentioned are tag questions, minimal responses, rising intonation and paralinguistic responses which are supposed to be typical in all female talk. While formal features have not been treated empirically in Jones’ study, Coates considers them linguistically and tries to highlight the notion of cooperation in all female speech. The linguistic features that Coates considers in her study are topic development, minimal responses, simultaneous speech and epistemic modality. She asserts that females apply these features so as to build on each others’ speech. In the end, women achieve a kind of friendship and maintain their collaboration. It appears that both Jones and Coates believe in females’ cooperation in their feminine speech community.

The present study implements Coates’ framework (2011a) and the same formal features to analyze gossip and investigate the notions of solidarity and power in speech. Yet, there are some differences between the present study and Coates’ study which are dealt with in details in the following section.

2.7.2 Gossip Revised

In this section, the applicability of Coates' gossip framework (2011a) to the present study will be discussed and the elements which differ from her framework will be clarified and any replacements will be justified. To start with, the most significant difference between Coates' data and that of this study is the gender of the participants. In her study all the participants were female while in this study they are all male. This difference may invite a different attitude in the process of analysis and interpretation of findings. However, since gossip is central to this study, Coates' framework can be used regardless of the gender of the participants.

Setting of this study is similar to that of the Coates'. In this study, time and place are not restricted or controlled due to the nature of the study which encourages an informal friendly atmosphere. The participants are given complete freedom to choose a suitable time and a comfortable place for a friendly chat (see Section 3.2.1).

In terms of the formal linguistic features, the present study follows Coates' model with an addition of *topic of conversation* in order to create a better understanding of the concept of gossip (see Section 2.10.1). This study has also adapted Beattie's interruption model which enables the researcher to investigate and observe the instances of simultaneous speech and interruption and in turns determines the notions of power and solidarity (see Section 2.10.4).

Another distinctive feature to be discussed is the notion of cooperativeness that Coates uses to explain female talk. While cooperation and solidarity are parts of female talk, competition and power exist in male speech community. This study intends to evaluate men's talk in terms of the cooperation as well as competition and power in their face to face interaction.

2.8 Power and Language

The world we live in is the world of power. There has always been a permanent conflict between the ones who hold power and the ones who would like to attain it. It remains to be seen whether this existing power is natural or constructed. According to Fowler (1985), power is socially constructed rather than naturally existed. It demonstrates that power discrimination in which a powerful party controls a weak party is created by society and its norms. Power is present in every aspect of our lives even in our language. Wareing (2004) believes that language plays a dual role in power demonstration. First, language itself creates power and second, it leaves the opportunity open for people to perform power through language.

It is obvious that communicators are able to demonstrate and challenge power when they are involved in discourse. Fairclough (2001) evaluates the relationship between power and language and divides it into two categories, *power in discourse* and *power behind discourse*. The former considers discourse a suitable place to practice and apply power while the latter deals with the explanation of how power influenced and constructed the orders of discourse.

Power is contributed among people according to their ability to control discourse. In other words, the participants who feel more superior in status, gender or any kinds of social inequalities have the tendency to subdue others and maintain power. In some cases, gender overrules status. It means that in equal situations, gender is more responsible for power demonstration than status (C. West, 1979; Woods, 1989) whilst, another researcher finds that the social status of the speakers is more influential than their gender (O'Barr & Atkins, 2011). As such, it is not definite which elements are more influential in attaining power.

Conversationalists play a significant role in running and attaining power, however, it is not an easy task to achieve it. Powerful participants are challenged to keep the power they have achieved while weak participants or those who do not hold power are eager to gain control that has been taken and kept away from them. This is what Fairclough (2001) considers a *social struggle in discourse*. As a result, the interactants have a critical function in power allocation and preservation.

There is an interesting aspect of power among Iranian community and discourse. Hillmann (1981) in his study *language and social distinctions in Iran* infers from a Persian short story that in some parts of Iran, people's status and their power among the other Iranians depend partly on the degree of being comfortable with written and spoken English discourses. Although this type of social power is not the main concern of the present research, it can be said that all the participants in this study possess a kind of power because they are able to speak English. The present study

tries to depict how power and solidarity are practiced and enacted within the spoken discourse among Iranian interactants.

2.8.1 Power versus Solidarity

Brown and Gilman (1960) associate power with asymmetrical relationships and solidarity with symmetry. They believe that a powerful party controls the subordinate party and it is called *nonreciprocal* because both parties cannot have the same kind of power at the same time. Tannen (1993), however, questions their view and marks the paradoxical relation of power and solidarity. She explains "... although power and solidarity, distance and closeness seem at first to be opposites, each also entails the other" (Tannen, 1993, p. 167). It means that power entails solidarity because it involves participants in relation to each other and solidarity entails power because intimacy brings up limitations and threatens independency.

In this regard, Tannen explains that closeness naturally confines freedom and when there is a practice of power, it involves the participants and naturally they feel closeness not distance. In order to show the joint relation between solidarity and power she rationalizes her view by an interesting statement "... power and solidarity are bought with the same currency: The same linguistic means can be used to create either or both." (Tannen, 1993, p. 168). What she believes figuratively means that these two elements can be demonstrated and achieved through the same linguistic features. She also puts a step forward and suggests that solidarity can have a form of control and assumes that hierarchal relationships necessarily entail closeness.

2.8.2 Power and Men

Power is generally defined as the control of a stronger party over a weaker one in society. This power imbalance might be seen in various levels of society, from domestic domain of homes to social domain of politics and economics. Nonetheless, this power inequity is more prominent when it comes to its practitioners, females and males. According to Kaufman (2000) the world of men can be defined as the world of power. He also asserts that any components that are coupled with masculinity are related to men's capability to impose power. He clearly states that power is an inevitable element of men's world and the world of masculinity is based on how and to what extent men can practice and impose power. In other words, manhood is equal to having power.

In order to find out how power is associated with men in general, Balswick and Peek (1971) assert that people are taught to be masculine and feminine since they are born. It implicitly means that young boys are taught and encouraged to be a man in order to value power and masculinity and at the same time devalue any non-masculine behavior such as expressiveness. Nevertheless, there are two issues to Balswick and Peek's theory (1971). First of all, they have limited their conceptualization into American society and next, they have considered masculinity the opposite of femininity. However, the presence of one element does not necessarily mean the lack of the other. In this regard, Sattel (1983) explains, our culture does not exemplify two stereotypes of masculine and feminine. Our culture, on the other hand, embodies "... a set of power and prestige arrangements attached to gender" (Sattel, 1983, p. 120).

In explaining the relation between power and men, Kaufman (2000) believes in a paradox of power and powerlessness, privilege and isolation. He states that men suffer from isolation and suppression of the feelings which seem feminine and as a result it makes a contradictory experience for men in the process of practicing masculinity and power. For men, in order to show their masculinity, they need to subdue not only the others but also their own emotions and that ultimately cost them some kind of hidden pain. Kaufman (2000) considers this *hidden pain* one of the reasons that some men accept feminism as a gateway to their freedom from suppressed feelings.

In the field of language and gender, it is broadly accepted by many sociolinguists that men impose power over women in an interaction (Fishman, 1980, 1983; Leet-Pellegrini, 1980; Zimmerman & West, 1975). However, the notion of power is usually accompanied by solidarity though they are not the opposite. The following section describes the relation between solidarity and men and demonstrates how men achieve and maintain solidarity.

2.8.3 Solidarity and Men

The general concept of solidarity is usually associated with women and their talk since they favor and encourage cooperation (E. Aries, 1976; Coates, 2011a; Davies, 2011; Tannen, 1992). However, cooperation and solidarity cannot be deleted from male talk completely. According to Coates (2003, p. 59) collaborative talk "...can only occur where speakers know each other well, and have shared knowledge. It is much less common in all-male talk than in all-female talk, but can be a powerful means of exchanging solidarity". Therefore, maintaining friendship and solidarity

are not specified to women only and can be observed in men's talk in various degrees and levels.

It is believed that men seek solidarity through different strategies than women, the strategies which can be labeled competitive or adversarial (Cameron, 2011; Kuiper, 2012; Pilkington, 1998). One of the common ways of maintaining solidarity among men is the usage of a set of common vocabularies. Kuiper (2012, p. 316) in a study analyzing two groups of sports men suggests that "...group membership can be identified by particular kinds of vocabulary acquisition". Subsequently the use of those common vocabularies leads to create solidarity among the members of that group. He believes that the mutual vocabulary knowledge of this group, in addition to the coerciveness of these vocabularies, are important elements in establishing solidarity.

The same result is observed in an earlier study by Klein (1971) that the use of some vocabularies and swear-words help men to clarify their friendship boundaries and form a community. In their community, they deliberately exclude women, children and strangers in order to show their bond. The words that they use which include taboo words might seem friendly to them. Others might consider these vocabularies rude and offensive, while the members of that community consider them warm and welcoming due to their familiarity with the terms. These examples demonstrate that men, just like women, seek solidarity when they are among their male friends but their approach to obtain solidarity is significantly different from women's.

In order to establish an in-group bond and reinforce solidarity, men use collaborative talk rather than competitive (Baxter & Wallace, 2009). This in-group solidarity functions as an obstacle for out-group members to enter their private domain. This function reinforces one of the characteristics of gossip in which gossip makes the group interaction so private that it bears no value for the people outside of that group community (see Section 2.4). Baxter and Wallace (2009) also discover that in collaborative talk, men use the linguistic elements which are usually attached to women such as minimal responses and tag questions. However, despite cooperation and solidarity between the interactants, their in-group identity construction sets some barriers against the powerful outsiders to enter their private domain. This in-group resistance in turn creates a kind of power for the group members over the outsiders.

Teasing is another conversational strategy which is considered more positively by men in order to create bonding (Beck et al., 2007). The familiarity of the interactants, the informality of the setting, and general disposition of speakers are all factors that can lead individuals to experience teasing as a friendly act. However, teasing demonstrates asymmetrical relationship when there is a powerful party who teases and the subordinate party who permits to be teased (Coser, 1959, 1960).

Lampert and Ervin-Tripp's work (2006) reinforces the idea that teasing may bring solidarity. They have examined mixed and same-sex groups of European Americans and come to a conclusion that in all-men group, men tease one another in order to build rapport and bond. It means that they do not consider teasing face threatening or mitigating but a way of maintaining solidarity. In their research,

Lampert and Ervin-Tripp (2006) also show that when women tease their male partners, they tend to eliminate the power asymmetry which exists in traditions. Women in their study, also try to elevate their power in order to build solidarity with their male friends.

Pilkington (1998) in a paper, discussing features of women and men's gossip in their own single sex communities, found something interesting about solidarity in men's speech and that is the competing and conflicting nature of male talk which results in solidarity. She discusses that, contrary to the general belief, men may engage themselves in private domains and encourage solidarity. Pilkington argues that although men use long pauses and uncomfortable silence, it does not show that they are uncooperative. On the other hand, men show their support and solidarity via their own strategies. For instance, she has encountered impoliteness, insult, criticism and lack of response; nevertheless she does not consider them a sign of power demonstration. In contrast, she discusses that men tend to support other mates "... by failing to prevent them from speaking rather than by encouraging them to speak" (1998, p. 268).

Pilkington (1998) also indicates that men use abuse and insult as a tool to show their solidarity and on the contrary, the positive politeness that is mainly used by females is considered negative by men. It is well demonstrated in the title of her research *Don't try and make out that I'm nice* which is extracted from a part of males' conversation and explains explicitly that men do not welcome and acknowledge being nice and positive. Interestingly, they do not even consider abuse and impoliteness an anti-social behavior. In this regard, Coates (2000) asserts that

not being nice is considered positive when associated with men but when associated with women, it is considered negative and subsequently she concludes that some behavioral norms are taboo for women.

Verbal sparring is another conversational style which is observed among men (Coates, 2004; Pilkington, 1998). Verbal sparring is a rapid exchange of arguments where turns are short and brief. However, among men verbal sparring is not a quarrel but a friendly enjoyable exchange of talk.

Cameron (2011), working on *sports talk*, proposes that male participants can be cooperative in their talk by using the same features which are usually attached to women's talk. However, the concept of competition is still observed more than cooperation. It is inferred that male conversationalists can be cooperative just like women but their cooperation is achieved through different ways from that of women such as teasing and taboo words. Moreover, competition overrides cooperation among men.

2.9 Iran and the Dichotomy of Patriarchy and Female Autonomy

This section presents some information about the Iranian society and the notion of patriarchy. In order to explain the process of patriarchy from past to present, it requires an examination of some feminists' movements in Iran and the patriarchal views that can be discussed through feminists' activities.

Iran is considered a country where patriarchal views are practiced (Azari, 1983). Iranian men are raised with a belief that being a man literally means that they are superior to women in different aspects such as their bodies, intellects, finance and even emotions (Fassihian, 2001). Surprisingly, they are considered powerful in emotional matters as long as they refrain themselves in demonstrating their emotions openly.

Iranian men hold power and authority in many aspects of social life such as having high status and highly-paid jobs. In family life, they also play the role of an authority such as having the right to divorce their wives. They are also given the full credit in decision making either in society or family. This power discrimination made Iranian women occupy an inferior position compared to men in society (Abbasi, 2002).

In Iran, women are perceived "... as family members whose rights and obligations are defined in relation to their male relatives" (Kian-Thiébaud, 2008). According to Kian-Thiebaud (2008), Iranian men, due to being a financial provider for the families or a breadwinner, are encouraged to have authority and power over women in both spheres of society and family. However, Iranian women did not give in to this subversion and gradually tried to free themselves from prejudicial restraints and retrieve their power. In the 1970s, Iranian society experienced the presence of an educated class with different values (V. M. Moghadam, 2011). Their values were against the existing patriarchal views in society and they demanded more liberty and equal rights. This can be considered as a transition point for women's freedom from prejudiced constraints.

According to V. M. Moghadam and Sadiqi (2006), women play an important role in changing the public opinion about gender rights. In the same vein, Iranian women have also played key roles in gaining and maintaining females' power and autonomy in Iran. They have tried to distance themselves from patriarchal dominant shelter of men (Kian-Thiébaud, 2008). In order to achieve this goal, Iranian women had to enter to the masculine domains such as economy, politics, education and so on. Nevertheless, the situation was not so easy for Iranian women. Those women were looked down and condemned due to their effort in changing unfair situations (Abbasi, 2002). Despite the obstacles they faced, it should be recognized that their struggle to win was not in vein. They have accomplished many achievements in both political (Adamiat, 1981) and economic domains (Bahramitash, 2003; Sarookhani, 2004).

Iranian women also tried to enter the academic realm and educate illiterate women in order to find a refuge, freedom, financial independence and also a respectable position in society (Shavarini, 2005). Now a days, Iranian women are very successful in academia and in 2002-2003; the number of women who enrolled at universities exceeded that of men for the very first time in the history of Iran's education (V. M. Moghadam, 2005).

At this juncture, it is essential to note that men's response to feminism and women's fight for gender equality is so varied (Whitehead, 2002). It cannot be ignored that giving up power and giving in to their opposite sex is not a pleasant transition especially for Iranian men. It is observed that this transition is not easy for a large number of men from different nations because they find this change a

threat to their social status and power. Even in an African community, it has been found that many men feel insecure and anxious since they are not in power anymore (Walker, 2005). This transition has caused an ambiguity in their masculine role. Morrell (2002) has also emphasized on ambiguous feelings of men in response to women's independence and equality.

As a result, in Iran, women's struggle to gain autonomy and independence was not smooth either. Men's power and autonomy was about to be challenged by women who were so far considered second citizens. Iranian men's strong ego made it even more difficult for Iranian women to pursue their dream for power and equality. In this regard, Fassihian (2001) says "An Iranian man without his ego is like a chicken without his head". She shows the fundamental role that egoism plays in Iranian male community.

Masculine patriarchy is still important for many Iranian men because they do not want to be recognized as being deviated from masculine norms in the context of society (Ansari, 2008). Apparently, there were some clashes and conflicts between genders in order to win this challenge. Iranian men either resisted or remained ignorant and indifferent.

Despite all the efforts, the differentiation between men and women are still observed in the context of society (Ghajarieh & Cheng, 2011). However, due to women's efforts, the patriarchal situations and male domination has become more lenient and flexible. Male domination is less practiced by Iranian men, especially younger generation (Ansari, 2008). Women participate in all the social activities

and also they occupy some high positions in politics. It is apparent that women's involvement and participation in various social spheres had effects on patriarchal societies. Due to women's efforts, patriarchal societies are moving towards being more *feminized* (V.M. Moghadam & Sadiqi, 2006)

2.10 Linguistic Features Demonstrating Power and Solidarity

The linguistic features chosen for this study are *topic of conversation*, *topic development*, *minimal responses*, *interruptions* and *epistemic modality* which are associated with power and solidarity. These features are chosen according to Coates' gossip framework (2011a) and adapted to find out how power and solidarity are distributed throughout the participants' talk. In the following sections these linguistic elements are explained and their relation to power and solidarity are further discussed.

2.10.1 Topic of Conversation

It is usually complicated to identify topic of a conversation. In other words, defining topic requires the researchers to explore more about topic development and its topic shift (Crow, 1983). In this study, topic of conversation and topic development are presented in two different sections to present a more comprehensive elaboration. Needless to say that a clear cut between these two elements is not viable and in some parts the contents clash.

At the onset, it is essential to explain what this study attempts to analyze when it comes to the topic of conversation. Coates (1996, p. 68) in defining it states "...any chunk of talk that hangs together..." is considered a single topic. Nonetheless, it is

possible to divide a chunk of talk into sub-topics but it only makes it more complicated when it comes to analyzing the data. As such, in this study, topic refers to any pieces of speech, including the sub-topics, which rotates around a main theme and that theme is considered the topic of conversation.

Identifying a topic from another topic may not be as simple as it seems especially when the topics overlap. Coates (1996) states that in conversations where the topics are gradually shifted, it would not be easy to extinguish whether a chunk of talk is a new topic or whether it is a continuum of the current topic. As such, in some cases there is no clear cut between the topics.

There are many studies which show that women and men talk about different topics in their own feminine or masculine groups (E. Aries, 1976; E. J. Aries & Johnson, 1983; Pilkington, 1998). The topics that women are usually engaged in are personal topics (E. Aries, 1976) like talking about people and feelings while men in all-male groups talk about things such as travel, current affairs, modern technology, cars and sports (Coates, 1987; Holmes, 2008). Coates in her book *Women talk: Conversation between women friends* (1996), emphasizes the fact that people and personal experiences have great values in women's choice of topic. The fact that women are connected to feelings and personal issues more than men is found relevant in another study in an Iranian context (Estaji, 2010).

Besides the difference between women and men in the type of topics they favor, there are many topics which are talked and discussed by both genders such as sex, dating or even personal appearance of the others (Levin & Arluke, 1985). This

shows that men are cable of talking about the topics which are mainly connected to women such as personal appearances of other people. On the other hand, women can discuss a serious topic such as war. In this regard, Coates (1996, p. 71) concludes that female talk can be about “everything and anything”. However, she considers the dominant masculinity and concludes that “...the world of ideas is masculine while the world of feelings is feminine”(Coates, 1996, p. 54).

Men in general, welcome impersonal topics and talk about their activities or the things out of their own private lives more than women (Coates, 2004; Johnson & Finlay, 1997). In other words, the main focus of their interaction is “...on information and facts rather than on feelings and reactions” (Holmes, 2008, p. 311). They may even pursue a kind of competitive style in their topic choice (E. Aries, 1976) when they talk about their experiences and the things they know in order to brag and boast.

Cameron (2011) working on all male speech considers alcohol, women and sports talk typical topics among men. She also discusses that the male interactants in her study have formed a kind of solidarity in cooperating with each other to discuss other men who are considered gay.

Furthermore, men emphasize on their achievements in different activities such as sports but if women talk about their achievements, they limit it to their own domestic surroundings (Coates, 1996). For instance, while women narrate everyday activities and experiences, men narrate and talk about “heroism, conflict and

achievement” and by doing this, they perform their masculinities (Coates, 2003, p. 37).

Talking about achievements has a dual function for men. First, they avoid sensitive topics and self-disclosure and second, they construct and empower their masculinity (Coates, 2004). Coates (2004) stresses that even if men are involved in sensitive and personal topics they modify their linguistic choices to remain masculine and maintain their masculine image. For instance, they may use taboo words to neutralize the feminine side of their topic choice. It concludes that men intentionally avoid the topics which may have feminine connotations and they do not want their masculinity to be challenged at any costs.

Nonetheless, Coates (2011b) argues that there are some men who opt to do the risk of self-disclosing when they talk about some private incidents in their personal lives. However, the case is not frequent and it is rather rare. She (2011b) also asserts that by being involved in self-reflexive situations, men discover their feminine sides as well. Nevertheless, it is not wrong to state that men in general, follow a competitive route within their favorite topics of conversation and at the same time in some cases they show their power and ego too while women mostly follow a more cooperative style.

It appears that there is a connection between the topic of a conversation and the other linguistic features that the participants employ to get their ideas across. Coates (2004, p. 133/134) declares that

“Topic choice is not a superficial matter: it has profound consequences for other linguistic choices. Hedging, for example, is closely correlated with more personal and / or sensitive topics. In terms of floor-holding patterns, non-personal topics encourage one-at-a-time floor holding because these topics lend themselves to what I call ‘expertism’,...”

In the same vein, Leet-Pellegrini (1980) has found a relation between the topic of the conversation and other linguistic features with respect to the dominance and cooperation. In her study, it emerges that men who were knowledgeable about the topic of the conversation talked more and tended to dominate and interrupt the female participants who did not have enough knowledge of the topic. In some cases the female participants were well-informed as well, however, they preferred a more cooperative talk and in achieving this goal they used cooperative linguistic features such as minimal responses. She also asserts that male speakers, who were well informed about the topic, exhibited a powerful style of dominating the topic and ultimately controlled the whole process of the conversation. Nevertheless, the opposite is approved by Gasaway Hill (2008) (see Section 2.10.2).

It can be inferred that topic has a multifunctional purpose. Topic of the conversation, like the other linguistic elements, may indicate power and competitiveness in some situations or solidarity and cooperation in some other cases. However, what makes it significant is its relation with the other linguistic features such as interruptions, floor appointment, minimal responses and hedges (Coates, 2004; Leet-Pellegrini, 1980). In the current study, the topic of conversation is given a special attention since gossip is evaluated. It aims to investigate what topics Iranian men gossip about.

2.10.2 Topic Development

In an interaction, people talk about various topics. A topic is introduced, progressed and then changed to another topic throughout the conversation. It is rather complicated to make a transparent distinction between different topics in a conversation (Coates, 1996; Gan et al., 2009). In this regard, Jefferson (1984) discusses about the utterances which are connected to the previous discussion topic yet at the same time, present an independent topic on its own accord. As a result, the exact point in which a topic is changed into another topic is rather vague. This makes it challenging for the present study since topic development does not only covers the processes in which a new proposed topic is developed and expanded but also encompasses the way in which a current topic is changed into another new topic.

Topic of a conversation can be controlled by the participants who either introduce new topics or change topics. This is an indication of dominance and power and this dominance is a masculine behavior which is generally associated with men (Coates, 2004; Tannen, 1994). In other words, Coates asserts that "... men pursue a style of interaction based on power, while women pursue a style based on solidarity and support" (Coates, 2004, p. 126). In this regard, Shuy (1982) believes that the speakers who introduce and change the topics are prone to dominate the conversation more than the other speakers who do not attempt to do it.

A topic that is introduced by the conversationalists can be developed or shifted to another topic smoothly or abruptly. It is believed that gender can be a salient factor in the development of a topic or its shift to another one (Abu-Akel, 2002; Coates, 2011a). In other words, the development of a topic is verified to a great extent via the gender of the speakers since females and males use various strategies to develop or drop a topic in an interaction.

According to some researchers (Coates, 1996, 2004, 2011a; Maltz & Borker, 2011) women try to develop topics smoothly by building on each others' topic in order to shape a continuity rather than discontinuity. This is due to the feminine nature of women who prefer and favor friendship and solidarity over competitiveness and power demonstration. Men, by contrast, are expected to change topics abruptly without considering the flow of speech (Pilkington, 1998; Tannen, 1990a). They pause or shift the discussion if they dislike the topic of conversation and reallocate the focus of conversation to another topic. This abrupt topic shift in turn demonstrates the power of men in an interaction when they easily change the topic without considering the current speaker and the speech flow.

Though abrupt topic shift is the characteristic of men's talk, it can be evident in women conversation as well (Coates, 1996). For instance, Coates (1996) states that in her study; one of the female participants switches the topic from *competition about children* to the topic on *taboo and funerals* without any connections or links.

This demonstrates and reinforces the performative character of gender when one gender can perform the characteristics which are known to the other gender (see Section 2.2).

Furthermore, changing a topic among men can have other various functions rather than power demonstration. As an example, Tannen (1990a) believes that topic change can be a sign of the interactants' lack of interest. When a participant does not like the topic being discussed, he or she may abruptly change the topic. However, this type of topic change can ultimately indicate power because the person who changes the topic shows his power in controlling the flow of conversation and leading it to the direction that he intends. However, elsewhere Tannen (1990b) argues that the connection of topic raising and dominance is not definite and the speakers who raise the most topics are not necessarily the most dominant interactants and this depends on some other factors in the process of interaction as well.

As Tannen (1990b) discusses, the connection between topic change and power is not explicit and it may vary from a study to another. For instance, Gasaway Hill (2008) challenges the general belief that powerful parties dominate the conversation by changing and introducing more topics (Mendoza-Denton, 1995; Shuy, 1982). Conversely in her study, examining spoken discourse in a political setting in America, less powerful participants- the ones with less political experience- change and insert more topics into the discussion. She has also noticed that gender is not a determining factor in power demonstration via topic development. She has concluded that there is no connection between topic shift and dominance in all male interaction either. The conversation of all females, however, demonstrated loads of

collaborative elements in topic shifting and in general they used more topic shifts and introduced more topics compared to their male counterparts.

In terms of topic development and power, Itakura & Tsui (2004) have come to a conclusion that in mixed interactions, men play a leading role in the development of the conversation while women play a trivial role in this process. In order to develop the conversation the male participants expand the topics which are of their own interest and it demonstrates their tendency to impose control over women. At this juncture, once again it can be inferred that men pursue a dominant style in interactions.

Unlike men, women try to expand the topic of conversation through a process called *mirroring* which involves repeating or paraphrasing what is being talked about in order to show their solidarity, support and connection (Coates, 1996). Coates also emphasizes the significance of reciprocal character of women's talk in developing a topic where they insert their well-timed matching comments and at the same time add new ideas to the existing topic. In other words, it works like a *give and take* concept when you spare and receive the support. This is a characteristic that can be scarcely seen in men's talk.

Another strategy which is observed among women more than men is the use of questions and in some cases tag questions in introducing a new topic indirectly (Coates, 2004, 2011a). In this regard, Coates (1996, p. 184) asserts "Questions are used in the development as well as in the initiation of topics. Speakers can use judiciously placed questions which are doing more than simply seeking an answer-

the main goal is to extend the topic under discussion". The questions which assist the participants to develop topics are mainly relevant and invite the others to participate more.

Besides questions, transition markers or minimal responses are also used as cues to introduce a new topic (Coates, 2011a; Keenan & Schiefflen, 1976; Ng & Bradac, 1993; Shuy, 1982). This strategy is face-preserving and keeps the polite trend of a conversation and instead of changing the topics without a notice; the interactants politely alter the focus of the conversation and place it on another topic. Another way of topic change is through topic-shading devices which preserves both speakers and hearers' face autonomy on its own accord (Crow, 1983; Sacks et al., 1974).

West and Garcia (1988) have proposed two types of topic transition which are called collaborative and unilateral. The former refers to the gradual collaborative form of topic change and the latter indicates a change of topic by only one of the participants and it is mainly an abrupt transition. They have found that in mixed sex interactions, women and men shared the same proportion of collaborative topic changes while in unilateral change of topic, male interactants were more active. They have rationalized that male participants support unilateral topic changes because it gives them the opportunity to avoid doing other things in conversation such as agreeing or disagreeing. They also contend that the male interactants in their study establish a kind of control over the current topic and it can ultimately demonstrate their manhood power in context. Their study demonstrates that men can be cooperative in topic changes; however they still favor abrupt dominant style.

Okamoto and Smith-Lovin (2001) have expanded West and Garcia's model (1988) and tried to examine topic shift in task oriented discussions. Conversely, they have discovered that gender is not a salient factor in the way that people develop their topics. Instead, they have found that social status of the participants more effective than their gender.

As demonstrated earlier, men and women apply various strategies and follow different trends to develop and change topics. Since the present study evaluates the linguistic features within solidarity and power demonstration continuum, the focus is to find out how and to what extent the participants have employed these two notions in developing and changing topics.

2.10.3 Minimal Responses

Minimal responses are the items indicating participants' attention in an interaction (Schegloff, 1972). Various terms are used to refer to these items such as *minimal responses* (Zimmerman & West, 1975), *back channel support* (Yngve, 1970) and *back channel behavior* (Duncan, 1972). Minimal responses or items, as referred to in this study, are the words or sounds such as *yeah, ok, yes, really, uhum, ahan/aha, exactly* and *oh* which primarily indicate the listeners' active attention in what is being uttered.

