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## Language and gender: How societal norms influence communication and implications for language teaching

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### Abstract

Gender differences have always been controversial in pragmatics, especially in linguistic practices. This study aims to explore how societal norms shape gendered communication styles and their implications for language teaching. To this end, qualitative conversational data were analyzed to comprehend these processes. More specifically, through descriptive and document analysis, empirical data and theoretical frameworks were examined to explore the relationships between gender, language, and societal norms. The study adopts a qualitative research design, integrating descriptive analysis of communication patterns and document analysis of existing literature to provide a comprehensive understanding of gendered language use. More specifically, by analyzing the "gender-as-culture" hypothesis and dominance theory, gender communication patterns were clearly defined. In addition, the analysis of the influence of cultural transmission and social hierarchies on the language usage of individuals in various personal and professional contexts strengthened these patterns. The findings of this study revealed that women are more associated with indirect, other-oriented communication styles that promote empathy and collaboration. On the other hand, men tend to use direct, self-oriented, and task-oriented communication styles to demonstrate their authority. These findings underscore the role of socialization and power dynamics in shaping linguistic behavior, contributing to broader discussions on gender and language. The analysis of learning strategies among genders was also emphasized to provide deeper pedagogic insights and inform language educators on how to tailor teaching approaches to accommodate gendered communication styles effectively. The study concludes that addressing gendered language disparities in educational settings can foster more inclusive communication, ultimately enhancing language learning outcomes. These insights are particularly relevant for language teachers and curriculum developers seeking to create equitable learning environments.

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## 1. Introduction

Language, a structured system of communication that consists of grammar and vocabulary, is not only a means of communication helping people express their thoughts, but it is also a means used for reflecting and consolidating societal and cultural norms in human interaction. Gender differences in language use, a topic of significant interest in sociolinguistics, have attracted the attention of many researchers. According to Paltridge [1], "gender" is not purely about biological sex; it refers to everyday work and social interaction. It is not about something that people have, but something that people do (Cameron [2]). These ideas indicate that differences in the communication patterns of men and women are not merely biological but are deeply affected by socialization and cultural expectations. Men and women generally develop different communication styles formed by social status, power dynamics, and culture. More specifically, the different patterns in communication that men and women use have been analyzed by many researchers, including the differences in how they pronounce words, use vocabulary, or ask questions. For instance, women's communication styles tend to be more empathetic and cooperative; meanwhile, men are aligned with more confident and direct communication styles.

However, social barriers such as entrenched stereotypes, power imbalances, and biases in daily life and professional settings hinder equitable communication between men and women. By highlighting several aspects of cross-gender communication and language variation, the primary objective of this study is to provide in-depth perspectives on how gendered language reflects and maintains inequality in society. It is also expected to suggest several critical strategies for encouraging comprehensive and equal communication patterns among genders in various social and educational contexts. Generally, the current study explores how social and cultural factors shape gender differences in language use through theoretical perspectives and concrete examples.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. The Concept of Gender

The concept of gender has been defined by various researchers in linguistic and sociolinguistic studies. Gender encompasses the political, social and cultural roles, behaviors, and expectations associated with being male and female. As Lips [3] indicated in his study, gender is basically built-in societal norms and continuously adapted through integrating into social-cultural interactions, language use, and specific symbolic practices among humans. In addition, Paltridge [1] argued that gender is not a fixed entity, but rather a repeated behavioral chain shaped through culture and society. Accordingly, it is not about what a person "has", but about what a person "does" through personal behaviors, common sense, and expression in diverse communication contexts [2]. Therefore, masculinity and femininity are defined as contrary ideals, maintaining distinctions in perceptions and treatments of men and women. These ideas have a significant impact on personal identity and collective behavior, influencing the evolution of gender communication patterns.

In addition, gender collaborates with institutional and cultural structures that define the allocation and performance of responsibilities. It is considered relational and exists in a powerful dynamic, in which men and women communicate in ways that maintain social structures. Such comprehension explains the relationships among gender, individual behaviors, and societal narratives that form communication styles. These perspectives provide insight into how humans use language to communicate with each other in different situations.

### 2.2. The Concept of Language and Gendered Language

The concept of language has been defined by various researchers. Language refers to a structured sign system used by humans to communicate, express thoughts and transmit information. It is also a vehicle that reflects the social institution. Hussey, et al. [4] emphasized that language is a fundamental aspect that influences human cognition, leading to the reinforcement of cultural concepts via diverse linguistic choices. According to Jahan [5] gendered language serves as a mirror reflecting social constructs where grammatical and lexical competences, communication styles, and discourses, significantly consolidate the role, status, and power relations among genders. It can affect humans' communication styles and perceptions across contexts and domains [5]. For instance, adapting to various settings and expectations, several people can use more masculine or feminine words, or tones to express their own thoughts and ideas.

