

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Do women and men speak differently? There has been a considerable amount of myths and a widespread belief of how sex role differences are reflected in language use. Gossiping, for instance, has long been considered as women's typical activity. Cameron (1997) proves that men also engaged in passing the shoptalk involving evaluative (mostly critical) commentary on absent parties. She analyzes the talk of some young men watching television. The findings are the complete opposite of the stereotype. Some of the talk was bragging about sexual conquests and the capacity for holding alcohol. The rest of it is commenting about various other absent men, such as "homos," "faggots," and "wimps". The disparagement shown by men certainly meets the definition of gossip. Another universal stereotype of how women and men are different is enshrined in proverbs:

A woman's tongue wags like a lamb's tail (England)

Foxes are all tail and women are all tongue (England – Cheshire)

The North Sea will sooner be found wanting in water than a woman at a loss for a word (Jutland)

Many women, many words; many geese, many turds. (England)

(Women, Men and Language, 1993)

Since the publication of Lakoff's book entitled "*Language and Woman's Place*" in 1973, there has been an explosion of studies in the field of language and gender. She argues that women have a different approach of speaking from men, which both reflects and produces a subordinate position in society. She also

emphasizes that issues of difference and issues of dominance were inextricably linked (Lakoff, Robin 1973). Many of early researches were dedicated to this particular field of communication dominance in order to prove stereotypes related to gender, such as “chattering” women. In 1975, Marjorie Swacker did an experimental study where both men and women were given a line drawing to examine, and were then asked to describe the picture from memory. There were some significant differences found in the responses of the male and female subjects. One item in the picture was a bookcase with a number of books in it. Although the women and men inaccurately mentioned the number of the books, the male subjects were more precise in their statements, for instance “there are seven books in the shelf”. Women, on the other hand, tend to hedge, for example “there are about seven books in the shelf”. The other difference was that men talked overwhelmingly longer than women that they had to be stopped by the experimenter as the tape ran out. Deborah James and Janice Drakih (1993) also conducted an experiment on the overall amount of speech produced by men and women. Out of 56 studies of adult mixed-gender interactions, 34 (61%) showed males talking more than females overall, while only 2 studies showed female talking more overall. The remaining 20 studies showed either no gender differences (16) or sometimes males or female talking more (14). These researches have successfully proven that stereotypes are often inaccurate.

Gender rather than sex will be used as the key category under discussion. According to West and Zimmerman, gender is something we *do*, not something we *are born with* (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 2003). The notions of gender are constructed by our practices in our social relationships (Foley, 1997). Moreover,

gender is not a set of traits, nor a variable, nor a role, but the product of social doings of some sort (West and Zimmerman, 1987). It is more to the social elaboration of biological sex (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 2003). Sex, on the other hand, is a socially agreed term for classifying women and men based on biological criteria (West and Zimmerman, 1987). It is a biological categorization based primarily on reproductive potential (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 2003).

It is commonly argued that biological differences between males and females determine gender. Higher levels of testosterone, for example, lead men to be more aggressive than women; and left-brain dominance causes men to be more “rational”. To whatever extent gender may be related to biology, the dichotomy of gender is a lifelong process. The differences, in Eckert and McConnell-Ginet’s words, are exaggerated and extended in the service of constructing gender.

The famous words of Simone de Beauvoir, “*Women are not born, they are made,*” are also true for men. The making of men and women is a process that begins before birth. In the beginning, parents are responsible for determining the gender of their child. They treat it as a boy or a girl. Then over the years, the child will take over the process and doing its own gender work. Therefore, if gender flowed naturally from sex, adults might not bother to do the gender work for their children. Children need to undergo the lifelong process; they are required to learn how to be a male or a female.

