

A Sociolinguistic Analysis of Language Style Differences between Male and Female Students in Whatsapp Group

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the language differences between women and men used in conversations or chats in the WhatsApp group of English Literature class B UIN Bandung. This research uses descriptive qualitative method with data obtained through copying and screenshots of several conversations from WhatsApp groups selectively, by keeping the identity of the message sender confidential. The data were analyzed based on differences in diction, language style, and ways of conveying information between male and female members. The results of the analysis show that men tend to use language that is more direct, concise, and to the point, while women are more expressive, polite, and use expressions that show emotion or social concern. The findings suggest that digital communication styles still reflect gendered communication patterns. This research is expected to contribute to sociolinguistic studies, especially in understanding the dynamics of language in digital media.

Keywords: language style, gender, WhatsApp, students.

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INTRODUCTION

Digital communication through applications such as WhatsApp is now one of the main means of interaction, especially among students. WhatsApp makes it easy to communicate in a quick and practical time, and in a more informal environment. In this context, conversations in WhatsApp groups often reflect different ways of speaking between men and women. Language differences between men and women are not new in sociolinguistic studies. Many previous studies have revealed that gender affects the way a person communicates.

According to Holmes (2013), women tend to use language that is more polite, affective, and supportive, while men more often use language that is direct, competitive, and tends to be dominant. This is supported by Lakoff (1975) who states that women's language is characterized by the use of intensifiers, tag questions, and more polite expressions than men.

However, in digital communication, these differences can be more complex due to the influence of the platform used, as well as the social norms that apply in the group. In this group, they not only discuss their coursework, but also informally share information or joke around. Interestingly, in these conversations, there are differences in language styles between men and women that reflect their respective social identities.

In text-based communication such as WhatsApp, non-verbal expressions cannot be conveyed directly, so users often rely on word choice, punctuation and visual symbols such as emojis to convey meaning. The use of these elements can differ between men and women, depending on how they fit into the communication situation and the social expectations of the group.

Therefore, digital language styles can be a reflection of gender communication patterns in a new form. Taking these things into account, this study aims to analyze the differences in language styles between male and female students in the English Literature B class WhatsApp group. This study will observe language choices, forms of expression, and other elements that reflect the characteristics of digital communication according to gender in a student environment. This study is also based on the sociolinguistic approach which studies the relationship between language and the social context of society.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sociolinguistics is a branch of linguistics that studies the relationship between language and society. The main focus of sociolinguistics is how social factors-such as age, gender, social status, cultural background, and environment-affect the way a person uses language in a particular context (Chaer & Agustina, 2010). In this context, gender is one of the important variables that is often examined in sociolinguistic studies. Holmes (2013) explains that the use of language by men and women tends to be different due to social construction and cultural expectations formed in society.

Differences in language styles between men and women are one of the main objects of study in sociolinguistics. In the context of digital communication, this difference in language style remains visible, although the form may experience adjustments. According to Herring (2006), in text-based communication such as on social media or chat platforms, women more often use emoticons, expressions of empathy, and long sentences, while men are more likely to use short sentences and to the point.

Research by Prayudi and Nasution (2020) also shows that language styles in student WhatsApp groups show a trend that is consistent with previous findings, where women are more communicative and expressive, while men are more informative and to the point.

RESEARCH METHODS

Type of Research

This research uses a descriptive qualitative method because it aims to describe the differences in language styles between men and women in digital communication. This method does not involve statistical analysis, but instead focuses on understanding the meaning and social context behind the use of language by each individual.

Data Collection Technique

Data collection was conducted through the documentation method, by taking screenshots of conversations from the WhatsApp group of class B English Literature students at UIN Bandung. The data collected was selected purposively, meaning that only certain conversations that were considered relevant and reflected the characteristics of male and female language styles were used as material for analysis.

Data Analysis Technique

Data analysis was conducted through grouping and comparison steps. First, the collected conversations were grouped based on the gender of the speakers. Then, each group was analyzed to see the differences in language use, especially in aspects such as the form of greeting, the use of symbols or emoticons, sentence structure, and the way of conveying messages. The purpose of this analysis was to identify the distinctive features of digital communication influenced by gender.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overview of Communication Styles Based on Gender

Based on the documentation of conversations in the WhatsApp group of English Literature class B UIN Bandung, there are differences in communication patterns between male and female students. The language style of female students tends to be more expressive, long, and full of greetings, while men use sentences that are shorter, direct, and lack emotional expression. This phenomenon is consistent with Tannen's Genderlect theory (1994), which states that women use rapport talk to build connections, while men prefer report talk to convey information directly.

Women in these WhatsApp groups often use greetings such as "friends," emoticons, and emotional punctuation that add interpersonal meaning to communication. This finding is supported by Mulac, Bradac, and Gibbons (2001), who state that women tend to use complex and interpersonal sentence structures.

In contrast, the men in the group used short, direct sentences more often. They rarely added emotional expressions. This is in line with the findings of Savicki et al. (1996), who mentioned that men focus more on message efficiency and clarity in text-based communication.

