

## Indirectness: A Study of Non-observance of Manner Maxim in Females' Speech

Sikander Ali  
Wasima Shehzad

### Abstract

*Indirectness is taken as reporting the exact or approximate words of another with such changes as are necessary to bring the original statement into grammatical conformity with the sentence in which it is included. The idea of indirectness in conversational discourse has many facets to exercise the practicability of Gricean theory, as there is a popular belief that women's speech is more indirect than men's speech. However, there has been little empirical evidence to support this claim (Rundquist, 1992). Thus, this paper aims at exploring the relationship between gender and indirectness, focusing on one type of indirectness, what Grice (1975) refers to as flouting the maxims of conversation. Results of this study indicate that there is indirectness in women speech, as there is non-observance of the Gricean maxims, thus providing evidence supporting the theory of indirectness.*

**Keywords:** indirectness, non-observance, manner, Grice, gender

### 1. Introduction

Indirectness is the rhetorical pattern in which the main idea is given with deviation from the direct point, or it is the implicit approach usually employed in communication (Wang & Zhu, 2011). It may be further defined as neither straightforward nor candid rather devious from the direct. Indirectness can be taken as reporting the exact words of another with certain amendments but having the original statement into grammatical conformity with the sentence in which it is included. According to Searle (1975: 99) "Indirectness occurs in those cases where illocutionary act is performed indirectly by ways of performing another".

According to some linguists, the use of indirectness is considered as a norm in communication. A pattern was found by a Japanese linguist Harada, who analyzed a conversation between a Japanese boss and his subordinate. In his opinion; the difference between the two was quite clear. Because of the higher status of the boss he had the prerogative to speak either formally or informally by showing his power or by playing it down to build a harmonious relation (Tannen, 1990). Since similar studies with reference to gender are scarce, the question arises if there is any non-observance of maxims / indirectness in females' discourse.

## 2. Literature Review

Indirectness is usually taken as a necessary means for fulfilling the needs of understanding and of being defensive (Gumpers, 1982), which is associated respectively with Brown and Levinson's (1987) positive and negative face. Rapport is considered as the satisfaction of being understood without having explanation of one, whereas defensiveness deals with the need of saving the face of others indirectly saving one's own face. For instance, in the examples, 'I never said that', or 'that is not what I meant' the goals of rapport and defensiveness, according to Tannen (1994), correspond to what Lakoff (1975) informed about politeness that, it maintains companionship and avoids 'imposing'. So, it is imperative to distinguish between individual and social difference to understand the use of indirectness in discourse. It is the individual who learns these conversational strategies in interactive experience, but he selects or rejects other strategies available to him (Brown & Levinson 1987).

Indirectness is taken as a communicative strategy in the conversational principle. It is quite common that people employ conversational implicature as a strategy in face threatening acts and flout the cooperative principle of communication. Both positive and negative politeness, are the representation of indirectness in conversation and in order to save face, people use both positive and negative politeness. It is a broad term, which can have multiple perspectives and can cover phenomena such as irony, hedges, metaphor, and understatement/overstatement. In a sense, all interpretation is indirect; consequently, 'a full understanding of conversational organization will have to await an adequate account of indirect communication' (Brown & Levinson, 1987: 23).

Grice explains (1975: 36), 'an utterance can be divided into what the speaker actually says and what he implicates'. Implication, according to him, goes beyond the level of what a person says, and what is implicated by the speaker has to be inferred from the contextual clues. There may be other non linguistic features which play an important role in the inference of meaning of what is implicated rather than what is said. The general principles of speech proposed by Grice are the Cooperative Principles and the Maxims of Conversation.

According to Grice, to govern all of the cooperative interaction among humans, it is imperative to follow certain norms. Later on these became popular as Gricean maxims, for instance, "Make your contribution such as it is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged" (Grice 1975: 47). The precise example of cooperative principle is the conversational maxims that deal specifically with communication, though this idea was later on challenged, criticized and but defended as well. As a result, Grice elaborated the maxims 'one might need others', and there are some other maxims (aesthetic, social, or moral in character), such as 'Be polite', are also normally observed by participants in exchanges, and these may also generate non-conventional implicatures as well.