In addition, language is associated with gender relations, often normalizing inequalities among men and women via daily speech patterns [6]. Gendered language is a phenomenon that various disciplines, such as linguistics, psychology, sociology, communication, education, and media studies, have studied. This literature review will summarize some of these disciplines' main findings and perspectives on gendered language, highlighting gaps and challenges for future research [7]. For instance,

in English, some words are used distinctively for men and women including gendered pronouns like "he" as the default for a man and "she" as the default for a woman. Also, some topics are considered more suitable for men or women including sports, politics, fashion, or gossips. These typical examples show how language conventions quietly maintain biases, and shapes social perceptions of gender roles. Furthermore, language is changing over time. It evolves along with social and cultural changes, and technological evolution. Accordingly, indicated by [Fromkin, et al. \[8\]](#) language acquisition is influenced by gender norms, as there are differences in the way men and women use language in daily social activities. Hence, these distinctions emphasize the domination of societal duties and expectations on acquiring and utilizing language [\[9\]](#).

### *2.3. Communication styles*

Communication style is a fundamental factor in social interactions, and gender has significant impacts on how humans communicate. Communication patterns encompass not only the content and style of language but also the patterns of interaction between speakers. Studies have found that in mixed-gender interactions, men often dominate conversations, interrupt more frequently, and control the flow of discussion, reflecting broader societal power dynamics [West and Zimmerman \[10\]](#). [Barnett, et al. \[6\]](#) indicated that cultural expectations shape how individuals express themselves; therefore, gender is an aspect that strongly impacts on humans' communication patterns. According to [Tannen \[11\]](#) indicated in the study of [Albesher \[12\]](#) men and women have distinct communication styles due to influences from socialization, cultural expectations, and power dynamics structures in society. These differences present clearly not only in vocabulary use, but also in tone, intonation, and body language. Additionally, [Albesher \[12\]](#) highlighted that men typically utilize communication to assert dominance and convey information, whereas women tend to focus more on harmony and empathy in social relationships. For example, in most situations, men frequently associated with direct and task-oriented language to dominate conversations. On the other hand, women tend to have a more indirect and relational-oriented language, gingerly express their thoughts to promote collaboration.

Furthermore, digital communication, one of the common communication styles in the 4.0 era, provides a modern perspective on the use of language among genders. It refers to the process of exchanging information and knowledge through digital devices and networks. More specifically, [Maksimenko, et al. \[13\]](#) found that women prioritize using emojis, stickers, or punctuation to express their emotions. On the other hand, men tend to attach to a more concise tone and fewer emotional expressions in their language. Lastly, leadership style reflects gendered language application in practical contexts. According to [Enaifoghe \[14\]](#) female leaders utilize empathetic and inclusive communication style as female leaders often promote opinion contribution or collaboration among humans. In contrast, male leaders tend to have more direct and task-oriented communication style. They tend to be more straightforward and with fewer expressions when communicating with others. These different perspectives emphasize societal and cultural structures that shape gendered language use within various professional and educational environments.

### *2.4. The Role of Social Contexts*

[Coates \[15\]](#) showed that while women may strive to adopt assertive language to navigate workplace hierarchies, they also risk being perceived as overly aggressive when doing so [Nawaz \[16\]](#) stated that the social context in which communication occurs significantly influences gendered language use. In professional settings, for instance, women often find themselves negotiating complex expectations regarding their communication styles. [Kapidzic and Herring \[17\]](#) noticed that women tend to employ more emotive language in online interactions, while men focus on informational exchanges. However, the anonymity afforded by these platforms can also create opportunities for women to engage more assertively, thereby subverting traditional gender norms. . .

### *2.5. Intersectionality in Gendered Communication*

According to [Eckert and McConnell-Ginet \[18\]](#) language is not a monolithic reflection of gender but is deeply intertwined with a spectrum of social identities. This perspective acknowledges that individual experiences of communication are shaped by various intersecting identities, leading to distinct challenges and opportunities in how people express themselves. [Smitherman, et al. \[19\]](#) found that the intersectionality of identity factors can create unique communication styles that reflect the specific cultural contexts from which individuals emerge. For example, women from different racial or ethnic backgrounds may employ distinct linguistic features that express their cultural identity and solidarity within their communities. Such practices not only serve as a means of identity expression but also as a strategy for navigating different social spaces, allowing individuals to connect with varied audiences while remaining true to their roots. In addition, [Benítez Pérez \[20\]](#) has emphasized that women of color navigate different communication challenges compared to their white counterparts. Women of color often face multiple layers of marginalization, which can influence their linguistic choices and communication styles.

