

**An Analysis of Gender Differences in Minimal
Responses in the conversations
in the two TV-series *Growing Pains* and *Boy Meets
World***

Ying He

Kristianstad University

English department

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Tutor: Anna Ekström

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1. Introduction

People spend much of their time interacting with each other. They talk about their daily lives, share information and enjoy leisure time. They communicate in informal conversations with friends and in formal environments with co-workers. In any relationship and any environment, communication is unavoidable. Human beings are always involved in communication processes: at home, in school, in the office, in the social community and so on. We should learn the communicative competence to perform appropriately in certain contexts. People use different communicative strategies with different people in different situations. People choose different strategies for various reasons, during which gender could be one hypothetical key reason: women and men are sometimes reported to use different communicative strategies with each other.

The study of conversations between the genders is a central area within linguistics as well as other fields and has been a topic of interest for a long time. Linguists have been investigating language and gender from many perspectives. One of the important issues between males and females is how they use communicative strategies to interact with one another. That is to say that although women and men are equal, they characteristically use different strategies in conversational interaction with each other. By studying this typical case, we will have an insight into the gender differences in communication. The most important thing is for both male and female to realize the causes of the differences in cross-sex conversation and aware of it, so they can be more suitable to the environment they are in.

Among the communicative strategies found in conversational interaction, minimal responses is one central phenomenon. Men and women are often said to use minimal responses differently. It is reported that women use minimal responses to show their support to the current speaker while men prefer the delayed minimal responses in order to achieve the dominance in conversation.

1.1 Aim and Scope

The aim of the present investigation is to find out how male speakers and female speakers use minimal responses in mixed-gender conversations from a particular family perspective in two American TV-series. The focus will be on the type and function of male and female usage of minimal responses. The specific context of the conversations analyzed is within the family.

1.2 Material

In order to find out how male and female speakers in mixed-gender conversations use minimal responses, two TV-series were selected. One is *Growing Pains* (1985), and the other is *Boy Meets World* (1993). These two TV-series were selected because they have almost the same members of the family: parents, two sons and one daughter. In addition, the TV-series have basically almost the same lengths for every episode. This is shown in the presentation below. To make the data comparable the selected TV-series were of almost the same seasons and the same lengths (6-7seasons, about 20minutes for each episode) dealing with similar or closely related topics. The six episodes are as follows:

Eason/episode	Title	Total Lasting Time
101	<i>Pilot —Boy meets World</i>	23:12 mins
102	<i>On the Fence —Boy meets World</i>	22:20 mins
103	<i>Father Knows Less —Boy meets World</i>	23:15 mins
101	<i>Pilot —Growing Pains</i>	22:54 mins
102	<i>Springsteen —Growing Pains</i>	23:46 mins
103	<i>Jealous —Growing Pains</i>	23:45 mins

The conversations in *Growing Pains* involve the five members of the family. Jason Seaver is the father, a psychiatrist, who had his practice at home. Maggie Seaver is the mother, a journalist who worked for the Long Island newspaper. Mike is the first son of this family, a dare-devil yet charming boy. Carol is the second child and the only daughter, a straight-A student. Ben is the third kid in the family.

The conversations in the *Boy meets World* also involve the five members of the family. Allan Matthews is the father, a grocery store manager. Amy Matthews is the mother, a homemaker. Eric is the first child in the family. Cory is the second son, 11-year-old boy. Morgan is the third kid and the only daughter of the family.

These six episodes are picked at random. All of them contain female-female, female-male, male-male and male-female conversations. The language used here is scripted language since it comes from a TV-series rather than real life, however, the nature of the two TV-series may lead us to believe that the language used in them is quite close to authentic speech and may therefore perhaps be representative of it.

1.3 Method

The two TV-series *Growing Pains* and *Boy Meets World* are of almost the same kind and the same lengths (6-7 seasons, 20 minutes for each episode) were selected. They are both about family situations. Both a careful listening to the spoken dialogue of each episode and a close analysis of the transcripts has been done.

