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A Comparative Analysis of Gendered Language Features: The Male and Female Protagonists in *Fruits Basket*

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ABSTRACT

This study presents a comparative analysis of gendered language features as exhibited by the male and female protagonists in the anime series Fruits Basket (Season 1). Grounded in Deborah Tannen's (1990) sociolinguistic framework, which posits that male and female communication styles often reflect contrasting cultures, a "report talk" prioritizing status and independence versus a "rapport talk" emphasizing connection and intimacy. This research examines the dialogue of Souma Kyo and Honda Tohru. Employing a qualitative descriptive methodology, the study conducted a close textual analysis of the series' transcripts to identify and categorize distinctive linguistic patterns. The findings indicate a pronounced divergence in their communicative strategies. Kyo's language is characterized by directness, imperative commands, and confrontational rhetoric, aligning with Tannen's concept of a report talk oriented towards asserting dominance and achieving conversational goals. Conversely, Tohru consistently employs linguistic features designed to build rapport, including frequent use of polite forms, mitigating devices, and empathetic expressions, demonstrating a primary concern for her interlocutor's emotional state and the maintenance of harmonious relationships. These results not only corroborate Tannen's theoretical distinctions within a popular media text but also illustrate how fictional narratives can mirror and reinforce broader sociolinguistic patterns. It is recommended that future research explores these dynamics across different cultural contexts and narrative genres to further validate these observations.

Keywords: Anime, Communication Style, Comparative Analysis, Discourse Analysis, Gendered Language

INTRODUCTION

Language serves as the fundamental mechanism for human socialization, enabling individuals to articulate thoughts and facilitate the exchange of ideas (Bekkouche & Toudjine, 2022; Salhi, 2008). As a complex social practice, language use is profoundly influenced by context, with factors such as gender playing a pivotal role in shaping communicative styles (Crossman, 2024; Holmes & Wilson, 2017). The intersection of language and gender represents a dynamic area of sociolinguistic inquiry, highlighting how men and women may employ distinct linguistic strategies (Ehrlich et al., 2017).

A seminal framework for understanding these differences was proposed by Tannen (2007), who conceptualized male and female communication styles as reflecting two distinct cultural orientations. She posits that men often engage in “report talk,” which prioritizes asserting status and independence, while women typically engage in “rapport talk,” which emphasizes building connections and intimacy. Tannen (2007) delineates these contrasts through six comparative dimensions: (1) Status versus Support, where men seek to establish dominance in conversation while women provide affirming feedback; (2) Independence versus Intimacy, with men valuing self-reliance and women fostering closeness; (3) Advice versus Understanding, as men tend to offer direct solutions whereas women express empathy first; (4) Information versus Feelings, with communication for men being fact-based and for women being emotionally nuanced; (5) Orders versus Proposals, where men use direct commands and women prefer indirect suggestions; and (6) Conflict versus Compromise, as men may openly engage in argument to persuade, while women seek negotiation and agreement (Olusoji, 2023; Shaibu et al., 2023).

This theoretical framework has been validated and nuanced by subsequent research across various domains. For instance, studies in computer-mediated communication have reinforced these distinctions; Juniana (2011) found male users exhibiting status-driven and advisory language on Facebook, while female users adopted a more supportive role. Similarly, in organizational settings, a study by Weinberg et al. (2019) confirmed that male managers tended to use more direct, assertive language to maintain power, whereas female managers employed more inclusive and affiliative language to build team cohesion. Further supporting this dichotomy, Sargsyan (2022) observed that women demonstrate greater conversational adaptability and engagement in phatic communication, whereas men tend to maintain a factual, topic-focused approach. Research has also extended to literary and media texts. For example, Gultom and Sartika (2023) applied Tannen's model to analyze the motives of language use among polygamous women in a family context, finding clear alignments with “rapport talk.”

However, the universality of this gender binary is not absolute. The influence of context, genre, and character archetype can significantly moderate these patterns.

