34. Comparing Language Use across Gender In Blogs

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ABSTRACT
This study aimed to compare the language use across gender in blogs. The 10 blog posts from 10 bloggers were randomly taken from www.blogmalaysia.com. The data were analysed by using content analysis, SPSS, Character and Word Counter with Frequency Statistics Calculator and checklist. The findings show that there is a feature of language which is intensifiers can be found in the blog posts. The results explained that male bloggers used more intensifiers, in their posts as compared to female. From both frequency and test results, it can be concluded that male bloggers used intensifiers more than female bloggers. The results of this study indicate that male bloggers prefer to use intensifiers such as very, quite, rather, so, too, really, just and such more in their blogs. In other words, it implies that male bloggers language use is wiser than female bloggers.

Keywords: Gender, blogs, language features, intensifiers

Background of the Study
The society believes that men and women act and behave differently in portraying their masculinity and femininity. Masculine and feminine are socially operates terms of two genders, male and female. Both masculine and male are represented different notion. Masculine refers to biology and male refers to identity. The existence of masculinity is important in completing a human called man. Hearn and Kimmel (2006) state that masculinity or femininity is not exclusively biological but the concept has been created by the society and the surroundings we live in. Various ways of representing both masculine and feminine, i.e. voice, physical appearance and behaviour. It is also associated with a deep voice, way of walking and the posture.

Therefore, blog is one of the suitable methods in order to study the differences of language use between men and women. A blog, which is updated on a regular basis by an author, is also known as weblog. It can contain information related to a specific topic. Some people used blogs as their daily diaries to share about personal lives, views on political issues or even as social commentaries. Blogs can be shaped into anything that the author wants them to be. It can give the opportunities to the author to write content that is unique to them. Having blog can give the author an occasion to interact with their visitors while promoting who you are and what you do. Todays’ blogs are being used for all sorts of purposes. Some companies use blogs to communicate and interact with customers and other stake holders while newspapers incorporate blogs to their main website to offer a new channel for their writers. Individuals also created blogs to share with their world their knowledge on specific topics.

Blogs have been invented in the late 1990s even it did not become notorious until the in anticipation of free software program which made it easy for everyone to set a blog online (Dominick, 2007). Blogs started since mid-1999 and since then the popularity of these blogs increase dramatically. As mentioned by Roy (2012), there are about 612 million websites in the world today, which is a rise of 30 million since February 2012. However only 185 million sites are still active and the rest are remaining as inactive sites. In Malaysia, it is estimated that half a million blogs existed (Johan, 2008). Based on the survey conducted by Pew Internet and American Life Project, a new blog is being created every 5.8 second. Blogs claim to give momentum and act as powerful organizing tools in making public shape their opinions and influence their behaviour.

In blogs, people normally share their stories as they treat blogs as their diaries and think that blog is a pivate place for them to express their feelings. Even if the language that they use is not proper, inappropriate to the context, they could not care less about it. This issue is interesting to be investigated as male and female use language differently in their writing. Rosseti (1998) conducted a research on gender showed that men were interested in sharing their personal point of view in order to
show the authoritative involvement to the discussion rather than interested in the involvement itself which prefer by women.

Women feel better to use expressions which show their support, appreciation and thanks in strengthening the relationship with the readers contrast with men, who choose to use tighter and less direct expressions. In addition, the unique pattern of discourse within the blogs, the combination of monologue and dialogue in a space-bound, electronic environment are the reflection of the language used by bloggers. Some studies shows that male and female bloggers tend to use few language features in their blogs. However, the frequency is different for each blogger. Thus, the purpose of this study was to compare language use across gender in blogs.

The present study was conducted in order to investigate the difference in the length of posts by female and male bloggers. The study also sought to examine the common language features produced by Malaysian bloggers and the differences in using the intensifiers in their blog posts. This study was derived from the previous study conducted by Zaini Amir et al. in early 2012. This study mainly involved the adult male and female bloggers who maintained their blogs for at least one year.

