

# The Impact of Power Distance and Gender on the Choice of Disagreement Strategies in Saudi Colloquial Arabic

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the potential impact of power distance and gender on the choice of disagreement strategies by speakers of Saudi colloquial Arabic (henceforth “SCA”) in same- and cross-gender interactions. A Discourse Completion Test (DCT) consisting of three situations reflecting the three different combinations of power status (high-low, low-high, and equal) was used to collect the data. To have a comprehensive account of the impact of gender, four groups of participants (Male→Male, Male→Female, Female→Female and Female→Male) were included. Each group consisted of 40 participants. The collected data were compared and analyzed using Maíz-Arévalo’s (2014) taxonomy of disagreement strategies. The data analysis revealed two patterns; firstly, when there was no power distance between interlocutors or when the speaker expressing disagreement had a higher power position than the addressee, gender appeared to have an impact on the choice of disagreement strategies by the speakers of SCA. When disagreeing with the same gender, both male and female speakers of SCA tended to use strong disagreement strategies but mitigated disagreement strategies when disagreeing with the other gender; and secondly, when the speaker expressing disagreement had a lower power position than the addressee, the gender of either the speaker or the addressee did not seem to have an impact on the choice of disagreement strategies. In this pattern, power appeared to be the decisive factor which both male and female speakers of SCA tended to use in mitigated disagreement strategies regardless of the gender of the addressee.

**Keywords:** disagreement strategies, gender, mitigated strategies, power, Saudi Colloquial Arabic, strong strategies

## 1. Introduction

Disagreement is one of the most common practices occurring in everyday interactions, and no matter how hard speakers try to avoid it, they often find themselves in situations where they have to use it (Kreutel, 2007; Mohajer, 2015). It happens when a speaker expresses a point of view that is not in harmony with another person’s view or statement. Koczogh (2012) defined disagreement as “a speech act expressing the speaker’s opinion or belief, whose illocutionary force is partly or fully inconsistent with that of the previous speaker’s utterance” (p. 234). In fact, research on the pragmatic dimension of language including various speech acts such as disagreement, request, apology, etc. has grown much since the work of Austin (1962) and Searle (1976) who explored the actions that words could functionally do. Based on the original version of speech act theory by Austin (1962), disagreement is classified as a commissive speech act since it suggests a speaker’s commitment to their ideas or beliefs. However, according to the taxonomy developed by Searle (1976), disagreement is classified as a representative act because it comes as a result of the psychological state in which the speaker is committed to the truth of an utterance.

In general, disagreement is regarded as a dispreferred act since it has the potential to jeopardize the interpersonal relationship between interlocutors (Kreutel, 2007; Mohajer, 2015). More specifically, from the perspective of politeness theory, disagreement is considered as a face threatening act in which the positive face of a hearer can be endangered (Brown & Levinson, 1987). And to minimize the threat and harm that can be caused by the disagreement, speakers often vary their strategies based on a number of factors that are believed to greatly influence the choice of these strategies including power, social distance, severity of disagreement, gender, etc. (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Khammari, 2021a; Rees-Miller, 2000).

Disagreement has received considerable attention by researchers in different languages and from different perspectives during the last a few decades (e.g., Alkheder & Al-Abed Al-Haq, 2018; Kakavá, 1993; Khammari, 2021b; Koczogh, 2012; Kreutel, 2007; Muntigl & Turnbull, 1998; Parvaresh & Eslami Rasekh, 2009; Rees-Miller, 2000; Sharqawi & Elizabeth, 2019, among others). However, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, there are no studies that examined disagreement in SCA. Moreover, while a few earlier studies examined the influence of gender on disagreement, the possible impact of the addressee's gender on the choice of disagreement strategies was rarely considered. For that reason, among others, the present study attempted to enthusiastically fill the gap in literature by exploring any possible impact of both the speaker's and the addressee's gender on the choice of disagreement strategies in SCA, a language form spoken in one of the most gender-segregated societies in the world.

The objectives of the current study are, thus, twofold: (1) to examine the effect of power distance between interlocutors on the choice of disagreement strategies in SCA; and (2) to examine the effect of the gender of both the speaker and the addressee on the choice of disagreement strategies in SCA.

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. Do speakers of SCA use the same or different disagreement strategies when interacting with similar or different genders?
2. Does power distance influence the choice of disagreement strategies among speakers of SCA?

The significance of the current study emerges from the fact that it is possibly the first attempt to date to examine the disagreement strategies used in SCA. It also examines the possible impact of both the speaker's and the addressee's gender on the choice of disagreement strategies. It is hoped that the findings will contribute to the growing body of research on language and gender. The possible impact of the addressee's gender on the choice of disagreement strategies, in particular, was rarely considered in earlier studies. Moreover, to express disagreement is not merely a matter of expressing opposing thoughts and opinions, but it also reflects the cultural and speech norms of the community since disagreement strategies are governed by these norms (Khammari, 2021a). Therefore, this study attempts to unearth some facts about the Saudi culture in relation to disagreements. Accordingly, it is hoped that the findings will add to the knowledge of researchers interested in SCA and to Arabic language learners from other cultures regarding cultural differences in relation to gender and disagreement.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Previous Studies on Disagreement

The speech act of disagreement has been examined by many studies in different languages and from different perspectives during the last a few decades; similar to other speech acts, such as requesting, apologizing, and refusing. The most prominent studies among these were the ones that focused on providing taxonomies for disagreement strategies. For example, Pomerantz (1984) provided a taxonomy for disagreement strategies from a conversation analysis perspective. In her taxonomy, she classified disagreement strategies into strong and weak strategies. Kakavá (1993) also proposed a taxonomy for disagreement strategies from a conversation analysis perspective. She distinguished between three linguistic realizations of disagreement: strong forms, strong yet mitigated, and mitigated forms of disagreement.

