Volume 19 Issue 29
Originally issued as G6



Global Journal of human-social science: G
Linguistics & Education
Volume 19 Issue 6 Version 1.0 Year 2019
Type: Double Blind Peer Reviewed International Research Journal
Publisher: Global Journals
Online ISSN: 2249-460X & Print ISSN: 0975-587X

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

By Alganesh Mulugeta

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

Keywords: language, gender, politeness, taboo, masculine, feminine, difference theory, dominance theory.

GJHSS-G Classification: FOR Code: 170204



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

Alganesh Mulugeta

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

Keywords: language, gender, politeness, taboo, masculine, feminine, difference theory, dominance theory.

I. Introduction

A number of investigations in relation to language and society have been conducted in the past decades. Many sociolinguistic studies were made in 1970 and their main concern was phonological, morphological and syntactic variations. In the beginning, gender was viewed as one of the sociolinguistic variables, like that of social class, age, ethnicity and social status. It was after Robin Lakoff had written an essay enitled 'Language and Woman's place', gender and language is established as a field of study (Lakoff, 1975).

Holmes and Meyerhoff (2003) say, gender arises over time in the societal interaction. Language is an asset which can indicate different features of one's social identity. These features involve variation of language in an interaction. Women and men do not deliberately select linguistic choices for the purpose of generating masculine or feminine identities in societal interaction. Instead, they established gendered linguistic approaches to accomplish pragmatic usage of language.

Author: e-mail: alga.zelalem@gmail.com

II. Review of Related Literature

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).

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

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

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is regarded as proper woman and she is admired whereas if she is direct, she is judged as assertive woman.

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

III. Research Questions

The central theme of the study is to analyze and describe the gender-based linguistic variations between female and male Tigrigna speakers of Raya and Agame. So, the following strands of research inquiries arise from this general theme. These are;

- Are there gender-based linguistic variations between female and male Tigrigna speakers of Raya and Agame?
- What are the socio-cultural factors that affect the language use difference of the genders in Raya and Agame?
- What is the ideology of gendered language among the speech communities of Raya and Agame?

IV. Methodology

a) Population and Research Participants

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

b) Instruments of data collection

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

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

The sample is classified into three sub-categories of age. In both study areas 60 respondents from Raya and 60 from Agame respectively have been given the questionnaire. It has been shown in the following table.

Table 4.1: Age /gender sampling of informants

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

V. Questionnaire Analysis

Throughout the questionnaire, there are two parts. The first one focuses on the participants? age and gender. The second part of the questionnaire consists investigating their opinion towards gender differences in language use. Besides, the respondents were given the opportunity to write their comments and suggestions. The researcher also tried to see their views concerning social factors that affect language user differences based on gender.

1. Is there a language use difference between women and men?
   A. Yes
   B. No
   C. Comments

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Table 4.1: Language use differences between women and men

