LANGUAGE AND GENDER: INVESTIGATING AGE-BASED TOPIC VARIATIONS AMONG FEMALES

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Abstract

This exploratory study examines female conversational themes across different age groups, uncovering how priorities and roles evolve over a woman's lifetime. Conversations during childhood and adolescence center on friends, school, and hobbies, reflecting the importance of identity-building and peer connections. In early adulthood, topics shift to education, career, and romantic relationships, highlighting self-discovery and autonomy. Middle adulthood focuses on balancing responsibilities, with career development, family, and health becoming central concerns. Later adulthood and old age introduce themes of personal fulfillment, spirituality, legacy-building, health, and community involvement, often marked by a reflective tone on life's achievements. The analysis reveals distinct patterns: lifestyle and entertainment topics like social media, beauty, and fashion dominate younger age groups (11–20 and 21–30), emphasizing trends, self-expression, and influencer culture. Professional growth and education also peak during this stage, while interest in activism and spirituality remains minimal. In middle adulthood (31–40), conversations demonstrate a shift to career stability, health, and personal relationships, with less focus on lifestyle or recreational topics. Older age groups (41–60) show a growing emphasis on health, mental well-being, food, spirituality, and parenting, with diminished interest in modern trends like social media or pop culture. These conversational shifts reflect broader life stage priorities, influenced by cultural norms, technological advancements, and individual experiences. By analyzing the topics discussed within age-specific conversational circles, this study sheds light on the challenges, aspirations, and evolving dynamics of women's lives, providing valuable insights for gender studies, sociolinguistics, social psychology, and discourse analysis. Female communication emerges as a rich site for exploring how societal expectations and individual trajectories intersect, offering a nuanced understanding of how women navigate identity, relationships, and societal roles across different phases of life.

Key words: Language and gender, Sociolinguistics, language variations, social-psychology

Introduction

Understanding how topics of conversation among women change across age groups is crucial for the analysis of communication patterns, social dynamics, and psychological needs in the lives of women. Conversations are not static; they evolve with women as they grow through various stages of life, reflecting changes in priorities, roles, and experiences. These transitions are influenced by developmental milestones, cultural norms, and personal circumstances and age-specific conversational topics are a very rich field of study in this respect (Tannen, 1990; Coates, 2015). This is because the study of changes in topics over time can highlight trends which show how women interact with their environments in nuanced ways, build relationships, and express their identities. This understanding also serves as a window into how social norms, technological improvements, and experiences of life in general shape the communication styles of women.

The subject matters of children and adolescents in early childhood and adolescence are largely centered on friendship, interests, and identity. This stage involves the use of dialogue for negotiation of peer relationships, establishment of self-esteem, and identity exploration by young girls. Peer interactions mainly determine conversational topics. Discussions on books, TV shows, celebrities, and personal aspirations mostly take place during this stage (Eckert, 2004). The social skills and the foundation for the early sense of self are developed in such conversations. Bullying, pressure to perform well at school, and body image become integral topics of discussion where a young girl finds her solace in talking over to peers. Moreover, the effects of

social media and digital communication on conversation have dramatically altered how teens communicate with one another as online platforms introduce new avenues and open up new horizons in what can be said between friends (Holmes, 2006).

During early adulthood, women's communication focuses on the challenges and opportunities of this formative period. Topics such as education, career aspirations, and romantic relationships are also discussed. The self is discovered and independent, focusing on health, fitness, and personal growth (Arnett, 2000). Women in their twenties and thirties discuss issues such as workplace matters, independence, and lifestyle choices - all aspects that they will have to establish in a professional and personal manner. Cultural and societal expectations to get married, start family or go to higher education will also be prominent in these conversations. The interplay between traditional expectations and modern opportunities often becomes a subject of reflection and dialogue.

In middle adulthood, the complexities of life's demands find expression in the topics dominating this stage. Women typically discuss family life, career advancement, and the continued struggle to balance multiple responsibilities (Gilligan, 1982). Parenting and child development are frequent topics; conversations address both the practical and emotional aspects of raising children. In addition to concerns over family matters, social bonding and community involvement become discussion topics. Health issues grow in importance, especially ones related to reproductive health and stress, as well as the early symptoms of decline (Moen & Wethington, 1999). Solution-focused discussion and giving one another advice mark much of conversation in this stage, due to women using their living experience to find ways for complex issues.

With respect to conversational topics during later adulthood, women talk more about life transitions-such as empty nest and preparing for retirement. Women now generally speak about letting go from or about their children and now reconnecting with personal interests again. Personal fulfillment becomes a paramount element in this stage, making discourse a great deal of time is directed on hobbies, travel, etc, by which one derives meaning (Lachman, 2004). Health and well-being are essential concerns as the chronic health problems women endure, as well as those of aging, shape her body. The nature of the role of social connections also evolves for women who put greater efforts toward meaningful relationships and being active in the community.

