Chapter III

Differences in Language Use Patterns of Women and Men in Private and Public Sphere

This chapter aims to focus on the everyday linguistic practices or language use patterns of both women and men in ‘private sphere’ as well as in ‘public sphere(s)’. The public sphere is considered as an area in social life where individuals can come together to freely discuss and identify societal problems, and through that discussion influence political action. It is "a discursive space in which individuals and groups congregate to discuss matters of mutual interest and, where possible, to reach a common judgment.” The public sphere can also be seen as "a theatre in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk" and "a realm of social life in which public opinion can be formed". On the contrary, the private sphere is the complement or opposite to the public sphere. It is a certain sector of societal life in which an individual enjoys a degree of authority, unhampered by interventions from governmental or other institutions. Examples of the private sphere are family and home. Martin Heidegger argues that it is only in the private sphere that one can be one's authentic self. In classical sociology, influenced by Greek Philosophy, this public versus private distinction was mainly based on a public world of politics and a private world of family and economic relations. However, in modern sociology, the distinction is normally used in reference to a separation of home and employment, a juxtaposition which has been seen as the basis for a traditional gendered division of labour. Here these meanings of private and public spheres have been adopted and applied according to the requirements of the research.
Language use in home domain or private sphere refers to the usage of language within familial settings. In this research, the respondents were asked about their language usage vis-a-vis their male counterparts in different socio-cultural and socio-economic situations. The departure point here was to identify whether women and men speak differently both in private as well as public spheres, a pertinent question that was raised primarily by Robin Lakoff (1975) and subsequently drew attention of almost every sociolinguist working on gender and language.

1. **Differences in Women’s and Men’s Language Use and Speech Pattern:**

More than three decades ago though Lakoff identified a serious problem in everyday conversational practice i.e. whether women and men speak differently and even if she argued that language is fundamental to gender inequality, but if we look at her explanations and insights from a critical point of view, all these are not absolutely acceptable. However, these are undoubtedly helpful in not only understanding the issue of our concern but also in making further statements or explanations.

Most of the respondents in this study agreed upon the point that women use a more soft and polite approach than that of men. Men in general were conceived of as more casual, free and frank during their linguistic practices. One important feature that the respondents attributed to men’s style of speaking was that their language more often reflects a tone of aggression and domination, while being far away from showing concern for others. In this context we can refer back to the dominance theory (Spender, Fishman, West and Zimmerman) which envisioned the differences in linguistic practices of women and men in terms of men’s domination and women’s subordination. Besides this, ‘differential socialization’ pattern was also regarded as being responsible for different behavioural patterns in general and language usage in particular. Learning gender specific behaviour and activities as well as adhering to gender specific societal
rules not only create stereotypical patterns but also impose upon every individual the expectation and sanction to act, behave and speak accordingly. This tacit alignment with the socially sanctioned norms of linguistic behaviour serves to strengthen the role of discourse as a site for construction of gender stereotypes. Research on gender and language structures as well as studies on language and construction of social identities have clearly shown that language cannot be a neutral medium for expression of Self. (cf. Cameron 1995, Eckert/McConnell-Ginet 2003, Mills 1995, Romaine 1999, Thorne/Kramarae/Henley 1983). Meanings are created and imparted in the process of language use. Language comes with its social, cultural and historical baggage and is to say the least as loaded as any other system of symbols. But it is in the context specific discourse that the individuals interpret meanings and views from these symbols. Thus, language is considered as a two pronged device, on the one hand giving voice to identities but on the other hand constructing identities suited to the social palate. One is not denying that language could be a medium to transcend gender dichotomy, to break out of hierarchical social structures or to subvert the enterprise of social differentiation itself. However, it must be made clear that examining the cultural roots of language use calls for an awareness of the role that language plays in perpetuating established stereotypes. As Marlis Hellinger points out "contrary to the assumption that language merely reflects social patterns such as sex-role stereotypes, research in linguistics and social psychology has shown that these are in fact facilitated and reinforced by language." (cf. Hellinger 1984: 136). Thus as the respondents have opened up their minds to speak on this issue we can refer to some narratives to throw light on their individual perceptions.

Urba (31 years, Govt. Service): Yes, of course, in regular conversation men and women speak differently. Usually women speak more formally than men, whereas men are a bit casual in regular conversation, though it may depend on the cultural background but they are different.
Debasree (36 years, Private Service): See, there is difference due to differences in character and nature of persons. Females are much more polite, they think before saying something that whether they should say it or not, whereas male persons do not even care to do that. They say anything very easily and they are generally not so polite. Despite our participation in workforce and everything our society is still male dominated due to which men speak differently.

The concept of male domination has not only been perceived of and talked by women of the higher age group i.e. women who are in paid jobs; rather most of the students have also expressed similar opinion regarding the issue. It is believed that society in the 21\textsuperscript{st} century is still ‘patriarchal’. As we all know literally being the meaning ‘rule of the father’, the term patriarchy was originally used to describe social systems based on the authority of male heads of household. However, it has now acquired a more general usage, especially in feminist theories, where it has come to mean male domination in general. Sociological in general and feminist research in particular has documented an enormous range of instances of patriarchal domination and of course linguistic usage is not an exception there. In most of the cases both women and men accept and approve the prevalent patriarchal domination because of their childhood socialization as well as because of the gender-stereotypes, which still act as one of the most dominant ideologies. Due to the male domination in society even in very subtle and underlying manner, men can very easily express anything and everything without being bothered about others, whereas women always think more before speaking and give importance to whom they are talking to.
Thus as Rumela (39 years, Legal Practitioner) said, “When girls talk, they control their words, emotions but boys don’t. Our controlling power is much more. Girls can’t address someone easily as ‘Tui’ (you) but boys use it very often. They always want to dominate”.

Besides, it was also admitted by most of the respondents that women are much more soft and sober as well as polished too, when it comes to the question of using language in general. They not only speak politely but also try to follow the ‘standard forms of behavioural and linguistic patterns’. Here we find huge similarity with William Labov’s findings where he stated that men use a higher frequency of nonstandard forms than women in stable situations (1966). By standard forms here is meant those linguistic forms or words that are grammatically correct, properly pronounced and also used or applied at proper and exact situation. According to the respondents women use these forms more often than men do and also they most often go for perfection and exact views. Moreover, while men have the tendency to speak in a brief and generalized manner, women are more inclined to use personal and subjective expressions through language. This kind of views has been expressed by several student respondents as well as the women in paid jobs. As put forward by – Sukanya (21 years, B.A. 3rd year student): there is difference between women and men because of the nature that they are born with. Men are with force and have masculine way of speaking while women have feminine way of it. Generally females use more of subtle words, not hurting anyone; while men use more rude approach because of their inherent masculine nature.

Some respondents also expressed that men are not only straightforward but often consider everything from their own perspective without taking into consideration others’ viewpoints. Here we can refer to Carol Gilligan’s theory of ‘Moral Development’ (1982), where she used a ‘gender perspective’ to determine whether males and females make moral judgements in
different ways. She found that while males use ‘justice perspective’, where they perceive anything to be wrong if the existing rules define it to be so, females always adopt a ‘care and responsibility’ perspective, which entails that they consider something to be wrong if it damages relationships.

One respondent Anindita (24 years, M.B.A. student) thus opined, “Men are not only casual, but sometimes they act very rude and they often take things for granted. In their case ‘concern’ is low, but on the other hand women are much more inquisitive, concerned as well as supportive”.

Another respondent Pamela (41 years, School Teacher) shared, “Girls think and speak. Exceptions are there. We are aware of the person who is sitting in front of us, what is his/her status, if she/he minds any of my words. We normally think in these perspectives before we speak. But it does not normally happen with the boys. Here also exceptions are there. Girls think in all respect and then speak. But boys don’t. What they feel at that moment they just speak that”.

Moreover, some respondents also observed and added that women and men face different normative expectations regarding their language usage. It is often found that what women are taught not to say both in public and private domains, men can and also they do say very easily and casually. It has also been noted that people also use language to colour themselves as they talk. Linguistic resources can be used to present oneself as a particular kind of person; to project an attitude or stance; to affect the flow of talk and ideas. And these can involve gender in a myriad of ways. Tone and pitch of voice, patterns of intonation (or ‘tunes’), choice of vocabulary, even pronunciations and grammatical patterns can signal gendered aspects of the speaker’s self-presentation. They can also signal the speaker’s accommodation to, or enforcement of, the gender of other interactants in a situation. At the same time, the association of these linguistic devices with feminine or masculine ideals makes them potential material to
reproduce or to challenge a conservative discourse of femininity or masculinity. For example, using a soft, high-pitched voice invokes the connection between female gender and smallness and fragility. Avoiding profanities, or using euphemistic substitutions such as ‘fudge’ or ‘shoot’ invokes the connection between female gender and propriety (Eckert, 2003: 61).