All of the episodes were carefully listened to, and all the minimal responses in the conversations were noted and collected. In the ensuing study of the material, all the different situations of minimal responses were cited. Then the uses of minimal responses were analyzed. At last the results were compared and the differences between male and female uses of minimal responses were analyzed

2. Theoretical Background

In this section the previous research that is correlated to aspects of gender and language in conversation and minimal responses will be presented.

2.1 Language and context

When we analyze different kinds of language phenomena, the context is an essential factor that we must take into consideration. Generally speaking, the context can be seen as a linguistic verbal context in which a conversation occurs. Such kind of context is quite helpful for us to understand the particular meaning of the word and phrase. What is more, when people intend to dig deeper into the meaning hidden behind some kind of utterances, also the social context, that is the physical context itself, is perhaps even more important than verbal context. When we say social context, it means involving various social variables, such as conversational settings. For example, using body gesture in public will be seen as improper or even rude, while it also could be seen as proper and acceptable in a private context. However, more recently

“The social environment (context), also known as the milieu, is the identical or similar social positions and social roles as a whole that influence the individuals of a group. The social environment of an individual is the culture that he or she was educated and/or lives in, and the people and institutions with whom the person interacts.”(Wikipedia, 2009. *Social environment*).

That shows more attention is paid to the concern of gender, social status and so on. Therefore both verbal context and social context should be taken into consideration to make the more precise analysis.

2.2 Conversation

Conversation is the essential part of human being's lives. People use the term conversation to refer to the spoken interaction in daily life or even just describe it as chatting which is a more informal type of spoken interaction. The reason why people treat the conversation as an informal type of spoken interaction is that in their point of view the conversation is only related to the personal things such as daily life rather than facts. In fact, the term conversation can not only occur in the informal context but also in the formal speech. Debate can be viewed as a simple example here for it is a simple type of conversation which happens in the formal speech.

2.2.1 Turn-taking

The basic structure of talk is "I speak-you speak- I speak- you speak" (Yule, 1996:71). What is obvious is that it takes at least two speakers to communicate in a conversation. It is also known to us all that the two speakers in the dialogue perform different roles in turn and usually only one person speaks at one time. That is, when one of the participants speaks, the other one should listen to him/her. According to Zimmerman and West (1975:106-107), Sacks et al (1974) outlines a model of turn-taking to analyze conversations, which says "that speech exchange systems in general are organized to ensure that (1) one party speaks at a time and (2) speaker change recurs" (1975:107). It indicates that only when the current speaker stops the others could have his/her turn to speak. There are some rules for the turn-taking system in different contexts: (1) it is the current speaker who chooses the next speaker and the next speaker should take the next turn to keep the conversation going. (2) if the current speaker does not choose the next speaker, anyone else has the right to take in turn to continue the conversation. (3) if the current speaker does not choose the next speaker or there is no one else take the turn, then the current speaker should continue his speaking. Therefore it is the speakers who are responsible for the management of turn-taking in conversation in order to keep the conversation going.

Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson (1974) present a model of turn-taking. Sacks et al observe that “overwhelmingly, one party talks at a time” (1974:700) and “transitions, from one turn to a next with no gap and no overlap are common” (1974:700). Turns are obviously finished at the end of the speech and these possible ending points are called Transition Relevance Places (TRP). Transition Relevance Places (TRP) are that when the current speaker stops, the next speaker will gain the floor at the end of the current speaker to keep the conversation going. At each transition relevance place the speaker can either continue, following the current turn, or just begin a new turn. According to these three researchers, conversation involves the smooth transition from one speaker to another with little or no time lapse intervening.

2.2.2 Interruption

Coates (2004) discusses the definition of interruption. According to Coates, the term interruption can be seen as a situation in which the next speaker begins to speak while the current speaker is still speaking. Interruption breaks the symmetry of the conversational and makes the current speaker fail to finish his turn of speaking. Because of its violation of the basic turn-taking rules, the term interruption is seen as uncooperative. It is common that men are more likely to interrupt women in order to get the right to speak. Compared with women, men are said to use the competitive way of speaking, therefore, interruptions are associated with competitiveness and seen as to be dominant in the conversation or get the floor. Women, on the other hand, are said to be cooperative in the conversation, they always wait until the current speaker finishes his/her speaking (Coates, 2004).

