

## **The Linguistic Representation of woman in Proverbial Discourses: Comparison between Persian and English [In English]**

Ava Imani<sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Assistant Professor of General Linguistics, Department of General Linguistics, Faculty of Letters and Humanities, Bu-Ali Sina University, Hamedan, Iran

\*Corresponding author: [ava.imani@basu.ac.ir](mailto:ava.imani@basu.ac.ir)

DOI: 10.22034/JLTLL.2021.532495.1010

Received: 20 Jun, 2021

Revised: 01 Aug, 2021

Accepted: 07 Aug, 2021

### **ABSTRACT**

This research investigates the social identity of the female gender in the Persian and English languages. To fulfil this end, proverbs of both languages, as the linguistic representations of their cultures, were gathered and analyzed based on the Fairclough's Approach (1989) to discourse analysis. Accordingly, two corpora consisting of 1668 proverbs were collected from both languages (239 proverbs belonged to the English dictionaries and 1429 proverbs belonged to the Persian encyclopedias). The Persian corpus was gathered from *Amsal-o-Hekam* and *Ketab-e-Koucheh* encyclopedias, whereas the English corpus was collected from *The Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs*, *NTC's Dictionary of Proverbs and Clichés*, and *The Oxford Dictionary of English Idioms*. The collected corpora were compared from a critical discourse analysis perspective. Based on the results obtained from a discursive juxtaposition, four major findings were discovered: First, the female gender displays greater degree of presence in Persian. Second, kinship system is more frequently used in Persian and the familial ties are tighter and stronger than those in the English culture. These findings are in line with the findings of sociologists who believe that family in the eastern societies enjoys a higher degree of solidarity and emotional linkage than in the European countries (Fokkema and Liefbroer 2008); Fokkema, de Jong-Gierveld and Dykstra (2012). Third, as far as the power relationships and the sexual hegemony are concerned, both languages showed nearly equal degrees of sexual discrimination and inequality. Furthermore, we concluded that the Persian language and literature is more caring about and attentive to the female gender. In other words, the female gender has received much more attention in the Persian culture compared to the English culture. As for the kinship system and the familial relationships, the Persian language showed a higher degree of social interactions. Finally, our diachronic comparison showed that the representation of female characters has improved across time as demonstrated by the current data and has gradually moved towards less dominance against the female gender in both Persian and English proverbs

**Keywords:** Woman, Proverbial Discourse, Critical Discourse Analysis, Fairclough's Approach, Power, Ideology.

### **1. Introduction**

Cultures are constantly changing and people shift in and out of particular cultures. Among cultural entities, proverbs play a significant role in shaping the cultural context, and are simultaneously shaped by it. So, according to Paltridge (2006), one of the main scopes of discourse analysis is considering the ways that the use of language presents different views of the world and different understandings. Based on this view, discourse analysis probes the patterns of language across texts and investigates the relationship between language and social and cultural contexts in which it is used. Thus, discourse analysis examines how the use of language is influenced by relationships between language users as well as the mutual effects the use of language has upon social identities and relations (Culpeper, 2011).

The present research plays a significant role in discovering an efficient method of analyzing the dual relationship between language and culture through proverbs in the Persian and English languages, and coming to a general understanding of how the female gender is manifested in the two cultures. Furthermore, it helps us to make sure that discourse involves the socially situated identities that we enact and recognize in the different settings, and include culture-specific ways of performing and recognizing identities and activities. That is, social identities are not pre-given and the relationship and connection between discourse and social affairs is not a deterministic and one-way process. Consequently, the results of this research could prepare the ground and pave the way for more detailed studies not only in linguistics and discourse analysis, but also in the interdisciplinary fields such as anthropological linguistics, sociolinguistics, and ethnography of communication.

As with the theoretical framework, this research has been conducted based on the Fairclough's approach to discourse analysis (1989 and 1999). Fairclough Approach is a tri-dimensional model which can be utilized as a framework for analyzing the social relationships and also as a reference in fighting against tyranny and dominance. In this model, language is a form of social practice. Such a view primarily implies that language is a part of society, and not external to it; secondly, that language is a social process; and thirdly, that language is a socially conditioned process; i.e., conditioned by other (non-linguistic) parts of society.

Additionally, Fairclough (1989) remarked that the traditions, institutions, moral codes, and established practices constituting social constructions could be transformed when people reproduce them differently by combining different genres or developing them in new ways. Furthermore, he points out that critical discourse analysis focuses its critique on the intersection of language, discourse, and social structure. Accordingly, critical discourse analysis affects the society by empowering the powerless, giving voices to the voiceless, exposing power abuse, and mobilizing people to remedy social wrongs (Fairclough, 1999).

Having such an analytic standpoint towards the issue, the proverbial discourse, as a type of discourse is one of the most important genres that can reveal how particular groups of people think, how they see the world, and how their worldview and attitudes towards a particular issue are. In spite of the significance of such an issue, few studies have been conducted on the analysis of proverbs within the scope of discourse analysis. To fill the gap, this research aims to investigate the critical presence of gender effect on the structure and meaning of Persian as opposed to English proverbs within the framework of a CDA pattern introduced.

The objective of this research is, by means of a discursive comparison of the proverbs in the two languages, to reveal how the female gender is represented in the two cultures as long as power and dominance are concerned and affected by ideological perspective in the cultures of the time given. Consequently, the similarities, differences, as well as the divergent and convergent cultural values of the two discourses regarding the female gender are to be touched upon. Accordingly, the following four research questions were addressed:

- 1) How woman is portrayed and characterized in the Persian Proverbs?
- 2) How woman is portrayed and characterized in the English Proverbs?
- 3) To what extent are the English and Persian cultures divergent/ convergent in their attitudes towards the female gender?
- 4) What social, cultural, and religious aspects could be inferred based on the proverbial discourses of the two languages with regard to the female gender?

