

50

English Language Investigation:

In what ways does the language of males differ to that of females when discussing the topic of relationships?

Edward Keith

6851

Word count: 2493

In what ways does the language of males differ to that of females when discussing the topic of relationships?

Introduction

I am investigating language and gender in order to test whether the findings of various gender studies are still relevant to adolescents today. The world of language has changed drastically just in this decade due to the increase in social media usage. This makes me wonder, could the patterns of language in men's and women's speech, too, be altering - or has the emancipation of women closed the gap?

I will apply my data to Lakoff's **deficit** observations, Spender's **dominance** experiments, and men and women's "gender-specific culture" within Tannen's **difference** model. I expect to find that women's language is co-operative, using positive face in order to reach an agreed conclusion, whilst men's is competitive, interrupting and overlapping in order to dominate the conversation. I will be analysing the two groups' lexis, genderlect and topic control for evidence that either backs up or disproves my research.

of

Clear objectives are outlined here.

Methodology

My investigation is designed to explore the difference between boys' and girls' language when in a single-sex group, discussing the topic of relationships. I recorded a group of four girls and a group of four boys – a wide enough sample size to give me a range of data, but not be difficult to transcribe. In order to initiate the discussion, I asked the group "is it better to be in a relationship or not?" By analysing *spoken* data I will be able to see group interaction, phonological features, and see more spontaneity than if I were to analyse texts, for example.

In order to make my investigation un-biased, I controlled variables as possible. The girls and boys are from the same friendship group, so felt comfortable talking about this sensitive subject. This narrows down their age (17) and socio-economic background, which I controlled along with their ethnic group (all participants speak English as their first language) to avoid cross-cultural differences in dialect.

After initiating I left, prompting a natural conversation. One issue with recording in college is that the participants were surrounded by other people, which led the girls' conversation being interrupted. It also increased surrounding noises, making it more difficult to transcribe.

A02

insight here

Analysis

Chapter one: Lexis

In response to an anecdote from speaker one, the word 'cute' is used four times collectively in the girls' conversation by speakers two and three. This supports Lakoff's (2000) theory that women use more *empty adjectives* than men, since the boys' conversation only used one – 'nice'. These exclamatives are feedback methods, showing appreciation for the story, despite containing little meaning (Waseleski, 2011). Furthermore, the word 'cute' is considered one of Lakoff's *women's adjectives*, which explains the men's avoidance to preserve masculinity. After speaker two's complement "that's so cute," it is immediately replicated by speaker three – and later when speaker

A01
 This is proper accurate analytical writing -> theory
 => understand & perceptively applied A02

three exclaims "that's cute," it is repeated by speaker two. This lexical repetition is done by women to be cohesive (Davies, 2011) and support the others' utterances. However, women's verbs is not something that Lakoff anticipated, yet is found in the conversation. Speaker four refers to sexual attraction as 'fancying' in the phrase "if you fancy someone," whilst in the boys conversation it is 'liking': "you didn't really like them" and "if you like her." It is possible that the reason for men's use of a euphemism to refer to sexual attraction is because men avoid talking about their emotions (Coates, 2005).

A02

The boys used ten intensifiers in total, whilst the girls used only four. This contradicts Lakoff's (2000) theory that women use more intensifiers than men, implying that they are, in fact, less emotionally expressive. All the girls' intensifiers were used in a positive way - "a really good idea," "so true," "so cute" - which could be seen to represent girls' cooperative nature when in conversation. On the other hand, two of the boys' intensifiers were to assert validity ("definitely," "genuinely"), giving them a more assertive tone. This shows how men's competitive nature can lead to lying, therefore intensifiers are needed to show that they are speaking the truth. A further two intensifiers are used in front of adjectives of attraction ("really hot" and "really fit") which demonstrate Coates' (2011) idea of *macho discourse*. Talking about women's appearances a way to show masculinity, therefore it's this which is emphasised. Most of the other intensifiers put stress negative words, such as ("so much commitment," "a lot of time," "really bad") - the opposite of the girls. This leads us to believe that men are more pessimistic about relationships - hence "taking the mick out of girlfriends" is part of *macho discourse*.

Evaluates

The word 'friend(s)' appears in the girls' conversation eight times, along with 'friendship' once. However, in the boys' conversation 'friend' appears just three times - and one ("I have friends") was a quote used to mock another speaker, and another, "friends with benefits," in fact means sexual partner. This is evidence that "women's topics relate far more to sensitive aspects of human life" - that being people and feelings (Coates, 2005). On the other hand, words in the lexical field of sexual attraction ('fit,' 'hot,' 'spice') are used eight times by the boys - but not once by the girls. This loosely supports Kiesling's (2011) theory that men talk about sex to show their heterosexuality. Contrastingly, though, when speaker three asks the boys "would you go out with someone if they were really fit but you didn't really like them," all of them immediately replied no. This shows us that, despite they may enjoy talking about appearance, it is not all they look for in a relationship.

