



## Gendered Language Employ in Academic Settings A Sociolinguistic Analysis

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### Abstract

*The paper examines the gendering of language in teacher-student relations in high schools in Baquba using sociolinguistic theory and van Dijk's framework to determine the effect of gender, power, and culture on communication. It is concluded by performing Discourse Completion Tasks with a sample of 50, in which females, according to the cultural expectations of harmony, use collaborative and polite discourse strategies such as hedging, in agreement with those expectations. Males, on the contrary, adhering to the code of masculinity, are more direct and assertive in their language. Such authority is evident in the fact that both sexes are more respectful toward teachers. The narratives of these experiences point out that the gendered communication structure is a cultural phenomenon, and that arguments for an equal approach to linguistic and cultural sensitivity must be encouraged to create a healthy and inclusive classroom environment.*

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## المخلص

تتناول هذه الدراسة استخدام اللغة المرتبطة بالنوع الاجتماعي في التفاعلات بين المعلمين والطلاب في المدارس الثانوية في محافظة ديالى، من خلال تطبيق المنظور الاجتماعي اللغوي ونموذج فان دايك لتحليل كيفية تشكيل النوع الاجتماعي والسلطة والثقافة للتواصل ومن خلال استخدام (مهام إكمال الخطاب) مع 30 مشاركاً، كشفت الدراسة أنماطاً مميزة: حيث تستخدم الطالبات استراتيجيات تعاونية مهذبة كالتحوط، بما يتوافق مع التوقعات الثقافية الداعية للتناغم، بينما يستخدم الطلاب الذكور لغة أكثر مباشرة وجزماً، تعكس معايير الذكورة، إذ أظهر الجنسان مستوى أعلى من الأدب في التواصل مع المعلمين، مما يؤكد تأثير هيئة السلطة. وتؤكد النتائج على أن التواصل المرتبط بالنوع الاجتماعي هو ظاهرة مغروسة ثقافياً، وتدعو إلى تبني استراتيجيات لغوية متوازنة وحساسية ثقافية لتعزيز بيئات تعليمية شاملة وعادلة.

## I. Introduction

Language is on the whole a basic medium of communication, which enables individuals to share details and express feelings and build social interactions. In education, the sociolinguistic factors that are involved in communication are highly affected by socio-cultural norms and power dynamics<sup>1</sup>. Among the most remarkable topics of concern of the contemporary research has been the gendered use of language, which puts to the point the differences of how men and women follow their communicative intent in academic conversation. Language displays social structures and ideologies, whether a simple request, apology or fight in everyday communication or more formal communication in terms of presenting research or discussing<sup>2</sup>.

According to sociolinguistic research, gender also influences communicative patterns, i.e. politeness, directness, and turn-taking. Interpersonal relations are dealt with politely to keep in check face threatening activities which in most cases vary across the sexes because of social pressures and cultural upbringing<sup>3</sup>. Likewise, language style or language strategy dilemmas are also connected with such categories as age, social power or class because they overlap with the gender that is involved in shaping language practice itself<sup>4</sup>.

In fact, recent studies have shown that the gendered use of language is not fixed but varies across cultures and situations. Indicatively, in the professional setting, women are more likely to use inclusive, collaborative speech, whereas men tend to adopt a competitive, assertive style<sup>5</sup>. These patterns, too, are refined further in academia through interactions of superiority and a sense of need to be exact in communicative action. However, even after these results, there remains a gap in understanding the role of gendered language in the academic field, particularly in relation to power relations and cultural heterogeneity.

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The present study seeks to fill this gap by examining the sociolinguistics of gendered language use in academic settings. Investigating how gender influences both linguistic choices in various contexts and how non-linguistic dimensions of socio-cultural factors determine these choices might provide further evidence for exploring the following research questions:

1. What would be the dominant patterns in the use of gendered language in academic settings in some secondary schools?
2. What is the role of sociocultural factors, such as power and cultural expectations, in influencing these patterns?

### 1.1 Hypothesis of the Study

The current study hypothesizes:

1. The application of language, especially in academic settings, has a lot to do with the application of their gender as both males and female participants would use unique approaches which in their turn rely on the corresponding sociocultural conventions as well as academic hierarchies.
2. The combination of gender and power relations, cultural specificity and social functions give rise to the differences in the use of language, politeness strategy, and the styles of communication.