To answer the above mentioned questions, two corpora of 1668 proverbs in both languages were collected and analyzed based on the Fairclough's approach to critical discourse analysis. It is worthy to mention that the present research was subject to some degrees of limitation and delimitation. In the data collection phase

of this research, in order to collect the corpus, only five sources were referred to; that is, two encyclopedias for Persian proverbs, and three dictionaries for the English proverbs. Other studies could be conducted by referring to more sources. Certainly, a greater corpus could provide a more thorough portrayal of the issue, and consequently may alter the findings and conclusions of this research.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Discourse, Social Identity, and Culture**

Discourse analysis is an approach to the analysis of language that looks at patterns of language not only across texts, but also across the social and cultural contexts in which the texts occur (Paltridge, 2006). Ergo, discourse analysis is interested in what happens when language users draw on the knowledge they have about language in order to do, manipulate, and perform things in the world. In this way, discourse analysis is highly associated with pragmatics, which is concerned with how the interpretation of language depends on knowledge of the real world.

There are different views on what discourse analysis actually is. Cazden (2001) explained two views on discourse analysis, the first of which includes those focusing on the analysis of the naturally occurring language. The second view considers different ways of talking and understanding. Fairclough (2003), however, contrasts between textually oriented discourse analysis, and socially oriented discourse analysis. According to him, these two views are not mutually exclusive. He, thus, argues that an optimal analysis of discourse is the one that takes both textual and social aspects into consideration. To recap, as far as the mutual interaction between language, society, and culture is concerned, three main views are acknowledged:

#### *a) Discourse and the social construction of reality*

This view sees texts as communicative units embedded in social and cultural practices. Accordingly, the language we use both shapes the world, and at the same time is shaped by the world (Fairclough, 1992). This interrelationship between language and society is mutual and reciprocal.

#### *b) Discourse and socially situated identities*

According to this view, when we speak or write, we use more than just language to display who we are, and how we want people to see us. Gee (1999) explains that discourse involves socially situated identities are enacted and recognized in the in

the different settings in which we are involved. They include culture-specific ways of performing and culture-specific ways of recognizing activities and identities.

*c) Discourse and performance*

This view is based on the premise that when we say something we do it. It implies that we bring states of affairs into being as a result of what we say and what we do. In short, social identities are not pre-given, but rather, are formed in the use of language and the various other ways we display who we are, what we think, value, and feel. Such attitudes towards discourse analysis implies a necessary shift from a non-critical analysis to critical discourse analysis. Critical discourse analysis inquires into real and often extended instances of social interaction which take linguistic form. The critical approach, thus, is distinctive in its view of the relationship between language and society, and the relationship between analysis and the practices analysed (Wodak, 1997). In parallel statements, Van Dijk (2001) and Fairclough (1999) maintained that discourse is socially constitutive, as well as socially conditioned. They added that discourse could be an instrument of power, and of increasing significance in contemporary societies.

Since Fairclough's views are more in line with our goals, in the present research we employed Fairclough's theoretical model to the comparative analysis of the notions such as equality, power relations, ideology and identification with women in the proverbial discourses of the two languages taking both textual and contextual features of the text into consideration.

## 2.2 Discourse and Gender

The study of discourse and gender is an interdisciplinary field shared by scholars in linguistics, anthropology, psychology, sociology, education, literature, and speech communication. Such major includes not only documenting gender-related patterns of language use, but also scrutinizing social, cultural, and political aspects of gender relations. The discursive gender-related studies dates back to 1975 when three pivotal books were published. They include *Language and Woman's Place* by Robin Lakoff, *Male/ Female Language* by Mary Ritchie Key, and *Language and Sex: Difference and Dominance* edited by Barrie Thorne and Nancy Henley. These books were due to the feminist movement of 1970s based on which the identification of male norms as human norms was strongly criticized. Accordingly, the discursive gender-related research generally focused on three aspects: 1) documenting

empirical differences between women's speech and men's speech, 2) describing women's speech in particular, and 3) identifying the role of language in creating and maintaining social inequality between women and men. This third focus is the basis of this research article that looks for identifying how cultural and social viewpoints, norms, attitudes, and values are represented by and with language.

More specifically, Lakoff (1975) states that the study of gender and discourse, besides providing a descriptive account of male/ female discourse, reveals how language functions as a symbolic resource to create and manage personal, social, and cultural meaning and identities. It is also worth mentioning that the early focus on women's speech, sex discrimination through language, and asymmetrical power relations maintained in two influential books, namely *Women and Language in Literature and Society* edited by McConnell Ginet et al. in 1980, and *Language, Gender, and Society* edited by Thorne Barrie, Cheri Karmarae, and Nancy Henley in 1983.

To sum up, the innovative aspect of the present research is conducting a comparative-contrastive analysis of gender and female manifestation through proverbial discourses in English and Persian and to the best of my knowledge, no critical discourse analysis has so far employed Fairclough's Model (1989; 1999) to investigate how the female gender is represented in the two cultures as long as power and dominance are concerned and affected by ideological perspective in the two cultures. This paper is an initial investigation of this issue.

### 2.3 Discursive Studies on Proverbs and Gender

Storm (1992) analyzed the traditional Japanese proverbs about women, as well as the modern colloquial sayings and idioms that appeared after World War II in the Japanese modern language. Then, he conducted a survey to examine the attitudes of the native speakers of Japanese towards the proverbs. She concluded that the general attitudes of the respondents were in line with the mainstream illustration of the proverbs. In other words, the ways women were depicted in the proverbs were endorsed by the general attitudes and viewpoints towards the female gender. This research also revealed that how woman is portrayed by the Japanese proverbs is different from the way woman is universally characterized. However, this research has not been able to compromise between the contemporary social and political changes, and managed to link the social, cultural, and political elements.