Here is each argument put forward to the question "is it better to be in a relationship?":

YES		NO	
Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
"sexual benefits"	"have fun while it lasts"	"Commitment (X2) and effort"	"nobody at our age is that committed"
"can talk to someone"	"its nice if you find the right person"	"you're either gonna break up or be married" and "more odds are youre gonna break up"	"it's a bit early to meet someone who you're gonna spend the rest of your life with"
"if she's fit"	"what if theyre [...] your best friend"	"Choosing university choices around your girlfriend"	"you'll have to break up for uni"
		"take up a lot of time"	"you wont know what [you want] until you've tried out"

✓

		"money is a massive one"	"when you leave home you change quite a lot"
		"you can just like get with them and then move on" [when you're not in a relationship]"	"if you're best friends and then you break up [...] ruin your relationship"
		"I've now got like three girls"	"if you re-get with them it's [...] awkward"
		"more freedom"	
		"if you do have a girlfriend and then you break up it's [...] difficult"	

These results support my findings on lexical fields within men and women's conversations. However, we can find some anomalies. When speaker one in the boys' conversation says "you can just like get with them and then move on move your play works well," his utterance is not completely accepted. Speaker three replies with the exclamation "so you're just playing them around" – implying shock and questioning speaker one's disrespectful recommendation. It is uncommon to find a male disapprove of a man being promiscuous (Dankoski, 1996), therefore speaker three is risking face. However, because speaker three laughed at this statement, this in fact shows that he respects speaker one for it, and finds the disrespect towards women funny – one of Coates' aspects of masculine discourse. However, the girls too show evidence of *macho discourse*. Speaker two argues the point "if you re-get with them again isn't that like just a bit awkward cos you're like oh well you got with five people when we were broken up and you only got with two." Firstly, this is unusual because it is girls talking about kissing, a (mild) sexual side of relationships contradicts Lakoff's (2000) statement that a 'lady' is 'quiet and inconspicuous'. Then speaker two follows up her rhetorical question with humour, saying "I mean it would probably be a lot more" – referring to the number of people she will 'get off with' at university. Promiscuity in a female, unlike with men, is generally looked down on by other females - being a *risqué* joke for a woman to make. The joke is probably made because the other girls already know that she is promiscuous and therefore she is happy to joke about this.

Evaluates throughout

Supports: conceptualised (A02) as well as systematic & evaluative

Chapter 2: Genderlect

Coates (1986) said that men use more non-standard language, which I have found to be true. Slang, such as "she's a spice," "she wants the D" and "get on the pull" in the boys conversation is all sexually themed. Experimenting with language is a way to create humour, as well as a way to identify yourself as part of a social group – something which seems to be far more important in the hierarchical, male conversations. Ellipsis is also used by speaker 3 when saying "gives you more freedom." The subject pronoun is omitted, most likely due to efficiency – and this 'straight to the point' attitude seems to be the cause for the majority of the non-standard language. On the other hand, the only example of non-standard found in the girls' conversation is when speaker four uses

neologism 're-get with.' This is an overgeneralisation of the prefix 're-' in the phrasal verb 'to get with.' Because the word is very new, it seems more reasonable to take a prescriptive approach to it.

Supporting Lakoff's (2000) observation that women hedge more, the girls' conversation contained nineteen hedges, whilst the boys' had just seven. Furthermore, the reason for using hedges appears to differ. For example, speaker one in the boys' conversation supports relationships, saying "you can talk to someone (.) if you're like (.) you know just like bored or whatever." The utterance starts off as a bold, sensitive statement – something that men typically avoid (Coates, 2005). It is apparent from the micro-pauses that he realises that he is risking mocking from his peers. Therefore, hedges are used to make his language more tentative – something considered by Coates (1986), a feature of women's language. By doing this his point sounds less assertive, therefore becoming less likely to be judged by the others. He then finishes with the coordinate clause, "but at the end of the day [...]" trying to show that his original point is not where his 'true' opinion lies.

The girls, however, use hedges as positive face techniques. For example, speaker two states "it's a bit early to meet someone who you're gonna spend the rest of your life with" – seemingly forgetting that two of the group are in relationships. Therefore her statement is not only opposing their choice to be in a relationship, but also questioning the validity of their boyfriends. By using the hedge 'a bit,' the time phrase is mitigated, therefore making the statement less harsh and less likely to offend. Therefore, whilst the boys are saving themselves from disapproval; the girls are saving the others.

That said, there is one intriguing similarity between the two sexes' use of hedges: both conversations front the verb 'get off' with 'like.' By saying "like get off," there is room left for interpretation – therefore there can be implications of sexual activity without having to mention taboo subjects. However, if Kiesling has found that men enjoy talking about sex then it seems peculiar that they are mitigating the lexical field. It is possible this is due to social class: all participants were brought up in middle-class families, where expletives and taboo language is strongly looked down on.

Chapter 3: Topic control

Feature	Male	Female
Interruptions	14	7
Overlaps	13	19
Fronted conjunction	8	15
Positive feedback	16 (alone = 4) (fronted = 12)	41 (alone = 29) (fronted = 12)
Sub-topic changes	19	13
Latching on	16	10

Zimmerman and West's (1975) claim that "men and women interrupt an equal number of times when in a same-sex conversation" is clearly disproved. Although the girls use more overlaps, almost all are in the form of positive feedback, supporting Coates' (2011) theory that women overlap as an enthusiasm strategy. Coates also stated that despite female conversations involve multiple speakers at one time, there is no malfunction, as the listeners can absorb more than one message at a time.

However, the majority of the girls' interruptions completely change topic – not considering the previous comment. For example, the past sixteen utterances had been about being in a relationship with your friend, and after speaker one's comment "but if you're true friends that's the best," speaker four says "cos if you're just breaking up cos you went to uni or something that's not like dramatic." It is likely that this is done because speaker four was bored of this subject, as the comment she interrupted had already been said. Speaker four speaks the least of the group (16%) yet contributes 4/7 interruptions - her strive for power showing 'male' linguistic behaviourism. This could be sign that she believes herself to be a higher social status than the others, and therefore does not feel the need to be polite, or possibly she has a large male influence in her life.