Bekkouche and Toudjine (2022) found a more equivalent use of language features across genders in their study, attributing this to specific cultural norms. Furthermore, research on fictional characters who defy traditional gender expectations, such as the work by Martinez et al. (2022) demonstrates how characters can strategically switch between “male” and “female” language features to achieve their goals, challenging a rigid application of Tannen's model. This indicates that while Tannen's categories provide a powerful analytical tool, their manifestation is mediated by situational and character-specific factors.

While the body of research on gender and language is substantial, a critical gap persists in the analysis of fictional characters who operate within a tightly-knit, understanding social group. Many studies disproportionately focus on language in contexts of conflict or power disparity. This research seeks to address this by conducting a symmetrical analysis of the language features used by both a male and a female character in a context where even ostensibly harsh language is interpreted through a lens of familial understanding. The study examines Kyo Soma and Tohru Honda from the anime *Fruits Basket*, characters who embody Tannen's contrasts: Tohru is consistently gentle and empathetic, while Kyo possesses a brash exterior that belies a capacity for kindness. A key point of inquiry is how Kyo's use of “report talk” is mitigated and accepted within their established social dynamic, which acknowledges his inherent nature without perceiving it as a genuine threat.

Therefore, this study aims to provide a comparative analysis of gendered language features through the dialogue of Kyo and Tohru. It seeks to identify, classify, and elucidate the differences in their communicative styles, thereby contributing a nuanced perspective on how gender can manifest in fictional discourse and reflect broader sociolinguistic theories, even within a forgiving social context.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design. This approach is selected as it facilitates an in-depth, contextual analysis of phenomena within their natural setting, prioritizing depth of understanding over numerical measurement (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). As Creswell and Creswell (2023) notes, qualitative methods allow for the real-time examination of data as it occurs, providing rich, detailed insights. The descriptive nature of this methodology is particularly suited to analyzing spoken or written language, focusing on the nuanced meanings within discourse rather than quantifiable metrics (Taylor et al., 2016). Furthermore, following the principles outlined by Bogdan and Biklen (2007), this study utilizes direct quotations from the data source to provide authentic evidence and enhance the reliability of the analysis.

The primary data for this research consists of the verbal utterances of the two main protagonists, Souma Kyo and Honda Tohru, from the anime series *Fruits Basket* (Season 1). Data was specifically sourced from the narrative arc detailing

the beginning of Tohru's cohabitation with the Soma family, encompassing episodes one through five. The series was accessed for analysis via the official Viu streaming service platform (https://www.viu.com/ott/id/id/all/playlist-fruits_basket_s1-playlist-26271902).

The data collection procedure was conducted systematically. First, the designated episodes were viewed in their entirety, with meticulous attention paid to all dialogues involving Kyo and Tohru. Subsequently, the transcripts of these dialogues were compiled. The analysis phase involved a close reading of the transcripts to identify utterances exemplifying the gendered language features defined by Tannen (2007) framework. Each relevant utterance was extracted and preliminarily categorized according to Tannen's six contrasting pairs: Status vs. Support, Independence vs. Intimacy, Advice vs. Understanding, Information vs. Feelings, Orders vs. Proposals, and Conflict vs. Compromise. Kyo's dialogue was analyzed for features associated with the male-oriented categories (Status, Independence, Advice, etc.), while Tohru's was analyzed for the corresponding female-oriented categories (Support, Intimacy, Understanding, etc.).

