

# Gender Conversation in Workplace Context

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**Abstract—** This study deals with Gender Conversation in Workplace Context. The subject of this study were 3 male staff and 3 female staff in Internal Auditor Unit at Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara. The object of this study were the utterances of Male and Female Staff. It specially focused on why are the conversation used by male and female staff as the ways they are. This study was conducted in descriptive qualitative research in order to describe conversational styles among male and female staff on break time in Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara Medan. The theory used in this study are based on the features of conversational styles proposed by Tannen (1992), namely status versus support, independence versus intimacy, advice versus understanding, information versus feeling, orders versus proposal, conflict versus compromise. Having analyzed the data, it was found that male and female staff used different style in conversation because male and female staff have different opinion about their status during the conversation. The reason male and female staff have different characteristics which also lead them having different style in conversation.

**Keywords—** Gender Conversation, Workplace Context, Male Staff, Female Staff, Different Style.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Communication is a process of delivering information, knowledge, thoughts, and feelings from one person to another. It is a process of transferring messages from one person to another. Communication among persons is known as conversation. Conversation is necessary for social interaction among people of everyday life. It is necessary because the language used by conversational participant is a kind of embodiment people's thoughts and it is used by persons to participate and to have some interaction one another. While doing the conversation, a person will produce their own style in transferring the information.

Tannen (2005:4) stated that conversational style is the basic tools with which people communication anything what is said in some way, that way is style. Further, Tannen explains that the style refers to a special way of speaking as if one could choose between speaking plainly or speaking with style. Thus, the role of style in conversation is really important in order to make the interaction communicative.

There are some factors that can influence the way people communicate with others. It has been generally assumed that one of the factors that can influence someone's ways of communication is gender. Trudgill (2000:65) claimed that men and women of today speak the same language but use different varieties within it. This statement implies that men and women, even though they use the same language, they deliver it in different ways of communication with different varieties of speech. According to Lakoff, Zimmerman, Tannen in Rajend (2000:226) state that females are more polite, hesitant, complain, cooperative and talk more in private context than men, whereas male don't talk about emotion, but they talk sport and women. In conversation, they are more competitive, dominate, authority, command and interrupt.

The general gender communication differences affect all men and women in every context. In recent years, as women have entered the workplace in larger numbers, the obvious communicative style differences between men and women have been discussed publicly. Workplace communication is the process of exchanging information, both verbal and non-verbal, within an organization. An organization may consist of staff from different parts of the society. These may have different cultures, backgrounds, and ofcourse gender. Based on these differences, how they are communicated will cause differences in conversational styles.

The conversation among staff is ocured when they have meeting, regular discussion, or while they are gossiping. So, when the staff have conversation, they will use their own styles to make their message succesfully transfered. Both of male and female staff may arguing and interrupting each other to stand their opinion about certain topic in conversation. Thus, in this research, the writer focuses on breaktime of where the conversation among male and female staff occurs in Internal Auditor Unit at Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara.

One of previous study which conducts the study about conversational style is Sylvia and Dewi (2015). It compares the conversational styles and preference structure of the host with different guest. This previous study and this research are discussed the same topic about conversational style. However, the previous study related the conversational style with the preference structure in talk show; while this research relates the conversational style to gender differences in workplace.

The aim of the previous research was to find out the features of conversational style used by the host toward different guests which was in a group and a single guest, in other words it compared the two different guests with the same host in order to see whether the conversational style of the host were different or not. On the other hand, this research intends to find out the style in conversation among male and female staff who are auditors in their workplace. The different also can be seen in the theory which is used to analyze the conversational style. The previous study uses Tannen's theory, while in this research the researcher uses Swann's theory.

According to Swann (2000:225) based on empirical studies of gender and talk have documented a specific feature of conversational styles such as: amount of talk, interruption, conversational support, tentativeness, and compliment. Furthermore, Swan stated that men talk too much in public context, it is to establish or maintain their status in their group, while women would like to talk less in public context. For interruption, males interrupt females more than reverse has been seen as unsurprising, since males have more power and status than females. Then for conversational support, female speakers more frequently use features that provide support and encouragement for other speakers, for example 'minimal responses' such as mmh and yeah.