### 1.2 Research Objectives

The research will address gender as a factor to be considered when using language in an academic context, examining the linguistic strategies males and females employ across various academic environments. Following the above-presented main characteristics of communication patterns, turn-taking, as well as the features of language, the current studies have sought to:

1. Determine the prevailing gendered discourse in secondary school students' communicative activities in the teacher–student and peer interaction.
2. Describe how communicative strategies are selected and used in relation to the interplay of gender, academic hierarchy and cultural background.

## II. Literature Review

### 2.1 Gendered Language Use

The fact that language can be used to communicate means that it reflects the social and cultural settings of its users. Gender language is particularly useful for explaining the differences and variations in how men and women use language to communicate, since males and females have different wishes and approaches to communication due to societal norms and an unequal distribution of power. A women use language more cooperatively and inclusively; however, men have adopted assertive and competitive styles in professional or formal workplace settings <sup>6</sup>.

In the academic environment, where hierarchies and status differentials are particularly pronounced, such gendered linguistic behaviours become even

more explicit. Men, in their case, tend to dominate more in conversations; in group discussions, they tend to interrupt more, whereas women tend to adopt politeness tactics (hedging or softening) to speak on situations that risk face<sup>7</sup>. The immediate academic culture and the norms of the wider social structure regarding gender roles dictate such actions.

## 2.2 Politeness and Power Dynamics

The essence of academic communication, politeness, is very important in interpersonal relationships and hierarchical dynamics. A positive politeness, a rapport-building strategy, and negative politeness, an avoidance-of-imposition strategy<sup>8</sup>. These are gendered strategies: women are generally found to use more positive politeness markers, such as compliments and expressions of agreement, while men may use more direct or negative politeness strategies<sup>9</sup>.

## 2.3 Social Differences and Gender Variances in Language Usage

Sociolinguistic research examines how social factors (class, ethnicity, age, and gender) systematically affect language use. In this model, gender as a social construct generates a different communicative style. They introduce differences in accent, dialect, and word choice, and conversational style, creating noticeable variations in how individuals identifying as various genders convey their ideas within a community<sup>10</sup>.

These patterns are developed at a tender age during socialization and upbringing and represent gender-specific norms and expectations that, in their turn, influence the speech. Besides, communicative strategies are influenced by structural variables, such as changes in educational levels and resource availability, alongside socioeconomic status, at the social level<sup>11</sup>. Such social differences are also suitable to be founded on and perpetuate larger social inequalities; i.e., one may exert power by speaking a language that makes others say it, and vice versa, they may highlight teamwork, an upward trend that shows already dominant power hierarchies<sup>12</sup>.

Peer groups, media representations, and cultural discourses also sustain gendered linguistic norms. People tend to adjust their language to conform to the standards of their social groups, whereas media and popular culture continually shape what is considered proper gendered language. Linguistic expression is therefore a compound result of overlapping social forces, of which gender combines with other aspects of identity to generate subtle patterns of communication<sup>13</sup>.

Social factors on gendered language practice are an essential prism through which linguistic diversity can be observed. To elaborate further on this dynamic, it is possible to discuss it in several significant areas of linguistic investigation: lexical choice and politeness, tag questions and hedges, intonation and pitch, and the continuous process of linguistic evolution<sup>14</sup>.

### A. Lexical Choices and Politeness

It has been shown that there are gendered tendencies in the selection of lexis and in the use of politeness strategies. The language of women tends to be more polite, indirect, and conciliatory, which aligns with the socialized expectation to preserve relational harmony. A men can use a more direct and assertive style of communication more often, which, in turn, is related to traditional concepts of authority and dominance (Daba, 2017)<sup>15</sup>.

### B. Tag Questions and Hedges

The gender-differentiating devices that can be used to mitigate something, including tag questions (e.g., isn't it?), hedges (e.g., sort of, perhaps), etc., are often gender-differentiating. Women have been seen to utilize these features more frequently, which could be explained by the fact that they enable them to participate in a joint conversation and make a compromise. Conversely, we could also relate the decrease in the number of such constructions in men speech to the regulation of assertion and declarations making<sup>16</sup>.

### C. Intonation and Pitch

The prosodic characteristics, which include intonation and pitch, are also sociolinguistically varied. Studies have shown that females tend to adopt greater intonation tuning and less convergent contours, which can be interpreted as a means of expressing themselves and facilitating entry. Men have speech styles that are less vulnerable to pitch fluctuations, consistent with cultures that ascribe authority and neutrality to their voices<sup>17</sup>.

