

# Gender-related differences and their influence on communication essay sample



## Introduction

The issue of the relationship between language and gender has been studied for many years and its tradition is longer than feminist linguistics. During the years of studies it became a distinct discipline of knowledge consisting of linguistic studies, concerning communication patterns connected with gender-related differences and cultural roles of genders. A human learns how to speak and communicate from the first months of his/her life. The young children have their own way of communication and every baby babbles in the same way but when they start playing with peers they watch older children and parents and begin to modulate their voices as to speak more like a man or more like a woman depending on their gender.

Communication, which is a process of sending and receiving messages, consists of two types: verbal and nonverbal one. The verbal communication helps to distinguish speaker's gender and age as well as educational and ethnic background. Nonverbal communication is everything which accompanies the language, including mimic, gestures, look and the tone of voice. In both fields a significant difference between men and women can be observed as they have different tempers and manners. In every community there are different stereotypes about gender and according to them, women talk a lot and are sensitive whereas men are aggressive and dominant. Many researchers dealing with communication try to describe gender-related differences in communication patterns.

They prove that men and women are different in many aspects, such as biology, psychology and the language they use. On the other hand, there are

some researchers who believe that men and women are more alike than they are different and the differences in the use of language are not significant at all. The aim of the paper is to discuss the gender-related differences in communication patterns as influenced by biology as well as psychology. In the first part, the significant terms such as communication, gender and sex are defined. The latter one is devoted to the review of the research in the field of gender-related differences and their influence on communication.

There are many disciplines which deal with gender, beginning with biology, through psychology, right up to linguistics. Although the aim of this paper is to examine the linguistic aspect of gender-related differences, the consideration starts with the biological and psychological features since they are believed to form the background for the discussion which follows. The researchers agree that men and women differ considerably in all of these areas. Taking biology into consideration, it is easy to notice how people differ visually but the biological difference extends also into hormones which are specific for each sex.

This difference is also noticed by empirical sciences, which include psychology. The researchers distinguish two elements: sex, which is biological, and gender, which is psychological and social. The first and main difference which can be observed is the appearance which distinguishes men and women. The differences are connected with the level of testosterone, which makes men more aggressive than women. This masculinization of brain is determined already in the prenatal life of a human.

The low level of testosterone results in a better developed right hemisphere, which causes men's rationality, and bigger integration of both hemispheres leads to women's greater sensibility. The part of the brain involved in communication process is the white matter, which is a tract connecting both hemispheres. This matter, called corpus callosum, is much smaller in man's brain than it is in the woman's one, which is responsible for males' lower ability of communication.

For women, the size of the white matter results in more-highly developed visuo-spatial functions. Another biological difference is human voice. Its shaping begins at the age of around four and is connected with social influence, as children can observe that men use lower voice while women use the higher one. This is the reason why boys intentionally lower their voices and girls raise theirs (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 2003). Although gender is very strongly determined by biological factors, they are not the only elements which shape one's identity, as sex characteristics are not the most important ones in such areas as occupation, gait or the use of colour terminology. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003) state that gender differences are exaggerated in our society and in reality they usually go together with similarities.

On the other hand, there is also the empathizing-systemizing theory, which says that there are three types of brains. Empathizing element is connected with emotions and appropriate reaction to them. On the other hand, there are people with the so called systemizing brains, their strong points being: analyzing and constructing systems. Such people are called "systemizers" and, according to Baron-Cohen (2005), they intuitively figure out how things

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work, or what the underlying rules are, controlling a system which can be as varied as a pond, a vehicle or a math equation. “ They all operate on inputs and deliver outputs, using rules” (p. 1).

The third type of brain is the balanced connection of the two previously mentioned ones. The important distinction needs to be drawn between the notions of gender and sex. “ Gender is determined socially; it is the societal meaning assigned to male and female. Each society emphasizes particular roles that each sex should play, although there is wide latitude in acceptable behaviours for each gender” (Hesse-Biber and Carger 2000, p. 91). Sex, on the other hand, is something people are born with and which is connected with biology (West and Zimmerman, 1987). A young child is taught which behaviours are acceptable for ladies and which for men. The same is observed as far as language is concerned. Boys can use more aggressive language, which is inadmissible for girls who are taught to be ladylike (Braedyn Svecz, 2010).

