Genderlect: The verbal battle for female intimacy and male independence

An analysis of the relation between language and gender with specific focus on Computer-Mediated Communication.

Bachelor Thesis

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Introduction

The linguistic research on the relation between gender and language is a complex and highly diverse topic. Various findings which were carried out on this copious issue went hand in hand with the research on the origin of language itself, and were analyzed from multiple angles including grammatical, phonological and lexical aspects. The contemporary theory of Genderlect has only been taken into account since 1975 and aims to detect gender differences in the way and style of interaction. The investigations into Genderlect were triggered by the assumption that women’s speech is powerless and inferior to men’s way of communicating.

As a result, many linguists started to analyze the variety of speech associated with a particular gender in combination with the presupposition that not only the role of men and women in society is subject to change, but also their conversational style. The research in this linguistic area even challenged the idea of the entire concept of ‘gender’ by emphasizing the performance of masculinity and femininity rather than the traditional assumption that a person’s gender is linked to one’s biological sex. This area of linguistic analysis became one of greater significance once these two varieties were no longer reflections of the unbalanced sexual stereotyping in society. Nowadays, male and female speech is, furthermore, treated as cross-cultural communication.

In order to elaborate on the gendered differences in conversation in modern times, the new technological aspects have to be considered. Computer-mediated communication, therefore, offers an advanced and complex field of research. Especially the construction of a gender identity through language in the new medium provides a new approach to the previous findings on Genderlect. When analyzing gendered language used in the electronic environment with regard to the possibility of anonymity, the new medium can, to some extent, provide evidence for the existence of differences in masculine and feminine discourse style.

The aim of this bachelor thesis is to firstly deal with the origin of the discernible distinctions between male and female interaction. Within the scope of the illustration of differences in gendered behavior, the contemporary idea of the concept that is ‘gender’ will be taken into account, since its cultural perception severely influences the findings in the linguistic area of research. Different approaches to the study of Genderlect, mainly supported by the famous studies of Robin Lakoff and Deborah Tannen, will be discussed in order to formulate research questions and list features for the different forms of speech associated with one gender.
which way this gender labeling influences the modern communication in electronic discourse will be examined within the paper, primarily by comparing remarkable features of face-to-face conversation to those found in computer-mediated interaction. Furthermore, the possibility of creating an alternative identity in the online medium will be considered with regard to the language that is used in the process of performing a different gender.

To add a practical dimension to the theoretical part of the paper, two forms of electronic discourse will be analyzed in the subsequent section. In order to substantiate the assertion of Genderlect in computer-mediated communication, blogs on the same topic from a man and one written by a female user will be examined.

1. Language and Gender

It is a standard phenomenon of human beings to label others in groups in order to make generalizations. “Just as we rarely question our ability to breathe, so we rarely question the habit of dividing human beings into two categories: females and males.” (Bergvall, Bing and Freed 1996: 1 in Tablot 2010: 12) Undeniably, everyone is a unique individual, shaped by numerous factors including ethnicity, religion, class, race, profession or age. However, patterns of similarity especially between masculine and feminine behavior are obvious. The sociolinguistic research in the field of Genderlect aims to identify those differences, in order to draw attention to the different varieties of communication and enable the interlocutors to find a common ground to negotiate. (cf. Tannen 1990: 14-17) In addition to that, the investigation into Genderlect focuses on eliminating the cultural stereotypes of gender differences in communication. According to folk knowledge, for example, women talk more or gossip all the time. Linguists dealing with the relation between language and gender challenge those myths or try to find an explanation for their existence. (cf. Coates 2004: 86)

Communication is a system and everything that is said is simultaneously an instigation as well as a reaction. Interlocutors often blame their partner for a problem or fight in a relationship instead of taking the different process of communicating into account. (cf. Tannen 1986: 125, 131) Especially conversations between males and females often fail mysteriously and may result in severe crises in relationships. Although both took part in the same exchange of utterances, their interpretations could vary dramatically. According to linguists dealing with the field of Genderlect, the language use also changes depending on the language user’s
position in society. Robin Lakoff underlines this important aspect in the research of language and gender by stating:

The acceptability of a sentence is determined through the combination of many factors: not only the phonology, the syntax, and the semantics, but also the social context in which the utterance is expressed, and the assumptions about the world made by all the participants in the discourse. (1989: 47,48)

Consequently, problems tend to arise, because the norm for communicating, as well as the expression of feelings and ideas, is different for male and female partners. Compliments, commands or apologies are part of our communicative competence. Experts agree on the thesis that men and women develop a different way of communication and, therefore, have a different understanding of how, for example, a compliment is done. (cf. Coates 2004: 86) Often the seemingly senseless misunderstandings are an outcome of the individual, but equally valid talking system. (cf. Tannen 1990: 15-18; Lakoff 1989: 47) Tannen explains the origins of the misunderstanding in mixed-gender conversation: “Some frustration in conversation between women and men can be understood by reference to systematic differences in how women and men tend to signal meaning in conversation.” (1994: 7)

1.1. History of Genderlect Theory

Gender distinction in language is a copious and ancient issue. Since the broad topic offers linguists a vast field for analysis, new hypothesis come up constantly. The study can even be traced back to the origin of language itself. Especially the rise of Standard English in the Middle Ages led to a determination of rules and consequently caused awareness of variation. Since educated men were in charge of codifying a standard grammar, vocabulary and structure, women’s use of English was treated as the incorrect attempt to produce language. Due to their advance in terms of education, features of complex, formal language were associated with men, while women were said to produce half-finished, short or incorrect sentences. (cf. Coates 2004: 15-17)

The examination of the relationship between gender and language is a highly diverse field of research. The roots of this divergent academic discipline are not solely rooted in the area of linguistics, but also in sociology, education, anthropology, psychology or literature. Experts in various fields have completely different notions of what question they want to elaborate on and, therefore, multiply ways of approaching the topic of Genderlect exist. (cf. Tannen 1994: 3,4)
The first approaches to examine the relation between gender and language concentrated on phonological and lexicogrammatical differences, for example by analyzing pronouns or affixes associated with either women or men. Although the English language lacks a complex pronoun system, since sex is only distinguished in the third person singular reference, other languages offer a basis for linguistic examination in terms of gender marking by the use of various pronouns. For instance, Japanese women use different pronouns than men. (cf. Talbot 2010: 4,5)

A lot of surveys have also been conducted about male and female ways of pronunciation. Those aimed at establishing the differences in social dialects. According to the findings of those surveys, carried out by famous linguists like William Labov and Peter Trudgill, women’s speech displays more prestige features of Standard English. Vernacular was associated with male speech within the scope of the sociolinguistic findings. (cf. Talbot 2010: 18,19)

In addition to the grammatical and phonological aspects, a distinction between the two opposite genders is sometimes even visible in the use of vocabulary. Although this phenomenon is only found in stable, conservative cultures in which social roles are not flexible, the linguistic interest in those gender-associated words is enormous. Due to their sex-exclusive use of vocabulary, it seems as if a different kind of language is used. (cf. Talbot 2010: 5,6)

The American linguist Ann Bodine contrasted sex-exclusive and sex-preferential features. The research of Genderlect is one of sex-preferential differentiation, because, unlike grammatical and vocabulary distinctions, features of male and female speech are not absolute. (cf. Talbot 2010: 6)

In 1975, Robin Lakoff, a female professor of linguistics at the University of Berkely, published “Language and Woman’s Place”, which is said to be the trigger for the study of language and sociolinguistics. Since the 1970s many linguists like Deborah Tannen or Susan Herring, two of the most known scholars in this area, have dealt successfully with the field of language and gender. (cf. Bucholtz 2004: 3-14)

1.2. Definition of Gender
Firstly, one has to distinguish between sex and gender. Sex, on the one hand, is a matter of bodily attributes and biologically founded. Every person is born either male or female. On the
other hand, gender is created by society. The gender associated characteristics are learned and therefore masculine and feminine behavior is not definite. (cf. Talbot 2010: 7) However, the distinction between sex and gender is not ultimate, because both interact when it comes to human behavior. In terms of Genderlect, you are born a boy, but society does construct the masculine stereotype. (cf. Talbot 2010:9)

In order to understand the theory of Genderlect, the overall concept of gender cannot be disregarded, because the way gender is understood predetermines the conclusions that are published in terms of its relationship to language. The binary conceptualization of gender, which exclusively presents the two categories of either male or female and ultimately links them to “biological” sex, claims that differences in language use are genetic. Nowadays, this fixed opposition of the biological sexes has been challenged by the idea of classifying gender as a constant performance independently of one’s sex. By treating gender as a series of dramatizations, experts, especially in the fields of linguistics, are confronted with the various, often even contradictory ways in which feminine or masculine behavior is expressed. (cf. Rodino 2006, online) Furthermore, it has to be considered that the way a speaker uses language does not bindingly depend on whether he or she is male or female, but the act of communicating has to be treated as part of the general performance that constructs an individuals’ gender. Rodino concludes the idea of examining gender’s continual production by stating: “Conceptualizing gender as performative helps expose the unnaturalness of binary gender and allows binary gender to appear as a discursive apparatus rather than as a natural, taken-for-granted trait.” (2006, online)

Additionally, gender can be described as a continuum; whereas one is either a man or a woman, degrees of masculinity or femininity can be detected. In terms of analyzing Genderlect, this feature of the socially constructed phenomena that is gender has to be taken into account, since not every person radiates the same degree of a female person, and, therefore, no generalization can be made. (cf. Talbot 2010: 12,13)