## **3. Methodology**

(i) *Descriptive analysis* and (ii) *Document analysis* are applied in the current study to collect data on the use of gendered language in diverse societal and cultural contexts.

### *3.1. Descriptive Analysis*

The study employs a descriptive analysis to examine communication patterns related to gendered language, with a particular focus on linguistic practices across different genders. More specifically, these communication patterns are analyzed carefully in various specific contexts to examine the impact of gender on communication styles in practical situations. In

general, this method is applied to provide deeper insights into the dynamics of gendered communication through illustrations of typical instances of societal expectations and cultural norms affecting language choices.

### 3.2. Document Analysis

Document analysis, an approach that involves the evaluation or systematic review of documents, was applied in the current study to analyze and interpret a collection of academic articles and books. The primary use of this approach is to gain deeper insights into the utilization of gendered language in various cultural and social contexts. More specifically, several academic papers were analyzed to explore various academic perspectives on how society and culture influence gendered linguistic patterns. In addition, concepts of language, gender, and some communication styles were deeply analyzed through the review of several academic books.

The current study integrates two qualitative methods to explain the complex relationship between language and gender in social and cultural contexts. This combination can help elucidate the socio-cultural constructs of gendered language use while offering solutions to minimize these disparities in language teaching, benefiting the promotion of equal communication patterns in various contexts. These findings are expected to promote a deeper, more comprehensive, and inclusive approach to linguistic studies and practical implications in educational and professional environments.

## 4. Findings and Discussion

This section presents the findings and discussion, exploring the complex interplay of language, gender, and cultural expectations. The examination delves into essential theories like the "Gender-as-Culture" hypothesis, dominance in linguistic practices, sociocultural influences, and gendered communication in leadership and education, as well as schemas for understanding how they play out in particular contexts. The results were expected to link theory with practice, especially in language teaching and meaningful communication.

### 4.1. The "Gender-as-Culture" Hypothesis

The analysis on gendered language application in various practical contexts have some significant findings. As indicated in the book of West [21] the "gender-as-culture" (or two cultures) hypothesis was developed to explain the communication distinctions between men and women speakers regarding English speaking contexts. More specifically, this hypothesis assumes that men and women, coming from the same cultural background, have been socialized in mid-childhood into distinct linguistic subcultures which later shape the basis for a lifetime of both same-sex and cross-sex communication. For instance, in the study of Maltz and Borker [22] some primary features for differentiating gendered communication style were analyzed.

Women's communication styles are characterized by question-asking, conversational expansion, and frequent use of minimal responses. It is indicated that they tend to ask questions, expand conversations, use several mini responses (e.g., 'ah huh', 'hmm'), employ strategic silence, and utilize conclusive pronouns such as 'we' or 'you'. Conversely, with men's communication styles, they are more likely than women to interrupt others, directly challenge or disagree with others, disregard of everyone's comments, control the conversation's topic, and applying direct language when giving opinions. Generally, women tend to use language involving indirectness and prioritization of relational harmony, while men often use a more direct and concise language.

Based on the "gender-as-culture" hypothesis, these differences in language use among genders are formed throughout their childhood. As indicated by Maltz and Borker [22] men and women live in distinct sociolinguistic subcultures; therefore, their use of language can be affected by various social and cultural elements of the society that they live in. More specifically, the development of one's communication style can be strongly affected by societal expectations, cultural norms, and power dynamics. These findings suggest a broader sociolinguistic view on the idea that considers masculine language is more dominant than feminine language.

### 4.2. Dominance and Power in Linguistic Practices

Dominance theory is used to explain the relationship between communication and gender. It particularly examines how communication functions among men and women and integrates power relations in daily conversations and professional settings. In other words, dominance theory focuses on analyzing language use concerning men being more dominant in mixed-sex interactions. According to dominance theory, men are more likely than women to adopt an instrumental communication style, make interruptions, or take up more personal space to emphasize their power.

These hierarchical structures are expressed more clearly in professional contexts. According to Pakzadian and Tootkaboni [23] regardless of the distinct directions of gender dominance, men tend to use interruptions and self-oriented communication styles, in contrast with the other-oriented communication styles of women. For instance, in the setting of an internal business meeting, male leaders or staff often interrupt their female colleague's speech to challenge his/her opinions or shift the topic and take over the control of conversations. These behaviors not only disregard their female partners, but it also indicates hierarchical gender norms. On the other hand, female speakers' interruptions through clarification questions or addressee-oriented questions mostly are encouragement for male speakers to express their ideas [23]. Generally, these instances indicated that men are more likely than women in being the dominant speaker of almost all conversations within professional contexts. Additionally, the dominance theory and above instances depict the relationship between communication, gender and power relations.