Kapidzic and Herring's (2011) research also reinforces these findings. They found that adolescent girls tend to be more cooperative and expressive in digital communication, while boys tend to be more dominant and straightforward.

In a study of short messages, Ling (2005) noted that females tend to compose messages in a polite and lengthy tone, while males write in a short and functional manner. Similarly, Baydaa and Challob (2022) found in their study of university students using WhatsApp that women used more politeness strategies such as indirect greetings and the use of the word "excuse me".

These differences also appear in other platforms. On blogs, Huffaker and Calvert (2005) found that men write assertively and directly, while women tend to interject creativity and emotional nuance. In professional media such as LinkedIn, women highlight social and collaborative values, while men emphasize achievements and technical data (Rui & Stefanone, 2013; Duffy & Hund, 2015).

A large-scale study by Penn et al. (2022) of 65,000 Facebook users found that women use language that expresses empathy and familiarity more often, while men tend to use neutral or more assertive words. But in general, both still show assertiveness in expressing opinions.

Overall, these observations reinforce the understanding that communication styles between men and women are not only influenced by biological factors, but are also strongly influenced by social norms and roles. As stated by FAO (2003), gender includes values and roles constructed by society, not merely sex differences.

Data Analysis of Student Conversations

The data in this study are snippets of conversations from the English Literature B class WhatsApp group, which are analyzed to see the differences in language styles between men and women in digital communication. Women tend to use expressive, friendly, and complete language. They also often insert emoticons and acknowledgments in conversations. This shows women's tendency to create a supportive and polite communication atmosphere.

Example of female conversation:

This sentence shows a polite and respectful communication style. The use of direct address and heart emoticons reflects empathy and social concern. This style is in line with women's tendency to build positive interpersonal relationships (Holmes, 2013).

This statement shows the application of an indirect form of politeness. This mode of delivery reflects a careful and considerate attitude towards the interlocutor, which is characteristic of female communication patterns according to Baydaa and Challob (2022).

And this statement is the same, women use emoticons more often to express their feelings or indicate their state.

This response reflects enthusiasm and participation in social interaction. The use of the word 'ikutan' accompanied by a smile emoticon indicates a friendly and open communication style. This is in line with Kapidzic and Herring's (2011) findings that women tend to express positive emotions more often in digital communication.

In contrast, men tend to use language that is more direct, concise, and sometimes less concerned with verbal politeness. This can be seen from the short sentences and the use of direct commands.

Example of a male conversation:

The use of abbreviations reflects a brief and informal language style. The absence of greetings or additional explanations indicates a communication pattern that is to the point and prioritizes effectiveness, in accordance with the concept of report talk proposed by Tannen (1994).

This response is delivered concisely and directly as a form of confirmation, without additional expression or further elaboration. This reinforces the tendency of men's communication style to be practical and less emotional (Savicki et al., 1996).

This expression represents a brief but agreeable response. The absence of emoticons or polite greetings reflects a communication style that tends to be spontaneous and to the point, as men tend to communicate informally and directly when giving consent.

This expression is conveyed succinctly and serves as a form of reminder or acknowledgment. The absence of additional explanations reflects the character of male communication, which tends to be oriented towards the core of the message without expanding information.

Findings and Interpretation

The results of the analysis of conversations in the WhatsApp group of class B show that there are differences in communication patterns between male and female students. Female students tend to use more polite, longer, and expressive language, and include greetings and emoticons as a form of emotional engagement. In contrast, male students use more concise, direct, and less affective language.

This difference is in line with Tannen's (1994) concept of Genderlect, which explains that women prioritize rapport talk to establish closeness, while men are more inclined to report talk which focuses on conveying information. This finding is reinforced by the research of Savicki et al. (1996), Ling (2005), and Kapidzic and Herring (2011) who found similar trends in the context of digital communication. The more prominent politeness strategy among female students indicates the influence of social norms on their communication style. On the other hand, male students show a more efficient and informal language style, although still communicative.

In general, these differences in communication styles reflect how social constructions shape different language patterns between genders. This proves that in digital communication, social factors still play an important role in shaping the way individuals convey messages. This data shows indications that there are differences in language styles between men and women, which can be explained through a sociolinguistic perspective. Although the data used is still limited, the tendency of each gender's communication style can already be seen in general.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of conversations in the WhatsApp group of English Literature class B students revealed significant differences in communication styles between men and women. Female students tend to use more expressive, polite, and interpersonal language, characterized by the use of greetings, emoticons, long sentences, and indirect politeness strategies to strengthen social relationships. In contrast, male students display a communication style that is brief, direct, and content-oriented, with concise language and minimal emotional expression. This finding is in line with Tannen's (1994) concept of rapport talk and report talk and supported by various digital sociolinguistic studies, confirming that gender-based language style differences are part of sociolinguistic studies shaped by social norms and gender roles in society, including in the realm of digital communication.

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