Analyis of Cyberlanguage: Identifying Gender Boundaries

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Abstract:

Cyber language and internet linguistics have been subjects of linguistics debates among researchers in recent years with the proliferation of the use of technology for communication. Along with its various other aspects, its analysis in determining the gender boundaries is a useful area of research. The present study was conducted to analyze cyber language to identify the gender boundaries among one hundred Facebook users of various age groups (13-30 years). In the Pakistani context the study examined the hypothesis that gender based linguistic differences exist in cyber space. For this purpose, the corpus was collected in natural form from the Facebook walls of its users. Gender boundaries were examined on the basis of new word formation and reduction at lexical level. These parameters were further divided into blending, conversion, compounding, derivation and coinage for new word formation, acronyms, phonetic spellings, non-standard spellings, letter/number homophones, clippings and contractions for reduction. Having suggested new parameters for gender identification, the study draws on gender differences on the basis of lexical features used on Facebook. The results indicate that a new but easily understandable language has evolved through Facebook which is responsible for significant differences between males’ and females’ linguistic properties. The results show that a specific age group from a gender is the dominant user of a specific feature but that very feature is absent on the wall posts of the same age group of the other gender. Levine’s test for equality of variances revealed that there is a significant difference between genders on the basis of compounding, coinage, abbreviation, acronyms, non-standard spelling, letter insertion and clipping; whereas, no significant difference was found between genders on the basis of blending, derivation, conversion, abbreviation, phonetic spelling and letter number homophone. On the other hand, genders significantly differ from each other on the basis of their use of nonstandard spelling and phonetic spelling.

Key words: Cyber Language, Gender, Facebook, New word formation, Reduction, discourse