

Gender Differences In The Language Use Of Malaysian Teen Bloggers

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Abstract

Past researches have shown that there is a difference in language use between males and females attributed by their roles and society's stereotyping or perceptions. Fast changing technology has provided another means for young people to express themselves using language as a tool. This study investigates the differences in language use by female and male Malaysian teenage bloggers who use blogs as a diary to express their daily issues about life. The language used is informal and similar to spoken language. Using a qualitative approach, this study aims to examine gender differences observed in the language features used by male and female teenagers in their blogs. The findings show that there are differences between male and female bloggers in the frequencies of five language features which are 'intensifiers', 'hedging', 'tag questions', 'empty adjectives' and 'adverbs'. The results of the study show that differences in language use among teenage bloggers may largely be attributed to gender.

Keywords: English language use, gender, blogs, teenagers, language features.

Introduction

In general, society has constructed the belief that men and women act and behave differently to images of masculinity and femininity. Male and masculine are two different

concepts: the first term refers to biology and the other refers to identity. Being male is not complete without the existence of masculinity. Even some features of masculinity are quickly recognized as being a biological part of being male (Mills, 2003). According to Hearn and Kimmel (2006), masculinity or femininity is not solely biological but it is constructed by the society and the surroundings we live in. Masculinity is demonstrated and expressed in various ways such as voice, physical appearance and behavior. It is also strongly associated with a deep voice, tall and wide shoulders, and a muscular body; sometimes it is portrayed in the posture and gait which require a bigger space than women.

In today's world, gender roles are fast changing where stereotyping of men to masculine and women to feminine are no longer prominent. Women are adapting to masculine roles and jobs while men seem to be adopting feminine characteristics in their life. More and more language and gender stereotypes are becoming inapplicable to today's men and women. In general, men and women are known to use language differently, but sometimes they may unintentionally exhibit feminine or masculine speech characteristics respectively when they talk.

Gender Differences in Spoken Language

According to Lakoff (1975), women and men speak English in different ways. They have been taught to speak differently since young: girls should speak in a passive voice and boys should speak what is termed 'rough talk' or active voice. In this regard, women frequently use women's language such as empty adjectives, intensifiers and qualifiers, tag questions, hedges and polite forms. Sunderland (2006) cited Jespersen's account of Rocherfort's documentation in 1665 about the language of the West Indies: Rocherfort found that women and men had their own languages which they used and understood among themselves. Although in real life, both sides understood each other's language, they refused to use it because if they used the language of the opposite sex, it would be viewed as inappropriate. For men especially, they would become the laughing stock of others.

Furthermore, Jespersen (1922, p. 251) also supports the belief that "Women have smaller vocabularies, show extensive use of certain adjectives and adverbs, 'more often than men break off without finishing their sentences, because they start talking without having thought out what they are going to say' and produce less complex sentences." In conversations involving both sexes, men could switch topics while women would take turns to speak, supporting others' opinions, complementing them, and trying to avoid interrupting others. When it is conversation among members of the same sex, women prefer to discuss personal topics while men prefer public issues and would avoid discussing private topics. The choices could be related to the nature of both sexes where women are more 'involved' and use emotional language pertaining to their feelings and thoughts. Men, on the other hand, are more into seeking 'information' and speak in a more straightforward manner and use authoritative language.

Gender Differences in Written Language

Research on gender differences in written language is quite limited compared to gender differences in spoken language because formal written texts such as books and articles obviously cannot convey intonation and phonological cues compared to spoken language. Olsson (2000) looked at gender-relatedness in introductory letters where she applied some of Lakoff, Jespersen and Crawford's theories (1995) on women's and men's language into her study and used their characteristics to analyze her data. She found that even if there are differences between the language used by the respective gender, these differences differ due to different types of discourse and other factors separating the persons communicating with each other.

