

Stereotypes and Gender Identity in Italian and Chilean Chat Line Rooms

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ABSTRACT

This work is an attempt to analyze how men and women communicate gender identity by using stereotypical traits in a chat line environment, through quantitative and qualitative data. In Study 1 (Coding & Counting Approach, Herring, 2004), 80 same-sex conversations (40 men and 40 women; 40 Italians and 40 Chileans), carried out in public chatrooms were analyzed using some Project H-Codebook categories and the X^2 . The categories taken into consideration were: *Firstper*, *Opinion*, *Apology*, *Question*, *Emoticon*, *Emodevice*, *Coalition_1*, *Coalition_2*, *Fact*, *Action*, *Challenge*, *Flame*, *Status*, *Style*. The results showed no significant differences between women and men in the use of these categories, except for *Flame* ($p < 0.001$). We used the Conversational Analysis method in Study 2 to examine conversational dynamics which chatters use to co-construct their identity. Qualitative results have emphasized the existence of specific gender related mechanisms, thereby making it possible to understand the construction of online subjectivity through relationships. Our results suggest that there is an opportunity to investigate communicative style through both quantitative and qualitative differences.

Keywords: *Identity, CMC, Gender, Conversational Analysis, Language Style.*

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1. Introduction

The subject of online identity is one of the largest branches of research in the area of CMC (Computer-Mediated Communication), which over time has discovered the users' communication pathways for presenting their identity. Many researchers, such as Danet (2001) and Mantovani (1995), have described some mechanisms through which traces of the Self may be found; Walther (1996) in particular emphasizes the importance of stereotypes as a guide during this process. When looking at other research which has been conducted on gender identity, the basic

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aspect of the self, it can be noticed that in many cases traditional stereotypes are found in asynchronous online environments (Herring, 1994; 1996; Witmer & Katzman, 1997). All things considered, we believe it is indeed possible to carry out further investigations using quantitative and qualitative data; currently, it appears to us that the need to combine the two methods seems to be spreading, even though there is no real multi-methodological approach. This study is an attempt to respond to the underlying requirements from which this new perspective arises. It is our intention to add to the existing results by way of an investigation to verify how men and women characterize themselves by using stereotypical traits in a synchronic environment (chat line rooms). Methodologically the need to integrate quantitative and qualitative methods cropped up when we were faced with the choice of associating the results obtained with the traditional method (grid analysis) or with Conversational Analysis (C.A.). Nevertheless, we analyzed two samples composed of men and women of different nationalities: Italian and Chilean. This is not a cross-cultural study; in fact the focus of the study was to verify the results obtained from the Italian sample by comparing it with a sample which has similar neo-Latin cultural roots. Both of these cultures are characterized by an Interdependent Self, which is typical of Latin-American cultures and of many southern European cultures, as opposed to the Independent Self (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

2. The management of identity: online gender as a polymorphic gender

It is possible to observe and describe what was experienced on the Net, by focusing on three principal perspectives: subjects, processes and objects (Galimberti & Riva, 2000). The aim of this study was to focus on the subjects in order to verify the extent to which people use stereotypes to construct their identity online. This stance includes communication and the cognitive and identity aspects through which it is possible to create an effective image of the self (Belloni & Galimberti, in press). To this end, the Net gives many opportunities for play (Baym, 1995) and also for testing a “new self”, being therefore a sort of “Workshop of Identity” (Peace, 2000). A theory has been suggested that our system of stereotypes remains active, even in an online context, so that when we meet someone we use this system to categorize our interlocutor. This Hyperpersonal Model stated that, in many cases, communication is very often better through the computer than FTF (Face to Face) communication, and it becomes Hyper-

personal: "CMC is more socially desirable than the experiences we tend to achieve in parallel FTF interaction" (Walther, 1996).

Desirability depends on four factors. The Sender is aware of what he/she transmits and he/she is able to choose it. The Receiver participates in the construction of the sender's image by using the categories of stereotypes to put the information he/she has received in order. The Channel facilitates the selective presentation of the self and the Feedback warrants a confirmation.

Various clues regarding social roles are utilised; the nickname (Bechar-Israeli, 1995), the communicative style, the paralinguistic aspects or the way one's own personal homepage is constructed (Kibby, 1997). Identity is fluid, it is the result of an unwritten choice in a precise context which always tries to develop along a path of continuity; besides "the representation of identities through the technological artifice of cyberspaces is necessarily an act of repetition; the identity exists at no time other than the performance" (Marks, 1996).

Moreover it is well known that gender is a category of basic importance in our social life because it is always associated to the body, which disappears on the Net. The body refers to a biological fact, sex; gender includes the expectations of a specific group about men and women (Arcuri & Cadinu, 1998). It is a social construction which is contextualised in space and time and is characterized by a certain level of fluidity which has always been sacrificed in favour of biological bipartition (O'Brien, 1999). Cyberspace has also been seen as the place in which to develop these opportunities (Biocca, 1997; Chua, 1996), but it is still a tool used by a society which knows only "male" and "female" (Hamilton, 2000; Haraway, 1999). Many researchers have described what happens between the two sexes in cyberspace. Vaughn Trias (1997) has distinguished between two traditions; the "*Democracy*" paradigm states that women and men participate equally in online life, leading to the disappearance of discrimination. On the other hand, the "*Difference*" paradigm has outlined how traditional cultural stereotypes have been transposed to the Net – with all their effects – describing the way in which they represent themselves (Perry & Perry, 1998; Patterson, 1999; We, 1993; Jaffe, Lee, Nuang & Oshagan, 1995).

2.1. Gender Language Style

The majority of these studies focused on the differences inherent to the communicative style of men and women, in order to verify a relationship with the traditional stereotype (Ferris, 1996; Savicki, 1996; Witmer & Katzman, 1997). Herring

(1994,1996) has described two gendered communicative styles reached in two academic lists: the **Assertive Style or Negative Polite Style**, typical of men (heavy assertions, humiliation, frequent answers, sarcasm and auto-promotion) and the **Supportive Style or Polite Style**, typical of women (appreciation, words of thanks, collaboration, doubts, apologies, questions and suggestions).