During the final years of life, women's discussions tend to be more reflective in nature, discussing legacy, family life, and aging. Topics over social connections, life's experiences, and community involvements are common (Carstensen, Fung & Charles, 2003). Health management becomes prominent as well, with discourses often centered on combating illnesses, coping with physical alterations, and finding new medical capabilities. At this point, women often want to pass on the wisdom and experience they have gained to others, especially younger people, through stories. At this stage, there is also a significant focus on storytelling and reminiscing because women reflect upon their lives and the relationships that have impacted them.

All stages of conversational topics among women are highly influenced by cultural, economic, technological, and the individual personalities. Specifically, technology has added new dimensions into the conversations of women as it now promotes global connectivity and creates a means of new dialogue (Holmes, 2006). At the same time, it is societal expectations that also continue to shape the themes that women explore in their conversations, with traditional gender roles and modern feminist perspectives each playing a role in what dominates each life stage.

This progression itself captures the richness and complexities within female communication throughout one's life. By reading along these developing topics, a researcher can gain information as to the unique challenges but similar experiences that define the phases, providing a comprehensive understanding on how women connect, care, and empower each other over conversation. This type of research is not only a deep insight into women's communication but also to the social dynamics in a broader sense, which is why it is an area worth studying in psychology, sociology, and gender studies.

Literature Review:

The exploration of women's speech by age is a multifaceted domain within sociolinguistics. Language goes deeply into the formation of identity and reflects broader social dynamics, such as gender, age, and life experience. Research has continually proved that speech patterns vary from one age group to the other, and younger and older women have different linguistic features that speak to the complex interplay of cultural, cognitive, and social factors (Lakoff, 1975; Leaper & Ayres, 2007).

Arslan, Abrar, Ullah and Haroon (2024) conducted the study about language and identity construction. Study reported certain instances of cultural and historical events which play significant role in the identity construction of the speakers. This study provided significant instances which relate to this study about the identity construction which leads to specific topics development the lives of speakers and language users.

Women's speech is not only due to their biological sex but also a product of socialization and context, shaped by the generational norms and the roles women have in society. In general, younger women tend to be more linguistically flexible, which reflects the exploration of self-identity and the influence of peer groups. Their speech often features characteristics of modern, fluid, and informal communication styles. Such characteristics include the frequent use of tag questions, hedges, and qualifiers like "you know," "like," or "I guess" (Tannen, 1994; Palomares, 2009). These features are helpful in establishing rapport, conveying solidarity, and engaging in collaborative discourse. Younger women would use these features to create social bonding among their peers by making their speech more interpersonal and less authoritative (Snyder et al., 2019). Linguistic features like these are, however often interpreted to communicate a lack of confidence or not being in authority. Their increasing use, however is calling for such interpretations into question as sociolinguists argue that these are engagement and social connectivity markers after all (Pardo et al., 2017; Leaper & Ayres, 2007). However older women tend to use language consistent with their already established positions within the societies. Their speech reflects their experiences in life, as well as the demands placed on them by society at their various stages of aging. These women are more direct in making statements, thereby avoiding qualifications or hedges that could weaken their command.

As such, old women's speech is very declarative, clear, and assertive (McMillan et al., 1977; Fagot, 1985). For example, older women may want to be clear and accurate because they have established careers and family responsibilities that demand efficiency in communication (Mulac et al., 1986). These speech styles thus reflect the generational expectations of women's communication in public, work, and domestic settings, where they are often positioned as caregivers, mentors, and leaders. Besides lexical choice, the difference in speech across the ages cuts across prosodic features of pitch, tempo, and rhythm. In studies on prosody, younger women generally tend to be more varied in their pitches, which are typically perceived as emotionally expressive and discourse-engaged (Shockley et al., 2004). The speech of younger women often

between the sexes. FPDA analyzes the tie between language and gender to power and explores the fluidity of meanings across contexts. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Corpus Linguistics investigate how large-scale texts, such as media or policy documents, encode societal gender norms, often revealing implicit biases through patterns and collocations. Queer Linguistics further challenges binary gender representations by analyzing how LGBTQ+ communities use language to subvert norms, while interactional sociolinguistics focuses on conversational dynamics, such as turn-taking and interruptions, to uncover how gender roles are negotiated in real-time. Together, these frameworks offer a holistic way of looking at the dialectics of language, power, and gender identity.