Jones and Myhill (2007) studied gender differences, focusing on specific linguistic characteristics such as usage of adverbials, repetition of the same words, especially nouns, and the use of synonyms and hyponyms. The findings showed that there were slightly noticeable differences in linguistic characteristics between the sexes. Another study by Gyllgård (2006) explored the gender differences in Swedish students' writing. In her study, she also included students' identification of female and male language features.

In the local context, a study on language use by female Malaysian bloggers was carried out by Akhmaliah (2009), focusing on undergraduate female students (between 20 to 23 years old,) who frequently updated their blogs. She selected two weblog hosts, Friendster and Blogspot, as her baseline data and, using Lakoff (1975) features, she identified only four features. These features are lexical hedges, tag questions, intensifiers, and avoidance of taboo language. Thus, she concluded that the three features appearing in female blog posts which conformed to Lakoff's theory were lexical hedges, intensifiers and tag questions.

Gender and Online Language

Gender research conducted by Rosseti (1998) on the use of email showed that men were more interested in presenting their personal points of view in order to present an 'authoritative' contribution to the discussion, while women were more interested in the contribution itself. Women used far more expressions offering support and a deepening of their relationship with the readers. In addition, women used more frequently open expressions of appreciation and thanks, while men used 'tighter' and less direct expressions.

Herring (1993, p. 8), in her discourse analysis of a Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) bulletin board described the features of women's language as "attenuated assertions, apologies, explicit justification, questions, personal orientation and support of others", whereas some features of men's language were "strong assertions, self-promotion, rhetorical questions, authoritative orientation, challenges and humor."

Huffaker and Calvert (2005) who conducted a research on gender similarities and differences in online identity and language use also focused on teenage groups as they were the highest users of blogs as well as other CMC tools. They looked at the use of explicit language among teenage bloggers, the posting length, and found that male language was more aggressive and active than female language. They found less than half of all teenage bloggers using explicit language in their blog posts because the blog is a private place, therefore they are freer to use such language there than in the outside world. In other words, this group of teenagers preferred to use slang rather than standard language. The researchers concluded that the use of language in CMC evolves with the communities that participate in its discourse.

The Nature of Blogs

According to Nowson (2006), blogs are web pages frequently updated with posts in reverse chronological order and the language used is less constrained by formality. This is further supported by Levy (2009) who states that blogs encourage self-expression, creativity, ownership and community building through informal writing. Zaini et al. (2011) have shown that use of blogs was able to develop students' writing skills in language learning. It also allows subscribers or bloggers to learn from one another in terms of ideas, grammar and structure, and organization of their essays. In addition, blogs can be used as a platform to solicit ideas and receive comments from others that may improve interaction and reflective and critical thinking. Therefore, when students use blogs as individuals, they have full control and ownership of the content. When they use blogs to collaborate with others, they work interactively (Shahsavar & Tan, 2011).

This study was undertaken because the blog is one of the CMC tools that uses text as conversation. This text reveals the language features which differentiate male and female bloggers. Lakoff (1975)'s identification of some features of language that are closely related to women has been applied to written language by several researchers (Huffaker & Calvert, 2005; Herring et al., 2005) who studied the language used in blogs. The researchers established that the differences and similarities in language use between both sexes were more pronounced in blogs compared to other CMC tools.

The Present Study

The aim of this research is to examine the differences in language use between male and female bloggers who are currently studying in Malaysian public universities. This study looks specifically at the relatedness of language use with the gender of the bloggers. By using content analysis of the teenagers' blogs, we examined the differences in language features between male and female bloggers.

Methodology

Using a qualitative research design, this study uses a case study approach by focusing on a group of people who carry out the same activity within a specific time. Findings from this study can be used to generalize to the population the sample is taken from even though it is a small sample. In other words, data from a group of people will be

qualitatively analysed for in-depth interpretations. This is supported by Merriam (2009) who states that a case study is restricted by time and activities and the data will be collected using a variety of methods over a continued period of time. This study will investigate language use among male and female teenagers who created and maintained their blogs over a period of three months.

