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An exploratory study on conversational skills of males with their spouses: A regional comparative perspective

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Abstract

Conversations can be understood in terms of informal talk which is used in daily chores of life; it facilitates the process of social bonding and maintains the relations at multi-level of interactions. Conversation is quite different from communication. Conversation is an informal dialogue delivery whereas communication is more systematic and formal in nature. The present study was carried out to explore the regional differences on conversational skills of males with their spouses. In this study, 100 female participants were selected from two different regions Delhi and Haryana. To tap the conversational skills, Conversational Skills Rating Scale (CSRS- Partner form) developed by Brain H Spitzberg was used. This scale measures four aspects of conversational skills: attentiveness, composure, expressiveness and coordination. In the second phase of the study Qualitative interviews were carried out to understand the reasons behind such differences. It was observed that regions do affect the way people learn and utilize conversational skills during the interactions with their partners. This research has larger implication in exploring the relationship between region and the conversational skills of the people of a particular region. This knowledge further helps in modifying or bettering the skills of people of a particular region through proper training, which can improve their personal as well as professional life.

Keywords: Conversation, communication, regional differences, attentiveness, composure, expressiveness, coordination

Introduction

'Talk' is the main way through which people get to know one another, become more or less intimate with each other and enter into long term or short term relationships. Talk is reflexively tied to personal identity, to human relationships, and to culture; that is, in talk participants co-construct their personal, social and cultural worlds, and participants' orientations to those co-constructed worlds influence the structure of talk (Ochs, 1988) [11]. Talk can be formally referred to as conversation and sometimes communication. Communication and Conversation are two different terms with overlapping features, yet used interchangeably. "Communication," which is etymologically related to both "communion" and "community," comes from the Latin *communicare*, which means "to make common" (Weekley, 1967) [16]. Communication can be defined as the process of transmitting information and common understanding from one person to another (Keyton, 2011) [10]. There are two ways of communication: verbal communication and non-verbal communication. A right message to a wrong person, in a wrong format at wrong time can hamper the meaning of the message therefore it is important to look at the process of communication. The process is divided into different parts: sender, receiver, content, format, channel and medium. It is important that all the parts of communication are carefully chosen keeping in mind the time and distance. The elements in the communication process determine the quality of communication. A problem in any one of these elements can reduce communication effectiveness (Keyton, 2011) [10]. There are different models of communication depicting different processes while communicating. Some of the most basic ones are: linear model (Shannon and Weaver, 1949) [13] and transformational model (Barnlund, 2008) [4]. Linear model is based on one way communication whereas transformational model promotes two-way communication. In all, it can be said that "communication is a formal and a systematic exchange of ideas". Conversation on the other

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hand, can be defined as situation in which two socialized individuals talk to one another as they go about their everyday informal lives. Conversation is the primary way in which people interact, it is the primary means by which children are socialized into a culture, it is the primary site in which identities are displayed and negotiated, and it contains within it the seeds of morality. Further, because turn-taking, initiating and changing topics, repairing problems, and terminating exchanges are required in all forms of social interaction. (Turnbull & Carpendale, 1999)

[15] Conversation is thus considered the informal aspect of communication and is the ideal form of communication in everyday living as. Conversation is a lighter form of communication where people can express themselves more freely and fully.

Man is a social animal. His immediate surroundings greatly affect his behavior and language. Man learns to speak by initializing his parents and other family members. Next in hierarchy comes, the role of society and the institute he goes to. These factors play a vital role in building or exhibiting one's communication skills. The present study tries to test this relationship between conversational skills and region. It tries to understand the regional influences that act upon the conversational skills of people living in a particular region. Given below are the research questions for the present study.

1. Is there any impact of regional differences on conversational skills of males?
 - Ho: There is no regional influence on conversational skills of males with their spouses.
 - H1: There is a difference between Conversational skills of Delhi males and Haryana males with their spouses.
2. Is there any impact of regional differences on conversational skills of males in terms of attention?
 - Ho: There is no regional difference between the conversational skills of males with their partners, in terms of attentiveness.
 - H1: Conversational skills of Delhi males with their partners in terms of attentiveness differ significantly from Haryana males.
3. Is there any impact of regional differences on conversational skills of males in terms of composure?
 - Ho: There is no regional influence on conversational skills of males with their spouses in terms of composure.
 - H1: There is a difference between Conversational skills of Delhi males and Haryana males with their spouses in terms of composure.
4. Is there any impact of regional differences on conversational skills of males, in term of expressiveness?
 - Ho: There is no regional influence on conversational skills of males with their spouses in terms of expressiveness.
 - H1: There is a difference between Conversational skills of Delhi males and Haryana males with their spouses in terms of expressiveness.
5. Is there any impact of regional differences on conversational skills of males, in terms of coordination?
 - Ho: There is no regional influence on conversational skills of males with their spouses in terms of coordination.

