

The Different Perspectives of Saudi Female Undergraduate Students Towards Linguistic Violence

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ABSTRACT

This paper explored the relationship between linguistic violence and attitudes of 90 Saudi female undergraduate students in the English department of King Saud University. The study was conducted to identify the most frequent abusive types of phrases and investigate its effectiveness on students' attitudes by recording their responses. Students were able to identify 270 phrases that evoked their emotions. Quantitative measures were used to analyze the student's attitudes when being exposed to verbal violence. Results confirm that labeling the person negatively (n=90) was more likely to trigger anger (n=114) and less likely to elicit frustration (n=67), which was the opposite in phrases implied threats that evoked the emotion of frustration more than anger. Regarding the hidden struggle among women in an abusive environment, findings suggest enrolling students in classes that motivate them to take action towards any form of verbal abuse. In addition, this research would raise awareness and decrease the rate of linguistic violence.

Key words: Saudi, Female, Domestic Violence, Verbal Abuse

INTRODUCTION

"I roared... it kills me the number of times I roared" (p. 219). That was a quote taken from Roddy Doyle's book *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors*. This quote was said by a battered female character and analyzed by Mildorf (2005) that showed how abused women used words that were related to animal sounds to express themselves (Mildorf, 2005). Furthermore, in the analysis of the book, he noted that an individual might be damaged psychologically and emotionally as a result of an abusive environment (Mildorf, 2005).

Set-roles based on gender play a big part in comprehending the reasons behind verbal abuse against women (Egharevba, Chiazor, Suleiman, 2013). Egharevba, Chiazor, and Suleiman (2013) stated that gender-roles were identified since the creation of man. Even though sex gives a biological description of an individual, people can create gender-roles over time to fit in a particular social environment (Egharevba, Chiazor, Suleiman, 2013). Male and female individuals may acquire and promote some behaviors (Doke, 2015). Moving forward in time, the principles of social standards have not been regarded when it came to women. However, the universal declaration of human rights (1948) states that "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights" (P. 5653), which confirms that all human beings deserve equality and freedom with no discrimination of any sort (Egharevba, Chiazor, Suleiman, 2013).

When examining Arab communities, it has been shown that violence outside the family circle is clearly remarked

and noticed (Douki, 2003). Violence against women was interoperated in three contexts; Firstly, Violence is considered as "An abuse of power. It is the domination, coercion, intimidation and victimization of one person by another by physical, sexual or emotional means within intimate relationships" (Aftab, & Khan, 2011, p. 4). This definition is in regards to violence in general and is not specifically against women. Secondly, the United Nation General Assembly initiated a plan to eliminate violence against women by making an official declaration in December 1993. The declaration stated that "Violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of the full advancement of women" (P.1). Thirdly, violence has also been defined as "any act of gender based violence that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women" (Doke, 2015, P.16). This study focuses on the third stated definition because it mentioned women's struggle against violence.

Every legal and medical system acknowledges that there is in fact physical and sexual abuse, but in every situation where there is physical abuse, there has to be an emotional effect that cannot be cured as fast as bruises (Hamamrman, & Bernet, 2000). Obviously, there are no clear-cut scars for verbal abuse that are similar to those of the physical abuse, which can be evidently visible (Grady, 2003). A recent study showed a group of female young adults that were

tested for violence. The percentage of those who suffered from emotional and verbal abuse was 27%, which reached a higher percentage than of those who suffered physical abuse (Raheel, 2015). Thus, it is vital to raise awareness for this issue (Raheel, 2015). Violence through physical abuse has been evident throughout history, but verbal abuse such as yelling, swearing and insulting has recently increased (Mildorf, 2005). Verbal abuse was defined as “Words that attack or injure an individual, words that cause one to believe an untrue statement, or words that speak falsely on an individual” (Grady, 2003, p.23-24). A second definition stated that verbal abuse is considered as a “language that is humiliating, degrading, or disrespectful; it may include the threat of ‘physical force, sexual or psychological harm, or other negative consequences’” (Di Martino 2002, p. 12). It was also defined as a “category of emotional torture that has long lasting repercussions” (Khan & Khan, 2014, p.110).

