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Gender and Interruption in Conversation Made by EFL Students

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Abstract

Interruption is defined as the act of resistance by a certain speaker in conversation caused by certain factors such as an eagerness to be powerful or the act of asking for clarification of the current speaker. The matter of interruption itself is influenced by many factors that cause it comes to the surface where gender is one of the crucial aspects in influencing the existence of interruption in the conversation. Conducting conversational analysis, the researchers investigated interruption occurred in morphology class of the third semester based on *West and Zimmerman's Syntactic Measurement of Interruptions*. 22 students were involved as the research subjects who are grouped into three. Each group consists of male and female students. The researchers also focused on interruption which occurred 1) before the speaker making the first point, 2) after the speaker making the first point, 3) in mid-clause after the first point, and 4) after a pause or other turn ending signal. Having analyzed two-hour video records of students' discussion, it is found that females interrupted more than males in mixed group gender. They tend to interrupt after the speaker making their first point and in mid-clause, after the first point was made acted as confirmation, conclusion, or completion of the speaker's idea. The findings support a previous study regarding with situation where interruption occurred when male and female speakers as the main speaker.

Keywords: interruption, gender, conversation, sociolinguistics

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Introduction

In everyday life, we always communicate with each other as we are social creators. Specifically, in communication, people always engage in conversation to transfer the message they would like to deliver. As Liddicoat (2007) states, human beings must engage in conversational interaction where they also depend on the conversation to have a meaningful life. Additionally, through conversation people made in everyday life, it makes them able to socialize and develop their relationship with each other.

The conversation is highly important for the human being. As Ford & Ford (2009) explain, everything we talk about in conversation is very urgent where we often use them when we are socializing, talking about the weather, trying to motivate people, helping friends solve problems, expressing ideas, etc. Therefore, people who do those actions want to have people understand, take appropriate action and create a sort of conversation to transfer messages.

Specifically, in conversation, we cannot leave aside that there must be a sort of interruption when people belong to a certain conversation. The matter of interruption itself is influenced by many factors that cause it comes to the surface where gender is one of the crucial aspects in influencing the existence of interruption in the conversation. Generally, much of the conversation happens to consist of male and female speakers which always being an interesting research subject to study. Additionally, understanding the nature of talk made by humans in everyday life has been always become an urgent matter especially to be a subject being studied. Supporting this idea, Maynard (2006) explains that it is fundamental to understand the role of conversation in human social life wherein the 1960s, there is increasing development in terms of analyzing the conversation as a field of study.

Specifically, interruption is a reflection of power. As stated by Tannen (1993) that interruption is a sign of domination. However, interruption regards as the act of doing violation to the current speaker because the interrupter speaks while the current speaker is speaking. Similar to Tannen (1993), James & Clarke (1993) state that interruption is a violation in conversation. It happens when one speaker talks in the middle of someone's talking. Interruption regards as a violation because it seems to be impolite to speak while another person is speaking. Interruption is interpreted as negative behavior and an attempt to show the power by controlling the interaction through taking the floor to speak and also control the topic of conversation. They also add that although interruption considers to the action of violation to another speaker in conversation, interruption has functions in conversation. The first function is such behaviour in conversation is to prevent the current speaker to finish his or her speaking and the second function allows the second speaker to take over the floor so that another speaker will have a turn to speak up his or her mind.

Generally, Murray (1985) mentioned that interruption has occurred when one person is cutting the current speaker off before ending the signal. Similar to Murray (1985), Lestary et al. (2017) pointed out that speakers' intention to interrupt is to complete and cut turns. Additionally, when speakers have something to share with other speakers or to convey their opinion or perspective, they usually come with interruption. However, there have to be some measurements in determining the interruption i. e. syntactic and context-sensitive cultural measurements (Okamoto et al., 2002). Other than that, interruption among mixed-gender situations is caused by disregard and assertiveness more than same-sex gender conversation (Al-Habies, 2020; Balan et al., 2020; Jabeen et al., 2021; LaFrance, 1992). Furthermore, in research conducted by

Adam (2013), the interruption can indicate several meanings including to agree, to support, to control over the floor, and to compete with other speakers.

Nevertheless, interruption behavior does not always regard as a violation of conversational rules. In this case, Tannen (1993) gives an example if someone does not understand what the current speaker is saying or the current speaker in answering a question is not properly understood, another speaker might interrupt to get clarification from him or her. In conclusion, interruption is one of conversational behavior which usually occurs in any type of conversation. Interruption itself in some theories has a negative connotation because the speaker who interrupts speaks while the current speaker is speaking. Furthermore, interruption is a representation of the action of being powerful. In this case, this conversation behavior is often done by a certain speaker to show domination to other speakers.