Studies of group discussions reveal that status, or as defined by Ridgeway (1983) “*the degree of deference, esteem and power to influence others*”, has many effects on participation. Ridgeway also confirms that high-status people are chosen as

a leader more frequently, more likely to influence the group decisions, and responsible for dominating conversation. According to Verba (1961), Burke (1968), and Ridgeway (1982, 1984), as quoted in *Expectations, Legitimation, and Dominance Behavior in Task Groups* (Ridgeway, 1986), high-ranking members are likely to successfully engage more effectively in directive or domineering behavior.

Kollock, Blumstein and Schwartz (1985), as cited by James and Clarke (1993) and Coates (2004), show that interruptions are associated with social status and power. West and Zimmerman (1975), as cited by Tannen (1993), also emphasize that the occurrence of an interruption representing a clear violation to the turn-taking norms which gives an access to others' attention is inextricably linked to dominance, power, and status. In other words, speakers with higher social status and power are more likely to interrupt more. However when it comes to gender, it is gender that overrides social status, as proven by West (1998) and Woods (1989), as quoted by , respectively in their studies of doctor-patient interaction and the conversation between a woman with a high-status position in the workplace and her male subordinate (Coates, 2004). Kollock et al. (1985) also found that in heterosexual couples despite the greater professional or social status than the man of the woman, the man tended to talk more nonetheless, showing that men were more resistant to reversals of status hierarchies. In respect of these studies, the status that will be the sole predominant aspect is gender differences. As Strodbeck, James, and Hawkin (1957) note, quoted by Smith-Lovin and Brody (1989), gender operates as a status characteristic. Women are stereotyped to be the powerless social group compared to men, or in other words, lower-status party compared to men. A number of early

studies were dedicated to this issue; and they found that men interrupted women more frequently than women interrupted men. An experiment done by Zimmerman and West in 1975 showed that male speakers were more responsible for more turn-taking violations. Another research conducted by Leet-Pellegrini (1980) proved that although women did talk more than men, men indeed dominated the conversations.

Coates (2004), as quoted by Zhang (2010), discusses the phenomenon of the beginning of the male role disappearance and how the traditional assumptions about gender identity are being challenged. Moreover, some researchers argue that the classroom has been feminized that girls now perform better than boys in term of the educational qualifications. It is no longer a certainty that girls begin to fall behind as they hit adolescence. In fact, girls outperform boys in public examinations and outnumber the boys in entrance of high education, which, according to Skolverket (2009) as cited by Zhang (2010), has resulted in an anxiety among some people that boys are at a disadvantage. In addition, Skolverket (2009) as cited by Zhang (2010) claims that it seems widely accepted by the boys that working hard academically is utterly repulsive. Graddol and Swan (1989), as quoted by Zhang (2010), also supports Skolverket by suggesting that another interpretation to boys' silence in classroom is their intention of adhering to male gender identity, as women are stereotyped as over talkative and somewhat gossipy with more small talk.

The ongoing phenomenon occurring in most Indonesian educational institutions is deliberately arranging groups into mixed-sex groups. The tendency of avoiding same-sex groups is believed to offer a better impact to the discussion. By taking gender influence into account, would mixed-sex groups still be deemed

appropriate for discussions? This paper describes how gender actuates agents of a discussion in committing interruptions, and how the interruptions produced function differently according to the genders of the listeners and the speakers.

1.2 The Problems

This study is an attempt to investigate to what extent gender matters in the interruptions produced by IC classes of 2013-2014 in group discussions. To be specific, this study aims at examining the influence of gender over the frequency of interruptions and the functions of interruptions. The questions formulated are:

1. What are the gender differences in the frequency of interruptions?
2. What are the gender differences in the functions of interruptions?

1.3 The Objectives

Referring to the mentioned questions, this study aims at discovering gender differences in the construction of interruptions. The objectives of this study, specifically, are to see (1) the gender differences in the term of the frequency of interruptions; and (2) the gender differences in the function of the interruptions. The functions interruptions under the discussion are adapted from the pedagogical arguments of group discussions from Long and Porter (1985).