The theories involved are language and gender theories by Robin Lakoff’s hypothesis of women’s language (1975); Dale Spender’s 1980 claim on language is ‘man made’; Otto Jespersen’s 1922 published ideas about women’s language; and women’s cooperative discourse by Jennifer Coates (1996), and gender and online discourse which includes Computer Mediated Communication (CMC).

Table 1.1
Basic Assumptions of Women’s Language (Lakoff, 1975)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assumptions</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use more intensifiers</td>
<td>intonational emphasis equal to underlining words (so, very, quite)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Jespersen (1922) published a set of ideas about women’s language and it included women talk a lot, use half-finished sentences because they speak before they have thought about what they will say, link sentences with ‘and’ because they are emotional rather than ‘grammatical’, and women have a smaller vocabulary than men. Lakoff’s hypothesis (1975) also supports Jespersen’s in terms of women use adjectives such as ‘pretty’ and ‘nice’ too much, and uses adverbs more than men.

**Literature Review**

An article by Westin (n.d.) found that there are two theories exist in order to explain dissimilarity of male and female language. The first theory stated that women use language to confirm their subordination while men use language to dominate. The second theory proposed the language used by male and female were based on the reality of being a part of very different subculture and having different life experiences. However, these matters do not make male or female language superior or vice versa, just different.

Women and men have been taught to speak differently since young where girls should speak in passive voice and active voice or ‘rough talk’ always related to boys (Zaini et al., 2012). As a result, empty adjectives, qualifiers, intensifiers, hedges, tag questions, and polite forms are often used by women.

In addition, Jespersen (1922, as cited in Zaini et al., 2012) stated that women normally have smaller vocabularies, extensively make use of certain adjectives and adverbs, more often break off without finishing their sentences compared to men because they like to talk without having thought of what they are going to say, and produce less complex sentence. In mixed gender communication, which involves women and men, it can be seen that women would take turn to speak, supporting other’s opinions, complementing them, and trying to avoid interrupting others, while men could switch topics easily.

A study carried out by Olsson (2000) who applied Jespersen, Crawford, and Lakoff’s theory (1995) on men and women language and used their characteristics in analysing the data. She found
that though differences of language used do exist by women and men and these differences differ due to the different types of discourse and other factors. In addition, the study of gender differences by Jones and Myhill (2007) focussed on specific linguistic characteristics: usage of adverbials, same words repetition especially nouns, and the use of hyponyms and synonyms, proved that there were slightly noticeable differences in language use between the sexes.

In the Malaysian context, Akmaliah (2009) carried out a study on language use by female Malaysian bloggers and the focus was on undergraduate female students (between 20 to 23 years old who frequently update their blogs. By using Friendster and BlogSpot as her baseline data, she identified only four features of language in accordance with Lakoff’s (1975) features and the features are lexical hedges, tag questions, intensifiers, and avoidance of taboo language. Therefore, she concluded that lexical hedges, intensifiers and tag questions which appeared in female blog posts were consistent to Lakoff’s theory.

The issues which related with gender do exist online. Gunn (2003, as cited in Huffaker, 2004) stated that there were disagreements on gender differences in CMC. Women were believed to have lack of knowledge about the Internet due to social-cultural reproductions, lack of knowledge in accessing the technology or even lower in technology confidence (Huffaker, 2004).

A research by Jaffe, Lee, Huang and Oshagan (1995) noted that when women were given the opportunity to be online, they prefer to hide their gender within CMC context. One convincing reason may be it is due to sexual harrassment or a fear of being stalked by males. Another reason by Herring (1993) is the tendency of being bullied by male participants or being dominated by them.

Scocco (n.d.) defined blogs as types of websites and has its own features different from other websites such as the content is published in a chronological order, updated regularly, and probability for readers to leave comments. The Internet is changing so fast and yet blogs seems to represent a social phenomenon. Nowson (2006) also agreed that blogs are the frequently updated webpages where the posts are in reverse chronological order and the language used is less formal. Through informal writing, blogs encourage creativity, self-expression, ownership, and community building (Levy, 2009). The use of blogs has developed students’ writing skills in language learning. These allow the readers or even the bloggers to learn from each other in terms of grammar and structure, ideas, and organizations of the essays. They work collaboratively when they use the blogs as a two-way communication (Shahsavar & Tan, 2011).