H1: There is a difference between Conversational skills of Delhi males and Haryana males with their spouses in terms of coordination.

Method

The present study was focused on regional differences on conversational skills, for this purpose sample of married women was drawn from the two regions, i.e., Delhi and Haryana. There were two phases of the study, in the initial phase data was collected quantitatively using "Conversational skills rating scale – partner form" given by Brain H Spltzberg. The questionnaire was administered on a total of 100 participants, 50 married women from Delhi and 50 married women from Haryana. The purpose of the study was to understand the differences in conversational skill in terms of male partners to their female counterparts and thus married women become the target sample. Women were instructed to rate their husbands on conversational skills under normal circumstances. The questionnaire consisted of 30 questions, 25 molecular / behavioral items and 5 molar items. Molecular items were based on 5 point rating scale; from poor-fair-adequate-good-to-excellent, whereas molar items had a 7 point rating scale from efficient to inefficient. Questionnaire focused on four skill clusters, namely, attention (A), composure (CM), expressiveness (E) and coordination (CO). The first dimension in the test is "Attentiveness" (attention to, interest in and concern for conversational pattern). Second dimension is "Composure" (confidence, assertiveness). Third dimension in the scale is "Expressiveness" (animation, variation in verbal and nonverbal forms of expressions). The fourth and last dimension is "Coordination" (the non-disruptive negotiation of speaking turns, conversational initiation and conversational closing). Based on these four dimensions, the overall conversational skills of the partners were calculated. For CSRS, Internal consistency has consistently been over .80, and is usually in the high .80s to low .90s. After the data was collected, SPSS was used to conduct data analyses.

After the quantitative data was analyzed and some significant differences between the two groups were formed, the study moved to its second and final phase which consisted of qualitative interviews of 5 females purposively selected from the sample. Based on the quantitative data, the participants were questioned and deeper knowledge was gathered on why such differences exist. Using thematic analysis some themes were derived and greater insight was achieved. The thematic network analysis was adapted from Attride & Sterling, 2001^[2].

Results

Communication is the glue that holds a society together. The ability to communicate enables people to form and maintain personal relationships. And the quality of such relationships depends on the caliber of communication between the parties (Brennan, 1974)^[5]. The present study was aimed at understanding the differences between conversational skills of males with their spouses from two different regions i.e., Haryana and Delhi. Based on the questionnaire adapted conversational skills were measured in terms of four dimensions that are: attentiveness, composure, expressiveness and coordination. On the first dimension, i.e., attentiveness, at the descriptive level, results indicate, that Delhi men are 'good' on this dimension whereas Haryana men are 'adequate', and at an inferential level the

difference seems non-significant, therefore, the null hypothesis is retained and no significant difference between the two groups of males from two different regions were found. Second dimension is composure, at descriptive level, results indicate that Delhi men scored 'good' whereas Haryana men scored 'adequate' and at the inferential level the findings are significant at 0.05 level. In this case we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis, stating that there is a significant difference between the groups of males from two different regions. Third dimension is expressiveness, at the descriptive level, scores suggest that according to their partners Delhi men are 'good' on this dimension and so are Haryana men and at inferential level results seem non-significant. Based on the values we retain the null hypothesis, stating that the difference between the two groups of males is non-significant or due to chance factors. The fourth dimension is coordination, at descriptive level Delhi men scored 'good' whereas Haryana men scored 'adequate' and at the inferential level the difference seems significant at 0.01 level of significance. Thus we reject the null hypothesis and state that the differences between the two groups of males from different regions are significant. Overall results suggest that there are some minor differences between the conversational skills of men from Delhi and Haryana. The overall results suggest that Delhi men have 'good' conversational skills whereas Haryana men have 'adequate' conversational skills. The results are significant at 0.01 level.

Table 1: Showing Means, SD and t-value of overall conversational skills of males with their spouses in different regions.

