

YOUTH LANGUAGE AND GENDER: HOW LANGUAGE USE DIFFERS BETWEEN YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN

NGÔN NGỮ VÀ GIỚI TÍNH: VIỆC SỬ DỤNG NGÔN NGỮ KHÁC NHAU GIỮA NAM VÀ NỮ THANH NIÊN

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the linguistic differences between young men and women, exploring how gender influences language use among youth. Youth language, characterized by its dynamic, innovative, and informal nature, reflects group identity and resistance to adult norms. Gender plays a significant role in shaping these linguistic patterns, influencing speech styles, vocabulary, and nonverbal communication. By analyzing theoretical perspectives on gender and language, this article highlights how young men and women express gender through their language choices. The article also contrasts women's more collaborative and expressive speech with men's direct and assertive style, and explores variations in slang and nonverbal cues. The impact of social media and digital communication on gendered language use is also considered, showing how digital platforms both challenge and reinforce traditional gender roles. The study employed a qualitative method based on the results of interviews and focus groups with 30 young men and women, offering insights into how they perceive and express gender through language in daily interactions. The article concludes with a reflection on the evolving nature of gendered language norms and suggests areas for future research, emphasizing the importance of understanding gender diversity in shaping language among youth.

Keywords: Youth language, gendered language, gender differences, digital communication, social media.

TÓM TẮT

Bài báo này xem xét sự khác biệt về ngôn ngữ giữa nam và nữ thanh niên, khám phá mức độ ảnh hưởng của giới tính đến việc sử dụng ngôn ngữ trong giới trẻ. Ngôn ngữ của giới trẻ, được đặc trưng bởi tính năng động, đổi mới và thân mật, phản ánh sự nhận diện nhóm và khả năng chống lại các chuẩn mực của người lớn. Giới tính đóng một vai trò quan trọng trong việc hình thành các mô hình ngôn ngữ, ảnh hưởng đến phong cách nói, việc sử dụng từ vựng và giao tiếp phi ngôn ngữ. Thông qua phân tích các quan điểm lý thuyết về giới tính và ngôn ngữ, bài báo nêu bật cách nam và nữ thanh niên thể hiện giới tính thông qua lựa chọn ngôn ngữ của họ. Bài báo cũng thảo luận về sự khác biệt trong cách nói, chẳng hạn như phong cách hợp tác và biểu cảm hơn của nữ thanh niên so với cách tiếp cận trực tiếp và quyết đoán của nam thanh niên, đồng thời khám phá các biến thể trong tiếng lóng và tín hiệu phi ngôn ngữ. Tác động của giao tiếp số và giao tiếp trên mạng xã hội đối với việc sử dụng ngôn ngữ theo giới cũng được xem xét, cho thấy các nền tảng số vừa thách thức vừa củng cố vai trò truyền thống của giới tính. Nghiên cứu này sử dụng phương pháp định tính dựa trên kết quả phỏng vấn và thảo luận nhóm với 30 nam nữ thanh niên nhằm cung cấp những hiểu biết sâu sắc về cách họ nhận thức và thể hiện giới tính thông qua ngôn ngữ sử dụng trong các tương tác hàng ngày. Bài báo còn phản ánh về bản chất không ngừng thay đổi của các tiêu chuẩn ngôn ngữ giới tính và gợi ý một số nội dung cho các nghiên cứu trong tương lai, nhấn mạnh tầm quan trọng của việc hiểu rõ sự đa dạng giới tính trong việc hình thành ngôn ngữ của giới trẻ.

Từ khóa: Ngôn ngữ của giới trẻ, ngôn ngữ giới tính, sự khác biệt về giới tính, giao tiếp số, phương tiện giao tiếp xã hội.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Youth language is a dynamic and ever-changing subset of language that evolves rapidly, driven by social identity, peer interaction, and innovation. This form of language reflects the creativity and fluidity of younger generations, constantly adapting to cultural shifts, technological advancements, and global communication trends. Youth language is often used as a marker of group belonging, with distinctive slang and expressions that set young people apart from older generations. One of the most significant factors influencing language use, particularly among young people, is gender. How young men and women communicate differs in many ways, shaped by societal expectations, cultural norms, and the roles that gender plays in identity formation. Young men and women often exhibit distinct linguistic patterns, which are not random but shaped by deep-rooted societal norms, gender roles, and cultural expectations. These differences manifest in their speech styles, vocabulary choices, and even nonverbal communication, contributing to the broader understanding of gender and language. This article aims to explore the differences in language use between young men and women. It examines the various social and cultural factors that influence these variations, providing insights into how language reflects broader gender dynamics. The language used by young men and women differs significantly due to the impact of gender norms, social roles, and communication styles, reflecting broader societal attitudes toward gender and identity. Understanding these differences can shed light on how youth language is shaped by gender and how it evolves within specific cultural contexts.