Reid (1995, p. 494) in her paper, *A study of gender differences in minimal responses*, emphasizes that "... there is no agreement on the delimitation of what is

or is not a minimal response”. However, she has come up with a criterion to distinguish minimal responses from other elements in a conversation. Based on her (1995, p. 494/495), minimal responses should have the following features:

1. They must be brief since they are only intended to be indicators of participation in the conversation.
2. They must be made in response to another speaker. This ensures they really are a ‘response’.
3. They contain little semantic content since they serve only to indicate participation or, at most, agreement.
4. They do not generally interrupt the flow of speech from the first speaker.
5. The second speaker, that is, the one who produces minimal response, is not attempting to take over the floor.
6. Each verbal minimal response constitutes either a completed or continuing intonation unit.

According to some researchers, minimal responses are not considered interruptions as the speakers do not intend to grab turns and control the floor (Fishman, 1983; Reid, 1995). In some studies, however, they can be interruptions when the participants attempt to grab the floor which ultimately creates a competitive setting (Jenkins & Cheshire, 1990). In the current study, minimal responses are treated as turns if they are uttered independently. They can even act as interruptions since they can carry various functions among the participants.

The basic function of minimal responses is showing active listenership. According to Schegloff (1972), the participants employ these responses to demonstrate a “continued, coordinated hearership” (1972, p. 380). It is also argued that the choice of minimal responses play an important role in the functions they serve. It means that the type of minimal responses that the interlocutors choose in their speech has an effect on how it is perceived by the speaker. For instance, Norrick (2011) has discovered that the minimal responses such as *uh-huh* and *mhm* do not attract much attention to themselves so naturally they do not show the listeners’ active listenership. On the other hand, some minimal responses like *oh* and *really* elicit and motivate the speaker to talk more. It emerges that not only the lack of minimal responses causes uncooperative environment in an interaction but also some kinds of minimal responses create unfriendly atmosphere among the interactants.

It appears that women and men are predominantly different in the use and usage of minimal responses. It is a widespread principle that women employ minimal responses more than men (Fishman, 1980; Holmes, 1995; Reid, 1995; Zimmerman & West, 1975). Based on Fishman’s research women are engaged in “support work” (Fishman, 1983, p. 96) when they use minimal responses. Minimal responses are usually well-timed to display the interactants’ active participation and also their interest in what the present speaker or speakers are saying (Coates, 2011a). As a result, conversational support and solidarity is naturally maintained (Coates, 2004, 2011a; Maltz & Borker, 2011; Tannen, 1990a).

Coates (2004) has identified another usage of minimal responses among female interactants and that is the acknowledgement of the completion of a topic. The

interactants use minimal responses to show their consensus on the termination of a topic and at the same time the acceptance of an up-coming topic. In so doing, the participants build a cooperative attitude based on their agreement over the topic.

While the use of minimal responses indicate the listeners' cooperation and attentiveness, lack of minimal responses can mean the opposite in some cases. In this regard, Zimmerman and West (1975) and Fishman (1983) believe that men tend to demonstrate their lack of interest and attention when they use the minimal responses which are not well timed or are *delayed*. Nevertheless, when men use minimal responses they aim to convey another function which is different from that of women. In all male groups, minimal responses can be a way to indicate the participants' agreement (Maltz & Borker, 2011). They use these items when they want to show their partners that they do agree with them while women reinforce their cooperative attitude by showing their concern and attention via these minimal items.

Pilkington (1998) has also concluded that men do not feel disturbed or unnoticed when their utterances are answered by long pauses and even ignorance. It seems likely that the male participants in her research do not need any back channel supports such as *uhum*, *yeah* and the like as motivational enhancers like women. Women, by contrast, find this inattentiveness uncomfortable. They even consider it an impolite act of their partner and it is basically due to the fact that minimal responses serve a different function for women and that is maintaining solidarity and friendship.

Coates (2011a) argues that although minimal responses exemplify women's talk, they are not mitigating in nature. These items are only considered weak when women use them in a mixed interaction where male speakers disregard women speakers' active listening skill. She (2011a, p. 209) has also identified two ways in which the female interactants use minimal responses. The first type is when these items are used in "the interaction-focused discussion section" where the participants aim to show their support and active participation in listening. In order to do so, females use the minimal items which "... are mostly timed to come at the end of an information unit (e.g. a tone group or clause), yet so well anticipated is this point that the speaker's flow is not interrupted" (Coates, 2011a, p. 209).

The second type is when the participants are engaged in "the information-focused" discussions. In these instances, the minimal responses are used less and they serve a different purpose but related to the first type. Minimal responses are employed to "... signal agreement among participants that a particular stage of conversation has been reached" (Coates, 2011a, p. 209). For example, there is an instance in her research when all the participants show their agreement by inserting minimal responses only after the speaker reaches a plateau which indicates the end of her statement. They do not insert minimal responses till the end of the discussion to acknowledge either a new topic or the end of a topic. It reinforces the fact that the frequent use of minimal responses does not make women's talk cooperative but the proper, well-timed and placed items create cooperation in women conversation. In this regard, Coates (2011a) reiterates that the frequent use of minimal responses does not make a person speak like a woman.

As can be seen, minimal responses are mostly associated with feminine talk so as to give support and strengthen solidarity. In the current study, minimal responses are considered in the masculine world of men and are re-evaluated in the Iranian context. Moreover, the present study tries to investigate the usage of minimal responses in reference to the cooperative and competitive attitudes that the participants impart when they use these items in all-men groups.

2.10.4 Interruptions

Interruptions, according to Zimmerman and West (1975), are categorized as any deep intrusions into the boundaries of a unit type (a meaningful end of the current speaker's speech) prior to the lexical elements which could be considered the termination of a unit type. They define interruptions as violations as they infringe the natural flow of speech. However, interruptions according to Beattie (1983), are not violations but parts of the speakers' *interactional competence*.

Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974) have proposed a turn taking model where the occurrence of interruptions is almost impossible since they emphasize on the notion of one and only one speaker at a time. According to them, a turn whether self selected or allocated should start at *Transition Relevance Place* (TRP), which is the termination of a unit type because at this point the speakers' utterance is complete in terms of grammar and meaning. They also consider the presence of any simultaneous speech an infringement and violation. However, Coates (2011a) in her research on conversation of non-dyadic groups of all females, contends that the rule of one person a time cannot be applied to every interaction. Yet, she asserts elsewhere that men may follow Sacks et al.'s turn taking model (1974) and *one*

speaker at a time rule can be observed in all-male conversation (Coates, 2004). It can be argued that the reason lies in the fact that men are more unlikely to pay attention to cooperative interaction than women. As a result, men favor *one speaker at a time* without the urge to observe and show support and attentiveness.

Generally, when more than two speakers interact, the presence of simultaneous speech and interruptions are expected. It can be inferred that simultaneous talk and interruptions are the natural subsequent outcome of non-dyadic interactions and even in a dyadic natural occurring conversation it is not easy to apply and observe *one speaker at a time* rule.

Zhao and Gantz (2003) proposed two kinds of interruptions based on the purposes they serve. They are disruptive and cooperative interruptions. In *cooperative interruptions*, interactants interrupt in order to show their support, agreement and also to ask for further explanation and clarification. This kind of interruption can also be found in the fast exchange of floor between speakers and "... may have a potentially positive influence on the interpersonal relationship between speakers" (Zhao & Gantz, 2003, p. 350). On the other hand, *disruptive interruptions* include disagreements, rejections and also the participants' thirst to control the communication. Therefore, unlike *cooperative interruptions* which have positive effects, they have negative effects on interpersonal relationships between the interactants and endorse a sense of power and dominance.

There are many studies on interruptions and gender which show that there are marked asymmetries between men and women in terms of the interruptions and

overlaps in mixed-sex groups. Men interrupt more often than women in order to take the turn or hold the floor (Bohn & Stutman, 1983; Eakins & Eakins, 1976; Jariah, 1999; Octigan & Niederman, 1979; Peterson, 1986; C. West, 1979; C. West & Zimmerman, 1983; Zimmerman & West, 1975), while women relinquish the floor without any serious complaints in response to males' interruptions and domination (Holmes, 2008).

Conversely, in single-sex conversations the case is reverse. It has been found that the females have more numbers of interruptions compared to the males in the process of taking turns. Women tend to interrupt other women more than men interrupting other men (Bilous & Krauss, 1988; Mohajer, 2006; Street Jr & Murphy, 1987). There are also some researches in which there is no significant difference found between males and females in the number of interruptions (Beattie, 1981; James & Clarke, 1993; Smith-Lovin & Brody, 1989) or type of interruptions (Beattie, 1981).

In a study on Iranian single and mixed sex interactions, gender does not appear to be a salient factor in the number of interruptions (Samar & Alibakhshi, 2007). However, academic status seems to be influential in this regard. In their study, people with high educational background interrupt the interactants who are less educated. They have ultimately uncovered that there is a connection between power and interruption. The powerful parties in society maintain a kind of authority which allows them to interrupt the others who are less powerful.

As stated above, interruptions are associated with ascendancy and power more than solidarity and cooperation. Many studies have confirmed that males have the

tendency to interrupt women, more than the reverse, as an indication of their dominance and power in an interactional level (Argyle et al., 1968; Eakins & Eakins, 1976; Natale et al., 1979; C. West & Zimmerman, 1983; Zimmerman & West, 1975). The most prominent work in this field is of Zimmerman and West (1975) where they explain that males' domination in speech is mainly due to the asymmetries that women and men experience in the context of the society. Their work, however, has been questioned by some researchers such as Talbot (1992) and Murray and Covelli (1988) who believe that Zimmerman and West's findings (1975) about male's dominance are not justified and are rather crude. Murray and Covelli (1988) also content that sometimes women interrupt men more than the reverse and since interruption is multifunctional it can be regarded positively such as showing support.

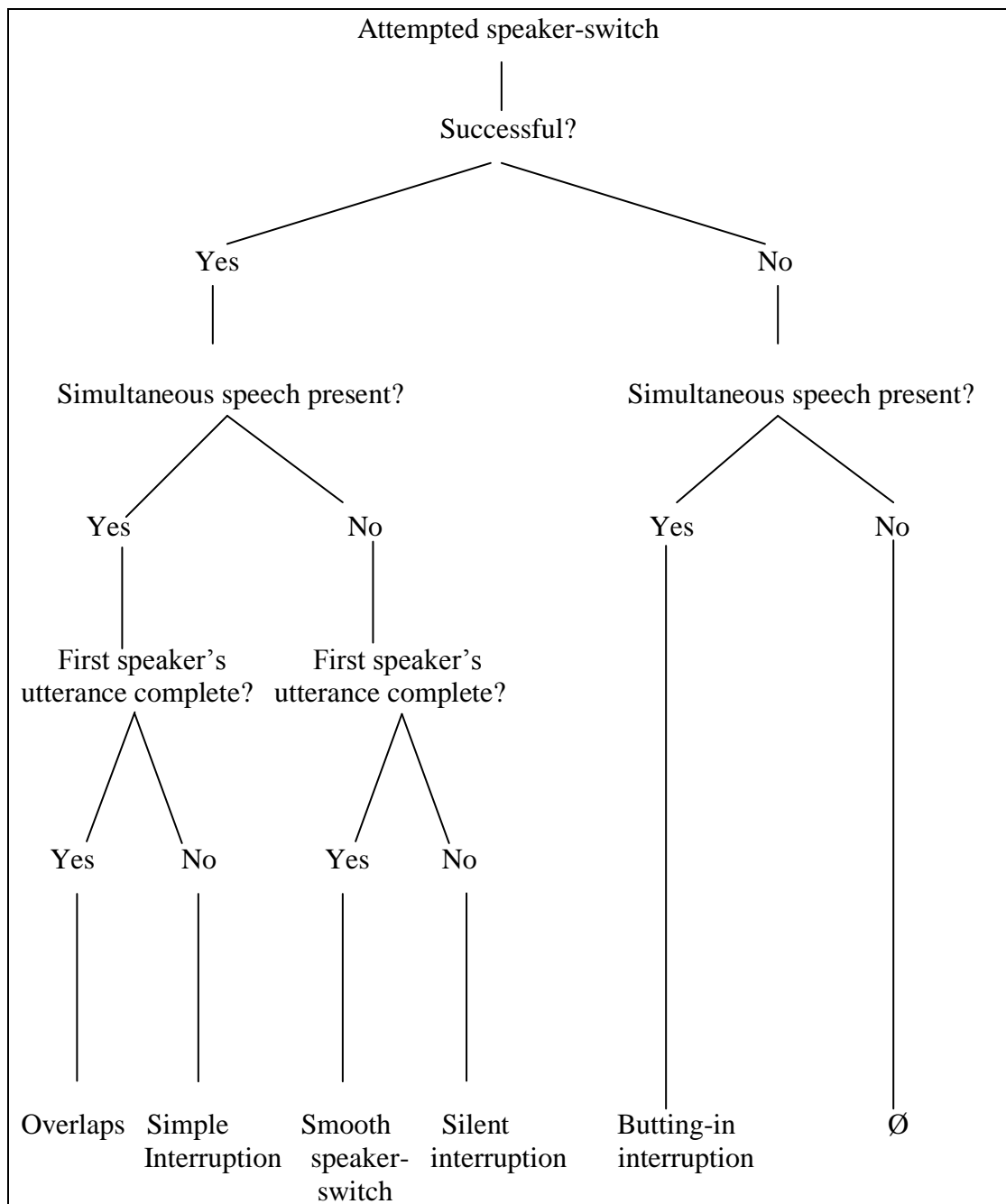
On the contrary to the belief that interruption is a sign of men power in conversation, Tannen (1984) suggests that some speakers express their solidarity and interest in the others' speech through overlaps, latching of utterances and even the fast flow of speech. In the same token, Kalčík (1975) and Booth-Butterfield et al. (1988) consider interruptions as indications of interactants' support and interest. Coates (2011a) in a study of all female single sex groups, concludes that women use interruptions and overlaps to show their support and cooperation rather than competing for the floor. Women, in her study, make interruptions but their goal is to cooperate with the other female friends. The same is also observed in Pilkington's study on gossip (1998). While these interruptions may seem cooperative among females, they may not be interpreted the same in men's talk. In Talbot's study (1992), one of the male participants objected his female partner

directly for interrupting him frequently in order to insert encouraging comments or questions. As such, apparently the way that women and men conceive an interpret interruption is different.

It is inferred that the way that the interruptions and overlaps are interpreted is complicated since interruption is multifunctional. It signifies that interruptions, depending on the context and the participants can be a sign of cooperation and support while in some other situations they may serve a competitive value as the participants vie for the turns and attempt to achieve the floor or dominate the conversation. In the same way, however slightly different, James and Clarke (1993, p. 241) assume that "... the extent to which an interruption is interpreted as negative and disruptive is probably not a black-and-white matter, but rather a matter of degree."

Conversely, Ferguson (1977) has found no significant relation between the number of interruptions and the dominance of the interactants. Beattie (1981) based on Ferguson's classification (1977), has identified five distinctive types of interruption. This classification presents a comprehensive model of interruptions and overlaps. It attempts to distinguish them in a more detailed manner. Her interruption model is summarized in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1 Classification of Interruptions (Adopted from Beattie (1981, p. 19)).



In her model, different types of interruption have been classified under two main divisions. She has sorted the speaker switches in terms of being successful and not

being successful in achieving the floor. Not successful in Beattie's classification means that the interrupter stops before being successful in gaining the floor. The two general divisions are subdivided into five categories which are summarized as follows

1. Successful

- Overlap: simultaneous speech present and utterance complete
- Simple interruption: simultaneous speech present but incomplete utterance
- Smooth speaker-switch: simultaneous speech not present but utterance complete
- Silent interruption: neither simultaneous speech present, nor utterance complete

2. Not successful

- Butting-in interruption: simultaneous speech present

She has considered the presence of simultaneous speech relative to the completeness of utterances. Completeness refers to the *intonational, syntactic and semantic features* in verbal communication as well as *nonverbal behavior* (1981, p. 20).

Through the interruption categories that Beattie (1981) has identified, the instances of cooperation, competition and power can be observed clearly. For instance, in butting-in interruption type, the interrupter barges into the current speaker's turn,

disregarding the completion of the sentence. Although the interrupter is not successful, this kind of interruption can be considered an intrusion if it is interpreted in isolation. However, if the context of the interaction plus the interrupter's intention is taken into accounts, the interpretation would be viewed differently. For instance, some butting-in interruptions can indicate the interrupter's interest rather than an attempt to take the floor as in the following example from Coates' data on gossip (Coates, 2011a, p. 210, Example 6).

Example 2.1

B: I mean it's not as if I'm particularly religious /
 E: but if- yeah / but if
 E: you've got a fa- if there's a spouse then perhaps they would
 E: want you to go /

In explaining this interruption, Coates (2011a, p. 210) uses the term *overlap-as-enthusiasm*, proposed by Tannen (1984), which shows the interrupter's interest to participate. As such, this butting-in interruption shows the participant's active role to create a cooperative interaction rather than a discontinuity.

Coates (2011a, p. 211) has also noticed a kind of interruption which she refers to it as *completion-overlaps* which entails a sense of cooperativeness because the second speaker assists the first speaker to complete her utterance. This is exemplified in the following extract, taken from Coates' data (Coates, 2011a, p. 211, Example 10).

Example 2.2

B: I mean that was just- = no /
 D: you just can't say that =

In this example, D does not attempt to take the floor from B. She only tries to assist her friend to complete her sentence. *Completion-overlaps* function as an enhancement of cooperation and solidarity.

Based on the above arguments, the explanation of interruptions in the current study is a challenge since many factors, regarding the interrupters' intentions and their effects on the flow of speech are taken into account. The present study benefits from Beattie's interruption model (1981). However, a careful analysis is required in order to clearly demonstrate the instances of cooperation and power demonstration within the interruptions.

2.10.5 Epistemic Modality

Epistemic modality or hedges are linguistic forms which demonstrate the speakers' certainty or uncertainty about the truth of the proposition they expressed (Coates, 2004). Epistemic modality covers the qualifiers such as *sort of*, *a little* and the modals like *may* and *might* and expressions like *you know*, *I mean*, *like* and *I think*. These elements are considered epistemic modal items since they show the degree in which the speaker is certain about the utterances he or she expresses. These elements are also called *hedges* because the speaker hedges the assertive tone of the sentences in order to protect his own and the addressees' face. As can be seen, the epistemic modal items have other functions than merely expressing uncertainty.

Epistemic modality plays a dual mode and has a bilateral effect in an interaction. It means that when epistemic modal forms are used, both the speakers and the addressees are affected positively. Therefore, the other function of epistemic

modality is to lessen the assertiveness of a statement and save both the speakers' and addressees' face. In informal friendly interactions, however, epistemic modality preserves the addressees' face more than the speakers' face (Coates, 1987). It is largely due to the fact the aim of an informal friendly interaction is to construct and maintain a good social relation between the interactants (Coates, 1987). As a result, the epistemic modal forms can play the role of keeping the addressees' face in order to save it from any offence.

In addition to preserving face, hedges provide the opportunity for the interactants to speak and communicate verbally (Coates, 2011a). It is assumed that epistemic modal forms or hedges play a contributing role in an interaction by inviting the other speakers to the discussion. The interactants use hedges to politely include everyone in interaction to create a friendly atmosphere in their communication.

The other usage of epistemic modality is to decrease the sensitivity of the topics (Coates, 1987, 2004). The more sensitive the topics get, the more frequent epistemic modal items are used (Coates, 2011a). It is basically due to the fact that sensitive topics naturally involve some self-disclosures and face-threatening statements and epistemic modal forms assist in neutralizing these effects (Coates, 2004). When the speaker is talking about something like his failures, he uses a lot of hedges to protect his face by attenuating the self relief he has made. Depending on the topic, the epistemic modal forms also protect the addressees' face to avoid any possible offence.

Epistemic modal forms are also used to decrease the boasting tone of the statements made. For instance, when a person is describing about his achievements and his victorious moments, simultaneously he uses epistemic modal forms in order to hedge his assertion. Epistemic modal forms decrease the force of the claims that the speakers have made about themselves. On the other hand, while epistemic modal items create a *modesty principle* for the speakers (Coates, 1987), it also preserves the addressees from feeling inferior compared to the boastful comments that the speakers have made about themselves.

Some studies prove that there is no significant difference in the frequency counts of the epistemic modal items used by women and men (Holmes, 1985; Vold, 2006). However, the functions that these items serve differ tremendously among genders (Holmes, 1985). Epistemic modal forms or hedges are seen in women's interaction more than men's mainly due to the cooperative nature that these items carry (Coates, 1987; Herring et al., 2011; Holmes, 1984; Lakoff, 1975; O'Barr & Atkins, 2011).

As stated earlier in this section, epistemic modality and hedges are connected to the topic of the conversation and are used to neutralize the sensitiveness of the assertions. In this regard, Coates (2011a) argues that women use epistemic modality more than men because they are engaged in more personal and sensitive topics. Moreover, some of the masculine topics that men talk about- especially the topics which are about things- do not welcome the use of hedges at all such as home beer-making (Coates, 2011a). It reinforces the assumption that women and men use epistemic modality for different reasons.

Lakoff (1975), however, considers hedges as a weak element in women's language. In this regard, Holmes (1986) criticizes Lakoff's assumption (1975) and proves it wrong by contradictorily discovering that women use epistemic modality to express their confidence and certainty in the background knowledge that they share and she relates it to the women's politeness. Holmes (1984) also emphasizes that women aim to facilitate the interaction when they use tag questions while men use these hedges to show their uncertainty about the utterances they say. This finding reconfirms that women seek cooperation and solidarity in speech. It is also inferred that despite what Lakoff (1975) has found, tentativeness cannot be attached to one gender. It is the function of the epistemic modal forms which determines whether an epistemic modal item conveys tentativeness or certainty.

It is essential to state at this juncture that in the current study, the functions of the epistemic modal items are taken into account in details because only through a careful analysis on function, the cooperative, competitive or powerful elements can be observed. However, each item is not going to be treated separately. Moreover in the present study, some certain hedges are considered to be analyzed and they are as follows: *I mean, you know, like, just, I think* and *maybe*. The selection of these items goes back to the fact that when English is not the first language of a community, language proficiency affects the type of epistemic modal items used by the interactants (Letica, 2009). Letica (2009, p. 119) rationalizes it by saying that "... it seems logical to conclude that non-native language users, due to imperfect knowledge of L2, will encounter even more problems when it comes to expressing more subtle differences in the levels of assertion". It appears that it is difficult for

non-native speakers to express their uncertainty through some epistemic devices. As such, in the present study the participants preferred these items over the other items and used them in their speech.

2.11 Summary

In this chapter, a comprehensive review of the relevant works on the topic of language and gender in relevance to power and solidarity is presented. The features which present these two elements are discussed and their relevance to the present study is justified. This chapter also looks at gender and how it is defined in sociolinguistics. Moreover, the concept of gossip is argued in feminine and masculine domains. It includes not only various viewpoints, debates and criticisms in the relevant fields, but also presents the ways in which the present research has adopted various frameworks and tailored them down to suit the needs of this study.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter provides information about the participants of the study and the language they use to interact. The instrument used in this study is also taken into account in this chapter. It also demonstrates what methodology is employed in order to analyze the data. Moreover, the methods' specifications to this study are highlighted. Since the data of this study is spoken, it is crucial to unfold how the data is gathered and transcribed. As such, the detailed steps taken to gather the data are presented to introduce an image of how this study is conducted. At the end of the chapter, the procedure that the data analysis is based on is discussed.

3.1 Profile of the Participants

A total of 12 Iranian men participated in this study. They form four groups and each group consists of three participants. The participants are Iranian men between the ages of 24 and 37. They all come from the same socio-economic background. One of the criteria for the selection of the interactants is their acquaintance with each other. They have all known one another for at least two years. Since the participants of this study are not strangers to each other, communication between them is possible. However, it is vital to mention that the participants in Group 1 are only classmates and they do not have much communication out of classroom confinements. While the participants in Group 2 have relations beyond classmate

status, that is the reason in Table 3.1 the terms *friend* and *classmate* are used to differentiate this matter.

Table 3.1 Profile of the Participants: Groups 1 to 4

Groups	Participants	Age	Education	Profession and position	Relationship
Group 1	N1	28	B.A. Law	Executive manager	Classmate
	N2	26	B.A. Microbiology	Employee	Classmate
	N3	29	B.A. Computer Engineering and Law	Computer shop owner	Classmate
Group 2	R1	25	B.A. Industrial Engineering	Marketing manager	Friend/ Classmate
	R2	24	B.A. Industrial Engineering	Marketing advisor	Friend/ Classmate
	R3	26	B.A. Management	Bank clerk	Friend
Group 3	L1	26	B.A. Art	Sales manager	Friend/ Classmate
	L2	28	B.A. Art	Artist / Interior designer	Friend/ Classmate
	L3	27	B.A. Photography	Photographer	Friend/ Classmate
Group 4	K1	37	B.A. Management	Executive director	Friend
	K2	27	B.A. Industrial Engineering	Stock broker	Friend
	K3	29	B.A. Agriculture	Restaurant owner	Friend

The status of the participants ranges between middle and high. Four of the participants hold high positions in society in terms of their career. As for their education, they all hold bachelor degrees in different areas.

In this study, the convenient sampling is used to choose the participants. It is mainly due to the fact that English is not spoken in Iranian society as mentioned in Chapter One (see Section 1.3). However, all of the subjects are able to converse and communicate in English. They have either studied English or lived abroad. The participants in each group have the same level of English proficiency but each group's English proficiency level is different from the other group. For example, the participants in Group 3 are able to communicate in English more proficiently than the participants in Group 1.

The number of participants in each group is limited to three and it has been done purposely in order to have full control of their turns and their interruptions. In larger groups, the speech exchanged between the interactants will mix up due to the enormous overlaps and interruptions. As such, keeping the size of each group limited to three participants is more favorable in this study.

3.1.1 The Use of Pseudonyms

In order to maintain the participants' anonymity, all the interactants are given pseudonyms. For this purpose, a letter is chosen for each group and each participant is identified by that letter accompanied by a number. As an illustration, the participants in Group 1 are identified by letter 'N' and a number is added to that letter to show every single person like N1, N2, N3 and alike (see Table 3.1).

Another concern of the present study in terms of anonymity is the proper names and the places that the participants use in their speech. These identifying names such as street names, people's names and names of the institutes or places, which are

occasionally mentioned in their conversations, are all disguised with pseudonyms to guarantee their anonymity since some names may carry some critical connotations. All the pseudonyms were randomly picked up by the researcher at the time of transcribing. As a result, any resemblance was unplanned.

3.1.2 The Language Used by the Participants

As discussed earlier in Chapter One, Section 1.3, the official language of Iranians is Farsi and English is not considered their second language but rather foreign. Nevertheless, the language used by the participants in this study is English. They were all asked to communicate in English at the time of recording. Although there might be some grammatical mistakes in their speaking, all the mistakes are retained in order to preserve the authenticity of the data and ultimately present a genuine research. This primarily means that the accuracy of the participants is not the concern of this study. On the contrary, their fluency was given more attention as this study principally focuses on face to face interaction in which the ability to communicate overrides accuracy. It should be mentioned that all the participants in this study are able to interact and convey their meanings in English by the help of either simplified grammar or uncomplicated words and in some cases both.

In addition, there are some utterances in the recorded data where the participants use Farsi words instead of English. In order to overcome this problem, all Farsi words or phrases are figuratively translated into English (see Section 3.7). There are even some examples where the participants themselves correct and help each other out with finding the English words. In general, there is no inconsistency observed in their conversation in this regard.

3.2 Instrument

The sole instrument in this study is transcribed spoken data. This instrument is selected because of the fact that this research is basically focusing on conversation and face to face interaction. The spoken data is obtained through recording the interactants' speech at the time of interacting using a digital sound recorder. The digital sound recorder assists to acquire the best quality of the voices and also to maintain the participants' pictorial anonymity as they did not welcome video recording.

It appears that in the beginning of the recordings, the participants in each group did not feel comfortable to speak English and they spoke Farsi to warm up their language. As such, the first parts of each recording where the subjects were not at ease to communicate in English are deleted. It was done purposely with the hope that the participants eventually forget the presence of the recorder to produce a natural conversation. After eliminating, the last 40 minutes of each recording is selected and transcribed for the analysis. As such, in this study the total number of 160 minutes of conversation is the data.

3.2.1 Setting

Setting of a conversation covers both time and place (see Section 2.7.1.1.). Jones (1980) asserts that the time of gossip for women is usually taken from their work time. In this study, however, the time that the male participants sit to have a conversation or gossip is not structured. The participants had their meetings whenever they had free time to have a talk but it does not necessarily mean that the

time to gossip for these participants is *snatched* from work as Jones has suggested (Jones, 1980, p. 194).

Place is another aspect of setting. The participants are asked to have their conversation in an informal setting such as in their homes, their living rooms or wherever they felt convenient to have a talk with their friends. As a result, each group agreed on having its interaction at one of the participant's home in the living rooms except Group 1 whose members chose one of the participants' workplace in one afternoon over a weekend. It is inferred that since the participants in Group 1 are only classmates (see Table 3.1), they preferred a place outside their private home environment.

It seems that the places in which the participants have selected to have their conversation are unlike what Jones (1980) has identified a private feminine domain for conversation and gossip. In this research, however, 3 groups out of 4 chose their houses as a venue to get together and have a chat with their friends. It may be due to the nature of a friendly conversation which invites privacy and convenience regardless of the gender of the interactants.

3.3 Theoretical Frameworks

A combination of three feminist approaches namely; dominance, difference and social constructionist approaches are used in this study (see Section 2.3.5). Gossip is also defined and analyzed according to Pilkington's explanation of gossip (1998).

