

GENDER DIFFERENCES IN LANGUAGE USE: AN SFL STUDY OF HENRIK IBSEN'S HEDDA GABLER

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Over the past thirty years, and as a result of the women's movement, gender issues have become connected with the issue of language. Gender studies and language studies are both interdisciplinary academic fields. The study of language began thousands of years ago, while the study of gender and language is quite short. The study of gender is important to the study of language and the first step to study gender is to explore the difference between men and women. It is quite clear that men and women have a lot of differences in many fields but the focus of this paper would be on the language used by males and females. The purpose of research is not to deny the basic dissimilarities but to show how they reflect themselves through language performing their day-to-day functions.

For this purpose, Henrik Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* has been chosen. This paper is an attempt to examine how power and authority are reflected through speech. To meet this purpose, *Systemic Functional Linguistics*, *Speech Acts* and *Language and Gender* theories have been adopted. The analysis of the selected dialogues is conducted using the *Interpersonal metafunction* framework i.e., *Mood*, *Modality*. *Interpersonal metafunction* is chosen as it serves the basic function of language i.e., of establishing and maintaining relationships. For results, the analyzed data is classified with the help of *Speech Act* and *Language and Gender* theories. Three aspects of *Speech Act* theory, i.e. *Representatives*, *Directives* and *Commissives* and six aspects of *Language and Gender* theories, i.e. *Manipulative*, *Dominance*, *Sexist Language*, *Swear Words*, *Tag Questions* and *Agreeing* are used to classify the data. *Speech Act* theory and *Interpersonal metafunction* are inter-related in the sense that both the theories are based on the notion that language is a means of acting. People do different things with language. They expect to achieve a large number of different aims and different purposes with language.

First of all, there is a need to discuss what these theories are and what they reflect. If *Mood* analysis helps in differentiating the type of the dialogue delivered, i.e. whether it is declarative, imperative, interrogative and exclamative, *Speech acts* help in classifying the dialogues on the basis of *illocutionary force* used. It shows whether the delivered dialogue is a *representative*, a *directive* or a *commissive*; *Modality* tries to explore the confidence and politeness reflected through speech and *Language and Gender* theories help in understanding the language used by male and female characters depicting their roles in family and society.

After *Mood* analysis it has been found that in *Hedda Gabler*, total *Describing* dialogues are 91, which include dialogues by all the characters. The maximum number of dialogues delivered as *Describing* is by Hedda, i.e., 40, by George Tesman is 24, by Judge Brack is 18, by Miss Tesman is 4, by Mrs. Elvsted is 4 and by Eilert Lovborg is only 1. These results show that female characters in the play describe more than male characters. Eckert's view supports this as, "Women reported discussing personal problems, doubts and fears, family problems, and intimate relationships more than men, while men reported discussing sports more than women. Women also reported discussing personal problems in depth more than men" (Eckert, 2013: 117). In *Hedda Gabler*, Mrs. Elvsted tells Hedda about her personal problems and Hedda discusses her personal matters and feelings with Judge Brack. And, George Tesman is busy working even at the time of their honeymoon.

In *Hedda Gabler*, total *Asserting* dialogues are 37. In this play, Hedda is more assertive than all other characters. She has 22 assertive dialogues while others have very less such as Mrs. Elvsted has 7, George Tesman has 4, Lovborg has 3 and Judge Brack has only 1 assertive dialogue. George Tesman's assertive dialogues occur only in the last act of the play. Where Hedda is assertive all the time and for everyone, Mrs. Elvsted is assertive only for Lovborg and once in front of Hedda. Martin Rojo and Gomez Esteban (2005) after conducting a study of "female-styles" in focus-group organisations, are of the view that, "men do not have to perform in any special way or put on an act of being something they are not, and they are seldom seen as especially tough or authoritarian, because their authority as managers is stereotypically presupposed anyway" (Dijk, 2008: 203). This also implies that women have to assert themselves, whereas, men do not have to. They (men) already have the authority unmarked and, therefore, have no need to prove it. Assertive speech is sometimes seen as at odds with "making nice", and Lakoff (1973) viewed avoidance of assertiveness as part of "ladylike" speech" (Eckert, 2013: 141).

But Linda Carli (1999) thinks differently. She offers evidence that women using tentative, non-assertive language are often heard as incompetent but exert more influence than women seen as assertive and competent.

