Gendered Language in Everyday Conversation: A Sociolinguistic Perspective

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Article Info	Abstract (10pt, Bold)
Article History *Received: May 23, 2025* *Revised: June 10, 2025* *Published: June 15,2025*	*Language is a powerful tool that not only facilitates communication but also reflects and reinforces social structures, including gender roles. While numerous studies have investigated gendered language, there remains a gap in understanding how everyday language subtly maintains gender hierarchies. This study aims to examine the use of gendered language in daily interactions from a sociolinguistic perspective. Utilizing a library research method, the study analyzes data from academic journals, textbooks, and reports using qualitative analysis to identify key themes in gendered language use. The findings reveal five major themes: gender differences in communication styles, power inequality in verbal interaction, language use reflecting stereotypes, awareness of inclusive language, and critiques of the binary approach. These findings highlight the dynamic role of language in shaping and maintaining gender ideologies. Ultimately, this research emphasizes the importance of inclusive and non-binary language practices in promoting gender equality across social contexts.*
Keywords *Gendered Language;* *Sociolinguistics;* *Communication;* *Gender Identity*	

INTRODUCTION

Language serves not only as a method of exchange but also mirrors social frameworks, cultural values, and individual identities. It is crucial in shaping, cementing, and even questioning societal views, particularly those relating to gender. Communication occurs through language structured in various forms, such as words, phrases, clauses, and sentences, whether spoken or written (Wiratno & Santosa, 2014). Our use of language embodies the wider social norms and anticipations, especially concerning gender roles. The connection between language and gender represents one of the most extensively examined areas in sociolinguistics. Gender-specific language, defined as the varied application of language influenced by the gender of the speaker or the subject, affects aspects like power relations, identity formation, and social unity (Cameron, 2005; Holmes, 2008). Daily interactions often expose nuanced language patterns that correspond to conventional gender roles—patterns that are frequently unnoticed or taken for granted. Lakoff (1975) noted that language utilized by women is often marked by traits such as tag questions, hedging, and politeness tactics that suggest a position of inferiority in social hierarchies.

Furthermore, research indicates that these linguistic characteristics are not biologically predetermined but are socially constructed through repeated actions, as suggested by Butler (1990). Both men and women may adopt various communication styles owing to societal expectations instead of inherent biological traits (Tannen, 1990; Coates, 2004). For instance, men typically demonstrate more forceful and authoritative language, while women tend to

communicate in a manner that is more indirect and relationship-oriented (Holmes & Stubbe, 2003). Such patterns are fundamentally linked to gender ideologies and the social conditioning processes found in institutions like the family, media, education, and the workplace. Even with the increasing recognition of the consequences of gendered language, there is still a lack of comprehension regarding how everyday linguistic habits perpetuate gender norms and exclusions, especially in multilingual and multicultural environments. Most prior research primarily addresses Western language contexts, with limited investigations into Southeast Asian conversations, particularly within Indonesian daily dialogues.

Thus, this research aims to examine gendered language in routine conversations through a sociolinguistic lens by investigating how language mirrors and reinforces gender-related roles, expectations, and power relations. By employing a library research approach, this paper reviews pertinent literature to unveil how gender is enacted, negotiated, and contested in daily communication. The anticipated outcomes are intended to enrich the larger discussion on gender equality and advocate for language practices that acknowledge the spectrum of gender identities present in modern society.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses the library research method as the main approach. Library study is a data collection method carried out by examining various written sources, both primary and secondary, which are relevant to the topic of language and gender in the context of daily conversation. The aim is to explore, compare, and analyze theories and previous findings that have been discussed by experts in the fields of sociolinguistics and gender studies. Data sources in this study include academic Journals, textbooks, and recent research reports addressing the relationship between language, gender, and social context. Keywords such as gendered language, gender and language, sociolinguistics, language ideology, and gender stereotypes in language were used to search the literature through scientific databases such as Google Scholar, and ScienceDirect. The data obtained was then analyzed qualitatively to find the main themes, language patterns related to gender in daily interactions, and theoretical approaches applied in previous studies. The goal is to create a comprehensive framework for understanding how language reflects, reinforces, or even challenges gender constructions in society.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