In order to study gossip based on the linguistic features, Coates' gossip framework (2011a) is used to evaluate the language of the participants. This framework consists of four linguistic features namely; topic development, minimal responses, simultaneous speech and epistemic modality (see Section 2.7.2). In addition, Beattie's interruption model (1981) is employed to examine occurrences of simultaneous speech and interruptions (see Section 2.10.4). Coates' gossip framework enables this study to observe power and solidarity in the language of the participants clearly.

3.4 Methodology

The methods adopted in this study are both quantitative and qualitative. At the outset, the quantitative approach helps to account for the frequency use of the various linguistic features and the qualitative approach facilitates the explanation of findings as this study centers around manifestation of power and solidarity in gossip. It is also essential to urge that although both methods are employed, the findings of this study are based on qualitative approach more than quantitative approach.

3.4.1 Quantitative Method

Quantitative approach is concerned mainly with quantity or numbers, graphs and tables. In this approach, data is described concisely through statistical values (Colton & Covert, 2007). In the present research, the quantitative method is partly beneficial in terms of the frequency counts of some of the linguistic features which are going to be considered and compared to depict a general view of the analysis in

hand. As a result, it can be concluded that this study benefits from both approaches in different degrees.

In the use of both approaches in a single study Colton and Covert (2007, p. 40) believe

“In addition, depending on the area of interest and the resources available, qualitative and quantitative methods may be used together, to broaden the range of information made available and to complement the data collected under each approach.”

It is concluded that the use of one approach does not necessarily contradict with the use of another. On the contrary, this combination supports the final conclusion as both approaches provide the researcher with sufficient information, numerically and qualitatively. As such, both approaches are used in this study to provide a thorough image of the data under analysis.

3.4.2 Qualitative Method

The qualitative method as the word suggests puts emphasis on the qualities and the meanings of the parameters involved in a research and more importantly, it concerns about the processes through which these parameters have been shaped. The qualitative research aims to examine and explain the elements that cannot be easily examined numerically.

In studies such as social sciences and sociolinguistics where the explanation of social human behavior in a natural setting is required, the qualitative analysis is

more appropriate (Colton & Covert, 2007). This study similarly attempts to find a suitable explanation for social behavior of a specific community, such as the Iranian male interactants, through their use of language.

Colton & Covert (2007) also explain that the descriptive information which is acquired through observations needs to be explained qualitatively in order to obtain a better finding. The present study evaluates the linguistic behavior of the interactants while communicating. As such another reason for applying qualitative approach in this study is the inevitable nature of face to face interaction and the real life communication. Moreover, qualitative analysis of the findings helps to explain how the linguistic and social behaviors of the participants are manifested in their language and if there is an explanatory pattern responsible for these kinds of behavior.

3.5 Procedure of Data Collection

The data of this study is collected from Iranian face to face informal conversation. The first step to be taken in the process of data collection is the participants' consent which is obtained through signed letters from all the participants in this study (see Appendix F). They were also informed that the data will be used solely for the research and they were also assured of the confidentiality of the information they spare.

The collection of data was carried out during a period of five months. The participants were given specific instruction about the sessions to be recorded, however, the objectives of the study was not revealed to them in order to avoid any effects of their knowledge of the study on the authenticity of the data. Each of the

sessions was recorded in the absence of the researcher. It is mainly because of the fact that the presence of the researcher may produce the “observer’s paradox” (Pilkington, 1998, p. 256) and may disturb the natural flow of talk. Moreover, as Pilkington (1998) has put it rightly, the presence of a female researcher in all-male group would ultimately demolish the idea of having a single-sex group.

The interactants were also asked to communicate naturally so as to maintain the authenticity of the data. They were also invited to serve food if they liked to and they could even do their normal chores just like the times when they usually interact with their friends. Yet, in the beginning of their conversation, some uneasiness is observed and they seem intimidated by the presence of the recorder. This apprehension is completely removed as the conversation goes on further because they gradually forgot about the presence of the recorder. However, the first utterances where the participants are not warmed up yet to have a conversation are deleted (see Section 3.2).

3.6 Transcription

In the present study, since the focus is on conversation and audio-recorded speech, transcription plays a significant role. It is apparent that transcription is the only suitable medium of connecting the spoken data to a written form in order to make it more comprehensible for the purpose of analysis. In transcribing spoken data, a careful attention is required to include all the necessary background and the participants’ sounds such as laughter, sigh and so on. In so doing, reading a transcribed text will create the feeling for the reader that he or she was present at the time of recording. However, it is obviously more complicated than it seems and

the transcriber needs not only to include the sounds and words uttered but also other nonverbal elements such as space and silence since they are all important in the process of analysis.

More importantly transcription plays an important role in conversation analysis (CA). CA mainly focuses on naturally occurring conversation and transcription acts as a bridge in linking natural talk to analysis. Hutchby and Wooffitt (2008) rationalize that transcription enables researchers to analyze the recorded conversation. In addition, they consider that transcription is a unique stage in the process of data analysis.

Jefferson's transcription convention (1979) is considered one of the most reliable models of transcribing and it is adapted and used in the present study (see Appendix A). It is important to note that the transcription elements, as complete as possible, do not demonstrate the real spoken form of talk and cannot be at any costs the substitute of the conversation. Heritage and Atkinson (1984) believe that the purpose of a piece of transcription is to capture various elements of talk in a sequential order without claiming any detailed representations of talk. It can also be said that the transcription system can be selective and is flexible enough to include any elements to describe particular features of talk.

According to Paul Ten Have (2007), following Psathas and Anderson (1990), every transcription file should include some general information to make the transcription model more understandable for both the reader and the analyst. These elements are summarized as follows (Have, 2007, p. 97)

- Time, date, and place of the original recording.
- Identification of the participants.
- Words as spoken.
- Sounds as uttered.
- Inaudible or incomprehensible sound or words.
- Spaces / silences.
- Overlapped speech and sounds.
- Pace, stretches, stresses, volume, etc.

In the present study, all the mentioned elements are taken into consideration. The sounds of laughter and sighs are specifically distinguished in order to provide a clear image of the recorded speech. Word stretches, stress and volume are also demonstrated by specific symbols (see Appendix A). These elements will ultimately help the current study to present a more comprehensive analysis. In this regard, Ten Have (2007: 94) argues “For analyzing talk-in-interaction, however, one wants to write down not only *what* has been said, but also *how* it has been said”.

3.7 Translation

In this research, some parts of the utterances in the interaction are in Farsi and need to be translated. These Farsi words may be comprised of specific terms or phrases which are mainly proverbs or contain some cultural expressions and figurative meanings. In some places, the interactants code-switch between English and Farsi. All the utterances in Farsi are translated into English and are placed in double

parentheses right after the Farsi words. Nevertheless, the original form of the words or phrases, as uttered by the participants, is intact to maintain the authenticity of the data.

In order to further clarify and make a clearer picture of how translation is done in this research, an example is extracted from one of the data set where the participants use Farsi and the translation in English I sprovided.

Example 3.1

[62] K2: no / I didn't have any parties ((connections)) / uh / when I / started my work / I had to work so hard (.) uh / I started my / uh job as a (.) karamooz ((apprentice))

In Example 3.1, 'connections' is the English equivalent for the Farsi word 'parties' and 'apprentice' is the equivalent for 'karamooz'.

3.8 Data Analysis

The current study applies conversation analysis (CA) as its basic framework of analyzing spoken language. CA is found to be the most applicable framework herein for two main reasons. The first reason deals with the nature of CA which invites natural occurring interaction. As highlighted earlier, the data in this study is the talk-in-interaction and as Hutchby and Wooffitt (2008) discuss, conversation analysis is the systematic analysis of natural talk which is occurring in everyday situations. In other words, CA can be simply described as an analysis of talk-in-interaction. They also argue that CA bases mainly on the recorded speech of people in natural settings.

The second reason deals with the transcription which enables the researchers to conduct the analysis of talk-in-interaction. Dealing with natural occurring conversation leaves CA mostly dependant on transcribed tape or video recordings. Since this study focuses on informal face to face interaction and depends mainly on transcribed recorded conversations, CA is assumed to be more applicable than any other frameworks.

A total of 160 minutes of conversation is transcribed for the purpose of analysis. This corpus belongs to 4 groups of Iranian male interactants. At the outset, the quantitative measurement is used to demonstrate the frequency counts of the linguistic features used by the male participants. The linguistic features in this research consist of five elements: topic, topic development, minimal responses, interruptions and epistemic modality (see Section 2.10). The qualitative approach is then applied in order to find out how the Iranian male interactants employ these features to pursue the concept of gossip. Eventually, the connection between the linguistic features and the notions of power and solidarity is qualitatively analyzed. At this juncture, the qualitative analysis helps to show how power and solidarity are distributed through the mentioned linguistic features in a masculine talk specifically ‘topic development’ which is entirely evaluated qualitatively.

CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter, the conversations of four groups of Iranian male interactants are analyzed and compared. This chapter focuses on the analysis of topic of conversation that the men in this study engaged in and the ways in which gossip will be highlighted. The use of linguistic features such as topic development, minimal responses, interruptions and epistemic modality in the men's talk that denote power and solidarity are also examined and discussed.

The frequency counts of the linguistic features are considered for each group to obtain an overview of the relation between the linguistic features and the aspects of power and solidarity. Each group's tendency towards powerful aspects of speech is considered in addition to solidarity and cooperation. Further, the way in which the interactants use linguistic features to demonstrate power and solidarity is also presented.

In order to analyze the data, some extracts from each group's conversation are selected to depict a plausible explanation of each feature. The examples have been chosen carefully in order to answer the research questions. According to Cameron (2011), in a research when we are trying to relate our analysis to gender, it is almost impossible not to be selective in our observation and pursue our analysis without any preconceptions. She believes that it is extremely hard to suppress some of our

expectations in the process and the same thing applies to this study. All the examples have carefully been singled out to demonstrate the relation between the linguistic features, gender and the notions of power and solidarity.

4.1 Topic of Conversation

Analysis of the data reveals that there are 13 topics discussed in this study. The topics that the participants talk about are various and differ from one group to another however; there are some topics such as *education, job, hobby, English language and sexuality* which are commonly discussed by some groups.

Table 4.1 Topics Discussed by the Participants in Groups 1 to 4

Groups	Topics					
Group 1	Smoking	Education	Job	Social Rights	Petrol	Hobby
Group 2	Immigration	Education	Job	Sexuality		
Group 3	Unacceptable behavior	The English Language Institute	Mobile Phones	Business		
Group 4	Movies	English Language	Job	hobby	Sexuality	

4.1.1 Topic of Conversation in Group 1

The participants in Group 1 talk about six different topics in which include *smoking, education, job, Social rights petrol and hobby*. The discussions of these topics mainly concentrate on general themes. However in some cases, they relate their discussion to their personal experiences. The topic on *smoking* appears to be more personal than the other topics.

Example 1

[55] N2: human / u::h / are the biggest disease in the world / and / uh / everyday they / uh / are growing up

[56] N3: I was fifteen years old / uh / I smoked /

[57] N1: the first [time?]

[58] N3: [and]/ for the first time and / uh (.) //

[59] N1: // how you get / how you /uh / attracted to the cigarette? / you know? / how *you* / attracted to smoke?

[60] N3: because my father smoked cigarette and //

[61] N1: // aha

[62] N3: I liked / this [and / uh] / and //

[63] N2: [me too] // ok but usually I think [falling in love is a] good cause for starting to smoke a cigar / ~

[64] N3: [they / uh / she]

[65] N2: ~ cigarette (.)

[66] N1: it could be but / not usually / but the thing that you said / I thought that / uh / usually the *people* that start smoking cigarette / if there / if there is someone in his / uh / in their family / they [never] / they never / attracted to [it]

[67] N3: [yes but] [my] father had a / *collection* of cigar

[68] N1: aha

[69] N3: and I liked this [and]

[70] N2: [u::h] / and as my memory helps I remember that when I / uh / was / uh / being in the country / for at university / uh / when I started smoking cigarette I collected / uh / the signs / uh which was on packets (.)

[71] N1: uhum

[72] N2: and now uh / I think I have more than thousand label of different cigarettes

[73] N1: did you / it was some hobby for you?

[74] N2: ye::s / and I uh want / I wanted to know that after for example 10 years how much cigarette uh / I /uh / used (.)

[75] N1: you mean every uh / label that you *used* you? (.)

[76] N2: after [I used the packet] / I //

[77] N1: [collected them] // ahan

[78] N2: uh / collect its sign

[79] N1: ahan / but / but I never tried different kinds of cigarettes I just tried //

[80] N2: // no / uh / for [example] I ~

[81] N1: [(xxx)]

[82] N2: ~ tried / uh / Winston / uh (.) Bahman even Farvardin ((he laughs))

[83] N3: Oshnoo ((a brand of cheap cigarette)) ((everybody laughs)) but //

[84] N2: // and / Captain Black / and once if I want to be honest u::h marijuana (.)

[85] N3: yes? / [really?]

[86] N1: [but it is] not a cigarette of course / it's / [it's some] drug

[87] N2: [oke::y]

[88] N3: *Marijuana?* ((he laughs))

[89] N2: [but]

[90] N1: [but] (.) but I never liked to change my / cigarette / you know (.) it / after that you / uh / get used to ...

Example 1 illustrates how the participants relate the general theme of smoking into their own personal experiences. For instance, N3 in [56] takes a turn and says that he was fifteen years old when he started smoking and then later in [60] and [67] he confesses that because his father was smoking so he started smoking too. It can also be inferred that through these personal experiences although the participants' friendship is maintained, they intend to boost their ego and appear more masculine when they talk about smoking. For example N2 in [70] says that he started collecting cigarette labels since he started smoking in order to find out how much cigarettes he has smoked after 10 years and in line [72] he emphasizes "and now uh / I think I have more than thousand label of different cigarettes". There is no rational behind this declaration except the fact that he wants to boast about the number of cigarettes he has smoked so far to ultimately appear masculine among the other participants. Also, he brags about different brands that he has tried such as Winston, Bahman (a local strong brand), and Captain Black in lines [82] and [84] respectively. He admits that he has smoked Marijuana once in line [84] in order to appear macho and tough. Example 1 demonstrates that the male interactants insert their personal experiences into general discussion to build conversation while at the same time they boost their masculine attributes.

Example 2

[449] N3: I studied computer and then uh / uh I have a store and I (.) opened the store
 [450] N2: ok
 [451] N3: yes
 [452] N1: but but / it's not usual in the other countries [if] you like some / some ~
 [453] N3: [yes]
 [454] N1: ~ courses you go through that course and you work / with that / with that course
 and / for example I studied *law* / but I never want to / *work* / as a lawyer or as a /
 everything that is related to law / **I just** uh / chose it because my family liked it
 because my / because the / the *society* says you that it's good uh / it's a good
course with uh / good *prestige* / with a good (xxx)
 [455] N3: but I never liked law (.)
 [456] N2: as an example (.) I am a graduate student in microbiology as you might know

[457] N1: yeah
 [458] N2: but (.) there (.) there is *no* chance for me getting job uh / in the same field /
 for example in laboratories and / I think it's so ridiculous it's awful

In Example 2, the discussion is about the connection between the field that people study at universities and the jobs that they follow after graduation. N3 in line [449] says that his educational field and his occupation are connected to each other but N1 in [454] confesses that although he has studied law, he did not like it and he only did it because his family and society think that it is a prestigious field. In fact, he self-discloses to his friends about his job. After this self-disclosure, another participant, N2, in lines [456] and [458] makes another disclosure and says that he cannot find the job according to his field of study. In Example 2, it is clear that the participants relate their personal life experiences and use self-disclosure as a strategy to build solidarity.

Example 3

[598] N1: ok you can say but but what did you do? / up to now? / to change these rules / do you uh / do you participate in some movements that / they try to change these rules for example we have some campaign that they uh take us uh some signatures for uh / uh for for changing their [**the this discrete**]
 [599] N2: [(In my (xxx))] it
 [600] N1: discriminative rules against
women / but [we] *never* want to participate in these movements (.) they're doing ~
 [601] N2: [uhum]
 [602] N1: ~ their best to change these rules / they have some *organizations* like that they have some people they

In Example 3, the topic of discussion is on *social rights* and N1 In lines [598] and [602], challenges N2 and criticizes him for not doing anything to change the discriminative rules against women in society. For instance in line [600] he says “discriminative rules against *women* / but we *never* want to participate in these

movements...”. This example is significant because while N1 uses masculine attitude in challenging N2’s indifference towards discrimination, he even asks him to be cooperative and supportive about women and their rights. In fact, N1 displays masculine attribute to show his cooperation and support and demands the same thing from the other participants. As such, by discussing the topic on *social rights* and challenging N2, N1 shows his power to demand N2 to be more cooperative about women rights.

Although the topics that the participants in Group 1 discuss are both general and personal, there are no instances observed where they talk about the activities or the things that they have done together. They do not even include people that they all might be familiar with. In other words, there are no instances of in-group references amongst the participants in Group 1. It is mainly due to the fact that they are only classmates and are not as intimate as the other participants in other groups (see Table 3.1).

Moreover, it is inferred that the topics that the participants in Group 1 discuss are about things and people. While discussing, they incorporate their own personal experiences and move from purely public spheres into more private sphere with some examples of self-disclosure. It appears that the participants seek friendship since they relate the topics to their everyday personal encounters. It generally shows that although there are no instances of in-group references among the participants in Group 1, they try to make their discussion personal and intimate.

The topics on *hobby* and *petrol* have been introduced and discussed for a short time and lead to other topics. The instances of these two topics are in the transcribe data (see Appendix II) and will be dealt later (see Example 19).

4.1.2 Topic of Conversation in Group 2

The participants in Group 2 talk about four topics which are *education*, *sexuality*, *immigration* and *job*. What is significant in this group is that they lead their conversation into a private level by including other people in their discussion. The topics discussed in this group are not only about things in isolation but include discussion of other people as an attempt to create and strengthen their in-group solidarity by talking about familiar encounters.

For instance, when the participants talk about *education*, they include other people and their mutual friends into their conversation and then critically gossip about their academic qualifications and achievements.

Example 4

[378] R3: B.S. / they were not good students (.) but in / for [Konkooor]
 [379] R1: [suddenly] they had a
 [Revolution]
 [380] R3: [yes] / [(xxx)]yes [yes]
 [381] R2: [suddenly]
 [382] R1: [released] //
 [383] R2: // **Mahtab Dohi** //
 [384] R3: // they couldn't //
 [385] R2: // **they always** //
 [386] R1: // they they were always under something ((they laugh))
 [387] R3: it's not //
 [388] R2: // all the time in the streets / yeah / it's not / it's not fair it's not reasonable I
 think [it's] just cheating
 [389] R1: [yeah] absolutely / [it's]
 [390] R2: [Mazdak] Abasi
 [391] R3: it's not a good
 reason (.) you know
 [392] R2: [why?]
 [393] R1: [we can] //

[394] R3:

// we couldn't / they could (.) why? that //

Example 4 illustrates the way in which the participants include their classmates in their discussion. In lines [383] and [390], R2 mentions two mutual classmates who did not deserve to be successful at university. Further, in line [386], R1 gossips about one of them who is a female classmate and belittles her success by saying that she and her friends did not have enough time to study hard because "... they were always under something" which initiates laughter. The analysis of this example reveals that achievements and success are important elements for men. Also, they criticize and condemn other people who were more successful than them. As such, it can be inferred that the participants gossip about their successful friends in order to cover their own failure and show themselves better. Moreover, excitement is observed among them when they shift the focus of their topic from a general theme of education to personal private lives of people.

Example 5

[530] R2: I date girls [(xxx)]

[531] R1: [and somehow] he likes / males han? ((right?))

...

[553] R2: I think that
you and Mohammad uh / they could be a good couple

[554] R1: couple (.)

[555] R2: and //

[556] R3: // no / (xxx) I love men //

In Example 5, line [531], R1 teases R2 about his homosexual relationships "and somehow he likes / males han? ((right?))". R1 tries to mock R2's sexual identity mainly because same-sex relationships are discouraged in the Iranian community. Further, in line [553], R2 who was once being mocked at in line [531], teases

another participant, R3, and suggests that he would make a good couple with Mohammad who is not present during their conversation. Instead of being hurt, R3 jokingly confesses in line [556] that he loves men and the conversation moves on.

It appears that teasing each others' masculinity is not a big issue for them because although their masculine identity is in jeopardy, they are willing to risk it. They tease one another's masculinity in order to boost their own masculine attribute and appear more powerful and manly. Teasing reduces conflicts and reinforces their group membership which is mainly observed among friends (Beck et al., 2007; Yedes, 1996). The discussion in their conversation appears to be cooperative but power is still embedded when the powerful participant teases the other interactant (Cosser, 1959, 1960).

Example 6

[893] R1: really (.) [weird (xxx) tomorrow] yeah / [and I think (xxx) you've got the ~
 [894] R2: [downstairs we're upstairs yes] [she's / she's (upstairs) I'm downstairs
 [(xxx)] (it's finished) ok?
 [895] R1: ~ [cd ha?]
 [896] R3: ok / so very good [(you know)]
 [897] R2: **[oke:::y] we can live with**
[(xxx)] / for uh [(xxx)]
 [898] R3: [yes] [(xxx)] ((someone starts clapping)) you are hot / *you are* ((he has a
 rhythmic voice)) ((everybody laughs))
 [899] R2: *ok* / it's so nice I think that //
 [900] R1: // (xxx) ((he speaks while laughing))
 [901] R2: so::: / you need something?
 [902] R3: yea[:::h] / yes
 [903] R2: [yea:::h]
 [904] R1: yes ha? ((they giggle))
 [905] R3: please talk about something (.) [useful / not] ~
 [906] R1: [(xxx)]
 [907] R3: ~ [the bull shit]
 [908] R2: **[ok I can I can] //**
 [909] R1: // **a new topic**
 [910] R3: yes
 [911] R2: ((he makes a sound like a turkey))
 [912] R3: what? [**girls**] [girls]
 [913] R1: [*speak*] about [*girls*] ha? ((everybody laughs))

[914] R3: *let's talk about girls* but not exactly girls (.)
 [915] R1: *girls* ((he changes his accent)) ha? ((they giggle))
 [916] R2: *ok*
 [917] R1: *ok*

In Example 6, what is observed is a series of utterances rapidly exchanged between the participants without following any specific topic. For instance, R3 appears to be frustrated because the conversation seems stagnant, and not going anywhere. As such in lines [905] and [907] he pleads “please talk about something (.) useful / not the bull shit”.

They also include a lot of in-group markers that makes it difficult for those outside their group to comprehend what they talk about. For instance, in line [898] R3 sarcastically mimics someone they all know him which is immediately followed by the participants’ supportive laughter.

In Example 6, the participants only fool around and laugh at the things and also poke fun about people whom they already know. Although there is no specific topic exchanged between them, it appears that they enjoy rapid exchange of talk which in turn demonstrates their friendship and enhances solidarity.

The two topics of immigration and job are not exemplified in this section because they are mostly integrated and also they do not contain specific instances of gossip. As such, they will be dealt with later in Examples 46, 47 and 57.

The topics that the participants in Group 2 talk about cover both general and private domains. It is general when they discuss and argue about things and it is private when they include in-group markers and also when they critically gossip about

other people. Further, they sometimes challenge each other's masculinity in order to appear more masculine as well. Moreover, it seems that teasing is regarded as a strategy for men to achieve solidarity because no one takes it seriously and thus nobody gets hurt and a lot of laughter is involved. They also pay great attention to their in-group solidarity because their conversation is affluent with familiar references and that is another signal of their effort in strengthening their friendship.

It seems that the participants in Group 2, gossip about people in order to avoid talking about themselves. They rarely include personal experiences to convey their idea and include other people instead. In so doing, their personal life is immune of being disclosed to others. The interactants in Group 2 also enjoy this type of conversation as it is evident in their frequent laughter.

4.1.3 Topic of Conversation in Group 3

The participants in Group 3 talk about four topics. The topics include *unacceptable behavior*, *the English language institute*, *mobile phones* and *business*. In discussing these topics, the participants include people and friends to describe them better and have a friendly private conversation. For instance, although the topics on *mobile phones* and *business* are masculine in nature since they focus on technology (Coates, 2003), the participants include people into their discussion to personalize them.

The significant point about the topics in this group is that the participants critically gossip about their friends and those they are already familiar with like in Example 7.

Example 7

[13] L1: no / it's ok (.)
[14] L2: yeah / he is a very / perfect guy for / you know / we *all the time*
talk about him ((he laughs))
[15] L3: all the time
[16] L2: he is a free topic ((he laughs)) / actually
[17] L1: he has a lot of black parts (.)

In Example 7, L2, in line [14], confesses that they gossip about one of their mutual male friends all the time which is confirmed by L3 in line [15] “all the time”. This shows that they enjoy gossiping about him since they include him and criticize him in their discussions. Further, their gossip is justified because “he has a lot of black parts” according to L1 in line [17]. L2 in line [16] even mockingly refers to their absent friend as a free topic and then he laughs. They participate in gossip about him all the time because they want to prove themselves and each other that they are better than their friend.

Example 8

[621] L1: yeah /first day he wears tuxedo [and] [(xxx)]
[622] L3: [tie]
[623] L2: [oh my god]/yeah
[624] L1: and I was /
[I was just (xxx)] that that this (.)
[625] L2: [we were laughing about it]
[626] L3: yeah / he's wearing a black suit / tie up
[627] L2: yeah
[628] L3: and //
[629] L1: // red tie
[630] L3: yeah red tie with a [black shirt] / a black shirt and / ~
[631] L1: [(xxx)]
[632] L3: ~ [and some] sometimes red (xxx) like his [tie]
[633] L2: [(xxx)] ((he is mocking))
[634] L1: [yeah]

In Example 8, it is clearly demonstrated how the participants gossip about their mutual friend's appearance. Although their mutual friend is wearing something

very elegant to work, they argue that his clothes are not suitable and appropriate for work. For instance, in line [621], L1 says “yeah / first day he wears tuxedo and (xxx)” and in the following lines [626], [630] and [632] the participants take turns to show their friend’s improper taste in clothes.

By sarcastically criticizing their mutual male friend’s appearance, they want to show that they have better taste in clothes. Besides appearance, they also gossip about his personal life in details in order to highlight his weak points and ultimately make him appear less masculine and such strategy can be seen in Example 9.

Example 9

[77] L1: you you don’t [know it] / I saw him two times *crying* for a girl
[78] L2: [(xxx)] two times? ...

...

[322] L2: you know his heart is so on top / he can cry so easy / he tell everyone I love you
[323] L3: *how does he do that?*

...

[333] L1: ... he said to me / he / *that guy* / he’s a / real pussycat / I said why are you saying that / to us? ...

Example 9 illustrates how the participants try to make an absent male friend appear less masculine. They criticize him because he cries for girls in line [77] “... I saw him two times *crying* for a girl”, emphasizing on the word *crying* which is followed by L2’s question in line [78] “two times?...” . Also in line [322] when L2 mentions that “... his heart is so on top / he can cry so easy / he tell everyone I love you”. In this instance, L2 says that their friend is able to cry easily because he wants to make him less masculine. Further, L3 in line [323] asks surprisingly “*how does he do*

that?” to demonstrate his distance from his friend’s disapproving character. He also tries to show that since he does not cry easily and does not go around telling people that he loves them, he is emotionally strong and masculine. In line [333], L1 refers states “... he’s a / real pussycat...”. In fact, L1 calls their friend pussycat to show the weak and soft side of his character and emphasize his unmanly behavior in order to highlight their own masculine, powerful behavior.

Example 10

[143] L2: did / did he tell you about] the B.M.W.?
 [144] (L3): yeah / he told us [(on Monday)]
 [145] (L1): [he told us] in a *party* /
 ...
 [219] L2: yeah / my father building a / um / making a billion dollar building / [I]
 [220] L1: [yeah] I can
 imagine some / years / in future / he’ll come to us / *I have lunch with Bill Gates*
 ((L2 laughs)) / it wasn’t good ((they laugh))
 [221] L3: no / I’ve got a *yacht*
 [222] L1: yeah
 [223] L2: yeah / that crazy guy told me that / we have a / uh jet ski on our villa you know (.)
 [224] L1: yeah
 [225] L3: bullshit

During the time they gossip about their mutual male friend, they also criticize his boastful attitude. In Example 10, they show how awful it is to boast about the things you do not own like a ‘B.M.W.’ as in line [143] and a ‘billion dollar building’ in line [219] and a jet ski in line [223]. They even make jokes about this behavior and imagine that one day their friend is going to boast about his lunch with Bill Gates in line [220] “... he’ll come to us / *I have lunch with Bill Gates...*” and in line [221] about riding a yacht “no / I’ve got a *yacht*”. By criticizing their friend’s boastful

behavior they try to show their distance from this behavior. This strategy is also apparent in Example 11.

Example 11

[241] L2: that's so hard / [you know what? / I tried it one time] / I told everything about ~
[242] L3: [that's sick / that's really sick]
[243] L2: ~ myself to one girl / and everything lie / actually I didn't say one of my friends /
introduce me to her / and she asked me and the guy [said everything] lie / ~
[244] L1: [but you know]
[245] L2: ~ [you know]
[246] L3: [this] [kind] [in society]
[247] L1: [yeah]
[248] L2: [but I didn't agree] with it / I go to the girl and said ok / I don't
have any / B.M.W.] ((he laughs))

In Example 11, L2 gossips about the time that one of his friends boasted on behalf of him to a girl and that he himself finally told the girl all the truth. He **raises his voice** and concludes his story in line [248] “**but I didn't agree with it** / I go to the girl and said ok / I don't have any / B.M.W.” and then he laughs. It appears that L2 wants to show his power when he bravely told the girl all the truth about himself. As it is observed, they tend to make a comparison between their friend's unacceptable behavior and their own decent attitude and at the same time, they emphasize their ego.

