

# **Gender Discrepancies in Linguistics and Behavioral Patterns ---- A Case Study**

## **Abstract**

Language disparity between the genders entails a long history. Various researchers gave priority to delimit their empirical observations to merely grammatical features so as to single out differences in speeches of men and women. The gamut of socio-linguistic research became wide in 1970s when female researchers enjoined upon themselves to probe deeper to dig out the discriminatory usage of linguistic code by males and females. This paper has to scrutinize the underlying potential linguistic differences between both the sexes through the careful analysis of a sample of natural conversation. It also includes a brief review of the literature to bring out the significance of the projected research topic. The paper dilates on research methodology and procedure to collect data for the comparative study of the results to determine discrimination between the genders in their linguistic specification.

## **Introduction**

The issue of language differences in gender has engaged the interest and attention of many a researcher since long. The movement of feminism in 1960s endorsed the view that language, being a strong weapon laid stress on male supremacy over female. The researchers set upon themselves the arduous task of bringing to light the discernible and testifiable differences in language use in genders. Lakoff's work (1975) is truly exponent of the empirical trend in research about co-variation in language and sex. This paper is to analyze a sample of natural conversation to find out how far both the genders stand distinguished at linguistic and behavioral levels.

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## **Aims and Objectives**

- This paper aims to unearth underlying differences in gender's patterns of general behavior and language use in their peculiar socio-linguistic domains.
  - Linguistics disparity in both the genders is to be gauged through various language variables like the use of syntactical structures and pronunciation.
  - A careful language contrastive analysis is meant to determine how far linguistic discrimination is an index of their general behavior in socio-cultural perspective.
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## **Significance**

This research carries a due significance since it will serve as a forceful impetus for the other language researchers to dig deeper to unveil the cultural ties between the different ethnic groups. It would stand in good stead in widening the bounds of cognizance regarding language disparity in a socio-cultural perspective.

## **Research Questions**

1. Does the language style of men and women indicate any differences?
2. Do both the genders show remarkable discrimination in their general behavioral patterns?
3. What sort of major language variables should be employed to bring out these afore-mentioned differences?
4. How far does linguistic discrimination impact behavioral attitude?

## **Literature Review**

This paper is substantially backed by a long line of researches that recorded variegated differences in both the genders not only in their behavioral patterns but also in their speech forms. It is a strong belief in our society that women are inferior in status and hence they cannot be at par with men in their speaking style. Furthermore, men behave more forcefully and assertively than women.

In the same strain, Goddard and Patterson (2000:49) adhere to the view that male behavior is usually accepted as the norm which does not require any particular suggestion or admonition. They also comment that women are regarded as inferior to men in their way of expression. Men, biologically, are more strongly built than women. They prefer to perform such sort of activities that require physical vigour like fighting the enemies, helping people in floods and earthquakes, saving the people from watery death etc. Conversely, women are endowed with the trait of nurturance. They are inclined to professions like teaching, nursing and treating the patients. Their behavioural patterns differ a lot from those of men.

According to Eakins and Eakins (1976), mixed talk shows evince that men's topics are more frequently pursued, but females stage a supportive role. Men care more for status while women attach value to integrity. Women are more likely to prefer mentioning colours, whereas men are more interested in games and sports.

In the early centuries, women were considered deficient in language use. During the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, opinion about women began to change, which resulted in the sexual revolution. Feminist movements in sixties highlighted that language was a powerful instrument in the hands of men to vex women. Thus views about women's inferiority or abnormality in linguistic norms underwent a big change. Lakoff's research (1975) bears ample testimony to this statement. Change in gender discrimination gave a new stimulus to the socio-linguistics researchers, leading to the emergence of peculiar disparities in the language use by the opposite sexes.

Peter Trugdill (2002) inferred from his research that women are more careful in language forms, grammar, lexicon and pronunciation than men. Men may come down to using slangs and even taboos, but women are very cautious in using vocabulary. Their expressions are more sophisticated than those of men.

According to Brown (1980), women are more polite and refined than men, since they use fewer abusive words than men.

Milroy and Margrain (1980) and Cheshire (1982) conclude from the researches that women's language is closer to Standard English than men's.

Researchers mostly use two models to conduct research in the field of language and gender ----- model of dominance and that of difference. The first one is linked to Pamela Fishman (1980), Dale Spender (1980) and Don Zimmerman and Candace West (1975). The second model is associated with Deborah Tanen (1984) Paradigm of Dominance brought it out that in case of mixed conversations, women are less likely to interrupt than men. The difference model was also dealt with in Tanen's Work "You just don't understand" (1990).

