Gender Representation Through Vocabulary Used By Women On Tiktok's Caption

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how gender is represented through vocabulary used by women on TikTok's Caption, with a specific focus on lexicon related to femininity. The research is grounded in the sociolinguistic assumption that language reflects and reinforces gender roles in society. As digital spaces become central to self-representation, women increasingly use specific words to construct their gendered identities online. The research adopts a qualitative descriptive method within a sociolinguistic framework. Data are collected from TikTok captions that include words such as pregnancy, mommy, maternity, give birth, breastfeeding, makeup, and wife, which are typically associated with women and their roles. The analysis applies Lakoff's theory of women's language, especially gender-specific vocabulary. The findings indicate the vocabulary used is not neutral but deeply embedded in cultural and biological representations of women. Words like pregnant, mom, pumping, and motherhood explicitly mark the speakers as female, while terms such as makeup, eyelash extensions, and style my hair associate women with appearance and beauty work. The presence of these lexical choices highlights the social construction of femininity. Thus, the repeated use of words that emphasize traditional female roles, particularly those related to reproduction, caregiving, and appearance, linguistically represents gender. These lexical patterns confirm the relevance of

Lakoff's framework in analyzing modern gender expression through language, especially in digital discourse.

Keywords : gender, TikTok's Caption, Vocabulary, Women.

INTRODUCTION

Gender is a very hotly discussed issue (Aniqurrohmah, 2023; Ariyani & Hadiani, 2019; Canale & Furtado, 2021; Galano & Graham-Bermann, 2016; Harris et al., 1995; Ott, 2016; Winter & Pauwels, 2005; Zakharova, 2014; Zamarro et al., 2020). Gender was first proposed by Robert J. Stoller in 1968 to separate human characteristics based on socio-cultural and biological. Etymologically (language), the word "gender" comes from English, gender means "sex", while in terminology (term), gender is a cultural concept that attempts to make distinctions in terms of roles, behaviour, mentality, and emotional characteristics between men and women that develop in society (Stoller, 1976).

Gender is different from sex (Coates, 2013; Tannen, 1999). Sex is biological, while gender is a status. In other words, a person is born with a certain sex, then based on their outward appearance, they gain status through gender, which includes cultural, psychological, and social normative aspects. Sex is understood as a biological category (male and female), while gender refers to psychological traits or social constructs associated with those biological categories. Gender is often operationalized and conceptualized as biological sex (e.g., male and female), in fact gender is a term used to describe socially and culturally constructed categories based on sex; masculine and feminine. So, sex is biological, while gender is a result of socialization (Coates, 2013; Kennedy et al., 2020; Livingston, 2019; Tannen, 1999; Viana & O'Boyle, 2023). Furthermore, gender distinguishes between masculine and feminine characteristics (Dalimoenthe, 2020).

Gender is not God's will and is not something that is possessed since birth, but a process and result of socialization in a very long history where the division of male and female roles can change or exchange from era to era. Gender is a social construction that is dynamic and contextual. Traditional stereotypes depict women with characteristics of gentleness, beauty, emotionality, and maternal nature, while men are associated with strength, rationality, masculinity, and courage. However, in reality, these characteristics are flexible and interchangeable. There are men who show emotional and maternal traits, as well as women who are rational and mighty. This

flexibility shows that gender is not an innate biological attribute, but rather the result of social construction that varies based on time, geographical space, and social strata. For example, in certain communities such as lower-class women in rural areas, physical and mental characteristics are actually found to be stronger than men in the same environment (Fakih, 2008).

Gender as a social construction of roles, identities, and expectations for men and women, functions as a legitimizing tool for the patriarchal system—a social structure that places men as the main authority holders in various aspects of life (politics, economics, culture, and family). Patriarchy utilizes gender norms to maintain a power hierarchy by: (1) creating a rigid dichotomy between masculinity (associated with strength, rationality, and leadership) and femininity (associated with gentleness, emotionality, and domesticity); (2) controlling women's bodies, sexuality, and space for movement through customary, religious, or state rules; and (3) naturalizing inequality as an inevitable "nature." Conversely, non-compliance with gender norms (for example: assertive women or emotional men) is often considered a threat to the patriarchal order, and is therefore subject to social sanctions (Butler, 2020).

