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Female and Male Conversational Style

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Summary and key-words

Female and male conversational styles are influenced by a number of things such as their social roles, their ethnicity, patterns they acquired in the childhood and many more. Concerning their social roles and statuses, women are mainly connected to the domestic unit and are supposed to take care of it. Their status is typically more bound, and that is why some authors, like R. Lakoff, hypothesize that this is the reason for their being more careful when it comes to speech and behavior. Further, women tend to be more polished and more adapted to social situations, because they know that it takes a lot of work to step out of their social roles. Men, on the other hand, have always been the dominant gender. They are the bread-winners and competitors on the marketplace, and their social status is mirrored in their speech. Some research (Tannen 1982) suggests that ethnicity can also be a factor contributing to misunderstandings, especially in mixed-gender conversations. In the example of Greek-American couple the problem is different interpretation of indirectness, but depending on cultures, misunderstandings can be caused by numerous other reasons. Another issue which raised lots of questions are tag questions. A well-known linguist, Robin Lakoff, claims that tag questions are mainly used by women, which was proven not entirely accurate. It was shown that the usage of tag questions depends more on the “power” of the speaker, than on the gender. The 'powerful' speakers are more likely to use tag questions than the 'powerless' ones. In conclusion, both genders are nowadays believed to be equal, but different. This, at least is the essence of some of the more recent approaches to language and gender, such as D. Tannen’s, D. Cameron’s, J. Coates’s and etc.

Key-words: high-involvement style, competitive style, dominance approach, difference approach, tag questions

Mnogo stvari utječe na način na koji žene i muškarci razgovaraju, poput njihovih društvenih uloga, njihovog etničke pripadnosti, modela razgovora koje usvajaju u djetinjstvu i ostalo. Što se tiče njihovih društvenih uloga i statusa, žene su tradicionalno povezane s kućanstvom i smatra se da se trebaju brinuti za njega. Njihov društveni status je statičniji i zbog toga neki autori, kao Lakoff, pretpostavljaju da su žene opreznije u načinu na koji govore i na koji se ponašaju. Nadalje, govor žena je uglađeniji i one se lakše snalaze u raznim

društvenim situacijama, zato što znaju da treba puno napornog rada kako bi napredovale na društvenoj ljestvici. Na drugu stranu, muškarci su oduvijek bili smatrani dominantnijim spolom. Oni financijski skrbe za svoje obitelji i natječu se na tržištu što se i vidi u njihovom govoru. Što se tiče etničke pripadnosti, do nesporazuma može lako doći, pogotovo ako se radi o razgovoru između muškarca i žene. Na primjeru grčko-američkog para možemo vidjeti kako je do nesporazuma došlo zbog različite interpretacije neizravne komunikacije, ali ovisno o kulturi, do nesporazuma može doći zbog različitih razloga. Još jedan zanimljiv problem su dopunska pitanja. Poznata lingvistkinja, Robin Lakoff, tvrdi da većinom žene koriste dopunska pitanja što se pokazalo netočnim. Čini se da uporaba dopunskih pitanja više ovisi o količini moći određenog govornika nego o njegovu spolu. „Moćni" govornici će prije koristiti dopunska pitanja nego oni s manje moći. Da zaključim, danas su oba spola smatrana ravnopravnim, ali različitim, što je i suština novijih istraživanja o spolu i jeziku D. Tannen, D. Cameron, J. Coates itd.

Ključne riječi: stil visoke uključenosti, natjecateljski stil, pristup temeljen na društvenoj prevlasti, pristup temeljen na društvenoj različitosti, dopunska pitanja

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1. Introduction

1.1. Aim of the paper

Throughout the history men and women had different social roles and were faced with different social expectations. It is only natural to assume that this would affect their conversational styles. Some approaches to theorizing male and female linguistic differences make this an explicit part of the explanation for the phenomena observed. There are some common patterns of female and male speech styles that are the same in most of the cultures. Nevertheless, there are also some elements that appear to be culture-specific.

The question of differences between male vs. female speech styles is not a simple one to answer. In addition to gender, one must also take into account some other variables that impact on the speech of individuals, such as their age and ethnicity. In other words, there are not the same speech patterns in the speech of teenagers and adults. They differ from topics to forms which they use, but some social behaviors remain the same throughout the lives of both men and women. Furthermore, ethnic differences influence greatly the speech of both men and women. This is what makes the topic both fascinating and difficult to study.

The aim of this paper is to lay out the major findings concerning female and male conversational style on the basis of the research of prominent experts in the field, such as Deborah Tannen, Robin Lakoff, Susan Harding, and many others. The paper will also try to address the issue of female-male miscommunication and the reasons why it happens so often. After laying out the different theoretical approaches in the section 2, in the main part of the paper I will look in more detail into some of the frequently cited differences between male and female conversational styles and the forces that seem to give rise to them.

