

## LANGUAGE AND GENDER: EXPLORING SOCIO-CULTURAL FUNCTION

### BAHASA DAN GENDER: MEMAHAMI FUNGSI SOSIAL BUDAYA

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#### Abstract

*There have been numerous studies investigating the relationship between language and gender. Some of the studies aim at analyzing language differences used by men and women on some features such as syntax, lexicon, phonology, and conversation analysis. Meanwhile, the others focus on the leverage of gender differences related to establishing and controlling the power inequality. This paper attempts to explore socio-cultural function inclusion in language development studies. This study was ethnographic classroom in nature, observing two student classes of Cirebon Invada High School. For detailed analysis, their mixed-gender classroom conversations were thoroughly chosen employing dynamic approach for a more inclusive socio-cultural function. The result of the study reveals that power cannot be built through gender differences without social aspects between both genders. Social dimensions namely functionality, economic status, power, network, and identity significantly affect language users in mixed talks. The respect for each other is salient, meanwhile, talk dominance is moderately declining. This indicates that gender is not the key factor in language uses differences, there is also another determinant factor such as social dimension. In pedagogy, these findings made a major contribution to an educational institution and all language learning activities particularly to the English language teaching activity by providing a balance treatment to both gender.*

**Keywords:** *gender and language, socio-cultural, mixed talk*

#### Abstrak

Telah banyak studi yang meneliti hubungan antara bahasa dan gender. Beberapa di antaranya ditujukan untuk menganalisis perbedaan bahasa yang digunakan oleh laki-laki dan perempuan yang didasarkan pada aspek sintaksis, leksikal, fonologi, dan analisis percakapan. Sementara itu, penelitian yang lain fokus pada pengaruh perbedaan gender berkaitan dengan kesenjangan kekuasaan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menggali aspek fungsi sosial budaya yang mencakup studi perkembangan bahasa. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan etnografi kelas, melakukan observasi terhadap dua kelas di lingkungan Sekolah Tinggi Invada. Untuk melakukan analisis secara mendalam, percakapan di dalam kelas yang terdiri atas campuran dua gender dipilih dengan menggunakan pendekatan dinamis yang mencakup fungsi sosial budaya. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa kekuasaan tidak dapat dibangun melalui perbedaan gender tanpa adanya aspek sosial di antara kedua gender. Dimensi sosial di antaranya yaitu fungsi, status ekonomi, kekuasaan, jaringan, dan identitas sangat mempengaruhi pengguna bahasa dalam suatu percakapan yang terdiri atas campuran dua gender. Upaya saling

menghargai begitu menonjol. Sementara itu, dominasi percakapan menjadi berkurang. Hal tersebut menunjukkan bahwa gender bukanlah faktor kunci dalam perbedaan penggunaan bahasa, sedangkan faktor lain yang menentukan yaitu dimensi sosial. Dalam pedagogi, temuan ini diharapkan dapat memberikan kontribusi terhadap institusi pendidikan dan semua aktivitas pembelajaran bahasa terutama untuk kegiatan proses belajar mengajar bahasa Inggris dengan memberikan perlakuan yang merata terhadap kedua gender.

**Kata Kunci:** *gender dan bahasa, sosial budaya, percakapan campuran*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Language studies have gradually broadened throughout the last decades. The variety aspects of language under analysis keep evolving steadily exploring the wide range of interdisciplinary subjects related to language. A great relationship between gender and language use has generated a fervent debate and has been one of the intriguing discussions among linguists. Some of the researchers consider that a certain language has been determined by the regional and national culture and thought peculiarities, meanwhile the others believe that it is the language itself which builds a basis for cognition and perception (Alhumaid, 2017). These perceptions are contemplated in the socio-cultural studies which lead the discussion on the construction of social concept.

