

# *A Sociolinguistic Perspective on the Language of Gender in the Novel the Four Winds*

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**Abstract:** In recent years, feminism has spread widely worldwide, and communication and dialogue between men and women have increased internationally, requiring the guidance of gender language theory. Meanwhile, Western linguists have made many achievements in gender linguistics, such as defect theory, dominance theory, difference theory, politeness theory and construct theory. In order to help people better understand the understanding of gender language differences, contribute to effective communication between men and women, and promote social peace and stability, this study will use a combination of close textual reading, dialogue analysis, an example analysis and comparative analysis to study the language style and dialogue of Elsa, the heroine of the novel the Four Winds, and ultimately conclude that the formation of women's language style is influenced by personal experience, family environment, and The conclusion is that the formation of women's language style is influenced by personal experience, family environment and social environment. At the same time, the variation of the above factors, in reality, will also make the language style have diversity.

**Keywords:** language, sociolinguistic, gender

## 1. Introduction

As feminism has gained popularity worldwide, the tension between men and women has increased, and some instances of gender inequality have turned into social hotspots, which has repercussions for a harmonious society. Western linguists have made significant progress in the study of gender linguistics recently, going into great depth into the causes and effects of the gender linguistic differences between males and females. Deficit theory, dominance theory, difference theory, politeness theory, and construct theory are the primary doctrinal opinions [1]. In the novel The Four Winds, Elsa, the heroine, develops from a fragile and timid child to a woman, mother, and fighter after being abandoned by her family and her husband against the backdrop of the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl that swept throughout North America.

This study uses The Four Winds as its textual foundation to explore the factors that led to the development of the heroine's language through a close reading of the text and dialogue analysis, beginning with the heroine's family and educational background. The goal of this study is to help people better understand the differences in gender language understanding and to promote effective communication between men and women. Second, using dialogue between the protagonist Elsa and

the males (father and husband) and Elsa and the females as examples, comparative analysis and example analysis are utilized to determine the distinctions between male and female communicative language (Rose and Joan). Lastly, by closely reading the text, this research may understand the text's broader context and derive inferences about the variety of things that have an impact on language from the changes in the heroine Elsa's language style before and after the text.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

One of the pioneers in the study of the connection between language and gender from a linguistic perspective in the field of gender language was the Danish linguist Otto Jespersen. He examined the linguistic distinctions between men and women using vocabulary and grammar in his 1922 book *Language: Its Nature, Evolution, and Origin*. R. Lakoff contended in the 1960s and 1970s that women were born with inherent flaws that differed from the standard male language, whereas men's speech was considered as standard and normative in a male-dominated culture [2, 3]. Linguists like D. Zimmerman, C. West, and P. Fishman argued that men's language was more dominant than women's language in the 1980s. They also claimed that men's conversational strategies were more competitive, demonstrated more dominance, and tended to control the conversation, frequently interrupting women's conversations [4-6]. Men were more status-conscious in verbal communication in the 1990s, according to Tannen, whereas women were more concerned with establishing a strong relationship with the other person. Women also tended to talk more nicely and preferred to agree with others' viewpoints more frequently than men [7]. Holmes examined the discrepancies between men and women in verbal communication in the twenty-first century in terms of "interruptions" and "feedback," with men interrupting speakers more frequently and women providing more feedback to speakers [8]. The study of how male and female speech differs is still ongoing; Ronald Wardhaugh, for instance, asserts that women frequently use words with certain colours [9]. Constructivists work against the traditional binary view of gender language, which holds that people enter new organizations and associations throughout their lives and that if they want to participate in society, people must constantly adapt their language to their social environment and adjust their language style so as to meet the demands of others on their language. Constructivists argue that the formation of female language is not an inevitable consequence of being born with a gender, but rather that this language style is a way for women to become women [10].

## **3. Conversations with Men**

Elsa's father, her husband Rafi, and her friend Jack are the three primary men that are mentioned throughout the book. The language in which Elsa meets and converses with Jack after she leaves home is left out for the time being to make the comparison of language more accurate and typical, and the conversations between Elsa and her father and Rafi are primarily listed. This is because Elsa's language style before and after she leaves home is influenced by various factors, such as her environment. Elsa and her father have a strained relationship because of the father's frequent displays of paternal power and desire to decide Elsa's fate in front of her. In front of Elsa, the father frequently asks rhetorical questions. Elsa wants to speak with her father about her future, but the first thing he asks her when he sees her is, "Why are you still awake?" " This question is meant to be rhetorical and indicate his annoyance. When Elsa tells her father that she wants to attend college because she enjoys reading and writing, he responds, "Do you need to be educated? Elsa's literary fantasy comes to an unexpected end. It is not just through questioning but also via verbal abuse that the father's authority is established. When the father learns of Elsa's pregnancy, he is not concerned with the reasons for Elsa's actions or with her health, but rather with his anger, which he expresses through curses such as "You've disgraced us all, get out of here". In this environment, Elsa is not only unable to express

herself honestly but is also subjected to her father's authoritarian lectures, which has led to a lack of confidence, timidity and euphemism in her speech.