In another research, Fokoya (2007) investigated the sexually insulting proverbs related to woman and tried to discover a discursive cause-and-effect relationship in the Yoruba language (an African language spoken in Nigeria). He tried to see if using the bawdy language has an effect on the overbalancing of the conversation stream, and whether the conversational value of such proverbs is sufficient for interlocutors to ignore their distastefulness as well as quality of having an unpleasant state towards with regard to those particular kind of languages or not. Similar to the previous research, in this paper the contextual and social factors have also been neglected and mere attention to the intra-textual features are not sufficient to gain an appropriate understanding of the work. Thus, besides the intra-textual analysis, the inter-textual as well as contextual analyses would be needed in analysing a text from other languages

As far as the discursive gender-related studies by the Iranian scholars are concerned, Parastesh and Sasanikhah (2010) analyzed the influences and representations of gender in three Persian novels based on the Fairclough's approach. They concluded that the female gender in these novels has been presented in two ways. They stated that woman, on the one hand, has been showed as an introvert, passive, emotional, dependent, lenient, and submissive creature. On the other hand, woman is likely to lose her piece and patience, break through her past life, and change into a challenging and demanding creature that can question the present situation. They also concluded that woman can change the certainty and steadiness of the language structure, and unbalance the available linguistic order. However, the results of this research may be to some extent influenced by the writing style of the authors, the time span and the genre of the mentioned novels. In other words, in order the findings to be confirmed, it is necessary to examine more novels and texts. Using more novels may alter the findings and conclusions of this research

In the following, we should refer to two more related studies done by Iranian researchers on *discourse*, *gender* and *proverbs*: Imani and Dehghankar (2016) and Imani and Eslami-Rasekh (2014) investigated the cohesion and coherence of woman in the Iranian proverbs. In these papers, they concluded that power relations affected the discourse of proverbs and the unequal distribution of power between men and women. Furthermore, they studied the dominant ideology hidden behind the language of proverbial discourse and they provided an insight into the role of proverbs in spreading some cultural, religious and social beliefs by close analysis of

the Persian Proverbs related to women in *Kouche* and *Amsal-o-Hekam* encyclopedias.

Last but not least, Yarmohammadi (2004) analyzed the methods of discourse analysis, the theoretical principles, as well as the relationship and proportion of the qualitative and quantitative approaches to discourse analysis by means of sociolinguistic and the discursive issues related to power, hegemony, and ideology.

To sum up, no studies have been conducted to compare the English and Persian proverbs related to *women* within the scope of discourse analysis. To fill the gap, this comparative research aims to investigate the linguistic representation of *women*, as well as the critical presence of gender effect on the structure and meaning of Persian as opposed to English proverbs within the framework of Fairclough's CDA approach.

### **3. Methodology**

#### *3.1 The Fairclough's Approach*

Fairclough (1989; 1992; 1995) sketches a tri-dimensional framework for interpreting and analyzing discourse. He introduces his approach as follows:

*“The approach I have adopted is based upon a three-dimensional conception of discourse, and correspondingly a three-dimensional method of discourse analysis. Discourse, and any specific instance of discursive practice, is seen as simultaneously (i) a language text, spoken or written, (ii) discourse practice (text production and text interpretation), (iii) sociocultural practice (Fairclough, 1995: 97).”*

As Fairclough points out, the first dimension is *discourse as text*. In this dimension, the focus is on the linguistic features and organization of the concrete instances of discourse. In this way, items like vocabulary (including wording and metaphor), grammar (for example, transitivity and modality), cohesion (for example, conjunction, schemata), and text structure (for example, episode making and turn taking) are systematically analyzed. According to this framework dimension, the use of passive verbs, for instance in news reporting, has the potentiality of blurring or trivializing the agent or doer of the political processes.

The second dimension of the Fairclough's approach to discourse analysis is *discourse as discursive practice*. According to this perspective, discourse is viewed

as something which is produced, circulated, distributed, and consumed in society. Fairclough argues that little time is spent on the issue of sociolinguistic resources, and dealing with language as discursive practice implies that after the primary analysis of vocabulary, grammar, cohesion, text structure, etc., due attention should be paid to factors such as speech acts, coherence, and intertextuality.

The third dimension, which has been mostly referred to in this article, is *discourse as social practice*. This dimension takes into account the ideological effects and the hegemonic processes in which discourse is seen to operate. Based on this dimension Fairclough, (1989) constructs his approach to social change, according to which hegemonies are open to change, and such process of changing can be seen in the discursive change. Therefore, the way in which discourse is represented sheds light on the emergence of new orders of discourse, struggles over normativity, attempts to control and resist against regimes of power.