While this type of research was being carried out, reflection begun as to the meaning of these results. The first possible criticism of this perspective is that research on a stereotypical style is an oversimplification which does not take the features of the different online environments into consideration (Rodino, 1997). Indeed the differences could be more qualitative than quantitative; we learn to be men or women through communication, gender is both its product and influences it at the same time (Mulvaney, 1994). For this reason, if “different communication ethics provide an explanation for the different styles” (Wallman, 1993), previous studies should have been the first step to the study of a traditional communicative ethic which influences the intentions of men and women offline as well as online.

Based on the features of our study, as described above, we needed to identify a good method in order to study it. In other words, we tried to find a way of studying how stereotypes and gender identity work in online interactions, in both the linguistic and interactional choices made. It would have to be a dynamic approach in order to enable us to consider the totality of the communicative elements which are present as well as the characteristics of the vehicle.

3. A new proposal: towards an interactional perspective

As we explained in the introduction, the aim of this research is to offer a new contribution to the series of University researches which are concerned with the manifestation/construction of gender identity in Cyberspace through two studies: a quantitative study and a qualitative study. Both have analyzed chat line same-sex conversation.

We have chosen the Chat Line because of some of its interesting characteristics. It is an environment in which communication is synchronic and its purpose is to chat and to make friends (Bonaiuto, Buffone & Castellana, 2002; Roversi 2001). In it we can find: funny and serious discussions, games (Danet, 2001), stories, arguments and true representations (Paolillo, 1999; Bechar-Israeli, 1995; Danet, Ruedenberg &

Rosenbaum-Tamari, 1998). It is well known that the chat room was created as a place to bring people together freely, even if in some cases little communities arise; people who habitually go to the same chat line or to the same chat room to get to know new people and to meet old friends (Suler, 2000). The methodology used in the previously mentioned research came from the analysis of synchronic environments texts, characterised by long interventions, which can be re-elaborated many times before being finally submitted, and which are finalised for a rhetoric purpose. The chat line environment is closer to female communicative needs but it is also less adequate for classic research (Stewart, Shields, Monolescu & Taylor, 1999). In this same environment it was possible to observe the dynamics of self presentation which refer to the general mechanisms of the chat line, as well as the communicative forms typical of that specific community. Understanding these mechanisms, which can be general or more specific, means understanding the way subjects present and reveal themselves during the interaction (Belloni & Galimberti, in Press). Even the language is specific; the traditional forms of writing and speech typically used on the Net are called Netspeak or Written Speech. In chat lines, more than in other environments, the desire to reproduce the forms of speech conflicts with the slowness of writing (Crystal, 2001; Collot & Bellmore, 1996, December 1993; Werry, 1996). In subsequent paragraphs we will describe the quantitative and qualitative tools used to gather and analyse data, based on the theoretical choices described above.

4. Study 1: Method

The first study used the typical methodology for this type of research (Herring, 1994; Rafaeli & Sudweeks, 1993), which is called the "Coding & Counting Approach" (Herring, 2004): using an observational grid, it was possible to count how many categories, referred to as a stereotypical language style, there were in female and in male conversation. The object of the analysis was a group of 80 conversations lasting about 20 minutes, gathered between January and March 2003. The chats taken into consideration are linked to national radio stations or to portals and preference was given to the welcoming rooms or to the ones dealing with general subjects. The chat rooms we considered were: www.supereva.it; www.rin.it; www.buonconsiglio.com/chat; www.estraneet.it; www.chat.tome.it; www.terra.cl; www.sipo.cl; www.angelfire.com; www.riosysenderos.com/chat. The choice was limited to those chat lines in which a

person is allowed to “observe without participating” (lurk) and especially ones which allowed the conversations to be copied. It was all same sex conversation, meaning that the chatters declared that they were of the same sex. The choice of same sex conversations is due to the fact that the gender of our interlocutor influences our communicative style; if I am communicating with a same-sex person my style would be more stereotyped (Carli, 1989). Since we could not verify this information with certainty, we took into consideration the nickname and grammatical clues; the cases in which incongruence was observed in these considerations were excluded.

The analysis grid we mentioned above includes some of the categories of the Codebook of the *Project H's work group* (Project H, 1993), which were validated by achieving average agreement through coders percentages of 90%. Basing ourselves on its validation, we used an instrument from 1993, even though online communication actually evolved after this date. The categories we chose were those which have been described as being typical of women and men's language in previous online (Herring, 1994,1996) and offline studies (Lackoff, 1975; Kirchler, 1992; Glass, 1992; Hall & Braunwald, 1981; Thorne & Henley, 1975). The categories used were: *Firstper* (personal contents), *Opinion*, *Apology*, *Question*, *Emoticon*, *Emodevice* (use of punctuation marks to fade emotive meanings), *Coalition_1* (appreciations referred to other chatters), *Coalition_2* (use of the first person plural), *Fact* (description of a fact), *Action* (encouragement to execute an action), *Challenge*, *Flame* (message which creates tension), *Status* (identification of the personal social status), *Style* (colloquial language). In literature, the first 8 categories were indicated as more female, whereas the rest were more male.

An almost-experimental design was conducted; the independent variables were “gender” and “nationality”. Through the comparison made between the Italians and the Chileans, it was possible to check whether any difference really was linked to gender.

The 80 conversations we analyzed were divided into 4 equal subgroups, which was the result of crossing the independent variables (20 for each subgroup): Women Italy, Men Italy, Women Chile, Men Chile. Five codifiers analyzed the texts, two of them being bilingual (Italian and Spanish). Italian conversations were coded by a bilingual codifier and two Italian native speakers; the Chilean conversations were coded by two bilingual codifiers and one Italian native speaker, an expert in Latin-American languages.

The presence/absence of each category was revealed through the analysis grid during the whole conversation. The data thus gathered was submitted to statistical

analysis through χ^2 . The tested Hypothesis was: Women and Men samples differ in the use of all the categories we considered.

4.1. Results

The results of Study1 show that men and women use all the categories we considered, except for one, which had a similar frequency. It doesn't seem possible to observe the same linguistic styles in the chat line which previous research has found, for instance, in focus groups.

