CULTURE-SHAPED LANGUAGE OF MALE AND FEMALE WRITERS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ENGLISH AND BAHASA INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

The research investigated how the writers of different genders from different cultures (western or American and Asian) reflected the differences in the language they used in their novels. Although gender differences were known to result from cultural differences, less research had been done in terms of contrasting the gender of different cultures, yet to discuss them in terms of gender roles as writers. The research aimed to explore the role of gender in constructing language to examine gender stereotypes from a linguistic perspective and describe gender differences in language use. It applied a qualitative method with library research style, which included several steps of reading the material, collecting and listing the swear words and adjectives used, categorizing the choice of words, and analyzing the choices. The research concludes that culture does contribute to the differences in how swear words are expressed, in which Indonesian writers use fewer swear words and avoid using vulgar words and profanity. In other words, gender differences do not affect adjectives used in bahasa Indonesia.

Keywords: culture-shaped language, male writer, female writer, swear words

INTRODUCTION

Language as an aspect of culture shapes human beings as part of the society that builds the culture itself. Language and culture are two inseparable things that influence one another. The difference in culture is also a factor in the differences in language used by the people of that community. Language as the reflection of culture is shaped by culture; thus, differences in culture can be seen in the use of language. Differences in language also determine how a person sees the world differently, and as no person is alike, then the way everyone perceives the world will also be varied. People then are differentiated by many variables. Bonvillain (2019) has asserted that people are differentiated based on gender, age, and status in all societies (including class, race, and ethnicity), contributing to diversity in communication behavior. There is a methodical bond between a person's language and how he/she comprehends the world. Hence, a person's use of language determines all aspects which are attributed to that person.

Language difference is also shown by the differences in gender. Wardhaugh and Fuller (2014) have stated that women and men may have different paralinguistic systems and move and gesture differently. This may prompt them to use a different way to communicate, and eventually, they may have different speech styles. The use of language then is also shaped and differentiated by gender, which means that men and women use language differently.

Based on gender, men and women are said to use the language differently (Opina, 2017; Vogel, Lopes, & Esposito, 2017; Zhu & Ruan, 2019; Coats, 2019; Wightman, 2020). The sexes often speak virtually different languages, which Tannen (in Mamona, Rubab, Akbar, 2020) has addressed as report talk versus rapport talk. Men often seek straightforward solutions to problems and useful advice, whereas women tend to try and establish intimacy by discussing problems and showing concern and empathy in order to reinforce relationships. It is common, then, for the conversations between the two sexes to end up to lack of agreement on meaning. Therefore, gendered use of language is

worthy of exploration because it brings into sharper focus real-world imbalances and inequalities. Male and female differences in language use are caused by psychology, social factor, cultural background (Opina, 2017), and education (Stoet & Geary, 2020; Akabayashi et al., 2020), in which females are more expressive. The differences in conversational styles, way of speaking, topics, talkativeness, and the intention of the conversation are believed because male and female are biologically different from each other and play different social roles as they are bound by social and gender norms (Cislaghi & Heise, 2019).

Studies in the use of the language of different gender indicate that the differences cover aspects such as verbal (pronunciation, intonation, vocabulary, syntax) and non-verbal (attitudes toward language, manners, and choosing topic) (Opina, 2017), emotion state words included pleasure (e.g., chuffed), affection (e.g., love), surprise (e.g., surprised), fear (e.g., scared), distress (e.g., gutted), concern (e.g., worry), indifference (e.g., do not care), anger (e.g., cross), and dislike (e.g., hate) (Finn, 2017). Wardhaugh and Fuller (2014) have claimed that language sets a frame to the actuality so it could govern the way a speaker comprehends and establishes the world surrounding them. Thus, the language one uses aids to form and view the world. However, gender differences also facilitate how a person is perceived through a different culture. In the same way, Uchida in Bonvillain (2019) has argued that gender is not immutable or static but a holistic and dynamic concept that affects language use. Bonvillain (2019) has added by asserting that women and men are socialized to express themselves in different ways in accordance with cultural norms that teach and reinforce differentiated gender roles. It is considered normal that cultural differences, such as the pressure (intentional or not) on girls to 'be nice' and polite and on boys to be strong and competitive, are likely to lead to the learning of different interaction styles and the adoption of different linguistic choices by girls and by boys. Some of these choices and the related broader gender ideologies often disadvantage girls and women. Women's language is portrayed to be excessive in the use of expressive forms, less direct, and more polite. Women avoid offending verbally and are more careful in choosing words to express themselves.

