

Analysis of Cyber Language: Identifying Gender Differences

By

Amna Mukhtar

ID # 100784023

Supervisor: Muhammad Shaban Rafi

MPhil Applied Linguistics

Department of English Language & Literature, The School of
Social Sciences & Humanities

University of Management & Technology

2012

To

Holy Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him)

The Holy Prophet said, “None amongst you can be a true believer until his love for me is greater than the love he holds for his parents, his children and everyone else”

Bukhari & Muslim related by

Hazrat Anas (R.A.)

Acknowledgment

I am thankful to Almighty Allah for His countless blessings upon me to accomplish this project.

I would like to pay my special thanks to Mr. Muhammad Shaban Rafi for his mentorship, suggestions, helpful comments, patience, time, and for being a source of calmness in the moments of stress and confusion.

I must gratefully acknowledge all the faculty of UMT for illuminating me and enabling me to be what I am today. Moreover, I would like to thank Ms. Umarah Shaheen, Ms. Sadaf Fatima and Mr. Irbaz Khan for lending as well as providing me the books throughout my M-Phil. I would also like to thank Mr. Farrukh Abbas for helping me in my Research project.

I would like to thank all hundred participants of my study who trusted me and volunteered their Facebook walls for my research. Thanks to Ms. Shazia Aziz and Mr. Irbaz Khan for proofreading my dissertation.

I owe to my parents and mother-in law for their endless prayers. Last but not the least I will like to thank my husband Naveed Zaman and children: Maryam Naveed and M. Ali Zaman for their continuous support. My M-Phil studies would have been a dream, had they not sacrificed their wishes, time and rest for me.

List of Tables

3.1	Demographic details of the participants.....	31
3.2	Total number and gender of the participants.....	32
3.3	Background information of the Facebook data collected.....	34
4.1.1	Distribution of Facebook wall Posts of 13-15 year old male and female students.....	44
4.1.2	Distribution of Facebook wall Posts of 16-19 year old male and female students.....	45
4.1.3	Distribution of Facebook wall Posts of 20-24 year old male and female students	46
4.1.4	Distribution of Facebook wall Posts of 25-29 year old male and female students.....	47
4.1.5	Overall distribution of Facebook wall Posts of 13-29 year old male and female students.....	48
4.2.1	Lexical choices of 13-15 years old male and female students.....	50
4.2.2	Lexical differences in 16-19 years old.....	57
4.2.3	Lexical differences in 20-24 years old male and female students.....	67
4.2.4	Lexical differences in 25-29 years old male and female students.....	68
4.2.5	Overall lexical differences in 13-29 years old male and female students.....	73
4.3.1	Grammatical differences between 13-15 years old male and female students.....	77
4.3.2	Grammatical differences in 16-19 years old male and female students.....	80
4.3.3	Grammatical differences between 20-24 years old male and female students.....	84
4.3.4	Grammatical differences between 25-29 years old males and females students.....	86
4.3.5	Overall grammatical differences in 13-29 years old male and female students.....	90

List of Figures

Fig 4.2.1	Lexical choices of 13-15 year old males.....	52
Fig 4.2.2	Lexical choices of 13-15 year old females	53
Fig 4.2.3	Lexical choices of 16-19 year old females	58
Fig 4.2.4	Lexical choices of 16-19 year old males.....	59
Fig 4.2.5	Lexical choices of 20-24 year old males	63
Fig 4.2.6	Lexical choices of 20-24 year old females	64
Fig 4.2.7	Lexical choices of 24-25 year old females	69
Fig 4.2.8	Lexical choices of 25-29 year old males.....	70
Fig 4.2.9	Lexical choices of 13-29 years old males	74
Fig 4.2.10	Lexical choices of 13-29 years old females	75
Fig 4.3.1	Grammatical features of 13-15 years old females	78
Fig 4.3.2	Grammatical features of 13-15 years old males	79
Fig 4.3.3	Grammatical choices of 16-19 year old females.....	81
Fig 4.3.4	Grammatical choices of 16-19 year old males	82
Fig 4.3.5	Grammatical choices of 20-24 years old males	84
Fig 4.3.6	Grammatical choices of 20-24 years old females	85
Fig 4.3.7	Grammatical choices of 25-29 year old females.....	87
Fig 4.3.8	Grammatical features of 25-29 year old males.....	88
Fig 4.3.9	Grammatical choices of 13-29 years old males	89
Fig 4.3.10	Grammatical choices of 13-29 years old females.....	90

