

## A Sociolinguistic Study of Linguistic Taboos in the Iranian Society

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**Abstract** – The present paper explores linguistic taboos in the Iranian society, their relationship with the social context in which they are used, and the socio-cultural factors affecting their use. Drawing on the general framework provided by Qanbar (2011) and adopting Brown and Levinson's (1978, 1987) politeness models as the theoretical basis for the analysis of linguistic taboos, this paper describes different categories of linguistic taboos in the multi-ethnic Iranian society and the strategies the Iranian speakers employ in order to avoid the use of these words, including using euphemistic words, Arabic equivalents, construction, replacement, and loan words with adjusted pronunciation. It also indicates that some linguistic taboos need to be accompanied by additional conventionally-fixed words. The findings also make it clear that the ways these linguistic taboos are treated are conditioned by the cultural and religious norms of the society.

**Keywords:** linguistic taboos, face threatening acts, politeness, euphemism, sociocultural system, Iran

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### I. INTRODUCTION

Linguistic taboo or avoiding mentioning certain words and expressions in a language is a common practice in every society (Mbaya, 2002). According to Farb (1974), "any word is an innocent collection of sounds until a community surrounds it with connotations and decrees that it cannot be used in certain speech situations" (p. 91). In the same vein, Wardhaugh (2011) asserted that certain things are not said because people do not talk about them, and when these things are talked about, they are talked about in very roundabout ways, i.e., euphemistically. He further notes that euphemistic words allow us to talk about unpleasant things to disguise or neutralize the unpleasantness (Wardhaugh, 2011). As an example, in many societies, because death is feared, there are a number of euphemisms related to this respect, such as 'pass away' or 'pass on'. However, polite alternatives lack a certain quality, not conveying the emotional force of the speaker's reaction. These unmentionable things are avoided, considered inappropriate, and loaded with such strong affective connotation that they cannot be used in polite discourse (Chu, 2009).

Linguistic taboos exist in all cultures in the world. According to Trudgill (1986), the most common taboo words in the English-speaking world are still associated with sex and excretion. Despite the similarities of linguistic taboos among societies, they also vary from culture to culture. They are said to be culture-specific, that is, a word functioning as a taboo word in one language may lack any taboo quality in another language. In fact, it is the

symbolic value the specific culture attaches to the words and expressions that renders them as taboo (Farb, 1974). Tabooness can also change in time.

Taboo subjects can also differ enormously from culture to culture. However, they typically include bodies and their effluvia (sweat, snot, faces, menstrual fluid, etc.); the organs and acts of sex, maturation and defecation; diseases, death, killing (including hunting and fishing); naming, addressing, touching, viewing persons and sacred beings, objects and places; food gathering, preparation, and consumption (Allan and Burridge, 2006).

Taboo words and words like them should be observed by all the members of the society. The penalty for breaking a linguistic taboo can be severe, because blasphemy and obscenity are still considered as crimes within the jurisdiction of many courts all over the world (Wardhaugh, 2011). However, Wardhaugh (2011) further states that "... there are always those who are prepared to break the taboos in an attempt to show their own freedom from such restrictions or to expose the taboos as irrational and unjustified, as in certain movements for 'free speech'" (p. 249).

Linguistic taboos have been addressed by many studies in different contexts across the world in the recent years. The majority of such studies have described taboo words by categorizing and subcategorizing them in relation to their general and culture-specific nature. However, few, if any, studies have addressed linguistic taboos in an Iranian context, and the subject in question has remained somewhat untouched. Therefore, the present study focuses on linguistic taboos in an Iranian context. More specifically, this study is intended to describe different categories for the commonly shared linguistic taboos in the multi-ethnic community of Iran. Further, it examines some of the strategies to which Iranian speakers resort to avoid the use of linguistic taboos in their speech.

## **II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

As a linguistic phenomenon operating in speech communities, linguistic taboos have been studied in different communities and contexts throughout the world. Some of the recent studies include Hongxu and Guisen (1990), Al-Khatib (1995), Mbaya (2002), Qanbar (2011), and Ahmad et al. (2013).