A large number of studies concerning with language have been conducted on the gender-based language from various aspects. The studies have evidently revealed that the result shifted based on certain variables under study. Consequently, it is difficult to make any generalization in the area of gender-based language study due to numerous variables on language. Some of the prime determinant variables that have been examined on previous studies comprise communication training (Cameron, 1994), sex differences in speech (Dubois, B., & Crouch, 1975), gender differences in linguistic form usage (Nemati, A., & Bayer, 2007), German and American Academic style (Schleef, 2009), Behavioural science (Speer, 2005), gender struggle (Hilaldo, Zaindy Roby; Suwargono Eko; Wardani, 2019). More importantly, considering the fact that women and men have a lot of differences on biological and different thought system, so it is open for any interpretation and research regarding to gender-based language study. Under such circumstances, since the study of language and gender are tremendous area, the theoretical foundation disclose distinction on perspective and results.

In this study, gender is not contextually accounted for as sex or biological distinction. By way of contrast, this paper strives for the comprehension of gender to be conceptualized in the framework of a social construct and cultural traits for women and men in a particular society. This concept is in line with (Coates, 2004) who postulated that gender refers to the sex variety which is formulated socially. The gender concept sheds light on the characteristics and attributions of one sex group that is the transformation from female and male into social women and men; more importantly, some roles, cultural values, and behaviours are attributed to them which are considered to be appropriate by a certain social group (Bonvillian & Siedlecki, 2000; Cameron, 2006). The repertoires of particular features or participants' speech habits occurring in the research site taken as the object of the study.

One of the most significant discussions of this study in social science is contributing some innovative strategies to create a learning program at educational institution. It is to shine

new light on managing, controlling, and building equal treatment of male and female language learner's communicative skill. This ethnographic study seeks to examine the changing nature of gender and language to illuminate the gaps between men and women in a particular cultural group. More precisely, this paper intends to determine underlying principle in communication between male and female and to investigate influential factors underlying the differences.

Some of the interesting questions in this context are proposed namely to what extent do both genders use the Cirebonese language distinctively? and, what could influence the distinction? These questions are of central interest as much recent research in gender-based language.

This article employs the Vygotskian socio-cultural theory; whereas, there are a large number of theoretical approaches deployed into language studies. The proponents of this theory state that the mediation one made in a particular circumstance influences the development of one's cognition. More specifically, the dimension affecting that milieu itself is culture in addition to cultural objects, concept, context, language, and social interaction (Johnson & Golombek, 2011). Consequently, such mediation leads to reveal some differences across genders.

For decades, one of the most popular ideas in analysing human language development literature is the idea that the analytical approach being used has changed recently onto genetic analysis as socio-cultural theorist. In this case, (Cross, 2010) argues that there has been a significant shift in investigating language development. It moves from the field of descriptive inquiry to a genetic one. In regard to this approach, there are some domains out of the cognition area that have been taken into consideration such as contextual learning, the availability of peers to support (Cullen, 2002; Donato, 2000).

Seminal contributions have been made related to the study which has been conducted more complete and whole of socio-cultural effects. For instance, P.J Caplan, Crawford, J.S Hyde (1997) examines some factors such as cultural values and concept which have a great influence on human cognition. This study has been established when the studies have shifted orientation from biological aspects moved forward to socio-cultural domains in the construction of one's gender (Cameron, 2005).

## **METHOD**

This study employs an ethnographic fieldwork attempting to explore at academic-situated lives of students, and also look at naturally occurring phenomena. A reason for deploying an ethnographic approach due to because the researcher immersed himself for the whole year in that academic community. Consequently, he can see what was originally occurring in the classroom and at campus cause of that self-immersion (Feldman, 2011). The data for this research were primarily taken from the classroom interaction amongst students at STIBA Invada comprising two classes which were selected purposively. On the basis of informed consent, the students acknowledged to be audio taped. To avoid bias, the research topic was not completely described to anticipate their discourse behaviour became unnatural. In other words, they tended to control and modify their behaviour just in case they knew the occurring phenomena being observed. When the present study was conducted, they were in

the second year of academic year. They came from different background of family and socio-economic status such as entrepreneurs, government worker, teacher, casual workers, farmer.