The main participants for this study were selected from BlogMalaysia.com., a platform in Malaysian Bloggers Directory. BlogMalaysia.com is open to any Malaysian blogger who wants to promote his/her blog and to discover new blogs operated by other Malaysian bloggers. Since the focus of this study was to observe any gender differences in language use by Malaysian teenagers who frequently update their blogs, following Azni (2008), the following types of blogs found in BlogMalaysia.com were excluded from this study:

- i. Blogs with multiple authors;
- ii. Blogs with pictures only and;
- iii. Blogs which are only for commercial and organizational purposes.

At the initial stage, 12 blogs were found to be registered in BlogMalaysia.com but after the screening process, only 6 blogs were taken into account. Researchers sent emails on the respective blogs to invite participation in the research. One week later, only four bloggers responded with the approval to use their blogs for the study.

Three criteria were used in selecting the participants:

1. The participant should be a university undergraduate student majoring in any field.
2. The posts should be written in English and the blog must have accumulated more than 50 posts since it started.
3. The participant has been a blogger for more than one year and frequently updates the blog.

The participants of the study are four bloggers consisting of two male and two female bloggers.

Research Instruments

The data for this study is from the blog postings of the four teenagers who treat their blogs as a diary where they express their feelings about daily issues to do with their lives and their studies. The instruments of analysis were a word counting tool and a checklist. The following is a description of the data sources and the instruments:

Blogs

The blogs were chosen from BlogMalaysia.com and the URL is www.blogmalaysia.com (see Figure 1 for a screen shot). BlogMalaysia was chosen because it is free and is the fastest growing blog directory in Malaysia. This website has a list of blog links in

Malaysia with 27 categories ranging from academic to travel. The purpose of BlogMalaysia is to invite bloggers around Malaysia to promote their blogs through this website. All the blogs are inspected prior to public listing. This is to avoid undesirable blogs and to eliminate spam. The blogs reside on sites such as LiveJournal, Xanga, Blogspot, or on a personally hosted web site with a vanity URL such as “www.myname.com”.



Figure 1: Print screen of BlogMalaysia.com

Word Counting Tool

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, is used to count the frequency of occurrences of the characteristics in blog postings. This tool was created by Computer Support Group (CSG) and is a very useful tool for web designers to improve their site, as well as for the students and others to improve their writing skills. This service is provided only for online users since the users have internet connection. There is also information provided on how to use the tool.

As shown in Figure 2, there are two columns: one is for entering the text and the other is for the results. Also, there are options for users to choose whether they want to sort the results by frequency or in alphabetical order. At the bottom of the tool is shown the total number of characters calculated from the texts provided by the user. The users are

advised to test the amount of text in order to identify the limit of the number of characters that the tool can process. This tool is used in this study to count the frequency of words that are listed as having the characteristics of the language used by males and females.