There are five findings in this study - Gender Differences in Communication Styles, Power Inequality in Verbal Interaction, Language Use Reflecting Gender Stereotypes, New Awareness of Inclusive Language, Criticism of the Binary Approach. (1) Gender Differences in Communication Styles: Several sociolinguistic studies have shown striking differences in the way men and women communicate, which are largely influenced by gender-related social structures. Women tend to use cooperative, expressive, and self-deprecating language forms, such as using words like "maybe" and "seems," tag questions, and more polite and non-aggressive sentences. This reflects women's social position which focuses more on connectedness and social harmony (Lakoff, 1975; Tannen, 1990). Meanwhile, men often communicate in a direct, competitive, and dominant manner, with a tendency to interrupt, express opinions without being condescending, and control the direction of the discussion (Coates, 2004). This difference confirms that language is not just a means of communication, but also a means of forming gender identity, which is influenced by cultural norms. (2)Power Inequality in Verbal Interaction: The power imbalance between men and women is also seen in the way they interact verbally. Classic research conducted by Zimmerman and West (1975) found that men were more likely to interrupt women in mixed-gender dialogues, indicating male dominance in controlling the flow of conversation. Holmes and Stubbe (2003) added that patriarchal social structures influence the language used, so that men tend to have more control

in conversations, while women are more likely to adopt self-deprecating strategies to maintain their social status. This situation occurs not only in informal contexts, but also in the professional world and other formal environments, showing how language can function as a tool to reinforce gender power. (3) Language Use Reflecting Gender Stereotypes: Everyday language often reinforces gender stereotypes through vocabulary choices and expressions that affirm traditional male and female roles. Cameron (2005) stated that language is full of metaphors and terms that associate women with weakness and helplessness, while men are associated with strength and mastery. Holmes (2008) emphasized that the use of masculine forms as generic or standard forms in language reinforces women's invisibility and makes men's experiences the benchmark. These stereotypes not only limit social roles, but also influence how we view and expect gender-based behavior. (4) New Awareness of Inclusive Language: In recent years, there has been an increasing awareness of the importance of using language that includes all genders to reduce discrimination and increase representation of all gender identities. Bradley (2020) explains that the application of gender-neutral language is starting to be applied in the media, education, and public policy. Technology also plays an important role in this, with Bamman et al. (2022) highlighting the need for gender-sensitive algorithm design so as not to reinforce existing biases. This change signals a paradigm shift in language use that values the diversity of gender identities and rejects discriminatory language practices. (5) Criticism of the Binary Approach: The conventional model in sociolinguistic studies that distinguishes gender into male and female has received much criticism, especially because it does not reflect the variety of gender identities that are now emerging. Butler (1990) put forward the idea of gender performativity, which suggests that gender is something that is created (performed), not an inherent characteristic. Zimman (2014) emphasizes the importance of language that represents non-binary and transgender identities that are often overlooked in highly binary language structures. This critique opens up opportunities to create more inclusive and adaptive language that values the diversity of gender identities.

Discussion

Traditional sociolinguistic studies show that there are significant differences in the way men and women communicate in everyday life. These differences are not caused by biological factors, but rather influenced by social norms and culturally generated gender roles (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 2003). One of the most striking differences is between direct and indirect communication styles. Tannen (1990) reveals that men tend to speak to assert position or power, using clear language and focusing on the meaning of the message. In contrast, women more often use language to establish social relationships and maintain harmony, so their speech is more indirect, considerate, and tries to avoid conflict.

