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GENDER FEATURES OF SPEECH BEHAVIOUR IN ENGLISH COMMUNICATION

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Abstract

Speech behaviour is a complex phenomenon that reflects not only linguistic competence but also social, psychological, and cultural characteristics of individuals. Modern linguistic studies increasingly focus on the relationship between language use and gender. Gender differences in communication are manifested in conversational strategies, speech acts, politeness forms, interruption patterns, and reactions to compliments. This paper examines the gender-specific features of speech behaviour in English communication based on pragmatic and sociolinguistic approaches.

Keywords: Speech behaviour, gender, communication, pragmatics, speech acts, conversational strategies, politeness.

Introduction

The concept of speech behaviour occupies a central position in linguistics, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, and communication studies. Researchers define speech behaviour as a set of communicative actions through which an individual expresses social identity, cultural values, and personal experience. Speech behaviour reflects both linguistic competence and the influence of social norms and expectations.

According to sociolinguistic research, speech behaviour is shaped by the value and normative system of society. Communicative choices are influenced by social status, cultural background, gender, and interpersonal relationships. Therefore,



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gender is considered one of the important factors affecting communicative behaviour.

A significant contribution to gender communication studies was made by Deborah Tannen. In her book *You Just Don't Understand*, she argues that communication problems between men and women often result from differences in conversational styles rather than intentional misunderstanding. Tannen distinguishes between “rapport-talk,” which is commonly associated with women and aims to establish solidarity and interpersonal connection, and “report-talk,” which is more frequently associated with men and focuses on information exchange, independence, and status negotiation.

Gender Differences in Conversation Opening Strategies

In English communication, conversations generally begin with greeting formulas such as *Good morning*, *Good afternoon*, *Hello*, or *Hi*. These expressions themselves are usually gender-neutral. However, gender differences can be observed in forms of address accompanying greetings.

Men are often addressed by forms such as *Mr.* and *Sir*, whereas women may be addressed by *Mrs.*, *Ms.*, *Miss*, *Ma'am*, or *Madam*. These forms indicate social relationships, levels of formality, and cultural expectations.

In informal communication, gender-related lexical choices become more noticeable. Male speakers frequently use expressions such as *Hi, man* or *Hey, buddy*, emphasizing solidarity and friendship. Female speakers, on the other hand, may employ emotionally expressive forms such as *Hi, sweetie* or *Hi, honey*, which reflect interpersonal closeness and emotional involvement.

Women also tend to express communicative intentions indirectly. Their illocutionary goals are often conveyed through suggestions, hints, or questions rather than direct statements. An example can be found in Helen Fielding's



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Bridget Jones's Diary, where Bridget's mother indirectly encourages her daughter to attend a New Year's party in order to meet Mark Darcy. Although the explicit topic concerns gifts and holiday plans, the underlying communicative purpose gradually becomes evident throughout the conversation. This demonstrates the importance of indirectness as a characteristic feature of female communicative behaviour.

Interruption and Conversational Dominance

One of the most frequently discussed aspects of gender communication concerns interruption patterns. Research indicates that men interrupt their interlocutors more often than women, especially in situations involving disagreement. Such interruptions are frequently associated with attempts to control the conversation, establish authority, or defend a particular viewpoint.

For example, in Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl*, the male character Nick repeatedly interrupts female speakers, redirecting the conversation and asserting his own perspective. These interruptions function as communicative strategies aimed at maintaining conversational dominance.

Deborah Tannen distinguishes between two forms of overlapping speech: **competitive interruption** and **cooperative overlap**. Competitive interruption is commonly associated with male conversational styles and serves to establish conversational control. Cooperative overlap, by contrast, occurs when speakers simultaneously contribute to a conversation in a supportive manner.

Women often employ cooperative overlap as a means of demonstrating empathy, agreement, and emotional support. In *Bridget Jones's Diary*, female friends frequently complete each other's sentences and contribute additional comments without attempting to dominate the conversation. Such behaviour strengthens social solidarity and creates a sense of shared understanding.



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Responses to Compliments

Gender differences are also evident in reactions to compliments. Men frequently minimize or downplay compliments in order to avoid appearing self-important. Such responses are connected with negative politeness strategies that emphasize modesty and social distance.

Women, however, tend to accept compliments more openly and use them as opportunities to reinforce interpersonal relationships. Common responses include expressions of gratitude and reciprocal compliments:

- *You look gorgeous.*
- *Oh, thank you. You are too kind.*

or

- *I like your dress.*
- *Thanks! And your dress is really nice too!*

These responses illustrate positive politeness strategies aimed at strengthening social bonds and maintaining harmonious interaction. Thus, compliments function not only as evaluations but also as important tools for establishing and reinforcing social relationships.

Conclusion

The analysis demonstrates that gender significantly influences speech behaviour in English communication. Women tend to prefer indirectness, emotional involvement, cooperative conversational strategies, and supportive responses, whereas men more frequently employ direct communication, competitive interruption, and status-oriented conversational practices. These differences do not indicate superiority of one communicative style over another; rather, they reflect distinct socialization patterns and communicative goals. Understanding gender-specific speech behaviour contributes to more effective interpersonal



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communication and provides valuable insights into the relationship between language, society, and identity.

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