Understanding Gender Differences through Analyzing the Variant Usage of Language by Male and Female: A Sociolinguistic Study on the Bangladeshi Tertiary Level Students

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Abstract

Background
With the development of sociolinguistics, language and gender study in some specific contexts needs to be conducted.

Objectives of the study
This study examined the gender differences through analyzing the language differences and finds out the social factors working behind the variation of language among the tertiary level Bangladeshi students.

Methods
A small-scale, quantitative survey on the gender differences in language use was conducted among the tertiary level students of four universities (public and private) in the northern part of Bangladesh.

Summary of findings
This study found significant gender differences in language use based on the conversational analysis of male and female students focusing on their distinctive speech act, choice of vocabulary, sentence construction, turn taking, use of hedges or fillers, conversation lead, etc. Multiple factors were found behind the variation of language used by male and female students; gender is one of them. Moreover, gender is culture specific. This study also showed that a particular society's power relation between two genders, economic structure, social norms, and beliefs have an impact on shaping the language of men and women.

Contribution and implication
This study will help female to recognize the factors that subconsciously build their perspective which are reflected in the language they use. This study will play a significant role in the arena of linguistics, sociology, and especially in feminism for various reasons.
Keywords: Sociolinguistics, Culture, Gender difference.

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Introduction

Language is the medium of interaction. It is often get modified by the context and featured by the gender (Karlsson, 2007). As a part of macro-linguistics, modern sociolinguistics has been carrying out its' investigation on how a particular language represents or talks about males and females, how a language is spoken by men and women, language differences between men and women, and the reasons working behind the differences (Cameron, 2014). Language is used in different contexts by males and females differently. Moreover, they use various linguistic strategies in their conversation. Coats and Johnson (2001) refer to the context which is responsible for the occurrence of language or communication. Some researchers used the term gender preferential than gender based differences to talk about gender differences in language use because both males and females have the potential to utilize some linguistic strategies but it is the context that let them select language type (Fitzpatrick et al., 1995; Kennedy & Camden, 1983). So, context decides what type of language has to be used. Males and females speak differently depending on the context. The way male and female speakers speak at home is totally different from the way they speak on the university campus or marketplace. However, their individual speech act has some common features. Male and female speakers adopt those features wherever they talk or whatever they talk about. Those features differ from male to female students. This study was based on several aspects of language differences like the purpose of the conversation, the amount of talk, use of vocabulary, turn taking, etc.

The conversation's purpose varies from male to female. According to Crawford, the way men and women talk is shaped by some fundamental differences (Crawford, 1995). Men and women have to play different roles in society. To accomplish those roles and responsibilities they have to act differently and speak differently depending on the purpose they have to serve. Maltz and Broker's (1982) model of gender marked language use claims that the content and purpose of males' and females' speech are different and sometimes serve opposite to each other. Males find scope for self-assertion through a conversation. On the other hand, females are more collaborative and try to build and maintain good relationships (Sheldon, 1990).

The amount of talk associated with males and females varies to a great extent. If we travel back to Greek philosopher Sophocles who said "Silence gives the proper grace to women" which means the silence of women was always appreciated (Kaplan, 1976). In other words, quiet women are good and those who speak can be tagged as talkative (Spender, 1989).

Women have their own areas of interest as men. They both cherish and use some distinguished specialized vocabularies. Women develop some special adjectives to address or admire people. They also have some special names and terms for colorand cosmetics. On the contrary, males have various interesting special dictions and phrases of different games and sports. Their different area of choice does matter because of their language differences (Holmes, 1986).

Language differences can happen at various levels like phonology, morphology, and syntax depending on the male's and female's language skills and preferences or the social contexts they are in (Gooch, 1973; Haas, 1979). A good number of research studies have been already conducted by different linguists, sociolinguists, feminists, and sociologists on male-female language differences (Mulac et al., 1986, 1988; MULAC et al., 1985). This study includes three significant approaches to language and gender: Dominance, Difference, and Deficit theories focusing on the language differences and the reasons for language differences between male and female students of the tertiary level of the northern part of Bangladesh. The general objective of this study is to explore the gender gap by analyzing the variant usage of a language by men and women. Based on the general objective, this research has been designed to be conducted on some specific objectives:

1. To identify the different usage of a language by male and female students
2. To identify the distinctive communicative style of male and female
3. To examine the factors working behind the language differences between male and female
4. To provide a clear picture of how an individual's perspective and behavior (language) is patterned by social treatment.

This study will play a significant role in the arena of linguistics, and sociology, especially in feminism for various reasons. First of all, it will enlighten both males and females about the reasons behind the variation in language use. Additionally, the result of this study will help female to recognize the factors that subconsciously build their perspective which are reflected in the language they use.

