

Multilingualism and Identity Construction in the Digital Discourse



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## **Dedication**

This work is dedicated to my great mother, who had wished to see me become a medical doctor. Although I could not fulfil her wish in her life time, I have promised myself to get a doctoral degree in Linguistics if not in medical field. This work is also dedicated to my loving father, husband and children as without their support I could not have achieved my target.

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May Allah Almighty bless them all with happiness, peace and prosperity!

## Abstract

This study explores how multilingual internet users construct power relations and social identities in the digital discourse. It explores the factors that reflect gender identities in the digital discourse. In this regard, gender differences are marked on the basis of the use of speech acts, politeness and face deployment. By using the ethical frame work suggested by Mann and Stewart (2000), the data is collected from 1028 participants from five different forums. The analysis of data is carried out by mix method approach. The focus of this study is on the comparative analysis of the speech acts used by males and females on Facebook wall. Gender boundaries are examined on the basis of differences in the use of speech act kinds, politeness and face deployment in five different contexts. The data is collected in natural form and is analyzed by using Searle and Austin's framework of speech acts correlated with Brown and Levinson's politeness theory and Goff man's use of face. This study reveals linguistic patterns that determine power relations and social identities in the digital discourse. The study reveals the alignment of users' personal and collective identities at local as well as global discourses. The results show significant differences between genders in the use of speech acts, politeness, Face, Negative Face Threatening Acts, Face Threatening Acts, Face Saving Acts and Miscellaneous Category. However, no difference between genders was found in the use of Face Invading Acts, Positive Politeness and Positive Face Threatening Acts. It is hoped that the patterns found in this study with regard to genders' use of speech acts, politeness and face deployment in the digital discourse will continue to be relevant in the future.

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## Glossary

Term	Definition
Speech acts	Basic unit of language used to express a speaker's action, intention and meaning
Politeness	Positive or negative face wants that we try to preserve in our conversation with others
Negative Politeness	Avoiding intrusion to other person's personal space
Positive Politeness	Avoiding intrusion to the other's personal space
FTA	Criticisms, challenges and insults that threaten our positive face wants
FIA	Rude, offensive and insulting remarks used to invade the positive face of the hearer
FSA	Expressions that save the face of the hearer
PP	Expressions of solidarity, praise, flattery, intimacy and empathy used in interaction
NP	Politeness strategy used for self protection by keeping a safe distance from others
Assertive SA	Statements that address a specific idea, proposition or belief
Directive SA	Commands, suggestions, requests and questions that are used to get addressee to do something
Commissive SA	Offering, promising, refusing, vowing and volunteering by which speaker commit themselves to future action
Expressive SA	Feelings of pleasure, pain, like or dislike that express speaker's psychological state
Declarative A	Statements that change the world (action verbs)

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Virtual Community	A group of people who interact in the virtual environment and have a shared interest or purpose
Identity	Socially contingent relations between interlocuters, which is multiple, complex and in a state of flux
CoP	A group of people who share a profession, experiences and information
CMC	Computer-mediated communication (CMC) is a process in which human data interaction occurs through one or more networked telecommunication systems.
Gender	It refers to culturally and socially constructed differences between men and women that varies from place to place and time to time.
Digital Discourse	Unit of speech or writing longer than sentence that involves the use of technology.
Power Relations	Division of power between genders
Positive Face	Our desire to be liked by participants
Negative Face	Our desire to protect our space and autonomy. It is our right to have  Freedom of action and freedom from imposition

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# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Chapter Overview**

This chapter begins with the description of important terms like digital discourse, Computer mediated communication (CMC), multilingualism, power relations, gender, Speech acts, politeness, face, identity construction, linguistic repertoire, community of practice and also their interconnections in sociolinguistics. This leads to the discussion on different definitions of virtual community proposed by various sociolinguists over a period of time. The concept of virtual community used by the researcher in this research is that given by Herring (2004). This is followed by the discussion on current statistics of Facebook users all over the world, which illustrates persistent increase in the population using this social Media. This prompt use of FB has set a major behavioural effect especially on the speech of the young generation. The researcher highlights the important role of digital discourse on the identity construction of genders on Facebook walls in multilingual and multicultural contexts. In this regard, speech acts theory, politeness theory and face deployment by the genders is explained. These theories are used as an integrated conceptual lens to conduct this research.

### **1.2 Introduction**

Internet linguistics and cyber language have been areas of interest for linguists in recent years, due to the proliferation of the use of technology for communication. The analysis of language & gender boundaries along with variables like age, class and ethnicity is a useful area of research

in CMC. This study is conducted to analyze cyber language and gender boundaries among 1028 facebook users of various age groups.