

In the Name of God



Razi University

**Faculty of Literature & Humanities
Department of English Language & Literature**

M.A.Thesis

**Constructing Gender Identity through Narratives based on
Halliday's Metafunctions**

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To my family

Abstract

Identity, its construction and presentation in discourse, have drawn attention of many researchers in the field. The present study focuses on the construction of gender identity of eight Iranian M.A. students through narratives of personal experience that are produced in Persian language. Data analysis in this piece of research consists of three parts: the first part is thematic coding based on which gender identity of participants is constructed through content analysis of their narratives; the second part is analyzing participants' identity based on a postmodern framework introduced by Norton Peirce (1995); the last part of analysis is analyzing narratives based on the three metafunctions of language introduced by Halliday (1985) in order to find out how these metafunctions can help us to understand how participants construct their gender identity. Based on these analyses, it was concluded that male and female participants constructed their identity differently. Also, participants' identity was not fixed; rather it was changing over time, multiple and contradictory, or a site of struggle. The results also showed that interpersonal and textual metafunctions can be used to construct identity. In addition, analyzing the corpus, it was found out that since Persian is a pro-drop language, we may have clauses which have no (apparent) theme. Moreover, it was concluded that the female participants used the interpersonal relation between the narrator and himself or herself, and the interpersonal relation between the narrator and the interviewer, more than male participants in their narratives.

Key Words: Gender identity, Narrative, Identity, Ideational metafunction, Interpersonal metafunction, Textual metafunction.

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Abbreviations

TTCTeacher Training Center

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1. Introduction

Gender is so much the routine ground of everyday activities that questioning its taken-for-granted assumptions and presuppositions is like thinking about whether the sun will come up. Gender is so pervasive that we assume it is bred into our genes.

(Lorber, 1994: 13)

Among numerous works examining different aspects of gender studies in general (Aries, 1996; Bloome & et al. (2005); Bucholtz, 2004; Butler, 2004; Cameron, 2005; Holmes, 2006; Janssen and Murachver, 2004; Lakoff, 1975; Mills, 1995, 1991; Peace 2003; Pennycook, 1998; Ridgeway, 2009; Rogers, 2003; Shelly Stagg and Kerrie, 2006; Tannen, 2004, 2003, 1994; and Wolfe, 2000), the notion of identity comes to attract significant attention (Barker and Galasinski, 2001; Butler, 2005, 1999; Cameron, 1995; Coates, 2007; Earle and Letherby, 2003; Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 2003; Lester, 2008; Mills, 2008; Rosenthal, 2003; Tannen, 2007, 2003; Wagner and Wodak, 2006; Weatherall and Gallois, 2003; Weedon, 1987; and Zubair, 2007). The study of gender and language might seem at first to be a narrowly focused field, but it is not. Tannen (1994: 4) believes that "gender studies are actually as interdisciplinary as they come". Researchers working in this area have their roots in wildly divergent academic disciplines, including sociology, education, anthropology, psychology, speech communication, literature, and women's studies, as well as linguistics. It must be noted, of course, that gender is cross-cut by other aspect of self-identity such as class, ethnicity, age, etc.

As a result of new understandings and theoretical developments based on which this and other studies are done, gender can be seen as "profoundly 'variable', and, even 'within an individual', 'multi-faceted' and 'shifting'" (Litosseliti and Sunderland, 2002: 31). Gender study in linguistics has accordingly undergone a radical shift of focus from 'gender roles' and 'gender differences' to a focus on variable identities (femininities and masculinities) and on gender not only as an individual, or even social attribute, but also as contextualized, changing sets of practices. Recently, we are dealing with the notion of continuous construction of a range of masculine and feminine identities within and across individuals of the same biological sex.

Wardhaugh cites Wodak (1997b: 13) and writes:

Gender is 'not a pool of attributes "possessed" by a person, but something a person "does". Elsewhere (1997a: 4) she adds that 'what it means to be a woman or to be a man [also] changes from one generation to the next and . . . varies between different racialized, ethnic, and religious groups, as well as for members of different social classes.' In such a view, gender must be learned anew in each generation.

Cited in Wardhaugh (2006: 316)

In the present study, we are dealing with the social construction of gender identity through narratives of personal experience. Analyzing narratives, I am going to discover how male and female participants construct their identity. De Fina (2003) argues that narratives not only reflect the individual's inner reality, but also shape it. Therefore, I preferred to ask my participants to narrate a personal experience in order to make them completely express themselves. Similar studies of narratives of personal experience focus on the postmodern

concept of the self. I will also follow a postmodern view of identity introduced by Norton Peirce (1995).