2.3 Definition of minimal responses

Generally speaking, listener responds to speakers in two ways. First, listener makes responses while the current speaker is talking. Second, listener makes responses after the current speaker finishing talking. These kinds of responses play an important role in conversations.

Here is an example cited by Yule (1996:75):

(1) Caller: *if you use your long distance service a lot then you'll*

Mary: *uh-uh*

Caller: *be interested in the discount I'm talking about because*

Mary: *yeah*

Caller: *it can only save you money to switch to a cheap service*

Mary: *mm*

Every time when the speaker (the caller) stops at the end of a tone unit, Mary appropriately uses *uh-uh*, *yeah*, *mm* as responses to the caller, which shows her agreement with the speaker.

The signals listed above such as *uh-uh*, *yeah*, *mmm*, functioning as direct feedback to the current speakers showing that their messages are being received. There are various terms to refer to this function, such as response token, response cues, minimal responses and so on. Here the term minimal responses have been chosen for this essay. Minimal responses are verbal and non-verbal indicators of a person's co-participation in a conversation (Reid, 2005:8).

Following are some definitions and research on minimal responses.

Zimmerman and West (1975:108) mention only *um hmm*, *uh huh*, and *yeah* as minimal responses. Kendon's (1975:204) come up with *yes*, *quite*, *surely*, *I see* and *that's true*. Reid (2005:8) argues in *Gender Differences in Minimal Responses*:

Fishman (1978:402) cites minimal responses as 'yeah', 'umm', 'huh'. Woods (1988:143) adds 'yes' and 'right' to this list. ...Tao & Thompson (1991:210) define backchannels as 'short, non-lexical utterances produced by an interlocutor who is playing primarily a listener's role during the other interlocutor's speakership'.

More examples will be given in following parts, which will define the minimal responses formally and functionally.

Reppen (2002) cites Duncan (1974) and expands the typology of backchannel responses from non-lexical vocalizations and *yeah*, and includes items such as *right* and *I see*, sentence completions, clarification requests, brief restatements and head nodding and shakings.

The examples listed above indicate that the minimal responses show the listeners' support to the current speaker and give him a sign that he/she can continue talking.

Here is an example from *Growing Pains*:

(2) Ben: *Male subject threatens death after first clip.*

Jason: ***Yeah***, *but what about your math project?*

Yeah is a simple minimal response that people use frequently, but here Jason uses it to introduce a new turn and therefore it should not be seen as the form of minimal responses.

Following are some rules for defining minimal responses: firstly, they are not to introduce a new turn or to grab the floor; secondly, they do not answer the current speaker's questions; thirdly, they are very brief; fourthly, they are made as responses to the current speaker.

The following forms are seen as minimal responses:

- a) verbal responses such as yeah, uh-huh;
- b) nonverbal responses such as nods and shakes of the head;

Here is an example from *Growing Pains*:

(3) Jason: *Do I look like a Gene Dickson Mike? Your mother's a working adult.
And when she's finished working, she will come home.*

Mike: *[Shake head]*

Here the head shake can be counted as a form of non-verbal minimal response instead of a verbal response. Such kind of nonverbal minimal response indicates the direct feedback and has the same function as the verbal one.

- c) single words as response such as *yes, no, okay*;
- d) phrasal utterances such as *oh, really ; oh, my god*;
- e) short clauses such as *that's right; that's true; I agree*;
- f) longer utterances such as *clarification request*;

Here is an example from *Growing Pains*:

(4) Maggie: *Go talk to him. You won't sleep if you don't. Don't worry. I'll continue
the search for the pajamas.*

Mike: *What?*

When the current speaker stops, the listener does not hear what the current speaker said, and here *what* is used to be as the clarification request as one kind of minimal responses.

g) smile and laughter.