In this context it is worth mentioning here that almost all the respondents of this study commonly hold the notion that men usually have the tendency to speak in high note. They not only shout more than women, but also often use more harsh language as well as numerous number of swear words and slang languages. It must be made clear here that in this study ‘swear’ and ‘slang’ words are not used synonymously. While slang words in literary terms refer to jargon or colloquial speech, swear words refer to vulgar or coarse language. But, it should also be mentioned that most of the respondents were not aware of this intricate distinction while commenting on these issues. However, as the respondents have used the term, slang has referred to any kind of bad or abusive language, which according to them is mostly used by males in our society. For instance, one respondent expressed:

Sweta (39 years, Doctor), “there is some difference between women and men regarding their language use patterns. May be due to different levels of exposure this difference is there. Unlike women, men generally have the tendency to use slang words more, though nowadays women also often use such words, especially the young generation”.

Another respondent Kakoli (39 years, School Teacher) also shared same opinion. She said, “Mainly our society is patriarchal society, hence what men say women generally admit and accept that. Men or boys use more slangs or swear words during their conversation, while in comparison women do not use these so much”.

In this study it has also been reported by the respondents that gender differences in language use patterns are more evident within the private sphere or comparatively intimate or
close public relations, whereas according to some respondents, in workplaces women and men often use or follow same linguistic patterns.

Thus as Sharanya (21 years, B.A. 3rd year student) stated, “Except for some boys and girls, generally girls and boys speak differently. Boys can talk very freely, but due to some societal norms and rules women often hesitate to speak as freely as boys. However, in professional field most often both speak in the same way.”

There the approach or way of using language often remains the same, while the content of the speech differs. So what is being observed here is that most of the respondents do believe that women and men speak differently indeed and that these instances of differences are often quite apparent in both private and public domains. Thus, realistically speaking it can be elucidated that gender stereotypes linked to gender ideology reproduce naturalized gender differences whereby hegemonic male dominance is sustained over female subordination. And since women themselves also accept this situation habitually as ‘natural’, they often yield to the surrounding state of affairs and thus gradually become incapable even to recognize and realize the degree and intensity of their so-called second-grade existence vis-a-vis men.

2. Issues discussed among Women and Men in Same-Sex groups in Private and Public Spheres

The previous discussion focused mainly on the differences between women and men in their speech pattern or style of speaking. However, differences are also found with regard to their issues of discussion both in private and in public spheres. Some respondents revealed during the study that women and men not always differ from each other in their approach or in the ways language is used. Rather often the speech pattern remains the same, while their area under discussion or subject matter of the conversation differs.
Thus as Chandrei (35 years, Assistant Professor in Pvt. Engineering College) said, “I don’t think that there is difference in their approach. Only the content of the speech differs.”

Many other respondents also shared similar opinion that the topics or issues that women discuss among them very often differ from that of the men’s group. However, they also often share same and equal space when it is a mixed-sex talk or conversation. More exposure, close and intimate bonding with some family members or even friends or peers often help them overcome their inherent inhibitions to act in certain ways, to talk in certain specific manner and feel free to use language the way they want to use it. The topics of discussion also vary from private to public sphere, since every individual does not share same kind of relationship with everyone in their very close private domain and comparatively formal and impersonal public domains. Therefore, in the following section we would provide detailed discussions about this under two separate sub-sections.

**Issues discussed by and among Males in Private Spheres:**

As we have already seen private sphere refers to the close and personal space of an individual’s life, without any interruption or intervention from outside, therefore in such settings the discussions also occur at a very informal and personal level. However, it should also be considered that even often within the private sphere the content of the discussions differ to a large extent according to the gender differences.

Data revealed that in same sex groups both women and men discuss about issues that are often different from that of the mixed-sex group situation. According to most of the respondents, among the male members (of the middle age group e.g. above 35-40 years) within the family discussions or conversations are mainly regarding personal problems, their own career,
workplace tensions etc. Besides, children’s education, sports and politics are also the commonly talked about topics among them.

As Nandini (30 years, Govt. College Lecturer) expressed, “When my father, uncles both paternal and maternal talk among themselves they usually talk about politics, sports, savings etc. However, in case of junior male members the discussion extends up to cinema, politics, sports followed by future plans, food and restaurant etc.”

Another respondent Anwesa (30 years, Govt. Bank employee) shared, “within same age group men in my family generally talk about their jobs, regular activities etc. and they also share funny things or incidents etc.”

Moreover, it has also been visible that men of the same age group especially the middle aged males also often talk about current affairs, financial investments, family problems, health problems of the elderly etc.

According to Sarmistha (32 years, Teacher), “when my husband talks to his close friends they mainly bring allegations against their own wives, saying that other’s wives are much better than theirs...apart from this, they also discuss topics related to their office and job, recent sports like IPL etc.”

So, it can be delineated here that sports and politics have always been men’s favourite topics for discussion. Therefore, Deborah Cameron (1997) has once suggested that ‘sportstalk’ is a typically masculine conversational genre. However, it can not be generalized that men of same age groups always talk more on sports and politics because the topics of discussion also change according to the age itself. Therefore while some topics are commonly talked about among men of one age group, some other topics may be more widely accepted in another group. For
instance, as we noted in the earlier narrative of Nandini, in her own family males of the lower age group talk about things which are not usually discussed among the middle aged or older men. In this regard many respondents shared similar opinion that when it comes to the matter of discussion among the older members in the family they generally talk about older times, cherish memories of their past and of course they often have a tendency to compare between the past and the present times and at the same time complaining about the present generation as well as things of this time. This is more or less common for all the respondents.

For example, Suchandra (20 years, B.A. 2nd year student) expressed, “my grandparents generally criticize modern times. They always say that previous times were much better, our old native house was much better....like this.” The respondents also added that most of the time the topics of discussion among both older male and female members remain the same. Apart from talking about the past they also share their opinions about their health, their children and other family matters. However, it was also noted that there are certain issues which are mostly discussed among the females of the older generation.

Nevertheless, males of same age group especially males of the middle ages also share among themselves their problems of life. According to the respondents most of the males talk about their family matters, how they run their family, about their children’s education, future etc. When the males talk to their siblings or cousins or even very close friends they also discuss about financial matters, their health problems, the health problems of their elderly, any crisis situation etc. Many respondents also added that sometimes these males also talk about their childhood days, their friendship and share their tensions and problems of life (both personal and professional). It was also expressed during the interview that generally the male members talk freely and nicely with their fellow beings. They often talk in a casual and frank manner with their
peers, younger relatives or friends and with enough respect and dignity with their elder family members. While some respondents said that almost all male members of their family share similar language use pattern with each other, many respondents did not agree with this point and expressed different opinion. They focused mainly on individual perceptions rather than collective representations.

Thus Sarmistha (25 years, M.Phil student) told that: “Every individual has different way of speaking, so language use pattern is also different. Actually here the differences are due to individual differences as well as differences of situations. Generation gap is also a factor here. The way my father talks to my uncles, younger to him, my uncles talk to my father with much more respect. So age is also an important factor.”

It was outlined from the discussion that the male members of same age group talk about numerous socio-cultural as well as economic and political issues among themselves. However, considering the lower or junior age group, it was reported by the respondents that young boys or young male members primarily discuss about their studies, education related matters like tuition, examinations, friends etc. It is an interesting fact to notice about the youngsters increased inclination or tendency towards using as well as talking about electronic gadgets, information and communication technology like internet, computer games etc. Entertainments like cinema, movie stars, recent music also occupy a greater proportion of their talk among their own sex and age group members. Besides, if the young males are from same educational institution they often discuss about the environment of their college or university. Most of the respondents also agreed upon the matter that boys or males often perceive and discuss anything from a perspective quite different from that of a girl or woman. Thus given the situation of a marriage ceremony if boys
are asked to describe it in their own way and girls from their viewpoint, differences will be found definitely.

As Srijita (25 years, M.Phil Student) said, “If girls are to describe or if they start telling about a marriage ceremony to anyone they mainly focus on decoration, the bride’s make up, dress, ornaments, food etc. But on the other hand boys do not usually go into such details and they mainly talk about the food and sometimes may be about the bride.”

