Difference between Women’s Speech and Men’s Speech in a Conversation

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Abstract
This research paper aims to investigate the claims on different speech between women and men in a conversation. Among the claims are, women tend to use more standard form of language than men, women talk a lot compared to men, women speech are less direct and assertive than men’s, women often break the rule of turn-taking in a conversation and many others. To realize the above objectives, a qualitative approach is adopted which is the content analysis method. The sample for this study is a conversation between women and men in a talk show taken from the YouTube channel. The conversation is then analysed critically through a content analysis to determine whether the claims are supported or challenged. As a result, two claims are challenged; women tend to use more standard form of language than men and women speech are less direct and assertive than men’s. The other two claims are supported which are women talk a lot compared to men and women often break the rule of turn-taking in a conversation. It can be concluded that gender does influence our use of language despite other factors that affect women and men to speak differently.

Key words: Women’s and men’s speech; Language gender claims.

1. Introduction

Male and female languages can be defined as the language that usually used in communication which can reflect the characteristic of different genders (Tian & Qin, 2016). This can also be explained that men and women are always fall under the different category when discussing on everything including the use of language or in speech communication. In a layman term, language can reflect our gender as well as our gender influenced the use of our language.

Historically for the past few years, according to Tian and Qin, only few researches were done in the field of language gender-related which was even after people has already accepted the men and women’s different psychological characteristics (2016). Despite the few researches on gender-related speech, the early views on the differences between male and female’s speech were recorded in novels, letters and other writings which later correlates with the views of people in the contemporary world and lead to more investigation in the field of sociolinguistics (Litosseliti, as cited in Riissanen & Watson, 2014).

In relation to the more investigation in gender-related speech, the feminist movement in the 1960s has contributed to the increase of interest in gender and language mainly in gender differences. In the feminist campaign, Lakoff had published a study on Language and Women’s Place which attracts linguists interest in this field and this has become the starting point of the importance of gender-related speech in the linguistics research (Tian & Qin, 2016).

Compared to the old days, many researches on language based on gender differences have been done by the linguists around the world. As a result, many claims or stereotypes are found regarding male and female speech. The main claim on this issue is women’s speech is different from men speech in many ways such as women tend to use
more standard form of language than men, women talk a lot compared to men, women speech are less direct and assertive than men’s, women often break the rule of turn-taking in a conversation and many others. Therefore, to investigate the truthfulness of all these claims, literatures are used as evidences as well as a video is taken from the YouTube channel which focuses on the discussion involving both men and women in order to see if either the claims are accepted or rejected.

2. Literature Review

There are many studies done in the field of sociolinguistics focusing on the language of different gender. Language used by men usually associated with power while women language is seen to as express solidarity and support. Generally, the aims of interaction between men and women are the same, but there are express in a different way (Riissanen & Watson, 2014). According to Holmes (1995), she states that women use language to develop a relationship with other whereas men use language as a tool for them to get or sending information. Coates in 2004 also claims that women’s language is more cooperative because they use hedges, questions and minimal responses in order to build relationship with other. Meanwhile, men’s language appears to be competitive. Coates also add on that women tend to talk about their problem differently in a way that they are being more personal than men.

In relation to this claim that women are more personal than men, a study was done by Riissanen & Watson in 2014 shows that women tend to use more direct form of thought than men. Thought use in this study is referring to the personal thought or problem. Women most likely to share their problem with other, therefore their speech is seen as cooperative compared to men who like to keep their personal thought.

Haas in 1979 called the study of language and gender as ‘genderlect’, which is learning someone behaviour that has been constructed as different gender roles in a society through his or her utterances. He claimed that boys tend to give direct request compared to girls and girls like to use standard form of language in providing information in a conversation (Onem, 2016). Haas also mentioned that men’s speech is usually directive, they use nonstandard form of language as they like to talk about sport, money and business. Meanwhile, for women’s speech, they tend to be more supportive, polite and emotional (as cited in Onem, 2016).

Parallel to this view of male and female’s speech, Eckert and McConnell- Ginet, 2003 also found that men’s speech is competitive and individualistic meanwhile women’s speech is cooperative and other-oriented. Based on this two views, the similarities can be seen as men are directive in their speech and women are more supportive in their speech. In my opinion, discussion topic leads to this different way of speaking between men and women. Men and women have different interest therefore, discussion topic may contribute to their different way of speaking.