In *Hedda Gabler*, total *Commanding* dialogues are 7 and all of them are delivered by Hedda only. She commands both Judge Brack and Lovborg. She is never seen *Commanding* George Tesman. This also shows that she commands the two persons with whom she feels the most comfortable. Generally it is believed that males command more than females. Even Coates supports this as, “it seems that men pursue a style of interaction based on power, while women pursue a style based on solidarity and support” (Coates, 1986:115). But *Hedda Gabler* is an exception here. She holds a dominating character in the play. That is why she commands in the play instead of any male character. Here, also, the power is situation specific and not gender specific. Thus the view of gender theorists is not fully supportive for *Commanding* dialogues.

In *Hedda Gabler*, total *Requesting* dialogues are 6. Out of these, *Requesting* dialogues by George Tesman are 3, by Mrs. Elvsted are 2 and by Judge Brack is only 1. George Tesman requests once Mrs. Elvsted, once Miss Tesman and once Hedda. As Hedda is shown confident and dominating in the play, she is never seen *Requesting* anyone. The need to request all the time also proves the subordinate position of a person. The results of requesting dialogues show the subordinate position of female characters but in male dominated plays only.

Commissives are promises, either given by the speaker or asked from the listener. In *Hedda Gabler*, total *Commissives* found are 10. Out of these, 2 dialogues are by George Tesman, 2 by Hedda, 2 by Judge Brack, 2 by Mrs. Elvsted, 1 by Lovborg and 1 by Miss Tesman. George Tesman’s 1 dialogue is addressed to Hedda and 1 to Mrs. Elvsted. He asks Mrs. Elvsted to help him in rewriting the book for Eilert’s sake. Lovborg shows full faith in Hedda and tells her about the lost manuscript and asks her not to tell Mrs. Elvsted about that. In return she also promises not to tell anybody about that. She expects him to promise that he will try to commit suicide in a beautiful way. Judge Brack’s both *Commissives* are, in a way, for George Tesman. In 1 dialogue he reminds George that he has promised him and in 1 dialogue he tells Hedda that George will not join politics. Mrs. Elvsted in 1 dialogue asks for a promise from Hedda and in 1 dialogue she requests George to write a letter to Lovborg.

Manipulation is the skilful handling, controlling or using of something or someone (Dictionary Definition: Vocabulary.com). Shawn Naito (1995) in his review of Deborah Tannen's 'Talking from 9 to 5 Women and Men in the Workplace: Language, Sex and Power' says that men treat women's indirect communicative style as *Manipulative*. After the analysis, it has been realised that not only women but men, also, can be *Manipulative*. In *Hedda Gabler*, total *Manipulative* dialogues are found to be 16, which include 15 dialogues by Hedda and only 1 dialogue by George Tesman. George Tesman's *Manipulative* dialogue comes only at the end of play when he says that Judge Brack will be good enough to stop by and see Hedda. Out of Hedda's 15 *Manipulative* dialogues, 3 dialogues are uttered to Judge Brack. She tells him that to live in that house is part of their (Hedda and George) bargain and in 2 dialogues she asks him the result if pistol was not stolen. Rest of her 12 dialogues are used to manipulate Lovborg. At first, she wants him to stay back with her, later she wants him to join George Tesman and Judge Brack for the party. She manipulates him by saying about Judge Brack,

"The contempt in his smile when you didn't dare join them for a drink"

(Ibsen, 1965: 268)

"And besides, I noticed him smile and glance at Tesman when you couldn't bring yourself to go to their wretched little party" *(Ibsen, 1965: 268)*

These results show that not only females but males can also use the art of manipulation and, that too, very successfully. But Maltz and Borker (1996) are of different view. They agree with Susan Harding (1975) when they suggest that both males and females learn the art of manipulation differently. Maltz and Borker state that, "While men developed their verbal skills in economic negotiations and public political argument, women became more adept at a quite different mode of interactional manipulation with words: gossip, social analysis...The different social needs of men and women, she argues, have led them to sexually differentiated communicative cultures, with each sex learning a different set of skills for manipulating words effectively" (Maltz and Borker, 1996: 86). Thus, both males and females can be *Manipulative* and it, again, depends on situation and position of the speaker more, rather than the gender of the *Manipulative*. It cannot be concluded that only males or only females are *Manipulative*. Dijk states that one of the characteristics of manipulation is that "it involves power and domination" (Dijk, 2006: 362). He

is of the view that it is like the abuse of power and domination. Thus, it can be said that whosoever manipulates, misuses his/her power in society.