Being the head of the family provides men the ability to dominate because of their social and economical rank (Haj-Yahia, 2000). This paper aims to describe Saudi women’s attitudes towards the linguistic violence that they might have faced. The focus of this paper is the hidden struggle among women in hope for decreasing the rate of linguistic violence. A sample of young Saudi female adults, between the ages of 19 to 25 who were students in King Saud University, were given a questionnaire to complete. Students were chosen randomly from the College of Arts due to the availability of volunteers.

Research Questions

RQ1 How would Saudi Female Undergraduate Students React when they are verbally abused?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Violence and Attitude

It has been discovered that according to Hastainge (2000), there is a relationship between women’s attitudes and verbal violence. He explained that, technically, there was a clear connection that linked women who were subjected to abuse to their personalities. A study in Nigeria conducted by Ayotunde, Akintoye & Adefunke (2014) showed that the attitude of Nigerian women had a significant relevance to the percentage of gender-based violence. The results showed that Nigerian women endured violence and that they never took a stand against it. 31.22% of Nigerian women were victimized, and the percentage of women who never complained during the time they were in an abusive environment was 44.13%. The researchers concluded that they Nigerian women should be aware not to tolerate violence. The data was collected from 2008 Nigeria Demographic and Health Surveys (NDHS), which rated the occurrence of gender-based violence and examined the relationship between 33,385 Nigerian woman’s attitude and verbal abuse. The age range was from 15-49 years. The study’s results are clear evidence that the more tolerance women show towards any form of violence, either physical or verbal, the more the rate of violence increases.

Verbal Abuse

In most social events, adolescents; including male and female individuals, tend to try their best to develop their negotiation skills (Mrick & Mrtorell, 2011). In recent studies, more and more young adults complained about being labeled with certain inappropriate names (Vicars, 2006). Yet, little research focused on words or phrases that affected people emotionally during an argument (Schroth, Bain-Chekal & Caldwell, 2005). Two studies have been applied to study words that affected individuals emotionally (Schroth, Bain-Chekal & Caldwell, 2005). The methodology used in the first study was asking 308 graduates to identify words or phrases that might hurt them as listeners in the middle of a negotiation. The second study provided another group of students with the words or phrases that the first group identified. This was to indicate the negotiators’ different realizations of the effects caused by those hurtful words. As a result, the students themselves saw that using words that evoked emotions to one another is ‘unfair’. On the other hand, female students tend to use abusive words as an advantage for ending discussions. (Schroth, Bain-Chekal & Caldwell, 2005) This needs a further study because words cannot be used exclusively for a certain gender (Schroth, Bain-Chekal & Caldwell, 2005).

The Consequences of Verbal Abuse on Women’s Mental Health

Verbal abuse towards women may cause serious psychological damages (Raheel, 2015). Inoue, Tsukano, Muraoka, Kaneko, and Okamura (2006) conducted a study in a psychiatric department in England and Wales where patients abused their nurses verbally. A survey was given to 266 nurses, from two different hospitals. (Inoue, Tsukano, Muraoka, Kaneko, and Okamura, 2006). They were asked to fill out questionnaires to see the average number of abuse amongst nurses. Two hundred and thirty two of them replied and out of those, 141 were victims of verbal abuse. The study great psychological effects that made them feel constantly nervous.

Reviewed studies showed that In Nigeri, 44.13% of women tolerated violence against them (Ayotunde, Akintoye & Adefunke, 2014). In another study, words that caused anger were considered ‘unfair’ to students when they were questioned, though females viewed them as a positive way to end discussions (Schroth, Bain-Chekal & Caldwell, 2005). Verbal abuse could result in having negative psychological effects on women, such as being constantly nervous (Inoue, Tsukano, Muraoka, Kaneko, & Okamura, 2006). Observation of the attitude of the victim herself when being violated is needed. The significance of this research lies in knowing how women themselves can affect the rate linguistic violence they endure.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The data for this study was collected from a sample of 90 Saudi female undergraduate students at King Saud University in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The students participated in the

study at the English department, college of Arts based on the availability of volunteers. They were randomly selected from three different levels (level 3, level 5 and level 7) in order to have a variety of ages. The age range is from 19 to 25. The study took place in the first academic semester of 2015-2016. The experiment lasted for 2 days.

Instruments

This study used Schroth, Bain-Chekal and Caldwell's (2005) approach, a questionnaire used to ask the participants two questions; the first one asked them to elicit three words or phrases that affected them emotionally and could be considered verbal abuse. The second question included seven types of emotions, which were Anger, Frustration, Fear, Surprise, Disgust, Friendliness and Shame. Each participant chose one of them to relate to what they wrote. This technique helped to identify words or phrases that triggers one's feelings when being exposed to verbal violence. It also helped to discover the relationship between the frequency of certain phrases and the most common response of the recipients.

