



**Gender and Language similarities and differences in  
mixed sex conversations and same sex conversations in the  
American TV series Modern Family**

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## **Abstract**

The study aimed to analyze females and males in mixed-sex conversations and same-sex conversations using cooperative speech, competitive speech, interruptions, and similarities and differences in their communication styles in the Tv series modern family. Men and women are said to use different speech styles regarding cooperative, competitive, and interruptions. I used three conversations taken from Season 1 Episode 24, Family Portrait, for mixed-sex conversations in my analysis. I also used three same-sex discussions taken from Season 3, Episode 5, Hit and Run, and Season 1, Episode 11, Up all night. The result shows similarities in both same-sex and mixed-sex conversations regarding women's use of cooperative speech styles and men's use of competitive speech styles and interruptions. However, my study found differences regarding women in mixed-sex and Same-sex conversations when it comes to interruptions. Women interrupt in mixed-sex discussions and not in same-sex discussions. Therefore, my analysis of the series modern family is in line with previous research on gender and language.

Keywords: Gender difference, language difference, men's speech styles, women's speech styles, same-sex conversations, mixed-sex conversations, cooperative, competitive, and Interruptions.

# Table of Contents

1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 BACKGROUND .....	1
1.2 AIM OF THE STUDY.....	1
2 LITERATURE REVIEW.....	2
2.1 GENDER DIFFERENCES .....	2
2.2 THE FOUR APPROACHES TO LANGUAGE AND GENDER STUDIES .....	2
2.3 PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON GENDER DIFFERENCES IN LANGUAGE USE.....	4
2.4 SPEECH STYLES.....	5
2.4.1 <i>Cooperative speech style</i> .....	5
2.4.2 <i>Competitive speech style</i> .....	6
2.4.3 <i>Interruptions</i> .....	7
2.5 GENDERED LANGUAGE IN TV SHOWS/FILMS.....	8
3: MATERIAL AND METHOD .....	9
3.1 MATERIAL .....	9
3.2 DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURE .....	11
4.RESULT AND ANALYSIS .....	11
4.1 MIXED SEX-CONVERSATION .....	11
4.1.1 WOMEN’S COOPERATIVE CONVERSATIONS .....	11
4.1.2 MEN’S COMPETITIVE CONVERSATION .....	12
4.1.3: MEN’S INTERRUPTIVE CONVERSATION .....	13
4.2 SAME-SEX CONVERSATION .....	14
4.2.1 WOMAN TO WOMAN COOPERATIVE CONVERSATION .....	14
4.2.2 MAN TO MAN COMPETITIVE CONVERSATION .....	15
4.2.3 INTERRUPTIVE MAN TO MAN CONVERSATION.....	16
5 CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION.....	17
REFERENCES.....	19

## Appendix

# **1. Introduction**

## **1.1 Background**

Whether women and men speak and use language differently has been discussed and researched since the 1970s. In the 1973, Robin Lakoff published *Language and Women's Place*, arguing that women have a different way of speaking than men. Lakoff discussed several features of female language in her book. Among them is that women use a linguistic style that reinforces a subordinate role and use of specialized vocabulary compared to the language of males. Females often use more concrete color words and concrete words that have a close relationship with life. In addition, female uses curse words in a milder tone, but males often speak firmly (Lakoff, 1973). Furthermore, she stated that women's way of speaking reflects their subordinate position in society. Lakoff argued that women use linguistic styles that reinforce a subordinate role. These are, for example, tag questions, question intonation, and weak directives, among others.

Previous research has found that men are more competitive, and women are more cooperative. Interruption and competitiveness are signs for men to assert their dominance (see Coates, 2004 & Holes, 2008). Jennifer Coates (2004) contends that men can uphold the social hierarchy they have been conditioned to maintain by affirming their authority through conversation. According to Coon and Mitterer (2010), gender role stereotypes are beliefs about men's and women's characteristics. Hence, men generally are thought to be strong, dominant, and logical, while women to be weak, passive, and emotional.

Similarly, Tannen (1992) points out that women use collaboration and cooperation to build relationships in their conversations. As for men, they use conversation for dominance purposes and to protect themselves from others. Besides, they view conversation as a contest to preserve independence and avoid failure (1992, p.24-25). All in all, whether discussions between women and men take place in TV shows or other institutions, they use different conversational styles. Because of this, the present study seeks to investigate women's and men's speech styles in TV series *Modern family*.

## **1.2 Aim of the Study.**

The present investigation analyses men and women's cooperative speeches, competitive speeches, and interruption regarding the American TV series *Modern Family*. My research questions are as follows:

- How are females and males similar and different in using cooperative speech, competitive speech, and interruptions when looking at mixed-sex conversations and same-sex conversations, in terms of 1.3 Overview of study?

In Chapter 2, I will present previous research on gender and language differences. In section 2.1, I will present four approaches of Language and Gender. Section 2.2 will present previous research on gender differences and language in particular cooperative roles, 2.2.1, competitive role, 2.2.2, and interruption, 2.2.3. Finally, in section 2.3, I will present previous research on gendered language in TV shows/films. I will discuss the material and method in chapter 3. I will deliver the results and analysis in chapter 4. I will end the study with conclusions and discussions in chapter 5.

