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Transgender Community's Perceptions of Applicability of Robin Lakoff's Theory about Language and Gender

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Abstract

By applying the features of women's speech stated by Lakoff, this research study sheds light on the language of transgender people because this population is relatively unexplored in this study area. It is mostly unknown that transgender people speak in terms that are appropriate for either gender because they can be neither male nor female. Thus, this study evaluates how well Lakoff's theory fits the transgender community and also explores their perceptions about it. Furthermore, this study incorporates both qualitative and quantitative research techniques. This study uses a semi-structured interviewing technique and a questionnaire to collect data from 20 transgender individuals in accordance with an explanatory sequential research design. According to the study's findings, transgender people utilize more tag questions, hedges, rising tone in declarative statements, and "empty" adjectives. However, transgender individuals do not lack a sense of humor. The transgender community is therefore relevant to Lakoff's idea. In addition to questioning gender stereotypes and highlighting cultural variety, this study provides a platform for further research on this group of marginalized people in society. The results of this research cannot be applied to other cultural contexts due to its small sample size and restriction to a particular Pakistani cultural context. Furthermore, because transgender people are difficult to reach and due to limited time framework, the research's quality and scope can be affected.

Keywords: *Language, Gender, Transgender, cultural variety, cultural contexts*

Introduction

In today's world, language is essential. It is absolutely necessary for efficient communication. People can express their ideas and opinions to others through language. In addition to being an essential tool for establishing and maintaining relationships with people, language is not always used to transmit information about the subject under discussion (Trudgill, 2000). Conversely, gender has a big impact on how people interact in society (Wardhaug, 2010). According to

Coates (1986), gender is the term that society uses to describe differences that are socially produced. All communities classify roles, norms, and expectations according to biological traits since sex is a fundamental concept based on biology. Moreover, gender categorizes an individual as either masculine or feminine (Nazir & Yasir, 2016). According to Gu (2013), the phrase "language and gender" refers to the relationship between the linguistic patterns of men and women. According to Lakoff (1975), there is a relationship between gender and language that involves the way language is connected to ideas of masculinity and femininity. Gender and language are inextricably linked.

Lakoff's innovative research opens up many important paths in the study of language and gender, particularly by enabling people to critically analyze the language they use and its implications for gender studies. This research is also based on her work. In summary, her thesis holds that while everyone is equally capable of speaking, there are some linguistic elements that are inherently absent from women's language. The following are some assertions made by Lakoff in support of her theory, according to which there are several ways in which women's linguistic patterns are different from men's (Lakoff, 2004).

- Women tend to use more tag questions which show their state of uncertainty about a statement.
- They use many kinds of hedges, e.g., "kinda" "well" "hmm" and so on.
- Women use "empty" adjectives a lot, e.g., sweet, lovely, and adorable.
- Women have more information of precise colour terms. For example, aquamarine and navy blue.
- Women do not have sense of humor.
- Use of adverbs of emphasis, such as just and so. For example, he is so good.
- High rising terminal at the end of assertive statements, e.g., you are good?
- Women don't use swear words in their conversation.
- Women usually use soft and polite words. For example, "he passed away" instead of saying, "he died"
- They use hypercorrect forms in their grammar and pronunciation.
- Women make use of emphatic stress in their conversation.
- Women speak in italics.
- They make use of indirect requests in their speech.
- Women apologize more.
- Women speak less frequently.

The distinct linguistic patterns and communication requirements of transgender people have come to be more widely acknowledged in recent years (Stryker & Whittle, 2013). The transgender minority in Pakistan typically experiences educational setbacks and is employed in street-based occupations like begging, stage acting, singing, and sex work (Abdullah *et al.*, 2012). Additionally, the experiences of transgender people are varied and influenced by a range of intersecting characteristics, including geographic location, economic status, ethnicity, race, and disability (Namaste, 2000). Under the shadow of Lakoff's theory, this research project investigates the unique language and communication patterns of the transgender community, breaking down boundaries and questioning conventional conventions.

Research Questions

- How is Robin Lakoff's theory applicable to the transgender community?
- What are transgender community's views regarding the relevance of Robin Lakoff's theory on language and gender?

Literature Review

According to Coates (2004), a number of linguists have explored this field of study in diverse ways, particularly after Lakoff's book "Language and Woman's Place" was published in 1975. She goes on to say that there are four different ways to studying language and gender: the deficiency approach, the dominance method, the difference approach, and the dynamic gender approach. Moreover, even though these methodologies have evolved successively throughout history, the emergence of a new methodology does not mean that the previous ones must be replaced. According to Lakoff's deficit theory, women's language is weak and unassertive because certain linguistic traits are absent from them. It is referred to as the deficit strategy for this reason (Lakoff, 1975).

According to the dominance approach, which Robin Lakoff also advocated, women's language is a reflection of their perceived inherent weakness. Men are therefore more dominating than women. Because of this, their language conveys their social authority. Lakoff (1975) refers to this as the dominant method. According to Tannen (1990), there are linguistic differences between males and females. These differences can be briefly categorized into six separate groups, each of which emphasizes the different linguistic patterns that males and females use. According to the dynamic gender concept, gender is a social construct. The varying roles that men and women play in society are what define gender, and these roles are always shifting. These social constructions, called "doing gender" do not rigidly categorize speech; instead, they use certain gender-related behaviors. This implies that although these conceptions are associated with specific genders, people can use them according to their preferences (West & Zimmerman, 1987).