Material and Methodology

Data Collection

The study gathered an analysis of conversations across ages: childhood, adolescence, early adulthood, middle, later adulthood, and the elderly stage. It applied data sourced from verbalizations in public places, personal interviews and Participants from various age groups were requested to fill up a structured proforma designed to capture key aspects of their conversational themes, priorities, and roles. This proforma was used as a tool for gathering self-reported data that complemented the analysis of recorded conversations.

Data Categorization

The collected conversational data were categorized into age-specific groups. Each group's discussions were classified based on predominant topics, such as friendships, education, career, health, and personal fulfillment. Thematic analysis was applied to highlight recurring subjects and trends that varied by life stage.

Graphical Representation

To facilitate interpretation, key insights were visualized through various types of graphs:

Bar Graphs: Presented with the frequency of conversational themes within each age group, such as which age groups have more often discussed health topics in contrast to career topics in other age groups.

Pie Charts: Reflective of proportional engagement regarding different themes within specific age categories.

Data Analysis

Graphical data were obtained through statistical tools, ensuring the accuracy of the representation. The visualizations were cross-checked with the coded datasets to ensure consistency. Patterns identified through graphs were further placed in context by considering cultural, technological, and societal factors affecting the discussions.

Tools and Software

Creation and visualization of graphs were implemented via Microsoft Excel and Python libraries (Matplotlib, Seaborn). The appropriate software ensured accurate plotting along with detailed analysis, helping clarify and improve the reliability in graphical outputs.

Results and Discussion

The bar graph illustrates the frequencies of various topics preferred by different age groups (11–20, 21–30, 31–40, 41–50, and 51–60). Here's a detailed explanation:

Frequencies of Responses according to different age groups

Topic Frequencies by Age Group
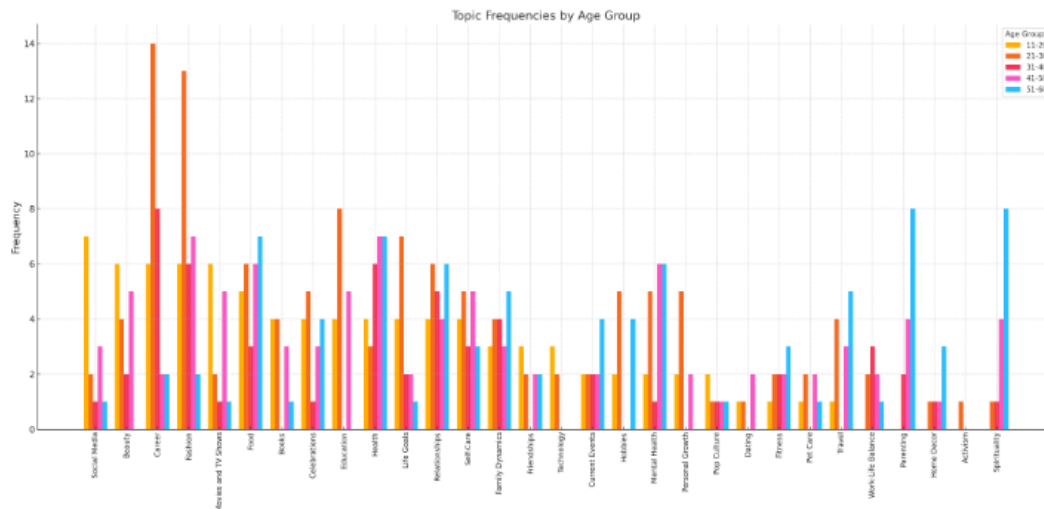
Key Observations by Age Group:

1. **11–20 Age Group:**
   o **High Frequency Topics:** Social Media (7), Beauty, Career, Fashion, Movies and TV Shows (6 each).
   o This age group shows a strong inclination towards lifestyle and entertainment topics, emphasizing trends, influencers, and self-expression.
   o **Low Frequency Topics:** Fitness, Pet Care, Travel, Dating (1 each).
   o There is minimal interest in topics related to health, pets, or broader life experiences like travel or relationships.
2. **21–30 Age Group:**
   o **High Frequency Topics:** Career (14), Fashion (13), Education (8).
   o This age group primarily focuses on professional and educational growth while maintaining a significant interest in style.
   o **Low Frequency Topics:** Activism, Fitness, Home Decor, Pop Culture, Spirituality (1 each).
   o Topics such as activism or spirituality receive limited attention.
3. **31–40 Age Group:**
   o **High Frequency Topics:** Career (8), Health, Fashion (6 each), Relationships (5).
   o The focus shifts towards career stability, health, and maintaining personal relationships.
   o **Low Frequency Topics:** Many topics, including Books, Travel, and Movies, are less prioritized, with frequencies around 0–2.
4. **41–50 Age Group:**
   o **High Frequency Topics:** Fashion, Health (7 each), Food, Mental Health (6 each).
   o There is a balanced interest in health, food, and fashion, showcasing a lifestyle-oriented focus.