1.4 Theoretical Framework

According to Zimmerman and West (1975), the occurrence of interruption is linked to dominance, power, and status. Early studies have shown that “*men interrupt*

women, adults interrupt children, doctors interrupt patients (except when the doctor is a 'lady'), the more powerful spouse interrupts the less powerful spouse, and those with masculine identities interrupt those with more feminine self-images." (Smyth-Lovin and Brody, 1989). These infringements of turn-taking rules allow the powerful, high-social status speakers, more access to conversational floor.

As quoted by Smyth-Lovin and Brody (1989), Strodbeck, James, and Hawkins (1957) note that sex operates as a status characteristic. Males are believed to have higher social status than females. Hence, they practically interrupt more than females.

1.5 The Significance of the Study

This study is expected to have both practical and theoretical contributions. The practical purpose of this study is to provide teachers with sufficed knowledge of how gender influences one's ability to convey ideas to others. Hence the result of this study is expected to be a learning paradigm which will guide teachers in improving the effectiveness of group discussions. Arranging discussion groups into mixed-sex groups, even though this has been implemented for a long time, might not constitute productive in eliciting students to convey their opinions when taking gender's role into consideration.

Moreover, this study aims at confirming the theory of Coates (2004) claiming that those with higher social status, or males, are more likely to interrupt more than the less powerful ones.

This study, furthermore, serves as a theoretical model as a comparison for future studies. With this study, future studies hopefully will benefit from the facts provided, and will produce more developed studies in the same nature.

1.6 Assumptions

From the above, there are several assumptions constructed serving as the basis of this study that are presented in the following.

1. There are discussions in Intensive Course.
2. The members of the discussions consist of males and females.
3. There are interruptions in the discussions.

1.7 Scope and Limitation of the Study

West and Zimmerman (1975) describe interruptions as an intrusion and penetration to one's turn. Despite its existence as a clear infringement to turn-taking rules, interruptions may perform as a positive, negative, and neutral interruption. This study will examine the amount of interruptions produced in a discussion, and how they perform. Specifically, this non-participant research observation will be delimited to the amount of interruption attempts produced, and the types of interruptions based on their functions. Any non-verbal cues, or gestures, will be disregarded.

1.8 The Organization of the Study

This study consists of four chapters. The first chapter is the introduction, containing the background of the study, the statement of the problems, the objectives

of the study, the significance of the study, the scope and limitation of the study, the assumptions, the organization of the study, and the definition of key terms.

The second chapter is the methodology. It consists of conversation and discussion, turn-taking rules, the definition of interruptions, interruptive and non-interruptive simultaneous speech, the types of interruptions, the functions of interruptions, gender differences in the frequency of interruptions, and gender differences in the function of interruptions.

Chapter three presents the methodology of the study. It consists of the research design, in which the form of the study is examined, the subjects of this study, the data collection, the instrument of the research, and the data analysis.

Chapter four is the findings and discussions of the findings. It presents gender differences in the frequency of interruption attempts and gender differences in the function of the interruptions.

The last chapter, chapter five, consists of the summary, conclusion, as well as the suggestions.

1.9 Definition of Key-Terms

The terms used in this study may be unfamiliar. The following descriptions are presented to give the description of the terms.

- a. **Gender.** The psychological category of human beings.

- b. **Interruptions.** Violations of turn-taking rules which usurp the ongoing speech in the absence of any evidence that the current speaker intends to relinquish the conversational floor.
- c. **IC.** A course which enables students to complete a typical semester or quarter-long class in a short amount of time since they are taught on a tighter than normal schedule, with more class time each week, but fewer weeks.
- d. **Positive interruptions.** Interruptions which contribute in the success of a group discussion and help students improve their English speaking skill.
- e. **Negative interruptions.** Interruptions which do not contribute in the success of a group discussion and do not help students improve their English speaking skill.
- f. **Neutral interruptions.** Interruptions which are related to communicative process.
- g. **Group discussions.** An activity in which a group of people talk together in order to share information about a topic or a problem.