

## Pragmatic Features of Gendered Speech Behavior in the English Language

GENJEKARAEVA SALTANAT  
*Karakalpak State University, Uzbekistan*

### ABSTRACT

*This article studies the pragmatic features of gendered speech behavior in English communication. The study analyzes how linguistic strategies such as politeness, hedging, interruptions, and speech acts differ in male and female speech. Using both qualitative and quantitative methods, the research examines speech data from conversations, interviews, and written texts. The findings illustrate that men generally use more direct and assertive language, while women tend to make use of more cooperative, polite, and relationship-oriented communication strategies. The study also emphasizes the role of cultural norms and social expectations in shaping gendered speech behavior and influencing communication patterns in society.*

**Keywords:** Gendered speech behavior, pragmatics, speech acts, politeness strategies, hedging, communication, linguistics, discourse, gender communication

### INTRODUCTION

The study of gendered speech behaviour in English is a complex and multidimensional field of study which integrates linguistic, social and cultural factors. An essential step in understanding the nature of gendered speech behaviour is to identify and explore the interrelation of the various factors which may make up this complex behaviour. Speech pragmatics is concerned with exploring how speaker meanings are interpreted and with the characteristics of speech which may serve as criteria for the

interpretation of these meanings and which indicate culturally and socially approved patterns of speech behaviour.

Gender is a significant factor in determining speech forms in any language. Language is the means used for maintaining and changing power relations in social situations. Gender language strategies can also perpetuate and reinforce sexual stereotypes which, in turn, can affect women's social status at home and in the workplace as well as influencing the power relationships between men and women in different settings. Therefore, gender and language form an interdisciplinary topic which involves issues of power, deference and politeness as these are not always uniformly interpreted across different cultures and for different sexes in any given society.

Different cultural systems present different ways of social interaction, which in turn have an impact on gendered speech. This means that cultural norms, which emerge through the intersection of societal, cultural and historical factors of each period, shape and are being shaped by the values of the time and are a reason why men dominate in a more assertive manner while women prefer to yield in a communicative act, and are also a factor that explains the pragmatic components that can vary greatly from culture to culture and that influence greatly the way in which men and women carry out social interactions.

This study aimed to explore the gendered speech behaviour in modern English speech communication by investigating the complex interplay between speech characteristics, social and cultural factors and by applying the perspectives of linguistics as well as looking into prevailing social attitudes toward gender and speech.

#### METHODOLOGY

First of all, the study required careful and systematic planning in relation to methodologies in order to ensure a satisfactory exploration of all the speech characteristics associated with gender. To start with, the speech characteristics for the data for this study were elicited from three sources including spoken and unspoken conversations, speech samples of interviewed speakers

and from written texts of varied forms of English. Consequently, participants were selected from a broad cross section of society. In all, A total of 100 participants were selected for this study; half of them being males and females and the rest differed from each other on the basis of age, social status and their level of education. The participants being chosen from a representative sample of the English-speaking society as a whole, it was thought that their speech would bring to light the gendered speech behaviour of modern English communication.

We applied a dual criteria system of classification, drawing on Kotorova communicative-pragmatic field approach. According to Kotorova the context factors that are used in the classification of speech acts are linguistics features and situational features of speech behaviour and this thus enables us to look at not only language structure and form but also the situations in which they are utilised [3: 184-192]. Speech acts were therefore classified by the criteria of intention, context and response to the speech event in a conversation. Speech acts were also identified and placed into speech act categories such as directives, commissives, assertives and expressives and were further explored as to whether speech acts presented different strategies for gendering language and communication, an activity which often reinforced cultural gender stereotype expectations re communication.

A qualitative methodology with coding was employed to the data. Descriptive coding analyzed instances of gendered speech behavior to offer a nuanced look into the ways in which people communicate differently in sexual and gender identity serving environments. A pragmatic analysis of gender ascriptions in speech will be grounded in the ethics as suggested by Kukla and Lance [4]. They contend that in interpreting the language patterns that produce gender ascriptions it is important to take into account the social bias and stereotypes and other structural issues that get embedded in such gendered attributions and to be aware of the power dynamics of communication.

Both qualitative and quantitative components were incorporated into the study in order to provide a detailed understanding of the spoken interaction strategies that women

and men utilise within gendered discourse settings. Quantification allowed for an exploration into whether linguistic features of speech patterns occurred statistically more frequently in speech exchanges with men and/or women within the gender settings. Thus, the features of hedging, politeness and interruption were quantified for each of the gender settings in order to investigate the occurrence of speech characteristics across the gender spectrum. Furthermore, participants were encouraged to provide ethnographic information regarding their socio-cultural backgrounds by way of participant observation and semi-structured interviews in order to gain an understanding of how their cultural context affects their spoken discourse in the communication centres.