The second issue to be discussed is the concept of communication. There exist several models of communication and the notion itself has been thoroughly described. According to Głodowski (2001), communication is a dynamic process which consists of sending and receiving messages relating to a specific situation and context and it is very strongly related to gender. As Peters (1999) reports: “ Communication is a word with a rich history. From the Latin *communicare*, meaning to impart, share, or make common, it entered the English language in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries” (p. 7).

Communication can be divided into two categories: verbal (connected with speaking and listening) and nonverbal, which uses mimic and gestures to help express the words or substitute them. The process of communication consists of four elements: encoding, medium of transmission, decoding and feedback. Both the sender and the receiver of the message are responsible for the success of the process (Sanchez, n. d.). To make it possible, the receiver's "understanding is necessary. According to Mistry (cited in Clark, 1997), problems which cause the failure of communication are either the direct result of people failing to communicate and/or processes which lead to confusion and can cause good plans to fail. The transmission of the message consists of two important elements: content and context.

Content refers to the language which is really used by the sender to transmit the information and context is the way of transmission, the so called paralinguistics, such as the tone of voice, body language, look and emotions (Clark, 1997). There are also different elements interfering with communication, which include culture, noise, perception, message, environment and stress. They work as filters through which the message goes and which can change it. The message sent can be misunderstood by the receiver unless those barriers are overcome through active listening and feedback (Clark, 1997).

Communication takes place only when the message is fully comprehended by all interlocutors so they have to make sure that they have heard exactly what the sender meant. Since there is such a strong relationship between gender and communication, it can be very interesting to check in what way they influence each other. It is important to find out how the gender-related <https://assignbuster.com/gender-related-differences-and-their-influence-on-communication-essay-sample/>

differences are connected with communication and if the cross-gender communication can be defined as “ cross-cultural communication” as some researchers believe.

As it has been mentioned before, there are many differences between both sexes and this part of the paper will be devoted to the way in which such differences influence communication. It can be observed even in everyday life that the female style of using language varies considerably from the male one. The characteristics of both styles will be also taken into consideration. As far as gender differences are concerned, it can be observed that men talk and act in a different way than women do. They prefer to show status, control and intellectual dominance while women like sharing their emotions and talking about home and family. This starts to shape in childhood when male children play together in groups in which the strongest one is a leader and rules the group and girls prefer smaller groups or only the company of a best friend.

The preferences from the early age continue into adulthood (Joseph, 1992; Tannen, 1991). The existence of gender differences in the language used has been investigated by the researchers from Northwestern University and the University of Haifa. The group of 31 boys and 31 girls aged 9 to 15 were asked to perform spelling and writing tasks which were presented in a visual and auditory way. The results have shown that in girls’ brains the message gets to the area of abstract thinking and they were more activated in language area than boys’. Girls’ performance accuracy corresponded with the level of activation of the language areas of the brain, which was different

from boys'. Their accuracy depended on how the auditory or visual areas of brain worked during hearing or reading words.

The difference between boys and girls lies in the pace of their development and as such it disappears in adulthood. The authors of the research advice the teachers to adjust teaching and testing methods to the needs of students, as the evaluation of children with sensory approach should be based on such a method: lecture should be tested orally and testing of the knowledge gained from reading should be done in a written way. In everyday life, women show much more abstract language than men, which is usually observed when a female gives directions how to get to some place.

They do not give a clear cue but describe places which are nearby a "given place which confuses men who cannot concentrate on many pieces of information mentioned at one time. (Boys' and Girls' Brain, 2008) It is very important to mention that every gender and even every person has their own way and style of communication. While men use speech as a means of conveying facts and information, women like discussing personal topics and they do not do it to seek advice or solution, which is characteristic of male utterances. The men's way of using language is characterized by literal meanings while women's is marked by hidden meanings. The female language includes more prestigious forms of speech (e. g. It grew.) than the male (e. g. It grewed).

