

Mishandling of Privacy in Language Classrooms: The Case of Iranian EFL Learners

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Abstract

The emergence of the concept of communicative competence marked a shift in the view of language teaching and language learning from mastery of grammatical structures to the ability to communicate. Communicative Language Teaching has been widely embraced and practiced all over the world by many language institutes during last decades. It emphasizes classroom communication and conversation as a basic means of language teaching. Some factors inhibit classroom communication. Among these, affective factors play an important role in language learners' Willingness to Communicate (WTC). One of the areas which has not been studied under subcategories of WTC is privacy, mishandling of which can lead to some sort of communication breakdown in classroom environments. This study was an attempt to focus on the areas of privacy which may be problematic in classroom situations if tried to be discovered by any attempt of interrogation in front of the class. A survey study was done to identify the areas of privacy in which language learners prefer not to be interrogated. Six areas of privacy were specified and related questions were included in the questionnaire forms. 118 (64 females and 54 males) language learners aged 20-25 years participated in the study. An interview session was held a week after the participants filed out the questionnaire forms. The results of the study indicated that participants were more reluctant to answer private questions in the area of "love matters. The second problematic area of privacy for participants was "life experiences" and the third was "occupation". Next came the areas of "family and relatives", "personal information" and finally, "likes and dislikes". Also, some implications are presented at the end of the study for language practitioners and a number of suggestions are provided.

Keywords: affective variables, willingness to communicate (WTC), privacy

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Affection and Learner Variables

Since the development of communicative approaches toward language learning, a lot of scholars have tried to specify learners' variables which can hinder language learning process. Affective variables have been the subject of much research in the areas related to learners' variables and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Brown (1973) discusses affective variables in second language acquisition (SLA). He believes that egocentric factors, social factors, cognitive style are among the prominent affective factors influencing second language acquisition. Woodrow (2006) in his project concluded that a skills deficit anxious student would benefit from instruction in language learning strategies and scaffolding of skills whereas a retrieval interference anxious student would benefit from de-sensitization and relaxation techniques.

Park and Lee (2005) indicated that examination anxiety, criticism anxiety and communication anxiety are the main components of anxiety for Korean students of English. They also found out that language ability confidence, language potential confidence, communication confidence and situational confidence are the components of self-confidence for Korean students of English. Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope (1986) indicated that adults typically perceive themselves as intelligent, socially-adept individuals who are sensitive to different socio-cultural mores. Such perceptions are rarely challenged when an adult speaker communicates in a native language. However, when learning a foreign language, the situation can be different. Since communication attempts may be evaluated according to uncertain or unknown socio-cultural and linguistic standards, communication entails risk taking and can be problematic.

In another study on English language anxiety, Pappamihel (2002) addressed the issue of English language anxiety in two settings: mainstream classrooms and English as a Second Language (SLA). It was observed that changes in anxiety levels can stem from many sources. These sources include factors that affect communication apprehension, test anxiety, fears of negative evaluation and identity creation tension.

B. Willingness to Communicate

The concept of Willingness to Communicate (WTC) has been the subject of a great body of studies and analyses in the field of language learning and teaching during the last decades. WTC is an important variable which underlies interpersonal communication. Burgoon (1976) started a line of research focusing on what was later known as "Willingness to Communicate". His work can be regarded as a seminal one which interested other researchers to analyze WTC. McCroskey & Baer (1985) developed the concept of WTC presented by Burgoon. They proposed a WTC scale which overcame some of the problems with Burgoon's earlier measure.

MacIntyre (1994) considered McCroskey's (1992) scale to have better validity and reliability. MacIntyre (1994) tested his causal model of the five basic constructs which had been identified by Burgoon (1976) as concepts determining Willingness to Communicate.

These concepts include: anomie, alienation, self-esteem, introversion, and communication anxiety. A sixth construct, perceived competence, was also included in his model to account for variation in McCroskey's (1992) WTC scale. In another study, the WTC construct which had been proposed by McCroskey and Baer (1985) was extended by MacIntyre, Clement, Dornyei, & Noels (1998). They adapted it to refer to the L2. They also identified several additional influences in L2 communication. Surprisingly, they found over 30 variables that may have potential impact on L2 WTC.