A baby is a linguistic clean slate. Language is learned, not inherited, and a baby will learn the way people raising him or her speak. Whether the child’s caregivers speak English, Swahili, Japanese, or American Sign Language, her flexible mind will pick up that language. Gender is similar: when you see a newborn baby, it’s hard to tell if it’s a boy or a girl. At just a few days old, there’s not much difference between the two. But the second someone says “It’s a boy!” or “It’s a girl!” a process of gendering begins that will continue through the child’s entire life. (McKee 2009, online)
The linguist Mary Talbot agrees with the argument of the linguistically clean newborn by arguing that it is not possible to anticipate that boys and girls possess innate qualities which are accountable for the development of Genderlect. Some experts in sociobiology and evolutionary psychology reject the assumption that features of gender in language are a result of society’s influence by trying to establish a genetic basis for behavior. (cf. Talbot 2010: 10) It is, for example, scientifically argued that cognitive differences exist, since the right and left hemisphere of the female brain are less lateralized than men’s, resulting in women being less at risk when it comes to the effect of injuries on the impairment of speech, since the speech centers are not exclusively established in the left hemisphere. This theory, however, by no means represents a valid generalization, and does, therefore, not offer any justification for the existence of differences in speech. Another finding suggests that the environmental influence of a newborn establishes its future way of talking and writing. Experts representing this argument claim that people tend to speak differently to a newborn girl than to a newborn boy. Nevertheless, the observation does not contradict with the idea that gender is constructed, but rather supports McKee’s argument that the process of gendering begins as soon as a person is born. Language, therefore, is definitely a gendered behavior that is socially constructed and it allows us to distinguish between characteristics that are perceived as either male or female. (cf. Talbot 2010: 11)

1.3. Male and Female Speech
Talbot claims that the two extremes in the research of Genderlect are language-as-mirror and language-as-reproductive. Language, one the one hand, reflects the social division in terms of gender differences in patterns of language use. One the other hand, it also part of the creation of the socially constructed distinction between a male and a female person. An example, for not only the reflection, but the creation of gender differences caused by language are the different forms of address for women. Inequality is sustained by addressing women either as ‘Miss’ or ‘Mrs’, based on their marital status. Men on the other hand are always referred to as ‘Mr.’, regardless of whether they are married or not. (cf. Talbot 2010: 15) Another example is the traditional conclusion of a wedding ceremony: “I now pronounce you man and wife.” While the husband is still referred to as ‘man’, his female partner ultimately becomes his ‘wife’. (cf. Lakoff 1989: 34) Robin Lakoff, the pioneer in modern Genderlect research underlines this creation of gender differences by language use: “Women experience linguistic
discrimination in two ways: in the way they are taught to use language and in the way general language use treats them.” (1989: 4)

Due to the fact that the social and cultural traits attributed to one sex are learned, they are also subject to change. Gender identity, therefore, is definitely flexible and locally constructed through discourse, rather than determined as male or female. Along with the role of men and women in society, the study of Genderlect has ultimately changed too. (cf. McKee 200, online; Herring and Paolillo 2006: 441)

1.3.1. Approaches to the Research of Genderlect
Four different approaches reflect the history of the research and are used to organize language and communication scholarship:.

- the deficit approach
- the dominance approach
- the difference approach
- the dynamic approach

The findings of the pioneer in linguistic research on Genderlect, Robin Lakoff, are based upon the deficit and dominance approach. (cf. Bucholtz 2004: 125) As a conclusion of her investigations into Genderlect, the female linguist remarks:

Women are systematically denied access to power, on the ground that they are not capable of holding it as demonstrated by their linguistic behavior along with other aspects of their behavior; and the irony here is that women are made to feel that they deserve such treatment, because of inadequacies in their own intelligence and/or education. (1989: 7)

As the quotation clearly indicates, the underlying assumption of the first approach was that women’s speech is inferior to that of men. The female voice was characterized as weak, unassertive and deficit. Furthermore, features that express uncertainty and a lack of confidence are associated with female speech (cf. Coates 2004: 6; Tannen 2010: 21). According to her hypothesis, girls who talk “rough” are immediately criticized or scolded in order to socialize them. (cf. Lakoff 1989: 5) Due to this approach men’s language was considered standard, since women in former times usually were denied access to education. In her book, Lakoff remarks that women, who want to be successful, have to be bilingual, in male, as well as, female speech. The chapter titled ‘Talking Like a Lady’ emphasizes the features that make female conversation sound irrelevant and meaningless and, therefore,
ultimately distinguish women’s language from the male norm. Female speakers have to be aware of the nuances of social situations in order to adapt the appropriate way of speaking, which is the male way. Additionally, she confirms the dominance of male discourse, by stating that men, on the contrary to the preferably bilingual woman, never adopt the female way of talking. (cf. Lakoff 1989: 7-10) The phenomenon is explained by Lakoff: “The language of the favored group, the group that holds the power, along with its nonlinguistic behavior, is generally adopted by the other group, not vice versa.” (1989: 10)

This approach was followed by the dominance theory suggesting that men generally dominate women in conversation, because female speech is naturally passive. (cf. McKee 2009: 4,16) Lakoff herself draws attention to the fact that linguistic and social change go hand in hand. This first model of the identification of feminine language mirrored the former social situation and set the basis for modern research on Genderlect. Furthermore, the powerful male language was an example for enacting dominance with the help of linguistic practice. (cf. Lakoff 1989: 41; Coates 2004: 6).

Nowadays, Lakoff’s theory is widely criticized, since it is only based on women’s deficiencies. In the first study on Genderlect, men are attributed power as if it were a biologically acquired characteristic, which cannot be challenged, rather than a socially constructed phenomenon. (cf. Talbot 2004: 51) Talbot, for example, disagrees with Lakoff’s overall view that women’s language is inferior and points attention to the fact that “she was unintentionally rearticulating existing prejudice about women’s talk.” (2004: 38)

Once the female reputation in society had changed and women took on important roles, the view on the question of Genderlect became more complex. One of those modern studies was carried out by Deborah Tannen, who was a student of Ms. Lakoff. In her book ‘You Just Don’t Understand’ the linguist argues that male and female conversation is cross-cultural communication. She disagrees with Lakoff’s theory by arguing that dominance is created in interaction. Consequently, men can only dominate a conversation if their female interlocutor’s linguistic strategy allows them to do so. (cf. Tannen 1994: 10)

Her analysis is therefore an example for the difference approach, which focuses on equality. This modern thesis allowed linguists to examine the female language outside of the oppressed framework (cf. Coates 2004: 6). According to this theory, men and women stem from different subcultures, because they grow up in a different environment. Culture, according to Tannen, is a network of habits and patterns gleaned from past experience
Furthermore, it is argued that male and female speaker grow up learning different ways of communicating also in sex-separated peer groups, which can be compared to people of different cultural backgrounds who have a different way of contextualizing cues, their talk and of signaling speech activities. (cf. Tannen 1994: 89) Linguistic differences serve as an imitation of male and female relations. (cf. Tannen 1990: 42; McKee 2004: 16) Tannen explains that:

If women speak and hear a language of connection and intimacy, while men speak and hear a language of status and independence, then communication between men and women is like cross-cultural communication, prey to a clash of conversational styles. Instead of different dialects, it has been said they speak different genderlects. (1990: 42)

Furthermore, she argues that, regardless whether a boy and a girl grow up in the same family, they are still raised in different world of words. Even infants, she claims, are treated differently depending on whether they are male or female and, consequently, they develop individual ways of communicating as they grow up. Patterns of behavior are caused by the treatment based on cultural experience. The social organization of children, therefore, is said to be the main reason for the development of gender distinction in speech. (cf. Tannen 1994: 10) When playing in same-sex groups, male children tend to stick to a hierarchical structure. Most of the time, they play in large groups, which have a leader. In addition to that, their games, like soccer, are competitive and a winner is elaborated. When establishing a leader or winner in a hierarchical group, strong directives and arguments are necessary.

Girl’s activities, on the contrary, are said to be played in rather smaller, non-hierarchical groups and do focus on closeness. Stereotypical female games, like jump rope or playing with dolls do not serve the purpose of competition. Young women’s playing behavior is characterized by joint participation in decisions and minimal status negotiation, since their games do not require a leader. As a result, direct forms, for example, are usually avoided in friendly female interaction. (cf. Tannen 1990: 43,44; Talbot 2004: 81)

Undeniably, gender segregation in childhood is the origin of differing patterns of interaction. (cf. Talbot 2004: 84) Women and men definitely have different past experience and, therefore, their expectations about the role of talk also differs. (cf. Tannen 1986: 133) Consequently, different conversational norms like signaling intentions or understanding are established and the varying expectations of discourse lead to miscommunication. According to Tannen’s theory “these ‘cultural differences’ account for the differing patterns observed
among girls and boys and women and men as well as for mutual negative evaluations that often result from cross-gender interaction.” (Tannen 1994: 89)

Nowadays, the difference approach has been challenged, because experts claim, under the premise that differences exist, similarities are far more visible. Even though women and men do have different communication styles and discuss varying topics, their main framework is the same. Although men tend to talk about sports, while women are interested in the exchange of gossip, topics like work, family and politics are still the most common ones for both genders. The dynamic approach tackles this issue, by drawing attention to that fact that one does gender, and therefore the gender identity created by society is ever changing. In the preceding Genderlect approaches, masculinity and femininity was considered pre-formed instead of performed. Gender is no longer seen as a fixed category, but rather as a social construct. This approach underlines the fact that the word ‘gender’ should be conceptualized as a verb, not a noun. (cf. Coates 2004: 6). Since social roles and stereotypes are challenged, so are the stereotypical features of former Genderlect analyses. (cf. McKee 2004, online) The more recent dynamic approach does not disregard the previous findings by Lakoff or Tannen; instead it implies that gender is under constant construction and the cultural idea of how masculinity and femininity are performed consequently changes too. (cf. Rodino 2006, online)

Although the four approaches developed in a historical sequence, they co-exist in the research of male and female speech. Instead of treating them as independent findings, all of the approaches still need to be taken into account. (cf. Coates 2004: 7).

