Different Vocabulary Choices and Expressions of Male and Female Bilinguals in Daily Conversations at the University of Nottingham Ningbo China

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Abstract. This study explores gender differences in vocabulary selection and communicative expression among bilingual students at the University of Nottingham Ningbo China. By analyzing naturally occurring English-Chinese bilingual dialogues of eight participants, this study explores how gender and life experiences influence language use in informal settings. Through qualitative coding and frequency analysis, the research results indicate that male bilinguals tend to use task-oriented, evaluative, and technical vocabulary, while female bilinguals tend to use cooperative, relational, and detail-oriented expressions. Transgender dialogue also demonstrates role asymmetry and different discourse strategies. In addition, the differences between same-sex groups with different life experiences highlight the influence of personal background on language style. These findings suggest that bilingual communication is influenced not only by gender but also by contextual and experiential factors. This study emphasizes the complex interweaving between identity, language use, and social background, while also acknowledging the limitations related to sample size and ecological validity, thus contributing to gender and bilingual research.

Keywords: Communication, Bilingual, Vocabulary selection, Social.

1. Introduction

Language plays a crucial role in reflecting and shaping gender roles in social construction and gender perception. The two have a complex interaction [13]. Under such conditions, the demand for exploring how biological sex and life experiences shape communication is constantly increasing. At the same time, with the acceleration of globalization, the number of bilingual people is also constantly increasing, which means that the complexity of vocabulary selection is expanding. As [11] suggested, in an increasingly globalized world, meticulous research methods are needed to capture the multifaceted nature of bilingual language use to address the complex interplay between bilingualism and vocabulary selection. Therefore, based on the above viewpoint, this essay will study different vocabulary choices and expressions of male and female bilinguals in daily conversations at the University of Nottingham Ningbo China. The reason for limiting the research scope to this university is that, as a Sino-foreign joint venture university, it provides a medium for studying bilingual vocabulary selection. This study aims to explore how differences in biological sex and life experiences, respectively, affect language use. Therefore, this essay aims to contribute to the extensive research on gender communication in bilingual environments and elucidate how language reflects and deepens social identity. Thus, the theme of this essay is worth exploring in depth as it lies at the intersection of several key research areas today. Additionally, the revelation of the phenomenon of individual vocabulary selection and expression differentiation in the research process is also conducive to strengthening related research.

2. Theoretical basis of gender and bilingual language use

Scholars have conducted much research on topics such as gender, bilingualism, and social identity for a long time. The literature review in this paragraph aims to investigate existing theoretical research on the influence of gender and social identity on language use and language representation of bilinguals. Specifically, this literature review will provide a theoretical foundation for the subsequent