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

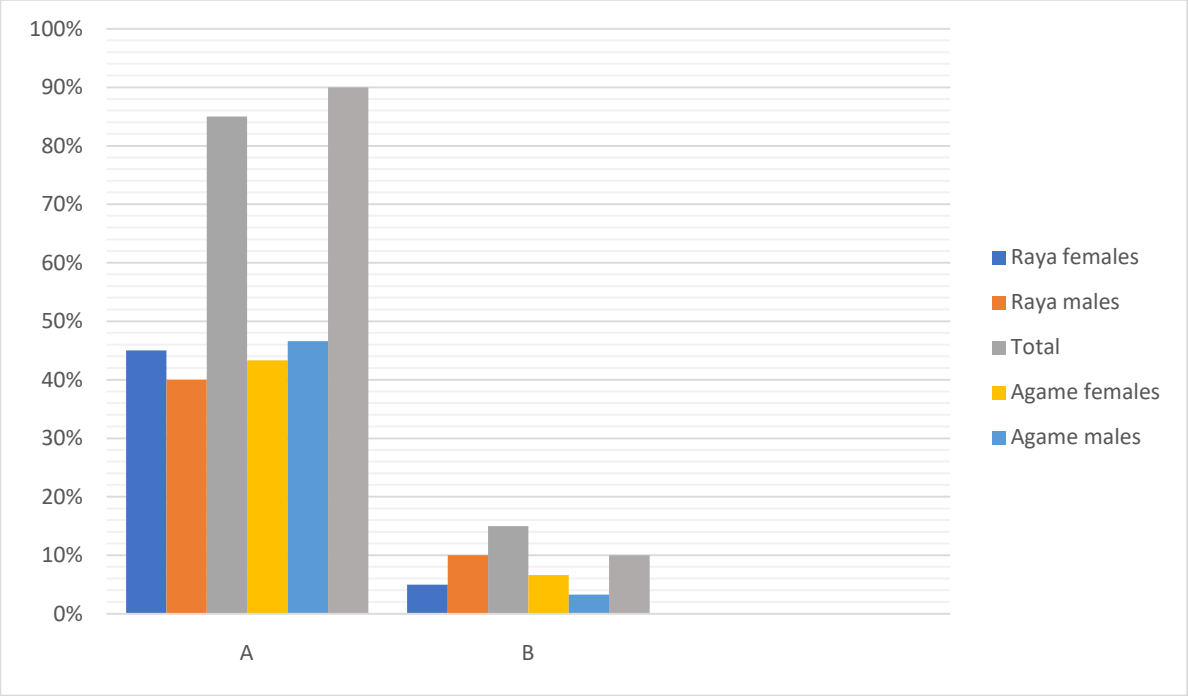


Figure 4.1: Language use differences between women and men

The above table indicates that most of the informants (85% and 90%) in Raya and Agame respectively responded that there is gender-based language difference in their speech communities. 15% and 10% informants in Raya and Agame respectively responded there in no gender related language variation at all.

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

Mcquiston and Morris (2009) say, men are more likely to use commands in an interaction for instance, "Do this now ... "and particular quantity such as, " ... and get all ten done by two o'clock." Women, on the contrary, are more likely to use fragmentary statements such as., "Let me see ... I think I have to." and indirect sentences for instance, "Have you thought about doing this now?"; Quina, Wingard and Bates, 1987). Women are also more likely to use politeness expressions for example, "May I have that report this afternoon?", whereas men, as indicated above, are more likely to state commands like, "I need the report by the end of the day"; Mulac, Winemann, and Widenmann et al. 1988).

Mills (2003) contests the view that women are politer than men. She says that *"Politeness' is not a property of utterances; it is rather 'a set of practices or strategies which communities of practice develop, affirm, and contest"* (Mills 2003: 9). But we can as well say that women, in general, develop such practices or strategies, while males do rarely.

2. In 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?

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Table 4.6: Expressions used by men which are out of norm

Suggestion	Raya females	Raya males	Total	Agame females	Agame males	Total
A	20	27	47	21	28	49
B	10	3	13	9	2	11
Total	30	30	60	30	3 0	60