Another respondent Payel (19 years, B.A. 2nd year student) expressed, “We usually are attracted to things like food, then bride and groom, decoration, jewellery, costumes etc. But boys are generally attracted towards food. Besides, they also talk about girls present in the wedding and also about their own issues.” It was deduced from the respondents’ replies that boys or males often don’t go into intricate details of anything while they talk among their own group and they use language the way they want to use and thus if we call it ‘boy’s talk’ or ‘men’s talk’ it is not free of expletives or swear words. They do not also hesitate to talk about their intimate relationships, personal problems and even sexual orientations and relations. Thus while talking within the same sex group males are usually more at ease than they are in other situations.

However, it has also been argued that almost all men in a particular group have the tendency to talk first as well as present and establish their own point before others in advance. Here reference can be drawn to Cheshire and Trudgill’s (1998) work that emphasized that men generally use several conversational strategies that can be described as a ‘competitive style’, stressing their own individuality and emphasizing the hierarchical relationships that they enter into with other people.
However, respondents of this study differ significantly from that of the views presented by various sociolinguists like Jennifer Coates (2004) that all-male talk most often include contest, battle and gladiatorial, all of which derive from an underlying metaphor that equates talk with conflict. On the contrary respondents here have argued that conflict situations might arise while a conversation is going on within an all-male group, an all-female group or even in a mixed-sex group.

One of the respondents Manashi (35 years, Assistant Professor in Engineering college) said, “whenever we all in our family sit together for discussing something it depends on the topic of discussion. Like if it is politics then all people start giving their opinions and it might end up with hot discussion and whenever the discussion is about buying a new thing like car we exchange our opinions in a cooler fashion.”

So it is not the case always that males conversation is turned to some quarrel or disagreement, rather the all-male talk can also be a peaceful one with proper exchange of words, opinions and also ‘gossip’- that respondents of this research conceived of not as something that only the females ‘do’ but also is a common attribute of men’s talk in present times.

It is conventionally accepted that gossiping is something that women do. In everyday talk, ‘gossip’ is a term used almost exclusively of women’s talk and it is a term which usually has pejorative connotations. Using a term such as ‘gossip’ draws attention to the fact that the language women use when talking to each other has not traditionally been treated as serious linguistic data. By contrast, men’s talk is seen as ‘real’ talk and has always been taken seriously. (Coates, 2004: 103). Jones later (1990) also identified four distinct kinds of conversation among women, which she viewed as different varieties of ‘gossip’. These are ‘house-talk’ (occupational
talk which is the housewife’s equivalent of ‘talking shop’); ‘scandal’ (which involves the verbal policing of other women’s behaviour); ‘bitching’ (a form of troubles-talk involving complaints about men to other women); and finally ‘chatting’ (which is purely phatic).

**Issues discussed by and among Males in Public Spheres:**

After having an overall idea about men’s language use patterns and discussion in the private sphere this research also attempted to throw light on the language use of men in the public spheres as perceived by the women respondents. However, it should be mentioned at the very beginning that the research did not take into account directly the opinion of any male member and with regard to the public sphere the female respondents claimed that since not all of them regularly interact with males of their family in the public places so they can only provide an idea about men’s linguistic usages in the public spheres, based on the experiences that they have had about their male family members, friends, colleagues etc.

In this study public places have referred to primarily educational institutions and workplaces and in some cases some other situations might be considered as public. Here also we find some differences of opinion among the respondents. While some respondents agreed that the male members of their family talk in the same way in both private and public places, some others expressed that due to the presumption that private and public are two different genres, people often act, behave as well as talk differently in these two separate domains. Narratives of some respondents will help us to understand this situation better.

Gargi (25 years, M.A-distance education): “Yes, in my family males talk almost in the same way at home and in public places. For example, when my father or uncles go to market or their workplace they treat senior or junior members equally and talk with equal respect. My brothers
or other male relatives of the younger ages when go to school or college they talk respectfully with the teachers, the way they talk with their parents at home. So it is almost same.”

Moumita (19 years, B.Sc 1st year student): “No, my male family members do not talk in the same way in home and in public places. Since at home a friendly atmosphere is there and workplace is completely different, so I think in different contexts people should talk differently.”

Debapriya (33 years, Assistant Teacher in Govt. School): “No, I don’t think they talk in the same way in private and public places…not at least with my husband. I have noticed that when we go somewhere in taxi he often shouts at the driver and also uses slang language, which he never uses at home with me. And with his friends also he sometimes uses different kind of language.”

Most of the respondents agreed on one point that in informal settings generally people or more specifically the male members do talk in the same way but in formal settings the talk is much more context bound and formalized. Moreover in public places they have a tendency to impress others or to leave some positive impact, which will not only maintain their impression but will also help them save their ‘face’ in certain situations. This is quite closer to Erving Goffman’s theory of ‘Impression Management’, where he argued that people are sensitive to how they are seen by others and use many forms of impression management to compel others to react to them in the ways they wish.

As put forward by the respondents, male members of their family or peer-group or even workplace share almost similar pattern of language use and discussion among their own group i.e. in an all men’s group. In public places they not only discuss about common topics that they also share with their family members or intimate friends, but also one important fact has been
identified i.e. these topics often differ from that of the topics discussed among both gender - male and female.

For instance, according to the respondents usually men in their respective workplaces often share a very friendly and frank relation with others. They often like to spend their time in workplace as well as talk to their colleagues in a jovial and frivolous mood, however work does not get hampered here. As the respondents expressed, work related matters occupy the most important place of the discussions among males. Besides, just like men talk about politics, sports etc in their private domain they also follow the same in the public places. When the respondents were asked to throw light on this particular area, most of them provided similar opinions.

As Tusni (38 years, MNC employee) put forward, “it is hard to tell what men talk about more among themselves in workplace. But as far as I hear or know, they often talk about girls or women. If some new person joins the company then also they talk about him or her...like who is more beautiful etc...we just get a hint or clue only.”

Similar point has also been raised by Sahana, (36 years, Pvt. Service- Vodafone), who said that men mostly talk about work. Apart from work, women and otherwise primarily work.. but they don’t respect the females. Though she has expressed a negative attitude towards her male colleagues but she also thought it was not the case always. Like since she is in a very higher and prestigious position in her office she receives immense respect from her junior colleagues and here males or females do not differ. Ultimately in all possible ways it has been admitted by most of the respondents that men in general even in workplace take a different approach while talking to their colleagues and it has also been argued that their topic or subject matter of discussion remains same to a large extent in both private and public domains. However exceptions are
always being there. Males usually do not share their personal problems at workplace with everyone.

As Barnika (34 years, Lecturer in Govt. Sponsored college) shared her views: “at workplace men generally talk about work related issues, work problems, politics and sports etc. Only sometimes they share personal problems there.” She further added, “Their approach is very often different, they talk more formally than that of women in general and often their approach is too loud also.”

It is from this perspective that sociolinguistic researchers often claimed that men do not ‘gossip’, that they usually deal formally with each other. However, as we have seen and referred earlier all-men’s talk can also be labelled as ‘gossip’. Like following Sally Johnson and Frank Finlay (1997) it can be enumerated that men also participate in gossip. They focused on men’s talk about sports particularly football. All these research actually reflect the fact that there are several aspects of men’s talk that can be labelled as ‘gossip’. There can be both competitive elements as well as cooperative elements alongside their tendency to avoid topics related to personal lives and focus more on sports related issues (Coates, 2004: 104).

**Issues discussed by and among Females in Private Spheres:**

The female respondents of this study provided the researcher with a detailed account of their own language use patterns vis-a-vis their male counterparts in both private and public realms and they have also given a clear comparative outlook in this regard. In this section the focus is on women’s linguistic practices in home domain as well as in different public places viz. educational institutions and workplaces. The research has also put emphasis on the topics of their discussion in same sex group as well as in mixed sex groups. We have already noted from the accounts of the respondents that women in general adopt a gentler and soft speech pattern as
compared to men. Not only that, their overall language use pattern, their discussions in both private and public places also often differ from that of the males. This can be better understood if we focus separately on women’s language use pattern/s in various socio-cultural or socio-economic situations.