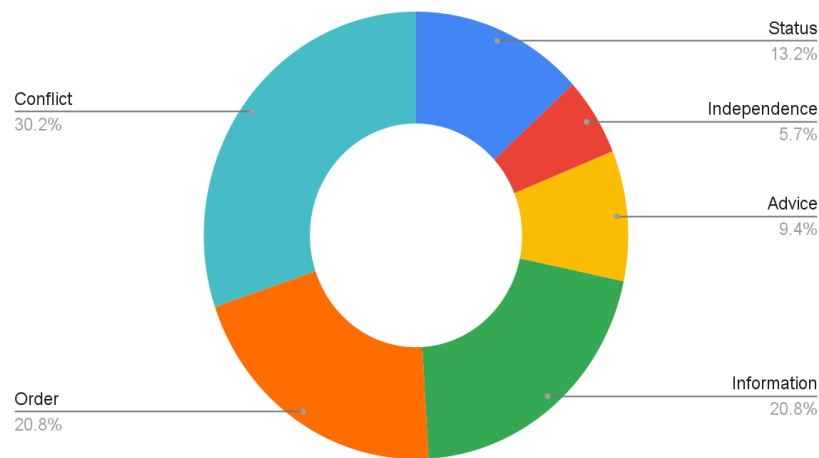
To ensure analytical rigor and minimize researcher bias, the classified data was subjected to a verification process. The preliminary classifications were reviewed by an independent expert in linguistics, who assessed the accuracy and consistency of the application of Tannen's model to the selected utterances. Finally, the verified data was synthesized and presented in a narrative format, with integrated quotations, to comprehensively address the research problem and illuminate the comparative language features of the two characters.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study aimed to identify and analyze the divergent gendered language features employed by the protagonists, Kyo Soma and Tohru Honda, in *Fruits Basket* (Season 1), through the theoretical lens of Tannen (2007) dichotomy. The findings reveal a pronounced alignment of Kyo's dialogue with the “report” dimension and Tohru's with the “rapport” dimension, substantiating Tannen's framework within a fictional narrative.

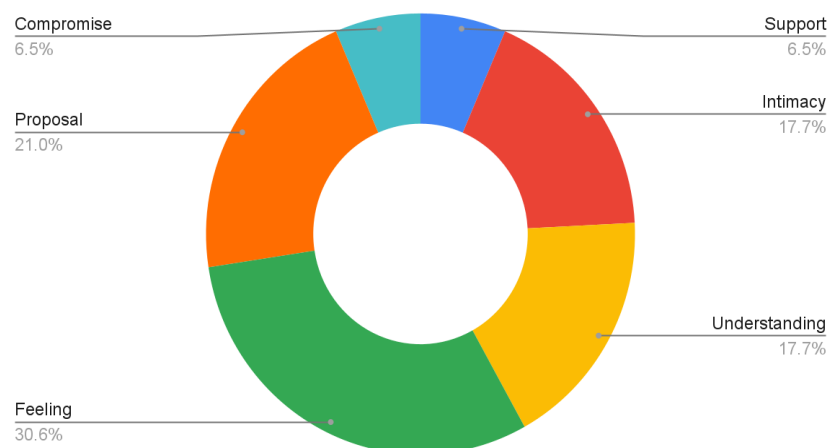
A quantitative analysis of the dialogue from the initial story arc (Episodes 1-5) provides a clear overview of the characters' predominant communicative styles. For Kyo, the most frequent feature is Conflict (30.2%, 16 data), followed jointly by Information and Orders (20.8% each, 11 data). This triad underscores a communication style centered on assertiveness, factual confrontation, and direct imposition of will. Status (13.2%, 7 data), Advice (9.4%, 5 data), and Independence (5.7%, 3 data) further complete a profile oriented towards maintaining a competitive stance in conversation.

Kyo's Language Features

**Figure 1** Kyo's Language Features**Source:** Author's Analysis

Conversely, Tohru's language is dominated by Feelings (30.6%, 19 data), highlighting her emotionally nuanced and empathetic approach. This is followed by Proposals (21.0%, 13 data), demonstrating her preference for indirect suggestions over commands. Intimacy and Understanding are equally represented (17.7% each, 11 data), reinforcing her focus on building close, empathetic connections. Support and Compromise (6.5% each, 4 data), though less frequent, are critical to her conflict-avoidant and harmonious communication strategy.