**Methodology**

This study was designed based on qualitative research design by using a case study approach which focuses on a group of people who perform the same activity within a specific time. The blogs which have been chosen for the purpose of this study have been created and maintained over a year. This study was conducted to compare the language use across gender in blogs.

10 participants (5 males and 5 females) were involved in the present study. The participants were selected from BlogMalaysia.com. which is the platform of Malaysian Blogger’s Directory. The focus of this study is to observe the language use of different gender in Malaysia, so blogs such as blogs with multiple authors, blogs with pictures only and blogs which are only for commercial and organizational purposes were excluded from the study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Blogs</th>
<th>Abbreviation in this study</th>
<th>First post</th>
<th>Total no. of posts</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://amieymisme.blogspot.com/">http://amieymisme.blogspot.com/</a></td>
<td>B1</td>
<td>January 2009</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://vanessajezamine.blogspot.com/">http://vanessajezamine.blogspot.com/</a></td>
<td>B2</td>
<td>September 2007</td>
<td>560</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.mymaurica.com/">http://www.mymaurica.com/</a></td>
<td>B3</td>
<td>May 2011</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://secretnicki.blogspot.com/">http://secretnicki.blogspot.com/</a></td>
<td>B4</td>
<td>November 2008</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.lifeafterfive.blogspot.com/">http://www.lifeafterfive.blogspot.com/</a></td>
<td>B5</td>
<td>May 2007</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://kaevin.blogspot.com/">http://kaevin.blogspot.com/</a></td>
<td>B6</td>
<td>November 2010</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://harrycentury.blogspot.com/">http://harrycentury.blogspot.com/</a></td>
<td>B7</td>
<td>December 2006</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The participants were grouped into two groups: Male bloggers and Female bloggers. Each group is comprised of 5 participants. Group 1 involved 5 female bloggers while Group 2 involved 5 male bloggers. The female bloggers were named as B1, B2, B3, B4 and B5 while male bloggers, B6, B7, B8, B9 and B10. Ten postings from each participant were selected as the materials in collecting data. Ten entries of each blog will be analyzed by using a word counting tool and a checklist. A word counting tool and a checklist are used in order to gather the information for the purpose of this study.

The blogs were chosen from BlogMalaysia.com, http://blogmalaysia.com/. It is free and the fastest growing blog directory in Malaysia. There are 27 categories in this website which range from topics on academic to travel. At the initial stage, 20 blogs were found to be registered in BlogMalaysia.com but after a screening process and due to invalidity with the researcher criterion of the blogs, only 10 blogs were taken into account. There are five male bloggers and five female bloggers. Both genders were selected because the researcher needs to compare gender and language use in Malaysian bloggers’ writing.

A word counting tool is used to count the frequency of words that are listed as having the identified characteristics of the language used by the participants in their postings. This tool, Character and Word Counter with Frequency Statistics Calculator (see Figure 3.1) is used to count the frequency of occurrences of the characteristics in blog postings. Computer Support Group (CSG) created this tool and it is very useful for web designers to improve their sites, as well as for the students.

![Character and Word Counter with Frequency Statistics Calculator](image)

The checklist was used as a tool to assist in the process of observing the blogs. Using the checklist, researchers identified the occurrence of each language characteristics in the blog postings over a period of one year. It consist of language characteristic which were adapted from Jespersen (1922), and Lakoff (1975). The analysis was done by using content analysis by looking at the checklist after the frequency of occurrences of each characteristic in blog postings were calculated by

<table>
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<th>First post</th>
<th>Total no. of posts</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://bem69.blogspot.com/">http://bem69.blogspot.com/</a></td>
<td>B8</td>
<td>April 2009</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://perrylim.blogspot.com/">http://perrylim.blogspot.com/</a></td>
<td>B9</td>
<td>June 2008</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://vincephilosophy.com/">http://vincephilosophy.com/</a></td>
<td>B10</td>
<td>November 2008</td>
<td>378</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
using Character and Word Counter with Frequency Statistics Calculator. The checklists were used in arranging the data collected from the blog postings.