Drawing on Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness (1987), Rees-Miller (2000) provided a taxonomy for disagreement strategies that included three types. These included softened, unmodified, and aggravated disagreement strategies. In fact, the taxonomy she proposed was typical for conflicting discourse (Maíz-Arévalo, 2014). Kreutel (2007) developed a taxonomy specifically for examining the disagreement strategies used by English language learners. In her taxonomy, she distinguished between what were described as "desirable" and "undesirable" features in non-native speakers' expressions of disagreement. Maíz-Arévalo (2014) further developed a taxonomy for disagreement strategies drawing on previous taxonomies proposed by Kreutel (2007), Pomerantz (1984), and Rees-Miller (2000). In Maíz-Arévalo's (2014) taxonomy, disagreement strategies were classified into two categories: strong and mitigated strategies. Furthermore, Muntigl and Turnbull (1998) proposed a taxonomy of disagreement strategies from the perspective of what they termed "social psychological pragmatics" (p. 226). In Their taxonomy, five categories of disagreement strategies that could be used specifically in arguing exchanges were proposed. They ranked these five categories according to their aggressive potential on the hearer's face.

As for the studies conducted on the speech act of disagreement in SCA, reviewing relevant literature showed lack on this regard. However, several studies on disagreement strategies in other varieties of Arabic were found. For example, Alkheder and Al-Abed Al-Haq (2018) examined disagreement strategies in Jordanian Arabic. They used

a DCT including ten imaginary situations to collect data from 217 university students. They found that the speakers of Jordanian Arabic preferred using softened disagreement strategies more than strong strategies. Giving explanations in particular was found to be the most frequently used disagreement strategy. Although they used a DCT, which included ten situations, no attention was given to power distance between interlocutors. Also, the study included only male participants and the possible influence of gender of either the speaker or the addressee was not accounted for.

Benyakoub, Alghazo, Altakhaineh and Rabab'ah (2022) conducted a cross-cultural study using Muntigl and Turnbull's (1998) taxonomy to examine disagreement strategies in Jordanian and Algerian Arabic. Their study focused on the effect of power status on the choice of disagreement strategies. A DCT that consisted of six situations was used to collect data from twenty speakers from each Arabic variety. The results showed that participants from Jordanian and Algerian Arabic shared a significantly similar preference for using two disagreement strategies in high to low status, low to high status, and in equal status. These two strategies are counterclaims and contradictions. They justified those choices by the speakers of Jordanian and Algerian Arabic to be more indirect to save their interlocutors' positive face. In spite of the fact that their study provided a rich analysis, it did not pay attention to the possible effect of gender and all their participants were males.

Khammari (2021b) investigated disagreement strategies in Tunisian Arabic. His study accounted for the variables of social distance, social power, and rank of imposition. A DCT that included 15 situations was used to collect data from 30 university students. The findings of the study revealed that the choice of disagreement strategies by speakers of Tunisian Arabic was affected by social distance between them and their addressees. More specifically, it was found that speakers of Tunisian Arabic tended to use more direct and unmitigated disagreement strategies when disagreeing with the addressees that had the same status as friends and classmates. It was also found that when the addressee had a higher social status, like a teacher or a father, the speakers of Tunisian Arabic tended to use indirect and softened disagreement strategies. Similar to Benyakoub et al (2021) and Alkheder and Al-Abed Al-Haq's (2018) studies, Khammari's (2021b) study did not account for the variable of gender.

In addition to the abovementioned studies that examined disagreement strategies in some varieties of Arabic language using DCTs containing situations that resembled face-to-face interactions in real life, a number of studies that examined disagreement strategies in asynchronous digitally mediated communication were also found. Harb (2021), for instance, examined disagreement strategies used by Arabic speakers on Facebook pages and groups. His study was based on examining a specialized corpus of nearly 50 thousand words, which included naturally existing comments/posts gathered over a period of 90 days from 19 public Arabic Facebook pages and groups in three topic areas: religion, politics, and society. Based on Relational Work (Locher & Watts, 2005), Harb proposed ten discursive strategies as primary models of the pragmatic realization of disagreement among Arabic speakers. He argued that most of these strategies are neither polite nor impolite, but rather appropriate, politic.

Almutairi (2021) examined disagreement strategies in Saudis' Twitter posts in political and sociocultural hashtags that were trending in 2017-2018. Her study revealed that aggravated strategies were the most frequently used disagreement strategies; followed by unmarked disagreement strategies; and finally, mitigated disagreement strategies were the least frequently used disagreement strategies. She argued that the dominance of aggravated strategies might be a result of the interaction between strangers on Twitter. Although Almutairi's (2021) and Harb's (2021) studies have contributed to the understanding of disagreement strategies in Arabic as used in social media, they did not account for social variables such as power status, social distance, and gender.

## 2.2 Disagreement and Gender

Since gender was not accounted for in earlier studies on disagreement strategies in Arabic that were reviewed earlier, here I will review studies that accounted for this variable in other languages. Also, a brief review of the relationship between language and gender in general will be provided before presenting studies that specifically were conducted on gender and disagreement.