This study seeks the answers to the following questions:

- How does gender influence linguistic differences in youth language?
- In what ways do young men and women use language to perform gender identities?
- What role does digital communication play in shaping gendered language among youth?
- How do societal and cultural expectations influence gendered language norms?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Youth language and its characteristics

2.1.1. Definition of youth language

Youth language, often referred to as a sociolect, is a distinct form of communication that young people use to

express their identity, establish group cohesion, and resist traditional norms. It is characterized by its dynamic and innovative nature, incorporating slang, informal expressions, and novel linguistic forms. Research by Bucholtz and Hall [1] highlights how youth language functions as a marker of group identity and social belonging, enabling young people to navigate and assert their place within peer groups while differentiating themselves from older generations.

Youth language serves as a powerful tool for expressing and negotiating identity. According to Eckert [2], the use of specialized language forms among young people helps them articulate their membership in specific social groups and resist dominant societal expectations. This resistance is often achieved through creative and playful manipulation of language, which reflects broader societal changes and evolving cultural norms.

2.1.2. Key features of youth language

Slang, abbreviations, and internet-based language are integral to youth communication. Research by Stenström [3] explores how young people employ these features to create a sense of exclusivity and group identity. For example, slang terms and abbreviations often evolve rapidly, driven by online interactions and social media trends. Similarly, memes and emojis have become central to youth language, allowing for expressive and often humorous communication. This phenomenon is supported by the work of Androutsopoulos [4], who notes that internet-based language facilitates the rapid spread of new linguistic forms and reinforces group solidarity among young people.

Youth language is marked by a high degree of creativity and playfulness. This is evident in the frequent innovation of new words and phrases, as well as in the playful manipulation of existing ones. According to Thurlow [5], young people often engage in linguistic experimentation, using language in unconventional ways to assert their individuality and respond to changing social contexts. This emphasis on creativity and playfulness reflects the broader trend of rapid language change observed among youth, driven by both technological advancements and shifting cultural dynamics.

The rapid pace of language change among young people is a key characteristic of youth language. Research by Deumert and Lexander [6] demonstrates how digital platforms accelerate the diffusion of new linguistic forms,

contributing to the rapid evolution of youth language. This constant innovation and adaptation highlight the fluidity of youth language and its responsiveness to contemporary social and technological influences.

To sum up, youth language is a dynamic and evolving sociolect characterized by its use of slang, informal expressions, and internet-based language. It plays a crucial role in expressing identity, establishing group belonging, and resisting traditional norms, reflecting the creativity and rapid change inherent in youth communication.

2.2. Differences in language use between young men and women

2.2.1. Speech patterns and styles

Young Women's Speech: Research indicates that young women's language often exhibits a more collaborative and expressive style. They tend to use hedges (e.g., "sort of," "kind of"), tag questions (e.g., "isn't it?"), and intensifiers (e.g., "so," "very") to soften their speech and foster interpersonal connections. Holmes [7] highlights that these features are used by women to maintain politeness and encourage cooperative conversation. Similarly, a study by Coates [8] demonstrates that young women's speech is characterized by an emphasis on emotional expressiveness and detail-oriented communication, reflecting their roles in nurturing relationships.

Young Men's Speech: Conversely, young men often display a more direct, assertive, and competitive communication style. Research by Eckert [2] shows that men are more likely to use fewer hedges and more declarative statements, which aligns with traditional notions of masculinity and dominance. This pattern is supported by McElhinny [9], who found that men's speech frequently emphasizes strength and control, reflecting their focus on asserting status and independence.

