

GENDERED LINGUISTIC STRATEGIES IN ONLINE EMOTIONAL DISCOURSE: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF MALE AND FEMALE DIGITAL COMMUNICATION

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Abstract

Digital communication is now one of the main locations of expressing emotions and formation of identities and relationships by using language. Gender has a significant role in influencing the linguistic choice in online communication which opens new possibilities of anonymity, reach of the audience and performativity. The current study discusses the use of explicit linguistic strategies in emotional communication via the internet by men and women and how explicit linguistic strategies are conditioned culturally and contextually. With the qualitative comparative design, 1,000 posts of various social media platforms were assessed using thematic and critical discourse analysis. It was focusing on pragmatic markers, emotional lexicon and styles of interaction within a cross-cultural context. There was more expressiveness and empathy among female users and assertive, humorous and evaluative tones were favored by male users. These trends were greatly shaped by cultural and contextual concerns which have exposed the flexibility in the expression of gender. The study emphasizes the fact that gendered linguistic techniques in the online world are socially constructed, context-specific and developing and they are indicative of the wider changes in digital communication and identity performance.

Introduction

Communication in the digital age has evolved to be no longer a face-to-face communication but mediated interaction online through social media, messaging programs, and online forums. These virtual environments have altered the way people express feelings, bargain identity as well as interact with other people in language. Linguistic patterns, emojis, punctuation, and linguistic patterns have become the essential elements of emotional communication previously limited by physical cues such as tone or gesture. In this dynamic communicative environment, the topic of gender differences in the expression of emotions has become a relevant sociolinguistic and discourse analysis

study. According to researchers like Herring and Stoerger (2014) and Holmes (2013), regardless of the fact that digital anonymity is uncovering traditional roles, gender is still a factor that affects communication norms online.

Although, gendered communication has been widely researched, a big part of the available studies is considered to be offline or oral. Nevertheless, the digital world is introducing new complications: the linguistic decisions are frequently shaped by the platform affording, the audience and the social norms. Online emotive discourse is not only expressive but performative in nature, it has to do with identity negotiation, power dynamics and social positioning. No comparative, discourse-based research exists

which analyses explicit linguistic means employed by men and women to manifest emotion on-line and conditioning of these by cultural and contextual parameters. The gap is important to discuss how it is possible to create and rebuild gender identities with the help of digital emotional discourse.

This study fits into a broader category of digital sociolinguistics and critical discourse analysis (CDA) with its contribution to the study of the gendered use of language on emotional online communication. It does not only transfer the previous studies in gender and language into the world of digital but also emphasizes the emotional expression as the prism that can be used to comprehend the social change. This research is informative to understand how men and women linguistically empathize, assert themselves, joke, and even solidify themselves in the context of the Internet by looking at comparative patterns by gender and cultural framework. The results have implications to digital literacy, gender equality, and cross cultural communication, providing educators, social media researchers and policymakers with a subtle insight on how gender norms are either replicated or subverted in the virtual spaces.

This study aims at the analysis of the naturally occurring online text, which include comments on social media, tweets as well as posts on discussion forums, concerning male and female users in the various cultural settings. The thematic and discourse analysis are used in the analysis to determine linguistic patterns and pragmatic strategies of expressing emotions. It is also restricted to communication in the English language, as it is hoped to be linguistically consistent, yet it recognizes that cultural conditioning is an important factor in linguistic choice.

1.1 Research Objectives:

- To compare the explicit linguistic strategies used by male and female users in digitalized emotional communication.
- To identify the extent and ways in which these strategies are conditioned contextually and culturally?

1.2 Research Questions:

1. What explicit linguistic strategies are used by male and female users in digitalized emotional communication?
2. To what extent and in what ways are these strategies conditioned culturally and contextually?

