



Understanding gender and language use: A path towards effective interpersonal communication

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ABSTRACT

Research exploring language disparities between men and women from a solely biological standpoint remains limited. Nevertheless, numerous studies have highlighted significant differences in language use, especially within social, political, and cultural contexts. These variations are intricately tied to the social structure, reflecting power dynamics within male-female relationships. Adopting an interpretive approach, the examination of gender disparities in language seeks to uncover social realities shaped by diverse gender roles and relationships. Moreover, this inquiry delves into the importance of grasping these linguistic variances to facilitate effective interpersonal communication. Understanding such nuances is pivotal for navigating and bridging potential communication barriers, fostering more meaningful and inclusive interactions across various social landscapes. By acknowledging and comprehending these distinctions, individuals can enhance communication efficacy and foster mutual understanding between genders.

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INTRODUCTION

The consensus is that language is a communication tool that people use to express ideas. Language expression expresses the attitude of the speaking community. For this reason, learning and understanding language must include social aspects that characterize the social system such as environment age level etc. The most important idea that has emerged in the study of language in relation to social culture is that the structure or behavior of languages is influenced by social structure. This perspective emphasizes the role of the most important parties in society which usually act through people to strongly influence language according to social consensus. Thus, the ideas and judgments of society can also be reflected through the language that preaches and is appropriate for men and women.

Language as an expression of culture provides an overview of social relations value systems aspects of cultural behavior and social conditions of society. One of the social aspects that often becomes an important issue in people's lives is the different differences in social relations based on gender. If language is a set of conventions capable of reflecting patterns of social relations, then it will also reflect gender diversity. This happens because the language contains concepts or labels related to the value systems of the subject's behavior etc. Language therefore records the assumptions that society believes about how a man, or a woman should behave. Such differences are often referred to as sexism resulting in masculinity and femininity in speech. There was also a stereotype that males were relatively more favorable than females in various social aspects including language.

The study of language use is closely related to gender differences. The term gender refers to a social construct that includes general differences in psycho-social and cultural aspects between men and women. The distinction varies from company to company and may change over time. A common assumption implies that women and men actually differ in language use because they differ in gender. This idea becomes something that society deems more normal than men and women speaking

differently. Linguists also agree that differences in the characteristics of the language used between men and women can be observed and distinguished.

In sociolinguistics, in general, discussions the differences in language use between women and men are concentrated in the context of social networks and speakers' meaning. The speakers' goals are usually determined by the context namely the time place event race religion socio-economic environment political process situation and partners. The speakers' intentions are visible in the words he chooses. However, its truth is still open to question whether it is seen as a hypothesis that must be investigated or a claim that must be agreed upon.

METHOD

This study adopted library research methods. The data sources are mainly theoretical studies in well-known journals, and relevant papers discussed deeply in the Training of Effective Communication for Islamic Preachers as a part of community service activities conducted in the city of Payakumbuh, the province of West Sumatera, Indonesia, in 2021. These resources were comprehended to explore the topic in depth. Triangulation technique was used to verify data. The content analysis was used to analyze data through determining the existence of certain concepts described in the text. The concluding remarks were formulated through integrating the researcher's ideas scientific-holistically.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Review on the concept of gender and language

Language is essentially a system of symbols which are not only a series of empirical sounds but also have non-empirical meanings. Thus, as a symbolic system that conveys meaning language is a means of human communication a means of evoking human emotions and a means of understanding human ideas in daily life especially the essence of truth in life in search of. Another perspective sees differences in language systems and language structures as reflecting different responses to the world in some respects. In addition, the language is used in certain contexts to meet social and cultural dynamics and to reinforce nationalist sentiments.

Gender differences in linguistic phenomena have deep social roots and do not occur by chance. The social dynamics and phenomena of linguistic differences are accepted as the basic reality of human differences (Besnier, [2007](#); Hanafiyeh & Afghari, [2014](#); Wahyuningsih, [2018](#)). The differences in status between men and women result in differences in duties and rights.