### D. Linguistic Evolution and Changing Norms

The dynamic of language reflects the social change. The transformations of the linguistic practice are giant steps of the transformation of the conception of the gender identity and inclusiveness. It is distinguished by the progressive use of gender-neutral (e.g., they/them) and gender-inclusive language and proof of a more liberal social perspective on other gender identities<sup>18</sup>.

### E. Moving Forward: Research and Application

These differences will necessitate evidence-based research over a long period of time to have a balanced perspective. Key priorities include:

1. Advancing in Research: Backing empirical research to shape evidence-based policy and education models.
2. Systematic Data Collection: On the way to determine the new trends and areas I am required to pay attention to, I am required to direct regular collection of data on how the language patterns perform.
3. Securing Legal Remedies: Creating policies against language discrimination.
4. Community Collaboration: Direct collaboration with different lingual communities to make research and applications culturally sensitive.

5. Constant Assessment: The reflecting the recent studies and social response through constant evaluation and revision of strategies.

#### **2.4 Cross-Cultural Perspectives**

Another aspect concerns the influence of cultural norms on the use of gendered language, given that societal expectations regarding the roles of men and women vary across contexts (Smith, 1998)<sup>19</sup>. Women in collectivist cultures may place greater emphasis on group harmony by using more indirect styles, while men will follow the culturally sanctioned roles of authority and assertiveness. On the other hand, an individualistic culture would provide freedom for women to express opinions, yet obstacles still exist via stereotypical thinking in typical male-dominated fields<sup>20</sup>.

#### **2.5 Main Classifications in Gendered Communication**

Based on the previous terms of sociolinguistic, the investigation divides gendered language use in the academic into three main fields:

1. Direct Communication Strategies: These are considered to be the strategies that are associated with authority and assertiveness and are usually a characteristic of the male speakers.
2. Indirect Communication Strategies: These are associated with politeness and avoidance of face threat and are commonly found in the speech of female speakers.
3. Adjuncts to Communication: Which comprise of empathy statements, gratitude, and hedging and are used in establishing rapport and are mainly used by women in mixed gender environment.

#### **2.6 The Role of Gender in Academic Communication**

Language is a bearer of more extensive social organization; in an academic context, it is a tool and a locus of power, identity, and negotiation of social roles. Gendered use of language: This is where the roles of men and women differ in their engagement with scholarly language, shaped by cultural norms, hierarchical structures, and expectations about both genders' roles<sup>21</sup>. These differences are found in contexts e.g. classroom discussion, presentation in the research, and group project.

#### **2.7 Communication Styles and Power Dynamics**

In universities, communication mostly conforms to the already-established power relations in the real world. Thus, as an example, it is seen that men throughout the board use their birthright assertive and authoritative styles, which imitates the socially predetermined roles of dominance and leading nature, whereas women would focus more on collaborative and inclusive approaches, which is aimed at maintaining group unity, smoothing up any potential source of conflict<sup>22</sup>. Hierarchical academic relations can be well modulated to foster such

patterns, in which students, teaching staff, and administrative services interact in a top-down manner.

As a case, men tend to interfere or interrupt other people more in mixed-gender group discussions. Conversely, women hedge by rephrasing things or present their input as a suggestion rather than a statement. Implicit biases and academic cultural standards preserve these practices and aid them.

### **2.8 Sociocultural Influences on Gendered Language**

Cultural norms also have a key role to play in the academic communication. To give an example, in the group of collectivist cultures women attach importance to the harmony of the group and speak in a circular way or slightly deferent style. Conversely, the basic individualistic cultures promote assertiveness thus providing space to women to express their views. However, they may again face tough challenges due to entrenched stereotypes in male-dominated fields<sup>23</sup>.

### **2.9 Linguistic Features of Gendered Communication**

Gendered language may be studied in terms of several linguistic features which include:

1. Pattern Patterns of taking interruptions: Males control discourse (by taking longer turns or interrupting) but the females rely on their cues and provide shorter turns to aid others.
2. Hedging and Modality: Women hedge using equipment to soften statements- "I believe," It appears"- as compared to men who are more likely to make simple, unmitigated statements.
3. Questions and Feedback: Women are more likely to use questions to seek out more interaction and confirming responses (e.g. That is a great point), creating a positive atmosphere.

## **III. Methodology**

### **3.1 Participants**

The sample consists of 50 Iraqi students from secondary schools within Baquba Governorate; 25 male and 25 female. A balanced gender representation was used to examine the usage of gendered language between teachers and students in a classroom setting. All were native Arabic speakers and had varying English skills, reflecting their status as learners of English as a foreign language. These were students aged 15 to 18, from almost all the streams available in a secondary education system.