Linguistic dominance is frequently context-dependent, influenced by cultural and institutional factors that exacerbate gender disparities. For instance, hierarchical structures within professional settings often privilege male assertiveness, thereby diminishing the visibility and impact of female contributions. To counteract these imbalances, it is essential to implement

institutional reforms and promote equitable conversational norms. Such measures can help to mitigate power asymmetries and foster more inclusive and balanced communication practices.

#### *4.3. Socio-Cultural Influences on Gendered Language Use*

Socio-Cultural factors, including social and cultural elements of a particular territory or region, have significant impacts on the communication patterns of individuals. Gendered communication patterns are deeply associated with the social development process. According to [Ugwu and De Kok \[24\]](#), humans' gendered communication patterns are formed from early childhood, as their behaviors are shaped through interactions with people around them, such as parents, teachers, or peers.

Regarding the socio-cultural perspective on linguistic practices, it is socialized that women tend to create and develop relationships through their language application. In addition, [Pakzadian and Tootkaboni \[23\]](#) indicated that women seem to utilize polite and indirect language to express their ideas and foster cooperation. On the other hand, men frequently stick with direct and self-oriented communication styles to indicate their power [23]. These instances are reflections of socio-cultural influences on gendered language use.

In addition, due to socio-cultural norms, there are significant differences in language use among generations. More specifically, regarding older generations, they are more likely than younger generations to use formal and hierarchical language. This emphasizes traditional socio-cultural values and constructs. On the other hand, linguistic patterns that focus on informality and egalitarianism are frequently used by younger generations, typically highlighting the shifts in gender roles and social dynamics. In general, these alterations indicate the natural development of cultural settings and their complicated connection with linguistic practices across generations.

#### *4.4. Gender and Leadership Communication*

Gendered language use is demonstrated more clearly through leadership communication style, especially in professional contexts. More specifically, the differences in language use among genders are typically demonstrated through the communication patterns that individuals utilize in the role of a leader. Regarding the leadership communication style of women, aligning with societal expectations in which women are expected to maintain harmony among relationships, they tend to utilize language that fosters comprehensiveness and collaboration [22]. This is expressed clearly through their actions and behaviors. For example, in a meeting, female leaders usually involve participants in conversations by asking questions for recommendations and feedback, responding to others with "uh huh," "hmm," and respectfully considering other opinions. These actions and behaviors clearly depict how women utilize linguistic patterns in the role of a leader to make the conversations continue smoothly without serious interruptions.

On the other hand, in terms of the leadership communication style of men, aligning with traditional perceptions of authority and power, men tend to apply more direct and assertive language to control conversations. More specifically, in the role of leader, men seem to dominate every conversation through their actions and linguistic use. For instance, a male leader can suddenly interrupt others' speech to challenge their views. In addition, in some situations, male leaders tend to guide the entire conversation according to their own ways of thinking without considering other participants' opinions. These actions and behaviors emphasize how men utilize linguistic patterns to demonstrate their authority and power in conversations. Generally, there are significant connections between gender and leadership communication style. The above instances have shown essential differences in the way men and women leaders apply language in professional settings.

#### *4.5. Gender in Language Learning*

Regarding language learning and teaching, there are significant gender influences on language acquisition. Some previous studies have indicated that women seem to learn a language faster than men do. In other words, women's ability in mastering a language is better than men's ability. More specifically, in the context of learning English as a foreign/second language (EFL/ESL), [Rafek, et al. \[25\]](#) indicated that female learners tend to outperform male learners in mastering various linguistic competences and skills of English language. For instance, their findings indicated that observed female EFL learners, compared to male learners, have a higher rate in acquiring vocabulary retention, grammar structure, the completion of various four-skill language exercises. Learners' language learning strategies can be the cause of these findings.

Furthermore, several previous researches have highlighted the idea that men and women tend to use distinct language learning strategies. The differences are clearly demonstrated by their linguistic actions and behaviors in the language learning process. According to [Tran \[26\]](#) compared to men, women tend to use more social interactions and conversational strategies in language learning. This idea was reinforced by Tannen's study [Tannen \[11\]](#) emphasizing that women tend to have greater social orientation than men. In addition, compared to men, women are more likely to stress collaboration and learn to handle sensitively with relationships. Meanwhile, men are associated with establishing and maintaining hierarchical relations, and asserting identity. [Cameron \[2\]](#) reinforced this idea by stating that "women use cooperative and supportive strategies in conversation, whereas men are more competitive." As a result, women seem to be more ready to deal with the inherent threat imposed to identity by L2 learning [3]. Based on these perspectives, it can be emphasized that women tend to use various language strategies, typically social strategies that involve empathy and collaboration. Meanwhile, due to cognitive orientation and competitive manners, men tend to utilize more analytic language learning strategies. In general, gender stereotypes in language learning can be the significant factor that impact the learners' success in language acquisition.