analysis section, which will highlight the theoretical framework and acknowledge its limitations through critical evaluations of relevant research. Firstly, the issue of gender influencing language choice has been extensively studied in monolingual environments. [9] pointed out that women's language is considered "more polite" and "emotional". Although the idea of Lakoff has inspired research on the influence of gender on language orientation, such ideas inevitably carry certain stereotypes. In addition, over time, researchers have gained a deeper understanding of the impact of gender on discourse choice. The difference in speaking styles between men and women is mainly reflected in vocabulary selection. Men tend to use indicative words while women prefer adjectives and intensifiers, indicating that women tend to connect while men focus more on discourse status [14]. However, recent research findings oppose the conclusion of homogenization of gender and language choices. [6] emphasized the role of specific contexts, social identities, and power in shaping language styles, rather than simply attributing differences in language styles to differences in biological gender. [1] also criticized the view of binary language selection between men and women, believing that gender has a performative nature and language styles are more regulated by culture and institutions. The topic of bilingualism and vocabulary selection has also been widely explored by scholars. Because in a bilingual environment, vocabulary selection becomes more complex. [5] mentioned the "complementarity principle" and held that bilinguals will choose different languages in different areas of life. This behavior can affect language preferences and vocabulary selection. Vocabulary selection is influenced by proficiency, social environment, conversational identity, and emotional states of both parties [3]. For instance, bilinguals may use code switching to discuss abstract concepts in specific contexts. When gender and bilingualism interact, related research becomes more specific, and the variability also increases. A study by [10] explored how physiological gender affects an individual's acquisition and use of a second language and showed that women are more adept at interpersonal communication and emotional dimensions of language, which influences their vocabulary choices in bilingual environments. Similarly, the research findings of [12] indicated that bilinguals of different genders lead to differences in code switching, with male bilinguals focusing on vocabulary related to topic control or marker states. However, these research findings are highly dependent on specific environments. In formal settings, people will adjust their vocabulary choices and expressions accordingly when stimulated by external factors. This means that there is a lack of data samples for more natural conversations in informal environments. In the context of Chinese English bilingualism, relevant studies have shown more specific sociolinguistic patterns. [15] pointed out that bilingual individuals often use English to showcase modernization, personality, and academic abilities, while Mandarin is more commonly used to express tradition and intimate relationships. In addition, [4] found that Chinese female bilinguals are more inclined to convert English language codes into Mandarin to gain social status and identity. In contrast, male bilinguals are more traditional and cautious in their use of English. However, these tendencies may also vary from individual to individual. Although there is much relevant literature on gender, life experiences, and bilingual individuals' language expression and vocabulary choices, there are still inevitable limitations. Firstly, most of the related research is often rooted in Western backgrounds and cannot be directly applied to bilingual environments in Asia, especially in China. Secondly, there is almost no literature on direct informal conversations between bilingual college students, especially in typical bilingual environments such as the University of Nottingham Ningbo China, where both languages are frequently used. Finally, the intersection of gender, bilingualism, life experience, and vocabulary selection has not yet been systematically theorized. Dialogue research in formal settings could also limit the generalizability of conclusions. Therefore, this essay aims to fill in the gap, which is that limited studies focus on bilinguals' vocabulary choice based on both gender and life background by investigating the differences in vocabulary choices and expressions in daily conversations among bilingual individuals of different genders at the University of Nottingham Ningbo China. This study will adopt a context-sensitive cross-cultural perspective by focusing on the real interactions of students in bilingual campuses, capturing the interactions between gender, life experiences, and language use in this context. Based on the above discussion, this essay will present two research

questions: Based on the experimental data, is there a significant difference in vocabulary selection between opposite-sex individuals in communication, compared to individuals of the same sex? Will life experience also lead to differences in vocabulary choices between the same genders in conversations?

3. Research Design and Data Collection Procedures

To explore the topic of this essay, it is necessary to design and implement a scientific and secure research project. This research project adopts the data collection method of small-scale purposive sampling, which allows focused comparison between genders and backgrounds, and balances consistency and flexibility, capturing authentic language use. The data collection time was during the participants' after-school break two weeks ago. To be specific, it invited a total of four groups of volunteers from the University of Nottingham Ningbo China, consisting of eight individuals, aged from twenty to thirty, five males and three females.

3.1. Participant Recruitment and Sampling Strategy

Volunteers were divided into two groups of two males, one group of two females, and one group of one male and one female. Additionally, the participants have almost identical educational and professional backgrounds. However, they come from different regions with different life experiences and personality traits. Participants were asked to have a natural conversation for two to three minutes in an informal setting, with the topic of recent school life, while conducting it in an informal setting can encourage natural conversation. During the conversation, the participants' audio was lawfully and compliantly collected into audio files, which were transcribed into text versions in English for analysis later.

3.2. Data Collection Environment and Ethical Considerations

Despite the completion of the data collection measures, there may still be potential issues arising. Such research projects may lead to the Observer's Paradox: Participants may adjust their speech when aware they are being observed. This probably leads to a decrease in data dependency, thereby affecting the reliability of the conclusion. In addition, all moral and ethical issues have been carefully discussed and strictly adhered to the school's moral policies. Before conducting this research project, the specific details regarding ethical approval and implementation have been reviewed and approved by the relevant professors. This study has achieved ethical considerations by ensuring that all participants are informed and agree, maintaining anonymity and confidentiality of information throughout the process. Also, participants are free to withdraw at any time without any punishment. Finally, all relevant data have been securely stored for academic research purposes only. After the data collection phase is completed, the study will use qualitative coding and simple frequency count to analyze the data.