Next is tentativeness, it is stated there are claims where female speakers use features that make their speech appear tentative and uncertain, such as 'hedges' that weaken the force of an utterance ('I think maybe ...', 'sort of', 'you know') and certain types of 'tag questions' (questions tagged on to statements, such as ('It's so hot, isn't it?')). The last feature which proposed by Swann is compliment females tend to use it than males. It is because females are interested to establish the connection of intimacy to their partner in conversation.

Related to the explanation above about the features of conversational styles, the reality of the conversation among staff during their interaction show different such as in the following.

Male Staff : *Ya ini, harus kita luruskan dulu persepsinya. Persepsi itu adalah insentif yang harus dibayarkan 30 persen dari sks. Bukan 30 persen kali dari remunnya.....* 'we have to make clear our perception, the amount which can be paid is thirty percent from her/his sks, not thirty percent from the remun.....')

Female Staff : *Tunggu pak, gak setuju saya. Ya, kalo kayak gitu, gak sesuaih sama KMK yang baru keluar. Cemanalah cara perhitungannya kalo gitu pak.* 'Wait, I don't agree. It is not appropriate with our new KMK/regulation'

Male Staff : *Setahu saya begitu. Tapi...* 'that's what I know, but'

Female Staff : *enggak pak, enggak gitu, karena ini di KMK ini gak sesuai sama yang itu. Saya contohkan aja yang grade 14, cobalah pak cari grade 14 berapa!* 'No sir, it's not like that. I give you grade 14 as an example, just try to find how much grade 14?'

Male Staff : *Hmm..Grade 14 itu sekitar 10 jutaan.* 'Hmm..Grade 14 is 10 million rupiahs'

In the conversation both of female and male were the staff who worked as auditor in Internal Auditor Unit. It has been stated as one of the conversational features is interruption. And it said that males interrupt females more than reverse has been seen as unsurprising, since males have more power and status than females. It means males speaker have been found interrupt female speakers more than vice versa, it is because they supposed to presume that they have a right to take the floor from female. However, male staff gave the explanation to the question, female staff interrupt directly to show her rejection about explanation with "Tunggu pak, gak setuju saya" statement and then when male staff responded about her statement before, she interrupted again by saying "enggak pak, enggak gitu" it was because she wanted to take the floor.

So from the conversation, it can be seen that female has done more interruption than male. This situation, show the different with Swann's theory about interruption which stated that males tend to do interruption. In addition, from the conversation above it can be seen that female staff use direct sentence Cobalah pak cari grade 14 berapa! Which means she ordered him to find out something. This situation also different with Tannen theory about the differences of communication between men and women which stated that males express orders for doing direct imperative in their communication, whereas females express proposals for doing indirect ways in communication. The views and phenomenon described above were the background of the writer's interest to make the problem of conversation style by male and female in workplace.

This might be happened because some reasons. Tannen (1992) stated there are six differences between men and women in communication such as; status versus support, independence versus intimacy, advice versus understanding, information versus feeling, orders versus proposal, conflict versus compromise.

Thus, based on the phenomenon which has been mentioned above, this research tried to find out gender conversational styles and the reasons of conversational style used by male and female staff in Internal Auditors Unit at Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara.

Based on the background, the problems of the study are formulated as follow:

1. How are the features of conversational styles realized by male and female staff in workplace?
2. Why are the features of conversational styles used by male and female staff as the ways they are?

While, based on the problem of the study above, the objectives of the study are

1. To elaborate the conversational style used by male and female staff in workplace.
2. To investigate the reasons of conversational style used by male and female staff in workplace.

This study is limited on the utterances with conversational style are used by male and female staff who are auditors in Internal Auditors Unit of Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara. Therefore, the writer used the theory proposed by Tannen (1992) for describing the reasons of males and females staff use different conversational

## II. RESEARCH METHODS

This study was conducted in descriptive qualitative research in order to describe conversational styles among male and female staff on break time in Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara Medan. Bogdan and Biklen (1992) say that qualitative design refers to the researcher's plan of how to proceed. How they proceed is based on theoretical assumptions (that meaning and process are crucial in understanding human behavior, that descriptive data are what is important to collect, and that analysis is best done inductively). According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007) Qualitative research is characterized by describing in words rather than numbers, by exploring to find what is significant in the situation, by trying to understand and explain it, by beginning without structure but structuring the research as proceeds and by working in natural situation.