1.2. Questions addressed in the paper

Being that this paper aims to give an overview of some of the major findings of already available research, in this section I lay out the main issues to be addressed in the remainder of

this paper. They are the issues that prompted most discussions in the pertinent literature and include the following set of more or less interdependent questions:

- What is the influence of social roles on the speech of men and women?
- What are the aspects of teenage speech?
- What role does the ethnicity have on the speech?
- Is there separate women's language?
- Which are the differences between male and female speech?
- Are tag questions only used by women?

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Introduction

There are numerous theories about women's speech being affective and their social role being the subordinate one, in contrast to men whose role in the society is dominant and their speech assertive and competitive. One of the theoretical approaches of this paper is Robin Lakoff's dominance approach, which states, among others, that women tend to use more tag questions because they need confirmation about their information. As I will show later, despite the fact that the theory has been around for 40 years, others have suggested that this theory is not entirely accurate.

Another theoretical approach on which this paper will focus is Deborah Tannen's work on female conversational style. She described it as a "cooperative" and "high-involvement style". Tannen used these attributes to show that women are more supportive in their conversations, while men are more focused on the competitive aspect of their conversations.

2.2. Dominance Approach vs. Difference Approach

In 1975 Robin Lakoff wrote her influential book *Language and Woman's Place,* which introduced the Dominance Approach to theorizing male and female speech styles. The dominance approach "asserts that there is a characteristic register or 'women's language' consisting of certain linguistic features and connoting tentativeness, deference, and lack of authority" (Cameron 1992: 3). She claims that women use more tag questions because of their subordinate position. They need confirmation in order to feel confident. She went that far as to calling women's language not a gender marker, but a status marker. In addition Pamela Fishman described women's role as 'interactional shitworkers' [1], "who maintain conversational flow and provide linguistic support for male conversationalists" (Cameron 1992: 3).

Contrary to the Dominance Approach, the Difference Approach (Jennifer Coates 1988) states that women's behavior is not a status marker of their subordinance, but simply a manifestation of their difference. In most countries there is a segregation between sexes from the early age (Goodwin 1980): girls play together with dolls, while boys play sports or with cars. They do not start to communicate between each other until they are teenagers. In these early years of childhood, children develop different tendencies and different social norms. Boys are more competitive and assertive in their talk, while girls are more cooperative and more focused on giving support rather than to compete among each other. Even though in a few years the mixed sex groups are starting to develop, these tendencies remain throughout their lives. This is why there are so many misunderstandings between the male and the female partner in a relationship. The Difference Approach calls these specific female speech patterns feminine and granted male masculine. But over and above, there is no dominant nor subordinate sex when it comes to the linguistic differences.

[1] In 1983 Pamela Fishman did research on the linguistic dynamics of heterosexual relationships. She found out that women ask a large number of questions whose function was to facilitate men's contributions to conversation. Men did not return the favor and the result was a pattern where women offered men the floor and supported them in holding it, while receiving little or no encouragement to talk on subject of interest themselves. This is why she called women 'interactional shitworkers'.

2.3. High – involvement style

Deborah Tannen (1993) described female conversational style as high-involvement style. This means that women prefer to discuss personal topics such as their families and friends, they shift topics abruptly[2], and they introduce new topics without hesitation, i.e. without any pauses. Other features of the high-involvement style are cooperative overlap and participatory listenership. To understand cooperative overlap, one must know the difference between interruption and simultaneous speech. By definition "interruption is a turn taking which violates the current speaker's turn" (Nordenstam 1992: 87). Simultaneous speech is, however, a term "for overlapping speech which does not violate the speaker's turn" (Nordenstam 1992: 88). According to Tannen, women use simultaneous speech and cooperative overlaps to assert to the speaker that one is listening to her and to show her support. Such overlaps often start with prestarters as *hm* and *yes*. Similarly, participatory listenership also shows the support for the speaker and that the listener listens to her. Good listenership is usually a female feature. Moreover, women are more likely to use back-channeling signals[3] to prove their attention toward the speaker.

In contrast to women, Tanner argues, men do not tend to be cooperative, but rather competitive. Their conversational style is described as assertive. Men's simultaneous speech is more an interruption in which their goal is to seize the attention of the other speakers. Men do not tend to use back-channeling signals. When they use *hm* and *yes*, they mean them as a response to the question. Their goal in the interaction is to keep the attention of the listeners and prove as a valid member of the group.

2.4. Summary

[2] Sudden change of topic, that does not relate to the previous one, e.g. changing the topic from work to household, or from children to the movies.