In the context of conversational dominance, a study conducted by Zimmerman and West in 1975 showed that men are more likely to interrupt women when speaking in mixed-gender situations. These interruptions are perceived as a way to assume dominance in verbal communication, which indirectly reflects the patriarchal power structure in society. Women also more frequently utilize linguistic strategies such as hedges ("maybe", "I think"), tag questions ("right?", "isn't it?"), and intensifiers ("very", "really") that reinforce their statements (Lakoff, 1975). The use of these terms is often understood as an indication of insecurity or conformity, but from a sociolinguistic perspective, it indicates an adjustment to social norms of politeness and collaboration associated with women's roles (Holmes, 1995). However, modern approaches emphasize that these differences are not general. The way of communicating is influenced by various factors such as social status, age, cultural background, and communication situation. Thus, it is crucial to analyze this language use in context and not get caught up in binary stereotypes related to gender (Cameron, 2005).

Language not only reflects social circumstances, but also plays an active role in shaping and reinforcing existing norms and stereotypes in society, including gender-related stereotypes. In this case, language can function as an ideological tool that reinforces differences in roles, characters and positions between men and women (Talbot, 2010). One example is the application of gender-biased terms and tropes in everyday life. For example, women who show leadership are often negatively labeled as "fierce" or "bossy", while men in the same position are considered "assertive" or "authoritative" (Lakoff, 1975). On the other hand, terms such as "matre girl" or "housewife" carry social meanings that limit women to domestic roles or are judged from a material orientation, while pejorative masculine equivalents are much less common.

Language also contributes to normalizing male power in various aspects of life. Generic terms such as manpower, mankind, or the use of the word "man" to represent humanity as a whole are evidence of how language removes women's representation from the public sphere (Mills, 2008). In Indonesian, this phenomenon is also visible, such as the use of the term "kaum Adam" as a substitute for mankind, or the phrase "career woman" which indicates that working is not the norm for women. Media and education also serve as important tools in reproducing language that is riddled with gender stereotypes. Research indicates that school textbooks and advertisements often show women in a passive position while men are active, reinforcing conventional narratives of gender roles. For example, the idea that women are responsible for caring for the home and children, while men work outside, continues to be conveyed through words and images.

Gender-influenced language use not only appears in everyday conversations, but is also clearly visible in various social areas such as work environments, media, education, and digital communication. In this case, language practices serve as a medium that reflects and maintains gender inequities in various public spaces and institutions. (a) In Work Environments; In professional arenas, language use often reflects gendered power structures. Research indicates that women often need to change their mode of communication to be accepted in work settings that generally value a more masculine mode of communication-one that tends to be direct, competitive, and results-focused (Holmes & Stubbe, 2003). When women adopt a more persuasive, collaborative or emotional way of speaking, this is often misinterpreted as an indication of weakness or lack of leadership (Tannen, 1994). Furthermore, in formal meetings or discussions, men tend to dominate the conversation and interrupt women who are speaking more often, which has the effect of reducing the chances of women's voices being heard in the decision-making process (Karpowitz & Mendelberg, 2014). (b) In Media and Education; The media has a significant influence in producing language that shows gender bias through the representation of characters in movies, advertisements, news, and songs. Male characters are usually portrayed as dominant, strong, and rational, while women are often shown as emotional, supportive, or sexual objects. The language used in advertisements also often reinforces classic gender roles, such as house cleaning products that are almost always directed towards women. In the education sector, a review of textbooks shows that portrayals of women are often limited to domestic or non-leadership roles, while men are mostly shown as inventors, leaders or protagonists. This creates hidden expectations about the roles that are considered "appropriate" for each gender from a young age. (c) In Digital Interactions; Text-based communication on social media platforms and messaging apps also shows differences in language styles based on gender. Research reveals that women tend to use emojis, expressive punctuation, or words that reflect empathy and emotional connection more often. On the other hand, men are more likely to use short, informative messages. However, this pattern is also changing with the growth of gender awareness and the flexibility of identity in the digital world.