1.3.2. Cross-Cultural Communication

Deborah Tannen named her Genderlect theory ‘cross-cultural communication’, because cultural difference necessarily implies different assumptions about natural and obvious ways to be polite. (1986: 41) The danger of misinterpretation, therefore, is greatest among speakers stemming from various cultural backgrounds. (cf. Tannen 1986: 41) Tannen explains why the research in Genderlect is necessary to eliminate some the occurrence of common misunderstandings among those two groups: “It’s like speaking different languages, only worse, because they are thinking they’re speaking the same language.” (1986: 69)

She underlines her cross-cultural theory by drawing attention to the fact that two basic dynamics motivate our daily communication: “the coexisting and conflicting of human needs
for involvement and independence.” (1986: 80). Although language is always a matter of balancing conflicting needs of involvement and independence, the need for involvement prevails in the female idea of conversation, while men focus on the need of independence. Male speech, on the one hand, is described by her as a reflection of the male competitive social structure, which is comparable to a hierarchical order. (cf. Tannen 1990: 24; Tannen 1986: 134)

In this world, conversations are negotiations in which people try to achieve and maintain the upper hand if they can, and protect themselves from others’ attempts to put them down and push them around. Life, then, is actually a contest, a struggle to preserve independence and avoid failure. (Tannen 1990: 24,25)

Men constantly try to display their knowledge to value the position of center stage. Contrary to the competitive male communication style, women use their words in order to negotiate for closeness and, consequently, play down their expertise to build rapport instead of trying to win the upper hand of the conversation. (cf. Tannen 1990: 125) Rather than viewing life as a perpetual battle to gain status, they see it as a community in which giving confirmation, supporting each other and gaining sympathy is far more important than power. Only isolation is feared in their network of connections. (cf. Tannen 1990: 25) As a result, women tend to convey meaning in how they speak and their metamessages while talking, rather than saying what they mean explicitly. Metamessages in conversation are a form of indirectness and applied by women to in order to reach an agreement by negotiation. (cf. Tannen 1986: 134)

Deborah Tannen emphasizes those two different models for interacting by collating several contrasting features. She labels the female style of conversation as ‘rapport-talk’, which is used to establish connections and relationships. (cf. Tannen 1990: 77) Furthermore, the linguist claims that women pay more attention to politeness in their speech. The concept of this social goal includes a deeper sense of trying to take into account the effect of an utterance on other people. Female speakers prefer negotiations, since they allow a display of solidarity. (cf. Tannen 1986: 35,37, 135)

Contrary to this, the language of men is described as ‘report-talk’, in which talk is primarily a means to maintain status. The word report stands for the communication’s intention to inform by communicating. Providing information automatically sends a metamessage of superiority. Since male relations are structured hierarchically, the one who has more information and advice, or can offer help is more knowledgeable and, therefore,
dominates the conversation. (cf. Tannen 1990: 62,63,77) As an example for the different ways of providing information, Tannen examines the typical male, as well as, the female response when being asked for directions. Men who feel the need to be higher in status offer directions even if they are unsure about the right way, since being able to give information frames one as an expert. Women, on the contrary, often add “I don’t know, that is how I would go, but there might be a better way”, although she exactly knows how to get to the requested place. With this form of comment, female speakers redress the imbalance of power they feel is created by having information that their interlocutor was not aware of. In order to establish connection and intimacy, girls and women give suggestions rather than explicit directions, since this is their main goal of conversation. (cf. Tannen 1990: 63,64) As a result, the female-preferred ways of communication such as small talk are considered worthless by men, since this so-called ‘empty rhetoric’ does not convey any kind of information. Talk, however, is the major way to establish, maintain and adjust our relationships. Words may carry information, but the way people say them communicates the social meaning of the spoken utterances. (cf. Tannen 1986: 30)

Nevertheless, it has to be considered that neither the male approach nor the female one is the norm. Regardless the gender, everyone tries to be equally involved in the conversation, it is just the focus on different elements and the level of degree that varies. (cf. Tannen 1990: 38) In order to underline the origin of the problems in conversations between men and women, Tannen points out: “Unfortunately, power and solidarity are bought with the same currency: Ways of talking intended to create solidarity have the simultaneous effect of framing power differences.” (1986: 135) For example, a woman who tries to be polite and nice may appear deferential and unsure of herself when talking to a man whose idea of communication focuses on the display of power. (cf. Tannen 1986: 135)

Whereas men try to reach independence, their female interlocutor focuses on the preservation of intimacy. This is due to men’s understanding of a hierarchical social order. From their point of view, status can only be gained by an asymmetry arrangement, in which every member of the community is different and separate. Every independent person can be placed differently within the hierarchy.

Women’s intimacy, on the other hand, is based on the concept of symmetry: the appearance of superiority is avoided, since every person is equal and closeness therefore is the key factor. (cf. Tannen 1990: 26,28). According to this assumption, intimacy and
independence dovetail with the idea of community and contest. Basically, boys’ intention is to be respected by their peers, while girls need the feeling of being liked. (cf. Tannen 1990: 108)

Undeniably, a lot of the common misunderstandings in communication do result from the overall differentiation between male’s attempt to fight for their status and the female’s search for connection. Misunderstandings are hard to eliminate, because each one feels convinced of the logic of her or his way of communicating. When it comes to analyzing failed conversations, especially the metamessage has to be taken into account, since it compromises what is said, as well as, what is not. Even the polite and kind offer to help a man, for instance, could lead to a fight, because the male interprets his wife’s offer as a metamessage that expresses superiority and dominance. (cf. Tannen 1990: 32; 1986: 137)

1.3.3. Stereotypical Features in Female Interaction

In order to identify typical female utterances, research on Genderlect not only focuses on personalities that influence the use of language, but also tries to draw attention to various generalized features associated with one gender. The origin for those is the different intention for men and women when communicating. Whereas male speech is characteristic of giving and getting information, the referential function of language, girls and women are concerned with the affective function, which focuses on seeking connection and consequently, their goal is to keep the conversation going. As a result, the language used by female speakers displays an extensive use of positive politeness markers such as hedges, compliments or apologies. (cf. Tannen 1990: 102; Talbot 2004: 85, 86) The female use of certain grammatical particles or lexical items is often depicted as meaningless, since it does not convey information. Nevertheless, they are far from meaningless, since the social context of an utterance is defined by them. By looking at the choice and frequency of specific features used in speech, the relationship of the interlocutors becomes obvious. (cf. Lakoff 1989: 8,9)

Furthermore, it is important to consider that Genderlect cannot only be found in what speakers really say, but in the way they are negotiating what they actually mean in their metamessages, which depend on subtle linguistic signals and devices. Different ways of communicating are especially detectable in the metamessage, since people consciously consider what they say, but barely think about how to say something. Since these devices, which indicate whether someone is listening or is interested and establish solidarity, do not work explicit, they are often misinterpreted, especially when interlocutors have a different
understanding of how they are supposed to work. The main difficulty of interpreting meaning caused by metamessages, is the fact, that those signals are usually not sent out intentionally. Examples for conversational signals and devices are pacing and pausing, loudness, pitch and intonation, asking questions, complaining and apologizing. (cf. Tannen 1986: 44, 45, 54, 55, 136) Primarily women take advantage of metamessages in conversation, since those signals establish and help to maintain relationships among people. Men, on the other hand, often deny the existence of any meaning beyond the explicitly stated message itself and feel offended by being held accountable for something he did not say. Tannen explains the different perspective on metamessages:

His refusal to admit that his statements have implications and overtones denies her authority over her own feelings. Her attempts to interpret what he didn’t say and put the metamessage into the message makes him feel she’s putting words into his mouth – denying his authority over his own meaning. (1986: 139)

Obviously, men and women respond to different levels of communication, because women pay far more attention to the unintentional signals like facial expression or the use of personal markers. (cf. Tannen 1986: 136-139) Be that as it may, metamessages are definitely a very important and fundamental part of communication and also serve as markers of the emergence of Genderlect. (cf. Tannen 1986: 140)

Most of the distinguishing characteristics listed below associated with either male or female language are apt to be found in informal speech. Those features are so-called personal markers of conversation, since they signal to the addressee how his or her interlocutor feels about what he or she is saying, and how the speaker wants the address to react. (cf. Lakoff 1989: 58, 59) Female-preferred conversational practices can be detected in the content, the form as well as the language used in their utterances:

- Content

Small talk and gossip are indispensable tools in women’s negotiation for closeness. Tannen argues that “Small talk is crucial to maintain a sense of camaraderie when there is nothing special to say.” (1990:102). Hand in hand with the use of small talk goes the desire to elaborate and discuss everything in great detail, because the telling of these details proves involvement. Men, on the contrary, hold the belief that the purpose of talking is the exchange of information, which small talk fails to fulfill. (cf. Tannen 1990: 102-104; Tannen 1986: 146). The use of gossip is also a female speech mechanism, because by sharing secrets, a
metamessage of rapport is established and agreeing on an issue emphasizes shared interests and values. (cf. Tannen 1990: 106, 107). Tannen elaborates on the female purpose of small talk by contrasting it to the male goal of informal conversation: “His idea of a good conversation was one with impersonal, factual, task-focused content. Hers was one with personal content.” (1990:103) Parallel to women’s appreciation for gossip, therefore, is men’s interest in the details of sports, news and politics. Public news gives men the power of knowing what is going on in the world, but the average woman is afraid of being left out, when she is not informed about personal details. Women bond through sharing their troubles, grief and problems with other female speakers. While men are more likely to offer advice and a solution to a problem, women only talk about the issue in order to create intimacy. Consequently, women do not understand why their husband would offer them a solution to a problem, since for them the intimate conversation itself is the main purpose. The reason why women remark that their husband does not listen to them is often because men do not value the exchange of problems and secrets in conversation to establish rapport. Intimacy, however, is primarily created by exactly this exchange of personal stories, problems, but also secrets that should not be shared. (cf. Tannen 1990: 98,100,110;Tannen 1986: 145) Conversely, women perceive the male telling of facts and information as lecturing, which carries a metamessage of condescension. Instead of showing support, female speakers see the male way of talking as a form of bragging. (cf. Tannen 1986: 146, 147)

Women are said to talk about insignificant details of everyday life, therefore, their conversation often even include reports of conversations. Instead of just summing up the content of the message, women recreate the experience that was a conversation. When doing so they often dramatize by repeating the tone of voice, timing, intonation, and exact wording of the talk. This feature of stereotypical female speech is crucial for accepting the distinguishing fact between male and female talk, which is the metamessage. For female speakers, it is important that their addressee understands how something was said, since they feel that the essence of the experience cannot be omitted when telling a story. (cf. Tannen 1986: 147)