[3] Back-channeling signals are uttered during the other speaker's turn, usually at a transition point. Their function is for a listener to show that she or he has heard/understood/agreed with the speaker and to support the speaker's continuing her or his turn (Linell and Gustavsson 1986: 54). The most used one is 'yes', with others being 'aha, you don't say', 'yes, right', and 'yes I do'.

There are different approaches when explaining the connection between the conversational styles and social roles of men and women. Robin Lakoff took the dominance approach which claims that women's social role is subordinate to men's and that their social subordination is reflected in their use of different linguistic forms such as tag questions. The Difference Approach, on the other hand, advocated by Coates, asserts that men and women are equal but different. They acquire their social behaviors and patterns through the childhood and they remain throughout their lives. Women's tendencies to talk about personal issues or to show support in the conversations are simple markers of their femininity. Women's speech is described as cooperative by Deborah Tannen, because women show the features of being cooperative in their conversations. Among other features, they use simultaneous speech, back-channeling signals. Men do not appear to show these linguistic patterns, because their conversations have different goals. They want to seize the attention and amuse the listeners, because this is a part of their competitive nature.

In the remaining sections I will zoom in a little bit on some of the details of and behind the theories introduced above. The goal is to give more substance to some of the central claims that have informed studies of language and gender over the past several decades.

3. Analysis

3.1. What is the influence of social roles on the speech of men and women?

It is often considered that women are the weaker sex and that their role is domestic, i.e. they are responsible that household is kept clean and nice, and that children are taken care of. Throughout the history it seems that their status is more house-bound than that of men. The stereotype of the domestic role has still not changed and women are still the primary care-takers of children. Men's social role is different. In most societies, they are the bread winners of the family. Their role is to earn money and provide for their families. Additionally, men are competitors. They have to compete on the marketplace to earn more and have more power. Women today are changing their social status from being just mothers to also becoming business women, who are as successful as men. Similarly there are some men that decide to

be stay-at-home dads, like in Canada where in 1990 the Government passed the bill granting fathers paid leave for the purpose of primary caregiving. However, this seems to be one of relatively few exceptions.

The social roles of men and women influence greatly their behavior. Many would still agree that women are more polite and more careful in their speech, because unconsciously they know that they are being "monitored". Men, however, are considered to behave more freely, because they know they are the "stronger" sex and they do not have to follow some of the rules women have to. Penelope Eckert states:

> the origins of gender differences in styles of interaction can be traced to the traditional roles that relegate women to the domestic realm and men to the economic marketplace, and although their roles have changed to some extent in our society, the social norms and the norms of interaction that have come to be associated with them remain to complicate and thwart social change (1993: 32).

She also claims that women do not have direct control over the household's capital and their worth is solely based on their ability to maintain order in the domestic unit. Moreover, they can gain compliance only through the indirect use of men's power or through the development of personal influence, which is much more difficult. Through social manipulation, good use of words, women win men's cooperation and thus their own power and influence. This is why women are more concerned with their social networks and social connections than men. They are more careful when acquiring acquaintances and more status conscious, because as stated above, their status is more bound, and trying to lose their old status takes much more thought and work than with men in the same situations. Eckert additionally states that:

> men can justify and define their status on the basis of their accomplishments, possessions, or institutional status, but women must justify and define theirs on the basis of their overall character and the kinds of relations they can maintain with others. Women, therefore, unlike men, are frequently obsessed with being the perfect spouse, the perfect parent, the perfect friend. (1993: 34)

This process of gaining power is extremely competitive, and yet it happens unconsciously. Women do not plan to act the way they do to acquire power, it is inherited. The same is with men, they are born to earn money and compete, and with just being born they have a "better" social status than women.

Furthermore, Kerstin Nordenstam (1992) made research about female and male conversational styles. She investigated both same-sex and mixed-sex conversations. The

setting of the conversations was informal and the informants were given free choice of topics. She came to conclusions that confirm some statements mentioned in the previous paragraphs. Women are more focused on personal topics, which might be explained due to their being more bound to the domestic unit. They mentioned, for example, twice as many names as men. Their topics were, however, not home-bound, which was slightly unexpected. They also talked about their careers. Men talked about cars, sports, jobs, and, surprisingly, about other men. They did not mention other women, whereas women talked about individuals of both sexes. Women were more relaxed and more flexible about topic choices. They were the ones who instigated the conversation in marriages. This confirms the statement that women are more careful about how they will be perceived by the society. Moreover, in conversations between two spouses, men interrupted more, and it is seen as a strategy of dominance. Their role is to be the bread-winners, and therefore the stronger sex, which they show by the way they talk. Men also interrupted each other to grab the other speaker's turn, whereas women are considered to be equals among each other, and their conversations had easy, natural flow.

As the previous paragraph shows, most of the beliefs about how social status affects male and female conversational styles were confirmed in the study cited above. In the following section we will look at how the variable of age ties into the gender-based differences in speech.