Hongxu and Guisen (1990) have explored linguistic taboos in a Chinese context, discussing the creation, observance, and socio-cultural influences of linguistic taboos. They have considered taboos as a socio-cultural phenomenon associated with superstition, custom, and hierarchical power. They have broadly divided taboos into macrolinguistic and microlinguistic categories. The former refers to all the words that are considered despicable and filthy by almost all speakers in a speech community, such as sex and death. The latter refers to certain words which are perceived as taboos in relation to a specific context. For the analysis of the Chinese taboos, Hongxu and Guisen (1990) have proposed a framework which includes a "macrocontext" (that is, societal factors) and "microcontext", which includes situational factors such as register and interlocutors. This results in three varieties of taboo: absolute taboo, a quasi-taboo and non-taboo.

Al-Khatib (1995) attempted to bring the linguistic taboos into focus by investigating its relationship with the social context where it is used and the socio-cultural factors of education, age, setting and topic. He also considered the creation, development, violation and replacement of taboo words. The study concluded that these processes are conditioned by the given sociological parameters and the cultural norms of the society.

In an attempt to explore a very interesting aspect of linguistic taboos, Mbaya (2002) has carried out a descriptive study of a custom in Oromo culture (Ethiopia) known under the name of *laguu* or *lagacha*, which involves avoiding the mention of the names of the persons who are related by marriage. As the study shows, husband, wife and the in-laws avoid using their respective names and substitute them with several forms, most of which are coinings. For example, the wife calls her husband using honorific pronouns like *you* (whether in singular or plural forms), *he* and *they*, different expressions including *my husband*, *head of my family*, etc., the combination of *father of* plus a child's proper name, physical and character traits like *the truthful one*, *the cautious one*, etc.

Similarly, Qanbar (2011) has investigated the linguistic taboos in the Yemeni society in terms of their relationship with the social context in which they are used and the socio-cultural factors affecting their use. In so doing, she has examined and described different categories of linguistic taboos in the Yemeni society and the strategies the Yemeni speakers resort in order to avoid the use of these words through different types of replacement of taboo words with more acceptable words such as using jargon terms, constructions, euphemisms, creating antonyms, metaphoric expressions, circumlocution, and use of standard Arabic terms. Moreover, she has argued that these processes are conditioned by the cultural and religious norms of the society. Her study has divided the taboo words in Yemeni society into two broad categories (general and context-specific) each with subcategories.

In the same vein, Ahmad et al. (2013) have investigated different kinds of taboos used in the Pashtoon society. They have provided an insight into Pashtoon society and culture as well as norms, customs and belief shared by the members of the Pashtoon society. They have also offered an explanation as to why certain words are considered taboos in the society and why certain taboo words are accompanied by particular conventionally-fixed words. The study reports that there is a great deal of similarity between taboo words of Pashtoon society with those cultures where Islam is prevailing as the religion.

Inspired by the reviewed literature, the authors were motivated to examine this sociolinguistic behavior in the Iranian context, the significance of which is provided below.

### III. THE STUDY

There seems to be certain “unmentionables” in every language. While certain linguistic taboos are universal, others vary from culture to culture. Despite the fact that Iran is a multi-ethnic community, the majority of the population are Muslim. In other words, people in Iran are influenced by the Islamic values according to which the use of obscene words is deprecated. Children in such a context absorb the Islamic values from their parents, teachers, peers, friends and the social environment.

However, as Trudgill (1986) notes, taboo language, very often, is just a matter of convention according to which the normal use of an item in a language is prohibited due to particular social values and beliefs. Moreover, linguistic taboos are subject to change with the development of society. For Trudgill, it is the society which affects language and its environment is echoed in language. As he further asserted, the most interesting way in which society affects its language is through taboo (Trudgill, 2000). Therefore, one needs to be fully-informed of the linguistic taboos as well as the ways they are treated in a particular society. For example, not observing taboo words in an Iranian context can bring about some harm to the speaker at the personal and institutional level.