'*Dominance*' is one of the approaches used to study the difference between the language of men and women. Under *Dominance* section, two types of dialogues are mentioned, *Dominating* and *Dominated*. In *Hedda Gabler*, total *Dominating* dialogues are 14, which include 6 dialogues by Hedda, 5 by Lovborg, 2 by George Tesman and 1 by Judge Brack. Out of Hedda's 6 dialogues, 4 dialogues are used for Lovborg, 1 for George Tesman and 1 for Mrs. Elvsted. She uses this dialogue to say that Mrs. Elvsted is a fool to think that she can have a man's fate in her hands. George Tesman once asks Hedda to go and sit with Judge Brack and once he asks Judge Brack to accompany Hedda. It can be seen that both these *Dominating* dialogues by George Tesman occur only towards the end of the play. Judge Brack in his only one *Dominating* dialogue tells Hedda that she will have to answer the questions asked by the police. He himself does not dominate rather says something about the *Dominance* of police. Lovborg's all 5 dialogues are used for Mrs. Elvsted. He asks her to leave him and go home only when he realises that he has lost the manuscript of his book. It has been seen that Hedda is the only one who tries to dominate almost everyone around her throughout the play. It is only at the end that she feels that Judge Brack can dominate her and ask her to do anything. And, when she realises this, she is not able to bear the thought of being *Dominated* and commits suicide.

In *Hedda Gabler*, total *Dominated* dialogues are 5, which include 3 dialogues by Hedda and 2 by Mrs. Elvsted. 1 of 3 dialogues by Hedda is to Lovborg when she asks him if she is a coward, and her 2 dialogues are for Judge Brack admitting that she is in his power and he has his hold on her. It's just because he knows about the secret of pistol which she gives to Lovborg. But, both these dialogues occur towards the end only, otherwise, Hedda is never seen *Dominated* in the play. Mrs. Elvsted once tells Hedda that she has made her miserable by telling Lovborg about her morning visit, and once again she tries to tell Lovborg that she can't be driven away like that. She says this because Lovborg was asking her to leave him and go home.

Penelope Eckert (2013) also mentions, as other Gender theorists, that the relationship between males and females is based on power and dominance. She says, "the power relations between men and women are similar to those between dominant and subordinate classes" (Eckert, 2013:

124). She also says that in day-to-day context in which these power relations are played out is quite different.

Sexist language is the language used to demean the other sex especially women. Simpson and Mayr (2012) are of the view that, “the term sexism can be defined as discrimination within a social system on the basis of sexual membership and denotes a historically hierarchical system of inequality, just like inequality based on class or race, where women (and sometimes men) are discriminated against, exploited and constrained in some way or the other on the basis of their sex” (Simpson and Mayr, 2012: 16). In *Hedda Gabler*, total *Sexist* dialogues are 5 which include 2 dialogues by Miss Tesman, 1 dialogue by George Tesman, 1 by Hedda and 1 by Judge Brack. Where Miss Tesman and George Tesman talk about the nature of women, Judge Brack and Hedda talk about men. Miss Tesman says that it’s expensive to be with women as they spend a lot and George Tesman agrees to it. Hedda in her *Sexist* dialogue provokes Lovborg by saying,

“*That’s what a man to be*” (Ibsen, 1965: 268)

And Judge Brack says that they (men) are not that true to principles,

“*We males, sad to say-we’re not always so true to principles as we ought to be*”.
(Ibsen, 1965: 281)

Swear words are the words uttered mostly when the speaker is either frustrated or in a difficult position. *Swear words* are used in two ways: first way is to invoke a deity or swearing an oath and second way is of using offensive and obscene language. In this thesis, the first usage of *Swear words* is taken in view. In *Hedda Gabler*, total *Swear words* are 29, which include 15 by George Tesman, 6 by Mrs. Elvsted, 3 by Hedda, 3 by Judge Brack and 2 by Miss Tesman. In *Hedda Gabler*, total *Swear words* are 29, which include 15 by George Tesman, 6 by Mrs. Elvsted, 3 by Hedda, 3 by Judge Brack and 2 by Miss Tesman. In *Hedda Gabler*, these dialogues are uttered more by male characters than by female characters. Thus, the utterance of these types of words is not gender specific. *Language and Gender* theorists are of the view that only women use *Swear words*, but, in this play, even the male characters use *Swear Words*. These theorists believe in the usage of swearing and taboo language, which is used by only men but in this thesis these words are used for evoking God e.g. ‘For Heaven’s sake’, ‘My Lord’ etc.