The relationship between language and gender has been a concern for many researchers in the field of sociolinguistics in the last few decades. In fact, Robin Lakoff's (1975) pioneering book *Language and Woman's Place* can be regarded as the primary work that inspired many researchers to examine the complex interaction between gender and communication by exploring linguistic practices and styles of men and women. She proposed a number of features that distinguished women's speech from men's speech. In general, women's speech was described by Lakoff (1975) as having a greater association with indirectness, uncertainty, hedging, avoidance of dominance, and powerlessness. This assumption was subsequently supported by a number of studies that argued that women's speech was characterized by the use of more indirect and softening devices in comparison with men's speech, especially, when performing speech acts that involve face-related issues (e.g., Furkatovna,

Jurabekovna & Mamurjonovna, 2021; Holmes, 1995; Scollon & Scollon, 2001; Tannen, 1990). That assumption, however, was challenged by some studies as will be shown in the following section.

Regarding disagreement and gender in SCA, it was mentioned previously that no previous studies had accounted for the variable of gender even in the few studies that were conducted on other varieties of Arabic. However, a number of studies examined disagreement strategies in relation to the variable of gender in other languages. Koczogh (2012), for instance, investigated the influence of gender on the choice of disagreement strategies in Hungarian. She examined 525 tokens of disagreement that were extracted from recorded face-to-face dyadic encounters of 30 Hungarian undergraduate students (15 from each gender). The initial corpus consisted of 68,193 words that were recorded between December 2009 and March 2010 over approximately 444 minutes. Her findings revealed that female speakers of Hungarian tended to disagree much more frequently and often in a more direct and blunt way than did male speakers. She emphasized that those results contradicted with the general assumption regarding women's style of communication that women agreed less frequently and less directly than do men. Koczogh explained that "female speakers of this study were willing to sacrifice attending the other's face for the sake of efficiency of communication or preservation of one's own face" (p. 243).

Bavarsad et al. (2015) investigated disagreement strategies used by male and female Persian learners of English and they focused on the impact of gender. Their data were collected using a DCT containing nine situations, and then it was distributed to 50 male and 50 female Iranian students. The study used Muntigl and Turnbull's (1998) taxonomy to analyze disagreement strategies and found significant gender differences where female speakers were found to have stronger preference for indirect strategies more than their male counterparts. Similar conclusion was reached by Sharqawi and Elizabeth (2019) who examined the effect of gender on the choice disagreement strategies produced by Iraqi EFL learners. A DCT consisting of ten situations was used to collect data from 80 Iraqi university students, 40 students from each gender. The study showed a gender difference where female learners used more indirect disagreement strategies than did male learners.

Pilkington (1992) studied the impact of gender on the conversational style of same-gender groups of bakery workers in New Zealand. It was found that women tended to avoid disagreement, soften their opposition, and employ more features of cooperative interactional style more than did men. Further evidence for this pattern was provided by Guiller and Durndell (2006) who examined how agreement and disagreement were expressed in educational online discussion groups by male and female speakers of English. 197 participants were included in this study. It was found that female participants tended to avoid disagreements, but when deciding to express an oppositional stance; they were inclined to use more indirect strategies to do so. Male participants, on the other hand, were found to be more direct when disagreeing. They used more explicit and aggravated forms of disagreement than did the female participants.

While the abovementioned studies examined the influence of gender on the choice of disagreement strategies, the focus was only on the speaker's gender and no attention was given to the possible impact of the addressee's gender. However, two particular studies, that considered that aspect, were found. Parvaresh and Eslami Rasekh (2009) studied the influence of the addressee's gender on the choice of disagreement strategies by female speakers of Persian. A DCT consisting of four situations was used to collect that data from 80 female native speakers of Persian. Their findings revealed that the addressee's gender affected the choice of disagreement strategies greatly. They found that when the addressee was of the other gender, Iranian women employed more indirect disagreement strategies. Parvaresh and Eslami Rasekh suggested that in a non-Western Islamic culture such as Iran, the consideration of deference might override that of solidarity when women disagree with men.

Heidari et al. (2014) studied the impact of power and the addressee's gender on the choice of disagreement strategies by male Persian speakers. A DCT consisting of six situations was used to collect the data from 100 male speakers of Persian. The Results showed that power and the addressee's gender influenced disagreement strategies highly. It was revealed that male speakers of Persian tended to be more indirect when disagreeing with an addressee of a higher status, and more direct and confrontational with an addressee of a similar or lower status. When disagreeing with the other gender, however, it was found that male Persian speakers tended to be more indirect regardless of the power distance between interlocutors.

### **3. Methodology**

#### *3.1 Data Collection: Method and Participants*

The data for this study were collected using a written DCT. The DCT is a questionnaire that comprises a number of imaginary situations in which respondents are required to respond to each situation as if they would in real life (Ogiermann, 2018). The DCT was first developed by Blum-Kulka (1980) and since then researchers have widely used it to collect data on the production of various speech acts. The DCT used in this study consisted of three

situations in which respondents had to respond to each situation by writing what they would respond to show their disagreement. These situations reflected the three different combinations of power distance between interlocutors. In the first situation, the speaker who showed disagreement had a higher status than the other interlocuter (+P). In the second situation, both interlocuters had the same status (=P). In the third situation, the speaker who showed disagreement had a lower status than the other interlocuter (-P).

When designing these situations, existing DCTs which were used to examine disagreement strategies in other varieties of Arabic were consulted (e.g., Alkheder & Al-Abed Al-Haq, 2018; Benyakoub et al., 2021; Khammari, 2021b). Nonetheless, some modifications were made to the selected situations to make them fit for the context of the current study and its objectives. To have realistic situations, the researcher had to take into consideration the cultural and social norms of the Saudi context. For example, since one of the objectives of the current study was to examine the effect of the gender of both the speaker and the addressee on disagreement, the gender-segregated nature of Saudi society had to be considered in designing the situations. According to the cultural norms of the Saudi society, close social distance (i.e., friendship and intimacy) between males and females who are not first-degree relatives is considered culturally inappropriate. Nevertheless, recent reforms in Saudi Arabia enabled Saudi women to work in mixed-gender workplaces.