Knapp and Hall (1997:334) claims that “Brunner (1979) discovered that smile signal attentiveness and participation in a conversation just as “yeah”, head nods do. These smiles facilitate and encourage current speaker’s speech rather than indicate happiness.” Laughter can be seen as one form of minimal responses for it represents a spontaneous feedback of conversation and it has the same function as other minimal responses.

2.4 Functions of minimal responses

The use of minimal responses “increases immediacy, signals that the listener comprehends the speaker’s message, and reinforces the speaker’s role in a conversation” (Andersen, 1999:201). Minimal responses have different forms and therefore they have different functions. Generally speaking, minimal responses such as yeah, uh-huh, and hm, show the good listener ship and supportive to the current speaker. However, if they are used in a rapid way, they can be used to ask the current speaker to stop (Knapp and Hall, 1997:427).

Gardner Rod (2004) analyzes the functions of soome common minimal responses such as *Mm/ hm, Uh-huh, Yeah, Oh, Right*, based on his research. *Yeah* (*Yes, yep, and so on*) can be viewed as agreement and acknowledgement, showing the supportive to the current speaker. Other forms such as *Mm, hm, Uh-huh* are generally used as keeping the conversation going, showing the good listenership to the current speaker, indicating the high listenership and low speakership incipency. *Mm* is weaker in agreement than yeah, with low speakership incipency. *Okay* indicates the change of topic or activity, which shows relatively high speakership incipency. *Oh* indicates

that the listener is attracted by the current speaker for the speaker's message is something new to the listener. *Oh* here shows high speakership incipency. *Alright* has the function of agreement and acknowledgement, with high speakship incipency.

3. Analysis

This analysis is based on randomly selected conversations in six episodes from two TV-series *Growing Pains* and *Boy Meets World*. They analysis focuses on the data so as to demonstrate the type and function of male and female usage of minimal responses.

3.1 Minimal Responses and their forms

The forms of minimal responses used in terms of mixed-gender conversations will be examined based on the data. All the forms of minimal responses are collected from six episodes of two TV-series. Table 1 shows different forms of minimal responses collected from all the conversations.

Table 1. Number of Minimal Responses in the two TV-series

	<i>Growing Pains</i>	<i>Boy Meets World</i>
Minimal Responses	136 (65%)	72 (35%)
Total	208 (100%)	

As is shown from Table 1, the numbers of minimal responses are clearly listed. The numbers of minimal responses from *Boy Meets World* are nearly half of that from *Growing Pains*. The three episodes from *Boy Meets World* are randomly selected, and

therefore there are a lot of school context. This essay is focused on the family situation so the author did not take the conversations of school context from *Boy Meets World* into consideration.

Table 2. Total Number and Percentage of Forms of Minimal Responses in the Two TV-series

Forms	Number	Percentage
Mm/mhm /hm	6	3%
Uh-huh	5	2%
Oh	50	24%
Okay	28	13%
No	44	21%
Yes	17	8%
Alright	5	2%
Yeah	37	18%
Others	18	9%
Total	208	100%

The forms of the minimal responses are clearly listed in Table 2. *Oh* is the most frequent minimal response, with a total number of 50, counting for 24% of all the minimal responses. The uses of *No* and *Yeah* are almost the same, happening for 44 and 37 times separately, taking the percentage of 21% and 18% separately. But *Mm/mhm/hm* and *alright*, which are both supposed to be the common responses, occur only 5-6 times in the conversation.

The number of other forms of minimal responses are 18, counting for 9%, which include head nods and shakes as well as laughter.

Table 3. Separate Number of Forms of Minimal Responses in the Two TV-series

Form	<i>Growing Pains</i>		<i>Boy Meets World</i>	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Mm/mhm /hm	3	2%	3	4%
Uh-huh	4	3%	1	1%
Oh	33	24%	17	24%
Okay	21	15%	7	10%
No	26	19%	18	25%
Yes	9	7%	8	11%
Alright	5	4%	0	0%
Yeah	24	18%	11	15%
Others	11	8%	7	10%
Total	136	100%	72	100%

As is shown in Table 3, *Oh* occurs most often in both of two TV-series, with the number of 33 and 17, occupying the same percentage in each TV-series. *No* and *Yeah* are also the frequent usage of minimal responses in both TV-series, all taking about 20% in each TV-series. *Alright* happens only 5 times in *Growing Pains* while it never happens in the first three episodes of *Boy Meets World*.