Although a plethora of studies have explored linguistic taboos in various contexts, few, if any, studies can be found to address the subject in question in an Iranian context. Thus, the present descriptive study seeks to explore linguistic taboos in order to provide a categorization of linguistic taboos in the Iranian society. More specifically, the purpose of the study is twofold. First, it is intended to describe different categories for the most common linguistic taboos in the Iranian society and the factors affecting their use. Second, it aims at providing a classification of the strategies commonly used by the Iranian speakers when dealing with linguistic taboos in their speech.

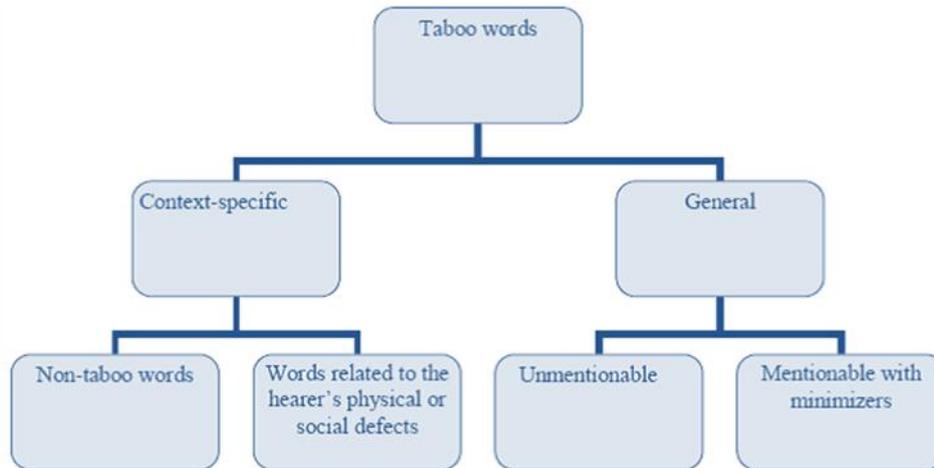
#### **IV. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The researchers found the concept of ‘face’, introduced by Goffman (1955), and ‘The Politeness Theory’, postulated by Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987), highly relevant in accounting for the tabooeness of certain words in the Iranian society. Brown and Levinson’s theory represents the face-saving view and builds on Goffman’s (1967) notion of face (Vilki, 2006). Politeness has been conceptualized as strategic conflict-avoidance (Lakoff, 1973; Brown and Levinson 1978, 1987; Fraser, 1990).

In Brown and Levinson’s politeness theory (1987:58), a participant is considered a Model Person (MP), who is “a willful fluent speaker of a natural language, further endowed with two special properties: rationality and face.” Rationality means that each speaker is capable of reasoning and knowing what options or strategies best suit the face needs (both faces) of interlocutors. The MP is also endowed with face. Every individual has two types of faces: positive and negative. Positive face is defined as the individual’s desire that her/his wants be appreciated in social interaction. Similarly, negative face is defined as the individual’s desire for freedom of action and imposition.

Additionally, according to the positive face needs, reasonable members of the society would continually try to present themselves in the best shape possible. To do so, they acquire sufficient means of censoring their behavior and their tongue by knowing taboo as well as permitted cultural domains. They always refrain from using words and expressions which are unpleasant, inappropriate or embarrassing to them or to the persons to whom they are conversing. Referring to an inappropriate topic is a threat to positive face and substituting a euphemism for a blunt term is a common strategy for reducing positive face threat (Brown and Levinson, 1987).

Brown and Levinson (1987) expect that the function of MP may be threefold: (1) as a reference model for the description of culture-specific styles of verbal interaction as a means of characterizing, (2) the ‘ethos’ of a culture and subculture, and (3) the affective quality of social relationships. The Politeness theory has served as the theoretical basis for other researchers, including Qanbar (2011). Based on the Politeness theory, Qanbar has provided a general framework for exploring linguistic taboos in Yemeni society (Figure 1).