Data and Methodology

Data Source

The study was conducted based on a small-scale, quantitative survey on the genderdifferences in language use. The study was administered in the four universities (public and private) in the northern part of Bangladesh. The primary data was collected from one public university; Begum Rokeya University,Rangpur, two private universities Bangladesh Army University of Science and Technology, Saidpur, and Pundra University, Bogura; and from one national university i.e., Bogura Azizul Haque College and University. Data was collected using simple random sampling from 100 (50 males and 50 females) students (Sugden et al., 2000). A structured questionnaire consisting of 17 multiple choices questions was used to collect primary data. On the other hand, both print versions and online sources i.e., relevant books, publications from authentic sources, journals, reports, newspapers etc. were also utilized for our study.

Methods

This study has adopted a quantitative research methodology for analyzing data. The quantitative approach has been chosen for getting more accurate results and for carrying out more effective evaluations.

Results and Discussion

The purpose of the conversation differs from male to female participants. In Figure 1, we can see that 13 percent of male participants converse about improving relationships. Thirty seven percent of them are driven by making a good image. The other 42 percent want to enrich knowledge by conversation while at least 8 percent do that for expressing their feelings. On the other hand, a total of 51 percent of female participants engage in conversation to build and maintain a good relationship. Other 7 percent of them are motivated to make a good image while another 33 percent are seeker of knowledge and at least 19 percent merely want toshare their feelings.
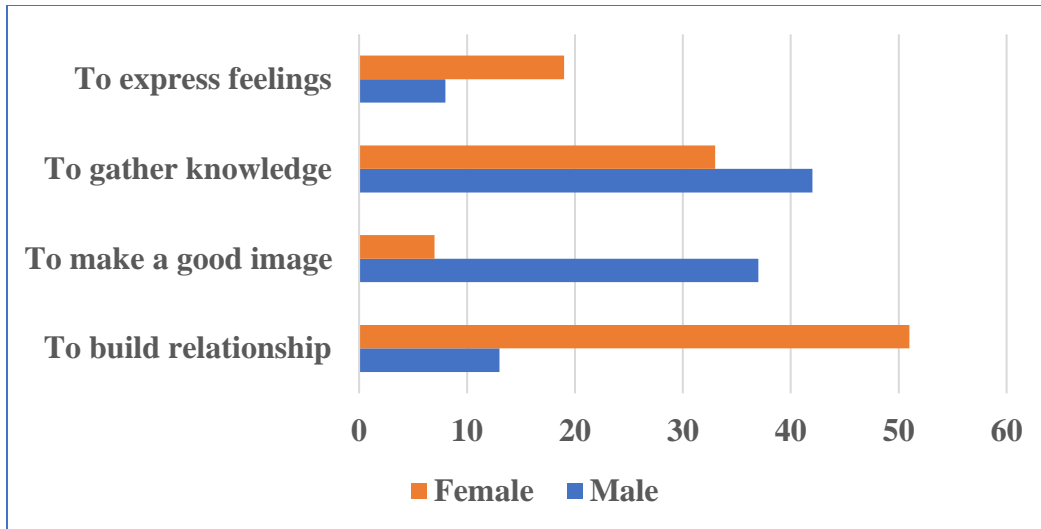
Figure 1. **Percentage distribution of purpose of conversation between male and female Bangladeshi university students**

Figure 2 shows male and female participant's choice of topic varies a great deal. The topic of interest differs greatly from male to female participants. A total of 41 percent of the male participants love to talk about politics. Talking about family affairs interests only 3 percent of them. On the contrary, female participants are less interested in politics. Only 8 percent of them feel free to talk about politics. Around 26 percent of females love to talk and listen about education or study-related issues. The number falls to only 4 percent when comes to the sport. However, the study shows that 62 percent of female participant's chosen topic is family matters.
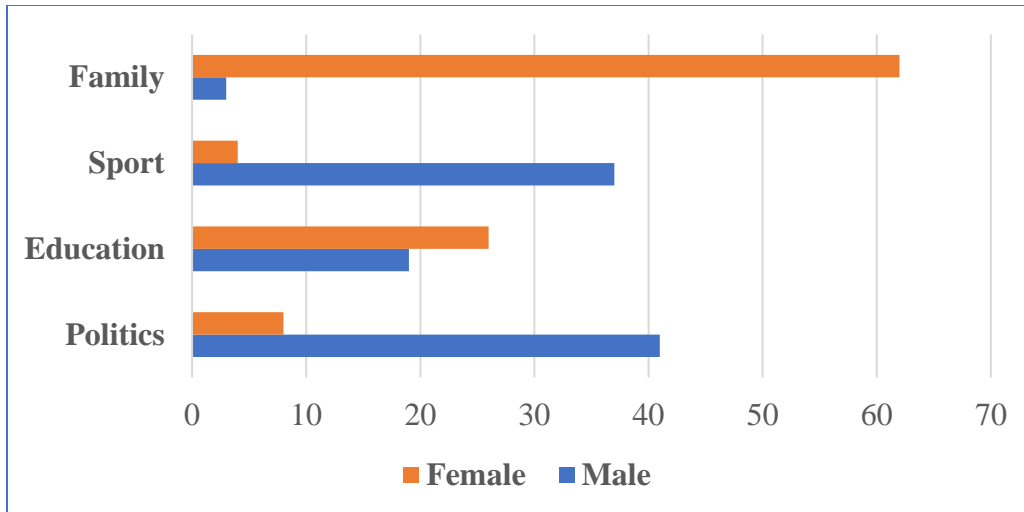
Figure 2. **Percentage distribution of topics of conversation between male and female Bangladeshi university students**