Over the past few decades, attention to gender bias in language has increased significantly, both in the general public and among academics and language practitioners. This

has led to various initiatives and transformations in language use to create more equal, inclusive and less gender-biased expressions. (a) Gender Neutral Language Development; Gender-neutral language is one response to the linguistic biases present in many natural languages. In English, for example, the use of neutral forms such as "they" as singular pronouns is becoming increasingly accepted in both formal and informal contexts, replacing the binary "he/she". In Indonesian, although morphologically less gendered, there is a tendency to move away from stereotypes such as the use of the term "ibu" for all roles in the home or "bapak" for positions of public authority. (b) Linguistic Transformation in Policies and Institutions; Some countries and institutions have implemented language policies that promote gender inclusiveness. For example, the European Union and the United Nations advocate the use of non-discriminatory language in official documents. In France and Germany, gender-neutral terms have been adopted in public documents and educational contexts (Bodine, 1975; Hellinger & Bussmann, 2001). Indonesia is also making progress in this direction, particularly through feminist activism and the LGBTQ+ community pushing for the use of inclusive words such as "friends" rather than "fathers/mothers", and against the use of overly patriarchal language in the media and education. (c) Resistance and Obstacles; Despite progress, efforts to neutralize language are often met with resistance, especially from conservative groups or institutions that uphold traditional norms. Changes in language use are often seen as a threat to cultural values or as too "ideological". This suggests that language is not only a means of communication, but also an ideological and political terrain (Cameron, 2005). In addition, in practice, implementing gender-neutral language is not always easy, especially in languages that have strong gender morphological systems such as Spanish, Arabic or German. Continuous structural and social adjustments are needed. (d) Recent Trends: Technology and Social Media; Technology and social media also play a role as drivers in the spread of inclusive language use. Platforms such as Instagram, Twitter and TikTok have seen the use of non-binary pronouns (such as they/them, or creative forms such as "friends", "buddy") as part of identity statements. Even language models such as ChatGPT are now being trained to recognize and generate more inclusive forms of language use (Bamman et al., 2022).

While there has been much progress in raising awareness of the importance of gender-inclusive language, the implementation of these principles still faces challenges. Structurally, culturally, and ideologically, language change is sometimes difficult to accept and implement in society. Therefore, it is important to recognize the barriers and devise appropriate strategies to advance gender equality in language. (a) Structural and Social Challenges; One of the main hurdles is the conservative nature of language norms that have been embedded in formal institutions such as education, media and government sectors. Many educational curricula, teaching materials, and journalistic writing methods still use terms that reinforce gender stereotypes. In addition, there is resistance from groups that see language change as a form of "ideological agenda" that threatens the stability of traditional values (Cameron, 2005). Other barriers arise from differences in understanding between generations and social classes. Younger generations and urban communities tend to be more accepting of gender-inclusive language, while conservative or less educated groups may feel unfamiliar or confused by phrases such as "all friends" or the use of non-binary pronouns. (b) Language Education and Literacy Strategies; Improving understanding of gender-inclusive language through education is crucial. This involves changes to textbooks to reflect gender balance, training for educators to use non-dated language, and language campaigns in the community through mass media and digital platforms (Sunderland, 2006; Holmes, 2008). In addition, it is important to include formal institutions such as universities, ministries, and media organizations in implementing clear language policies on gender equality. For example, by establishing guidelines for the use of gender-neutral terms in official or internal communications. (c) Functions of Technology and Artificial Intelligence; Technology, particularly in the form of artificial intelligence and

linguistic models, has tremendous capabilities to support gender-equitable language practices. Digital platforms can be programmed to automatically recommend gender-neutral words, such as "user" instead of "male user," or 'colleague' instead of "father/mother colleague." However, it should be noted that language models can reinforce prejudice if not consciously trained on gender issues (Bamman et al., 2022). (d) A Cooperative and Cultural Approach; A successful strategy must involve collaboration between the linguistic community, academics, gender activists and public policy makers. More than a top-down approach, language change will be more effective when accompanied by a cultural approach that respects local values, such as local wisdom that supports equality and inclusivity.