A part from that, Onem in 2016 conducts a study on speech acts used in male and female’s speech. Onem found in his study that female participants used more words when making a request. It is explained that women used more words in their speech because they wanted to give details and elaborated information when requesting. It is also explained that the details and elaborated language used by females are because they wanted to be more cooperative and avoid losing face. In contrast to men, their used of language when making a request are shorter and simpler as this reflected their personality which is less complex than women. This study prove that the claimed on women talk more than men is accepted as well as women are less directive in their speech compared to men. Interestingly, Tannen (1990) in her book found that men also talk more than women in various situation which reject the claim above. Thus, the claims on women talk more compared to men or Coates (2004) called it as “folkloristic knowledge” can neither be accepted nor rejected.

On top of that, another study was done on the politeness used between men and women’s speech by focusing specifically on the use of ‘sort of’ (Miettinen & Watson, 2013). With respect of ‘sort of’, the claim on women’s speech is cooperative while men are competitive are rejected as the result found in this study shows that men and women are more or less the same in the usage of politeness strategies in their conversation.

Besides that, there is a study on turn-taking in a chat room was done by Panyametheekul & Herring in 2003. The study found that women do participate more compared to men. Even though this research was done in a virtual world or the online medium, the result does reflect the real-life conversation which women often break the rule of turn-taking in a conversation.

In short, from this literature review, some claims made regarding the different language between men and women are different can accepted like women’s language are cooperative while men’s are competitive. On top of that, some
claims can also be neither be accepted nor rejected such as women talk more than men as studies found both can talk more depending on the various situation. Therefore, to have a more clear view on this discussion, a video of a discussion involves men and women are used to confirm all the claims made above.

3. Data collection

In order to investigate the claims made in men and women’s language, I have taken a video from the YouTube channel on the discussion involving both men and women. The video is taken from the The Real Daytime channel on YouTube. It is an American talk show which airs for an hour, five days a week. For the discussion on the topic of men and women’s language, I have chosen only a five minutes video discussing ‘Can Men Have Female Friends?’. The video can be watched here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lCti-gZ0v_k.

The show is actually hosted by five female speakers. However for this particular discussion, the show is given a title The Real Husband Takeover. The video has eight speakers involving five female speakers and three male speakers who are the guests. There are three couples on the talk show who are the real husband and wife. From this video, I can see how men and women use language differently. The transcription of the video is presented in the appendix section.

a. Women tend to use more standard form of language than men

Based on the video, both men and women can be seen using the same level of language. All the speakers are using a standard form of English with the American accent. None of them are using any slang or jargon in their speech as the discussion is understandable despite they are talking very fast. The example of the standard form of English used by both gender can be seen throughout the discussion and the transcription of the full discussion is available in the appendix section. One interesting fact that I got from the video is one male speaker (male 1) who is a Black American, his dialect is quiet strong compared to his wife and another female speaker who are also a Black American. However, the dialect used by male 1 is not influenced by his gender but it maybe the influence from his mother tongue.

b. Women talk a lot compared to men

This stereotype seems to be true as in many culture women will always talk more than men. From the video, women do talk more compare to men despite female speakers outnumbered the male speakers. There is one part in the video where the male speakers do not talk and only the female speakers are talking. Men can be seen to talk when they were asked questions. In contrast to women, they just keep on talking even there is no question asked. The example can be seen below:

(Noisy sound – the entrance of the three female speakers who are the wife of the male’s guests)

Female 1: We… we… we… we were simply try to start we run a little late..
Female 3 and female 4: (said something unclear together- both are talking at the same time)
Female 1: No we didn’t start with our show
Female 3: Yes you did
Female 1: And the party has just begun!! (Audience clapping and cheering)
Female 3: What you were saying
Female 2: I just show out to do my job, they were in your sit
Female 4: (Said something unclear) (noisy- female 2 is also talking at the same time)

c. Women speech are less direct and assertive than men’s

Interestingly, for this claim, it can be seen women speech are not less direct compared to men. Both male and female speakers in the discussion are direct in their speech. Men, which is contrast to the claim that they like to keep their thought to themselves seem to be wrong as they are very open to share their thought with the audience without having any indirect meaning. When the host asked them the question of can men have female friends, one of the male speakers answer all his thought honestly. Women also are direct in asking question to the male and sharing their thought on the issue discussed. The examples of both genders are being direct are presented below:
Example 1:
Female 1: Do you think men can have female friends?
Male 1: Nope. Not mine
(Audience clapping and laughing)
Female 2: Thank you for being honest...(clapping hand)...thank you for your honesty
Male 1: I know... I know, I think everybody deserve...but I don’t want to be no other woman’s friend I love my wife (audience clapping and laughing) that’s my best friend that’s my best buddy I don’t need nobody else for Jesus thank God

