From Text to Context: Unveiling Gendered Communication Styles in Work-Related Group Chats

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Abstract—**Effective communication within a professional environment is a cornerstone of successful collaboration. In today's digital age, group chats have become an important platform for communicating among colleagues. This article delves into an appropriate aspect of workplace communication- how men and women use language differently in work-related group chats. While linguistic differences based on gender have been studied extensively, their manifestation within the context of digital communication remains relatively unexplored. Through an analysis of communication dynamics within work-related group chats. This article examines how men and women employ language patterns, vocabulary choices, and interaction styles, and the implied meanings of the texts. It explores whether established gender-based linguistic traits, such as rapport-building and assertiveness, extend to digital communication spaces. The article also investigates how gendered communication may influence perceptions of leadership, collaboration, and overall team dynamics. Drawing both existing research and empirical observations, this study seeks to uncover whether traditional communication norms persist in digital interactions or if technology introduces new paradigms. The findings shed light on potential areas of disparity and resonance in gendered communication styles within virtual workspaces. The implications of these communication patterns on team cohesion, conflict resolution, and professional growth are also discussed. In conclusion, this article contributes to the growing discourse of digital communication in professional settings by offering insights into the subtle yet impactful ways that men and women navigate language in a communication environment that leverages the strengths of diverse communication styles, ultimately enhancing collaboration and productivity.**

Keywords—workplace; gendered-based; communication styles; power relations

I. INTRODUCTION

Effective communication is a critical component of cooperation, productivity, and organizational success in today's dynamic settings. The ubiquity of digital communication platforms has altered the parameters of professional relationships, with group chats for work-related discussions, decisions, and problem-solving becoming commonplace tools. As professional contacts increasingly take place in the virtual world, it is crucial to have a thorough understanding of how communication works there.

The complex ways in which language and interpersonal interaction patterns differ between people of different genders have come to light as a result of substantial scholarly investigation into the topic of gendered communication. However, the interaction between gender and linguistic patterns within the framework of virtual communication, particularly in work-related group chats, is still largely unexplored. This article explores this area, illuminating the ways in which men and women use language to converse, work together, and build their professional presence in the complex world of group chats. The emergence of remote work and virtual teams has intensified the significance of digital communication tools. Within this context, this article seeks to address the following questions: To what extent do traditional gender-based linguistic traits permeate the virtual workspace? How the male and female colleagues use linguistics features in their chats and how far directive and indirective-ness exploited by them?

This study endeavors to contribute insights into the evolving landscape of gendered communication in professional digital interactions. By exploring linguistic nuances, interaction styles, and the resonance of traditional

communication norms in virtual spaces, this research seeks to not only bridge the gap in current scholarship but also provide actionable insights for professionals, leaders, and organizations navigating the intricacies of modern workplace communication.

In the subsequent sections, this article will delve into the theoretical underpinnings of gendered communication within the sociolinguistics study, offer an overview of the methodological approach, present findings from the empirical analysis, and conclude with implications, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

II.   LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Gender and Language in the Workplace

The study of gender differences in language has a long history in sociolinguistics (for literature surveys, see Cameron, 1998; Eckert, 1989; Holmes & Meyerhoff, 2003). Most studies focus on spoken language behavior, although a limited body of research has looked into the effects of gender on written style. Internet researchers have also investigated gender-based correlations of online activity. Nearly all of the work has relied on one-to-many data sources (e.g., Chat, listservs, computer conferencing). Linguists have long known that a person's gender might influence their language output. Several languages restrict specific lexical, phonological, or grammatical use patterns to men or women at the most basic level. In Australia, for example, aboriginal women utilize sign language that males are not allowed to learn (Kendon, 1980). Other gender differences stem from more modest acculturation. For example, it is often documented that ladies utilize more politeness signs than males (e.g., Coates, 1993), but men interrupt women more frequently than vice versa (e.g., Tannen, 1994).

Furthermore, Pilkington (1998) asserted that female employees employed overlapping turns, co-constructed discussion, and positive feedback in their conversations with one another, but men's conversations displayed humorous conflict and rivalry. Susan Schick Case (1988) conducted a thorough examination of a group of male and female corporate executives. She observes that 'the male approach was an assertively combative one that offered, opposed, and competed' (Schick Case 1988: 52). Nicola Woods (1989) proved that, even in high-status jobs, a woman is more likely to be interrupted by a male subordinate than to interrupt him.

