

He's a man and she's a woman: A Conversation Analysis on Linguistic Gender differences

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Abstract— *This study used a conversation analysis design guided by a questionnaire adopted from Rowe and Levine (2015) to assess the linguistic gender differences of male and female. Three pairs of interactants of varied age group, children, teens, and adults, were observed as they engaged in dyadic conversations. Interactants chose the topic of their choice to give the conversation a natural and smooth flow. Age, gender and physical appearance were noted to describe the profile of interactants and to find out how these would possibly influence their dyadic encounters. Elements of communication such as number of interruptions, clarifications, reference to past and future events, and initiators were noted. Social aspect of communication relating to speech acts were also observed since this would show similarities and differences between male and female interactants. One of the conclusions reached in this study was age and physical appearance had no impact since each pair of interactants belonged to the same age group and all interactants were physically fair. Gender differences, however, were manifested in the varied communication elements as well as in the social aspects of communication, particularly in speech acts.*

Keywords— *conversation analysis, gender differences, elements of communication, linguistic differences, speech acts.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Language is an important factor in our day-to-day communication. Through language, people can express emotions, share personal views, needs and everything they want to say. This means that language surrounds, defines personality, determines social behavior, supports societal system, indicates thoughts and feelings and provides a platform to share ideas, co-operate and refine development process (Chaturvedi et.al. 107) However, men and women use language differently. In sociolinguistics, the relation between language and gender is one of the major issues raised long time ago.

Gender differences of all kinds fascinate people, and so it is not surprising that there is curiosity about the way women and men talk and whether there are linguistic gender differences. Gender differences can also be observed between and among conversations. Baquee (2016) mentioned that the amount of words used when talking is another field where men and women have the difference. Academic research has shown that while women tend to have more expressive, tentative, cooperative, and polite communication

characteristics, men use more aggressive, assertive, direct, and powerful communication traits (Basow & Rubenfield, 2003; Maltz & Borker, 1982; Wood, 1996; Mason, 1994).

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The Genderlect theory of Deborah Tannen strongly believes that men and women have different ways of communicating, different dialects which can best be described in a cross cultural format (Tannen, 1990). These differences may be seen in elements of communication including the duration of time a male or female speaks, number of interruptions, number of clarifications, referent to past and future events, and even who initiated the start and end of conversation.

In the same token, Gray (1992) postulated that there are significant and consistent differences in communication styles between men and women. The extent of these differences can be observed not only in the physiological elements of communication but also in the social aspect including the purposes of communication.

Among these are social functions are questioning, instructing, demanding, and correcting.

Similarly, the difference approach is in consonance with Tannen and Gray which emphasizes the idea that women and men belong to different subcultures. Men and women live in a different or separate cultural world, and as a result, they promote different ways of speaking (Nemati, 2007). Women's growing resistance to being treated as a subordinate group led them to assert a different voice, a different thinking, and a different way from me. Based on observations, stylistic differences can be seen between male and female. Women's speech has been said to be more polite, more formal, more clearly pronounced, and more elaborated or complex, while men's speech is less polite, more elliptical, more informal, less clearly pronounced, and simpler. On the other hand, males interrupt females more than they interrupt other males, and males are more likely to give direct orders than females.

Furthermore, the dominance theory believes that men and women inhabit a cultural and linguistic world where power and status are unequally distributed. This approach focuses on male dominance, and assigns language differences between men and women to the dominance of men with a society (Baquee, 2016).

Another theory which serves as a basis for this research is the Speech Act Theory. It holds that the meaning of linguistic expressions can be explained in terms of the rules governing their use in performing various speech acts (e.g. admonishing, asserting, commanding, exclaiming, questioning, requesting, warning). Ludwig Wittgenstein and J.L. Austin provided important stimuli for the theory's development which explains linguistic meaning in terms of use of words and sentences in the performance of speech acts. Some advocates claim that the meaning of a word is nothing but its contribution to the nature of the speech acts that can be performed using it.