1. Literature Review

2.1 Gender, Emotion and Language

Sociolinguistics and gender discourse studies that have been conducted over time in understanding the difference between the use of language between men and women, particularly in terms of emotion. Indicatively, Babanoğlu (2015) discovered that in the sample of EFL speakers, the number of feeling/vocabulary acts of male speakers was indeed higher than that of females- a problem to the traditional assumptions. Meanwhile, more extensive work (Alba-Juez & Larina, 2018) also highlights the importance of discourse-pragmatic features that indicate the presence of emotion and gendered patterns in daily interaction. It is generally agreed that the female speakers are more likely to use affective adjectives, hedges and relational markers, whilst the male speakers might use more assertive, instrumental or evaluative words (Newman et al., 2008 as cited in Babanoğlu; also Cameron, 2008).

2.2 Gendered Internet Communication

With the spread of digital and online environments, gendered communication in computer-mediated communication (CMC) has become the topic of consideration. Herring and Stoerger (2014) point out that gender disparity still exists in online forums, blogs and texting. In a seminal study, Herring (1996) observed that in online discussion groups, men were more numerous and had different language functions although mixed results on the differences in linguistic styles were obtained. More recent research demonstrates that women employ more emojis, affective signs and collaborative language more on the web, whereas men prefer more direct, topic-oriented and action-oriented language (Woodson et al., 2025). In the world, Meirandani et al. (2025) discovered in Tik Tok/ Instagram data that women employed more emotional/collaborative words, as opposed to

men who employed fewer words which were direct.

2.3 Supportive, Expressive Emotionality and Web-based Systems

In particular, in emotional discourse, Rababah and Banikalef (2018) examined the Facebook statuses of Jordanian users and found that females used emotion significantly more than males. A gender-sensitive sentiment-analysis study of online teacher-education in the educational field revealed that there were gender differences in emotional climate. These results indicate the contextual (platform, cultural region, topic) conditions of the use of emotional language online.

2.4 Strategies in Language: Intensifiers, Politeness, Graphic Accents

Such language characteristics as intensifiers, hedging, tag-questions, emoticons/graphic accents were demonstrated to be gender-dependent. In online chatting in the Iraqi EFL setting, Hamood and Challob (2023) discovered that female students employed more strategies in politeness such as negative politeness in comparison with the male students. In another study in Pakistan, the researchers discovered that male students made more use of contractions and initialisms in text messages, whereas females made more use of letter/number homophones and emotive elements (Jahanzeb et al., 2022). These differences emphasize the fact that linguistic strategy (lexical/grammatical choice) is gendered in the digital world.

2.5 Cultural and Contextual Conditioning

Gendered language is contingent on both cultural norms and platform affordances. An example can be Li (2024), who studied Chinese undergraduates and discovered that gender differences in expressing emotions were not significant and indicated that cultural or contextual dominance was in effect. In addition, Rahmawati & Djuharie (2022) in the Indonesian WhatsApp groups found that men used direct concise language, whereas women used more expressive and polite forms. These analyses point to the fact that gendered linguistic strategies are mediated by contextual

conditioning, which includes culture, platform, audience, genre.

2.6 Digital Discourse Connotations on Emotion

Gendered tactics are relevant in digital emotional discourse: there are different ways of how the user is mediated by expectations of gendered behavior and technological affordances to express, soften, intensify or control emotion online. Indicatively, when talking about texting women use more emoticons, which can be understood as solidarity; men are briefer in their texting, which could be viewed as status or task orientation (Woodson et al., 2025). Platform norms, gender norms and emotional genre, interact in such a way as to constitute a dynamic field.

Although some baseline research has been done, there are a number of gaps that are pertinent to the subject: Numerous studies are done on generic gendered language or online communication in general; a smaller number target the use of emotional linguistic strategies (intensifiers, softeners, emotional lexicon) by gender in the domain of online communication (Taib & Suppiah, 2025). There is a lack of comparative research between cultures and platforms of emotional discourse. Limited literature exists about how the conditions of context (topic, audience, platform) mediate gendered emotional language in the online environment.

2. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study follows the approach of qualitative comparative research design because of the principles of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and socio-linguistic inquiry. It is aimed at the discussion of how linguistic strategies of expressing emotion are used by male and female users in a digital setting. The qualitative discourse analysis will allow the researcher to record subtle linguistic constructions, emotive manifestations and meanings that are hidden in a context and that otherwise quantitative procedures may fail to detect (Fairclough, 2010). Comparative orientation enables the determination of similarities and differences in

the style of communication between men and women in common online platforms.

3.2 Data Collection

The information was gathered from social media, including Twitter, Reddit and Facebook based on emotional content discussions, including reactions towards events in society, societal concerns and personal experiences. To be diverse in terms of the cultural background and tone of emotion, a purposive method of sampling was used. The data was extracted from (January 2025 to October 2025) comprising of approximately 1,000 comments (500 male, 500 female)). Gender identification was anchored on the publicly accessible profiles and linguistic features in accordance with the ethical standards of using anonymized data (Page, 2014). The texts were chosen according to the level of relevancy to an emotional expression of anger, empathy, sadness, or joy. Any comments with explicit hate speech, advertisement messages and uncertainty in gender identity identification were left out to have a clear and analytic validity.

3.3 Data Processing and Ethical Issues

All the chosen data was anonymized, and the names or other distinguishing parameters of the users were substituted with pseudonyms. The Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR) was adhered to in regards to ethical considerations and their ability to respect the digital consent and privacy (Markham & Buchanan, 2012).

3.4 Analytical Framework

A thematic discourse analysis strategy (Braun & Clarke, 2006) is used in the study, supplemented by the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) of Halliday to analyze the language use. Thematic analysis determines the presence of common strategies in language, whereas SFL allows one to classify the language functions like interpersonal meaning and appraisal (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Such emotional discourse is explored based on the choice of lexicon, emotive signals, hedging expressions, intensifier and metaphorical structure. There is also the theory of gendered communication by Tannen (1990), which can be viewed as a comparative one. Tannen claims that women use language to establish a connection and use language as

empathy whereas men use competitive or assertive forms of language. This model facilitates the way in which digital contexts reinforce or redefine such patterns.

3.5 Coding Procedure

The coding was conducted in three systematic coding phases:

Initial Coding: The texts were read repeatedly in order to determine linguistic clues in emotional expression (e.g. exclamations, intensifiers, emojis, hedges).

Axial Coding: Codes were classified into larger thematic groups that included; empathy and support, aggression and dominance, sarcasm and humor and vulnerability expression.

Choosing Coding: Final themes were narrowed to capture areas of underlying gendered discourse patterns and situational contextual forces like cultural norms or trigger events.

NVivo software made the coding process easy and it enabled the visualization of themes and easy comparison between gender categories and their tags.

3.6 Comparative Dimension

The comparative study was aimed at revealing frequency and role of linguistic strategies in emotional discourse of male and female. As an example, the speech of male users was examined as direct, assertive and evaluative but that of female users was studied as emotional, empathetic and relationship framing. This was done by examining the difference in emotional response to global and local problems as well as between Western and South Asian participants as a result of cultural and contextual conditioning.

3.7 Reliability and Validity

In a bid to improve inter-coder reliability, a second linguist went through a sample size of 10-percent of data coded, and there was above 85 percent agreement, thus, it was very consistent. Triangulation was brought about through the combination of linguistic interpretations with thematic interpretations and contextual interpretations. The methodological validity and interpretative richness of the analysis is enhanced by the use of the well-known theoretical frameworks i.e. the CDA, the SFL

and the gendered discourse theory (Wodak and Meyer, 2016).

This study has limitations despite the rigor of the methodology used. The gender information individuals provide about themselves in social media is not always in accordance with their real identity, which can have an impact on the results. Further, the gender cultural diversity can create overlaps in language behavior that would complicate binary differences. However, these limitations are offset by the comparative and contextual focus which focuses on patterns, as opposed to strict classifications.