**Figure 1:** Linguistic taboos in the Yemeni society (Adapted with permission from Qanbar (2011))

Because Yemen and Iran are both Islamic societies and share many cultural and Islamic beliefs, the researchers adopted the framework for the Iranian context. Drawing on the general framework provided by Qanbar (2011), taboo words and expressions in the Iranian society can be divided into two broad categories:

1. Context-specific
2. General

These two broad categories are further divided into subcategories. The words under *context-specific* category are neutral and non-taboo, but they become taboo when mentioned in particular contexts. Context-specific taboos are divided into two subcategories: *non-taboo words*, and *words related to the hearer's physical or social defects*; while the subcategories under the category *General* include *the unmentionable* (the words under this subcategory should be euphemised in polite speech), and *mentionable with minimizers* which include words that are to be mentioned along with other fixed conventional expressions which Qanbar called them *minimizers*.

In the section that follows, linguistic taboos in the Iranian society are explored.

## V. LINGUISTIC TABOOS IN THE IRANIAN SOCIETY

### A. Context-specific Taboo Words

- 1- *Non-taboo words*: These are neutral in meaning in everyday speech but become taboos in particular contexts when used as swear words such as *sag* (dog).

- 2- Words with connotations to the hearer representing for him/her a physical or social defects: Mentioning *kachali* (baldness) in front of a bald man or uttering *kuri* (blindness) before a blind man may cause the hearer to feel embarrassed.

## B. General

This can be further divided into two subcategories as shown in the Figure 1:

- 1- Absolutely forbidden words or the unmentionable
- 2- Permissible or mentionable with minimizers

**The unmentionable.** The absolute forbidden words (Unmentionable) are divided into the following five subcategories:

- 1- Words or terms referring to the private organs of the human body and their functions, and body effluvia (e.g., *pestan* (female breast));
- 2- Words or terms referring to religion (blasphemy) or words against religious figures and symbols (e.g., *Bahaiat* (Baha'i));
- 3- Words or terms referring to national or historical or the present political figures or political system (e.g., *Esraeel* (Israel));
- 4- The first names of one's female members of the family mentioned in public or before an outsider;
- 5- Words referring to things that you give away to the poor and the needy, or friends on social occasions.

Obviously, the first three sub-categories, sex, religion and politics, could almost be found in almost all cultures across the world, though with varying degree. People often learn about the tabooeness from early childhood and it forms a part of childhood language socialization (Qanbar, 2011). The second subcategory which concerns blasphemy differs from one religion to another. For example, *Bahaiat* (Bahâ'í Faith) is not recognized as a legal religion in Islamic Republic of Iran and the followers of this religion are even seen as unclean or infidels by the government. As a result, the term *ferghe Bahaiat* (Bahâ'í sect) is used instead. The third subcategory addressing the current political system and figures in charge informs the present political scene. For example, the term *Esraeel* (Israel) is not used within the Iranian political system or in mass media because the Iranian government does not recognize Israel as a state and accordingly the use of such a term is felt to be a legitimatization or acceptance of the existence of Israel as a state. Instead, the terms like *rezhime Sehyunisti* (Zionist regime), *rezhime eshgalgare Qods* (Qods occupying regime), *Felestine eshgali* (occupied Palestine) or *sarzaminhaye eshgali* (occupied lands) are used.