The other factor that had to be considered in designing the situations in the current DCT was the nature of topics involved in these situations. Generally speaking, interaction between the two genders at workplace in Saudi Arabia is culturally expected to be limited to work. This had to be reflected in the situations in the DCT. Also, controversial gender topics that might be provocative to one gender were avoided even if they have relevance to work, such as the salary or work hours based on gender. This control criterion was employed to avoid any possible discrepancy in disagreement strategies between the two genders that are stimulated by gender-related topics.

Based on the cultural norms of the Saudi society regarding gender-segregation and the objectives of this study, the only context that could be considered for conducting the current study was mixed-gender workplaces. Accordingly, the participants who were included were Saudi employees working in mixed-gender workplaces, such as private and public organizations, companies, banks and stores in Jeddah city, Saudi Arabia. The total number of the participants was 160, divided evenly, 80 males and 80 females. The participants' ages ranged from 20 to 60 and they were chosen randomly. The selection of Jeddah was due to the criteria that it is a big city in the country with great diversity; it has a big number of workplaces that provided the needed data for this research; and the openness of the city provided the most suitable environment to carry out the task with fewer limitations than what could be encountered in other cities.

Since examining the possible effect of the addressee's gender on the choice of disagreement strategies was one of the objectives of this study, four versions of this study's DCT were made available; all of them were identical in terms of situations. Two of them were designed for female participants; one was directed to female addressees, and the second one was directed to male addressees. Each of those two versions was distributed to 40 female participants. There were also two versions of the DCT that were designed for male participants; one version was directed to male addressees, and the second one was directed to female addressees. Each of these two versions was distributed to 40 male participants. The reason for having two versions distributed to different participants of the same gender was to avoid any possibility that the participants might get the impression that they had to give different responses based on the gender of the addressee. That might have happened if they were provided with all situations related to the two genders in the same DCT.

### *3.2 Data Analysis*

The collected data were coded and analyzed using Maíz-Arévalo's (2014) taxonomy of disagreement strategies. In light of the nature of the current study and its objectives, it was found that this taxonomy was the most suitable taxonomy for analyzing the collected data. Since other taxonomies are either typical for face-to-face conversations (e.g., Kakavá, 1993 and Pomerantz, 1984), or for conflicting discourse (e.g., Muntigl & Turnbull, 1998 and Rees-Miller, 2000) they were not suitable for analyzing the data of the current study.

In Maíz-Arévalo's (2014) taxonomy, disagreement expressions were classified into two categories: strong and mitigated (softened) strategies. Strong strategies, which are referred to as direct strategies as well, are characterized by the lack of any mitigating devices where the speaker is concerned with defending their point of view more than considering the addressee's desires. Mitigated strategies or indirect strategies, on the other hand, are characterized by the use of linguistic elements that soften the possible harm or threat caused by disagreement.

To analyze the data, the frequency and percentage of the disagreement strategies used by the participants in the four groups were calculated. This was followed by comparing and contrasting the results of the four groups to reveal any similarities and differences between them.

Table 1 presents the classification of the disagreement strategies provided by Maíz-Arévalo (2014, p. 209).

Table 1. Classification of disagreement strategies

<b>Strong disagreement</b>	<b>Mitigated disagreement</b>
Linguistic realizations	Linguistic realizations
Use of bare negative forms (e.g., “no,” “no way,” “of course not”)	Token agreement (e.g., “yeah . . . but”)
Use of the performative “I disagree”	Use of hedges (e.g., “I guess,” “it seems,” “I do not really know,” etc.)
Use of the performative negation “I don’t agree” or “I can’t agree”	Requests for clarification (e.g., “maybe I didn’t understand, could you explain it more clearly?”)
Blunt statement of the opposite	Expressions of regret (e.g., “I’m sorry but I don’t agree with you . . .”)
Use of insults and negative judgments (e.g., “you are a moron”)	Use of prefacing positive remarks towards the addressee (e.g., “that’s a very good analysis”)
	Suggestions (e.g., “How about doing it in a slightly different way?”)
	Giving explanations

**4. Results**

*4.1 Analysis of Disagreement (Situation One: High-Low Status)*

In this situation, the participants were asked to express disagreement in the following scenario:

*You are the manager of a company. You are discussing some affairs of the company in the meeting with the employees. An employee says: Some employees of this company are paid high salaries even though they do not work more than 6 hours a day.*

In this situation, the speaker who was expected to express his/her disagreement was at a higher power position than the other interlocutor, a manager (+P). Table 2 presents the results of the distribution of used disagreement strategies by the participants in (M→M), (M→F), (F→F) and (F→M) groups. The results presented in this table included only the distribution of the used disagreement strategies in terms of their general classification: strong or mitigated strategies. A detailed illustration of the distribution of frequencies of the specific disagreement strategies used by the participants in the four groups in situation one (high-low status) is provided in Appendix A.

