Universidad Autónoma de Aguascalientes

Centro de ciencias sociales y humanidades

Departamento de idiomas

Sociolinguistics

The differences between men and women when talking

Wendy Moya Jiménez

Brenda Elizabeth López Gómez

Deadline: December 5, 2016

**Introduction**

A language is a code that members of a particular society speak (Wardhaugh, 2006), and it has been studied for hundred years ago. As the language is in constant change, sociolinguists study its grammar changes and peculiarities, its variations in comparison with the language itself or even with other languages, the different dialects that a certain society could have, the different pronunciations a simple letter have, and the specific features a group of members on a society use to express ideas.

This research paper talks about the differences that men and women have at the time they speak as well as two main theories that belongs with this topic that are the *difference theory* and the *dominance theory*, besides it talks about the linguistic behavior of each group and the different perspectives linguists and sociolinguists have about it; such as who gender is the one that speaks more, the one that interrupts more, say more fillers, diminutives, intensifiers, swear words, as well as possible explanations and evidence that support some of the hypothesis that have been done through the years.

Moreover the characteristics of the men and women's speech is because of how society establish the roles of the genders in their childhood, as the specific manners and activities one gender and the other have allowed or not to do to be appropriate or correct (Mohindra and Azhar, 2012).

**The differences between men and women when talking**

Some linguists have been studied the different aspects of the language in different contexts, so the differences in language between men and women are not the exception. Linguists say that men and women speak different languages, but how is this possible? It is because they use different vocabulary, grammatical forms, and even different and peculiar movements when talking. Some of the relevant aspects that researchers have been studied about men and women differences are the way they talk such as specific words that each gender uses, the grammatical structures, the formality, the amount of talking, and the nonverbal cues women and men use when they are having a conversation such as eye contact, the nodding of the head to imply agreement, the movements of the arms and hands to complement spoken ideas, and so on. Even when men and women speak the same language, they both have problems of communication and they are caused by the different use of this.

Women unlike men uses more some features of the language such as "lexical hedges or fillers, tag questions, rising intonation on declaratives, empty adjectives, precise color terms, intensifiers , hypercorrect grammar, super polite forms, avoidance of strong swear words, and emphatic stress" (Lakoff, 1975, as cited in Nemati and Bayer, 2007). Men, on the other hand, use more swear words, interrupt women more than women to men, they go directly to the point when they try to express something, they start a conversation more than women do, and they are less polite than women when talking (Wardhaugh, 2006). Linguists have been searching for the reasons this claims happen, so they found some theories.

There are two main theories that try to explain why men and women talk different. They are the “difference theory” and “dominance theory”. The "difference theory" says that men as well as women, even those that belong to the same social group, have different costumes and cultural behaviors, so as a result, they speak quite distinct. Women behave quite different from men because since they are kids, society categorize the different activities one and the other had to do, or to speak. The second theory is called the "dominance theory" in contrast with the previous theory, refers to the idea that society plays an important role on how men and women interact with it because what is important in their social environments are the social status and the dominance they want to carry on. (Uchida, 1992, as cited in Nemati and Bayer, 2007). So how you speak and behave is a cause of the social status and not a matter of genders.

One of the aspects that many researchers focus their attention on is the amount of talking between men and women. The people in general most of the time believe that women are more talkative than men, but it is not true. Sociolinguists do not agree about what gender is the one that talks more time because there are some studies that give the credit to women and others to men, for example, according to Smith-lovin, Skvorets, and Hudson (1996) men talk more than women in a variety of contexts, but on the other hand, according to Aries (1982) woman talk more than men in a variety of contexts (As cited in James and Drakich, ND). Surprisingly, "In the University of Texas at Austin found both men and women in the USA and México use and average of about 16,000 words per day" (Dominguez, 2014). It is because they talk more in certain situations and contexts. Men probably may talk more with topics related to politics, sports, business, and so on. Also, they talk more when they are with many people; in contrast women would probably talk more about their feelings, family, relationships, etc., and they talk more when they are with a few people (Haas, 1979).