• **Language Use**

In terms of conversational practices, minimal responses are associated with women’s speech. Short answers are used as a form of back-channels to indicate the listener’s support for the
current speaker. Female speaker use those minimal responses skillfully and do not overlap with or interrupt their interlocutor. When men use this linguistic strategy, they apply it delayed in order to undermine the current speaker and reinforce dominance. While for female speakers minimal responses are an essential part of cooperative talk, since they are used to develop a topic, men’s withheld or delayed use of backchannels is a way of curtailing the current topic. (cf. Coates 2014: 87,88; Talbot 2004: 77) Consequently, men often interpret those supportive signals sent from women as a device to imply impatience or as an exaggerated way of showing interest. Another aspect of minimal responses that may cause misunderstandings in conversation is their different interpretation. Female speakers, on the one hand, tend to utter “mmh” or “uh-huh” in order to show that they are listening. Men, on the other side, use those back-channels as a way of indicating that they agree with the speaker. This may result in a mysteriously failed conversation, because if a woman supports a man on his talk by giving minimal responses and later claims that she does, however, not agree with what he said, the male speaker feels misled, since he had already interpreted her signals during the conversation as an agreement. Conversely, women do not understand why their male addressee does not pay attention, since he does not use any minimal responses throughout the conversation. (cf. Tannen 1986: 143,146) The different gendered ways of using minimal responses is, according to Tannen, an example for the assumption underlying the concept of Genderlect, since it obviously highlights the fact that men and women are being stylistically consistent in their interactive inconsistency. (1986: 146)

Another conversational tool to reduce the force of a statement and, consequently, signal tentativeness are tag questions. Additionally, approval and mutual consent is indicated when women adorn their opinion with a question like ‘she is very nice, isn’t she?’ Also tag question can serve a multifunctional purpose; their meaning is either modal or affective. Modal tag questions are speaker-oriented, because they ask the addressee to confirm the statement. Consequently, those express certainty about the proposal expressed. Tag questions with a primarily affective function, on the contrary, are addressee-oriented, since they are used to either support the addressee or mitigate the negative force of the speech act. (cf. Coates 2004: 91). The intonation of women’s language in tag questions, where usually a declarative is expected, is also used in their statements. Female speaker often give answers that express uncertainty due to their question intonation. (cf. Lakoff 1989: 53)
Attention is often engaged by using preambles like ‘Do you know what?’ in the first part of a pre-sequence. This particular way of introducing a topic is also a feature of female language in order to support and create interest for their topic. (cf. Talbot 2004: 77)

The overuse of intensifiers is one of the most obvious signals when comparing male and female texts or conversations. Women and girls use intensifiers like ‘very’ or ‘so’ to aim at the level of feelings. This may result from the times were women were not equal to men and they had to intensify their statements in order to be taken seriously. (cf. Lakoff 1989: 55)

Since Lakoff often draws attention to the fact that women are not allowed to talk rough, also the formal use of language displays Genderlect features. Apparently, you can distinguish between men’s and women’s formal writings, because women use hypercorrect grammar. (cf. Lakoff 1989: 55)

In terms of grammatical particles, pronouns are said to cause a lot of troubles between male and female speakers, especially within the framework of a relationship. Men often use ‘I’ or ‘me’ in situations in which their female partners use ‘we’ or ‘us’. Consequently, women are often offended by an announcement such as “I think I’ll go for a walk”, because they feel as if their male interlocutor specifically uninvited them. His use of ‘I’, as well as, the omission of an explicit invitation gives makes her feel excluded from his plan. (cf. Tannen 1986: 136, 137)

- **Form**

Hedges like ‘you know’, ‘sort of’ or ‘well’ and ‘you see’ on the one hand weaken the strength and force of an utterance. Since women’s language is described as tentative, hedges are a form of unassertiveness. (cf. Coates 2004: 88) Saying things too directly is avoided in female conversation and, therefore, they add tentativeness to their commands, requests or statements to mitigate the statement’s force or the unkindness of a statement. Furthermore, complementing a sentence with a hedge conveys the sense that the speaker is not able to vouch for the accuracy of what he or she said. (cf. Lakoff 1989: 57) On the other hand, those fillers can serve as minimal responses to keep the conversation going. Modern researches claim that hedges have a multifunctional purpose, since they can express either certainty or
uncertainty. (cf. Coates 2004: 88) The belief that women use hedges in order not to assert themselves strongly is challenged by the argument that the use of hedges depends on the choice of topics. According to this theory, male speakers avoid sensitive topics. When discussing sensitive issues, hedges are usually a valuable resource for the speaker to mitigate the force of what is said and protect the speaker’s, as well as, the hearer’s face. (cf. Coates 2004: 90)

When it comes to the use of directives, female speakers tend to disguise them as suggestions by using forms like ‘let’s’ or ‘gonna’, the inclusive ‘we’ or modal auxiliaries to mitigate the demand. Additionally, the word ‘maybe’ is often part of a woman’s directive, since it indicates the weakened force of the command. Men, on the contrary, use explicit commands and directives in order to establish status differences. According to a study established by Jennifer Coates, girls tend to use more forceful directives in cross-sex arguments. (cf. Coates 2004:95)

Especially the origin of the different use of directives can be traced back to the difference in cultural background of boys and girls. Since language strategies go hand in hand with group dynamics, the different ways of communicating while playing games as children influence Genderlect. Children’s games involve planning, making decisions, persuading and agreeing on courses of action. Directives and commands are necessary for negotiations and, therefore, play an important part when it comes to analyzing the social organization of a group based on linguistic forms used. While boys, who need to establish a leader, use so-called ‘aggravated directives’ like give me’ or ‘I want’ in order to establish status differences, girls involve every member of their group in the process of decision making. This phenomenon can also be detected in parenting, since mothers are more likely to consult their children’s wishes, while fathers give clear directives. (cf. Coates 2004:95; Talbot 2004: 81)

Taboo language and swear words are stereotypically not associated with female speech. Lakoff claims that men use stronger expletives such as ‘shit’ or ‘damn’ than their opposite gender. Female speaker use weaker or softer profanities like ‘oh dear’. More recent research corroborates the theory, which was originally solely based on folk-linguistic belief, by proving empirically that male speaker swear more often. Moreover, women and men in general use more swear words in company of their own sex. (cf. Coates 2004: 98)
While taboo language is stereotypically associated with the male gender, polite language is said to be a feature of female speech. (cf. Coates 2004: 98) Especially, the over-exaggerated version in terms of politeness is associated with women. Not only are they avoiding swear words, but in female speech euphemism is used extensively. Instead of informing the other interlocutor that someone died, women would rather use the expression “passed away”. (cf. Lakoff 1989: 55-57)

Another polite speech act used by women are compliments. In general, women give and receive more compliments, because they consolidate solidarity between speaker and addressee. Gender differences are also detectable in the form of the compliment. Women prefer more personalized forms like ‘I like your new haircut’ and are more likely to compliment each other on appearance. Additionally, female receivers of compliments tend not to accept it, but rather mitigate its meaning. Compliments given by men are usually impersonalized, for example ‘Nice car!’, and deal with skill or possession. In same-sex groups, men strictly avoid compliments on appearance, since it is considered a face-threatening act in male speech. (cf. Coates 2004: 99, 100; Talbot 2004: 85)

Furthermore, Robin Lakoff attributes so-called ‘empty’ adjectives to the female use of vocabulary. Instead of referential meaning, those adjectives contribute to the expression of feelings like adorable, charming or divine. (cf. Lakoff 1989: 53)

Emphatic stress is another feature of feminine emphasizing. It is a common phenomenon that women put exaggerated emphasis on words like in “What an adorable dress!” Lakoff uses the term ‘talking in italics’ for this female-preferred feature and claims that it is a way of expressing uncertainty with your own self-expression. In non verbal communication, this emphatic stress is expressed in italics or capital letters. (cf. Lakoff 1989: 56)

When it comes to the description of colors, women are said to use more precise terms than men. While a boy might tell others about the blue sea, a girl might talk about the same experience, using the term aquamarine. According to Lakoff, the precise discrimination in naming colors is considered trivial and irrelevant by men. (cf. Lakoff 1989: 9, 53)
Linguists nowadays strongly criticize the traditional differentiation of certain utterances into binary functional categories in Genderlect research, since this generalization over simplifies the complexity of speech acts. Their function cannot be placed into a single category, since the context of the conversation definitely determines the ways in which utterances operate. While Lakoff describes tag questions, for example, as a female habit of expressing uncertainty, those questions definitely work on two levels at once. On the one hand, the message is a request for information, while the metamessage is also a way of showing interest and appreciation. (cf. Tannen 1986: 56) Additionally, the speech act is used to express solidarity and closeness or to reduce the force of a command. In general, women are said to use more questions in conversation than men, since it is the female way of keeping a conversation going. However, the fact that female speakers exploit questions and tag questions is usually only used to provide an example for their weakness in interactive situations. (cf. Coates 2014: 93) Therefore, the complex multifunctionality, as well as, the diversity of meaning of linguistic strategies has to be differentiated when specifically correlating them with either male or female speakers. (cf. Rodino 2006, online)

1.3.4. Written Discourse
The findings on written discourse are rather limited and based upon personal letters or experimental essay composition. In general, those studies aimed to investigate the features of spoken Genderlect found in written language. (cf. Baron 2004: 7,8)

Since Computer-Mediated Communication is a mixture of written and spoken interaction, the features of explicitly text-based Genderlect studies have to be taken into account as well. Especially online genres like weblogs, to which a lot of written language criteria apply, obviously recall their offline antecedent, such as diary entries or hand written letters, whereas the convention for written speech in conversational modes of computer-mediated communication like chatrooms are still emergent. (cf. Baron 2004: 7, 8; Herring and Paolillo 2006: 454)

Most research focuses on identifying gender differences in terms of discourse-pragmatic usage, like politeness or assertiveness, instead of analyzing the frequency of grammatical words used. (cf. Herring and Paolillo 2006: 454) Nevertheless some studies were
carried out, which distinguish linguistic aspects involving the use of tenses, appearance of personal pronouns, and the use of verbs or contradictions. A finding that looked at personal letter over the centuries not only detected gender differences in written discourse, but also throughout history. Women, in text-based language, used significantly more first-person pronouns, singular as well as plural, and so-called private verbs such as ‘think’ or ‘feel’. (cf. Baron 2004: 7, 8) Another female-preferred stylistic feature of written discourse is the use of multiply quantifiers. Men, on the contrary, favor second-person pronouns, noun determiners, as well as, demonstratives and apply a lot of numbers in their writing. (cf. Herring and Paolillo 2006: 442, 445, 454)