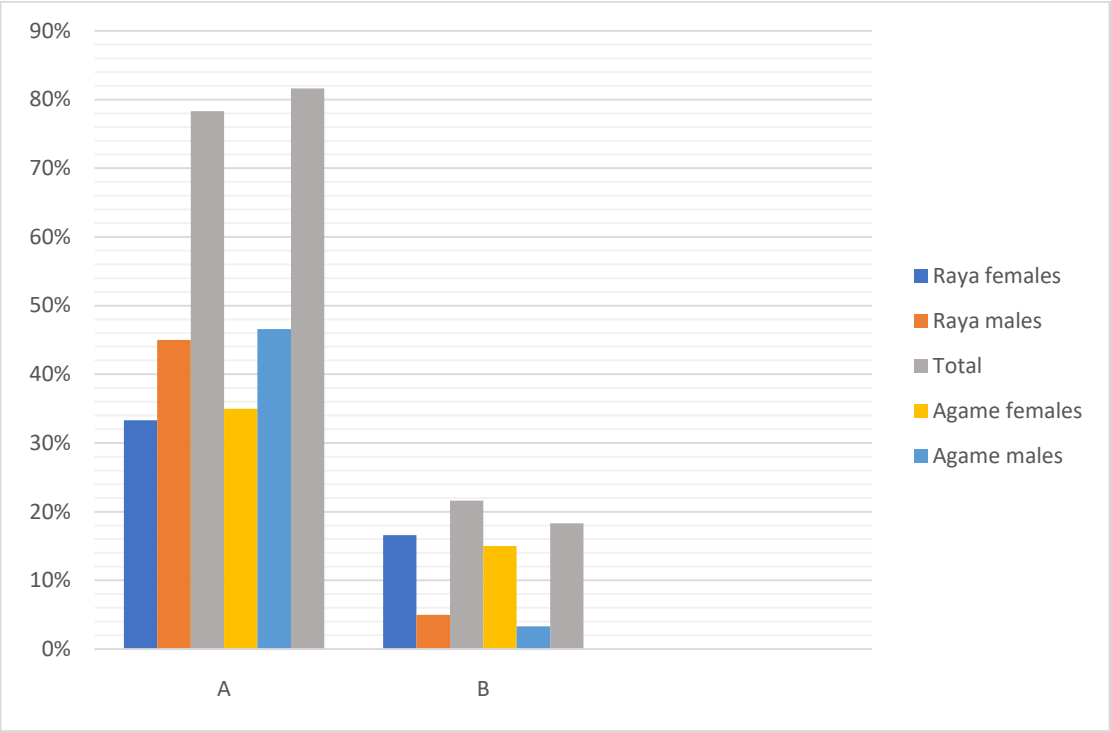


Figure 4.6: Expressions used by men which are out of norm

The data in the above table show that 78.3% and 81.6% informants in Raya and Agame respectively say males use linguistic expressions that go against the linguistic norms of the speech communities. 21.7% and 18.3% of the informants in Raya and Agame responded the opposite.

Regarding the above issue, we can say, based on the data, that males mostly the youngsters deviate out of the normative language use in Raya and Agame. They are free to use taboo and slang expressions compared to their females. The males are observed to directly use taboo expressions as they are without euphemizing them. Bakhtiar (2011) says, distinct linguistic approaches are demonstrated in men's and women's speech. Many researchers have dealt with gender specific languages. (Trudgill,1983; Jay,1992; Jay & Jonsche witz, 2008; Wardhaugh,1986). Generally, women have a habit to employ linguistic structures which are closer to the polite language variety and are more uncertain to employ taboo words in public. Therefore, they are mostly cutting out taboo related expressions and applying as some alternative euphemistic expressions to avoid possible risks to their own and the listener's face. Taboo words have impacted the expressions used by of both genders, and men usually have more freedom in employing taboo words, conversely, women have always been expected and trained to talk 'lady like'.

3. In your point of view, why most men prefer to use expressions which are out of the norm?
   A. Because it is important in their work
   B. Because it is easy to communicate
   C. To show their power