The fourth and fifth subcategories are culture-specific and often shared among Islamic societies. In case of the Iranian society, it is considered indecent for a man to utter either the first names of his female family members before an outsider or the names of the family

female members of an outsider without a genuine need. Mentioning the first name of a person indicates an intimate relationship between people. Such relationship between two persons from opposite genders, while they are not related by blood or by marriage, is not tolerated by other members of the family to which the female person belongs. To see why it is so, a background for the status of women in Iran becomes necessary. The position of women in the Islamic Iran is often determined by their status in law and custom. Despite the fact that nowadays Iranian women have more power and opportunities than some other Islamic countries in the region, they have a long way to go. Iranian males are still in dominant position over women and assume the responsibility to provide and to protect. As a result, there are many taboos imposed on women in the Iranian society in terms of how to behave, what to wear, and how to talk. So when addressing a female member, Iranian men need to use such terms as *khanom* (Madam), *ayal* (my wife), and *haj khanom* (an address term used to refer to a female pilgrim who has visited the House of Allah in Mecca in Saudi Arabia).

Similarly, the fifth subcategory is deeply rooted in the Islamic teachings and values and is well-established in an Iranian context. In case you give away something like money, clothes, food to the poor, it is not a good practice to talk about it with others in order to be admired and praised. Instead, Islam insists that the best rewarding alms are those given in full secrecy (Qanbar, 2011), and, as Koranic teachings also stress it, it is much better to receive our return from Allah, who rewards much more generously than men do. Likewise, when Iranians offer a gift to a friend or an acquaintance on social events like a wedding, they do not mention it to other people. Below is an example:

A: *che ghadr be moasese komak kardi?* (How much did you give away to the charity?)

B: *mablaghe naghabeli bud.* (It was not much)

**Mentionable with minimizers.** This category is Iranian-specific, and includes words and phrases that are considered taboos and shocking to the hearer. When being verbalized, they need to be accompanied by certain fixed conventional phrases. The function of these phrases is to mitigate and *minimize* the illocutionary force of the tabooed item and make it acceptable. This category is further divided into three subcategories: *unclean objects*, *supernatural things*, and *expressions of admiration*, each of which is explained in details below.

**Unclean objects.** These are words or phrases referring to unclean places, objects and things (e.g., *dastshuee* (toilets) or *eshal* (diarrhea)). When the hearer is directly addressed, the minimizers of this subcategory are intended to save his/her face from being injured by these unclean words. Interestingly, the words themselves become contaminated as they are associated with the dirty things they stand for (Hongxu and Guisen, 1990). These minimizers are *rum be divar* (May I face a wall), *golab be rutun* (May you face rosewater), just to name a few. These minimizers are used before mentioning the unclean objects and things because they are believed to consider the hearer's dignity and avoid them to experience shame when the dirty words are mentioned. Below are more examples:

*Golab be rutun, dastshuee ma gerefteh* (May you face rosewater, our toilet is clogged.)

*Rum be divar, ta be hal ehsase estefragh betun dast dade* (May I face a wall, have you ever felt like vomiting?)

**Supernatural things.** This subcategory deals with words or phrases referring to supernatural things that go beyond the control of the human being (e.g., supernatural creatures like *jen* (jennies); certain diseases like *saratan* (cancer)). The minimizers of this subcategory protect both the speaker and the hearer from what it is mentioned. German psychologist Wundt (1927) explains that taboos were originally an objectified fear of a "demonic" power which was believed to be hidden in a tabooed object. In the same vein, Allan and Burrige (2006) stated that "the most serious taboos apply to things thought to be ominous, evil or offensive to supernatural powers" (p.237). Violating such taboos is feared to cause harm to the violator and perhaps his/her fellows. It is exactly this fear that leads to the practice of using a particular minimizer aimed at keeping the evil at a distance or driving it off.

Thus, uttering the name of a fatal disease like cancer is often preceded by phrases like *zabunam lal* (my tongue be dumb). These minimizers will make sure that neither the hearer nor the speaker gets the disease mentioned. To talk about the possibility of the death of someone dear to either the speaker or the hearer, minimizers like *ishala bad az 120 sal* (may after 120 years), *dur az jun* (far from your life), *omret deraz* (may you have a long life), *khodaye nakardeh* (God forbid), *khoda on ruzo nayareh* (may God not bring about that day), *gushe sheitun kar* (the ear of Satan be deafened), *cheshme sheitun kur* (the eyes of Satan be blinded) are used. Here are further examples:

*Age khodaye nakardeh etefaghi baraye shoma biofteh ...* (God forbid, if something happens to you ...)