Another feature that is really interesting to compare is the use of diminutives in both men and women. Women tend to use more diminutives than men and it happens in almost every language (Ruke-Dravina, 1952, as cited in Brower, Gerritsen, and Haan, 1979). In Spanish is very common that women use diminutives when talking with both men or women; one example of this feature in Spanish is in the word "*playita"* and *"verdecito” which* means beach and green as in the phrases "*Te puedes ir a la playita*" (you can go to the beach), or "*El clima, las lluvias, y lo verdecito del campo*" (the weather, the rainy days, and the green countryside)(Personal communication, 2016). Women tend to use diminutives because they want to show their feminine side and/or they want to sound not too rude when talking. On the other hand, men do not use them frequently or they use them rarely.

The use of lexical hedges or fillers in women is more common than in men. Women tend to hesitate and say words like Am.. Uh... well..., and also to use repetitions, self-corrections and requests for information (Lakoff, 1975, as cited in Brower, Gerritsen, and Haan, 1979); every single language has its own representative words that people use to think what to say next (i.e., the word *este* and *mmm* in Spanish is commonly used). Examples of this are in the following phrases said by two women:

-"…flores, todo..y ya *este...mm...*y te vas de vacaciones..." (L, Rubalcaba, Personal communication, December 1, 2016).

-"...invierno pues no me gusta... pero no..*.este*...sin dudarlo..." (M, Cardona, Personal communication, December 1, 2016).

As in the previous examples people use these words to reformulate or to think the next idea they want to say. There are evidences that show that these words help the speaker to think about what to say next and do not loose their turn to speak. It happens because speakers are always monitoring their speech and editing their thoughts in order to express their ideas as clearly as possible (Holmes, 2001, as cited in, White, 2003).

The politeness is another aspect that linguists compare between women and men because there are considerable differences such as the different words that they use to be either formal or informal. The formality is usually used by women than men because woman express a set of words that are as define as "Superpolite forms" (Lakoff, 1975, as cited in, White, 2003). Linguists characterized the women's speech as more polite and formal in a majority of situations than men (Holmes, 1995, as cited in Lorenzo-Dus and Bou-Franch, 2003). Some specific words that women say when they are having a conversation are *excuse me, would, could, should, please, etc*. But in the case of other languages such as Spanish women tent to speak words such as *puesto que* (since)*, sin dudarlo* (without hesitation)*, dado que* (inasmuch as)*, muchas gracias* (thank you very much)*, por favor* (please)*,* and so on, for example in the phrase " este...*sin dudarlo* esa es mi estación favorita" (M, Cardona, personal communication, December 1, 2016) in contrast with men that they do not use them a lot and they go direct to the point as in this phrase " Invierno y por el frio" (Winter because it's cold) (H, López, personal communication, December 1, 2016).

Both genders, of course, can express formality, but it depends on culture, age, race, and specific communities that the person belong to as well as the socioeconomic level that they have. When the two genders interact, women are expected to talk with an extend of formal or polite words in order to maintain their social status or simply to establish meaningful relationships either with family, co-workers, friends, or partners (Wardhaugh, 2006). Still another claim is the fact that men interrupt more than women when they are taking turns to speak (Zimmerman and West, 1975). It is so related to the fact that women are more polite than men, so they do not respect the talking turns; it is not because they want to bother women, but a consequence of one theory " the Dominance theory" that explain that this claims are because of the social status, power, occupational positions, etc. (Zimmerman and West, 1975 p.105) As males care about how society see them, it provokes that they want to call their attention, yet they interrupt with more frequency than females.

Other aspect that belong to this category is the use of swear words. Men, within a society, are allowed to coarse and say bad words, so studies demonstrate that men can say without problems swear words more than woman, besides if women use them, they use some words that are not gross or offensive such as "damn" or "oh dear" (Lakoff, 1975, as cited in Broadbridge, 2003). In the set of interviews done in Aguascalientes, México were interviewed 12 people of which 6 are women and 6 are men. From those interviews none of the women said a swear word, on the contrary they talk very polite, but in the case of men, one of the 6 men said a kind of swear word in Spanish "*mendigo"* this word means something that you do not like too much as in the phrase "...y aparte no esta el mendigo calor sofocante que no me gusta para nada" (J. Gonzalez, personal communication, December 2, 2016), so it proves that men tent to use more bad words than woman.