3.2. What are the aspects of teenage speech?

The topic of teenage conversations is very important, because linguists can observe teenagers in their natural habitat and see how they shape their opinions for the adulthood. From the early age boys and girls prepare themselves for the roles they will have in the future.

Studies of children suggest that girls tend to play in smaller groups and the groups are homogeneous in terms of age (Lever 1976, Eder and Hallinan 1978, and Brooks – Gunn and Matthews 1979). Play is cooperative and often takes place in a private setting. There is no or little competition, and girls consider each other equals. What is interesting is that when they do fight, they do not really know how to handle the arguments so they often just break up as a

group. During their play girls learn to do three things with words: “to create and maintain relationships of closeness and equality, to criticize others in acceptable ways, and to interpret accurately the speech of other girls” (Maltz et al. 1982: 205). They form as groups to a large extent by talk. Girl talk is the core of girl’s friendships. Furthermore, girls learn to criticize and argue with other girls without seeming too aggressive and bossy. Girls reject girls who do not meet group norms. In these situations indirectness plays a great role. Just like in adulthood, teenage girls know how to humiliate someone without sounding too harsh, but by evaluating the situation and choosing appropriate words.

On the other hand, boys play in more hierarchically organized groups and the inferior boys are not excluded from the group, but they are made to feel their inferiority. The hierarchies fluctuate over time and every boy gets the chance to be victimized and has to learn to cope with it. In their world, boys learn to do these things with words: “to assert one’s position of dominance, to attract and maintain an audience, and to assert oneself when other speakers have the floor” (Maltz et al. 1982: 207). The assertiveness is not to be confused with aggressiveness.

> The simple use of assertiveness and aggression in boys’ play is the sign not of a leader but of a bully. The skillful speaker in a boys’ group is considerably more likeable and better liked by his peers than is a simple bully (Maltz et al. 1982: 207).

According to the same author, the most eloquent speaker will know when and how to use words in certain situations. Knowing how to act in particular situations will establish him as a leader and therefore he will gain respect of his peers. Common features of boys’ social interaction are storytelling, joke telling, and other narrative performance events. The most appreciated linguistic skill is maintaining peers’ attention. A boy learns to assert himself, because this is what he will need in the future to compete in the marketplace. Boys do not use back-channeling signals, but rather side comments. They do not do this to interrupt the speaker, but to set themselves as individuals in the group.

Penelope Eckert compared the high school to the marketplace. Instead of competing for money, teenagers compete for popularity. It is already established that men, i. e. boys, compete for the attention, but also girls compete and their competition is rather more cooperative. Eckert (1989) gathered a group of ninth grade girls, who did not ‘hang out’ together since they started junior high school. None of them is extremely popular, but all of them have asserted themselves as valid members of their high school. During the time of their

conversation, they form a 'temporary community', even though they know that after the conversation they would probably not hang out together anymore. Expectedly, their conversation is focused on boys, but they move from the traditional roles of women and form their own consensus. They prefer boys who are individuals, i.e. have some specific features and are interesting, rather than liking only popular boys. They call these popular boys "air-heads" and think they are boring. Although they are not friends they come to the same conclusion and part with mutual agreement.

Donna Eder carried out a study on the basis of fifty nine students of ages between ten and fourteen. She found out that:

> Teasing is often an important means for initiating cross-sex interaction. Because of its ambiguous nature teasing is a safe way to communicate liking without being held accountable for one's feelings. At the same time romantic teasing has also been found to be a technique for maintaining gender boundaries. Children will often tease other children for talking with or sitting next to someone of the other sex, implying there is a romantic attraction. As a result males and females often have limited contact with each other during the elementary and middle school years (1993: 18).

She also concluded that teasing gives girls an opportunity to play with language and develop creative and novel responses. Just like Eckert, Eder noticed a detachment from the traditional gender roles. Girls feel free to approach boys first and create their own peer culture. It is becoming more evident that "children bring traditional and societal concepts to their activities, but primarily as a resource. Their actual behavior reflects these traditional concepts but frequently goes beyond them to include new and creative transformations" (Eder 1993: 29). By doing this, children begin to develop the sense of personal I and start to form their own individualities.

3.3. What role does the ethnicity have on speech?

In this section, let us concentrate on the different interpretations of the same utterances based on the ethnicity of the persons involved in a conversation. One can easily assume that anyone can master a foreign language with a lot of hard work, but ways of signaling intentions and attitudes in a language seem to be self-evident, natural, and real. Conversational control

processes operate on an automatic level. For example, different cultures understand indirectness in completely different ways.

Deborah Tannen observed a Greek-American couple in their conversation. The misunderstanding arises when it comes to the indirectness, especially in requests:

Wife: John's having a party. Wanna go?

