

GENDER ASPECTS IN ENGLISH MEN'S CONGRATULATORY SPEECHES

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Abstract: This study examines how English-speaking men construct masculinity through congratulatory discourse, particularly in birthday greetings to their wives. It analyzes lexical, stylistic, and pragmatic features to reveal emotional expressiveness and partnership. Using discourse and gender theories, the research shows that modern masculine speech reflects empathy and equality, shifting from patriarchal norms toward emotional reciprocity and appreciation.

Keywords: gender, masculinity, congratulatory speech, discourse analysis, pragmatics.

Аннотация : Данное исследование рассматривает, как англоговорящие мужчины конструируют маскулинность через поздравительные высказывания, особенно в поздравлениях с днём рождения, адресованных женам. Анализируются лексические, стилистические и прагматические особенности, отражающие эмоциональную выразительность и партнёрство. Используя теории дискурса и гендера, исследование показывает, что современная мужская речь проявляет эмпатию и равенство, отходя от патриархальных норм к эмоциональной взаимности и признательности.

Ключевые слова: гендер, маскулинность, поздравительная речь, дискурс-анализ, прагматика.

Annotatsiya: Ushbu tadqiqot ingliz tilida so'zlashuvchi erkaklarning tabrik nutqlari orqali maskulinlikni qanday ifodalashini o'rghanadi, xususan, turmush o'rtoqlariga yo'llangan tug'ilgan kun tabriklari misolida. Tadqiqotda leksik, uslubiy va pragmatik xususiyatlar tahlil qilinib, hissiy ifoda va hamkorlik aks ettiriladi. Diskurs va gender nazariyalari asosida olib borilgan tahlil natijasida zamonaviy erkak nutqida hamdardlik va tenglik ifodalari kuchayib, patriarxal an'analardan hissiy o'zaro qadrlashga o'tish kuzatiladi.

Kalit so'zlar: gender, maskulinlik, tabrik nutqi, diskurs tahlili, pragmatika.

Introduction

Language serves as a social mirror, reflecting not only communication but also the cultural and gender ideologies embedded within a community (Cameron, 2003). Congratulatory speech acts, as one of the most socially ritualized forms of communication, function to reinforce social bonds, express emotional affiliation, and construct interpersonal identities. In recent years, linguists and discourse analysts have

increasingly turned attention to gendered speech acts, examining how men and women perform identity through language in both private and public domains (Coates, 2015).

This research focuses on English men's congratulatory speeches—specifically, birthday greetings to wives—and examines their lexical, stylistic, and pragmatic structures through a gender lens. The purpose is to determine how English men express affection, gratitude, and admiration, and what these linguistic choices reveal about evolving masculine identity. The relevance of this analysis lies in its contribution to understanding how gender relations are linguistically negotiated in the twenty-first century, moving toward models of emotional partnership and equality.

Gender and Language

The relationship between gender and language has been extensively studied, particularly since the seminal works of Lakoff (1975) and Tannen (1990). While early studies tended to dichotomize male and female speech patterns—associating men with assertiveness and women with politeness—more recent research emphasizes the performative and contextual nature of gender (Butler, 1990; Cameron, 2003). According to this view, masculinity and femininity are not fixed categories but dynamic performances enacted through linguistic choices.

Men's language traditionally carried traits of dominance, authority, and rationality (Coates, 2015). However, contemporary studies indicate a diversification of masculine discourse, where emotional expressiveness and empathy have become more socially acceptable (Lawson, 2020). This shift is particularly visible in personal genres such as congratulatory and affectionate speech, where men's self-expression reflects changing cultural constructions of gender.

Masculinity in Discourse

Masculinity in linguistic performance is closely linked to social ideologies of what it means "to be a man." Connell's (1995) theory of hegemonic masculinity defined the traditional model as power-oriented and emotionally restrained. In contrast, inclusive or empathic masculinity (Anderson, 2009) highlights men's emotional openness and equality-oriented interactions.

Within congratulatory discourse, this change is manifested through lexical choices that emphasize affection ("love," "cherished," "beautiful"), relational metaphors ("heartbeat of our family"), and gratitude ("thank you for being my partner"). Such expressions indicate a softer, more cooperative model of masculinity, diverging from the dominance traditionally associated with male speech.

Methodology

This study uses qualitative discourse analysis as its main method. Three authentic examples of English men's congratulatory speeches to their wives were analyzed, focusing on lexical, stylistic, and pragmatic levels. The analysis pays

particular attention to metaphorical imagery, emotional intensity, and gender positioning within the text.

Each excerpt is treated as a micro-discourse, reflecting broader cultural and gender ideologies. The analytical framework draws upon Cameron's (2003) model of language ideologies, Connell's (1995) masculinity theory, and pragmatic strategies described by Eshreteh (2022) in speech act analysis. The purpose is to reveal how linguistic form correlates with gendered meaning.

Analysis

“Happy birthday to the woman who lights up my world with her smile and makes every day brighter with her love. Your kindness, strength, and unwavering support mean everything to me. Here’s to many more years of togetherness and endless love.”

The highlighted clause—“lights up my world with her smile and makes every day brighter with her love”—creates a metaphor of illumination, positioning the wife as the emotional source of warmth and stability. Lexically, the blend of kindness, strength, and support attributes both emotional and moral authority to the female figure. The male speaker, conversely, performs a grateful and admiring masculinity, characterized by acknowledgment rather than domination. Pragmatically, this reflects an empathic masculine discourse where affection is explicitly articulated.

“My dear wife, as you blow out the candles on your birthday cake, I want you to know that you are the greatest gift life has ever given me. Thank you for being my partner, my best friend, and the love of my life.”

The phrase “the greatest gift life has ever given me” is both hyperbolic and symbolic, reconfiguring the male speaker as the recipient of the woman’s emotional generosity. The triadic structure reflects egalitarian partnership rather than hierarchical gender roles. Lexically, the use of gratitude signals emotional humility.

“On your special day, I want to remind you of how deeply you are cherished and adored. You are the heartbeat of our family, the rock of our home, and the love of my life.”

The dual metaphors—“heartbeat of our family” and “rock of our home”—demonstrate a fusion of emotional and structural imagery. The wife is depicted as both the emotional center and the stabilizing force of domestic life. The male speaker’s role is performative: he affirms, appreciates, and recognizes rather than instructs or leads. This discourse demonstrates how modern men linguistically construct affection and stability as shared attributes.

Discussion

Across all three examples, common linguistic patterns emerge: frequent use of metaphors of light, strength, and stability; explicit expressions of gratitude and emotional transparency; and redefinition of gender roles within partnership discourse.

The use of emotionally loaded verbs (cherish, adore, love) and metaphoric constructs (gift, heartbeat, rock) underlines the emotional reciprocity that now characterizes English male speech in private contexts. Such expressions challenge the long-standing stereotype of male verbal restraint (Coates, 2015). Pragmatically, these speeches perform relational maintenance acts that sustain affection and identity through verbal recognition.

Conclusion

This study concludes that English men's congratulatory discourse illustrates a transition from traditional patriarchal masculinity to an inclusive and emotionally expressive model. Lexical and stylistic choices reveal how affection, appreciation, and emotional vulnerability have become integral to male speech in intimate contexts. The male speaker constructs identity through empathy, mutual respect, and verbal affirmation of partnership.

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