## **2 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Gender differences**

For a long time now, the issue of gender differences has been of great controversy as many people have different views regarding it. Mesthrie (2009, p.213) states that our society has diversified and contributes significantly to the differences resulting from other sociolinguistic perspectives regarding this controversial issue. Currently, significant focus is on using language rather than basing it on gender, the speech content, and even the relationship between those involved. However, in this study, I will present some previous research related to gender differences and language, starting with the four approaches of gender studies: the deficit approach, the dynamic or social construction approach, the dominance approach, and the difference approach.

### **2.2 The four approaches to language and gender studies**

The footprints of gender can be found in our way of speaking. Gender has a way of influencing our lives so smoothly that we do not even realize and unexplainably accept it as part of our natural lives. Development and differentiation of gender roles manifest in nearly all aspects of our social lives, speech patterns, and how we relate. Gender is a variable that can explain our language patterns. Linguistics has approached language and gender from a variety of perspectives. Below are the four approaches to the study of the relationship between language and gender.

Lakoff's (1975) deficiency approach shows how women's language contributes to their lower status and weaker societal position. Women use linguistic forms such as hedges, 'empty' adjectives like charming, divine, lovely, soft, and unassertive by comparing to male language norms. Most researchers have offered critics on most works done regarding the topic of competitive speech. One of the principal victims of the criticism is Lakoff's piece, "Language and Woman's Place," published in 1975. According to Coates (2004, p.5), Lakoff's book includes too many petty claims that do not have supportive and numerical evidence. Additionally, Lakoff's arguments emphasize women's language being poor, stating that they need to be as bold as men to be respected in the same way men are (Coates, 2004, pg. 6).

The dynamic or social constructionist model is a more modern approach that considers different factors instead of categorizing speech in the two broad categories of men and women (Coates, 2013, pg. 7). According to this approach, gender and identity are seen as a contract and not a social category (Coates, 2013, pg. 5). The dynamic method is widely used in modern research. Gender is no longer viewed as static but dynamic (Coates, 2013, pg. 6). When analyzing speech utilizing this approach, the speaker's characteristic is given more weight than their gender. For example, the position that one plays in society. For example, a woman's speech in leadership will have more weight than that of a peasant man.

The dominance approach proposed by West & Zimmerman (1983) suggests that men naturally are more dominant than women. Women in society are viewed as subordinate to men. Women have no active positions in society since men constantly dominate them and are frequently interrupted in their speech. Men are always seeking to control the topic and dominate women. This inequality leads to an imbalance in position, leading to communication failure between women and men.

The difference approach suggests that the varying communication styles between men and women are brought about by constant socialization since childhood, which has embedded the idea that men and women belong to different cultures (Tannen, 1990). According to Tannen (1990), men and women have been trained since childhood to think, act, and behave differently. Men have been trained to be competitive and challenging hedged, while women have been trained to be implicit, subtle, and indirect. Women in society are often viewed as vulnerable, while men as vital and protectors. These hard-wired ideas display through their speech. Women tend to take the second or inferior position while airing out their views on critical societal issues such as sports and politics. Tannen also argues that men and women have other goals while

communicating. She says that while men often use "report style" when presenting information, women tend to use "rapport style," aiming to build and maintain relationships.

### **2.3 Previous research on gender differences in language use**

Gender and language relationships have been analyzed in many ways. Holmes and Meyerhoff (2005, p.452) state that the differences in gender and language are complementary, in the sense that "whatever men's language is, women's language is not." for example, if men's language is competitive, then women's language is subtle and implicit. However, Tannen (1992) relates gender differences in language to cultural differences. She claims that these differences may sometimes be associated with cultural diversity. For instance, the genders' language may differ due to the segments of cultural affiliations in each society. Thomson, Murachver, and Green (2001) argue that the co-existence of the genders also plays a critical role in defining gender language. When one gender is isolated and only interacts with each other, gender language difference widens, whereas the gap shrinks when the genders co-exist. This factor majorly defines their language style and not the gender itself since the environment determines language.

According to Broadbridge (2003), men are more likely to interrupt than women among speakers, with women being the most interrupted. Broadbridge made the assertions after exploring the difference between male and female speakers comprising two males and two females working in an English-language school based in Tokyo, Japan. Broadbridge's (2003) study supports Zimmerman and West's (1975) study of mixed-sex dialogue that indicated men frequently violate women's right to complete a turn and coarsely assume the floor. The study noted that women are concerned not to infringe the men's turn until they end their turn. However, James and Clarke (1993) had contrasting findings, which attained no significant differences between genders regarding their tendency to interrupt one another. According to James and Clerk, little evidence exists that women might deploy interruptions and establish connections significantly than men (p.248-249).

One area in which language and gender have been analyzed is gender and politeness. Women generally have circuitous language compared to men, who usually employ a straight language format. In most cases, the female gender is elegant in their conversation so that it feels innate. This refined language of females is evident in how they are used to using polite terms in asking for things to be done. On the other hand, men are known for head-on conversation. Therefore, their language sounds commanding in nature.

## **2.4 Speech styles**

### **2.4.1 Cooperative speech style**

In conversational analysis, the cooperative speech model is whereby participants intend their conversation to be informative, truthful, relevant, and straightforward. This concept was advanced by Paul Grice (1975) through his essay titled; "Logic and Conversation," which argued that conversations were not all about disconnected remarks joined together and would not make sense if they were. Grice instead opined that cooperation was the hallmark of meaningful conversation (Grice, 1975). Other thoughts on the subject include Aloysius Martinich's (2012) "Communication and Reference." Martinich states that the substance of the cooperative principle is to achieve the purpose of a conversation and not to engage in anything that frustrates that purpose (Martinich, 2012).