4. Data Analysis

4.1 Emotional Expressivity and the Lexical Choices

One of the key results was that female users used a greater level of emotional transparency, with the tendency to use emotion words (I feel heartbroken, so happy, terribly anxious) more frequently, along with evaluative adjectives (amazing, beautiful, devastating, touching). Their discussion was more inclined towards anticipating subjectivity and relating to others. Male users in contrast were more implicit in their expression of emotion; these expressions were situational or action based and not explicit emotional descriptions. They included indications (hit hard, Couldn't believe it, That's rough) or the use of emojis as indirect displays of emotions. Whether their expression showed feelings or not, it seemed to be repressed or coded in a humorous, understated, or metaphoric way. Lexical analysis found that female discourse was more inclined to use affective adjectives and adverbs (really sad, deeply grateful, totally upset), whereas male discourse consisted of more verbs of reaction (hit, fight, deal, manage), as had been previously observed with women (respecting affective elaboration) and men (respecting control or evaluation) (Holmes, 2008; Newman et al., 2008).

Women of a collectivist culture (South Asian situations) employed more collective pronouns (we, us, our) and relational metaphor, (family, home, heart), but Western women resorted to individual emotional discourses (I am proud of myself, I am worthy of this). The trend of stoic

or task-oriented emotional expression was common among male users in any situation.

4.2 The strategies of Intensification and Softening

Intensifiers were resorted to by both genders differently. Adverbial intensifiers (so, really, totally, absolutely, reduplication) were also used by female users to enhance affective tone (sooo happy, really really sad). This level of intensification was used to create emotional solidarity and welcome empathy. Male participants, in their turn, were more dependent on colloquial forms of intensifiers (damn, super, kinda, bit too much) or metaphoric exaggeration (felt like getting punched in the face). These discourses were emotionally sincere and were able to uphold social conventions of manhood emotional restraint (Cameron, 2007). The gendering of softening devices was not only in the way hedges were used (perhaps, perhaps, I suppose, I think) by women and disclaimers (no offense, not meaning to sound emotional) by men, but also in the way apologies were diffused (sorry if that sounds too much). This imbalance demonstrates gender-specific politeness strategy where the hedging of the women helps them get a rapport and the disclaimers used by men preserve independence (Lakoff, 1975; Holmes, 1995).

4.3 Courtesy and Compassion Indicators

Women speakers were more positively polite oriented towards preserving social harmony and emotional support. They resorted to vocatives and relational markers very often: dear, sweetie, bro, sis, and supportive phrases (sending hugs, stay strong, proud of you). Such language signs served as approvals to common feeling and the strengthening of social bonds. The male users on the other hand showed solidarity by being funny, giving advice or sharing experience opposed to the open empathy. Comments such as hanging in there man, been there, dude or sarcasm were common. Although, less obvious, these types of support were cross-culturally acknowledged in male discourse groups as emotionally affiliative but face-saving (Coates, 2004).

The communication norms of every digital community influenced the development of the strategies of politeness. As an example, female

users in the Middle East and South Asia employed religious or culturally based empathy indicators (May Allah ease your pain, Stay blessed), whereas Western females were using secular indicators of emotional validation (You've got this, We're here for you). Male cultural users were more pragmatic and reassuring (It'll get better, Things happen, keep going).

4.4 The Use of Humor and Sarcasm in Emotional Negotiation

One of the important emotional control mechanisms was humor. Male users also used ironic distance or sarcasm to minimize vulnerability (Guess I am the emotional one now, Yeah, that went well- totally not a disaster), as a protecting mechanism and as an identity performance. Humor was also used differently by female users - frequently to self-demean or to identify with each other to normalize the expression of emotion (Cried again, shocker!, Why am I like this?). Therefore, humor turned out to be a gendered discursive asset; men humor built up strength, women humor built up interrelatedness. Humor patterns were also cross-culturally different, where western male users tended to be sarcastic, whereas South Asian males tended to be teasing or metaphorically humorous. The adaptive humor styles were observed in female users across cultures who balanced seriousness and light-heartedness to keep themselves engaged and empathetic.

