World Englishes: How Differently Canadian English Native Speakers and Iranian EFL Learners Make Yes/no Question Variants

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Abstract

This paper investigates the commonalities among linguistic structures despite differences in different varieties of English. It, further, probes the proximity of yes/no question variants produced by Canadian English native speakers and those produced by Iranian intermediate EFL learners. The functions of such question variants are also probed in this study. Making use of an Edinburgh Map Task, 60 Canadians and Iranians performed the task and made English yes/no question variants considering the context and functions of the questions. Based on the results, both groups utilized the same type of yes/no question variants with the same functions. However, with respect to quantity, Canadians made more variants while the context was similar. Another difference noticed was the most frequent variant: Iranians' frequent variant coincided with the informal context, the Canadians', yet, did not. These findings revealed that both Canadians and Iranians from two different circles syntactically and pragmatically behaved similarly.

Keywords: World Englishes, Standard English, Variation, Proximity

1. Introduction

In recent years, rapid growth in international contacts and communication in politics, trade and technology, tourism, education, entertainment and the internet, among others, reveals the fact that a common language is required to facilitate understanding and to provide successful communication (Kaur, 2010). Hence, for a great number of the people involved in international interactions, English has become a language of vital importance. In effect, the continuing spread of English throughout the world has given rise to the development of different varieties of this language.

Kachru (1985) elaborates on English diffusion and proposes the three concentric circles: the Inner Circle, the Outer Circle, and the Expanding Circle. The countries where English is used could be classified under Inner, Outer, or Expanding regarding the role that English plays in their societies. Following Kachru, McArthur (1987, 1998) was tempted to say that these three circles have resulted in several English "languages". Thus, these diverse socio-cultural contexts and the use of the language in culturally distinct contexts resulted in the world Englishes (Kachru, 1990).

Van Rooy (2010) emphasizes gaining insight into the study of world Englishes as a difficult issue without considering variability inherent in the structure of language. He claims that based on the recent works on the development and stabilization of Englishes (Trudgill 2004, 2008; Schneider 2003; 2007, 2008), the interaction between linguistic and social forces is of importance as the key to a meaningful understanding of the role of variation in language. Given variation, Jenkins (2006) asserts that there exists both inter- and intra-speaker variation according to social context, which performs linguistic and social functions. On the other hand, while

the earlier works on world Englishes often have accentuated the features that were unique to the particular national or regional varieties; the recent ones have paid special attention to the commonalities, the stable and settled features of these varieties (Schneider, 2003).

Concerning the variation in world Englishes claimed by Van Rooy, Trudgill, and Schneider as well as the commonalities available in these varieties proposed by Schneider; this study aims at investigating how far or near the Iranians' (the Expanding Circle) linguistic performance (producing yes/no question variants) is to the Canadians' (the Inner Circle) despite their diverse socio-cultural contexts. It probes for any stable and settled features between the English yes/no question variants produced by Iranian EFL learners and Canadian English native speakers. The study further scrutinizes the functions of such various yes/no question structures utilized by Canadian English native speakers and Iranian EFL learners.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 World Englishes Debate

In addition to Kaur (2010) and Hoffmann (2000), Widdowson (2003) believes that the spread of English throughout the world has resulted in different varieties of English and these varieties are the outcomes of the contact between language, people, and culture. Kachru (1985), first, succinctly expressed the diffusion of English in terms of three concentric circles: the Inner Circle, the Outer Circle, and the Expanding Circle. He states that these three circles bring to the English language linguistic diversity and the resultant cultural diversity. Kachru further claims that the world Englishes are the consequence of the diverse socio-cultural contexts and diverse uses of language in international context which are culturally distinct.