In addition to personal, informal interaction, experts on Genderlect tried to investigate whether gender issues carry over into formal essay composing. The stereotypical male writing contains references to quantity, judgmental adjectives, elliptical sentence structure, locatives, as well as sentence-initial conjunctions and filler words. Women, on the contrary, refer to emotions, use intensive adverbs, dependent clauses, sentence-initial adverbials, verbs expressing uncertainty, hedges and long-mean-length sentences. (cf. Baron 2004: 8) Furthermore, women’s written language is claimed to display a greater usage of the “standard” variety than men’s discourse. (cf. Baron 2004: 9)

2. Gender and Electronic Discourse
In order to define the world of digital communication, David Crystal uses the term ‘global village’. Further the linguist claims that the language used in computer-mediated communication could be seen as a unique dialect of that village. (cf. Crystal 2001:6). This particular language used in electronic discourse is often referred to as “Netspeak”. David Crystal holds the view that this expression is appropriate, because the term ‘speak’ emphasizes the fact that electronic communication includes written, as well as, spoken discourse. The Internet is clearly a predominantly written medium; however, the fact that it is also influenced by traditional spoken language offers a new research area. (cf. Crystal 2006 1: 18,19) According to this definition, also video-based interactions like Youtube videos are part of the broad linguistic field of computer-mediated communication. However, this paper will only elaborate on text-based discourse.
2.1. Computer-Mediated Communication

In general, Computer-Mediated Communication is the process by which people create, exchange, and perceive information using networked telecommunications systems (or non-networked computers) that facilitate encoding, transmitting, and decoding messages. (December 2012, online) Crystal, furthermore, describes the Internet as an electronic, global and interactive medium and claims that each of these properties has consequences for the kind of language used in online discourse. (2001: 24) The interactivity on the World Wide Web is the core feature of the new form of communication and, therefore, the audience always has to be taken into account when analyzing online discourse. (cf. Crystal 2001: 18) Computer-mediated communication does display features of traditionally spoken interaction and written texts. Nevertheless, important discontinuities are obvious. The variation of Netspeak can be described as ‘writing the way people talk’. (cf. Crystal 2001: 25) In order to examine the new form of discourse, the differences between the factors that distinguish the two traditional ways of communicating have to be emphasized.

According to David Crystal “Digitally mediated communication is identical to neither speech nor writing, but selectively and adaptively displays properties of both.” (2010: 235) Therefore he lists, for example, new patterns of turn-taking, the use of emoticons, hypertext linkage or framing as linguistic aspects associated only with the world of digital communication. (cf. Crystal 2010: 229).

Although online discourse is not mediated by an entirely new language, Netspeak displays features that are unique to the Internet. The fact that the way people communicate online nowadays has a major influence on traditional speech and writing discourse confirms its linguistic status as a new variety of language. Speakers use terms from formerly electronic discourse in their everyday conversation. The influence of Netspeak on standard language is mainly on vocabulary, but almost every aspect of our language might be shaped by the way we talk online. (cf. Crystal 2001: 18,19) A large number of words and phrases emerge constantly. For instance, people use the prefix cyber- or e- to talk about online activity. The symbol @, traditionally used for e-mail addresses, is also commonly used as a universal link
between recipient and address, regardless of whether or not the conversation takes place online. It also has come to be influential in non-Internet settings as a replacement for the word ‘at’. Other remarkable features of Netspeak that are used in everyday language are various types of abbreviations such as ‘cu’ for ‘see you’ or ‘LOL’ for ‘laughing out loud’. (cf. Crystal 2001: 21, 81-85)

The research in this field constantly encounters new phenomena; while computer-mediated communication at the very beginning was only concerned with stand-alone clients, like the analysis of interaction via e-mail, the discourse varieties on the World Wide Web are consistently growing, changing and overlapping. Not only the structure of discourse has been transformed over the last couple of years since the advent of the popular Internet in the 1990’s, but also new facets in terms of content and context have to be examined. Status updates on facebook, so-called ‘apps’ on mobile phones that are based on the user’s current geographical location, as well as, a different form of audience that is addressed are only a few examples of the modern kind of online discourse linguists are confronted with on a daily basis. In terms of online discourse analysis, four broad levels of examination are taken into account: structure, meaning, interaction management, as well as, social phenomena. (cf. Herring 2012: 4-6)

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Phenomena</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Typography, orthography, morphology, syntax,</td>
<td>Structural/descriptive linguistics, text analysis, stylistics</td>
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<td></td>
<td>expressivity, genre characteristics, etc.</td>
<td>discourse schemata, formatting conventions, etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meaning</td>
<td>What is intended, what is communicated, what is accomplished</td>
<td>Meaning of words, utterances (speech acts), exchanges, etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interaction management</td>
<td>Interactivity, timing, coherence, repair, interaction as co-constructed, etc.</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Social phenomena</td>
<td>Social dynamics, power, influence, identity, community, cultural differences, etc.</td>
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</tr>
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Table 1: Four levels of CMDA (Herring 2012: 5)
Since computer-mediated communication is definitely an innovative area of linguistic research, also the question of Genderlect in this special environment has to be analyzed from a new, dynamic perspective. Herring’s levels of Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis, therefore, not only offer a way for a general examination of the language online, but also provide a framework for the research of Genderlect. Internet linguistic is concerned with sometimes communicative features known from face-to-face interaction, but often completely different phenomena and methods than in speech and these have to be detected and analyzed. (cf. Herring 2012: 4-6). The research of Genderlect, furthermore, aims to answer the question of how gender disparity persists in an anonymous medium which allegedly renders gender invisible. (Herring 2000: 2)

2.2. Gender Identity and Electronic Discourse

Over the past 20 years, the relationship between gender identity and computer mediated communication has been theorized. (cf. van Doorn, van Zoonen and Wyatt 2007: 144) In the late 1980’s the first research on gender in the cyberspace was published and it was characterized by great optimism regarding the potential of online communication to provide widespread gender anonymity. Nevertheless, the Internet undeniably offers individuals a way to virtually perform gender, a phenomenon that is triggered by the decision of choosing a nickname and, consequently, causes the practice of gender construction in cyberspace to be more critically approachable. In text-only computer mediated communication, female users can, for example, pick a gender-neutral name in order to minimize stereotypically discrimination or harassment. Obviously, the new medium challenges the traditional binary system of female and male speakers, since gender reassignment can be effected only by a few movements on the keyboard. Computer-mediated communication, therefore, undeniably disarticulates the constructed gender identity from biological “sex” and challenges the formation of traditional stereotypes. (cf. Rodino 2006, online; Herring 2000: 1,2)

In general, three large strands of research can be identified. First of all, many studies focus on the virtual representation of the real, offline ‘self’. This research in online discourse examines the relation of the actual person, who can be seen as a performer, and his or her representation, similar to a ‘character’, in cyberspace.
The second division of the findings on gender and computer-mediated communication is concerned with the user as a unified, embodied self that is located in the physical world. Within the scope of these studies, the differences or similarities of male and female Internet use have been discussed. Men, on the one side, are said to represent themselves on shorter pages, with longer entries and displayed more self-reference. Female users, on the other hand, showed more awareness for their audience, which is obvious due to their reference to the potential readers of the webpage. Furthermore, the diverse use of certain applications like homepages, chats or discussion forums have been analyzed. (cf. van Doorn, van Zoonen and Wyatt 2007: 144-146)

By emphasizing that there is a discrepancy between the ‘real’ offline self and the virtual identity also the possibility of pretending to be a completely different identity or even gender in the electronic world has to be taken into account. Consequently, the third general group of studies is concerned with the construction of an entire alternative gender identity in an online environment. The underlying argument of this research is that, nowadays, technologies reflect, structure and produce gender relations. Therefore, the use of nicknames or ‘characters’ in online games are analyzed in order to determine the relationship between gender identity and computer-mediated communication. (cf. van Doorn, van Zoonen and Wyatt 2007: 144-146)

2.2.1. The Self-Categorization Theory Online
Netspeak undeniably offers a new environment for linguistically research in terms of gendered language use, since due to online anonymity features can no longer be ascribed to a male or female speaker without dispute. Consequently, the focus of Genderlect research has shifted towards alternative influences such as a certain context in a computerized setting. The ability to hide one’s real identity has underlined the fact that gender differences between men and women exist, however, they are highly sensitive to extraneous factors. Specific circumstances may, therefore, increase, decrease or even erase traditional gender-based patterns of use. By taking these external influences on the originally assumed fixed linguistic behavior attributed to either men or women into account, the modern approach that gender identity actually has a diverse, dynamic and sometimes also transient nature, on the contrary to traditional approaches, suggesting that communicative behavior is inherent and cannot be changed, is highlighted. (cf. Lee and Palomares 2009: 6,7)
The theory, which was introduced in 1987, is a successfully applied method to predict and explain an array of linguistic behavior for men and women in computer-mediated communication. Lee and Palomares explain the underlying premise of the theory used to determine the origin of gender-typical language use: “People mentally represent social groups as contextually contingent prototypes or fuzzy sets of attributes that define in-group similarities in contrast to out-group differences.” (2009: 7) According to this basic presumption of self-categorization a state called ‘depersonalization’ becomes operative, which indicates that men and women automatically internalize the group prototype that is most obvious and relevant. Since those preexisting prototypes not only describe, but also prescribe attributes associated with a certain social group, the process of depersonalization provides a normative self-definition of how a person should behave, as well as, perceive in a given context. (cf. Lee and Palomares 2009:7)

In terms of Genderlect, especially in online discourse, the theory is used to underline the fact that gender-based language is more likely to emerge if a gender-categorization in the given interaction is relevant. Since, on the contrary to face-to-face communication, the “global village” often allows a user to hide his or her true identity, also the gender and language phenomena changes. The self-categorization theory implies that in the modern world of online communication, male and female speaker are only using stereotypical gendered language when their gender is revealed within the given interaction, because they are expected to. (cf. Lee and Palomares 2009: 8)