4.5 Cultural Conditioning and Active Adaptation

This analysis showed that gendered emotional discourse is highly contextual as well as culturally conditioned. In collectivist cultures (Pakistan, India, and the Arab world), women users showed communal empathy and emotion sharing as a moral practice -emotion displayed to maintain relations but not self-expression. On the other hand, the western female users were more likely to attribute emotion to self-assertive discourse, which corresponded to individualist rules of authenticity and self-disclosure (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). The discourse of the male users was more culturally consistent in all circumstances, emotional restraint, instrumental

focus, and humor were the coping strategies. Nevertheless, men in collectivist societies added contextual honor indicators (brother, sir, respect) to maintain social order even in emotional situations. Also, the expression of emotions was also mediated by digital affordance like emojis, GIFs, and hashtags. Women were using these tools to increase empathy (#grateful #love) and men used them to be ironic or humorous (strenght act #whatever #movingon). This reinforces the point of view that technology environment interacts with the gender norms to influence emotional performance (Kiesling, 2005; Herring & Paolillo, 2006).

4.6 Thematic Interpretation

The cross-comparison brings out the way in which gender is a linguistic and cultural construction in online emotional talk. Linguistic strategies of women focus on the appeals to connection, empathy, and self-disclosure, whereas those of men focus on the appeals to control, humor, and implicit affect. Such results confirm the difference theory of gendered communication (Tannen, 1994) but also follow the view of social constructionists that the digital world can offer more fluid gender roles than face-to-face communication (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). Noteworthy, emotional talk on the internet is not an easy manifestation of biological difference as a discursive act that depends on cultural, contextual and platform standards. Women tend to be expressive in a way that conforms to communal perceptions of compassion, and men combine the emotional expression with the approved forms of masculinity. In general, the use of emotional language in the Internet shows the spectrum of expressivity: between expressive and expressive affect on one side and coded or enacted expression of emotion on the other, indicating not only gender identity but also culture present in the discourse of the Internet.

5. Findings and Discussion

The digital emotional language analysis of 1,000 social media messages (500 male, 500 female) indicated the differences and similarities in employing language strategies in the digital emotional communication. Using thematic discourse analysis, four prevailing themes were

determined: (1) Affective Expression and Strength., (2) Empathy and Relational framing., (3) Assertiveness and Display of Power. and (4) Cultural Conditioning of Emotional Language. Both themes bring out the interaction of gender, culture, and context in influencing the linguistic expression of online communication.

5.1 Emotional Expression and Intensity

Both men and women users were involved in high emotional intensity in the expression of the intense feelings like anger, joy or grief. Nonetheless, females had a wider emotional palette, frequently using intensifiers and emotive modifiers and exclamation marks to increase the intensity of the emotions (how heartbreaking!!!, I can feel very moved). These results can be compared to the idea of rapport talk as proposed by Tannen (1990) according to which the language behavior of women is focused on connection and sharing emotions.

However, male users tended to employ more of the evaluative or performative statements that were used to express emotion in the form of commentary and less vulnerability (That is pathetic, This is ridiculous). This is in line with the prior results that the discourse of men can be judgmental or rationalizing but not necessarily overtly affective (Coates, 2015). However, in the political or sport setting, male participants also employed humor and sarcasm as the means of emotional release, indicating that online platforms can offer other platforms of indirect emotional communication.

5.2 Empathy and Relational Framing

Female participants exhibited strong adherence to empathic signs and solidarity-enhancing techniques, including the use of inclusive pronouns (we, us), softeners (maybe, I think, emoticons) of support or understanding. These phrases contribute to the gendered bias of preserving the balance of relationships and social integrity (Lakoff, 1975; Holmes, 2013). In emotional posts, including those mentioning sorrow or social injustice, female users often reacted with words representing group sympathy, placing themselves in the position of being empathetic to other users. Conversely, male users were more likely to use detached framing, as they were usually concerned with

factual evaluation or argument, but not with emotional reciprocity. However, when dealing with common frustration (political outrage), men would adopt group language to create group identity, and this entails a context-specific empathy, which is manifested in solidarity and not sentimentality.