To date, different models of world Englishes have been proposed; the one, however, which clarifies on the existence of *varieties* of English rather than only *one variety*—Standard English—is that of Kachru. His model represents how the varieties are spread and acquired and also the functional domains in which English is used across cultures and languages. (Widdowson, 2003). The situation of English around the world is described in terms of three concentric circles (Bhatt, 2001; Mesthrie & Bhatt, 2008; Bolton, 2004; Kachru & Nelson, 1996; Timmis, 2007; Widdowson, 2003): The Inner Circle countries are the ones where English is the native language of the people and is acquired as the mother tongue. The United States, Britain, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand belong to this circle. The Outer Circle encompasses countries with long history of colonization, where English is utilized both officially and institutionally (Pishghadam and Sabouri, 2011). This circle covers India, Nigeria, Bangladesh, Malaysia, the Philippines, Zambia, Pakistan, Tanzania, and South Africa, among others. Ultimately, the Expanding Circle includes countries which outnumber the English speakers in the Inner Circle countries. Here, English is assumed to be a foreign language and does not have any established social role in the community, even though its functional domains are expanding rapidly. China, Russia, Japan, Korea, Egypt, Indonesia, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Iran are placed in this category.

Adopting the idea of world Englishes, Bhatt (2001) refers to the diverse linguistic, cultural, and ideological voices represented by the different English languages. He also points out that world Englishes rejects the dichotomy of US (native speakers) vs. THEM (non-native speakers) and instead emphasizes WE-ness (McArthur, 1993; 1998; Kachru, 1992). The pluralization of the word *English* implies the formal and functional variations, diverse sociolinguistic and cultural contexts, and the various identities English has received due to its acculturation in new sociolinguistic ecologies (Kachru 1965, Strevens 1992). Kachru (1983, 1986) and Bamgbose *et al* (1995) claim that the pluralism is an integral part of world Englishes and the monotheistic frameworks of the English language have been examined and replaced by frameworks that are faithful to multilingualism and language variation. Thus, English is regarded as a pluricentric language representing diverse sociolinguistic histories, multicultural identities, multiple norms of use and acquisition, and distinct contexts of function (Smith 1987, Ferguson 1982, Kachru 1982, Kachru and Quirk 1981).

Van Rooy (2010) asserts that the study of language structure without considering the variability inherent in it makes it difficult to gain insight into the structure of world Englishes. Kachru contends that while researchers satisfactorily accept the notions of multilingualism and multiculturalism:

> "We are still hesitant to cross the threshold and face the complexities of multilinguals' language behavior and the impact of that language data on our hypotheses and our attitudes. We are reluctant to modify, reformulate, revisit and reassess our favorite paradigms." (Kachru 1996a: 252) Also,

> "How does one account for the variation that is characteristic of every level of language in each variety." (Kachru 1996b: 141)

Recent developments in the realm of theoretical linguistics reveal a need for a reappraisal of the realities of language and may overcome some of the paradigm gaps identified by Kachru (1996a). Labov (1994, 2001) is among the first who have indicated that language variation is not necessarily free or random, but is inherently structured or patterned, and therefore, is something which is worth taking into account (Chambers 1995). Croft (1995: 518) claims that variation occurs not only in the use of language by adult speakers, but also it "must be a part of the speaker's knowledge of language". In consequence, according to Croft, insight into the speaker's mental representation of language—the object of Chomsky's (1965) inquiries—requires consideration of variation.

Varieties of English across the world have received serious attention from a number of contributions in recent times, including Trudgill (2004), Mair (2006), Schneider (2007), and Mesthrie and Bhatt (2008). The variability of Englishes in different places is the common focus of these contributions, paying special attention to the commonalities as well as the stable and settled features of these varieties. As Schneider (2003) rightly points out, earlier work on world Englishes often accentuated the features that were unique to particular national or regional varieties without paying enough attention to the commonalities.