Several modern linguists have taken the online performance of a false virtual gender identity, with respect to how the language is manipulated in order to intentionally perform a different gender, into account. In general, this innovative research in the modern field of Genderlect has revealed that people tend to change the macro forms of communication like exploiting gender-stereotypical topics, instead of the molecular forms such as gender-typical lexical choices or syntactic. Therefore, the unconscious use of discourse style can still reveal one’s actual gender online. As an example for the self-categorization theory Lee and Palomares conducted a study illustrating the linguistic assimilation to gendered avatars in computer-mediated communication. Since a male or female avatar, which is defined as a graphical self-representation in a computer-mediated environment, heightens the salience of gender, the self-categorization theory helps to analyze the outcome of the linguistic experiment. Avatars intimate a prototype for gender-based behavior and, consequently, the
users adopted the appropriate language to their new character. (cf. Lee and Palomares 2009: 8-10, 15,16) This phenomenon can be explained based on the self-categorization theory: “Because a gendered avatar implicated the language appropriate for the context, people conformed to gender-based language expectations.” (Lee and Palomares 2009: 15) Additionally, the recent findings also emphasize that Genderlect is not a static set of features used by one gender, but rather dynamic and based on the context. (cf. Lee and Palomares 2009: 16)

2.3. Genderlect in Online Interaction

In 1993, a famous cartoon was published saying that “On the Internet, nobody knows you are a dog”. This debatable quotation points towards the advantages and disadvantages of online anonymity. At first, it was assumed that gender was completely invisible in text-based online discourse. Due to the absence of physical cues, the Internet offers greater equality in terms of gender, race as well as social class. Since the message sender’s identity was thought to be entirely irrelevant online, experts expected the medium to be inherently democratic and egalitarian and to provide increased opportunities for subordinate groups. The original idea was that women would be able to engage in male dominant discussion without encountering stereotypical behavior or even discrimination. (cf. Herring 2005: 1,2; Herring 2000: 1)

While this aspect about online communication has advantages as well as disadvantages, linguists never seemed to be bothered about the threats or benefits of hidden identities, since language evidently reveals a lot of information about the user. Due to the fact that hardly anyone is aware of the theory of Genderlect, people give away information unconsciously in their discourse style. Although participants use neutral usernames, their written text alone is sufficient for detecting whether they are female or male. (cf. Herring 2005: 6).

Susan Herring, one of the leading linguists in the field of gender and computer-mediated interaction, emphasizes the fact that the Genderlect theory from face-to-face communication is applicable to the language in cyberspace. Linguistic features like verbosity or the female politeness also signal gender in chats, blogs or forums. (cf. Herring 2005: 7) She further argues that “social phenomena such as gender styles seem most resistant to technological reshaping, perhaps because they exist at a higher level of abstraction and their expression is not bound to a specific communicative modality.” (cf. Herring 2012: 20,21)
Although a majority of discourse patterns are a reproduction of gender styles already detected in face-to-face communication, Computer-Mediated Communication nevertheless offers a new and innovative linguistic research area, since emergent features like graphic accents have to be analyzed. (cf. Herring 2012: 9-10, 21-22)

2.3.1. Aligned Variant vs. Opposed Variant

Each post, entry or comment can be divided into several macrosegments. Those are functional constitutions of a text, which are further fragmented in terms of coherence and surface cohesion, including linguistic choices for the utterance. (cf. Herring 1996: 83,84). The fragmentation of female and male post unveils the overall structure of their writing style when using electronic devices. By doing so, the function of the message can be evaluated. (cf. Herring 1996: 83)

The female writing style is described as aligned. In discussions, it is obvious that women link their message to the previous contribution, tend to agree with it and offer a solution. Additionally, girls and women include suggestions, answers and they usually appeal to contribute the discussion. (cf. Herring 1996: 94) Their style is reflected in the structure of their message. Firstly, they start their entry with an appreciative response that links to the interlocutor’s question or statement. Secondly, they provide information, in which a prominent amount of politeness markers, hedges, as well as conditional phrases is used in order to offer a solution. In the end, female users appeal to others to participate and want the communication to continue. (cf. Herring 1996: 93) Naomi S. Baron, an American linguist, conducted a study concerning turn-taking, in which it was evidently displayed that women use a greater number of turns in order to close the conversation. (cf. Baron 2004: 19) Also their way of posting online is used to promote a harmonious interaction, because they use the Internet to develop their interpersonal relations. (cf. Herring 1996: 104) This theory goes hand in hand with the finding suggesting that women usually log-on to the Internet in order to exchange private e-mail, whereas men primarily use the electronic environment to participate in public discussion groups. (cf. Herring 2000: 7)

Contrary to the emotional women we find the status seeking man, who attracts attention to himself by criticizing and challenging others in online environment. His competitive writing style is described as “the opposed variant”. Susan Herring states:

Instead of linking to a previous message and agreeing with it, the writer disagrees; instead of building supportively on the ongoing discussion, the
writer expresses a critical view; and instead of appealing for continued discussion, the writer proposes that the discussion come to an end.” (1996: 95)

The male writing contains propositions, formal vocabulary and grammar and direct forms. By challenging the addressee, their discussions become a competitive activity. (cf. Herring 1996: 95, 104)

Therefore, online communication mirrors the features of face-to-face interactions when it comes to the stereotypical contrast between community and contest. At the same time, Susan Herring’s structured analysis questions the theory of the female rapport and the male report talk. While those are also in online environment, obviously and undeniably existing, her study aims to explain the empirical findings. While women use hedges like “perhaps” or “it seems to me”, men use strengtheners like “of course” and “obviously”. Those contribute to the overall expression of their views as assertion of a fact and consequently, their exchange of opinions or evaluations often appears as report talk. (cf. Herring 1996: 104) Furthermore, it is argued that in computer-mediated communication “both men and women structure their message in interactive ways and that for both, the pure exchange of information takes second place to the exchange of views.” (Herring 1996: 86)

Although the research on primary female or male discussion groups does display features of Genderlect online, the proof for the existence of this theory is found in mixed gender discussion groups. The members of the minority gender usually shift their attitudes towards the norms of the majority gender. This phenomenon can be detected when a man contributes in a female-dominate discussion group. In this environment, men adopt the women’s language by using hedges or posing their assertion as a question instead of a statement. (cf. Herring 1996: 82, 100) Women contributing in male-dominate discussion groups tend to be more aggressive than among other female users. (cf. Herring 2005: 7) It is evident that the more numerous a gender group is in an online discussion or conversation, the greater the influence it has on the shared discursive norms. (cf. Herring 2000: 3)

2.3.2. Online Features
Herring distinguishes features of asychronous and synchronous Computer-mediated Communication. On the one hand, the availability of synchronous data is limited available for research, and therefore barely elaborated on in terms of Genderlect. Nevertheless, real-time
chat modes are a reflection of face-to-face conversation, which makes synchronous conversation much more applicable for detecting different features. According to a study, male and female users tend to participate more equally, in terms of message length as well as the number of messages, in chat environments compared to asynchronous platforms. It further has to be taken into account that asynchronous interactions mainly focus on professional und structured text. In discussion groups or forums, the gender hierarchy influences the interaction considerably, resulting in a male domination. In rather anonymous chats, both genders tend to participate equally. Anyway, the findings of synchronous computer-mediated communication in general parallel those of gender distinctive language in asynchronous interaction. (cf. Herring 2005: 10,11; Herring 2000: 5)

In asynchronous discussion lists, newsgroups or blogs, male users tend to post longer messages and men tend to begin and close the discussion in mixed-sex groups. Consequently, male users, who usually control the topic and the terms of discussion, dominate the interactions in cyberspace. Their writing style is labeled as adversarial, or opposed, towards their interlocutors and they are said to use harsh language. Furthermore, men state their personal opinion strongly as facts and use more violent action verbs such as ‘kills’. Women, on the contrary, post short messages and qualify and explain their ideas. The verbs used by female-presenting characters are primarily neutral and affectionate. Due to their aligned style, they tend to apologize and offer support more often. Female users are also less likely to persist in posting when their messages do not receive a lot of responses. (cf. Herring 2005: 7; Herring 2000: 3,5) In terms of turn taking, no significant difference can be detected. (cf. Baron 2004: 18)

Those two different forms of online interaction can be further divided in ‘one-to-many’ and ‘one-to-one’ types of computer-mediated communication. While people in chats usually talk privately to one another, weblogs aim to address many readers. It is claimed that gender asymmetries are more evidently visible in one-to-one communication, since this form is a modern version of face-to-face conversation. (cf. Baron 2004: 9, 10) Baron argues: “In considering the literature on one-to-many CMC gender issues, we need be mindful that the social conditions for one-to-one CMC are quite different.” (2004: 10) Firstly, one-to-many electronic discourse often addresses strangers. Secondly, postings in those networks can
usually be anonymized. Therefore this distinction has to be considered, because both varieties offer a different floor for Genderlect research. (cf. Baron 2004: 10)

2.3.3. Politeness
The aspect of politeness strongly influences language, and is, therefore, one of the most obvious means through which a user’s gender is cued in computer-mediated communication. Female users can be detected by speech acts such as thanking, showing appreciation or apologizing to their interlocutors. For women, the violation of politeness, consequently of the female aiming for closeness, is considered a crime. The strict observance of online rules of conduct is important, and female online forums mirror the social environment. Therefore, they create and draw attention to their rules, which help to ensure the maintenance of the social closeness. This argument is affirmed by the fact that female students participate considerably more in online classrooms, which are controlled by a teacher, than their male colleagues. (cf. Herring 2005: 7,9; Herring 2000: 3)

Bald face-threatening acts such as unmitigated criticism or insults are therefore associated with male Netspeak. Compared to women, men and boys use rather violent verbs and they often include sexual references. Consequently, the online form of insulting someone by using swearwords, called ‘flaming’, is another feature that reveals male users. According to the average men, women’s polite language is considered a form of censorship. Obviously, men fear a threat to their freedom of speech in online environment more, than a violation of politeness. (cf. Herring 2006: 7,9,11; Herring 2000: 3)