Location	Mean	SD	t-value
Delhi	92.28	12.53	3.05*
Haryana	85.34	10.08	

Table 2: Showing Mean, SD and t-value on different dimensions of conversation skills of males from two different regions.

Dimensions	Location	Mean	SD	t
Attentiveness	Delhi Haryana	3.55 3.34	.67 .59	1.77
Composure	Delhi Haryana	3.69 3.38	.63 .52	2.74**
Expressiveness	Delhi Haryana	3.89 3.68	.59 .51	1.89
Coordination	Delhi Haryana	3.63 3.22	.60 .57	3.59***

Therefore overall it can be said that region do exert influence on conversational skills of people living in it. The rating of conversational skills of males by their spouses does indicate the difference on two dimensions that are composure and coordination. Composure refers to avoidance of anxiety cues, and an assertive or confident manner of conversation. On this particular dimension Delhi males are rated 'good' whereas Haryana males are rated as 'adequate'. Coordination refers to coordinated entrance and exit from conversations, non-disruptive flow of conversational turns, topical innovation, etc. on this particular dimension Delhi men are again rated 'good' by their spouses whereas Haryana Males are rated 'adequate'. Thus the overall rating is where Delhi males are rated 'good' whereas Haryana males are rated 'adequate' by their spouses.

To understand the reasons behind these differences participants from Haryana were selected for qualitative interview. The focus on Haryana spouses was basically to explore the answer to question like 'why have they rated

their male counterparts as adequate?', 'what are the reasons behind their rating?', and 'how they explain their understandings? A total of 3 interviews were conducted. And thematic analysis was employed to make sense of the collected data. 2 global theme, 4 organizing themes and 14 basic themes were derived. The thematic network is given below:

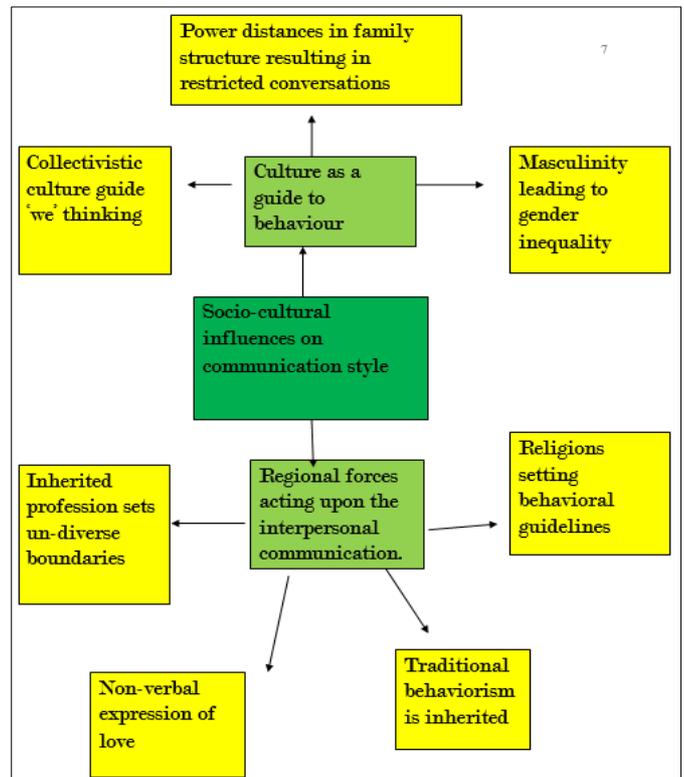


Fig 1: Thematic Network representing Global theme 1, i.e., Socio-cultural influence on communication style.