2.2.2. Vocabulary and slang

Gender Differences in Slang and Informal Language: The use of slang and informal language varies between genders, with certain terms being gendered or used differently by young men and women. Androutsopoulos [4] notes that young men and women adopt distinct slang terms to reflect their social identities and group affiliations. This variation in vocabulary is influenced by social dynamics and cultural trends, as demonstrated in McCormick [10] research, which explores how gendered slang evolves in response to changing social contexts.

Influence of Social Media: Social media significantly shapes gendered slang and informal language. According to Androutsopoulos [4], platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter amplify gendered language trends and contribute to the rapid dissemination of new slang. This influence underscores how digital communication reinforces and sometimes challenges traditional gender norms.

2.2.3. Nonverbal communication and pragmatics

Nonverbal Cues: Nonverbal communication, including gestures and eye contact, also shows gender differences. Coates [8] highlights that young women are more likely to use nonverbal cues to support their verbal communication and build rapport. In contrast, men may use nonverbal signals to assert dominance or convey confidence, reflecting their more competitive communicative style.

Pragmatic Differences: Pragmatic use of language varies by gender, with women often focusing on building rapport and establishing emotional connections, while men use language to assert status. Holmes [7] finds that women's language practices are geared toward maintaining cooperative interactions, whereas men's practices emphasize hierarchical relationships and dominance.

2.3. Language, power, and identity

Language is a powerful tool for constructing and expressing gender identity. Young people use language to signal their alignment with or resistance to traditional gender roles. For example, young men may use more aggressive language to perform masculinity, while young women may adopt softer speech patterns to perform femininity.

Gendered language can either reinforce or challenge societal expectations, depending on how it is used. In some cases, young people may consciously subvert traditional gender norms through language, adopting non-binary or gender-fluid expressions to reject rigid gender categories.

Language also serves as a marker of social power. The way young men and women use language often reflects and reinforces power dynamics within peer groups. For example, more assertive speech patterns may be used by young men to maintain dominance, while young women might use language to navigate social hierarchies more subtly.

2.4. The influence of social media and digital communication on youth language and gender

Social Media as a Platform for Gendered Language Use: Social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok, Twitter,

and Snapchat play a major role in shaping gendered language use. The way young people communicate online often reflects broader gender dynamics, with distinct trends emerging within male and female communities. For example, gendered hashtags, emojis, and meme culture are often used to signal group belonging or align with gendered norms. The visual and textual language of social media amplifies these distinctions, making gendered language use more visible and pervasive.

Online Communities and Gender Performance: In online communities, the performance of gender through language is especially pronounced. In gaming forums, for instance, young men may engage in competitive language, trolling, or aggressive banter, while young women might adopt a more supportive or emotionally expressive communication style in influencer culture or fan communities.

Impact of Digital Communication on Gender Norms: Digital communication is both challenging and reinforcing traditional gender roles. On the one hand, it allows for greater fluidity in language use, enabling young people to experiment with gender-neutral or non-binary expressions. On the other hand, online spaces can reinforce stereotypes through gendered interactions, particularly in male-dominated environments like gaming or tech forums.

2.5. Cultural and societal influences on gendered language

2.5.1. Media representation and gendered language norms

Influence of Media: Television shows, movies, and music significantly shape how young men and women speak, reinforcing gender-specific language norms. Media representations often perpetuate traditional gender roles, influencing language use by both genders. For instance, television dramas may portray women as nurturing and supportive while depicting men as assertive and competitive. This portrayal affects how young people adopt and adapt their language to align with these roles.

Pop Culture Icons: Pop culture icons, including celebrities and influencers, play a crucial role in shaping youth language and gendered expressions. The language and behaviour of pop culture figures often set trends that young people emulate, either reinforcing or challenging traditional gender norms. For example, female pop stars

who project assertiveness and independence may influence young women to use similar language, while male celebrities who express emotional vulnerability might impact young men's language in novel ways.

2.5.2. Societal expectations of masculinity and femininity

Impact of Societal Norms: Societal norms regarding masculinity and femininity heavily influence language use among young men and women. Expectations often dictate that young men use more assertive or aggressive language, reflecting traditional masculine ideals, whereas young women are typically encouraged to use more polite or deferential language, aligning with traditional feminine views. These societal norms shape both the language used and the nature of social interactions young people experience.