Tohru's Language Features

**Figure 2** Tohru's Language Features**Source:** Author's Analysis

Status vs Support

Tannen claims that men grow up in a world where conversation is competitive and therefore strive to ensure that others do not dominate them. Women, however, use conversation to gain support and confirmation rather than status.

Datum 1: Status

While cleaning up the upstairs room, Kyo suddenly came and broke the roof from above. Of course, the roof collapsed, and he confidently invited Yuki to fight. Kyo did not seem to notice Tohru, who was surprised at the door.

Kyo: *(He broke through the roof)* “Yo! You ready for your beating, rat-boy?”

Yuki: “Huh, how about you give it up already? Since you are weak”

Kyo: “**Why, you?!**” *(angry clenched fist)*

Kyo: “**You’re gonna get hurt if you think I’m the same fighter I was last time!**”

(Fruit Basket S1 Episode 1, 00:21:09 - 00:21:46)

The conversation between Yuki and Kyo shows a strong desire to fight back. Yuki and Kyo are seen provoking each other until Kyo is finally provoked and feels upset. Kyo's dominant status is shown through the sentence, “**You’re gonna get hurt if you think I’m the same fighter I was last time!**” where he does not accept that Yuki underestimates him. Since the beginning, Kyo and Yuki often fight over their respective egos and pride. Kyo's behavior matches most men in that they do not like it when someone else is more dominant than themselves.

Datum 2: Support

It was raining hard at this time, and the wind blew hard. Yuki ran to the hill behind the house to cover her small field with a tarp, followed by Tohru. While putting up the tarpaulin, they got lost in conversation.

Yuki: “N-no..”

Yuki: “Actually, I’m kind of ashamed. Boys shouldn’t complain like that”

Tohru: “**I’m happy you did**”

Tohru: “**Because I feel like the more you tell me about yourself, the better friends we can become**”

(Fruit Basket S1 Episode 3, 00:15:49 - 00:16:06)

The dialog above shows that Tohru is a friend who will always be there to embrace and support her friend. Her sentence, “**I’m happy you did,**” and the explanatory sentence, “**Because I feel ... better friends we can become,**” shows that Tohru has no problem with Yuki expressing his grievances. Tohru uses this language feature to show her openness to Yuki as a friend.

Through the two conversations above, between Kyo and Tohru towards Yuki, it can be judged that they have significant differences. As a man, Kyo feels that he is the one who must dominate the person he is talking to; he wants to emphasize his

status as an influential person in a conversation. Kyo does not want to be underestimated by his interlocutors. Nevertheless, when it comes to Tohru and Yuki, their conversation is warm. Tohru shows no domineering nature. Instead, she tries to be equal to her interlocutor. Equality means to position herself as the interlocutor, trying to support and respect.

Independence vs Intimacy

Tannen claims that since men are concerned with status, they focus more on independence. Conversely, women think in terms of intimacy, seeking support and closeness from their partner.

Datum 3: Independence

Today was the first day Kyo moved to the same school as Tohru and Yuki. Kyo had previously attended an all-boys school, so he was very protective. Yuki approached Kyo, who was next to the school building. They argued with each other as usual until finally, Yuki mentioned Kyo's status.

Yuki: "I don't understand why you actually want to go inside it"

Kyo: "You.. you would never understand!"

Kyo: "I'm gonna win"

Kyo: "I'll win against you, and become a full-fledged member of the Somas!"

Kyo: **"I won't let them ostracize me anymore!"**

(Fruit Basket S1 Episode 2, 00:16:27 - 00:16:41)

Kyo showed his resentment towards Yuki, who constantly insulted his ambition to enter the Souma family circle (this was because Kyo was a cat, so he was alienated by other zodiac families). He raised his voice and said he would win over and over again to Yuki. Then through the line, **"I won't let them ostracize me anymore!"** Kyo declares his independence and severe intention not to be underestimated and ostracized by his FAMILY. The reason behind Kyo always challenging Yuki is none other than to prove his worthiness without someone's help but by dominating someone.