Below, there is a diagrammatic representation of Fairclough's approach (1989):

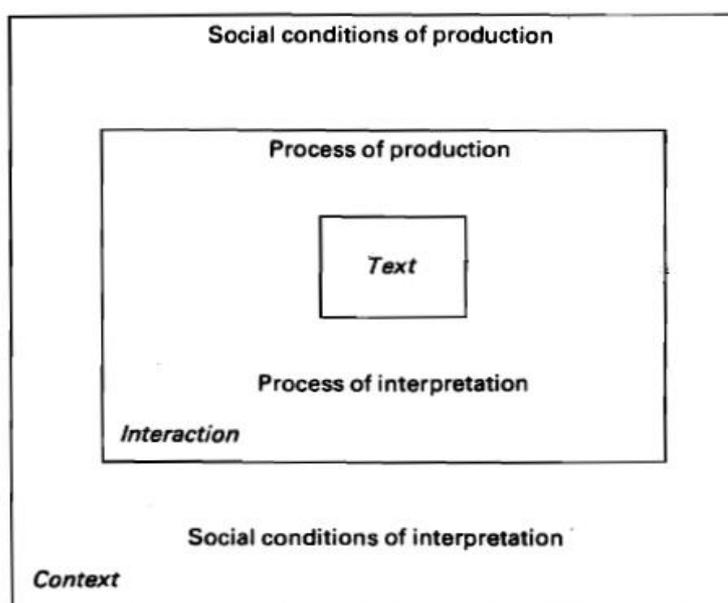


Fig. 1 Discourse as text, interaction and context (Fairclough, 1989: 25)

### 3.2 Data Collection Procedure

The corpora were collected from among the innumerable entries of five dictionaries and encyclopedias. The Persian proverbs were accumulated from two famous encyclopedias namely *Amsal-o-Hekam* by Ali Akbar Dehkhoda, and *Ketab-e-Koucheh* by Ahmad Shamlou. From these two, the first one was compiled in 1930s, and the second one was printed fifty years later in 1980s. Such a chronological distance somehow guaranteed a thoroughness of the related proverbs. This time span was an appropriate break to claim that both old and modern proverbs have been covered in the corpus. The English proverbs were gathered by referring to three dictionaries namely *The Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs*, *NTC's Dictionary of Proverbs and Cliches*, and *The Oxford Dictionary of English Idioms*.

At the first phase, the whole dictionaries were browsed through, and all entries that were somehow related to the female gender were picked out and noted down. They included all proverbs that were somehow related to the female gender, whether in their building vocabulary or in their connotation. This included a wide range of female kinship characters and familial roles such as wife, mother, girl, grandmother, mother-in-law, daughter, sister, sister-in-law, etc. At the second phase, all gathered proverbs were sieved and identical or very similar proverbs were deleted from the analysis list. Finally, two corpora of 1668 proverbs were segregated for analysis. From this, 239 proverbs belonged to the English dictionaries, and the remaining, i.e., 1429 proverbs belonged to the Persian encyclopedias.

### 3.3 Data Analysis

The analysis of the proverbs was based on the Fairclough's threefold distinction in research methodology (1989), namely description, interpretation, and explanation. Fairclough argues that a critical discourse analysis should make a progression from description to interpretation, and from interpretation to explanation.

Accordingly, in this research, in the phase of description, the focus was on the textual and exterior features of the proverbs such as word selection and word relations. At the interpretational level, the analysis concentrated on the way in which language users arrive at some kind of understanding of discourse based on their cognitive, social, and ideological resources. By means of such analysis, kinship systems, cultural and societal norms and traditions, as well as the power relations of the social members of the language users were identified. Finally, at the explanation level, the research moved from a non-critical discourse analysis study to a critical one. Consequently, the dominant ideology, the core beliefs, as well as the prominent and hegemonic doctrines of the two languages with regard to the female gender were

compared and contrasted. In the following, some examples have been provided showing how the framework applied to analyse the data.

In the phase of description, firstly the discursive structures involving the words or phrases such as “proper and common names of women”, “kinship terms”, “words related to woman”, “titles, labels, and address terms of women”, “taboo words”, “gender metaphors”, etc., were categorized and the frequency percentage of each category was calculated, secondly the distribution of power toward men or women and different types of attitudes toward women (positive, negative or neutral) were measured (see the tables in section 4). Below, some examples of the discursive structures are underlined in the following proverbs:

Example 1: *madar zanet dooset dare*

Your mother-in-law likes you (used when one receives something pleasant by chance)

Example 2: *dokhtar be to miguyam, aroos to beshno*

Daughters receive orders, daughters-in-law should do them

Example 3: *Be danesh zanan key namayand raah*

Women do not lead by knowledge

Example 4: *aslam pedar ast ke madaram rahgozar ast*

I originally belong to my father

Example 5: *Leili ra be cheshm e Majnoon bayad did*

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder

As with the distribution of power between the two genders and different attitudes towards women, the examples 3 & 4 were negative and reflected the supremacy and domination of men over women. On the other hand, at the interpretational level the juxtaposition of *daughter* and *daughters-in-law*, *father and mother*, *Leili and Majnoon* in the examples 2, 4 and 5 reflected the way in which language users arrive at some kind of understanding of discourse based on their cognitive, social, and ideological resources. By means of such analysis, kinship systems, cultural and societal norms, traditions, familial relations as well as the power relations of the social members of the language users were identified.

Finally, at the explanation level, the research moved from a non-critical discourse analysis study to a critical one (criticizing the superiority of men over women, inequality, and sexual discrimination) as well as the prominent and hegemonic doctrines of the two languages with regard to the female gender were compared and contrasted. Furthermore, as Fairclough puts it the higher the amount of intertextuality and discursivity is, the greater change is made in the social structures of a society. Therefore, the amount of using the intertextuality, interdiscursivity, religious, literary, historical and cultural aspects in the proverbs were investigated and explained considering the social and political macro structures, such as male chauvinism (male domination). To be more precise, Example 5 referring to *the story of Leili and Majnoon* in the history and literature of Persian language indicating the intertextuality and examples 3 & 4 indicating the existence of male-domination macro-structure. Further examples have been analysed and provided in section 4.

## **4. Results**

### **4.1 The Persian Proverbs**

After the analysis of the Persian proverbs, the following results were obtained:

1) From among the corpus that included 1429 proverbs, 1232 proverbs (about 86%) revealed a negative attitude towards woman and the female gender. Thus, only 137 proverbs (about 9%) were recognized to have a positive attitude towards men. The remaining proverbs which were 60 in number (about 5%) had a neutral, and sometimes both positive and negative attitude towards the female gender. The following table (Table 1) shows the frequency and percentage of the three types of attitudes.