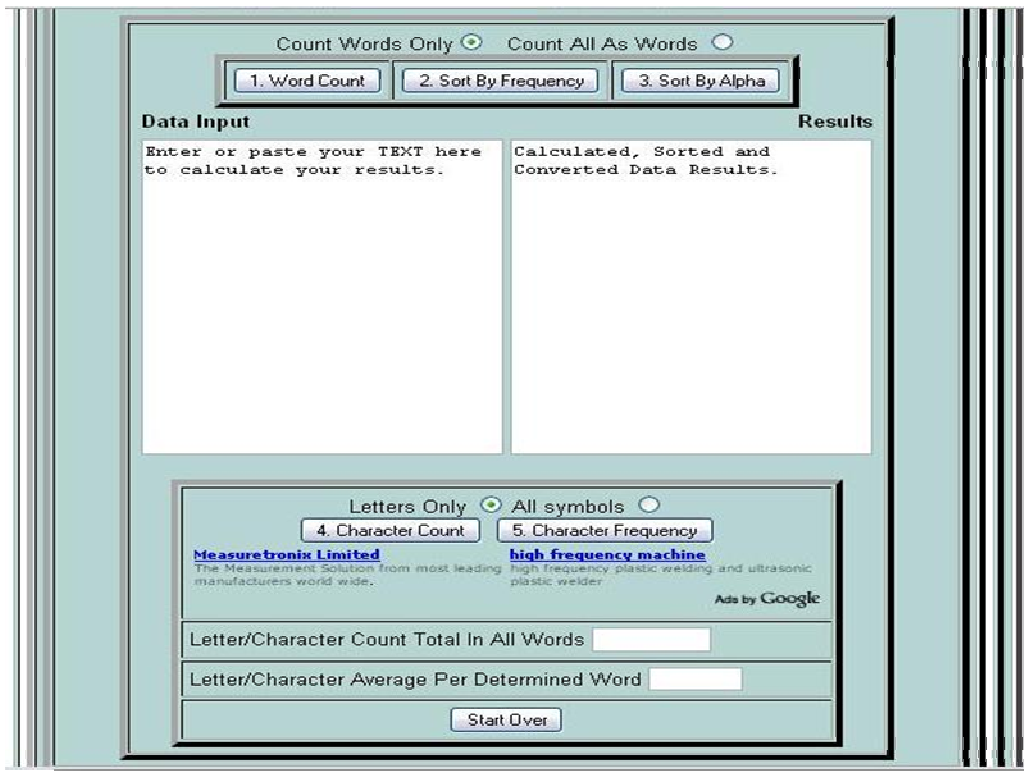


Figure 2: Interface of Word Counting Tool

Checklist

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 characteristic in the blog postings over a period of three months. The checklist consisted of language characteristics which were adapted from Jespersen (1922), Lakoff (1975) and Crawford (1995), with additional columns for new findings.

Results

Five categories of language features emerged from the data analysis: intensifiers, hedges, tag questions, empty adjectives, and adverbs. The male teenage bloggers were identified as S1 and S2, while female teenage bloggers were known as S3 and S4. This section presents the data showing the differences in language features used by male and female bloggers. Evidence from each category will also be presented to give a better explanation.

(a) Intensifiers

According to Olsson (2000), intensifiers act as a boosting device in language. However, Lakoff (1975) categorized intensifiers as part of hedging where it weakens the feelings of the speaker in language. Hence, the researcher looked at eight intensifiers, namely, ‘very’, ‘quite’, ‘rather’, ‘so’, ‘too’, ‘really’, ‘just’ and ‘such’.

Table 1 show that both males (S1 and S2) used intensifiers in their postings. S1 had a higher frequency of intensifiers (n=134) compared to S2 which was only 23. The difference in the frequency can be accounted for by the difference in the number of postings: S1 made 51 postings while S2 made only 22 postings. The lower number of postings may explain the reduced occurrence of intensifiers.

Table 1: Intensifiers used by males in blogs

Months	S1 (51 posts)	Average number of intensifiers used in the posts	S2 (22 posts)	Average number of intensifiers used in the posts
January	58	1.13	3	0.13
February	29	0.56	11	0.5
March	47	0.92	9	0.4
Total	134	2.62	23	1.04

Some examples of intensifiers from the male bloggers are as follows:

- S1 - We were initially *quite* worry and would like to buy him Strepsils.
 - To my readers, I'm *very* sorry...
 - Wow...I didn't know it was *so* expensive.
 - But he assured me that the increment will not be *too* fast in the next 2-3 years.

- S2 - It's *very* touching, especially for someone like me...
 - I was *very* proud to be a Nokia user during the days...
 - It's *very* rare for her to dress up like a girl...
 - She is *very* rude

On the other hand, Table 2 shows that both females (S3 and S4) used intensifiers more frequently in their postings with S4 recording the highest number of occurrences (n=210) followed closely by S3 (n=178). There were only slight differences in the number (n). The high frequency of intensifiers in the female bloggers' postings may be explained by the fact that their posts were mainly about their emotions and feelings on certain issues.