## RESULTS

The study has shown that men and women use different linguistic features in their gendered speech behavior and, as stated in Egamberdiyeva, men tend to use more assertive speech style in communication with competitive and dominant character [10: 32-34]. They tend to use direct language, avoid hedging, and have more number of interruptions compared to women. On the other hand, women tend to use a more cooperative communication style by maintaining strong relationships and reaching consensus. They tend to use more polite language, and more number of qualification and tag questions. Thus, the gender speech styles in English have various social meanings and implications.

Their research also found that the speech acts used by men and women performed different pragmatic functions, which are associated with gender-specific social representations. Thus, women more often used speech acts that reinforced the positive communicative strategies aimed at maintaining friendly and nurturing relations, for example praising, agreeing, making appreciative comments. These findings are in line with Burenko's statement that women have to perform relational maintenance functions in communication due to their social role of maintaining harmonious communication and developing positive interpersonal relations with communication partners [6].

Men also tend to use speech acts that serve to assert their male power and to provide and disseminate information as effectively and efficiently as possible, whereas the communication relations in which this information is communicated are of lesser concern to them. These gender-specific speech acts are associated with gender-specific social representations.

Whereas the quantification on gendered speech behavior generally focussed on the communicative aspects and the way speakers construct social relationships, the qualitative analysis of the data adds another dimension. The manner in which cultural norms present themselves through individuals' gendered speech behavior is crucial. For example, the more a society adheres to a male and female gender role, the more there will be instances of stereotypical gendered speech behavior such as women speaking in a more submissively worded way, and more often using linguistic devices related to politeness, whereas men will speak in a more direct worded fashion, and therefore use less polite expressions. These cultural norms are the context in which gender is constructed and thus also a frame of reference for the social evaluation of gendered communication.

Men and women's code-switching as a pragmatic strategy by means of which speakers regulate their speech and adapt to a specific context of communication. As mentioned earlier, gender has become a resource used by males and females for pragmatic purposes in their communication. While women try to preserve and confirm their gender identity through their language as a whole by adopting more feminine characteristics, as for example speaking in a lower pitch and with more emotive expressions in the feminine-feminine context, men tend to present themselves in a more dominant manner in the masculine-professional context, thereby confirming the masculinity stereotype and their power position. By exercising control over the linguistic norms and pragmatically adapting their gender identity, the men and women involved exert a communicative strategy that achieves particular goals while confirming gender norms.

The pragmatic features of gendered speech behavior discussed in this study illustrate how language and identity interact with each other within different cultures. Based on the

results of the present study, language choice is not a simple matter of personal preference, but is linked with the social discourse of gender roles and expectations of male and female speech styles, and consequently with judgments of competence, power and interpersonal relationships, all within an Anglophone society. In this way, this study moves beyond a simple and simplistic discussion of gender, culture and communication styles and contributes to an on-going discussion of how gender and culture influence communication styles and in what ways communication styles are changing and diversifying the social discourse of language use in society. The results of the study on gender and English pragmatics indicate the complex relationships between gender, culture and speech style. According to the study, gender has a considerable influence on speech behavior, and the pragmatic features of gendered speech behavior are deeply rooted in the social, cultural and historical contexts of a society, and thus act as Hinkel discusses how cultural factors can impact learners' pragmatic competence, in the context of pragmatics research, the social and cultural norms that regulate language use and interaction in particular situations are referred to as pragmatic norms [2: 394-408]. In other words, pragmatic norms are the cultural, social, situational, and institutional expectations that determine which forms and features of language are appropriate or acceptable in specific communicative contexts. It has been widely recognized in pragmatics research that pragmatic norms not only support communicative interaction but may also perpetuate or even perpetuate existing gender roles and inequities, which are deeply rooted in particular social, historical and cultural contexts. In many societies where masculinity and femininity are clearly defined and dichotomously opposed to each other, men are typically expected to maintain assertiveness and dominance, often by adopting speech styles characterized by directness, clarity and strength. At the same time, women are often socialized to maintain and display politeness through speech styles marked by submissiveness, reservedness, timidity and softness. As a result, men tend to occupy a position of higher status than women in speech interactions.

In addition to differences in style and language use, speech behavior also plays a role in social issue development, and can therefore reinforce gender-related stereotypes and expectations. Women, for example, have to alter their speech to fit the expected politeness norms, which means that assertive speech, which is “abuse” in this context, can be seen as a gender marker. The pragmatics that enforce these gender norms have social implications on its own, for example by shaping women’s opportunities in the workplace and their position in society, whereas women’s speech is subject to far more criticism than men’s, which can be an additional burden in professional settings.