In 2001, MacIntyre, Baker, Clement, & Conrad studied WTC, its relation to social support and language-learning orientations on immersion students. The results of this study showed that endorsement of all five orientations for language learning was positively correlated with WTC both inside and outside the classroom. Peng (2013) tried to establish the psychometric properties of the instrument used to measure L2 WTC. He measured WTC in the Chinese context where English is learned as a foreign language (EFL). The results indicated that the participants reporting WTC in classroom situations outnumbered those expressing WTC in out-of-class situations.

Kang (2005) redefined WTC as a dynamic concept. In her article, she conducted a qualitative study which showed how situational willingness to communicate (WTC) in a second language (L2) can dynamically emerge and fluctuate during a conversation situation. Acculturation and L2 WTC may at the first look seem not to be related concepts. However, Gallagher (2012) explored the link between L2 WTC and cultural adaptation in international students. He showed that “sojourners who are more willing to use the L2 across social situations are less prone to the irksome daily events involved with living in a new culture.” In another study (Cao & Philp, 2006), a number of factors were perceived by learners to influence WTC behavior in class including: the group size, familiarity with interlocutor(s), interlocutor(s)' participation, familiarity with topics under discussion, self-confidence, medium of communication and cultural background.

C. Privacy

Privacy doesn't seem to be a clear concept and easy to describe. Neither are its boundaries clearly defined in an acceptable framework which can fit internationally into different cultures. It has long been the subject of many discussions among social, psychological and also lay groups. Also, the norms of privacy seem to differ among different nations and cultures and also among different social groups in any culture.

The concept of privacy has been defined by many scholars (Warren & Brandeis, 1890; Moore, 2001, 2004). Parent (1983) argues that “privacy is the condition of not having undocumented personal knowledge about one possessed by others.” It has also been defined as “the state of possessing control over a realm of intimate decisions, which include decisions about intimate access, intimate information, and intimate actions” (Inness, 1992). Parker (1974) defines privacy in a similar way. In his view, privacy is “control over when and by whom the various parts of us can be sensed by others.” Peikoff (2008) defines privacy as “the claim of individuals, groups, or institutions to determine for themselves when, how, and to

what extent information about them is communicated to others.” Foddy (1984) gives a report of Altman’s account of privacy as “an interpersonal boundary process by which a person or group regulates interaction with others”, “(the) selective control of access to the self or to one’s group”, “that social interaction is a continuing interplay or dialectic between forces, driving people to come together or to move apart.”

In a study entitled “Public Identity in Defining the Boundaries of Public and Private” (Kovács, 2002), some of the factors which may play a role in the determination of the boundaries between private and public speech were mentioned. Kovács (2002) believes in what Schutz (1962) states:

“Private communication, in a strict sense, is only the face-to-face communication between consociates mutually involved in each other's biographies.”

Kovács (2002) maintains that in all other communicative situations the partners must make a judgment about the level of public nature of the intended communicative act and about the degree of freedom of communication at the given level. This degree of freedom is strongly influenced by the nature of the political system. Western cultures have not been the only area analyzed in the previous body of literature. In his comparative study, Capurro (2005) dealt with intercultural aspects of privacy, particularly with regard to differences between Japanese and Western conceptions. Some of his conclusions are summarized as:

- Westerners’ Platonic Metaphysics vs. Japanese three-fold world
- Westerners belief in a Christian theology, and the personified idea of the evil
- Western morality’ basis on the idea of the individual as an autonomous being which has dignity, implying freedom and autonomy which is the basis of a democratic system
- The emphasis of Japanese morality on the value of the community and the dimension of “in-between” (Aida) human beings vs. Westerners’ emphasis on individualism and autonomy (for Japanese, private things are less worthy than public things).
- Importing only some aspects of the Western concept of privacy by Japanese and particularly not the “individualistic” perspective that ascribes privacy to the dignity of the person.

