

Gender Performativity in Cinematic Discourse: An Analysis of Dialogue in the Movie The Drama

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Abstract

In contemporary linguistics and media studies, gender is viewed as socially constructed and performative. This study aims to analyze dialogue in the movie *The Drama* using Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity to examine how masculinity and femininity are socially constructed and challenged. It also examines how traditional gender roles are reinforced or resisted in cinematic discourse and how gender is performed through language. The study employs a qualitative research design and purposive sampling to analyze linguistic features such as lexical choices, speech acts, repetition, and interactional strategies in selected dialogue excerpts. The findings show that humor, dominance, and emotional suppression contribute to the construction of masculinity, while emotional openness and sensitivity contribute to the construction of femininity. However, conventional gender stereotypes are also challenged through male vulnerability and female assertiveness. The study concludes that gender in *The Drama* is socially constructed and performed through language and interaction, demonstrating its fluid and performative nature.

Keywords: Gender Performativity, Masculinity, Femininity, Film Discourse, Dialogue Analysis

Introduction

Background and context of the study

Gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviors, identities and expectations that relate to men and women in the society. Gender is studied in linguistics through the ways of language reflect, negotiate and construct gender identities and social relations. The study of gender has undergone profound evolution over time. The biological differences between men and women were the focus of the earlier studies on gender, but later the focus shifted towards gender as social and cultural context. In 1970s and 1980s, feminist researchers examined how gender roles and inequality are shaped by society and language. Researchers in linguistics such as Robin Lakoff studied the differences of use of language of men and women. Later, Judith Butler's gender performativity theory introduced the idea that gender is performed through language, behavior, and social interaction and it is not innate identity (Butler, 1990). In linguistic and media studies, the concept of gender is considered as socially constructed and performative rather than fixed biological attribute. Masculinity and femininity are produced, regulated and normalized through discourse as a primary site within this framework (Saleem & Yasmin, 2024; Yasmin et al. 2019).

Recent studies in critical discourse analysis and feminist linguistics have shown that gender ideologies are significantly shaped by the media texts (Akram et al. 2025; Irshad & Yasmin, 2023). Films, advertisements and digital media play a major role in reproducing hegemonic gender norms through linguistic and multimodal strategies, and space is offered for resistance and identity reconfiguration simultaneously (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003; Lazar, 2007). According to research on film discourse, gender hierarchies are frequently constructed, while masculinity as dominant and femininity as subordinate are reinforced by cinematic dialogues (McCullough & Lester, 2024).

Recent studies in 2023-2025 have applied Butler's theory to media contexts including film, advertisements and digital platforms, confirm that through discourse and interactional language choices gender performativity is constructed actively (Raveendran & Pannikot, 2023). Critical discourse analysis of contemporary films indicates that gender powered relations are encoded, and dominant ideologies of masculinity and femininity are reinforced or challenged through dialogues and character interaction (Zhang,

2024; Ferani & Pattiasina, 2025). According to the multimodal and discourse-based research on media texts, gender identities are constructed centrally on screen through linguistic features such as lexical choices, speech acts and conversational patterns (Salsabila, 2024).

The present study analyzes the dialogues of the movie "*The Drama*" to examine how masculinity and femininity are constructed through them. Butler's Gender Performativity theory is used as a framework in the study to analyze linguistic practices in dialogues of the film construct, reinforce or challenge gender roles within the cinematic discourse.

Research Questions

1. How are masculinity and femininity performed by the dialogues of the movie?
2. How are gender roles constructed and challenged in the movie "*The Drama*" through dialogues?

Statement of the Problem

While there has been much work done on gender representation in media, little research has been conducted on the linguistic enactment and negotiation of gender identities in film dialogue. Dialogue from films may reinforce traditional gender roles and stereotypes in addition to affording opportunities to critique gender roles. Thus, the present study focuses on the analysis of the linguistic characteristics and interactional strategies which are used in *The Drama* construct to construct, reinforce and challenge gender identities and how it is done by means of Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity..

Literature Review

In linguistics, discourse studies and media research, the research on relationship between language and gender is very significant area. According to early feminist linguistic studies, language reflects a patriarchal social structure which strengthens unequal gender relations (Lakoff, 1975). Later studies view gender as socially and discursively constructed identity rather than a fixed category. Gender performativity theory by Judith Butler played an important role in this shift which states that gender is performed repeatedly through acts, behaviors and discourse rather than fixed biological category (Butler, 1990).