Correspondingly, Bonvillain (2019) has claimed that men use curse words with greater frequency and greater profane force than do women, while women tend to employ milder expletives. Swearing, a linguistic universal, is used to express intense emotions (fear, joy, anger, excitement). Swearing is acknowledged as one of many devices that languages offer speakers as a way to give additional emphasis to their speech, often in combination with other emphasizing techniques like stress, intonation, and tone of voice, not to mention non-linguistic phenomena like gestures and facial expression. The contribution of swearing in such situations is the added strength supplied by the taboo words necessary for swearing to take place.

Women also have a tendency to use specifiers and meaningless adjectives to express subjective affective judgments, which are supported by the society that allows them to display emotion. This is similar to Jespersen's idea in Bonvillain (2019), which states that women are apt to use intensifiers such as 'very', 'so', or 'extremely', and what some have called 'empty' adjectives, as 'wonderful' and 'lovely'. Therefore, it is expected for women to use more adjectives to describe and denote more than men do. Profanity or swear words use between males and females has been in the spotlight for years. These studies show different results in which some may favor that males have a tendency to swear more than women (Muhanovic, Babic, & Latic, 2018; Zhu & Ruan, 2019; and Coats, 2021). In terms of adjective use, some works also claim that there are differences between males and females (Barczewska & Andreasen, 2018; Gygax et al., 2019). Works on gender differences in written discourse have also been an interesting topic. Previous research in L1 writing has provided confirmations that females perform better than males in many aspects of writing (Limpo & Alves, 2017; Castro & Limpo, 2018; De Smedt et al., 2018; Adams & Simmons, 2019; Zhang et al., 2019; Reilly, Neumann, & Andrews, 2019; Al-Saadi, 2020; Li, Chen, & Banerjee, 2020).

As the realization of language use, fiction has also taken part in reflecting and shaping the cultural identity of communities, as well as the identity of individuals. Therefore, the research would like to investigate how the writers of different genders from different cultures (western or American and Asian) reflect the differences in the language they use in their novels. Although gender differences are known to be a result of cultural differences, fewer studies have been done in terms of contrasting the gender of different cultures, yet to discuss them in terms of gender roles as writers. The research aims to explore the role of gender in constructing language to examine gender stereotypes from a linguistic perspective and describe gender differences in language use.

The novels used in the research are under a similar genre that is teenage literature. Teen literature or young adult books with the target readers are teenagers or young adults in their teens or early twenties. Fictional works can be defined as a piece of literature about untrue events and people. In other words, fictionality, not factuality, is the key element of literature. The languages in question are English and bahasa Indonesia, as seen in *Fangirl* by Rainbow Rowell (2018) and *An Abundance of Katherines* by John Green (2019) for English, *Pacar Ketiga* by Andhika Rahmadian (2015), and *Friendklops* by Sara Tee (2015) for bahasa Indonesia.

METHODS

The research applied a qualitative method with library research style, which includes several steps of reading the material: *An Abundance of Katherines*

written by John Green (2019) published by Penguin Group, *Fangirl* written by Rainbow Rowell (2018) published by Saint Martin Press, *Friendklops* by Sara Tee (2015) and *Pacar Ketiga* by Andhika Rahmadian (2015), both are published by PT Gramedia Pustaka Utama. The researcher collects and lists the swear words and adjectives used, categorizes the choice of words, and analyzes the choices.

The qualitative method applied in the research is known to investigate the reasons and modes of decision-making while the data obtained describe certain types of information. Aspers and Corte (2019) have stated that qualitative research is about questioning the pre-given (taken for granted) variables, but it is thus also about making new distinctions of any type of phenomenon. The qualitative descriptive method is used to focus on discovering the use of swear words and adjectives by male and female English and Indonesian writers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Cultures define 'swearing' as a barometer for social norms. As humans are part of their society, society's culture determines how males and females are allowed to curse or how to society may view and accept them when they curse. Swearing can act as a form of linguistic creativity in utilizing offensive language to express feelings or attitudes (Finn, 2017). In *An Abundance of Katherines*, the swear words said by Colin (the main character) and Hassan (the side character) is in the form of 'fug'; it is an alteration of 'fuck', which is explained in the novel. Therefore, the word 'fug' and all the words formed are considered similar to 'fuck'.