3.3. Analysis Method: Qualitative Coding and Frequency Counting

Firstly, due to the relatively small data set of this research project, adopting quantitative research is almost meaningless. Secondly, because participants used a mixed Chinese English approach during the conversation, it is necessary to conduct a qualitative analysis of the keywords used in the conversation. In addition, when conducting dialogue analysis, it is necessary to consider the context of individual statements rather than independent analysis to more accurately determine the conversational style of the interlocutors. Therefore, qualitative coding, an analysis method suitable for the above conditions, was selected by this study. At the same time, although the collected data samples are relatively small, to ensure a more comprehensive analysis, it is necessary to count the frequency of meaningful words appearing in the data to infer the tendency of vocabulary selection. Therefore, this study will also perform simple frequency counting during the data analysis process.

4. Research Findings: Gender Vocabulary Patterns and Discourse Strategies in Bilingual Dialogues

This section will integrate and analyze the data collected from the above experiments, applying various linguistic concepts, including lexical field analysis and meta-discourse markers. There was a significant difference in vocabulary selection between male and female participants during the conversation.

4.1. Vocabulary Selection for Male and Female Groups

Specifically, male participants prefer to use vocabulary related to tasks, scientific techniques, and structured problem-solving. For example, in male group 1, the conversation between the two shifted from the gaming field to electronic hardware and finally to an academic career. They discussed the technical attributes and features of the game in detail. The use of vocabulary such as "PS5," "Dual Sense", "controller", "gyroscope", and "linear motor" indicates that they are discussing topics that revolve around a core object and have specific domains. At the same time, they also constructed academic themes from the perspective of task completion, and without any preparation, they mentioned that the paper is an issue that both parties must primarily focus on, such as "must do lots of... this annoying essay". Male group 2 further reinforced this preliminary observation, although their conversation topics were not entirely the same, the two males in this group were still task-oriented and selected core objects for divergent exploration. The core focus of their conversation was academic issues. In addition, their choice of vocabulary can reflect that both individuals are result-oriented. The selection of words such as "business communication coursework", "poster", "reflection", "questionnaire", and "module selection". These choices indicate the current difficulties and academic issues that need to be addressed, reflecting the exchange of information value between the two through language. Conversely, both female participants in the female group exhibited detail-oriented features in vocabulary selection. Although the topics discussed by the two female participants in the conversation were still academic, their emphasis was different from that of the male participants. Compared to male participants who directly express their opinions or emotions towards academic issues, female participants are more inclined to use design-oriented vocabulary to collaboratively solve problems. They tend to use concrete, realistic nouns and interpersonal harmonious vocabulary such as "wooden stairs", "bookshelf", and "poster", which are high-frequency words in the conversation, indicating the collaborative goal of the two female participants in this group to focus on details and visual aesthetics. To compare the tendencies of vocabulary in each group more intuitively, Table 1 summarizes the three most frequently used actual words in each conversation group, as well as their respective frequencies.

Table 1. High-frequency vocabulary used by each group

Group	Top 3 Words	Frequency
Male Group 1	PS5, controller, essay	12, 9, 6
Male Group 2	questionnaire, deadline, poster	11, 8, 7
Female Group	bookshelf, picture, second floor	10, 8, 6
Mixed Group (M)	deadline, question, system	9, 6, 5
Mixed Group (F)	yes, can we, maybe	8, 7, 5

In addition, both also pay attention to the experiential perception of others, such as " this product can be tasted" and "we can introduce our products", indicating that their dialogue is not limited to closed-loop divergent thinking on specific topics, instead, they focus on the construction of social connections, which aligns with the theory purposed by [14] that women are more inclined to establish a harmonious relationship with the other party during conversations to promote their collaborative work.