*Gushe sheitun kar, migan saratan gerefteh* (The ear of Satan be deafened, he is said to have cancer.)

Talking about supernatural creatures like jinnies, afreets, ghosts, etc. invokes the use of minimizers like *besmela* (in the name of God). Mentioning the supernatural creature without using the minimizer is also believed to bring along the creature mentioned itself and would severely harm both the speaker and the hearer/s.

**Expressions of admiration.** This subcategory has to do with words or phrases referring to the expressions of admiration for things or objects we admire or like. Deeply rooted in common beliefs and sometimes in religious doctrine, it deals with the protection of the admired or liked object from the evil eyes. This object may be physical like a new car, a certain distinguished beauty feature, a dress, or abstract things like a skill in doing something (Qanbar, 2011). This also holds for an Iranian community. It is commonly believed that one's eyes may have an evil effect if he or she likes or admires an object too much. In case of a physical thing, it is believed that it will be broken or ruined. And in case of a human being, it is believed that the person may die or at least be infected by an incurable disease. Consequently, in order to protect the beloved one or the admired thing from the evil eyes, people use utterances like *salavat bar Mohammad* (peace be upon Mohammad), *mashalah* (God's will is to be done), *bezanam be takhteh* (knock on wood), *betereke cheshme hasud*

(may the eyes of the jealous be exploded), *elahi cheshme bad azat dur bashe* (may ominous eyes be away from you), resorting to Koranic verses, etc. before the admiration. Below are further examples:

*Bezanam be takhte, javun mundid ha!* (You have remained young-looking, knock on wood!)

*Mashalah, che khune bozorgi darid!* (God's will is to be done, what a big house you have!).

## VI. FACTORS AFFECTING THE USE OF LINGUISTIC TABOOS

The use of taboo words and the degree of perceiving words as acceptable or prohibited in the Iranian society is subject to a number of socio-cultural factors. This means that a given taboo word does not necessarily have the same influence on different speaker groups. That is, words that may be shocking to one individual may not necessarily be as shocking to others.

Considerable debate has existed over the folk-linguistic perceptions which led to the claim that women's language differs markedly in act, frequency, reason and content from that of men's (e.g. de Klerk, 1992, 1997; and Gordon, 1993). We argue that this is true about the Iranian society as well. This is because common beliefs and Islamic teachings have emphasized women more than men to be solemn and serene in their verbal behavior. Women are, thus, expected to use more standard forms and less swear words than men in their speech. That is to say, they have a preference for refined and veiled and indirect expressions. This is instilled and reinforced from early childhood whether through parents or in educational environments. Further, in the Iranian culture girls are not so much expected to be present in open, mixed environments and on streets. The same holds for educational contexts where female students attend single-sex schools until they finish their high school. As a result, females are not exposed to a variety of verbal behaviors.

Demographic background can also contribute to the use and perception of the taboo words. Urban context requires individuals to, culturally and linguistically, integrate into the mainstream society. However, in rural areas a more traditional cultural value system dominates. As a result, open expression of some concepts may be typical in urban areas while the same may still be considered taboo and vice versa. For example, although talking about *hamjensgaraee* (homosexuality) and associated terms is still considered a taboo concept by the majority of the society and the Islamic government strongly opposes it, it is dealt with and discussed, more or less, privately by a very small portion of the society in urban contexts, while remaining almost an entirely negative concept, equivalent to *lavat* (pederasty), in rural areas.