Table 4. Male and Female Occurrences of Minimal Responses in *Growing Pains*

Form	Female	Percentage	Male	Percentage	Total
Mm/mhm /hm	2	1%	1	1%	
Uh-huh	0	0%	4	3%	
Oh	17	13%	16	12%	
Okay	7	5%	14	10%	
No	3	2%	23	17%	
Yes	3	2%	6	4%	
Alright	0	0%	5	4%	
Yeah	2	1%	22	16%	
Others	2	1%	9	7%	
Total	36	26%	100	74%	136

As is shown in Table 4, the most prominent difference use between male and female is the use of *No* and *Yeah*. Males use them much more than females, with 23 to 3, and 22 to 2. Here is an example of using yeah as minimal responses:

(5) Jason: *Jerry? I guess he is not a...*

Mike: *Yeah, Jerry Delish. He's an older friend of mine, an excellent driver, with two years of drivers A.*

And for other forms, men use the head shakes and nods and laughter more frequently than women. Besides, the uses of *uh-huh* and *alright* are not found in female characters.

Table 5. Male and Female Occurrences of Minimal Responses in *Boy Meets World*

Form	Female	Percentage	Male	Percentage	Total	
Mm/mhm/hm	1	1%	4	5%		
Uh-huh	0	0%	1	1%		
Oh	10	14%	7	10%		
Okay	3	4%	4	6%		
No	4	6%	12	17%		
Yes	0	0%	8	11%		
Alright	0	0%	0	0%		
Yeah	3	4%	8	11%		
Others	0	0%	7	10%		
Total	21	29%	51	71%		72

The most prominent difference in Table 5 is the use of *no*. Males use it as three times as the females, with 12 to 4. Besides, the uses of *uh-huh*, *alright*, *yes* and other forms of minimal responses are not found in female characters.

As is shown in Table 4 and Table 5, it is obviously that male speakers use more minimal responses than females: 100(74%) to 36 (26%), and 51(71%) to 21(29%). According to Coates, female uses more minimal responses than men. The data here indicates the opposite result of Coates. Here are some reasons for this phenomenon: firstly, there are four male speakers and two female speakers in each TV- series, therefore male speakers have more screen time and have more chances using minimal responses. Secondly, the language happened in two TV-series is the scripted language which was written by script writers. This means the data collected here are not from the conversations of real families. However, the findings here do reflect the social norms in conversations in daily life and show the usage and form of minimal responses. Thirdly, men spend more time in the family affairs nowadays. They communicate more with family members and do more house workings to help their wives. This leads to the more conversations here between husband and wife, as well as father and children.

Comparatively, the use of okay and yeah are different between two families based on the data collected. In *Growing Pains*, male speakers use twice more than female speakers, with 14 to 7, while the situation in *Boy Meets World* is that males and females use nearly all the same number of it. Besides, the uses of *yes* and other forms of minimal responses are not found in female characters in *Boy Meets World* while they did occur in *Growing Pains*.

Some of research have suggested that there are some factors related with the use of language such as social status or power. Table 4 and Table 5 examine whether social factors affect the female or male's uses of minimal responses or not.

