AN INVESTIGATION OF DEBORAH TANNEN'S THEORY OF MALE AND FEMALE LANGUAGE ON FACEBOOK

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Abtsract

This study focused on investigating the existence of areas of conflicts in a recorded written conversation of young male and female in Facebook. The investigation was based on Deborah Tannen's theory of the six conflicts between male and female language. The findings show that the six-conflicts exist in written language between male and female. It confirmed that gender is a strong feature in a language that affects people in their ways of communication.

Key words: *gender, conflict, written language*

1. Background

Eckert and McConnell (2003) say that we are surrounded by gender lore since we are small. While it is true that since we born, our parents have given us identity as being male (boys, men) or female (girls, women) by looking at our biological states: our sex. Starting from that moment, we will likely to develop ourselves in the way male or female should be. Yet, to have the attributes as male and female, one must learn what is expected based, allowed, and valued of being male and female based on social cultural rules (Susiloningsih and Agus, 2004). Being accepted as male or female

biologically is a matter of sex, while being accepted as male or female based on social cultural rules is a matter of gender. Gender is not something we are born with, and not something we have, but something we do (West and Zimmerman, 1987 in Holmes and Meyerhoff, 2003)

Since centuries, there has been ways of thinking that men and women are sharing different roles in society. In most societies, there are differences and inequalities between women and men in responsibilities assigned, activities undertaken, access to and control over resources, decision-making opportunities, as well as the language use (Kuntjara, 2003). Among those aspects of differences and inequalities, language use that differentiates men and women has also been an interesting field of study since 1960.

Further studies are focusing not only on the difference of language and gender but advance to how language reveals, embodies and sustains attitudes to gender and how language users speak or write to reflect their sex. The goals of the advance study about language and gender is not merely to find ways of having equality of gender but grasp the nature of language use by men and women in which will enable deeper understanding about why do men and women use language in their ways. One of Deborah Tannen books entitled with "*You just Don't Understand*" are published to accommodate this goal. In her books, she describes men and women language in six contrasting series as follows:

- Status vs. support
- Independence vs. intimacy
- Advice vs. understanding
- Information vs. feelings
- Orders vs. proposals
- Conflict vs. compromise

Each of the series comes with an explanation of the nature that influence men and women use the language in each way. From the above overview, it can be seen that the field of interest of studying language and gender is in the way men and women use language in conversation and writing in regard to the reflection of their gender.

In this current study, the writer focuses on the investigation of Tannen's six contrasting theory on the way men and women use language in written conversation when they interact in one of social network namely "Facebook". Facebook has become one of the greatest inventions that affect people around the world. Since the launching o fthis site in 2004 by Mark Zukenberg and his co founders Dustin Moskivitzs, Chris Huges, and Eduardo Saverin, up to now, there are already 400 million Facebook   users   all   over   the   world (www.digitalbuzzblog.com/facebook-statistics-facts-figures-for-2010/). One of the best features on Facebook is where we can up date our status and others can comment on it, which enables conversation to take place at any time and at any where. The

conversation, moreover, is taking a different form; it is not spoken but written one. This is interesting as the mode of conversation in which Tannen's theory are being studied are mostly on spoken conversation. It is interested to know whether Tannen's theory is maintained when men or women are having written conversation on Facebook. The main outcome of the current study is focused on investigating Tannen's theory on men and women language in written conversation on Facebook network.

2. Theoretical Framework

That men and women are different in their way of communication is not a something new for us. In her best-selling book You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation, Deborah Tannen (Tannen, 1990) proposed that women and men have difficulty communicating with one another, in part because they interpret messages in fundamentally different ways. Take the conversation below as an example:

Woman: *Rokku ga terlalu pendek kan*? 'my skirt is not too short, isn't it?'

Man: : *ganti aja*! 'Just change!'