If the participants in conversation always assume that each other would behave according to these maxims, then the conversational implicature is made possible. Therefore, when there is non-observance of the maxims by a speaker, it appears that either he is too

informative or less informative, or irrelevant to the topic or unclear. There is an assumption that by observing these maxims it is easy for the listener to infer what the speaker really wanted to share (Grice, 1975). The foundational idea defended by him is that the speaker's meaning is inferred on the basis of decoding of utterance and of contextual information, and the hearer is guided by the expectation that the utterance should meet some specific standards. The standard given by Grice was based on what he envisaged in his mind that a conversation is a cooperative activity. The cooperative principle is expected to be followed by interlocutors requiring that they "make conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which engaged" (Grice, 1975: 47).

While addressing to children, more indirect directives are employed by women, traditionally connected with politeness (Brumark, 2006). Women are more indirect in their conversation and concerned with face saving more than anyone else (Brown & Levison, 1987). Similarly, Lakoff (1975: 122) reasons "there is difference in the use of indirectness and that has also been related to gender, this is due to having possible consequence of social inequity between men and women". However, this has not been confirmed by empirical research as Rundquist (1992) contests.

In Rundquists' study (1992), with reference to non-observance of Gricean maxims as indirectness in conversation between parents and between spouses, the men flouted the Gricean maxims more frequently than the women. The reason of this male behavior is that they tend to put down women by using sarcasm or ironic remarks or show them as being inferior to their conversational partner. He supports the popular belief that women's speech is more indirect than that of men. However, the results of the study given by Ali (2011), indicate that it is the vice versa, and women flout the maxims more often than men.

### **3. Research Methodology**

In this research a quantitative approach was applied to answer the research question. Indirectness was checked through the Discourse Completion (DCT) Test used by Kulka and Olhstein (1984). They adopted four strategies for DCT. These strategies moved from Mood Derivable to Mild Hints. Utterances in which the grammatical mood of the verb signals illocutionary force are called Mood Derivable. It is the intention of the speaker which is quite clear, direct and exposed. For instance, if the speaker says 'leave me alone', the grammatical mood of this utterance can easily be derived. Therefore, such an utterance is considered as direct and if it is direct it shows observance of the Gricean maxims of conversation.

Similarly, performatives are those utterances in which the illocutionary force is explicitly named e.g. (I am asking you to leave me alone). It means the force behind the intention of the speaker is clearly named. 'I am asking'. This is also direct, but comparatively less direct according to Kulka and Olhstein (1984). Whereas the utterances which contain partial reference to the object for the implementation of the act e.g. (You have left the kitchen in mess), are called Strong Hints.

There is an unclear hint or the partial reference of the intention of the speaker but there is no reference to the proper request in Mild Hints these are interpretable by the context e.g. (I can't see a parking area). That's why these sorts of utterances are called indirect. And according to Grice one must be as direct as possible.

These four strategies use for DCT are listed below:

1. Mood Derivable (Highly direct / Observance)
2. Performatives (Direct / Less Observance)
3. Strong Hint (Indirect / Less Non-Observance)
4. Mild Hint (Highly indirect / Non-Observance)

The following scale was used to measure indirectness through these four strategies.

**Table 3.1. Scale of measuring Indirectness (Adapted from Blum-Kulka & Olshain, 1984: p. 202)**

Strategy types	Definitions	Indirectness Scale
<b>Mood Derivable</b>	Utterances in which the grammatical mood of the verb signals illocutionary force e.g. (shut off the window)	<b>Direct</b> ↓
<b>Performatives</b>	Utterances in which the illocutionary force is explicitly named e.g. (I am asking you to shut off the window)	↓ ↓
<b>Strong hints</b>	Utterances containing partial reference to object or element needed for the implementation of the act e.g. (You have left the window open)	↓ ↓ ↓
<b>Mild hints</b>	Utterances that make no reference to the request proper but are interpretable by context e.g. (I am freezing)	↓ <b>Indirect</b>

To study indirectness in the female speech in academic settings one hundred participants, including the female teachers and students of Lahore Garrison University and Lahore Leads University were asked to take Discourse Completion Test based on seven communicative situations. These seven situations are discussed in the following table.

### 3.1 Case Processing Summary of Seven Situations

SITUATION: 1. 'You are having dinner with your friend. You are at her place. One of the windows is open, and you are feeling rather cold. Your friend is sitting right next to the window, and you would like her to close it. What do you say in the following four options, either, in a highly direct way, less direct, less indirect or in a highly indirectly way.

