

# Deborah tannen's "the power of talk: who gets heard and why essay sample

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## **Deborah Tannen's "The Power of Talk: Who Gets Heard and Why" Essay Sample**

There is no particular way to communicate according to Deborah Tannen as communication is not just saying what you mean but how one communicates the meaning. Situation varies from one person to another. Language communicates ideas but a more powerful form of communication is social behavior (Tannen: 244). Language use is a learnt social behavior that allows us to negotiate relationships and it is influenced by cultural experience (Tannen 2001: 243). How we talk and express ourselves may be interpreted differently in other cultures and members of the opposite gender (Tannen 2001: 243). Deborah Tannen, a linguist from Georgetown University, did a research on the influence of linguistic style on conversations and human relationships and found that how we learn to speak as children affects our judgment of competence and confidence plus whether we get heard in a discussion later on in adulthood (Tannen 2001: 243).

She found that men and women communicate differently and just like cross-cultural communication, misunderstanding can occur. Women, according to her research, were often overlooked when it came to opportunities for promotion because of their lack of self-confidence as seen by their male bosses. But women, as Tannen proves, have grown up in a different environment to their male colleagues and have learnt to communicate differently to men (Tannen 2001: 244). This has sometimes been interpreted as being less competent and less confident (Tannen 2001: 244). An understanding of these differences could lead to a better and fairer working environment for both men and women (Tannen : 242).

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As children, girls and boys play differently. Girls are more likely to learn how to develop a sympathetic relationship with others and focus on common goals rather than differences. Girls tend to balance their needs with those of others to avoid seeming over confident or bossy (Tannen 2001: 244). Boys are more likely to learn how to develop their status in society by playing in large groups of boys whose leadership roles are defined (Tannen 2001: 244). They are likely to use language to communicate their needs and highlight their abilities rather than down grade them in an attempt to move up the leadership hierarchy (Tannen 2001: 245). This social behavior is carried on into adulthood and into the workplace resulting in both genders having different communication skills and expressing what they mean.

“ Men tend to be sensitive to the power dynamics of interaction, speaking in ways that position themselves as one up and resisting being put in a one-down position by others. Women tend to react more strongly to the rapport dynamic, speaking in ways that save face for others and buffering statements that could be seen as putting others in a one-down position.”(Tannen 2001: 246). This means that women are more likely to down grade their ability and not want to seem as boastful whereas men are more likely to speak highly of their abilities by blowing their own horn (Tannen 2001: 246).

Humans have developed a conversation ritual that demands a certain type of response. Again, Men and women have quite diverse conversational rituals. Women tend to apologies more frequently to express concern and are likely to soften criticism to help the other person save face (Tannen 2001: 250) by

being indirect in her feedback. They also ritually exchange compliment by taking the one-down position and expect the other person to understand the exchange ritual and pull them up again with compliments Tannen 2001: 251).

Men on the other hand, avoid apologies because it puts them in a one-down position. They grew up looking for ways to put others down by criticizing and pushing themselves on top (Tannen 2001: 251). So for a woman to engage in a compliment exchange with a man by taking the one down position, would find that he will not likely pull her up but rather pull her down further and provide an advice or criticism (Tannen 2001: 251).

This significant characteristic style can put women at a disadvantage in a workplace situation and be judged as lacking in confidence. It is therefore vital for people in management positions to understand the diverse communicative style of both men and women in order to take full advantage of talented staff. There is no one right way to communicate as communication depends on the situation, the culture and linguistic style of the people (Tannen 2001: 257).

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Tannen, D. 2001 " The Power of Talk: Who Gets Heard and Why". From Linguistics at Work: A Reader of Applications, edited by Dallin D. Oaks 242-259.