In Michelle Obama's address to undergraduate students at Peking University, "The First Lady on the Importance of Studying Abroad" Wardani and Kristiani (2017) note the linguistic characteristics exclusive to women. The YouTube manual for Michelle Obama's speech, which follows Lakoff's theory in highlighting the linguistic traits of women, and numerous viewings of the video are used to compile the study's findings. The study finds 89 items, of which 18 (20%) have lexical hedges or fillers, 1 (1%), 13 (15%) have intensifiers, and 57 (64%) have emphatic stress. There are also declaratives with increasing intonation in one item. Thus, throughout her address, Michelle Obama only made use of four of the ten features of women's language.

According to study of Putra and Prayudha (2019) on "America's Got Talent" female judges employ six linguistic devices, including hedges, intensifiers, empty adjectives, high rising terminals on aggressive assertions, emphatic stress, and gentle, polite language. In addition, only three language characteristics, swearing, interruptions, and direct language are used by male judges out of ten.

The study conducted by Saputra *et al.* (2023) examines the linguistic characteristics of female protagonists in "Superhero" films. This study looks at the language characteristics that the female lead in the movie "Captain Marvel" uses. Ten linguistic traits of women's speech are identified by Lakoff's theory, which is used in this study. The findings indicate that "Carol

Danvers" who plays the movie's principal female character, uses eight different linguistic strategies. Nine linguistic hedges or fillers, nine hypercorrect grammar errors, two intensifiers, one "empty" adjective, one super polite form, and seven emphatic stresses are among them. In the meantime, neither solid words nor precise color keywords are used in the utterances. According to the statistics, rising intonations are the most often employed feature. On the other hand, the low frequency emergent features are super polite forms and empty adjectives.

Therefore, the majority of the research focuses on how men and women speak, particularly when examining language and gender issues. How about transgender individuals, though? This study applies Lakoff's theory of language and gender to the transgender community. This is the only empirical study that uses Robin Lakoff's list of 15 characteristics of women's language to examine how the transgender community is seen in relation to language and gender. This study contributes to the corpus of existing knowledge in this way. It provides opportunities for more study on the transgender community in the fields of gender and language.

Research Methodology

This study uses a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods. The explanatory sequential design used in this study falls into the mixed methods approach group. In an explanatory sequential design, the collection and analysis of quantitative data is done first, and then the collection and analysis of qualitative data (George, 2023). The data from 20 transgender students at "The Gender Guardian" school is gathered for this study using a simple random sample technique. In addition, the survey research design is used to collect the data for this investigation. Semi-structured interviews and questionnaires are used to gather data. The data from the questionnaire is analyzed using SPSS software version 27, and the main points from the semi-structured interview are recorded on register to fulfill the study's objective.

Data Analysis

Data is evaluated following transgender respondents' responses. Data is carefully verified for accuracy and completeness prior to analysis. In addition, any inaccurate or missing data is examined and dealt with appropriately. Key points from the semi-structured interview data are recorded in the register for analysis. This method aids in condensing significant data in accordance with the study's objectives. However, SPSS software is used to evaluate quantitative data. With the use of the Cronbach's Alpha test, SPSS offers reliability analysis to evaluate the internal consistency between the questionnaire items. Therefore, the Cronbach's Alpha test is also used in this study in order to accomplish this purpose. Additionally, this study uses SPSS to provide frequency tables, descriptive statistics, and visual data display. In this study, the mean values of 30 items are compared using a one-way ANOVA test to determine whether there is a discernible difference between them.

Findings and Discussion

According to the research findings, transgender people use more tags (10%) in their conversations to ask for agreement or confirmation from their listeners; more hedges (9%) to lessen the impact of their speech and communicate uncertainty; rising intonation on declarative statements (3%) to ask for agreement and make a firm statement; and more "empty" adjectives (13%) to express politeness and emotions. Furthermore, due to linguistic, cultural, media, and other causes, they know more specific color terminology (2%) than other people. They utilize more intensifiers (12%) in their speech to convey emotions and emphasize their points, and they employ hypercorrect grammar (15%) in their conversations to seem more sophisticated

and to fit in with society’s standards. Because of societal expectations and traditional gender roles, transgender people use more emphatic stress (4%) in their conversations to make their opinions seem forceful. They also speak in italics (2%), use (super) polite forms (19%), and use indirect requests (6%) in their daily conversations to avoid coming across as aggressive or too assertive. Finally, they apologize more (6%) in order to maintain harmonious relationships and to be more emphatic and accommodating. Furthermore, because of socialization and cultural norms, as well as because they feel less confident in themselves, they speak less frequently (2%) than before. They also refrain from using profanity in their discourse. These results are all consistent with Lakoff’s theory.