Procedure

The purpose of this study was to explore women's attitudes towards verbal abuse. Therefore, this study followed a certain procedure based on Schroth, Bain-Chekal and Caldwell's (2005) approach. The first step of the procedure was to give the participants a brief introduction about the topic while handing them the questionnaire. Before answering the questions, the participants recorded their age, academic level, without names. The questionnaire contained two questions; the first question asks the participants to write down three phrases (in English or Arabic) that they considered verbal abuse. The second question asked them to relate their phrases to certain types of emotions provided on the questionnaire between brackets. Schroth, Bain-Chekal and Caldwell (2005) asked participants to specify where a certain verbal abuse took place, at work or at home. However, this study did not include this part because of its purpose, which focused on the participants' attitudes. After collecting the data from 90 students, words and phrases will be identified and analyzed.

The six categories of verbal abuse (Schroth, Bain-Chekal & Caldwell, 2005; Tramel & Reynolds, 1981).

Six Categories of Verbal Abuse

A	Labeling the other person negatively/ making attribution about the other's party motives/ belittling the other person's position.
B	Telling the other person what to do/ what they cannot do/ what she's ought to do.
C	Appealing to a higher source (or an ideal)/ blaming abdicating responsibility.
D	Rude/ not listening/ explicative/ insincere praise/ sarcasm/absolutes/ educating other.
E	Labeling your own behavior as superior.
F	Implied threats (or mean thoughts).

Analysis

In order to analyze women's different attitudes towards verbal abuse, all the phrases that were elicited by the participants will be gathered and classified under six different categories (Schroth, Bain-Chekal & Caldwell, 2005; Tramel & Reynolds, 1981). For example, a certain phrase, such as "you idiot!" would be classified under the category A (Labeling the other person negatively/ making attribution about the other's party motives/ belittling the other person's position). After classifying each phrase under its appropriate category, the frequency of phrases and attitudes will be analyzed and measured by using SPSS.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study showed that there was a strong relationship between women's attitudes and verbal violence. Saudi women's attitudes towards verbal abuse were observed. From 90 female college students who were asked about their experience of verbal abuse, 270 abusive phrases were identified. Most of the students felt angry when exposed to verbal abuse. Saudi women's anger towards verbal abuse could be a motive for them to take action against it.

In Table 2, the frequency of certain words or phrases that evoked emotional responses were listed. The participants were asked to provide abusive words and phrases from their own experiences. 270 words or phrases were identified and classified to their appropriate categories. First, the category of labeling the other person negatively ("You are useless", "You are stupid" and "You are a loser"). The second category of appealing to a higher source (or an ideal)/ blaming abdicating responsibility, such as "you are a women, everything you do will not count, you will end up hanging your academic certificate in the kitchen". Third, telling the other person what to do/ what they can't do or what she is ought to do type of phrase, such as "You can never succeed". Fourth, is the category of being rude/ not listening/ explicative/ insincere praise/ sarcasm/absolutes/ educating other phrase; "you don't respect our feelings". The second least type is labeling one's own behavior as superior, such as "You're a women I am more powerful than you". The least frequent type of phrases were implied threats (or mean thoughts); like "We'll have the (talk) when we get home".

The phrases led triggering six-identified category of emotional responses among students. Most of the phrases that triggered students' emotions were those which labeled them negatively (n = 90). Students did not accept personal attacks and they could be insulted by being called with unsuitable names. Therefore, the predominant reaction towards negative labels was anger (n = 114). Actually, of all the seven-tested emotions, in this study, labeling negatively had reached the highest record of emotional reaction, such as "You are useless", "You are stupid" and "You are a loser".

The following will show each type of the seven-triggered emotions and the number of times they were triggered throughout the six categories. The most frequent emotion was the emotion of anger (n=114). The 114 phrases that triggered anger, 33 were categorized as labeling, which was the highest number among other categories.