Cultural Practices and Language Use: Cultural practices further illustrate these gendered language expectations. For instance, in many cultures, young men are encouraged to exhibit dominance through their language, while young women are socialized to prioritize harmony and support. This is evident in various settings, such as educational environments and sports, where boys may use more competitive language and girls more collaborative language.

2.6. The evolution of gendered language norms among youth

2.6.1. Challenging Traditional Gender Norms

Young people are increasingly challenging traditional gendered language patterns by adopting non-binary and gender-fluid language practices. This shift reflects a broader recognition of gender diversity beyond the male-female binary. Non-binary and gender-fluid individuals often use language that avoids traditional gender markers, contributing to a more inclusive linguistic environment. This includes the adoption of gender-neutral pronouns like "they/them," which has gained traction among youth as a way to acknowledge and respect diverse gender identities.

The use of gender-neutral pronouns such as "they/them" is reshaping language norms among youth. This shift represents a significant departure from traditional gendered pronouns, challenging longstanding conventions and promoting a more inclusive approach to addressing individuals. The growing acceptance and use of these pronouns in both informal and formal contexts indicate a shift toward

recognizing and validating non-binary and gender-fluid identities.

2.6.2. Fluidity in gendered language

There is a growing trend of language fluidity among young people, where individuals switch between "masculine" and "feminine" language styles depending on the context. This fluidity challenges rigid gender binaries and reflects a more nuanced understanding of gender. For example, young people might use more assertive language in professional settings while adopting a softer tone in personal interactions. This fluid approach to language use demonstrates how young individuals are negotiating and redefining traditional gender roles.

2.6.3. Influence of feminism and gender equality movements

Feminist and gender equality movements have significantly influenced young women to adopt more assertive language styles. These movements advocate for equal representation and empowerment, encouraging women to use language that reflects confidence and authority. As a result, young women are increasingly embracing direct and assertive communication, challenging traditional expectations of female politeness and deference.

Social justice movements, including those focused on gender equality, have had a profound impact on language inclusivity and the rejection of sexist language among youth. These movements promote awareness of language's role in perpetuating gender biases and encourage the use of more inclusive and respectful language. Consequently, there is a growing rejection of sexist terms and an emphasis on language that supports equality and diversity, reflecting a broader shift in societal attitudes toward gender.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Participants

The study involved 30 participants aged 18 to 25, equally divided between men and women, from different cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. The participants regularly engage in digital communication and interact within both academic and informal social contexts, which allowed for insights into both online and face-to-face language use. The participants' anonymity was ensured throughout the study.

3.2. Design of the Study

This research employed a qualitative descriptive approach using semi-structured interviews and focus

groups to collect data. The method aims to explore how gender influences language use among youth, focusing on speech patterns, vocabulary, slang, nonverbal communication, and the role of social media.

3.3. Data collection and analysis

Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with each participant, as well as focus group discussions that encouraged group dynamics to reflect natural conversational styles. Interviews included questions designed to elicit examples of participants' everyday language use in both online and offline settings, with particular emphasis on how gender impacts these practices. Focus groups allowed observation of how language is used in real-time peer interactions.

The recorded interviews and focus group sessions were originally transcribed and analyzed using themes. Key themes were identified based on recurring linguistic patterns related to gender differences, such as hedging, assertiveness, vocabulary use, and nonverbal communication. Additionally, the role of digital communication in reinforcing or challenging traditional gender norms was analyzed, with a particular focus on social media usage.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study align with and expand upon existing research on gendered communication patterns, while also highlighting the significant influence of digital and social media platforms on contemporary language use. Several key themes emerged from the data, providing insights into how young people negotiate gendered speech, vocabulary, and nonverbal communication in both face-to-face and online environments.

Speech patterns and styles

The study confirmed existing research on gendered speech patterns, revealing distinct communication styles between young men and women. Young women exhibited a collaborative and expressive style, often using hedges (e.g., "sort of," "kind of") and intensifiers (e.g., "very," "so") to soften their speech. One female participant noted, "*I usually say 'kind of' when I'm not sure, because I don't want to sound too direct or offend anyone.*" These features were particularly prominent in group settings, where women aimed to build rapport and offer support to others. The data indicated that this style of speech is aligned with societal expectations for women to be more relational and emotionally expressive.