A cooperative way of talking can be considered a feminine function since women seem to use polite and pleasant speech styles than men. Women support the speaker and show they are listening and following the speech with the use of minimal responses such as "right," "yeah," or "mhm" and can add their thought and experience in the conversation (Coates 87). According to Coates (2004), women are more gossipers, but their speech can be described as one characterized by sharing and creating bonds. Coates also states that women can blend a collaborative and cooperative style to show more flexibility in the speech, which draws more reticent (Coates, p.125). Tannen (1992) also asserts that women have a more cooperative style and are inclined to avoid conflicts, putting them at a disadvantage, thus making the language powerless.

The cooperative speech model involves deploying the associated members for promoting better ideas and entails support and unity. The collaborative model assumes that the members seek to achieve a similar goal and are ready to help each other. According to Tannen (1992), women seek to establish relationships in their conversations while men use conversations for dominant goals and safeguard themselves from others. Men regard conversations as a contest to uphold their independence and evade failure. At the same time, women's speech is more polite as they establish an atmosphere with consensus and unity.

On the other hand, men deploy aggressive commands and directives to attain superiority in conversation to safeguard themselves from being intimidated. However, Mills (2003) opposes the view that women are more polite than men. Instead, she said that politeness "is a resource



which use cooperation to structure their relations with others, and they can be self-intended about their own and others' use of politeness and impoliteness" (p.245-246).

Men and women pursue different speech behavior in conversation. Coates (2004) argues that each gender portrays a unique speech expression that can describe their identity in some views. For instance, most men's talks usually lean on power possession and presentation of might, while women are characterized by embracing a style of speech geared towards unanimity and sustenance (Coates 2004, p. 124). This opinion shows that men aspire for competition in their dealings, which produces aggressiveness, while women seek unity in their endeavors, making them collaborative in behavior (Coates 2004, p. 125). These differences in gender speeches can be witnessed when children's conversation is dissected. When other factors are kept constant, the two genders take different routes in their speech style (Coates 2004, p. 126). Many women in western societies who have shown collective responsibility and support to other individuals in joint conversations show that women are compassionate in speech (Coates 2004, p. 126). Contrarily, men's quest for recognition in terms of power and might. The desire to remain outstanding in everything is always evident in their address and the kind of people they want to relate to (Coates 2004, p. 126).

#### **2.4.2 Competitive speech style**

For competitive style, participants in a conversation are interested in winning or outshining each other rather than communicating as it is for the cooperative manner of speech. Participants of competitive-style discussions focus on persuasion and not communication, aiming to have their views or opinions come out the fittest or are approved. They care less about incorporating other participants' views or finding common ground of understanding. This style has several drawbacks; the most persuasive or influential ideas take precedence, which often clouds logic. In addition, such conversations are often noisy or hostile as participants strive to outdo each other. Competitive communicators are primarily interested in power, competition, and dominance during their communication engagements; their conversations are assertive and challenging. For instance, competitive speeches include the exchange of words between two and intense arguments. It happens in monologues, a scenario where only one individual speaks, denying others the chance. These uninterrupted speeches are very advantageous since they allow an individual to express themselves fully. Tannen (1992) argues that competition in speech is a masculine way of communicating, which is a dominant characteristic in most males.

Coates (2004) notes that men tend to ignore or disagree about what others say and pursue a language style based on power. They discuss issues that they view themselves as experts and take turns holding the floor with less or no interruption from others. Men can even challenge each other by making comments about something. Moreover, men's discussions include gloating and engaging in topics like money, politics, and movies. Men's conversations have stories of achievement, creating a competitive environment. The conversations are indirect and impersonal as compared to women's conversations that hold intense emotions and feelings.

According to Coates (2004, p. 126), men are more likely to engage in competitive speech than women by nature. Through conditioning, men have been trained from their childhoods to be assertive, dominate, and defend themselves. Therefore, they are often referred to as the protectors of society and are usually displayed in their speeches. (Maltz and Coates, 2004. P.160). While analyzing the differences between men and women, Coates (2004) found that men tend to be competitive in their speech while women tend to be cooperative.

Men and women are fundamentally different traced from their childhoods. They are raised differently in society (Coates 2004, p. 126). According to Maltz and Borker (1982), girls are taught to create and maintain relationships, accurately interpreted the speech of others without judging, and critique others in good ways. On the other hand, boys are taught to attract an audience, assert themselves in the presence of others, and maintain a position of dominance among their peers in their speech. These, coupled with traditional gender constructs and the roles allocated to each gender, make men naturally competitive in their remarks and make women naturally cooperative. A typical example of competitive and cooperative speech in men and women is a case of a woman in a position of power in a company (Coates, 2004, p. 202). This woman is faced with a dilemma when giving directives to a man in a lower position of power. If she uses a competitive speech style, she will be perceived as non-feminine, whereas if she decides to be cooperative in her speech, she will be perceived as powerless. Her directives can easily be regarded as opinions by the man in the lower position, presenting a challenge.

### **2.4.3 Interruptions**

Interruption occurs when the next speaker begins to speak while the current speaker is still speaking. Interruption seems to function as a way of controlling the topic or even change the subject. Women are more likely to be interrupted by men in their conversations than men are. This is mainly because of the social norms and traditional gender constructs that place the man

above the woman. However, interruptions are not always found in men's conversations only (Coates, 2004, p. 131). Female discussions are often characterized by disruption in what is known as a conversational jam session model (Coates, 2004, p. 131). In this model, all women work together to construct meaning. Zimmerman and West (1975), in Wardhaugh (2006, p.325), assert that men tend to interrupt women more in mixed-sex conversations to denote their power. However, women perform fewer violations and tend to wait until the speaker has finished talking. The tendency of men to interrupt signifies their strength as they are likely to interrupt the floor when it is women's chance.