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgment.....	II
List of tables.....	III
List of figures.....	IV
Abstract.....	VIII
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Introduction.....	1
1.2 Significance of the study.....	3
1.3 Statement of the purpose.....	4
1.4 Research questions.....	5
1.5 Summary.....	5
1.7 Chapter division.....	6
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	7
2.1 Introduction.....	7
2.2 Language and gender in real space.....	8
2.3 Gender and computer mediated communication.....	14
2.4 Does CMC provide anonymity to its users.....	23
2.5 Summary.....	26
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY.....	27

3.1 Introduction.....	27
3.2 Ethical consideration in collecting and handling data.....	27
3.3 Research design.....	28
3.4 Data collection.....	29
3.5 Coding.....	30
3.6 Population and participants.....	30
3.7 Method.....	33
3.8 Data analysis.....	35
3.8.1 Lexical features.....	37
3.8.1.1 Word formation.....	37
3.8.1.2 Word reduction.....	38
3.8.2 Grammatical features.....	40
3.8.2.1 Reduction.....	40
3.8.2.2 Insertion.....	41
3.9 Delimitations.....	42
3.10 Summary.....	42
CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS.....	43
4.1 Introduction.....	43
4.1.1 Prolificacy.....	49

4.2 Analysis of Lexical Features of Facebook Posts.....	49
4.2.1 Lexical Differences in 13-15 Year Old male and female Students	49
4.2.2 Lexical Differences in 16-19 Year Old male and female Students....	56
4.2.3 Lexical Differences in 20-24 Year Old male and female Students...	63
4.2.4 Lexical Differences in 25-29 Year Old male and female Students....	68
4.2.5 Over All Lexical Differences in 13-29 Year Old male and female Students	72
4.3 Analysis of Grammatical Features of Facebook Posts.....	76
4.3.1 Grammatical Differences in 13-15 Year Old male and female Students	77
4.3.2 Grammatical Differences in 16-19 Year Old male and female Students	80
4.3.3 Grammatical Differences in 20-24 Year Old male and female Students	83
4.3.4 Grammatical Differences in 25-29 Year Old male and female Students	86
4.3.5 Grammatical Differences in 13-29 Year Old male and female Students	88
4.4.1 Summary.....	92
4.5 Discussion.....	92
4.6 Future research	94
5CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION.....	95
5.1 Final Word.....	98
REFERENCES.....	99

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the current study is to examine gender differences among the students of various age groups who use Facebook. The study focuses on gender differences on lexical as well as grammatical level. The gender based differences are scrutinized at four basic parameters such as: new word formation, reduction, deletion, and insertion. These parameters were further divided into clipping, onomatopoeic compounding, blending, conversion, abbreviation at lexical level and copula, subject and punctuation deletion and insertion, code mixing and capitalization on grammatical level.

A sample of hundred participants (from Facebook) was chosen to answer the research questions. The Facebook users were divided into four distinct groups depending on their age to confirm gender based linguistic differences. The number of messages sent by each participant and the total number of words were calculated. The messages were coded for lexical as well as grammatical features. The frequencies of the lexical and grammatical features were counted and converted into proportions by dividing the total frequency by the total word count and multiplying by hundred to yield frequency per hundred words. The frequency of lexical and grammatical features was measured to prove the males' and females' use of any particular feature.