Sociologists who study gender differences posit the level of inequality between men and women as the unit responsible for the emergence of language differences. Moreover, the traditional concept of men outside and women inside has dominated human thought for thousands of years. Men are considered more responsible for providing income for their family. On the other hand, women are always excluded from society and are in a weak position and active only in the family.

Men seem to have absolute power in society. Their status also determines how self-control is exercised in society. This reality is determined by the fact that the social authority has the ability to choose policies using the Latin language (Al-Khaza'leh & Ariff, [2015](#); Almathkuri, [2021](#); Desky et al., [2017](#)). Social power and control can be seen through the speech acts of men who always interrupt the conversation, especially when talking to women. In contemporary society, although many women are strikingly successful in economics, politics, and even have the same job in many fields as men, the tendency of men's attitudes to discriminate against women still exists. Men show their power through the way they talk to women. To strengthen their self-image under the shadow of male discrimination, women are encouraged to use other means to get a respectful position and use distinctive and

standard language in their daily speech acts.

Socio-cultural factors especially have a profound effect on human behavior and ideological thinking. The concept of culture suggests that people have certain social acceptances and expectations about different gender roles and behaviors (Fleming & Agnew-Brune, [2015](#); Hall et al., [2020](#); Hussein, [2012](#); Stewart et al., [2021](#)). For example, women must speak well and politely while men are relatively simple, arrogant, and assertive. Such social expectations continue to be maintained and perpetuated from generation to generation.

Socially the difference between men and women begins when a child is born. Children are given gender-based names and taught to grow in the desired direction to meet their physical needs and social functions. Boys are expected to grow up highly motivated in every situation and their speech should show masculinity. On the other hand, women are generally expected to maintain cleanliness chastity and calm. They should speak softly and lovingly. In fact, they should speak fluently with consistent pronunciation and correct grammar. They are not allowed to use prohibited and obscene words. These show that women's speech is particularly demanding in terms of manner and choice of words. This social fact suggests that gender differences influence the treatment and acceptance of different people. In fact, there is a positive relationship between gender role identity and cultural circles.

The facts above indicate that attitudes and adaptability greatly determine the recognition of gender roles during the process of social interaction. Therefore, boys and girls are gradually guided to develop and adapt socially according to their gender. The cultural conduct and different ways of communicating naturally form a distinctive language effect between men and women. In addition, the way women and men communicate is also closely influenced by their parenting patterns and their experiences of social interaction in childhood. Even as they grow up, the established way of communicating is difficult to break.

The use of language also reflects different social relations in the communication process. Sociolinguistic research shows that gender differences in the use of language in society are mainly due to gender social phenomena such as the type of social structure cultural background and behavioral mindset. Gender language differences are a social fact that must be viewed objectively. In fact, societies that share the same language tend to accept differences between speakers of that language due to physiological psychological and environmental factors. These differences mainly consist of differences in the form of language use most of which are observed along the linguistic and paralytic dimensions. Gender differences in language use are considered a linguistic and social phenomenon. Linguists from different countries have conducted important and in-depth research on the phenomenon of gender differences in language use under different socio-cultural and historical backgrounds. It is also closely related to social reality and socio-cultural values. Gender differences also deepen our understanding of the general rules of language and allow us to understand the factors underlying language development and change (Alwi & Irwandi, [2022](#); Borba & Ostermann, [2007](#); Xia, [2013](#)).

Linguists have concluded that different contexts lead to differences in the phonetic vocabulary and sentence structure used by men and women. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, explained that traditional social factors create a higher social status for men (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, [2003](#)). This leads to linguistic dominance and creates differences in male and female speech. Chinese linguist Chen Songxin pointed out that gender relations and age differences influence language use. Research shows that the use of recitation and linguistic habits are closely related to differences in marital status sex and age resulting in linguistic diversity. There are at least two main reasons for this. First, people of different social status have different psychological states. Secondly despite the complexity of society

men and women still have different social roles. These factors contribute to linguistic variation.