The last section, i.e., *Agreeing* has also been further divided into two sections- *Agreeing* and *Disagreeing*. In *Hedda Gabler*, total *Agreeing* dialogues are 40, which include 13 dialogues by

George Tesman, 10 dialogues by Hedda, 6 by Berta, 5 by Judge Brack, 4 by Mrs. Elvsted and 3 by Lovborg. Out of 13 dialogues of George Tesman, 6 dialogues are used to agree with Miss Tesman, 4 to agree with Hedda in the first act and 3 to agree with Mrs. Elvsted while talking about Lovborg's book. Hedda's 9 dialogues are used to agree with Judge Brack and 1 to agree with Mrs. Elvsted. In her first 7 dialogues, she agrees with Judge Brack about her life and settlement, and in the last 2 dialogues, she agrees that he has no power over her. Judge Brack in all of his dialogues agrees with Hedda. In first 4, he just agrees with whatever she says and in the last he reminds her that what she is afraid of will happen, but he uses all dialogues for Hedda only. In her 4 dialogues, Mrs. Elvsted at first agrees with everything in general but in the last 2, she agrees with George Tesman about writing Lovborg's book. Lovborg once agrees with Hedda and twice agrees with Mrs. Elvsted that the book was her child. Miss. Tesman in both her dialogues agrees with either Hedda or what she says about George. Berta agrees only with Miss Tesman. It has generally been believed that the one who is holding the *Dominating* position does not agree with others rather others agree with him/her as in the case of Hedda. She does not agree with her husband even once but she agrees with Judge Brack, who is a family friend.

In the play, total *Disagreeing* dialogues are 8, which include 3 by Mrs. Elvsted, 3 by Hedda, 1 by Judge Brack and 1 by George Tesman. Mrs. Elvsted disagrees with Hedda twice, once when she mentions that she wants to go home alone and second time she disagrees with Lovborg when he asks her to go home and leave him. Hedda once disagrees with George Tesman when he says that they would trade in the new piano, and then she disagrees with Judge Brack twice when they were discussing about her marriage and the trip. Judge Brack also disagrees with what Hedda has understood about his views. Studies have found that women tend to agree more than men in order to show support in both single and mixed-sex talk (Leet, Pellegrini, 1980; Aries, 1982; Wood & Karren, 1986; Carl, 1989). They are of the view that women tend to perform more positive socio-emotional behaviour of this kind of interaction than men. But in this play, the case is different. Here female characters disagree more than male characters.

Language and Gender theorists (Lakoff, 1975; Coates, 1986, 2013; Eckert-Ginet, 2013; Wodak, 1997) are of the view that females use *Tag questions* as their language is weak and deficit. They lack confidence and in need of the approval of other person, i.e., male, they use *Tag questions*. In *Hedda Gabler*, total *Tag questions* used are 11, which include 6 *Tag questions* used by George Tesman and

5 by Hedda. In this play, neither consent nor emphasis is shown in *Tag questions*. Both Hedda and George Tesman use *Tag questions* for Lovborg and Mrs. Elvsted but rarely for each other.

As far as *Modality* is concerned, it “refers to a range of different ways in which speakers can temper or qualify their messages” (Eggins and Slade, 1997: 98). Also, Halliday and Matthiessen put *Modality* in contrast to *Polarity*. *Polarity* is about “negative” and “positive”, however, modality refers to “intermediate degrees, between the positive and negative poles” (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004: 147) and the function of modality is “to construe the region of uncertainty that lies between ‘yes’ and ‘no’” (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004: 147). There are two types of *Modality*: *Modalization* and *Modulation*. *Modalization* refers to the degrees of frequency or probability and *Modulation* refers to the degrees of obligation, inclination or capability.

In *Hedda Gabler*, George Tesman uses high *Modalization* 7 times (5 negative and 2 positive), Hedda 5 times (4 negative and 1 positive), Judge Brack 4 times (all positive), Lovborg twice (both negative) and Mrs. Elvsted only once (negative). In *Hedda Gabler*, Lovborg uses medium *Modalization* twice (both positive), Hedda twice (both positive), George Tesman once (positive), Judge Brack once (positive), and Mrs. Elvsted once (positive). In *Hedda Gabler*, low *Modalization* used by Hedda is 3 times (1 negative and 2 positive), by Mrs. Elvsted once (positive), and by Lovborg also once (positive) only.