The girls also used a significantly higher number of fronted conjunctions. When faced with an incoherence in opinion, the girls tended to open their opposing point with 'but'. For example, in response to speaker one's rhetorical question "what if they're like your best friend?" speaker two asks "but can you not just stay best friends with them?" This makes it appear that she has taken the previous point into account - supporting the idea that women build on each other's points (Coates, 1986). She is further avoiding face-threatening by phrasing the sentence as a negative. However, in the boys' conversation, the interrogative "doesn't that outweigh being bored?" is replied with the interjection "no because you have [...]" from speaker one. Again, when speaker asked "would you go out with someone if they were really fit but you didn't really like them" and speaker four suggests "for a little bit," speaker two replies with the interjections "no no that's the good thing about being single." This illuminates two distinct differences between male and female speech: politeness. The girls are constantly using positive face in order to have a more co-operative conversation, whilst the boys are talking almost for a more transactional purpose.

Coates' (1986) observation that women use more positive feedback is clearly proven. However, when we look at the positioning, we see that the boys actually used the same number as the girls to open a sentence. The reason for girls using over 7x more isolated examples of positive feedback could be due to Coates' (1986) theory that when girls say 'yeah' it means 'I'm listening,' but with boys it means 'I agree.' For example, when speaker one asks "what if they're like your best friend" speaker four gave the positive feedback, 'yeah.' However, the rise-fall intonation indicates doubt, later proved by her counter-argument "but then you have to [...]" This imbalance illustrates boys' competitive language - not needing to show agreement as they want to be proved the one better informed (Coates, 1986).

As evident from the results table, the boys get through 7 more sub-topics than the girls – supporting the theory that men jump from one topic to another (Coates, 1986). Furthermore, the boys went off topic 3 times, whilst the girls kept completely to the initial question. When the girls did slightly verge off topic it was an anecdote of speaker one's parents' relationship – which in fact was analysed by the girls in order to relate it to the conversation: "if they were like oh its not good to be in a relationship they wouldn't be together now." This shows their tendency to debate more general points, and build upon others' contributions (Coates, 2011). The anecdote in the boys' conversation also completely supports Coates' (1986) theory, by being an anecdote of superiority. Speaker one says "broke up with my girlfriend I've now got like three girls 'hi toby hi toby hi toby' all the time," – not only showing how popular he is with the opposite sex, but also disrespecting his previous girlfriend, which, as previously seen, is praised by men. Therefore we can conclude that the girls have a greater communicative competence (Hymes, 1967) – in particular their *discourse competence*. The female ability to establish intersentential relationships could be the key reason for their language' cooperative nature.

Conclusion

From my investigation I have discovered that there are clear differences in the language of men and women, although not all existing theories are accurate. I discovered that, lexis-wise, men strongly stick to *macho discourse*, whilst women *do* prefer talking about feelings (Coates). Both genders, however, avoided or mitigated powerful words – the nouns 'sex' or even 'love' were not spoken once. I also learnt that women are far more formal in their speech in order to stay focused on the question at hand, whilst men go off topic (Coates, 1986). Furthermore, the different meanings to men and women of positive feedback prove their different approaches to language. The girls said 'yeah' to cooperate, whilst the boys used it purely to convey a message: that they agree. However, the numerous anomalies found in speaker three of the boys conversation and speaker four in the girls', leads me to believe Liberman's theory that "Whatever the average female versus the average male difference turns out to be, it will be small compared to the variation among women and among men."

It is possible that my results weren't as accurate as they could have been, due to the boys group being closer friends than the girls – and therefore the girls may have been more conscious and less natural in what they said. If I were to get greater data samples from different social groups in the college, I could calculate a more accurate average for my results. Furthermore, in the boys group none of the participants were in a relationship, meaning there was a lack of argument. For further research I could make sure that two people in each group are in a relationship and two aren't in order to see what happens when boys disagree.

Always tentative.

One of the strongest investigations I've seen – the data is so good, this may partially explain why. Analysis is tentative, but highly detailed & perceptible. Range of aspects of gender study is judicious.

The use of the two data sets, meanwhile, means that context is also insightful & applied.

Deserves full marks

Girls transcript

Speaker 1: personally I think that short term relationships are a really good idea (2) but not [long term]

Speaker 2:
[WHY] ((laughs))

Speaker 1: because (.) nobody at our age is that committed (.) lets be [honest]

Speaker 3: [yeah that's] true

Speaker 2: (1) you'll have to break up for uni

Speaker 1: (1) YEAH THAT'S [TRUE] (.) that's so true

Speaker 3: [yeah] and also we're young (.) we don't know (.) yet (.) we haven't found ourselves

Speaker 2: yeah (1) it's a bit <early> to meet (.) someone who you're gonna spend the [rest of] your [life with]

Speaker 1:
[yeah]

Speaker 3: [yeah] (1) [and I think (1) I think you wont know what] until you've tried out [(1.5) different options]

Speaker 1: [and then you see those people who are like together]

Speaker 2: [yeah and especially] (.) like when you leave home you change quite a lot as well↑=

Speaker 3: [yeah]

Speaker 1: =[yeah] what if you're on opposite sides of the country

Speaker 2: [yeah]

Speaker 4: [yeah] (.) but its not like if you go out with someone you have to stay with them forever

Speaker 1: (1.5) [That's true]

Speaker 2: [good point] ((laughs))

Speaker 4: have fun whilst it lasts (.) you know [like if] you fancy someone (.) then (.) [go out with them]

Speaker 1: [YEAH]

Speaker 3: [yeah] [I think its
yeah I (.)] I do think its nice if you find the right person

Speaker 2: (1.5) ((laughs))

