CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1   Background of the Study

Language is thought of as the uniquely human part of a broader system of communication. Like gravity, language is one of those things which everyone is familiar but few can adequately describe and explain. Sapir (1921:8) states that language is a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions, and desires by means of voluntarily produced symbols. Further, Saussure states that language as an abstract symbol consists of a vocabulary and set of grammatical rules which govern how words may be combined to produce sentence (Graddol and Swan, 1989:5).

Language and communication are often defined as the human ability to refer abstractly and with intent to influence the thinking and actions of other individuals. Speech is the heart of communication and behind speech there is the presence of language. Speech is the manifestation of language, whereas language is the more generalized capacity on which speech depends. According to Montgomery (1995:xxii),

> "Language stands to speech like the rules of chess in relation to the playing of specific chess games. Just as playing chess depends upon participants sharing the same basic set of rules for the manipulation of its pieces, so language is constituted as a meaningful human activity only by virtue of shared conventions for the manipulation of its symbols."

We realize that no people have the same language because no people have the same experience of language. Therefore, all of us have different styles of communication with other people. Our style depends on a lot of things such as: where we are from, how and where we were brought up, our educational background, our age, and even our gender. According to Chaika (1994:3), people use language to reveal or conceal their personal identities, their characters, and their background, often wholly unconscious that they are doing so. Generally speaking, men and women speak in particular ways mostly because those ways are associated with their gender. Trudgill (1984:88) states that,

> "Linguistics sex varieties arise because….language….is closely related to social attitudes. Men and women are socially different in that society lays down different social roles for them and expect different behavior patterns for them. Language simply reflects this social facts…What is more, it seems that the larger and more inflexible the differences between the social roles of men and women in a particular community, the larger and more rigid the linguistic differences tend to be."

Further, he also says that sex varieties are the result of different social attitudes toward the behavior of men and women, and of the attitudes men and women themselves consequently have to language as a social symbol (Trudgill, 1984:94). The use of different linguistic forms by women and men, according to Holmes (1992:164), contrast to different degrees in all speech communities.

Gender differences in language use have always been an interesting issue to bring up into discussion or become the object of a research project. These differences began to be noticed at least as early as the seventeenth century in the societies visited by missionaries and explorers, and the interest these differences

caused often led to claims that in some societies men and women spoke completely different language. For instance, in some languages men and women have differences in vocabulary items in the way they use different words to refer to the same thing. In Japanese, for example, the word for *"water"* is *mizu* for male speakers, but *ohiya* for females. Another example is the Japanese word for *"stomach"*. Japanese men will use the word *hara*, while Japanese women will more likely to use *onaka* (Bonvillain, 1999). However, according to Trudgill (1984:80) actually men and women did not speak different languages. They rather spoke different varieties of the same language where the differences were lexical only. He argues that explicit and categorical grammatical and or even lexical marking of speaker gender is not the norm. Instead, people usually find differences in the frequency of certain things like words, pronunciations, constructions, intonations, or whatever, especially when the circumstances of utterance are taken into account (Trudgill, 1984). Coates supports what Trudgill says about the differences in men and women's language use. She says that all this debate about men and women having used completely different language is an overstatement. What tends to happen to varying degrees in various societies is that the gender of a speaker will determine or increase the likelihood of choices of certain phonological, morphological, syntactic, and lexical forms of a language while precluding or diminishing the likelihood of certain other choices (Coates, 1986:35).

Trudgill, Holmes, Coates and Chaika are just a few of the many scholars who discuss and show great interest to these differences on the way men and women use language or what many linguists refer to as men and women's language style. Back to the year of 1922, Otto Jespersen was the man who carried out the earliest discussion of gender styles in language. He published the very first piece in modern linguistics concerning "women's language." In his book he describes women's vocabulary as less extensive, keeping them in what he refers to as the central field of language – the "indispensable small-change of a language". He also claims that the periphery of language and the development of new words are only for men's speech. Much later, in 1975, Robin Lakoff published "Language and Woman's Place" and became one of the first women to publish theories on the existence of women's language. This 1975 book spawned dozens of studies on the existence and characteristics of women's language. Zimmerman and West (1975:116) and also Tannen (1990:24) were few of the many researchers who conducted a research on women's language style based on Lakoff's theories. At that time, many researches and studies have been mostly focusing on face-to-face interaction where two people or more of the same or different sexes physically meet and conduct a conversation.

Profound changes have been taken place in technologies of communication. Satellite television is now well established, cable is assuming an ever-increasing role, and many new applications are being developed for

techniques of "virtual reality," and the data or information superhighway is imminent. Even though many new techniques have been available for communicating in a mediated way, communication itself remains rooted in and dependent on our everyday ability to interact through language.