The issue of mishandling of privacy in a classroom environment has not been addressed in the studies which have been conducted in the areas of WTC and affective variables. Some of the factors which make students unwilling to talk in language classrooms have been addressed in WTC framework. Among these factors, the probable role of mishandling of privacy in language classrooms has not been studied. Such a study could pave the way toward devising more enriched frameworks capable of addressing more affective variables causing unwillingness to communicate.

The present study seeks to specify the areas in which male and female language students may feel annoyed if asked private questions in a classroom situation. It can help language practitioners be aware of the probable threats which can hinder learners’

developments in classroom. Also, materials developers can refer to the results of the study when attempting to develop materials and include any questions in course-books.

II. METHODOLOGY

A. Participants

The participants of this study were English students studying at a language institute in Isfahan, Iran. Language proficiency did not seem to play an important role in trying to keep one's ego and thus it was not controlled for. 64 males and 54 females (118 participants in total) were selected for the purpose of analysis of the study. As age and gender were the variables being assessed in the present study, all participants selected for the study were aged between 20-25 years.

All participants were studying Touchstone Series in Danesh Pajouhan Institute of Higher Education. Touchstone course-books are an internationally taught series mostly embraced by different institutes for their rich contexts for classroom communication and informal talk in classroom. This is in line with the aim of the current research. The participants of the present study were studying Touchstone 3 and Touchstone 4, the level of which allowed the students to engage in classroom talk.

All participants filled out the questionnaire forms. They were told that the purpose of the study was to help language teachers make the classroom atmosphere a more desirable place for their students.

B. Instruments

In order to assess participants' (un)willingness to answer questions related to different areas of their private life, 118 questionnaires were given to the participants. More detailed explanation of the instruments used in the present study is presented in the next section.

1. Questionnaire

The "Privacy questionnaire" was developed for the purpose of this study (see Appendix A). It includes 30 questions which are related to six areas of participants' private life. Each five questions in order are related to one of the private areas of participants' life. As 5-point Likert scale was used in questionnaire forms, participants had 5 options to choose from: strongly agree (5), agree (4), no idea (3), disagree (2) and strongly disagree (1). All of the participants read the questionnaire in Persian, the official language of Iran. The participants were asked to specify their gender, while they were not asked to write their names or reveal any part of their personal information. They were asked to draw a shape or write any word of their interest in a box specified in questionnaire forms. They were asked to draw a mark or write a word which they can remember after a while, if necessary. This mark would be used to identify the questionnaire forms of the participants who participated

in the interview session. There was no time limitation for the participants to fill out the questionnaires. In order to make sure that none of the participants of the study was older than 25 years old or younger than 20 years old, they were also asked to write their age in the questionnaire forms.

2. Interview

10 participants (five males, five females) were interviewed a week after all of the participants filled out the questionnaires. Six questions were asked related to six areas of their private life. Their answers were compared to the items they chose on the questionnaire form in order to be more confident about learners' performance on the questionnaire forms and raise the reliability of the study.

C. Pilot Study

As the questionnaire had not been administered prior to the study and was devised to be used in this study, it needed to be read by experts in the same field and piloted before the beginning of data collection to make sure that it enjoyed an acceptable reliability. Two language teachers teaching in the same institute who were also studying TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) in University of Isfahan commented on the questionnaire prior to pilot study. Based on their comments, items 10 and 14 were changed. Afterwards, the questionnaire was given to 10 participants who were attending classes in the same institute and who were in the same age group. The results showed that the reliability of the questionnaire was acceptable ($r = .87$).

All 10 participants of the pilot study were asked if the instructions of the questionnaire were clear. They were also asked if all the items were written in a clear language and they knew exactly what they were supposed to do. None reported any ambiguity regarding the items and the instruction. Pilot study was done in the same place which the main study was supposed to be done.

D. Procedure

Questionnaires were given to the participants. They were informed of the importance of their contributions to the results of the study and were asked to pay due attention and discretion and patience while filling out the questionnaires. Instructions were given in order to make sure that students wouldn't confuse the items with the questions to be answered. That is, because all 30 items were in question forms, it was possible that some students confuse them with simple questions to answer. All participants were told that the answer to these questions is by no means the aim of the study. They were told that they just needed to determine to what extent they like/dislike the questions to be asked. It was clarified that, if an item was really intrusive to their privacy, they needed to check "strongly disagree". If the item was by no means any threat to disclosing their private matters in a classroom environment, they needed to check "strongly agree". They could use the other choices

“agree”, “no idea” and disagree” based on their view of how an item may be an intrusion to their private life.