According to Schneider (2003), investigation of the emergence of new Englishes around the world, despite the substantial differences among the indigenous languages and cultures that have come into contact with English in this process, have resulted in surprising similarities both structurally and sociolinguistically. He claims that these similarities are more than chance results and coincidences; instead, they are products of fundamentally similar contact processes, which can be accounted for by theories of communication, accommodation, and identity formation. Furthermore, Schneider proposes that New Englishes emerge in characteristic phases that eventually give rise to new dialect formation, and that the entire process is driven by identity reconstructions by the parties involved. It is, to some extent, determined by similar parameters of the respective contact situations. He implies that variability and differences between varieties of English are characteristic of both identity construction and linguistic evolution; these processes, nonetheless, have more commonalities than differences.

An emerging new variety of English is composed of elements of both "diffusion" from the English input and "selection" from an indigenous language form (Schneider, 2000a). Of course, differences caused by colonization types and the amount of segregation practiced in an area, historical accidents, regional and cultural parameters, linguistic substrata, varying context conditions, and other idiosyncrasies cannot be ignored. All these explain the great variability that we find when New Englishes are compared. Trudgill's (2004) work draws attention to the influence of the input on the output. The input to the formation of new varieties must therefore be considered as an equally important determinant of the outcome of dialect formation than the dynamic processes by which features spread and variation is reduced. The input brought along by English native speakers is itself internally variable.

According to Schneider (2003), the entire process of rerooting English in a foreign land can be viewed from two complementary perspectives: the *colonizers* and the *colonized*. Any kind of emergence of new Englishes needs to incorporate both. To a considerable extent, the histories of new Englishes can be viewed as processes of *convergence* between these two groups, despite all the initial and persistent differences between them. It is noted that these two groups' "correlates come to approximate one another in an ongoing process of mutual linguistic accommodation over time" (Schneider, 2003: 243-244).

2.2 Persian English and ELT in Iran

Iran is among the Expanding Circle countries where English is mostly used for educational and commercial purposes. English is learned in the language institutes as an extracurricular activity besides their attendance in primary schools and junior and senior high schools; those interested in English can even continue to learn it as a major at universities. English is learned and evaluated regularly concerning the most dominant varieties of English in Iran: British and American Englishes (Pishghadam and Sabouri, 2011). Imitation plays a significant role in learning the language and its assessment. Proficiency is assessed based on the extent of proximity to the native-like accent. Pishghadam and Sabouri (2011) maintain that Iranians assume that British and American Englishes are the best varieties as these two varieties exhibit the Standard English which native speakers use.

Imitating the dominant varieties of English and attempting to approach native-like proficiency presumably demotivate those who fail to do so in the EFL context of Iran. Also, "it has exploitative effects on the learners who manage acquiring it after great effort." (Pishghadam and Sabouri, 2011: 89) Recent research has revealed that, from a sociological perspective, those learners who have a high tendency to learn a native-like accent of English and thus put much effort in it show a kind of deculturation (Pishghadam and Kamyabi, 2008). In this respect, Pishghadam and Navari (2009) believe that cultural enrichment is not necessarily the result of contact

between two languages; on the contrary, one of the two languages is at risk and its culture may experience deculturation.

Pishghadam and Sabouri (2011) argue that imitating English is what is achieved via linguistic imperialism and it limits people's creativity in using the language. Yet, English must be considered as a valuable tool at the disposal of people with different nationalities so as to express their thoughts and their culture. Viewing English as an international language is in step with Crystal's (2003) view calling for adopting a functional account of English. This view concedes English as a valuable instrument for people to attain their aims and a medium of being heard by the whole world.

2.3 English Yes/no Question Variants

English yes/no questions like any other structures in a language can vary based on the different conditions the speakers might encounter. Jenkins (2006) argues that both the inter- and intra-speaker variations are conceivable according to social context, which performs linguistic and social functions. Yes/no question variants produced by Canadian English native speakers are mostly the ones listed in the following, each of which is produced concerning the context the speaker encounters.