From the conversation, the woman asking the dress of being too much is actually looking for an understanding of the doubtful feeling of her choice for the skirt. But for the man, it is interpreted merely as a question that looks for an advice of what to do. In the

women's eyes, she thinks that the man is not supportive. In his eyes, however, he is being supportive, because men don't talk to each other about their troubles unless they really do want a solution; talking about their problems is wallowing in them. The man doesn't realize that his woman was simply trying to establish a certain kind of intimacy with him, inviting him to respond and share with her (Tannen, 1990)

The way men and women communicate differently brings interest for Tannen to study the difference so that men and women can truly understand each other and have a talk. Her study found some common areas of conflicts between men and women ways of communication. Those are status vs. support, independence vs. intimacy advice vs. understanding, information vs. feelings, orders vs. proposals and conflict vs. compromise. Below are Tannen's six areas of conflicts in details.

Status vs. Support.
Men grow up in a world in which a conversation is often a contest, either to achieve the upper hand or to prevent other people from pushing them around. For women, however, talking is often a way to exchange confirmation and support. In shorts, communication for men is a place to try to achieve and maintain status and for women is a network of connections seeking support and consensus.

Independence vs. Intimacy.

Since women often think in terms of closeness and support, they struggle to preserve intimacy. Men, concerned with status, tend to focus more on independence. These qualities can lead women and men to starkly different views of the same situation. Tannen notes that men are confused by the various ways women use conversation to be intimate with others. One of these ways she calls "troubles talk." She says, "For women, talking about troubles is the essence of connection. I tell you my troubles, you tell me your troubles, and we're close. Men, however, hear troubles talk as a request for advice, so they respond with a solution." When a man offers this kind of information the woman often feels as if he is trying to diminish her problem or cut her off.

Advice vs. Understanding.

To many men a complaint is a challenge to come up with a solution. But often women are looking for emotional support, not solutions. When my mother tells my father she doesn't feel well, he invariably offers to take her to the doctor. Invariably, she is disappointed with his reaction. Like many men, he is focused on what he can do, whereas she wants sympathy.

Information vs. Feelings.

Deborah Tannen's distinction of information and feelings is also described as report talk (of men) and report talk (of women). The differences can be summarized in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 The differences of report talk between male and female

Women	Men
- Talk too much - Speak in private contexts - Build relations - Overlap - Speak symmetrically	- Get more air time - Speak in public - Negotiate status/avoid failure - Speak one at a time - Speak asymmetrically

Orders vs. Proposals.

Women often suggest that people do things in indirect ways - "let's", "why don't we?" or "wouldn't it be good, if we...?", women feel comfortable to propose others to do things she wants. Proposal for men is confusing. Therefore, men may use, and prefer to hear, a direct imperative.

Conflict vs. Compromise.

In trying to prevent fights, some women refuse to oppose the will of others openly. But sometimes it's far more effective for a woman to assert herself, even at the risk of conflict. Men tend to

openly oppose to show their status and their value on others. They feel no weight to face the conflict.

3. Findings and Discussion

The aim of the study as what has been stated above is to investigate the realization of Tannen's theory of men and women language in written conversation on Facebook network. The sample of the study was a man named Edy and a woman named Yuliastuti of around 23 years old that signed up already on Facebook network. Some of their written conversation were recorded and then analyzed based on Deborah Tannen's theory of the six-contrasts between male and female language namely status vs. support, independence vs. intimacy, advice vs. understanding, information vs. feelings, orders vs. proposals and conflict vs. compromise.

3.1. Status vs. support

Men, in conversation, are seeking for the establishment of status they are more valuable than others, while women are looking for networks and connection where they can share, minimizing differences, and finally get support from the community.

The difference of maintaining status and seeking for support can be seen clearly on the way Edy and Yuliastuti respond to a question. Edy, when asked by Ardika whether the girl in the

picture was his girl or not, answered by asking another question, "What do you think?" instead of giving the information needed. Edy is not supporting Ardika this way; rather, he was saying "Where is your logic? You know it was not my girl friend but my sister, so why bothering to ask such a silly question?" by asking "What do you think?" Edy showed his superiority in the way he thinks of being more logical than Ardika's way of thinking (Figure 3.1).