The research’s findings, however, also show that transgender people have a sense of humor and can recognize a good joke when they hear one. They also don’t use swear words (7%), but they don’t do so as a linguistic tactic to adhere to social norms that value politeness and sophisticated speech, and they don’t use italics to emphasize points or convey uncertainty in their speech. They do not support Lakoff’s arguments by implying that they are ignorant of these explanations because they carry out these speech functions subconsciously in their daily lives and because they grew up in a setting where such functions are carried out unconsciously. These transgender people’s claims refute Lakoff’s theory. Thus, transgender people are relevant to Lakoff’s idea.

Following is a pie chart which shows the percentage of women’s language features used by transgender community.

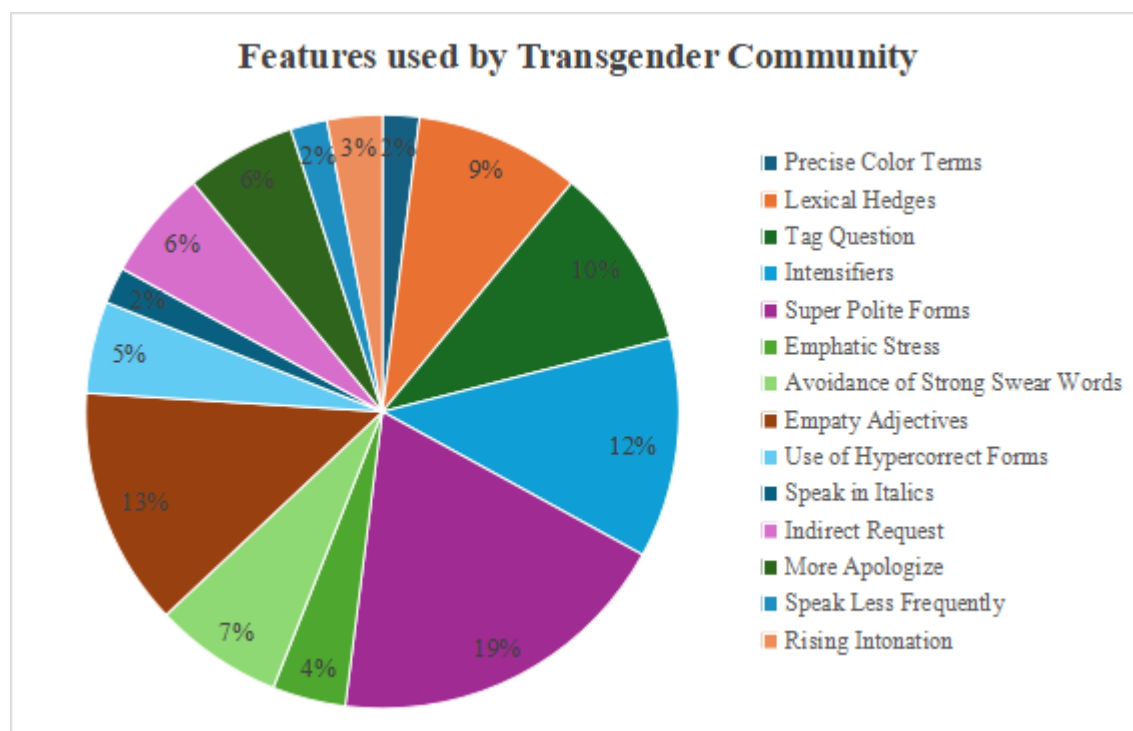


Figure 1: Features used by transgender community

Conclusion

This study examines how the transgender community views Lakoff's theory and assesses its applicability to them. Results indicate that 14 of Lakoff's 15 features such as the use of intensifiers, hedges, and tag questions, are shared by the transgender population. But they disagree on a few topics, such as Lakoff's assertions regarding humor and the rationale behind abstaining from profanity. Because of their ingrained societal conditioning, transgender people (7%) do not use profanity, and they do not highlight uncertainty with italics. Because it acknowledges the voices of transgender people in Pakistan's sociocultural milieu, this study makes a significant contribution and lays the groundwork for future research on transgender language traits in other contexts. This enhances social acceptance and equality, fosters inclusion, and helps legislators lessen prejudice. The study's shortcomings, however, include a small sample size because of the delicate subject matter, difficulty reaching transgender people in Lahore, and time limits. Future studies can broaden their scope by investigating linguistic aspects from the perspectives of dominant, different, and dynamic genders. Further insights can also be obtained through discourse analysis of media representations of transgender people and public figures. By improving knowledge of language and gender, this study advances inclusive social and linguistic practices.

Recommendations

- Given that this study demonstrates the transgender community's relevance to Lakoff's theory, it is advised that educators (particularly those in the linguistics field) expand their understanding of how this particular society is still largely unexplored, how they deal with language barriers, and how they can be most helpful, particularly in the research domain.
- Working along with cultural sensitization efforts in Pakistan that dispel linguistic stereotypes and encourage acceptance of gender identity is essential. Together with discussions on male and female language, the curriculum should cover transgender language as well. This increases awareness of transgender linguistic manifestations and promotes inclusivity, which increases societal acceptance.

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