In everyday conversation, men and women usually use language differently as Language and gender differences in communication (Speer, 2005). Similarly, Okamoto et al. (2002) explain that men and women view conversational behavior differently because of their gendered behavior. Besides, men and women learn how to use language in different ways because of their activities in the same-sex group. In this case, men learn how to maintain an audience and declare their opinions, whereas women learn to create the closeness of relation by exchanging information. Men tend to talk about sport and cars while women tend to talk about gossip regarding relationships or other topics of conversation, men like to talk about themselves while women like to talk about men, men talk a lot while women listen, men are assertive while women are submissive, men are logical while women are illogical. Women's talk considers more friendly, cooperative, and relational where women tend to give positive reactions better than men and work hard to get meaningful conversation. Men's talk is more dominant, more directive, and less supportive. For example, men tend to dispute another speaker's utterances. This conversation behavior could be in terms of acknowledgment to another speaker's comments, the act of changing the topic of conversation, or giving no response to another speaker's utterance (Alharthi, 2020; Okamoto et al., 2002; Parangan & Buslon, 2020). Those types of conversation behavior by men and women spread widely in society and culture. Because of that reason, men and women bring different assumptions and rules to everyday conversation.

Supporting Okamoto's theory, Johnstone (1993) also states that the use of language by men and women is not in the same way. Men and women use language differently in terms of interpreting others' speech, in conversation among themselves like women with women and men, in joking, in public image-making, in writing, and telling their personal stories. Besides, Johnstone (1993) adds that the explanation of gender differences in terms of language use has several kinds of points of view. Some scholars view the differences of men and women in using the language is from a psychological difference. Others claim that the differences come from social origin based on status and prestige. Moreover, others declare that the difference is from the cultural differences where men and women usually socialize in same-sex peer groups. Lastly, the differences come from different forms and functions of talk. In short, men and women live in different worlds in terms of the psychological world, the social world including prestige, power, status, and also a culture where all those elements make men and women shape their talks.

Furthermore, men and women have their styles in having the conversation. In this case, Eckert & Ginet (2003) explain the conversational style made by men and

women. In women's talk, they always try to be cooperative and supportive speakers. In addition, women also tend to pick up and build on each other's themes. On the contrary, men's style is more competitive rather than cooperative and also maintains the foster hierarchy of being dominant in conversation. The topics they discussed are also different and the differences seem to be corresponding to their style of talk. In short, the term of gender is not merely the matter of biological sex of being men and women, it is related to what men and women do and perform in social life. In other words, it is elaboration between sex references to the social term which usually occurs in everyday life. Moreover, men and women have their style in terms of the use of language in performing talk including the way they talk and the topics being discussed.

Furthermore, study regarding gender is fascinating due to many researchers studied about gender aspect in their research focus i.e. Sheu et al. (2005), Radwan (2011), Otlowski (2003), and Rahimpour & Yaghoubi-Notash (2007). Specifically in this research, since communication is always related to gender aspect where people, including men and women, interact with one another, some researchers eager to investigate which gender is more dominant in conversation in many contexts of setting, e.g. Bartolome (1993) with "Dominance and Sex: Two Independent Variables in the Analysis of Interruption", Anderson & Leaper (1998) with "Meta-Analyses of Gender Effects on Conversational Interruption: Who, What, When, Where, and How", and Lovin & Brody (1989) with "Interruptions in Group Discussions: The Effects of Gender and Group Composition". In this case, even though those researches were conducted in different settings, their investigation concluded that men interrupt more than women. Additionally, men interrupt more than women also found in mix-gender class which was done by Atakan & Yurtdaş (2013). Other than that, research regarding gender in relation to interruption seems to be very fascinating to many researchers in many area of studies i.e. Bui (2021), Cannon et al. (2019), Gay (1990), Ghilzai (2018), González-Sanz (2018), Johannes P. et al. (2020), and Maghfiro et al. (2020). However, this research intends to propose two main objectives: the description of the dominant gender is also included in the description of the result in this research. In addition, this research also points out the influence of the gender aspect on interruption in conversation made by male and female students in speaking class in the Teaching English Department setting at University of Widya Gama Mahakam Samarinda, Indonesia.