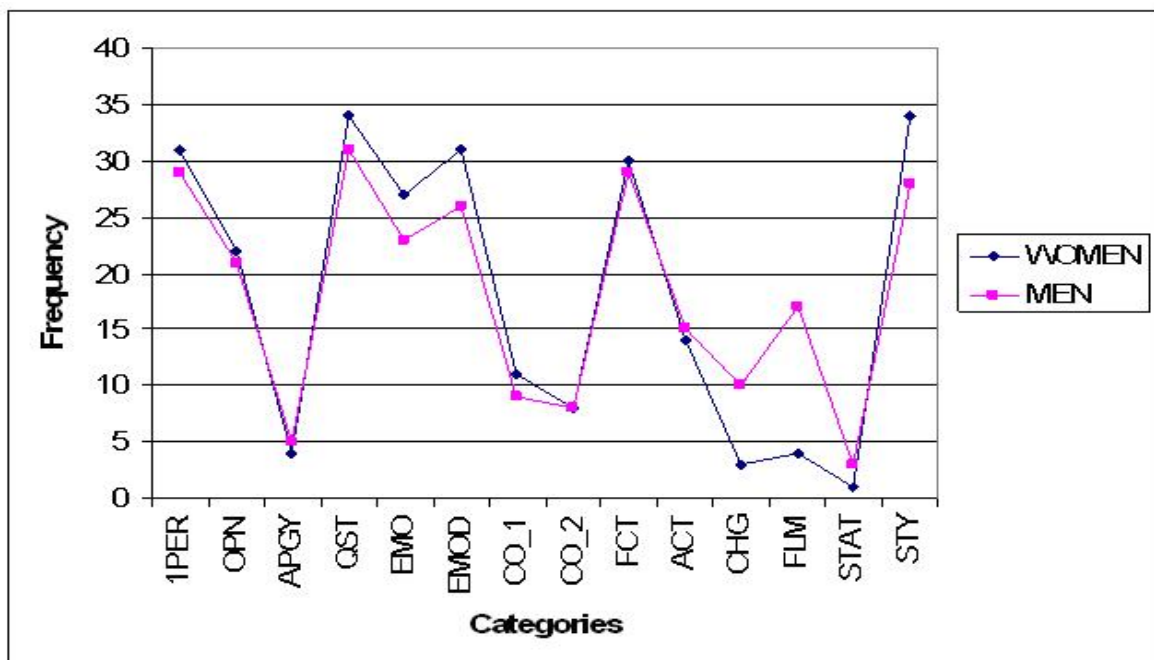


Figure 1: Frequency of the categories we considered in male and female conversations

The categories are divided in three groups depending on their frequency: low frequency (*Apology*: 12,5%; *Challenge*: 15%; *Coalition_2*: 20%; *Status*: 5%); middle frequency (*Opinion*: 53,8%; *Action*: 36,3; *Coalition*: 28,8%; *Flame*: 26,3%) and high frequency (*Firstper*: 75%; *Fact*: 67,5%; *Question*: 81%; *Emoticon*: 62,5%; *Emodevice*: 68,8%; *Style*: 77,5%). The frequencies of all categories are reported in Figure 1 and in Figure 2. The comparison between men and women shows that only 1 of the 14 considered categories turned out to be significant, being a traditional male style trait: *Flame*; $\chi^2 (1) = 10.912$, $p = 0.001$. Examining Italian and Chilean groups, there are

three significant differences: *Emoticon* ($\chi^2(1) = 5.33, p = 0.02$), *Emodevice* ($\chi^2(1) = 7.040, p = 0.008$), *Flame* ($\chi^2(1) = 5.230, p = 0.02$).

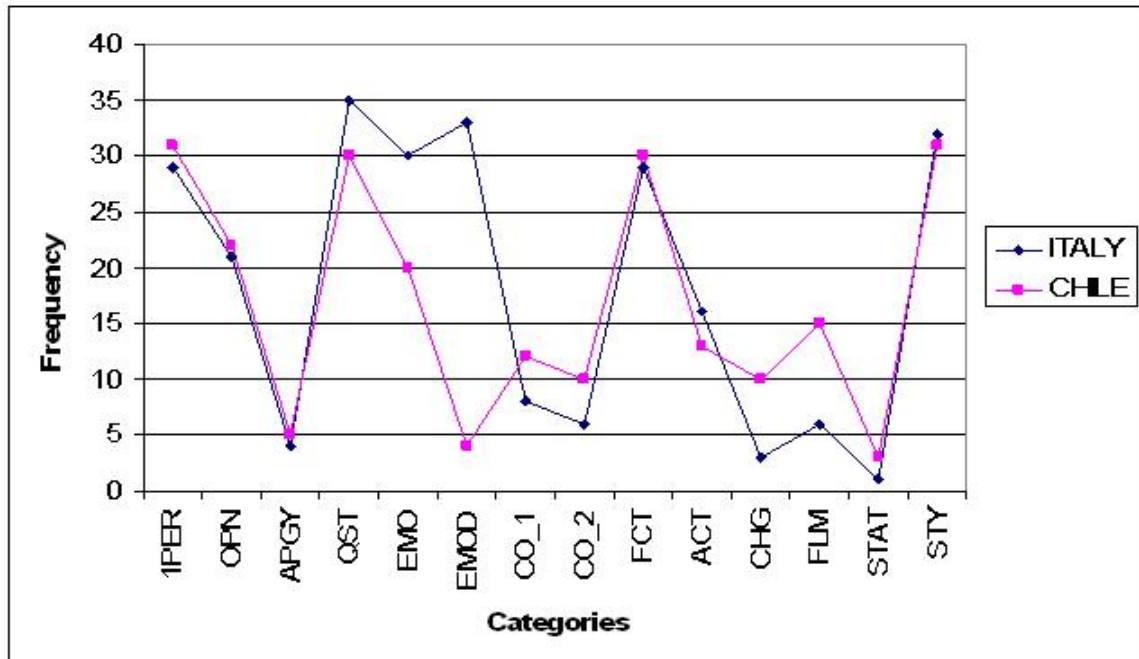


Figure. 2: Frequency of the categories we considered in Italian and Chilean conversations

4.2. Discussion

Study 1 states that only *Flame* really differs in male and female conversations, indeed it is also relevant in the Italy-Chile comparison. However, these results do not allow us to say that there is a gendered language style which is valid for chat rooms. There are more “first encounters”, in which an individual presents him/herself, and basic information (gender, age, residency etc..) is negotiated, in the chat lines rather than in an online forum. This creates the expectation that considerable use will be made of all those strategies which can counterbalance the absence of body, in order to be easily recognized as a man or a woman. The decision to count only the presence/absence of a category in the whole conversation without considering how many times the category was present within a session, was intended to reveal strong differences. Probably with a “weaker” method it would be possible to achieve results that are more similar to those in previous studies.