Language not only influences but also shapes individual perceptions of reality (Ambarwati et al., 2023). In the context of gender, the language we use unconsciously shapes the conception of masculine and feminine roles in society masyarakat (Nugraha & Prasetiyo, 2021). This explains why the stereotype arises that men have linguistic freedom while women must be careful in their language. This phenomenon is associated with a deep-rooted patriarchal system, which not only creates gender inequality but also limits women's linguistic expression (Lesmana et al., 2021). In addition to everyday interactions, gender construction through language is also significantly reproduced in the media realm, especially social media which functions as a reflection of social reality (Temaja & Purandina, 2022).

Media is one of the most important agents of socialization in the modern era, which informs cultural norms, beliefs, and expectations to audiences directly or indirectly (McQuail, 2012). There are several types of media, such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, and so on (Boyd, 2014). Social media helps accelerate communication by playing a major role in disseminating information (Crețu, 2021). Communication with social media will influence beliefs, values, and attitudes, world views, social organizations, human nature, activity orientation, and perceptions of self and others (Hamidati et al., 2011). Communication on social media provides

opportunities for everyone to express themselves. Everyone tries to show their existence by continuing to update all existing developments by uploading something in the form of videos, images or writing. When someone uploads something, the upload is in the form of information that can be enjoyed by the public and becomes public consumption so that what is private becomes public (Dwi & Watie, 2011; Watie, 2016). One of the primary messages that media convey to audiences is about gender (Krijnen & Bauwel, 2014).Seeing men, women, boys, and girls appear on television and other media—including what they say, do, look like, and how they interact—can shape audiences' views about gender roles as well as their conceptions of themselves and others (Tortajada et al., 2013; Van Zoonen, 2002).

Gender and language in linguistics are topics that need to be studied because language can reflect gender roles in society, including in the way language is used in everyday communication, such as the use of pronouns, greetings, and nouns (Butler, n.d.; Tannen, 1999). Language also greatly influences our perception and perspective on something. Women tend to express their intentions honestly through gestures or speaking style (meta messages), while men tend to express their intentions directly. The different "women's language" is characterized by a lack of self-confidence, politeness, and weakness, which reflects the subordinate status of women in society (Lakoff, 2004). This subordination is seen in various elements of language such as vocabulary, expressions, terms, syntax, phonology, and grammar.

Language and gender research from Sociolinguistic studies shows that women use more standard phonological forms, use more emotional and hyperbolic vocabulary and topics related to daily activities, while men do not show these characteristics; both characters do not use harsh or taboo words, question marks, and gender stereotypes reveal that men tell stories about science and technology, while women tell stories about households and the surrounding environment (Rizka, 2018).

Based on the explanation above, the purpose of this study is to identify gender through the vocabulary used by women in TikTok content.

METHOD

Based on the explanation above, the purpose of this study is to identify gender through the vocabulary used by women in TikTok content. The data source in this study is the caption created by TikTok

users. The data for this study is the utterances in the content captions from TikTok users. The data collection method in this study uses the documentation method (Miles et al., 2014)and the interactive model of Miles et al (2014) in analyzing the data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Women have a lot of vocabulary that is commonly used to show their identity as feminine. Feminine roles such as caring for children, dressing up, or being gentle are "learned and acted out roles" in patriarchal societies (Butler, n.d.).

1. **'Pregnancy'**

   Pregnancy is one of the words used to indicate identity as a woman.

   Data 1.