Bogdan and Biklen (1992) assert that descriptive means the data collect in the form of words rather than numbers. Descriptive qualitative tried to analyze the data with all their richness as closely as possible to the form in which the researcher record and transcribe and the written result of the research contains quotation from the data to illustrate and substantiate the presentation.

This study would employ case study design. A case study refers to the study done to a subject, a setting, or a depository of data (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992). It is suitable for the study since the researcher observed analyzed the features, the process and the reasons of conversational style used by male and female staff in Internal Auditors Unit at Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara Medan.

The data of this research were conversation utterances of male and female staff in form words, phrases, and sentences during break time. The sources of data in this research staff in Internal Auditors Unit from Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara. Actually, there were 6 staff in that unit, 3 males and 3 females. According to Mashun (2005) there are some criteria to get the representative data, to choose the respondents as subject of research base on: age, sex, have education and different background of family situation. All the participants in this study were staff who had same education, and they were in S2 Degree from Accounting Major.

The data collected through observation and interview. The researcher applied observation in this research in order to obtain the data during the conversation. The researcher recorded the utterances from male and female staff by using recorder and then transcribed their utterances. The data were taken in the break time (12.00 PM-13.30 PM).

Then researcher reviewed the transcription and analyzed it to find out the conversational styles used by male and female staff, how the features of conversational styles realized by male and female staff in workplace. And the last was interviewing, it was used to get the information of the reasons of conversational style used by male and female staff in workplace.

According to Bogdan and Biklen (1992) in qualitative research, the researcher was a key instrument. The supporting instruments to collect the data are: 1) Observation and 2) Interview sheets. The observation and interview sheets will be used to collect the data from male and female staff in Internal Auditor Unit while they were doing conversation by using audio-recorder.

The data in this study will be analyzed by using interactive technique Miles and Huberman's theory. According to Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014), the phases of data analysis are divided into three parts; there are data condensation, data display, conclusion drawing and verification.

In this study, data condensation included the process of selecting utterances of the staff which contained the types of conversational styles in order to make sure that it was really suitable as the data. Simplify the data by categorizing the utterances into types of conversational styles and the realization of conversational styles to make it simple. Abstracting is the process of making written summary on the types and the reasons, and the reason of conversational styles used of male and female as what theories say and transform the written summary.

In this research the researcher chose to display the data in diagram form, because it would be easier to see the percentage types of conversational styles and the realization conversational styles used by male and female staff. The purposes of display the data was to ease the data understood in form of diagram rather than in longer explanation.

Conclusions are drawn to answer the research question by describing and interpreting what the research saw in the data. Before the researcher determined the data to be concluded, going back and checking up the data condensation, it was done to make sure that the data were enough to answer the problems of study.

In qualitative research, in order to make the finding of a study "worth paying attention to" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), trustworthiness is very important. In qualitative research the analyzed data must be auditable through checking that the interpretations are credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability.

## III. FINDING AND DISCUSSIONS

### A. Findings

Based on the data analysis above, the findings of this study were summarized as the following:

It was found that all features of conversational style occurred in conversation of male and female staff during break time. The fourth male and female staff used the amount of talk, interruption, conversational support, tentativeness and compliment. The most frequently used by male staff was Interruption which comprised 26 of 92 utterances (28.26 %). The second rank was Amount of talk, which occurred in 24 of 92 utterances (26.09 %). The third was Tentativeness, which was found in 14 of 92 utterances (21.74%) and the fourth was Conversational Support which comprised 14 of 92 utterances (15.22%), the fifth was Compliment, which occurred 5 of 92 utterances (5%), the last was Mix types, which was found 3 of 92 utterances (3%). While, the most frequently used was amount of talk which comprised 33 of 94 utterances (35.11%). The second rank was Tentativeness, which occurred in 19 of 94 utterances (20%). The third was Interruption, which was found in 15 of 94 utterances (15.96%) and the fourth was Conversational Support which comprised 13 of 94 utterances (13.83%), the fifth was Compliment, which occurred 4 of 94 utterances (4%), while the last was Mix Types was found 10 of 94 utterances (11%).