The next instrument used in this study was an oral interview. 10 participants were interviewed. Each was asked six questions related to the areas of privacy evaluated by the privacy questionnaire. The responses given to the questions in the interview session were compared to the results of the questionnaires. The participants of the interview session were selected among the students of different classrooms.

III. RESULTS

30-item Privacy questionnaire was used in the present study. It needed to be made sure that the results of the study could be generalized to similar contexts and the questionnaire enjoys an acceptable value of reliability. Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was used for this purpose. The reliability of the questionnaire was found to be 0.913 which shows an acceptable value. It shows an improvement over the reliability calculated in the pilot study using Cronbach’s alpha coefficient. It may be due to the increase in the number of the participants of the study compared to the number of participants of the pilot study.

1. Descriptive statistics of the scores

Since the variables are ordinal, the measures of frequency, relative frequency and median were used in descriptive statistics. The data were divided into two groups based of the participants’ gender.

1.1 Median

Since the variables are ordinal, the best measure to calculate their central tendency is the median. Thus, the median of the scores calculated for all of the participants of the study is presented in Table 1. The median scores are presented in 3 rows including the median of males, the median of females and the total median. Each measure is calculated for all six questions and is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Median of the Scores for both Male and Female Groups

| Area | Personal Information | Occupation | Family & Relatives | Likes & Dislikes | Love Matters | Life Experiences |
|---------|----------------------|------------|--------------------|------------------|---------------------|------------------|
| Males | 4.0000 | 4.0000 | 4.0000 | 5.0000 | 2.0000 | 4.0000 |
| | Agree | Agree | Agree | Strongly Agree | Disagree | Agree |
| Females | 4.0000 | 4.0000 | 4.0000 | 4.0000 | 2.5000 | 4.0000 |
| | Agree | Agree | Agree | Agree | Disagree or No Idea | Agree |

| Area | Personal Information | Occupation | Family & Relatives | Likes & Dislikes | Love Matters | Life Experiences |
|-------|----------------------|------------|--------------------|------------------|--------------|------------------|
| Males | 4.0000 | 4.0000 | 4.0000 | 5.0000 | 2.0000 | 4.0000 |
| | Agree | Agree | Agree | Strongly Agree | Disagree | Agree |
| Total | 4.0000 | 4.0000 | 4.0000 | 5.0000 | 2.0000 | 4.0000 |
| | Agree | Agree | Agree | Strongly Agree | Disagree | Agree |

1.2 Inferential statistics of the scores

Research Hypothesis One: Asking private questions does not lead to students’ unwillingness to respond in particular areas of their private life.

Six normal groups are compared in this section. The variables are ordinal. Therefore, Kruskal-Wallis test is used for data analysis.

The mean ranks of 118 participants of the study for the areas of “personal information”, “occupation”, “family and relatives”, “likes and dislikes”, “love matters” and “life experiences” are 437.79, 346.07, 357.07, 493.94, 161.52, and 330.61, respectively. The null hypothesis is rejected, $X^2(5, N=118) = 193.98, p < .05$. It means that participants’ views show a significant difference among the areas. This raises another question: how are the areas of participants’ private life different? Kruskal-Wallis nonparametric test was used for this purpose. Table 2 displays the results of the test.

Table 2: Kruskal-Wallis Test Results for 6 Areas of Participants’ Private Life

| | N | Mean Rank | Mean Rank | Mean Rank | Mean Rank |
|----------------------|-----|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Love Matters | 118 | 161.52 | - | - | - |
| Life Experiences | 118 | - | 330.61 | - | - |
| Occupation | 118 | - | 346.07 | - | - |
| Family and Relatives | 118 | - | 357.07 | - | - |
| Personal Information | 118 | - | - | 437.79 | - |
| Likes and Dislikes | 118 | - | - | - | 493.94 |
| Chi-Square | | 0.000 | 1.173 | 0.000 | 0.000 |
| df | | - | 2 | - | - |
| Asymp. Sig. | | 1.000 | .556 | 1.000 | 0.000 |

Table 2 shows that the area of “love matters” is scored lowest by the participants of the study and it has a significant difference from other 5 areas. The significance levels for the 3 areas of “life experiences”, “occupation” and “family and relatives” are higher than 0.05, $p > 0.5$. Thus, the 3 groups are not significantly different from each other. The areas of “personal information” ($p < 0.05$) and “likes and dislikes” ($p < 0.05$) are both significantly different from all other areas.