Computer is one of the products of the advancement in technology which experiences a fast and fascinating development in the world today. It is often said that computer technology is rapidly transforming the world in which we live. As a result, there are growing demands on almost everyone to become technologically literate. People may already use computer programs to type and create many type of documents, but they may still feel confused, or intimidated, by the publicity of Internet and the jargon people use to talk about it. The Internet was first introduced to the world with the development of ARPAnet (Advanced Research Project Association Network) in 1960s in the United States. Since then the function of computer has changed with the invention of the first version of the Internet. Now we can also use computer to communicate with other people from any different parts of the world through the Internet. Everyday more and more people surf the web or log on to the Internet. People get on-line from many places such as work, school, and home. Some people even becoming a Net addict by spending much of their free time surfing the web, writing e-mail, or talking in chat rooms. In short, Internet has been hyped as the most significant development in communication tools since the invention of newspaper.

Many have tried to define the Internet, which is also known as the Net or cyberspace, as the information superhighway, the online community, the electronic library and digital revolution. Basically, according to Teeler and Gray (2000:1), the Internet is a network of people and information linked together by telephone lines which are connected to computers. Research shows that more than 100.000 independent networks (public and private) are currently connected to form this vast global communication system. This is what Teeler and Gray call as the "road" of the information superhighway. There are many ways to transport information over the Net. Electronic mail or E-mail is one of the most commonly and widely used applications on the Net. Besides electronic mail, there are other text-based and multimedia applications that can be found on the Net such as mailing lists, newsgroups, chats, MOOs (Multi-User Object-Oriented dimension), videoconferencing, and the World Wide Web (WWW or Web for short). E-mail and other types of Internet application programs are known as the communication tools in Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) among language researchers.

Formerly, the majority of the Net users have been educated, middle or upper class men, particularly those with backgrounds in science and computing. Originally, they were the people who had access (Reid, 1991). Based on several studies investigating gender differences in the use of computers as Meunier (1996) cited, males tend to be more interested in computers than females and that males use computers more than females at a younger age (Collis, 1985; Fetler, 1985;

Fisher, 1984; Adam & Bruce, 1993; Murray, 1993). Other studies indicate that a preference for computer use, or lack of it, stems from socialization which takes place outside schools (Yelloushan, 1989; Kirk, 1992; Henwood, 1993). For instance, parents are more likely to buy a computer and video games for their sons than for their daughters (Levin & Gordon, 1989). Several studies also note that sex differences in computer use are engendered by the media which tend to advertise computer use essentially as a male activity (Sanders, 1985; Jones, 1997; Forsyth & Lancy, 1989; Dimona & Herndon, 1994). To conclude, societies display a cultural bias in favor of males as users of the computer, while societal reinforcement for female interest in computers is lacking. This also explains why women's participation on-line is less than men's.

Although many scholarly researches have been done on the implication of gender in communication, research in the area of Computer Mediated Communications (CMC) is a fairly recent development. According to Trias (1997), communication researchers and sociologists did not really begin studying the Internet until 1978, when Hiltz and Turoff wrote the book "The Network Nation". The arrival of women onto the CMC scene has sparked interest in communication differences between men and women. Although many researches on the use of the Internet have been done in the past decade or so, it was only recently that researcher begun to take the gender of users into account (Herring, 1994).

According to We (1993), CMC is an almost miraculous medium where people can communicate individually with each other, mediated by nothing more than computers and wires. Aware of this fact, many scholars have studied Computer Mediated Communication to explore whether gender differences in electronic communication actually exist, especially since gender is not readily apparent (unless specified) in on-line communication. Therefore, many claim that the virtual world erases gender differences and promotes a more equitable democracy for all. There are, however, still some scholars who believe that CMC is not completely gender-free. If we assume that men and women have different styles of face-to-face communication and use it for different purposes, will these differences carry over into the on-line communication? Are gendered speech characteristics elicited when in the physical presence of a member of the opposite sex? Or are gendered language socialized into each of us so firmly that we reveal our gender even through typewritten dialogue?

Several studies have been carried out to answer the question whether one can determine another person's gender just by reading their written words. In 1993, Gladys We conducted a research on cross-gender communication in cyberspace by sending a questionnaire to several different newsgroups and electronic mailing lists. Her main purpose was to find out (1) how men and women generally felt about communicating on-line, (2) what they think about the differences between communicating online and face-to-face. The results of her