Similarly, Smith-Lovin and Robinson (1992) state that men often interrupt females in mixed-sex conversations, while females are more respectful and give them their chance with no interruptions. On the contrary, people of the same sex speech are more coordinated with minimal or no interruptions (p. 130). Other researchers have carried out studies in the same field. A good example is Elbytra (2014), who intended to determine how men and women take turns by analyzing the movie "Hitch." What he discovered for his study marries the findings of Smith-Lovin and Robinson. However, Itakura & Tsui (2004) claim that women are more courteous in speech, unlike men. Even so, males indulge in a self-oriented conversational style while female addresses are motivated by other people. Therefore, female speeches compliment others or build upon what other people say mutually rather than compete. In other words, male dominance is not predetermined or imposed on female speakers but is mutually initiated between the two genders (in Wardhaugh, 2015, p. 288 & 289).

## **2.5 Gendered language in TV shows/films**

Television programs also considerably keep gender differences alive. The characters and personalities of men and women are fabricated to conform to the social status of the intended audiences of television channels. Some explorations that delve into how television shapes gender differences have found that women primarily show a unique social and sensory integration in their language presentations.

Elham Hoominfar, through her paper, *Gender Socialization*, argues that media (TV and film) plays an instrumental role in teaching behavior and influencing attitude, therefore strongly affects the process of socialization (Hoominfar, 2019). Elham explains through her essay that TV and film transfer defined gender stereotypes and gender roles to people in different age and social groups. In a nutshell, media has various ways of influencing gender socialization.

Qualitative analysis conducted by the study shows that men receive more time on the screens as women and women are underrepresented in media; most characters in TV shows, films, and video games are males. Moreover, the essay also argues that films are scripted so that women play roles traditionally considered to belong to women as the same goes for men (Hoominfar, 2019).

According to Bimbola Oluwafunlola Idowu-Faith's paper titled, *It Never Happened* the perpetuation of female powerlessness and male superiority in Nigerian Christian films, films, and TV shows tend to portray women as a vulnerable and powerless creature to their male counterparts (Idowu-Faith, 2020). She argues that feminine image is always a gendered discourse that promotes bias and discrimination. It is an observation that she makes in both secular and evangelical Nollywood films. The article seeks to sensitize films to pay keen attention to ethical and gender issues even as they intend to educate society on other matters of concern.

Guranda Shamilishvili writes about the effect of TV and film on gender socialization through his article, *psychological influence of modern mass media on formation of gender stereotypes*. His paper aims to establish the influence of media in the formation of existing stereotypes in society. Guranda explains that mass media plays a core role in socialization when people become conscious of their culture and social order. He further states that it is during the process that perceptions are formed and behaviors developed for every person. People tend to be influenced or controlled by the social state, norms, or roles they observe in people's social lives broadcasted through media (Guranda Shamilishvili, 2019).

### **3: Material and Method**

#### **3.1 Material**

This primary material of the present study is the television series *Modern Family* (season and episode to be specified later), which revolves around same-sex and mixed-sex conversations. I choose the TV series *Modern Family* to analyze men's and women's conversation similarities and differences. The first reason is that it depicts people who have different gender. The second reason is that this TV series focuses on daily life, which brings out the theme of people's lives, such as love, friendship, or family. The third reason is that the audience gets a sense of how men and women communicate in daily and informal conversations.

Modern Family is a very famous American ABC sitcom, and it concentrates on the interaction between three families. It consists of three different types of families (nuclear, blended, and same sex) living in the Los Angeles area; First, the nuclear family consists of Phil and Claire and their three children, Haley, Alex, and Luke. Then, the blended family consists of Jay Pritchett, his daughter Claire Dunphy, and his son Mitchell Pritchett. Jay and his young wife, Gloria, raise her son from a previous marriage, Manny Delgado, and have their son, Fulgencio Joe. Finally, the same-sex family consists of Mitchel, Cam, and their adopted Vietnamese daughter, Lily Tucker-Pritchett. In each of the three families, the mother figure is played by the woman or a more feminine partner. Gloria, Claire, and Cam all express an energetic desire to raise and care for a family over a desire to have a professional career for themselves. My research is a qualitative study. Therefore, I will concentrate on the material found in some selected episodes. I selected three conversations of mixed-sex and three conversations for same-sex for my research. I picked these conversations to find the necessary linguistic features such as cooperative speech, competitive speech, and interruptions.

Season 1 Episode 24, Family Portrait, was chosen to analyze language and gender styles for mixed-sex conversations.

The conversations to be explored are:

1. Women cooperative conversation in mixed-sex conversation.
2. Men's competitive speech or conversations in mixed-sex conversations.
3. Men's interruptions in mixed-sex conversations.

Season 3 Episode 5, Hit and Run, and Season 1 Episode 11, Up all night, were selected to analyze gender and language for same-sex conversations.

1. Women cooperative conversations are a woman-to-woman conversation: Season 3, Episode 5, Hit and Run.
2. Men's competitive conversations are a man-to-man conversation: Season 1 Episode 11, Up all night.
3. Men interrupt against other men, a man-to-man conversation where they interrupt each other: Season 1 Episode 11, Up all night.