Datum 4: Intimacy

Souma and Tohru's family were eating dinner in the living room tonight. Tohru is the one who is responsible for cooking all the food tonight. They chat like a family until Shigure teases Kyo, who looks awkward after apologizing to Tohru for his harsh treatment.

Shigure: "You know, Kyo personally offered to walk you home from work!"

Kyo: "It'll never happen again! No more!"

Tohru: **"Alright, but seeing you eat a proper meal makes me ever happier, Kyo"**

Tohru: **"How is it? Do you like it?"**

(Fruit Basket S1 Episode 2, 00:21:34 - 00:21:49)

Hearing from Shigure that Kyo had offered to pick Tohru up from work late at night, Kyo nodded. He is happy to be close to the Souma family, especially Kyo. Although Kyo embarrassedly said he would not pick Tohru up again, Tohru just smiled and turned the conversation to Kyo. Tohru tried to be friendly and approachable by stating that she was happy to see Kyo eating and asked if Kyo liked it with the phrase, **“How is it? Do you like it?”**

Unlike the previous language feature, men try to show that they do not need anyone else’s help. Men feel that their self-esteem is very high. It feels natural representing Kyo, who is keen to prove himself by always challenging Yuki. This contrasts with Tohru, who prefers peace and does not want any disputes. Tohru wants to establish good relationships with the people around her.

Advice vs Understanding

Men like to find solutions, whereas women seek sympathy and understanding. While a man might seek to solve a problem that their wife or girlfriend might have, Tannen claims that the wife or girlfriend wants sympathy.

Datum 5: Advice

Tohru had just gotten home from school and found Kyo fixing the broken roof in his room. Kyo came down the stairs a few seconds later because his work was done. Tohru, who was standing in the doorway, showed an awkward expression.

Kyo: **“Call in a pro later to fix it for real”**

Kyo: **“Right now you only need to keep the rain out, right?”**

Tohru: “Y-yes...”

(Fruit Basket S1 Episode 2, 00:10:29 - 00:10:34)

Kyo knew he was not good at fixing things like the roof, but he tried. Feeling that his work was not perfect, Kyo responsively advised or gave a solution to Tohru to better call a handyman in the sentence, “Call in a pro later to fix it for real.” As well as advising to be careful of the rain in the meantime.

Datum 6: Understanding

After school, when there was no one in the class, Yuki called Tohru. Yuki told her about her past, where when people know the identity of the Souma family, their memories will be suppressed so that they forget. With a face full of regret and sadness, he expressed his feelings to Tohru.

Yuki: “No matter what decision gets handed down, I can’t do anything. So.. I’m sorry”

...

Tohru: “Um thank you for worrying about me, it really makes me happy”

Tohru: **“I’ll be okay. The way I see it, you might have no choice if the secret I found out was that important”**

Tohru: **“So please, do whatever will make you and your family feel safest”**
(Fruit Basket S1 Episode 2, 00:08:32 - 00:09:18)

After listening to Yuki's outpouring and apology, instead of getting angry, Tohru smiled at Yuki. Tohru was happy about Yuki's openness towards her. Through the sentence **“I'll be okay. The way I see it, you might have no choice if the secret I found out was that important”** Tohru showed her understanding of the situation that hit Yuki. In addition, Tohru felt that Yuki was enough with an understanding without a specific solution; after all, it was a sensitive family matter.

At first glance, there is a clear line between action and speech. The language features this time; women show how they position themselves to the other person, like Tohru, who tried to understand Yuki's situation and did not explicitly tell her to do an action. Tohru only gave a calming remark. While on Kyo's side, he realized that if he only gave understanding, the other person would not do anything. So without further ado, he gave a solution to the problem, wanting the other person to get an understanding and solution directly.