But not only males and females have differences in the spoken language, but also in the nonverbal communication. Nonverbal communication refers to the messages that the speaker send though movements (Ambady and Rosenthal, 1998). When speakers are having a conversation, they perform some movements to sign either agreement or disagreement about the topic they are conveying. Eye contact, movements with the head, arms, and legs, and the position of the body are just some of the common movements speakers perform. In the case of women they have a superior number of nonverbal codes as well as better encoders of their feelings and sentiments; they express them through smiles, laughs, and facial expressions (Ambady and Rosenthal, 1998, p.778). Although, according to some sociolinguists both women and men realize nonverbal cues when talking, but they do so in different situations. For example men do more movements when they want to show dominion, convey authority, power, or when they try to flirt with a girl. On the other hand, women perform more movements when they want to express that they are paying attention to what the other person is saying, agreement, or in order to complement the other person's ideas (Carli, Loeber, and LaFleur, 1995). Moreover, when males and females are talking, women use more eye contact than men because they try to demonstrate that they care what the other person is saying and that they are listening, in contrast with men that do not use much eye contact (class notes, 2016). This happen because in the past years men was the only who had the rights to do whatever they wanted, and the power to do so, and women the ones that had to obey men with the purpose to have better socioeconomic status. That is why woman had to talk and behave in a particular way, and men in other (class notes, 2016). This theory is then very related to the next feature.

Sociolinguists such as Berger, Fisek, Norman, & Zelditch (1977) say that the behavior is not a matter of gender but a matter of having high or low status (as cited in Carli, Loeber, and LaFleur, 1995). This theory says that what make the speakers behave and speak is the status you are in; when people are in a higher status, society perceive that their contributions are better and more important than the ones made for low-status individuals (Ridgeway; Ridgeway, Berger, and Smith, 1985; Stein and Heller, 1979 ,as cited in Carli, Loeber, and LaFleur, 1995).

 **Conclusion**

To sum up, women and men are not quite different as the people believe so because even though they have some distinctions, in certain moments they have a balance according to many of studies about it. Woman, as it was said, talk more polite than men, use more fillers and reformulate more their ideas than men thus, men talk direct to the point while women take up their ideas again and again. Even though people in general believe the hypothesis that women talks more than men, some of the evidence that the studies demonstrate that both men and women talk the same amount of words and time because it all depends on what topic and on what circumstances women and men are engage to talk.

Talking about the body movements and the nonverbal cues, males and females are equal because they make specific movements according to the situation, for example men, as they want to show power, they will move more in front of more people than women. On the other hand, women move more when they are proving that they are involved in the conversation and care about it.

Languages are in constant change, so linguists as well as sociolinguists will be still in constant study to find out the answers to those unknown statements and questions about the differences among people; specifically between men and women.

**References**

Ambady, N and Rosenthal, R. (1998). Non verbal communication: Harvard University. *Enciclopedia of mental health*, 2, 775-782. Retrieved from <http://ambadylab.stanford.edu/pubs/1998Ambady.pdf>

Broadbridge, J. (2003). Module 5 sociolinguistics. The University of Birmingham. Retrieved from <http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-artslaw/cels/essays/sociolinguistics/JamesBroadbridgeSociolinguisticsAnInvestigationintoDifferencesbetweenWomensandMensSpeech.pdf>

Brower, D., Gerritsen, M., and Haan, D. (1979). Speech differences between women and men: On the wrong track?. *Journal of JSTOR, 8*(1), 33-50. Retrieved from <https://marinelgerritsen.files.wordpress.com/2011/12/brouwer-gerritsen-and-de-haan-1979.pdf>

Carli, L., Loeber, C., and LaFleur, S. (1995).interpersonal relations and group processes: Nonverbal behaviors, gender, and influence. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 68* (6), 1030-1041. Retrieved from <http://www.communicationcache.com/uploads/1/0/8/8/10887248/nonverbal_behavior_-_gender_and_influence.pdf>

Class notes. (November, 2016). Sociolinguistics. Aguascalientes, Ags, México. Universidad Autónoma de Aguascalientes.