Many respondents also admitted that they have a tendency to talk with their family members and friends or colleagues in an adjusting tone. They always ‘talk their minds’ while giving equal importance to the person or persons interacting with them. That implies they not only talk but also listen carefully and patiently to other speakers. Here we can refer to those Sociolinguists, who have investigated the talk of all kinds of single sex-groups, old and young, middle-class and working-class, from a variety of different cultures. One observation that has been something of a constant is that, while men tend to disagree with or ignore each other’s utterances, women tend to acknowledge and build on them. It seems that men pursue a style of interaction based on power, while women pursue a style based on solidarity and support. Cheshire and Trudgill, summarising research on the links between gender and conversational discourse, come to the following conclusion:

It seems clear that, other things being equal, women and men do have a preference for different conversational styles. Women- in most western societies at least- prefer a collaborative speech style, supporting other speakers and using language in a way that emphasizes their solidarity with the other person. Men, on the other hand, use a number of conversational strategies that can be described as a competitive style, stressing their own individuality and emphasizing the hierarchical relationships that they enter into with other people (Cheshire and Trudgill 1998: 3).

As described by the respondents of this study, they themselves along with their female family members generally talk quite freely and frankly with each other i.e. in an all-female group.
However, some women under some specific situations might speak in some other way but the general approach remains same for almost all women in question. Their sober and placid approach is also reflected in the discussions they are involved in.

According to Mahua (31 years, Lecturer in college), “My aunts (both maternal and paternal) are quite friendly to me. They are frank and open when they talk to me. Ever since the demise of my mother, I feel I have come much closer to my aunts. I usually share my problems with them and talk to them when I am worried or in a pensive mood. I talk mostly about various family affairs with my aunts and with my elder sister I share about family affairs, personal accounts, films and music and also cooking.”

It has been realized while conducting this study that in most of the cases language remains same, while the approach of different persons as well as their different and varied outlook to use language in various situations creates differentiation. And that is why we find what we call ‘women’s language’ or ‘men’s language’. Here one important point should also be mentioned that women and men often talk about or discuss about different things. This can be an obvious effect of socialization, where not only children of different gender are treated differently but also that they are taught to adhere to different set of behavioural patterns followed by different types of toys, clothing, studies and finally also to different kind of jobs. This ‘gender socialization’ has enormous impact on the way language is used by both males and females in private and several public spheres. Thus we find diversity in their thought process, speaking style, choice of words as well as topics of discussion. As mentioned in the earlier section, while boys or men are more likely to talk about sports, politics, friends, jobs, current affairs etc. women have the general tendency to speak about their personal matters, family affairs, friends, movies, shopping, outing etc. and many more.
As one young respondent Arpita (20 years, B.A. 3rd year student) said, “With female friends we discuss about lots of topics like films, page-3 topics, lots of ‘gossip’, fashion, education and many more. However, with male friends the topics are mainly education and love life.”

Sanghamitra (31 years, Lecturer in college) expressed, “In my family women mostly talk about family matters including household chores, expenses, children, cooking etc., while they share same things plus exchange opinions about newspaper, television, current affairs with the men in the family.”

So what we find here is that in an all-women discussion family issues along with personal matters occupy the most important place. With regard to this it can be argued that gender is a critical factor in structuring the types of opportunities and life chances faced by individuals and groups, and strongly influences the roles they play within social institutions from the household to the state. Although the roles of men and women vary from culture to culture, there is no known instance of a society in which females are more powerful than males. Men’s roles are generally more highly valued and rewarded than women’s roles: in almost every culture, women bear the primary responsibility for childcare and domestic work, while men have traditionally borne responsibility for providing the family livelihood. The prevailing division of labour between the sexes has led to men and women assuming unequal positions in terms of power, prestige and wealth. Despite the advances that women have made in countries around the world, gender differences continue to serve as the basis for social inequalities (Giddens, 2010: 614).

And linguistic practice or usage is also one genre where such inequalities and differences are found to a large extent. Due to women’s traditional role playing and long time association with home domain and household work, still now such areas occupy a predominant position of their life and also even their interactions with others. Thus when the respondents were asked to throw
light on their topics of discussion with fellow female members, as a whole it was found that personal, familial and household matters are the most discussed topics among them. The following narratives will help us better to understand these arguments.

Ratnabali (38 years, Textile Designer in a Private Company): “In my family my mother, sister and I generally talk about household matters, daily marketing etc. We also discuss about the illness and health status of the elderly in family, about various entertainment issues, newspaper or magazine articles and also about our relatives...that means we usually talk about everything.”

Banasree (43 years, Teacher in a Private School): “I talk to my daughter about her studies, friends everything. Generally I rarely interact with my mother-in-law, but when I talk to her I talk about family matters, my daughter’s education, mother-in-law’s health etc. With my mother I share everything about my husband, daughter, mother’s health, about my elder sister and brother-in-law... all these kind of things.”

Sayani (20 years, B.A. 3rd year student): “I share lots of things with my mother like educational topics, career oriented matters etc. Besides, when my mother talks to my ‘mashi’ (aunt) there is more fun and very normal ‘gossip’. However, when my grandmother steps in and joins the discussion of my mother and aunt they generally talk about serious family matters, where advice is required. Moreover, television serials, children’s education and other family centred talks are the most discussed issues.”

As deduced from these narratives, family centred talks or arguments are the widely used topics or issues of discussion among females of same family. Though with age often the topics vary, yet some commonality is maintained in all possible cases. Many respondents also claimed that generally women like to talk on various ‘homely issues’ as well as light matters. In reality, the
fact is that women and men speak differently or adopt different approaches while talking to each other primarily because of their ‘differential orientation’. While, traditionally and cross-culturally men usually have more access to various aspects of public spheres than that of women, women’s comparatively lack of opportunities to interact in and experience nuances of public domains often leave them far behind from participating in several public realms.

As described by one respondent Madhurima (30 years, H.R Manager in Private Firm), “Men tend to speak more about career related matters, office, sports, outside world, politics i.e. broader aspects etc, whereas females speak more about micro aspects, home, children, friends, family, emotions etc.”

They not only share about daily household chores like cooking, food, daily expenses and children’s education but also about films, serials, music, shopping, outing etc. They often focus on the intricate details of what they are talking about and at the same time try to maintain a minimum decorum in all situations so that they do not hurt anyone or do not perform in a way that is not accepted by the society at large. Herein once again Goffman’s theory of ‘impression management’ and also the Symbolic Interaction theories of Charles Horton Cooley (Looking Glass Self, 1902) and George Herbert Mead (Mind, Self and Society, 1934) seem to have relevant connections. In all these theories arguments have been placed in favour of human individuals, who are not only socialized with the help of various socializing agents but also develop the ability to construct and reconstruct self images on the basis of which they interact with fellow human beings and thus enable themselves to live collectively in the society. Mead wrote that, ‘the critical importance of language in the development of human experience lies in this fact that the stimulus is one that can react upon the speaking individual as it reacts upon the other’ (Mead, 1934: 69). He also postulated and would have agreed with Wittgenstein that there
are no private languages, rather language is social all the way down and this social constitution of language make people aware of others, present in the interacting situation. Following this line of argument it was noticed that nearly all women have a tendency to think in advance what others, interacting with them, will think about themselves and thus this perception often leads them towards developing their particular behavioural patterns as well as linguistic practices. According to the respondents’ accounts, females often tend to adopt a suggestive and cooperative standpoint. They often avoid harsh or conflicting situations where they have to be vocal enough to make others understand their viewpoint. However, it has also been noticed that not all females fall under this category; especially nowadays the young generation are strong and stern enough to establish their point of view in front of others in both private and public situations. They often raise their voices against inequalities and are capable enough to fight back situations, which in earlier times were difficult to be handled or managed by them. It has also been revealed that women in general talk freely within a same-sex group. They are more at ease while talking to female family members, friends or colleagues rather than men. However there are exceptions, specifically when in present day fast-paced world boys and girls share same platforms in almost every areas of their life. In this context different narratives will throw light on these two different arguments.

Soumi (21 years, B.A. 3rd year student) shared, “I think females scold very much. They always try to impose what to do and what not to upon others. However, I talk very freely with females in my family- my mother and my ‘didi’ (sister). I share everything with my mother and sister. The topics which I can not discuss with my father I can discuss with my ‘didi’ very easily like whatever problems I am facing in my college, what things are happening in my life etc. My mother always explains things to me and gives real life examples which she has experienced in
her life. She also tells me to share everything with her so that I do not take a wrong decision that creates further problems in my future life and she also gives suggestions. Besides, family issues, upcoming occasions etc. are also discussed between us.

Munmun Das Sarkar (42 years, Doctor): “In our family women usually talk in a good approach, though sometimes it becomes loud. Their language usage is very polished and they talk just like the males in the family. They do not discuss much about cooking and everything, rather talk about health issues, what is to be done in the house etc. My mother-in-law often talks in a dominating way to my father-in-law, but she speaks very nicely with her sons and also with us.”