Husband: OK:

(Later)

Wife: Are you sure you want to go to the party?

Husband: OK, let's not go. I'm tired anyway. (Tannen 1982: 220)

None of the partners confessed to have felt any disinclination to go. The American wife reported that she asked her husband if he wanted to go without considering her own preference. She tried to make sure that he really wants to go to the party, so she asked him the second time. She thought that she is being solicitous and considerate. The Greek husband thought that his wife was asking him about the party because she wanted to go, and when she asked him about it for the second time, he understood it as a way of her telling him that she had changed her mind. He made up a reason not to go to the party, because he wanted her to feel good.

There is another example told by a Greek woman of about 65. Before she married, she always asked her father for permission before doing anything. He never explicitly denied her anything, but she knew if she asked him to go to a party, and he answered: "If you want, you can go", that she was not allowed to go. The indirectness has a larger effect on the Greeks than on the Americans. The Greek husband misunderstood his wife's question, because in Greek culture many things are understood naturally, without the need of verbalizing them directly. On the other hand, Americans are more direct, and the American wife assumed that her husband would tell her explicitly what his preference was. Moreover, she was not paying any attention to the husband's intonation, tone of voice, and nonverbal signals, which would have contributed to the mutual understanding.

Tannen then made another research by using this example and asking a group of Americans, a group of Greeks, and a group of Greek-Americans to interpret the conversation. They focused on the husband's choice of OK. He replied with a word, which is called the

brevity effect. Americans explained it as informality, casualness, and sincerity. The Greeks, however, "pointed to it as evidence that he was reluctant to go to the party. To them, brevity is a sign of unwillingness to comply with another's perceived preference" (Tannen 1982: 228). Greek-Americans were closer to the Greeks in their interpretive style. Moreover, it seems that the "third generation Greek-Americans who have lost the Greek language may have not lost … Greek communicative strategies" (Tannen 1982: 230).

The findings presented here give us a vague answer to what extent ethnicity influences male-female communication. A frequent assumption that women are more indirect in their speech is here proven false when it comes to the ethnicity of the pair studied. An American woman seems to be more influenced by her ethnicity than her gender, but that is only a single case, and it would be unwise to generalize from this individual example to 'theories' about how gender and ethnicity work together to create linguistic styles. It is obvious that much contrastive work between different pairs of ethnicities needs to be carried out before more robust conclusions can be drawn.

3.4. Is there a separate women's language?

This question is far from a simple one. Despite the fact that many cultures seem to share a lot of common ground, one would be hard pressed to claim that in each language there is a special *lect* that is the *lect* only used by women. It would require massive amounts of information to even come close to answering this question.

In this section I will concentrate on the question posed about the possibility of a separate women's language in Ole Togeby's paper "Is there a separate women's language?" (1992). He introduces three different conceptions of language, with the first one called 'Shibboleth'[4]. He there states that "[a] 'language' means one among many different languages: English, Danish, Norwegian, or a dialect or a sociolect of such a language" (Togeby 1992: 64). The language that we learned in our childhood is natural to us and we cannot avoid certain linguistic forms in expressing our thoughts and feelings. Furthermore, he

[4] "A shibboleth is a linguistic variable that can be used as a diagnostic of where someone comes from. The story goes that the Ephraimites lost to the Gileadites in a battle. They tried to flee, but the Gileadites were able to unmask them because they pronounced the word *shibboleth* with an /s/ and not an /ʃ/." (Meyerhoff 2006: 14).

mentions Robin Lakoff and her research on tag questions and compares them to the Danish appendage negation. “It is the appending of the negative particle *ikke* ‘not’ to an affirmative sentence, and of the adverb *vel* to a negated sentence: *Her er koldt, ikke* ‘Here is cold, not’, *Vi har ikke fri pä fredag, vel* 'We have not free on Friday, surely'“ (Togeby 1992: 64). Lakoff claimed that only women use tag questions as a way of seeking confirmation, but Togeby's empirical investigation of 37 native Danish speakers shows different results. Working-class men had more appendage negations per 100 sentences (7.8%) than working-class women (0.6%) and middle-class men (1.5%). The middle-class women did not use appendage negations at all. Finally, he concluded that language is based on biology; women speak the way they do, because of their innate psychological characteristics, and that women's language is a sociolect.