Example 2:
Female 2: Now wait... now wait, I have the real question for you guys because we were talking about right when you guys are coming out I was asking does it matter what does she looks like?
Male 1: It don’t matter
Female 3: It doesn’t matter
d. Women often break the rule of turn-taking in a conversation
From the video, this claim is undeniable as women do often break the rule of turn-taking in a conversation. This can be seen that when the female speaker (female 1) ask a question to the males, one of the male speaker is answering the question, however female speakers (female 1 and 2) interrupts his speech by asking a new question. Female speaker 1 and 2 break the rule of turn-taking in a conversation. The conversation can be seen below:
Female 1: No seriously just regular female friends
Male 1: You better answer it right...
Female 2: Do you think its possible do you think its possible for a man just be friends with the... with the women
To have a simple view either the video of the talk show is supporting or challenging the claim, the result is presented in the table below, symbol (/) is positive while (X) is negative:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Claims</th>
<th>Supporting</th>
<th>Challenging</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Women tend to use more standard form of language than men</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Women talk a lot compared to men</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Women speech are less direct and assertive than men’s</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Women often break the rule of turn-taking in a conversation</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Discussion
Based on the data collected from the YouTube video, some claims can be accepted while others claims are rejected. For the first claim, women tend to use standard form of language compared to men. In the literature review, it is said women usually use standard form of language (Haas, 1979), however in the video it shows that both men and women are using standard form of English. Thus, this view challenges the claims stated before. In my opinion, both men and women in the video can be seen using standard form of English because it is a TV show, therefore there is a rule and regulation that they need to abide. Using too many slang or jargon may lead to the difficulty for the audience to understand the discussion.
Secondly, the claim on women talk more than man, past studies show that even though many studies showed that women talk a lot compared to men (Onem,2016), there were also studies showed that men can also talk a lot like women (Tannen, 1990). The video shows that women talk more than men. This can be explained that the numbers of the female speakers are more than the male speakers which are five and three. Besides that, women talk more because they are the host for the talk show hence, their roles is to keep the
talk show going on and live up the environment.

Thirdly, women are said to be less direct compared to men. Past studies showed that women are more cooperative while men are more direct in the use of language (Coates, 2004). Interestingly, the video shows that both men and women are direct in their speech. Both genders seem not to use like hedges or any pragmatic marker in their conversation. I think this phenomenon happened because as mentioned previously the male guests are the husband of the three female host of the talk show and they are all are close friend to each other. Therefore, because of the close the relationship that they have, they are free to share their thought and ideas which lead them to be direct in their speech regardless of their gender.

Lastly, the claim on the women often break the rules of turn-taking in a conversation, the past study only shows that women tend to violate the rules in turn-taking in the online medium (Panyametheekul & Herring, 2003). The video has supported this claim as it shows that women do break the rule of turn-taking. The show can be seen to be very noisy as everybody especially all the female speakers are talking at the same time. They usually interrupt each other in their discussion. When everybody started talking at the same time, there will be one person who will control the situation by raising up their voice or asking a new question.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, without question men and women have the tendency to use the language both same and differently. This is depending on many factors such as the people who they are talking to, the environment, the topic that they are talking and other factors.

Regarding the claims or “folkloristic knowledge” (Coates, 2004) of different language of men and women, some of them may seem to be true stereotypes which prove by the previous research and some of them may be challenging the claims. To sum up, the previous research proves that women language tend to be cooperative, they discussed on more personal issues, they talk a lot and they often violate the rule of turn-taking. Meanwhile for men, their speech is competitive, using language as a tool to obtain and transfer information and they are direct.

Interestingly the video on the discussion shows that some of these stereotypes are wrong such as both genders are direct in their speech and both gender are using the same level of language which is English. Undeniably, some claims proven to be true in the video like women talk more than men and they tend to violate the rule of turn-taking in a conversation.

References


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