In the context of gender, the way people interact and are treated through language plays an important role in how gender identities are formed, negotiated and recognized in society. Gender-related language not only reflects existing power relations, but can also reinforce or counter them. (a) Language as a Shaper of Gender Identity; Language serves as a key tool in the performative construction of gender. Judith Butler (1990) states that gender is not an innate identity, but something that is "done" through social practices, including in the way we use language. The way men and women speak (or what they are expected to do) becomes part of a social performance that reinforces their respective gender identities. For example, women who speak in a more masculine way (direct and assertive) are often judged negatively (called aggressive or "unfeminine"), while men who use a more cooperative or emotional communication style can be seen as "less masculine" (Coates, 2004). This suggests that language is not neutral, but rather influenced by social expectations associated with gender. (b) Power Relationships and Social Exclusion; Gender-biased language practices serve to establish and maintain unequal power relationships. In the context of social interactions, men tend to have more control over the conversation, interrupting more frequently or directing the direction of the topic, while women usually provide supportive reactions, even though they have fewer speaking opportunities (Tannen, 1990; Karpowitz & Mendelberg, 2014). Furthermore, non-binary or queer gender identities are often not recognized in rigid, binary language systems. Language that cannot include these identities contributes to a form of symbolic exclusion, which is the rejection of identity through lack of representation in language (Zimman, 2014). (c) Resistance and Negotiation of Identity Through Language; On the other hand, language has also become a medium for resistance. Queer communities, feminists, and other gender minorities have developed new language variations as a means to negotiate their identities. This can be seen in the use of non-binary pronouns, alternatives to terms of address, and the creation of linguistically safe spaces for dialogue, both in real and digital environments. For example, the use of the word "they" in Indonesian in place of the pronoun "he" for non-binary subjects is a form of resistance to binary norms. This practice shows that language functions as an arena for the negotiation of living and changing identities.

CONCLUSION

This research emphasizes that language serves as a crucial vehicle through which gender beliefs are created, upheld, and at times questioned. It shows that the ways we use gendered language—such as styles of communication, word choices, and interaction patterns—are firmly rooted in daily conversations. These linguistic habits are shaped by societal and cultural influences rather than being biologically predetermined, mirroring larger power dynamics and societal expectations. The primary insights indicate that women and men often employ divergent linguistic approaches based on their societal functions, rather than on intrinsic characteristics. Women's way of speaking often highlights courtesy, emotional articulation, and teamwork; conversely, men's language habits frequently indicate authority, confidence, and dominance. Such patterns reinforce existing gender structures, particularly in workplaces, educational environments, and media contexts. Additionally, gender-biased expressions bolster

stereotypes and limit the visibility of non-binary and marginalized gender identities. The increasing awareness concerning the significance of inclusive language marks a constructive evolution toward gender parity in communication. However, obstacles persist due to entrenched traditional values and institutional resistance. Initiatives aimed at fostering gender-neutral and inclusive language necessitate not only organizational changes but also a heightened awareness of cultural nuances and unified efforts. In conclusion, language acts as both a battleground for gender disparity and a significant means for resistance and change.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings of this study, a number of recommendations can be made to support more equitable and gender-inclusive language use; Future research should focus on gender-related language use across different social and cultural contexts, particularly in under-researched communities. Field research examining real-world conversations would be invaluable in deepening our knowledge; Inclusive Language Policy. It is recommended that government agencies and public organizations develop formal guidelines on the use of gender-sensitive language, especially in documents, regulations, and other public communications; The Role of Technology. Technology companies, especially those designing language applications, such as automatic translators or grammar checkers, should ensure that their systems do not reinforce gender bias, but rather help promote equitable language.

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