It took about 5 hours of 5 teaching visits to collect the data. In the purpose of data analysis, two categories were made to examine the extracted data very carefully in order to discover information, namely expression in Cirebonese language and mixed talks comprising two genders. In this paper, the data transcription had been transcribed into English translation, then they were analysed using an established technique, namely analytic induction through recursive cycles such as data condensation, data display, and data verification and conclusion (Miles, et al., 2013). In the process of data condensation, the whole data of mixed talks in Cirebonese language were classified based on some socio-cultural aspects influencing the conversations. On the step of data display, an in-depth analysis was conducted on the classified data to generate temporary rational explanation underlying each extract. Finally, in data verification and conclusion, the construction of themes was to generate a description of emerging information during the data analysis. This description consists of a detailed interpretation of facts concerning with people, places, and events in a situation with the similar issues in gender studies of language development. These qualitative themes are considered as the ones arising as major result in this qualitative study.

With the aim in mind, in this paper the author examines some previous work and propose a relatively new method for investigating language use and gender namely dynamic approach. This analytical approach applied here have wide applicability since it is affected by the approach of research itself. Although there are numerous social systems involving in this study that have great influential factors, but this paper prioritizes on language usage as accepted diversification in one social group and eliminates power and status intervention. Dynamic approach formulates gender as social construction through language use in society, and it is perceived as doing gender (Coates, 2004).

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

The emerging discussion in this paper form the basis on the statement that there are some particular aspects establishing the differences among male and female in language usage and mixed talk. One of the interesting phenomena in this setting was participants' composition involving in conversation and talk which were taken into account as gender difference. Two key features of this natural phenomena are interruption and talk dominance which will be primary discussion. Only a few extracts are presented in this paper. Table 1 is an extract 1 for the case of interruption.

Table 1: a Case of Interruption

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Conversation</b>
Male student 13	: :Guess what! I got a "D" on my Reading Comprehension test
Male student 14	: You must be kidding
Male student 9	: Awfully sorry to hear that. How could you be so silly? Others pass their test and get "A".....
Female student 11	: = You just can't get it right. That dreadful game addict is driving you to distraction
Male student 9	: You have to kick your bad habit

The conversation in table 1 shows there were four participants involving three male students and one female student in short mixed conversation in classroom. The participants status are considered to be equal among them. It is demonstrated by the interruption content as advisory statement. It can obviously be seen that in the middle of previous utterance has not been completed yet during conversation, female student naturally made an interruption. Fast response was made by male student 9 without making any break which was indicated by “=” to support the advice given by female student. From the interruption which was practiced by female student, it is evident that she exposed a masculine feature of language use in this mixed conversation. Such a phenomenon could hardly be revealed in the past language studies in which a woman uncovers masculine characteristic of language.

Table 2. Case of Interruption

Participants	Conversation
Male student 19	: How lucky she is. I do want to be just like her. Her life is always in great luck. Her English is excellent and so smart
Female student 21	: I think she is not lucky, but she always work hard
Male student 19	: Hmmm, so what do you think, which one is more important – hard work or luck to be successful?
Male student 22	: I guess work hard is more important!
Male student 23	: How are you so sure? I often see many people who do not like to work hard; yet they succeed!
Female student 21	: OK, at first so you need to understand what being successful is. You know, mere wealth doesn't guarantee to be success in....
Female student 24	: = being successful implied being master of one or more competency and being in demand. You must remember the harder you work, the luckier you get. No substitute for hard work.
Male student 19	: Oh my God! I oftentimes avoid hard work. Therefore, I'm like this, have not achieved much in my own life
Female student 24	: Don't be hopeless, you will be like her even much better in case you work perseveringly in your chosen fields of study.

In table 2, there are five participants, three men and two women, carried on the conversation in mixed talk. The interruption occurred which was indicated by a female student 24 interrupting other participants during their conversation. This interruption ensued within argumentative discussion concerning with the relationship between hard work and luck in academic life. In this mixed talk, the male student 19 initiated the discussion and asked some questions to know more about achievement. It can be clearly seen that the status amongst participants is comparatively close and at the same level which was evidently understood from their informally expression and advisory statement. In this case, female student 24 made an interruption naturally without making a break which was indicated by “=” to deliver her knowledge in supporting the information given by female student 21. Through the interruption made by female student 24, the conclusion can be drawn that she uncovered the feature of masculine language use in this mixed talk. The table 3 is extract for the case of talk dominance