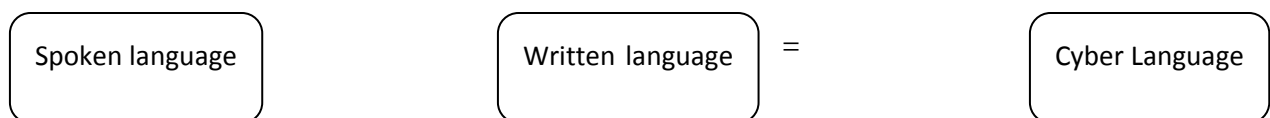
The results indicate that males and females not only use different stylistic features but linguistic features as well. The study shows that females tend more towards insertion, whereas males are more inclined towards deletion. It has also been noted that females are the dominant users of punctuation marks, emoticons, abbreviations, acronyms, emoticons, and onomatopoeic. On the other hand, males tend to delete copula, subject, and punctuation marks.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Cyber language is a term used for all types of electronic or Computer Mediated Communication (CMC). CMC can be defined as a process by which people create, exchange and perceive information using network telecommunication system that facilitates encoding, transmitting and decoding messages (December, J.1997). Cyber language can be studied in two main genres; synchronic (real time) such as instant messages and chat rooms or Facebook, where participants respond to each other in real time , whereas, in asynchronic , (delayed time) such as emails, discussion groups or blogs , participants may not be online at the same time. Cyber language, unlike all other languages, has no speakers but writers and is produced in less edited manner than published writing. Frerra, Brunner, and Whittemore (1991) have termed cyber language as “interactive written discourse”. Cyber language has the features of spoken language but no one speaks as they write.



Cho and Murray (2007) introduce CMC as a language which promotes abbreviation, ellipsis, contraction, and structural reduction. Moreover, cyber language reveals significant typographic (the art of writing and arranging words), orthographic (standardized way of using a particular

writing system to write a language), morphological (study of words), and syntactic (rules of arranging words in a phrase or a sentence) variability. Where typographic features constitute non-alphabetical symbols (including use of letters and numbers for alphabets e.g. *b4*, for before, *gr8* for great, *2day* for today etc.). Non-standard capitalization (*ALL CAPS*, *aLteRnAtiVe CaPitAliZaTioN* or *lack of initial capitalization*), absence or repeated use of punctuation (what???????) and use of emoticons (e.g. smiles ☺ or whinkies ;-) are also considered typographical features of cyber language. Nonstandard orthography is another defining feature of cyber language. It includes reduction which is categorized as: abbreviation, (*brb* for be right back) acronym (*OMG* for oh my God), clipping (*add* for advertisement), vowel omission or substitution (*cmng* for “coming”), nonstandard spellings (*wanna* “want to”), and new word formation: blending (*netlingo* for internet language), backformation (*edit* from editor), and conversion (nouns used as verbs *texting* from text), compounding (netiquette for net etiquette) on lexical level. Whereas copula deletion (*you coming* for Are you coming?), subject deletion (*m in office* for I am in office), and phrases’ abbreviation (*loll* for laughing out loud), etc and insertion (excessive use of punctuation (are you coming?????????), code mixing (*jaldi ao movie daikhain gay* (come quickly, we will watch movie), multiple phonemes or onomatopoeic (*hahahahaha*) are observed as regular features of cyber language.

Cyber language is not only a means of connecting people but has acted as a gateway for traditional housewives and other females, to convey their feelings, who are never allowed to speak up and share their feelings with others. These females have got the opportunity to share their feelings even without revealing their identity. Hence, social media provides them the opportunity to express their views. Facebook is a social networking service (Wikipedia) where people especially the teenagers stay in contact with each other and communicate through new

fringed language that is the third medium of communication after writing and speaking. The present study is carried out on one of the forms of CMC i.e. Facebook. Facebook is a social service that connects people with each other. Many studies have already been dedicated in analyzing linguistic differences regarding gender in CMC but Facebook language is still open to investigate.

