

Week 6 Extra Credit

GENDER AND CONVERSATIONAL PATTERNS

Purpose: The purpose of this exercise is to evaluate the results of research investigating how men and women differ in their language usage.

Instructions: For this project you will need a tape recorder and the cooperation of your friends. Recruit two friends, one female and one male, to agree to have you tape record a staged discussion for which you provide the topic. Do not tape record any conversation without the permission of the people involved.

Using the data sheet on the following page, analyze the conversational patterns in each interaction using the variables and operational definitions below.

Participants: Describe the people you observe. Record their sex and ethnicity. Also record any other information that you think might affect their interaction (for example, relationships, status, etc.).

Setting: Briefly describe the setting. Comment on where you made your observations, the time of day, whether the participants are sitting or standing, and any other factors that you think are important. Record the length of time you observe the dyad.

Time Speaking: Record the amount of time each person speaks.

Interruptions: A speaker might be interrupted in two ways. A conversational topic that is introduced by a speaker might not be picked up by the listener; thus it is "dropped". In other cases, a speaker might be unable to complete a statement because the listener interjects comments or changes the topic.

Tag Questions: This linguistic construction includes a statement that is modified by appending a question at the end that encourages a response from the listener. "It's a nice day, isn't it?" "Gail and Lee performed that operation beautifully, didn't they?"

Supportive Remarks: These include brief remarks and comments that indicate attentiveness to and interest in the speaker, such as "mmm-hmm" or "that's right".

Tentative Comments: This involves the use of disclaimers or hedges. Disclaimers communicate uncertainty (such as "I'm not sure, but it seems to me"). Hedges include comments such as "kinda like", "I don't know, but", and "I guess".

Conversational Patterns Data Sheet

Person A: Sex _____ Race/Ethnicity _____

Person B: Sex _____ Race/Ethnicity _____

Comments: _____

Setting: _____

Length of Observation: _____ minutes

Time Speaking

Person A _____

Person B _____

Number of Interruptions

Person A interrupts Person B _____

Person B interrupts Person A _____

Number of Tag Questions

Person A _____

Person B _____

Number of Supportive Remarks

Person A _____

Person B _____

Number of Tentative Comments

Person A _____

Person B _____

Summarize your results by responding to the following questions.

1. Compare the conversational patterns of the woman and man you observed. Describe similarities as well as differences.

2. Relate your findings to the text's discussion of gender and language use. Compare and contrast your results to the research literature summarized in your text.

Which results are similar? Can you suggest why?

Which results are different? Can you suggest why?

3. One interpretation of the research is that gender differences in language use are related to differences in status and power (Henley, 1977). Others interpret these differences as reflecting differences in social roles (Wood, 1994). That is, women are more likely to use conversational styles that are interpersonally warm and supportive of others. Comment on these interpretations, using your data and your text to support your argument.

Adapted from Hyde, Janet Shibley. *Half the human experience: The psychology of women* (5th ed.). Copyright © 1996 by D. C. Heath and Company. Used with permission of Houghton Mifflin Company.

References: Henley, Nancy. (1977). *Body politics: Power, sex, and nonverbal communication*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Wood, Julia. T. (1994). *Gendered lives: Communication, gender, and culture*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.