Table 2. Distribution of disagreement strategies in situation one: high-low status

<b>Strategy type</b>	<b>M→M Group</b>		<b>M→F Group</b>		<b>F→F Group</b>		<b>F→M Group</b>	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Strong	33	82.5%	8	20%	31	77.5%	5	12.5%
Mitigated	7	17.5%	32	80%	9	22.5%	35	87.5%
Total	40	100%	40	100%	40	100%	40	100%

As Table 2 shows, the four groups (M→M, M→F, F→F and F→M) varied in their preference for using strong and mitigated disagreement strategies. However, a rather steady pattern could be observed when carefully comparing these four groups. This pattern is characterized by an agreement between male and female participants with regard to the choice of disagreement strategies based on the gender of the addressee. When disagreeing with the same gender, both male and female participants tended to use strong strategies. On the other hand, when disagreeing with the other gender, they tended to use mitigated strategies. This becomes evident from the results presented in

Table 2. For instance, 82.5% of the participants in M→M group preferred using strong disagreement strategies while only 17.5% of them preferred using mitigated strategies when disagreeing with male addressees. Similarly, 77.5% of the participants in F→F group preferred using strong disagreement strategies while only 22.5% of them preferred using mitigated strategies when disagreeing with female addressees.

When disagreeing with the other gender, the majority of the participants in both M→F and F→M groups preferred using mitigated disagreement strategies. For instance, 80% of the participants in M→F group preferred using mitigated disagreement strategies, while only 20% of them preferred using strong strategies when disagreeing with female addressees. Similarly, 87.5% of the participants in F→M group preferred using mitigated disagreement strategies while only 12.5% of them preferred using strong strategies when disagreeing with male addressees.

Examples of strong disagreement strategies from situation one are included the following:

Bare negative form:

1. هذا الكلام غير صحيح  
This is not true.
2. لا لا. ما تقوله غير دقيق  
No no. What you are saying is inaccurate.

Stating disagreement (Using performative “I disagree” and the performative negation “I do not agree”):

1. لا أتفق مع ما قلته  
I do not agree with what you said.
2. اختلف معك كلياً فيما ذكرته  
I completely disagree with what you mentioned.

Blunt statement of the opposite:

1. جميع الموظفين يأخذون ما يستحقون  
All employees get what they deserve.
2. ما فيه أحد في الشركة يحصل على راتب يزيد عن إنتاجيته  
No one in the company gets a salary that exceeds his/her productivity.

Insult and negative judgment:

1. لا شأن لك بهذا  
This is none of your business.
2. هذا شيء موب من اختصاصك  
This does not concern you.

Examples of mitigated disagreement strategies from situation one are included the following:

Token/partial agreement:

1. صحيح، لكن الرواتب تكون على الإنجاز أكثر من عدد الساعات  
True, but salaries are based on productivity more than the hours.
2. نعم، لكن المؤهلات والخبرات لها وزنها في تحديد الرواتب  
Yes, but qualifications and experience have their weight in determining salaries.

Hedges:

1. اعتقد ان طبيعة المهام هي ما ينظر اليها في وضع الرواتب  
I think the nature of the tasks is what considered when determining salaries.
2. حسب علمي ان تحديد الرواتب يكون مبني على معايير معينة  
As far as I know, deciding salaries is based on certain criteria.

Expressions of regret:

1. ما عيش بس انا اختلف معك  
I am sorry, but I disagree with you.

2. معذرة لكن هذي المعلومة غير دقيقة

I am sorry, but this information is inaccurate.

Giving Explanation:

1. كل موظف يأخذ ما يستحقه بناءً على حجم المهام الموكلة اليه

Every employee is paid what he/she deserves based on the size of tasks assigned to him/her.

2. صحيح وهذا لأن الراتب يكون يتناسب مع الجهد المبذول وحجم المسؤولية مو على عدد ساعات العمل

True! And this is because the salary corresponds to the exerted effort and the responsibility size, and not on the working hours.

4.2 Analysis of Disagreement (Situation Two: Equal Status)

In this situation, the participants were asked to express disagreement in the following scenario:

You work in a company and one of your colleagues suggested that feedback from customers should be taken into consideration when considering employees' promotion, but you disagree with that since you believe this can be biased.

In this situation, the speaker who was expected to express his/her disagreement had the same power status as the other interlocutor (=P). Table 3 presents the results of the distribution of used disagreement strategies by the participants in the (M→M), (M→F), (F→F) and (F→M) groups. The results presented in this table included only distribution of the used disagreement strategies in terms of their general classification: strong or mitigated strategies. A detailed illustration of the distribution of frequencies of the specific disagreement strategies used by the participants in the four groups in situation two (equal status) is provided in Appendix B.

Table 3. Distribution of disagreement strategies in situation two: equal status

Strategy type	M→M Group		M→F Group		F→F Group		F→M Group	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Strong	30	75%	7	17.5%	28	70%	4	10%
Mitigated	10	25%	33	82.5%	12	30%	36	90%
Total	40	100%	40	100%	40	100%	40	100%

As Table 3 illustrates, the four groups (M→M, M→F, F→F and F→M) showed inconsistency in their preference for using strong and mitigated disagreement strategies. There is a stronger preference for either strong or mitigated disagreement strategies in each group. In fact, this result is similar to the one revealed by the analysis of the data related to situation one (high-low status). The same pattern that was revealed in situation one where there was an agreement between male and female participants regarding the impact of the gender of the addressee on the choice of disagreement strategies was observed in situation two, equal status, as well. When disagreeing with the same gender, both male and female participants were more inclined to use strong strategies. Contrastingly, when disagreeing with the other gender, the participants tended to use mitigated strategies. This becomes clear from the results presented in Table 3. For instance, 75% of the male participants preferred using strong disagreement strategies when disagreeing with male addressees while only 25% of them preferred using mitigated strategies when disagreeing with male addressees. Similarly, 70% of the female participants preferred using strong disagreement strategies when disagreeing with female addressees, while only 30% of them preferred using mitigated strategies when disagreeing with female addressees.