The topics in Group 3 are very private, concentrating on people's personal lives, behavior and skills. They also provide a lot of familiar references to make and strengthen their in-group solidarity and it appears that they enjoy their talk tremendously as it is evident in their laughter. They directly confess to the fact that they are gossiping while denying it at the same time as apparent in Example 12.

Example 12

- [35] L2: let me mention that we are not gossiping ((everybody laughs)) ladies are (xxx) we are not gossiping
...
- [396] L2: ... you know *he always say it / he always change* (.)
[397] L3: [um / actually he's smart]
[398] L1: [that's not good] because //
[399] L3: // he's smart / he's trying to //
[400] L2: // we're gossiping / [he's smart] ~
[401] L3: [he's trying to]
[402] L2: ~ *aha* ((L1 and L2 laugh))
[403] L3: oh he's trying [to]
[404] L2: [gossip] is fun ((he laughs))
[405] L3: u::[:h / he's like] / *what you are* / if you're
[406] L2: [I know that girls (do it)]
...
- [511] L2: she made us] run away from the class you know
[512] L1: [really]
[513] L3: [we're] not gossiping
anymore ((L1 & L3 laugh))
[514] L2: yeah / this is not gossiping / **I mention again** / for all
the audience
[515] L1: you're the best teacher of us ((they all laugh))
[516] L2: no / this is not
gossiping / and / no / she don't know her (.)
[517] L3: yeah / she (xxx)

Example 12 shows that although the participants are gossiping, L2 in line [35] sarcastically emphasizes that they are not gossiping which is greeted with laughter from the other two participants including himself. Later in line [400], L2 admits that they are gossiping and adds in line [404] that “gossip is fun” and then he laughs. Afterward in their conversation when the topic focuses on the English language institute and when they are gossiping about one of their teachers, L3 in line [513] says “we’re not gossiping anymore” and immediately L2 in line [514] reassures sarcastically that they are not gossiping while they actually do. L1 and L3 laugh at this reassurance and L2 in [516] justifies that since the researcher does not know the teacher they are talking about, it cannot be considered gossip “no / this is

not gossiping / and / no / she don't know her" which is agreed upon by L3 in [517]. Despite their denial, this demonstrates solidarity among the interactants when they cooperatively accept one another's statements. It also shows that since gossip-in a general definition- is a feminine act (Jones, 1980) the participants do not want to be attached to it as this may be the reason they keep denying it throughout their interaction despite the joy and fun they receive.

Moreover, the participants in Group 3 talk about their absent mutual friends and their lives without directly talking about their own personal experiences. It seems that gossiping about absent parties give them the opportunity to exclude their personal lives and feelings. At the same time, through criticizing the other people's behavior, they attempt to show themselves righteous. In addition, they try to show themselves more masculine by pin pointing and challenging their friends' unmanly behavior. Therefore, their masculine and powerful attitude is reinforced and maintained.

The examples presented in this section are extracted from two topics of *unacceptable behavior* and *the English language institute* because they contain more instances of gossip and the participants talk about these two topics in length while the topics on *mobile phones* and *business* are discussed for a short time (see Appendix D).

In sum, the interactants in Group 3 focus on personal lives of people with joy and laughter. It appears that by discussing personal and private issues of people's lives, they strengthen their friendship and they build their in-group solidarity stronger.

They cooperatively criticize and gossip about their absent friends so as to show their distance with them and their close companionship with the community they are in. In fact, they have found a common ground to build conversation, enhance their solidarity and strengthen their relationship.

4.1.4 Topic of Conversation in Group 4

In Group 4, there are five topics discussed by the participants. The topics are *English language, movies, masculinity, job and hobby*. While discussing the topics, the participants include people and personal experiences into their discussion and also they incorporate some in-group markers to make their conversation private.

Example 13

[389] K3: you know K2 / my father used to be /used to live in [America] for like twenty ~
[390] K1: [(specific)]
[391] K3: ~ eight years / owned eight restaurants everything / he left Iran when he was
eighteen and he came back after twenty eight years / and even can't / can't ((with
British accent)) *write* / Farsi / so good / I remember a lot / uh / few times me and
him / my father used to watch BBC / news and everything / he is like watching and
watching and watching and sometimes he looked at me like he had no idea ((K1
laughs)) at all / what / what kind of //

In Example 13, K3 talks about *English language* and discusses the differences between American and British accent. In line [391] he includes a personal anecdote about the times that he used to watch news with his father. But in order to start his anecdote in line [391], he boasts about his father first saying that his father "...owned eight restaurants everything ..." in America. This extract indicates that K3 includes his personal experiences in order to brag about his father and his belongings.

Example 14

[109] K1: ... now I think / uh / Tornatore is one of my ((he giggles)) close friends you know / because I think it's //
[110] K2: // you can make a good relation with him
...
[292] K1: yeah ((he laughs)) // uh I love Richard Gere everybody laughs at me but / [(xxx)]
[293] K3: [I love Richard Gere and] I love his wife in the movie

In Example 14, the participants are gossiping about movie stars and directors. K1 in line [109] says that Tornatore, the director of the movie 'Malena' is like a close friend to him. He does this self-disclosure to show his feelings and also to make their discussion personal. In respond, K2 paraphrases him in line [110] and says "you can make a good relation with him".

Furthermore, in line [292], K1 discloses his feeling one more time by saying that he loves the actor 'Richard Gere' and immediately he mentions that everyone laughs at him because Richard Gere is a man and having homosexual feelings is not acceptable in Iranian society. It is expected that this kind of self-disclosure leaves men's masculinity vulnerable to be challenged. In Group 4, however, the opposite happens. K3 in line [293] instead of teasing K1, supports him and self-discloses as well "I love Richard Gere..." and immediately adds "...and I love his wife in the movie". K3 adds that to decrease the homosexual connotation they have shared by saying that they love a male actor. It shows that K1 and K3 make the topic more personal by inserting their feelings and ideas.

Example 15

[528] K2: and he is *specialist* / uh / mmm / to offer some ladies with *lots of pashm* (.) ((fine hair)) ((K1 laughs))
 [529] K1: **pardon me / Shabi is [one of the beautiful women]** ((he laughs))
 [530] K2: [no / no / no / **when she wanted to dance with me**] / **I felt he is a *man***
 [531] K1: you and Mahanaz saw Shabi / Shabi that wanted to play in your *movie*
 [532] K3: yes / small ass chick ((K1 giggles))

In Example 15, in line [530] K2 talks sarcastically about a girl and criticizes her body “... **when she wanted to dance with me / I felt he is a *man***”. The speaker, K2, and K1 know the girl well and K1 tries to make sure that K3 recognizes her as well so in line [531] he tries to give some familiar references “you and Mahanaz saw Shabi / Shabi that wanted to play in your *movie*” and K3 in [532] reassures K1 that he knows her “yes / small ass chick”.

Example 15 shows how the participants care about making a friendly conversation by inserting familiar references to enhance their solidarity. As a matter of fact, they try to be cooperative to ensure a friendly interaction.

Another significant point among the participants in Group 4 is that they tease one another’s masculinity and challenge it as evident in Example 16.

Example 16

[460] K3: no no no / no no / he has a lots of female friends / opinion one / he has no cock / he has no penis sorry / because there is no lady in the room I / I dare myself to ((he giggles)) speak so nasty / the *second* opinion is //
 [461] K2: //he / he has [something] like haste khorma ((date’s seed))
 [462] K3: [he’s not] no / he is not / he is not a straight person you know / maybe he has other ways to go / (business) ((he chuckles)) *usually* we don’t have female friends (.) [(that)]
 [463] K2: [but] I guess / uh / ((K1 laughs)) //
 [464] K3: // no he / [he he he also] looks like you know / he has this [earring and (xxx) in the] ~

[465] K2: [is he (xxx)] [his main (xxx) is beautiful]
 [466] K3: ~ right side and everything ((he chuckle))
 [467] K2: *teachers*

In Example 16, K3 and K2 collaboratively tease K1 for not being heterosexual. K3 in [460] says that K1 does not have a male sex organ “.../ he has no cock / he has no penis sorry ...” which is approved by K2 in the following line [461]. In [462] K3 directly concludes that K1 is not straight. And in [464] he adds that K1 wears an earring on his right ear as well. K3 and K2 tease and challenge K1’s masculinity in order to appear more heterosexual and ultimately more powerful compared to K1.

It is interesting to observe that when K2 and K3 tease K1, their conversation is full of laughter and fun. Even K1, who is the target of their gossip, joins them and laughs along as apparent in Example 17.

Example 17

[540] K3: this guy / is the most luckiest guy in the world / but he doesn’t *use it* / you know ((K1 laughs)) / we straight people are / running after girls but he *has* girls around him ((K1 laughs)) (maybe we must visit them)? ...

In Example 17 line [540], K3 continues criticizing K1’s masculinity by adding that “this guy / is the most luckiest guy in the world / but he doesn’t *use it*...”. Then in the same line he emphasizes that “...we straight people are / running after girls but he has girls around him ((K1 laughs)) (maybe we must visit them)...”. In this part, K3 intends to appear heterosexual and marks his distance from homosexual men by saying that “we straight people” and then later he shows his masculine power by emphasizing that “maybe we should visit them”. The pronoun “them” here, refers to the girls. Although K3 teases K1’s masculinity, there is no hurt feeling observed because K1 laughs in line [540] in the midst of K3’s tease.

The topics on *job* and *hobby* are not discussed in this section since the participants talk about them for a short while as preambles for the other topics and the instances of gossip are not numerous.

It is observed that the participants in Group 4 gossip about their other people and themselves. They include other people into their discussion and critically gossip about their abilities and their appearances they include their personal experiences to convey their ideas. In their discussion, there are familiar references that they refer to and that makes their gossip private and personal which in turn assist them to create a friendly atmosphere and ultimately develop their solidarity.

It is noticed that there are instances where they tease and challenge each other's masculinity to appear more masculine and powerful. Also, they brag about their belongings in order to create power over the others. However, laughter is observed in plenty all through their discussion which shows that they consider gossip as an entertainment.

4.1.5 Summary

All the groups in this study talk about the topics which are both general and private in nature. They talk about general things such as *immigration*, *education* or *English language* and then they relate them into their own personal experiences or those of others to make them private.

However, the participants in Group 1 avoid talking about other people and there are no instances of in-group talk among them. It means that the participants in Group 1 are not so intimate to share any in-group references to identify their own group membership. On the other hand, the participants in Group 2, 3 and 4 have a lot of in-group references that sometimes their conversation cannot be understood by strangers while the members of that community are able to comprehend and communicate with that topic. This is an indication of solidarity between the interactants in Groups 2, 3 and 4. Nevertheless, the participants in Groups 2 and 3 avoid talking about their own personal lives or experiences and instead they focus on and gossip about other people's lives. They cooperate with each other to share stories about other people but they try to avoid personal connections with the topic and in that case their personal lives are not exposed to the others and their masculinity is preserved.

It is also observed that masculinity is important for the participants in this study. For instance, the participants in Group 1 talk about *smoking* because they can be boastful. The participants in Group 4 gossip about successful people which in turn shows the importance of success and achievement in men's world. Group 2, 3 and 4 challenge and gossip about other males' sexual expositions in addition to each other's heterosexual masculinity in order to appear more powerful and masculine. The analysis demonstrates that the interactants in this study gossip and talk about the topics that draw cooperation and build solidarity, even though power is still observed and embedded in their interactions.

4.2 Topic Development

In this section, the ways in which the topics are shifted and developed by the participants are taken into account. This section also looks at the manners that power and solidarity are manifested in topic development.

4.2.1 Topic Development in Group 1

The participants in Group 1 develop the topics through questions and answers. They also add something to the discussion to build on each other's utterances as demonstrated in Example 18.

Example 18

- [59] N1: how you get / how you /uh / attracted to the cigarette? / you know? / how you / attracted to smoke?
 [60] N3: because my father smoked cigarette and //
 [61] N1: // aha
 [62] N3: I liked / this [and / uh] / and //
 [63] N2: [me too] // ok but usually I think [falling in love is a] ~
 [64] N3: [they / uh / she]
 [65] N2: ~ good cause for starting to smoke a cigar / cigarette (.)
 [66] N1: it could be but /
 not usually / but the thing that you said / I thought that / uh / usually the *people*
 that start smoking cigarette / if there / if there is someone in his / uh / in their
 family / [they never] / they never / attracted [to it]
 [67] N3: [yes but] [my] father had a / *collection*
 of cigar
 [68] N1: aha
 [69] N3: and I liked this [and]
 [70] N2: [**u::h**] / and as my memory helps I remember
 that when I / uh / was / uh / being in the country / for at university / uh / when I
 started smoking cigarette I collected / uh / the signs / uh which was on packets (.)
 [71] N1: uhum
 [72] N2: and now uh / I think I have more than thousand label of different cigarettes
 [73] N1: did you / it was some hobby for you?
 [74] N2: ye::s / and I uh want / I wanted to
 know that after for example 10 years how much cigarette uh / I /uh / used (.)
 [75] N1: you mean every uh / label that you *used* you? (.)
 [76] N2: after [I used the packet] / I //
 [77] N1: [collected them] //
 ahan
 [78] N2: uh / collect its sign
 [79] N1: ahan / but / but I never tried different
 kinds of cigarettes I just tried

In Example 18, the participants talk about smoking and N1 in [59] poses a question “how you get / how you / uh / attracted to the cigarette?...”. N3 in line [60] responds to the question and says that his father was the main reason that he started smoking and then he immediately receives two supportive feedbacks from N1 and N2 in lines [61] and [63] consecutively. N2 in line [63], after admitting that he had the same reason for smoking, adds on by providing another reason “... I think falling in love is a good cause for starting to smoke a cigar / cigarette”. The conversation flows and continues with N1, supporting N2, adds his own idea in line [66] “it could be but ... if there is someone in his / uh / in their family / they never / they never / attracted to it”. Immediately after, N3 in [67] gives a supportive comment and returns back to the issue of his father and smoking then in return he receives a supportive minimal response from N1 in line [68]. It shows that all the participants try to build on each other’s utterances to support the topic of discussion and develop it cooperatively.

Further, after N2 confesses that he used to collect cigarette labels, N1 in line [73] queries “... it was some hobby for you?” and N2 in line [74] replies “yes”. Also in line [75], N1 asks N2 for more clarification “you mean every uh / label that you *used you?*” and then he tails off to let N2 respond in line [76]. While N2 is answering the question, N1 supports him in line [77] by trying to complete his friend’s sentence and using a minimal response “collected them ... ahan”. It is observed that the participants ask each other relevant questions to develop the topic.

It is implied that the topic in this extract is developed cooperatively because everyone in this group attempts to add something to the discussion. It appears that

the interactants in Group 1 cooperatively expand the conversation on *smoking*. Each participant shows interest to the topic of conversation via expressing his ideas which in turn develops the conversation collaboratively. Nevertheless, there are some instances where the topic is not expanded cooperatively like in Example 19.

Example 19

[509] N2: ... many students uh / um / intend to continue their study uh / in other countries (.)
 ((they all giggles))

[510] N3: ok

[511] N2: let's seal the deal (.)

[512] N1: so what should we do now?

[513] N2: and / what do you think about the / price of uh / cars today?

[514] N1: I don't know / I
 don't like cars

[515] N3: Iranian cars? (.)

[516] N1: even Iranian cars

[517] N3: even [Iranian]

[518] N2: [*oh* and] what *about*
the fuel?

[519] N3: about the?

[520] N2: fuel

[521] N1: fuel / petrol

[522] N3: yes / petrol /

[523] N2: yeah the it's *so ridiculous* (.) ((he giggles)) (.) ((N3 giggles)) government uh / (set)
 a ra uh law about uh / and they've limited citizens for using uh petrol

[524] N1: yeah

[525] N2: ok? / but after u for example and they esp / spend *much money* on it / ok? for uh /
 making u::h / cards and u::h something like this but (.) they announce uh I think
 about / uh three weeks ago that they want to collect *all* the cards and after that uh
 you should uh / uh (.) um buy petrol free

[526] N3: but I think / I agree with my
 government because Iranian people are very (xxx)

[527] N1: they're the //

[528] N3: // and yes
 and they uh don't
 handle (our fuel)

[529] N2: what do you mean by this? (.)

[530] N3: it means
 uh / um //

[531] N1: // people just go::: //

[532] N3: // yes

[533] N1: by their car

[534] N3: oh yes / go [by their cars] ~

[535] N1: [to have fun]

[536] N3: ~ for fun like *Jordan*

[537] N2: *oke:::y*

[538] N3: yes

[539] N2: ok

[540] N3: and uh //

[541] N2: // I have a question

[542] N3: ok

[543] N2: do you think there is *another* ho hobby for uh / young people? (.)

[544] N3: uh yes //
 [545] N2: // *what?* / clubs?
 [546] N3: no *clubs* uh / uh no clubs but uh //
 [547] N2: // point [out that] /for ~
 [548] N3: [we have a]
 [549] N2: ~ [example] boyfriends and girl friends (.) go //
 [550] N3: [we have a]
 [551] N1: // **no they can go out**
 [together / but not]
 [552] N3: [yes go out and **go to** **the cinema**

In Example 19, line [509] shows that the topic *job* has reached its end because there is a long pause at the end of this line which is followed by everyone's giggle. N1 in line [512] asks "what should we do now?". At this juncture, one of the participants N2, in line [513] asks a question about cars "... what do you think about the / price of uh / *cars today*?". N2 asks this question to suggest a new topic which is completely irrelevant to the previous topic *job*. N1, who seems not interested in the topic, immediately says in line [514] that he does not know about the price of cars because he does not like cars. Another participant, N3, shows his interest and tries to elicit more information about this new topic so in line [515] he asks "Iranian cars?". At this moment N1 in line [516] directly reiterates that he is not interested in Iranian cars either. As a result, there is no topic uptake due to N1's lack of interest. In this extract, N1 has shown his power in preventing the topic to be developed by providing uncooperative comments and also N2 appears powerful when he tries to shift the topic abruptly without considering the flow of speech.

Similarly in line [518], N2, whose topic is not taken, once again suggests a new topic. He asks the others to give their opinions about *petrol*. It seems that nobody tries to build on this topic either. Since nobody takes up the topic, N2 does not take the risk this time to let his friends drop his proposed topic for the second time, so he volunteers himself in line [523] to express his idea about *petrol* "... it's *so*

ridiculous ... government uh / (set) a ra uh law about uh / and they've limited citizens for using uh petrol". Afterwards, he adds more to the topic in line [525] and then the conversation moves on through N1 and N3's comments.

In Example 19, it is observed that the topic on *cars* is dropped and not taken successfully due to the participants' uncooperative attitude and the topic on *petrol* is, however, developed by the topic initiator himself, N2, who suggested the topic in the first place. After that, the other participants build on each other's statement to expand the topic. It is perceived that the topic on *petrol* is finally developed cooperatively by each participant adding his own contribution to the discussion.

When N1 and N3 from lines [526] to [540] try to justify the increase in petrol price and rationalize that people waste petrol by driving around aimlessly for fun N2 shifts the topic by presenting a challenging question in line [543] "do you think there is *another* ho hobby for uh / young people? (.)". From this point onwards, the topic is shifted from *petrol* to *hobby*. This provides an evidence of topic shift with reference to the previous topic. Gradual topic shifts demonstrate the participants' cooperative attitude in building on each other's statements and also indicates that the participants try to establish solidarity.

Nevertheless, the significant point in Example 19 is the presence of long pauses amongst the participants. The pauses in this instance are the indication of the interactants' reluctance to develop the topic.

Example 20

[185] N1: and what happens to your (xxx)? / I I if smoking could hel can help your / you to //
 [186] N3: // I usually open my store ((he giggles)) in the afternoon on Friday but / today (.)
 ((he giggles))
 [187] N1: you you you (.) //
 [188] N2: //and [but / I have] *another* question what do you think about ~
 [189] N1: [(xxx)]
 [190] N2: ~ the cost of living in uh Iran? (.)
 [191] N1: what's the relation between Iran and (.) //
 [192] N2: // because I think u:::h //
 [193] N3: // cigarettes
 [194] N2: smoking / uh cigarettes needs money /
 ok? (.)
 [195] N1: not that much [money] that you //
 [196] N3: [I] // I don't agree with you because uh /
 many people [that use] **now use [many]**
 [197] N1: [(there is)] [there is a lot of] them ha? (.) use opium
 [198] N3: yes use
 opi / opium //
 [199] N1: // opium
 [200] N3: [opium] opium [and]
 [201] N2: [opium] [*opium*] *it's too expensive*
 [202] N3: yes but uh [they are not]
 [203] N1: [they're not that] much rich
 [204] N3: they're not rich
 [205] N2: *oke:::y*
 [206] N3: they are *poor*

In Example 20, the previous topic of conversation was *smoking* when N3 in line [186] inserts something out of the topical context about his shop and it gives another speaker, N2, the opportunity to change the topic abruptly. N2 in lines [188] and [190] introduces a new topic by posing a question which does not have any connections with the previous topic of *smoking* “I have *another* question what do you think about the cost of living in uh Iran?”. His question is then followed by a long pause which indicates the other participants’ confusion at this abrupt change. After the silence, one of the participants, N1, takes a turn in line [191] and questions the relation between the new topic *cost of living* and the previous one *smoking*. N2 justifies in line [194] “smoking / uh cigarettes needs money / ok?”. N1 and N3 who believe otherwise take turns in lines [195] and [196] consecutively to disapprove his idea and express that smoking does not need much money. As it is

observed, N2's topic *cost of living* is not taken successfully and instead *smoking* topic is retrieved and then developed into discussing different kinds of cigarettes and drugs. It can be concluded that N2 tries to be dominant when he shifts the topic without considering the flow of talk. Also the other two participants N1 and N3 want to show their power in conversation by rejecting N2's topics and disagreeing with his comments.

In general, the development of the topics in Group 1 suggests that the participants develop some topics collaboratively, giving supportive feedback, completing each other's utterances and adding more into the topic. While in some cases, traces of masculine behavior is depicted via abrupt topic shifts, rejecting new topics, long pauses and developing topics through disagreement rather than support. In conclusion, the participants in Group 1 show power and dominance while cooperating to develop and shift topics in their conversation.

4.2.2 Topic Development in Group 2

It appears that the participants in Group 2 develop their conversation topics by building on each other's utterances. They also expand the topics through argument, disagreement and teasing. The turns are short and the turn changes are rapid.

Example 21

[295] R2: ok I have a (xxx) news it's hot news I think that / do you know Ali Mehrabi? //
 [296] R1: // oh yes ((he bursts into laugh))
 [297] R2: accepted ((everybody laughs))
 [298] R3: accepted uh
 last year
 [299] R1: really? (xxx) ((they all laugh again))
 [300] R2: Ahmad Mohammed accepted
 [301] R1: accepted / really?

...

[343] R2: **I think it's a *disaster* (.) this kind of the / [this]**
 [344] R3: [no /] I I don't think //
 [345] R2: // person
 goes to university ((R1 and R2 laugh))
 [346] R3: I don't think it's a disaster (.) why *disaster*?
 [347] R2: **it's *disaster***
 [348] R3: where?
 [349] R2: **they don't** / because I think that they / they don't uh //
 [350] R3: // no //
 [351] R2: // they don't uh pass the uh / [pass the] course in uh //
 [352] R3: [they think] // yes in university
 [they]
 [353] R2: **[bachelor]** (.)
 [354] R3: in university [they have Konkoor] ((university entrance exam in Iran))
 [355] R2: [uh they are just] **cheating** / *konkoor is cheating* / and
 [it's] [not]
 [356] R1: [yeah]
 [357] R3: [it] prevents it from cheating ((R1 laughs in the middle of R3's speech))
 [358] R2: I think that R3 is a / very I think that very //
 [359] R1: // very optimist (.) you are so
 optimistic to [Konkoor]
 [360] R3: [no no] //
 [361] R2: // **no / he's very uh / qualified to uh** //
 [362] R1: // talented
 [363] R2: talented and qualified to [uh]
 [364] R1: [enter] the [(xxx) han?] ((right?))
 [365] R2: [continue] master in a good
 university [and]
 [366] R1: [I] think
 [he is really] / he's always serious about uh / uh / really?
 [367] R2: [I think that]
 oh yes
 [368] R1: *really* / he's really serious and he is [really] *sabet ghadam* ((persistent))
 [369] R2: [ok]
 ok //
 [370] R3: // no //
 [371] R2: // please uh (.) //
 [372] R3: // they uh / yes you're right they uh / uh (.) B.A. /
 B.A.?

In Example 21, line [295], R2 introduces the topic on *education* by announcing “ok I have a (xxx) news it's hot news I think that / do you know Ali Mehrabi?”. R2 initiates the topic on *education* by calling it *hot news* in order to get everyone's attention. R2 in line [295] asks if the other participants know a friend called “Ali Mehrabi” who appears to be academically disqualified according to the group interactants despite the fact that he has successfully managed to get the university admission for master degree. This news creates interest amongst the participants

and thus they build on each other's utterances by giving supportive feedbacks such as "oh yes" in line [296] or start to repeat each other's utterances in lines [298] and [301]. One of the participants, R1, shows his interest in lines [299] "really..." and also in line [301] "accepted / really?". R2, who has introduced the gossip in the first place, adds news about another friend in line [300] to keep the conversation going. This is an indication of a cooperative topic development where all the participants play active roles by contributing to the conversation.

When the topic on *education* proceeds, the participants start to argue and challenge each other's ideas. For instance, R2 in line [343] comments that it is like a disaster when someone who is not qualified, gets university admission. R3 who believes otherwise, challenges R2 in line [344] and asks "... why *disaster*?" and the argument starts at this juncture. In line [347] R2 emphasizes once again that "**it's *disaster***" and R3 in line [348] argues back "where?". Also, in line [355], R2 says that the university entrance exam in Iran namely, *Konkoor* is cheating. R2's statement is immediately agreed by R1 in line [356] but R3 in line [357] disagrees and says the opposite "it prevents it from cheating" which is laughed upon by R1. In this extract, the participants argue with each other to assert their own comments as such, it is inferred that there is a power struggle between the participants at this stage. However, it is inferred that the topic on *education* is developed cooperatively though through arguments and challenging comments.

Meanwhile in Example 21, R1 and R2, who cannot accept R3's contradictory comments, ultimately stop arguing with R3. Instead, they team up and collaboratively tease R3's ideas and comments as evident in line [359] where R1

refers to R3 and says “you are so optimistic to Konkoor” and also when R2 in line [363] sarcastically says that R3 is “talented and qualified ...”. Also in line [366], when R1 tease R3 and says “...he’s always serious...” R2 supports him in line [367] and mockingly says “oh yes”. It seems that R1 and R2 cooperate with one another to tease R3 while at the same time they show their power against R3. R3 is considered powerful too since he does not change his idea.

Example 21 demonstrates that the topic is developed cooperatively while the participants build on each others’ statements despite the arguments and disagreements they have. It also appears that no one is hurt. All the interactants have adopted a masculine, powerful style in order to achieve solidarity and strengthen their friendship (Lampert & Ervin-Tripp, 2006). Example 21 indicates that the interactants can be cooperative while there is a power struggle among them.

The participants in Group 2 have shown that they can be cooperative while still possessing powerful attribute in developing a topic as evident in Example 21. Such cooperative behavior can also be seen in Example 22.

Example 22

[406] R3: I want to give you an example
 [407] R1: yes
 [408] R2: yes / I [know]
 [409] R1: [there] is / **there are** many [examples]
 [410] R3: [yes I]
 [know]
 [411] R2: **[there] are examples / why you’re / I think that [you / you just]**
 [412] R3: [this / this] tight / this tight
 place this tight [(xxx)]
 [413] R1: [ok] / please change //
 [414] R2: // change [the issue and we / we can] we ~
 [415] R3: [it’s really it’s really because of
 the]
 [416] R2: ~ can spoke / yes we can spak / **spoke**
 [417] R1: *spak* ((everybody laughs))

[418] R2: we can speak about uh /
girls uh //

[419] R3: // no / it's [(xxx)]
[420] R2: [what's your idea R3] about / uh marriage?
[421] R1: would you like
to speak would you like to speak / R3 / for example would you like to translate it
for us? ((everybody laughs))
[422] R3: I think it's a good (xxx) ((they continue laughing)) (.)
[423] R1: it's //

[424] R3: // (xxx)
[425] R1: it's a good topic huh?
[426] R3: well / I think yeah we couldn't accept in a / *good*
university for B.A. / but they could
[427] R1: no //

[428] R2: // **they could? / they / Sara**
Karimian was accepted uh at [Isfahan University]
[429] R3: [yeah / yeah uh I I] / I I saw Sara [Karimian]
[430] R1: [(xxx) accept]
/ accepted [at university]
[431] R3: [why not?](.) and she [studied] so hard and was accepted
[432] R1: [why not?]
[433] R2: **studied**
so hard?
[434] R3: maybe they [did something / maybe (xxx) *more than us*]
[435] R2: [**they don't they don't they didn't / they didn't study**
anything]
[436] R1: please / please //
[437] R3: // [you're certain that (xxx)]
[438] R2: [(xxx)]
[439] R1: don't speak
together
[440] R2: before / in the bachelor and [the /u:::h] always (.) //
[441] R3: [yes in bachelor]
[442] R1: // yes date /
[don't (xxx)] / back up R3/ how could you / how could you for example / uh ~
[443] R2: [date]
[444] R1: ~ cover all the / *four years in one year?* (.) four years in one year and suddenly
they change [that]
[445] R2: [I accept] that / [Maryam Zamani] uh / is related with you in ~
[446] R1: [accepted in (xxx)]
[447] R2: ~ [uh] some //
[448] R3: [ok] // I / I [I really disagree]
[449] R2: [sometimes /] I don't know why you defend uh / uh //
[450] R3: // no / [it's] not a defense (.) I think we uh / I uh (.) it's not defending (.) ~
[451] R1: [yes]
[452] R3: ~ [(xxx) and]
[453] R2: [yes] she is // ((he giggles))
[454] R3: // may maybe he
[455] R1: she wants to be an [(xxx)]
[456] R2: [I think she's]
he ((everybody laughs))
[457] R1: maybe she's a guy / ok you have a bad / you have a / you
have //
[458] R3: // I don't know what //
[459] R2: // you have had a bad [experience / ok]
[460] R3: [(xxx) it's not] a defense /
someone is accepted at university and *we cannot* / we say that this uh / I don't
know this [situation (xxx)]
[461] R1: [so why why she couldn't] / why / why didn't she / why can't she /huh /
why couldn't she / vow / why ...