Speaker 1: YEAH like my parents have been together since school

Speaker 2: (1) have they actually

Speaker 1: yeah

Speaker 2: that's [so cute] ((high pitched))

Speaker 3: [WOW] [(1) that's so cute

Speaker 4: [that's like ()]

Speaker 3: mine would [just fight at school]

Speaker 2: [Your parents have] been together for the whole time (.) since school

Speaker 4: see and if they were like oh its not [good to be in a] relationship [they wouldn't] be together now (1) they wouldn't be alive so

Speaker 3: [aww that's cute]

Speaker 2: [that's cute]

Speaker 1: [yeah]

Speaker 3: [yeah] (1) that's true

Speaker 4: I dunno=

Speaker 1: =but my dad went out with my mums best friend

Speaker 4: (1) well that's (awkward)

((interruption))

Speaker 4: so I think we can agree that its better to (.) be in one=

Speaker 3: =yeah=

Speaker 1: =yeah=

Speaker 2: =No <prolonged> ((laughs))

Speaker 3: cos if you find someone who brings out the best in you

Speaker 1: YEAH (0.5) what if theyre like your best friend

Speaker 3: exactly

Speaker 4: ↑yeah↓

Speaker 2: but can you just stay best friends with them ((very fast))

Speaker 1: (0.5) yeah that's [true that's true]

Speaker 4: [but then you have] to like [(.) ask them ()]

Speaker 2: [but surely like (.)] if you're best friends
and then you break up=

Speaker 1: =yeah=

Speaker 2: >doesn't that [ruin your friend]ship↑<

Speaker 1: [yeah (.) yeah] yeah [I] think it does

Speaker 3: [no] (.) not if you're (0.5) close enough=

Speaker 1: =do you not think so=

Speaker 2: ((laughs)) =if you're true friends [you wouldn't]

Speaker 1: [aah] (1) yeah

Speaker 4: [yeah if (.) you] if you really are good friends=

Speaker 3: =but if you're true friends [(.) that's the best]

Speaker 4: [cos if you're just breaking up] cos you went to uni or
something that's [not like] (1) dramatic=

Speaker 1: [exactly] =yeah [that's good]

Speaker 3: [no]

Speaker 2: yeah but then if you break up for uni and then each of you like get with other people
surely that like (.) looks bad especially if one person (.) is like=

Speaker 3: =yeah but you've broken [up]

Speaker 4: [but] it's not like just because you've broken up you're not
gonna ever get with anyone for the rest of your [life]

Speaker 3: [exactly]=

Speaker 2: no no no yeah but exactly but then if you re-get with them again isn't that like just a bit
awkward cos you're like oh (.) well you got with 5 people when we were broken up and you only got
[with 2]

Speaker 1: [yeah] (.) that's true actually=

Speaker 2: =I mean it (.) would [probably be a lot more but ((laughs))]

Speaker 1: [it would be like () jake's friends]

Speaker 3: WE ARE ON A BREAK ((American accent))

All: ((laughs))

Speaker 2: yeah we are on a bre- I love that

Boys transcript

Speaker 1: Er (.) its definitely not better to be in a relationship =

Speaker 2: = why henry

Speaker 1: (1) because its so much much commitment and effort (.) yes there's sexual benefits =

Speaker 3: ((laughs))

Speaker 2: = very true

Speaker 1: and you can talk to someone (.) if youre like (.) you know just like bored or whatever but at the end of the day =

Speaker 3: yeah but doesn't that outweigh (1) being bored

Speaker 2: (1) No (.) because you have like friends who you can go and see

Speaker 1: [not always]

Speaker 2: And especially at like [(.) our age] commitment and stuff (.) you don't wanna have to be

Speaker 3: [(I) have friends] ((in a high-pitched voice))

Speaker 2: choosing (.) universities around your girlfriend's choice you don't have to choose (.) stuff [like]

Speaker 3:
[yeah]

Speaker 2: that around (.) your girlfriend you don't have to do things (around [her] [it does take up a lot of]

Speaker 1: [it does take up a lot
[of time (1) you've] got other things on [your plate] (.) ucas

Speaker 4: [(grief) and money]

Speaker 2: [exactly (.) money is a massive one

Speaker 3: [youre either gonna break up (.) or
youre gonna get married]

Speaker 2: (.) I am so much richer [(there)

Speaker 1: [yeah (.) youre either gonna break [up or be married (.) and
the] big

Speaker 3: [break up or get married so]

Speaker 1: more odds are gonna get youre gonna break up so [(.) right now (°I don't want it)

Speaker 3: ((laughs))

Speaker 2: [yeah (.) so choose] you should do things that make you happy and not that make other people happy do it for yourself [selfish]ness is way forward =

Speaker 1: [yeah]
= if you like her fair (.) its gonna be nice (2.5) but at the end of the day (.) [is it worth] it

Speaker 2: [if she's fit]
(.) IF SHE'S FIT =

Speaker 1: If she's if she's a spice =

Speaker 2: Then we're all [good

Speaker 3: [would you go out with someone if they were really fit but you didn't really like them =

Speaker 4: no

Speaker 2: No

Speaker 1: no no that that this this that [that's the] [(.) that's the good thing about being single]

Speaker 2: [Actually]

Speaker 4: [for a little bit for a little bit] (.) well well
may-maybe just a little friends with [benefits thing ()]

Speaker 1: [no no that's the good thing] about being single because (.) you don't
(.) i-if theyre really hot and theyre willing to go out with you (.) [then you can just] see them

Speaker 3: [you can get]

Speaker 1: and you can just like get with them [and then move on (.)]move your play (1.5) works well
=