While observing how these categories have been used by chatters during conversations, it emerges that each one is a sort of label which gathers similar behaviour with different intentions. Women and men use the same communicative

tools in various strategic ways. For example, *Emodevice* category implies the use of capital letters, repetitions, and an incorrect use of punctuation to fade emotive meanings. Even if they are the same *Emodevice* elements, in female conversations they allow interlocutors to: place an emphasis on the phrase, call the chatter's attention, and reproduce intonation or expressions such as doubt and surprise. Also men frequently used the same elements in order to increase their own visibility in the group and to emphasize single words or parts of a phrase. Also *Flame* is used in many ways in analyzed conversations, and not always with hostile intent. It is possible to distinguish the flaming sessions by: Purpose (vulgar attacks to insult somebody on a personal level, jokes and coalition aimed at excluding one or more chatters), Targeted Person (a member of a minority) and Development (rapid development, quite contained, hidden origin from a false gentle behaviour).

These observations do not lessen the importance of the quantitative results. The near absence of flame in the female subgroup is an important indication of the communicative habits of women in chat rooms, but on the other hand, the presence of this mechanism in male conversations doesn't mean that there is a hostile mood. In this case those differences will also emerge within the same group, as shown for *Flame*.

In conclusion, compared with the results found in the literature, very few differences were found whilst comparing the two groups of men and women without taking into consideration the different nationalities. It may be possible that the method of counting is too selective and that it doesn't allow us to detect more differences. On the other hand, these differences are not linked to nationality. A more in-depth analysis about the way of using such categories shows how behaviours which are categorized as similar, are used with different intentions, thereby allowing us a new perspective with which to compare women and men. However this type of information needs to be integrated with the analysis of the intentions and the dynamic mechanisms of the conversations which can lead to different situations which are heterogeneous. This first study demonstrates the need for a method which is able to recognize the dynamic interweaving of the intentions and the active construction of conversations, and this is what has encouraged us to use C.A.

5. Study 2: Method

This kind of approach has been useful on many occasions, but it does not consider the “more subtle nuances of interaction that can meaningfully describe a community” (Thomsen, Straubhaar & Bolyard, 1998). So, 10 of the 80 codified sessions of conversation have been submitted for Conversational Analysis. The criteria for selection were based on the results in the first phase of the research, the sessions we considered are the ones in which there are the highest numbers of considered categories involved. The two most interesting conversations are presented in this article, one for each gender. The names of the users were not modified due to the use of nicknames which protect the anonymity of the chatter. The discursive ethnomethodological perspective, which focuses attention in group dynamics, was followed. (Hamman, 1996). According to this paradigm, participants express themselves in the interactions, from which the community’s shared meanings arise. During these exchanges the users negotiate the modality of their own presentation which will be held valid by those who form part of such an environment and who recognise each other in this way, due to this behaviour (Zuccheromaglio, 2002). Instead of depending on the precision of numbers, the reliability of this method depends on: “prolonged engagement and persistent observation, depth of analysis and sampling, learning rhetorical codes over time, dealing with dissimilar people, using informants” (Thomsen, Straubhaar & Bolyard, 1998).

The method which has allowed us to re-enact interactions and to observe the meanings negotiation is Conversational Analysis. C.A. focuses its interest on the combination of representations which emerge from the flow of the interventions which are also at the basis of numerous social dynamics (Galimberti, 1992). “The semantic representations which are reconstructed through deciphering are utilised only as a source of hypothesis and of clues for the second process of communication, the inferential process” (Trognon, 1992). The ambiguity which is dealt with and reviewed in due course during the conversation through a correction subsystem, is at the basis of a communicative result which is necessarily localised.

In this research we will focus on two fundamental mechanisms of conversation: successful performance (or accomplishment) and satisfaction of linguistic acts. A linguistic act is successfully performed if an interlocutor first of all understands the content of the proposition. Whereas a linguistic act is satisfied if there is a correspondence between what the interlocutor has said and the real world. For

example, if someone gives an explicit command (“I order you to do...”), the act is successfully performed if interlocutor recognizes it as a command. On the other hand, the act is satisfied if the interlocutor then obeys (Giglione & Trognon, 1993). As a theorem of interlocutory logic says, a linguistic act cannot be satisfied if it is not successfully performed: “this theorem means that the conversational value of an illocution is established through the accomplishment of the illocution which follows it. Thus, accomplishment (in the sense of conversational analysis) is always the fulfilment (in the sense of general semantic) of the preceding illocution” (Trognon & Brassac, 1992).

“Yet (...) the conversational interpretation of the previous theorem makes a rule of it by default in such a way that the conversational interpretation (by default) of an illocution does not suppose a pair of two illocutions (initial illocution and the conversational accomplishment that follows it) but at least three. When “everything is going well” this sequence of three illocutions allows the speakers to “face” the problem of mutual knowledge, i.e., to continue the exchange (...). This type of three-way exchange is thus indicative of the creation of a pooling between the two interlocutors” (Trognon & Brassac, 1992; Trognon, Grusenmeyer, 1993).

These two properties of conversation will allow us to clarify the dynamics of the construction of social texture typical of any analysed sequence of which the observed local network of interaction is a consequent manifestation (Trognon & Brassac, 1992; Galimberti, 1992).

The work of co-construction makes the two interlocutors co-utterers, both responsible for what is happening. This highlights how it is not possible to consider their identity, which is constantly being revealed, as optional (Galimberti, 1994). In the course of this stream, C.A. will study two different approaches, two ways of intending to present oneself as a man or as a woman.

The qualitative analysis was conducted by two judges. First, the utterances were recognized (in a chat they can be divided into several separate sentences), after which the mechanism of success and satisfaction were detected. It was possible to model a Psycho-social Hypothesis on this “structure”, which explains the relational dynamics and the negotiated meanings.

There are five subjects in this exchange, and all of them are very active in the discussion of each topic. It is possible to detect four threads of conversation, even if the contributions are collocated in a way which doesn't always follow a linear and temporal development. The chatters showed they were at ease when following the course of the conversation.

The first subject to be tackled, of which only the final part is shown, refers to plant care (*Plants*). The conversation starts with a series of comments and advice with regard to the care of MD's plant, which is not really an answer to an explicit request (perhaps contained in one of the preceding interventions). Two interlocutors respond to her with some advice (A1-A2 and L1-L2 answer MD1) taken into account by MD (MD2-MD3-MD4). The combination of advice + thanks is an expression of a good atmosphere and they are followed by words of thanks which express appreciation towards that specific person.