"Hey, why the fuck do you and Hassan say fug all the time?" Colin exhaled slowly, his cheeks puffing out. "Have you ever read The Naked and the Dead by Norman Mailer?" "I don't even know who that is." "American novelist. Born in 1923. I was reading him when I first met Hassan. And then later Hassan ended up reading it because it's all about war, and Hassan likes actiony books. Anyway, it's 872 pages, and it uses the word fug or fugging or fugguer or whatever about thirty-seven thousand times. Every other word is a fug, pretty much. So anyway, after I read a novel, I like to read some literary criticism of it." "Color me surprised," she said. "Right. Well, when Mailer wrote the book, he didn't use 'fug.' But then he sent it to the publisher and they were like, 'This is a really excellent book you've written, Mr. Mailer. But no one here in 1948 is going to buy it, because it contains even more F-bombs than it does Regular Bombs.' So, Norman Mailer, as a kind of fug-you to the publisher, went through his 872-page book and changed every last F-word to 'fug.' So, I told Hassan the story while he was reading the book and then he decided to

start saying fug as an homage to Mailer—and because you can say it in class without getting in trouble." (Green, 2019, p.120)

Table 1 Swear Words Used by Male and Female Writers in English

Swear Words	Number of Swear Word Occurrence from Male Writer	Number of Swear Word Occurrence from Female writer
Fuck	75	42
Ass	23	6
Shit	57	18
Screw	4	-
Dick	3	-
Bitch	2	-
Pussy	4	-
Eff	-	2

The swear words found in the two novels are listed in Table 1 with some variations of words formed from the mentioned words, e.g., motherfucker, which is categorized under the same category, that is under the word 'fuck'. In terms of swear words, male writers tend to use more swear words than female writers. The kinds of words are also more varied from male writers. In English, the male writer uses 186 swear words, whereas the female writer uses 68 swear words. The male writer uses the word 'fuck' and words formed from it mostly. The male writer also uses 'shit' most of the time. Knirnschild (2019) has found that speakers using female-descriptive derogatory terms to be much more obscene than instances of speakers using male-descriptive derogatory terms in her study of 409 U.S. university students. Similarly, DeFrank and Kahlbaugh's research (2019) that speakers swearing in mixed-gender dyads are considered less sociable, and males swearing in mixed-gender dyads are perceived as more offensive.

However, culture seems to influence the vulgarity and number of swear words used in the literature work as Indonesian writers use fewer swear words. It can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2 Swear Words Used by Male and Female Writers in Bahasa Indonesia

Swear Words	Number of Swear Word Occurrence from Male writer	Number of Swear Word Occurrence from Female writer
Sinting	-	1
Berengsek	-	1
Sialan	2	
Mampus	1	
Kampret	2	

In bahasa Indonesia, the male writer also uses more swear words than the female writer. It is also

more varied and harsher. The female writer seems to avoid using swear words in which the words she uses are considered mild and not offensive. This is ascertained by the understanding that informal usage of bahasa Indonesia merges into street slang or youth slang, sarcastic or humorous abbreviations, deliberate 'misunderstandings' of words, and components borrowed from local languages. Indonesian culture and norms do not allow people to curse or swear freely, and that cursing or swearing can be taken as a sign of being uneducated and impolite. Moreover, the novels are intended for young readers, making the use of swear words carefully selected.

To conclude, the use of swear words corresponds to gender differences. Males are proven to curse more than females. The frequency of utilizing profanities in the novels is dominantly displayed by male authors, either in English or Indonesian. Differences in the use of swear words are also influenced by the culture. English writers use the swear words more than Indonesian writers. Similarly, male writers also outnumber female writers in the use of swear words. Language choices, in terms of swear words, are determined by gender and cultural differences.

In the use of adjectives in English, the female writer tends to describe nouns by using more than two adjectives, and sometimes accompanied by complementizer as the example.

*Cath looked up at the guy, **a dangerously hip-looking character with shaggy hair and oversized glasses*** (Rowell, 2018, p. 38 line 31).

Whereas the male writer enjoys using excessive dashes to attribute the noun as seen in the following excerption:
*She was **incredibly hot—in that popular-girl-with-bleached-teeth-and-anorexia kind of way**, which was Colin's least favorite way of being hot* (Green, 2019, p.52).