Sharanya (20 years, 3rd year student): “In my family with my mother I talk about everything like my studies, health issues, matters related to daily life, criticism of others (what we call ‘PNPC’), familial issues etc. But in our parents generation women tend to speak in a controlled way, while in our case it is not so. We say what comes to our mind very easily.”

So, in a nutshell it was perceived and admitted by the respondents of the study that women in general speak in a softer and sober way and discuss among themselves things that are not always talked about in front of males. They mostly use language in a gentle, refined as well as understanding manner with proper organization of words and phrases and also with respect and consideration for other speakers. Though sometimes they also adopt other styles like talking in a very calculative way but they always try to provide proper explanations about what they are trying to say and convey. Their frankness with other close and intimate females help them share their common and regular matters like health problems, food, movies, dress, shopping, internet and social networking sites to very personal matters including that of family problems, love affairs and physical (sexual) relations, emotions and sentiments etc. Though women or more
specifically young women nowadays also often discuss about sports, recent politics and current affairs but in general terms their topics of discussion often differ from that of men and also one interesting point is that women speak about some issues more with other women while they share some other things more with men.

**Issues discussed by and among Females in Public Spheres:**

In the previous section we went through women’s language use pattern and topics of discussion in private sphere. But since women of different age groups are also involved in various public fields, hence a brief account of their linguistic practices is also worth mentioning here. In this particular research two different age groups have been considered viz. young college or university going girl students of 18-25 years of age and educated women in paid jobs belonging to the age group of 30-45 years. As we have noticed here, women of these two age groups are involved in or associated with mainly two different public realms, namely educational institutions and respective workplaces (e.g. school, college, court, govt. office, private sectors etc.). In this section women have not only opened up about their own language use patterns but they have also attempted to provide an account of the linguistic practices of other women, present in the public places.

To begin with, most of the respondents reported that in both private and public places women tend to adopt same approach to language use. Their already mentioned soft and sober nature and approach are clearly visible in various public places also. When the respondents were asked about whether they talk in the same way in private and public places, mixed responses were obtained. While some respondents of both age groups claimed that neither of their female family members speaks in the same fashion in private and public places, some others argued that
linguistic usage does not differ from private to public situations. The explanations behind these arguments state that people in general and women in particular often have the tendency to speak in a different way in public places to maintain their ‘face’ (discussed earlier in this chapter) as well as follow a gentle approach so that their socio-cultural status is also maintained. They often do not speak as freely and frankly as they speak in their home. While respondents who believed that they or their female family members do not speak in the same way in private and public domains actually focused on maintaining a transparent and clear approach in both the situations. According to them, since language is the most important mediums of communication and expressing one’s ideas, it should always be free from any kind of value judgments or prejudices. Language should also be considered as the mirror image of an individual so that one can easily discern what he/she or other persons are talking about in private or public situations is actually the truth or the exact opinion of that person. Thus in such situations, as the respondents claimed, one’s clear and genuine image is being maintained.

While talking about women’s linguistic practices in various public places points which were highlighted are what approach or style do the women adopt when they communicate with others in public places, on what issues do they speak the most within their own gender group and also with people of the opposite gender. In this context we should firstly distinguish between the respondents on the basis of their age and involvement with the public realms. As we have mentioned earlier half of the total respondents belong to the age of 18-25 years and they are mainly students of college or university or other higher education institutions. That implies that educational institutions are their most important and frequently visited public place, whereas for the second section of the respondents i.e. women in paid jobs, belonging to the age group 30-45 years their workplaces refer to the same. Therefore, in this section we will focus on their
linguistic practices in public places separately so that we can have a clear and comprehensive picture about this.

According to the younger respondents when they talk to their female friends in college or university they mainly follow a good approach. They also adopt a free and frank style of speaking in such situations. They more or less share everything with their close female friends and also often give suggestions as and when required and also seek advices from their friends in certain situations.

As one respondent Rituparna (19 years, B.Sc. 1\textsuperscript{st} year student) expressed her opinion, “Language use patterns of me and my female friends are soft, gentle and modest. Honesty plays an important part while females are in a group and discussing about something.”

Another respondent Ananya (19 years, B.A. 2\textsuperscript{nd} year student) also shared, “Me and my female friends follow a gentle and polite approach to talk to each other. We generally use Bengali, or sometimes talk in Hindi or English and talk about various serious and light matters, whereas with the distant friends I just adopt a formal approach of ‘hi’, ‘hello’.”

It was almost admitted by all the respondents that within their own gender group and of course within their close friends’ circle they usually talk with each other very frankly, by sharing their extremely personal as well as different formal issues. In a way their talk or more specifically the talk among same aged friends or peers can be considered as ‘friendly talk’. They not only share and exchange opinions, rather generally have in mind the tendency to develop intimate bonding with fellow-speakers. Their talk is mostly friendly, frank and often informal in nature. Here we can refer to Jennifer Coates’s work ‘Gossip Revisited: Language in All-Female Groups’, where she has also described women’s talk in almost the similar manner. Besides approach, another
important dimension of women’s language or more specifically women’s talk is their topics of discussion. Among the student respondents chatting with intimate friends or peers even in the public places include several issues starting from studies to personal matters or entertainment. Here some narratives again will help us in grasping the actual situation in a comprehensive fashion.

Nibedita (19 years, B.A. 1st year student): “With my female friends we generally discuss about studies, current affairs, films, fashion and also gossip.”

Debannita (22 years, B.A. 3rd year student): “We talk about everything..dress, style, future, films and boyfriends etc.”

So, here we can see that young girls in their own group like to share about their personal life including their daily chores, their dress and style etc. It is often being noticed that young girls especially after attaining their puberty get exposure to the outer world, which was previously not completely known to them. Moreover, impacts of globalization along with huge media exposure and growth of information and communication technology also often radically change the norms and values of the youth in modern times. It is often argued that youth in contemporary societies are the major players in constructing and deconstructing their numerous identities. It is in this transitional phase that individuals innovate new ways and attach new meanings to various aspects of their life. During youth distinctive fashions in the clothing and hairstyle, music and dance etc. are being noticed and it is in this life stage that language-change is also most clearly visible. And as the young respondents have revealed their talk involves discussion about all these things as well as something more also like sharing their personal problems or crises, emotions etc.
Thus Soumyosree (23 years, final year M.A. student) expressed, “We talk about practical and emotional topics. I am a feminist. I find satisfied with my female friends to talk about my emotions.”

Another respondent Anita (20 years, B.A. 3rd year student) also said, ‘with my female friends discussion is mainly on various personal issues.’ So, in most of the instances we can find that young girls or women like to share about a number of issues including their studies, several health problems, personal matters etc. with their co-speakers of the same gender. However, it should also be mentioned in this regard that these girls do not interact with their friends only in the public place/places. They also come into contact with other female and male members there, belonging to varied age groups. For instance, the girl students also interact regularly with their teachers and other non-teaching staff members respectively and the most notable departure point here is that the approach of the respondents towards members other than their friends often varies to a large extent. While talk between the same aged young female friends is livelier, full of fun, excitement, frankness on the other hand the talk among these young girls with their teachers reflect enormous respect, politeness, reverence and in some cases a level of freeness and frankness also. Being more formal in nature this kind of talk includes discussion about issues like studies, career, future prospects etc.

As expressed by one respondent Dipika (21 years, B.A. 3rd year student), “I talk to my teachers in a good and gentle manner with respect.”

Another respondent Rikta (19 years, B.Tech student) said, “In school life we used to talk less with the teachers and there were more respect. In college on the other hand, with teachers I don’t feel a gap, I talk quite frankly.” Overall we can say that since teachers are in a much higher social position in terms of their seniority, educational qualification etc. young respondents
mostly talk respectfully with them. Here the teacher-student relation also plays an important role, where students through the process of socialization learn how to behave as well as talk with their elder members in both private and public places. Apart from this, in educational institution, which is the most significant public place of a young individual’s life, their interaction with other staff-members i.e. non-teaching members also project a combination of respect, gentle and good approach.

One of my respondents Mayuri (19 years, B.Com 2nd year student) narrated, “In my college the non-teaching staff members are very friendly and cooperative. I generally talk to them informally, while with teachers I follow a normal respectful approach with a formal tone.”

