

¹ Gender-Based Linguistic Variations: The Comparative Study of
² Raya and Agame Tigrigna Speakers in Southern and Eastern
³ Tigray

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Received: 7 December 2018 Accepted: 5 January 2019 Published: 15 January 2019

7 Abstract

8 This study aims at investigating the gender based - linguistic variations between male and
9 female Tigrigna speakers of Raya and Agame. In order to achieve the objectives, the
10 researcher used both open-ended and close-ended questions for the subjects. The
11 questionnaire focuses on the participants age and gender. Moreover, the research is based on a
12 sample population of 120 informants of different sexes and ages (between 15 -80) years old and
13 different levels of education. In both study areas 60 respondents from Raya and 60 from
14 Agame respectively have been given the questionnaire. Moreover, recording is one of the
15 methods of data collection forgetting of accurate data, especially among old people who were
16 unable to write their answers for the questions. The findings of this research work show that
17 there is a wide difference between males and females in constructing and using language. The
18 findings also indicate the socio-cultural factors behind using language differently.

Index terms—language, gender, politeness, taboo, masculine, feminine, difference theory, dominance theory.

²¹ 1 I. Introduction

22 number of investigations in relation to language and society have been conducted in the past decades. Many
23 sociolinguistic studies were made in 1970 and their main concern was phonological, morphological and syntactic
24 variations. In the beginning, gender was viewed as one of the sociolinguistic variables, like that of social class,
25 age, ethnicity and social status. It was after Robin Lakoff had written an essay entitled 'Language and Woman's
26 place', gender and language is established as a field of study (Lakoff, 1975). Holmes and Meyerhoff (2003) say,
27 gender arises over time in the societal interaction. Language is an asset which can indicate different features of
28 one's social identity. These features involve variation of language in an interaction. Women and men do not
29 deliberately select linguistic choices for the purpose of generating masculine or feminine identities in societal
30 interaction. Instead, they established gendered linguistic approaches to accomplish pragmatic usage of language.

31 Author: e-mail: alga.zelalem@gmail.com II. Review of Related Literature

32 2 a) The Study of Language and Gender

Studies about language and gender are mainly focused on whether there is a language use difference between the genders. There are some differences related to speech in many languages, such as English, Chinese and Japanese (Hellingr and Bußmann ??1984). It is, as language has existed, the language use difference between male and female has also occurred within it. Nowadays there are no languages that do not show language use difference between men and women at all Prewitt (2011). Sociolinguistic investigation concerning gender and sex began in 1970. Predominantly two features of language behaviors were studied; these are the speech behavior of men and women on the linguistic features such as on the phonological level and the conversational style between men and women in discourse. Since then, strong pattern of gender distinction has been verified in a number of studies. Consequently, it can be suggested that the language use difference due to gender may be coming before class difference which has a strong impact in linguistic difference and change (Coulmas, 1998).

5 B) INSTRUMENTS OF DATA COLLECTION

43 According to Hobbs (2003), in the recent ten years, sociolinguistic researches on language and gender have
44 started to use different theoretical frameworks in studying linguistic forms of men and women. The first theoretical
45 framework is related with the power imbalance between men and women in an interaction and the second theory
46 deals with the aberrant characteristics of women's language stemmed from their relegation in society. On the
47 contrary, the third theoretical framework is based on men and women grow in separate gender speech groups and
48 therefore, develop distinct communication styles.

49 As Holmes and Meyerhoff (2003) stated, people have different assumptions about the linguistic style of men
50 and women. In other words, while men are expected to be straightforward in their speech, women are typically
51 not expected to be direct in the expression of their ideas; rather they supposed to express their views indirectly.
52 If a woman is indirect in her speech, she is regarded as proper woman and she is admired whereas if she is
53 direct, she is judged as assertive woman.