The relationship between language and gender is evidenced by the fact that the way men and women speak is not the same in all situations. According to some linguists the difference in language between men and women is because they have been conditioned differently by the society in which they were brought up (Beukeboom & Burgers, 2019; Plug et al., 2021; Simon, 2021). Meanwhile, differences in the character of the voice may be caused by the norms that govern how women should voice when they speak. Meanwhile, differences in speaking skills can be explained due to differences in educational levels between men and women. In addition to biological factors as the cause of differences between women and men in using language - differences in voice and verbal skills - social factors also explain the causes and forms of differences between the speech of men and women.

Research on gender differences in linguistics was initiated by Robin Lakoff. With her classic book *Language and Woman's Place* (1973) she sparked the interest of linguists in the study of gender and language relations. In his book Lakoff presents some features of women language. (1) Specialized vocabulary. Unlike male language women tend to use more specific words with colors such as cream yellow, purple blue and lavender. Women also tend to choose specific words that are closely related to life. (2) softer exclamations. When harsh words are used women use them in a softer tone. This is different from men who often speak in a strong tone. Due to the dominance of social norms different ways of speaking can arise. (3) Empty adjectives. Women always use certain adjectives to express their feelings. (4) Acceptance of questions. Using tagged questions is a popular way for women to express themselves and get to know others. (5) Intonation. The use of a rising tone by women even in declarative sentences is intended so that their uncertainty and doubt can be expressed through a rising tone. (6) Superpolite forms. Women prefer indirect speech as a way of showing a more polite attitude than men. (7) Hypercorrect grammar. This feature is seen from the use of grammar and pronunciation; women usually speak formally not only in grammar, but also in pronunciation. (8) Joke-telling and humor. Compared to men, women's language lacks humor. Women are basically not good at creating humor and understanding humor. The differences in lexicon, syntax, and pragmatics mentioned above indicate the uniqueness of women's language styles, such as submissive, uncertain, and passive. Their speaking style cannot be separated from society's guidance to them and their social status which is sometimes in a marginal position (Lakoff, 1973).

Anthropologists focus on the differences between phonetics and vocabulary. Many tribal peoples in Montana and the Gros Ventre recognize it as a distinctive ethnic accent. Therefore, if a man talks like a woman, he is considered bisexual. Among the objects studied by linguists are linguistic differences between male and female native speakers. Dialogists believe that women are more conservative than men in using a language. This situation arises because women leave home to spend more time with family members and rarely interact with strangers. Additionally, women rarely work in fields that require strong language skills such as military training and sports. This fact makes women ideal subjects for learning languages and gender differences.

However, there are other views that argue that masculine language reflects speech characteristics and that men often use different speech. Although women are said to be more conservative than men on the other hand women language is not conservative because women can adopt new words more easily than men especially women who are working and have more contact with the outside world. Therefore, dialectologists argue that there are significant differences in the languages of men and women in economically underdeveloped areas.

In the sociolinguistics perspective, the relationship between language and gender is studied from various perspectives focusing mainly on the relationship between gender and linguistic style. Sociolinguists hypothesize that women are more educated than men. Women language is indirect

and implicit. Men are the exact opposite. All the research reflects that there are many assumptions about women language and communication styles.

Previous studies have emphasized aspects of difference between male and female languages without reporting any similarities. Sociologists argue that there is a natural difference between the language of men and women during conversation. This difference is possibly one reason for the failure of verbal communication between women and men. Both men and women have their own perspectives that help them avoid prejudice and discrimination against each other. On the other hand, some researchers are unable to fully uncover all the differences between women and men. Differences between men and women as separate communities are ignored which simplifies the differences between them. Apart from the gender aspect researchers also emphasize the importance of context in communication because all communication takes place within a specific context. Therefore, there is a need for contextual research to study gender differences in language use.

The relationship between gender and language as well as their similarities should be examined. The aim is to provide a complete and objective description of the relationship between men and women. Many researchers have argued that cross-cultural differences explain differences in linguistic and behavioral characteristics between men and women. These cultural differences develop gradually during childhood and are maintained throughout life. Apart from the subculture they still have their own national culture which makes them belong to the same nation. This fact shows that there must be differences and similarities in their behavior including verbal behavior along with their values and behavioral patterns in their subcultures. Differences are necessary to find a balanced and complete perspective on the relationship between gender and language. Researchers should consider in detail gender differences in all aspects especially individual's personalities and communication styles. These create differences in the use of language in lifestyle and outlook on life. Researchers need to contextualize gender differences and go from there.