Speaker 3: [so youre just playing them around] ((laughing))

Speaker 2: = being being a player is the [way forward]

Speaker 1: [just play the field]

Speaker 3: that's what we're going for =

Speaker 2: = yeah for example (.) broke up with my girlfriend ive now got like three girls ((in a high pitched voice)) hi toby hi toby hi toby (()) all the time

Speaker 1: this is total bullshit

Speaker 2: genuinely is not (.) it genuinely is not (.) you saw me with that girl in the library yesterday

Speaker 1: oh wait is it [is it] Amelia [(1) PLAYER [PLAYER] ((in a posh voice))

Speaker 3: [I did] [no is she sophia]=

Speaker 2: = um I didn't talk to her yesterday she just snapchatted me sophie yeah =

Speaker 3: = sophie

Speaker 1: sophie who

Speaker 3: smith[son?]

Speaker 1: [smith] (.) oh fair yeah yeah (1.5) ((whispers)) does she want it (())

Speaker 3: ((whispers)) she wants it

Speaker 4: She wants the D

All: ((laughs))

Speaker 1: yeah in her bum

Speaker 3: (1) Toby would be willing so=

Speaker 3: = o:h god =

Speaker 2: I'd be willing with anyone

Speaker 3: OH ((laughs (3)))

Speaker 1: He:llo (1.5) umm anyway

Speaker 2: (1.5) but (.) back on the topic is having a girlfriend better (.) no (1) I think we all agree on that

Speaker 3: gives you more freedom

Speaker 2: yeah freedom to do what you want when you want and theres nothing to stop you

Speaker 1: yeah but if you do have a girlfriend and you break up then its like [(.) difficult]

Speaker 2: [yeah that's] (.) its an awkward stage (.) especially like seeing them around (.) that's [awkward

Speaker 3: [did you enjoy it though when you were in a relationship=

Speaker 2: = for (.) for a bit but then it starts to grate on you (1) [and the thing is (.) and when things]

Speaker 1: [but yeah but if you've like] two and a half years then that's different=

Speaker 2: = when things become bad after two and a half years they become really bad and when you just want it to end you just want it to end=

Speaker 4: word of advice (1) don't do long distance

Speaker 2: (1) yeah long distance [bad shout]

Speaker 1: [yeah you did] long distance (0.5) lucky [()]

Speaker 3: ((laughs)) [wait] is that

Speaker 1: (1) is that over (1) ah (.) ah man James

((Speaker 2 pats Speaker 4's shoulder)

Speaker 3: £ did you get on the pull at Bristol though

Speaker 4: (1.5) no I didn't cos my sister was like right next to me I was [()

Speaker 2: [(SO?)]=

Speaker 3: = yeah but your sisters [fit]

Speaker 1: [I] would have pulled your sister though

All: ((laughs 2.5))

Speaker 2: I would have pulled your [mum]

Speaker 1: [she] knows that I want that she want I want

All: ((laughs 1.5))

Speaker 3: it's a two [way thing]

Speaker 1: [she knows shes gonna get it from me]

Speaker 3: ((laughs 2))

Speaker 1: she heard me say it=

Speaker 2: = I can feel Will's bum cheeks (curling) around my knee

All: ((laughs 3))

Bibliography

- *The mystery of Mars and Venus* (Deborah Cameron) – Oxford University Press 2007
- *Women, Men and Language* (Jennifer Coates) – Pearson Education Inc. 1986
- *Language and Gender: a reader 2nd edition* (Jennifer Coates) – Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 2011
- *Language and Gender* (Angela Goddard and Lindsey Meân) – Routledge 2000
- *Sociolinguistics of Language* – Basil Backwell Inc. 1990
- *(Real) men talk: Investigating the stereotypes*
http://www.englishandmedia.co.uk/emag/subscribers/downloads/archive_emag/_emagpast/Men%20talk%20analysis.html (Jennifer Coates) – eMagazine, 2005
- *Zimmerman and West's Study (1975)*
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DkVm3HZ_JUE#t=166 (AllAboutLinguistics) – Youtube, 2013
- *Dell Hymes and the Ethnography of Communication* (Barbara Johnstone and William Marcellino) <http://repository.cmu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1013&context=english> - Carnegie Mellon University, 2010

- minimal response
- fronted conjunction
- hedge
- intensifier

Ed Veith



Boys' conversation transcript

Speaker 1: Er (.) its **definitely** not better to be in a relationship =

Speaker 2: = why ^{Henry} Speaker 1

Speaker 1: (1) because its so much much commitment and effort (.) yes there's sexual benefits =

Speaker 3: ((laughs))

Speaker 2: = **very true**

Speaker 1: and you can talk to someone (.) if you're like (.) you know just like bored or whatever but at the end of the day =

Speaker 3: yeah but doesn't that outweigh (1) being bored

Speaker 2: (1) No (.) because you have **like** friends who you can go and see

Speaker 1: [not always]

Speaker 2: And especially at **like** [(.) our age] commitment and stuff (.) you don't wanna have to be

Speaker 3: [(I) have friends] ^{joke} ((in a high-pitched voice))

Speaker 2: choosing (.) universities around your girlfriends choice you don't have to choose (.) stuff **[like]**

Speaker 3: [yeah]

Speaker 2: that around (.) your girlfriend you don't have to do things (around [her] [it does take up a lot of]

Speaker 1: [it does take up **a lot** ?
[of time (1) you've] got other things on [your plate] (.) ucas

Speaker 4: [(grief) and money]