54 As Wardhaugh (1986) says, there are genderbased linguistic variations in choice of words in many languages.
55 For instance, women in Japanese use some sentence final particles 'ne' or another particle 'wa' in their speech.
56 There are cases where men and women express the similar idea in different ways in Japanese language. For
57 instance, 'boku' or 'ore' are used by a Japanese male speaker to refers to himself; whereas as, a Japanese woman
58 uses 'watasi' or 'atasi'; a man says 'boku kaeru', "I will go back" in plain or informal speech, and a woman says
59 'watasi kaeru wa' meaning "I will go back". In Telugu, a Dravidian language spoken in Andhra Pradesh, women
60 say 'nenu peddadaanni'. 'I am the elder one', while men say 'nenu peddavaaNNi', "I am the elder one". The final
61 markers daanni and vaaNNi are feminine and masculine pronominal markers respectively.

62 3 III. Research Questions

63 The central theme of the study is to analyze and describe the gender-based linguistic variations between female
64 and male Tigrigna speakers of Raya and Agame. So, the following strands of research inquiries arise from this
65 general theme. These are; ? Are there gender-based linguistic variations between female and male Tigrigna
66 speakers of Raya and Agame? ? What are the socio-cultural factors that affect the language use difference of
67 the genders in Raya and Agame? ? What is the ideology of gendered language among the speech communities
68 of Raya and Agame?

69 4 IV. Methodology a) Population and Research Participants

70 The target groups selected as key respondents for the purpose of this particular study have been female and male
71 Tigrigna speakers of Raya and Agame. The selection of these speakers as the source of data was intentionally
72 performed. The participants of this study ranged in ages from 15-80 years old. Thus 60 informants were selected
73 from the three districts of Raya namely Ofla, Kilisha and Tao and 60 respondents from Agame districts such as
74 Ganta Afeshum, Enda weizero and Sindeda.

75 5 b) Instruments of data collection

76 The researcher used both open-ended and close-ended questions for the subjects in order to identify gender-based
77 linguistic variations of men and women in Agame and Raya. The questionnaire focuses on the participant's age
78 and gender. The research is based on a sample population of 120 informants of different sexes and ages (between
79 15 -80) years old and different levels of education. Moreover, recording is one of the methods of data collection
80 for getting accurate data, especially among old people who are unable to write their answers for the questions.

81 The interaction of the people has been recorded without the awareness of the participants.

82 The sample is classified into three subcategories of age. In both study areas 60 respondents from Raya
83 and 60 from Agame respectively have been given the questionnaire. It has been shown in the following table.
84 V. Questionnaire Analysis Throughout the questionnaire, there are two parts. The first one focuses on the
85 participants' age and gender. The second part of the questionnaire consists investigating their opinion towards
86 gender differences in language use. Besides, the respondents were given the opportunity to write their comments
87 and suggestions. The researcher also tried to see their views concerning social factors that affect language user
88 differences based on gender. The above table indicates that most of the informants (85% and 90%) in Raya and
89 Agame respectively responded that there is gender-based language difference in their speech communities. 15%
90 and 10% informants in Raya and Agame respectively responded there in no gender related language variation at
91 all.

92 According to the informants in Raya and Agame Tigrigna speakers, males are observed to use languages that
93 express male gender dominating situations in their speech communities. Males are relatively free to use the so
94 called linguistic taboos and slang expressions in both Raya and Agame speech communities. The females of
95 Raya and Agame, on the other hand, tend to use polite and taboo free languages relative to their male counter
96 parts. Females are more conservative in their language use than males in Raya and Agame. The reasons that
97 brought this linguistic variation in both speech communities are believed to be the social, economic, cultural and
98 educational statuses of the speech communities which are dominantly influenced by males in Raya and Agame.
99 Therefore, we can conclude that there is gender-based language variation.

100 Mcquiston and Morris (2009) say, men are more likely to use commands in an interaction for instance, "Do
101 this now ... "and particular quantity such as, "... and get all ten done by two o'clock." Women, on the contrary,

102 are more likely to use fragmentary statements such as, "Let me see ... I think I have to." and indirect sentences
103 for instance, "Have you thought about doing this now?"; Quina, Wingard and Bates, 1987). Women are also
104 more likely to use politeness expressions for example, "May I have that report this afternoon?", whereas men,
105 as indicated above, are more likely to state commands like, "I need the report by the end of the day"; Mulac,
106 Winemann, and Widenmann et al. 1988). Mills (2003) contests the view that women are politer than men.
107 She says that "Politeness" is not a property of utterances; it is rather 'a set of practices or strategies which
108 communities of practice develop, affirm, and contest" ??Mills 2003: 9). But we can as well say that women, in
109 general, develop such practices or strategies, while males do rarely. The data in the above table show that 78.3%
110 and 81.6% informants in Raya and Agame respectively say males use linguistic expressions that go against the
111 linguistic norms of the speech communities. 21.7% and 18.3% of the informants in Raya and Agame responded
112 the opposite.