Another thing seems to happen with Yuli, where she would give an answer, an explanation if needed, to a question. Yuli up dated her status and saying that she was alone again and Prabhu asked her "why don't you send messages?". Yuli answered the questions by giving detailed reasons of why she could not send messages that was because she was sleepy. By doing this, Yuli is supporting Prabhu's questions by giving proper information for his questions. In this case, Yuli is trying to show their friendship by being supportive to Prabhu's request of information. It showed that they interacted and shared each others (Figure 3.2).

Figure 3.1. Difference of maintaining status

Figure 3.2. Seeking for support

3.2 Independence and Intimacy

Tannen (1990) notes that in the world of status, independence is the key, while intimacy belongs to another world that is connection. Men will look for the independence and will try to maintain the status by, for example, make decision without discussing it with their partners. Discussion before making every single decision, is threatening their freedom to act, their independence. While most women will be glad to have discussion with their partners in every turn they make. They appreciate it as evidence of involvement and communication which are seen as features of intimacy. Further, Tannen (1990) differentiate intimacy and independence by giving way of thinking for intimacy as "We're close and the same" while for independence as "We're separate and different."

In the figure.3 below, Edy up dated his status concerning why there is a term of "Hawa nafsu" but there is no term "Adam nafsu". It was interested because "Hawa" means 'women' and "nafsu" means 'sexual desire' while Edy believes that it is "Adam", 'men' who has more "Nafsu", 'sexual desire'. So in his belief, Edy thinks that the term should be "Adam nafsu" instead. This question invited comment from Diah where she answered "that's right??????? *Ckckckckc....aku baru menyadari nya* ('I am just aware of that'), then from now on, we have to use both…" This comment can be seen as support from Diah who was in

agreement with Edy's thought by clearly saying "that's right" at the beginning of her comment. However, Edy, who looked for independence, being supported did not make him feel that they were on the sam boat. Edy raised another thought by saying *Tidak salah banyak orang bilang, wanita sumber penderitaan…hehehe*, 'no wonder that people said women is the source of unhappiness hehehe'. He was trying to say that even when Diah agreed to him in a certain point, it did not mean that they were completely in the same page already.

Edy LocoMonster
Kenapa harus "HAWA nafsu", bukan "ADAM nafsu"????
December 28, 2010 at 12:03pm · Like · Comment

> **IdaAyu Diah Respati W** that's right?????? ckckckc…aku baru
> manyadarinya….then from now on..we have to use both………
> December 28, 2010 at 12:05pm · Like

> **Edy LocoMonster** tidak salah banyak orang bila, wanita sumber
> penderitaan heheheh
> December 28, 2010 at 12:07pm · Like

Figure 3.3. Independency

This example displays that Edy's way of raising another difference of thought as the way to maintain his status of independency, while Diah's way of agreeing was a way to look for an intimacy as they shared the same thought.

3.3 Advice and Understanding

Tannen (1990) notes that in a conversation, women say something that bothers them to ask for support and understanding. They are looking for confirmation that what they feel is common and that others also feel the same as they do. While men are distinctive in the way they say something that bothers them to others in order to look for solution. It is an advice to solve the bothering things that matter.

Yuliastuti (Figure 3.4) up dated her status and said that she was sleepy. She got several comments from her friends. Putu Frans, male, gave a very short advice for her that was "Tidur", 'got to sleep'. Prabhu, another male, was giving another advice with an additional detail as "*Manjus alu ru bo2 bin gex*…('take a shower first, then have another time to sleep…'). What both men were trying to do was clearly offering solution for Yuliastuti to overcome her problem of being sleepy. The best solution advised by those men was to have another time to sleep and would be much better if she took shower first before doing so. Further, Yuliastuti commented on the advisable solution offered by Putu Frans and Prabhu.