Research Methodology

In analyzing interruption and gender in conversation made by male and female students of the fourth semester of the Teaching English Department, the researcher uses conversation analysis as the analytical approach. As Wooffitt (2005) points out that conversation analysis is one of the methodological approaches to study verbal interaction. In this case, the researcher will use conversation analysis as an approach to analyzing the conversation made by male and female students which related to the interruption occurs and also the influence of gender aspect regarding the presence of the interruption itself.

To easier the researcher, the researcher will use the transcription of the data recorded which consists of the recording of a conversation by male and female students in the classroom. Moreover, the transcription can help the researcher to extract the data recording by coding the conversation based on Gail Jefferson's transcription symbols so that the researcher can classify the interruption done by male and female students in

the classroom and also determine the influence of gender term related to the presence of interruption.

After data collection, the next step that the researcher will do is data reduction wherein the transcription, the researcher will reduce the data which is not related to the focus of the study so that the researcher can identify the interruption made by male and female students. After data reduction, the researcher will display the data that has been reduced by explaining the interruption reflected in the conversation as well as the influence of gender in terms of the presence of interruption in the conversation. After all, the researcher will conclude with the data that have been displayed before (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

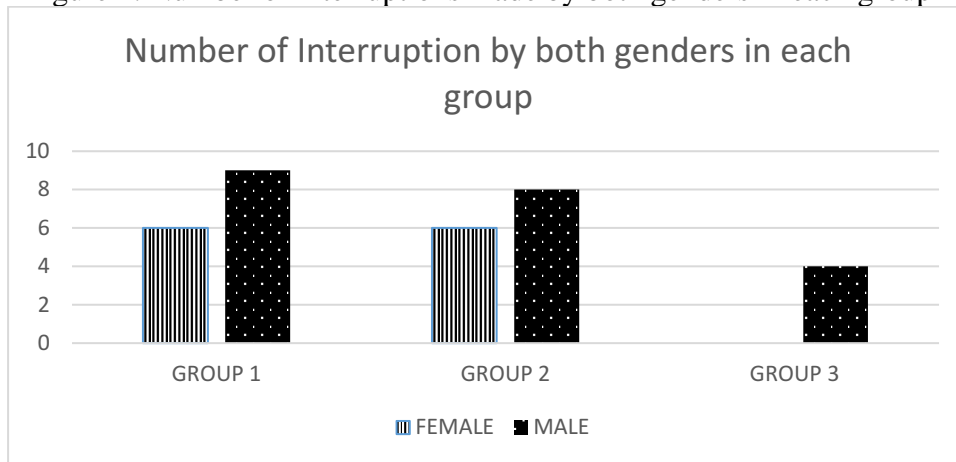
Moreover, in analyzing the interruption made by the students, the researchers rely on the theory of West & Zimmerman (1983), where interruption refers to “violations of speakers’ turns at the talk”. They also added that interruption is operationally defined as “incursions that are initiated more than two syllables away from the initial or terminal boundary of a unit-type”. In other words, when someone cut off another person’s talking before s/he made the point which is more than two syllables, it is considered as an interruption. Not only referring to West and Zimmerman’s syntactical measurement, to analyze the interruption that occurred during students’ discussion, we also refer to context-sensitive cultural measurement proposed by Murray (1985), which covered four situations where interruption taking place.

Findings and Discussion

Research Question 1: *How is interruption reflected in conversation made by male and female students of the fourth semester of Teaching English Department at Widyagama Mahakam University Samarinda?*

In collecting the data, we involved 22 college students who were grouped into three to discuss morphology. Group 1 consists of seven students with two males (as the main speakers) and five females (as the audiences). Group 2 consists of eight students with three males (two of them were the main speakers) and five females (as the audiences). Having analyzed three discussion videos with 30 – 40 minutes duration, overall, we found that interruption likely appeared in groups with the male speakers (group 1 and group 2). Meanwhile, in the group with the females as the main speakers (group 3), interruption rarely occurred. The male audience tends to listen carefully to the female speaker and commented when she had made her points. During 30 minutes discussion, only two cases of interruption occurred. The following graph describes the number of interruption occurred in three groups based on Murray’s measurement.