“The other conception of language can be described by the metaphor about the bird in the cage; in a way your mind is captured in the vocabulary of language like a bird in a cage” (Togeby 1992: 66). In other words, you can only use the concepts which are offered to you by the words in your language, and you cannot express emotions for which you do not have the words. Togeby also claims that “every single word represents a classification of reality, and together all the words in the vocabulary form an ideology” (1992: 66). He describes our language with words as monopoly and apartheid, because men have monopoly of being ‘normal’, i.e. the male counterparts have mostly been considered the default one. He gives examples of male gender, such as *haveformaend* 'chairmen', *arbejdsmaend* 'workmen', and *folketingsmaend* 'parliament-men', that do not have the female counterparts. When there is a name for the female counterpart, it is often pejorative. This can be compared to the English spinster and bachelor. The word spinster is negative, while being bachelor is considered to be a positive characteristic. Moreover, the Danish generic pronoun is *he.* So when we talk about teachers, doctors or some other occupations, we use the pronoun *he* for them. Thanks to this phenomenon Danish laws about marriage may sound funny, because there are no women mentioned, like in this example: “One of the spounses has the right to divorce when the other spouse has sought *his* life or been cruel to *him* and the children“ (Togeby 1992: 67).

The third part of the paper is called 'Did your mother serve at the Palace?'. Togeby starts with a following story:

> a prince once traveled around visiting his country. In a village the peasants crowded round the market square to see him, and among the people the prince saw a man who was the very image of himself. The prince went down to the man and asked him, 'Did your mother serve at the palace?' 'No', the man answered, 'but my father did'. (Togeby 1992: 68)

The prince wanted to humiliate the man, but he failed to do so, because the man's sharp answer changed the whole situation. Togeby wanted to show how linguistic interaction can be seen as an ongoing regulation of the social relations and can be used as a strategy in the conversation. Then he mentions male competitivenes and female cooperativeness. He concludes that most of the interaction styles are learnt in school, and that we are all different.

One language where it has often been claimed that women do have their own separate language is Japanese (Takahara 1991). Japanese has three gender categories: male, female, and neutral one. Female style has separate linguistic features differing from the male and neutral ones. Women's language is recognized as a sociolect for 100 years, and thus sex distinctions are built directly into the Japanese syntax. Women have specific grammatical forms, such as tag-like questions and the usage of female markers *wa* and *no*[5]. Takahara explains that women have few question forms, whereas men have many more (wh-questions, yes/no questions and others). He also adds that women's statements require an answer and their questions do not. This is explained with women's lack of confidence and their constant search for approval. They have been discriminated against linguistically, among many other things, for years (having separate and lacking some of the linguistic forms), and that is mirrored in their speech. Other than male and female gender, in Japanese there is also neutral pattern, which is used in formal situations. Women often lack words or grammatical forms for specific utterances, so they borrow from the neutral pattern, but never from male speech. Women also do not have specific forms for imperative. It is replaced by indirectness, because it is considered that women are hesitant to give commands. Female speech is seen as informal, thus women lack linguistic forms for formal situations. In Japan, women had no place in socially elevated situations. Nowadays men borrow more and more from female speech. They use offers instead of imperatives, they borrowed the *no*-marker to mild their questions, and talk more indirectly, because they want to be seen as polite and nonconfrontational, and these qualities are often connected with female speech.

3.5. What are the differences between male and female speech?

[5] The particles wa and no are used to indicate the female gender in the sentence. To exemplify this let us look at the sentence 'It is strange, I think'. A Japanese woman will say it: 'okasii wa ne', whereas a Japanese man will say: 'okasii ne'; or 'I bought this', female sentence: 'kore katta no', and male: 'kore katta' (Takahara 1991).

Kerstin Nordenstam (1991) explored male and female conversational styles by doing research of six dyads of men and of women, and six mixed dyads called marriage. The informants were given a tape recorder and great freedom in choosing the topics. The only thing that they had to do is talk for half an hour. The first thing she noticed is that almost every man mentioned the presence of tape recorder and some even talked about it for most of the time. The women, on the other hand, completely ignored it. Secondly, men's dyads were in most cases organized hierarchically, for example father and son or company director and his colleague, whereas women seemed to be all friends of equal standing. Only men yawned.

Later on, she focused on the word distribution. The number of words in the whole corpus of conversations is 86,000, distributed over 8,400 utterances. As expected, utterances were unequally distributed between the three groups. "Men have the longest utterances, with an average of 12.3 words per utterance, and women the shortest, with an average of 8.2 words per utterance. The corresponding figure for the marriages is 11.3" (Nordenstam 1992: 77). When we divide the number of words uttered by women and men in the married couple's conversations, we come to a different pattern. "The average male utterance consists of 8.7 words, the average female utterance of 13.9 words" (Nordenstam 1992: 77). Here we get the reverse of the proportion in the single gender dyads. Research findings over the years have shown that the old stereotype that women talk more is not valid, but Nordenstam makes us question these results in mixed gender groups.

Moreover, the distribution of words between women is 50/50 and between men about 70/30. The most striking difference is between marriages. The study proves the old stereotype and the wives do talk more than their husbands. Nordenstam interprets these findings as women fulfilling their task thoroughly. They are the ones who were chosen to pick a partner, so it is only natural that they keep the flow of the conversation.