Table 4.7: Reasons of using expressions which are out of the norm

Suggestion	Raya females	Raya males	Total	Agame females	Agame males	Total
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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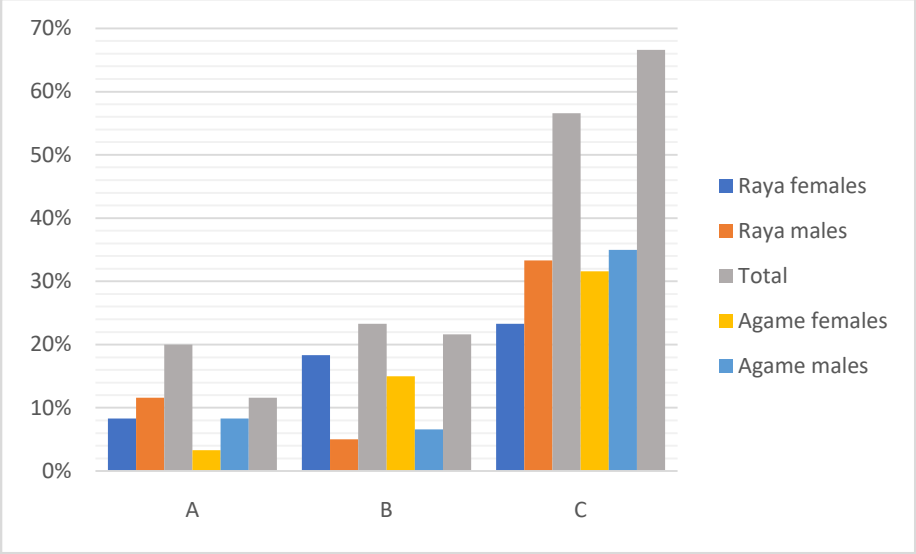


Figure 4.7: Reasons of using expressions which are out of the norm

As indicated in the above table, 56.6% and 66.6% informants in Raya and Agame respectively responded that males use language that indicates the supremacy of their gender over their counter parts. 23.3% and 21.6% of the respondents in Raya and Agame respectively say that the male's languages for its own sake. On the hand, 20% of the informants in Raya and 11.6% of the informants in Agame responded that the societies are the ones who play the leading role for males to use language that shows the masculine dominance in both of the speech communities.

4. From the following in which women differ from men?
   A. In using expressions
   B. In selecting of terms
   C. In constructing of sentences

Table 4.8: Women's and men's main differences

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

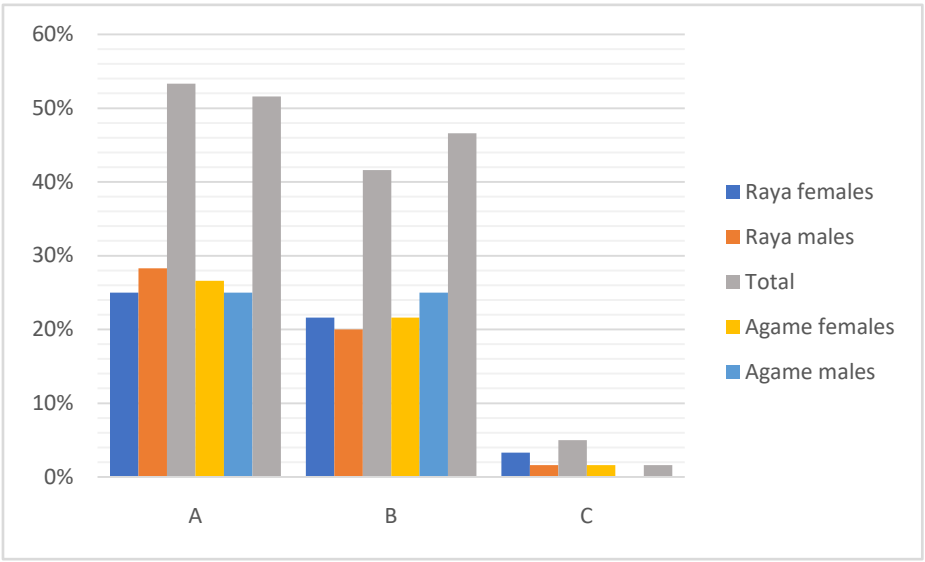


Figure 4.8: Women's and men's main differences

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

Based on the above data, we can say that females in Raya and Agame think what to say and when to say before they start speaking. They choose the topic of their speech ahead of their speech. Moreover, they are observed to use polite expressions and sentence constructions.