In Example 22, the interactants talk about *education* and argue about the fairness of university entrance exam (Konkooor) in Iran. When their argument does not get to any consensus, R1 and R2 consecutively in lines [413] and [414] suggest changing the topic. However R3 does not want the topic to be changed and when R2 in lines [418] and [420] starts asking about *girls* and *marriage* consecutively, he insists on pursuing the argument about *education*. Therefore, in line [426], R3 resumes the topic “well / I think yeah we couldn’t accept in a / *good* university for B.A. / but they could”. It seems that R3 is a powerful participant since he does not let R2 change the topic. At this point, R1 and R2, whose ideas are in line with each other about university entrance exam (Konkooor) in Iran, ultimately are fed up with the argument and try another strategy to overpower R3 in this argument. As such, they begin teasing and challenging R3’s masculinity. In order to do that, R2 in line [445] unkindly says that R3 is having a relation with the girl he is defending her success. Later in line [456], R2 puts a step forward and says that the girl R3 is having an affair with is a man “I think she’s *he*”. R1 and R2 both intend to challenge R3’s masculinity by showing him a homosexual. It is evident that R1 and R2 build on each other’s utterances to tease their friend and at the same time they show their power to R3 since they do not let R3 proceed with the argument.

It is clear that the topic in Example 22 is developed competitively between the interactants. They argue and tease each other to prove themselves right. However, cooperation is observed when R1 and R2 tease R3 in this instance and in so doing, despite the collaboration between R1 and R2 collaboratively develop the topic. It is

observed that power is practiced among the participants in Example 22 while cooperation is also observed.

Example 23

[249] R3: rev / revolutionary situation uh / it exists / I prefer to be *here*
 [250] R2: why?
 [251] R1: what for?
 [252] R3: you have to be (*here*)
 [253] R1: to earn money?
 [254] R3: not earning money / I don't know
 revolutionary situation I I like this situation / *revolution* situation not the //
 [255] R2: // you [hope] / excuse me what's your purpose to study here / and in ~
 [256] R3: [(xxx)]
 [257] R2: ~Payam e Noor university? (.) it hasn't [been]
 [258] R1: [what] do you want to gain?
 [259] R3: I think /
 [what] / I think if you're searching for *knowledge* and you're searching for uh ~
 [260] R1: [finally]
 [261] R3: ~ I don't know for (.) ((someone is whispering and everybody laughs)) for
 continuing your course (.) ((they laugh again))
 [262] R2: ok
 [263] R1: (xxx) (.)
 [264] R2: ok (.)
 [265] R1: so uh you
 were talking about //
 [266] R3: // oh yes //
 [267] R1: // riots han?
 [268] R3: I / I //
 [269] R1: // you'd like to choose
 [you like (your) country]
 [270] R3: [yes if you'd like to /] continue your course (.) you (xxx) post graduate degree / I
 think in / in Iran you can
 [271] R1: *in Iran you can?*

In Example 23, the participants are talking about *immigration* and the reasons people immigrate to the other countries. R3 in line [249], expresses that his preference is to stay in Iran if anything goes wrong with the country such as war. R2 in line [255] tries to challenge him and asks him a related question "... excuse me what's your purpose to study here ...". In this question "here" refers to Iran and that makes a relevant link between both topics of *immigration* and *education*. Ultimately, R2's question in line [255] is like a turning point for the topic on

immigration to be shifted to the topic of *education*. As such, it can be concluded that the topic is changed smoothly with reference to the previous topic.

The other point which is only observed in the conversation of the participants in Group 3 is that in some parts of their conversation, there is no specific topic discussed or recognized. They exchange utterances, laugh and joke without following a topic. In other words, their talk only makes sense to them. This is demonstrated in Example 24.

Example 24

[694] R3: **let's [talk about]**
 [695] R2: [(xxx)] what's the good news //
 [696] R3: // **what about [(xxx)]**
 [697] R2: [what] //
 [698] R1: // let's talk
 about *what*
 [699] R2: what? ((everybody laughs))
 [700] R1: as you guys (have noticed) ((they
 laugh)) (xxx) doesn't have any benefits for us *so* / maybe we [can]
 [701] R2: [ok /] we're
 invited for dinner uh / [this] place / yes of / [of course *yes* Ms. Lalami is] ~
 [702] R3: [*really?*] [(xxx)]
 [703] R2: ~ so uh //
 [704] R1: // kind? ((they are giggling))
 [705] R2: kind and uh //
 [706] R1: // so extravagant?
 [707] R2: generous
 [708] R1: generous and [extravagant]
 [709] R2: [yes /] extravagant and uh //
 [710] R3: // hos / *hospitality?*
 [711] R1: hos / *hospitality*
 [712] R2: *hospitality*
 [713] R3: hos / pit //
 [714] R1: // (it [**really became hard**])
 [715] R3: [**hospitable ha?**]
hospitable / yes I told that (.) ((someone coughs))
 [716] R1: ok of course //
 [717] R2: // ok uh //
 [718] R1: // ladies and
 gentlemen let's talk about ((everybody laughs))
 [719] R3: we can lie there //
 [720] R1: // (lucky they don't see us)

It appears that the participants do not have anything to talk about and in line [697] when R2 says “what”, R1 interrupts him immediately in line [698] to say “let’s talk about *what*” which is followed by another “what” from R2 in line [699] and then everybody bursts into laughter. It shows that at this juncture, there is no particular topic that they could talk about. However, the participants keep supporting one another’s statements. In Example 24, incoherent lines are exchanged between the interactants that makes it almost impossible for the people out of their in-group community to make any sense out of it. It appears that they competitively try to keep the conversation alive by interrupting each other to either repeat utterances or add to the discussion. This is an indication of the cooperative attitude of men that although there is no particular topic discussed, they cooperatively build on one another utterance.

Example 25

[773] R2: would you please speak about your [u:::h]
[774] R1: [you want] to supervise the situation ha?
[775] R2: your / your um / about uh / girl in your uh office

Example 25 demonstrates that after rambling on for a long time, one of the participants, R2, in line [773] attempts to suggest a topic. However R1, does not welcome that and even considers this as an attempt to control the situation because in line [774] he immediately interrupts R2 and accuses R1 for controlling the flow of conversation “you want to supervise the situation ha?”. R2 does not pay attention to this accusation and moves on in line [775] “...about uh / girl in your office”. It shows that the participants cannot tolerate the co-participants to control the

conversation. Here R1 appears to show some traces of power in not accepting R2 to suggest and develop a topic.

Example 26

[54] R2: but I think that nowadays everything is [related to uh / politics]
 [55] R1: [I think that I think he is one the
 shareholders] I think ((they giggle)) / he is one of the (xxx) arm
 [56] R3: what did you say?
 [57] R2: I think that nowadays everything is uh related to politics
 [58] R3: yes yes (.)
 [59] R2: ok
 [60] R3: it it says (it goes to) [(xxx)]
 [61] R1: [**Rahmani**] it says Rahmani
 [62] R3: yes / I / I I happen to
 know / before this uh / statement of / Rahmani / I liked him / I I I think that / I
thought that he's a (xxx) of personality he's a / his point of views are based on /
 truth and ba based on uh / I don't know //

In Example 26, R2 attempts twice to change the topic of conversation from *job* to *politics*. R2 in line [54], in order to attract the attention of the participants to the new topic, says “but I think that nowadays everything is related to uh / politics”. R2’s statement does not attract anyone’s interest. As such, once again in line [57] he repeats his sentence “I think that nowadays everything is uh related to politics”. Although in the following line [58] he gets some supportive feedback from R3 , the topic is not taken. R3 in line [62] retrieves the topic on *job* and continues talking about one of the shareholders of a company they all know. R3 appear to be satisfied with the topic of conversation and does not want to change it. R3 is considered powerful since he does not allow R2 change the topic and determinedly resumes the previous topic.

It can be summarized that the participants in Group 2 have adopted a competitive style in developing topics but their competition can be explained as their

enthusiastic efforts in building on each other's utterances. As such, solidarity is maintained in their conversation. Moreover, the participants change topics smoothly which indicates their concern about the flow of talk. Nevertheless, there are some instances where topics are dropped and not developed at all. This is an indication of the participants' powerful attitude which is embedded in their cooperative behavior.

4.2.3 Topic Development in Group 3

The participants in Group 3 develop their topics via adding supportive comments to the discussion as evident in Example 27.

Example 27

[6] L1: let's [talk] about Hadi ((L2 laughs)) interesting
 [7] L2: [(xxx)] yeah
 [8] L1: animal
 [9] L3: the most interesting
 // ((L1 and L3 laugh))
 [10] L2: // I wish //
 [11] L3: // in the world ((L1 and L3 laugh))
 [12] L2: I wish that you didn't
 mention the name that was very you know ((L1 and L3 laugh)) now you destroyed
 everything mate ((L3 laughs))
 [13] L1: no / it's ok (.)
 [14] L2: yeah / he is a very / perfect guy for / you know
 / we *all the time* talk about him ((he laughs))
 [15] L3: all the time
 [16] L2: he is a free topic ((he
 laughs)) / actually
 [17] L1: he has a lot of black parts (.)
 [18] L2: yeah / what did he do to *you*?
 [19] L1: he didn't do something bad for / to me but / *you know him* / everyone knows him
 [20] L2: yeah I know him
 [21] L1: you know all the / all the problem is his *behavior* / it's not
 correct (.)
 [22] L2: oh all the problem is he always lies
 [23] L1: yeah / that's that's / that's it
 [24] L2: that he always lies and

Example 27 shows the onset of the topic *unacceptable behavior*. One of the participants L1 in [6] suggests to talk about Hadi, who is one of their mutual male

friends. His suggestion receives positive feedbacks from L2 and L3 in lines [7] and [9] respectively. L2 in line [14] even says that they talk about Hadi all the time which is approved by L3 in line [15] “all the time”. In line [17] L1 says that Hadi has many black points in his character. L2 in line [18] immediately confirms L1 and asks a question to develop the topic “yeah / what did he do to *you*?” which is followed by L1’s reply in [19] “he didn’t do something bad for / to me but / *you know him* / everyone knows him”. In line [21] L1 adds more to the topic “you know all the / all the problem is his *behavior* / it’s not correct (.)”. L2 cooperates with L1 and in line [22] adds that “... all the problem is he always lies”. L2’s idea is approved by L1 in line [23] “yeah / that’s that’s / that’s it”. As can be seen, L1 and L2 cooperatively take turns to build on each other’s utterances to develop the topic.

Example 28

- [55] L1: ~ you you know / at *those* days he was *awful* / he was awful he is you know / uh (.)
 he have a / he is / he has a work now / and I think he is much [better now]
- [56] L3: [I don’t know] why
 does he go to that place to work / he / he doesn’t [earn money] he doesn’t / ~
- [57] L2: [he doesn’t know what to do]
- [58] L3: ~ he just goes to [show up something]
- [59] L2: [he even cannot teach] you know / he he cannot teach / I
 guarantee that
- [60] L1: yeah
- [61] L2: he cannot teach / he he his talking is very bad / he his
 accent is very bad actually it’s awful / and the //
- [62] L1: // I think he is / [he is (xxx)]
- [63] L2: [I’m not the
guy to judge] you know / [but everybody] says that / he is smart but / you !
- [64] L3: [he is smart]
- [65] L2: ~ know it’s not enough for teaching
- [66] L1: yeah / but he *uses* his brain yeah you
 know / wrong way ((L3 laughs))
- [67] L2: yeah
- [68] L1: he he can use it in better ways you
 know
- [69] L3: yes

In Example 28, line [55] L1 says that their mutual friend, Hadi, is a better person now because he goes to work. At this point, everyone gets excited to add more and incorporate supportive comments. L3 in lines [56] and [58] says that their friend goes to work as a teacher only to show off. L2 supports him in line [59] by adding that “he even cannot teach you know...”. And L1 in line [60] provides the minimal response “yeah” in order to confirm and support the other participants. L2 moves on in line [61] by providing the reasons that Hadi cannot be a teacher “... his talking is very bad / he his accent is very bad actually it’s awful ...”. As can be seen, the topic is cooperatively developed by the participants who add something to the discussion and confirm one another. This is an indication of solidarity between the participants in Group 3.

Example 29

[467] L1: one time he told me //
 [468] L2: // and one time I was sitting there and I was looking into his eyes and / I was like (.) fuck me I / what the fuck are you talking about? / sorry for French words ((L1 and L2 laugh))

[469] L1: but / some / one day he told / he told me that uh / I have a girl friend / she is the / you know Mr. X / daughter / Mr. X was a great / you know (.)

[470] L2: very famous [guy]
 [471] L3: [(x) [xx] ok]
 [472] L1: [very famous important] guy / and *accidentally* that Mr. X was / you know our family’s friend ((L3 laughs)) and he didn’t have *any daughters* / he had just three sons ((L3 bursts into laughter)) **I told him / and I told him** Hadi ((they all laugh)) / *he didn’t have daughters* / he said *no:::* / [he wants /he wants / **he] wants to buy me a ~**
 [473] L2: [no / he has a] ((he laughs))
 [474] L1: ~ B.M.W. / because of his daughter / I said / he [has (xxx)]
 [475] L2: [oh my god] / he was (god) ((L3 laughs))

[476] L1: and I saw him you know / after six months and I / you know / that I’m always stupid / I [asked him]
 [477] L2: [you asked] him?
 [478] L1: yea::: h
 [479] L2: **did you [ask him]**
 [480] L1: [I was /] I was I was [shy / but I said]
 [481] L2: [you’ve gotta be] fucking kidding
 [482] L1: did you / did he / I asked my mum did he have a daughter? / she said /my mum my mum looked at me / NO / he has three sons ((L3 laughs))

[483] L2: and none of [your business]
 [484] L1: [what do you want?]
 none of your business / what do you want? / I said [no]
 [485] L2: [yeah] three sons and none of
 your business ((he laughs))
 [486] L1: I hate Hadi ((they laugh)) / I'll kill you man
 [487] L3: that was (.) not good (.)
 [488] L2: yeah / this is this is so / this is so crazy man (.) he lies
 so much
 [489] L1: we have a proverb in Persian you know / lie never / behind never
 put in / under the stone (.)
 [490] L2: aha::
 [491] L1: the truth
 [492] L2: yeah the [truth]
 [493] L3: [Persian] idiom
 [494] L2: yeah
 [Persian idioms]
 [495] L3: [Persian idioms]
 [496] L2: yes / they're Persian idioms (.) *put your ha:::nds* ((he laughs))
put your ha:::nds [(xxx)]
 [497] L1: [(xxx)] *no*
 [498] L2: *nurse and doctors* ((mimicking their teachers))
 [499] L3: *oke:::y* ((mimicking))
 [500] L2: [(xxx)] ((voice change, mimicking))
 [501] L3: [no no / what] was that word?
 [502] L2: [ye:::s]
 [503] L3: [ye:::s]
 [504] L1: *ye:::s*

Example 29 demonstrates how the participants develop the topic by inserting their anecdotes. L1 intends to start an anecdote about one of their mutual friends, Hadi, so he takes a turn in line [467] and says “one time he told me”. However, he cannot say more because L2 interrupts him to say another anecdote about the same friend Hadi. At this juncture, L1 gives in and L2 proceeds. When L2 is finished with his short story, L1 resumes his anecdote in line [469] “... one day he told / he told me that uh / I have a girl friend...”. Meanwhile, L2 incorporates supportive feedback to L1’s story in order to show his interest such as in line [475] “oh my god / he was god” and also in line [481] “you’ve gotta be fucking kidding”. L2 also tries to complete L1’s utterances to show him that he is supportive as in lines [473], [483] and [485].

Finally, L1 summarizes his anecdote in line [486] by saying that “I hate Hadi ((they laugh)) / I’ll kill you man”. His conclusion then receives two immediate supportive comments. One from L3 in line [487] “that was (.) not good (.)” and another from L2 in line [488] “yeah / this is this is so / this is so crazy man (.) he lies so much”. This is clear that in Example 29, all the participants cooperate to develop the topic gradually.

After the anecdote, L1 in line [489] proceeds and presents a Persian proverb which suits the situation. L2 in line [490] immediately says “aha:::” in order to show his understanding and agreement. It appears that talking about a Persian proverb prompted L2 to mimic one of their female teachers so in line [496] he quotes her and says “yes / they’re Persian idioms (.) *put your ha:::nds ...*”. At this juncture the topic shifts smoothly to another topic. The new topic, *the English language institute*, is then supported and developed by the other participants when they all mimic their teacher’s voice and sentences in the following lines from [497] to [499]. It is apparent that the topic is shifted and developed smoothly. The participants use Persian proverb to mimic their teachers’ voice and quotations and then gradually they build on each other’s utterances and shape the new topic.

Generally, it appears that the participants in Group 3 cooperate with each other constantly to develop a topic. They give supportive feedback and comments to motivate the current speaker. They also take turns to add more to the topic. Further, there are many instances where they complete each other’s utterances and repeat one another.

4.2.4 Topic Development in Group 4

The analysis of the data indicates that the participants in Group 4 appear to develop the topics cooperatively as seen in Example 30.

Example 30

- [83] K1: ... I think it's better to speak about some movies that we like because I think / uh / we all / like the movies and watch the movies *a lot* / for example we can speak about Cinema Paradiso / it's a very famous movie and I think that / uh / it's a very good idea for speaking but it's just a suggestion
- [84] K2: one thing that / I'm really interested in / uh / this movie u::h it was the music / [it was the ~
- [85] K3: [yes / yes / yes] / yes
yes yes yes [(absolutely)]
- [86] K2: ~ the perfect music] [and] u::m what a pity / uh / I couldn't / uh / play that / song / that music
- [87] K1: *you couldn't?*
- [88] K2: I couldn't
- [89] K1: why?
- [90] K2: I tried / uh / to perform that music several times but / uh / I I couldn't cover it
- [91] K3: to adapt it
- [92] K1: to our own music [(xxx)] / what was it? [(xxx)] [(xxx)]
[yeah] [it's] really / it's really (xxx) [because in your] family [all the person] are very ((he giggles)) good in [music]
- [93] K3: [(xxx)]
- [94] K2: [but I] couldn't / I couldn't make a [relation]
- [95] K1: [your father] your brother and //
- [96] K2: // yeah / but I couldn't make a relation / uh / with that music (.) to play
- [97] K1: that music of Cinema Paradiso is really unbelievable / it's very good / it's *awesome* / but / uh / I think that the / the personality that play (xxx) in the movie is very good for example I don't know what's the name of Alfredo in movie / but Alfredo is really unbelievable for the first time that I saw Cinema Paradiso I / uh / I think it's really my uncle / you know
- [98] K3: the old man?
- [99] K1: yeah / yes the old man / the / uh / the *blind* man (.) because in the middle of the movie / the cinema is / uh / *burning* (.)
- [100] K2: was burning
- [101] K1: was burning and / but I think it's a / a really / uh / *good* movie for *me* because / uh / I'm really related to the movie / I think that / uh / I'm one of the men that is playing in the movie you know and / uh uh / Tornatore its director / of the / this movie has another movie Star Maker / the / the place of the movie is like Cinema Paradiso / you saw the Star Maker?
- [102] K3: yeah

K1 in line [83] proposes the topic *movies* and then suggests *Cinema Paradiso* because they all have watched and liked this movie. His topic is immediately supported by K2 in line [84] who takes a turn and talks about the music of *Cinema Paradiso* which is followed by K3's support in line [85] "yes / yes ... (absolutely)". In line [86], K2 adds that he regrets why he is not able to play the movie's music and immediately K1 asks K2 "you couldn't?" in line [87] and also in line [89] "why". K2 replies in line [90] "I tried / uh / to perform that music several times but / uh / I I couldn't cover it" and K3 immediately paraphrases K2's utterance in line [91] "to adapt it to our own music ...". As can be seen, the topic is collaboratively progressing when the interactants ask relevant questions, provide supportive minimal responses and paraphrase each other. They all aim to add on to the discussion and develop it cooperatively.

Furthermore, K1 in line [97] concludes that "...the music of Cinema Paradiso is really awesome..." and then he adds "...but / uh / I think that the / the personality that play (xxx) in the movie is very good for example...". K3 shows his interest by asking K1 a question in line [98] for more clarification "the old man?". From this point on, the participants talk about the main character of *Cinema Paradiso* and the conversation moves on. As observed, in this extract the topic is developed gradually and cooperatively since the participants support each other and add comments to the discussion.

Example 31

- [454] K3: **but I wanna add something else** / sorry I wouldn't speak in five minutes I promise ((he chuckles)) but / [when somebody]
 [455] K1: [it's a good thing] / yes it's a [good thing]
 ((laughing))

[456] K3: [when I / when I] some / when I see / when I see / some male persons / having *a lots and a lots* of / female friends / even more than his male friends

[457] K2: yeah

[458] K3: I figure out two things / I have two kinds of feeling //

[459] K2: // **he [is] motivated** to learn English

[460] K3: [one] no no no / no no / he has a lots of female friends / opinion one / he has no cock / he has no penis sorry / because there is no lady in the room I / I dare myself to ((he giggles)) speak so nasty / the *second* opinion is //

[461] K2: //he / he has [something] like haste khorma ((date's seed))

[462] K3: [he's not] no / he is not / he is not a straight person you know / maybe he has other ways to go / (business) ((he chuckles)) *usually* we don't have female friends (.) [(that)]

[463] K2: [but] I guess / uh / ((K1 laughs)) //

[464] K3: // no he / [he he he also] looks like you know / he has this [earring and (xxx) in the] ~ [is he (xxx)]

[465] K2: [is he (xxx)]

[466] K3: ~ right side and everything ((he chuckle))

[467] K2: [his main (xxx) is beautiful] *teachers*

[468] K3: ha *had* beautiful teachers

[469] K2: yea::h

[470] K3: that's why he has been so //

[471] K2: // yeah

[472] K3: yeah / activated

[473] K1: you know / it's important [for me] **[but not] physically**

[474] K3: really? / it's important for me that I'm in good

[475] K1: relationship with / uh / [my (xxx)] [your teachers and you're being] *thankful* to your //

[476] K3: [your teachers and you're being] *thankful* to your //

[477] K1: // not [teachers you know that] I have a / uh / *really* I have / I have lots of / uh / ~ [great (xxx)]

[478] K3: [great (xxx)]

[479] K1: ~ girl friends but / uh / I *like this* / and I don't think in a bad way / in a wrong way

[480] K3: yeah / nothing [so odd]

[481] K2: [it's a **good**] **wa:::y**

[482] K1: [I just / I just] I just //

[483] K3: // we believe in you **come on man** ((K1 laughs))

Example 31 is another indication of cooperative development of topics. In line [454], K3 intends to mock his friend K1 so he raises his voice to get everyone's attention and says that K1 is supposed to be gay since his female friends are more than his male friends and he does not have any intentions for women. Meanwhile, another speaker K2 in line [457] inserts a minimal response to show his

attentiveness and enthusiasm to the topic “yeah”. K2 also shows his support by trying to complete K3’s utterances in lines [459] and [461]. Later in line [467], K2 adds that K1 has beautiful female teachers and K3 repeats K2’s sentence in [468] “ha *had* beautiful teachers”.

K2 in lines [470], [472] and [474] concludes that K1 is not sexually active. Meanwhile, K2 provides a supportive feedback in [471] “yeah”. Only after the discussion comes to this point, K1, who has been the victim of this mockery, takes turns in line [475] to defend himself “... it’s important for me that I’m in good relationship with / uh / my (xxx)”. At this point, K3 interrupts K1 in line [476] to makes fun of K1 and says “your teachers and you’re being *thankful* to your”. It appears that K2 and K3 build on each other’s utterance collaboratively and develop the topic in order to pursue a shared intention which is mocking K1. This is, however, different from women collaborative topic development since the participants tease each other. Nevertheless, teasing can be considered a cooperative act among men (Beck et al., 2007).

Example 32

[517] K1: it’s a / uh / [I want / **I want to**] / pardon me I want to say something that it’s ~
 [518] K3: [it is someone who (xxx)]
 [519] K1: ~ it’s //
 [520] K3: // he doesn’t want me to translate [it you know]
 [521] K1: [something like /it’s] something like //
 [522] K3: // he doesn’t want the world to figure out
 [523] K1: it’s something like *joke* / it’s /uh /
 it’s happened to me (like that) / uh / one of my girl friends told me ((he chuckles))
 / why not anything / and / and I’m so / I have so problem with her / because she
 asked me why *not anything* / why / why we just communicate and watch the
 movie [and go to party] ((he chuckles))
 [524] K3: [yeah / I know / I know / I know a good] surgeon / I know a good surgeon
 (.) ((K1 laughs)) [he (xxx)]
 [525] K1: [no / I’m a *ma:::n*] ((he giggles)) / you sure about ((he continues
 giggling)) / but it’s very important for me in a *polite* way you know
 [526] K3: yeah / you do
 the polite way

Example 32 is another instance where the participants in Group 4 develop a topic cooperatively through teasing one another. In this extract, K1 tries three times in lines [517], [519] and [521] to start an anecdote. However, K3 who is mockingly accuses K1 of not being a man, does not let him proceed and interrupts K1 periodically to add something in order to tease him. K1 finally becomes successful and in line [523] he starts his anecdote "... it's happened to me (like that) / uh / one of my girl friends told me...". K3 in line [524], after K1 has almost completed with his story, takes the opportunity right to interrupt him and tease him again "yeah / I know / I know / I know a good surgeon...". K1 in line [525] gets frustrated and emphasizes "no / I'm a *ma:::n* ...". K3 in line [526] sarcastically responds "yeah / you do the polite way". As can be observed, the participants compete with each other to add something but yet, it can be concluded that the topic is developing progressively as the participants build on each other's contribution competitively to create a friendly interaction.

Example 33

[334] K2: asshole
 [335] K3: no / [asshole is a bad word] / asshole is a bad word
 [336] K1: [asshole (xxx) / yeah]
 [337] K2: lazy / too lazy
 [338] K3: [lazy] and lousy and ((K1 laughs)) / lousy [bastard you know]
 [339] K1: [lazy]
 [340] K2: [something like that]
 [341] K1: and I think
 uh / couch potato
 [342] K3: couch potato?
 [343] K1: I think so
 [344] K3: I'm not so familiar with these
 / British (.) theme

In Example 33, all the participants are looking for a word to describe K1's laziness in resting and watching movies for long hours. K1 himself suggests the word *couch potato* in line [341]. K3 mistakenly thinks that *couch potato* is a British term as such in line [344] says that "I'm not so familiar with these / British (.) theme". This serves as a transition point for shifting the topic from *movies* to *English language*. In this extract, the interactants change the current topic smoothly when they are looking for a word. In other words, the new topic is embedded in the previous topic. As such, it can be concluded that the participants make a gradual topic shift

The analysis of the data in Group 4 suggests that topics are developed progressively and collaboratively though competition was observed at some points. Nevertheless, this competition is an indication of their excitement to cooperate. Moreover, the participants change the topics gradually. They make cohesive connections to the previous topics rather than an abrupt way of shifting without any linkage to the current discussion topic. This is an indication of the interactants' cooperative attitude in developing topics which in turn strengthens their solidarity.

4.2.5 Summary

The interactants in Groups 3 and 4 are more cooperative in developing the topics than the participants in Groups 1 and 2. They build on each other's utterances to expand the suggested topics. Competitive attitude is also observed among the participants in Group 2 when they try to develop the topics. Nevertheless, the competition that is observed among them can be regarded as their enthusiasm to take part in the interaction. The same is observed in Group 4 when the participants

tease one another and compete to add to the discussion. As such, the topics are developed cooperatively.

Group 1 is, however, slightly different from the other groups. They do not develop the topics as cooperatively as the other groups. There are situations where the topics are dropped and ignored. This is an indication of lack of interest and negligence of the participants to the topics suggested. As such, lengthy pauses are seen in their conversation. Furthermore, the participants in Group 1 demonstrate powerful attitudes when they drop a topic or when they are reluctant to develop it. Power is also observed among the participants in Group 2 when some participants control the development of topics and reject new topics.