When disagreeing with the other gender, the majority of the participants in both M→F and F→M groups preferred using mitigated disagreement strategies. For instance, 82.50% of the male participants preferred using mitigated disagreement strategies when disagreeing with female addressees, while only 17.5% of them preferred using strong strategies when disagreeing with female addressees. Similarly, 90% of the female participants preferred using mitigated disagreement strategies when disagreeing with male addressees, while only 10% of them preferred using strong strategies when disagreeing with female addressees.

Examples of strong disagreement strategies from situation two are included the following:

Bare negative form:

1. لا، الفكرة مره مش صحيحة

No, the idea is totally incorrect.

2. مش ممكن  
No way

Stating disagreement (Using performative “I disagree” and the performative negation “I do not agree”):

1. لا اتفق معاك نهائياً في هذا الاقتراح  
I completely do not agree with you on this suggestion.
2. انا اعترض على هذه الفكرة  
I disagree with this idea.

Blunt statement of the opposite:

1. فكره غير منطقية ان نعتمد على تقييمات العملاء في الترقية  
It is an illogical idea to rely on customers’ feedback for the purpose of promotion.
2. تقييمات العملاء غير دقيقة وغير منصفة في بعض الأحيان  
The customers’ feedback is inaccurate and unfair sometimes.

Insult and negative judgment:

1. باقتراحك هذا راح ينظلم ناس كثير  
Your suggestion will do unjust to many people.
2. خليك في شغلك واتركك من المقترحات الفاشلة  
Mind your own business and forget about these unworkable suggestions.

Examples of mitigated disagreement strategies from situation two are included the following:

Token/partial agreement:

1. نعم، لكن من الصعب الحكم على إنتاجية الموظف من خلال تقييمات العملاء  
Yes, but it is hard to judge an employee’s productivity from customers’ feedback.
2. صحيح، بس فيه معايير أفضل من هذي الطريقة  
Yes, but there are better criteria than this way.

Hedges:

1. بيدوا ان هذه الطريقة ممكن راح تخلق مشاكل كثيرة .  
It seems that this way may cause many problems.
2. ما أدري بس أحس انها فكره صعبة .  
I do not know but I feel it is a hard idea.

Expressions of regret:

1. ماعليش اختلاف معك في هذا الشيء  
I am sorry but I disagree with you on this thing.
2. اسمح لي بس فكرتك غير سليمة  
Forgive me but your idea is not right.

Using prefacing positive remarks:

1. فكره جيدة لكن فيه تحدي انو كيف نظمن ان التقييمات تكون عادلة  
Good idea, but there is a challenge in how we can ensure that the feedback is fair.
2. مقترح ممتاز لكن الإشكالية ان تقييمات العملاء قد تكون مبنية على العاطفة في بعض الأحيان  
Excellent suggestion but the problem is that the customers’ feedback sometimes might be affected by emotions.

Suggestions:

1. ليش ما نفكر في معايير أكثر موضوعية؟  
Why don’t we think of more objective criteria?

- اشوف إنك تعرضي الفكرة على ناس متخصصة للتأكد من مدى فاعليتها

I recommend that you (fem.) present this idea to specialized people in order to ensure its extent of effectiveness.

**Giving Explanation:**

- اختلف معك، لانو تقييمات العملاء مؤشر غير موضوعي

I disagree with you because customers' feedback is not an objective indicator.

- صعبة لأنه بعض العملاء ما يقيموا او ما يأخذوا التقييمات بجديّة

It is hard because some customers do not give feedback or do not take the issue of providing feedback seriously.

**4.3 Analysis of Disagreement (Situation Three: Low-High Status)**

In this situation, the participants were asked to express disagreement in the following scenario:

You work in a company. Your boss presents you with a plan for reorganizing the department and you are certain it will not work.

In this situation, the speaker expected to express his/her disagreement was at a lower power position than the other interlocutor (-P). Table 4 presents results of the distribution of the used disagreement strategies by the participants in the (M→M), (M→F), (F→F) and (F→M) groups. The results presented in this table included only distribution of the used disagreement strategies in terms of their general classification: strong or mitigated strategies. A detailed illustration of the distribution of frequencies of the specific disagreement strategies used by the participants in the four groups in situation three (low-high status) is provided in Appendix C.

Table 4. Distribution of disagreement strategies in situation three: low-high status

Strategy type	M→M Group		M→F Group		F→F Group		F→M Group	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Strong	2	5%	1	2.5%	3	7.5%	0	0%
Mitigated	38	95%	39	97.5%	37	92.5%	40	100%
Total	40	100%	40	100%	40	100%	40	100%

As Table 4 shows, there is great consistency between the four groups (M→M, M→F, F→F and F→M) in terms of their strong preference for using mitigated disagreement strategies. In fact, the gender of either the speaker or the addressee does not seem to have an impact on the choice of disagreeing strategies in situation three (low-high status). It is actually the power distance between interlocutors in this situation that appeared to be the decisive factor in choosing disagreement strategies. Accordingly, when disagreeing with an addressee having a higher power status, both male and female participants were more inclined to use mitigated strategies regardless of the gender of the addressee. This becomes clear from the results presented in Table 4. For instance, 95% of the male participants preferred using mitigated disagreement strategies when disagreeing with male addressees and 97.5% of them preferred using mitigated strategies as well when disagreeing with female addressees. Similarly, 92.5% of the female participants preferred using mitigated disagreement strategies when disagreeing with female addressees and 100% of them preferred using mitigated strategies when disagreeing with male addressees.