However, in the digital communication era, those findings somehow become vague as there are more linguistic features applied by the participants such as emoticons and emojis. These characters are used to augment the text with additional information. Siebenhaar (2018) analyzed the usage of emoji in *WhatsApp* chats and found mixed results: While he reported emoji usage to be negatively associated with age in a Swiss chat corpus, he found no age differences in an initial analysis of the chat corpus we analyzed in the present study. In a similar manner, An et al. (2018) did not find a consistent relationship between emoji usage with user age in *WeChat* messages. In line with the theory that women experience and express emotions more often than men (Fabes & Martin, 1991; Kring & Gordon, 1998), previous research indicates that there are significant gender differences in the usage of emoji and emoticons. Findings from studies based on Facebook status updates (Oleszkiewicz et al., 2017), online chat rooms (Fullwood et al., 2013; Wolf, 2000), SMS (Tossell et al., 2012), and *WhatsApp* messages (Pérez-Sabater, 2019) suggested that women use more emoticons than men. Tossell and colleagues (2012) also found that men used a more diverse range of emoticons in their SMS data than women. The observed gender differences seem to exist for emoji, too: A large-scale study on smartphone users provided evidence that women use more emoji in their communication than men (Chen et al., 2018), contradicting a smaller study on Chinese *WeChat* users suggesting that gender has no effect on emoji usage (An et al., 2018). Also, women reported to use emoji (but not emoticons) more often than men in studies with self-reported survey data (Jones et al., 2020; Prada et al., 2018).

B. Language Features of Men and Women in a Work-related WhatsApp Group

There are several linguistic features used by participants in a work-related group chat, whether it's a female or a male participant. Here are some explanations of linguistic features that are used to analyze the data of this article:

1. Use of Emoticons
   According to Koch (2020), both men and women utilize emoticons in various digital communication platforms, including work-related group chats. Emoticons can be used to express emotions, clarify intents, and improve the tone of written texts, among other things. While the use of emoticons may appear to be genderless, experts have investigated if there are any gender-related trends in their use.
   Gender norms and preconceptions have been shown in studies to impact the perception of emoticons. Women, for example, may be more likely to use emoticons to generate a nice and welcoming tone, whereas men may use them to convey comedy or reduce tension. Gender-based interpretations of emoticons can influence how communications are interpreted, sometimes leading to misunderstandings or misinterpretation.

2. Direct and Indirect Language
   Men and women have different communication patterns in work-related group chats, according to Tannen (2012). To preserve healthy connections and a collaborative climate, women prefer to use more indirect language, including courteous phrasing and mitigating statements. This method conforms to cultural expectations that women communicate in a caring and thoughtful manner. Men, on the other hand,

frequently use straightforward language to express their thoughts assertively and quickly. This direct approach is confident and task-oriented, reflecting classic leadership concepts. Organizational culture and the unique environment of the communication task can impact these communication habits. Individuals can negotiate these gendered language patterns in the digital context of group chats, affecting how directness and indirectness are utilized in modern workplaces.

3. Hedges

According to Coates (2016), both men and women may utilize hedges in work-related group chats, which are language strategies that soften assertions or communicate doubt. Women frequently use hedges to negotiate civility and establish healthy relationships while adhering to cultural norms. They may employ these tactics to offer their thoughts in a more hesitant manner. Men, on the other hand, may employ fewer hedges, preferring directness and confidence in their communication. This reflects conventional gender stereotypes linked with assertiveness. Context is important, since both genders may adjust their usage of hedges based on corporate culture and the nature of the dialogue. The digital aspect of group conversations allows for experimenting with communication techniques, influencing the use of hedges in current workplace interactions.

4. Apologetic Expressions

Both men and women may use apologetic expressions—words that convey regret or politeness. Tannen (2012) shows that women often use these expressions more frequently, possibly due to societal expectations for them to be empathetic and polite. This could be their way of navigating these expectations while maintaining positive relationships. Apologetic language is used as a strategy to soften messages, requests, or critiques, fostering collaboration. In contrast, men may use fewer apologetic expressions, prioritizing direct communication and aligning with traditional norms of assertiveness. The context, including organizational culture and conversation nature, plays a role in how apologetic language is used by participants of all genders. In the digital communication landscape, the use of apologetic expressions can adapt based on virtual dynamics and the personalities involved.