2.3.1 Standard English Variant (ASV/ASC)

Mair (2006) draws attention to the extensive range of grammatical variation that even contemporary standard varieties of English, Canadian English included, exhibit. The first variant is known as the *Standard English variant* as it follows the standard procedure to construct yes/no questions. The availability of the auxiliary-initial clauses distinguishes such variants from declaratives. Further, the availability/non-availability of the auxiliary shows the distinction between this variant and others. Considering the context of use, the Standard English variant (ASV/ASC) or subject-verb inversion is what is expected to be used in the written register and in more formal contexts. Trudgill and Hannah's (1994) definition which is in harmony with Widdowson's (2003: 44) indicates that "the Standard English is the variant usually used in writing and spoken by educated speakers of English". It "refers to grammar and vocabulary (*dialect*) but not to pronunciation (*accent*)". Furthermore, Halliday (2006: 350) highlights the fact that the standard variety has "no intrinsic value" and that it is "just another dialect, but one that happened to be wearing a fancy uniform".

(1)   Auxiliary-fronted (Standard) (ASV/ASC)

Auxiliary + Subject + Verb/Complement

Do you work at school?

Are you a teacher?

2.3.2 Subject-fronted Variant (SVC/SAC)

The second variant which is a *declarative with a final rising intonation* (SVC/SAC) integrates two aspects: being a statement on the face of it and a question in nature in tandem. It is the variant assumed to be used in the colloquial speech, and thus, cannot be traced in the Standard English. Halliday and Greaves (2008: 63) state, "The falling tone realizes a lexicogrammatical category declarative which in turn realizes a semantic category of *statement*, while the rising tone realizes a lexicogrammatical category of interrogative which in turn realizes a semantic category of *question*". They add that the falling tone realizes certainty while the rising tone realizes uncertainty. Here, the uncertainty is expressed through the combination of a statement and a rising intonation on it.

(2)   Subject-fronted (Declarative Statements + Final Rising Intonation) (SVC/SAC)

Subject + Auxiliary/Verb + Complement

You work at school?

You are a teacher?

2.3.3 Confirmation Check Phrase (SVCCP/SACCP)

The rest of the variants which are supposed to be apt to be used in the colloquial speech, too, have been classified in this research and labeled as SVCCP/SACCP, SVCT/SACT, and P. They all are forms produced under the condition when the speaker requires *confirmation check*. To differentiate the type of confirmation checks, they are separated and labeled as confirmation check phrases, tag questions, and single phrases.

Long (1980) defines confirmation check as any expression immediately following an utterance by the interlocutor designed to elicit confirmation that the utterance has been correctly understood or correctly heard by

the speaker. Thus, "*the man, right?*" following "*Next to the man*" in a conversation by the other speaker is a confirmation check. These expressions can be answered by a simple confirmation phrase such as (*Yes, Mmhm*) when the preceding utterance has been correctly heard or understood; therefore, no new information from the interlocutor is required. According to Lee (2008), confirmation check phrases which are usually repetition of a portion of the preceding speaker's utterance with rising intonation are used to draw the speaker's attention to a specific linguistic form. Pica (1987), however, claims that confirmation check phrases are a tool to check the interlocutors' comprehensibility of their own productions. Consider the following example in which Pica demonstrates how the syntactical error is self-repaired from *esquí* to *esquié* 'skied' by the student (Grant = G) immediately after the confirmation check is received from the expert partner (Amanda = A):

(3) G: me gusta a esquiar. (I like to ski.)

 G: **esquí** solamente tres veces en montanas. (I only skied three times on mountains.)

 A: ¿esquí? (skied?) [*Confirmation check to indicate the wrong form*]

 G: Esquiar, yo esquié. si, esquié. Lo siento. Cuando esquié, usar, usé mi snowboard. ¿Como se dice "snowboard"? (To ski. I skied. Yes, I skied. I'm sorry. When I skied, to use, I used my snowboard. How do you say "snowboard"?)