Table 1. The Frequency and Percentage of Attitudes towards the Persian Proverbs

Number/Percentage	Negative Attitudes	Positive Attitudes	Neutral Attitudes
e			

---

Frequency	1232	137	60
Percentage	86 %	9 %	5 %

Below some instances of the positive, negative, and neutral representations of the female gender are provided.

- Negative Representation:

*Khojasteh zani kou ze madar nazad*

Happy is the woman who is not born

*az badi haye zan masho imen, garcheh az aseman nozoul konad.*

Do not feel safe from the woman's evil, though she comes down from heaven.

*asb o zan o shamshir e vafadar keh did.*

Horse, woman, and sword are not trustworthy.

*bar nayayad kas ba makr e zanan hargez.*

No one can ever resist against the guile of women.

*cho khahi ke khari nayari be ruy, be pishe zanan raz hargez maguy.*

If you want to avoid ignominy, never tell your secrets to women.

- Positive Representation:

*zanan ra hamin bas bovad yek honar, neshinand o zayand shiran e nar.*

This is enough for women's worthiness that they give birth to brave men.

*agar chand farzand chon div e zesht, bovad nazd e madar cho hour e behesht.*

If there are some children as ugly as devil, for their mother they are as beautiful as angels.

*zir e paye madaran bashad janan.*

Heaven (Paradise) is under the feet of mothers.

*pedar o madar miveh ye nayabab and.*

Father and mother are non-findable fruits.

*haqh e madar negah dashtan behtar az hajj kardan ast.*

Observing mother's rights (respecting mother) is better than worshipping.

- Neural Representation:

*zan bala bashad be har kashane i, bi bala hargez mabada khanei.*

Women, you cannot live with them, you cannot live without them.

This proverb, which is common to both English and Persian represents marriage (living with women) positively and negatively, however, the positive pole is stronger than the negative one. It connotes that though marriage and living with women may be troublesome, it, whatsoever, cannot be avoided.

*farzand haman konad be har hal, kaz madar e khish o az pedar binad.*

Children follow their father and mother's footsteps.

2) The analysis of the proverbial discourse of the Persian language revealed that the kinship system and the familial relations in the Persian culture are to a high degree prevalent. In other words, the family is a dynamic and interconnected system in which a great deal of communication and cooperation between the members can be acknowledged. The presence of woman in its different characters and familial roles such as mother, daughter, sister, bride, daughter-in-law, mother-in-law, wife, etc. is strongly perceived in the Persian language and culture. From the total corpus of 1429 proverbs, 1132 proverbs were found that had at least one word that directly represented the female gender as a family member. Below two examples are provided:

*madar zanet dooset dare*

Your mother-in-law likes you (used when one receives something pleasant by chance)

*dokhtar be to miguyam, aroos to beshno*

Daughters receive orders, daughters-in-law should do them

3) It was also concluded that, the Persian culture possesses a high degree of male chauvinism and sexual discrimination. The inequality is highly biased towards men.

*zan o ejdeha har do dar khak beh*

Woman and monster better to be died.

*baraye yek dame shahvat ke khaak bar sare aan, zaboone zan shodan aaiine shir mardan nist.*

To satisfy a short moment of lust, it is not heroism to yield to women.

4) Through a comparison of the proverbs available in *Amsal-o-Hekam* and *Ketab-e-Koucheh* encyclopedias whose publication dates differ for fifty years, it was concluded that the proverbial discourse of the Persian language and literature moves towards a softer and more lenient standpoint towards the female gender. These findings will be talked over in the Discussion section.

#### 4.2 The English Proverbs

After analysing the English proverbs, the following results were obtained:

1) From among 239 proverbs, 182 proverbs (about 76%) showed a negative attitude towards woman, and only 32 proverbs (about 13%) had a positive attitude towards woman. The rest of the proverbs (about 11%) had a neutral stand regarding the female gender. The following table (Table 2) shows the frequency and percentage of the three types of attitudes.

Table 2. The Frequency and Percentage of Attitudes towards the English Proverbs

Number/Percentage	Negative Attitudes	Positive Attitudes	Neutral Attitudes
Frequency	182	32	25
Percentage	76 %	13%	11 %

Some instances of such proverbs include the following.

- Negative Representation:  
Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned.  
The female of the species is more deadly than the male.  
No wife, no worry.  
A whistling woman and a crowing hen are fit neither for god nor for men.  
A woman, a dog, and a walnut tree, the more you beat them the better they be.
- Positive Representation:  
Men make houses, women make homes.  
A good wife makes a good husband.  
My son is my son till he gets a wife, my daughter is my daughter all the days of her life.

He that will thrive must ask his wife first.

- **Neutral Representation:**

Better to be an old man's darling than a young man's slave.

A blind man's wife needs no paint.

England is the paradise of women.

Some cases were also found in which woman was represented both positively and negatively, however, the positive representation was more conspicuous. They include:

Women, you cannot live with them, you cannot live without them.

Wives must be had, be they good or bad.

2) The familial relationships and the family ties were considerably loser in the English proverbs compared to those in the Persian language. In spite of the miscellany and diversity of the words related to family members in the Persian corpus, almost no case was found in the English corpus with words such as mother-in-law, aunt, sister-in-law, etc.

3) The same as the Persian corpus, many cases were found in the English corpus evincing an unequal distribution of power between men and women in society.

A woman, a dog, and a walnut tree, the more you beat them the better they be.

People knew a man by the company he kept, but they generally knew a woman by the man who kept her.