Table 3. Case of Talk Dominance

Participants	Conversation
Male student 8	: :You know that our class has arranged a study tour?
Male student 15	: Yes, but still, I haven't idea the destination they have fixed for it
Female student 17	: How about going to the beach?
Male student 15	: Which beach do you mean?
Female student 18	: I think Pangandaran will be very exciting, It's enjoyable to be around there
Male student 8	: Do you know anything about Pangandaran beach? Where is it located?
Female student 18	: Absolutely! It is about 91 km from Ciamis town. It offers uniquely black and white sand, and beautiful rising sun. I have some visits there with my family
Male student 8	: OK, I have been cherishing a dream to visit this wide black and white sandy beach.
Male student 15	: Yeah, I see it seems a wonderful place to visit. I think I must join

In this conversation, there were four students, two females and two males, participating in mixed talk. In this extract, notwithstanding male student fairly outnumbered in the turn-taking, but the talk dominance was equally shared among them. This phenomenon reflects that the talk dominance was not caused by the issue of gender differences but the female student functionality in expressing her idea related to the discussing topic about target study tour. Under such circumstances, an agreement was made in this mixed-talk.

Despite decades of research, this continues to be debated among researchers in gender-based language development. By analysing the result of this study, it can be stated that interruption is not solely associated with men. Notably, a study which was conducted by Biber and Burges (2000) showed the tendency of women to speak less than men, particularly in mixed-gender settings. By way of contrast, the recent evidence of this study has tended to contradict established finding on this subject. The conclusion can be drawn from data presentation above that it is not gender difference, but socio-cultural aspects play an important role in mixed talk which are reflected on a binding status of speakers highlighting the interruption.

From the short discussion above, key findings emerge in a case of dominance of talk, namely that there are other aspects influencing dominance such as functionality and status. It is generally believed that allowing older people to speak more is considered as showing honour and politeness for some cultures. In functionality, it is deserving of right to speak and give opinion on condition that we are resourcefulness in solving the problem and making decision on our own. Considering this result, it is reasonable to conclude that the perspective of talk dominance in this study is more qualitative and quality of utterances. This recent evidence has tended to contradict previous study demonstrating that the dominance of man in talk is considered from the perspective of quantitative by counting the total number of contributing words in talks. For instance, Li (2014) examined language and gender in *Desperate Housewives*. He explains that based on the talk amount, men use more words than women arranging utterances in conversation. It means, men are considered to be more talkative than women are. Meanwhile, based on the aspect of turns, men tend to take more turn floor.

### **Implication for Language Learning**

The result of this study casts a new light on language learning that it is very important for English teacher to pay more attention on commonalities between both genders instead of

differences. It will be vulnerable for language users when differentiation appears since it can give bad effect of powerful and powerless language. The positive results can be achieved if English teachers give equal treatment to both genders in all language learning activities. For instance, women and men have similar opportunities and right to do, speak, and many other activities without having any discriminations. In a case of language planning, Weinstein (in Wardaugh, 1987) states, “language planning is a government authorized, long-term, sustained, and conscious effort to alter a language’s function in a society for the purpose of solving communication problems.” Meanwhile, Pauwels (cited in Rash, 2012) claims that the status of deviant groups can be improved if harmful gender bias is got rid of from language. In addition, non-sexist language plays an important role in creating the equality academic atmosphere between men and women. As a result, both genders are able to give a lot of contribution to social development.

## CONCLUSION

The contributions of this paper made here have wide applicability to the field of sociolinguistics explaining the relationship between language use and gender. The main conclusion that can be drawn is that there are some differences among some Cirebonese speaker in using language across gender in mixed-talks. These present findings confirm that those differences are caused by some social factors namely status, power, and functionality. More importantly, the broad implication of this conclusion provide evidence that no absolute truth related to the statement that gender is only one factor causing the differences. In other words, the development of gender construction has a deep dependence on socio-cultural dimension.

Language discrimination and sexist language are considered to be the important issue which have impacted on social aspect quite considerably. The right solution to this issue would bring some benefit in which both genders are treated equally in all fields of society. Some innovative, creative and inspiring research methodologies are urgently needed to release it. In the same way, socio-cultural theories will be a great impetus in the future.

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