

## A Study of Genderlect features in “Fifty Shades of Grey” by E L James

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**Abstract** *Gendered language not only focuses on what is said but also includes how to express that thought. This paper attempts to investigate the differences between the speech style of men and women. Data of ten passages have been collected from the novel “Fifty Shades of Grey” by E L James and analyzed qualitatively by using Deborah Tannen’s Difference approach. The results of this study show that there are notable differences that distinguish men’s communication pattern from women because of different established norms and culture of that society. Moreover, this study can be helpful to bridge the communication gulf between the two genders. Furthermore, this study can reveal to maintain a healthy atmosphere and raises awareness in society by understanding their different style of utterances. In addition, it also proves very helpful for the language teachers teaching to teach the learners according to their culture.*

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**Key Words:** Genderlect, Communication patterns, Rapport talk, Report talk, Established norms, Language and Gender, the communication gulf

### Introduction

Communication is a very important process in the life of human beings. [Woods \(2009\)](#) opines that communication is a productive and organized method in which two different meanings are constructed in the conversation of humans with some patterns. In the current studies, it is asserted that men and women speak in different ways because of their socio-cultural behavior. Communication does not only refer to what do you mean, but it also includes how you say something, which varies from person to person ([Tannen, 1995](#)). Communication occurs by some linguistic choices or sometimes by using certain symbols and body language made by both male and female. She further opines that language is an accomplished practice which simply means that our thinking and speaking is highly influenced by our cultural beliefs. So, language is the only way to express their feelings and emotions in front of others.

In ancient times, [Jespersen \(1922\)](#) states that men have different ways of expressing one thing as compared to women because women understand everything but do not pronounce it

as that of men. Moreover, he opines that women use some typical words and phrases in their conversation while men never use them. So, it seems that women have a different language that man in conversation.

The conversation is a type of discourse that has no specific rules, but it is composed and governed by a number of inherent conventions in the social use of language ([Carroll, 2008](#)). Likewise, [Tannen \(1990\)](#) argues that communication is actually a discussion in which most men try to achieve a central position while talking and defend themselves from the attempts of others (p. 24). In addition, the conversation includes a gendered way of talking in terms of suitability and drive meanings of different things according to context. Hence, gender is the social identity of a person, which is reflected through different linguistics choices. Moreover, gender is something that a person performs in front of society because it is a socially constructed norm (Butler, 2011). [Holmes \(2006\)](#) states that people evaluate other’s attitude in terms of their usefulness in the context with a view of the

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patterns of gender. So, it indicates how men and women behave during communication.

Gender varieties or genderlect are present as men and women both use language differently and signify different rules of language assigned to them by society. Owens (2012) claims that the aim of genderlect is to develop a shared understanding between two genders. Gender is entirely different from sex, as it has some relation to social cooperation ([Weatherall, 2003](#)). The areas that are under the study of genderlect include vocabulary used by men and women as well as their sentence construction and structure during communication. [Tannen \(1990\)](#) first coined the term genderlect in her book to show that there is no concept of inferiority and superiority between men and women; rather, they are different from one another in every aspect of life because of their cultural differences.

### Objective

The aim of this study is to highlight the features of genderlect in this novel.

### Research Question

To achieve this objective, the researcher has designed the following research question  
Which features of genderlect are found in this novel?

### Literature Review

Language and gender is the most interesting area in the field of sociolinguistics as language is used as a tool in communication between two genders. The use of language and gender has been an argumentative issue in the field of research. For hundreds of years, it has been discussing that women interact differently from men. In the 1960s, feminist campaigns recognized that language is one of the main tools for men to oppress women. However, many researchers are looking at how a linguistic system carried male chauvinist values and beliefs in the 1970s. A lot of research that has been done on language and gender issues show that language reiterates not only male dominance but also mirrors the patriarchal system. In 1922, Jespersen wrote on the same topic in his book and had innovative research in the study of the language of men and women. He states that men pronounce words according to the established

norms, whereas women deviate from them. [Labov and Trudgill, in 1972](#), conducted research on the same topic of pronunciation difference between men and women in sociolinguistics. Both proposed that women use less stigmatized language as compared to men and are more closely related to the standard language. Moreover, women are more flexible to use the patterns of language that gives high status to others.