Table 2: Intensifiers used by females in blogs

Months	S3 (39 posts)	Average number of intensifiers used in the posts	S4 (64 posts)	Average number of intensifiers used in the posts
January	56	1.43	60	0.9
February	59	1.51	72	1.12
March	63	1.61	78	1.21
Total	178	4.56	210	3.28

Below are some examples of usage of intensifiers from female bloggers.

S3 - Then we were *too* late....

- I was feeling *very* tire recently...
- Btw, I found this website *quite* useful in my report writing
- The price of Samsung handphone dropped *so* super-ly fast...

S4 - It is indeed a *very* fun assignment which I enjoy a lot...

- The company is *so* cool!!
- The books are just *too* heavy...
- Although the portion is *so* much smaller...

It is clear that from Table 1 and Table 2 that the frequency of occurrences of intensifiers is higher in blogs written by females (n=388) than in those written by males (n=157).

(b) Hedging

Table 3 presents a list of lexical hedges that are used in this study. Even though there are many lexical hedges listed by previous researchers such as Dubois (1987); Skelton (1988); Holmes (1990); Low (1996) and Hyland (1996), this study focuses only on these 27 lexical hedges as shown in Table 3. According to Holmes (2001), hedging is a way to express uncertainty and also to soften the utterances of the speaker. However, Olsson (2000) found that other researchers such as House and Kasper (1981) and Blum-Kulka and Ohlstein (1984), stated that hedging is used to modify certain types of speech acts, requests and apologies.

Table 3: Lexical hedges

Lexical hedges		
sort of	kind of	Well
I think	I guess	I mean
I thought	I feel	I would
I should	I suppose	I might
I reckon	I'm sure	I am thinking
I am feeling	Perhaps	Maybe
you know	Probably	you see
a (little) bit	pretty much	whatever
it seems like	if you like	just like

Table 4 shows the frequency of hedges used in blogs written by males (S1 and S2). Both bloggers used hedges in their postings, but S1 had a higher frequency (n=114) than S2 (n=27). This could again be due to the difference in the number of postings: S1 had 51 posts whereas S2 just posted 27 entries through the three months.

Table 4: Hedging used by males in blogs

Months	S1 (51 posts)	Average number of hedges used in the posts	S2 (27 posts)	Average number of hedges used in the posts
January	61	1.19	2	0.07
February	22	0.43	13	0.48
March	31	0.60	12	0.44
Total	114	2.23	27	1.0

Below are some examples of hedges used in the blogs written by males:

- S1 - The weather on that day *somehow* make me felt uncomfortable and lethargy
- *Perhaps* you guys will first see how well I earned before reading the story
 - I *think* above 20...
 - You were *like* flying down...
- S2 - *Perhaps* it's easier to see it during special days...
- She's *kinda* disappointed when I told her that...
 - I *think* my supervisor graded me as "above average"!
 - *Most probably* I won't be able to work during...

Table 5 shows that the females (S3 and S4) used lexical hedges more frequently in their postings with S4 having the highest number (n=246) compared to S3 (n=94). The differences in the frequency may be due to the huge difference in the number of postings. S3 only had 39 posts throughout three months while S4 had 64 entries altogether.

Table 5: Hedging used by females in blogs

Months	S3 (39 posts)	Average number of hedges used in the posts	S4 (64 posts)	Average number of hedges used in the posts
January	31	0.79	47	0.73
February	27	0.69	95	1.48
March	36	0.92	104	1.62
Total	94	2.41	246	3.84

(c) Tag Questions

According to Lakoff (1975), a tag question is considered as a hedging device since it shows that the speaker is not confident in making a statement. Nevertheless, men usually use tag questions to show their perception on some topics while women are seen as indecisive people and have no view of their own. Mindell (2001) claims that tag questions can take three forms which are verbal (...isn't it?), vocal (I come here alone?) and gestural (head or shoulder shrug). In this study, the researchers looked at verbal tags which occurred at the end of the sentence such as '...right? Isn't it?' as well as those that did not occur at the end of a sentence, such as 'Isn't it cute?'