M enters the conversation through auto-selection and this marks the passage to the second argument (*Stewart*). M1 is immediately welcomed by MD and only two chatters participate at the beginning of the new exchange, but after a few interventions L joins in, always through auto-selection. The conversation progresses through a series of funny comments which seem successful and satisfied, judging by some expressions, mostly laughs (M3-MD7/MD8; MD10-L5; MD11-M7). At this point S enters the room, and a series of greetings (third argument: *Greetings*) are added to the previous discussion. The chatters demonstrate that they are able to deal with the situation efficiently. They don't give up talking about *Stewart* and the conversation progresses efficiently anyway with a series of questions and expressions that are successful and satisfied: MD12-L8-L9-MD14-L10-MD15-M9-L11_MD16-L12-MD17-L13-Md18-L14. Neither do they ignore the entrance of a friend, quickly answering her greetings (Md13-S3; S4-A4; S9-M10).

When the greetings conclude, S demands attention in order to introduce the fourth argument of the session (*Film*). The interesting thing to note is that despite the speed with which the interventions can follow each other in a public chat, for S only one directive is enough to obtain an immediate answer. (S10-A8-M11...). The group redirects its attention very easily to any new topic introduced by another member of the group. As observed before, the chatters easily accept the proposal answering the suggestion with explicit appreciations of this idea. (A9-MD19-M14-...).

The session is an excellent example of the “choral” harmony created by female users; this mood is constructed through recurrent mechanisms. First of all, aggressive tones are avoided; the language is never vulgar and the allusions are accompanied by expressive linguistic acts which are useful for easing the meaning and for specifying the intentions of the chatter who is speaking (MD7, MD8). Emoticons and Emodevice elements are utilised both to shape the tone of an intervention and as an intervention in itself. Even in chats, such elements have sufficient strength to create a successful and satisfied intervention and to constitute an additional communicative element which enriches the conversation and favours its development.

No incomprehension or any form of misunderstanding are present thanks to constant attention being paid to all the interventions. All the proposals coming from the users are answered immediately: in fact, there is no single case in which a new subject is not replied to (M1-MD5; S1-M8, S10-A8). It's true that not all interventions are successful and satisfied, but this happens during the deepening phase; refusal of a subject never occurs. At least, also if attention for the others is a constant element in this group, the “advice-appreciation” mechanism which features at the beginning of the conversation, although less frequent, is just as important. The exchange of positive replies reinforces the users and creates a reassuring climate in which any of the chatters can feel free to introduce any subject.

5.2. Analysis of the Second Sequence

The second session can be considered to be a typical example of a conversation between males, in which a challenge develops into a light flame.

The interlocutors are three male chatters; one of them tries to attract the attention of the women present in the room, but he only manages to get the ironic replies of two men who were present. The conversation is constructed in three moments: the *challenge*, the *flame* and the *coalition* and the *revealing of the game*.

The session is opened by the creation of the challenge; S in 4 interventions tries to attract the girls who are present in the room, but the only one to answer him and to make his interventions successful in a very ironic manner is A (A1). S doesn't accept that initially, but even the subsequent appeal is accepted only by A2. At this point S answers by describing his interpretation of the intentions of A as a challenge (S6-S7); A doesn't answer directly, but his subsequent behaviour seems to validate this hypothesis. From this moment all the interventions, which feature irony and quite heavy

offence, seem to be successful and satisfied by the two interlocutors (A and S) and by SK, a third chatter who joins them. Sk enters the conversation with a negative comment which is replied to by A with laughs of appreciation: a silent coalition between the two forms. This situation is made explicit once again in S9- S10 and it is not contested by anyone. Then a flame occurs in the form of a provocation and a response until A5. A6 marks a turning point. Perhaps because A perceives that the chat is becoming too heated up, he reveals the true nature of the conversations, by specifying the playful mood.

<i>challenge</i>	S1	<SEMENTAL>AHORAAA
	S2	<SEMENTAL>YAAA
	S3	<SEMENTAL> ALGUNA INTERESADA
	S4	<SEMENTAL> SOY ARDIENTE
	A1	<andyu2> k tu culo es ardente
	S5	<SEMENTAL> CONOZCO TODAS LAS POSICIONES
	A2	<andyu2> como te dan ???
<i>flame</i>	S6	<SEMENTAL> CHE PASA COMPADRITO
	S7	<SEMENTAL> QUIERE GUEVEAR
	Sk1	<skatala> POR QUE NO TE CORRI UNA PAJA MEJOR SEMENTAL O ES QUE NUNCA LE HAY PUESTO GENIO
	S8	<SEMENTAL> OTRO GUEON MAS
	A3	<andyu2> jajajajaja guena compare
	S9	<SEMENTAL> 2 CONTRA 1
	S10	<SEMENTAL> ME LOS COMO
	Sk2	<skatala> HUEN PERO NO PAJERO COMO VO MAS VALE
	A4	<andyu2> Como tkeri engrpir una mina por el chat tai guen del hoyo
	S11	<SEMENTAL> MMMMMMMMMMMMM
	S12	<SEMENTAL> SON GAYS
<i>game</i>	A5	<andyu2> soy entero apavao
	A6	<andyu2> aki es puro hueveo no mas loko
	Sk3	<skatala> NO SOY NORMAL PERO EL QUE TIENE PROBLEMA SOY VO PASANDOTE ROLLOS POR PIXEL

Table 2: Full Text of the Second Session. Male Conversation

Assuming a conversational stance, we can say that the sequence engenders a particular but effective form of collaboration. The scheme illustrates how only the interventions which interpret the situation (S7 - S9) are not replied to, whereas those pertaining to the flame are answered throughout the conversation. Chatters respond to each other's intervention as in the first female session.

5.3. Discussion

Some interesting conclusions can be drawn from the qualitative analysis. The quantitative results are confirmed on the one hand; their availability opens up new interpretative lines on the other: this can be assumed to demonstrate differences in the underlying motivations to behaviour not discriminated by quantitative analysis.