Examples of strong disagreement strategies from situation three are included the following:

**Blunt statement of the opposite:**

- الخطة الحالية محققة اهداف القسم فلا داعي للتغيير في اعتقادي .

The current plan fulfills the department objectives and there is no need for the change in my opinion.

- الخطة غير مناسبة من وجهة نظري .

The plan is not suitable from my point of view.

Examples of mitigated disagreement strategies from situation three are included the following:

**Token/partial agreement:**

- 1 . نعم، لكن اشوف انها لا تناسب المرحلة الحالية .  
Yes, but I think it does not suit the current stage.
- 2 . لا بأس بها، بس بعض النقاط بيغى لها تعديل .  
It is all right, but a few points need to be modified.

Hedges:

- 1 . اعتقد ان الخطة تحتاج الى دراسة أكثر عمقا .  
I guess the plan needs to be studied more thoroughly.
- 2 . حسب رأي المتواضع أضمن تحتاج الى شوية تحسينات .  
According to my humble opinion, I think it requires some modifications.

Expressions of regret:

- 1 . ما عيش بس الخطة التي وضعتها تحتاج الى تحسين .  
I am sorry but the plan you put forward requires modification.
- 2 . اعذرني لكن اشوف ان الخطة غير مناسبة .  
Forgive me but I think the plan is not suitable.

Using prefacing positive remarks:

- 1 . خطه رائعة لكن اعتقد ما تتماشى مع الظروف الحالية .  
Great plan but I think it does not suit the current circumstances.
- 2 . هيكله ممتازة بس يحتاج لها تعديل .  
Excellent organizational structure but it requires modifications.

Suggestions:

- 1 . وش رأيك نعيد صياغة الخطة لزيد من جودتها؟  
How about we restructure the plan in order to increase its quality?
- 2 . إذا رأيتم ان تعرض على لجان مختصة ليعطوا رأيهم فهو الأفضل .  
If you would like; the plan can be presented to specialized committees to give their opinions; this would be better.

Giving Explanation:

- 1 . بالرغم من انها خطة جيدة لكن أخشى أنها لا تتناسب مع الوقت الحالي .  
Although it is a good plan, I am afraid it is not suitable for the current time.
- 2 . اري ما نستعجل في تطبيقها لأن الهيكله الحالية ماشي حالها .  
I think we should not be in a hurry to employ it because the current plan is working fine.

**5. Discussion**

This study examined the role that power and gender play in the employment of disagreement strategies by speakers of SCA. The data were collected using a DCT consisting of three situations that reflected the three different forms of power relationship between interlocutors (high-low, low-high, and equal). The data analysis showed that the speakers of SCA varied their choices of disagreement strategies based on power distance between them and their addressees. Gender was also found to be influential in the choice of disagreement strategies in certain situations with particular forms of power relationship between interlocutors. Accordingly, when considering the possible impact of social status of interlocutors along with the gender of both the speakers and the addressees, two patterns were identified related to the choice of disagreement strategies. The first pattern consisted of situations in which the form of power relationship between interlocutors is high-low and equal. The second pattern consisted of the situation in which the form of power relationship between interlocutors is low-high.

Regarding the first pattern, when the speaker expressing disagreement had equal or higher power position than the addressee, they tended to use strong (direct) disagreement strategies when talking to the same gender and mitigated (indirect) disagreement strategies when talking to the other gender. In this pattern, then, it is not only the issue of power distance between the interlocutors, but also gender plays an influential role in choosing the disagreement strategies. In general, when the speaker has a higher power position than the addressee, they normally have the

options to either use direct (involvement) or indirect (independence) strategies when performing various speech acts without the fear to cause a threat to the addressee's face (Scollon & Scollon, 2001). Here, however, the speakers of SCA who have a higher power position than their addressees varied their disagreement strategies based on the gender of the addressee. When expressing disagreement to an addressee from the same gender, they preferred using direct strategies. On the other hand, when expressing disagreement to an addressee from the other gender, they preferred using indirect strategies.

This conclusion agrees with the studies of Parvaresh and Eslami Rasekh (2009) and Heidari et al. (2014) who came to the conclusion that the speakers of Persian tended to be more indirect when disagreeing with the other gender and more directly with the same gender. More specifically, Heidari et al. (2014) found that male speakers of Persian tended to be more indirect when disagreeing with female addressees than with male addressees. Similarly, Parvaresh and Eslami Rasekh (2009) found that female speakers of Persian in female-male interactions employed more indirect disagreement strategies than in female-female interactions. They explained that in a non-Western Islamic culture such as Iran, the consideration of deference might override that of solidarity when disagreeing with the other gender. In fact, similar findings and explanations were provided by a number of researchers who conducted studies on the speech act of request in Arabic language. Alzahrani (2022), for instance, found that Saudi female speakers tended to use more indirect request strategies with males than with female addressees. He attributed that to the gender-segregated nature of the Saudi society, where "using directness by Saudi female speakers in same gender interactions can be seen to achieve closeness ... whereas using indirectness with males can be seen to achieve distance" (p.116). Similarly, Al- Marrani and Sazalie (2010) concluded that female speakers of Yemeni Arabic in female- female interactions employed more direct request strategies than in female-male interactions where they preferred indirectness. They explained that "being direct in these situations expresses camaraderie and is consistent with cultural norms" (p. 491).