4.3 Minimal Responses

The minimal response items that are used for this study include *yeah, ok, yes, really, uhum, ahan/aha, exactly, oh*. The frequency counts of these eight items are calculated and tabulated based on their occurrences in each group. In addition, the total number of minimal responses, used in the interaction of members in each of the groups, is evaluated and compared in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2 Distribution of Minimal Responses in Groups 1 to 4

Minimal Responses	Yeah	Ok	Yes	Really	Uhum	Ahan/aha	Exactly	Oh	Total
Group 1	5	14	22	4	5	7	2	1	60
Group 2	20	21	42	6	4	4	2	7	106
Group 3	61	3	5	12	1	3	0	8	93
Group 4	28	2	18	15	7	2	1	3	76

Total	114	40	87	37	17	16	5	19	335
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As can be seen in Table 4.2, Group 2 has used minimal responses at the highest rate (106), compared to Group 1 which records the lowest rate (60). The most frequent minimal response item in this study is *yeah* (114) and the least frequent item is *exactly* (5). Moreover, it is observed that the most frequent minimal response item among Groups 1 and 2 is *yes* while among Groups 3 and 4 is *yeah*. The following section presents the use of minimal responses in each group.

4.3.1 Minimal Responses in Group 1

The participants in Group1 use minimal response items 60 times in their discussion which is the lowest number among the groups. Example 34 shows the manner in which minimal responses are used by the interactants in Group 1.

Example 34

[67] N3: my father had a / *collection* of cigar
 [68] N1: *aha*
 [69] N3: and I liked this [and]
 [70] N2: [*u::h*] / and as
 my memory helps I remember that when I / uh / was / uh / being in the country /
 for at university / uh / when I started smoking cigarette I collected / uh / the signs /
 uh which was on packets (.)
 [71] N1: *uhum*
 [72] N2: and now uh / I think I have
 more than thousand label of different cigarettes
 [73] N1: did you / it was some
 hobby for you?
 [74] N2: *ye::s* / and I uh want / I wanted to know that after for
 example 10 years how much cigarette uh / I /uh / used (.)
 [75] N1: you mean every uh
 / label that you *used you?* (.)
 [76] N2: after [I used the packet] / I //
 [77] N1: [collected them] // *ahan*
 [78] N2: uh / collect its sign
 [79] N1: *ahan* / but / but I never tried different kinds of cigarettes I
 just ...

In Example 34, N3 in line [67] introduces an anecdote by saying that “my father had a / *collection* of cigar”. At this moment, N1 in line [68] utters a well-timed minimal response “*aha*” with an encouraging tone in order to show his interest in wanting to know more about N3’s father and his cigar collection. After this supportive comment, N3 resumes his turn in line [69].

Nevertheless, it is observed that in Group 1, there are some situations where the minimal response is delayed. For instance, in line [70], N2 presents an anecdote and at the time that he anticipates the presence of a minimal response, pauses to let the others provide their supportive comments. After a lengthy pause, N1 in line [71] says “uhum” to show N2 that he is listening. It is obvious that the minimal response is delayed which in turn, shows N1’s lack of interest in what N2 is talking about.

There is also an instance when the minimal response is not provided. In line [74], N2 expresses that “... I wanted to know that after for example 10 years how much cigarette uh / I /uh / used”. After this utterance, N2 pauses to give the opportunity to the other participants to confirm him. But after a lengthy pause, N1 in line [75], instead of giving a minimal response, asks N2 a question for more clarification “you mean every uh / label that you *used* you?”

Example 35

[473] N2: I think u:::h there are *many fields* of study in my country / ok?
 [474] N3: ok
 [475] N2: but there
 are *not even* / a job vacancy (.) do you believe it? (.)
 [476] N1: not that much you can choose
 uh the course that you like / and if *you like it* / you can / uh find a job (.) ...

In Example 35 line [473], N2 expresses his idea about educational fields in Iran “...there are *many fields* of study in my country / ok?”. He uses *ok* with an enquiring tone in order to invite the others to give their supportive comments and show their agreement. At this juncture, N3 provides a minimal response in line [474] “ok” and then N2 proceeds in line [475]. This indicates N3’s supportive attitude to show the current speaker, N2, that he is listening attentively. It also shows that the current speaker, N2, requires hearing a supportive feedback before he proceeds further.

In line [475], N2, after expressing that there are not any job vacancies in Iran, pauses to let his friends express their ideas or at least show their attentiveness by a minimal response. But, since no comment is received from the other participants, he poses a question to seek their agreement in the same line [475] “do you believe it?” which is once again followed by a lengthy pause. Ultimately, N1 reluctantly takes a turn in line [476] and gives his contradictory point of view without using any minimal responses.

The lack of minimal response in Example 35 can be explained based on the fact that men use minimal responses to show their agreement (Maltz & Borker, 2011). In this instance, N1 does not agree with N2 and that is the reason N2’s statement in line [475] does not receive any minimal responses. It also shows that N1 wants to show his power by expressing his opposing response and not providing a supportive feedback.

It can be concluded in Group 1, the minimal responses are mostly delayed or never spared. Therefore, their interaction is full of lengthy pauses. This demonstrates the participants' lack of interest and cooperation. Moreover, the participants who do not provide minimal responses appear powerful because they refrain from being cooperative.

4.3.2 Minimal Responses in Group 2

The analysis of the data demonstrates that the participants in Group 2 use minimal responses cooperatively.

Example 36

[323] R2: *small university*
 [324] R2: **hmadi Mohammed [Gillan] university** do you know ~
 [325] R3: [university]
 [326] R2: ~ / her?
 [327] R3: [M.B.A. ?]
 [328] R1: [aha:::]
 [329] R2: *ye:::s*
 [330] R3: M.B.A.?
 [331] R1: she's nuts
 [332] R2: yeah
 [333] R1: yeah ((everybody laughs))
 [334] R3: M.B.A.?

In Example 36, the participants are gossiping about their classmates who did not have enough academic knowledge but they could all pass post-graduate level successfully. When R1 in line [331] comments about one of their mutual female classmates and calls her *nuts*, immediately after this in line [332], R2 take a turn to say “yeah” in order to express his agreement and his support. R1 in the following line [333] repeats “yeah” to reassert that their female classmate is really nuts. The

exchange of the minimal response item “yeah” between R1 and R2 demonstrates their cooperation in supporting R1’s assumption about that female classmate.

Example 37

[300] R2: Ahmed Mohammed accepted
 [301] R1: accepted / really?
 [302] R3: [they accept]
 [303] R2: [uh / **one of the**] / uh (.) one of
 the [institutes]
 [304] R3: [yeah]
 [305] R1: yes
 [306] R2: yeah

Example 37 is another indication of supportive use of minimal responses. In line [303], R2 is making an effort to remember the name of the institute that one of their classmates is accepted “uh / **one of the** / uh (.) one of the institutes”. At this point, R3 in line [304] tucks a minimal response “yeah” to show R2 that he knows what he intends to say. Immediately after, the other participant, R1, in line [305] says “yes” to comfort R2 that they already know what he is trying to say and there is no need to struggle further. After R3 and R1’s supportive minimal responses in lines [304] and [305], R2 says in a relief “yeah” in line [306].

The exchange of minimal responses in this example demonstrates the participants’ attentiveness and their support in showing what the current speaker is attempting to say. This example illustrates the participants’ joint effort in supporting each other.

Example 38

[47] R3: it’s *totally bullshit* / it is the / the the gossip
 [48] R1: uhum
 [49] R3: that //
 [50] R1: // it was a rumor

- [51] R3: yes it's a gossip that uh I don't know **why** / some / sites and some um information
sources say that because of political / shareholders but it [is not] true / I know ~
[52] R1: [uhum]
[53] R3: ~ the share holders / I ...

In Example 38, there are two instances of minimal responses. R3 in line [47] expresses his idea about a rumor that “it’s *totally bullshit* / it is the / the the gossip”. R1 in line [48], at the exact end of R3’s utterance, presents his comment “uhum” to show his support. This is evidence of a well-timed minimal response. Once again in line [52], before R3’s sentence is complete, R1 tucks another minimal response “uhum”. Although the second minimal response in line [52] is not well-placed, there is also no indication of an intrusion. Therefore, it can be assumed that both minimal responses have supportive values. Example 38 is an indication of the supportive role that the participants play in Group 2. There is no power play among the participants when it comes to the use of minimal responses.

In summary, the usage and the proportion of minimal responses among the members of Group 2 suggest that the participants willingly express their solidarity and support by minimal responses. There are no instances of delayed minimal responses and the participants abundantly show their support and attentiveness.

4.3.3 Minimal Responses in Group 3

The participants in Group 3 use minimal responses to show their support and their agreement to one another.

Example 39

- [59] L2: he even cannot teach you know / he he cannot teach / I guarantee that

[60] L1: yeah
 [61] L2: he cannot teach / he he his talking is very bad / he his accent is very bad actually
 it's awful / and the //
 [62] L1: // I think he is / [he is (xxx)]
 [63] L2: [I'm not the guy to judge] you know /
 [but everybody] says that he is smart but you know it's not enough for teaching
 [he is smart]
 [64] L3:
 [65] L1: yeah / but he *uses* his brain yeah you know / wrong way ((L3 laughs))
 [66] L2: yeah
 [67] L1: he he can
 use it in better ways you know
 [68] L3: yes
 [60] L1: he's / he's a ((L2 laughs))

Example 39 shows that L2 in line [59] is gossiping about one of their mutual male friends, Hadi, and guarantees that Hadi is not willing to be a teacher ‘he even cannot teach you know / he he cannot teach / I guarantee that’. At the exact point that L2’s utterance is semantically and syntactically complete, L1 inserts ‘yeah’ in line [60] to confirm L2’s comment. L2 after receiving L1’s supportive feedback proceeds in line [61] to add more gossip ‘... he he his talking is very bad / he his accent is very bad actually’. Elsewhere, in line [65] when L1 says that Hadi uses his brain in a wrong way, L2 agrees with him in line [66] ‘yeah’. Also in line [67], L1 proceeds and emphasizes that Hadi, who is the target of gossip, can use his brain in better ways which is immediately accepted and supported by L3 in line [68].

Example 39 shows that all the minimal responses are accurately timed after the completion of an utterance and there is no instance of a delayed minimal response. It is apparent that all three participants in Group 3 have exhibited a solidary attitude in confirming each other’s speech.

Example 40

[106] L1: you know he wants just to tick the girl / in her in [his list]
 [107] L3: [yeah / yeah]

[108] L2:	he want / he want somebody to always feel pity about him you know	no no no /
[109] L1:		yeah
[110] L3:	he [wants to] feel ((he snaps)) / yeah he can do it	
[111] L2:	[he like that]	yeah
[112] L3:		you know
[113] L2:		yeah he
[114] L3:	always [do that] [if / if] you see him with a / with a girl and another girl with another	

Example 40 is another evidence of how the participants cooperatively use minimal responses to show their agreement and support. The conversation is about the participants' mutual male friend and in line [106] L1 states that their friend wants to be with many girls because he tries to tick the girls' names on his list. In line [107], L3 overlaps L1's utterance so as to show his agreement by inserting minimal responses "yeah / yeah". However, another speaker, L2, who has a different idea from L1, takes a turn in line [108] and adds his own comment. L1 instead of arguing back, in line [109], shows his agreement and says "yeah". There are two more minimal responses in lines [111] and [113] which are both used to show the listener's support.

It can be derived that the participants in Group 3 have adopted a cooperative attitude in employing minimal response items to reveal their support and agreement to the current speaker. All three participants actively acknowledge their friend's comments by minimal responses.

4.3.4 Minimal Responses in Group 4

The manners, in which minimal response items are used and exchanged among the participants in Group 4, are displayed in the following examples.

Example 41

[427] K3: ... sorry everybody I wanted to add something *on the record* / it's so important to
me
[428] K2: yes
[429] K3: personally //
[430] K1: // ok
[431] K3: K1 / the one who is speaking / the one who
spoke a lot about Cinema Paradiso and everything / for the people who are not /
seeing us /just hearing us / he started learning English (.) exactly or approximately
not more than one year ago / then he had no idea about English language I believe
/ because he / he used to be / he *is* my friend since childhood / but / he is one of my
favorite / learners you know / he tried so *hard* you know / he is //
[432] K2: //yeah
[433] K3: he he is a *hummer* you know / I ...

In Example 41, K3 in line [427] intends to introduce a new topic and attracts everyone's attention by saying that "sorry everybody I wanted to add something *on the record* / it's so important to *me*". K1 in line [428], at the exact completion point of K3's sentence, inserts a minimal response "yes" in order to show his interest and also to encourage K3 to proceed. K3 carries on in line [429] but after uttering a single word, another speaker K1, interrupts him in line [430] to insert a minimal response item "ok". K1 uses the minimal response in order to show his interest and attentiveness to what K3 is trying to say. After these two minimal responses, while K3 is talking, no one intervenes his turn until K2 in line [432] inserts the minimal response "yeah" to show his agreement and support to K3's statement. Although the minimal responses are not accurately well-timed, the participants do not intend to intrude the current speaker's turn. They only interrupt to show their attentiveness, interest and agreement.

Example 42

[141] K3: ... if you open the movie / in the middle of of that and we see *at least* five minutes of
it //
[142] K2: // you want to follow it
[143] K3: you *wanna* follow it

[144] K2: yeah
 [145] K3: completely stuck to your chair and [you (xxx)] you are betting on the / TV you
 [146] K1: [really yes]

In Example 42, the participants are talking about the movie *Cinema Paradiso*. K3 in line [141] highlights the value of the movie by saying that "... if you open the movie / in the middle of of that and we see *at least* five minutes of it". K2 in line [142] adds "you want to follow it" and K3 in line [143] acknowledges his friend's statement "you *wanna* follow it". K2 takes a turn in line [144] to reaffirm the agreement over the idea just being exchanged "yeah". This displays the cooperative use of the minimal response. In addition, K3 in line [145] emphasizes that the movie is so interesting that "you completely stuck to your chair ...". K1 shows that he is attentive to what is being discussed and demonstrates his support by expressing "really yes" in line [146].

Example 43

[283] K3: so K2 / what was the / uh / best movie you have seen lately? (.)
 [284] K2: unfaithful
 [285] K3: unfaithful?
 [286] K1: [unfaithful]
 [287] K2: [yes]
 [288] K3: the Richard Gere [and] the absolute] beautiful ~
 [289] K1: [yeah]
 [290] K2: [yes] / Richard Gere]
 [291] K3: ~ (xxx) lady / [and] she is ...
 [292] K1: [yeah] ((he laughs))

In Example 43 line [288], K3 wants to talk about the actor, Richard Gere, and his wife in the movie *Unfaithful*. K1 and K2 after hearing the name of the actor in the movie get excited and consecutively in lines [289] an [290] butt into K3's line to

make a contribution “yeah” and “yes / Richard Gere”. This shows the participants’ cooperative role in using minimal responses to show their interest. Further, in lines [288] and [291] K3 mentions Richard Gere’s wife in the movie *Unfaithful* and expresses that she is a beautiful lady. K1, in order to show his support and agreement in line [292] makes an interruption and says “yeah”. Although the minimal responses are projected in the middle of the current speaker’s turns, they are considered cooperative since they do not infringe the flow of speech.

To summarize, it appears that the participants in Group 4 have taken up a cooperative attitude in exchanging minimal responses. They use minimal responses to show their agreement, support and their interest. They also use minimal responses to simply acknowledge what the speaker is saying. There is no instance of delayed minimal responses among the participants in Group 4.

4.3.5 Summary

The analysis of the data shows that the participants in Group 1 do not use well-timed minimal responses in their conversation. It means that the minimal responses are mostly delayed and appear after lengthy pauses. Furthermore, there are some situations where the presence of a minimal response is anticipated, but no minimal response is spared. It shows that the participants in Group 1 do not use minimal responses cooperatively. In some cases, it is observed that the participants do not provide supportive minimal responses in order to show that they are more powerful.

Minimal responses, however, are used in a different manner among the participants in Groups 2, 3 and 4 compared to Group 1. The participants in these groups (2,3

and 4) use minimal responses cooperatively in order to show their attentiveness to the current speaker's speech and also their interest in what he is saying. In addition, they use minimal responses to show their agreement with the statements being uttered. There are many instances in their conversation where the interactants use minimal responses merely to show their support and solidarity.

Most of the minimal responses used by the participants in Groups 2, 3 and 4 are well timed and are projected at the exact place where the current speaker anticipates them. There are, however, some occasions where minimal responses are butted into the current speaker's turn, like in Group 4, as an indication of the participant's enthusiastic attitude to show their support and interest.

4.4 Interruptions

In order to analyze interruptions, Beattie's classification model (1981) is applied (see Section 2.10.4). Table 4.3 demonstrates the number of times that the participants in each group take turns. It also displays the type of interruptions they have used in their conversation.

Table 4.3 Distribution of Interruptions in Groups 1 to 4

Types of Interruptions	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	total
Overlap	43	62	69	42	216
Simple interruption	60	131	178	125	494
Smooth speaker-switch	292	502	410	364	1568
Silent interruption	118	138	86	95	437
Butting-in interruption	84	82	149	104	419

Total turns	597	915	892	730	3134
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As can be seen in Table 4.3, Group 2 has the most number of interruptions (915) and Group 1 has the least number of interruptions (597). The difference between these two groups is drastic as the participants in Group 2 interrupt each other 915 times and in Group 1 only 597 times. Moreover, the difference between Group 1 and the other groups (2, 3 and 4) is prominent as well. It appears that the interactants in Group 1 take less turns and interrupt each other at a much lower rate than the other groups. The table also shows that the most common type of interruption among the groups in this study is smooth speaker-switches.

In order to explain and observe the instances of power and solidarity among the participants, the interruptions that each group has made is analyzed and interpreted in a separate section.

4.4.1 Interruptions in Group 1

The participants in Group 1 have interrupted one another for 597 times as shown in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4 Distribution of Interruptions in Group 1

Types of Interruptions	Group 1	
	Numbers	Percentage
Smooth speaker-switch	292	48.9
Silent interruption	118	19.7
Simple interruption	60	10
Butting-in interruption	84	14
Overlap	43	7.2

Total	597	99.8
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The most common type of interruption in this group is smooth speaker-switches with 292 occurrences, followed by silent interruptions (118), butting-in interruptions (84), simple interruptions (160) and overlaps (43).

Example 44

[468] N3: ... I think it's *no problem* uh you uh start your work for *another people* or for government

[469] N2: I [think]

[470] N3: [I think] (.)

[471] N2: ok

[472] N3: ok

[473] N2: I think u:::h there are *many fields* of study in my country / ok?

[474] N3: ok

[475] N2: but there are *not even* / a job vacancy (.) do you believe it? (.)

[476] N1: not that much you can choose uh the course that you like / and if *you like it* / you can / uh find a job (.) if you like the the things that you *study* //

[477] N2: // for example / I::: after I graduate I uh used to work in uh *laboratories* fo for about one year

[478] N1: ok

[479] N2: but o:::nly as a learner (.) they don't want to u:::h //

[480] N1: // give you the [opportunity]

[481] N2: [(and)] to hire to employ someone / *only* they accept uh graduates for uh / as a learner / [and after they're uh]

[482] N1: [because it's supposed that at the] first time you would [be this]

[483] N3: [*no* I think] many of my problem our problem uh / um all / uh / all our job is related to my government (.) I think

Example 44 shows that the participants are talking about the problems of finding a good job in Iran. In line [468], N3 states that it is ok if you start working for government or other people. At this point, N2 assumes that N3 has finished, so he takes a smooth turn in line [469] to express his opinion “I think” but soon after uttering the single word “I”, N3, who was not apparently finished with his utterance, interrupts him in line [470] to continue his turn. But after this

interruption, N2 and N3 immediately stop and pause to let the other interactant proceed. They even offer the floor to each other by exchanging the word *ok* in lines [471] and [472]. This back and forth exchange of the word *ok* with an inviting intonation between N2 and N3 indicates their cooperation in allocating the right of speech to another speaker. Finally, N2 breaks this loop and continues in line [473] “I think u::h there are *many fields* of study in my country”. Here, there is no evidence of vying for the floor or fighting to hold the floor between N2 and N3.

Further, in line [476], N1 expresses that it is easy to find a job in Iran according to your study field. N2, who believes otherwise, interrupts N1 in [477] to express his contradictory idea through an example “for example / I:: after I graduate I uh used to work in uh *laboratories* fo for about one year”. At this juncture, it seems that N1, whose turn is taken away, does not attempt to vie for his turn back because when N2 interrupts him, he tails off in line [476]. There is no competition observed between the participants to possess the floor nevertheless; N2 appears to be more powerful since he does not let N1 finish his sentence before interrupting him. N1 instead of trying to get his floor back takes a smooth turn in line [478] to support the interrupter by a minimal response. Also in line [479] when N2 struggles to find a suitable phrase to complete his sentence “... they don’t want to u::h”, N1 in line [480] interrupts him to offer a phrase and complete his sentence. Example 44 provides the evidence that there is no competition observed between the interactants in this group. They do not vie for the floor and they even interrupt to show their cooperation and solidarity.

Example 45

[322] N2: ok / let's talk about education educational system / in Iran (.) do you believe it's good? (.)

[323] N1: educational / oh uh and uh we can uh / find some connection between educa[tional]system and smoking cigarettes because it it //

[324] N2: [and] // yes

[325] N1: yeah
really and goes let me // ((he giggles))

[326] N2: // nowadays [I don't know why] all the uh / students ~

[327] N1: [let me finish my word]

[328] N2: ~ at high school even uh low uh levels uh / use to smoke (.)

[329] N1: yeah this is the
connection between / [smoking and] educational system

[330] N3: [because I think] because I think uh / they
uh think smoking cigarettes uh (.) is like uh I'll / in a / like uh / students (.) more
uh //

[331] N1: // you mean they they show themselves as a grown //

[332] N3: // bigger uh (.) //

[333] N1: // not
big / you mean they they when they start smoking at high school [they] uh think ~
[yes]

[334] N3: [yes]

[336] N1: ~ think that they are ...

In Example 45, line [322], N2 suggests his co-participants talk about the "...education educational system / in Iran (.)". His suggestion, however, is followed by a lengthy pause which indicates that the other participants are reluctant to take a turn to talk about the suggested topic. Since no one takes a turn, he asks a question in the same line, [322], to grant the turn to the other speakers "...do you believe it's good? (.)". At this juncture, after another lengthy pause, N1 in line [323] takes a turn to express his idea about the suggested topic. Nevertheless, N2, who has introduced the topic, is too excited to let his friend complete his words. Therefore, he makes two unsuccessful interruptions in [324] to grab the floor and express his ideas. Being frustrated, N1 in line [325] takes a turn and asks N2 to let him finish first. But as it is apparent, N2 is eager to talk about the topic so he ignores N1's request and interrupts him again in [326] and holds the floor until his point is fully expressed. Meanwhile, N2 desperately butts into N1's sentence in [327] and once again requests N1 to let him finish his utterance "*let me finish my word*". In this instance, it is observed that N1 and N2 compete with each other and vie for the

floor to convey their own point of view. It is also inclined that there is a power play when they intrude into each other's turns and do not intend to give in and relinquish the floor easily.

In Example 45, besides competitive and powerful attitudes that the participants show, solidarity is also detected among them. For example, in line [328], after N2 completes his point of view, he pauses and lets the others take the floor. As such, N1 takes a turn in [329] to show approval to his friend "yeah this is the connection between / smoking and educational system". Meanwhile, N3 in line [330] butts into N1's sentence in order to add something "because I think" but immediately, he realizes his mistake and waits until N1 completes his sentence and only after that he resumes in the same line [330] "because I think uh / they uh think smoking cigarettes uh (.) is like uh I'll ...". It appears that N3 pays attention to the other speaker's right of speech and that is the reason he peters out. N1, on the other hand, is a powerful speaker because he does not relinquish his turn easily to N3.

Although N1 shows his power in line [326] by not giving his turn up, he also shows his cooperation to N3. He makes an interruption in line [331] to help N3 elaborate and paraphrase his sentence "you mean they they show themselves as a grown". Also in line [333], once again he interrupts N3 in order to help him correct his sentence "not big / you mean they they when they start smoking at high school..." which in turn is acknowledged by N3 in line [334] "yes". As it is observed, some interruptions are competitive like the lines from [324] to [327]. Some interruptions show the power of the participants like lines [326], [327] and [329] and also some interruptions are cooperative as in lines [331] and [333].

It can be inferred that the participants in this group have employed both cooperative and competitive interruptions to keep the conversation going. In some cases, they assist each other and take turns to show their agreement while in some other cases; they get competitive to express their ideas. There are some instances of power demonstration among them as well when they vie for the floor.

4.4.2 Interruptions in Group 2

The participants in Group 2 interrupt each other for 915 times in total.

Table 4.5 Distribution of Interruptions in Group 2

Types of Interruptions	Group 2	
	Numbers	Percentage
Smooth speaker-switch	502	54.8
Silent interruption	138	15.08
Simple interruption	131	14.3
Butting-in interruption	82	8.9
Overlap	62	6.7
Total	915	99.7

Smooth speaker-switches are the most common type of interruption in this group (502), followed by silent interruptions (138), simple interruptions (131), Butting-in interruptions (82) and overlaps (62). Example 46 presents the manner in which the participants interrupt each other.

Example 46

[62] R3: yes / I / I I happen to know / before this uh / statement of / Rahmani / I liked him / I I I think that / I *thought* that he's a (xxx) of personality he's a / his point of views are based on / truth and ba based on uh / I don't know //

[63] R1: // facts

[64] R3: after these / I doubt about him I don't know why yes fact but

[65] R1: you changed your mind

[66] R3: (sure) yes

[67] R2: what's the purpose of immigration? why people nowadays go abroad
everyone you know you know uh //

[68] R1: // decided to go

[69] R2: yes decided to go to abroad

[70] R3: to abroad [(xxx)]

[71] R2: [what do you think] about *this?* (.)

[72] R3: it's related to [u::h]

[73] R1: [(xxx)] I think they are
 looking for / hum? / somewhere else / [for] some new / freedom / new [freedom] ~
 [why?] [what you]

[74] R2: ~ new en uh entertainment

[75] R1: I think it depends on your country (.)

[76] R3:

In Example 46, R3 in line [62] is talking about one of the shareholders of a bank in Iran and it appears that he comes short in finding a word in the middle of his utterance so he says "... his point of views are based on / truth and ba based on uh / I don't know". At this point another participant, R1, in order to assist him in finding the correct word, interrupts him in line [63] and suggests the word "facts". R3 acknowledges his friend's contribution and moves on in line [64] "yes fact but after these / I doubt about him...". At this juncture, when R3 says "I doubt about him", R1 in line [65], paraphrases him and says "you changed your mind". R1's sentence is immediately acknowledged by R3 in line [66] "yes (sure)". It is obvious that the turns are exchanged cooperatively and the participants show their support and solidarity in this extract.

In line [67], R2 feels that they have thoroughly dealt with the current topic *job* so he interrupts R3 to ask a question about immigration "what's the purpose of immigration? why people nowadays go abroad *everyone* you know you know uh". It is seen that he stammers at the end of his utterance. Since he quivers, R1 seizes the opportunity to interrupt him in line [68] and complete R2's utterance "decided

to go” which is first acknowledged and then completed by R2 in line [69] “yes decided to go abroad”. The interruptions between R2 and R1 are deliberate and occur cooperatively. R3, also shows his support and takes a turn in line [70] and repeats R2’s phrase “to abroad...”. In this instance, the participants tend to interrupt each other either to help one another in finding a word or acknowledge one another’s utterances. As such, the participants have adopted a cooperative attitude to show their solidarity.

There are some instances in Example 46, where the participants get competitive in possessing the floor. The evidence is when R3 in line [72] tries to answer R2’s question about immigration “it’s related to u::h”. At this point, R1 finds the opportunity right and interrupts R3 with an overlapping speech in line [73] to express his own point of view “(xxx) I think they are looking for / hum? / somewhere else ...”. Then R2, the participant who proposed the topic of ‘immigration’, raises his voice and makes two unsuccessful attempts in lines [74] to ask further questions. However, he is not permitted to utter more than some words because R1 does not want to relinquish his floor. Another participant, R3, who could not complete his sentence in the previous line [72], makes an interruption in line [76] and finally expresses his idea “I think it depends on your country”. It shows that the participants compete with each other to express their opinions and at the same time appear more powerful by possessing the floor.

As illustrated in analysis, the participants in this group interrupt each other for both cooperative and competitive purposes. However, it is observed that power is still practiced among them when they compete with each other to assert their own idea.

They also show their power when they do not want to relinquish their turn to the other interactants easily.