When the conversation is observed, it can be noticed than men interrupt more frequently than women (Yule, 2006; Brown, 2000). In many countries there are different stereotypes connected with gender. One of them relates



to the styles of communication. It is believed that women talk more and the main topic of their conversation is home and household activities while men talk mainly about economics and outside activities (Spolsky, 1998). The prejudice connected with the amount of talk was presented by Tannen (1991) and supported by research which has shown that it is not true that women talk more. In the research taken by Eakins & Eakins (cited in Tannen, 1991) it turned out that during meeting they are the men who talk more, with one exception, and there was no exception in the length of talking the participants did.

Another research, taken by Swacker (cited in Tannen, 1991), shows that during question and answer sessions it is a man to be heard first and their questions and comments are twice as long as women's. The stereotype was created on the basis of observations done at households where women really talk a lot because they know this topic and there are only some situations when men do not speak much. If the topic is familiar to them, they would speak much more because in this way they could show their knowledge and dominance, which characterize them. This is a reason why men talk very willingly about their hobbies and fields of their interest (Cameron, 2007). Both styles of communication have their own and unique features.

The female style is called "rapport-talk" which is "a way of establishing connections and negotiating relationships" (Tannen, 1991, p. 77). Women feel most comfortable speaking to people they know and those who are close to them. Among the topics discussed there is family, feelings and experiences. Watching the conversation, one can easily detect that women speak in turns. Their talk is seen as nurturing, indirect and respectful. They <https://assignbuster.com/gender-related-differences-and-their-influence-on-communication-essay-sample/>

try to be as tactful and courteous as possible (Braedyn Svecz, 2010). Such characteristics as empathy and closeness can be observed. Looking at forms which women use, it can be noticed that they use question tags "(e. g. " don't you?") and hedges (expressions such as " kind of", " sort of").

Another pattern which can be observed is the use of back-channels, which are indicators of listening, e. g. " really?", " yeah?", " hmm?" (Yule, 2006). Considering the male style of conversation, it seems to be much less private than in the case of women's. It is called " report-speech" and, according to Tannen (1991), " it is primarily a means to preserve independence and negotiate and maintain status in hierarchical social order" (p. 77). They achieve it by emphasizing their skills and knowledge. They prefer talking about such themes as sport, news and facts to personal topics as their main goal in conversation is to get or give information. This style is characterized by jokes and stories. In conversations between men one can observe that the language is more aggressive and includes swear words and slang.

They do it because it helps them show power (Braedyn Svecz, 2010; Tannen, 1991). A significant difference is connected with expressing feelings. Women like talking about how they feel in contrast to men who prefer to stay silent and process all the information they get. As far as men are concerned, they process information inside themselves before saying them aloud. They have to find the correct answer which would fully show what they mean. They can go away and stay in their private place even for hours before they decide to say anything. It is completely different when women are taken into consideration.

Their way of analyzing information is just letting the thoughts flow. As there are so many differences between male and female styles of communication, there must also be a great problem with understanding each other's intentions. Women's indirectness confuses men who are accustomed to using direct structures and sending clear information. Males and females use the same words but for them every phrase has different meaning. A woman's way to express feelings more deeply is the usage of such means as superlatives, metaphors and generalizations which are not to be understood literally but can also clarify the misunderstandings.

Because of these differences cross-gender communication can be compared to communication between representatives of different cultures. They speak the same language but the words can be understood in two ways: literally and figuratively. This phenomenon is called genderlect - language stays the same but meanings are different. Even if children grow up in the same environment, they learn behaviours appropriate to their gender. A similar situation can be observed in the language they speak. Boys watch their fathers and girls watch their mothers and they seem to be their authorities so children want to imitate them in their "behaviours and the way of speaking. If they learn such things during childhood, they will continue them into adulthood (Tannen, 1991). Considering verbal communication an important issue, nonverbal communication must also be mentioned. This is the area where the essential difference between genders is placed.

Because of men's and women's temper, they act differently while having conversation. Women are more emotional and they smile and nod more often than men whereas men take position which stresses their dominance. <https://assignbuster.com/gender-related-differences-and-their-influence-on-communication-essay-sample/>

According to Fay (2010), “ men generally approach from the side and at an angle” while “ when women engage in conversation, they approach from the front and prefer to stand toe-to-toe” (para. 10). A female speaker’s nodding can be misunderstood by her interlocutor because it is usually found a sign of agreement and understanding but women sometimes nod only to confirm their comprehension.