5. According to your point of view, are there any differences between women and men in using taboo words?
   A. Yes
   B. No
   C. If your answer is yes, how?

Table 4.9: Differences in using taboo words between women and men

Suggestion	Raya females	Raya males	Total	Agame females	Agame males	Total
A	26	22	48	21	18	39
B	4	8	12	9	12	21
Total	30	30	60	30	30	60

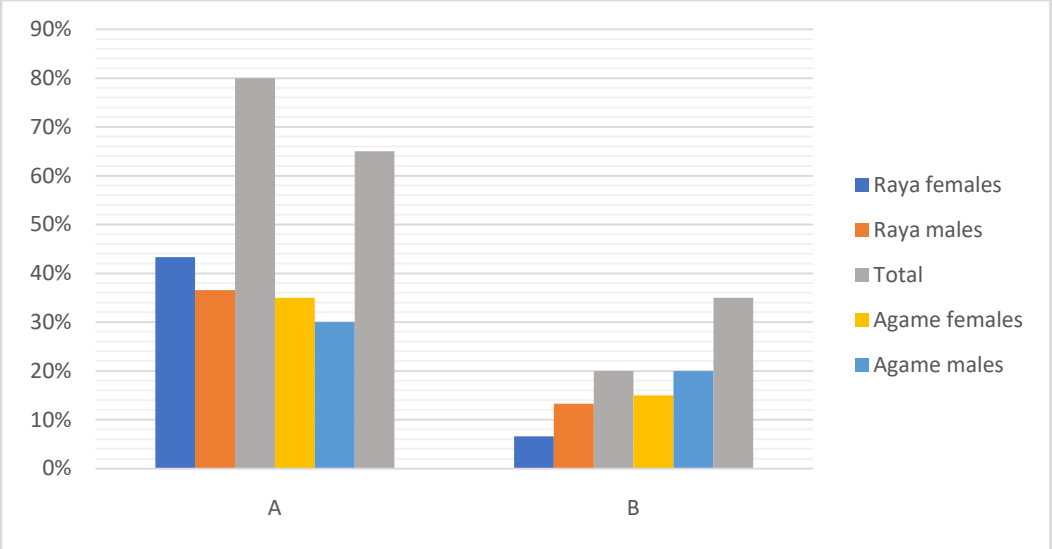


Figure 4.9: Differences in using taboo words between women and men

The above table indicates that 80% and 65% of the informants in Raya and Agame respectively responded that males dare to use vulgar language compared to their female counter parts. 20% and 35% of the respondents say the opposite.

As mentioned before, males in Raya and Agame are relatively free to use their language when we compare with their female counter parts. The freedom of their language use includes the use of vulgar language freely in males compared to females, especially when they talk to the people of their age. On the other hand, if females use some vulgar languages in Raya and Agame, they are subject to social criticism of the linguistic communities. According to Tannen (1990), there are different evidences that women and men are judged differently even if they use the same language. A linguistic strategy which is used by women reflects differences, shyness and lower self-confidence.

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

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Table 4.10: Women and men and the use euphemistic expressions