Table 2. Trigger words and emotions (n=270)

Emotions	Labeling	Telling	Higher source	Rude	Superior	Threats	Total
Anger	33	22	26	24	6	3	114
Frustration	20	16	13	10	4	4	67
Fear	3	1	1	2	0	0	7
Surprise	16	2	5	6	0	0	29
Disgust	3	2	4	2	1	1	13
Friendliness	5	3	0	0	0	0	8
Shame	10	5	6	9	2	0	32
Total	90	51	55	53	13	8	270

The second most occurring type of phrase in anger is appealing to a higher source (n=26). Rude/ not listening/ explicative/ insincere praise/ sarcasm/absolutes/ educating other made up 24 of the 114 incidents, which is more than telling the other person what to do/ what they cant do/ what she is ought to do. The least frequent types of phrases that triggered anger were labeling your own behavior as superior (n=6) and implied threats (n=3).

When people appealed to a higher source or underestimated women, female students were more likely to be frustrated rather than angry (n = 67). One of the given examples was, “*you are a women, everything you do will not count, you will end up hanging your academic certificate in the kitchen*” with a total of (n=55). Basically, Saudi females saw themselves as superior and did not allow any kind of language that insulted their position. A small number of those students were disgusted phrases (n=4). Students were also frustrated when they were told what they could or could not do (n=16). Another category that scored highly was when students talked to people who did not listen to them, did not give them any attention or spoke rudely to them with a total of 53 reactions. The results showed that students were most likely to be angry towards these types of phrases as well as labels of superior behavior, such as “*I am more powerful than you*” (n=13).

Frustration, the second triggered emotion, was mostly evoked by phrases of labeling negatively (n= 20). Telling the other person what to do/ what they can't do and what she is ought to do was the second highest (n=16). A slight difference appeared in the scores of appealing to a higher source (or an ideal)/ blaming abdicating responsibility and rude/ not listening/ explicative/ insincere praise/ sarcasm/absolutes/ educating other. The frequency of the category of Appealing to a higher source (or an ideal)/ blaming abdicating responsibility was 13, while being rude/ not listening/ explicative/ insincere praise/ sarcasm/absolutes/ educating other was 10. Phrases that labeled your own behavior as superior and phrases with implied threats scored equally, (n=4).

Fear, the third triggered emotion, had a total the highest score in labeling negatively (n=3). Second most frequent is being rude/ not listening/ explicative/ insincere praise/ sarcasm/absolutes/ educating other (n= 2). It has been noticed that certain phrases scored equally, such as telling the other person what to do/ what they cant do/ what she ought to do and appealing to a higher source (or an ideal)/ blaming abdicating responsibility (n=1) Phrases that labeled your own

behavior as superior and phrases that implied threats did not reflect the emotion of fear (n=0). Saudi and Nigerian women differed in their reaction towards verbal abuse in terms of tolerance. The findings of Ayotunde, Akintoye & Adefunke (2014) that was conducted in Nigeria showed that 44.13% of women tolerated verbal abuse. Also, the study found that their resistance increased the rate of linguistic violence. They found less likelihood of abuse amongst non-tolerant women in Nigeria considered lesser than in tolerant Nigerian women. On the other hand, this study showed that Saudi women were less likely to tolerate any type of word that they considered abusive. However, when Saudi women were faced with phrases that implied threats, fear was more likely to be evoked rather than anger. The emotion of fear (n=8) was triggered in a minor number of students. One of the examples was when a student who was threatened by her mother, identified the following phrase; “*we will have (the talk) when we get home*”. This study confirms the previous study because due fear, Saudi females might tolerate verbal abuse like females in Nigeria.

Surprise, the forth elected emotion, reached the highest number in labeling negatively (n=16) but the number decreased compared to rude/ not listening/ explicative/ insincere praise/ sarcasm/absolutes/ educating other phrases (n=6). This was followed by appealing to a higher source (or an ideal)/ blaming abdicating responsibility (n=5). The least frequent types of phrases that triggered the emotion of surprise is telling the other person what to do/ what they cant do/ what she is ought to do (n=2). The feeling of surprise has not been evoked by the phrases that labeled your own behavior as superior and phrases that implied threats (n=0).

Disgust, the fifth emotion, showed the highest number in appealing to a higher source (or an ideal)/ blaming abdicating responsibility (n=4) followed by labeling negatively (n=3). The frequent of the category Telling the other person what to do/ what they cant do/ what she is ought to do was similar to the category of being rude/ not listening/ explicative/ insincere praise/ sarcasm/absolutes/ educating other phrases. The least frequent phrases are labeling your own behavior as superior and implied threats (n=1).