Furthermore, Nordenstam analyzed the topics of conversations. It was shown that men talk to each other about manly things – cars, sports, jobs – and women about womanly things – children and personal relations. She noticed that women also talk about their jobs and courses. Regarding the married couples, the tendency is the same, but the wife seems to talk about one thing and the husband about another. Women are mostly interested in other people, especially their children and friends. This preference, as already mentioned, is called high-involvement style. In addition, women change topics most frequently, followed by men, and

the married couples bring up the lowest number. Out of 68 main topics of marriage conversations, 34 were introduced by women and 34 by men. Thus the hypothesis that men decide the topic of conversation does not apply to this research.

In addition, one has to regard the topic shifts. They can either be abrupt or smooth. The sudden change of topic, where the person who takes the turn presents a not previously discussed topic, is called abrupt. On the other hand, smooth topic shift is characterized by the occurrence of a formal boundary marker. Women appear to use more abrupt topic shifts, which "may be the consequence of a quick talking pace and a great deal of personal involvement between the conversational partners" (Nordenstam 1992: 83). The men's dyads use smooth topic shifts and formal phrases to change the topic. The women's conversations usually have easy flow without any special pauses, whereas men seem to have more difficult time with keeping up the conversation. Men put themselves on pressure to make the conversation success; they are obsessed with the tape recorder and they find it hard to relax.

Simultaneous speech, i.e. cooperative overlap is one of the most important features of women's speech. They talk at the same time to show support to each other. They use back-channeling signals to show that they are listening to the speaker and agree with them. They also ask a lot of questions. These features are a part of participatory listenership and are only evident in conversations among women, while they are lost in marriage conversations. Men, however, interrupt each other. They fight for the attention and seek the chance to get their turn. They use more short responses as a way of answering to the question, while women use them as back-channeling signals only.

There are some additional differences between female and male conversational style. Women "see questions as a part of conversational maintenance, while men seem to view them primarily as requests for information" (Maltz et al. 1982: 213). There are two conventions for beginning and linking an utterance to the preceding one. Women seek for an explicit acknowledgement of what has been said and link with the next utterance, whereas men ignore these strategies of linking. Moreover, women see overt aggressiveness as personally directed, negative, and disruptive, while men view as conventional organizing structure for conversational flow. Their attitudes towards problems sharing and problem solving are also different. Women share experiences and often reassurances with one another. Men, in contrast, hear problems of the speaker and make explicit requests for solutions by lecturing to the audience (Maltz et al. 1982).

3.6. Are tag questions only used by women?

One of the features that has frequently been cited as characteristic of female speech are tag questions. I will analyze them in separate section, because of the abundance of information gathered about them. Tag questions "have been analyzed as a marker of subordination, as a marker of person-centered female values, and also … as markers of authority and power in discourse" (Cameron 1992: 16). Deborah Cameron analyzed the findings of two studies which examined the tag questions in different contexts. Before I present the main findings of the two studies, let me first explain how the use of tag questions is normally explained within the three analyses.

The first analysis is the Dominance Approach. As explained earlier "Lakoff points out that the tag is formally between a polar interrogative and a declarative" (Cameron 1992: 17). She distinguishes between the 'legitimate' use of the form – to check information of which the speaker is unsure – and 'illegitimate' use, in which the speaker seeks agreement for a proposition. Lakoff claims that the latter one is characteristic of women. Instead of simply stating facts, women construct their propositions in form of a question, thus inviting someone else to confirm their validity. Her interpretation has been challenged by Janet Holmes (1984), who agrees that there are two types of tag questions, but she calls them 'modal' or 'speaker-oriented' and 'affective' or 'hearer-oriented'. The first one serves to confirm information, e.g. "The provost's addressing us tomorrow, isn't he" (Cameron 1992: 17) and the 'affective' tag should be seen as an invitation to the hearer to respond to the speaker's comment. Holmes states that "asking a question is a way of giving someone else the floor" (Cameron 1992: 17). This type of tag she calls 'facilitative' because they facilitate the contribution of the interlocutor. Tags also have a second 'affective' function and these tags she calls 'softeners'. They are used to soften the serious statements, such as accusations. She then concludes that women use more 'affective tags' than men, because of concern for others.

The most recent analysis of the tag questions is called asymmetrical discourse. The field of asymmetrical discourse analyzes the institutional talk, where one party has more power than the other, like a conversation between doctors and patients or courtroom officials

and defendants. The findings of the researchers in this area show results opposite of Lakoff's. They characterize the tag form as powerful. They rationalize this by two explanations:

> First, research shows that in asymmetrical encounters the 'powerful' party makes extensive use of questions to control the less-powerful speaker's contribution … Asking a question both compels the hearer to speak and constrains what s/he can relevantly say in reply, thus exerting control over topic choice. (Cameron 1992: 18)

Second, some forms are more conducive than the others. Conducive means that the form favors one answer over another to some extent. For example, yes/no questions are less open than the WH-questions. Tags are most conducive because they contain an embedded, complete proposition, for example: You're going to the film tomorrow, aren't you? The tag form strongly assents the proposition.