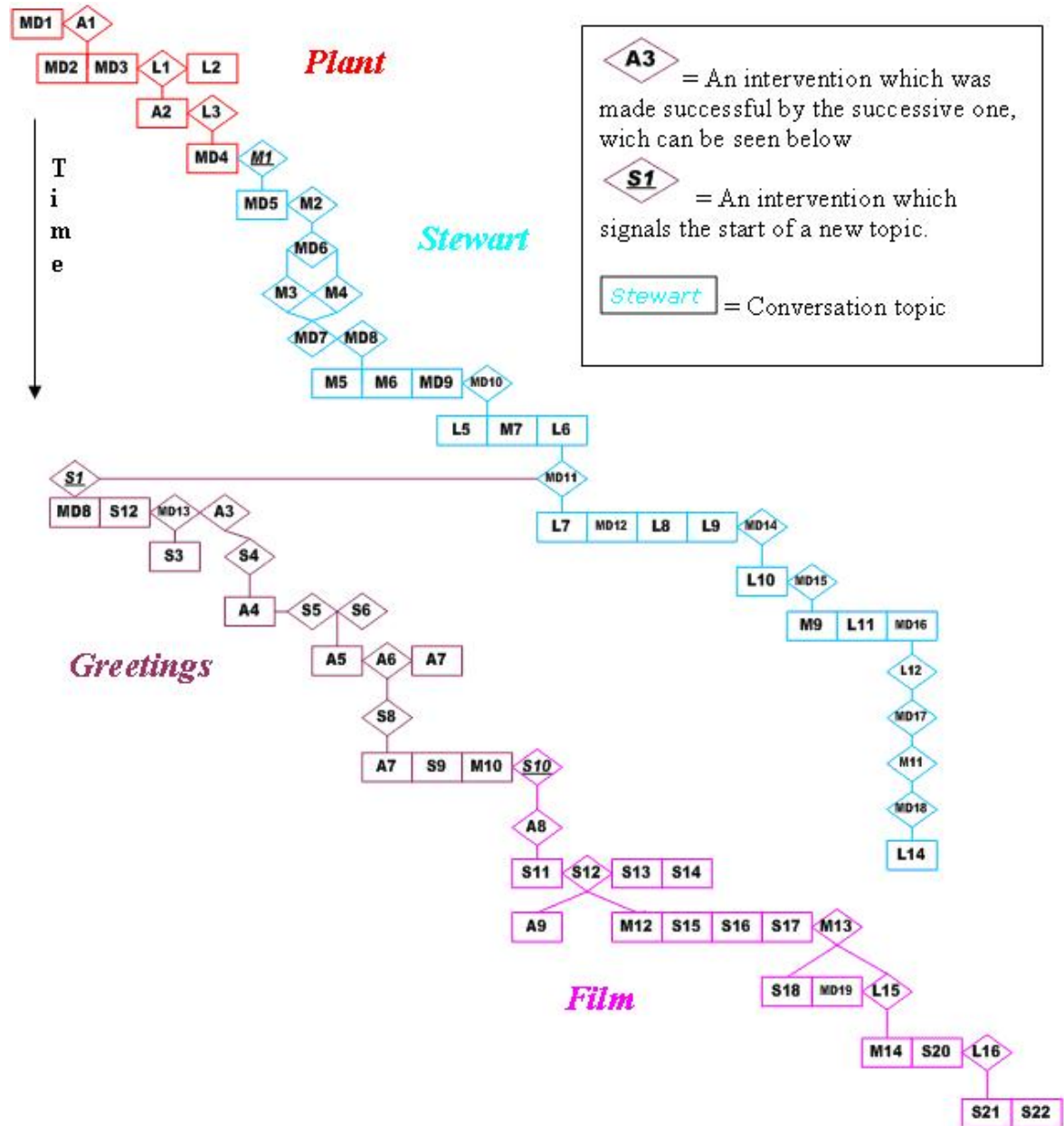


Figure. 3a: Scheme of the first conversation (Female users) which emphasizes the topics and the “satisfaction” and “successful performance” relationship between utterances

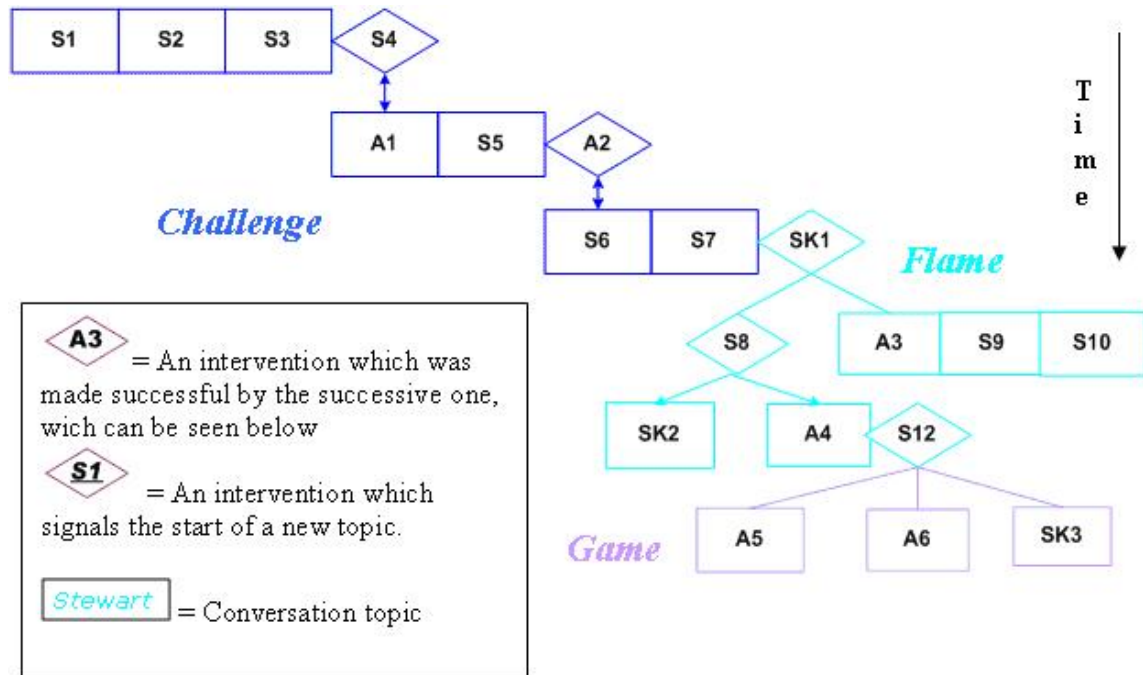


Figure. 3b: Scheme of the second conversation (Male users) which emphasizes the topics and the “satisfaction” and “successful performance” relationship between utterances