### **3.2 Instrument**

Data collection was done using a discourse completion task (DCT). The DCT comprised six hypothetical situations which were created to give out information that was reflective of the use of English in academic communication. These scenarios included:

1. Participation in a group discussion in order to find a solution to a problem.
2. Seeking an instructor to give feedback on a given assignment.
3. Giving constructive criticism and responding as one makes a presentation.
4. Deployment of roles in a joint project.
5. Approaching others in an academic setting.
6. An argument with 1 of my classmates.

### 3.3 Procedure and Analysis of the Data

Administration of the DCT was in a classroom setting to control the setting. The students were given sufficient time to think of answers in English. The data collected were discussed based on a mixed-method approach; qualitative analysis: hedging, directness, assertiveness and verbosity are linguistic features that were coded based on the responses. It also tries to identify if there are commonalities in the communication pattern by men and women to the situations presented. In addition, quantitative analysis: The number of the specified linguistic strategies was counted to find out if there is any gender difference between the participants. To evaluate the statistical significance some of these statistical tools were used.

### 3.4 Findings and Discussion

Findings suggested that there were certain significant gendered communicative practices amongst Iraqi students in an academic environment. The qualitative and quantitative analysis of the linguistic use of the participants indicated a significant difference in the gender of a participant in terms of linguistic use. Table (1) presents the responses of samples:

Scenario	Example Response	Analysis
Requesting feedback	"Could you please let me know how I can improve this part?"	Politeness and indirectness (female)
Responding to criticism	"Thank you for your feedback, but I believe this approach works better."	Polite disagreement (male)
Disagreeing with a peer	"I don't think this method will work, let's try another approach."	Direct assertion (male)
Group discussion participation	"What if we combine these two ideas? That might work."	Collaborative suggestion (female)

In this subtle contextualization of sociolinguistic interactions, this methodology provides a very useful point to start the investigation of the influence of gender in the linguistic interaction in educational institutions. The current research gives a clear presentation of gendered involvement in the language acts evident in the interpersonal communication between teachers and learners in the second-level education in Baquba Governorate Schools. It reflects that there are multiple gendered practices through which boys and girls negotiate

their positioning in response to the social roles and cultural expectations in which they engage when doing task work in a classroom.

An analysis of the data showed that there were some differences between the use of language in teacher-student interaction in the case of male and female students that could not be disregarded. Female students always applied the use of cooperative and inclusive methods, hedging, indirectness and seeking consensus. The findings confirm the previous study that said women seemed to be more concerned with harmony and use non-conflict communication strategies. Indicatively, female students were never too rude to put their answers in contexts of politeness combined with deliberation particularly when it came to a negotiation or some form of insult to the teachers.

Male students were much more categorical and emphatic, particularly with reference to difficult questions and poor teachers, however. It is more applicable to the sociolinguistic studies, which demonstrate that the confident and dominant use communicative strategies (Tannen, 1994). Male students were more likely to voice their opposition in a more literal way and were more likely to have strong opinions about norms of masculinity and dominant personality when communicating formally.

Language behavior was greatly influenced by the classroom situation hierarchy. The authority-and-power model was another communication shaping structure that was seen in both female and male students when they were talking with their teachers, where both were courteous and submissive in their communication. Peer-to-peer interactions resulted in less interpersonal hierarchical influences though, women students exhibited less competitive and less collaborative and male students exhibited more competitive.

These cultures have a great influence on the process of gendered communication in Collectivistic, high power, distant cultures such as Iraqi culture. The female students' politeness and indirectness would thus reflect the cultural value that sets high importance on harmony and accord in social relationships. Once again, this demonstrates that aggression is the symbol of what male students should be confident and decisive about at social and official platforms.

This type of finding implies a relationship between gender and cultural mannerisms when it comes to using communication strategies in classroom interaction. Others may be explained as a trend of the world in the field of gendered communication; however, others have been definitely influenced by the Iraqi sociocultural background. These findings also have a lot of implications for promoting communicative and inclusive practices throughout the education field.

Awareness of the impact of gender on communication in the classroom will provide a better basis for teachers' action plans to create a balance between discussion and collaboration. One will learn more effective and inclusive learning modes by teaching males and females how to master a spectrum of communication modes that are complimentary to one another: assertiveness and collaboration. It will also allow the teachers to accept linguistic diversity in academic communication given the increasing globalization and multiculturalism in the teaching world.