Table 6. Minimal Responses in Terms of Gender (by female speakers)

Form	Female 1	Female 2	Female 3	Female 4
Mm/mhm/hm	2	0	1	0
Uh-huh	0	0	0	2
Oh	16	1	8	2
Okay	7	0	1	0
No	3	0	4	0
Yes	3	0	0	0
Alright	0	0	0	0
Yeah	2	0	3	0
Others	0	2	0	0
Total	33	3	17	4

Female 1=Maggie, the mother in *Growing Pains*; Female 2=Carole, the daughter in *Growing Pains*; Female 3=Amy, the mother in *Boy Meets World*; Female 4=Morgan, the daughter in *Boy Meets World*

As is shown in Table 6, it is clearly that Female 1 uses the most of minimal responses, with a total number of 33. Maggie is a mother with three children as well as a journalist who worked for the Long Island newspaper. Maggie happens most of the time in the first three episodes, therefore she has more chances to take participant in the conversations. Besides, the identity as a mother offers her more chances communicating with her three children. Female 3 is also a mother with three children and she is also a homemaker. Therefore she has more opportunities to be involved in conversations in family situation. And she uses minimal responses with a total number of 17. Compared with both of two mothers, Female 2 and Female 3 both as daughters seem to use less minimal responses. Partly because they are not the main characters in the TV-series, besides, children have lower social status than parents.

Table 7. Minimal Responses in Terms of Gender (by male speakers)

Form	Male1	Male2	Male 3	Male 4	Male 5	Male 6
Mm/mhm/hm	1	0	0	3	0	1
Uh-huh	4	0	0	0	1	0
Oh	8	8	0	5	0	2
Okay	11	3	0	1	0	3
No	12	11	0	8	1	3
Yes	2	4	0	4	0	4
Alright	4	0	1	0	0	0
Yeah	6	15	1	1	3	4
Others	4	4	1	1	0	6
Total	52	45	3	23	5	23

Male 1=Jason, Male 2=Mike, Male 3=Ben, Male 4=Allan, Male 5=Cory, Male 6=Eric

As is shown in Table 7, Male 1 uses the most of minimal responses, with a total number of 52. Male 1 is Jason Seaver, a father as well as a psychiatrist who had his practice at home. Male 2 is Mike, the elder boy in the family, and he uses minimal responses nearly the same as Jason, with a total number of 45. Male 4 is Allan, the father of the family as well as a grocery store manager. Allan uses minimal responses as many as Male 6 who is called Cory, the younger son of the family. Both of them use minimal responses for 23 times. Since both of the father and these two sons are main characters and they occupy most of the screen time, they got more chance to be involved in the conversation. Besides, the six episodes are randomly chosen, therefore, Male 3 and Male 5 as other kids in the family just have less chances showing in the

screen time. According to the theoretical background, men in subordinate position use more minimal responses than their more powerful counterparts. However, here fathers use more minimal responses than sons. It may have something to do with the randomly chosen episodes and the scripted language here.

3.2 Minimal Responses and their functions

Minimal responses can be divided into two groups in terms of function. One is to show the listener's agreement and support, encouraging the current speaker to go on. And the other is to interrupt the current speaker and to be dominant in talking. The functions of minimal responses can be illustrated through the following examples.

(6) Jason: *Well, it just means I don't like you coming in, and trying to get away with something.*

Mike: *Yeah that's it. I guess that means I can't go. Right.*

With using the minimal response *Yeah*, Mike is sure that Jason does not like him to go out at the moment. And *Yeah* here has the function of showing the speaker's agreement.

(7) Eric: *Look, Cory*

Cory: *Yes*

Eric: *It means if they win Friday night they're in the play-offs.*

Obviously, Cory uses minimal response *Yes* here is not to answer Eric's question. He uses *Yes* just to show that he is listening to Eric and encouraging Eric to continue his speaking. Therefore, the minimal response *Yes* here can be viewed as showing listener's attentiveness and encouraging current speaker to go on.

(8) Maggie: *Oh, it's too bad about the concert. You must be ...*

Mike: *No. I still got a couple of things going. I'll get the tickets.*

It is clear that Mike uses minimal response to interrupt Maggie, stopping her from continuing speaking. And the minimal response *No* here has the function of showing the speaker's disagreement. Table 8 shows the numbers of minimal responses in terms of their functions.