Here, the null hypothesis is that the mean rank is the same for all 6 areas of privacy. The directional hypothesis states that at least the mean rank of one of the areas of privacy is different from that of the other areas. The mean rank values of 64 male participants of the study for the areas of personal information, occupation, family and relatives, likes and dislikes, love matters and life experiences are 251.92, 178.33, 186.95, 273.17, 79.91, and 184.72, respectively. The value of Chi-Square was reported as 127.646. The level of significance is lower than 0.05. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected, $X^2(5, N=118) = 127.64$, $p < .05$. It means that the male participants’ views show a significant difference among the areas. This raises another question: how are the areas of male participants’ private life different? Kruskal-Wallis test was used for this purpose. Table 3 displays the results of the test.

Table 3: Kruskal-Wallis Test Results for 6 Groups of Male Participants’ Private Life

| | N | Mean Rank | Mean Rank | Mean Rank |
|----------------------|----|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Love Matters | 64 | 79.91 | - | - |
| Occupation | 64 | - | 178.33 | - |
| Life Experiences | 64 | - | 184.72 | - |
| Family and Relatives | 64 | - | 186.95 | - |
| Personal Information | 64 | - | - | 251.92 |
| Likes and Dislikes | 64 | - | - | 273.17 |
| Chi-Square | | 0.000 | .116 | 3765.000 |
| df | | - | 2 | 1 |
| Asymp. Sig. | | 1.000 | .944 | .054 |

According to Table 3, the area of “love matters” got the lowest score for the male participants of the study and has a significant difference from other areas. After the area of “love matters” come the areas of “occupation”, “life experiences” and “family and relatives”. The level of significance is higher than 0.05, $p = .994$. Thus, a significant difference exists among these areas and the other areas of privacy, but these three areas are not significantly different from each other. Next come the areas of “personal information” and “likes and

dislikes”. They’re not significantly different from each other, ($p = .054$) but are significantly different from the other six areas.

Here, the null hypothesis is that the mean rank is the same for all 6 areas of privacy. The directional hypothesis states that at least the mean rank of one of the areas of privacy is different from that of the other areas. The mean rank values of 54 female participants of the study for the areas of personal information, occupation, family and relatives, likes and dislikes, love matters and life experiences are 185.17, 168.20, 171.35, 220.96, 83.20, and 146.11, respectively. The value of Chi-Square was reported as 70.082. The level of significance is lower than 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, $X^2(5, N=118) = 70.082, p < .05$. It means that the female participants’ views show a significant difference among the areas. This raises another question: how are the areas of female participants’ private life different? Kruskal-Wallis test was used to address the question. Table 4 displays the results of the test.

Table 4: Kruskal-Wallis Test Results for 6 Groups of Female Participants’ Private Life

| | N | Mean Rank | Mean Rank | Mean Rank |
|----------------------|----|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Love Matters | 54 | 83.20 | - | - |
| Life Experiences | 54 | - | 146.11 | - |
| Occupation | 54 | - | 168.20 | - |
| Family and Relatives | 54 | - | 171.35 | - |
| Personal Information | 54 | - | 185.17 | - |
| Likes and Dislikes | 54 | - | - | 220.96 |
| Chi-Square | | 0.000 | 5.597 | 0.000 |
| df | | - | 3 | - |
| Asymp. Sig. | | 1.000 | .133 | 1.000 |

According to Table 4, the area of “love matters” got the lowest score by the male participants of the study and has a significant difference from other areas. Then, no significant difference is observed between the areas of “life experiences”, “occupation”, “family and relatives” and “personal experiences”, $p > .05$. It means that no significant difference exists between these areas, while the areas are significantly different from the areas of “love matters” and “likes and dislikes”. Next come the areas of “likes and dislikes” which is significantly different from the other areas.