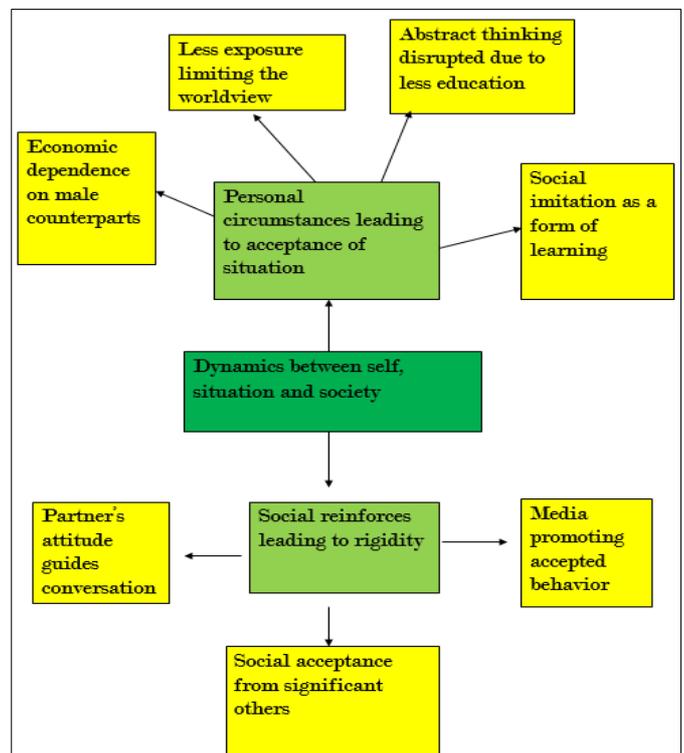


Fig 2: Represents thematic network of global theme 2, i.e., Dynamics between self, situation and society.

Discussion

Delhi and Haryana are neighboring regions but with significant differences in cultures, language, lifestyle, occupation and many other important aspects of lives. The overall quantitative results suggest that Delhi men are better than Haryana men on conversational skills. The probable reasons for such differences can be traced in the qualitative themes derived. According to the data collected the reasons behind the differences on conversational skills can be varied.

These can be traced back in basic themes that are briefly discussed below

Basic theme 1: Collectivistic culture guide 'we' thinking: Culture is a human medium that translates and governs man's actions and give meanings to what he does or consciously refrains from it. It has roots in a Latin word 'colere', which means 'to build on, to cultivate, and to foster' (Dhal, 2000) [6]. This theme basically describes how collectivistic culture leads to the promotion of 'we' thinking. But this we includes all the significant others and not just the partners. Even the conversations between partners are usually involves exchange of social actions. This is also evident in the joint family culture and 'village is the extended family' culture, where all knows all and thus less time for the married partners to spent with each other. Rosengren (1983) [12] contends that culture is the cognitive and evaluative framework within which human beings act, and feel.

Basic theme 2: Power distances in family structure resulting in restricted conversations: Power distance refers to the extent to which inequality among persons in different positions of formal power are viewed as a natural (and even desirable) aspect of the social order (Hofstede, 1980, 2001) [7, 18] Based on who gives the maximum contribution to running the family, in terms of finance, is the hierarchy structured. And on this ground the women is far below the men, as he is the major source of bread earner and thus his decision is the final. Therefore the conversations are usually short and structured based in power distance.

Basic theme 3: Masculinity leading to gender inequality: Masculinity has favoured men and put them on pedestal which has taken away the humanly rights from them, such as crying, caring, loving, being concerned or even empathising with their partners. This leads to gender inequality not only in actions but also in thoughts and feelings. Whereas Delhi which is a heterogeneous society where gender roles are not that rigid, less gender discrimination, strict legal consequences, and relatively less female feticide, where we can see equal number to females working outside the house, where personal and professional life is different and where the concept of love, respect, care are bit clear, at such place, conversational skills became important

Basic theme 4: Inherited profession setting un-diverse boundaries: Based on the regional inheritance, the people of Haryana have got the profession of farming as an inherited part of their living. This leaves people with physically draining day, evenings are usually punchayats and social gathering and nights are sleeps. Such schedule leaves no space for private talks and is consisted wasteful. Haryana with majority of rural area and agriculture as the dominant

occupation, where people are their own bosses and consequences are dependent on climate, where no one is your competition but the nature, in such a region communication is not a necessary skill. Whereas Delhi - capital of India where professions and professionalism is a necessary thing. In a metropolitan city, with sky touching buildings and millions of people working on the bases of hierarchy of authorities, where performance appraisal takes place every month, where jobs are less and applicants are more, where competition is high, where majority of the organizations are based on profit making agenda, where you need to have skills to stand out of the crowd and convince companies to buy you, at place like this communication and conversation becomes one of the important skills to survive and excel in your field

Basic theme 5: Non-verbal expression of love: most of Haryana follows a non-verbal expression of love. Love is felt and acted upon but never said. Partners do not get much time with each other to relax.