Moreover, this research is going to analyze male and female participants' identity based on the three metafunctions that Halliday (1985) has introduced for language. These metafunctions are: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. Ideational metafunction is used as a means of representing patterns of experience, interpersonal metafunction focuses on the interactive event involving speaker or writer, and audience, and textual metafunction is responsible for creating text. In this part of the present study, I aim to show how these metafunctions can help us to understand how participants construct their gender identity.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Identity, its construction and presentation in discourse, have drawn attention of many researchers in the field. There are many factors that influence the construction of identity among which gender is focused upon in this study. As a method for analyzing data, I will follow Halliday (1985) to show how these three metafunctions of language can be used to construct gender identity. The present work tries to explore these issues in eight Iranian M.A. students' narratives of personal experience. My aim is to examine whether metafunctions of language introduced by Halliday can help us to understand how participants construct their gender identity or not. In other words, I want to know how each of these gender groups makes use of these metafunctions in their narratives.

1.3. Research Questions

In this study, my main objective is to answer the following questions:

1. How Iranian male and female M.A. students, who participated in this study, construct their gender identity through narratives of personal experience?
2. How male and female participants of this study construct their gender identity based on a postmodern view of identity?
3. How Halliday's metafunctions of language can help us to understand how participants construct their gender identity?

1.4. Significance of the study

As a social institution, gender is one of the major ways that human beings organize their lives. In other words, gender norms are inscribed in the way people live. In spite of this, there are only a few research projects in Iran regarding gender-related studies. In addition to this limited literature, there is a gap in this field especially considering gender identity. Hence doing research related to such issues is of great importance. To the best of my knowledge, no work has been done on Iranian postgraduate students regarding the way they construct their gender identity. No work, also, has been done on constructing gender identity based on the three metafunctions of language introduced by Halliday (1985). Therefore, this study will provide a good resource for the future studies in linguistics regarding constructing identity.

1.5. Limitations of the study

As this study is about gender, the gender of the researcher may affect the results of the study. I came across instances of such effects during the process of data collection. As a result of the gender of the interviewer, i.e. being female, female participants felt more intimate than male ones. They also tended to narrate more easily and show less hesitation regarding telling their most personal experiences of life. To lessen the effect of this factor, I tried my best to provide an intimate and friendly atmosphere during the interview and while the participants, especially male participants, were narrating their personal experiences.

1.5. Scheme of the work

Apart from this chapter which gives a general picture of the work, I will organize the thesis into six other chapters as follows. In Chapter 2, I will present an overall view of the most fundamental concepts and theories of the present study together with some related studies, which have been conducted within the same theoretical frameworks. I will bring together summaries of some works related to identity, gender identity, narrative and identity, and Systemic Functional Linguistics. I will point to the study conducted by Norton Peirce (1995) regarding a postmodern view of identity. Also I will refer to the works of De Fina (2003) and Benwell and Stokoe (2006) about narrative and identity. Regarding gender identity, I will refer to the views of Coates (2007), Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003), Butler (1999), etc. Halliday (1985), Ivanič and Camps (2001), and Eggins (2004) will be considered next to discuss Systemic Functional Linguistics.

In Chapter 3, Methodology, after providing a short description of the corpus, I will describe the process of data collection. Then I will explain in detail the procedures I undertook to accomplish the research. Data analysis of this study includes three parts: analyzing gender identity, analyzing identities based on a postmodern view, and analyzing Halliday's metafunctions of language which are ideational, interpersonal and textual metafunctions.

The aim of Chapter 4 is to construct gender identity of the participants through their narratives of personal experience. In this chapter, using thematic coding, I will explain through examples how male and female participants constructed their identity and what features they used to construct their gender identity.

In Chapter 5, I will explore identity of the participants based on a postmodern view. In this present study I have adopted Norton Peirce (1995) classification for different kinds of identity. She introduced three different features of social identity, namely 'social identity as changing over time', 'social identity as non-unitary (i.e. multiple) and contradictory', and 'social identity as a site of struggle'. In this chapter, I will show how my corpus conforms to these features of identity.

In Chapter 6, I will analyze my corpus based on the three metafunctions that Halliday (1985) introduced for language. In ideational metafunction, I will analyze different processes to find out which process is the dominant one in the narratives of each gender group and also compare the frequency with which male and female participants make use of different processes. Then, based on interpersonal metafunction, I will compare the two gender groups in the frequency of using statements, questions, commands, and offers in their narratives. Finally, I will analyze textual metafunction.

The final chapter provides a summary of the present work, its objectives, frameworks and results. In this chapter I will answer the research questions stated in Chapter 1, and clarify the possible conclusions.