III. METHODS

The study employed conversation analysis in order to find out the linguistic differences of male and female interactants. Conversation analysis is an inductive, micro-analytic, and predominantly qualitative method for studying language as it is used in social interaction where its focus is on language as a resource for social action; and its procedure is based on the analysis of details of participants' own behavior.

In order to know the profile needed for the study, interactants are identified according to their age, sex, sociolinguistic background and appearance. Other significant information taken into consideration on the behaviors of the interactants included number of interruptions, number of times interactant referred to past and future events, number of times for clarification, who had the 1st and last word, initiation, and who closed the interaction.

In analyzing the data, the following questions were used to further investigate and identify the linguistic behavior of the interactants. These questions were taken from Rowe and Levine's book, "A Concise Introduction to Linguistics in 2015."

1. What generalizations can be made about the age of interactants?
2. What generalizations can be made about the different sex-gender combinations of interactants?
3. Could you notice any effects that the physical appearance of interactants had on the communications?
4. Who spoke the most? The least?
5. Who interrupted whom the most often? How did gender, age, or other factors affect this?
6. What generalizations can you make about the nature of interactants and the type of 'speech acts' as they performed?
7. Humans are the only animals for which communication about past and future events is common. What does the data show about this?
8. What correlations can you make between asking for clarification and nature of the interactant?
9. Could you see any consistencies in who opened and closed an interaction and how it was done?
10. Did age have anything to do with this?
11. Did gender have anything to do with this?

Dyadic communication of three pairs of male and female interactants were recorded to answer the research questions. Each dyad was timed at ten minutes. The pairs were told that their conversation would be recorded for research purposes and their identity were kept confidential in accordance with ethical considerations in research.

The researcher purposely chose that research interactants must have an age gap of not more than five years to minimize the impact of age and to focus on the gender differences. The children interactants are siblings, teens were classmates, and adults were office mates. Participants were

chosen using a purposive sampling to suit the targeted profile.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Three pairs of dyadic interaction between male and female of different ages were recorded to answer the research questions. Their conversation is recorded to answer the questions needed in this research. The first table presents data on the duration of speaking, number of times of interruption, number of times referring to past and future events, number of times for clarification, and initiator of first and last words.

As can be seen in the table females generally engaged longer speaking time. Byrd (1994) explained that females tend to regard experimental situations (recorded interactions) as relatively formal settings, and as a result,

speak more carefully that the male participants. Females also have the tendency to pronounce words more carefully and to add an explanation whenever they felt the need to assert or to make their point clear.

In all three pairs, males interrupted more times than the females. When analyzed, the interruptions made by males were made to hint that they understood their female interactants. In a conversation between male and female, male often interrupts females although this is less likely to happen in conversations of both males. Michael Karson, a psychologist indicated that in a lively culture, not interrupting someone usually means the speaker thinks that the other party is boring or too stupid to merit a response. He added that interruption spares the communication partner from having to wind up every sentence with a grammatical stopping point.

Table 1. Elements Found in the Conversation of Interactants

Interactants	Communication Elements							
	Gender	Speaking time	No. of times of interruption	No. of times referred to		No. of times for clarification	Initiator	
				Past Event	Future Event		First word	Last word
2 children	Male (9)	2.10	3	0	1	3	√	
	Female (4)	3	2	1	2	1		√
2 teens	Male (14)	3.15 secs	3	3	2	4		
	Female (13)	5.30secs	1	4	5	3	√	√
2 adults	Male (28)	3.07secs	6	0	2	4		
	Female (32)	5 secs	3	1	4	1	√	√

Recalling past events and referring to future events in communication is inevitable. The teen male interactant referred to the past when he said, "I played volleyball since I was in grade two. Human beings love to talk about the past so that they could provide a background of themselves for better understanding. Yet another reason why people do refer to past is for them to consolidate the events in their well. This was obvious with the adult female said, "I've been to Manila several times. My family lived there for five years." This confirms the view of Charles Fernyhough, a

psychologist, who said that recalling or recollecting the past is one way in which people could organize their memories and the best way of doing this is by talking about them. It could be noted that in the three pairs of interactants, females tend to refer more to past and future events more than males.