Basic theme 6: Traditional behaviorism is inherited: The way one acts is also guided by what is the accepted way of behaving in that particular region. This way of behavior is accepted by the members of the society and also children grow up seen this in their own parents and other adults. Therefore it becomes an automatic part of their behavior and also accepted by self and others.

Basic theme 7: Religions setting behavioral guidelines: Religious books guide the behavior of people. All the participants of the interview seemed to mention about the 'Ram -Sita' marriage. And not only accept their husbands as 'Parmeshver' but also sets guidelines for themselves to follow Sita, which makes them blindfolded followers of their husband and their families.

Basic theme 8: Economic dependence on male counterparts: One of the reasons why women have accepted and feel partially satisfied with the conversations with their male counterpart is because they are economically dependent on their partners, which makes them automatically inferior and promotes the exercise of 'asking permission' from their husbands before doing anything.

Basic theme 9: Less exposure limiting the worldview: Most of these women were born, brought up and married in the nearby villages itself. They have lived a limited perspective and are unable to be flexible with it. They have been taught these rituals and the stories of 'goddess Sita' and they wish to see no other distractions to it. Haryana being a majority of rural area and strict gender roles and prevailing caste system, which further restricts life from all the possible exposures, an individual is not able to taste all the colors and forms of life. As it go "practice makes the man perfect" it can be said that with everyday opportunities and challenges for living, conversational skills of Delhi men are better than Haryana men with less exposure.

Basic theme 10: Abstract thinking disrupted due to less education: Most women were married in the early years of development and thus their education have been limited. Most of the learning is centered on doing household chores of lives, taught by elder ladies of the house. Schooling for girls is considered not very effective. Schooling have been

famously associated with ability of abstract thinking, and it seemed legitimate as women seem to resist the fact of better life and are rigid on continuing their own lifestyle.

Basic theme 11: Social imitation as a form of learning: Bandura's concept of social learning actively shapes people's behavior in villages. The rules and regulations of how to behave are predetermined and everybody follows them, even a new member needs to learn it through imitation. Distractions to new ways are not entertained and these ways of behaving are resistant to change as they are approved by majority.

Basic theme 12: Partner's attitude guides conversation: The conversation involves two parties and not just the female but also the male counterparts. When the male counterpart is disinterested in hearing your opinion or when their mood guides the topic being talked about, the conversations become limited.

Basic theme 13: Social acceptance from significant others: Society sets rules and regulations of how to communicate with others, and it actively guards them as well. Therefore it helps to evaluate self and the conversations they have with others based on such rules set by society. Not only is it important to meet these rules for self-evaluation but also evaluation of self by others.

Basic theme 14: Media promoting accepted behavior: Media also promotes these rules and regulations. They reinforce the behavior that meets the social accepted rules and discourages the other. Women working outside the house for earn livelihood is not even a concept in rural areas. At maximum they can work at farms which are owned by their own families or say help their husbands in farming related activities. Therefore most Haryana origin movies, films, T.V. programs also forecast the idea of women as housewife but not corporate leaders or politicians, or even an artist. More often media contents, news, entertainment or commercial, contain prejudices of class, gender, race or representation and social segmentation. (Khan & Fazal, 2012)^[9].

To conclude, It can be said that communication is indeed an important part of living. We live in a world filled with other people. We live together, work together, and play together. In our personal lives, we need each other for security, comfort, friendship, and love. We need each other in order to achieve our goals and objectives. None of these goals can be achieved without communication. Communication is the basic thread that ties us together. Through communication we make known our needs, our wants, our ideas, and our feelings. The better we are at communication, the more effective we are at achieving our hopes and dreams (Alessandra & Hunsaker, 1993)^[1]. Understanding interpersonal communication is essential in maintaining healthy relationships. It is important in our family life as well as professional life too, as it affects nearly every aspect of our existence. It affects various sphere of our lives, such as personal, professional, social, but it also gets affected by various elements of living such as society, media, culture, profession, gender roles etc. Communication skills can be improved through appropriate knowledge, practice, feedback and reflection.

Limitations

As the coin has two parts to its existence, every research has two important functions to serve, one is implications and the other is limitation. Even the present study has drawbacks. Two of the major drawbacks are a) sample size is small which cannot help in making confident generalizations, b) qualitative interviews were gathered from Haryana but not Delhi, so it may basically tell us about the partial truth. Therefore the future research can be done keeping these limitations in mind and filling this gap in knowledge.

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