Table 6 shows the number of occurrences of tag questions in the boys' blogs (S1 and S2). The frequency of this feature is low compared to the others. However, S1 used tag questions more (n=19) than S2 (n=1).

Table 6: Tag questions used by males in blogs

Months	S1 (51 posts)	Average number of tag questions used in the posts	S2 (21 posts)	Average number of tag questions used in the posts
January	14	0.27	0	0.00
February	4	0.07	1	0.04
March	1	0.01	0	0.00
Total	19	0.37	1	0.04

Some examples of tag questions that can be found in male blogs are:

- S1 - You know what I mean *rite*?
 - All the new products have been reduced from RM 2.50 to RM 2.00. *Aren't* they cheap?
 - It's amazing *rite*?
 - 1 token = Rm1, *isn't* it cheap?
- S2 - The catalogue was given by the supplier, nice *huh*?

Table 7 shows that both females (S3 and S4) used tag questions with S4 having a higher frequency (n=44) than S3 (n=6). The difference in frequency is noticeable, but it can be concluded that this happens because of the difference in the number of postings.

Table 7: Tag questions used by females in blogs

Months	S3 (39 posts)	Average number of tag questions used in the posts	S4 (64 posts)	Average number of tag questions used in the posts
January	2	0.05	22	0.34
February	2	0.05	16	0.25
March	2	0.05	6	0.09
Total	6	0.15	44	0.68

Below are examples of the tag questions used by the two female bloggers:

- S3 - With PC, *isn't* she pretty?
 - It looks like the lateral view of the body vertebra *right*...
 - The MSK system course will be finishing soon....so fast, *huh*?
 - I hope you won't repeat the same grandfather story again here *ok*....
- S4 - There is nothing to be surprised of, as it has already been a fact, *right*?
 - Remember our souvenirs, *ok*?
 - You think I'm really so free and rich enough to fly back for vacation in Cameron Highlands *ah*?
 - Just take them as my latest pictures *okay*??

From Table 6 and Table 7, once again S1, who is a male blogger, used tag questions more (n=19) than S3 (n=6), who is a female blogger because of the difference in the number of posts. Overall, it explains that there are significant differences in the number of tag questions used by both sexes because the total number of postings for male bloggers (S1 and S2) were 20 and the total number of postings for female bloggers S3 and S4) were 50.

(d) Empty Adjectives

Olsson (2000) explains that an empty adjective, like other adjectives, usually appear before a noun. However, it differs in terms of the way it is used. An empty adjective is when the speaker or writer expresses his/her emotional reaction. In this study, researchers only looked for these empty adjectives, for example: ‘adorable’, ‘nice’, ‘gorgeous’, ‘wonderful’, ‘charming’, ‘sweet’, ‘lovely’, ‘cute’, ‘divine’, ‘marvelous’, ‘delightful’, ‘brilliant’, ‘beautiful’, ‘awful’, ‘good’ and ‘fantastic’.

Table 8 shows that both male bloggers (S1 and S2) used empty adjective in the postings with S1 having a higher number of occurrences (n=80) than S2 (n=12). Again, the difference in frequency occurred probably because of the difference in the number of postings between these two bloggers.

Table 8: Empty adjective used by males in blogs

Months	S1 (51 posts)	Average number of empty adjective used in the posts	S2 (22 posts)	Average number of empty adjective used in the posts
January	32	0.62	4	0.18
February	21	0.41	4	0.18
March	27	0.52	4	0.18
Total	80	1.56	12	0.54

Below are examples of empty adjectives used by male bloggers:

- S1 - Suraya and her *adorable* pose...ahemm...
- Wow...that is *fantastic* to spend a day on a river cruise
- It has *lovely* beaches and parks
- I had a *great* fun but then I was summoned by the police traffic

- S2 - I was shocked and no doubt, this is a *good* way to promote the restaurant!
- Sadly, I failed and didn't even put up a *good* fight...
- Many people said that I have changed, which is not a *good* thing for me

Meanwhile, Table 9 shows that both female bloggers (S3 and S4) also used empty adjectives frequently in the posts with S3 are having 64 of this feature and S4 having 175 of such features. Although there are significant differences in the frequency between these two female bloggers, it still shows that females used this feature more frequently.