Speaker 2: exactly (.) ^{things} money is a massive one

Speaker 3: [you're either gonna break up (.) or you're gonna get married]

Speaker 2: (.) I am so much richer [(there)]

Speaker 1: [yeah (.) you're either gonna break [up or be married (.) and the] big

Speaker 3: [break up or get married so]

Speaker 1: more odds are gonna get you're gonna break up so [(.) right now (°I don't want it)

Speaker 3: ((laughs))

Speaker 2: emotions → but masc. [yeah (.) so choose] you should do things that make you happy and not that make other people happy do it for yourself [selfish]ness is way forward =

Speaker 1:

= if you like her fair (.) its gonna be nice (2.5) but at the end of the day (.) ^{MR} [is it worth] ^{rhetoric} it

Speaker 2:

[if she's fit]

(.) IF SHE'S FIT =

Speaker 1: If she's if she's a spice =

Speaker 2: Then we're all [good

Speaker 3: [would you go out with someone if they were **really** fit but you didn't **really** like them =

Speaker 1: no

Speaker 2: No

Speaker 1: no no that that this this that [that's the] [(.) that's the good thing about being single]

Speaker 2: ^{masc} [Actually]

Speaker 4: ^{masc} [for a little bit for a little bit] (.) well well may-maybe just a little friends with [benefits thing ()]

Speaker 1: [no no that's the good thing] about being single because (.) you don't (.) i-if they're **really** hot and they're willing to go out with you (.) [then you can just] see them

Speaker 3: [you can get]

Speaker 1: ^{masc} and you can just like get with them [and then move on (.)] move your play (1.5) works well =

Speaker 3: ^{♀ respectful} [so you're just playing them around] ((laughing))

Speaker 2: = being being a player is the [way forward]

Speaker 1: [just play the field]

Speaker 3: that's what we're going for =

Speaker 2: = yeah for example (.) broke up with my girlfriend ^{masc} ive now got like three girls ((in a high pitched voice)) hi Speaker 2 hi Speaker 2 hi Speaker 2 ^{mas} (()) all the time

Speaker 1: this is total bullshit ^{← jokes}

Speaker 2: **genuinely** is not (.) it genuinely is not (.) you saw me with that girl in the library yesterday

Speaker 1: oh wait is it [is it] Amelia [(1) PLAYER [PLAYER] ((in a posh voice))

Speaker 3: [I did] [no is she ^{Sophie} louisia]=

Speaker 2: = um I didn't talk to her yesterday she just snapchatted me ^{Sophie} louisie yeah =

Speaker 3: = Sophie

Speaker 1: Sophie who

Speaker 3: Smith[s?]

Speaker 2 "is" "my forward" twice - apart

Speaker 1: [Smith] (.) oh fair yeah yeah (1.5) ((whispers)) ^{sex} does she want it (())

Speaker 3: ((whispers)) she wants it

Speaker 4: She wants the D

All: ((laughs)) Jules

Speaker 1: yeah in her bum

Speaker 3: (1) ^{Toby} Speaker-2 would be willing so=

Speaker 3: = o:h god =

Speaker 2: I'd be willing with anyone ^{desperate?}

Speaker 3: OH ((laughs (3)))

Speaker 1: He:llo (1.5) umm anyway

Speaker 2: (1.5) but (.) ^{eval.} back on the topic is having a girlfriend better (.) no (1) I think we all agree on that ^{agreement}

Speaker 3: ^{ellipses} gives you more freedom

Speaker 2: yeah freedom to do what you want when you want and theres nothing to stop you ^{superiority}

Speaker 1: yeah but if you do have a girlfriend and you break up then its like ^{vulnerable} [(.) difficult]

Speaker 2: an awkward stage (.) especially like seeing them around (.) that's ^{loss vulnerable} [awkward] [yeah that's] (.) its

Speaker 3: [did you enjoy it though when you were in a relationship=

Speaker 2: = for (.) for a bit but then it starts to grate on you (1) [and the thing is (.) and when things]

Speaker 1: [but yeah but if you've like] two and a half years then that's different=

Speaker 2: = when things become bad after two and a half years they become really bad and when you just want it to end you just want it to end ~~[you just want it to end]~~ ^{direct address -> expert}

Speaker 4: word of advice (1) don't do long distance ^{expert?}

Speaker 2: (1) yeah long distance [bad shout]

Speaker 1: [yeah you did] long distance (0.5) lucky [()]

Speaker 3: ((laughs)) [wait] is that

Speaker 1: (1) is that over? (1) ah (.) ah man James

((Speaker 2 pats Speaker 4' shoulder))

Speaker 3: did you get on the pull at Bristol though ((smiling)) ^{} swift topic shift}

Speaker 4: (1.5) no I didn't cos my sister was like right next to me I was [()]

Speaker 2: [(SO?)]=

Speaker 3: = yeah but your sisters [fit]

Speaker 1: [!] would have pulled your sister though

All: ((laughs 2.5))

Speaker 2: I would have pulled your [mum]

Speaker 1: [she] knows that I want that she want I want

All: ((laughs 1.5))

Speaker 3: it's a two [way thing]

Speaker 1: [she knows shes gonna get it from me]

Speaker 3: ((laughs 2))

Speaker 1: she heard me say it=

Speaker 2: = I can feel Will's bum cheeks (curling) around my knee

All: ((laughs 3))

side track
masculinity/jokes

equality

- 10 laughs
- 16 latching on
- 29 interruptions/overlaps
- 8 fronted conjunctions

- minimal responses:
 - alone: 4 (av 2 words)
 - fronting: 12 (11 yeah/1 exactly)
- 6 (+w?) intensifiers
- 5 (+2?) hedges