4.2. The Discourse Function and Attitude Markers of Gender

The differences in discourse functionality caused by different modes of expression also reveal different genders' tendencies towards discourse selection. In male group 1, comparative and evaluative language was repeatedly emphasized, such as "the difference between PS5 controller and plug-in box" and "its vibrator seems to be better". They emphasize the qualitative evaluation of a certain viewpoint or substance, directly indicating their attitude from the beginning. When discussing academic topics, they still tend to use evaluative language. When discussing academic topics, they still tend to use judgmental language, such as "I suck at writing essays", to indicate their attitude and level of capability, and to inform the interlocutors of their strategic actions. Similarly, in male group 2, the central focus of the discussion between the two individuals remains on evaluation planning and exchange of insights, with the agenda-driven format determining a faster pace of dialogue. Male communication often revolves around task autonomy and value exchange in status negotiations [8]. The statements of "we must hurry up" and "the deadline has come" that express our stance and seek mutual benefit also confirm this viewpoint. In contrast, female participants tend to choose language with a protective and mutually beneficial nature for expression. Their words imply the sharing and collaboration of information, and they are more inclined to explore and cooperate on the topic by representing it rather than directly qualitative analysis. They emphasized visualizing the discussion on the topic, such as "you can add some pictures" and "if you need, we can put them on the second floor." In addition, this also indicates that their discourse is inclusive and consultative, which mirrors the argument pointed out by [9] mentioned earlier. The differences in dialogue styles between male and female participants in the mixed group are more prominent.

4.3. Interaction and Role Asymmetry among Mixed Gender Groups

In the conversation, the man in this group was still engaged in topic discussions centered around the task. His role in the conversation was close to that of a respondent. The female participant maintained affirmation of male language while actively asking questions. Although their positions in the dialogue are not symmetrical, they still follow the previously proposed interaction pattern. [7] suggested that using meta-discourse markers for analysis helps to elucidate discourse strategies. Although all four dialogues tend to use engagement markers, men and women have different purposes for using meta discourse. "I heard", "must be", "you just need", and other engagement markers used in male dialogues are used to reflect the directionality of the topic and the determinacy of personal attitudes. Women, on the other hand, use different engagement markers such as "we can" and "do you plan to have…" to express consistency with the other person and a cautious attitude towards the topic. In addition, women prefer to use filler words such as “so" and "yes" to ensure the coherence of sentences and the continuity of emotional expression. In contrast, men tend to use transitional words such as "uh", "damn", and "right" as markers of attitude or topic change.

4.4. The Impact of Life Experiences within the Same Sex Community

Research also suggests that vocabulary selection and expression patterns are influenced by life experiences. Although the logical basis of the dialogue between the two male participants is the same, there is a certain deviation in the lexical style and expression displayed by the two groups of interlocutors. According to the experimental plan, two groups of male participants had completely different life experiences and personal personalities after controlling for the same variables, indicating a correlation between life experiences and shaping dialogue priorities. This observation is consistent with the research findings of [13] mentioned earlier. [2] also obtained similar observational results in her analysis of the dynamics of female discourse.

5. Conclusion

To summarize, this essay reveals the differences in expression and vocabulary choices between male and female bilinguals in daily conversations at the University of Nottingham Ningbo China,

through the above argument. The findings revealed clear patterns consistent with established gender communication theories. Specifically, male participants tend to use vocabulary related to tasks, science, technology, and dynamic competition. Their speeches focus on problem-solving, information exchange, and knowledge assertion. In contrast, female participants prefer choosing vocabulary related to design, seeking emotional resonance, and demonstration. Their conversation highlighted mutual support, experience sharing, and participation in assistance. The comparison between the two control groups, both composed of males, who have different life experiences, also indicates that there are still differences in vocabulary selection and expression methods even in communication between same-sex individuals. The conversation between males in the first group tends to be more focused on technical jargon, pop culture references, and critical evaluation, while the conversation in the second group tends to be more focused on academic logistics, project management terms, and ambiguity and uncertainty. This means that language differences are not only attributed to gender identity but also shaped by a wide range of life experiences. From a micro perspective, both social and cultural exposure, personal interests, and personality play important roles in shaping language choices. The findings of this study are consistent with the conclusions drawn by previous scholars. This means that even in the dimensions of bilingualism and specific cultures, gendered language tendencies still exist. However, this study indicates that the existence of language differences has also been proven to be influenced by other factors. In addition, the limitations of this study should also be acknowledged. The sample size of this research project is relatively small and focuses on bilingual individuals in Chinese and English. The single topic and unnatural setting also affect the generalizability of the conclusions. In the future, this study will consider expanding the participant population, incorporating naturalistic observation methods, and further exploring how bilinguals change their vocabulary and intonation based on specific environments and interlocutors.

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