Nevertheless, the conclusion related to the first pattern discussed above, is not consistent with previous studies that suggested a general gender difference between males and females regarding their choices of disagreement strategies where the former had stronger preference for indirectness than the latter (e.g., Bavarsad et al., 2015; Guiller & Durdell, 2006; Pilkington, 1992; Sharqawi & Elizabeth, 2019). However, knowing that these studies did not account for the gender of the addressees would explain the inconsistency between the findings of these studies and the current study's finding. As a result, this conclusion questions the validity and universality of the general assumption that women's speech is characterized by the use of more indirect and softening devices than men's speech (e.g., Furkatovna, Jurabekovna, & Mamurjonovna, 2021; Holmes, 1995; Lakoff, 1975; Scollon & Scollon, 2001; Tannen, 1990). This assumption should be then problematized, especially when considering the impact of the addressee's gender on the pragmatic choices in gender-segregated societies.

As for the second pattern, when the speakers expressing disagreement had lower power position than the addressee, they tended to use mitigated disagreement strategies regardless of the gender of either the speaker or the addressee. In this pattern (low-high), it is actually the power distance between interlocutors that appeared to be the decisive factor in choosing disagreement strategies while gender seemed to have no impact. This tendency by speakers of SCA agrees with the conclusion reached by Khammari (2021b) who found that when the addressee had a higher social status, the speakers of Tunisian Arabic tended to use indirect disagreement strategies. In fact, the tendency to use indirectness in Saudi Arabic when addressing people of higher status seems to be a widespread practice not only in relation to disagreement but also to other speech acts such as request and refusal (e.g., Almathkuri, 2021; Alrashoodi, 2020). When the speaker has a lower power position than the addressee, it is generally expected that the speaker would use indirect (independence) strategies when performing speech acts (Scollon & Scollon, 2001).

## 6. Conclusion

This study examined the ways in which the speech act of disagreement is expressed by speakers of SCA when talking to people of higher, equal, and lower statuses of the same and the other gender. The results showed that gender played an influential role in high to low and equal statuses. In these two combinations of power status, the speakers of SCA preferred to use strong (direct) strategies when disagreeing with the same gender and mitigated (indirect) strategies with the other gender. The reason for this tendency can be attributed to the cultural norms of gender-segregation in the Saudi society where deference and distance are the expected behavior when the addressee is of the other gender. On the other hand, when the addressee is of the same gender, solidarity and closeness are then the expected behavior. In low to high status, however, gender did not seem to have an effect on the choice of disagreement strategies, where speakers preferred to use mitigated (indirect) strategies regardless of the gender of the addressee. It is actually the variable of power that appeared to be the influential factor in the choice of disagreement strategies.

To that end, among the limitations of the current study is that it depended on Maíz-Arévalo's (2014) taxonomy of disagreement strategies to classify and analyze the collected data. Using other taxonomies might lead to reaching different results. Another limitation is that this study did not account for the age and educational background of the participants. These two variables might also impact the choice of disagreement strategies. Accordingly, the researcher recommends future studies accounting for these two variables. Finally, since the realizations of speech acts, including disagreement, are parametric and culture-specific, the researcher recommends conducting cross-cultural studies on disagreement strategies between gender-segregated vs. coed societies. Such studies are more likely to increase awareness about the cultural differences that might cause misunderstanding or problems in communication between people from diverse cultures.

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## Appendix A

Distribution of specific disagreement strategies in situation one: high-low status

Strategy type	M→M Group	M→F Group	F→F Group	F→M Group
Strong	Frequency	Frequency	Frequency	Frequency
Bare negative form	8	2	7	1
Stating disagreement (Using performative "I disagree" and the performative negation "I do not agree")	13	2	15	2
Blunt statement of the opposite	8	3	7	2
Insult and negative judgment	4	1	2	0
Mitigated				
Token/partial agreement	2	10	3	9
Hedges	1	6	2	7
Request for clarification	0	0	0	0

Expressions of regret	1	3	2	5
Using prefacing positive remarks	0	0	0	0
Suggestions	0	0	0	0
Giving explanations	3	13	2	14
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>40</b>

### Appendix B

Distribution of specific disagreement strategies in situation two: equal status

<b>Strategy type</b>	<b>M→M Group</b>	<b>M→F Group</b>	<b>F→F Group</b>	<b>F→M Group</b>
<b>Strong</b>	Frequency	Frequency	Frequency	Frequency
Bare negative form	7	1	5	0
Stating disagreement (Using performative “I disagree” and the performative negation “I do not agree)	13	2	12	2
Blunt statement of the opposite	6	4	8	2
Insult and negative judgment	4	0	3	0
<b>Mitigated</b>				
Token/partial agreement	3	11	3	13
Hedges	2	3	2	4
Request for clarification	0	0	0	0
Expressions of regret	1	4	2	3
Using prefacing positive remarks	1	6	1	7
Suggestions	2	6	3	4
Giving explanations	1	3	1	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>40</b>

### Appendix C

Distribution of specific disagreement strategies in situation three: low-high status

<b>Strategy type</b>	<b>M→M Group</b>	<b>M→F Group</b>	<b>F→F Group</b>	<b>F→M Group</b>
<b>Strong</b>	Frequency	Frequency	Frequency	Frequency
Bare negative form	0	0	0	0
Stating disagreement (Using performative “I disagree” and the performative negation “I do not agree)	0	0	0	0
Blunt statement of the opposite	2	1	3	0
Insult and negative judgment	0	0	0	0
<b>Mitigated</b>				
Token/partial agreement	4	6	5	10
Hedges	6	7	6	1
Request for clarification	0	0	0	0
Expressions of regret	5	3	2	3
Using prefacing positive remarks	7	14	10	5
Suggestions	8	7	9	13
Giving explanations	8	2	5	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>40</b>

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