Variation in language and gender attain interest with the proclamation of Lakoff's book "Language and Woman's Place" in 1975. This book becomes the birth of gender issues in the field of sociolinguistics. Moreover, [Cuellar \(2006\)](#) opines that this book has opened a new strand in the field of language as it also stresses the social aspects, including class, power and social fairness.

Spender, in his book "Man-made Language" (1980), argues that though men and women belong to one linguistic community, their power and social status are unequally divided. Mostly, language is in favor of men that show superiority in its nature. Hence, the dominance theory shows that men and women's language is different as the result of male supremacy and reveals that language is still under the control of one gender (men) that control, construct and regulate male domination (Bowden, 2014).

[Tannen \(1990\)](#), in her book, opines that communication is best understood between genders when we focus on their cross-cultural format during the conversation. She suggests that though both men and women are using language differently, so they are expressing different dialects or genderlects.

### Gendered Language and Genderlect

Osborne (1982) defines gendered language as the language that constitutes rude, trivial and prejudiced differentiation among different genders. Different researchers claim that gendered communication occurs when women marginalize to shape the apprehension of society. Prewitt-Freilino (2012) argues that cultural practices shape the language as well as the ways of society and construct their own world around them. This gendered language reflects a patriarchal system (Cohen, 1987) and privilege language as male-dominated that further frame their ideologies in society. This language creates a negative image, sense of

isolation and stereotypes associated with women in a particular society. Hence, their culture shows that language is just for men and also used to give favor to them, so it creates negative consequences in the community

The study of Khan et al. (2020) on the Pakistani drama serial "Ana" is conducted to highlight the features of genderlect and recognize the social identities in Pakistan. Their objective is to pinpoint the differences in the communication patterns of men and women in Asian culture. The result of this study reveals that the language of men and women are appreciably different because of their different subcultures and stereotypical roles assigned to them by society. Moreover, the findings also affirm that ideologies have a great influence on the speech patterns of men and women. Besides, the results also show that there is an imbalance of power between both genders that is present in Pakistani society.

[Weatherall \(2003\)](#) opines that gender not only attributes to the natural and irresistible outcome of one's sex, but it also has a direct link to the social communication of men and women. Genderlect theory by [Tannen \(1990\)](#) reflects the notion that men and women belong to two subcultures. This idea first comes forward in the 1980s when women were considered as a fragile, subordinate and trivial object. It occurs because of the amalgamation of 'culture' and 'male culture'.

[Maltz and Borker \(1982\)](#) opine that there are two communicative styles (cooperative and competitive) of men and women. They further suggest that women use the cooperative style for the progress of communication, whereas men use the competitive style for the exchange of information. Moreover, they were of the view that every speaker has different speaking roles according to their own different linguistic response, regardless of their sex and gender.

### **Theoretical Framework**

[Tannen \(1990\)](#) proposed a different approach in her book "You just don't Understand: Men and Women in Conversation", which states that the style of men and women are different in communication because there exist cultural differences. She associates men's talk as "report" and women as "rapport". According to her, men engage in conversation for transferring information and to maintain a relationship

because it becomes a contest for them. On the contrary, women communicate with others for the sake of intimacy and to build relationships (p. 24). Furthermore, she argues that miscommunication occurs when they interpret other's communication with respect to their gender. That is the reason men always try to lead the conversation in one direction, whereas women, due to their innate nature, lag behind to control the conversational wheel. In her book, she opines that men's and women's surroundings are entirely different because they brought up in different worlds of words. In society, people predict and acquire different words for them during a conversation that has a great impact on their communication patterns. She also believes that though men and women both are talking about the same thing, they are interpreted differently in accordance with their gender as men's soft way of utterance is politeness, but it is considered as powerlessness for women in society. The main points of this theory include status vs support, independence vs intimacy, advice vs understanding, information vs feelings, orders vs proposals and conflict vs compromise.

### **Research Methodology**

The research method that is used in this research is essentially qualitative in nature. Cresswell (2011) opines that this type of research is used to investigate and understand the deeper meaning of the text. This research is descriptive in nature so that a researcher gets new insights to find out the solution to a given problem (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). Ten passages have been selected from the novel "Fifty Shades of Grey" by E L James. The researcher uses a non-probability sampling technique to select data for analysis as this is a more reliable technique as compared to others ([Cavana et al., 2001](#)).