Through the observation of the mechanisms of success and the satisfaction of linguistic acts in particular, the conversation analysis enabled us to shed light on the **mechanisms of collaboration** used on the meta-communicative plane present in both the sessions (The categories Coalition_1 e Coalition_2 were not coded for either of them) even though they had different finalities which can be referred to gender stereotypes. Women in fact demonstrate a propensity to create an atmosphere which does not enable the development of tension, facilitating the development of more and more strength ties in the group. This result is obtained with the use of two mechanisms: a constant attention to the interventions of the people present in the room and the exchange of help and words of thanks. The conversation proceeds with questions and expressive interventions that show interest and which allow them to elaborate on the theme which has been introduced. The chatter speaking always claims the attention of others active online, to the extent that the subject is discussed thoroughly and never just truncated. Even when a chatter who is well known enters the room, the greetings don't prevent any of the other users continuing to talk about the previous argument. Indeed, attention is always paid to the advice-intervention, and sincere appreciation is

given for the interest the other has shown. (*Plant*) or the whole group (*Film*). Vice versa for men it's not so important to create a good atmosphere in a group, but on the other hand they are interested in spending their time playing pleasantly even if the interaction is with strangers, preferring in any case activities linked to competition. Obviously the mechanisms used to deal with the conversation change. In fact, the definition of the antagonists through the differentiation process and the use of the flame in a joking manner, both prevail in the male sample. The intention is to pass the time by challenging oneself in an apparent contrast. Everything appears clearly when A decides to reveal the playful context in which the discussion is taking place because he has the impression that someone is interpreting it in an incorrect way. The chatter critiques the wrong interpretation of the situation, not the colloquial style or the offences. Considering these premises, it is obvious that we will not find this type of conversations referred to as "us" which is united since the frame activated is "challenge". Once again the making of a collaborative context is revealed by the analysis of conversation mechanisms.

It can therefore be observed that despite appearances, a glance at the communicative and social intentions of the participants has allowed us to find intentions examined in the dynamics in line with the dominating gender stereotypes, even though they are masked by behaviours which are apparently contrasting. These behaviours did not permit recognition of the creation of the group climate in female subgroups, with the use of the quantitative method, and they also hid the male propensity to competition behind a real argument. Observing carefully the two conversational schemes in Fig. 3a and Fig. 3b, it's possible to recognise the two "gender" conversational strategies emerging from the analysis of the linguistic acts. A dialogical continuity, used as a sort of social "glue", prevails in the conversation between women (Fig. 3a), whilst the one between males (Fig. 3b) is characterised by a typical monological coherence. The conversation analysis has thus allowed us to recreate the collaborative dynamics which for many authors are the basis of those fixed categories which are utilised (and which we also utilised) for a quantitative analysis.

6. Conclusions

By summarizing our analysis, we can now recognize the two main purposes of this paper:

1. To call into question some of the results present in literature through the study of online gender which is the basis of a context which was never previously considered, that is synchronic environments. Since most of the works in literature are carried out by means of a quantitative approach, we were obliged to use this approach.
2. To start exploring both quantitative and qualitative methods to produce and analyze interactive data on online gender-related phenomenon.

The choice of using both approaches is based on the need to consider two sides of the gender identity and stereotypes construction:

- as products of online interactions within chat lines
- as processes; through C.A. it was possible to observe how they emerge from the stream of analyzed conversations.

For us, a great advantage arises out of this choice: the possibility of analyzing these mechanisms as generators of social phenomena (in both the “weak” and the “strong” sense) as we will illustrate afterwards, as shown in Fig. 4.

With regard to the results, the quantitative analysis described in the first part does not confirm the presence of a stereotypical style outlined by previous studies. Only one category resulted in being significant (*Flame*), excluding those categories which are considered to be fundamental in the definition of gender stereotypes, such as *Emoticon*, *Coalition* and *Question*. These findings made us reflect on how it would be possible to fit these results into the series of researches on Gender Language Style which have confirmed gender specificity on several fronts: style (Herring, 1996, 1999; Ferris, 1996), usage of emoticon (Witmer & Katzman, 1997) and group incidence (Savicki, 1996).