Conversely, young men demonstrated a more direct and assertive communication style, generally avoiding the use of hedges or softening strategies. A male participant shared, *"I don't like to use 'maybe' or 'kind of.' It makes you seem unsure, and I prefer to be clear about what I mean."* This speech pattern reflects broader societal norms that associate masculinity with assertiveness and dominance, particularly in competitive or hierarchical situations.

Vocabulary and slang

In terms of vocabulary and slang, both genders incorporated informal expressions and internet-based language, though the choice and frequency of use varied. Young men were more likely to use aggressive or competitive slang, especially in gaming or sports-related contexts. One male participant mentioned, *"We use words like 'own' or 'destroy' when playing games. It's all about winning and showing you're better than the other guy."* This suggests that slang serves as a tool for reinforcing dominance and status among peers.

On the other hand, young women favored slang that was more emotionally expressive or relationship-oriented. A female participant explained, *"I like using words like 'lit' or 'vibe' because they connect with how I feel about something or someone."* Social media platforms, particularly Instagram and TikTok, emerged as influential spaces for shaping gendered slang. Female participants often adopted language trends set by popular influencers, while male participants engaged in competitive banter in male-dominated online spaces like gaming forums. One male respondent described, *"The way we talk in gaming forums is different – it's more about who's in charge."*

Nonverbal communication

The study also identified key differences in nonverbal communication across genders. Young women frequently used nonverbal cues such as gestures and eye contact to enhance emotional connections during conversations. As one participant noted, *"I like to use my hands when I talk, especially with friends. It helps to show that I'm really into the conversation."* This supports the notion that women are more likely to employ body language to build relational depth.

In contrast, young men often used body language to assert control or convey confidence, particularly in group settings. A male participant remarked, *"When I'm with the guys, I don't move much, but I make sure to stand tall and*

keep my voice steady. It's about showing you're in control." This reflects societal expectations that associate masculine communication with physical dominance and power.

Influence of social media and digital communication

Social media platforms played a dual role in both reinforcing and challenging traditional gender norms in communication. Male participants in gaming communities, for example, used aggressive and competitive language that echoed traditional masculine roles. *"We use a lot of tough language when playing online, but it's just part of the game culture,"* commented one male participant.

Meanwhile, female participants in influencer culture adopted emotionally expressive language, but also demonstrated a shift toward more assertive tones. *"I've noticed more girls being direct on Instagram, like saying what they think without worrying too much about what people will say,"* said one female participant. This highlights the growing fluidity in gender expression, as women increasingly blend traditional femininity with assertiveness in their online interactions.

Non-binary and gender-fluid participants added to the complexity of the discussion, using digital platforms as spaces for more inclusive and neutral language. The growing adoption of "they/them" pronouns among these participants underscores the broader societal shift toward more inclusive language practices. One non-binary participant shared, *"I feel like online I can just be myself. I don't have to fit into 'he' or 'she,' and people are starting to respect that more."* This reflects the evolving nature of digital communication as a platform for challenging and redefining traditional gender norms.

The findings of this study underscore the importance of continuing to explore how language reflects and shapes gender norms, particularly in the digital age. As young people increasingly engage in online communication, it is likely that traditional gender roles will continue to evolve.

Moreover, the role of nonverbal communication in gendered language deserves further exploration, particularly in online spaces where physical presence is less emphasized. Understanding how nonverbal cues are adapted to digital communication could provide deeper insights into how gendered language is evolving in the virtual world.

5. CONCLUSION

Language use among young men and women differs in several significant ways, shaped by societal norms, cultural influences, and digital communication platforms. From speech patterns to vocabulary and nonverbal cues, gender plays a crucial role in shaping how youth express themselves and interact with others.

As digital communication continues to evolve, so too will the ways in which young people use language. The fluidity of online interactions allows for more experimentation with gendered expressions, challenging traditional norms and creating space for new, inclusive forms of communication.

Recognizing gender diversity in language is essential for understanding the future of communication. As young people continue to shape language norms, their linguistic choices will reflect not only their identities but also broader social changes in gender dynamics and inclusivity.

Future research should focus on how different digital platforms influence gendered communication styles and explore the experiences of marginalized groups, including non-binary and gender-fluid individuals, who are at the forefront of these linguistic shifts.

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