Haas, A. (1979). Male and female spoken language differences: stereotypes and evidence. *Journal of Psychological Bulletin, 86*(3), 616-626. Retrieved from <http://www.communicationcache.com/uploads/1/0/8/8/10887248/male_and_female_spoken_language_differences-_stereotypes_and_evidence.pdf>

James, D. and Drakich, J. (ND). Understanding gender differences in amount of talk: A critical review of reaserch. Critical reviews of literature. (pp.280-312). Retrieved from <http://web.stanford.edu/~eckert/PDF/JamesDrakich.pdf>

Lorenzo-Dus, N. and Bou-Franch, P. (2003). Gender and politeness: Spanish and British undergraduates’ perceptions of appropriate requests. *Género, lenguaje y traducción.* Universidad de Valencia. 187-199. Retrieved from <http://www.uv.es/~boup/PDF/Requests.pdf>

Mohindra, V. and Azhar, S. (2012).Gender communication: A comparative analysis of communicational approaches of men and women at workplaces. *Journal of Humanities and Social Science, 2*(1), 18-27. Retrieved from <http://iosrjournals.org/iosr-jhss/papers/Vol2-issue1/D0211827.pdf?id=5636>

Nemati, A. and Bayer, J. (2007). *Gender Differences in the Use of Linguistic Forms in the Speech of Men and Women: A Comparative Study of Persian and English,* 185-201. Retrieved from <http://www.communicationcache.com/uploads/1/0/8/8/10887248/gender_differences_in_the_use_of_linguistic_forms_in_the_speech_of_men_and_women-_a_comparative_study_of_persian_and_english.pdf>

Trace Dominguez. Do woman really talk more then men?. (July 31,2014) [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L9OBLymC4T0>

Wardhaugh, R. (2006). *An introduction to sociolinguistics: fifth edition*. Blackwell Publishing.

White, A. (2003). Women's usage of specific linguistic functions in the context of casual conversation: Analysis and disscussion. University of Birminham, England. Retriened from <http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-artslaw/cels/essays/sociolinguistics/White5.pdf>

Zimmerman, D and West, C. (1975). *Sex roles, interruptions and silences in conversation*. 105-129. Retrieved from <http://web.stanford.edu/~eckert/PDF/zimmermanwest1975.pdf>

**Appendix**

**Questionnaire**

**¿Cuál es tu estación del año favorita? ¿Por qué?**

Interviewee 1 (woman)

Mi estación preferida es el invierno porque me encanta el frio.

Interviewee 2 (man)

Mi estación del año es la primavera por que me encanta el calor

Interviewee 3 (woman)

A mi me gusta la estación de verano por que hace calor y porque puede andar uno en ropa ligera y... porque...esta a gusto el clima, es la mejor estación para mi.

Interviewee 4 (woman)

A mi me gusta el invierno porque se acercan las fiestas navideñas y la nav... las posadas, hace frio, la navidad, y y y y ps ya..

Interviewee 5 (woman)

Me gusta la estación del año, invierno por que no me gusta... el calor.

Interviewee 6 (woman)

Pues mi estación favorita es...es el verano por que...mmm.. Es cuando está un poquito más verde todo..todo el campo y todo, y es cuando este vas de vacaciones ..a la playita o así, es...es mi estación favorita mas que nada por el.. Por el clima también que esta agradable y las lluvias y lo verdecito y los árboles, flores, todo..y ya este...mm...y te vas de vacaciones a la playita, esa es mi estación favorita, la...el verano.

Interviewee 7 (men)

Mi estación es el verano por el clima que tiene y las estaciones este.. Los meses que abarca.

Interviewee 8 (men)

Mi estación favorita es el verano por que me gusta la lluvia

Interviewee 9 (woman)

Mi estación favorita es verano puesto que no hace tanto calor ni tanto...ni tanto frio como el que...mmm como que... es mediano de las dos cosas, en primavera hace demasiado calor.. Jajaja..Invierno pues no me gusta... pero no...este...sin dudarlo esa es mi estación favorita y así...este...pues as razones son esas

Interviewee 10 (male)

Invierno y por el frio

Interviewee 11 (male)

Mi estación favorita es el... invierno por que en invierno es época navideña, época para... estar en familia y así...y aparte no esta el mendigo calor sofocante que no me gusta para nada.

Interviewee 12 (male)

Nunca he tenido una estación del año favorita, pero si tuviera que elegir alguna yo diría que...eh la primavera por que es la época en la que dejas de cargar chamarra, dejas de usar amontonada la ropa y puedes usar o ropa mas ajustada o también puedes estar mas ligero de tu forma de vestir, así que yo elegiría la primavera principalmente por esas razones.