113 **6 In**

114 Regarding the above issue, we can say, based on the data, that males mostly the youngsters deviate out of
115 the normative language use in Raya and Agame. They are free to use taboo and slang expressions compared
116 to their females. The males are observed to directly use taboo expressions as they are without euphemizing
117 them. Bakhtiar (2011) says, distinct linguistic approaches are demonstrated in men's and women's speech. Many
118 researchers have dealt with gender specific languages. ??Trudgill,1983; Jay,1992; Jay women have a habit to
119 employ linguistic structures which are closer to the polite language variety and are more uncertain to employ
120 taboo words in public. Therefore, they are mostly cutting out taboo related expressions and applying as some
121 alternative euphemistic expressions to avoid possible risks to their own and the listener's face. Taboo words have
122 impacted the expressions used by both genders, and men usually have more freedom in employing taboo words,
123 conversely, women have always been expected and trained to talk 'lady like'. As indicated in the above table,
124 56.6% and 66.6% informants in Raya and Agame respectively responded that males use language that indicates
125 the supremacy of their gender over their counter parts. 23.3% and 21.6% of the respondents in Raya and Agame
126 respectively say that the male's languages for its own sake. On the hand, 20% of the informants in Raya and
127 11.6% of the informants in Agame responded that the societies are the ones who play the leading role for males
128 to use language that shows the masculine dominance in both of the speech communities.

129 **7 From the following in which women differ from men?**

130 A. In using expressions B. In selecting of terms C. In constructing of sentences

131 **8 Agame males**

132 As it is seen in the above table, 53.3% 51.6% of the informants in Raya and Agame respectively responded that
133 females are totally different from males in their language use, where as 41.6% and 46.6% informants in Raya and
134 Agame respectively say that females are different in their diction (word choice) from males. On the contrary,
135 5% and 1% of the respondents in Raya and Agame say that females are different from males in their sentence
136 construction (sentence choice).

137 Based on the above data, we can say that females in Raya and Agame think what to say and when to say
138 before they start speaking. They choose the topic of their speech ahead of their speech. Moreover, they are
139 observed to use polite expressions and sentence constructions. The above table indicates that 80% and 65% of
140 the informants in Raya and Agame respectively responded that males dare to use vulgar language compared to
141 their female counter parts. 20% and 35% of the respondents say the opposite.

142 **9 According to your point of view**

143 As mentioned before, males in Raya and Agame are relatively free to use their language when we compare with
144 their female counter parts. The freedom of their language use includes the use of vulgar language freely in males
145 compared to females, especially when they talk to the people of their age. On the other hand, if females use
146 some vulgar languages in Raya and Agame, they are subject to social criticism of the linguistic communities.
147 According to Tannen (1990), there are different evidences that women and men are judged differently even if
148 they use the same language. A linguistic strategy which is used by women reflects differences, shyness and lower
149 self-confidence. 70% and 95% of the informants in Raya and Agame respectively responded that females are
150 observed to use polite languages in their speech communities as indicated in the above table. 30% and 5% of the
151 informants in Raya and Agame respectively, on the other hand, responded in the opposite.

152 In Raya and Agame speech communities, females who are polite in their language use are highly respected
153 and accepted by their respective speech communities. In these speech communities, it is not only social factor
154 that plays a role the way females use their languages. Culture and religion also influence language use in Raya
155 and Agame speech communities. Females who strongly and impolitely utter their language are culturally at
156 large and religiously in particular subject to criticisms. Therefore, females speak more slowly and more politely
157 than males to get social, cultural, religious acceptance in Raya and Agame. 7. In your point of view, are there
158 differences in expressions used by women and men when they are in the state of anger, happiness and fright? A.
159 Yes B. No C. If your answer is yes, how? As indicated above, 61.6% of the informants in Raya and 56.6% of

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160 the informants in Agame responded that females and males use different languages to express their happiness,
161 anger and fear. 38.3% and 43.3% of the informants in Raya and Agame respectively responded that there is no
162 difference between females and males in expressing of happiness, anger and fear.