Research Hypothesis Two: There is no significant difference between male and female students regarding their willingness to answer private questions in different areas of their private life.

That is, are female’s point of view and male’s point of view the same in six areas of Privacy questionnaire? Mann-Whitney U Test is used to answer the question. The results of the test are presented in Table 5. The null hypothesis states that the mean ranks of males and females are the same and the directional hypothesis means that they’re significantly different.

According to Table 5, the mean rank of 64 male participants in this area is 66.62 and that of 54 female participants is 51.06. The level of significance is lower than 0.05 ($U=1272$, $Z=-2.695$, $p=0.007$). Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected. It means that the way male participants responded to the questions of this area differed significantly from those of female participants of the study. According to mean ranks, it is observed that the male participants of the study are more willing to answer private questions asked in this area of their private life. In other areas of students’ private life, no significant difference is observed between to gender groups.

Table 5: Results of Mann-Whitney U Test for All Participants

| | | Mean Rank | | | | | |
|-----------------|----|----------------------|------------|----------------------|--------------------|--------------|------------------|
| | N | Personal Information | Occupation | Family and Relatives | Likes and Dislikes | Love Matters | Life Experiences |
| Males | 64 | 66.62 | 57.41 | 57.88 | 62.84 | 54.67 | 61.80 |
| Female | 54 | 51.06 | 61.98 | 61.43 | 55.54 | 65.22 | 56.77 |
| Mann-Whitney U | - | 1272.000 | 1564.000 | 1624.000 | 1514.000 | 1419.000 | 1580.500 |
| Wilcoxon W | - | 2757.000 | 3674.000 | 3704.000 | 2999.000 | 3499.000 | 3065.500 |
| Z | - | -2.695 | -.758 | -.582 | -1.280 | -1.733 | -.823 |
| Sig. (2-tailed) | - | .007 | .448 | .560 | .200 | .083 | .410 |

1.3 Interview

10 participants (5 males and 5 females) were chosen among the students of different classes who had participated in the study. They were interviewed separately. Each was asked 6 questions related to six areas of the Privacy questionnaire. At the end, each was asked if they had experienced any instance of an ex-teacher asking them a question related to some other areas of privacy not included in the privacy questionnaire. Also, they were asked if they felt some other areas of privacy exist in their life and may be asked by the teacher which had not been included in the questionnaire. The results of the interview session are presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Results of the Interview Compared with Participants' Responses to Privacy Questionnaire

| | Question 1 | Question 2 | Question 3 | Question 4 | Question 5 | Question 6 |
|--------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Number of Matching Items | 7 | 6 | 8 | 8 | 6 | 7 |

Table 6 shows that the answers given to the question of each area are mostly in line with their median of their responses to the items of the same area of privacy questionnaire. The values presented in the second row of the table show that the answers are consistent with those to the same area of privacy questionnaire are 7, 6, 8, 8, 6 and 7 for the areas of “personal information”, “occupation”, “family and relatives”, “likes and dislikes”, “love matters” and “life experiences”, respectively, the average of which matches the reliability obtained for the questionnaire.

Furthermore, at the end of the interview session, participants were asked if more areas could be added to the questionnaire. They suggested the areas of education and friends to be added to the questionnaire.

IV. DISCUSSTION

A. Discussion of Research Question One

It was hypothesized that asking private questions leads to students' unwillingness to respond in particular areas of their private life compared to other areas. This hypothesis was accepted. The area of “love matters” was selected by both male and female participants as the most problematic area of their private life. This could be one of the most probable findings an individual may guess before the implementation of any related research. Many individuals regard their love matters and desires as highly private aspects of their life. Many people do not prefer to talk about their private affairs and loved ones and the way they get along in the presence of others. A language classroom as a public place with a group of students and a teacher that are not necessarily intimate friends – except for few private classes – does not seem to be an appropriate place for this purpose. The questions of this area include topics related to individuals' spouses, their relationship with their spouses and their first love, in case they have had any. Both males and females are not willing to answer questions asked in any of these areas.