In this context, one point is worth mentioning that with age interaction pattern including language use, topics of discussion also changes to a large extent. For example, in this study it has been noticed that the way the student respondents talk to their friends varies largely from the way they talk to their teachers or other members in the educational institution. Similarly teachers and other members also tend to follow specific patterns of language use with the students as well as within their own group. As Jennifer Coates has shown, certain patterns reflect that despite being appropriate in specific age groups such as among teenagers they simply disappear as the young individuals grow older. These are labelled as age-graded patterns. The extensive swear word vocabulary which some teenagers use is likely to change over time. The frequency with which they use such words tends to diminish, especially as they begin to have children and socialise with others with young families. Thus, while students within their peer group are more likely to use such language, their teachers or parents do not tend to use these and it has also been noticed that children are taught from the very beginning that they should not use swear words in front of their elders. That is why they often restrict themselves from using such things even in several
public places. Slang is another area of vocabulary which reflects a person’s age. Current slang is the linguistic prerogative of young people and generally sounds odd in the mouth of an older person (Coates, 2004: 167). As the respondents have opined in this study that in present times they or more specifically their male friends often use ‘slang’ (referred to as swear words) in front of their close friends only, but they usually do not use these in front of strangers, their elderly or seniors or even those with whom they share a purely formal relation.

With the second category of respondents, linguistic usage in public sphere refers to the respondents’ language use patterns, approach and style of speaking, topics of discussion in their respective workplaces. The responses obtained here often do not match completely with that of the younger student respondents. Since this section of respondents belong to the age group 30-45 years and are involved in paid jobs, often their linguistic approach and attitudes towards talking to people in the ‘public’ workplace depend upon their designation or position at workplace as well as their socio-cultural and economic background. Most of the respondents agreed that workplace is quite different from that of one’s private spheres and thus should not be treated in the same personal and informal way. Workplace does not only refer to a kind of public sphere meant for economic activities, rather it has its own code of conduct, formal rules and regulations to bind the individuals together for the betterment and development of the particular concern or organization in question. According to some respondents at workplace they mostly adopt a formal and impersonal approach while talking with others and focus more on their respective jobs, while some others also opined that since they spend quite a long time of the day at their workplace they often develop a good, friendly relationship with some of their colleagues. This again supports women’s collaborative linguistic style as proposed by Cheshire and Trudgill,
where they emphasized the fact that women use such language use patterns and talking style that help them build relation e.g. friendly relation with others.

In the words of Swagata (39 years, Psychological Counsellor), “I talk very friendly with my female colleagues. We generally talk about our family, ‘saree’, and cinema everything, like music, story books, studies, politics – all these are discussed between us.”

Debasree (36 years, Employed in Administration in a Pvt. Firm) shared, “When we get off time or break, we have our food together and also then we talk and chat very intimately just like friends.” But many times women do not share same friendly relation with all their colleagues at workplace, depending on their age, mentality, socio-cultural background or in terms of the interpersonal relationship that they share.

Thus according to Antara (33 years, Assistant Professor in an Engineering College), “I don’t talk in the same way with all. With some of my female colleagues I just talk normally, while with some others I do talk in a friendlier way.”

Similar views have been expressed by Sarmistha (school teacher), who said, “I talk formally mainly since I do not have intimacy with everyone. With few female colleagues at my school I talk in an informal manner. Sometimes there are ‘hot exchanges’ otherwise just casually, normally we speak and since we all are busy at school we hardly get time to talk. However, with the higher authority I talk both formally and freely by maintaining a distance and with the subordinates I generally speak in a very cordial and personal manner.”

Respondents here not only stressed on their approach of using language with others at workplace, they also focused on the various arguments or discussion that take place there. Thus we can get a clue about their topics of discussion in the respective workplaces. It is being noticed
that following the ‘collaborative’ style of speaking, which is also referred to as ‘rapport talk’ by Deborah Tannen (1990), women in their workplaces often share about several personal experiences and issues with their female colleagues. This is often for the purpose of building personal relationships as well as women usually prefer to talk in private context. Narratives given by some respondents establish this fact more firmly.

For example, as one respondent Jhilam (34 years, School Teacher) expressed her views, “I talk to my seniors very respectfully and with my contemporary people I joke, share various experiences, talk about cinema etc. I have very doting senior teachers and other same aged colleagues are very supportive. They even help in times of crisis. We mainly discuss about things related to our school and overall there is a cordial atmosphere.”

Almost similar views have been put forward by another respondent Tusni, working in a multinational company. As described by her, “If the age group is same then it is more like a friendly talking. Even in my case I have very good friendship with one colleague, belonging to the age of 56 years, while among the young crowd also I have very good terms with a girl of just 27-28 years. In general there prevails a friendly atmosphere.”

While discussing about workplace-conversations or talk and gender it is worth mentioning that interaction in the workplace can be productively viewed as social practice in action. Interacting participants are constantly negotiating meaning, and in the process reproducing or challenging the larger social structures within which they operate. The culture of the workplace is also constantly being instantiated in ongoing talk and action; it develops and is gradually modified by large and small acts in regular social interaction within ongoing exchanges. Larger patterns are established through the accumulation of repeated individual
instances, and each instance gains its significance against the backdrop of the established norms. From this perspective, people simultaneously perform a number of different aspects of their social identity, including gender, in their ongoing talk. Workplace culture is a multi-dimensional, complex concept, and one of those dimensions is often the masculine-feminine dimension. As they talk to others throughout the working day, people enact their ethnicity, their professional status, and their gender identity (Holmes, 2006: 15). In analyzing workplace talk, it is important to take account of the many and various influences on how social meaning is encoded and interpreted. These embrace the wider situational context of interaction, including the contribution of ideology to interpretation, the role we are enacting, the social setting in which we are operating, who we are talking to, and what about- these are all crucial for understanding the discourse, and for defining our social identity in any particular encounter. As Deborah Schiffrin noted, ‘social identity is locally situated: who we are, is at least partially, a product of where we are and who we are with’. And whether gender is fore grounded, or an aspect of the taken-for-granted background, is similarly contextually relative (ibid: 17).

Language Use Patterns of Women and Men within Mixed-Sex Groups:

It has often been argued that same-sex talk or conversation varies from that of mixed-sex conversations to a large extent. The respondents felt and shared that people do not talk in the same way in both private and public spheres and also that there are notable differences in their style of speaking, attitudes towards co-speakers as well as issues or topics of discussion in same-sex groups vis-a-vis mixed-sex groups. It was expressed by quite a large number of respondents that since women have often been socialized in a different fashion as compared to men and also due to their relatively lack of exposure to the public world, previously they often used to develop among themselves a docile approach, which taught them to be subservient and silent in front of
their male counterparts. Though time has changed and women in recent times are valiant and vocal enough to raise their voices in both private and public realms, yet they still often lag far behind the males regarding establishing their respective point of views. Male domination even now is a widely accepted phenomenon, which is inherent in every layers of society and is constantly supported by existing social rules. Language use is also not an exception here. As Robin Lakoff and several other researchers have already shown, women’s linguistic practices vary largely from their male counterparts. Interestingly women’s linguistic usage with men specifically in the public domain is always under scrutiny. Their language use pattern is not only compared with that of the males but they are also taught and dictated how they should talk with men in their family or elsewhere in the public spheres. However, during the study it has been noted that nowadays situations have changed a lot. Now there prevails more of a kind of equal situation, where women and men share same amount of space and also share with each other an equal and friendly relation both in private and public places. Thus, when it comes to the question of conversation or talk between both women and men several dimensions can be found. Now, as far as verbosity is concerned, Smith and Connolly (1972) concluded that girls are both more talkative and more fluent. They talk more both to their mothers and to other children before the age of four years, but after that such differences disappear. However, as further research has showed, unlike children’s language in case of adult language women are found to talk less than men in mixed company. Certain research also suggests that boys dominate mixed conversation from an early age. Joan Swann’s (1998) analysis of classroom talk (using 9-11 year olds) showed convincingly that boys talked far more than girls, both in terms of the number of turns taken and the number of words uttered. However, research on interruption and simultaneous speech has found no significant differences between younger girls and boys. By the age of 15, though, boys
start using interruptions to dominate talk (Gilbert 1990). Parents also differ significantly in terms of both interruptions and simultaneous speech (Coates, 2004: 156). Besides this, politeness is another dimension of communicative competence where we find gender differences. Research on child language has concentrated on the way parents teach polite language, for example, formulae like greetings and thank you. Gleason (1980) studied parents and children in both natural and laboratory settings. She was interested in finding out how much explicit teaching of such formulae goes on. She found parents very consistent in prompting their children to respond with socially appropriate items, particularly thank you. Parents treated girls and boys similarly, but provided different models: the mothers used far more polite speech than the fathers. This was also the main finding of Snow et al. (1990) who studied the linguistic behavior of parents in twenty four families. Thus while girls and boys are both urged to use polite forms the children observe that it is predominantly adult females who use them themselves.