Due to his background and younger age, the spouse uses milder language with Elsa than her father does and avoids using any profanity. He nonetheless initiates the discussion like a man, dominating the majority of the time and has the authority to terminate it at any point. Rafi and Elsa met by accident, and for the first time, Elsa felt valued and affirmed. Rafi changed Elsa's life completely, freeing Elsa from her father and mother's control. Elsa knew that the Rafi family had been forced to accept her as an unexpected guest, so she worked hard, and within a few years, she went from being a rich girl who knew nothing about sewing and farming to a person who could. However, with the dust raging, the land destroyed, and the long drought without rain, the people's living conditions are getting worse and worse, and many peasants have left their homes with their families in tow, listening to the rumours of California's wealth. Elsa is content with the status quo and believes that things are no better in California than they are at home, in contrast to her husband, who is determined to go and explore what is portrayed as the pleasant and serene state of California. Throughout their chats, Rafi forces his opinions on Elsa, telling her things like, "Have you ever considered that life must be so much more interesting than what we've seen?" and "Why haven't you left me yet". Although she disagrees with her husband, because of her lack of self-confidence and her dependence on him, she tries to be polite in her expressions and to please him, but he always digresses: "Go to bed, I'll go to bed too" or simply interrupts: "Oh God, I hate that! ".

In conclusion, Elsa communicates with men in a vulnerable way and uses more passive language. Males communicate with Elsa not to share ideas and advance together but to export their viewpoints in order to persuade Elsa to do what they want. The man always interrupts or questions Elsa when she does not speak in a way that suits him, and she frequently decides to abandon her point of view.

#### 4. Conversations with Women

There are three main women who appear in the text, Rose, Rafi's mother, Joan, a friend, and Loreda, Elsa's daughter. As Loretta is still young, Elsa's language style in conversation with her daughter should be different from that with adults. To ensure the accuracy and uniformity of the linguistic comparisons, only Elsa's conversations with Rose and Joan are analyzed in depth in this section.

First of all, once Elsa tells her father that she wants to go to school and become a writer, he repeatedly interrupts and uses rhetorical questions to take charge of the dialogue and make Elsa bow to his power and accept his point of view. However, Elsa accuses herself, and Rose says, "Oh, darling," confesses her own pain to ease Elsa's excessive sadness, and Rose cheers her on, saying, "My son is blessed to have found you." In conclusion, Elsa receives more complimentary responses from the women. In addition to trying to comprehend Elsa's point of view by attentively listening, the female listener refrains from interrupting Elsa and does not just push her views on her.

Second, Elsa always tries to accommodate the wishes of her father and Rafi, who always seem to be in a dominant position in the conversation; as a result, the heroine is always passive in their company and is frequently interrupted when speaking if it is not in line with their wishes. In contrast, Elsa behaves differently when speaking to the women, choosing to express herself more frequently and choosing to remain silent after being interrupted. When faced by her new friend Joan upon her arrival in California, Elsa is brave enough to express her opinions, enquiring as to the local employment situation, "Are they all out hunting for work?"

The female listener sought to stabilize the female protagonist rather than to establish her authority and status in the conversation, and the women talked to each other to deepen their emotional bonds. In conclusion, the female protagonist demonstrated a willingness to initiate a conversation with the women, spoke freely, and received more positive feedback.

## 5. Reasons

Elsa's language in conversation with men is characterized by subtlety and euphemism, a tendency to agree and go along with what men say, and an infrequent tendency to disagree. In the context of the text, three factors - early childhood experiences, family environment, and emotional experiences - explain the current characteristics of Elsa's language.

First, according to Elsa's early experiences, her illness left her frail as a child, and her parents forbade her from leaving her bedroom on her own because they feared for her safety. She maintained a low profile and kept quiet at home. She was used to missing important family gatherings and receiving frosty treatment from her relatives. Elsa was cautious around her family because she had nothing to be proud of, and it felt like her parents had always seen Elsa as a necessary but unimportant presence. On the other hand, her two sisters, who were of average height, average build, good temperament, and attractive looks, married the ideal man at the ideal age and were the pride and joy of their parents. With the neglect of her parents and the contrast of her sisters, Elsa's language gradually becomes less confident and habitually ingratiating.