Table 9: Empty adjective used by females in blogs

Months	S3 (39 posts)	Average number of empty adjective used in the posts	S4 (64 posts)	Average number of empty adjective used in the posts
January	32	0.82	68	1.06
February	15	0.38	63	0.98
March	17	0.43	44	0.68
Total	64	1.64	175	2.73

The following are examples of empty adjectives that can be found in S3 and S4 blogs' posts.

- S3 - I'm really glad that I was blessed with lots of *good* housemates...
 - I would have slept through my *sweet* Saturday morning...
 - Wish u have a *great* one. ^_^
 - Cause I realize that most of the time we communicate in English, *cool* ...
- S4 - Being watched by a fierce face while having dinner is definitely an *awful* experience.
 - And I've got *good* news...
 - He bring us to this restaurant that sell very *nice* beef noodles
 - The filling is soft but al dente and not so *sweet*.

In comparing the male and female bloggers, the results shows that S1 who is a male used this feature quite a lot in his postings (n=80) in relation to S3, a female (n=64). But, overall the data shows that female bloggers used empty adjective more (n=239) than male bloggers (n=92).

(e) Adverbs

An adverb can modify a verb, an adjective, another adverb, a phrase, or a clause. An adverb indicates manner, time, place, cause, or degree and answers questions such as "how," "when," "where," "how much". According to Crawford (1995, p. 23) there are more variables that might be gender-related and one of it was 'beginning a sentence with an adverb', and apparently, males usually use it in their sentences more than females do.

Table 10 shows the frequency of male bloggers (S1 and S2) using adverbs at the beginning of their sentences. Although both of them used adverbs as sentence starters, S1 had a higher frequency (n=56) than S2 (n=13). Once again, this probably happened because of the differences in the number of postings from these two blogs.

Table 10: Adverb used by males in blogs

Months	S1 (51 posts)	Average number of adverb used in the posts	S2 (22 posts)	Average number of adverb used in the posts
January	28	0.54	0	0
February	16	0.31	10	0.45
March	12	0.23	3	0.13
Total	56	1.09	13	0.59

Below are examples from the two male bloggers.

S1 - *Initially*, it was alright but later on when the crowd were getting bigger, it was verystuffy.

- *Occasionally* the weather can reach 38 degrees Celsius...
- *Pathetically*, only 2 additional pieces of breads on top of the current 2 were given.
- *Ironically*, that was the first time I saw such slip.

S2 - *Honestly*, I like the food...just that I don't like to introduce much about food in my blog.

- *Personally*, I prefer simple design with simple yet meaningful wordings
- *Eventually*, his friend sent me a message in YouTube
- *Seriously*, I am glad that my friends were willing to sacrifice their time over the weekend...

Table 11 shows the frequency of adverbs used in the females' postings (S3 and S4). Both female bloggers used adverbs at the beginning of their sentences. S4 is the higher user of adverbs (n=51) than S3 (n=26).

Table 11: Adverbs used by females in blogs

Months	S3 (39 posts)	Average number of adverb used in the posts	S4 (64 posts)	Average number of adverb used in the posts
January	14	0.35	15	0.23
February	5	0.12	18	0.28
March	7	0.17	18	0.28
Total	26	0.66	51	0.79

Below are examples of adverbs from female bloggers.

- S3 - *Lastly*, I promise to help my friend...
 - *Hopefully* everyone will come...
 - *Secondly*, I would like to send my condolence to my unfortunate college mate.
 - *Lastly*, let's update a bit on our batch IMU Alumni status.