According to the respondents within the home domain women and men talk to each other in more or less a congenial manner, depending on the age of each other and the type of relation they share. Though sometimes male domination is quite evident not only in parent-child relationship but also among spouses, but this is not always the case.

One respondent Moumita (19 years, B.Sc 1st year student) said, “Generally the male members of my family talk softly with me. But when my elder brother gets angry he talks very rudely with me.”

Then as narrated by Sucharita (31 years, Govt. Service) her father and uncle used to talk in a different manner before she got a job. They were more domineering then and used to say that she could not do anything, she would not get anything. But after she got her job their approach has
soften down and now they talk quite softly, nicely. She further added that since she was accustomed with such situations, she also sometimes used to answer back in an aggressive tone. However she has also changed her style of speaking now. It was also shared by her along with several others that in home domain the males talk to the females generally in a casual and polite way. However, with age and personal relationship the approach varies from being more polite to being ruder. Here Deborah Tannen’s (1994) research on ‘Gender and Family Interaction’ is worth mentioning, where she has referred to the ‘Power/Connection Grid’ to interpret family interaction. She argued that discourse in the family can be seen as a struggle for power and also equally as a struggle for connection. She disagreed with earlier researchers’ explanation of one-dimensional model of power (or hierarchy) and connection (or solidarity) and also incorporated dimension such as closeness and distance. However she did not try to hypothesize anything, rather simply explicated that in family also interaction depends on the type of relationship i.e. whether hierarchical or equal as well as on the closeness of that particular relationship, which is absolutely time and context specific. She concluded by saying that power and connection are the dimensions along which human relationships are negotiated, and they are also the dimensions along which gender identity is negotiated (Holmes, 2006: 180-182).

As one respondent Chaitali (22 years, B.A student) said, “The way my father and uncles talk among themselves, they just talk equally nicely in the same way with politeness with the women in family.”

Sushmita also expressed similar opinion. According to her, “In my family males and females talk very freely. They talk to each other in a loving way and with enough respect. They never speak roughly or rudely.” Besides, it was also noticed that usually though males talk freely and politely with the females, but that also depends who is talking to whom and in what context. Like the
way a husband talks to his wife or a wife talks to her husband differs from the ways they interact with their children or other people at home.

For example, as Urba (31 years, Govt. Service) explained, “When my husband and brother in law talk to my mother in law they talk of course casually but with me much more friendly, since I am not their mother.”

It was observed that the respondents more or less believed that differences in situation or context also influence the speech pattern of both males and females, implying thereby that our ‘talk’ or more specifically our language is not only socially constructed but is also context specific. This view has been propounded by postmodern sociologists also, who believed that language is a social construct that ‘speaks’ and ‘identifies’ the subject. Since the most significant function of language is to communicate information, any form and source of knowledge to become information has to be contextualized. Thus, in different socio-cultural contexts people or to be more specific both males and females often act, behave and also talk differently. This is true for all who use language to interact or communicate with others.

As one respondent Lalti (31 years, School Teacher) explained, “In my family the males talk politely with the females. However sometimes they also speak rudely or roughly depending on the situation.”

So, what is evident here is that the pattern of language use between the males and females is not a fixed one; it varies from one context to another, on the basis of the interactants’ mutual relationship, their socio-cultural background as well as personal opinions and outlook.

Mixed-sex conversation or talk does not only occur in private or home domain. Women and men come into contact with each other in several other situations, which can be labelled as
public spheres, like in this study educational institutions, workplace etc. It has often been argued that just as the talk between same-sex groups often differ from private to public sphere, similarly mixed-sex conversations also often differ from one context to another. However, it should not be taken for granted that linguistic usage and attitude towards co-speakers always differ from private to public domain. An overview of the empirically obtained insights will help us in understanding this area as well as in relating the practical instances with the existing theoretical arguments.

Among the student respondents though not all have regular contact with men in their colleges or universities, but they have provided an account of their interaction or more specifically their language use pattern with males they are acquainted with in various public places. Though all student respondents did not or do not attend co-education colleges, many of them claimed that they do not have male friends. Not only they are more close to and at ease with their female friends, but also that they have hardly had any direct interaction with any male of their age. However, it was also noticed that many respondents not only had close friendship with same aged males but that they used to share with them very personal matters just as they do with their female friends. According to most of the young respondents they and their male friends talk quite frankly and friendly with each other and they prioritize friendship over gender, due to which they do not face any problem in identifying with their male friends. They usually adopt a casual and jovial approach among themselves.

For example, Sukanya (21 years, B.A. 2\textsuperscript{nd} year student) shared, “I talk in the same way with my female and male friends. Our approach is very jovial and friendly. I use certain language that I can’t use with my parents, and at times I am rude with them as well.”
In this study half of the respondents, belonging to the age group of 18-25 years represent the ‘youth’ life-stage. Youth as a distinct stage of a human individual’s life is usually defined and described as the period of constructing social identity on the path to adulthood. Youth is not merely a biological age, but a social institution (denoting the transition period between childhood and adulthood), which emerged and developed with modern society and economic development that made the youngsters free from the responsibilities of adulthood. Youth identities in general are no longer considered as static and prefigured. Focusing on identification in and through interaction, identity is generally better understood as an product of language use rather than as an analytic prime and that focus should be not on identity per se (which suggests a set of fixed categories), but rather on identification as an ongoing social and political process (Bucholtz and Hall, 2004: 376). This process-based notion of identification has caused linguists to question our preconceived ideas about the naturalness of the relationship between speech and speakers.(my article) Along with the concept of youth as a distinctive social category, comes the term youth culture, which revolves around the two dominant dimensions of youth: self-representation and group affiliation. It is in this stage that individuals innovate new fashions in their clothing and hairstyle, music and dance and nonetheless language. Thus for a section youth at least it is often ‘change’ is the name of the game. Sociolinguists worldwide have agreed that adolescence and youth are the life stages in which language change is most clearly visible (Kerswill 1996). Young people are the linguistic movers and shakers, at least in western industrialized societies, and, as such, a prime source of information about linguistic change and the function of language in social practice (Eckert 1997a: 52). Youth language refers to all patterns of language use in the social age of adolescence encompassing all ranges of linguistic descriptions.
Language is, at all times considered to play an important role in shaping the identities of the human individuals first, because language is the expression of a collective identity which in some way already comes predefined in individuals as a result of their socialization (generally associated with the territory) and which connects them (or not) with certain “origins”; Second, language is also a living thing that precedes and is defined irrespective of its speakers, thus constituting an internally coherent system that must be protected from external influences; and finally, the “natural” expression of identity is to speak “one’s own” language; speaking another or speaking it with “interference” from others is frequently a sign of aberration that requires explanations and excuses.

However, since during youth individuals attach new meanings to various aspects and several external factors (including peer pressure, media exposure, popular global culture patterns and increasing impact of information and communication technology etc.) also influence them, their lives undergo enormous transformation, effects of which can easily be discernible in their newly developed life-style patterns. Youth is that phase of an individual’s life when they act as ‘agents’ rather than being simply the ‘passive recipients’ of the action and events of the social structure. They are the major players in constructing and deconstructing their numerous identities. In contemporary plural societies subject to the impact of migration and global circulation of information, commodities and visual images, the range of identities available to individuals has become more flexible and complex. Young people are now more likely to embrace and revise the new cultural flows, due to their distinctive generational experiences as well as youth culture’s demands for innovation and originality. Youth identity practices, therefore provide important insights into the ways in which broader categories and categorizations become fluid and porous in an era of transnationalism and flexible citizenship.
(Ong, 1999), globalization and technologies of virtual mobility (Castells, 2000), migration and diaspora (Brettel 2003; Papastergiadis 2000), the “traveling” of theory and culture (Clifford 1997; Said 1983, 2000), “Creole” cultures (Hannerz 1996) and “liquid” lives and times (Bauman 1992). The new forces of social change like Westernization, Modernization, Industrialization, Globalization, Politicization of issues and Media exposure have changed the norms and the values of the youth throughout the country. In the course of India’s different phases of social transformations, significant changes are seen in their societal norms and values, which have deep impact on the youth. And this impact is well represented in the language use pattern of the young men and women as well as in their topics of discussion.