III.   METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach to explore how gender and language patterns interact in work-related group chats. The data are collected from one of the lecturers' chat groups of Sebelas Maret University. The data are identified through recurring themes and language features related to gender. To ensure accuracy, multiple researchers independently code a subset of the data, and participant feedback validates the findings. The researcher respects ethical guidelines by obtaining informed consent, protecting participant identities, and acknowledging our own biases. While the study's sample size and focus on text communication could limit findings, our research provides insights into gendered communication in the digital workplace. Future research could extend to other communication forms and organizational contexts. The aim is to offer actionable insights into modern workplace communication challenges.

IV.   RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the investigation, it is identified that there are several linguistic features used by male and female participants in the related group chat and the relationship of those features with the gender of the participants. The following section provides the details.

A. Linguistic Features of Male Participants in the Group Chat

TABLE I. LINGUISTIC FEATURES OF MALE PARTICIPANTS

People in the Group Chat		Personal Information			Language Features				
No	Name	Sex	Age	Job Title	Use of Emoticons	Hedging	Direct	Indirect	Apologetic Expressions
1	A	Male	50	Head of Study Program	11	3	3	6	5
2	B	Male	45	Senior by 3 years	4	0	2	1	0
3	C	Male	34	Senior by 2 years	1	0	0	0	1
SUM					16	3	5	7	6

Participant A is a 50-year-old male with the job title "Head of Study Program". Throughout the conversation, A demonstrates a frequent use of emoticons, inserting them into messages a total of 11 times. This suggests that A tends to use visual cues like emoticons to express emotions or tone in their messages. Interestingly, A hedges their statements three times, indicating a tendency to express uncertainty or ambiguity. Additionally, A engages in both direct communication (three instances) and indirect communication (six instances), revealing a versatile approach to conveying their thoughts.

Here is an example of the chat by Participant A:

[6:01 PM, 6/20/2023] Participant A: ***Assalamualaikum bapak ibu*** *sy pernah di ingatkan oleh dosen S1 *** terkait penyebutan nama seseorang dg huruf kapital dan mulai itu sy selalu terapkan penyebutan nama orang dg huruf besar pada huruf pertama nama org tsb. Sy bbrp kali mgk juga bapak ibu pernah di wa mhs kadang mhs menyebut nama kita dg huruf pertama nama kita dg huruf kecil padahal harus nya huruf besar.* ***Monggo kita terapkan pada diri kita dan contohkan kpd mhs kita.*** 🙏 🙏 🙏

The chat is sent by Participant A when someone sent him a text and called him "pak" but didn't capitalize the first letter of "pak". He's not happy with it as in his point of view, it's not standardized language. As a lecture, we have to always give a good example for the students, starting with that tiny aspect.

The situation is interesting because the content of the chat aligns with a communication style that is often associated with feminine traits, regardless of the speaker's gender. The chat's focus on politeness, attention to detail, and encouraging a courteous approach to communication still reflects the speaker's intent to create a respectful and considerate atmosphere, even if it may deviate from traditional masculine communication norms. This highlights that individuals can transcend stereotypical gender communication patterns and adopt diverse styles that align with their values and objectives.

Moreover, it can be seen from table I that Participant B, a 45-year-old male, employs emoticons in their messages four times, suggesting a moderate use of visual cues for emotional expression. Unlike Participant A, B refrains from hedging their statements, choosing a more assertive communication style. While B uses direct communication twice, they use indirect communication once, showcasing a balanced mix of both approaches.

Participant C, a 34-year-old male, is denoted as "Senior by 2 years," indicating a relatively lower seniority compared to B. C's use of emoticons is minimal, with only one instance observed. This suggests that C might prefer to rely on words rather than visual cues to convey emotions. Interestingly, C avoids hedging and uses indirect communication as the sole form of communication in the group chat. Moreover, C employs apologetic expressions once, indicating a tendency to be considerate or polite in their interactions.