Looking at the above example taken from Pica (1987), we come to the point that the so-called confirmation check phrase indicates communication difficulties which occasionally prevent continuation of the conversation due to comprehension problems.

(4) Subject-fronted (Declarative Statements + Confirmation Check Phrase) (SVCCP/ SACCP)

Subject + Auxiliary/Verb + Complement + Confirmation Check Phrase

You work at school, right? You are a teacher, right?

You work at school, ok? You are a teacher, ok?

You work at school, yeah? You are a teacher, yeah?

You work at school, you said? You are a teacher, you said?

2.3.4 Tag Question (SVCT/SACT)

Tag questions which are included in the confirmation check phrases in the literature and an individual category in this study were studied more broadly by Long (1980). Long includes tag questions among confirmation checks, comprehension checks, and clarification requests. He argues that such questions are established not only to elicit confirmation that the utterance has been correctly understood or heard and ensure whether the speaker's preceding utterance(s) has been understood by the interlocutor, but also to elicit clarification of the interlocutor's preceding utterance(s).

(5) Subject-fronted (Declarative Statements + Tag question) (SVCT/ SACT)

Subject + Auxiliary/Verb + Complement + Tag question

You work at school, don't you?

You are a teacher, aren't you?

2.3.5 Single Phrase (P)

Single phrases which largely include noun, verb, adjective, adverb, and preposition phrase are some sort of confirmation check phrases. When the utterance is not heard or understood correctly and thus the interlocutor attempts to make sure that s/he is right in what s/he has heard, such phrases are constructed. Frequently, the phrase comprises the most essential element in the preceding utterance heard.

(6) Single phrase (Noun Phrase/Adjective Phrase/Adverb Phrase, Verb Phrase, Prepositional Phrase, etc.) (P)

A teacher?

Beautiful?

At school?

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

The study was conducted on two groups of participants: Canadian English native speakers and Iranian EFL learners. The Canadian group consisted of 15 male and 15 female native speakers of English within the age

range of 18 to 26 who were born, raised, and still were residing in Toronto, Canada. Hence, they were assumed to be all originally Canadian English native speakers. One of the qualifications required for the Canadian participants to be selected for this study was their level of French proficiency. As the researchers intended for French not to have any effect on the English native speakers' linguistic performance, they were orally questioned about their level of proficiency and not evaluated through administrating French tests. The researchers relied on the participants responses as they all claimed to be elementary learners of French. They were undergraduate students studying at Glendon College, York University, Toronto, Canada. The participants were not chosen randomly from a large population and the two criteria for their selection were their nationality and knowledge of French.

The Iranian EFL group was composed of 15 male and 15 female Persian native speakers learning English as a foreign language at English language institutes in Isfahan, Iran. They were graduated students within the age range of 25 to 35 whose mother tongue was Persian. To prevent the effect of L1 interference and L2 proficiency on their linguistic performance, intermediate EFL learners were selected based on their results on the standardized Test of Spoken English (TSE). Thus, the main criterion for selection was their speaking skill.

3.2 Instrumentation

Edinburgh Map Task (EMT) was the data elicitation tool used in this study. The Edinburgh Map Task was the modified version of the EMT compiled by Human Communication Research Center (HCRC, 2010). The HCRC Map Task Corpus was produced in response to one of the core problems of work on natural language: much of the knowledge of language is based on scripted materials, despite most language use taking the form of unscripted dialogue with specific communicative goals. The original Edinburgh Map Task is a cooperative task involving two participants. The two speakers sit opposite one another and each has a map which the other cannot see as there is a barrier placed between them. One speaker—designated the Instruction Giver—has a route marked on his map; the other speaker—the Instruction Follower—has no route. The speakers are told that their goal is to reproduce the Instruction Giver's route by asking questions on the Instruction Follower's map. The maps are not identical and the speakers are told this explicitly at the beginning of their performance.

