

Gender Differences In Language Use On Weblogs

Yun Bai

School of Foreign Studies, Liaoning University of Science and Technology, AnShan 114051, LiaoNing China

Abstract: Blog writing is not totally the same as that in books and newspapers. It is a language form between speech and writing as bloggers are having a kind of conversation with their online friends through their posts. This is a brief research into gendered language features of blog writing which will tell something more than previous studies on speech and writing.

Keywords: Gender features; Weblogs; Choice of themes

1. Introduction

Since men are from Mars while women from Venus, the two genders are supposed to have great differences from each other in all aspects, of which language use has been paid more attention to in the past few decades.

It seems to be consensus now that men and women speak different languages because of their different social status. As Coates (1993)^① believes, Linguistic differences are merely a reflection of social differences, and as long as society views women and men as different-and unequal-then differences in the language of women and men will persist.

2. Literature Review

More researches have been done ever since Lakoff's assumptions about women's language were published. According to Lakoff (1975)^②, women tend to use more tag questions, empty adjectives, they would like to hedge and they lack a sense of humor. But her assumptions are regarded as empirical by most language researchers.

Tannen (1990)^③ summarizes male and female language use in a series of contrasts, which are: status/ support, independence/ intimacy, advice/ understanding, information/ feelings, orders/ proposals and conflict/ compromise. The second of each contrast is supposed to be women characteristic.

Chambers (1992)^④ believes that women's speech reflects standard phonological, lexical, and grammatical patterns more than men's does.

Heylighen and Dewaele's (2002)^⑤ statistically measured formality/ contextuality of blog writing, finding that the writing in women's blogs was significantly less formal than in men's blogs.

On reviewing the literature, it's easy to find that nearly all those researches were done into speech and gender. I believe lots of distinct gendered features will just disappear in written texts. However, they can still help investigate on gender difference in writing.

3. Methodology

I am going to take a look at some of the personal diary-style weblogs, or 'blogs' as they are more commonly known and trying to find out whether the language differences between man and woman are reduced in written forms as Simkins-bullock and Wildman (1991)^⑥ suggested and if not, what differences exist there? Are they the same as Lakoff (1975)^② claimed about gendered speech in her book?

In order not to make any assumptions without analysis and to get an external idea of whether men and women write differently, I read the posts without seeing the authors' detailed information (especially their gender). I copied all the writings to a separate document and read them through. It was an interesting part of work, and I could easily figure out which of the posts were written by men and which by women according to the knowledge I have about gendered linguistic features. Then I went back to the original weblog documents to check my guess; to my surprise, I got all of them right. Now I can say that there do exist differences in weblog writing between genders.

Weblogs, as we know, include all kinds of writings, from personal diaries to academic posts. Traditionally, genres of writing are associated more closely with one gender than the other. My focus of study is on the same genre of diary blogs by males and females.

However, even in the same genre of writing, males and females show great variation in the choice of themes and topics. In most of these posts I read, there is a tendency that men wrote about things and women wrote about feelings, which is consistent with the view of Tannen (1990)^③ on the contrast of information and feelings.

It's not hard to find that all the female authors I have here were writing about their own feelings towards personal experiences. And most of them were using strong words to express their anger, disappointment, and maybe happiness towards things, while only one of the male writings was about his own experiences (4th July Tool Purchases). But it still seems that there were less strong-feeling words in his post than in others by female authors.

It seems quite the same in writing contexts that men and women have totally different ideas of what they talk about. Women have

been shown to talk more in private with female friends about topics often considered trivial and unimportant by men,

Due to their preference in different topics, the use of first-person pronouns may vary as mentioned above. It is not that women are self-worshipping, but they are expressing their own feelings and often include themselves in the writing, while men are usually talking about others, usually excluding their own feelings. Tannen (1990)^③ notes that women typically write in an “involved” style, trying to forge a more intimate connection with the reader, which leads to more pronoun use. While the male authors used obviously less first-person pronouns, the females used about 30 first-person pronouns. Thus we can see that the use of pronouns is in some way related to the topics and styles of writing; to be exact, pronouns are more often found in “involved” writings than “informational”.

4. Conclusion

The above analysis reveals that men and women do write differently, and some of the gendered writing features are consistent with those spotted. Females wanted to talk about relationship, family, personal feelings and other trivial things in general; males wanted to talk about job, politics and traveling besides personal things. And the preference to different topics produced a difference in male and female writing styles. In the 8 posts I analyzed, females tended to write in an involved way and men in an informational style. Concerning their contents of writing, female bloggers used more pronouns, especially first-person pronouns in singular form, which is partly related to their preference to involved writing. Males would sometimes employ lots of first-person pronouns when they were writing about their experiences as well.

Anyway, it is seen from the above study into blog writing that males and females do have differences in language use. With the knowledge of this, more researches can be conducted into gender language in weblog use, for example, how men and women reflect and construct their gender in a virtual world? And I’m sure the answers will soon be found.

References:

- [1] Coates, J. (1993). *Women, Men, and Language*, (2nd Ed.). London: Longman.
- [2] Lakoff, R. (1975). *Language and Woman’s Place* In: D. Graddol & J. Swann, (1989). *Gender Voices*. Cambridge: Basil Blackwell.
- [3] Tannen, D. (1990). *You Just Don’t Understand: Women and Men in Conversation*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Chambers, J. K. (1992).
- [4] Linguistic Correlates of Gender and Sex. *English World-Wide*, 13.
- [5] Heylighen, F. & Dewaele’s, J. (2002). Variation in the Contextuality of Language: An Empirical Measure. *Foundations of Science* 6: 293-340.
- [6] Simkins-bullock, J. A. & Wildman, B.G. (1991). *An Investigation into the Relationship between Gender and Language*, Sex Role 24

About the author: Yun Bai(1977.05-) Hui nationality, native place: Hebei Province, degree: master’s degree, graduated from the University of Birmingham School of Education in 2007, English as the second language teaching major, research direction: English as the second language teaching.