Information vs Feeling

Men are more likely to be factual in their speech than women. Women will use less factual language that stems from a more emotional viewpoint.

Datum 7: Information

The context of the conversation below is when Kyo and Yuki come to follow Tohru to her grandfather's house. Both felt empty and lost when Tohru said goodbye to return to her grandfather and brother's house. Kyo took Tohru's hand from her grandfather's house while Yuki packed Tohru's belongings.

Tohru: “H-how did you know that?!”

Kyo: **“We could hear the whole thing”**

Tohru: *(Being embarrassed)*

Kyo: “Isn't a selfish request okay sometimes?”

Kyo: **“If someone asked for selfish stuff every day, it'd piss me off”**

(Fruit Basket S1 Episode 5, 00:18:48 - 00:19:03)

Kyo replied firmly with the phrase, **“We could hear the whole thing,”** when Tohru asked how Kyo and Yuki knew about Tohru's desire to return to Souma's house. Then Kyo also revealed a fact in the sentence, **“If someone asked for selfish stuff every day, it'd piss me off”** to Tohru, but the statement was intended for someone other than Tohru. It was just a sarcastic piece of information.

Datum 8: Feeling

Tohru was brought to the Souma family home when Yuki and Shigure found her pitching a tent in the middle of the forest on the Souma family property. However, while they were talking, they heard the sound of an avalanche, which

surprised them, and they tried to calm down that the avalanche did not bury Tohru's tent. The trio returned to the location where Tohru's tent was. Unfortunately, the tent had been buried by the landslide.

Tohru: "Oh no! My mother's picture is inside the tent"

Tohru: "Mom!" (*Trying to dig out the landslide*)

Yuki: "Honda-san, calm down"

Tohru: "**But my mother is... What should I do? I have to get her out.. She can't breathe in there..**" (*Start to shed tears of sadness and confusion*)

(*Fruit Basket S1 Episode 1, 00:14:38 - 00:14:52*)

Tohru was worried, so she approached and tried to dig out the landslide. Tohru cried while shouting at her mother. In between her cries, Tohru told her that her precious mother's picture was buried. "**Oh no! My mother's picture is inside the tent**" She was afraid that her mother couldn't breathe. "**But my mother is... What should I do? I have to get her out... She can't breathe in there..**" Tohru said nonsensical things, but that was because she wanted Yuki and Shigure to know how precious Mom was to Tohru, even though it was just a picture.

From the two examples of the dialog above, it can be seen how men and women have differences in conveying information. If Kyo, as a male representative, conveys information spontaneously and according to the facts as they are, then Tohru, who is a woman, will mix more information with her feelings as an added emotional spice.

Order vs Proposal

Tannen claims that in conversation, men are more likely to be more direct in their language, using imperatives to command others. Women are more likely to use more suggesting language in opposition to commanding, e.g., man - 'close that window it is cold' (direct imperative), women - 'isn't it cold in here' (therefore suggesting she wants the window closed but uses an interrogative in oppose to an imperative).

Datum 9: Order

It just so happened that while this was happening, Yuki and Tohru were eating lunch, then Kyo opened the sliding door loudly with an angry face. Behind him was Shigure dressed in a neat and formal suit.

Kyo: "**Shut up!!!**"

Shigure: "I want you to listen for a second, Kyo"

(*Fruit Basket S1 Episode 2, 00:13:12 - 00:13:15*)

Here Kyo shouted, "**Shut up!!!**" to signal and tell Shigure not to continue talking. Kyo is disgusted that Shigure decided something without his consent. Kyo even shows his anger by stomping his foot loudly to show his disapproval.

Datum 10: Proposal

It was already lunchtime. Tohru cooked and prepared the food neatly on the table. There were only Tohru and Yuki, as Shigure and Kyo seemed to have business outside. To keep the atmosphere quiet, the two chatted about free topics.

Tohru: "You went out for a while too, right?"