a. Checklist 1 – Length of the blog posts
b. Checklist 2 – Frequency of blog posts by bloggers
c. Checklist 3 – Frequency of language features used by female bloggers
d. Checklist 4 – Frequency of language features use by male bloggers
e. Checklist 5 – Differences in language features used in blogs
f. Checklist 6 - Intensifiers used by female bloggers
g. Checklist 7 – Intensifiers used by male bloggers

In addition, to check the significance value of each language feature, the researcher used Pearson Chi-Square tests from IBM SPSS Statistic. p.value of each feature must be less than 0.05. If the p.value is more than 0.05, it can be concluded that the data is not significant. Whereas if the p.value less than 0.05, the data is significant.

Figure 3.2
Print screen of IBM SPSS Statistics

Results and Discussion

The length of blog posts was analysed by using content analysis and the checklist. Ten blogs were selected for analysis. The data were collected from ten postings from each blog site. The first analysis was the calculation of the length of ten blog posts and the average length of words per post.
B1, B2, B3, B4 and B5 were the female bloggers while B6, B7, B8, B9, and B10 were male bloggers. The highest total number of words among participants was B10 who wrote 6474 words for ten postings. Out of ten participants, B6 wrote the least, with 2332 words for ten postings. Both B10 and B6 were male bloggers.

In terms of total words written, male bloggers accounted for nearly 18,891 words and female bloggers, 18,881 words. There was a slight different between the score of both genders, which is 10 words or 0.03%. The average numbers of words per individual post is between 265.9 to 452.7 for female and 233.2 to 647.4 for male.

However, when we analyse the frequency of blog posts by bloggers, we noticed that B2, which is a female blogger, posted 560 posts since she started blogging in September 2007. In comparison with B6, a male blogger, he posted only 38 posts since November 2010. Even though they started blogging in the different year, B2 has shown that she kept updating her blogs compared to B6. On average, B2 posted 8.1 posts in a month compared to B6, only 1.1 posts per month. The frequency of blog posts by bloggers indicates that female bloggers posted more posts than male.

In general, men write more than women. Jespersen (1992) stated that women have a smaller vocabulary and what vocabulary they do have is not always used properly. The difference in total number of words of male and female blogs in this study might be due to this. Another study which supported Jespersen’s is by Herring (2000) where she has found that women generated shorter posts than men to discussion lists and news groups.

This study identified one common language feature: intensifiers. Once the common language feature used in blogs were determined, the frequency of occurrence of intensifiers was counted. Female bloggers scored the highest user of intensifiers. Female bloggers used 317 intensifiers in their ten posts. The highest user of intensifiers was B4 (n=76). B1 and B3 (n=2), B4 (n=7) and B2 with 8 times used this feature. Intensifiers scored the highest appearances in ten blog posts.

Table 4.1
The frequency of language features use by female bloggers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language features</th>
<th>B1</th>
<th>B2</th>
<th>B3</th>
<th>B4</th>
<th>B5</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intensifiers</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>317</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Intensifiers as claimed by Lakoff (1975) are women’s language although in this study it has shown that male used it more. However, the difference was very tiny. This may be due to the length of the posts which differ across gender.

The effects of gender and language use to Malaysian blogger’s writing were assessed by using content analysis and the checklist. The results which were the frequency of each language feature use by male and female bloggers were presented and further discussed in this section.

Below are the results of language features used according to gender. Lakoff (1975) labelled intensifiers as a part of hedging where it weakens the speaker’s feeling in language though Zaini et al., (2012) defined intensifiers act as a enhancing tool in language. There were nine intensifiers that the researcher looked at: “very”, “quite”, “rather”, “so”, “too”, “really”, “just”, “pretty” and “such”.