1. 'Shut off the window'. (Mood Derivable, Highly Direct)
2. 'I am asking you to shut off the window'. (Performatives, Less Direct)
3. 'You have left the window open'. (Strong Hints, Less Indirect)
4. 'I am freezing' (Mild Hints, Highly Indirect)

SITUATION: 2. 'Your college or university is taking a tour of students to Murree and you want to participate in the tour, you need permission from your father / husband, how will you seek permission?'

1. I am going for a tour. (Mood Derivable, Highly Direct)
2. I am asking you to give me permission to go on tour. (Performatives, Less Direct)
3. Our college is taking a tour to Murree. (Strong Hints, Less Indirect)
4. Our college is taking a tour to Murree. My friends are also going. Please. . (Mild Hints, Highly Indirect)

SITUATION: 3. 'Suppose you are in financial crises these days and you need money, now you are bound to ask your friend to lend some money. How will you request to lend money?'

1. Give me some money. (Mood Derivable, Highly Direct)
2. I am asking you to lend me money. (Performatives, Less Direct)
3. I am in crises lend me some money. (Strong Hints, Less Indirect)
4. I am in financial crises, please. . . . (Mild Hints, Highly Indirect)

SITUATION: 4. 'Suppose tomorrow will be your birthday and you want to get gift from your father / husband / brother, which strategy will you wish to follow?'

1. Give me gift on my birthday. (Mood Derivable, Highly Direct)
2. I am asking you to give me gift on my birthday. (Performatives, Less Direct)
3. Today is my birthday, I like gold bracelet. (Strong Hints, Less Indirect)
4. Today is my birthday. (Mild Hints, Highly Indirect)

SITUATION: 5 'Due to participating in the ceremony of the marriage of your brother you missed the last class of college / university and you need notes of the previous lecture from your friend, how will you request?'

1. Give me notes of previous lecture. (Mood Derivable, Highly Direct)
2. I am asking you to give me notes of previous lecture. (Performatives, Less Direct)
3. I missed previous lecture, give me your notes. (Strong Hints, Less Indirect)
4. I missed previous lecture, do you have notes? (Mild Hints, Highly Indirect)

SITUATION: 6. 'It is hot weather, you came back from your office and in order to quench your thirst you need water, which criterion will you prefer to apply?'

1. Give me a glass of water. (Mood Derivable, Highly Direct)
2. I am asking you to fetch a glass of water. (Performatives, Less Direct)
3. I am thirsty; please fetch a glass of water. (Strong Hints, Less Indirect)
4. It is hot weather outside and I am thirsty, please..... (Mild Hints, Highly Indirect)

SITUATION: 7. 'You are jogging in a park with your friend. Suddenly, he stumbles, falls and hits his head on a stone. He is bleeding quite badly and he is in a lot of pain. You want to call an ambulance as fast as possible, but unfortunately, you didn't take your

mobile with you, and neither did your friend. Some meters away, a woman approaches you talking on her mobile. What do you say?

1. Give me your mobile. (Mood Derivable, Highly Direct)
2. I am asking you to give me your mobile. (Performatives, Less Direct)
3. My friend is injured may I have your phone. (Strong Hints, Less Indirect)
4. My friend is injured, please.....(Mild Hints, Highly Indirect)

So if somebody goes for the first option e.g. 'shut off the window' or 'give me your mobile' shows that s/he is direct and if he is direct he is observing the Gricean Maxim. And if someone prefers to say 'I am freezing' or 'my friend is injured, please...' shows highly indirectness of utterance which according to Grice is non-observance of the maxims.

#### 4. Data Analysis & Discussion

It is a generally observable phenomenon that if there is higher non-observance there will be higher tendency of using hedges, similes, metaphors or paradoxical statements (Ali, 2014). Non observance, as mentioned earlier, may result in higher levels of indirectness. According to Brown and Levinson (1959), there is inherent impoliteness in a direct request that can be more threatening to face because there is encroachment in the domain of addressee's territory. In this context there is a need for the preference of polite behavior which is called indirectness.