Robin Lakoff (1975) sheds a considerable light on the specific account of women's use of language in her book "Language and Women's Place". She has asserted that women make use of hedges more than men, prefer to employ tag questions use empty adjectives, correctly use grammar and pronunciation, use question intonation in declarative statements, overuse qualifiers, very much like to use modal verbs and intensifiers etc.

Later Atkins (1998) and Holmes (2001) almost endorsed Lakoff's work entitled "Women's Language".

Some of the studies mentioned above, will be used to help in the analysis of the data pertaining to this research.

### **Methodology and Data Collection**

It was a mixed type of research qualitative as well as quantitative. In order to collect data for the research at hand a conversation of 10 teachers of English language classes serving a public institution in Lahore. It was a mixed-sex group randomly selected. Half of them were females. Their conversation was carefully recorded for the data collection. At the end, the participants were given a questionnaire to fill in. The purpose of data collection is to information about the following features of language use:-

1. Interruptions and overlaps
2. Turn taking
3. Use of vulgar language
4. Chattiness
5. Assertive expressions
6. Use of grammar, lexicon and pronunciation
7. Hedging

### **Data Analysis**

Data collected through conversation and questionnaire were carefully analyzed. Following are the inferences:-

First, interruptions and overlaps reflect conversational dominance. Men interrupted or overlapped their female counterparts eight times, whereas they themselves were interrupted / overlapped only twice.

According to Zimmerman and West's data (ibid 1986), as most of interruptions are from men in mixed-sex conversations, the speakers who fall silent are women.

Secondly, turn taking is violated because of interruptions. It happens when the next speaker starts speaking while the current speaker is still speaking. The analysis shows that men interrupt far more than women. They do not appear to stop and wait for the female speaker to finish her turn. Men usually adopt violation style 25% more than their female counterparts. That is why, women try to take more turns in order to continue her conversation.

Thirdly, men use vulgar language more frequently than women. They may often swear and utter slangs like "Shit, Bloody, Pissed". Women may make a scant use of slangs of vulgar expressions. It may be 10%. On the contrary men may utter vulgar words more than 80%.

Fourthly, analysis of the data shows that the women utter more words than men. Men utter 40% while women utter round about 60%. It may not be the real picture

because there may be different grounds accountable for the quantity of utterance by men and women. If the participants are close friends, they will be free enough to chat as much as they like. Even the common topic would not detract from their chattiness. Similar view has been expressed by Swacker (1975) and Tannen (1990). It has also been observed that men may overreach women in talkativeness but only when men talk to their friends, rather than to their life partners.

Fifthly, the analysis shows that women are less assertive than men in their utterances. According to Lakoff (1975), women employ tag questions more than men because of their being talkative in their conversation. Siegler and Siegler (1976) also hold that women's speech shows a frequent use of tag questions. It is surprising to observe that some of men use tag questions in the largest amount. On the whole, men are likely to use 20% of tag questions whereas women may exceed 50%.

Sixthly, the analysis of the research of this paper indicates clearly that women are more careful than men in the use of language form. They prefer to be accurate in grammatical structures, Lexicon and Phonology.

According to Trudgill (1972), men frequently prefer to use nonstandard linguistic forms. It has an obvious ground. They have to adhere to their typical style so that they may be able to attain their social status at least through the correct use of language. Female participants involved in this research made much use of empty adjectives, quotations, indirect commands / requests, apology, intensifies, complete sentences rather than half expressions etc. The research makes it evident that women use 65% correct use of language, when men vary between 30% and 50%.

Lastly, the research has identified that women make a greater use of hedges than men. They employ polite form of language. Their language is less direct and more tentative. Women like to employ hedges for example, "sort of, kind of, I guess, it seems like" and so on. In the light of rough estimate from the research, women employ hedges 60% while men use 15 to 30 % hedges.

## **Recommendations**

The research does show linguistic discrimination in gender, but a challenging task still exists for further research to specify conditions under which language discrepancy occurs. There are the conditions under which differences dovetailed with gender rise up in mutual linguistic interactions.

## **Conclusion**

The major motive of this paper was to analyze how far both the genders display linguistic discrepancies in their conversation. It was to unfold the extent it depends or contradicts the peculiar assertions and claims set forth in the literature review. One impediment did impair the sample which could not retain naturalness because the research was carried out with the full knowledge of the participants. Nevertheless, the research did evince that men interrupted the conversation more than women, men were assertive whereas women were tentative and less aggressive in their conversation; women employed more hedges and less vulgar words than men. These language variations hear out that men and women do hail from different subcultures upholding the notions of power and integrity.

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