B. Linguistic Features of Female Participants in the Group Chat

TABLE II. LINGUISTIC FEATURES OF FEMALE PARTICIPANTS

People in the Group Chat		Personal Information			Language Features				
No	Name	Sex	Age	Job Title	Use of Emoticons	Hedging	Direct	Indirect	Apologetic Expressions
1	D	Female	41	Senior by 15 years	0	0	6	0	0
2	E	Female	29	Senior by 3 years	3	2	0	2	2
3	F	Female	35	Senior by 3 years	6	0	3	3	0
4	G	Female	34	Senior by 2 years	4	2	2	4	2
5	H	Female	32	New lecturer	2	0	0	0	1
6	I	Female	29	New lecturer	2	0	2	0	2
7	J	Female	27	New lecturer	3	0	2	0	2
8	K	Female	27	New lecturer	6	0	1	2	4
SUM					26	4	16	11	13

Participant D, a 41-year-old female, is identified as "Senior by 15 years." This likely refers to D's extensive experience and seniority within the context of their job. Interestingly, D refrains from using emoticons and hedging in their messages. Instead, D strongly favors direct communication, using this approach for six instances. This suggests a straightforward and assertive communication style, possibly stemming from their senior role. However, D does not engage in indirect communication or apologetic expressions, indicating a more assertive and less nuanced communication approach.

Here is an example of a chat by Participant D:

[12:01 PM, 8/18/2023] Participant D: *bu E*** dan mba @G*** dapat template ini drmrn?kok kerja sama pendidikan hilang/tdk ada sheetnya penamaan sheet* ***jangan diubah, jangan dihilangkan*** *meskipun bukan untuk D3, dilewati saja. Kita membiasakan dengan sistemnya BAN PT, form itu* ***tdk boleh diubah sedikit pun*** *krn di cell2tertentu ditempatkan formula utk memudahkan pekerjaan asesor. Demikian pula hasil copasan tdk akan terdetect tulisannya di BAN PT*

The chat is sent by Participant D when she found out that two relatively younger lecturers did something to a document that was actually shouldn't be edited at all. She directly sent the chat to the group where everyone can read that. By omitting emojis, Participant D adopts a straightforward approach that avoids emotive expression. This is consistent with traditional gender norms that attribute less emotive expression to men. The lack of hedging or softer language also signifies a direct and assertive communication style, a trait often associated with masculine communication.

The preference for direct sentences reinforces the participant's authoritative and experienced position, which, in this case, is "Senior by 15 years." The participant likely feels comfortable making decisive statements without the need for additional linguistic modifiers. This aligns with masculine communication norms, where being concise and to the point is valued.

Moreover, Participant E, a 29-year-old female, holds the position of "Senior by 3 years." E employs emoticons in their messages three times, indicating a moderate use of visual cues for emotional expression. Furthermore, E uses hedging twice, suggesting a tendency to express uncertainty or to soften statements. Interestingly, E balances their communication between direct and indirect styles, each employed twice. Additionally, E employs apologetic expressions twice, showcasing a courteous and considerate tone in their interactions.

Participant F, a 35-year-old female "Senior by 3 years," stands out with a relatively high use of emoticons (six times). This suggests a strong reliance on visual cues to convey emotions or tone. Similar to Participant D, F avoids hedging in their messages, opting for more assertive communication. F balances between direct communication (three instances) and indirect communication (three instances), indicating an adaptable approach. Notably, F does not employ apologetic expressions, indicating a more direct communication style.

Participants G, H, I, and J are all new lecturers in their late twenties to early thirties. Collectively, they use a total of 12 emoticons, with each individual using emoticons in their messages. Participants G and H also exhibit hedging in their messages (two instances each), showing an inclination to express uncertainty. While participants G, I, and J engage in both direct and indirect communication, participant H solely uses direct communication. Additionally, participants I and J employ apologetic expressions twice each, displaying a courteous tone in their interactions.

C. *The Patterns of Linguistic Features in the Group Chat*

TABLE III. THE PATTERNS OF LINGUISTIC FEATURES EMPLOYED BY MALE AND FEMALE PARTICIPANTS IN THE GROUP CHAT

Gender	Linguistic Features				
	Use of Emoticons	Hedges	Direct	Indirect	Apologetic Expressions
Female	26	4	16	11	13
Male	16	3	5	7	6

In this conversation, the participants' communication styles appear to be influenced by traditional gender norms, but there are also signs of evolving trends. Participant A, a middle-aged male, seems to embrace a balanced approach by using both direct and indirect communication methods. This aligns with the idea that men often lean towards direct communication, focusing on the exchange of information. However, A's frequent use of emoticons could suggest a shift from the historical tendency of men to avoid emotive expression, indicating a more modern willingness to use visual cues for emotional connection. This claim is in line with Tang Y's claim (2019) that senders of friendly emoticons usually would be perceived as more outgoing and favorable people.