   *My **pregnancy** journey*

   According to etymonline, the word pregnancy (noun) comes from the word pregnant (adjective) and the suffix -cy. The word pregnancy appeared in the 1520s. Pregnancy means "state of a female who has conceived or is with child" (the condition of a woman who has conceived or is pregnant). According to Oxford Learner's Dictionaries online, pregnancy is a noun meaning the state of being pregnant (the state of being pregnant). The phrase my pregnancy journey shows that the speaker as a woman is telling the story of her pregnancy journey. This is supported by:

   > Data 2
   >
   > *Find out 2 weeks later, take a lot of **pregnancy** test cause we thought the first one was just broken.*

   In the above speech, the use of the word pregnancy is seen. The speech reveals that the speaker uses many pregnancy test tools. As proof that pregnancy refers to vocabulary that refers to women, it can be seen in:

   > Data 3
   >
   > *Going through first trimester, dying and my husband keep doing this to my face my hole **pregnancy** idk why.*

   In the above statement, it is clear that pregnancy is only for women with the statement my whole pregnancy where the speaker is a woman.

2. **'Pregnant'**

The word pregnant refers to a feminine's identity.
Data 1
Pregnant *but have no idea*

According to etymonline the word pregnant (adjective) comes from the Latin "praegnantem" (nominative "praegnas") which consists of "prae" (word-forming element) which means before and the root word "gnasci" which means born. Literally means before being born. This word appeared in the 15th century. Pregnant (adjective) means "with child, impregnated, that has been conceived in the womb" (with a child, pregnant, who has conceived in the womb). According to the Oxford Learner's Dictionaries online pregnant is an adjective meaning having a baby developing inside her body (having a baby developing inside her body). This shows that pregnancy and pregnant are only used by women and can make it happen. This is supported by:
Data 2
First ultrasound 13 weeks ***pregnan****t, he was soooo smoll.*

Ultrasound is often used to visualize fetal development and assess its health. The above statement shows that the speaker is monitoring the pregnancy that has been 13 weeks. This is clearly seen at 13 weeks pregnant. This proves that pregnant can only be referred to women.

Data 3
We got married and I got ***pregnant****.*

"I got pregnant" emphasizes that the speaker is a woman and that the speaker is pregnant.

3. Give Birth

Give birth is also closely related to the mother. This is seen in:
Data 1
I just ***give birth*** *2 moths ago.*

According to etymonline, the word *give* (verb) means to give, bestow, deliver to another (to give, bestow, hand over to another; to distribute, give; hand over, devote, entrust) and the word birth (noun) in the 12th century means the fact of being born (the fact of birth) in the mid-13th century means the act of giving birth, a bringing forth by the mother, childbirth (the act of giving birth, giving birth by the mother, giving birth). Supported by the Merriam-webster dictionary, give birth means to have a baby (having a baby). Literally, give birth

means to give birth. According to the big Indonesian dictionary, giving birth (verb) has the root word lahir and means to remove a child from the womb. This can be done by women and the use of this word is directed at women as in the data below.

> Data 2
> *My response to anything after **giving birth**.*

4. 'Mommy'

> Data 1
> ***Mommy** and Baby Arie*

According to etymonline, the word mommy (noun) is an American English variant of mamma in 1844. The spelling variant mommie is attested in 1882. The word mommy refers to "a career path for women who prioritize childcare" attested in 1987. According to Oxford Learner's Dictionaries online, mommy is a noun meaning a child's word for a mother. This shows that the word mommy refers to women who have children and mommy is only played by women.

> Data 2
> *A day in **Mommy**&Baby Arie life.*

The phrase "A day in mommy & Baby Arie's life" wants to convey the routine of a mother (mommy) with her baby named Arie. Mommy is used as a term of address seen in:

> Data 3
> *Mari buat sarapan bareng **Mommy** Arie.*

The word Mommy Arie refers to Arie's mother. In this speech, the speaker wants to emphasize to the audience her status as Arie's mother.