A correlation can clearly be seen that those who initiated the interactions were also the ones who frequently asked for clarification. This implied that the initiators are obliged to make sure that they achieve their goal-

understanding. In teen and adult dyad, the initiator were the females and they also had more times of clarifications than their male counterparts. In the children dyad, the boy who initiated the conversation also had more clarifications than the girl.

In teen and adult conversations, females were the ones who opened and closed the interactions. This shows consistencies of their roles as initiators. In children conversation, however, the boy initiated the talk but was closed the girl.

Furthermore, other than gender, age and physical appearance, certain social factors like different speech acts such as interrupting, questioning, instructing, demanding and correcting within the interactions are observed. Dan and Rui

(2017) stated that people’s social background is closely related to people’s language behavior, and even people who use the same language will have many differences because of their social backgrounds. In this study, each pair of interactants have almost similar social backgrounds since they share something common, home in the case of the children, classroom in the teenage interactants, and work place in the case of adults.

In table 2, it can be noted that age did not have a great impact in the three dyadic communications. Age is not a major factor in this study that each pair of interactants belonged to the same age category- children, teenagers, and adults. Thus, they have the same topic of interest making conversation easy and natural.

Table 2. Analysis of Communication Elements Found in the Conversation of the Interactants

INTERACTANTS	SOCIAL ELEMENTS					
	Physical appearance		# of times an interactant performed the act on:			
	Age		Questioning	Demanding	Instructing	Correcting
2 children	Male (9)	lean fair skin	2	1	0	0
	Female (4)	chubby a bit fair	2	2	2	0
2 teenagers	Male (14)	skinny wavy hair	3	0	0	1
	Female (13)	a bit chubby fair complexion	0	2	1	1
2 adults	Male (28)	tall chubby	4	1	0	1
	Female (32)	fair skin slender round eyes	2	3	2	1

Physical attractiveness is important in human interaction according to Timothy Newton. In this research, the three pairs of interactants ere pleasing looking and fairly attractive. Physical attractiveness related positively to the quantity of social interaction with both males and females although attractiveness related positively to the quality of social experience for both sexes (Horton Spieler, & Shriberg,

2010). This allowed generally more satisfying, pleasant, intimate, disclosing, more assertive and lower in fear of rejection by the opposite sex.

It is the nature of interactants to perform speech acts when they offer an apology, greet, request, complain, invite, compliment or refuse. This study focused on the following

acts: questioning, demanding, instructing, and correcting. Philosopher John Austin explained that utterances operate within the natural language. As such, words could be used not only to present information but also to carry out action.

Among the speech acts, questioning was the most observed act performed by male interactants. This was followed by demanding and instructing which is mostly carried out by female interactants. Interactants had equal number of correcting. This is largely due to their close age gap. The act of correcting usually happens when there is a big age gap between communicators. Tannen (1990) described that women's conversational style is more supportive, while male is seen as more competitive. This explains why male dominated the questioning among the types of speech acts.

V. CONCLUSIONS

Generally, in this study of linguistic behavior in dyadic interactions, the interactants language was analyzed based on their age, gender, physical appearance, elements of communication and social aspect in terms of speech acts.

Interactants belonged to the same age group, hence, they agreed in almost all aspects of communication where they share the same topic of interests. This aided the smooth flow of conversation where each one assumes responsibility in the communication process.

As regards gender combination, male and female differ in the way they use language. Based on this study, female's speech is more distinctive, more precisely articulated and better differentiated phonetically, than that of male. Male interactants spoke more rapidly without being too conscious of their pronunciation.

Lastly, it is the nature of interactants to perform speech "acts" such as questioning, demanding, instructing, and correcting. This proved that they used words not only to present information but also to carry out action. Speech acts include real-life interactions and require not only knowledge of the language but also appropriate use of that language within a given culture. Truly, language reflects, records, and transmits social differences, so it is not surprising to find reflections of difference in language as reflected in this study.

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