The full texts for these conversations are given in the appendix.

### **3.2 Data Analysis Procedure**

The specific field of this research will include the analysis of the language and gender differences in the tv series Modern Family. I analyzed my material by first selecting six seasons out of the 11 seasons of the TV series Modern Family transcripts. Finally, only three different seasons are chosen for the study from across eight seasons. After selecting the three seasons, I started to look for Episodes that contain features such as cooperative speech, competition, and interruptions. I watched the three episodes and read a print version of the transcripts looking for conversations that contain cooperative, competitive, and interruption features. I had a problem with the transcripts since they did not show the character's name. Therefore, I had to watch the video several times and write the respective terms of each character. I had a problem watching the video while choosing the names of characters and suitable conversations for my analysis. I decided to pick three mixed-sex and three same-sex as part of the transcripts from three different episodes. In every conversation analyzed, I guide the reader to the season and episode are taken from to be clear for them. Part of the conversations from the transcripts is shown in the appendix. I also decided to bring in an outsider called Javier, a former husband of Gloria and the father of Manny. Thus, the material used will be part of the transcripts taken from the chosen episodes using specific scenes that implicitly or explicitly provide the necessary evidence. The conversations to be analyzed had to be carefully picked, considering both same-sex and mixed-sex discussions. The conversations were analyzed using information from chapter two.

## **4.Result and Analysis**

In this part, I will present the analysis and result of the study by comparing mixed-sex and same-sex conversations.

### **4.1 Mixed sex-conversation**

#### **4.1.1 Women's cooperative conversations**

A cooperative speech style characterized by support assumes that the participants are all working towards a common goal. This section will present the analysis of how women use collaborative speech styles in mixed-sex conversations. However, cooperation takes place between women. Women in their conversations use collaboration and cooperation to support

each other. Conversation,1 is from season 1 Episode 24, Family Portrait that illustrates women's use of cooperative speech styles to help each other is:

[1] **Phil** - Listen.

Uh-huh? Honey, I screwed up, but if ever you are in my arms again-

[2] **Claire** - Phil, not now.

Yes, now. I do not want to look at this picture...

[3] **Phil** - when I am 80 years old

And you are long dead... and know that you were angry at me when we took it.

[4] **Claire** - Phil, we will talk about what you did later.

[5] **Phil** - Okay, everybody. Eyes over here. I did not do anything. She kissed me.

[6] **Claire** - What?

[7] **Claire** - Who kissed you?

[8] **Phil** - Gloria.

[9] **Jay** - What?

[10] **Gloria** - It was the kiss cam.

[11] **Jay** - Why did you kiss Cam?

[12] **Gloria** - No, I kissed Phil. He told me I had to.

[13] **Phil** - No, no.

[14] **Claire** - Okay, hang on a second. Was this before or after you ignored the phone call from your wife?

[15] **Phil** - You saw that too?

[16] **Claire** - Mmm. (Conversation - 1)

Gloria and Claire demonstrate a cooperative speech in the above extract. Although Claire finds out that Gloria kissed Phil [7] (bad news), Claire is calm about it and does not attack Gloria. She instead goes ahead to seek clarification and to find out exactly what happened [14]. Gloria also takes time to explain herself to everyone by sharing accurate details about the events that led to the kiss [12]. In the end, Claire remains calm [16]. This example qualifies to be a mixed-sex conversation since Jay and Phil (men) are present. The discussion above supports Tannen (1990) that women adopt the cooperative role and avoid conflicts. Although the conversation between Gloria, Claire, Jay, and Phil is heated [6], it does not spiral out of control.

#### **4.1.2 Men's Competitive Conversation**

Men use competitive speech styles in their conversations. Men are more competitive in their speech than women. This competitive nature of men is displayed in mixed-sex conversation when men assert their dominance over other men and women. Conversation 2 from season 1 Episode 24, Family Portrait, illustrates this perfectly.

[1] **Cameron** - Just so you know, I am angry with you.

[2] **Michel** - I knew it!

[3] **Cameron** - It was a big day for me, and he didn't want to go because he doesn't like Small talk.

[3] **Claire** - Would it be terribly inconvenient... to just postpone this hissy fit For a few minutes?

[4] **Mitchel** - Maybe some of us don't Want to take a picture today.

[5] **Haley** - Thank you.

[6] **Cameron** - And please, Claire, don't try to make Mitchell do something he doesn't wanna do. (Conversation - 2).

As is illustrated in the above conversation, Claire goes against Cameron and Mitchel [3], but Mitchel fights back by saying that he does not want to take the family photo [4]. Cameron also directs Claire [6], Informing her not to "try to make Mitchell do something he doesn't wanna do." Although Mitchel and Cameron compete, they team up to fight the common threat (Claire). The above discussion is a classic example of the competitive nature of men in mixed-sex conversations. The above discussion agrees with Tannen (1992) that competition in speech is a masculine way of communicating, which is a dominant characteristic in most males.

#### **4.1.3: Men's Interruptive conversation**

Although interruption is rare in men's conversations, it can occur when there are heightened emotions or excitement. These high emotions are often seen when men have heated arguments over common topics such as politics or football. For example, in conversation 3 below from season 1 episode 24, family portrait, the men involved are not on the same page when taking the family photo. Below is the conversation and subsequent analysis.

[1] **Mitchel** - Maybe some of us do not I want to take a picture today.