Table 8. Numbers of Minimal Responses in Terms of Their Functions

Function	Number
Agreement	135 (65%)
Disagreement	42 (20%)
Others	31 (15%)

As is shown in Table 8, most of minimal responses have the function of showing the listener's agreement and listenership. Here are some reasons. Firstly, since the conversations are made up with scripted language, there are many short conversations just including the agreement. Secondly, in both of two TV-series, most of the conversations are between mixed-gender, in which two sons interrupt their mothers less.

And other functions here including some kinds of minimal responses that neither belong to the agreement nor disagreement. They are just to show the excitement or disappointment. More attention should be paid to the context where conversations occur, therefore the minimal responses can be identified properly.

Table 9. Numbers of minimal Responses in Terms of Their Functions Based on Gender

Function	Numbers of Minimal Responses			
	Male	Percentage	Female	Percentage
Agreement	90	59%	45	82%
Disagreement	37	24%	5	9%
Others	26	17%	5	9%
Total	153	100%	55	100%

It is clear that from Table 9, both male and female speakers use minimal responses mostly to show their agreement, with 90(59%) and 45(82%). By contrast, female speakers use almost twice minimal responses than male speakers to show their agreement based on the percentage. Besides, male speakers use more minimal responses to show their disagreement with 37(24%), while female speakers only use minimal responses to show their disagreement for only 5 times.

There is a tendency that men are more likely use minimal responses to interrupt others to be dominant in conversations while female speakers use minimal responses more to show their agreement and encourage the current speaker to continue his/her talking.

Table 10. Numbers of Minimal Responses in Terms of Gender of Speakers and Functions in two TV-series

Speaker/Listener	Agreement		Disagreement		Total
	Growing Pains	Boy Meets World	Growing Pains	Boy Meets World	
Female/Female	3	1	0	0	4
Female/Male	50	18	18	12	98
Male/Female	26	15	4	1	46
Male/Male	12	10	5	2	29

From Table 10, minimal responses are used differently by male and female speakers in terms of their functions. Firstly, both male and female use minimal responses to show the good listenership and agreement. That maybe because the date collected is from the TV-series of family situation, the members of the family use more minimal responses to support the addressee. According to Coates' point of view that women use minimal responses to show their good listenership and support for each other. Here only two mothers use 4 minimal responses to show agreement in same-sex situation, partly because both of two daughters in TV-series are young and they occupy only a little screen time. What is more, female speakers use more minimal responses to show their agreement when the current speaker is male, with the total number of 41.

Secondly, male speakers use more minimal responses to interrupt the current speaker to show disagreement and to be dominant in talking, whether in same-sex conversation or in mixed-gender conversation, with the number of 23 and 14. But it should be noticed that the disagreement minimal responses occur mostly between parents whose relationship is husband and wife.

Based on Table 8 to Table10, it can be indicate that both male and female speakers prefer to choose minimal responses based on the gender of their addressee. Female speakers use more minimal responses to show their active listenership and agreement while male speakers use more minimal responses to interrupt others and show their disagreement in order to be dominant in talking.

4. Conclusion

It is believed that male and female are linguistically different from each other. They use different communicative competency in daily conversations. This essay proves

that there is indeed a difference between male and female in the conversations where minimal responses are concerned.

Previous work shows that women speak more and use more minimal responses than men. However, based on this essay, it is men who use comparatively more minimal responses. What is more, it is men who speak more in daily conversations according to data collected from the primary material. Women, on the other hand, use more minimal responses to show their active listenership and agreement to the addressee in mixed-gender conversations. By contrast, men use more minimal responses to interrupt the current speaker in order to be dominant in conversation. The most important is that both male and female speakers prefer their use of minimal responses according to the gender of addressee.

The study of gender differences in minimal responses in the conversations is quite difficult for many factors should be taken into consideration. Normally it based on the gender of addressee and the context where conversation occurs, as well as the relationship between speaker and addressee. Therefore, more attention should be paid when doing the analysis based on the data collected.

The result from this essay maybe quite limited, but it might at least indicate how male and female speakers perform differently in the use of minimal responses in conversations. More primary material should be taken into consideration if we want to get a more definite conclusion.

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