Figure 3 shows that in the context of Bangladesh male speakerusually start a conversation. Sixty one percent of the total male participants use informal language and the other 22 percent use colloquial variation whereas only 17 percentspeak formal. In the case of females, the picture is the opposite. Most of the participants,shown above 74 percent speak formal language, the other 26 percent use informal and colloquial. About 77 percent of male participants open a conversation while the other 23 percent do not. Among female participants, 81 percent are usually reluctant to open a conversation while the other 19 percent easilycan.
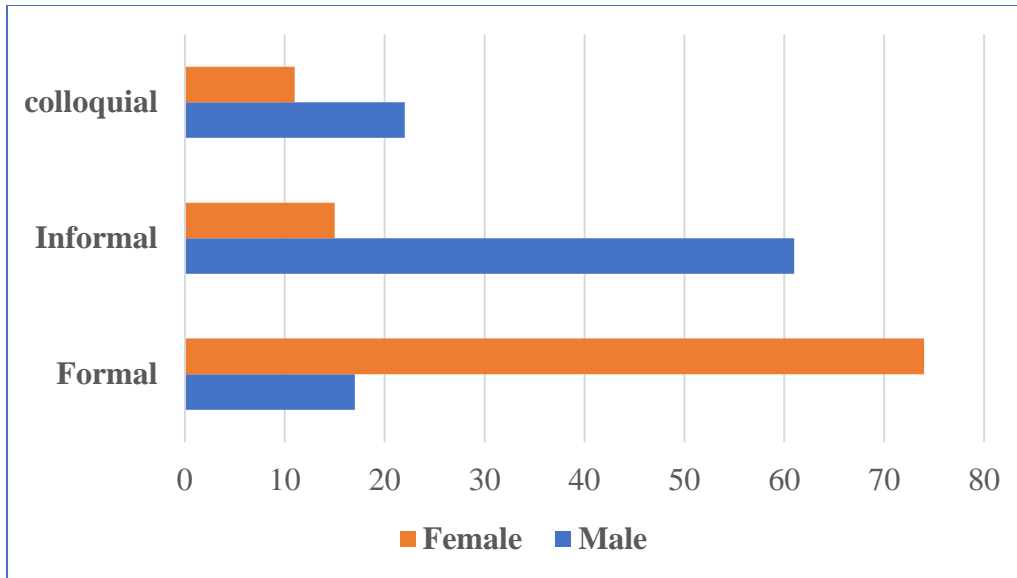
Figure 3. **Percentage distribution of usage of language type between male and female Bangladeshi university students**

Table 1. Distribution of response regarding major type of conversational differences between male and female Bangladeshi university students

Factors	Options	Gender	
		Male (%)	Female (%)
Ice-breaker	Yes	77	19
	No	23	81
Usage of slang	Yes	93	14
	No	7	86
Seeking approval	Yes	21	79
	No	65	12
	Sometimes	14	9
Like hedges and fillers	Yes	22	94
	No	78	6
Using hyperbolic expressions	Yes	13	89
	No	87	11

Response minimally	Yes	23	94
	No	77	6
Use of special lexis	Yes	21	79
	No	65	12
	Sometimes	14	9
Adjective preference	Yes	22	97
	No	78	3
Commanding style	Yes	84	11
	No	16	89
Interrupting a conversation	Yes	69	18
	No	31	82
Pitch	Low	16	91
	High	84	9
Conversation gesture	Yes	44	72
	No	66	28
Amount of talk	Home	38	68
	Outside	62	32
Social expectations	Yes	93	94
	No	7	6

Table 1 shows the overuse of slang and taboos by the male participants. About 93 percent use slang comfortably and at least 7 percent simply donot. On the other hand, only 14 percent of total female participants use slang and the other 86 percent do not.

