

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background

Sociolinguistics is a branch of linguistics that examines the relationship between language and society, as well as how social factors influence language use in various contexts. According to Al Masaeed (2024), sociolinguistics plays an important role in understanding multilingual societies and the social dynamics that arise from language interaction. Kawafha and Al Masaeed (2023) emphasize that sociolinguistic research can provide insights into language ideology in second language learning, while Abdulrasulova (2023) highlights that sociolinguistic competence has a significant impact on teaching effectiveness and cultural understanding.

Research on gender-based language variation shows differences in communication patterns between men and women in various contexts. Tran Thanh Du et al. (2025) revealed that women more often used indirect, other-oriented communication styles, while men tended to be more direct, task-oriented, and authoritative. In line with this, Hoang Thu Ba (2023) found that gender differences influence the politeness strategies used in formal negotiations, both in the United States and Vietnam. Meanwhile, Zibin et al. (2025) emphasized that communication differences are more apparent in nonverbal aspects, especially those related to gender roles in social and digital spaces.

In sociolinguistic studies, gender identity has been shown to influence language practices in both face-to-face and online communication. Za'rour et al. (2025) found that online product reviews still reflected gender-based communication patterns, with women being

more expressive and detailed, while men are more concise and factual. Pak (2025) emphasizes that modern sociolinguistic trends examine the relationship between language, gender, and sexuality, particularly in LGBTQ+ communities that use language to negotiate new identities. Meanwhile, Sargin (2025) shows that language plays an important role in shaping social and individual identities, so that its use reflects complex gender dynamics.

Studies on language in social media show that gender remains a determining factor in digital communication styles. Aydın (2025) found that gender-based communication differences on platforms such as Twitter, Reddit, and WhatsApp are greatly influenced by context and audience. Kennison et al. (2025) researched the use of emojis and found that women use them more often, while men tend to use certain emojis that are related to personality traits. Furthermore, Flores and Sepúlveda (2025) revealed that gender representation on Instagram, especially in health and wellness themes, is still dominated by binary, thin, and athletic body stereotypes, indicating that social media also reproduces traditional gender constructs.

Although previous studies have discussed gender-based language variations in both direct and digital communication, specific studies on netizen comments on Instagram are still relatively limited. Most studies have focused primarily on formal contexts, product reviews, or the use of emojis on various social media platforms. However, Instagram, as a popular interactive space with strong visual characteristics, has different communication dynamics. This research gap highlights the need for an in-depth analysis of how gender identity influences language variation in netizen comments on Instagram.

Previous studies have revealed that gender influences

communication strategies in terms of politeness, expressiveness, and the use of nonverbal symbols. For example, women tend to use more expressive and emotional language, while men display a concise and authoritative style. Recent studies also highlight how gender influences the choice of communication style in the ever-evolving digital context.

A study of gender-based language variation on Instagram is important because this social media platform has become one of the most popular communication spaces, especially among the younger generation. This study focuses on a sociolinguistic analysis of language variation based on gender differences in netizen comments on Instagram. Specifically, this study aims to identify differences in language styles used by male and female users in terms of word choice, sentence structure, and other linguistic expressions. Using a qualitative approach, this study is expected to provide a comprehensive picture of how gender factors influence digital communication practices, while highlighting the social dynamics reflected in online interactions.

B. Identification of the Problem

Based on the background of this study, this research identifies several key issues related to the use of gender-based language in Instagram netizen comments, particularly from a sociolinguistic perspective, as follows:

1. There are still significant differences in language use between men and women that are not yet fully understood in the context of social media.
2. Previous studies have focused more on formal communication or product reviews rather than on netizen comments on Instagram.
3. Gender-based language variations in comments on Instagram have not been analyzed in depth from a sociolinguistic perspective.

4. Women and men tend to use different communication strategies, but how these patterns emerge in Instagram comments remains unclear.
5. Social media, including Instagram, has the potential to reproduce or challenge gender stereotypes, but few studies have examined this aspect in netizen comments.