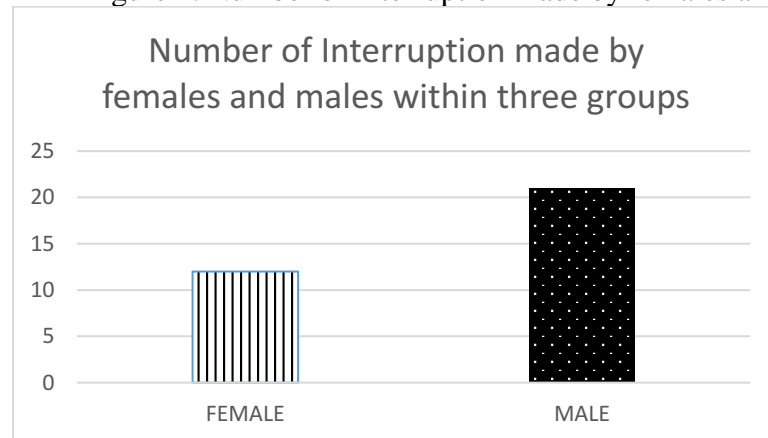
Figure 1. Number of interruptions made by both genders in each group



The bar chart above shows that among the three groups, an interruption occurred more in groups 1 and 2. As it is shown in group 1, females made 6 interruptions and males made 9 interruptions. Similarly, in group 2, females made 6 interruptions and males made 8 interruptions which are fewer than males in group 1. In total, there are 15 interruptions occurred in group 1 and 14 interruptions appeared in group 2. However, there are only four interruptions that arose in group 3. It proves that interruption likely takes place when males are in charge to lead the discussion.

In terms of how much each gender made interruption, the following graph describes the result;

Figure 2. Number of Interruption made by females and males within three groups

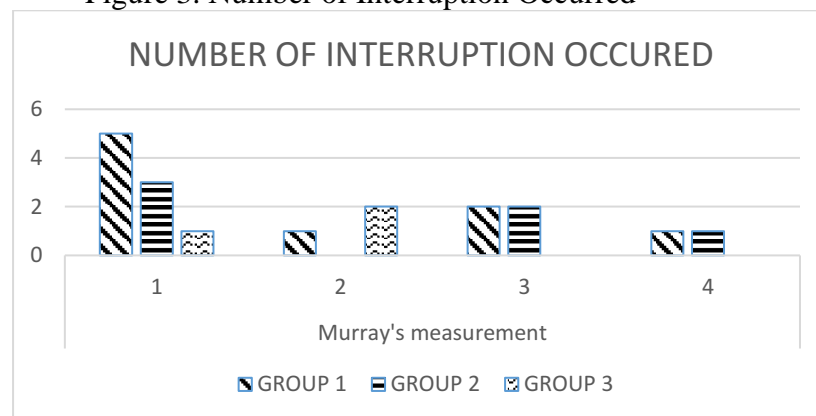


As it can be seen on the graph above, it is clear that males interrupted more than females. From all interruptions recorded from three groups, there are 33 interruptions were made, and 21 of them were made by males. Females only made 12 interruptions. This result is in line with some research findings, such as West & Zimmerman (1983); Tannen (1993); and Anderson & Leaper (1998).

Furthermore, when the interruptions occurred in the three groups were analyzed through Murray's measurement, it is found that the interruptions were likely taken place in a situation when the person cutting off the speaker before she or he made a point in

a conversation. In this study, the situation is symbolized with the number “1”. The following graph displays the number of interruptions that occurred in each different situation summarized by Murray.

Figure 3. Number of Interruption Occurred



Note:

- 1 = cutting the speaker off before he or she has made his or her first point of the conversation;
- 2 = cutting the speaker off before he or she has made the first point of a turn
- 3 = cutting the speaker off in mid-clause after the first point of a turn
- 4 = beginning to speak during a pause or other turn ending signal

The graph shows that in group 1 (the diagonal stripes bar), the interruption arose more in situation number 1. It is when the audience cuts off the speaker before he or she made the first point of the conversation. Five cases have appeared in group 1 in situation 1. However, only three cases appeared in group 2 and one case in group 3.

What is more, for situation number 2, where the audience cut off the speaker before he/she made the first point of a turn, one case was found in group 1 and two cases were found in group 3. Meanwhile, for situation number 3, where the audience cut off the speaker in mid-clause after the first point of a turn, group 1 and two made the same number of cases, i.e.: two cases. Similarly, only one case appeared in groups 1 and 2 regarding the fourth situation, where interruption occurred during a pause. Thus, it can be said that interruptions were mostly appeared when the speaker had not made the point of the conversation and at the mid-clause after the first point of a turn. It is important to highlight that these situations prevail in groups with the males as the main speakers. Meanwhile, in the group with the females as the main speakers, interruptions have appeared before the speaker made the first point of a turn (situation 2). Considering the number of cases in group 3 (the females as the main speakers), which is only three cases (within 30 minutes of recording), it shows that the males tend to wait until the female speakers finish talking. The interruption they made was for confirmation only. There was not found completion-oriented interruption as it has happened in the group with males as the main speakers.