research showed that both men and women feel that on-line communication help them to have a better communication with other people of different sexes than in face-to-face communication. Surprisingly, the study showed that the majority of people are aware of the person's gender they are communicating with. According to the result of We's questionnaire, 88% of the users think that men and women communicate with each other differently online than face-to-face. A higher percentage of women (45%) said they wrote their e-mail postings differently for men than for other women. However, most of the men (71%) responded that they replied similarly to postings whether replying to women or to men, although a lower percentage of men (29%) said that they posted differently for women than for other men. Another study on CMC was done by Herring (1994). She conducted a research to answer the question whether one can determine another person's gender just by reading their written words. She presented her findings in a talk at a panel called "Making the Net Work*." She said that men and women have recognizably different styles in posting to the Internet. She backed up this claim with research where she analyzed messages posted by men and women to various newsgroups. In 1997, Paolo Rosetti examined the implications of gender differences on language use in electronic mail discussion group. He carried out a project of informal research into the different styles women and men adopt when contributing to e-mail discussion groups. In his research, he identified expressions from both groups which appeared to have obvious or underlying expressions of

aggressiveness or supportiveness. Additionally, he also collected samples of language expressing opinions from both groups. His analysis was based on the assumption of an aggressive (male), supportive (female) dichotomy expressed by Herring (1994). Over the span of the third and fourth weeks of May 1997, Rossetti randomly collected 100 e-mail messages from a variety of e-mail groups spanning the following topics: bird watching, politics, auto racing, single parent issues, martial arts, teaching English as a second language, dog training, women's basketball, fire fighting, ecology, vegetarianism, computer aided software engineering, gardening, civil rights, and women's religion. From the data collected, he found a clear difference in the language used by males and females online. "Aggressive" expressions recorded in the messages written by men far outnumbered those written by women. Men also used far more openly aggressive language, including personal attacks and put-downs as well as "taboo" words. In contrast, women used far more expressions offering support and a deepening of their relationship with the readers. Additionally, women used much more open expressions of appreciation and thanks, while men used 'tighter' and less direct expressions. Furthermore, men are found to be more interested in presenting their personal point of view in order to present an 'authoritative' contribution to the discussion, while women were more interested in the contribution itself.

Based on the above explanation and the results of related studies, the writer is interested to find out the language features frequently used by men and

women when responding to e-mail postings from same-gender or cross-gender participants in online discussion groups. Since "Yahoo" is one of the largest and most popular Internet portals, the writer decides to collect 100 e-mail messages from a number of "Yahoo" discussion groups as the source of data in her study.

1.2   Statement of the Problem

In line with the background of the study, the major problems of this study are formulated as follow:

1. Do men and women use different language features when responding to e-mail postings from same-gender or cross-gender participants in "Yahoo" discussion groups?

2. What language features are frequently used by men and women when responding to e-mail postings from same-gender or cross-gender participants in "Yahoo" discussion groups?

1. 3   Objective of the Study

Derived from the above research questions, this study is intended to:

1. Find out whether men and women use different language features when responding to e-mail postings from same-gender or cross-gender participants in "Yahoo" discussion groups.

2. Find out the language features which are frequently used by men and women when responding to e-mail postings from same-gender or cross-gender participants in "Yahoo" discussion groups.

1.4   Scope and Limitation of the Study

Being aware of the limited time and broadness of the topic, the writer decided to limit the scope of her study as follows:

1. The study focuses on the investigation on the language features used by men and women when responding to e-mail postings from same-gender or cross-gender participants in "Yahoo" discussion groups.

2. The subject of the study is the writers of the e-mail messages. These messages are posted by members, both men and women at the age of 30s to 50s, of "Yahoo" discussion groups as a reply to other members' postings.

3. The writer makes use "Yahoo" Profile directory http://profile.yahoo.com to help her determined the gender of the email writer besides looking at the name provided at the beginning or the end of the messages. E-mails that are signed with neutral gender names and have no guarantee that the signature represents the actual gender of the writer (e.g. Paul could sign off as Paula, should he wish to) are discarded by the writer.

4. The data source of the study is e-mail postings randomly collected from one of the largest and most popular group directories on the Net called "Yahoo" discussion groups. Only groups with a "restrictive" membership are chosen by the writer in order to minimize the disturbances created in a no subscription group where anyone could post anything to any list (Shea, 1994:26). "Restrictive" membership means everyone who wants to join a certain "Yahoo" discussion group has to send e-mail with some personal information in it, like name and age, to get the approval from the group moderator and be able to post their messages.

5. The e-mail messages collected by the writer are limited to 100 messages taken from a variety of "Yahoo" discussion groups within a month period in March 2003 spanning the following topics: abortion, bird watching, F1 racing, movies, single parents, hiking, divorce and separation, gardening, English teaching, feminism, home décor, LDR (long distance relationships), classic cars, men's issues, and Harley Davidson.

6. Since the writer only has limited time to finish her thesis, she chooses only seven out of thirteen female- and male-preferential language features previously identified in e-mail messages by Thomson & Murachver (2000). The 7 language features used to analyze the e-mail

messages are: (1) references to emotion, (2) personal information, (3) opinion, (4) suggestion, (5) aggressive expression, (6) supportive expression, and (7) asking question. One additional variable is added by the writer to measure men and women tendency on sharing personal experience to other members of the group based on one of We's questionnaire results (1993).