Other factors affecting the use of linguistics taboos can be time, level of education, the relationship between the interlocutors, and age. As languages change, so does the tabooeness of some words. This means that some taboo words in the past may lose the stigmatized status over a period of time. Surprisingly, one such an example is the term *taraneh* (song) which was once replaced with other terms such as *kar* (work) or *ghet'e* (piece) in state media following the post-1979 revolution years. The level of education also contributes to the use of linguistic taboos. The educated, for example, are more conservative to use taboo words than the uneducated. However, they have to bring up taboo subjects if they are in the position of,

say, a doctor or a specialist. The kind of the relationship between the participants may also permit or disallow the use of the taboos. The more the interlocutors are intimate, the more they would feel free to use taboos (Coupland et al., 2003). It is also commonly thought that the teenagers would use more taboos than adults or children.

## VII. STRATEGIES TO AVOID USING TABOO WORDS IN THE IRANIAN SOCIETY

In light of what has been described so far, it can be inferred that Iranians avoid directly mentioning linguistic taboos by use of several strategies. The common strategies are *euphemisms, the use of Arabic terms, constructions, addition of particular conventionally-fixed words, replacement, change in pronunciation, change in the name of places, and loan words with adjusted pronunciation*. Taboo words can be avoided or mitigated by employing all or some of the strategies mentioned.

### A. Euphemisms

Using euphemized terms is one of the most commonly used ways of treating linguistic taboos. These are words which are used as pleasant replacements to those that are considered harsh or offensive. For example, words that deal with death are an area in which the use of euphemisms is very remarkable. Words referring to death and the ceremonies associated with it are not taboo in the Iranian society, though talking about the possible death of someone close may evoke the use of a minimizer as mentioned before. The common word *mord* (died) is typically not used for someone close. Instead it is euphemised and is replaced by phrases and circumlocutions like *dargozasht* (passed away), *omresho dad be shoma* (s/he gave his/her life to you), be *rahmate khoda raftan* (went to the glory), *rafteh* (departed), *az miane ma raft* (left us), *az miane ma par keshid* (fled away). Additionally, when the name of a dead person is mentioned, it is followed by the expression *Khoda biamaorzad* (may God absolve him) or *Khoda rahmat konad* (may God have mercy on him). A dead person is also mentioned by terms like *marhum/marhume* (the late; *marhume* is used for a female dead person) and *azize safar kardeh* (the departed beloved). Similarly, in Islamic Iran if a soldier is killed in war or while serving in military, the term *shahid* (martyr or fallen) and the verb *shahid shodan* (martyrize) are used. Associated words with death like *peikar* (corps), *ghabr* (Arabic term for grave), *gassal* (Arabic term for mortuarist), *gosl khaneh* (mortuaries') are respectively used for *jenaze, gur, morde shur* and *morde shur khaneh*. The term *kafan* (Arabic term for shroud) is neutral.

### B. Use of Arabic Terms

The use of Arabic terms is very common for the body organs and their functions. For example, the male organ is replaced by the word *alate mardaneh* (male organ) or *alate tanasoli e mardani* (the male reproductive organ). As for the female organ, the term *farj* (vagina) or *alate tanasoli zananeh* (the female reproductive organ) are used. The Persian word for testicle is the Arabic word *beizeh*. The word for stool is *madfu*. The term *madfu*

*kardan* (to defecate) is a formal verb which is used instead of the vulgar verb *ridan* in Persian. For women's menstruation, the term *ghaedegi*, a combination of an Arabic word with a Persian noun-making suffix, is used. The terms *ehtelam* or *jenabat* are used to refer to men's semen flowing out when sleeping.

### C. Construction

Taboo words can also be avoided by using whole constructions. For example, to have an intercourse can be substituted with non-offensive constructions like *amizesh dashtan* (to have a mix), *nazdiki kardan* (to approach) and *hambastar shodan* (to share the same bed). The phrase *khod ra khali kardan* (to empty yourself) is a common construction used to avoid a more literal description of 'defecation' or 'urinating'. Similarly, words for prostitutes are replaced by construction like *zane khiabai* (a street woman). In case of children's urinating, family members use the circumlocution *khodesho khis kardeh* (He has wetted himself).