Several theories have emerged in the language and gender debate: the deficit-advantage theory of fundamental differences and the correction theory (Simpson, 2011). Impairment theory holds that women language imitates men language by expressing language less fully than men language. Lakoff argues that women express their language because they are marginalized in social life. When communicating in society women must speak certain language differences that reflect their lower social status than men. Therefore, women are not able to express their language like men. In contrast to deficit theory dominance theory assumes that men and women can interpret language differently depending on their status. This view is supported by the findings of O'Barr and Atkins (1980) Zimmerman and West (1975) Swacker (1975) Spender (1980) and Hultz (1990) (Borden-King et al., 2020; O'Barr & Atkins, 1986; Spender, 1980; Swacker, 1975; Zimmerman & West, 1975). When women have a higher social status than men, they are better able to express themselves in language. In other words, the difference between languages is determined by which role plays a greater role. Once dominant in social life men often become more dominant in language use than women.

Fundamentalist theory states that language is used by humans as a tool to express their worldview. Women just copy what men say. Therefore, women lack experience and understanding due to their limited linguistic expression. According to various theories men and women have different socialization patterns and therefore different sociolinguistic subcultures. In this theory, women have a different structure than men. Women are also considered to have an advantage in certain linguistic fields. Revisionist theories include revisionist feminist theories that criticize perceived sexist language in representing reality. Reformist theory contains reformist feminist ideas that criticize perceived sexist language can create bias when reality is represented. The proponents of reformist theory propose to neutralize sexist words, such as chairperson instead of chairman, Ms. instead of Missus or Miss, men, and women instead of men, and humanity instead of mankind.

Differences in men's and women's speech

The language structure used by men in speaking or communicating is different from the language patterns used by women. Women focus more on the emotional function of interactions than men. Women often choose different ways to communicate to connect and stay together. This contrasts with masculine language constructions that focus on power and status. Women also prefer to discuss personal matters rather than private matters. Women tend to avoid direct conflict maintain social relationships with other interlocutors and engage in dialogue with other interlocutors (Al-Harabsheh, 2014; Dong, 2014; Sun, 2014). So, they are professional communicators and more cooperative than men. Status consciousness causes women to use more standard forms of speech than men.

Women are expected to speak socially according to their social class or social status. In general women use more authentic discourse to claim a higher social status in society (Alderton, 2020; Cameron, 2007; Dong, 2014; Mohammed, 2020). Therefore, in a society where women and men influence language gender factors can be found in the use of language. However certain linguistic features appear only in women's speech or only in men's speech. These features often include subtle differences in pronunciation and word form (morphology). Holmes (2013) reported a difference in pronunciation among American Indians in the Gros Ventre region of Montana such that women pronounce bread [kjatsa] and men pronounce it [dʒatsa]. If someone in this community uses the wrong tense the senior members of the community will assume they are bisexual. Bengali uses feminine prefix [l] and masculine prefix [n] in some words (Holmes, 2013).

The difference in word usage between women and men can also be demonstrated using different affixes as found in Yana, a North American Indian language. There is an additional suffix in some of the words used among men compared to the equivalent words used by women and for women as illustrated below:

Table 1. The Difference between women and men in Word-Shape in Yana, North American Indian language

Women's form	Men's form	Meaning
Ba	ba-na	deer
Yaa	yaa-na	person
Nissakle	nisa aklu-ci	he might go away

Source: (Holmes, 2013)

Language variation in the speech of women and men is one of the broadest aspects of difference that characterizes all social hierarchies in society. In this context men are placed in a more powerful position than women. In Bengali society for example minors are forbidden to call their leader by their first name. Women are also not allowed to call their husbands by their first names. Instead, they should use certain words such as "suncho" that show respect for the husband. The same phenomenon also occurs in Indonesia where the wife does not mention her husband's name but instead uses her own address according to local tradition in each region. The language difference between women and men in a society reflects the boundaries of roles. Community based on gender differences. Some forms of speech that are only spoken by men are intended to indicate certain social roles. Most women consider the language and its characteristics (such as sound accents etc.) more than men (Bui, 2021; Pebrianti, 2013). When the social roles of women and men in a community overlap their speech variations also overlap (Kitzinger, 2007). In other words, feminine and masculine variations are not completely different but have the same speech form in different numbers and frequencies. However, the status of women who are below men means that their social status is guaranteed in terms of language using standard language variations.