Example 47

[194] R1: here's your duty ((he laughs))
 [195] R2: to catch uh (.) [uh] to catch a visa / to ~
 [196] R1: [a girl]
 [197] R2: ~ catch a //
 [198] R1: // to catch a permanent [visa]
 [199] R2: [permanent] visa
 [200] R1: residency [(xxx)]
 [201] R2: [residency]
 and I think it's so important nowadays and because of the uh //
 [202] R1: // you
 [have to] prepare somewhere to escape
 [203] R2: [our] have um [um] / yes it's //
 [204] R1: [(xxx)] // I
 think that whenever the [situation] is going to break down ((he snaps)) / you ~
 [205] R3: [(xxx)]
 [206] R1: ~ escape [(xxx)]
 [207] R3: [I don't know] es / escape uh //
 [208] R2: // escape yes uh //
 [209] R3: // in fact
 does not exist / escape from what? / you are Iranian / you are [(xxx)] in ~
 [210] R1: [imagine
 imagine you]
 [211] R3: ~ Europe you're an Iranian //
 [212] R2: // but that's good
 [213] R3: you will be / you will
 be sad / if [(xxx)] things happen in Iran / you will be happy if something / ~
 [214] R1: [imagine]
 [215] R3: ~ your heart is here
 [216] R2: yes but uh if I / **if you live** / if you live if you live in Iran
 nowadays you should and you it's obligation that you are [(xxx)] to uh ~
 [217] (R1): [(xxx)]
 [218] R2: ~ here any uh many lies and it's / I think that [uh]
 [219] R1: [face] with many lies?
 [220] R2: and I
 think that it's (.) and you gonna be nervous
 [221] R1: imagine you were in this riot
 han? ((righ)) (.) you were out (.) suddenly a bullet comes and (.) shot you / han? /
 what would you do? (.)

In Example 47, the participants interrupt each other for variety of reasons. For instance, in line [195] R2 is struggling to find a word “to catch uh (.)”. R1 uses this pause as an opportunity to interrupt him in line [196] to suggest the word “girl”.

However, it appears that R2 was not looking for the word *girl*, so he continues "... to catch a visa / to catch a". At this juncture, R1 once again interrupts him in line [198] to repeat him and add the word *permanent* "to catch a permanent visa". This sentence is immediately acknowledged by R2 through an interruption in line [199] "**permanent** visa". The interruptions between R1 and R2 are cooperative since neither of them intends to possess the floor and the interrupters try to assist one another.

Nevertheless, in Example 47, there are some instances that the participants struggle for the floor. Such as in line [210] where R1 tries to express his idea and posses the floor so he butts into R3's utterance and says "**imagine imagine you**". However, despite his raised voice, R3 does not allow him to win the floor and moves on. R1 once again interrupts R3 unsuccessfully in line [214]. Finally, he waits until another speaker, R2, completes his sentence and then without fringing into the other speakers' turns, he takes a turn in line [221] and eventually expresses his idea "imagine you were in this riot ...". This demonstrates that R3 is a powerful interactant because he does not relinquish his floor easily. Moreover, R1 is considered powerful too since he does not give up his attempts and persistently makes interruption until his idea is fully expressed. As it is observed, in Example 47, the participants have been cooperative and competitive while power is clearly manifested as well.

Example 48

[599] R3: what did you say?
 [600] R2: Maryam Moghimi
 [601] R1: *o:::h*
 [602] R2: ok [what]
 [603] R3: [very] very very good

[604] R2: ok / [I / I / I saw /] [I saw her]
 [605] R1: [who's she? / who's she?]
 [606] R3: [(xxx)] (xxx)
 [607] R1: *who is she? ha?*
 [608] R2: one of uh //
 [609] R3: // she's a zero
 [610] R2: she / yeah ((everybody laughs))
 [611] R1: hero?
 [612] R2: hero / yeah

In Example 48, the participants are gossiping about their classmates. R2 wants to talk about a girl called 'Maryam' and that makes the other participants to get excited to know more about the girl. For instance, R1 in line [605] butts into R2's sentence to ask "who's she? / who's she?" and repeats that in line [607]. When R2 in line [608] tries to answer "one of uh", R3 interrupts him in line [609] and says "she's a zero" which is acknowledged and supported by R2 in line [610] and then all the participants laugh. In the following line [611], R1 sarcastically asks "hero?" which rhymes with *zero*. R2 in [612] acknowledges that "hero / yeah".

Example 48 provides the evidence that there is an excitement between the participants in Group 2 and that explains the presence of frequent interruptions. In this example, the turns are rapidly changed which can be a sign of the participants' interest and solidarity (Tannen, 1984; Zhao & Gantz, 2003). In this example, there is no indication of power demonstration or domination. What is observed is an excited contribution to the interaction.

Generally, it can be inferred that the participants in Group 2 have shown cooperative and competitive attitudes in their interaction. The interrupters show their solidarity through their interruptions. There are also some instances that power

is seen between the interactants where they hold on to their floor or struggle to win the floor.

4.4.3 Interruptions in Group 3

The interactants in Group 3 have made the overall number of 892 interruptions in their interaction.

Table 4.6 Distribution of Interruptions in Group 3

Types of Interruptions	Group 3	
	Numbers	Percentage
Smooth speaker-switch	410	45.9
Simple interruption	178	19.9
Butting-in interruption	149	16.7
Silent interruption	86	9.6
Overlap	69	7.7
Total	892	99.8

The most frequent type of interruption in Group 3 is Smooth speaker-switches (410) followed by Simple interruption (178), Butting-in interruption (149), silent interruption (86) and Overlaps (69).

Example 49

[621] L1: yeah /first day he wears tuxedo [and] [(xxx)]
 [622] L3: [tie]
 [623] L2: [oh my god] / yeah
 [624] L1: and I was /
 [I was just (xxx)] that that this (.)
 [625] L2: [we were laughing about it]
 [626] L3: yeah / he's wearing a black suit / tie up
 [627] L2: yeah
 [628] L3: and //
 [629] L1: // red tie
 [630] L3: yeah red tie with a [black shirt] / a black ~
 [631] L1: [(xxx)]

[632] L3: ~ shirt [and / and some] sometimes red (xxx) like his [tie]
 [633] L2: [(xxx)] ((he is mocking))
 [634] L1: [yeah]
 [635] L2: I go to him
 what's up mate / you make it / goo:::d / you're teaching (xxx) / yes / I am a teacher
 now / how do you do? ((imitating that guy's voice)) I was like oh / [fuck off] mate ~
 [(xxx)]
 [636] L1: ((he laughs))
 [637] L2: ~ / [I know you better than] [that]
 [638] L1: [(xxx)]
 [639] L3: [I'm] / I'm going to / uh / my work like this / or I know
 (.) ((he laughs))
 [640] L2: work is a different place actually
 [641] L3: yeah that's //
 [642] L1: // oh his [job is very]
 [643] L2: [he's just] *teaching* [there]
 [644] L3: [contracting] or something (.)

In Example 49, the participants are gossiping about one of their mutual male friends, Hadi, and criticizing his attire at work. They interrupt each other to jointly add something to the conversation. For example in line [621] L1 says that their friend "... first day he wears tuxedo and ..." and L3 in line [622] interrupts him to add "tie". Also, L2 in the following line [623] interrupts L2 to confirm them "*oh my god / yeah*". In line [626] when L3 adds "... he's wearing a black suit / tie up", L2 takes a turn in [627] to confirm him "yeah". At this point, L3 in line [628] intends to continue talking about Hadi's clothes but L1 interrupts him in line [629] in order to remind the other participants that Hadi was wearing "red tie" too. L3 in line [630] takes a turn, acknowledges his friend's contribution by mirroring and using the exact phrase in his sentence "yeah red tie with a black shirt / a black shirt". It seems that the participants do not see the interruptions as an intrusion but considers them as a cooperative act in contributing a word.

Further, in line [639], L3 in order to make another contribution in criticizing Hadi's attire, interrupts L2 and tries to mimic Hadi's voice "I'm / I'm going to / uh / my

turn in line [654] and adds “no / come on / poor his children / what / *what does he do?*”. Although L1 and L2 express conflicting ideas by interrupting one another, their interruptions cannot be judged as power demonstration. L2 in line [655], despite their different ideas, interrupts L1 to show his agreement by echoing L1’s phrase “yeah / poor his children yeah mate”. Moreover, in line [656] when L3 says that “that’s not important any more”, L2 interrupts him in [657] to show his support “that’s none of our business actually”.

It is observed that although the participants have different ideas, agreement is easily achieved at the end without any conflicts. This clearly demonstrates the cooperative attitude which exists between the interactants in Group 3 while interrupting one another.

Example 51

[665] L2: ... he don’t have any friends actually
 [666] L1: yeah / he don’t have *any* [friends] / **how** //
 [667] L2: [do] // does he have any friends?
 [668] L3: no (.)
 [669] L1: **some** / [sometimes]
 [670] L2: [(who are his)] close / close friends that //
 [671] L3: // **we** / *we were* like his /
 very close friends
 [672] L2: we were / we were his best [friends]
 [673] L3: [and]/ we are not / anymore / so //
 [674] L1: // **he has** / **but he has lots of best ex-friends**

Example 51 is another evidence of the participants’ cooperation. In this extract, the interactants are still talking about the unacceptable behavior of their mutual male friend when L2 in line concludes that [665] “he don’t have any friends actually”. L1 immediately supports him in the following line [666] and echoes his friend’s sentence “yeah / he don’t have *any* friends ...”. At this stage, L2 in line [667] attempts twice to interrupt in order to show his support but his first interruption was

not successful. However, he succeeds in his second attempt and wins the floor to emphasize and ask “does he have any friends?”. L3 immediately in line [668] replies “no”. L3 also in line [671] interrupts L2 to say that “we were / we were his best friends”. L2 interrupts L3 in the following line [672] to mirror and echo L3’s comment “we were / we were his best friends”. L3 then, interrupts him in [673] to add that “and / we are not / anymore”.

As can be seen, despite the frequent interruptions, the participants cooperate with each other to have a friendly conversation and create solidarity. They interrupt each other to show their support by mirroring and echoing one another’s statements which in turn shows their solidarity (Coates, 1996).

In general, it is perceived that all three interactants in Group 3 have actively adopted a cooperative style in interrupting each other. There are hardly traces of power play or competition in their interruptions. They try to build on each other’s utterance by interrupting one another in order to enhance their solidarity and create a friendly conversation.

4.4.4 Interruptions in Group 4

The participants in Group 4 interrupt each other for 730 times in total.

Table 4.7 Distribution of Interruptions in Group 4

Types of Interruptions	Group 4	
	Numbers	Percentage
Smooth speaker-switch	364	49.8
Simple interruption	125	17.1
Butting-in interruption	104	14.2
Silent interruption	95	13.01

Overlap	42	5.7
Total	730	99.8

As seen in Table 4.7, smooth speaker-switches have been used more than the other types of interruption (364). After that, simple interruptions (125), butting-in interruptions (104), silent interruptions (95) and overlaps (42) are followed respectively.

Example 52

- [97] K1: ... it's very good / it's *awesome* / but / uh / I think that the / the personality that play (xxx) in the movie is very good for example I don't know what's the name of Alfredo in movie / but Alfredo is really unbelievable for the first time that I saw Cinema Paradiso I / uh / I think it's really my uncle / you know
- [98] K3: the old man?
- [99] K1: yeah / yes the old man / the / uh / the *blind* man (.) because in the middle of the movie / the cinema is / uh / *burning* (.)
- [100] K2: was burning
- [101] K1: was burning and / but I think it's a / a really / uh / *good* movie for *me* because / uh / I'm really related to the movie / I think that / uh / I'm one of the men that is playing in the movie you know and / uh uh / Tornatore its director / of the / this movie has another movie Star Maker / the / the place of the movie is like Cinema Paradiso / you saw the Star Maker?
- [102] K3: yeah
- [103] K1: and the //
- [104] K3: // (xxx location) (.) [it has]
- [105] K1: [no no no] / it's the time of the movie I think
- [106] K3: uhuh
- [107] K1: it's really a good doc / doctor Mareli / doctor Mareli and I / it's really good / I think Tornatore uh / I I think until now uh / I liked Roman Polanski because of Bitter Moon and [some] thing like ~ [yeah]
- [108] K2: [yeah]
- [109] K1: ~ that but now I think / uh / Tornatore is one of my ((he giggles)) close friends you know / because I think it's //
- [110] K2: // you can make a good relation with him
- [111] K1: yes / it's really good ...

The topic of conversation in Example 52 is about the movie, *Cinema Paradiso*. In line [99] K1 describes a scene from the movie and says “ ... in the middle of the

movie / the cinema is / uh / *burning* (.)". K2 in line [100] takes a turn to correct his friend "was burning" and K1 in the following line [101] acknowledges that and moves on. It shows that the turns between the participants are changed smoothly. In line [103], K1 tries to add more about the movie *Cinema Paradiso* "and the" but he is not allowed to proceed further because K3, assuming that K1 wants to talk about the location of the movie, interrupts him in line [104] to complete his sentence "(xxx location) (.) it has". However, it appears that K1 did not want to talk about the location of the movie so he interrupts K3 in [105] and says "no no no / it's the time of the movie I think" and K1 interrupts him in [106] to show his support and understanding "uhum". Despite the interruptions, it seems that none of the participants try to win the floor.

In line [107], when K1 is talking about his favorite director, *Tornatore*, and his movies, K2 in [108] butts into his sentence to show his support "yeah". Also, in line [109] when K1 says that he thinks that the director, *Tornatore*, is like his close friend because of his movies, K2 interrupts him in the middle of his utterance and helps him paraphrase "you can make a good relation with him" which is acknowledged by K1 in line [111] "yes / it's really good ...".

In this example, there is no indication of power play between the participants. They do not struggle for turns and they do not strive to hold the floor. They interrupt each other to confirm one another's statements or assist to complete utterances. It appears that the participants attempt to create a friendly interaction by jointly interrupt each other to build on each other's contribution.

Example 53

- [454] K3: ... **I wanna add something else** / sorry I wouldn't speak in five minutes I promise ((he chuckles)) but / [when somebody]
[455] K1: [it's a good thing] / yes it's a [good thing] ((he laughs))
[456] K3: [when I / when I] some / when I see / when I see / some male persons / having *a lots and a lots* of / female friends / even more than his male friends
[457] K2: yeah
[458] K3: I figure out two things / I have two kinds of feeling
[459] K2: **he [is] motivated** to learn English
[460] K3: [one] no no no / no no / he has a lots of female friends / opinion one / he has no cock / he has no penis sorry / because there is no lady in the room I / I dare myself to ((he giggles)) speak so nasty / the *second* opinion is //
[461] K2: //he / he has [something] like haste khorma ((date's seed))
[462] K3: [he's not] no / he is not / he is not a straight person you know / maybe he has other ways to go / (business) ((he chuckles)) *usually* we don't have female friends (.) [(that)]
[474] K3: **[but not]**
physically

In Example 53, K3 in line [454] comforts the others and announces that after saying his last point, he would not speak for 5 minutes. Although at this stage, K3 does not apologize directly for possessing the floor too much; his concern for his friends' speech right can be categorized as a cooperative act. After this, K3 in line [456] continues and tries to tease another participant's sexuality, K1, so he starts by saying that "...when I see / some male persons / having *a lots and a lots* of / female friends / even more than his male friends". At this point K2 interrupts him in line [457] to show him that he is attentive "yeah". K3 after receiving the supportive feedback proceeds in line [558] "I figure out two things / I have two kinds of feeling". K2, assuming that K3's statement is complete, abruptly takes a turn in line [459], raises his voice and tries to complete K3's sentence "**he is motivated** to learn English". This interruption is considered a cooperative attempt made by K2 in order to add on to the content. K3 in line [460], interrupts K2 twice until he finally manages to convey his intended meaning "... opinion one / he has no cock / he has

no penis sorry / because there is no lady in the room I / I dare myself to ((he giggles)) speak so nasty / the *second* opinion is”. At the time that K3 intends to present the second opinion, K2 once again interrupts him in line [461] to suggest his opinion and complete K3’s sentence “he / he has something like haste khorma ((date’s seed))”. Once again K3 interrupts K2 twice in line [462] to present his second opinion “no / he is not / he is not a straight person you know...”.

The analysis in this example demonstrates that the interactants do not consider interruptions as an invasion into their speech. Conversely, they consider it a cooperative act of sharing ideas because despite the competition observed between K2 and K3 to take a turn, there is no power struggle between them. They simply interrupt each other to cooperate and add to the conversation.

Generally, it appears that the participants in Group 4 have made both cooperative and competitive interruptions to show their solidarity. Traces of power and dominance are not observed among the interruptions that the participants in Group 4 make. The interactants either interrupt to add to the conversation or confirm, support and complete each other in order to jointly create a friendly interaction. Since there is no bid for the floor or fight for the turns, it is concluded that solidarity is achieved via their interruptions.

4.4.5 Summary

The interruptions that the participants in Groups 3 and 4 make are more cooperative. They interrupt in order to support each other or echo one another’s utterances. Competition is also observed when they interrupt; however, their

interruptions can be explained by the excitement which exists between the interactants to add something to the discussion. There is no instance to show intrusive interruptions. The participants are aware of each other's right of speech and that is the reason their interruptions are cooperative.

The interruptions among the participants in Groups 1 and 2 are also cooperative since there are many occasions where they interrupt to help one another to find a word or phrase and add to the discussion. There are, some instances where the participants in Group 2 compete and interrupt to build on each other's utterances and ultimately show their support and create a friendly atmosphere. However, the interactants in Groups 1 and 2 also vie for the floor to convey their intended meanings. They try to control the conversation via the interruptions they frequently make. The participants competitively interrupt their co-participants so as to assert their ideas and appear more powerful.

4.5 Epistemic Modality

Analysis of the data reveals that the participants in this study use the epistemic modal items in their interactions such as you *know*, *I think*, *like*, *just*, *maybe* and *I mean*. Frequency counts of these six items are shown in Table 4.8 and the last column of the table represents the total amount of epistemic modal items used by each group.

Table 4.8 Distribution of Epistemic Modal Items and Hedges in Groups 1 to 4

Epistemic Modal Items	You know	I think	like	Just	Maybe	I mean	Total
Group 1	7	85	2	8	4	8	114
Group 2	19	76	3	6	15	2	121
Group 3	220	10	33	21	0	2	286

Group 4	46	34	16	17	6	0	119
Total	292	205	54	52	25	12	640

As demonstrated in Table 4.8 epistemic modal forms are used for 640 times in this study. Amongst the four groups, Group 3 uses epistemic modal items and hedges much more than the other groups at 286 times, preferring the item *you know*, while Group 1 uses these items at the lowest rate, 114 times, preferring the item *I think*. It also appears that *you know* is used more than the other items in this study while *I mean* is the least frequent item.

4.5.1 Epistemic Modality in Group 1

Table 4.9 shows that the participants in Group 1 have used epistemic modal items for 114 times.

Table 4.9 Distribution of Epistemic Modal Items and Hedges in Group 1

Epistemic Modal Items	I think	I mean	Just	You know	Maybe	like	Total
Group 1	85	8	8	7	4	2	114

The most frequent item is *I think* (85), while the other items are used less than 10 times each. The item *like* is the least frequent item since it is used for only two times. The following examples elaborate the manners in which these items are used in interaction.

Example 54

- [322] N2: ... let's talk about education educational system / in Iran (.) do you believe it's good?(.)
...
- [336] N1: ... they think / it it gives them some prestige or something like that (.)
[337] N2: yes (.)
somehow yes (.) but u:::h I think you / didn't get my point (.) I::: (.) mean that we / we speak about the quality of the educational system in my country Iran (.)
u:::t //
- [338] N1:
[339] N2: // I think [it's *so ridiculous*]
[340] N3: [I think / uh /] **I think** in [another] / country is like ~
[341] N2: [I think]
[342] N3: ~ Iran (.)
[343] N2: no / [never]and ever / I think it's the mockery of educational ~
[344] N3: [uh / we]
[345] N2: ~ system (.) I think / for exa *it's not practical* / it's only *theoretical* (.)

In Example 54, the participants are talking about *education*, which is proposed by N2 in line [322] “... let's talk about education educational system ...”. Nevertheless, it seems that N1 has miscomprehended the topic because he tries to connect the previous discussion which was about *smoking* to *education* and in line [336] he says that the students believe that smoking “... gives them some prestige or something like that”. N2 tries to tell N1 that this is not what he meant so in line [337] he hedges his sentence “...but u:::h I think you / didn't get my point...”. N2 uses *I think* when he wants to pinpoint N1's misunderstanding in order to avoid any direct confrontation. In other words, N2 hedges his statement to preserves and protect his friend's face by not offending him. This is an indication of N2's cooperative attitude. Moreover, N2 uses epistemic modality to guard his own face in case his topic is not agreed upon and taken up by the other participants.

There are also some other instances of epistemic modality in Example 54, like in line [339] when N2 hedges his idea about the educational system “I think it's *so ridiculous*”. He uses *I think* to attenuate the force of the statement ‘so ridiculous’.

N2 also protects his face by using *I think* because there is a risk that his opinion is not accepted by the other participants and when he hedges his statement, the risk is lessened.

Further, in line [340], N3 attempts to state his own idea about education in Iran and the other countries so hedges twice in order to protect his face in case his idea is not accepted by the other participants “I think / uh / **I think** in another / country is like Iran”. Afterwards, another speaker, N2, intends to express his opinion so he makes an unsuccessful attempt in [341] by using *I think* to start a line. Finally, he gets to express his disagreement in lines [343] and [345] “no / never and ever / I think it’s the mockery of educational system (.) I think / for exa *it’s not practical* / it’s only *theoretical*”. N2 makes use of *I think* twice in order to decrease the intensity of the negation he has used in the beginning of his statement “no / never and ever”. Moreover, he does not intend to impose his idea on the other participants that is the reason he uses the item *I think* which shows his care and cooperation towards the other participants’ right to agree or reject his opinion.

Example 55

[182] N2: ... I started smoking / [uh since] I was u::h as a / high school student [u::h] ~
 [183] N1: [started smoking] [uhum]
 [184] N2: ~ at the age of I think *sixteen* (.) uh and / I think it was my *biggest* u::h / u::h (.)
 thing that I I shouldn’t do (.)

In Example 55, N2 talks about the time he started smoking and in line [182] using *I think* as a tentative device because he is not sure about the exact age he started smoking “...at the age of I think *sixteen*...”. In line [184], he attempts to reveal his feeling about his smoking so he uses *I think* once again in order to mitigate the

force of his statement and ultimately preserves his face "...I think it was my *biggest* u:::h / u:::h (.) thing that I I shouldn't do". N2 tries to show his regret by self disclosing that it was like his biggest mistake that is why he uses the epistemic modal item *I think* to attenuate the sensitiveness of the information he has shared with his friends.

Example 56

[329] N1: yeah this is the connection between / [smoking and] educational system
 [330] N3: [because I think]
 because I think uh / they uh think smoking cigarettes uh (.) is like uh I'll / in a /
 like uh / students (.) more uh //
 [331] N1: // you mean they they show themselves as a
 grown //

In Example 56, the participants talk about the connection between educational system and smoking. In line [330], N3 wants to express his opinion but since he does not know how to convey his meaning he uses epistemic modal items 4 times in order to search for a word "because I think ... because I think uh / they uh think smoking cigarettes uh (.) is like uh I'll / in a / like uh / students (.) more uh". The use of 'uh' for 6 times also reinforces the fact that N3 does not know how to put his idea into words. At this stage, N1 interrupts him in [331] and helps him to express his opinion "you mean they they show themselves ...". As it is apparent, epistemic modal items are used in this example as fillers to assist N1 find the suitable words to articulate his opinion.

It is clear that the epistemic modal forms are used by the participants in Group 1 in order to protect both the speaker and the addressee's face and this is an indication of their solidarity because they care about the other participants as well. They use

these items at the times when they want to discuss over things and also when they want to express their disagreement or self- disclose. The participants use them in order to weaken the intensity of their propositions. There are also some instances where the participants in Group 1 use epistemic modal items when they come short in words and they struggle to convey their intended meaning. As a result, it can be inferred that the participants in Group 1 use epistemic modality in order to enhance their solidarity.

4.5.2 Epistemic Modality in Group 2

In Group 2, as stipulated in Table 4.10, there are 121 occurrences of epistemic modal items.

Table 4.10 Distribution of Epistemic Modal Items and Hedges in Group 2

Epistemic Modal Items	I think	You know	Maybe	Just	like	I mean	Total
Group 2	76	19	15	6	3	2	121

The epistemic modal item, *I think*, is the most common form (76) amongst the other items. It seems that *I mean* and *like* are not so popular among the participants as they have been used only 2 and 3 times by the participants in this group respectively.

Example 57

[121] R1: I think some [people] (xxx) who were going abroad / for example Australia ~
 [122] R3: [this]

[123] R1: ~ and they regret from what they did / it's because of they're wasting time they're wasting their time there and they don't have any kind of ((someone laughs)) they they don't have any kind of uh prospect uh action prospective action and / they are maybe / they waste their their time on uh / for example entertaining / or having holiday / maybe something / the uh people who are uh working there I think they uh are satisfied by that and their living / their uh the way of their living

In Example 57, R1 compares the people who have immigrated to other countries and work there with the people who live and work in Iran. When R1 wants to exemplify the situation of the immigrants, he uses epistemic modal items to tone down his statements. For instance in line [121], R1 hedges when he wants to make an assertion “I think some people (xxx) who were going abroad / for example Australia and they regret from what they did...”. Also in line [123] he uses *I think* when he wants to make another assertion “... people who are uh working there I think they uh are satisfied ...”. It appears that R1 hedges his statement in order to lessen its assertiveness. He also tries to save his face in case the other participants disagree with him. Meanwhile, he has shown his concern for the other participants by not imposing his ideas on them.

Example 57 demonstrates that the current speaker, R1, uses many epistemic modal items wherever he intends to convey his own personal idea. It is assumed that the speaker uses epistemic modal items so as to reduce the strength of his statements and also to protect his face, in case his opinions are not accepted by the others participants. By doing so, he appears to be unassertive and less forceful. While at the same time, he protects the addressees' face by not presupposing their immediate agreement which in turn is a sign of the speaker's cooperative attitude in the interaction.

Example 58

[456] R2: I think she's *he* ((everybody laughs))
[457] R1: maybe she's a guy / ok you have a bad

...

[553] R2: I think that you and Mohammad uh / they could be a good couple

...

[794] R1: and I think she was so uh / friendly uh / she was *so::: hot / ho hot / hot*

In Example 58, line [456] R2 makes a very sensitive assumption about a girl that all the participants know. R2 declares that the girl is a *she-male* and in order to tone down the sensitivity of the assertion, he hedges “I think she’s *he*”. Another speaker, R1 confirms him in line [457] by hedging his statement “maybe she’s a guy ...”. Both R2 and R1 use epistemic modal items to neutralize and sugar-coat the offensive assumptions that they have made about their mutual female friend.

In line [553], R2 wants to make a very sensitive comment about R3’s masculinity and since his claim can be offensive and overwhelming, he uses *I think* in the beginning of his sentence to decrease its tone “I think that you and Mohammad uh / they could be a good couple”. R2 in this extract makes a comment that R3 is not a straight person and he can couple up well with another male friend that they all know. The epistemic item *I think* plays the role of decreasing the sensitivity of R2’s sexist exclamation about R3. He has actually used epistemic modal item to neutralize the effect of his challenging comment about his friend’s masculinity.

Further, in line [794], R1 wants to make a positive statement about another mutual female friend and so he hedges “... I think she was so uh / friendly uh / she was

so::: *hot / ho hot / hot*". R1 uses *I think* before he makes any comments about the intended girl in order to emphasize two points. First, he uses epistemic modality to highlight his own personal idea. Moreover, the use of epistemic modality implies that nobody else is obliged to agree with him. In this case, he has saved his own face and the addressees' face concurrently.

Example 59

[879] R1: *poach egg? / boil it no? / they don't say poach it / we can we can ask her*
 [880] R2: *oke:::y*
 [881] R1: *we can ask her and I think I think she / she'd approve me (.) you know she'd confirm me affirmed me / affirmation*

In Example 59, the participants are looking for a word and they wonder if the verb *boil* is the appropriate word in their utterance or *poach*. R1 in line [879] recommends the word *boil* and then suggests asking one of their female friends whose knowledge of English is much better than them. Nevertheless, in line [881] he concludes by saying that "... I think I think she / she'd approve me (.) you know she'd confirm me...". In this instance, R1 uses *I think* twice and *you know* once so as to attenuate the strength of the self confidence he has already shown when he said that their female friend would confirm his suggested word. In fact, he tones his statements down and protects his face in case he is incorrect in making such a proposition. At the same time, he is less assertive with his utterance. R1 demonstrates that he is attentive and cooperative towards the other participants by not being so persuasive although the assertion that he has made about himself is powerful on its own.

The manners in which the epistemic modal items and hedges are used in Group 2 reveal that when the topic is sensitive the use of epistemic modal items increases in order to reduce and soften the tone of the assertions they have made about other people or themselves. Overall, the data suggests that the participants in Group 2 follow a cooperative manner since they use epistemic modality for respecting and saving their own face and face of others in the group. In so doing, they lessen the force of their ideas and ultimately signify their cooperative attitude in not being so imposing.

4.5.3 Epistemic Modality in Group 3

The frequency counts of epistemic modal items in Group 3 show that the participants use these items for 286 times in their conversation.

Table 4.11 Distribution of Epistemic Modal Items and Hedges in Group 3

Epistemic Modal Items	You know	like	Just	I think	I mean	Maybe	Total
Group 3	220	33	21	10	2	0	286

It is found that more than two thirds of the total number of epistemic modal items represents the item *you know* (220) times which is very high compared to the other items. For instance, *like* is the second favorable item (33) while *maybe* is not used at all.