The modified EMT created by the researchers was two parallel maps for the Instruction Giver and the Instruction Follower. The Instruction Giver's map had fewer items than the Instruction Follower's. The starting and finishing points were not specified on the Instruction Follower's map. There was a special maze inserted in the middle of the map. The maze had several pairs of people's names, objects, fruits, and times. The EMT was piloted twice by ten undergraduate students studying Political Sciences, Psychology, and International Studies at Glendon College, York University, Toronto, Canada. Afterwards, its validity was substantiated. This task involved natural data collection and that was why it represented a partly real-life situation.

3.3 Procedure

Participants of the study were selected and paired for the data collection. The pairs were organized in male-male, male-female, and female-female categories. To have a friendly communication, the participants in each pair were all friends and their communication was of an informal one. They were recorded in the university classes while they sat opposite one another and there was a barrier between them as they were supposed not to see the partner and his/her map, either. At first, the researcher explained the situation and gave the instructions required for the performance. They were briefed on what the maps would entail and what the Instruction Giver and Follower would do from the beginning. The Instruction Giver was asked not to give extra information while directing the Instruction Follower and motivate him/her to inquire more information.

Giving directions essential to perform the task at the beginning, the researcher left the participants to do the task. Both participants in a pair were supposed to run the task; thus, a 4-5 day interval was applied between the recordings of each pair. The aim of this interval was to avoid the probable imitation in the construction of the yes/no question variants from the first Instruction Follower to the second in a pair. Accordingly, a pair did their performance in a session, then 4 or 5 days later, they met again, changed their roles as Instruction Giver and Follower, and performed the parallel task similarly to what they had performed in the first session. The differences on the maps used in the first and the second sessions were just limited to changing the location of the items.

Each pair's conversation was recorded and transcribed. The frequency and percentage of each yes/no question variant was calculated in each conversation. Moreover, the frequency of the variants was subject to Binary Euclidean Distance to reveal the degree of proximity of the variants in both groups.

4. Results and Discussion

To probe the proximity of the Iranian EFL learners' linguistic performance with that of the Canadian English native speakers, the frequency and percentage of yes/no question variants produced by the participants in each pair were calculated. The Binary Euclidean Distance analyses, then, indicated how far the variants produced by the Iranian EFL learners were from those produced by the Canadian English native speakers. The five respective variants were auxiliary-fronted (Standard), subject-fronted (declarative statement plus final rising intonation), subject-fronted (declarative statement plus confirmation check phrase), subject-fronted (declarative statement plus tag questions), and single phrases.

Table 4.1. and Table 4.2. depict, respectively, the frequency and percentage of English yes/no question variants produced by the Canadian English native speakers and Iranian intermediate EFL learners.

As evident in Table 4.3., based on the values of Binary Euclidean Distance values, among the variants, the highest ranking was allocated to declarative statement plus tag questions (*SVCT/SACT*) and auxiliary-fronted (*ASV/ASC*) variants. These two variants were the farthest from the variants constructed by Canadian participants. The rest of the variants ranked closely (*P*, *SVC/SAC*, and *SVCCP/SACCP*) revealed a high proximity to the Canadian-produced variants.

4.1 Auxiliary-fronted (Standard English) (ASV/ASC)

Canadian participants utilized this variant with the highest frequency among the five variants. However, this variant had the second rank of frequency among Iranians. Comparing Canadians' and Iranians' usage of the ASV/ASC variant, a 0.35-percent difference was noticed. The proximity of usage of this variant was high among Canadians and Iranians. The following examples show the proximity of usage of the ASV/ASC variants produced by Canadians and Iranians:

Canadian English native speaker: Do you have the picket fence and level crossing at top of your page?

Iranian intermediate EFL learner: Is it above picket fence?

4.2 Subject-fronted (Declarative Statement+Final Rising Intonation) (SVC/SAC)

The Iranian intermediate EFL learners' proximity of usage of the SVC/SAC variant to the Canadians' usage of this variant was high and it received the second rank (0.23%). Regarding the usage frequency, both Canadian and Iranian participants ranked third in frequency. The examples below indicate the nearness of the variant:

Canadian English native speaker: I start there at the camera shop?