Feminist discourse analysts used Butler's framework for their work, and they argued that language is a performative tool that

individuals use for enacting masculinity and femininity in everyday interaction (Cameron, 1998). According to Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003), gender is a social practice, where gender norms are maintained or disrupted by linguistic choices. These studies show that discourse is a central site to examine how gender identities are negotiated in institutional, social and media contexts.

Research on media discourse, especially film dialogues, is increasing because films play a major role in constructing and negotiating cultural ideologies. Media texts are fully loaded with ideologies, and they often use language and representation for reproducing dominant patriarchal structures (Lazar, 2007). Film dialogues are the important spaces for analysis of gender performance because speech of characters represents the societal expectations of masculinity and femininity.

In cinematic discourse, gender representation is analyzed by analytical and performative approaches. Gendered interaction patterns are examined in contemporary films by Zhang (2024) and he revealed that authority, control and assertiveness are associated with male characters while emotionality and relational dependency are attached with female characters. Hegemonic gender norms are reproduced by dialogues structures and conversational dominance patterns in modern film narratives (McCullough & Lester, 2024).

The gender performativity analysis is expanded to digital and audiovisual media by recent Butlerian studies. Raveendran and Pannikot (2023) analyzed media discourse for understanding performative gender identities and linguistic repetition and interactional practices have normalized the gender roles. The importance of discourse strategies such as speech acts, turn-taking, modality and lexical choices in gender construction is revealed by research. The discourse study of film interactions examines that audience perceptions of gendered behavior are shaped centrally by conversational patterns and verbal expressions (Salsabila, 2024). Likewise, traditional gender binaries are both reinforced and challenged in the cinematic discourse which acts as a space for it (Ferani & Pattiasina, 2025).

There is growing research on gender and media discourse, but limited studies are focused on gender performance through dialogue in the movie 'The Drama'. The previous studies neglected linguistic examination of dialogues and are focused on visual representation or broader thematic analysis. So, the present study fills the gap by examining how masculinity and femininity are constructed, negotiated and challenged through the dialogue in the movie 'The Drama' using gender performativity theory of Judith Butler.

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

In this study, a qualitative discourse-analytic research design is used to examine how gender identities are enacted, negotiated and subverted in the film's dialogue, *The Drama*. The study aims to explore the meaning of language and interaction in a qualitative manner, as quantitative measurement of variables is not needed. Judith Butler (1990) theorised the concept of performativity as a means to conceptualise gender as an identity rather than a biological trait that is socially constructed and repeated.

The selected dialogues from the movie *The Drama* are the main sources of data in this study. Purposive sampling was used to choose excerpts from the dialogue that explicitly or implicitly performed masculinity and femininity. Dialogues were chosen based on their pertinence to gendered interaction, emotional

expression, conversational power, self-presentation, interpersonal relations and opposition to the mainstream gender expectations.

The following are excerpts that feature interaction between the primary characters as well as linguistic elements that help to build, strengthen, challenge, or create gender identities. Having concentrated on extracts chosen with purpose allowed an extensive analysis of the ways in which language is used which are deemed to be particularly important in the understanding of the gender performance in the story.

The study is based on Butler's (1990) Gender Performativity Theory which maintains that gender is not fixed or natural condition but is being continually created by repetitive discursive and social acts. In this context language is a performative and a space in which genders are enacted, sustained, and negotiated.

In order to operationalise Butler's theory, the following linguistic and interactional categories are analysed:

The selected dialogues were transcribed and examined through close textual analysis. The analysis of each extract was done in terms of the narrative context and interactional environment. The analysis was carried out in four steps.

First, snippets of dialogue for the purpose of gender performance were picked out and sorted into categories. Second, several linguistic aspects like lexical, speech act, repetition, hedging, humor and conversational strategies were investigated. Third, these linguistic characteristics were analyzed in relation to Butler's notion of performativity to identify how they helped to construct or destabilize the notions of masculinity and femininity. Finally, the obtained results were analyzed between male and female characters to look for any commonalities and differences in performance of the characters of the opposite gender.