163 As for the informants, it is common to see males boast in the names of their fathers, brothers, and friends.
164 For example, they say 'w?ddi?', son of?, 'É?"arki?', friend of?, '?aw?', brother of? Moreover, in Raya, males
165 boast by using a loud sound of '??bbubbu', or they say 'É?"ajjam b?l', which means 'take care!'. In this case,
166 males of Raya and Agame are not observed to boast by the name of their mother or wives because it is believed
167 to be a symbol of fear to boast by female gender for males in Raya and Agame.

168 Females in Raya on the other hand, are observed to say 'gwal É?"?jjatu' (the daughter of my father), or ?fti
169 ? (the sister of?) to boast. Females in Agame, on the contrary, say 'n?É?"?ti gwal' (I the young girl), having
170 functional meaning 'no one can beat me.' In both speech communities' females are observed to use the name of
171 their God and names of saints to express their fear. The above table shows that 56.6% and 63.3% of the total
172 informants in Raya and Agame respectively responded that all the languages used by males should also be used
173 by females. On the other hand, 43.3% and 36.6% of the total informants in Raya and Agame responded that the
174 languages males use should not be the same as that of the females.

175 Based on the informants' data, language is primarily used for communication. Therefore, there should not be
176 any difference by saying 'the language of males' and 'the language of females'. That language is created by its
177 respective speech community, so females must utilize it equally with their male counter parts as they are equally
178 part of that linguistic community. What is allowed for males must be allowed for females as well. Moreover,
179 what is condemned for females should be condemned for males as well. For example, if slag expressions are
180 not accepted to be spoken by females, they should not also be accepted to spoken by their male counter parts.
181 Of course, the change cannot come overnight. I would recommend until the attitude of the speech communities
182 toward linguistic prejudice gets balanced males and females should stick to their respective gender based linguistic
183 styles.

184 10 VI. Conclusion

185 This study was conducted to analyze and describe gender-based linguistic variations between male and female
186 Tigrigna speakers of Raya and Agame in southern and eastern Tigray respectively. Similar to any other society,
187 Raya and Agame speech communities possess a culture that manifests patriarchy. Language use is one of the
188 ways this patriarchy is manifested through. In this connection the researcher has investigated how language
189 use manifests gender disparity between the Raya and Agame Tigrigna speakers. In the light of dominance and
190 difference theories, the researcher has tried to describe the language use difference between men and women in
191 the targeted linguistic groups. This research aims to correlate the linguistic and the social structures relying
192 on the qualitative and quantitative samples taken from the native speakers of Tigrigna in Raya and Agame.
193 Moreover, by using basic research methods such as questionnaire including (open and close ended), interview
194 that is unstructured and participatory observation, the researcher has collected the relevant data. The data was
195 collected, transcribed and analyzed based on thematic descriptive analysis and quantitative approach. Based
196 on this analysis, the findings were made and conclusions are drawn. The findings generally show that there is
197 gender-based linguistic difference between male and female Tigrigna speakers in relation to naming in marriage,
198 loudness of voice, intimacy expressions, taboo words, insult terms and swearing expressions. The results also show
199 that the sociocultural factors behind using language differently and the ideology of gendered language among the
200 speech communities of Raya and Agame.