Besides the scope limitation, there is another aspect that shows the limitation of this study. Since the writer is just an undergraduate student, her background knowledge on the subject matter under study is quite limited. She only has a little knowledge about the theories related to this thesis. Moreover, she knows only some books that become the sources of the theories. This limitation makes it difficult for the writer to deepen her knowledge on the theories that can sharpen the research techniques, and discussion of the findings of this study.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study is aimed at giving somewhat a clear picture about the cross-gender communication in the Internet.

The writer also hopes that the findings of this study can enrich the varieties of Sociolinguistics studies. It is expected that this study can give some contributions to the field of Sociolinguistics especially about the different language features that men and women use in E-mail communication. In addition,

the result of this study is also expected to raise greater interest for the readers in studying Sociolinguistics.

1.6   Theoretical Framework

This study is based on the theories of Sociolinguistics that cover the relation between language, gender, styles, and e-mail communication.

A lot of media attention has been devoted to the idea that women and men communicate very differently. In fact, it is sometimes stated that women and men communicate so differently from one another. Language and gender theory helps the writer to understand that the differences in communicative styles of women and men emerge as a result of the different way they were socialized during childhood.

From a very early age, men and women are taught different linguistic practices. Communicative behaviors that are acceptable for boys, may be considered inappropriate for girls. Girls are encouraged and awarded for using "elegant" language whereas boys are allowed more flexibility and roughness in language use. The main distinction between the way boys and girls communicate is that girls generally use the language to negotiate closeness, while boys generally use language to negotiate their status in a group. According to Tannen (1990:77), women talk to build rapport and men talk to impart knowledge. Women desire rapport because they seek to make network of relationships with

other people. For them, it is important to emphasize sameness and equality with their peers with whom they are establishing rapport. However, for men, the world is seen as a hierarchy, with people in a higher or lower status position with respect to the man. Exhibiting knowledge and skill is necessary to determine relative status.

The theory of gender and e-mail communication is also presented because nowadays e-mail is being used by people in many diverse areas, for many diverse reasons. Yet, it seems that not everyone is equally enamored with this new technology. Specifically, men and women do not seem to respond to e-mail in the same way.

Existing research into the gendered use of e-mail highlights the different ways men and women use this medium of communication. Whilst men are stereotypically expected to possess technological competence and the computer is stereotypically thought to be the man's technology, existing research suggests that women are heavier users of e-mail than men (Kraut et. al., 1998; Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2000). These differences come about because men seem to embrace e-mail usage and culture in a much comprehensive way, while women use e-mail for fewer, more stringent communication needs.

In other forms of communication (for example instant messaging, newsgroups, and message boards), gender can again be found despite the claims that online forms of interpersonal communication neutralizes distinction of

gender. Research by Susan Herring (1994) suggests that when communicating on message board, men made use an adversarial style, criticized, and/or ridiculed other participants, often while promoting his own importance. Women, in contrast, displayed features of attenuation-hedging, apologizing- asking questions rather than making assertions and revealing thoughts and feelings whilst interacting with and supporting others. From observing many mix-sexed message boards, Herring found that similar patterns emerged on many lists.

1.7   Definition of Key Terms

To avoid misinterpretation and/or misunderstanding, it is necessary to define the key terms used in this study.

1. **Difference:**

   A characteristic that distinguishes one person or thing from another or the general.

2. **Feature:**

   Any bit of speech or writing which a person can single out from the general flow of a language (Crystal, 1992:11). It is based on the repetition or mixing of elements of style, and, on the particulars of the grammatical, e.g.: nominal versus verbal, or the vocabulary (Bussman, 1996:459).

3. **E-mail:**

   Electronic mail; a way of exchanging written messages on the Internet.

4. **"Yahoo" Discussion Group:**

   Online discussion groups that are listed in one of the largest and most popular Internet portal (*Yahoo*) where members can read messages and respond to them.

5. **Internet:**

   A global collection of interconnected computer networks that is home to the World Wide Web and a huge number of discussion groups and other online forums (Teeler & Gray, 2000:103).

1.8   Organizations of the Thesis

This thesis consists of five chapters. The first chapter is the introduction. It is divided into nine sub-topics: the background of the study, the statement of the problems, the objectives of the study, the assumptions, the significance of the study, the scope and limitation, the theoretical framework, the definition of the key terms and the organizations of the thesis. Chapter two is about the review of the related literature which presents the basic theories of the study and some related studies. Chapter three discusses the research methodology which covers the research design, the subjects, the source of the data, the research instruments, the procedures of collecting the data, the techniques of data analysis, and triangulation. Chapter four describes and discusses the research findings. The last chapter consists of summary, conclusion and suggestions.