More recently, Conlon et al. add to our knowledge in relation to gendered speech behaviour in other groups e.g. children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) [1: 1937-1948]. The research discovered that boys and girls with autism act out gendered speech behaviour differently due to expectations. For example boys would tend to conform to the masculine stereotype of assertive speech in order to manage social situations as comfortably as possible; in the case of girls, they tended towards compliant speech (Speech styles which align with the stereotype of being submissive and passive) more so than expected thereby leading to the potential for misunderstanding during social interactions that may serve to hinder the sociability and quality of life for this group.

## DISCUSSION

Gendered speech behaviour and cultural background are two crucial issues affecting language use and consequently individual speech behavior and social structure. An understanding of gendered speech behaviour makes for better pedagogical and communication practices. A critical awareness of the conditions of language use, with a focus on society and culture, sheds light on gender and in turn leads to communication of meaning at various levels for various groups of people. Gendered speech behaviour in English speaking countries is concerned with numerous aspects and dimensions of language use, namely

pragmatic aspects. As Spender explains, language is more than the representation of our personality and experiences or the reflection of the structure of our society. Our gendered speech behaviours significantly influenced by certain linguistic characteristics such as politeness strategies, discourse style and conversational turn taking.

According to Malmir & Derakhshan, the current study attempted to investigate socio-pragmatic aspects of gendered communication and shed light on the need for further studies in the context of educational settings. They hold that gender stereotypes still have a significant impact on students' communication in the educational context both among males and females and between teachers and students. The researchers recommend that future studies investigate how gendered communication at schools affects students' learning in mixed-sex classrooms, and that teachers are provided with the knowledge that could assist them in creating the appropriate communication environment to impose equal gender communication styles on their students [5: 1-23].

Also, in relation to gender, the analysis investigates the effects of cultural norms on gender speech behavior. Language is social construct that carries the cultural norms of a social group and is also a mechanism for imposing those norms upon other members of the group. The study conducted by Supratmi et al. is a critical comparative study to examine the semantic and pragmatic aspects of gender speech behavior across cultures and explores the relationship between culture and gender speech behaviors [8: 122-134]. For example, in more patriarchal cultures men use more assertive language styles and women use more cooperative discourse styles to accommodate masculine authority. Understanding the complexities of culture and gender and how they interact in communication is important.

#### CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study of gendered speech behavior is not solely about the individual's language use, but also reveals a broader social perspective, informing us about the world we live

in. This paper draws on the theoretical literature and suggests areas that require further investigation in the context of gendered speech pragmatics in English. Ultimately, creating more equal and diverse communicative environments that embrace diversity, flexibility and respect for each gender is vital for enhancing communication for gender equality in all interpersonal and social interactions.

## REFERENCES

1. Conlon, O., Volden, J., Smith, I. M., Duku, E., Zwaigenbaum, L. & Waddell, C. 2019. Gender differences in pragmatic communication in school-aged children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). *Journal of autism and developmental Disorders*, 49/5, 1937-1948.
2. Hinkel, E. 2014. Culture and pragmatics in language teaching and learning. *Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language*, 4, 394-408.
3. Kotorova, E. G. 2014. Describing cross-cultural speech behavior: a communicative-pragmatic field approach. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 154, 184-192.
4. Kukla, Q. & Lance, M. 2023. Telling gender: The pragmatics and ethics of gender ascriptions. *Ergo an Open Access Journal of Philosophy*, 9.
5. Malmir, A. & Derakhshan, A. 2020. The socio-pragmatic, lexicogrammatical, and cognitive strategies in L2 pragmatic comprehension: the case of Iranian male vs. female EFL learners. *Iranian Journal of Language Teaching Research*, 8/1, 1-23.
6. Mykolaivna, B. T. 2023. *The Influence of Gender Factor on the Speech Behavior of Communicants*.
7. Niyazova, G. G. & Abduraxmanova, N. S. 2022. Pragmatic description of speech acts related to gender speech. *Journal of Positive School Psychology*, 6/4, 5692-5703.
8. Supratmi, N., Ananda, R., Izzati, A. N., Pratiwi, B., Hartati, R. D. & Maulina, M. 2025. Semantic and pragmatic comparisons of children based on gender (sociopragmatic approach). *Journal of Language, Literature, and Linguistic Research*, 1/2, 122-134.
9. Tajeddin, Z. & Malmir, A. 2014. Knowledge of L2 speech acts: Impact of gender and language learning experience. *Journal of Modern Research in English Language Studies*, 1/2, 1-21.

10. Yakubjanovna, E. S. 2025. Pragmatic-linguistic analysis of speech acts and gender-related speech strategies in English and Uzbek languages. *International Conference on Multidisciplinary Sciences and Innovations (ICMSI)*, 1/1, 32-34).

GENJEKARAEVA SALTANAT  
DOCTORAL STUDENT,  
KARAKALPAK STATE UNIVERSITY,  
UZBEKISTAN.