C. Limitations of the Problem

This study has several limitations that need to be considered. First, the research focuses only focused on netizen comments on the Instagram platform, so the results may not fully represent gender-based language variations in other social media platforms such as Twitter, TikTok, or Facebook. Second, the research focuses only on comments written in English, so the findings may be less relevant to the multilingual context or netizens who use a mixture of languages. Third, the researchers only analyzed language variation based on male and female genders without including non-binary gender identities, so the perspective of gender diversity was not fully accommodated. Fourth, the analysis of social factors that influence gender-based communication styles was based only on linguistic data and the context of the comments, so it did not cover the psychological factors or the more in-depth personal backgrounds of netizens. In addition, the data were limited to ten selected comments from each post, resulting in a total of 150 comments analyzed in this study. This limitation was applied to ensure in-depth qualitative analysis and data manageability. Therefore, the findings may not represent all available comments on the selected posts. Finally, this study is descriptive and qualitative in nature, so the generalization of the results is still limited, although it can provide an important initial overview for further studies on gender-based language variation in the digital realm.

D. Research Questions

Based on the identification of problems, this study formulates several research questions as follows:

1. What are the language variations used by male and female netizens in comments on Instagram, particularly in terms of word choice, sentence structure, and linguistic expressions?
2. How are gender-based differences in communication styles reflected in netizen comments on Instagram?
3. How do netizens on Instagram use language to reflect or challenge gender stereotypes in digital communication?

E. The Purposes of the Research

Based on the research questions formulated above, the purposes of this study are as follows:

1. To identify the language variations used by male and female netizens in comments on Instagram, particularly in terms of word choice, sentence structure, and linguistic expressions.
2. To analyze how gender-based differences in communication styles are reflected in netizen comments on Instagram.
3. To examine how netizens on Instagram use language to reflect or challenge gender stereotypes in digital communication.

F. The Significances of the Research

This research is significant because it examines language variation based on gender identity in netizen comments on Instagram. As one of the most popular social media platforms, Instagram reflects the dynamics of digital communication. By linking sociolinguistic analysis to gender differences, this research is expected to broaden our understanding of how social factors, particularly gender identity, shape language practices in virtual communication spaces.

Theoretically, this research contributes to the development of sociolinguistics, especially in the study of gender-based language variation on social media. This study enriches the literature, which has mostly emphasized formal contexts or other digital platforms such as Twitter and WhatsApp. By focusing on Instagram comments, this study offers a new perspective that highlights the relationship between gender identity and language practices, while also expanding our understanding of communication dynamics in contemporary digital society.

Practically, this research is useful for providing insight into how gender differences affect communication styles on social media. The results of this study can be used as a reference for educators, researchers, and digital communication practitioners in understanding the patterns of interaction in virtual communities. In addition, these findings can also help the public awareness of the use of more inclusive and equitable language in digital spaces, thereby preventing the reproduction of discriminatory gender stereotypes.

Thus, this research not only contributes to the academic realm but is also socially relevant. The analysis of gender-based language variation in Instagram comments is expected to broaden our understanding of the role of language in shaping identity, social relationships, and gender representation in the digital age, so that the results can be utilized for scientific and practical purposes in the fields of communication and culture.

G. Operational Definitions of Key Terms

To ensure clarity and avoid ambiguity, operational definitions of key terms used in this study are presented as follows:

1. *Sociolinguistics* is a branch of linguistics that studies the relationship between language and social factors, including how age, gender, status, and context influence the way people communicate.
2. *Language Variation* refers to differences in language use that arise due to social, cultural, or identity factors, including word choice, sentence structure, and communication style.
3. *Gender Identity* refers to an individual's understanding and expression of gender. In this study, gender identity is limited to male and female netizens as identified from the selected Instagram comments.
4. *Netizen Comments* are forms of digital communication consisting of responses, opinions, or expressions from social media users that reflect their identity, attitudes, and specific language styles.

5. *Instagram* is a social media platform that allows users to share photos, videos, and comments, while also serving as a space for digital social interaction that shapes language variation.