Another element of nonverbal communication is adjusting the tone of voice to the conversation. Women very often inflect their voices, soften or raise them. The change in a woman’s voice can be mainly noticed while she is talking to a baby. On the other hand, The Gender Similarities Hypothesis by Hyde (2005) states that males and females are more alike than they are different.

The author cites Hollingworth (1918) and Thorndike (1914) who believed that these differences are too small to be found important. The research based on meta-analyses (the combination of several studies related to the same topic) has been conducted. The authors collected and compared the results of studies on gender-differences and proved that the differences exist only in four areas which are verbal ability, visual-spatial ability, mathematical ability, and aggression. Other areas were not as significant as those mentioned and the results in their research were close to zero.

## Conclusion

Interpersonal relationships are one of the most important abilities to achieve success in life. People gain ability to communicate since early childhood.

Children start speaking before they are one year old but the real  
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communication takes place when they are able to understand messages and create comprehensible sentences. Although the basics of gender-related differences lie in biology, men and women differ also in the way they communicate. This is connected with their temperament and character which play a significant role in communication. Thanks to verbal communication, speaker's age as well as educational and ethnic background can be distinguished. It also shows differences between men and women.

The same situation connected with gender difference may be observed in nonverbal communication. Men's dominance and arrogance is shown by the position they take and their aggression is noticeable in the language they use. The stereotyped woman is sensitive, tender, timid, dependent and submissive. During an act of communication women are more affectionate, they use more gestures and they inflect their voices.

The stereotypes, which are generalizations about a group of people whereby we attribute a defined set of characteristics to this group, may be unfair as they are based only on observations done in everyday life but when one tries to use some specialist methods of research, it occurs that our opinion was not right. There are also some researchers who believe that the gender differences are not significant enough to be noticed, stating that men and women are more alike than they are different. However, the group of researchers supporting that hypothesis is not as numerous as that the group of linguists dealing with gender-related differences in communication patterns.

## Summary

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The aim of the paper is to describe the phenomenon of interpersonal communication and the influence of gender differences on it. In the first part such terms as communication, gender and sex are explained. The distinction between sex and gender is crucial for correct comprehension of the issue. In this part of the paper all the differences which exist between men and women, beginning with biology, through psychology and sociology, right up to linguistics, are addressed. In the center of the author's interest occur psychological differences as well as the way they influence interpersonal communication.

The second part of the paper is devoted to connections between gender differences and communication. The author cites the results of research which show that gender influences communication. The men's and women's communication styles as well as gender-related stereotypes are presented. The next described element is the way of expressing feelings and nonverbal communication. The Gender Similarities Hypothesis, which shows that men and women are more alike than they are different, is also introduced in the paper.

Streszczenie Praca ta jest próbą opisanania fenomenu komunikacji interpersonalnej i wpływu, jaki na nią wywierają różnice płci. W pierwszej części wyjaśnione zostały pojęcia takie jak komunikacja, płć biologiczna (sex) i płć społeczna (gender). Rozróżnienie tych pojęć jest kluczowe dla właściwego zrozumienia tematu, jak również ze względu na częste ich występowanie w pracy. W tej części pracy szczegółowo opisane zostały wszelkie różnice istniejące pomiędzy osobnikami płci męskiej i żeńskiej,

począwszy od biologii, poprzez psychologię i socjologię, kończąc na lingwistyce.

W centrum zainteresowania autorki znalazły się różnice psychospołeczne oraz sposób, w jaki wpływają one na komunikację międzyludzką. Celem drugiej części jest wykazanie powiązań pomiędzy różnicami płci a komunikacją. Autorka przytacza wyniki badań przeprowadzonych przez językoznawców, z których wynika, że płeć wpływa na sposób porozumiewania się mężczyzn i kobiet. Szczegółowo opisane zostały także style komunikacyjne obu płci, jak również stereotypy ich dotyczące. Kolejnym elementem opisanym w pracy jest sposób wyrażania uczuć i komunikacja niewerbalna. Dla kontrastu autorka przytacza również hipotezę mówiącą o tym, że mężczyźni i kobiety są bardziej podobni aniżeli różni.

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