B4 had a higher usage of intensifiers (n=76) compared to the other female bloggers. The difference in the frequency can be accounted for by the difference in the total number of words in 10 posts. B4 wrote 4527 words in 10 posts while the other female bloggers basically wrote 2659 to 4198 words in 10 posts. The differences in total words in 10 posts may explain the reduced occurrence of intensifiers.

On the other hand, males bloggers (B6, B7, B8, B9 and B10) used intensifiers more frequently than female bloggers in their 10 postings with B10 recording the highest number of occurrences (n=113) followed by B9 (n=102). There were only minor differences in the number (n). The frequency of occurrences of intensifiers is higher in blogs written by males (n=428) than those written by females (n=317).
Table 4.2
The frequency of language features use by male bloggers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language features</th>
<th>Bloggers</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B6</td>
<td>B7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intensifiers</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In comparison as shown in Table 4.3, male used 57.5% intensifiers in their blogs compared to female with 42.5%. From the chi-square test, there is significant difference in the number of intensifiers used by male and female bloggers. This is because the p.Value is less than 0.05. This shows that male bloggers use intensifiers more than female bloggers.

Table 4.3
Differences of language features used in blogs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language features</th>
<th>Female Bloggers</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
<th>Male Bloggers</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intensifiers</td>
<td>317</td>
<td>42.5</td>
<td>428</td>
<td>57.5</td>
<td>745</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lakoff (1975) stated that different and unequal roles and status are reflected by gender differences in language use. Women are pressured to talk like a lady due to the lower status of them in society. Therefore, supposedly women using more intensifiers compared to men. Men and women use the language use the language according to the society beliefs on how both genders should communicate. However, the result in this study has shown that male bloggers used more intensifiers in their postings. The use of intensifier ‘so’, is more frequent in women language than men language, though certainly men use it (Lakoff, 1975). Intensifiers are words which are used to add force to the meaning of verbs, adjectives or other adverbs. Coates (1986) noted that Lakoff’s assumptions of women’s language was a claim based on no empirical evidence, as a result, the is no wrong or right if male bloggers used hedges and intensifiers more than female bloggers do.

Conclusion

Basically, intensifiers is one of the features of language that emerge from blogs. This feature is matched with Lakoff’s (1975) theory. Based on this study, male bloggers used intensifiers more than female bloggers. The use of intensifiers is to add force to the meaning of verbs, adjectives or other adverbs and it also indicate that a speaker does not want to give up his or her speaking yet (Baalen, 2001).

This study was experienced with certain limitations. The first limitation was on the small number of participants involved in this study as only five male bloggers and five female bloggers. The other constraint is the use of proper English in writing. The second limitation is time constraint. This type of study needs a long duration of time in order to collect the data. The third limitation is the study was confined only to the blog entries that existed in the blogosphere during the research period. The findings would be interesting if the researcher selects more blogs from different groups for this study.

Based on the findings of the present study, it is shown that blogs can differentiate the language use among gender. Blogs had the facility to minimize the time consumed for any researchers to analyzing the data because it only involves blogs and there is no need of seeking time for interview, developing pilot test or even to find the participants to get involved in the study.

On the other hand, there are other features of language do exist in blogs. It includes the use of tag questions, hedges, empty adjectives, adverbs, pronouns and taboo language. The present study only limit to one language feature: intensifiers, as proposed by Lakoff (1975). By looking at these
features, assumptions of whether the bloggers use the same pattern of language features in their spoken language or not, can trigger others too. Although this study is about the written language in blogs, it would rather somehow affect the other skills too.

This study is expected to contribute to the field of education by bringing attention to blogs as another alternative that is applicable for English language learning. It is hoped that blogs can be a part of learning material in school.

This study can be further studied based on the recommendation explained in this chapter. Firstly, the number of participants needs to be more than 50 bloggers. The second recommendation is the ideal duration and gaps involve in collecting data. In addition, blogs deserve further exploration by scholars. They are important for technologists, teachers, parents and researchers who are interested in computer mediated communication, online communities, children and technology, and adolescent development. In future work, we should explore how well such models carry over to gender identification in other informal online genres such as chat and forum comments.

References