In the past many researches (Lakoff, 1975; Tannen, 1991; Coates 1988) were dedicated for identifying gender differences in face-to-face interaction. These studies were later questioned for the type of data collected moreover, in face-to-face conversation females were disadvantaged, given less turns to speak, and were dominated by the presence of men. The data collected for such researches was not in its natural form; whereas, the data collected through Facebook is in its natural form where the language used is not affected by the presence of interlocutors.

1.2 Significance of the Study

Studying language differences in terms of gender has always been the area of interest for many sociolinguists; however with the popularity of internet communication researchers are revisiting the already existing parameters for gender identification. Consequently, cyber language has opened new dimensions for sociolinguists to study and explore the relationship between cyber language and gender. The significance of the study has grown with the use of internet in education, and workplace. With the increased use of cyber language it has been assumed that internet language reduces the gender inequalities that are present in face –to- face interaction by diminishing the salience of physical and social cues that reveal the gender of participants (Wojahn, 1994). On the other hand, researchers (Rodino, 1997; Turkle, 1995; Mei

Rong & Ching-Yu-Hsieh, 2007) claim that gender boundaries have started merging and any gender can disguise itself in any way.

The results increase the significance of the present study which disagrees with the previous researches which claim that genders behave alike while communicating through cyber language. Moreover, the current study provides certain parameters which can be used to identify the gender of any anonymous person.

1.3 Statement of the Purpose

The purpose of the current study is to examine gender differences among the students of various age groups who use Facebook. The study focuses on gender differences on lexical as well as grammatical level. The present study aims at exploring the gender boundaries with lexical features of cyber language such as: new word formation, clipping, onomatopoeic, compounding, blending, conversion, abbreviation, and grammatical features such as copula, subject, and punctuation deletion, code mixing and capitalization

The present study discusses the stereotypes that are attached with males and females, as Tennen (1990 difference theory) Lakoff (1975 women's use of hedges and tag questions), Trudgill (1974 use of prestigious accent) and Zimmerman and West (1975 dominance theory) observed in their studies. This is assumed that if women show all these stereotypes in their language, they think in the same way or it can be said that women's thoughts control their language. As American anthropological linguist Edward Sapir and his student Benjamin Whorf proved in their Sapir – Whorf hypothesis (1954) that language determines thought. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis can be seen in males' and females' use of cyber language, where females show their uncertain state of mind or hesitant nature through their use of words, emoticons and graphical images. On the other

hand, males reveal their dominating nature by using expository style, use of rough language or even terminating communication in case of disagreements (Blum, 1999; Savicki, Lingenfelter, & Kelley, 1996; Vrooman, 2001).

1.4 Research Questions

The study aims to explore the following research question:

1. To what extent do young Pakistani male and female students differ, if they do, in their lexical features used on Facebook?
2. To what extent do young Pakistani male and female students differ, if they do, in their grammatical features used on Facebook?

1.5 Summary

Chapter one provides an overview of the current study on “Analysis of Cyber Language: Identifying Gender Differences”. The chapter provides insight into the significance of the study and unfolds new traditions of using language that are now emerging due to the increased dependency on internet. It provides brief history of how language of males was differentiated from females, in the real space, on the basis of a few stereotypes. Moreover, it discusses the new ways of identifying gender through cyber language which itself is a medium that supports anonymity.

1.6 Chapter division

This dissertation is designed to identify gender differences, among 13-29 years old Pakistani students, through cyber language. The whole dissertation is divided into five chapters. Chapter one opens with the introduction and significance of the study. The background of the study in real and virtual life is given in chapter two, which discusses the past studies (Lakoff 1975; Tannen 1995; Herring 2003) on language and gender. Chapter three discusses the detailed methodology of the present study. It also discusses the participants, settings, data collection and analysis. Detailed data analysis and results are discussed in fourth chapter whereas chapter five is concluded with the final word about the study.