Analysis and Discussion

Overview

The selected dialogues from the movie "*The Drama*" are analyzed by identifying seven discourse features which show how gender identities are performed linguistically. The analysis is based on Butler's theory of gender performativity, which states that gender is not fixed biological characteristic rather it is constructed, negotiated and challenged continuously through repeated linguistic practices. The discussion focuses on the linguistic strategies that reveal how conversational interaction construct gender identities.

Lexical Choices and Gender Construction

In the construction of gender identities, the lexical choices play an important role because adjectives, emotional vocabulary and descriptive expressions are used by the speakers to judge themselves and others. According to Butler (1990), the gender does not reflect the innate identity rather discourse produces it repeatedly. Masculinity and femininity are continuously performed by the word choice of characters.

Charlie repeatedly uses appearance-oriented adjectives to judge Emma. He discusses her laugh by saying that:

"It's very cute, but it's also kind of like... repulsive even."

The gendered discourse in which women are judged according to their attractiveness and physical appeal is reinforced by the adjective 'cute' and Emma is positioned as an object of evaluation. However, the contradictory meaning is created by the immediate juxtaposition of cute with repulsive. The uncertainty and emotional confusion are revealed by conflicting lexical choices of Charlie. Here unstable form of masculinity is performed by his language, he is concealing vulnerability and struggling to maintain confidence.

These opposing lexical choices explain that masculinity is not naturally dominant and negotiated through discourse.

Conventional gender stereotypes are reinforced further by Charlie when he talked about emotional expression.

"Crying makes you look kind of ugly... Like, women."

Physical appearance and emotional expression are associated with femininity by the adjective 'ugly'. Crying is considered as something that diminishes attractiveness of female and not a natural emotion. This lexical evaluation associates femininity with beauty standards and emotional vulnerability, while masculinity with emotional restraint. The patriarchal assumptions that women are judged according to the appearance are reflected by the lexical choices.

Gender is also constructed by emotional vocabulary. Emma says during the proposal rehearsal:

"I love you so much it hurts."

"It's scary."

"I'm too afraid to even ask."

Femininity is constructed through emotional openness and relational intimacy, and it is represented by the words such as 'love', 'hurts', 'scary' and 'afraid'. Emma does not conceal her actions and shows affection, fear, and vulnerability openly. Conventional feminine discourse is associated with emotional expressiveness and is reproduced by these lexical choices. In theory of gender performance, Butler argues that emotional openness and relational intimacy are not natural characteristics of women rather they are socially repeated performances.

The self-reflective evaluative words are also frequently used by Charlie:

"Just a weird little freak."

"Weird little British freak."

Masculinity is constructed by humor through the lexical items such as 'weird' and 'freak' rather than authority. Here Charlie exposes his insecurity, social awkwardness and also labels himself negatively rather than performing confidence. The hegemonic masculinity is challenged through these lexical choices because here male speaker is not dominant and he is discussing his emotions openly. As a result, traditional gender stereotypes are reinforced and also destabilized by vocabulary used in the movie. Masculinity and femininity are presented as fluid conversational performances in the movie and not as a natural biological sex.

Speech Acts and Gender Performance

Speech acts are very important for the performance of social identities because language is not just for exchanging information, rather actions are performed through it. Butler theory indicates that gender identities are constructed through the repetition of speech acts. Throughout the film, masculine and femininity are performed through confessions, commands, questions, criticisms and evaluations.

One of the strongest examples is confessions of Charlie:

"I almost did a mass shooting."

"I planned to bring a weapon to school."

The identity of Charlie is reconstructed with these confessions because they are exposing vulnerability and psychological exposure rather than performing traditional masculine confidence. The hegemonic masculinity is destabilized by the male character's acknowledgment of emotional instability and his willingness to disclose violent thoughts rather than emotional control.

During conversations, Emma repeatedly performs commands:

"Do it again."

"Go on."

Here Emma is using imperative speech acts to direct the interaction rather than occupying a passive conversational role.

These commands show that Emma is controlling interaction here and positioned her as active conversational participant. The traditional expectations that women should remain accommodating and submissive during conversation are challenged by such linguistic behavior.

Questions also play an important role in gender performances. Emma asks the questions repeatedly:

"How is that weirder?"

"Why do you want to talk about fucking in front of your family?"

Here Emma is exercising conversational agency by questioning Charlie's behavior and forcing him to justify actions. She is evaluating and challenging masculine behavior rather than accepting male authority.