A woman's place is in the home; many go out for wool and come home shorn.

The wife is always the last one to find out.

4) Out of these analyses, some aspects regarding the social, cultural, ethical, traditional, and religious norms and conventions were inferred which have been discussed in the following section.

## **5. Discussion**

As far as the first three research questions are concerned, it can be argued that in this research article a discursive analysis was conducted on the proverbs in the Persian and English literatures. Accordingly, two corpora of the two languages were collected and then compared and contrasted. The first conclusion was based on the quantity or number of the corpora. The Persian corpus included 1429 proverbs, while the English corpus consisted of 239 proverbs. Such a big difference in number

discloses that a great body of attention in the Persian literature is devoted to the female gender. This difference, however, is not only a matter of quantity, it but also is a matter of quality. While in the English corpus the female related lexicon was limited to several words like mother, wife, and daughter, the lexicon of the Persian corpus covered a wider range of feminine words such as mother-in-law, daughter-in-law, aunt, grandmother, bride, stepmother, nursemaid, foster, etc. has been used. Some examples include:

*dayeh mehrban tar az madar*

Nursemaid who is more sympathetic (caring) than mother is.

*aroos nemitavanest beraghsad migoft divar kaj ast.*

The bride did not know how to dance, she accused the wall for not being flat and level. (used when one tries to justify his/her deeds by unacceptable excuses)

*magar inja khoone ye khaleh ast?*

Are you in your aunt's home? Or, Is this your aunt's home? (used when one feels too intimate, relaxed, and informal in somewhere).

Definitely, such diversity and miscellany reveals that the kinship system ties and connections in the Persian culture are tighter and stronger than those in the English culture. It can also be concluded that in the Persian culture family is a nucleus around which all members gather. Frequent uses of the lexicon of family members show that the traditional framework of family is still preserved, and the modern proverbial discourse makes use of such lexicon. These findings are in line with the findings of sociologists who believe that family in the eastern societies enjoys a higher degree of solidarity and emotional linkage (Fokkema and Liefbroer 2008). Fokkema, de Jong-Gierveld and Dykstra (2012) demonstrated that levels of co-residence are higher in the eastern countries are much higher than in the European countries.

The findings of the present study indicated that the proverbial discourses of both languages showed a negative attitude towards the female gender in most cases. The percentage of the proverbs with a negative attitude in the Persian language was higher than that of the English proverbs (86% VS 76%). It should be mentioned that the existence of such difference, which is not statistically meaningful, might be due

to the higher degree of the Persian corpus compared to the English corpus in both quantity (1429 VS 239) and diversity. However, regardless of the level or amount of negativity, both discourses shared common pessimistic attitudes regarding the female gender. Such pessimism was seen in some characteristics and attributes like unfaithfulness, disloyalty, betrayal, deceitfulness, villainy, imperfectness, stupidity, verbosity, etc. Below some examples in both languages are provided:

A woman and a ship ever want mending

A woman's work is never done

A whistling woman and a crowing hen are neither fit for god nor men

Silence is a woman's best garment

*cho khahi ke khari nayari be ruy, be pishe zanan raz hargez maguy.*

If you want to avoid ignominy, never tell your secrets to women.

*Mabada kas kea z zan meh jouyad, ke dar shoureh biyaban gol narouyad.*

One should not expect women to be faithful, as it is not possible for desert to blossom

*Agar zan hasoud naboud, yek shohar haneh aalam ra bas boud*

If women were not jealous (envious), a husband were enough for the whole world.

*Makre zan eblis did o bini bar zamin keshid*

The Devil is less fraudulent than women are

*Hamleh ba shir mard hamrah ast, hileh kaar e zan ast o roubah ast*

Lions and brave men attack, women and foxes cheat

*Be danesh zanan key namayand raah*

Women do not lead by knowledge

*Ze kaar e zanan hame ayad kaasti*

Woman's job is always imperfect

*Zanan chon naghesean e aghl o dinand, chera mardan rah e anha gozinand*

While women are imperfect in their brain, and religion, why do men follow (want) them

As far as the forth research question is concerned, it could be maintained that, in addition to documenting such aspects of sexual discrimination and male chauvinism, which were the foci of research questions one, two, and three, some inferences were made about the cultural and social norms and traditions concerning the female gender in both languages. Such claim is in agreement with Wolfgang's (2008) statement who asserted that one noteworthy merit of studying proverbs is discovering the social and cultural norms of the speakers.

As for the Persian language, the following inferences were made based on the proverbs' connotation and implied messages.

- 1) In the Persian culture, women are expected to be beautiful, loyal, fertile, and homemaker:

*safaye Khaneh ab ast o jaroo, safaye dokhtar chashm ast o abroo*  
A neat house and a beautiful girl are favorable.

*amadan ba chador, raftan ba kafan.*

A wife should not leave her husband until the end of her life.

*az zanan e jahan khosh ayandeh, doost darandeh ast o zayandeh*  
The happiest women are those who are beautiful and fertile

*be khaneh neshastan bovad kare zan, boron kare mardan e shamshir zan*  
Wives are responsible for domestic affairs, husbands are responsible for out-of-home affairs.

- 2) In the Persian culture, bride's *dowry* is of a high significance, and sometimes more important than her beauty.

*naaz e aroos be jahaz ast*  
The bride's value is as big as her dowry

- 3) The bride's *Virginity* is of a high significance.

*shouy e doshizeh doshizeh bayad*  
A virgin groom should be coupled with a virgin bride

- 4) Wives have no responsibility concerning the economic issues. Men are the financial provider.  
*shoharam shoghal bashad nanam dar taghar bashad*  
If my financial needs are satisfied, I do not care about other characteristics (beauty) of my husband.
- 5) Marriage is highly encouraged; divorce is highly remonstrated  
*zanan ra bovad shouy kardan honar, bare shouy zan beh ke nazde pedar*  
It is better for daughters to marry than living with their fathers.  
  