### **Data Analysis**

#### **Status Vs Support**

As the novel opens, there are two major characters who accidentally met in an interview and fall in love with each other. Christian Grey, like other men, is conscious of his status, whereas Anastasia is quite shy and nervous by nature. [Tannen \(1990\)](#) opines that men always try to accomplish high status during a conversation because they think that they are the centre and controlling objects of the world and take the

world as a competition, as mentioned in text no 1

***“Oh, I exercise control in all things, Miss Steele,”***

Moreover, his status is shown during a conversation when he is staying in the best business hotel in Portland, as mentioned in text no 3. Furthermore, in-text no 6, men show their dominance by exerting their power on the inferior creature. That is the reason when Ana blames Christian that he is a sadist; he himself admits that he is dominant and wants her to surrender herself in front of him. Here Christian shows his status by exploiting his argument with Ana.

On the contrary, women are more supported by nature because, for them, the world is all about building connections with others. The helping nature of women is shown when Kate insists Ana take an interview for her college magazine. Though Ana does not know about anything, she agreed because Kate is not feeling well. This is mentioned in text no 2 when Kate remarks

***“Ana, thank you so much for doing this. I owe you, I know.....”***

Besides, women also connect with other women or men for supporting or maintaining their relation during communication.

### Independence Vs Intimacy

Christian is seen as an independent character in the novel. [Tannen \(1990\)](#) states that women want to build relations with others for the sake of closeness. Men do not need closeness as they are more independent by nature as compared to women. Men show their independency by placing their own thoughts, ideas and beliefs in front of others and do not rely on the opinion of others. This independent nature is shown by Christian when he commands Ana to sit on one side of the table. Furthermore, it is also shown when Christian orders a breakfast menu of his own choice for Ana, as mentioned in text no 4. Moreover, this nature of men is further exposed when Christian gives a non-disclosure agreement to Ana and told her to sign if she wants to be in a relationship with him, as quoted in text no 5.

On the contrary, women close with others quickly and share all their feelings with that person. So when she maintains an intimate relationship with Christian, she told everything about her just for the sake of physical comfort and to strengthen their relationship. This

attribute of women is shown when she asks Christian for the photoshoot in a very humble manner, as mentioned in text no 3

***“Tomorrow, if that’s okay. Where would be convenient for you, sir?”***

Besides, women also use the language of gratitude in front of men to restore their relations for a long period of time as she expresses thanks to Christian for the arrangement of clothes, as a notice in text no 4. Sometimes, women ask questions about a particular thing that shows that they do not have much knowledge about the world and worldly affairs. It happens in text no 5 when she asks questions about agreement time and again with Christian. The same thing is shown when Ana is telling Kate about Christian in detail as in-text no 2

***“He’s very focused, intense even- and young. Really young.”***

### Information Vs Feelings

[Tannen \(1990\)](#) opines that men communicate to transfer knowledge or information because they claim that they have more knowledge about worldly affairs. This is shown when Christian tells Ana about business

***“Business is all about***

***people.....  
.....And I reward them well.”***

When Ana asks how she pleases her, he informed her that he has some rules that are for her benefit and gives pleasure to him, as mentioned in text no 6. The same idea is exposed when Ana tells him that this agreement is legally unenforceable, and he declares that it represents an arrangement that he would like to make with her. If she does not like the agreement, then there is no need to sign it as mention in text no 7. In the whole passage, Christian uses rapport talk to become a dominant one as his words carry more information as compared to Ana. [Tannen \(1990\)](#)

In contrast, women, when communicating with others, always share their feelings and emotions because, for them, communication is all about strengthening the social links. Ana expresses her feelings about Christian in front of him by hearing all the details related to business as quoted in text no 1. Moreover, it is shown when Ana tells her feelings to Kate about Christian after taking an interview with him, as mentioned in text no 2.

### Order Vs Proposal

In a patriarchal society, men order their submissive to do work of their own choice. They command others to do something in one direction. As in text no 8, Christian uses direct imperative to order Ana as

*"Obey me in all*

*things.....Think of it as a role-play, Anastasia."*

Men want their women to follow them in every aspect of life. When a man wants to order someone, he is using authoritative language and sometimes threaten women to do what he wants; as in-text no 9, when Ana demands some distance from him, he simply threatens her that he could make him stay there. In-text no 4, Christian also orders Ana to sit by pointing to a particular place on the table.