Yuki: "Yeah, I went to my secret base in the backyard"

Tohru: "**Secret base??!!**"

Tohru: "**Woahh that has a thrilling ring to it!**"

(Fruit Basket S1 Episode 2, 00:12:50 - 00:13:00)

While chatting, Tohru had asked Yuki's whereabouts before they ate. Yuki replied that he had just taken care of his secret base on the hill behind the house. Tohru immediately felt excited and unknowingly coded Yuki to invite her there through her words that read, "**Secret base?!!! Woahh that has a thrilling ring to it!**" Referring to Tannen's statement, women often code their interlocutors if they want to tell them to do something. Aside from being shy, they might want to be politer. In contrast, men often go straight to the point; if they want to tell them to do something, they do it without caring how the other person responds.

Conflict vs Compromise

Men are more likely to use language to argue a point. Women are more likely to use language to avoid such conflict and are far more likely to negotiate with others to try and find a solution or compromise.

Datum 11: Conflict

The incident in episode 1, where the three boys surnamed Souma turned into animals (cat, rat, and dog), managed to shock Tohru. Tohru slipped and accidentally hugged the three. After some time, a courier suddenly rang the doorbell, making Tohru panic. Tohru was even confused to see the three animals speaking in human language.

Kyo: "**We can't even make a good cover story if you jerks transform, too!**"

Yuki: "You're the one who slipped up first, stupid cat"

Kyo: "**Excuse me?!!**"

Yuki: "Shut up, clumsy cat!"

(Fruit Basket S1 Episode 2, 00:00:29 - 00:00:36)

Kyo was upset because Yuki and Shigure were also accidentally hugged by Tohru, which made the three of them change. He vents his anger in the form of a snarling cat with the phrase, "**We cannot even make a good cover story if you jerks transform, too!**" which gets an unacceptable reply from Yuki. Kyo's anger is further provoked, making him ready to fight with Yuki immediately.

Nevertheless, fortunately, Shigure managed to mediate between the two and explained slowly to Tohru.

Datum 12: Compromise

Tohru was invited to the Souma's residence when Yuki and Shigure accidentally found Tohru and her tent in the middle of a hill belonging to the Souma family. At Souma's house, Tohru tried to explain her situation.

Tohru: **"Um, would you please let me live there for a little while?"**

Tohru: **"I'll leave as soon as the renovations are over"**

Tohru: **"I.. don't have much money, but I'll pay what I can"**

Tohru: "Please"

(Fruit Basket S1 Episode 1, 00:13:12 - 00:13:27)

Tohru's monologue above is her attempt to compromise with Shigure and Yuki. Tohru asked to stay in her tent because she had nowhere to stay. As an attempt at compromise, she even offered to pay Milk Souma's land rent with the money she had. Tohru's expression at that moment was wretched. In solving a problem, each individual has their way. Likewise, with men and women, the way they work to solve problems is the opposite. Represented by Kyo, men seem to prefer to mix things up with emotion and violence. Almost everything ends in conflict if no one gives in. Conversely, women try to take a gentler approach by discussing with the other party and finding solutions with a cool head.

The findings of this study offer substantial support for the foundational work of Tannen (2007), demonstrating that her dichotomous model of "report" and "rapport" talk remains a potent analytical tool for dissecting gendered communication in contemporary media narratives. The consistent alignment of Kyo's dialogue with conflict, orders, and status, and Tohru's with support, understanding, and compromise, provides a clear fictional corroboration of Tannen's observations from real-world interaction. This extends the applicability of her theory beyond traditional sociolinguistic contexts, affirming its utility in the critical analysis of anime characterisation and scriptwriting. The stark contrast observed reinforces the idea that these gendered styles are deeply embedded cultural scripts, readily deployed by creators to signal character archetypes to audiences.