*amadan ba chador, raftan ba kafan.*  
A wife should not leave her husband until the end of her life
- 6) Levirate and sororate are two common traditions in the Persian culture.  
*kasi doa mikonad ke zanash namirad ke khahar zan nadashteh bashad*  
One is worried about his wife's death who has no sister-in-law
- 7) Unity of husbands and wives makes perfect.  
*kadbanou va kadkhoda ke ba ham sazand, az khaak zar konand.*  
When husband and wife cooperate, they are perfect (can solve all their problems).
- 8) Men's submissiveness to women is highly criticized.  
*kasi kou bovad mehtar e anjoman, kafan behtar our a ze farman e zan*  
Better to die than obeying wives.
- 9) Women's beauty is not absolute.  
*Leili ra be cheshm e Majnoon bayad did*  
Beauty is in the eye of the beholder
- 10) Love is more invaluable than life.  
*Majnoon e rokh e Leili az marg nayandishad.*  
One who loves his sweetheart, does not care about his death
- 11) Marriage is a must. Wives are sources of peace and ease.  
*kasi ke zan nadarad aram e tan nadarad*  
No wife, no serenity

12) The intra-family marriages are encouraged  
*asb e khoob az tavile biroon nemiraved, dokhtar e khoob az ghabileh*  
A good horse will not be sold; a good girl will be married by her relatives

13) Permanent and temporary marriages are common.  
*magar in bacheh sigheh ast, aan bacheh aghdi?*  
Is this son of a permanent wife, and that son of a non-permanent wife?

In the Persian culture, permanent wives are generally more amiable.

14) The human race originates from father and continues through sons (the male is original)  
*aslām pedar ast ke madaram rahgozar ast*  
I originally belong to my father

*baradar posht, baradar zadeh hamposht, khahar zadeh ra be zar bekhar, be sang bokosh*  
One's paternal relatives are blood and flesh; maternal relatives are not reliable.

15) Sons are more favorable than daughters  
*adam sag bezayad bokhtar nazayad*  
Better to have a puppy than a daughter

*zood beza, nar beza*  
Bear a child, and give birth to a son

16) Bigamy and polygyny are common traditions.  
*boro zan kon ey khajeh har nobahar, ke taghvim e pari nayayad be kaar.*  
Every year take a new wife, the last year's calendar is not valid for this year.

As for the English proverbs, due to the scarcity of the proverbs' number and miscellany, only four statements were deduced concerning the English culture and beliefs:

1) Women are not encouraged to go or work outside.  
A woman's place is in the home

- 2) Women are enchanting and irresistible.  
One hair of a woman draws more than a hundred yoke of oxen.
- 3) Marriage is not much encouraged.  
A woman without a man is like a fish without a bicycle  
If you would be happy for a week take a wife; if you would be happy for a month kill a pig; but if you would be happy all your life plant a garden.
- 4) It is difficult to find a favorable or ideal wife  
Fine linen, girls and gold so bright. Chuse not to take by candlelight.
- 5) Wives should be submissive to their husbands.  
People knew a man by the company he kept, but they generally knew a woman by the man who kept her

It should be mentioned that there were many entries (proverbs) for each category; however, in this paper only a limited number of instances were provided for exemplification. Such conclusions about the Persian and English cultures as two paragons of the eastern and western societies correspond to the findings of recent researches in sociology in which the western and eastern families were compared and contrasted. Such researches advocate that in the eastern countries marriage is considered an important source of social and emotional support (House, Landis and Umberson 1988; Ross and Mirowsky 1989). A recent study showed that the negative effect of divorce on wellbeing is weaker in eastern countries than in more individualistic countries (Kalmijn 2010), which was explained by the stronger support norms (Kalmijn and Saraceno 2008).

In the same way, the results of socio-anthropological studies suggest that there exist differences between eastern-based and western-based cultures and societies (Reher 1998). In eastern countries, nuclear households are predominant, whereas in the family structure is more often expanded and the density of the kinship network is higher. These socio-anthropological statements are quite in line with what this research concluded thanks to a critical discourse analysis.

### **Conclusion**

Applying Fairclough's approach to the analysis of proverbial discourse, this study analysed the linguistic representation of *women* in the Persian and English languages. It sought to reveal how the female gender is perceived by the speakers of these two languages, and how it has been depicted and typified in their spoken languages and cultures. It also tried to investigate the ways in which relationships within family are revealed in different cultures. It also touched upon the kinship terminology as well as the kinship systems of the two cultures. Lastly, attention was called to the power relationships and the hegemonic views towards the female gender in both cultures.

As a result, it was revealed that the Persian language and literature is more caring about and attentive to the female gender. In other words, the female gender has received much more attention in the Persian culture compared to the English culture. As for the kinship system and the familial relationships, the Persian language shows a higher degree of social interactions. This fact reveals that the kinship system ties and connections in the Persian culture are tighter and stronger than those in the English culture and frequent uses of the lexicon of family members show that the traditional framework of family is still preserved. These findings are in line with the findings of sociologists who believe that family in the eastern societies enjoys a higher degree of solidarity and emotional linkage than in the European countries (Fokkema and Liefbroer 2008); Fokkema, de Jong-Gierveld and Dykstra (2012).

However, as far as the power relationships and the sexual hegemony are concerned, both languages showed nearly equal degrees of sexual discrimination, male chauvinism, and inequality. Ergo, it can be claimed that the evolutionary trajectory of the Persian and English proverbial discourse has tended from entropy towards more balance, unbiased and fairness. Although, such changes and nullification has demanded elapsing of time as well as many other social, cultural, and individual changes.