On the contrary, women always propose the things which their men want, and they use super polite form during their

conversation. That is the reason Ana agreed to follow all the instructions given by Christian.

### Advice Vs Understanding

Men mostly advise and suggest others because they think that they have much experienced about a thing and wanted to sort out the solution to a given problem. As in text no 5, when he tells Ana about the agreement, she is ready to sign it without reading. Here Christian advise her as

*"Anastasia, you should always read anything you sign,"*

Ana always tries to understand the instructions of Christian because it is the duty of women to cope up with the situation and understands everything. When she does not get what he wants, she asks questions again and again to understand the deeper meaning of his utterance. This nature is shown in text no 6 when he declares himself a dominant one, and she is inquiring about it in detail.

Table 1. Genderlect Style

	Men	Women
Construction of Discourse	Use of direct imperatives and declarative sentences, maintain status and show independence	Continuous use of questions to engage in conversation, show support and intimacy
Level of expression	Give information, advice and suggestions, objective by nature	Express feelings and emotions, subjective by nature
Politeness in conversation	Less polite as compared to women, less use of modal constructions	More polite in nature, sometimes use super polite forms.
Topics of communication	Report talk	Rapport talk

Table 2. Frequency of Genderlect Features

Genderlect Features	Frequency
Status vs Support	4
Independence vs Intimacy	6
Information vs Feelings	5
Order vs Proposal	3
Advice vs Understanding	2

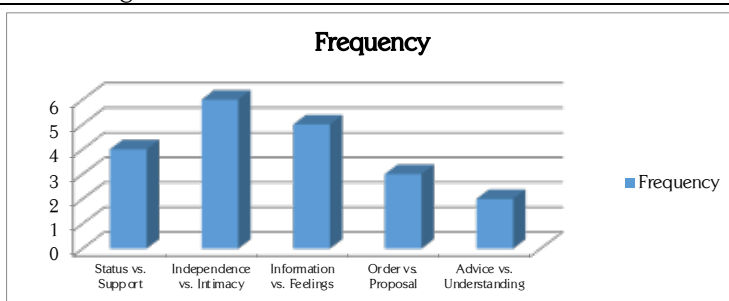


Figure 1: Frequency

### Themes emerged after careful Data Analysis

Women empowerment is one of the most important themes that emerged after careful data analysis. As both Ana and Kate have the opportunity to spend life and make decisions according to their will, and this empowerment shows women mobility and social interaction in society.

Compassion fatigue is also present in the relationship between Ana and Christian. Mostly this fatigue is from the men's part, but here Ana is exhausted in this relationship and wanted to leave Christian.

Physical and sexual lust is also present in the character of Christian as he wanted to make some boundaries in their relationship. So the contract which Ana has signed shows the sexual lust of Christian.

Emotional intimacy is also the most prominent theme that is extracted after the analysis of data. Both Ana and Kate have this attribute present in their character that shows their caring and understanding nature.

Analysis reveals that there is a mysterious relationship between Ana and Christian. Christian wants to fulfil his sexual desires, whereas Ana demands full love from him

BDSM is the most prominent theme of this study, as it indicates the struggling power of both genders psychologically. Moreover, this sexual practice involves power relation as well as an imbalance of power and pain.

### Findings and Conclusion

Hence, the above all analysis shows that differences in the speech of men and women are not socially constructed, nor is they based on

superiority and inferiority of one gender, but there is a cultural gap between these two genders. [Tannen \(1990\)](#) opines that the world of men and women are totally different; that is why they are speaking different words in their communication. To sum up, genderlect style is present in the communication patterns of Christian and Ana clearly in this novel. The genderlect features that are shown by men include prestige, freedom, information and recommendation, whereas women show support, intimacy and understanding nature in the novel. The analysis clearly shows that conversational designs are shaped by men and women for the sake of their benefit.

### Future implications

This study has some social implications as it can be helpful to raise awareness among people that the communication difference between men and women is because of their brought up in different culture and environment. Moreover, this study can also be helpful in creating a healthy atmosphere in society. So, there is an urgent need to understand the language and culture of a particular society. This study can be also beneficial to remove misunderstanding in the communication patterns of men and women. It has some pedagogical implications as well as it helps language teacher to teach language according to their culture. Future researchers can conduct comparative research on the communication patterns of two different regions. Hence, this study reflects that the conversational designs of men and women should be interpreted according to the culture of that society

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