Furthermore, the results resonate strongly with prior research that has applied Tannen's framework to other mediums. For instance, the pattern observed in Kyo's language mirrors the findings of Juniana (2011), where male users on Facebook exhibited status-driven and advisory language. Similarly, the identification of Tohru's use of proposals and indirectness aligns with Sargsyan's (2022) observation that women demonstrate greater conversational adaptability and preference for phatic communication. This consistency across studies—from social media to animated series—strengthens the empirical basis for Tannen's categories and

suggests a pervasive, cross-medial understanding of gendered communicative norms.

However, this research also introduces a crucial nuance that partially challenges a rigid interpretation of the model. While the data overwhelmingly supports a gender-based dichotomy, the narrative context of *Fruits Basket*—specifically, the familial and forgiving environment of the Soma household—acts as a moderating factor. Kyo’s conflict-oriented speech, while frequent, does not lead to his permanent social ostracization; it is interpreted by Tohru and others within the context of his known character. This situational tolerance echoes the findings of Bekkouche and Toudjine (2022), who found that cultural and contextual factors can lead to a more equivalent use of language features. Therefore, this study suggests that while Tannen’s binary is a powerful descriptive tool, its manifestation and social consequences are not absolute but are filtered through specific relational dynamics and narrative frameworks. This positions the current research not as a mere validation, but as an extension that highlights the critical role of context in mediating the performance of gendered language.

CONCLUSION

This study has elucidated the distinct gendered language features employed by the protagonists in *Fruits Basket*, providing clear empirical support for Deborah Tannen’s theoretical framework. The analysis conclusively demonstrates that Kyo Soma’s dialogue is predominantly characterized by language of report—prioritizing status, independence, direct advice, factual information, orders, and conflict. This communicative style functions to assert dominance, maintain autonomy, and engage in competitive verbal exchanges. In stark contrast, Tohru Honda’s speech consistently aligns with the language of rapport, embodying support, intimacy, understanding, feelings, proposals, and compromise. Her language is fundamentally oriented towards building emotional connections, demonstrating empathy, and preserving interpersonal harmony.

The central differentiating factor underlying this dichotomy appears to be the role of emotion in communication. While both genders utilize a range of speech acts, Tohru’s language is deeply infused with and guided by emotional nuance, using feeling as a primary metric for interaction. Kyo’s language, however, strategically minimizes emotional expression in favor of factual reporting and instrumental goals, a pattern that reflects broader sociolinguistic norms associating masculinity with emotional restraint and femininity with emotional expressiveness (Holmes, 2013). Ultimately, this research affirms that fictional characters serve as potent vessels for replicating and dramatizing real-world sociolinguistic patterns. The findings encourage readers and scholars to critically identify and classify gendered language features not only in media but also in everyday communication,

highlighting how linguistic choices are intrinsically linked to the performance of gender identity.

SUGGESTION

Based on the findings and limitations of this study, several avenues for future research are recommended to further develop the understanding of gendered language in fictional discourse. First, a longitudinal study analyzing the dialogue of Kyo and Tohru across all seasons of *Fruits Basket* would be highly valuable. This would determine whether their gendered language features remain static or evolve in response to character development and deepening relationships, potentially revealing a convergence of "report" and "rapport" styles as characters mature.

Second, to test the robustness and cultural specificity of Tannen's (1990) framework, a cross-comparative analysis with anime series featuring divergent gender archetypes is strongly suggested. Investigating series with a more emotionally expressive male protagonist or a more dominant, solution-oriented female lead would challenge the binary model and provide nuance to our understanding of how gender and language interact in different narrative contexts.

Finally, research could move beyond textual analysis to incorporate reception theory. A study investigating how audiences perceive these gendered language features—whether as reinforcing stereotypes, reflecting realistic communication, or constituting complex character traits—would add a crucial layer of understanding regarding the social impact of linguistic portrayals in media. By pursuing these directions, scholars can build upon this study's foundation to develop a more dynamic and comprehensive model of gendered linguistic performance in popular culture.

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