2.3.4. The Use of Graphic Accents
Emoticons were invented to substitute for facial expression and gestures in computer-mediated communication. These symbols serve as a removal of attitudinal ambiguity. (cf. Crystal 2011: 23) Different studies have been conducted to investigate whether the gender influences the use of typed emoticons. Hand in hand with the stereotype of the emotional women goes the finding that a greater proportion of women use emoticons to express their feelings than men. (cf. Baron 2004: 19) Although the use of graphic accent is not the most prominent factor in order to distinguish male and female discourse, women, on the average, tend to use a greater amount of emoticons. (cf. Wolf 2000: 829) According to Alecia Wolf, this hypothesis is verified by investigating the use of typed symbols in male or female dominant groups. While the difference between male and female application of typed smileys
was not significantly discernable, the adaption of male users in female dominant environments online emphasized the stereotypical assumption: men, when communicating with women, used more graphic accents in order to adjust the female style. (cf. Wolf 2000: 833) Additionally, the types of emoticons used are also gendered. The majority of women tend to use the graphic accent expressing humor. The most common typed male emoticon lies in the category of teasing and sarcasm. (cf. Wolf 2000: 823)

Since graphic accents not only contain emoticons, also the expression via the use of punctuation characters in computer-mediated has been evaluated. The emotional women can also be discerned for example by the use of exclamation marks. Similar to intensifiers, this, sometimes over exaggerated use of exclamation marks emphasizes the message on the level of emotions. Although exclamation marks are assumed to add a demanding and strong tone to the message, those are also used to mark friendly interaction, thanking, emphasis or offering support. (cf. Crystal 2011: 62)

3. Gendered Weblogs
One of the major problems encountered when dealing with language on the Internet is the incredible amount of data. On the other hand, the diversity of this data hand in hand with its extreme speed of change makes generalizations in the field impossible. (cf. Crystal 2010: 230).

In order to detect features of language associated with one particular gender online, this seminar paper will mainly concentrate on personal ‘blogs’. Even though bloggers usually present themselves as either a man or a woman, their overall presentation is achieved through various gendered performances, including discursive and visual means to create either an image of masculinity or femininity. (cf. van Doorn, van Zoonen and Wyatt 2007: 155)

A weblogs, short ‘blog’, is a personalized, publicly-available, web page. This special category of web pages emerged in the late 1990’s and offers users the possibility to combine various online media into one page. In the majority of cases, the websites are single-authored and the user can post entries on diverse topics, similar to online diaries. The authors can take advantage of various technological features like images, audio and video data to express themselves and, therefore, create a vivid representation of their self. The general purpose of compiling a blog is to share content with others through the Web. In terms of the entries’ content, three sub-genres of weblogs can be distinguished: personal journals, also referred to
as lifelogs, photologs or filters, which deal with events external to the author’s life and
usually provide hyperlinks to important news items. Photologs also lack personal information
and are only created to share the passion of photography. Lifelogs reflect the traditional act of
‘diary writing’ and are the most suitable source for emphasizing the relation of language and
gender in electronic discourse.

The genre of weblogs also displays common structural features like dated entries that
are published in reverse chronological sequences, as well as, sidebars that contain links and
usually a calendar. Those sidebars often provide a link to other weblogs and, consequently,
create a community through the act of blogging. In the so called blogosphere, the totality of
blog-related websites, the written language is unmediated and therefore it displays the natural
male or female language of the author. (cf. Crystal 2001: 15; Herring and Paolillo 2006:
440-443, 445; van Doorn, van Zoonen and Wyatt 2007: 146,147) However, the decisive factor
for selecting blogs is their availability. Weblogs can be defined as a form of one-to-many
asynchronous communication. Regardless their purpose or target audience, those websites are
available for the entire online community. Whereas research on instant messaging or E-mails
is difficult due to the lack of obtainable data, weblogs expose their language freely and offer a
great ground for linguistic research. Crystal offers an overall distinction between features of
spoken and written language that apply to weblogs:

Spoken language criteria applied to blogs:
- not time-bound
- spontaneous (with restrictions)
- not face-to-face
- loosely structured
- not socially interactive (increasing options)
- not immediately revisable
- not prosodically rich

Written language criteria applied to blogs:
- space-bound
- contrived (variable)
The framework within which Netspeak is mediated has to be taken into account. In terms of blogs, criteria of spoken language are detectable, such as the structure, but, since it is a primarily text-based medium, written language criteria are dominant. (cf. Crystal 2001: 32)

Another decisive factor for determining stylistic gendered features in weblogs is their sub-genre. In their empirical research titled ‘Gender and genre variation in weblogs’, Herring and Paolillo draw attention to the fact that the genre of communication has to be considered: “The connection between language use and writer gender is mediated by the classification of texts into conventional types.” (2006: 439) The communicative purpose of the text produced undeniably influences the author’s content, as well as, style. The functional standards of a specific genre require the authors to apply a certain kind of language, irrespectively of their gender. (cf. Herring and Paolillo 2006: 439, 440, 455)

Gender is, however, not only reflected in the discourse of the blogging practice, but also the type of the personalized website. According to a study, carried out in 2004, personal journals are mostly published by women, while men write the majority of filter-blogs online. This finding, however, represents the stylistic extremes, since it goes hand in hand with the stereotypical assertion that the topics in same-sex groups are gendered. While women usually discuss people, relationships and internal states, men’s conversation are about objects and external events such as politics. In order to objectively analyze a male and female discourse, the examples used have to be taken from the same sub-genre. Otherwise, the findings are misleadingly influenced by properties exhibited in a certain genre, which were traditionally associated with either male or female language use. (cf. Herring and Paolillo 2006: 440, 441)

Additionally, scientific examinations on gender identity represented in weblogs suggest that the reason for the act of blogging is a different one for men and women. While women claim that writing a blog is an emotional release, male users list the sharing of experiences and interest with others as their main purpose. Men, therefore, contextualize their blogging behavior in a more formal way in order to avoid representing themselves as too ‘emotional’ or to distance themselves from the traditional female activity of keeping a diary. (cf. van Doorn, van Zoonen and Wyatt 2007: 150, 153)
3.1. **Introducing the User**

In order to add a practical dimension to the theory of Genderlect in online interaction, two different blogs about travelling will be examined. Travel is a topic that is neither stereotypically connected to women nor to men. The website [www.travelblog.org](http://www.travelblog.org) is a community for people reporting about their unique experience abroad. In this variety of personal journals, the bloggers present their identity in relation to their offline life by sharing their travel experience in the form of written entries, which are supported by hyperlinks and images. (cf. van Doorn, van Zoonen and Wyatt 2007: 155) Since the users are bound to a specific layout, the research will only concentrate on the written discourse.

As an example of report talk, the latest entries of Scott Dickenson, a 23 years old Canadian traveler will be conducted. Under the nickname ScottD, he writes about his experience in Asia.

![Figure 1: Introduction ScottD (Dickenson 2010, online)](image)

To illustrate the gender difference, the blog of Jennifer Greaves, stemming from England, will be dealt with. Her female rapport talk is displayed by reading about her trip to China.
The first impression of a blog is always the introduction. It aims to answer the question who is writing and what is he or she writing about. Both users in the examples used explicitly give away their offline identity and do not make any effort to disguise their gender. The stereotypical assumption concerning quantity is not applicable to this first message. Jennifer Greaves, elaborates on the presentation of her stories, while Scott Dickenson sticks to the minimum information necessary. Although this might not reaffirm the finding that men tend to use more words for their post, it does mirror Deborah Tannen’s study of report and rapport talk. While the male user only sticks to the necessary information needed to introduce the goal of his writing, the female introduction offers her readers a long explanation. Another feature is the conclusion of this very first impression: Scott hopes that he will inspire people by his writing, so he immediately states a goal of his information-giving. Jennifer, on the contrary, only states that she hopes people will enjoy reading her blog. Therefore, her blog is only about the communication itself, while he immediately gives away a purpose of informing his readers.

Typical features of male and female speech are barely discernible. Jennifer Greaves does use a more creative way of applying punctuation by using points to increase the curiosity and importance of the fact that she stayed in Hongkong for much longer than expected. Furthermore, she uses exclamation marks, but not in an outstanding pattern.

Although these introductory notes differ from the average stereotypical men and women’s message length, the whole blogs in general endorse the hypothesis by Susan Herring. When it comes to the length of a post or an entry, the two examples clearly coincide.
with the theory of Genderlect online. The male blogger on the average reports about his journey with 800 to 1000 words. A contrasting juxtaposition confirms the stereotype by Herring, that boys post longer messages in asynchronous conversation than girls do. Jennifer only types about 400 to 700 words for her readers.

3.2. Male and Female Blogging

Figure 3: From Hong Kong to the’burbs (Greaves 2012, online)

Features of typical women’s language can be detected in Jennifer’s post. In this entry, the authoress uses an ‘adequate’ amount of intensifiers. Emphasize is uttered by the words ‘very’,
‘so’, ‘exactly’ or ‘perfectly’. Furthermore, the fillers ‘just’ and ‘such’ are used to underline the statements. Her language has a creative notion, since she includes expressions like ‘hustle and bustle’ or phrases like ‘at the end of the day’.

Moreover, the title of the blog named ‘From Hong Kong to the ‘burbs’ is an indicator for stereotypical female language use. The seemingly insignificant heading is an example for the common pronunciation of ‘the suburbs’ in colloquial language and consequently refers to how it is usually uttered. Instead of using a formal title, she automatically creates a notion of the place by emphasizing a generally known colloquialism. This creative use of language strongly highlights women’s attention for the way something is articulated.

A significant line in terms of Genderlect analysis is the very last sentence saying: “Especially when they have a very cute baby as well.” Not only does this sentence contain the hedges ‘especially’ and ‘as well’, but also an intensifier in combination with the empty adjective cute, both of which are used to put an emphasize on the fact that her friend has a baby.