The areas of “life experiences” and “occupation” are the second and third problematic areas for the participants of the present study. The only difference between the order of problematic areas of privacy as determined by males and females is observed here. While females' responses to the questions show that the area of “life experiences” was more problematic for them than the area of “occupation”, males found the questions related to the area of “occupation” more intrusive in their private life. It could be because, in the society in which the study was conducted, men are more associated with earning money than women,

although such a pattern has started to be changed. Still, in many families of this society, men are regarded as the member of the family who is responsible for making money for the whole family. They probably feel that, among the concerns of a family, what is “outside” the house is more their concern and what is “inside” is more a concern of their wife’s. Needless to mention, it is just a possible reason put forward in this study. More studies can shed more light on other possible reasons of this behavior.

Another area of privacy, “life experiences”, the second rank for females and the third rank for males, is regarded by both groups of participants as not highly problematic; however, care needs to be taken while asking private questions in this area, especially for females, since 9.3% of females and 4.7% of males strongly disagree to be asked questions in this area (see table 4.7). A possible reason could be individual experiences of the participants of this study. People experience great moments and sad moments throughout their life. Not all of them would be willing to share all these experiences with the people they don’t have much in common with and they may not see outside the classroom environment.

The next area of privacy, “family and relatives”, is not significantly different from the areas of “occupation” and “life experiences”, but is significantly different from other areas. It is ranked as the fourth problematic area of learners’ privacy. A careful look at most course-books taught in language institutes reveals that a great number of questions are presented in the course-books to be asked which are related to this area. It seems that the fact that such a large portion of classroom interrogation deals with learners’ family members and their relatives makes the learners take this for granted. It may become something usual for them to be asked questions in this area. This seems to be something unavoidable. A useful way to teach the grammar is to ask students about their friend and family members. As an example, after teaching “present continuous tense” and having the students repeat the forms and substitute – if necessary and if this is the way you teach – it could most probably help to ask them immediate questions like “What are you doing?” or “Are you listening to me?”. Then, more referential questions – the questions whose answers does not the teacher know – may prove to be useful (Chastain, 1988). Such a practice may become something ordinary for the students and this can be one of the reasons this area is ranked fourth.

The same may be the case for the fifth problematic area of this study, “personal information”. In most language courses, the first units are related to learners’ personal information. Thus, at the beginning of a language course, they reveal their identity and answer so many “information questions” such as: “What’s your ID number?”, “What’s your home address?”, “Where do you live?” etc. This can make learners more open to the questions asked in this area of their privacy.

The least problematic area determined by the participants of the present study is “likes and dislikes”. The median of the scores obtained for males and females shows that it is not problematic for males and females to be asked private questions (see table 1). The median observed for males (5.000) shows that they don’t seem to have any problems if when asked any questions in this area of their privacy. Females’ median score (4.000) shows that they are a little more careful how to answer the questions in this area. Still, both groups are open to

questions asked in this area. Thus, it seems safe to suggest that a teacher can ask many questions in this area without wondering to invade learners' private realm.

B. Discussion of Research Question Two

The only area in which there was significant difference between the scores of two groups is the area of "personal information". Although both groups were willing to be asked questions in this area (the fifth rank), the significant difference means that teachers need to be more careful when asking female participants questions about their personal information compared to male participants. No significant difference was observed between the mean ranks of both gender groups for other areas of privacy.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Two conclusions can be drawn from this study. Firstly, asking private question in some areas of learners' private life can lead to learners' unwillingness to answer the questions and subsequently, it may be one of the factors leading to communication breakdown in classroom. Regarding the areas studied here, the following order was observed for learners' unwillingness to answer private questions from the most problematic area to the least problematic one:



Figure 1: Six Areas of Privacy in the Order of Participants' Unwillingness to Answer Questions Asked in the Areas

The same order is true for female participants, while for male participants, the area of "occupation" comes before the area of "life experiences" and is determined as more problematic.