It was found that all the features of conversational style were realized by male and female staff. For male staff, the frequency of deletion was the highest which was occurred 39 from 82 utterances (48%), the second was addition which was comprised 24 from 82 utterances (29%), the third was permutation which was found 12 from 82 utterances (15%), and the last was substitution which was occurred 7 from 82 utterances (6%). While, for female staff the frequency of deletion was the highest which was occurred 35 from 90 utterances (35%), the second was deletion which was comprised 28 from 90 utterances (31%), the third was permutation which occurred 16 from 90 utterances (18%) and the last was substitution which were comprised 11 from 90 utterances (12%).

Having interview with fourth male and female staff who work as auditor in Internal Auditor Unit which is their workplace was to support the answer of their reasons used conversational style during the break time. The reasons of male staff used different conversational style because of the status, independence, and information. While the additional reason were confirmation, context, and politeness. For female staff, the reasons were support, intimacy, and feeling. While the additional reason were confirmation and politeness. This study is limited in Internal Auditor Unit which consisted of 4 males staff and 4 female staff so the data prested is limited.

**B. Discussions**

By seeing the findings above, all of features of conversational style were uttered by male and female staff who work as auditor in Internal Auditor Unit which is their workplace. The findings of those features of conversational styles were similar to the findings of the previous research conducted by Harahap, Hotmasari (2016). Hotmasari (2016) found that the features of conversational used by female seller-buyer are higher in using amount talk and interruption than male seller do in business transaction at market. While in this study, female was higher in using amount of talk but for

interruption male was higher. Male tends think that they have different status with the female staff. While the additional reason were confirmation, context, and politeness. Male focus on the topic of the conversation and like to confirm it to make a clearer information.

Whereas, was higher in amount of talk because they think that there are no differencies between male and female staff since they have same profesion at their workplace in Internal Auditors Unit, which are auditors. The other reason was intimacy, female tend to express their intrest in their partner conversation to establish the connection of intimacy to their conversation. While the additional reason were confirmation and politeness. Female talk more in conversation, cause they think that they would get more information and also get a confirmation about the topic and want to communicate it to their partner of conversation politely.

Looking at the realization of conversational style of male and female staff in Internal Auditor Unit, the female staff realized more than male staff during the conversation. The realization of conversational style can be seen from the frequency of deletion which was the highest both by male and female staff conversation. The second realization also same, which was addition. And for male, the third was permutation, and the last was substitution. While, for female staff, both of permutation and substitution had same frequency.

The researcher had some interviews with male and female staff in Internal Auditor Unit to get the reason of the features of conversational styles used by male and female staff as the ways they are. According to Tannen (1992) stated there are six differences between men and women in communication such as; status versus support, independence versus intimacy, advice versus understanding, information versus feeling, orders versus proposal, conflict versus compromise. The comparisons between the previous theories and the research findings related to the reasons of conversaional styles used were in Table 1 below.

TABLE 1. THEORY AND RESEARCH FINDINGS

	The Reasons	Theory		Findings			
		Male	Female	Male	Female		
1	Status vs Support	Status	V S	Support	Status	V S	Support
2	Independence vs Intimacy	Independence	V S	Intimacy	Independence		Intimacy
3	Advice vs understanding	Advice	V S	Understanding	-		-
4	Information vs feeling	Information	V S	Feeling	Information	V S	Feeling

5	<b>An order vs proposal</b>	An order	V S	Prop osal	-	V S	-
6	<b>Conflict vs compromise</b>	Conflict	V S	Com prom ise	-	-	-
					Contex t	Confir mati on	
					Politen ess	Politeness	
					Confir mation		

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It has been stated before that the reasons of male staff used different conversational style because of the status, independence, and information. Male tends think that they have different status with the female staff. While the additional reason were confirmation, context, and politeness. Male focus on the topic of the conversation and like to confirm it to make a clearer information. Male tend to use some conjunctions to show their agreement and their politeness. Whereas, female staff think that there are no differences between male and female staff since they have same profession at their workplace in Internal Auditors Unit, which are auditors. The other reason was intimacy, female tend to express their interest in their partner conversation to establish the connection of intimacy to their conversation. While the additional reason were confirmation and politeness . Female talk more in conversation, cause they think that they would get more information and also get a confirmation about the topic and want to communicate it to their partner of conversation politely.

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