Research Question 2: *How is the influence of gender in the presence of interruption in conversation made by male and female students of the fourth semester of Teaching English Department at Widyagama Mahakam University Samarinda?*

To analyze how much gender influence the presence of interruption, we consider the number of interruption of each gender has made and the content of interruption they made. As it has been explained above that males interrupted more than females. The higher number of interruptions made by males related to the male's role compared with the female's role in society. Zimmerman and West (1975) emphasized the role of man as the dominance, whose greater status and power, to take the conversational floor. This situation explains why in this study the males interrupted more than the females, since, males interrupted when they want to complete the other speaker's explanation (who is also male) and to provide more complete information (dominance as the only source of information in the group).

For example;

Excerpt 6

MS1.G2: jadi klo di free morpheme i//
 MS2.G2: //morpheme itu sebenarnya ada 2, yang//
 MS1.G2: //bebas
 MS2.G2: yang dia bisa berdiri sendiri, ada yang dia bisa gabung, kayak link gitu nah.. klo berdiri sendiri itu seperti *the*//
 FA1.G2: //itu yang free morpheme kah?
 MS2.G2: iya free tapi bagian itu (0.3)
 MS1.G2: oh (0.3)
 MS2.G2: sperti *the, run, on* (0.3)//
 FA1.G2: //apa tadi? *The*?
 MS2.G2: *the*
 MS1.G2: oya, ini//
 MS2.G2: contoh//
 MS1.G2: //ntar dulu... contoh yang ini sebenarnya dibagi dua lagi, di free morpheme, namanya masuk di fungsional morpheme, disitu maksudnya, morpheme-nya tidak dapat menerima imbuhan

In the above excerpt, the interruptions have occurred between two male speakers. They interrupted each other to complete each other statements as well as showed who was in charge of the group.

However, when a female interrupted, the objective of her interruption was for confirmation. Females are interrupted when they want to confirm the correct idea in their minds with the speaker. For example:

Excerpt 1

MS1.G1: ... assignment, in the assignment that we have to fill in the blank//
 FA1.G1 and FA2.G1: //not assignment, homework!↑

Excerpt 4

MS2.G1: ah...er...bagaimana dengan kata *sekejap*//
 FA3.G1: //sekejap?
 MS2.G1: ((nodding)), kejam, kejam lah
 FA2.G1: gak ada...
 FA1.G1: sekejap itu sudah kata dasar

Excerpt 7

MS1.G2: ntar dulu... contoh yang ini sebenarnya dibagi dua lagi, di free morpheme, namanya masuk di fungsional morpheme, disitu maksudnya, morpheme-nya tidak dapat menerima imbuhan//

FA1.G2: //oh, jadi yang 'the' tadi ya?

MS1.G2 and MS2.G2: iya

If we take a look at the content of interruption above, the female audiences show a way of demonstrating cooperation and enthusiasm (Anderson and Leaper, 1998) in form of confirmation. When males are in the position as the audience and the females as the presenter, the males tend not to interrupt. Meanwhile, when the males are in charge as the presenters with females as the audience, the male presenter tends to interrupt their partner (another male presenter) and the audience to complete the speaker's idea or to make the correction. The males interrupt when the other speaker pauses because of losing the idea to help/ continue the speaker's idea.

On the other hand, females as the audience tend to interrupt for confirming the speaker's idea/opinion. They also mostly interrupt before the speaker makes the point and after the first point has been made. Unlike males, females do not consider gender to interrupt, they interrupt their female friend as well as their male friend. Above all, even though most male audiences tend not to interrupt when female speakers are talking, some male audiences are curious to interrupt female speakers because they assume that the topic is interesting.

Conclusion and Suggestion

Regarding the number of interruptions made, males interrupted more than females, considering the male's roles as the dominance and the one whose power. Moreover, the interruption was likely to appear in the group with the male as the main speaker. Besides, an interruption occurred mostly in the situation when the speaker has not finished making the first point of a conversation. Making interruption after a pause or other ending turn signal seldom happened. The findings of the research are hopefully can give benefits for the next researchers. Therefore, further researchers are suggested to have a deeper analysis on a similar area of research especially gender and interruption. Besides, the teaching of Sociolinguistics in English teaching should be more interesting to have students' attention. Therefore, lecturers are suggested to have more creative ideas on how to teach Linguistics subjects such as in part of gender and interruption exist in teaching English classrooms. Other than that, the pedagogical implication in this research drives to highlight that male and female students have their styles in conversation. Consequently, lecturers need to understand that the way of learning of both male and female students is different.

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