Nearly 21 percent of males use question tags and the other 14 percent use on an irregular basis whereas 65 percent of the total male participants do not seek approval by tagging questions (Table 1). The reverse situation is noticeable in the case of the female participant where exactly 79 percent of females use tag questions to get their approval. Other 12 percent do not use tags but again less than 9 percent do tag questions sometimes.

Female user uses an extensive number of hedgingwords to soften their conversation. About 94 percent of female speaker add hedges in their talk, other 6 percent simply avoid them. But only

22 percent of male participants use hedges while conversing and the other 78 percent do not prefer hedging words (Table 1).

The account of using exaggerated expressions differs from male to female.

Among male participants, 13 percent used intensifiers in their talk. Other 87 percent talk without putting those with the language. Female speaker overtly uses intensifiers and hyperbolic expressions. Eighty ninepercent of female respondents answered it positively and the other 11 percent ticked negatively (Table 1).

To keep the conversation going the speaker uses some sounds or word stems signifying minimal responses. According to the study among male speaker, 23 percent use this kind of response while the other 77 percent of male speakers do not respond minimally. On the other hand, 94 percent of total female participants use minimal responses to support the speaker. Though other 6 percent of femalesdo not use those.

Table 1 shows the picture of using special lexis by male and female counterparts. The percentage of the special lexis user among male participants is 21 percent while other 14 percent use occasionally and 65 percent of them do not normally use unfamiliar or special lexis. However, the number of special vocabulary users among female respondents is high. A total of 79 percent of females uses special lexis. Again, 9 percent use it occasionally, but 12 percent do not use it at all.

In Table 1, it is found that male participants use fewer adjectivesthan female. Among male participants 22 percent use adjectives while they engage themselves in a conversation. A major portion of 78 percent usually donot use adjectives in casual conversation. Ninety seven percent employ adjectives in their conversation while only 3 percent do not bother using them.

Table 1 shows that 84 percent of males do command directly by using imperative forms while the other 16 percent do that more politely or indirectly.The table shows the difference between male and female participants differ a great deal while giving direct commands. Among them, 89 percent usually give proposals rather than giving direct commands. However, 11 percent are in favor of giving commands directly and using imperatives to direct or order.

Table 1 shows that 69 percent of male students interrupt the conversation while 31 percent do not interrupt the speaker and allow them tofinish first. However, only 18 percent of female students interrupt their male speakingpartners and the other 82 percent do not make interruptions. Between male and female speakers' 16 percent of males speak in a low pitch while 84 of them

speak in a high pitch whereas female 91 percent speakin a lower pitch and the other 9 percent prefer speaking at a high pitch.

Among the total male respondent, 44 percent move their hand or bodies orgive facial expressions while they speak, other 66 percent do not pose gestures in their conversation. On the contrary, 72 percent of females are habituated to body movement while they speak. The remaining 28 percent do not use gestures or facial expressions.

In the issue of the amount of talk, there are also differences between male and female students. The study reveals that 38 percent of males think that they talkmuch at home but another 62 percent claim that they talk much outside.

Sixty eight percent of female speakers think that they talk much at home and loveto talk with family members. The other 32 percent are reserved for talking in the home arena and talk much on the university campus.

Interestingly 93 percent of male participants agreed and said 'yes'while the other 7 percent do not think that adequate. On the other hand, 94 percent of female speakers answered positively, and they think they are on the right track while the other 6 percent denied negation.

From the above findings, it is worth noting that the conversation between males and females differs to a great extent. The purpose of making conversation varies from male to female participants. Males are more concerned with gathering knowledge as well as protecting their good image. On the other hand, females aredriven by the tendency to build a good relationship. Some females are also purposive of attaining knowledge. A good number of females talk only to express their feelings whereas males are less bothered about building relationships and reserved of expressing their feelings. Some topics attract men more whereas some others attract women more. Very few of them talk about politics or sports. The language type collected for this study reveals that female speakers use more formal language in contrast to their male counterparts. Male speakers are in love with the informal usage of language property. Among the university students, male students usually start conversations while female students feel reluctant. Usage of slang or vulgar words or expressions marks noticeable differences between male and female language.

Limitations of the study

This paper has been done with some limitations. First and foremost, the researchis conducted on

limited participants. Its' data is collected from only four universities. Moreover, there were also methodological limitations. Along with providing a survey questionnaire, it was needed to hold close interviews for better results. All these issues need to be improved in further research.

Conclusion and Policy Implications

Males and females are physiologically different. They socialize differently.Their perception of society is different as well. Language is the channel by which their different individual social perception finds its way out. So, the language differences as well as the reasons behind the differences can be understood by studying the language they use. This study shows that a particular society's power relation between two genders, economic structure, social norms, and beliefs have an impact on shaping the language of men and women.

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