Example 60

[59] L2: he even cannot teach you know / he he cannot teach / I guarantee that

[60] L1: yeah

[61] L2: he cannot teach / he he his talking is very bad / he his accent is very bad actually
it's awful / and the //

[62] L1: // I think he is / [he is (xxx)]

[63] L2: **[I'm not the guy to judge]** you know /
[but everybody] says that he is smart but / you know it's not enough for ~

[64] L3: [he is smart]

[65] L2: ~ teaching

[66] L1: yeah / but he *uses* his brain yeah you know / wrong way ((L3
laughs))

[67] L2: yeah

[68] L1: he he can use it in better ways you know

[69] L3: yes

In Example 60, there are six epistemic modal items used by the participants. In this extract, the interactants are gossiping and criticizing the teaching ability of one of their mutual male friend, Hadi. L2 in line [59] hedges his statement to say that “he even cannot teach you know...”. Another instance of the use of epistemic modality is in line [63] when L2 hedges “**I'm not the guy to judge** you know / but everybody says that he is smart but / you know it's not enough for teaching”. L2 starts his line with “I'm not the guy to judge” followed by the epistemic item *you know* in order to show his humbleness and also to preserve his face. Then, once again he uses *you know* before his actual judgment “you know it's not enough for teaching”. Since L2 is gossiping about another person, he attenuates the force of his sensitive statements via epistemic modality.

Further, L1 in line [68] also states that their mutual friend, Hadi, can make use of his talent better in other activities than in teaching “he he can use it in better ways you know”. The epistemic modal item *you know* at the end of his utterance shows that he does not want to impose his idea on others. This demonstrates that when the participants talk about sensitive topics such as gossiping about someone's

professional abilities, they hedge their statements to attenuate the force and preserve the solidarity among them.

Example 61

[531] L2: ... you know at the moment that / the woman coming to the class and / we were like / ok / hold on ((L1 and L2 laugh)) / this is a very bad accent / she has a very bad accent mate

Example 61 displays how epistemic modal items assist the speaker to convey his ideas. In line [531], L2 gossips about one of their mutual female teachers and criticizes her accent. He starts by hedging his statement "... you know at the moment that / the woman coming to the class...". He uses *you know* in order to reduce the risk of being assertive and harsh on the judgmental comments he makes. Further, he makes use of *like* as a quotation "...we were like / ok / hold on ((L1 and L2 laugh)) / this is a very bad accent...". L2 uses *like* to directly say what he had uttered at the time of event. L2 hedges his statement because he wants to tone down the gossip he is sharing with his friends.

In summary, the manners in which the participants use epistemic modal items in Group 3 suggests that the cooperation is valued greatly among the interactants in this group. They use epistemic modal items to decrease the force of the utterances they make when the topic is sensitive (Coates, 1987, 2004) like the times when they gossip about other people. The use of epistemic modal items in Group 3 reinforces their solidarity.

4.5.4 Epistemic Modality in Group 4

A total number of 119 epistemic modal items is used by the interactants in Group 4.

Table 4.12 Distribution of Epistemic Modal Items and Hedges in Group 4

Epistemic Modal Items	You know	I think	Just	like	Maybe	I mean	Total
Group 4	46	34	17	16	6	0	119

As displayed in Table 4.12, the most common epistemic modal item among Group 4 is *you know* (46) and the least common item is *maybe* (6). The only item which is not used by the interactants in this group is *I mean*.

Example 62

- [101] K1: was burning and / but I think it's a / a really / uh / *good* movie for *me* because / uh / I'm really related to the movie / I think that / uh / I'm one of the men that is playing in the movie you know and / uh uh / Tornatore its director / of the / this movie has another movie Star Maker / the / the place of the movie is like Cinema Paradiso / you saw the Star Maker?
- [102] K3: yeah
- [103] K1: and the //
- [104] K3: // (xxx location)
- (.) [it has]
- [105] K1: [no no no] / it's the time of the movie I think
- [106] K3: uhum
- [107] K1: it's really a good doc / doctor Mareli / doctor Mareli and I / it's really good / I think Tornatore uh / I I think until now uh / I liked Roman Polanski because of Bitter Moon and [some] thing like that but now I think / uh / Tornatore is one of my((he giggles))~
- [108] K2: [yeah]
- [109] K1: ~ close friends you know / because I think it's //
- [110] K2: // you can make a good relation with him

In Example 62, the participants are talking about *Cinema Paradiso*. In line [101] K1 wants to say that the movie is really good so he hedges "...I think it's a / a really / uh / *good* movie for *me*...". He hedges his personal idea about the movie and emphasizes on the word *for me* to demonstrate that it is his own idea and no one else is obliged to agree with him. In other words, he tries to protect his own and

[257] K3: // he doesn't get me (.) ((K1 and K3 laugh))
 [258] K1: I didn't hear you
 [259] K3: I said
 the best part / or even the only nice part I have seen in Malena //
 [260] K1: // [(xxx)]
 [261] K3: [is] her fu::ll
 legs ((K1 laughs)) (.) the small boys *watching* //
 [262] K1: // you know [the masturbation ~
 [263] K3: [and the / no no / I
 don't like / I don't even] like the word / but I considered myself as the small boy ~
 [264] K1: ~ of the child when the father comes]
 [265] K3: ~ watching her / kind of half naked //
 [266] K1: // but I **think** / uh / [Monica Bellucci]

In Example 63, K3 gives his opinion about a part of the movie *Malena*. As such, in line [253] he says “**you know the best part I liked in** / is her legs you know ...”. He hedges his statement at the beginning and the end of his utterance, in order to show his own idea. He also tries to emphasize that no one is obliged to agree with him. Moreover, he uses epistemic modality to reduce the sensitivity of the statement he makes about a woman's legs in the movie which was the best part according to him.

Another example of epistemic modality is in line [256] where K1 wants to state his own opinion about the same movie *Malena*. He hedges his utterance and says “... in my ideas is very much / you know that / that you know we have / uh / we have a”. It seems that K1 intends to express a very sensitive point and apparently he does not know how to put it into words, that is the reason his utterance is not comprehensible. In lines [262] and [264], he finally gets to express his intended point and hedges “you know the masturbation of the child when the father comes”. K1 talks about masturbation which is very sensitive for men to talk about it. That is the reason K1 uses a lot of epistemic modal items to reduce the sensitiveness of his statement. Talking about masturbation decreases men's masculinity since it does not show their sexual power. As such, K1 uses epistemic modality to eradicate the

weak perception attached to the concept of masturbation. At the same time, K1 saves his face because he does not talk about it directly.

Generally, the participants in Group 4 use epistemic modal items and hedges when the topic is sensitive or there is a self-disclosure involved. The epistemic modal items assist them to protect their own face and the addressees' face to minimize the conflict or disagreement in which solidarity is ultimately achieved.

4.5.5 Summary

It appears that epistemic modality is used by all the participants in all Groups to enhance solidarity. The participants use epistemic modal items in order to preserve their own face and the face of others. They also avoid being assertive in order to support the other participants' opinions. In addition, they use epistemic modality to gossip and discuss sensitive or personal topics.

Moreover, since the participants in Group 3 use these items at a much higher rate than the other groups (see Table 4.8), it is inferred that they have shown more solidarity than the other groups. The interactants in Group 1 have used it at the lowest rate and they sometimes use epistemic modal items as fillers when they come short in words. It is concluded that although all the groups use epistemic modality to enhance their solidarity, the participants in Group 3 have shown more solidarity compared to the other groups by employing these items at the highest rate.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION AND FINDINGS

5.0 Introduction

This chapter concludes with the summary of the findings on the concept of gossip with the reference to the language that Iranian male interactants use to practice power and solidarity. The data analysis in the previous chapter proposes that the participants show their power and solidarity in their gossip through various linguistic features in different degrees. The implications of this study and a few recommendations for future studies are also presented at the end of the chapter.

5.1 Gossip among Iranian Men

Iranian male interactants in this study, just like women, get engaged in friendly, informal talk with their friends. They converse and exchange information in different ranges of topic to have an amicable, enjoyable conversation.

The analysis shows that Iranian men gossip. It is evident in their conversations which are more inclined to being private. For instance, they talk about their personal experiences or people's lives rather than public, general topics. The information they share is very trivial and the focus is more into chatting about familiar things and people. Moreover, it is evident that the participants enjoy this trivial exchange of talk because laughter is involved as well. The participants in Group 3, even openly confess to the fact that they gossip and that they enjoy doing it. Yet, at the same time they deny and condemn it (see Example 12). As such, it

can be concluded that Iranian men in this study gossip. However, different groups do this in different degrees and levels. For instance, Group 1's gossip is different from Group 3's. Group 1 includes their own personal examples into the discussions while Group 3 includes the private lives of other people into their gossip.

The findings of the study also reveal that the topics that Iranian men gossip about vary from one group to another (see Table 4.1). However, what is obvious is that the participants in each group select topics based on their own interest. It is observed that many of the topics that they gossip about are neutral in a sense that they can be selected and discussed by both genders such as *education, immigration, movies, job, behavior, English language, hobby* and *social rights*. It is true that there are some masculine topics discussed by some of the groups such as *smoking* and *petrol* in Group 1 or *business* and *hand phones* in Group 3, and *sexuality* in Groups 2 and 4. However, the participants include some intimate private elements such as personal anecdotes into these masculine topics which in turn it lessens their masculine nature. For example, when they talk about *smoking* and *business*, they add their personal experiences and include the experiences of other people as well in order to make the topic more personal and intimate.

Furthermore, there are many instances where the participants gossip about the people that they are all familiar with. For instance, if a person out of their group community joins them, he might not be able to enjoy their topics because he is not familiar with the people and things that they are gossiping about. Talking about familiar things and people is an indication of their collaborative talk (Cameron, 2011). However, these in-group private references are only observed among the

participants in Groups 2, 3 and 4 since they share mutual friends and memories. There is no indication of any of these private in-group topics discussed by the participants in Group 1. Although the participants in Group 1 include their personal experiences into the topics, they do not have any memories or any friends in common to gossip about. This is mainly due to the fact that the participants in Group 1 are only classmates and their friendship is limited to the classroom interaction (see Table 3.1) and naturally they have not had the opportunity to have any shared common grounds.

The analysis of the topics in this study reveals that the interactions among the participants in Groups 2, 3 and 4 contain all the characteristics of gossip (see Section 2.4). Their topics are mainly private in nature, the information exchanged is trivial but important for the interactants. It is enjoyed by everyone and their topics do not trigger much interest for the people out of their group community. It appears that they have established in-group solidarity in their interaction.

Conversely, the topics that the participants in Group 1 use, lack in-group mutual references. Although the conversation between the participants in Group 1 can be considered gossip, it does not share all the characteristics of gossip. It can be argued that the participants in Group 1, due to being only classmates, are not able to create an intimate environment. Pilkington (1998) highlights that gossip only occurs among friends and intimates.

5.2 Functions of Gossip among Iranian Men

The Iranian male interactants in this study gossip for various reasons. It is also inferred that the purpose of gossip can vary from one group to another or it can be the same in all the groups.

The participants in this study gossip in order to create and have a friendly, enjoyable conversation. The participants laugh a lot and exchange jokes when they gossip. There is also a cooperative manner exhibited among the interactants. They show their cooperation by supporting one another's sentence or adding on to the gossip. They also complete each other's sentence and use supportive feedback when they are involved in gossip.

The participants in Groups 3 and 4 have a lot of in-group references to make their gossip so private and personal which invites in-group solidarity into their interaction (Baxter & Wallace, 2009). While on the other hand, the participants in Group 1 do not talk about any mutual in-group references. That is the reason their in-group solidarity is different from the other groups in a sense that the participants in Group 1 are less intimate.

It appears that gossip serves another function among men which is different from women's gossip and that is the participants' tendency to reaffirm their masculinity over and over when they gossip. This function is exclusively for men because they want to appear macho and powerful when they boast about themselves like in Groups 1 (see Example 1) and their belongings like in Group 4 (see Example 13). They also criticize the other men's sexuality in order to demonstrate themselves to be more masculine (see Example 9). Moreover, in order to appear more masculine

and heterosexual, they jokingly accuse their friends of being gay and apparently less masculine (see Example 16). It can be concluded that men need to reaffirm their heterosexuality and manly behavior in their masculine world and gossiping about the other men gives them the opportunity to satisfy this ego. They reconstruct their heterosexual masculinity through the cooperative act of gossip (see Section 2.6).

Moreover, it is observed that since achievements and success are important to men (see Section 2.11.3), they gossip about those who are successful in different aspects of life while they are not as victorious as them. Therefore, they gossip about them and criticize them in order to degrade them and ultimately justify their own shortcomings. Gossip in this regard helps men to create a cooperative bond where the other people's success is considered trivial or failure. When the interactants gossip critically about their friends' achievements there is a very cooperative trend observed among them. They all cooperate with each other to belittle that particular person in order to feel good about themselves. If one of the participants deviates from this cooperative, scandalized trend, they turn against him (see Example 21). It shows that gossip invites cooperation.

The participants in Groups 2, 3 and 4 gossip about and criticize the behavior of other people. In doing so, they make judgments about their characters, their social and personal behaviors and even their appearances. They intend to emphasize their difference from those people and their behavior (Coates, 2003) as evident in Example 10. In effect, the participants in Groups 2, 3 and 4 intend to show their friends' inappropriate manners and attitudes and at the same time proclaim their

distinction from those people and their characters. As such, they cooperatively create and maintain a positive image of themselves which once again satisfies their masculine egoism. Moreover, most of the criticism and gossip are agreed and cooperated upon by all the participants. It is observed that gossip has provided the participants the opportunity to strengthen their in-group solidarity.

It is observed that the participants in Groups 2 and 3 mainly gossip about other people. Although they seem very intimate with each other, they do not include themselves or their personal experiences to the gossip. It seems that they gossip about other people to exclude their own personal life. Moreover, since sharing personal life experiences is a characteristic of women's talk, excluding private experiences gives the male interactants in this study the opportunity to preserve their masculinity.

The findings also give evidence that laughter is integrated with men's gossip in this study. Laughter is frequently heard after a comment or a joke or even a tease in order to show the joy that the interactants feel. In addition, laughter neutralizes the formality and seriousness of the discussion and in that case the friendly atmosphere is maintained and preserved and no one gets offended. The entertaining aspect of gossip is also admitted directly by the participants in Group 3. They confess to the notion that they get pleasure from gossip and they frankly say "gossip is fun" and then laughter is accompanied (see Example 12, line [404]). This reinforces the idea that entertainment is another function that Iranian male participants try to achieve when they gossip.

It is concluded that gossip is multifunctional in this study. Iranian men gossip in order to strengthen their friendship and establish their in-group solidarity. They also gossip in order to have a good time with their friends. While at the same time, they are able to satisfy their ego when they brag and boast about themselves. They also try to reaffirm their heterosexual masculinity by gossiping about the other men's sexuality. As such, it can be interpreted that there is an embedded masculinity within their gossip. In other words, the purpose of gossip for the Iranian men in this study is constructing and strengthening their sexuality and power through friendship and cooperation.

5.3 The Distribution of Power and Solidarity in Iranian Men Interaction

Basically the data analysis in the present study reveals that the Iranian male interactants practice both power and solidarity in their speech to various extents. The manners in which the linguistic features are used demonstrate the degree that the participants exert power and practice solidarity.

The topics discussed by the interactants in this study reveal that they have a tendency towards showing their intimacy and enhancing solidarity. The participants – except the participants in Group 1- try to talk about the topics which are familiar to all the participants to create in-group solidarity. In other words, they want to privatize their friendship into their own confinement. This is also a clear indication of their friendship bonds. On the other hand, there are some topics that the participants want to appear powerful and masculine such as *smoking* and *business* (see Table 4.1). As such, the topics discussed by the participants demonstrate their

tendency to enhance their solidarity while the traces of power and masculinity are observed.

In examining the relationship between topic development and the notions of power and solidarity, the findings disclose that the participants develop the topics cooperatively most of the time. They collaboratively confirm their friends' ideas by giving minimal responses and contributing ideas to the discussion. This clearly indicates that the cooperation exists between the participants. On the other hand, there are some instances where the participants develop a topic by arguing, discussing or challenging each other's opinions. These instances, however, can be concluded as the participants' excitement to contribute and develop the topics competitively even though they argue and disagree. Further, in some instances, the arguments and disagreement can be interpreted as the interactants' tendency to show power which is observed among the participants in Group 2 (see Example 22).

It is also observed that there is a close connection between the kind of topic and how it is developed. It is inferred that when a topic is interesting for the participants in this study, they become competitive and try to add comments and build on each other's contributions. They sometimes argue and disagree. The way that the male interactants develop the topics cooperatively in this study is, however, different from women. For men in general, developing a topic by arguing, disagreeing and challenging is an indication of solidarity in order to reinforce their friendship (Pilkington, 1998).

In contrast, while developing a topic can be cooperative, not developing it can be a sign of uncooperativeness. There are some cases in this study where the participants in Group 1 drop the suggested topics and do not develop it. First, this manner can be an indication of the participants' lack of interest in the topic (Tannen, 1990a) like in Group 1 (see Example 19). Second, it is inferred that the participants show a powerful attitude since they ignore the suggested topics and do not cooperate to expand them. This is observed in the interaction of the participants in Group 1 since they are not as intimate as the other participants in the other groups. As such, they are not concerned to develop one another's topics cooperatively.

In terms of the minimal responses, it is evident that the participants in this study show their cooperation while they use these items well-timed in order to show their attentiveness as a listener. They also use minimal responses to motivate the speakers to talk more. These are all indications that the male interactants impart solidarity in their speech. However, only in one of the groups, Group 1 there are instances of delayed minimal responses which signifies their lack of interest or inattentiveness in an interaction (Fishman, 1983; Zimmerman & West, 1975). It concludes that in this group, when the participants delay or ignore minimal responses, they want to show their dissatisfaction of the topic. It can be argued that since the participants in Group 1 are not so intimate, they do not show their concern and attentiveness to the current speaker as much as the other groups.

Further, the participants in Group 1 do not provide well-timed minimal responses because they want to show that they are superior to the current speaker and do not want to confirm him or show him their attentiveness. This indicates that there is

also a power play between the interactants in Group 1. In this study, the interactants in Group 1, compared to the other groups, use minimal responses uncooperatively.

With reference to the connection of minimal responses and topic of conversation, it appears that when the topics are very interesting and all the participants have a common interest in that particular topic, the use of minimal responses increases as an indication of their support and interest (see Examples 36 and 40). It is mainly due to the fact that the participants are so close to each other and that they share some experiences or ideas. Therefore, they try to show their cooperation to one another by providing minimal responses. By doing so, they ultimately assist each other to create a cooperative interaction and reinforce their solidarity.

In this study, the participants have adopted both cooperative and competitive styles in terms of the interruptions. Nonetheless, there are also some traces of power demonstration observed among them. The participants in Groups 3 and 4 show their cooperation when they add their ideas to the discussion or echo and mirror one another's utterances. In some cases, they interrupt each other to show their agreement or support. As a result, the interruptions cannot be considered an intrusion since the participants collaboratively build on their talk. This is an indication of cooperative attitude in maintaining solidarity.

There are many instances that competition is observed among the participants in Groups 2, 3 and 4 where the turns are short and changed rapidly. This kind of interruption can show the participants' excitement to add something to the discussion and cooperate. Evidently, the interrupters do not intend to possess the

floor and they only interrupt each other to give their support by providing a minimal response, echoing and repeating each others' sentences. Since there is no indication of the participants' struggle to win the floor, these competitive interruptions can be an indication of the interactants' cooperative behavior in building on each other's utterances (see Example 49). In this study the competitive behavior of the participants in interrupting each other is ultimately recognized as a cooperative act.

Power is observed among the participants in Groups 1 and 2 when they interrupt each other in order to dominate the conversation. They make interruptions to propose new ideas out of context and try to control the direction of the interaction (see Example 46). It demonstrates that there is a power play observed in some instances between the participants when they hold on to their turns or frequently interrupt one another to appear more powerful.

The participants in this study show their cooperation when they use epistemic modal items in their speech. All the groups employ epistemic modality to decrease the force of their statements. However, the participants in Group 3 use epistemic modal items much more frequently than the other groups (see Table 4.8). Therefore, it can be inferred that the participants in Group 3 are more into cooperation than the other groups when it comes to the use of epistemic modality.

The participants use hedges when they want to propose an idea. In that case, hedges assist them to decrease the force of their proposition. In other words, the participants show their concern by not being assertive towards their co-participants.

Nevertheless, the connection between the topic of conversation and the use of epistemic modal items is very prominent and revealing in this study. It appears that there is a positive correlation between topic and epistemic modality in the conversation of Iranian men. The more sensitive the topics are, the more epistemic modal items are employed like in Group 3. The participants in Group 3 gossip about other people and criticize their attitudes, so the use of epistemic modality increases (see Example 60). They use these items in order to show their solidarity in terms of preserving and saving the face of the others.

The participants also use these items to decrease the negative effects of their assertions or disagreements (see Example 54). It shows that the participants pay attention to one another when they intend to express something unpleasant. It is concluded that, solidarity is accomplished because the participants decrease the intensity of their disagreements by the help of epistemic modal items. Overall, there is no indication of competition or power play between the interactants in terms of epistemic modal items.

5.4 Socio-Cultural Effects on Iranian Linguistic Behavior

The social behavior of people in an interaction can reveal the social community that they have come from in addition to the cultural orientation of that community. Iranian men in this study have shown cooperation and solidarity while interacting with other men in their single sex group communities. Although Iranian society is considered patriarchy and Iranian men are supposed to demonstrate power, it is observed that the interactants in this study cooperate with one another and try to use

language collaboratively. This can be explained by the virtue of the fact that Iranian women have played key roles in changing men's perception of gender rights and equality in Iranian society (see Section 2.9).

Due to women's participation in various social spheres, Iranian men especially the younger Iranian generation have become more aware of women's rights. They also consider women's freedom a gateway to their own freedom. Some Iranian men from the younger generation believe that the masculinity which is empowered by dominating and subverting another gender is not a real power (Ansari, 2008). As such, they try to eliminate the differences between men and women which exist in society and culture in order to liberate themselves from prejudiced ideas and pressure (Ansari, 2008). Iranian men's changing opinion about women's rights is evident in one of extracts of the data in this study where the participants discuss about women's movements. They also show their regret because they have not participated in women's campaigns and movements to demonstrate their support (see Example 3).

It is inferred that the growing awareness of women's rights and gender equalities have affected the Iranian interactants's point of view in this study. They are cooperative and they endeavor to establish and enhance solidarity in their conversation. Moreover, since the participants are young, they have observed women's achievements and success in society. As such, the patriarchal values and domination are less observed among them.

In this study, however, it is perceived that power is still embedded in Iranian men's interaction. At some points, the participants try to show their power and domination to the other participants. This can be explained by the fact that patriarchal values and male dominance is not completely eliminated from Iranian society but decreased considerably compared to the past (see Section 2.9).

Iranian men still prefer to reaffirm their masculinity and avoid the activities that make them appear less masculine. As an example, in this study, gossip is practiced by the participants. But, they deny the fact that they are gossiping and they directly say that this activity is for girls (see Example 12, line [406]). Iranian interactants in this study do not want to be attached to gossip because it is considered a mischievous feminine act in Iranian society (Torab, 1996). To be attached to femininity, makes them less powerful than the stereotypical Iranian men in society who hold power. In addition, if they are less masculine they would be teased by their male and female friends and families (Ansari, 2008). As such, the Iranian men in this study maintain their masculine power even though they adopt and show cooperative attitude.

5.5 Summary of the Findings

The analysis of the data in this study suggests that Iranian men gossip in order to have a friendly enjoyable interaction with their friends. They also gossip about other people and criticize their behavior in order to reinforce their ego that they are better people than them. They also try to reaffirm their heterosexual masculinity by gossiping about the other men who appear to be less masculine. However, since gossip is generally considered a feminine activity, this study reaffirms the

performativity of gender where people perform gender differently in various social contexts (see Section 2.2).

The analysis of Iranian men's language also suggests that in an informal interaction among men in single sex groups, the main goal is maintaining solidarity and cooperation. However, the language that they use is both cooperative and competitive while cooperation is more observed and competition is interpreted as cooperation (Kuiper, 2012).

There are also some traces of power in the language of Iranian male participants. They interrupt one another, argue and disagree in order to show their masculine power and dominance. As such, it is concluded that there is an embedded power in Iranian men's talk in addition to the solidarity that they reinforce.

It is also observed that the intimacy level of the participants has a direct impact on the notions of cooperation and power. The more intimate the interactants are, the more solidarity is observed among them. This also indicates that power play is more observed among the interactants who are less close to each other.

The findings of the data suggest that the topic of gossip has a direct impact on the manners in which the linguistic features are used. It means that when the topics are personal and private and when the participants talk about familiar people and things, the more cooperation is seen in their interaction.

The cooperation of the participants in this study is explained by the virtue of the fact that the Iranian younger generation has been influenced by Iranian women's movement in maintaining gender equal rights in society. Iranian women's achievements have changed the public view of men, specifically younger men. That is the reason the Iranian male interactants in this study have shown more support and cooperation and less domination.

5.6 Implications of the Study

This study which focuses on the Iranian community adds knowledge to the studies on language and gender. There are scarce studies on male interaction in the Iranian society. It is mainly due to the fact that in a patriarchal society, it is not easy to evaluate men's behavior in interactions. As such, this study fills the gap in the studies on language and gender in Iranian society. Moreover, since this study highlights gossip in a masculine world of Iranian men, it contributes significantly to the field.

The findings of the study show that gossip can be an enjoyable activity among Iranian men in their interaction which enhances their solidarity and friendship. While at the same time, Iranian men still maintain their power and reaffirm their masculinity when they gossip. As such, this study assists to demonstrate that gossip does not lack a purpose among Iranian male interactants. Moreover, in this study gossip is not considered a derogatory act which is done by Iranian women only.

This study also contributes to the relationship between Iranian men and women in an interactional level. Since, Iranian men share many linguistic elements with

women in creating a cooperative interaction in their male communities; they can adopt the same cooperative features in interacting with women to enhance their relationship. Therefore, this study benefits both the researchers in this field and the Iranian male community to generate a better understanding with women.

5.7 Recommendations for Future Research

The present study makes a contribution to the studies of language and gender in general and face to face interaction in particular. Most of the researches so far, focus on Western communities and contexts. This study, however, chooses Iran, a different social context where patriarchal values are still practiced. In a patriarchal society like Iran, gender studies are still pursued with caution due to its controversial nature. As such, this study would serve as an impetus to opportunities for future researches in this field.

The concept of gossip and the way that women and men get involved in this activity can be evaluated in various social contexts. For instance, social networks and virtual world of websites can be very interesting areas for the researchers to evaluate gossip. Women and men may behave and gossip differently with different purposes when they are not communicating in face to face interaction.

This study also focuses on male single sex groups. Further studies can investigate mixed sex groups and observe the consequences of females' presence into friendly masculine domain in order to see whether men pursue the cooperative attitude or stick to their masculine behavior. Moreover, gossip can be evaluated in mixed sex communication to observe any differences in men's behavior.

This study eventually encourages more studies in the field of language and gender, expanding the opportunities for researchers to discover power and solidarity in different contexts with different social and cultural values. Moreover, studying gossip in this study, welcomes more studies to break through the stereotypical norms which are coupled with women's gossip within particular cultural contexts. As such, expanding the research on gossip and language in single or mixed sex groups in different settings and cultures would be a further completion to the present study.

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APPENDIX A

TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTION

The system used in conversation analysis is meant to explain the “sequential features of talk” (Have, 2007, p. 96) and in so doing they needed a convention or standard to describe the details of talk in interaction. Gail Jefferson (1979) is known as the pioneer of transcription convention and many developments have been done in this area so far following her model.

The transcription convention presented below is the modified version of Jefferson’s transcription standard (1979). It has been tailored to bring it into line with the present study and so some features have been dropped or added. It has been aimed to focus on verbal repertoire. Non verbal actions have also been considered in some extent nevertheless only the verbal elements are analyzed. Nonetheless, some nonverbal elements may better assist in comprehending the linguistic sequences.

The transcription convention covers two distinct parts which according to Jamaliah Mohd. Ali (1995, p. 314) (1995) can be divided into two major lines, “speech lines” and “information lines”. Speech lines are mainly concerned with the uttered words and phrases, while information lines contain the explanation of non speech events and some other background sounds as well as the information that the researcher has provided to translate and elaborate some words or phrases which are presented in Farsi language.

Speech Lines

[A single left bracket indicates the point of overlap onset
]	A single right bracket indicates the end of the overlapped utterance
Bold	Bold letters indicate the utterances which are uttered with loudness
?	Question marks show a question or the rising tone which signifies a question
(xxx)	Three xs in single parenthesis indicate unintelligible speech
(word)	the words or phrases in single parenthesis demonstrate uncertain speech
/	A slash indicates a short pause
(.)	A dot in parenthesis indicates a long pause - more than 1 second
<i>Word</i>	Words in italics indicate some sort of emphasis
:::	Colons indicate prolongation of the immediately prior sound
~	one at the end of an utterance and one at the beginning of an utterance in some lines below indicate the continuation of the same line
//	Double slashes, one at the end of one line and one at the beginning of a next line indicate an interruption without any simultaneous speech
...	Three dots are used to indicate the continuation of utterances within a turn which has been eliminated

Information Lines

((word))	Words in double parenthesis are used to explain any non-speech sounds and non verbal actions and any necessary information such as translation and the researcher's clarifying comments
[1], [2]	Arabic numerals indicate the lines of the transcription from the beginning of each transcription
N1, N2...	Capital single letters indicate male speakers in each group and the immediate number after each letter indicates the order of speakers appearing in conversation
<u>Underline</u>	Underlines present the lines which are highlighted in analysis