On the other hand, cultural expectations also play a pivotal role in shaping language acquisition experiences. Women are frequently encouraged to cultivate verbal and social skills from an early age, resulting in enhanced proficiency in collaborative and interpersonal tasks. In contrast, men are often socialized to prioritize utilitarian and goal-oriented modes of



communication. These culturally ingrained tendencies emphasize the need for tailored educational strategies that ensure equitable learning opportunities and address these imbalances effectively.

#### 4.6. Language and Gender Emotional Expression

Differences in emotional expression of genders is another aspect that cannot be overlooked. Emotion plays an essential role in developing the communication style of individuals. More specifically, due to various socio-cultural norms and expectations that affect individuals' emotion development, men and women are tend to be different in the way they apply linguistic competences to express their feelings. For instance, Ugwu and De Kok [24] indicated that women put more efforts in using linguistic competences to build and reinforce relationships, as well as foster collaborations. Based on analysis of various women's communication styles, considering different contexts, it can be inferred that women are more likely than men to express emotions in conversations. They usually add and emphasize several words like "really" and "very" in long sentences or use rising and falling tones clearly in questions and statements to express their sincerity to other speakers. These linguistic behaviors can help them maintain harmony among relationships. This reinforces the idea that women, socialized as being empathetic and caregiving, should prioritize maintaining harmony in communication within various contexts.

On the other hand, men, socialized as being calm and logical, tend to apply fewer emotional expression elements in their communication styles [24]. More specifically, to be considered competent and responsible in most personal and professional contexts, men do not often express their emotions through linguistic behaviors. For instance, according to Hussey, et al. [4], men tend to prioritize task completion and clarity rather than emotional resonance. They often use short phrases with neutral tones, including "ok," "good idea," or "this better," in conversations to reduce their probability of emotional expression. These highlight the different expectations that society places on men and women.

### 5. Conclusion and Implications for Language Teaching

To sum up, the relationships of language, gender, and socio-cultural constructs have been clearly examined throughout this paper. Various socio-cultural factors, including norms, expectations, and power dynamics, were underscored to provide deeper insights into how men and women apply language in communication. Accordingly, due to societal norms and cultural expectations, men are associated with communication patterns that involve direct speech and task orientation to promote their power. In contrast, women develop communication patterns that involve indirect speech and an orientation towards others to promote empathy, collaboration, and the maintenance of harmony among relationships. Based on the analysis of dominance theory, leadership communication style, and emotional expression, women are more likely than men to use language strategies in communication. In conclusion, this study highlights the influences of socio-cultural constructs on gendered language, providing insights for researchers to develop strategies that promote more equitable communication across genders.

The issues mentioned in the current study have far-reaching implications for classroom practice, especially in the context of language learning and teaching. Considering various socio-cultural factors that influence the selection of language learning strategies by men and women, language educators and researchers are responsible for selecting the right methods to foster students' language acquisition. More specifically, teachers should clearly understand the learning strategies of each sex. Then, from the awareness of gender differentiation, teachers can develop more applicable teaching methods to enhance the learning of both genders. The more teachers know about their students' current learning strategies, the more effectively they can address specific students' needs. In addition, language teachers should raise their students' awareness of gender stereotypes in the particular community to which they belong. This can help students understand clearly why male and female learners have different learning strategies. Furthermore, several learning activities that involve group interaction with fewer peer evaluations and promote collaboration among members are highly recommended. This is to enable students to have equal opportunities in stating their opinions during the language learning process. In conclusion, teachers should carefully consider students' learning preferences to maximize the effectiveness of language teaching and learning.

Theoretically, the interplay of language, gender, and social norms illustrates the intricate relationship between cultural transmission and communicative practices. This analysis underscores the enduring influence of gendered language norms shaped by societal power dynamics, roles, and cultural expectations. Addressing these inequalities necessitates the adoption of transformative strategies in language education. By integrating gender-sensitive curricula and pedagogical approaches, educators can mitigate disparities in communication and foster equitable linguistic practices. Such an approach not only advances theoretical discussions but also offers practical pathways for cultivating inclusive environments across professional, educational, and social spheres, thereby promoting collaboration and mutual understanding.

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