### D. Addition of Particular Conventionally-Fixed Words

Holy words like *Allah* (God) should not be mentioned solo but accompanied with a variety of adjectives, among which *tabarak va ta'ala* (the blessing and the exalted) is more common. The name of Prophet Mohammad should be also accompanied with *sali Allah aleihe va salam* (peace be upon him). Likewise, the name of Mohammad's daughter Fatima should be followed by *salam Allah aleiha* (Allah's hay to her). Also, the common term *aleihe salam* (hay to him) is used after the mention of Shiite Imams. As Islamic teachings suggest, under no circumstances should Allah's and Prophet Mohammed's names be mentioned in the bathrooms.

### E. Replacement

There are also words which are not seen as taboo by common people but tabooeness is imposed by the government and institutions. For example, authors and translators are not allowed to use such words as *sharab* (wine) and *meikadeh* (bar or pub) in their works as making wine and running a bar are illegal in Iran. Words like 'boyfriend' or 'girlfriend' in foreign movies are changed to a *wife*, *fiancé*, an *acquaintance*, or a *colleague* when they are translated or dubbed into Persian. Similarly, the commonly used swear word in movies, namely 'shit', is translated as *lanati* (damn!) in Persian.

### F. Change in Pronunciation

Interestingly, there are foreign words parts of which are pronounced almost the same as linguistic taboos in Persian. In such cases, they are shortened or the pronunciations are changed so that they will be safe to be expressed in Persian. For example, the Greek football teams Olympiakos and Panathinaikos are often shortened to *Olympiako* and *Panathinaiko* respectively as the ending parts of these words are pronounced the same as the Persian word

for female vagina. Similarly, the Spanish team Zaraguza is changed to *Saragossa* due to the fact that part of the word, namely, *guz*, is pronounced the same as the Persian word for fart.

### G. Change in the Names of Places

Closely related to linguistic taboos is the change in the names of some places and areas. For example, the Iranian State Department in 2012 has agreed to change the names of some villages. Consequently, the village name Gandabe Olia was changed to Ghandabe Olia. The name *Gandab* had a pronunciation similar to the Persian word for sewage. However, such changes in names of areas are very infrequent.

### H. Loan Words with Adjusted Pronunciation

These are words which are borrowed from foreign languages and are used as replacements for taboo words. In so doing, the pronunciations are often changed so that they can be pronounced comfortably in Persian. For example, the English medical term *period* is used, albeit with an adjusted pronunciation, for women's menstruation. Another example is *pipi kardan* (from English *pee-pee* but it has come to mean defecate in Persian), which is often used by urban citizens when addressing children.

The strategies and mechanisms addressed above are by no means an exhaustive account of how linguistic taboos are avoided in the Iranian society. However, they serve to illustrate a variety of ways to which Iranian speakers resort in order to avoid a face-threatening environment and create an environment of calm, polite, and morally acceptable speech.

## VIII. CONCLUSION

This paper aimed at providing a categorization of linguistic taboos in Iranian society. Drawing on similar works in Islamic societies and using the framework provided by Qanbar (2011), it attempted to explore the commonly shared linguistic taboos in the Iranian society. The paper began by describing linguistic taboos in Iranian society in terms of its relationship with the social context in which they are used and the factors affecting them. It then provided a classification of strategies the Iranian people use when dealing with linguistic taboos. The paper also made it clear that the ways people treat linguistic taboos are conditioned by cultural and religious norms of the society.

Interestingly, there is a great deal of similarities in most of the linguistic taboos between the Iranian society and Islamic societies as both Iran and these Islamic countries are driven by Islamic doctrine and values. However, what distinguishes them lies in the culture-specific category, echoing a distinctive cultural identity. Further, it needs to be reminded that in a multi-ethnic society like Iran there is the possibility that regional societies share linguistic taboos not seen in other parts of the country. Consequently, as the main focus of the present paper was to explore only commonly shared linguistic taboos, the local ones were disregarded.

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