

CAUSES, CONSEQUENCES AND TEACHING STRATEGIES OF GENDER DIFFERENCES IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

Banovsha Mammadova Guloghlan

Doctor of Philology, Associate Professor

Azerbaijan University of Languages

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2578-1363>

benovshem.m@gmail.com

Abstract. *Research shows that there are neurobiological, motivational, and social differences between women and men in language acquisition. Generally, women demonstrate advantages in verbal skills and exhibit emotionally and interest-oriented motivation. Men, on the other hand, tend to learn foreign languages for more pragmatic, goal-oriented reasons. Various theories and international research results emphasize the concept of genderlect and its significance in sociolinguistics. Based on these findings, teachers should apply differentiated methods in the teaching process, taking gender differences into account. To enhance women's motivation, the practical and career-related benefits of learning a foreign language should be explained, while for men, a socially rich and interactive learning environment should be created. This approach can improve learning outcomes and contribute to the elimination of gender stereotypes.*

Keywords: *genderlect, neurolinguistics, teaching strategies, second language acquisition, language learning beliefs, social identification*

Our study examines how the relationship between learning a non-native language and gender has changed over the past thirty years and how gender stereotypes influence this process. Early studies considered differences between men and women as fixed, biological, and binary categories. However, later research has shown that gender is a variable characteristic shaped by society and environment. Here, we discuss language learning and gender stereotypes, review numerous related studies and theories proposed over the years, and present the results of our own survey.

Neurolinguistic aspects of foreign language learning. First, it is necessary to consider the biological aspects of language learning, as biological factors directly affect the process. Key brain regions involved in language processing include Broca's and Wernicke's areas. Broca's area is crucial for speech production, while Wernicke's area is essential for language comprehension. The proper functioning of these areas directly affects the efficiency of language learning. Research shows that women's language processing involves more balanced activation of both the left and right hemispheres. This allows women to process language through broader neural networks, aiding their advantages in verbal memory and lexical skills. Hormonal

effects should also be considered. For instance, higher levels of estrogen in women strengthen synaptic connections and increase neuroplasticity, enhancing verbal memory, vocabulary development, and overall language learning. These hormonal differences also influence how the brain approaches language processing. Such information should inform teaching approaches and methods, ensuring that the individual characteristics of both genders are effectively supported.

Several theories highlight gender stereotypes in foreign language learning:

- George Lakoff's Dominance Theory (1975) posits that women's cautious and weak forms of language use are directly related to their social status. He argued that women's speech commonly includes hedges, excessive adherence to normative grammar, polite forms, and question intonation, reflecting social powerlessness. However, no empirical studies were conducted at that time to validate this theory.
- Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory suggests that learning is a cognitive process that occurs within a social context. This context should involve observation and motivation, allowing an individual to imitate a model. Consistent modeling enables learners to acquire specific skills and language behaviors.
- Deborah Tannen's Difference Theory (1990) states that men and women develop different "genderlects" during socialization. This theory claims that women are more open to new language structures and correct their errors more quickly.

Genderlect refers to the ways men and women use language differently. We reviewed multiple studies on this topic, both in native and foreign languages. For example, John Blair's 2000 study in a Canadian high school investigated how boys and girls communicate, their topics of conversation, and the linguistic tools used in lessons. Krupnick's 1985 study examined how gender affects teaching and learning quality at Harvard University. Findings showed that the teacher's personality and pedagogical experience influence classroom dynamics more than gender, suggesting that gender is part of subjective identity formation and underpins social interaction.

These studies indicate that genderlects reflect how individuals express themselves in society and perceive the world. Gender is not the only factor determining communication style, but it is an integral part of identity and affects social interaction. Although these insights emerged long ago, it is increasingly recognized that gender plays an important role in the learning process, interconnected with other factors.

Genderlects play a significant role in the learning environment and influence the social acquisition of language, as they form distinct social identities. However, few studies have explored men's and women's spoken-to-written communication styles.

Written language has often been considered a reflection of spoken language, and gender differences in written expression have been minimally investigated.

Empirical studies provide useful insights. Kristin Burstall's 1975 study of 6,000 students, Susan Boyce's 1987 research, and Murphy's 2010 study all show that women outperform men in language learning. Some research links certain foreign languages to gender stereotypes; for example, a 2002 study found that boys associated French with a "feminine" image and German with a "masculine" one, affecting motivation.

Research conducted in Poland with 549 students and 64 teachers revealed that gender plays some role in language learning, but other social factors have a stronger influence. In Turkey, studies at Çukurova University's Preparatory School examined gender differences in language learning beliefs among 180 students. Female students reported higher motivation, while male students focused more on the practical application of language learning and were less concerned with difficulties or feelings of inadequacy. These findings indicate that language learning beliefs can vary by gender and influence teaching methods.

Studies on second language acquisition show that students' beliefs about language learning are related to motivation, age, academic performance, and learning experience. Research can be summarized in a table highlighting gender differences in language learning beliefs.

For example, focus group discussions held in 2007 at a Canadian public university with students enrolled in six foreign language programs showed that men's and women's beliefs about language learning were largely similar. The main difference was that women tended to believe that people who speak multiple languages are smarter. Compared to other studies, this suggests that gender plays a role in beliefs and motivation but has a limited effect on overall learning approaches.

Conclusion. Research shows that gender differences in foreign language acquisition are determined by both biological and social factors. Women prefer emotional and communicative motivation in language learning, while men favor goal-oriented and pragmatic approaches. These differences affect learning outcomes, teaching strategies, and the social function of language. Using gender-sensitive teaching methods can increase learning effectiveness and help eliminate gender stereotypes.

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