Thus, if there is non-observance of the maxims, it establishes that they are not cooperative to the maxims. Coates (2004) is of the opinion that, these cooperative styles must be re-evaluated even a question is raised by them as whether powerlessness can be attributed to women's speech? She argues that there must be revaluation of women's concern for others. They claim that women's more cooperative behavior within the work environment leads to productive deliberations. Powerlessness is stereotypically associated with women, however, all women cannot be considered as powerless. This is the reason, women are seen through the lens of men and they are judged aggressive according to the certain norms especially stereotypical norms (Sunderland, 2006).

Tannen (1994) challenges the supposition that talking in an indirect way, which is non-observance of maxims, indicates lack of confidence and powerlessness. It is fundamental in human communication either male or female there is indirectness, which varies from culture to culture or region to region. She also denies that only females flout the maxims by being indirect. Both the males and females flout them.

There are differences which can be associated with their backgrounds – ethnic, regional, professional, social and cultural as well. They tend to be either direct or indirect in different situations and ways. However, non-observance is closely related to power and those in power have the prerogative to issue orders either directly by observing the maxim/s or by flouting the maxims. But this phenomenon can be hardly understood without considering the context or cross cultural perspective. According to many scholars directness / observance is logical and associated with power whereas indirectness / non-

observance is aligned to subservience or dishonesty. But according to some linguists, varieties of indirectness are considered a norm in communication (Ali, 2011).

There were four categories to measure non-observance/indirectness of Gricean maxims which move from Mood Derivable/Directness, Performatives/Less Directness, Strong Hints/Less Indirectness and finally Mild hints/Indirectness. The overall evaluation of the responses of one hundred participants, collected through DCT, is illustrated in the following Table 4.1.

**Table 4.1: Indirectness in Discourse Completion Test**

Scale Title	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Mood Derivable /Directness	158	22.5	22.5	22.5
Performatives / Less Directness	136	19.5	19.5	42.0
Strong Hints / Less Indirectness	172	24.5	24.5	66.5
Mild Hints / Indirectness	234	33.5	33.5	100.0
Total	700	100.0	100.0	

There were 158 replies given by the participants, who were direct and 136 participants were less direct comparatively. Accumulatively it was 294. The frequency of the less indirectness was 172 and 234 were of complete indirectness which makes a total of 406. This reflects that majority of the population was indirect, which shows they did not observe the maxims. This reflects that females in the academic settings prefer indirectness which is the non-observance of the maxim of manner (Rundquist, 1992), and under certain conditions it can be taken as the non-observance of the maxim of relevance as well (Brumark, 2006).

The overall analysis demonstrates that only a small number of females follow the maxims of Grice and most of the females do not bother about following these maxims in their formal academic speech. If more numbers of females are not observing the maxim it means they are indirect. As mentioned earlier indirectness is the part of human speech especially in this case of Pakistani women as the findings of this study reflect. As it is associated with power, the females of Pakistan are less in power so they observe the maxims less.

The following example would clarify how indirectness occurs in human conversation. If a female is in the mood of having dinner outside at a restaurant, when her husband comes, she instead of saying directly 'let's go for dinner outside' she prefers either strong or mild hints by insinuating 'I am so tired today', or 'the weather is so romantic outside' etc. In another example, while having dinner in a restaurant, she feels cool breeze disturbing her.

As a result, the present analysis shows that less number of females follows the maxims of Grice and most of the females do not bother about following these maxims in their conversation. It can be concluded that this non-observance in females' speech is done as a communicative strategy to achieve the desired objectives. There may be certain motives behind when one does not observe the maxims in speech. And there are further multiple factors that can be seen as playing the pivotal role in either observing / non-observing the maxims.

## 5. Conclusion

Indirectness is a reporting of the exact words of another with certain amendments but having the original statement into grammatical conformity with the sentence in which it is included (Prezi, 2014). But there is difference in the use of indirectness especially with reference to gender. This is usually associated with social inequity; which raises the question, if it is power which determines the use of indirectness as whereby one becomes formal or informal and shows one's power or plays it down to build a harmonious relation. The present research demonstrates that women are indirect in their formal speech that takes place in the academic settings such as conference presentation. However, one should be cautious that in associating women's indirectness to powerlessness or their being inferior gender. The reason could be their preference for being more polite. Thus, there is a pertinent need to come out of the traditional myths about female gender, especially the educated women and desiderata to approach them as professional rather than as women.

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