### **Suggestions for Future Research:**

This research was a qualitative one. Further studies could enjoy a triangulation of data collection methods. For instance, surveying the native speakers of the two languages and appraising their ideas through interviews and questionnaires could lead the study to more interesting and fact-based results.

### Acknowledgements

I would like to express my thanks to reviewers for their valuable suggestions on an earlier version of this paper.

### Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

### Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

### REFERENCES

- Ayto, J. (2009). *Oxford Dictionary of English Idioms*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Barrie, T., Karmarae, C., & Henley, N. (1983). *Language and Sex: Difference and Dominance*. Rowley, MA: New House.
- Cazden, C. (2001). *Classroom discourse: The language of teaching and learning*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Culpeper, J. (2011). *Impoliteness: Using language to cause offense*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dehkoda, A. A. (1999). *Amsaal-o-Hekam [Proverbs and Idioms]*. Tehran: Amirkabir. [in Persian]
- Fairclough, N. (1989). *Language and Power*. London: Longman.
- (1992). *Discourse Analysis*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- (1995). *Critical Discourse Analysis*. London: Longman.
- (1999). *Global Capitalism and Critical Awareness of Language*. *Language Awareness*, Vol 8, No 2, pp 71–83. Doi: 10.1080/09658419908667119
- Fairclough, N. (2003). *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research*. London: Routledge.
- Fokkema, T. & Liefbroer, A. C. (2008). "Trends in living arrangements in Europe: Convergence or divergence?" *Demographic Research*, Vol 19, No 36, pp. 1351-1418. Doi: 10.4054/DemRes.2008.19.36
- Fokkema, T., de Jong-Gierveld, J., & Dykstra, P.A. (2012). "Cross-national differences in older adult loneliness". *The Journal of Psychology*, Vol 146, No 1-2, pp 201-228. Doi: 10.1080/00223980.2011.631612

- Gee, J. P. (1999). *"Discourse analysis"*. London: Routledge.
- Ginet, S. M., Borker, R., & Furman, N. (1980). *"Women and Language in Literature and Society"*. California: Praeger
- House, J.S., Landis, K.R., & Umberson, D. (1988). *"Social relationships and health"*. *Science*, Vol 241(4865), pp 540-545.
- Imani, A. & Dehghankar, A. (2016). *"The manifestation of woman in the Persian proverbial discourse: A CDA perspective"*. *Journal of Research in Applied Linguistics*, Vol 6, No 1, pp 173-183.
- Imani, A. & Eslami-rasekh, A. (2014). *"Peivastegi va hambastegi-ye zan dar tahlil-e peikare-bonyad-e zarbolmasal-haye Irani: Barresi tatbighi tahlil-e gofteman [Cohesion and Coherence of woman in the corpus-based analysis of Iranian proverbs: A comparative study of discourse analysis]"*. *Journal of Comparative Linguistic Researches*, Vol 4, No 8, pp 101-119. [in Persian]
- Kalmijn, M. (2010). *"Country differences in the effects of divorce on well-being: The role of norms, support, and selectivity"*. *European Sociological Review*, Vol 26, No 4, pp 475-490. Doi: 10.1093/esr/jcp035
- Kalmijn, M., & Saraceno, C. (2008). *"A comparative perspective on intergenerational support: Responsiveness to parental needs in individualistic and familialistic countries"*. *European Societies*, Vol 10, No 3, pp 479-508. Doi: 10.1080/14616690701744364
- Key, M. R. (1975). *"Male/female language"*. Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press.
- Lakoff, R. T. (1975). *"Language and women's place"*. New York: Harper Colophon Books.
- Paltridge, B. (2006). *"Discourse Analysis"*. London: Continuum.
- Parastesh, S., & Sasanikhah, F. (2010). *"Baznama'ie-ye jensiyat dar goftmane roman [Representation of Sexuality in Novel Discourse]"*. *Zan dar Farhang o Honar*, Vol 4, No 1, pp 55-74. [in Persian]
- Reher, D.S. (1998). *"Family ties in Western" Europe: Persistent contrasts. Population and Development Review*, Vol 24, No 2, pp 203-234. Doi: 10.2307/2807972
- Ross, C.E., & Mirowsky, J. (1989). *"Explaining the social patterns of depression: Control and problem solving, or support and talking"*. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 30(2), 206-219. Doi: 10.2307/2137014
- Shamlou, A., & Sarkisiyan, A. (1998). *"Ketab-e-Koucheh [Book of Alley]"*, Vol 1-12, Tehran: Maziar. [in Persian]

Sprears, R. A. (1993). *"NTC's Dictionary of Proverbs and Clichés"*. Lincolnwood (Illinois): National Textbook Company Group.

Storm, H. (1992). *"Women in Japanese Proverbs"*. *Asian Folklore Studies*, Vol 51, No 2, pp 167-182. Doi: 10.2307/1178330

Van Dijk, T. A. (2001). *"Critical Discourse Analysis"*. In D. Schiffrin, D. Tannen, and H. E. Hamolton. (Eds.), *The handbook of discourse analysis*. Oxford: Blackwell

Wilson, F. P. (1970). *"The Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs"*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Wodak, R. (1997). *"Gender and Discourse"*. London: Sage.

Wolfgang, M. (2008). *"Proverb Speaks Louder than Words: Folk Wisdom in Art, Culture, Folklore, History, Literature, and Mass Media"*. New York: Peter Lang Publications.

Yarmohamadi, L. (2004). *"Gofteman shenasie rayej va enteghadi [Current and Critical Discourse Analysis]"*. Tehran: Hermes. [in Persian]