Girls' conversation transcript

Speaker 1: personally I think that short term relationships are a **really** good idea (2) but not [long term]

Speaker 2:
[WHY] ((laughs))

Speaker 1: because (.) nobody at our age is that ^{emotions} **committed** (.) ^{eg-er} lets be [honest]

Speaker 3: **[yeah that's] true**

Speaker 2: (1) you'll have to break up for uni

Speaker 1: (1) **YEAH THAT'S [TRUE]** (.) **that's so true**

Speaker 3: ^{emotions} **[yeah]** and also we're young (.) we don't know (.) yet (.) we haven't found ourselves

Speaker 2: **yeah** (1) it's a bit **early** ((prolonged)) to meet (.) someone who you're gonna spend the [rest of] your _w [life with]

Speaker 1:
[yeah]

Speaker 3: **[yeah]** (1) **[and I think (1) I think you wont know what]** until you've tried out [(1.5) different options]

Speaker 1: **[and then you see those people who are like together]**

Speaker 2: **[yeah and especially] (.) like** when you leave home you change **quite** a lot as well ((rising intonation))=

Speaker 3: **[yeah]**

Speaker 1: =**[yeah]** what if you're on opposite sides of the country

Speaker 2: **[yeah]**

Speaker 4: **[yeah] (.) but** its not like if you go out with someone you have to stay with them forever

Speaker 1: (1.5) **[That's true]**

Speaker 2: ^{co-operation} **[good point]** ((laughs))

Speaker 4: have fun whilst it lasts (.) ^{phatic} you know ^{hedg} **[like if]** you fancy someone (.) then (.) [go out with them]

Speaker 1: **[YEAH]**

Speaker 3: [yeah] [I think its
yeah I (.)] I do think its nice if you find the right person

Speaker 2: (1.5) ((laughs))

Speaker 1: YEAH like my parents have been together since school

Speaker 2: (1) have they actually

Speaker 1: yeah

Speaker 2: that's ^{♀ adj} so cute ((high pitched))

Speaker 3: [WOW] ((1) that's so cute)

Speaker 4: [that's like ()]

Speaker 3: mine would [just fight at school]

Speaker 2: [Your parents have] been together for the whole time (.) since school

Speaker 4: see and if they were like oh its not [good to be in a] relationship [they wouldn't] be together now (1) they wouldn't be alive so

Speaker 3: [aww that's cute]

Speaker 2: [that's cute]

Speaker 1: [yeah]

Speaker 3: [yeah] (1) that's true

Speaker 4: I dunno=

Speaker 1: =but my dad went out with my mums best friend

Speaker 4: (1) well that's (awkward)

((interruption))

Speaker 4: so I think we can agree that its better to (.) be in one=

Speaker 3: =yeah=

Speaker 1: =yeah=

Speaker 2: =No ((prolonged)) ((laughs))

Speaker 3: cos if you find someone who brings out the best in you

Speaker 1: YEAH (0.5) what if theyre like your best friend

Speaker 3: exactly

expletives

♀ all
give
consensus

emotions

agreement

"that's..."

Speaker 4: yeah ((rise fall))

Speaker 2: but can you just stay best friends with them ((very fast))

start with 'but' - co-operation?

Speaker 1: (0.5) yeah that's [true that's true]

Speaker 4: [but then you have] to like [(.) ask them ()]

Speaker 2: [but surely like (.)] if you're best friends
and then you break up=

↑ odd to total!

Speaker 1: =yeah=

relationships

Speaker 2: doesn't that [ruin your friend]ship ((rising)) ((very fast))

Speaker 1: [yeah (.) yeah] yeah [I] think it does

Speaker 3: [no] (.) not if you're (0.5) close enough=

Speaker 1: =do you not think so=

supportive

← semantics?

Speaker 2: ((laughs)) =if you're true friends [you wouldn't]

Speaker 1: [aah] (1) yeah

Speaker 4: [yeah if (.) you] if you really are good friends=

Speaker 3: =but if you're true friends [(.) that's the best]

Speaker 4: [cos if you're just breaking up] cos you went to uni or something that's [not like] (1) dramatic=

Speaker 1: [exactly] =yeah [that's good]

Speaker 3: [no]

Speaker 2: yeah but then if you break up for uni and then each of you like get with other people surely that like (.) looks bad especially if one person (.) is like=

anomalous; ♂

Speaker 3: =yeah but you've broken [up]

Speaker 4: [but] it's not like just because you've broken up you're not gonna ever get with anyone for the rest of your [life]

Speaker 3: [exactly]=

Speaker 2: no no no yeah but exactly but then if you re-get with them again isn't that like just a bit awkward cos you're like oh (.) well you got with 5 people when we were broken up and you only got [with 2]