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

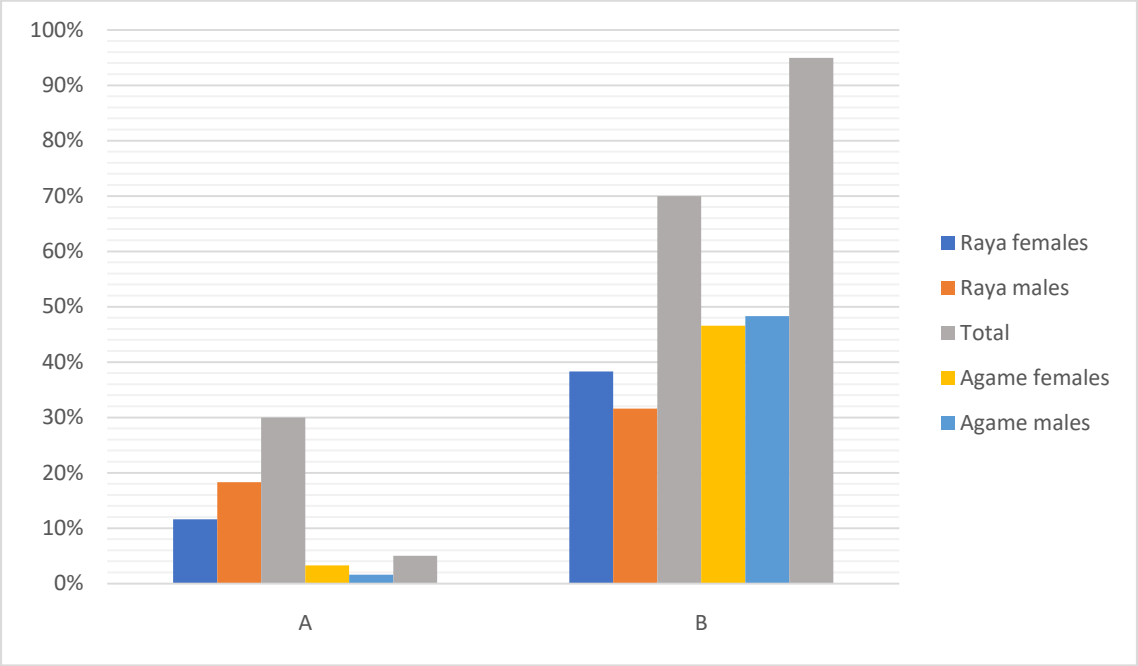


Figure 4.10: Women and men and the use of euphemistic expressions

70% and 95% of the informants in Raya and Agame respectively responded that females are observed to use polite languages in their speech communities as indicated in the above table. 30% and 5% of the informants in Raya and Agame respectively, on the other hand, responded in the opposite.

In Raya and Agame speech communities, females who are polite in their language use are highly respected and accepted by their respective speech communities. In these speech communities, it is not only social factor that plays a role the way females use their languages. Culture and religion also influence language use in Raya and Agame speech communities. Females who strongly and impolitely utter their language are culturally at large and religiously in particular subject to criticisms. Therefore, females speak more slowly and more politely than males to get social, cultural, religious acceptance in Raya and Agame.

7. In your point of view, are there differences in expressions used by women and men when they are in the state of anger, happiness and fright?
   A. Yes
   B. No
   C. If your answer is yes, how?

Table 4.12: Expressions used by women and men to express emotions

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

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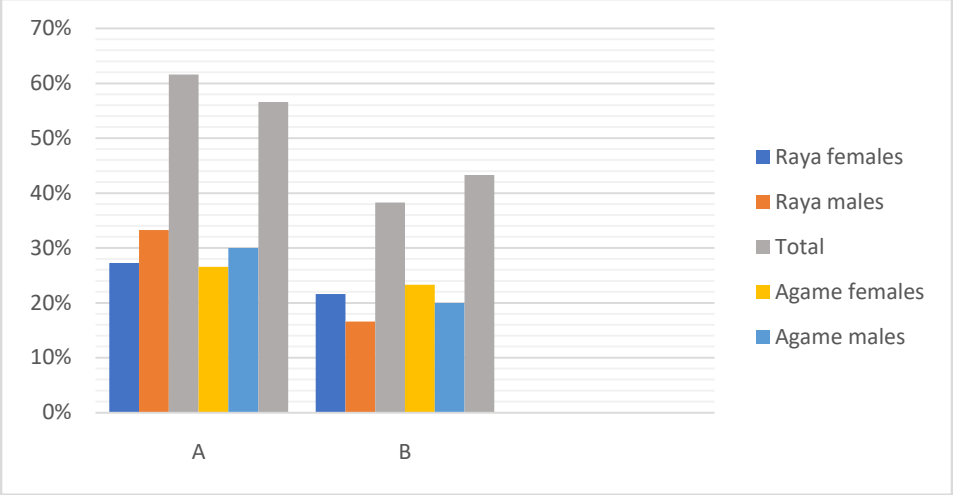