In the selected play, George Tesman uses high *Modulation* 9 times, out of which, 4 are obligatory and 5 show willingness/inclination. Judge Brack uses high *Modulation* 4 times, which include 2 obligations and 2 willingness/inclinations. And, Lovborg uses high *Modulation* 4 times, 3 of which are obligatory and 1 shows willingness/inclination. Whereas, Hedda uses 12 times high *Modulation* value, which include 4 obligatory (1 negative and 3 positive) and 8 willingness/inclinations (3 negative and 5 positive). Mrs. Elvsted uses high *Modulation* 3 times, which include 2 obligations and 1 shows willingness/inclination. In the play, only Judge Brack uses medium *Modulation*, obligatory, in male characters, and, that too, only once; and, in female characters, only Hedda uses medium *Modulation*, i.e., 5 times and all of these are positive and obligatory. And George Tesman uses low *Modulation* value 22 times (6 negative and 14 positive), Judge Brack 4 times (3 negative and one positive), and Lovborg 6 times (2 negative and 4 positive). Whereas, Hedda uses low *Modulation* 30 times (13 negative and 17 positive), Mrs. Elvsted uses 8 times (1 negative and 7 positive) and Miss Tesman uses once (positive) only.

The results of both *Modalization* and *Modulation* show that male characters have made use of more high modal values than female characters while female characters have used more medium and low value modals. This shows that male characters are more confident, and female characters lack confidence and are more polite than male characters. As Hickel (2009) has observed that “high scale modals like *must* indicate full commitment...they make the speaker sound determined” (Kondowe, 2014: 09). For the use of low scale modals, Hickel (2009) states that “these modals indicate lack of speaker’s confidence in the truth of the propositions which is being advanced” (Kondowe, 2014: 09). And, Kondowe (2014b), is of the view that “*can* often serves to mark possibility and likelihood, and politeness in discourse” (Kondowe, 2014: 09). And Gender theorists, Lakoff (1975), Coates (1986, 2013), Bell (2014) and Eckert and Ginet (2013), state that politeness is a gender specific characteristic.

Apart from all this analysis, it has been found that *Vocatives* also play a significant role in the language. Leech is of the view that *Vocatives* have an attitudinal function implying familiarity and adding to the informality of the discourse as they “establish or maintain a social relationship between the speaker and the addressee(s)” (Leech, 2014: 108). In *Hedda Gabler* also, Hedda calls her husband Dr. It is not shown in their interpersonal conversation rather hinted at the starting of the play by Berta. She tells Miss Tesman that Hedda calls George, Doctor. And, later in the play, when Hedda tells George Tesman about burning Lovborg’s manuscript she calls him George. He feels delighted at this and even mentions:

“*And then, that you’ve started to call me George, too!*” (Ibsen, 1965: 293)

On the other hand, Lovborg wants to call Hedda by her first name but she prohibits him by saying that he can only think but cannot say it. This shows that Hedda and Lovborg share the intimacy which George and Hedda lack.

All these results prove that there are significant differences between the language used by male and female characters. Many reasons have been given for this difference. Maltz and Borker (1996) are of the view that the difference is due to the upbringing of males and females in different social cultures. They state that, “boys and girls learn to use language in different way because of the very different social contexts in which they learn how to carry on friendly conversation” (Donald and Macaulay, 1996: 87). Even Eckert (2013) is of the view that the conventions of verbal activity differ from culture to culture.

But in a different study by Spolsky (1998), it is said that one reason for the difference in language is lack of education. He points out that, “Of the social causes of gender differentiation in speech style, one of the most critical appears to be level of education. In all studies, it has been shown that the greater the disparities between educational opportunities for boys and girls, the greater the differences between male and female speech” (Spolsky, 1998: 37).

Feminist critics hold the view that females live a life of repression but Ibsen has created his females differently. He wrote *A Doll's House*, a revolutionary play, when *Language and Gender* theorists were of the view that it is mandatory for women to speak the language specified for them. Lakoff goes to the extent saying that, “If she doesn't learn to speak women's language, in traditional society she's dead: she is ostracized as unfeminine by both men and women” (Lakoff, 1975: 61). At that time, Ibsen created Hedda's character, who is dominating and carries her father's surname even after marriage and is interested in horses and pistols rather than being a mother. Hedda is shown confident and assertive since the starting of the play. Even Miss Tesman tells Berta how she looked when they first met her and both Judge Brack and Lovborg ask her the reason for getting married to George Tesman. This clearly shows her superiority.

To understand the gendered differences, if *Mood* analysis has helped in exploring how specific functions are performed through language, *Modality* has helped in clarifying who is more confident or who is more polite, males or females. *Language and Gender* theories suggest that women and men do not choose words to create their gender identities rather they draw upon such linguistic strategies to perform pragmatic and interactional functions of language that constitute their roles in a gendered way.

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