5. 'SAHM' (Stay-at-home mom)

> Data 1
> *Proud **SAHM**. I pray for all you ladies out there, who is not married and have baby yet.*

SAHM stands for stay-at-home mom which means a mother who stays at home to raise children and manage the household (housewife). According to the Great Dictionary of the Indonesian Language, a housewife means a wife or mother who only takes care of various household chores, not working in an office. This proves that SAHM can only be used by women. This proves that SAHM does her job continuously, in other words, working all the time for the family.

6. 'Mother'

Data 1
*I used to be a nurse before I become a **Mother**.*

According to Oxford Learner's Dictionaries online, the word mother is a noun that means a female parent of a child. This is reinforced by Etymology, mother (noun) means female parent, a woman in relation to her child. It is clear that the speaker is a mother from the utterance "I become a mother." Becoming a mother can be done by women and the speaker is a woman.

7. 'Wife'

Data 1

*Bagian 13. Our first Valentine as husband and **wife** and parents. Baby Arie and I surprised my husband with all these decorations. I made him a cake and a card with my lips on it and we also make him a gift with baby Aries's foot prints.*

According to Oxford Learner's Dictionaries online, wife is a noun meaning the woman that somebody is married to. This is supported by Etymology, the word wife in Old English means female partner in a sanctioned union" (wedded wife). This is very clear in the phrase our first valentines as husband and wife and parents. Wife has a partner, namely husband.

8. 'Pumping'

Data 1

*My story when I was still **pumping** milk for my baby boy.*

According to merriam-webster online dictionary, Pumping comes from the word pump (verb) which means to raise (something, such as water) with a pump (to raise (something, such as water) with a pump). Pumping milk means pumping milk from a woman's breasts. Pumping milk is one proof that taking care of children is women's task and as a symbol of femininity.

9. 'Breastfeeding'
Data 1
*Pas baru lahiran aku sempat takut gaada ASI ku, eh 24 jam setelah lahiran malah banjir. Sampe muka anakku selalu belepotan habis **breastfeeding**, karna pas dia udah selesai susunya masih tetap keluar. Puji Tuhan.*
Breastfeeding comes from the morpheme breast (noun), the morpheme feed (verb), and the suffix -ing. According to the Oxford

English Dictionary, Breastfeeding (noun) means the action or practice of feeding a baby. From the caption, it can be concluded that breastfeeding is the act of giving breast milk to a baby/breastfeeding. This proves that breastfeeding is played by the mother and the word breastfeeding can only be used by and for women who have children.

10. 'Makeup'

Data 1

*Buarpun sudah menjadi seorang Mommy. Aku selalu usahain ada time untuk pake **make up** ala kadarnya, pake kuku-kuku palsuku atau time untuk coba-coba outfit di dalam lemariku, habis itu foto-foto untuk upload di instagramku.*

The phrase pake makeup is usually done by women. According to the big Indonesian dictionary, pake is an informal form of pakai which means to wear. Then according to etymonline, makeup (noun) comes from make (verb) and up (adverbial) which means manner in which something is put together (how to put something together). This is reinforced by Merriam-webster Dictionaries online, makeup means the way in which the parts or ingredients of something are put together; cosmetics (the way in which the parts or ingredients of something are put together; cosmetics).

11. 'Pake kuku-kuku palsu'

Data 1

*Buarpun sudah menjadi seorang Mommy. Aku selalu usahain ada time untuk pake make up ala kadarnya, **pake kuku-kuku palsuku** atau time untuk coba-coba outfit di dalam lemariku, habis itu foto-foto untuk upload di instagramku.*

According to the Indonesian official dictionary, fake nails mean artificial nails made of acrylic, gel, paper, and so on, functioning to beautify the appearance. This means that women wear fake nails to beautify their appearance and fake nails are used by women.

12. 'Eyelashes Extensions'

Data 1

*Yang pada nanyain hair care, face care dan **eyelashes extensions** ku.*

Eyelash (noun) comes from the words eye (noun) and lash (noun). According to the Merriam-webster dictionary, eyelash means the

fringe of hair edging the eyelid. While extension (noun) means a part constituting an addition. So, eyelash extension is the addition of hair to the eyelashes which functions to beautify the appearance. In general, women do eyelash extensions.