Friendliness, the sixth triggered emotion, showed only in labeling negatively (n=5) and Telling the other person what to do/ what they cant do/ what she is ought to do (n=3). This emotion was not triggered in the other categories.

Shame, the seventh and last triggered emotion, showed the highest score in labeling negatively (n=10). However,

the frequency of telling the other person what to do/ what they cant do/ what she is ought to do was half its number, (n=5). Rude/ not listening/ explicative/ insincere praise/ sarcasm/absolutes/ educating other was considered the second highest (n=9). The phrases that scored the least were the types that labeled your own behavior as superior (n=2) and phrases that implied threats (n=0).

As the table showed, the frequency of the categories led to triggering certain emotional responses. The most frequently used types of phrases that triggered emotional responses were those who labeled the person negatively (n = 90) or appealed to a higher source (or an ideal)/ blaming abdicating responsibility scored highly (n=55). The emotions that were most frequently triggered were anger (n = 114) and frustration (n = 67). Thus, Labeling the person negatively was more likely to trigger anger and less likely to elicit frustration, which is the opposite in phrases that implied threats and that evoked the emotion of frustration more than anger.

The most elected emotions in the results of this study and in Schroth, Bain-Chekal & Caldwell (2005) were anger and frustration but they differed in the types of phrases that triggered those emotions. The most frequent type of phrases was negative labels (n = 226). Both studies were similar in that labeling negatively was featured highly, but they differed in the second most frequent. For this sample, the second most frequent phrases among students were appealing to a higher source (n = 177), rather than telling what the student ought to do. This confirmed the results of the previous study and extended the research in that different phrases engender different reactions in different contexts.

Abusive language could result in having negative psychological effects on women, such as being constantly nervous or angry. Inoue, Tsukano, Muraoka, Kaneko, and Okamura (2006) conducted a study in England with a sample of 266 nurses who were exposed to verbal abuse by their patients. The results showed the psychological effect which made them nervous. Women might be stressed as a result of being exposed to verbal abuse. The nurses were like the Saudi women in this study in the sense of psychological effects but the triggered emotions were completely different. One hundred and fourteen phrases resulted in anger, not distress or fear. Inoue, Tsukano, Muraoka, Kaneko, and Okamura (2006)'s study was very specific in terms of the context in which the exposure to verbal abuse happened in a psychiatric department. This might be the reason behind increasing verbal violence since patients suffered from mental disorders. In contrast, the findings of this study did not focus on the context of where verbal abuse happened but the attitudes of Saudi female students in general.

LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

This study faced some difficulties in generalizing its results on all Saudi female undergraduates for several reasons. The first reason is that some of the participants were not able to recall the same accurate words that evoked their emotional response at that specific time. The second reason is that some of the students identified the abusive phrases in Arabic. After translating the phrases into English, some of them could

not carry the same accurate meaning as in Arabic. Also, the study was concerned with the participants' evaluation about certain phrases they experienced and triggered their emotions, but other observers may not consider those phrases abusive and may evaluate them differently. The limitations of this study lies in the fact that it was not able to test how the observer felt while being exposed to the same phrases that were identified.

While conducting this study, the research came up with some recommendations for further research. First, this study investigated the effectiveness of abusive words that lead to triggering certain emotions; it would be compelling to conduct the same study at other universities. Second, this study was conducted on a small-size sample (90 students). It would be useful to examine a larger-size sample to generalize findings. Third, Saudi female ages were from 19 to 25 years. It would be helpful to observe older female attitudes towards verbal abuse. Fourth, besides using questionnaires to identify abusive phrases, in order to collect data, interviewing abused women would be helpful in explaining the whole situation of how verbal abuse was treated.

CONCLUSION

To conclude this research, the attitude of Saudi female undergraduates can affect the rate of linguistic violence they endure. The results of this study showed that students get angry rather than frustrated when being labeled negatively. To give them the ability to prevent psychological issues due to abusive words, students should enroll in classes that motivate them to take action towards any form of linguistic violence. Otherwise, verbal abuse might lead battered Saudi females to underestimate themselves to the point that they use animal sounds in their expressions as the female character in Roddy Doyle's *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors*, she says "I roared. . .it kills me the number of times I roared". Saudi females' attitudes might get affected as a result of a verbally abusive environment.

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