Secondly, there exists a significant difference between male and female students regarding their willingness to answer private questions in the area of "personal information", i.e. females are significantly more reluctant to respond to questions asked about their personal information.

The present study can play a significant role for EFL/ESL practitioners to decide on the questions they ask in any give classroom environment. It could be useful for the teachers who face some eyebrows raised when asking some questions. Furthermore, it may help teachers figure out ways not to intrude learners' privacy. Also, it helps them find one of the reasons some learners are not willing enough to participate in classroom debate.

A teacher may need to be more careful when asking private questions about learners' love matters, loved ones, their private affairs and the people whom they associate with. Enough care should be taken when asking questions about learners' occupation, their salary and financial matters. Since some learners may have bad experiences, or may not be willing to talk about their past for any other reason, the teacher should be careful not to interrogate learners about all the experiences they've possibly had. Moreover, the teacher needs to be aware that some learners may not like to tell others about their family and relatives. Other areas of privacy seem to be less problematic if explored by the teacher.

VI. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The present study was conducted in one language institute in Isfahan and 118 learners participated in the study. A wider range of participants could yield more reliable conclusions. Six areas of privacy were evaluated in this study. As participants suggested during the interview session, areas like "friends" and "education" may need to be evaluated. The role of culture is not considered in this study. Culture may play a role in learners' attitudes towards revealing some part of their private life. All participants were aged between 20-25 years. Age could be regarded as another factor influencing learners' level of willingness to respond to private questions in both gender groups.

VII. SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This study has focused on mishandling of privacy in language classrooms in an EFL context in Iran. The same research can be conducted on EFL learners in different cities of Iran or in different countries of the world. A comparative research can also be designed on different age groups for both gender groups. Also, other areas could be added to the questionnaire and evaluated in terms of privacy intrusion.

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Appendix 1

Appendix A: Privacy Questionnaire (English Version)

Class: ----- Age: ----- Gender: -----

Please make sure that your choices of any items are merely based on how do you like to answer those items. You are not asked to answer the following questions. You are just asked to determine how you like to respond to the questions in a classroom environment. For example, choosing “strongly agree” means that if the teacher asks you the item in a classroom environment, it is by no means an intrusion to your privacy, while choosing “strongly disagree” means that the item is a total intrusion to your privacy in the presence of your classmates.

Pleas draw a mark in the following box. You should draw a mark which is easy for you to remember later.



| Item | Question | Strongly Agree | Agree | No Idea | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|------|---|----------------|-------|---------|----------|-------------------|
| 1 | Where do you live? | | | | | |
| 2 | What's your phone number? | | | | | |
| 3 | What's you educational level? | | | | | |
| 4 | Do you work out? | | | | | |
| 5 | How much do you study every day? | | | | | |
| 6 | What do you do? | | | | | |
| 7 | How much is your income? | | | | | |
| 8 | How many hours do you work every day? | | | | | |
| 9 | Where do you work? | | | | | |
| 10 | How do you like your job? | | | | | |
| 11 | How many brothers and sisters do you have? | | | | | |
| 12 | What's their educational level? | | | | | |
| 13 | What do your parents do? | | | | | |
| 14 | How do you get along with you brother(s) and sister(s)? | | | | | |
| 15 | How often do you visit your relatives? | | | | | |
| 16 | Who's your favorite singer? | | | | | |
| 17 | Do you like going to the movies? | | | | | |

| | | | | | | |
|----|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| 18 | What's your favorite season? | | | | | |
| 19 | What's your favorite color? | | | | | |
| 20 | What kinds of clothes do you like to wear? | | | | | |
| 21 | Have you ever been in love with somebody? | | | | | |
| 22 | How do you get along with your husband/wife? | | | | | |
| 23 | How do you love your husband/wife? | | | | | |
| 24 | What was the first time you fell in love? | | | | | |
| 25 | What would you like your husband/wife be like? | | | | | |
| 26 | Where did you travel last and how did you spend it? | | | | | |
| 27 | Who were you angry with the last time you got angry? | | | | | |
| 28 | How you ever been really scared of something? | | | | | |
| 29 | How you ever donated a lot of money? | | | | | |
| 30 | How you ever been really sick? | | | | | |