



Gender Features of Rhetoric: A Discursive and Pragmatic Analysis

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Abstract: The main focus: sociolinguistic, gender-related features of rhetoric: discursive and pragmatic aspects. The study seeks to find distinguishing patterns in rhetorical strategies, communicative intentions, and linguistic devices used, which are typical of male as opposed to female language. This study is based on gender linguistics, social constructivism, and pragmatic theory. The results indicate that the differences in the way males and females use rhetoric are ultimately due to societal standards and not based on biology. By organizing current theoretical perspectives, this paper is a timely contribution both to the field of gendered communication as it relates to academic and professional discourse.

Keywords: Rhetoric, Gender, Discourse, Pragmatics, Communicative Strategies, Sociolinguistics



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Introduction

In Since the days of ancient Greece, Rhetoric has been the art of persuasive communication. Rhetoric was essential to society—and the three principles which serve as its cornerstone, ethos, pathos and logos, were first established by Aristotle. Recent linguistic work on rhetoric has particularly focused on the social and cultural contexts of rhetoric, with attention to gender (e.g., Brown 2006, 2007; Foss 2014; Norrick 2006; Okamoto and Fujimura 2013).

Gender linguistics developed as an interdisciplinary research field in the latter part of the twentieth century, focusing on the interaction between language and gender identity. Academics like Robin Lakoff maintained that women's language styles deploy certain linguistic features — hedges, tag questions and intensifiers — as markers of social positioning, rather than weakness as a speaker. More recently, Deborah Tannen identified the difference between "rapport talk" and "report talk" — that the former is generally how women speak (to create relationships), and the latter how men speak (to exchange information and negotiate status).

This paper aims to examine the gender-related characteristics of rhetoric from a discursive and pragmatic perspective and explore how far the observed characteristics are socially constructed.

The research is grounded in three main theoretical perspectives:

1. Classical Rhetorical Theory – emphasizing persuasion, credibility, and emotional appeal.
2. Gender Linguistics – focusing on linguistic differences associated with gender.
3. Social Constructivism – particularly the theory of performativity proposed by Judith Butler, which conceptualizes gender as a socially constructed and repeatedly performed identity.

From this perspective, rhetorical behavior is not biologically predetermined but shaped by social expectations and institutional norms.

This study employs qualitative discourse analysis and comparative pragmatic analysis. The research methods include:

- Discourse analysis to examine rhetorical strategies within social contexts.
- Pragmatic analysis to investigate speech acts and communicative intentions.

- Comparative method to identify differences and similarities in male and female rhetorical patterns.
- Content analysis of scholarly sources and documented communication samples.
- The study does not essentialize gender differences but treats them as tendencies influenced by cultural factors.

The analysis indicates that female rhetorical patterns often emphasize cooperation, solidarity, and emotional alignment. Common features include:

- Use of hedges (e.g., “perhaps,” “I think,” “it seems”),
- Tag questions (e.g., “isn’t it?”),
- Politeness markers and mitigated directives.

In contrast, male rhetorical patterns tend to prioritize assertiveness, directness, and hierarchical positioning. These include:

- Declarative and authoritative statements,
- Competitive discourse strategies,
- Explicit argument structuring.

These tendencies fit into Tannen’s profile of relational vs report-oriented communication.

Pragmatically, indirect speech acts occur more often in conversation performed by females. Requests and suggestions are generally presented as optional or collaborative (“Would you be able to...?”). Instead, male discourse is more likely to include direct imperatives and an emphasis on explicit problem-solving (“We must do this now”).

These distinctions illustrate competing communicative targets: situational repair vs. task accomplishment.

Sociophonetic research shows that women generally use a greater intonational range and stylistic variation than men, and that men are more likely than women to use low pitch and more stable intonation. From a stylistic perspective, women’s rhetoric could use more evaluative adjectives and affective vocabulary; men could be more succinct and more focused on the structure and clarity of transmission of information.

Crucially, the results confirm an argument for the social conditioning of rhetorical gender differences. Style of communication is thus greatly affected by institutional roles, power relations, and cultural expectations. The second one, an example would be women within leadership positions tend to use more traditionally masculine rhetorical strategies.

In conclusion, gendered rhetoric should not be seen as static or universal, but rather as contextual and dynamic.

Understanding gender features of rhetoric has practical implications for:

- Academic communication,
- Organizational leadership,
- Cross-cultural interaction,
- Educational discourse.

Knowledge of rhetorical variation may improve rhetorical use and interpretation and curb misunderstanding arising from gender stereotypes.

Findings from this study show a gendered component of rhetoric that is derived from social and cultural elements rather than biological essentials. Women are generally more relationship-oriented and indirect, while men tend to be more direct and disclose a negotiation of status (see You & Wurtz 2002). But these patterns are not universal, nor are they permanent. Hybrid and adaptive rhetorical strategies are increasingly reflected in contemporary discourse.

It would be beneficial for future research to add a quantitative corpus-based-component to provide empirical support to the tendencies suggested here.

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