Gender identities are further negotiated by the evaluative speech acts:

"That's weird."

This evaluation does not protect his feelings rather directly critiqued Charlie's behavior. Conventional femininity is challenged by the interactional strategy of female criticism.

The different speech acts overall show that gender identities are not biological characteristics rather they are constructed through the repetition of conversational actions.

Repetition and Self-Repair in Gender Performance

During interaction, identity is negotiated by repetition and speaker's attempt to reveal self-repair. Butler suggests that gender identities are not fixed identities rather they are continuously constructed through repeated linguistic performances.

Charlie frequently says:

"I really, really, really admire it."

The word 'really' is repeated here and acts as a linguistic marker of insecurity and self-monitoring. Here Charlie is pretending to be confident by strengthening his statement through repetition while concealing his vulnerability. However, hesitation and social anxiety are exposed by the excessive repetition. As confidence requires continuous linguistic performance, masculinity is unstable.

Self-repair is also present in Charlie's discourse throughout the movie.

"I didn't..."

"I didn't actually do anything."

He reduces negative interpretations by repeatedly modifying his statement rather than accepting responsibility immediately. Masculinity is continuously negotiated through the strategy of self-repair. In same way,

"I kinda sort a just moved behind..."

Here hesitation before admitting cowardice is represented by interrupted speech. Charlie softens personal accountability through revisions and reconstructs the event slowly. The ongoing linguistic negotiation maintains masculine identity of Charlie.

Hedges and Mitigation as Gendered Strategies

The Speakers use hedging to soften statements, reduce certainty and minimize responsibility. Charlie frequently uses hedges to negotiate masculine identity throughout the film.

For example:

"Kind of"

"Kinda sort a"

"I think"

When Charlie was explaining the dog incident, he said: "I kinda sort a just moved behind..."

The hedge 'kinda sort a' presents that his behavior is accidental and not deliberate while mitigating the responsibility. Masculine identity is protected by mitigation from direct criticism and reduces accountability linguistically.

In the same way,
"I think I just glitched when I saw you."

The phrase 'I think' is used here to soften the unusual confession and it also reduces certainty. Here hesitation and self-monitoring are used by Charlie to construct masculinity rather than presenting himself confidently.

Charlie even says while evaluating Emma's laugh:
"It's kind of like... repulsive."

The hedge still expresses judgement, but it also weakens the force of criticism. These mitigated strategies reveal that masculinity is not naturally authoritative, rather it is carefully constructed through discourse.

Humor and Sarcasm in Gender Performance

Characters use humor as an important strategy to negotiate gender identities throughout the discourse. Male characters frequently convert vulnerability in sarcasm and teasing rather than expression of emotions directly.

Remarks of Charlie:
"It's cute but repulsive."

The emotional attraction is masked by the humorous contraction through ridicule. Charlie uses ironic evaluation to replace vulnerability and perform masculinity instead of expressing affection openly.

He repeatedly refers to himself as:
"Weird little freak."

Charlie avoids direct emotional exposure while acknowledging weakness through self-deprecating humor. Masculine identity is protected by humor which is used as a coping strategy.

This discourse style is also reflected by male peer interaction:
"Don't pussy out."

The hegemonic masculine expectations that men should demonstrate courage and emotional toughness are reinforced by the insult while associating femininity with hesitation.

After Charlie's confession, other male characters also answered in a humorous way:

"What a horrible little piece of shit you were."

Here vulnerability is transformed into teasing instead of offering emotional comfort. The masculine emotional discomfort is normalized by humor, and it also maintains group solidarity. Therefore, humor exposes instability of masculine norms and reinforces them.

Emotional Expressions and Gender Identity

Gender identities linguistically performed by speakers are revealed by emotional expressions.

Affection and vulnerability are repeatedly expressed by Emma through these emotional expressions:

"I love you so much it hurts."
"I can't be without you."
"I'm afraid."

The femininity is constructed by these affective expressions which represent emotional openness, intimacy and relational commitment. Emotions such as fear, dependance and affection are verbalized openly by Emma without any attempt to suppress her emotions.

However, emotional vulnerability is also shown by Charlie:
"I think I just glitched when I saw you."
"I didn't actually do anything."