Figure 4.12: Expressions used by women and men to express emotions

As indicated above, 61.6% of the informants in Raya and 56.6% of the informants in Agame responded that females and males use different languages to express their happiness, anger and fear. 38.3% and 43.3% of the informants in Raya and Agame respectively responded that there is no difference between females and males in expressing of happiness, anger and fear.

As for the informants, it is common to see males boast in the names of their fathers, brothers, and friends. For example, they say 'wəddi …', son of…, 'ʔarki…', friend of…, 'ħaw…', brother of… Moreover, in Raya, males boast by using a loud sound of 'ħɨbbubbu', or they say 'ʔajjam bəl', which means 'take care!'. In this case, males of Raya and Agame are not observed to boast by the name of their mother or wives because it is believed to be a symbol of fear to boast by female gender for males in Raya and Agame.

Females in Raya on the other hand, are observed to say 'gwal ʔɨjjatu' (the daughter of my father), or ħafti … (the sister of…) to boast. Females in Agame, on the contrary, say 'nɨʔʃti gwal' (I the young girl), having functional meaning 'no one can beat me.' In both speech communities' females are observed to use the name of their God and names of saints to express their fear.

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

Table 4.13: Gender and the use of taboo

Suggestion	Raya females	Raya males	Total	Agame females	Agame males	Total
A	23	21	44	25	27	52
B	7	9	16	5	3	8
Total	30	30	60	30	30	60

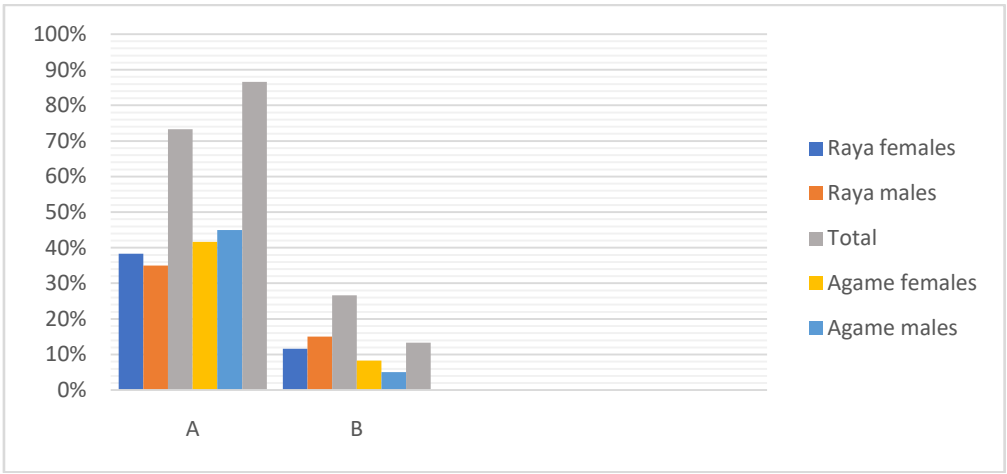


Figure 4.13: Gender and the use of taboo

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As indicated in the above table, most of the informants (73% in Raya and 86% in Agame) responded that taboo expressions should be uttered by males, but not by females. 26.6% and 13.3% of the total informants in Raya and Agame respectively responded the reverse. The respondents say that it is better when males use taboo or vulgar languages in Raya and Agame. But if the females utter vulgar languages in Raya and Agame, they don't get social inclusion. They will rather be socially condemned. Generally, the speech communities of Raya and Agame prefer the vulgar languages not be used in some open linguistic contexts.