Iranian intermediate EFL learner: I have to turn around youth hostel?

4.3 Subject-fronted (Declarative Statement+Confirmation Check Phrase) (SVCCP/SACCP)

Regarding frequency, the fourth ranking was accorded to the SVCCCP/SACCCP variant for both the Canadian English native speakers and the Iranian intermediate EFL learners. As for the proximity of usage, the production percentage of this variant by Iranians was not relatively far from that of Canadians. In other words, in this respect, the amount of difference between Canadians and Iranians was 0.24%. Examples of the variants produced by these two groups are represented in the following:

Canadian English native speaker: Level crossing is to the east and picket fence to the west, right?

Iranian intermediate EFL learner: I have a west lake, yes?

4.4 Subject-fronted (Declarative Statement+Tag Question) (SVCT/SACT)

The SVCT/SACT variant ranked the fifth in order, with regard to the proximity of usage. For Canadians, it was not a high frequency variant among the variants used in informal contexts. Moreover, Iranians interestingly did not utilize this variant at all and ranked this variant as the fifth. Concerning the proximity of usage, this variant indicated the least nearness, compared to other variants (0.50%). The following examples show the respective proximity of usage:

Canadian English native speaker: You're going to the right, aren't you?

Iranian intermediate EFL learner: Not applicable

4.5 Single Phrase (P)

The single phrase variant (P) outnumbered the other variants for Iranian intermediate EFL learners and received the second ranking by the Canadian English native speakers. It was rather the most frequent variant used by both groups of the participants. Given the proximity of usage, the least distance was discerned between Canadians'

usage of this variant and Iranians'(0.20%). In other words, this is the nearest variant as used by the Iranians compared to what Canadians produced. The proximity of usage is shown in the examples below:

Canadian English native speaker: Near the camera shop?

Iranian intermediate EFL learner: Below picket fence?

As stated earlier, the results of the Edinburgh Map Task (EMT) seemed to be highly indicative of the linguistic performance of Canadian English native speakers and Iranian intermediate EFL learners on producing yes/no question variants. The findings showed the nearness of the linguistic performance of Canadian and Iranian participants. The nearness mostly extended to the type of variants; in addition, the context when the variants were produced and the quantity of the variants produced were of concern. Single phrase and declarative statement plus tag questions were the two extremes on the continuum. Identifying single phrase as the most similar variant, we proceeded to the SVC, SVCCP, and ASV variants as similar ones.

Regarding the context, except the ASV and P variants, the remaining variants were all produced in the available informal contexts by both groups, as anticipated. The only difference in this respect was the performance of Canadian English native speakers who presumably seemed not to consider the context, when they constructed the yes/no question variants. The situation was handled with the utmost care to be as friendly as possible; while Canadian English native speakers accorded the highest rating to the ASV variant which was expected to be produced in the rather absolute formal contexts.

As to the quantity of the variants, it was noticed that there was partially great dissimilarities between the Canadian's and Iranian's linguistic performance. Canadians made more use of the yes/no question variants than Iranians did on the same task. The most distinguished dissimilarity was that the Iranians did not use the SVCT variant. Another difference concerned the usage of the ASV variant by Canadian English native speakers in an informal context. The next dissimilarity was grammatical: Iranian intermediate EFL learners did not use the definite article *the* in most of the structures. Another noteworthy point in this respect was utilization of the word *yes* in the SVCCP variant by Iranians. Almost in all examples, the confirmation check phrase was made with *yes*, while Canadians frequently used such words as *right*, *yeah*, and *ok*.