13. 'Pakai Gaun'

Data 1

*Pertama kali aku **pakai gaun** yang dibelikan pacarku.*

According to the Indonesian official dictionary, a dress is a noun that means a woman's dress. This confirms that a dress is intended for women and only women wear dresses.

14. 'Style my Hair'

Data 1

*Let's **style my hair** together.*

"Let's style my hair" identifies Women's activities. Women love beauty, of course styling hair is part of Women's activities to make hair look beautiful.

15. 'Motherhood'

Data 1

*The reality of **motherhood** before he threw up on me, he opened on me LMAO.*

According to Oxford Learner's Dictionaries online, the phrase motherhood is a noun that means the state of being a mother and is reinforced by etymonline that the phrase motherhood comes from the words mother and hood in the 1590s and means the state or fact of being a mother. Motherhood is intended for women. Similar to data 4, there is the phrase new mom. The speaker claims to be a young mother. Mother can only be played by women.

Thus, the vocabulary employed by women is not impartial; rather, it is strongly rooted in both cultural norms and biological associations of femininity. Terms such as *pregnant*, *mom*, *pumping*, and *motherhood* clearly identify the speaker as female, whereas expressions like *makeup*, *eyelash extensions*, and *style my hair* link women to physical appearance and beauty-related practices. These lexical selections reflect how femininity is socially constructed. Consequently, the frequent appearance of words tied to conventional female roles—especially those concerning childbirth, nurturing, and aesthetics—

serves as a linguistic manifestation of gender. This pattern of word usage supports the applicability of Lakoff's theory in examining contemporary expressions of gender identity, particularly within digital communication platforms.

16. 'Mom'

Data 1

*Just young **mom** doing things she love.*

According to etymonline, the word mom (noun) means mother and is short for mommy. The word mom appeared in 1867. According to Oxford Learner's Dictionaries online, mom is a noun meaning a mother. The word young mom replaced with she makes it clear that mom is identified as a woman. The word mom is also used in:

Data 2

*I loved my life before becoming a **mom**. But I love my life MORE after becoming a **mom**. His **mom**.*

In the sentence "But I love my life more after becoming a mom. His mom" gives the meaning that mom refers to a woman who has children. This is emphasized by His mom which means her mother.

17. 'Maternity'

The word maternity is related to the mother. This can be seen in:

Data 1

*First **maternity** pictures take it by myself in my apartment room.*

Data 1 shows that the speaker said the first maternity photo was taken by herself in her apartment room. Maternity is a word that refers to women and is played by a mother. According to Oxford Learner's Dictionaries online, maternity is a noun that means the state of being or becoming a mother. This shows that a woman becomes a mother. In addition, according to etymonline the word maternity (noun) means the quality or condition of being a mother which comes from the French maternité (motherhood) in the 15th century, from the Medieval Latin maternitatem (motherhood), from the Latin māternus (a mother), and from māter (mother).

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings above, it is clear that women have a specific vocabulary that not only reflects their biological and social experiences, but also strengthens their gender identity as women.

Referring to Lakoff's theory (1975) in Language and Woman's Place, the use of words such as pregnancy, pregnant, maternity, give birth, mom, to makeup and style my hair shows how women's language reflects experiences that are private, emotional, and domestic. Lakoff argues that women's language is often expressive, personal, and oriented towards social relations, which then forms the image of femininity as "gentle" and "bound to the role of the household". In this context, the choice of vocabulary by women - whether in talking about pregnancy, childcare, or appearance - is not only a form of communication, but also a discourse that confirms social position and gender ideology. Thus, the use of vocabulary that is typical of women is not just a biological reflection, but also a form of identity performativity that is constructed through language, in accordance with Lakoff's view that women's language is a reflection of the subordination and roles attached by patriarchal culture.

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