non-stand still

Speaker 1: [yeah] (.) that's true actually=

masculine

Speaker 2: =I mean it (.) would [probably be a lot more but ((laughs))]

~~~~~

Speaker 1: [it would be like ( ) jake's friends]

Speaker 3: WE ARE ON A BREAK ((American accent))

All: ((laughs))

Speaker 2: yeah we are on a bre- I love that

- 4 laughs
- 10 latching on
- 28 overlaps (17 of which minimal responses)
- 15 fronted conjunctions
- minimal responses:
  - alone: 29 (av. 1.6 words)
  - fronting: 12 (all 'yeah')
- intensifiers: 3
- hedges: 12 + 7?

+ topic control

+ fluency: overlaps

# Media Piece

**Name:** Edward Keith

**Candidate Number:** 6851

**Title:** "Ouch! Check out them hot chicks..."

**Genre:** Magazine article for a teachers' magazine

**Audience:** Readers of 'Teachers Weekly'

**Purpose:** inform (primary), entertain (secondary)







WORD OF MOUTH // WORD OF MOUTH // WORD OF MOUTH

## Ouch! Check out them hot chicks...

Issues interpreting what your students are trying to tell you? In this week's Word of Mouth, modern foreign language teacher, Joanna Smith, discusses the new generation of language spoken by teenagers today.

*generic Review*

It's a frustrating one for me. I am fluent in French, Spanish, German - even Mandarin... but there's one language I just can't seem to master. It's got many unique words, complex meanings - all masked by an indecipherable pronunciation. What language could this possibly be? Teenager.

Over my career I have slowly seen the dissolution of the English language, and its gradual replacement with this strange, new language I like to call Teenager. However, this exotic tongue - until now unintelligible for adults - is about to have some light shed on it. In this article I will be exploring some of the ways that Teenager deviates from standard English, so that can we can finally begin to understand more about this fascinating and complex species. It's time to say goodbye to Miss Mistranslation and hello to Miss Comprehension!

As the bell rings at 12.15 on a Thursday lunchtime, a wall of revulsion hits me as I realise that I will not be spending my lunch time tucking into a succulent shepherd's pie and gossiping about pupils' private lives. Instead, the pubescent shrieks of lunchtime supervisor duty are calling my



name. However, every cloud has a silver lining. It is here where Mrs Smith puts on her jet black shades delves into her espionage alter ego of Agent Schmidt,

eavesdropping on unsuspecting victims. By simply leaning against the courtyard fence, looking around and twiddling my thumbs like any inconspicuous old biddy, I am opened up to the baffling, yet wonderful, world of the teenager. So what's *innit* that makes it so different?

Well, firstly, there's a whole new vocabulary. Do you remember the days when being *fit* meant you did lots of exercise? When being *hot* meant there was a high temperature? When being a *spice* meant you added heat to a jalfrezi? Well, forget those meanings if you want to speak Teenager. Oh yes, in the dark corners of the school canteen you'll hear young 'lads' exclaiming "She's fit," "She's hot," and even "She's a spice" - all meaning one thing: that the girl over there in the ludicrously short skirt is *attractive*. And the girls' equivalent? "Peng." No, it's not a new Japanese carbohydrate to liven up your lunchtime salads, it's their genuine way of saying that a boy is good-looking. The teenage ability to disguise private discussions as every-day conversation has fooled many of us - myself included. But now that we've got our key Teenager

*appropriate  
sensible  
field!*



## WORD OF MOUTH // WORD OF MOUTH // WORD OF MOUTH

adjectives sorted, they're never to ruse us again! Now, on to teenage verbs.

Arguably the most crucial terms you'll need to know when studying the teenager are the words used for the verb *to kiss*. Whether it be in the library, behind the bike shed or under your chewing-gum-ridden desk, this is not a topic of conversation to enter with insufficient knowledge. The words 'kiss,' 'smooch,' and 'snog' are all at their disposal – so what do they do? These crafty creatures only go and conjure up a new phrase that sounds so innocent that no adult would ever suspect even the smallest of pecks. *Get off* is the preferred term for kissing, along with *pull*; a common synonym. The language has even reached the complexity of variations of the phrase - "*re-get off*" being a favourite amongst the more promiscuous students. This 'innocent language' mask is used so that these teenagers can talk about whatever secret they wish, without us teachers having a blinking Mary as to what's going on. But let us not dwell on kissing – there is more one more infamous mystery about teenage language yet to solve.

The final language zit I wish pop is the use of a single word. It's a short word, but these four letters have the power to exasperate every teacher across the country when inserted into every sentence, of every quote, of every single extract of the Teenager language. You've guessed it – it's the dreaded *like*. It never ceases to amaze me, the teenage inability to say a single utterance without the word. But why? Well, in this case the teenagers are justified. From my intuition, *like* has two main functions:

1. To avoid controversy
2. To fill a pause

The first function, avoiding controversy, is achieved by making the sentence appear more vague – therefore reducing the chance of any potential objections from peers. The second function avoids awkward gaps of silence when speaking. This explains the myth that teenagers speak much quicker than adults. Having fewer and shorter pauses creates the illusion of a faster tempo, when in fact, it is just a higher volume of words, rather than a faster speed.

I record one of my French students claiming "it's *like* really hard to get *like* good grades in *like* languages." Disregarding my strong disagreement with the sentiment expressed, it is a good illustrator of *like*'s functions. In the first two instances, *like* is used to precede words which have subjective opinions: "really hard" and "good grades." This therefore applies to the first function, as she is avoiding disagreement from another student. The final *like*, however, precedes the word "languages" - a word which cannot vary with context. Therefore, this example follows the second purpose, avoiding an awkward silence as she scours her brain for the desired word.

So there you have it, a brief insight into the Teenager language. Next time you find yourself tapped in to a student's conversation, why not test yourself and see how much you can understand – you'll be amazed by how far a few derogatory words can get you! That said, I have reached the realisation that fluency in Teenager is an unachievable prospect for me, or indeed any of us. The teenager species is very much an enigmatic one, and they will continue to evolve their language as much as required in order to keep things that way. And honestly, I think that's for the best.

Want to get **your** voice heard? For more information on how to get your article into Word of Mouth, visit [www.teachersweekly.com/getinvolved](http://www.teachersweekly.com/getinvolved)

Well-structured, fluent & entirely appropriate re-presentation of key findings of investigation for this audience. Informative & concise.