Alternative explanations for gender differences in verbal behavior

The study of the relationship between language and gender was initiated by Robin Tolmach Lakoff who proposed the theory of the existence of *Womens Language* (1975). Lakoff states that there are many reasons for the differences between men and women. For example, men's speech is more confident and mature. They tend to use appropriate vocabulary when speaking in public. On the other hand, women use a less confident language use figurative words are careful in expressing things and often use more polite words or gestures (Castaneda-Pena, [2008](#)). There are gender differences in language use. Language experts also agree that differences in the characteristics of the language used by men and women can be observed and differentiated. Thus, it is very natural when men and women speak differently (Coulmas, [2005](#)).

In a sociolinguistic perspective, the study of differences in the language of women and men is related to the social network of the speakers and the context of meaning. The meaning created by the speaker is determined by the context, such as time, place, event, race, religion, circumstances of political socio-economic process and speaker. Furthermore, the speakers meaning can be understood from their choice of words. For example, the words marry and divorce in Indonesian are only spoken by men. This happens because only men have the right to marry and divorce.

The new trend in researching the relationship between language and gender is reflected in the field of research which is no longer limited to the field of linguistics but also includes the field of psychology. Almost all psychologists agree that there are fundamental differences in the way of men and women use language to communicate. Psychologists argue that men use language to get things or solve problems, but women speak more often than men and use language for emotional functions such as talking more about feelings and maintaining harmonious relationships (Chaplin, [2015](#); Romera, [2015](#)). Moreover, men use competitive language which reflects their effort to achieve and maintain social status. On the contrary, women use cooperative language which is aims at creating equality and harmony. Language differences between men and women can sometimes cause misunderstandings. But men and women have their differences and there is no superiority or inferiority in the use of language. These differences are caused by various factors namely biological and socio-cultural factors.

Gender effect on interpersonal communication

Interpersonal communication is defined as the process of transferring information and shared understanding from one person to another that is essential to the success of an organization. It must therefore be managed effectively to ensure the achievement of organizational goals. In addition, Singh states that in the organization, communication should act as a flow of information content feedback and understanding between different actors of the organization using all methods and media communication tools of all network channels of the communication system or organizational structure (Singh & Lalropuii, [2014](#)). However, in this context, gender also plays a significant role in the way we communicate. In terms of differences in communication styles, men and women often have different communication styles. Men tend to use a more direct and assertive communication style, while women tend to use a more cooperative and empathetic communication style. These differences can influence how we understand and respond to each other's communications.

Gender also influences our perception and interpretation of communication. Gender stereotypes can influence the way we understand messages conveyed by other people (Cameron, [2007](#)). For example, men may tend to perceive women's communication as more emotional, while women may tend to perceive men's communication as more dominant. Gender can influence the expression and use of nonverbal communication. For example, research shows that women tend to

use more expressive body language and use more intense eye contact, while men tend to use stronger and more dominant body movements. These differences can influence how we understand and respond to each other's nonverbal communications. Gender roles can also influence conversation dynamics. For example, in some cultures, men may be expected to talk more and have greater control in conversations, while women may be expected to listen more. These gender roles can influence the distribution of power and decision making in conversations.

CONCLUSION

Language and gender refer to how language use affects women and men. The relationship between language and gender shows that men and women do not speak to each other in the same way in any society. The reason men and women speak different languages is since the society in which they were raised has different expectations for them. It is also important to realize and understand the impact of gender in interpersonal communication. With better understanding, we can build more understanding and respectful relationships, and overcome potential misunderstandings or gender stereotypes that may influence our communications.

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