### **For Future Research**

Despite the paper offering a long-overdue overview of gendered language use in academic delivery, the study is technically confined to one cultural/institutional setting. To obtain such results, other researchers can compare studies of Iraqi students with those of different student groups to understand how cross-cultural communicative strategies are employed. The fact that age, academic discipline, and level of competency were other variables to be studied would enhance the explanation of the interaction between gender and language in education systems.

### **Conclusion**

Conclusions drawn from many findings:

1. In the situations studied, females in this sample were more likely to be direct, indirect, and seek consensus, possibly reflecting the cultural stereotype of a female who is more concerned with interpersonal harmony and avoiding interpersonal conflict. Male students, however, tended to be more direct and less hedged in disagreeing: this might be due to socially expected male norms of 'confidence' and 'leadership'. However, these are general tendencies among this specific group and cannot be generalised to all Iraqi students or academic contexts.
2. This was evident in the behaviour of both male and female participants who were more polite and formal when interacting with teachers, with the academic hierarchy bearing on their linguistic choices. Peer-to-peer relations seemed to be less hierarchical with females in this study often demonstrating more cooperative styles and males more competitive styles - although variation did exist and these were not fixed.
3. One potential explanation for the differences observed, the cultural dimensions, collectivism and high-power distance are dominant characteristics of the culture in Iraq. In this cultural context, the indirectness of women students may be regarded as their way of showing respect and group harmony and the assertiveness of male students may be considered as a culturally encouraged demonstration of determination. However, it should be noted that these are

tenable explanations not causal connections, and the study did not explicitly measure cultural values and might not have controlled for other factors.

4. The results suggest that it is important to promote both assertive and cooperative speaking among pupils, but that any suggestions for teaching practice should be interpreted with care. Overall, the results indicate that increasing cultural sensitivity and being open to different communication styles might help to create more inclusive classrooms; however, more diverse and large-scale studies are required to make firmer practical conclusions.
5. The limited geographic location, one specific task-based methodology, and small number of students in the study results in a lack of generalizability to all Iraqi secondary students or to any other academic context. Further study, with more culturally diverse samples, larger numbers, and with more variables (such as age, subject area and language fluency) may determine the extent to which these trends are paralleled or found exclusively in this population.

#### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge University Press, p.21.

<sup>2</sup> Moaveni, S. (2014). *Engineering fundamentals: An introduction to engineering* (5th ed.). Cengage Learning, p.11.

<sup>3</sup> Fraser, B. (1990). Perspectives on politeness. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 14(2), p.219.

<sup>4</sup> Smith, P. (1998). Gender and social interaction in discourse. *Discourse & Society*, 9(1), p.63.

<sup>5</sup> Holmes, J. (1995). *Women, men, and politeness*. Longman, p.218.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, p.219.

<sup>7</sup> Tannen, D. (1994). *Talking from 9 to 5: Women and men in the workplace*. William Morrow, p.22.

<sup>8</sup> Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1987), p.24.

<sup>9</sup> Holmes, J. (1995), p.221.

<sup>10</sup> Holmes, J. (2016). *Introduction to Sociolinguistics*: Addison Wesley Longman Publish, New York, p.44.

<sup>11</sup> Brown, R. & Gilman, M. (2016). *The pronouns of power and solidarity in Sebeeki*. Thomas A. ed., *Style in Language*. Cambridge, M. A., p.253.

<sup>12</sup> Jespersen, O. (2022). *Language: It's Nature Development and Origin* London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, p.33.

<sup>13</sup> Labov, W. (1976). *Sociolinguistics Patterns*. University of Pennsylvania Press, USA, p.21.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>15</sup> Daba, H. A. (2017). *Sociolinguistic study of address terms in Hausa*. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, Madison, p.77.

<sup>16</sup> Kamal, M. A. (2017). "A Sociolinguistic analysis of Hausa patterns of address," M.A thesis, Bayero University, Kano, p.23.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>18</sup> Peter, T. (2020). *Sociolinguistics: An Introduction to Language and Society*. Penguin books Ltd. London, p.65.

<sup>19</sup> Smith, P. (1998), p.66.

<sup>20</sup> Cameron, D. (1997). *Verbal hygiene*. Routledge, p.33.

<sup>21</sup> Holmes, J. (1995),p.227.

<sup>22</sup> Tannen, D. (1994),p.27.

<sup>23</sup> Cameron, D.,p.37.

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