Secondly, the family environment shapes her language. The conversation between Elsa and her mother and father on the day before her twenty-fifth birthday shows that Elsa is passive in her relationship with her parents. The father and mother always use questions and rhetorical questions in their conversations, giving the impression of aggression. For example, "Why are you still up?" "Is this the time?" "Do you have to be educated?" "Are you still hiding a talent from us that we don't know about?". The father's position in the family was high, in a position of no doubt. He would not hesitate to interrupt Elsa if she said something that did not meet his expectations and offended him. The mother, on the other hand, is the enabler of this up-and-down relationship, working with the father to stifle Elsa's inner desire to know, and the father orders the mother to give Elsa something to calm her down. From previous experience, Elsa knows that in every conversation she has with her parents, she is not qualified or powerful enough to change her situation. In order to be recognized and approved by her parents, Elsa, as a daughter, has to conform to her father's standards. Elsa's mother is the spokesperson for her father, who has domesticated her mother in a patriarchal society, and whose husband's standards are the standards of the society at the time, and under which female language is an inherently flawed language - because she deviates from male language.

Thirdly, looking at Elsa's relationship and marriage experiences, Elsa became pregnant out of wedlock and was driven to Rafi's house by her family, with no possibility of ever returning home. Not only has Elsa lost the home she grew up in, but she has also prevented Rafi from going to university, and she feels guilty and ashamed that she has ruined the young man's life. Elsa's low self-esteem makes her always more eager to say things that will satisfy Rafi, such as: "Elsa didn't know how to answer ..... Did he mean something else ..... He sighed, so she knew she had said the wrong thing". Here Elsa hesitates and weighs her words in order to please Rafi, making sure she satisfies the other person by reading their point of view. In a way, this is Elsa's way of attaching herself to the object, of pleasing it, through her silent and tangled words, and, one might say, of placing herself in a subordinate position to the other.

One of the reasons why Elsa's language style is not innate is because of the different demands and expectations of men and women in the family and society, with men being seen as strong and carrying the weight in traditional society, while Women are marginalized and seen as the 'second sex' to men, as the weaker sex, and so women make their linguistic style in dialogue fit the social expectation threshold - the expectations of men - just as Elsa's language fits the expectations of her father and husband. The same is true of Elsa's language [11].

Certainly, the gendered language researcher cannot deny that gender has no bearing on language, nor can he or she go so far as to claim that gender determines all linguistic variations. Therefore, the

factors affecting language are very sophisticated, involving ethnicity, region, human psychology, human physiology, culture, educated, social status, nature of occupation and even sphere of activity. The vocabulary Elsa uses before and after her travels to California varies greatly. Elsa's language before she leaves home tends to be ingratiating, cautious, and reluctant in its presentation and is distinguished by a high number of ellipses and dashes in the text, which are affected by her oppressive surroundings. For example, when Elsa tells her father that her expectations have been rejected, she tends to agree with him rather than resist "Yes ... Yes. I know, but-" "See- Sorry. I'm just ... " "Okay. Of course," she was always interrupted by her father when she tried to make a point, like "I just thought--".

After leaving home, however, Elsa's language style is more competitive and proactive, influenced by a variety of factors, including her environment and experiences. Elsa is out on her own with her two children, she cannot rely on any men and has to rely on herself to make ends meet. Elsa no longer waits passively in the face of difficulties but is happy to call on everyone to "Let's do it, explorers". "Elsa's words are no longer full of inferiority and hesitation, she speaks up in the face of oppression and says, "Don't give up!"

Therefore, in the study of sociolinguistics, it is important neither to deny the existence of gender language differences altogether nor to simplify complex issues, to homogenize the factors that influence language, and to overemphasize the role of gender in language.

## 6. Conclusion

The discourse between the heroine and men and women in the book *The Four Winds* was examined, and it was discovered that gender language is greatly influenced by personal experience, family context, and social environment, among other factors. Men's language is more competitive, while women's language is softer. Conversations between women aim to deepen relationships, whereas conversations between men and women aim to subdue and emphasize the other party. Women's conversations try to strengthen their bonds, whilst men's and women's conversations aim to influence the other person and emphasize particular benefits. Further, in female-male conversations, women are submissive and, in most cases, silent when interrupted by men.

To sum up, there are major differences between female and male language in terms of purpose and style, and this phenomenon is bound to cause friction between men and women in the communication process. To reduce the occurrence of such incidents, men and women should first understand each other's gender language characteristics, reflect on whether their own language has more curse words and impolite interruptions, and when they encounter disagreements with each other, they should impose their views on each other by listening rather than persuading, and only in this way can they promote the development of a harmonious society.

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