9. According to your point of view, are there any problems if women use all the expressions used by their men counter parts?
   A. Yes
   B. No
   C. Comment

Table 4.14: Problems occurred while women used expressions used by their men counter parts

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

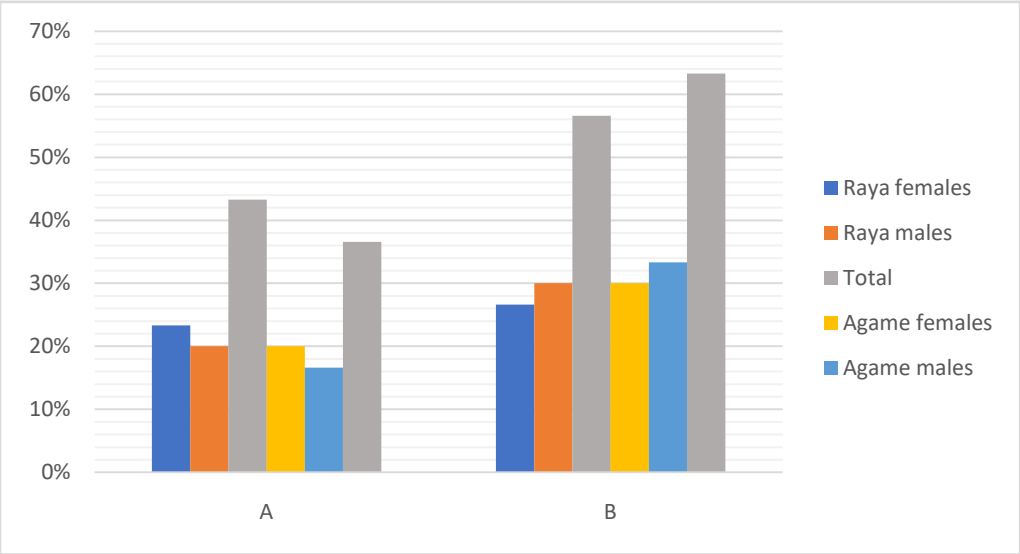


Figure 4.14: Problems occurred while women used expressions used by their men counter parts

The above table shows that 56.6% and 63.3% of the total informants in Raya and Agame respectively responded that all the languages used by males should also be used by females. On the other hand, 43.3% and 36.6% of the total informants in Raya and Agame responded that the languages males use should not be the same as that of the females.

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

VI. Conclusion

This study was conducted to analyze and describe gender-based linguistic variations between male and female Tigrigna speakers of Raya and Agame in southern and eastern Tigray respectively. Similar to any other society, Raya and Agame speech communities possess a culture that manifests patriarchy. Language use is one of the ways this patriarchy is manifested through. In this connection the researcher has investigated how language use manifests gender disparity between the Raya and Agame Tigrigna speakers. In the light of dominance and difference theories, the researcher has tried to describe the language use difference between men and women

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in the targeted linguistic groups. This research aims to correlate the linguistic and the social structures relying on the qualitative and quantitative samples taken from the native speakers of Tigrigna in Raya and Agame. Moreover, by using basic research methods such as questionnaire including (open and close ended), interview that is unstructured and participatory observation, the researcher has collected the relevant data. The data was collected, transcribed and analyzed based on thematic descriptive analysis and quantitative approach. Based on this analysis, the findings were made and conclusions are drawn. The findings generally show that there is gender-based linguistic difference between male and female Tigrigna speakers in relation to naming in marriage, loudness of voice, intimacy expressions, taboo words, insult terms and swearing expressions. The results also show that the socio-cultural factors behind using language differently and the ideology of gendered language among the speech communities of Raya and Agame.

VII. Recommendations

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

Regarding language use disparity based on gender, the society unfairly gives more value to men than to women. Hence to change this unfair language usage in the society, awareness raising programs should be carried out in Raya and Agame. Organizations such as Women's affairs office and others have to promote the concept of gender 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.

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