Thus as Sukanya further added, “We generally talk about new technology, recent apps, relationship status, places of entertainment, cricket as well as education, future plans also.” Episodes of social transformation have also made individuals free from the rigid binding of gender, class or caste etc. and many more. Close and intimate relationship with friends of opposite gender are nowadays not looked down upon as something ‘objectionable’, rather people perceive ‘friendship’ as just a true and genuine relationship, where everyone is equal and free to express his/her opinions.

In the words of Arpita (20 years, B.A. 3rd year student), “I usually talk with my male friends in a charming mood and never use slang language. I don't have any hesitation in mixing with them. When both my female and male friends are there we generally talk about filmy gossip, our love life, education etc.”

Another young respondent Mayuri expressed that: “We mainly have a friendly and casual approach in college. When we all are together, we discuss about one common thing i.e. studies.
Besides, we talk about outing or travelling, shopping, friends, restaurants etc.” These students also share among themselves various college related matters, their education, exams and career. Not only that, apart from the serious discussions, they also talk about cinema or movies, politics, sports, songs etc. while chatting in a mixed-sex group. They usually follow a light approach, though sometimes depending on the relationship between the speakers the approach gets formal and rude too. However, in general the youngsters prefer to talk on new books, fashion, cricket, current affairs, mobile phones, and other new gadgets. Another most talked about issue of their discussion is about talking of their teachers, their style, personality as well as method and style of teaching etc. They also share about their family problems with their close friends irrespective of their gender. Often being in funny or humorous mood the young individuals are more likely to look at their life from a very light and frank perspective, while not ignoring the background and basic standard of their life. Thus, we find that though the young respondents often do not feel free to mix with their male counterparts, but in present times they usually follow a casual approach to talk to each other. There might be differences in the way the women and men speak, their attitudes to each other but in general in mixed-sex talk or conversation in present times youngsters of both genders share a common platform and whatever new linguistic practices they introduce, all of them have the tendency to follow these.

Besides this, since the study also includes the responses and perceptions of women in paid jobs, belonging to the age of 30-45 years, it is now necessary to focus on their dimension. That implies that the discussion about mixed-sex conversation or talk should also incorporate the views put forward by the respondents about the linguistic usage of both women and men in their respective workplaces. To begin with, workplaces are not merely considered as ‘workplaces’ rather as the most important ‘public place’ where the individuals spend most of their time. They build up
professional and sometimes personal relationships with co-workers or colleagues. Their interpersonal relationships along with their professional status and designation determine their linguistic practices and attitudes towards others to a large extent. Unlike the young respondents, in case of the more mature and mid-aged working women respondents ‘mixed-sex talk’ does not always reflect same level of freeness or frankness as in the case with same-sex groups. Most of the women agreed upon the fact that in public place and more specifically in mixed-sex situations men often adopt a much more restrained approach while talking to women. Though at workplace, working for a long time often witnesses very good friendship between both women and men, but in general since it is a formal place of work, people usually tend to share an impersonal relation. That undoubtedly impacts their language use pattern, which is more of a formal kind as compared to that of the young respondents also. This projects that in public places or particularly in workplaces people do not always act or perform or even talk in the same way as they do in the private domain or with close acquaintances in the public domains. However, it was also noted during the study that women and men do not always maintain a distance while talking to each other as well as in front of many others. Thus, mixed-sex conversations are often casual, informal and free enough, where all the speakers can participate without any hesitation and also irrespective of their gender. And so even when they talk about work or job related issues with each other, they also share their opinion about other friends and colleagues, their personal problems, various funny incidents, several societal issues etc.

As Riya (32 years, Private Service) said, “Though we mainly talk about our work, but sometimes when we all are together, we often go out for shopping something for someone, i.e. for buying gifts also.”
Another respondent Moushumi (36 years, Govt. Service) shared, “When we all talk together, we generally talk about our families, then since males are there we also discuss about sports, politics etc. and usually there remains a friendly environment then.”

Differences have also been found among the respondents on the basis of their job or work pattern. Those women who are in educational institutions often do not regularly interact with men in their workplace since they do not have male colleagues and thus heir approach in public places especially with other males is quite formal and sober. On the other hand those who are in their specific jobs for a long time and also interact with males on a regular basis often do not feel shy or hesitate to be informal with their male colleagues. They talk about workplace politics to any work related issues, family issues, funny incidents etc.

As expressed by Swati (36 years, Pvt. Service), “In a mixed group we generally talk about everything, like that can be the criticism of ‘boss’ or any cinema, books, travelling etc. and mostly all these.”

However, it has also been reported by the respondents that their conversation with both men and women together also often depends upon the time and context. It is not the case that mixed-sex conversations are always peaceful and harmonious; rather there are troubles also, though they are solved mostly by the help of everyone present in that immediate group. Sometimes the males speak more than the females and vice-versa. Since everything is time and context specific therefore the linguistic usage and conversations among women and men also depends upon the social or socio-cultural scenario.

Thus, as Jhilam (33 years, School Teacher) responded, “When we are in meetings we talk formally. But in picnic we are very informal. We don’t discuss family issues then, rather make fun, talk about various incidents of our school and also do ‘leg-pulling’ of others.”
So in a nutshell, we find that in public places or more specifically in workplaces women and men tend to follow a cordial and informal approach while not crossing their limits and also by maintaining a minimum formality of the relations. Thus they discuss about work environment, new projects, their promotion and salary hike to new cooking recipe, fashion, movies, jokes and many more things. The approach of using language or speaking style also often varies depending on the person’s position in the workplace.

For Debapriya, (33 years, School Teacher), “In my school since the males are subordinate to us, we don’t discuss everything with them or in front of them. The females do not feel comfortable to talk freely with them.” Similarly, since the employer or ‘boss’ (female or male) is also in a hierarchically higher position, often the employees can not open up freely and casually before him/her. That is why most of the female respondents of this study as well as their other colleagues not only maintain a distance from the authority but they also follow a minimal decorum of their workplace. Hence, in mixed-sex conversations or talk the speakers are mainly each other’s colleagues, who share time together and also talk in such ways that not only help them in making relationships, but also strengthen their position in their places of work. One important point to note here is that maturity, experience and the personal outlook to distinguish between different situations often help people to deal with various issues of their lives and at the same time also help them to maintain a balance between private and public life. Thereby we find differences between the thought process, mentality and also the behavioural patterns of young and mature women respondents, which have been reflected here by their linguistic practices and perceptions about the linguistic patterns of their male counterparts.

In the words of Parnita (20 years, B.A. 3rd year student), “We try to talk in a straightforward manner, with using proper language. Generally my male friends have the tendency to establish
their argument and they also often use ‘slangs’. However, many times they do not say it consciously; just use it in course of talking with others.”

Another respondent Neetu (22 years, pursuing M.Sc) said, “I have seen when boys are with other boys they use slangs or rough words, but when they are with girls they don’t use these.”

That implies boys in general often hesitate to use ‘slang’ or ‘swear’ language in front of girls or even other elderly persons, assuming that this kind of language use can adversely affect their image in the public realm. It is also being argued that they do not use such things to avoid any kind of controversy as well as to show respect for the female and senior co-speaker or speakers.

Then Gomm (1981) recorded and analysed the conversations between young British men and women. The findings suggested that in both same sex groups as well as mixed groups men usually swear more than women. However, women do swear in their own ‘female’ group, but that proportion is definitely very low (Coates, 2004: 97).

Conclusion: Finally it can be concluded that the private-public distinction is often reflected in the behavioural patterns of both women and men, in the language they use, the way they talk as well as the issues or themes that are being talked about. Here home domain, referred to as private sphere represents intra-family communications, where the respondents along with their family members attend to various strategies especially to build solidarity between them. Despite having the power and connection line in family interactions, in general terms language use of women in private domain reflects their greater ability to express and share emotions with others and thus being able to work together as and when needed. Men, on the other hand, are not so much concerned about what is going on in one another’s minds and thus are more object-oriented and interested in things in the outside world. Moreover, in public places, often the approach or the
way language is used by both women and men differs from that of intimate private spheres. In public places individuals often use several formal and face-saving strategies for avoiding or preventing a conflict as well as securing one’s present social position. Though some people also follow and use same linguistic pattern in both private and public places but the content of the speech often differs from one context to another. Here, women’s subjective perceptions have reflected and put forward multidimensional views about language use patterns that can not distinguish between human individuals only on the basis of their gender. Rather other factors such as their age, personal relationship between the speakers as well as the specific context and place, they are interacting in also play significant roles in deciphering their linguistic practices and issues of discussion in daily lives.