- o **Low Frequency Topics:** Activism, Home Decor, and Pop Culture (1 each).
- o Interest in more niche or creative topics remains low.
5. **51–60 Age Group:**
    - o **High Frequency Topics:** Parenting, Spirituality (8 each), Food, Health (7 each).
    - o This group places high importance on spirituality, family, and overall well-being.
    - o **Low Frequency Topics:** Social Media, Books, Pop Culture (1 each).
    - o Limited interest in modern or youthful topics like social media or pop culture.

General Trends:

- **Career and Education:** These are most prominent among younger age groups (11–30), with decreasing relevance as the age increases.
- **Health and Mental Health:** Grows in importance with age, peaking in the 41–50 and 51–60 groups.
- **Lifestyle Topics (Fashion, Beauty, Social Media):** More frequent among the younger age groups, especially 11–20 and 21–30.
- **Parenting and Spirituality:** Exclusively significant for the 51–60 age group, reflecting life stage priorities

The study investigated the thematic themes in the conversations of females cutting across various age groups. The results indicated specific trends and changes influenced by the developmental stages, societal roles, and individual experiences. Discussions in childhood and adolescence centered on friendship, school, hobbies, and identity development. Peer relationships were fundamental to the shaping of dialogue; most discussions involved social media, entertainment, and ambitions. Themes were highlighted such as negotiation of peer dynamics, fear of bullying, academic performance, and body image; all in relation to how digital communication facilitated bonding with peers through the use of emojis and informal language.

In early adulthood, discussions shift toward issues of education, career, and romance. The primary theme of independence and self-sufficiency, though in the interplay of old values and new opportunities, remains central. There was emphasis on health, fitness, and lifestyle, coupled with much discussion of overcoming obstacles at work and in the realm of relationships.

Conversational topics in middle adulthood reflected the complexities of balancing familial, professional, and societal responsibilities. Parenting, child development, and health concerns, particularly stress and reproductive health, dominated the discussions. Community involvement and solution-focused dialogues also became more prominent in this life stage.

In later adulthood, personal fulfillment and health became the central themes. Conversations were on hobbies, travel, and meaningful relationships, often focusing on life transitions, such as the empty nest phase and retirement. Reflective tone characterized these conversations, with emphasis on legacy and life accomplishments. Discussions in old age became primarily reflective, centered on storytelling, wisdom-sharing, and community involvement. Managing health, coping with aging, and fostering social connections while passing on life experiences were important topics.

Graphical analysis shows that the frequency of topics varies with age groups and, therefore, cultural, technological, and societal influences. Younger participants have more engagement with digital communication, while older groups emphasized clarity and directness in dialogue.

The results emphasize the dynamic nature of female communication, which changes at different stages of life according to the changing priorities and roles. These findings are consistent with previous work on gendered communication, opening up new avenues of investigation into how age, cultural norms, and technological developments interact. The move from identity formation in adolescence to self-construction in early adulthood and, finally, to reflective dialogue in old age underscores the adaptive character of female communication, allowing women to negotiate varied social and personal contexts in a very flexible manner.

Societal expectations, including career advancement in middle adulthood and legacy building in old age, strongly influenced conversational themes. The tension between traditional gender roles and modern feminist perspectives was especially strong in early adulthood discussions. Digital platforms had a transformative role in the shaping of conversational styles, especially for younger participants. The use of emojis, abbreviations, and multimedia tools facilitated expressive communication but also introduced new complexities in interpreting dialogue.

Health discussions were at the top of the list among all the age groups because of its universal importance for female discussion. However, it had a shift from body image concerns in adolescence to chronic health management in old age. In later life, there was a change to the more introspective conversation which was storytelling and wisdom-giving. Such a change indicates the power of communication in creating intergenerational relationships and holding personal and collective histories.

The study gives insightful information regarding the changing nature of female communication, contributing to fields like sociology, psychology, and gender studies. These findings can inform interventions aimed at enhancing interpersonal relationships, promoting mental health, and fostering community engagement across age groups.

Conclusion:

This study indicates changes in conversational themes in women's lives over time. The themes are influenced by changes in priorities, roles, and social factors. Childhood and adolescence center on identity formation and peer relations. Early adulthood centers on career and relationships. Middle adulthood balances family, career, and health issues. Later adulthood and old age center on personal fulfillment, legacy, and community involvement, but with a reflective tone. By analyzing these transitions, the study provides insights into gendered communication patterns shaped by cultural and technological factors and underscores the shared yet diverse experiences of women across the lifespan.

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