Participant B, another male, diverges from A by displaying a more assertive communication style. This aligns with the traditional male communication norm of being straightforward and action-oriented. B's moderate use of emoticons might hint at a growing comfort among men to integrate emotional elements into their messages. This suggests a shift away from the notion that emotional expression is solely reserved for women.

Participant C, yet another male, adheres to indirect communication, which has historically been linked with femininity. This could indicate a preference to use subtler cues and consider the context when conveying messages. C's infrequent use of emoticons aligns with the stereotype of men using fewer visual cues for emotional expression. However, the presence of apologetic expressions could reflect a willingness to soften communication, challenging traditional masculine communication norms.

The female participants present a spectrum of communication styles as well. Participant D, a senior female, aligns with traditional male communication by being direct and authoritative. This may reflect her extensive experience and senior role. Her lack of emoticons and hedging resonates with the stereotype of men avoiding these elements in favor of a more assertive tone. Participant E, a younger female, displays a blend of styles by combining direct and indirect communication with emoticons and hedging. This suggests a willingness to navigate between traditional male and female communication norms. The use of hedging indicates an acknowledgment of uncertainty, a trait often attributed to feminine communication.

Finally, participants G, H, I, and J, all female, collectively showcase a range of communication styles. Their usage of emoticons might indicate a departure from older gender norms that discouraged men from using such symbols. The instances of hedging and indirect communication among this group could align with the notion of women prioritizing social harmony and avoiding confrontational language. That finding aligns with Obidovna's claim (2022) that women are more likely to soften their statements than men. The employment of apologetic expressions by participants I and J further underscores this trend of women striving for courteous interactions.

The data shown above, however, are not meant to compare two communication patterns between female and male participants since the number of participants of each gender is not equal. There are more female participants than male participants, resulting in a bigger dataset of female participants.

V.   CONCLUSION

From a gender differences perspective, the analysis indicates that male participants often prioritize directness and efficiency in their communication. They may value clear and concise information exchange and may be more inclined to focus on the factual aspects of their messages. However, **Participant A (male, 50)** uses emoticons more frequently than his female counterparts. This trend could be attributed to Participant A's position as the head of the academic program, which creates a desire to foster inclusive communication among all faculty members, irrespective of seniority or new appointments. Concurrently, this effort is directed towards fostering a communicative framework characterized by warmth and avoidance of formality.

On the other hand, female participants appear to embrace a more varied communication style that includes both directness and indirectness. They use emoticons more often, emphasizing emotional expression and fostering a warm workplace environment. The frequent use of politeness suggests that female participants may strongly emphasize maintaining positive relationships and showing consideration for others' feelings. Despite those findings, **Participant D (female, 41)** tends to type directly and use no emoticons in her chats. She prioritizes clarity and straightforwardness, not employing hedging, indirectness, or apologetic expressions. Her messages are concise and focused on conveying information efficiently.

The findings align with gender and language theories, highlighting distinct communication patterns between male and female participants in the workplace. From a sociolinguistic perspective, male participants prioritize efficiency and factual exchange, reflecting the gendered tendency towards instrumental communication. This resonates with the dominance approach, suggesting that males often focus on conveying information directly. However, the analysis also reveals nuances. Participant A deviates from the typical male pattern by using emoticons frequently. This can be understood through the accommodation theory, as he, in a leadership role, seeks to establish an inclusive and warm communication environment for all faculty members, transcending traditional gender norms.

Conversely, female participants exhibit a multifaceted communication style rooted in the different approaches. Their emoticons emphasize emotional expression and create a supportive, collaborative work atmosphere. The consistent employment of politeness strategies aligns with the rapport theory, underscoring females' inclination to prioritize social harmony and build positive relationships. An exception is seen in Participant D who adheres to the deficit theory, exhibiting a communication style akin to the dominant male norm. Her concise and direct communication aligns with the male-associated "report talk," eschewing hedging or emoticons for clarity and efficiency. These findings substantiate gender and language theories, showcasing the interplay of communication patterns, leadership roles, and gendered expectations in shaping workplace discourse.

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