5.3 Assertiveness and Power Display

Male speech tended to display aspects of power of language, which consisted of commands, indicators of certainty and confrontation. It was typical to say such things as You are not listening to the point, or It is so obvious what is going on here, showing that one was assertive and took charge of the flow of conversation. This is an indication of the tendency of report talk (Tannen, 1990) where men employ communication to demonstrate power and preserve status. Nevertheless, there seemed to be some boundaries that the digital medium disrupted. As well, female users used assertive forms particularly when talking about social or political injustice. This change can be signaled by a contextual equalization effect (Herring & Stoerger, 2014), when anonymity and a certain level of publicity on the internet stimulate women to use more confident language patterns that were traditionally regarded as male discourse. The platform and the topic thus play a major mediating role on gendered use of language.

5.4 Emotional Language Cultural Conditioning

The results showed that emotional discourse is heavily influenced by cultural context. Politeness strategies and indirect emotional expression were found in female users of collectivist cultures (South Asia, the Middle East) where the culture required modesty and restraint (Hofstede, 2001). Western female users, in turn, were more emotional, focusing on personal agency and authenticity.

Equally, Western males were more confrontational than their collectivist counterparts who employed humor or irony to mask criticism. These are the differences which confirm that gendered linguistic behavior is not universal but it is contextually rooted within the wider cultural communication norms.

In general, the discussion confirms that gendered linguistic strategies are not fixed biologically but mediated by a culture and context-dependent. Although women talk in a more emphatic and affective way, and men in a more assertive and detached way, the internet provides new communication styles that are hybrids of both. The digital requirements of visibility, brevity, and performance are accommodated by both genders, and new discursive identities are provided by culture of platforms (Page, 2014). This study is in line with other sociolinguistic studies that question the dichotomy of gender and language application (Cameron, 2008). Internet spaces serve as sites of discursive bargaining, in which the emotional expressivity is mediated by technological capability, cultural norms and the performance of identity. The results can then be used to comprehend the way, in which digital communication re-creates the gender norms, and it might be that, gradually, the styles of expressiveness are going to be moved closer together through the effect of the digital mediation.

6. Conclusion

The current research aimed to find out how explicit linguistic strategies are used by male and female users in digitalized emotional communication and how explicit linguistic strategies are culturally and situationally conditioned. The study found through a qualitative and comparative discourse analysis of 1,000 social media posts that gender expression of emotion in the online space is unique and moving in its dynamics and is more representative of the general trends in society and the development of digital identity. The results prove that the female ones are more likely to use emotional expressive, empathetic and relational linguistic patterns, with a tendency to focus on solidarity, mutual sympathy and supportive communication. However, male users showed favor to assertive, evaluative, and performative linguistic strategies, whereby, control, humor, or rational commentary are often considered as priority. Nevertheless, it was also observed that there was a high amount of overlap and flexibility in the research, which implies that gendered communication online

does not necessarily rely on the classical binaries. Online spaces, which provide both sexes with choices on expressive or assertive modes based on the subject, audience, and culture context, have offered an opportunity to both sexes.

One of the major lessons of this study is that emotional discourse is strongly derived through cultural and contextual conditioning. The gender of the participants in the collectivist culture, both men and women, were more inclined to restrain emotions, preferring politeness and indirectness, but the people in individualistic settings were more open and expressive. This indicates that, gendered linguistic behavior would not be examined in isolation of the cultural and digital ecologies that it is practiced. Online platforms with their anonymity and immediacy also have an effect on the process of negotiation of emotional authenticity and social norms among the users. The study adds to the existing research on digital sociolinguistics, gender discourse, and critical discourse analysis and demonstrates how emotional language online is an effective identity, sympathy, and resistance marker. It helps researchers like Cameron (2008) and Herring and Stoerger (2014) maintain that gendered language is culturally, but not biologically, fixed. To sum up, digital communication is changing how gender and emotion intersect in language. The line between the masculine and feminine linguistic patterns is getting more and more permeable, exposing a shifting range of expressive modes. Further studies would build on the findings by studying nonbinary and cross-cultural users and including multimodal features like images, emojis, and videos to learn more about how emotion is expressed in digital contexts beyond text.

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