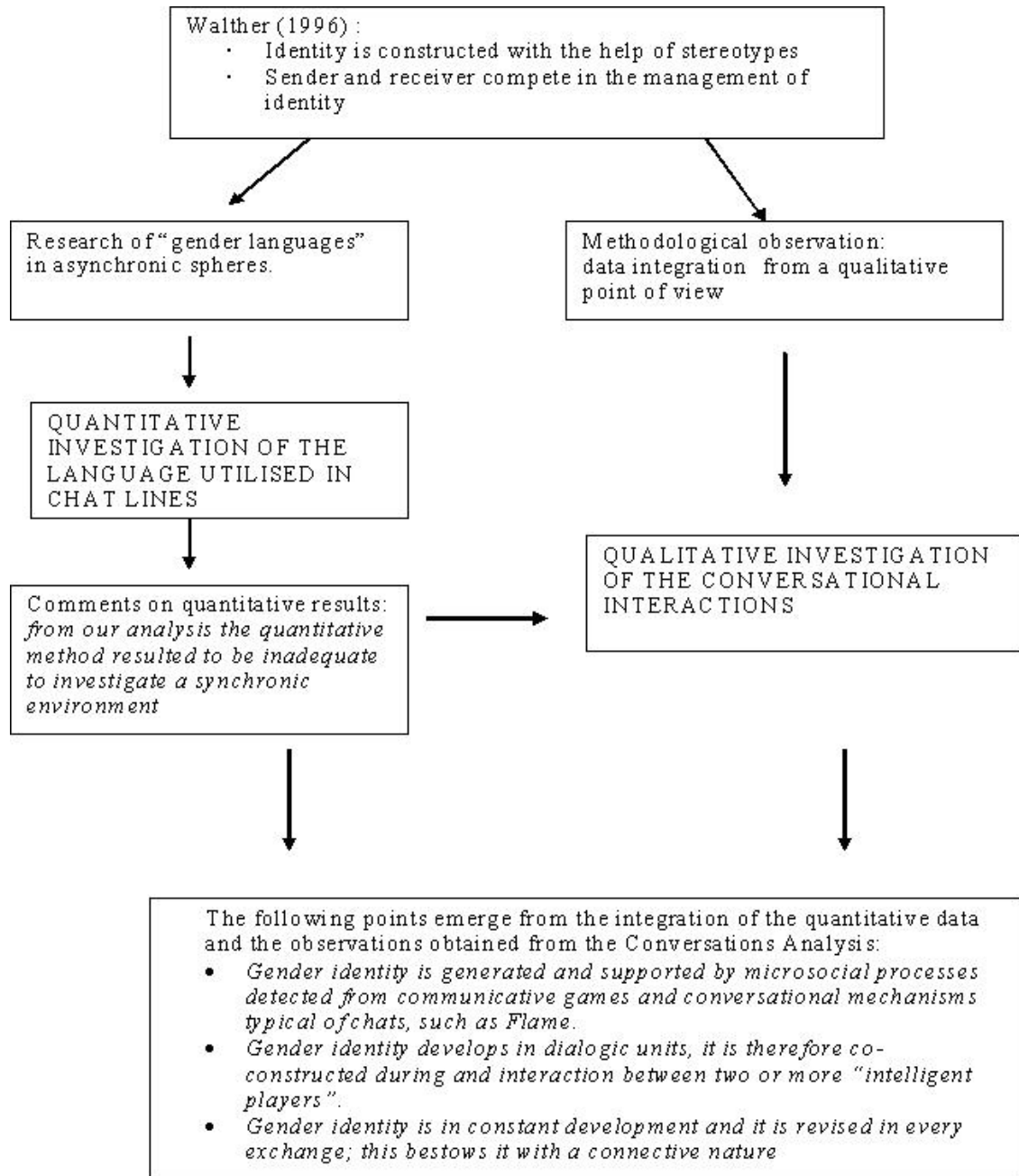


Fig.4: Structure of the article

The reply to this question came while we were working on the second point, dealing with methodological issues which we proposed from the start. Besides being a way of going more in depth when analyzing the results previously obtained, the openness towards qualitative research methods seems to be the most adequate choice of studying the phenomena in a synchronic environment (the chat line) which would otherwise remain hidden to our observation. This statement is in line with the attempts

of anyone looking for a method which can find the user's strategies in the communication of the self in CMC. They adapted communication to the presence of a computer as a medium, and also to the characteristics of each environment present on the Internet in which it is possible to meet other netizens. Typing speed, the recreational atmosphere and the impulse to get to know people, are the characteristics which are most evident in chat lines and create material which can be investigated dynamically, as it evolves.

The comment on the utilisation of categories in conversations is the first step in defining their meaning in a more precise way, for example outlining how behaviours inserted in the same category arise from different intentions. Conversational Analysis offers a more complete vision of the interactive dynamics which occur in the sessions we considered, highlighting the intentions beneath the coded behaviours, and allowing them to be 're-qualified'. So, it was possible to grasp the dynamism of the communicative behaviours in their environment and the development of a gender identity constructed step by step by the group. The whole interaction appears more "female" or more "male", depending on whether it was focused on finding the harmony and the collaborative support, or was more based on clashes and transgression. Even though at a "micro" level the quantitative analysis did not reveal significant differences, thanks to an adequate research instrument, such as the analysis of conversations, it was possible to find the same stereotypes which according to Walther (1996) guide the subjects during online interaction.

Another important consideration emerges from the analysis of the sessions of conversation. It was shown how the male subjects could use the flame to socialize. This analysis is carried out on content and structure, creating meaning and structures interaction. This double function is further confirmation of the rate of socialisation present in CMC, because it demonstrates that these mechanisms become independent from the objectives for which they are usually enacted. It becomes a real tool at the service of the creation and maintenance of social relations. These conversational mechanisms should not be considered to be social phenomena in a "weak" sense, as indicators of the phenomenological level of a sense of society elaborated elsewhere. They became indicators of microsocial processes in a "strong" sense; processes which generate evaluation, attitudes and behaviours "sensitive" to stereotypical representations and objectives of subjects (all elements which are "filled" by the *gender identity* and the "games" by means of which the subjects have the possibility to interact). These processes are linked to social rules and norms (which are also

characterised in cultural terms and are therefore “sensitive” to gender identity) and obviously, to the characteristics of the environment. Smart players enact these types of mechanisms in order to create a dialogical and connective gender identity. We have tried to demonstrate these phenomena by addressing central methodological issues. A research on stereotypes and gender identity can be conducted by investigating extracted monological chunks of communication, in order to move to dialogical units in which gender identity is created. This work indicates that gender identity should be considered as a construct which has an interactive and relational nature and not as an attribute which exists *a priori* from the personality of the subject: “social identity refers to the sense of the self constructed in time through participation in social life and identification with others” (Hewitt, 1996).

This opinion is in tune with the theories which support a “social” development of gender stereotypes, arising from what a group considers to be “male” or “female”. On this front there are different theorists who are interested in the mechanisms which favour the genesis of stereotypes. Hoffman and Hurst (1990) who researched the rationalisation of unequal group distributions, or the theorists of Social Learning according to whom the group rewards the behaviours which conform to dominant models. Therefore it is up to the group, during reciprocal interactions, to elaborate the content of the category “gender” and to push its own members to reproduce it or to make it their own. The creation of gender identity in a social exchange confers a **connectivist** nature to it, besides a **dialogical** one. This term doesn’t only indicate that with time the communication strategies elaborated in the community become a common heritage of its members, which can be summarised in rules available in the FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions). The connectivist identity, similarly to the connectivist intelligence described by De Kerckhove (1991), is the result of an exchange produced in the “here and now”, always available to ulterior modifications in subsequent exchanges. It does not arise from general knowledge but from the agreement of a group of interlocutors which becomes the basis and a starting point for a new re-elaboration. The connectivist identity condenses in itself the synchronic exchange between the users which doesn’t stop because it is continuously enacted.

Taking all this into consideration, many different points emerge. On one hand there is the need to deepen the qualitative observations in order to describe more precisely the process of the creation of the social function of some conversational mechanisms. On the other hand, considering the ecological nature of the data which has permitted us to observe the natural phenomena, it seems appropriate to extend the research in the

laboratory, to effectively control the way in which the two variables of age (as suggested by the work of Huffaker, Calvert & Lee, 2005) and sex are working. In this study the proposal for adopting a pluralism of research methods has revealed a remarkable potential for an improvement in the understanding of gender differences which doesn't stop at a linguistic level to outline a more articulate Gender Communicative Style by taking into account a more complex and socially articulated level: the conversational level.

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