Table 3 Adjectives Used by Male and Female Writer in English

Types of Adjectives	Number of Adjective Occurrences from Male Writer	Number of Adjective Occurrences from Female Writer
AdjP, N	43	65
AdvP, AdjP, N	10	7
AdjP, NP	3	13
AdjP, N, PP	11	11
Adj, N	9	16
dashes	24	35
TOTAL	100	147

Note (For the research, the adjectives in English are classified by the distribution with nouns):

AdjP, N	=	more than one adjective is used to specify a noun,

AdvP, AdjP, N	=	Adverb phrase, Adjective phrase, Nou
AdjP, NP	=	one (or more than one adjective) to specify Noun + Noun
AdjP, N, PP	=	Adjective phrase, Noun followed by Preposition phrase
Adj, N	=	one adjective to specify noun.
Dashes	=	adjectives used to specify noun are separated by dashes

The female writer also uses dashes but in shorter forms and prefers to use multiple adjectives in denoting nouns. Adjectives used by the female writer highlight the nouns they specify, for example, on page 15, line 2, A boy with **slick**, **black** hair, and cold, **grey** eyes; page 24, line 2, a **tiny little** rectangle, just wide enough on each side of the door for their beds.

The male writer, conversely, uses adjectives to denote the noun plainly. For example, on page 3, line 5, a **curiously blank** look; page 31, line 29, a **clipped metallic pink**. Thus, the adjectives used by the male writer do not double the meaning. In terms of number, the female writer uses 65 times of adjectives phrases to specify nouns, whereas the male writer uses the adjective phrases plus noun 43 times and the numbers differ significantly in other variants of the adjectives used.

Nevertheless, for Indonesian, as exemplified by two teenage literature writers, the number of adjectives does not reflect the gender differences. The male writer uses more adjectives than the female writer, as can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4 Adjectives Used by Male and Female Writer in Bahasa Indonesia

Types of Adjectives	Number of Adjective Occurrences from Male Writer	Number of Adjective Occurrences from Female Writer
Color	4	6
Condition	28	19
Characteristics	16	4
Shape/size	4	2
Modifying adverb, adj	6	1
TOTAL	58	32

(For the resesarch, the adjectives in bahasa Indonesia are categorized based on the types)

The male writer uses adjectives 58 times, whereas the female writer uses adjectives 32 times. In all types of adjectives, the male writer outnumbers the female writer; except for adjectives denoting color, the female writer uses it more than the male writer. The female writer does not use a modifying adverb to specify the adjective as much as the male writer. The distributions of adjectives in denoting nouns have similar patterns for both male and female writers in

that in most of the sentences. An adjective is used to specify a noun, and in some sentences, the writers use more than one adjective. The male writer shows a preference for using physical attributes in describing things, for example:

Luki, cowok jangkung berkulit sawo matang, sahabat Tania sejak kecil. (Rahmadian, 2015, p.15)

Whereas the female writer prefers to describe it characteristically as exemplified in Tee (2015, p. 7):

*Vena gadis yang **sempurna*** (Vena is a perfect girl).

Bahasa Indonesia shares a quite similar pattern of adjectives and adjectives phrases as English. Adjectives in bahasa Indonesia are words that describe nouns for their shape or size, color, condition, etc. Nevertheless, in the bahasa Indonesia context, it is not proven that women use more adjectives than men that can be seen in these two teenage literature novels, where the male writer outnumbers the female writer in using adjectives. This is perhaps related to the writer's writing style, which is personal preference and not associated with gender and cultural influence. Thus, it can be said that in using adjectives, gender differences do not affect the differences in the language use of Bahasa Indonesia.

CONCLUSIONS

Gender differences are proposed to affect how a person uses language, and considering language is part of a culture, it is also supposed to shape language use. Based on the four teenage literature books, it can be concluded that men are more likely to curse or use swear words more than women despite the cultural differences as claimed by Bonvillain, and Wardhaugh and Fuller. Culture does contribute to the differences in how swear words are expressed, in which Indonesian writers use fewer swear words and avoid using vulgar words and profanity.

Interestingly, though the English still follows the basic assumption of women's tendency to use more adjectives to denote nouns, the male writer uses less descriptive adjectives than the female writer; Indonesian writers show different results. The male writer uses more adjectives than the female writer. The male writer tends to describe nouns based on physical attributes, whereas the female writer uses character attributes to describe nouns. Although the preference may be caused by personal preference, it can be concluded that gender differences do not affect adjectives used in bahasa Indonesia.

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