5. Conclusions

The main conclusion we arrive at in this study is that the yes/no question variants made by Canadian English native speakers and Iranian intermediate EFL learners are of the same type. They all included the five major categories of ASV, SVC, SVCCP, SVCT, and P. Jenkins (2006) asserts that there exist inter- and intra-speaker variations which perform social and linguistic functions. These five identical categories verify these two sorts of variation. Each of the categories implies both the inter- and intra-speaker variation while the dissimilarities noticed between Canadians and Iranians highlight the inter-speaker variation. On the other hand, Schneider (2003) discusses the commonalities which may be located in different Englishes. In this project, the common variants produced by both groups could verify the commonalities proposed by Schneider. It is worth stating that these variants are also available in Persian which is the EFL learners' mother tongue. The commonality might result from either what Chomsky (1965) called "mental representation of language" or L1 interference from Persian. It can further be referred to the influence of the Inner Circle Englishes such as British and American on the variety of English that Iranians use in their communication. As Pishghadam and Sabouri (2010) claim, Iranian EFL learners usually try their utmost to imitate these two Englishes in order to become native-like.

The second conclusion reached is the quantity of the variants produced. Canadian English native speakers outnumbered the Iranian intermediate EFL learners almost 4 to 3. This can be probably due to the fact that English is regarded as a foreign language for Iranians. Obviously, this paucity of knowledge of English compared to English native speakers does not allow them much room for maneuver making more yes/no question variants. As far as communication and doing the task is concerned, that would seem to suffice.

The discrepancy in the context and the construction of the Standard variant is the next conclusion coming out of this study. Trudgill and Hannah's (1994) and Widdowson (2003: 44) believe that "the Standard English is the variant usually used in writing, and spoken by educated speakers of English". The undergraduate students were not educated enough to use the Standard English in their speaking and the situation was not formal, either, to let them construct these Standard variants. The first probable reason behind it would be the academic context where the participants did the task. It is quite likely that the university's atmosphere was formal enough to make the participants feel no friendly relation between them. Nonetheless, the same condition was provided for Iranian participants and they showed that they considered the context while making yes/no question variants. Of course, this phenomenon could also be by virtue of the mismatch between nationalities of the researchers and the

Canadian participants. Admittedly, they felt the informal friendly situation but still disregarded the relevance of the Standard variants and informal context.

Eventually we come to the conclusion that the omission of the definite article *the* in the yes/no question variants produced by Iranian intermediate EFL learners might be associated with the interference from their L1. In Persian, the Iranians EFL learners' mother tongue, definite and indefinite articles are present; thus, it would not be natural for even the intermediate learners to linguistically behave this way. As for the difference between the confirmation check phrases between the two groups of participants, the use of the word *yes* could definitely be attributed to L1 interference. In Persian, speakers frequently use this word in order to get confirmation from the listener. Altogether, these findings reveal that both Canadians and Iranians from two different circles syntactically and pragmatically behave similarly.

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Table 4.1. Frequency of English yes/no question variants (Used by Canadian English native speakers and Iranian intermediate EFL learners)

Variant	Frequency (Canadian)	Frequency (EFL)
ASV/ASC	1454	465
SVC/SAC	845	460
SVCCCP/SACCCP	215	112
SVCT/SACT	15	0
P	929	1560
Total	3458	2597

Table 4.2. Percentage of English yes/no question variants (Canadian English native speakers and Iranian intermediate EFL learners)

Variant	Percentage (%) (Canadian)	Percentage (%) (EFL)
ASV/ASC	42.04	17.90
SVC/SAC	24.43	17.71
SVCCCP/SACCCP	6.21	4.31
SVCT/SACT	0.43	0.00
P	26.86	60.06
Total	100.00	100.00

Table 4.3. Binary Euclidean Distance (BED) values of English yes/no question variants (Canadian English native speakers and Iranian intermediate EFL learners)

Variant	Binary Euclidean Distance Values (%)
ASV/ASC	0.35
SVC/SAC	0.23
SVCCCP/SACCCP	0.24
SVCT/SACT	0.50
P	0.20