By stating that this type of holiday is the perfect break from a busy life, she also offers help and supports other readers in their decision to go abroad. In the final paragraph, the user reminds everyone of how important good friends and family are. However, even when stating that “you can’t put a price on a good holiday” she uses the personal pronoun ‘I’ beforehand in order to highlight the fact, that it is her own opinion rather than a general statement.
Although the features listed by Lakoff are barely sufficient to determine the gender of the text, Deborah Tannen’s cross-cultural theory makes the juxtaposition possible. The most obvious distinction when reading the two different blogs is undeniably the intention of the authors. The female user’s entries revolve around her own experience and how she felt about that. In the example given above, Jennifer describes her holidays in Australia. While she barely gives any detailed information about the journey in general, she wants the readers to understand her experience. Although her message is way shorter than Scott’s entry, she elaborates on the experience herself, while he states facts about his trip. Not only does her female language about feelings underline the negotiations for closeness, but she even explicitly utters this hypothesis stated in the Difference Approach. Although her blog entries are shorter than those of Scott Dickenson, she makes use of the rapport rather than the report talk.

Figure 4: The Pink City (Dickenson 2010, online)
Scott Dickenson elaborates on his trip to Jaipur, by primarily focusing on the facts of his journey. Instead of only giving information about what he has seen, he also states facts and information about the place. In addition to that, he tells his own experience and gives advice. A remarkable indicator of men’s focus on getting and giving information in conversation can be detected in the very first paragraph. As the author tells the story of how he met his driver Mukesh, he does not justify his reason for taking advantage of his services on the grounds of personality, but only focuses on his knowledge. While a woman would probably emphasize whether her tour guide throughout the trip was nice or friendly, Scott only foregrounds his ‘encyclopedic knowledge’ and the ‘journals full of recommendations’. Furthermore, it is exactly indicated that those recommendations ‘date back to 1984’, which is another feature of male speech. Besides stating numbers, the young traveler also provides his readers with information concerning time and money; details that only seem necessary in report-talk.

While Jennifer describes her experiences of one week of holiday in a foreign country primarily based on how she enjoyed these days, the male user focuses on describing his journey more like a tourist guide. In his blog, he even offers footnotes to provide its readers with additional information. Those are applicable to his intention to also motivate his readers to go on this journey.

Contrary to the language used in the female blog, he hardly avails intensifiers for his description. He does not only avoid intensifiers, but he also makes fun of their usage by putting the “very dangerous monkey” under quotation marks, as a means of sarcasm. Private verbs, including ‘think’ or ‘feel’ are not prominent in his blog either. When examining his entry for features associated with male written language, it is particularly striking that he states dates, quantity and locatives. While the female language contains rather short sentences, his paragraphs are constructed similarly to an informative essay: conjunctions are used, as well as an elliptic sentence structure.
For determining gender differences in the blog entries, especially the way of ending the posts are of great significance. While the female blogger JHP ends her 304-words post by giving advice, and offering support, ScottD’s 1702-words blog entry ends with a conclusion and summary of the vacation in Jaipur.

![Monkeys on a Motorcycle](image)

In the end India was what I expected in both positive and negative ways. The place is crowded, hot, loud, exhausting, and in the words of my seatmate on one train, “Bamboozling.” It’s also incredible, vibrant, gorgeous, and the food will literally blow your mind. As frustrating as some parts of travelling in India are, I can almost guarantee I will be headed back there at some point, as my experience was only a narrow slice of a giant country. I am particularly interested in the far North of the country where The Himalayas provide what I’ve read are some of the most incredible vistas on the planet. As for this travel blog, it will once again go into retirement until the next time I leave Canada’s borders. Based on the past two years that might not be too long from now...

Footnote 1: This reference will probably be dated by the time most people read it. It seems like Ryan Gosling has a new movie coming out every weekend these days and chances are he is way more famous six months from now.

Footnote 2: Chickpeas. I thought this was weird and told Ganesh bananas would be a better idea. I was proved right when an older guy came with some bananas and the monkeys forgot all about our chickpeas.

Footnote 3: One night Coors Light and another night Fosters. Why? I have no idea.

![The Pink City](image)

Obviously, he reflects on those days in a very critical way. Contrary to Jennifer, who is very enthusiastic about every single experience she gains while living abroad, Scott looks at his trips from a different point of view. He does not only underline the positive aspects, but also informs his reader about the journey and then offers a critical review. The blog entry can also be understood as a form of lecturing about going on a trip to India, especially from a female point of view, since it primarily focuses on the provision of information.

In a way, his posts can be substituted for information on this place, while her entries are mainly about her personal feelings. He uses judgmental adjectives like ‘loud’ and ‘exhausting’ and describes part of his experience as rather ‘frustrating’.
3.3. Comments

These two comments given above are a typical response from supposedly female non-members of the travelblog.com community. Due to the anonymity of those who are not registered in this forum, one can only assume their gender by looking at the language. However, non-members have the possibility of giving their name.

The first two comments are an answer to JHG’s blog entry about her vacation. Those messages can be dissembled in terms of Susan Herring’s macrosegments. Firstly, an appreciative response is given, stating that both of the commentators love her blog posts. The first comment, written by Natalie Boxshall, even includes a confirmation stating that she likes this kind of holidays too. Both of the female writers use euphemism to emphasize their admiration like the word ‘love’. Additionally, an emphatic stress is put on the word ‘pleaaaaaaseee’. Furthermore, the usage of intensifiers is again striking. In the second part of their message, information is provided and finally, they imply the continuation of the conversation, by including questions and a polite phrase. In the final sentence of the second comment, Hannah friendly demands a ‘proper email’ to discuss everything in great detail, which clearly indicates her need for conversation in order to create intimacy.

Other aspects than the overall structure of the messages are the use of graphic accents. Although the appearance of emoticons is not overwhelmingly remarkable, exclamation marks, as well as a creative use of punctuation in order to structure the sentence are detectable.
In terms of gendered speech acts, the female way of writing can be detected in both of the short messages. The first comment, for example, already points towards Jennifer’s remark about the pronunciation of ‘the suburbs’ by its heading “Burbs and birds!”, which is a way of not only showing interest in Jennifer writing, but also connecting to her words. Additionally, the user Natalie Boxshall states that she has actually bothered to learn the name of the special birds. While this would be seen as an accomplishment in male conversation, the female user plays down her knowledge by using the preamble ‘I know it’s geeky’.

The female style in the examples given is a reflection of their stereotypical aim to develop interpersonal relations online. The commentaries are written in an aligned variant and especially these responses serve as a model for Genderlect theory.

Anyway, the hypothesis about Genderlect is only verified when the opposite speech variety is taken into account:

![Figure 7: Comments (Dickenson 2010, online)](image)

Although the user disguises his identity by using the gender-neutral nickname ‘taz’, the discourse style alone is sufficient to reveal that a man is the author of the message. While for female users, it is necessary to use their real name in order to create a relationship through their conversation, the non-member taz only uses the comment to display his own knowledge and experience and, therefore, sees no need to introduce himself.

Instead of trying to make his negative criticism look like an advice, the supposedly male users states it directly. This comment, written in the opposed variant, expresses disagreement and a critical view. Although he gives the blogger information on his next trip to the Philippines, he does not want the conversation to continue, since he finishes the message with a note saying that Scott can hopefully visit the place again and consider his tips. Due to the male competitive writing style, also suggestions and propositions are listed in a very direct
way. He neither uses a lot of intensifiers, graphic accents nor euphemisms. In addition to that, his sentence structure is rather formal and it is joined through conjunctions.

**Conclusion**

Nowadays, Genderlect is more than just a theory that is based upon the superiority of men. The linguistic research in the field of Genderlect has often been criticized for increasing and emphasizing stereotypes. However, one has to consider that men and women are different, even stem from different cultures according to Deborah Tannen, and therefore their language mirrors those distinctions. Furthermore, the contemporary findings in the field of Genderlect particularly emphasize that gender associated characteristics of male and female speech are not absolute, since those are not ultimately linked to one’s biological sex. Gender is a behavior that is under constant construction, since the cultural idea of masculinity and femininity in our society is ever changing.

Even though features of speech can no longer be genetically attributed to men or women, the importance of the linguistic area of research has not lost its relevance. On the contrary, language is considered an important part of an individual’s performance of gender. The socially constructed idea of masculine and feminine behavior is reflected in a person’s way of communicating and, therefore, the more recent investigations into Genderlect have shifted their original focus and are primarily concerned with the way interlocutors present their gender when speaking or writing.

When dealing with the altered conception of the general concept of gender and its changed relation to language, especially the modern possibilities of communicating have to be taken into account. Undeniably, computer-mediated communication offers a new and copious ground for analysis, since the unique medium is a combination of written and spoken discourse. In addition to that, the electronic environment allows experts to examine the construction of gender identity in a medium due to the absence of physical cues. Nevertheless, several studies carried out suggest that the varying language use mainly reveals a person’s real identity and, therefore, the analysis of Netspeak is obviously an evidence for the often denied existence of gendered difference in speech. Features associated with one gender in face-to-face interaction can also be detected in asynchronous, as well as, synchronous communication online. Additionally, innovative divining factors have arisen from the field of Genderlect in
electronic discourse like the female use of graphic accents, the length of postings or the framing of their written messages.

On the basis of an observation of two random blogs about travelling, written by a male and a female user, the stereotypical assumptions were confirmed. Although, features of Lakoff’s theory were hardly sufficient for an overall distinction, the general structure in combination with the writer’s intention offered proof for the existence of Genderlect. The female rapport talk and the male report talk were obviously illustrated in those different weblogs and their appertaining commentaries.

The findings suggest that although Herring argues that the male speech is only mistaken for being informative, since a lot of strong and confident verbs are used, the different intentions for communicating certainly influence the discourse style. The female user, on the one hand, reported about her feelings and experience, while the male author wrote in order to inform his readers about the trip itself.

Although this linguistic research area is, to some extent, based upon stereotypes, Genderlect is by no means just a myth. Due to the fact that barely anybody is aware of those features, users display them everyday unconsciously in chats, blogs or social networks. Therefore, even though men and women can try to hide their identity by using a different username or avatar, language use alone is sufficient to detect one’s gender.
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