The first study I will illustrate is the casual-conversation study (Cameron 1992), which examines the data from the Survey of English Usage conversational corpus. The sample contains both mixed-sex and single-sex interactions. The researchers analyzed 96 tokens of the tag questions using Janet Holmes' theoretical framework. The expected pattern appeared. Men used a greater percentage of modal tags and women of affective ones. The men who scored highly on the affective/facilitative tags knew that the recorder is on. One possible interpretation is that "these men took on the role of facilitator to maximize the amount of data elicited for the Survey and to ensure their own contributions did not dominate the sample" (Cameron 1992: 19). Interestingly, the role of facilitator is the one Fishman describes as 'shitwork' taken by women in their domestic unit.

Moreover, in the second study (Cameron 1992) researchers examined data from three contexts: a classroom, where the teacher controls the talk, a doctor-patient setting with the doctor in control; and a TV chatshow with the presenter in control of the talk. The sample was selected to balance out the numbers of 'powerful' and 'powerless' participants. The numbers of men and women were once again equal and tag questions were analyzed using Holmes' framework. The results showed that men and women produced an equal number of tags, but men used twice as many modal tags, while women used more affective ones. They also showed that tags were overwhelmingly used by 'powerful' speakers and there were no examples of facilitatives or softeners being used by 'powerless' speakers. The 'powerful' speakers use more affective tags, while the 'powerless' ones use modal tags. According to these findings role seems to be better predictor of tag use than gender. There are more

'powerful' women, who use affective tags and, granted, tags are not markers of the subordinate status.

Finally, it seems that previously discussed Holmes' interpretation of affective tags as markers of supportiveness, Fishman's notion of 'interactional shitwork', and Lakoff's dominance approach do not stand ground here. If we concentrate on the function of tags in the usage of 'powerful' and 'powerless' speakers, we can explain these new findings. The 'powerful' speakers often criticize and it is understandable that they use more 'affective' tags to soften the criticism they offer, whereas modal tags have been used as requests for reassurance by the 'powerless' speakers (Cameron 1992).

4. Conclusion

My purpose in this paper has been to analyze and compare different studies on female and male conversational styles. They have shown some expected and some surprising findings, which I will briefly name here and end with a tentative conclusion.

Based on the commonly understood conventions women are considered the weaker sex and men the bread-winners. Women are bound to their domestic unit, while men are supposed to compete on the marketplace. Even though this has changed to some extent, these traditional roles still influence on the conversational topics and on the social behavior of men and women. It seems that women are more adapted to the complicated social situations, such as job interviews, because they had to work harder to climb the social ladder and their social status is more bound. Stereotypical as it may sound, men are not that polished in their speech and social behavior, because they know things come easier to them.

Moreover, these social patterns of men and women are acquired in the early age. Children learn the traditional roles by playing, but later on they use the knowledge about social groups as a basis of their development and they form their own perceptions. Boys and girls play separately and their groups have different characteristics and rules. The reason for female-male miscommunication can be traced back to the childhood. Research suggests that until a certain age (adolescence) the only form of mixed-communication is teasing and this is

always in a form of 'play'. Adult women and men are often accused of playing games in relationships, and teasing can easily be the reason of this acquired social behavior. If children played together from time to time, misunderstandings in adulthood would probably happen less often that they do now.

Furthermore, ethnicity plays a great role in the way people communicate. Misunderstandings can easily happen, because cultures interpret things differently. In this case, non-verbal sings help in communication, while words can confuse and mislead the listener. Some cultures, like Japanese, have also developed separate women's language, which only complicates already complicated issue of female-male communication.

Last, some interpret differences between men's and women's speech as inequality of genders. Men have always been considered more powerful than women, but this opinion of the social roles is starting to change. Today women can enjoy the same privileges and both sexes are considered equals. Their conversational styles still differ from each other, but they have equal status, and there should not be any more stereotypes of their behavior.

To sum up, topic about female and male conversational styles is not an easy one and there are still parts that require further research, but what we already know is that even though they are different from each other, both men and women are starting to use some features of speech from the opposite sex. For example, men have been borrowing softeners to sound more polite, while women are starting to use language as a means for asserting themselves on the marketplace. There are numerous examples for this change, so we can conclude that there is no separate men’s and women’s speech. Maybe one day we would be more similar in the way we speak, but for now, female and male speeches are still different from each other in some characteristics, and that makes them different conversational styles, rather than different languages.

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