201 11 VII. Recommendations

202 Based on the above conclusions, the researcher would like to forward the following recommendations.

203 Regarding language use disparity based on gender, the society unfairly gives more value to men than to women.
204 Hence to change this unfair language usage in the society, awareness raising programs should be carried out in
205 Raya and Agame. Organizations such as Women's affairs office and others have to promote the concept of gender
206 equality by preparing seminars, workshops and other media. Further researches are necessary to explore the issue
of gender and language in Tigrigna and other Ethiopian language. ^{1 2}

41

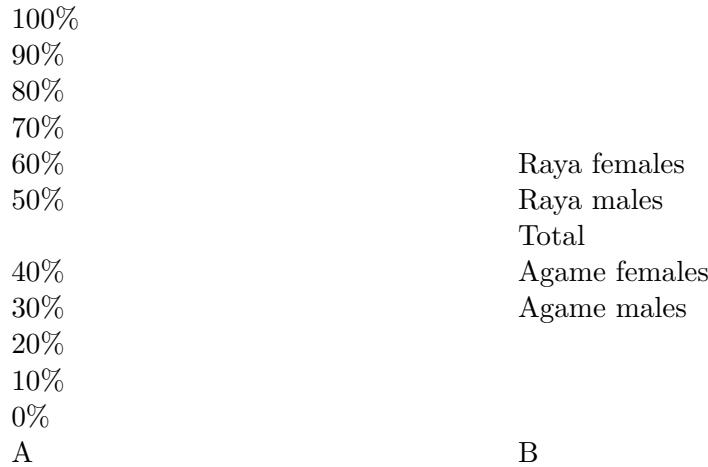
Age group	Male	Female	Total
From 15-25 years old (young and adolescent)	20	20	40
From 26-50 years old (adults)	20	20	40
From 51-80 years old (elder informants)	20	20	40
Total	60	60	120

Figure 1: Table 4 . 1 :

41

Suggestion	Raya females	Raya males	Total	Agame females	Agame males	Total
A	27	24	51	26	28	54
B	3	6	9	4	2	6
Total	30	30	60	30	30	60

Figure 2: Table 4 . 1 :

46

[Note: Raya / Agame are there men who use expressions which are out of the norm? A. Yes B. No C. If your answer is yes, how? 6: Expressions used by men which are out of norm]

Figure 3: Table 4 . 6 :

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47

Year 2019	50%	60%	Raya females			
18	40%		Raya males			
Volume XIX Issue VI	0%	10%	Total			
Version I	20%	30%	Agame females			
G)			Agame males			
(
Global Journal						
of Human Social						
Science -						
Suggestion	Raya fe- males	Raya fe- males	Total Agame Agame Total			
	males	males	males	males		
A	5	7	12	2	5	7
B	11	3	14	9	4	13
C	14	20	34	19	21	40
Total	30	30	60	30	30	60
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[Note: & Jonschewitz, 2008; Wardhaugh, 1986). Generally, Figure 4.7: Reasons of using expressions which are out of the norm/]

Figure 4: Table 4 . 7 :

4

Suggestion	Raya females	Raya males	Total	Agame females	Agame males	Total
A	15	17	32	16	15	31
B	13	12	25	13	15	28
C	2	1	3	1	-	1
Total	30	30	60	30	30	60

[Note: 8: Women's and men's main differences]

Figure 5: Table 4 .

Year 2019

20

Volume XIX 20% 30%
Issue VI Ver- 40% 50%
sion I 60% 70%
80% 90%
(G) 10%
0%

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Year 2019

Raya females Raya males Total Agame
females Agame males

Volume XIX Is-
sue VI Version I

(G)
Global Journal
of Human Social
Science -

A 6. According to your point of view, who are
expected to use more euphemistic expres-
sions between women and men? A. Men
B. Women C. Comments B

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Figure 6:

4

Suggestion	Raya females	Raya males	Total	Agame females	Agame males	Total
A	7	11	18	2	1	3
B	23	19	42	28	29	57
Total	30	30	60	30	30	60

Figure 7: Table 4 .

4

Suggestion	Raya females	Raya males	Total	Agame females	Agame males	Total
A	17	20	37	16	18	34
B	13	10	23	14	12	26
Total	30	30	60	30	30	60

Figure 8: Table 4 .

413

8. According to your point of view, which gender is
expected to use taboo words?

- A. Men
- B. Women

Figure 9: Table 4 . 13 :

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4

Suggestion	Raya females	Raya males	Total	Agame females	Agame males	Total
A	14	12	26	12	10	22
B	16	18	34	18	20	38
Total	30	30	60	30	30	60

Figure 10: Table 4 .

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