

GENDER DIFFERENCES IN SPOKEN ENGLISH: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC INVESTIGATION OF INTERACTIONAL STYLES**Hamroyeva Muborak**

Master's degree student of Webster university

Abstract: This article explores gender-based differences in spoken English, focusing on interactional patterns, discourse markers, and pragmatic strategies. Drawing on sociolinguistic theory and previous research by Lakoff (1975), Tannen (1990), and Holmes (1995), the study examines how male and female speakers differ in their use of language across various social contexts. Using recorded conversations from university seminars, interviews, and informal dialogues, this study analyzes turn-taking, politeness strategies, and topic control. Findings suggest that while stereotypical gendered speech patterns are present, they are highly context-dependent and influenced by social roles rather than biological sex alone. The study contributes to ongoing debates in discourse and gender studies by emphasizing the role of power, setting, and identity in shaping language use.

Keywords: gender differences, spoken English, sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, interactional styles

1. Introduction

Gender and language use has long been a central topic in sociolinguistics, raising questions about how male and female speakers differ in spoken interaction. Early studies proposed that women's speech is more polite, cooperative, and indirect, whereas men's speech tends to be more assertive and competitive (Lakoff, 1975; Tannen, 1990). However, more recent approaches challenge essentialist views and emphasize the influence of context, power dynamics, and individual identity (Cameron, 2007). This study investigates whether such gender-related differences persist in contemporary spoken English, with particular attention to discourse features such as turn-taking, hedging, question types, and feedback strategies.

2. Literature Review

The foundational work of Robin Lakoff (1975) argued that women's speech reflects subordinate status in society, characterized by hedges, tag questions, and indirect requests. Deborah Tannen (1990) suggested that men and women belong to different "speech cultures," leading to miscommunication. Janet Holmes (1995) highlighted that women tend to use more positive politeness strategies, while men are more prone to use negative politeness or bald on-record directives.

However, critics like Deborah Cameron (2007) argue that these claims often overgeneralize and ignore diversity among speakers. Recent corpus-based and discourse studies emphasize variability and the importance of social roles, institutional context, and personal style over biological sex.

3. Methodology

This qualitative study uses **discourse analysis** to examine 12 audio-recorded conversations, divided equally between male-only, female-only, and mixed-gender interactions. The data were collected from:

- University seminar discussions
- Peer interviews

- Informal group chats

Participants (n = 24) were university students aged 19–25, with equal representation of gender identities. Transcripts were coded for:

- Turn-taking patterns
- Hedging and modal verbs
- Interruption frequency
- Politeness strategies
- Use of questions and minimal responses

Ethical approval was obtained, and all participants gave informed consent.

4. Findings

The analysis revealed notable patterns:

- **Turn-taking:** Women tended to support turn-taking through backchannels (e.g., “mm-hmm,” “yeah”), while men interrupted more frequently in mixed-gender conversations.
- **Hedging:** Women used more hedges (“kind of,” “maybe,” “I think”) in formal settings, whereas men used fewer hedges overall.
- **Question Use:** Women asked more open-ended questions, promoting interaction. Men used more rhetorical or information-seeking questions.
- **Politeness:** Women consistently used more face-saving strategies (e.g., softeners, indirectness), particularly in formal conversations.

However, the data also showed **role-based variation**. For example, female speakers in leadership roles used assertive strategies similar to male peers.

5. Discussion

These findings confirm some traditional observations about gendered language use, such as women’s preference for cooperative conversational styles. However, the variation across contexts and speaker roles challenges essentialist interpretations. Rather than being biologically driven, many differences appear to reflect socialization, discourse norms, and power relations. This supports Cameron’s (2007) critique that gendered language is performative and variable.

Moreover, the presence of assertive female speakers and supportive male speakers in different contexts indicates that **gender identity interacts with setting and purpose**, not simply biological sex. The study thus supports a **contextualized view** of gender and language.

6. Conclusion

This study contributes to the understanding of gender and spoken English by offering a nuanced analysis of discourse patterns in real-life conversations. While some gendered speech features persist, they are neither universal nor fixed. Future research should explore intersectional factors such as culture, ethnicity, and institutional power in shaping language use.

7. References (APA Style)

- Cameron, D. (2007). *The myth of Mars and Venus: Do men and women really speak different languages?* Oxford University Press.
- Holmes, J. (1995). *Women, men and politeness*. Longman.
- Lakoff, R. (1975). *Language and woman’s place*. Harper & Row.
- Tannen, D. (1990). *You just don’t understand: Women and men in conversation*. Ballantine Books.