[2] **Haley** - Thank you.

[3] **Cameron** - And please, Claire, do not try to make Mitchell do something he does not wanna do.

[4] **Mitchel** - Oh, shut up, Cam.



[Imitating Wings Flapping]

[5] **Claire** - Okay, stop it! Stop it! Everyone, listen. This took me forever to put together, so I do not really care who kissed who and who has got a pimple on her head... and who is wearing an outrageously inappropriate dress.

[6] **Jay** - Ah, this is ridiculous. You are both uptight about everything. You did not want to go to a wedding with him because you did not want to make small talk? That is how I met Gloria.

[7] **Jay** - You could not come up with that, Ivy League? And you. You would be a lot happier if you were not so obsessed with everything being perfect. Look at us here all in white. What are we, a cricket team? Life is not perfect, Claire. Now calm the hell down. (Conversation - 3)

From the above conversation, Mitchel [4] interrupts Cameron. The discussion is so heated up that Claire interrupts [5] to control the conversation and prevent further fire. The conversation Jay, Cameron, and Mitchel display clear signs of competitive discussions. Both women and men interrupt in the above discussion. Therefore, the above discussion agrees with Zimmerman and West (1975) that men violate women's right to finish their speeches in mixed-sex conversation. On the other hand, the above discussion disagrees with Zimmerman and West's (1975), that women are concerned with not interrupting mixed-sex conversations.

## **4.2 Same-Sex Conversation**

### **4.2.1 Woman to Woman Cooperative conversation**

According to Coates (2004, p. 126), women are more likely to have a cooperative conversation than men because women are taught to create and maintain relationships, respectfully critique other peoples, and interpret other people's speech accurately. This section will present the analysis of how women use cooperative speech styles in same-sex conversations. Conversation 4, from Season 3, Episode 5, Hit and Run, illustrates how women use collaborative strategy in same-sex conversation is:

[1] **Gloria** - *So what happened? You were running for office, and now you are not?*

[2] **Claire** - *Mm. I do not really want to talk about that.*

[3] **Gloria** - *I know. I am sick and tired of no one needing my help. You are going to tell me what is wrong, and I am gonna give you the right answer, because I have all of them. So why are you not running for office?*

[4] **Claire** - *Because my family needs me too much. You saw what just happened.*

[5] **Gloria** - *Why are you not running for office?*

[6] **Claire** - *That does not work on me.*

[7] **Gloria** - *Why are you not running for office?!*

[8] **Claire** - *Because I do not want to lose! I-- pfft! I have not done anything outside of my house in 18 years. I do not want the first thing I do to be a complete failure. This guy has won six elections. I am way out of my league.*

[9] **Gloria** - *Look, I do not know anything about this guy, but I know that you are a tough lady, and I come from a family of tough ladies. And I have to say, sometimes you scare me a little bit. And I know that you are strong enough to win and definitely strong enough to be okay if you lose (Conversation - 4).*

The cooperative conversation is portrayed in the above discussion by Claire and Gloria. It starts by enquiring [1] to Claire, and Claire responds smoothly, using soft and affirmative words such as mm [2]. All through the conversation, the two women display empathy, understanding, and the purpose of the conversation is protected. They talk in turns, and there are no interruptions. The structure and flow of this conversation are consistent with Coates and Tannen on women's collaborative role and supporting each other (Tannen, 1994, p.26).

#### **4.2.2 Man to Man competitive conversation**

From childhood, men are trained to be more assertive than women. As a result, men's conversations aim to maintain dominance and display might (Coates 2004, p. 126). For example, when a man talks to another man, he strives to hide his weaknesses and show his strengths instead. The competitive nature of men is illustrated and analyzed in conversation 5 below, taken from season 1 Episode 11, Up all night.

[1] **Javier** - *Hey, there. Hey, Jay. Listen, I am sorry. Did I wake you up?*

[2] **Jay** - *No. No, I am a light sleeper.*

[3] **Jay** - *That's what happens when you get older.*

[4] **Javier** - *Oh, you are not old.*

[5] **Jay** - *I did not say I was old. I never sleep much anyway.*

[6] **Javier** - *Life is just more interesting after 2:00 a.m. You know, the liquor tastes better, the, uh, women are more beautiful.*

[7] **Jay** - *What is it they say? That the night belongs to the poets and the madmen. Which are you?*

[Both Chuckling]

[8] **Javier** - *Perhaps both.*

[9] **Javier** - *And I think maybe you too, huh? (Conversation -5).*

The conversation above begins with Javier waking Jay up [1]. Even though Jay was asleep, he defends himself and says that he is a light sleeper [2]. He does this to show that even if Javier caught him off guard, he is still in control. The conversation continues with more and more defense [5] and counterattacks [9]. Both Jay and Javier engage fiercely in the conversation. It is, however, essential to note that interruption does not take place in this conversation. Instead, Jay and Javier wait for their turn to talk. The above discussion agrees with (Coates 2004, p. 126) that competitive speech is a common phenomenon among men.

#### **4.2.3 Interruptive Man to Man conversation**

Men are known to use a competitive speech style in their discussions to show power and dominance. However, interruptive speech does not always mean that some cuts short the other person while speaking. Still, it could also mean that the other party in the conversation presents ideas different from those the other party was offering. Interruptive speech style is illustrated and subsequently analyzed in conversation 6 below, taken from Season 1 Episode 11, Up all night.