- S4 - *Actually*, I want to share some good news (as I promised)!!!
 - *Luckily* we've got the TV to watch...
 - *Seriously*, I love the collection of my photos...
 - *Unconsciously*, I am actually applying what I read just now

The results show that female bloggers used slightly more initial adverbs (n=77) than male bloggers (n=69). The difference in the number of adverbs used by female and male bloggers is not large. Thus, we can conclude that this language feature is not gender specific.

Discussion

According to Lakoff (1975), gender differences in language use reflect different and unequal roles and status. Because of the lower status of women in society they are pressured to talk like a lady. Therefore, it results in women using more hedges and intensifiers compared to men. Women and men use the language according to the society's beliefs of how both sexes should communicate.

The most noticeable differences between males' and females' language use in their blog posts are intensifiers and lexical hedges. The findings of this study seem to support Lakoff's (1975) theory that women use intensifiers more than men. This feature relates to gender as women, in seeking to be heard, tend to use intensifiers to boost the language, or to "intensify a proposition's force" (Holmes, 2000). However, sometimes the use of this feature creates the impression that the users are expressive and exaggerating in describing something. The frequency of intensifiers' use among male bloggers is lower (n=157) than among female bloggers (n=388) because the language use is more direct and impersonal.

Lexical hedges are usually used by women as a weakening tool since it expresses uncertainty and is also a way to soften an utterance. The data shows that again this feature supports Lakoff's (1975) theory as female bloggers use it more frequently (n=340) than do male bloggers (n=141) and, thus it is related to gender. The use of lexical hedges in female bloggers' language reveals that they tend to write spontaneously whereas the male bloggers tend to think before they write. Female bloggers use hedges as fillers, as when the communicator stalls, perhaps to ponder or think about the subject discussed. The male bloggers' frequency for lexical hedges is low because their postings are informative and definite and specific. Therefore the need to use this feature is also low.

However, the usage of both features (intensifier and lexical hedges) happens to be higher in female bloggers language use because of their nature as women. In Malaysian society, women are sometimes constructed as subordinate and submissive to men (Bresnahan et al., 2001). Thus their language reflects the attitude and nature which is constructed by society.

Tag questions are used either to show uncertainty about the content of utterances or as a softening tool which shows closeness of the language users' relationship (Olsson, 2000). In this case, this feature is related to gender, as female bloggers used it more frequently (n=50) than did male bloggers (n=20). Most of the tag questions that occurred in blog posts did not indicate the bloggers' uncertainty about their contents; instead it expressed the closeness of bloggers to their readers. Furthermore, the bloggers used tag questions to help the readers to participate in the discussion posted in the blogs.

An empty adjective is hard to define because it is abstract and closely associated to emotions and feelings. The findings show that this feature relates to gender since female bloggers used it more frequently (n=239) than male bloggers (n=92). It shows that female bloggers tend to express emotion in their postings to express something that is intimately linked to them. Sometimes it shows that females exaggerate in explaining or describing something which in turn makes the whole thing look better. This huge difference might occur because of the way women usually incorporate feelings and emotions into their expressions. According to Lakoff (1975), empty adjectives are usually used by women as they are generally considered more expressive and emotional compared to men.

As Rubin and Greene (1995) found, initial adverbs are used by primary school girls but later this feature of language use may change especially when they turn 12 and beyond. The data discussed earlier shows that both female and male bloggers used adverbs as starters in sentences with 77 occurrences for female bloggers and 69 occurrences for male bloggers. The difference is insignificant as there is only a difference of eight occurrences between them.

Conclusion

In conclusion, language features such as intensifiers, lexical hedges and empty adjectives are very closely related to gender and socialization. However, the use of adverbs as indicated in this study as well as in earlier studies do not seem to be related to gender. The findings of this study indicate that there are some gender differences in language use among Malaysian teenage bloggers.

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