Guilt, anxiety and fear are revealed by these statements. Charlie openly expresses his psychological struggles instead of

maintaining emotional distancing. His discourse challenges the traditional gender binaries by explaining that emotional openness is not only associated with women.

Butler's argument is supported by the coexistence of emotional openness in both male and female characters. Emotional openness is not an innate gender difference instead of, it resulted from repeated social performances.

Interactional Strategies and Conversational Power

The During interaction, Gender identities are also negotiated by interactional strategies such as interruptions, challenges and conversational control.

Emma frequently uses direct evaluation and challenges Charlie:

"That's weird."

She does not accept Charlie's explanation rather she evaluates his behavior directly. Emma is positioned as an active conversational participant because of this critical response.

He is questioned further by her:
"How is that weirder?"

The conversational authority is shifted towards Emma because of interrogative structure, and he is also required to justify himself. The conversation is directed by Emma, and she challenges masculine assumptions rather than occupying a passive interactional role.

Conventional romantic expectations are rejected by Emma in the same way:

"I feel like we should just dance normally."
"It kinda feels a little performative."

She questioned traditional wedding rituals and resists socially expected romantic performances. Butler's argument is supported by her interactional control that gender performances are not natural instead of it they are socially constructed.

The conversational power between male and female characters repeatedly shifts throughout the film. Hesitation, repair and defend themselves are also used by men in this film, whereas women use interruptions, criticism and evaluate male behavior. The traditional male domination in conversation is challenged by these interactional patterns. This discourse supports Butler's claim that repeated social interactions continuously negotiate gender identities and conversational authority emerges dynamically throughout the movie.

The findings across all seven linguistic categories show that lexical choices, speech acts, repetition, self-repair, hedging, humor, emotional expression and interactional strategies are used to continuously perform gender identities in the movie and gender identities are not stable or biologically determined. Some linguistic patterns present both male and female characters as emotionally complex, conversationally active and socially negotiated, they destabilize the hegemonic masculinity and traditional femininity while conventional gender stereotypes are also reproduced by some linguistic patterns. Overall, Butler's theory is supported by the analysis that gender is not an innate characteristic, rather it is constituted through repeated discursive performances.

Major Findings, Conclusion, and Recommendations

Major Findings

The analysis produces five major findings.

1- The language, behavior and interactions of the characters continuously construct and perform gender; it is not shown as fixed or biological.

2- Both masculinity and femininity are constructed through lexical choices, emotional expressions and speech acts. Love, fear and vulnerability are frequently expressed by Emma, whereas insecurity, anxiety and emotional struggles are also shown by Charlie.

3- The strategies such as repetition, self-repair, hedging and self-repair used by Charlie reveal vulnerability and challenges traditional ideas of masculinity. It shows that masculinity is not always confident and dominant.

4- Commands, questions, criticism and evaluation used by Emma challenge the traditional idea that women should be passive or submissive. It reveals that in conversation women can also be powerful and active.

5- Overall, the analysis shows that traditional gender stereotypes are reinforced and also challenged in the film. Masculinity and femininity are continuously performed and negotiated by language and social interaction, and they are demonstrated as fluid identities.

Conclusion

This Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that gender in The Drama is not static but dynamic and is continually produced and negotiated through language and interaction. The analysis reveals that humor, sarcasm, suppression of emotions, ambivalence, and defense mechanisms all build up a masculinity, whereas emotional openness, sensitivity, and interaction, build up a femininity. But the weakness of men and the strength of women are not the only factors undermining traditional gender roles. The findings in this study provide support for Butler's theory of gender performativity, by supporting the idea that gender is produced through iteration and repetition of linguistic and interactional acts. In sum, the study indicates the importance of the role of speaking voices in film in both affirming and disrupting traditional gender identities.

Recommendations for future research

1. Future researchers can analyze other films and dramas to examine how masculinity and femininity are constructed across different types of cinematic discourse.
2. Future researchers can use multimodal approach including facial features, body language, clothing, camera angles, gestures and visual representation along with dialogues to examine gender performativity.
3. For the deeper analysis of gender and power, future studies can also combine Butler's gender performativity theory with other approaches such as Critical Discourse Analysis, Conversation Analysis or feminist stylistics.

Credit authorship contribution statement

Aimen Zafar: Writing – Original Draft, Methodology, Formal Analysis.

Musarat Yasmin: Writing – Review & Editing, Conceptualization, Supervision

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