[1] **Javier** - *Jay, the saddest words in any language, my friend.*

[2] **Jay** - *Yeah.*

[3] **Jay** - *Hey, help me out here. Everybody sees you as this great guy. You know, you live this life of adventure.*

[4] **Jay** - *How come I do not buy a word of it? All I see is a dad who does not show up.*

[5] **Javier** - *Hey, Manny knows me. I live in the now.*

[6] **Jay** - *Well, I was living in the yesterday when Manny was crying outside that door... 'cause you didn't show up for the 10th time.*

[7] **Javier** - *And when I do not come, you think, uh- what, I'm just off chasing a good time, hmm? Javier - You ever think it might be hard for me, coming here?*

[8] **Jay** - *Why? Because of Gloria?*

[9] **Javier** - *Because of you.* (Conversation - 6).

Jay and Javier repeatedly present ideas that are entirely different from the pictures that the other party presents. There is a feature of interruptive speeches. The characters in the above text do not respond the way others would expect them to. For example, when Javier says that he lives in now [5], Jay responds by saying he lives in yesterday [6]. This is both a competitive and interruptive feature of speech. Another example is seen when Jay asks why and suggests an answer, "Because of Gloria?" [8], but Javier responds by indicating that it is "Because of you." Among men in same-sex conversations, interruptions that cause one person to be cut off are rare. The above discussion disagrees with Smith-Lovin and Robinson (1992) that people of the same sex speech are more coordinated with minimal or no interruptions (p. 130).

## **5 Conclusion and discussion**

Various research (Coates 2004, Tannen 1992, and West and Zimmerman 1975) has confirmed that men and women have different speech styles. This paper aimed to investigate whether men and women use different speech styles in the TV series *Modern family* and their similarities and differences in their speech styles? I transcribed three mixed-sex conversations and three same-sex conversations from different seasons and episodes. For most examples, men and women follow the typical pattern of previous research that women use cooperative strategies; men use competitive techniques in their speeches, and men interrupt conversations. My study found that women use cooperative behavior in mixed-sex when it comes to cooperative speech style and men use competitive speech style. For example, in conversation 1, Gloria and Claire use collaborative speech styles. Claire seeks clarification and to find out exactly what happened

[14]. Gloria also explains herself to everyone by sharing accurate details about the events that led to the kiss [12], which makes Claire calm ([16]).

On the other hand, in conversation 2, Cameron is angry with Mitchel [1] and competitively disagrees with each other [3]. Both conversations agree with Coates (2004) that women use cooperative speech styles and men use a competitive speech style. When it comes to interruptions, my study found that men tend to interrupt in mixed-sex conversations. In conversation 3, Mitchel interrupts Cameron [4]. Claire is observed to interrupt Phil [5]. In this conversation, both Mitchel and Claire interrupt the conversation and disagree with Broadbridge (2003) that men are more likely to interrupt than women among speakers.

In conversations of same-sex discussions, women use collaborative speech styles. For example, in conversation 4, Gloria encourages and supports Claire to run for office. Gloria complements Claire by saying to her; I know that you are a tough lady; I know that you are strong enough to win and strong enough to be okay if you lose [9]. Claire uses minimal responses such as Mm in answer to Gloria's statement. Hence, the conversation agrees with Coates (2004) that women use a cooperative speech style.

The influence of competitive communication is also highlighted in same-sex conversations. Notably, this form of speech takes place mainly among male speakers. Speakers who use this form of speech seek to be correct and win an argument without leaving room for negotiation. My findings show that men of the same sex use competitive speech styles. For example, in conversation 5, Jay and Javier use a competitive speech style by using defense and counterattacks [5] in their discussion and agree with Tannen (1992) that men use a competitive speech style. Furthermore, in my finding, men of the same sex interrupt each other's conversations by disagreeing with each other's views. For example, in conversation 6, when Javier says that he lives in now [5], Jay responds by saying he lives in yesterday [6]. Therefore, conversation 6 disagrees with Smith-Lovin and Robinson (1992) that people of the same sex speech are more coordinated with minimal or no interruptions (p. 130).

Therefore, my findings show similarities in cooperative and competitive speech styles and interruptions. Men naturally lean towards competitive speech and interruption, while women lean more on cooperative speech. Both women in mixed-sex and same-sex conversations use cooperative speech styles. Likewise, both men in mixed-sex and same-sex conversations use competitive speech styles and interruptions. My study found similarities in women's and men's speech styles in mixed-sex and same-sex discussions regarding cooperative speech,

competitive speech, and interruptions. However, the study found differences between women in mixed-sex and same-sex conversations regarding interruptions. Therefore, my analysis of the series *Modern Family* is in line with previous research on gender and language. The present investigation is predominantly quantitative, but using a limited amount of data, the episodes could be analyzed in-depth, which is a strength of this study. However, the data used in this study is only a snapshot of gender similarities and differences in language use, so we must not generalize it. Therefore, a more significant number of conversations might have impacted the results. Hence, the decision to use only three episodes is also a study's weakness. Other factors that may have affected the outcome are the characters' relationships, the speakers' cultural backgrounds, and everyday situations. The gender similarities and differences in using cooperative speeches, competitive speeches, and interruptions need further study involving more primary materials.

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## Appendix

### Mixed-Sex Conversations

#### Conversation 1, 2 and 3: Season 1 Episode 24, Family Portrait.

Gloria, Jay, Cam, Mitch, Claire, Phil, and their whole families are at Jay's house preparing for a family portrait.

**Phil** - Listen.

Uh-huh? Honey, I screwed up, but if ever you are in my arms again-

**Claire** - Phil, not now.

Yes, now. I do not want

to look at this picture...

**Phil** - when I'm 80 years old

and you are long dead... and know that you were angry at me when we took it.

**Claire** - Phil, we'll talk about what you did later.

**Phil** - Okay, everybody. Eyes over here. I did not do anything. She kissed me.

**Claire** - What?

**Claire** - Who kissed you?

**Phil** - Gloria.

**Jay** - What?

**Gloria** - It was the kiss cam.

**Jay** - Why did you kiss Cam?

**Gloria** - No, I kissed Phil. He told me I had to.

**Phil** - No, no.

**Claire** - Okay, hang on a second. Was this before or after you ignored the phone call from your wife?

**Phil** - You saw that too?

**Claire** - Mmm.

**Jay** - Could we please just take the damn picture?

**Photographer** - Okay. Everybody,  
one more time.

**Cameron** - Just so you know, I am angry with you.

Michel - I knew it!

**Claire** - Oh, damn it!

**Cameron** - It was a big day for me, and he didn't want to go because he doesn't like small talk.

**Claire** - Would it be terribly inconvenient... to just postpone this hissy fit for a few minutes?

**Mitchel** - Maybe some of us don't want to take a picture today.

**Haley** - Thank you.

**Cameron** - And please, Claire, don't try to make Mitchell do something he doesn't wanna do.

**Mitchel** - Oh, shut up, Cam.

[Lmitating Wings Flapping]

**Claire** - Okay, stop it! Stop it! Everyone, listen. This took me forever to put together, so I do not really care who kissed who and who has got a pimple on her head... and who is wearing an outrageously inappropriate dress.

**Jay** - Ah, this is ridiculous. You are both uptight about everything. You did not want to go to a wedding with him because you did not want to make small talk? That is how I met Gloria.

**Jay** - You could not come up with that, Ivy League? And you. You would be a lot happier if you were not so obsessed with everything being perfect. Look at us here all in white. What are we, a cricket team? Life is not perfect, Claire. Now calm the hell down.

**Claire** - Okay, Dad, that is great, and that is easy for you to say. But do you think I like being like this? No, I do not. If you have some quick-and-easy fixes, why don't you just give it to me right now?

## **Same-Sex Conversations**

### **Conversation 4: Season 3, Episode 5, Hit and Run.**

Gloria and Claire are at Jay's house. Claire expresses her concern about Claire's refusal to run for office for Town Council.

**Gloria** - In my country, it is tradition-- when the men are out seeking vengeance, the women-- they stay home, and they drink.

**Claire** - Sometimes I think you just make this stuff up.

**Claire** - Do you want a drink or not?

**Claire** - Oh, yeah.

**Gloria** - So what happened? You were running for office, and now you are not?

**Claire** - Mm. I do not really want to talk about that.

**Gloria** - I know. I am sick and tired of no one needing my help. You are going to tell me what is wrong, and I am gonna give you the right answer, because I have all of them. So why are you not running for office?

**Claire** - Because my family needs me too much. You saw what just happened.

**Gloria** - Why are you not running for office?

**Claire** - That does not work on me.

**Gloria** - Why are you not running for office?!

**Claire** - Because I do not want to lose! I-- pfft! I have not done anything outside of my house in 18 years. I do not want the first thing I do to be a complete failure. This guy has won six elections. I am way out of my league.

**Gloria** - Look, I do not know anything about this guy, but I know that you are a tough lady, and I come from a family of tough ladies. And I have to say, sometimes you scare me a little bit. And I know that you are strong enough to win and definitely strong enough to be okay if you lose.

**Claire** - I scare you.

**Gloria** - Are you kidding me? I want Thanksgiving at my house!

**Claire** - Why does everybody think I talk like that?

### **Conversation 5 & 6: Season 1 Episode 11, Up all night.**

Jay Pritchett and Javier Delgado are at Jay's house in the pool room. Jay walks in to join Javier in a man against man conversation.

**Javier** - Hey, there. Hey, Jay. Listen, I am sorry. Did I wake you up?

**Jay** - No. No, I am a light sleeper.

**Jay** - That's what happens when you get older.

**Javier** - Oh, you are not old.

**Jay** - I did not say I was old. I never sleep much anyway.

**Javier** - Life is just more interesting after 2:00 a.m. You know, the liquor tastes better, the, uh, women are more beautiful.

**Jay** - What is it they say? That the night belongs to the poets and the madmen. Which are you?

[Both Chuckling]

**Javier** - Perhaps both.

**Javier** - And I think maybe you too, huh?

**Javier** - I see a picture over here of you on a motorcycle. You ride?

**Jay** - I used to.

**Javier** - Used to? Used to?

**Javier** - Jay, the saddest words in any language, my friend.

Jay - Yeah.

**Jay** - Hey, help me out here. Everybody sees you as this great guy. You know, you live this life of adventure.

**Jay** - How come I do not buy a word of it? All I see is a dad who does not show up.

**Javier** - Hey, Manny knows me. I live in the now.

**Jay** - Well, I was living in the yesterday when Manny was crying outside that door... 'cause you didn't show up for the 10th time.

**Javier** - And when I do not come, you think, uh- what, I'm just off chasing a good time, hmm? **Javier** - You ever think it might be hard for me, coming here?

**Jay** - Why? Because of Gloria?

**Javier** - Because of you