Yuliastuti to Putu Frans: *med tidur ..hehehe.* 'have got enough sleep..hehehe'

Yuliastuti to Prabhu: *med manjus..hehehe*. 'have got enough shower…hehehehe'

She commented in such a fashion to show her displeased towards the solution offered as she was not looking for that. She knew already that if one was sleepy then went to have some sleep. What she was looking for was a confirmation of her feeling and both men were failed to do so because they were trying to be a problem solver as what the rest of the men will do when they are faced with problems.

3.4 Information and Feelings

Tannen (1990) states that for most women, the language of conversation is primarily a language of rapport: a way of establishing connections and negotiating relationship. This is done by displaying similarities and matching experiences. It is to build up the feeling of close and comfortable for each others. For most men, however, talk is primarily a mean to preserve independence and negotiate and maintain status in a hierarchical social order. This is done by exhibiting knowledge and skill, and by holding center stage through verbal performance such as story telling, joking, or imparting information.

Figure 3.4. Supportive information

In Figure 3.5, On December 24th, Yuliastuti made a joke on her up dated status by saying that she was so confused on having too much money (*pis*), yet, the money is then altered not as real money but just knives (*pis_au*/*pisau*). This joke was supported by her friend Leeiy who was saying that she would like to borrow the knives to cut off cone-shaped rice. Yuliastuti was trying to be supportive as well by asking whether Leeiy had birthday as she wanted to cut off the cone-shaped rice (the rice usually used to celebrate birthday). Leeiy responded by simply giving the date of her birthday. Their conversation was maintained in such a fashion where both of them showing the feeling of being so close that

Yuliastuti could ask anything include birthday time of Leeiy and that Leeiy gave the information without hesitation.

The other way happened on January 12th where Edy up dated his status and said that there has been a tornado (Figure 3.6). His friend, Bowye, was simply commented by asking information about the place where the tornado had been seen. Instead of answering the question seriously, Edy made a joke by saying that the place was in his dream and ended the answer with a big laugh. Bowye, maintaining his status, made another joke and that the rest of conversation was all jokes. Bowye's asking for information was just typical of men. While women would insert feeling on it, instead of merely ask where it happened. In addition, just to maintain the status, Edy and Bowye kept on joking each other until the rest of the conversation. While, Yuliastuti and Leeiy made a joke just for establishing connection and to maintain it, they share private things men would not have done in a conversation.

Figure 3.5. Private information

Figure 3.6. Jokes

3.5 Orders vs. Proposal

Tannen (1990) says that being able to propose for women, will give a chance to get support in doing things she wants. They will feel very pleased when others do things in agreement with them. Meanwhile, being able to order for men, will give them power to tell others to do thing he wants. These traits result in different way of asking someone to do something that is by ordering (direct way) and by proposing (indirect way).

In Figure 3.7, Yuliastuti up dated her status on January 5th by saying things in an ambiguous mode as "Hari ini untuk yang kedua kalinya…('this is the second time for today'). To understand what she proposed by saying so, we need to see at the comment from Edy who was asking the meaning of "ini" ('this') to her and that the respond from Yuliastuti made it clear that she had made mistakes twice in a day that triggered Edy's emotion and for that she was trying to say sorry by admitting that she had made mistakes twice ("Hari ini untuk yang kedua kalinya…('this is the second time for today') to let Edy see her regret for the mistakes. Yuliastuti was being indirect in proposing apologizer for the mistakes she has done that day.

On the other hand, Figure 3.8 shows that Edy, when he wanted someone to do certain things, was using an order. He was asking Yuliastuti to take a rest as it was late at night already by simply saying "be peteng…ngaso malu, xixixixix ('it's night

already, take some rest..xixixixi'). Edy was using direct way of saying what he wanted. The message was clear and it was an order to do something.

Gracefully Yuliastuti
hari ini untuk yang ke dua kalinya.....
January 5 at 10:02am via Mobile Web

Edy LocoMonster kamu tahu apa artinya "ini"?? jiakakkakakakakka
January 5 at 11:49am

Gracefully Yuliastuti hahahahaa geg minta maaf ya, gra2 aq wi jd emosian hehehee
January 5 at 2:31pm via Facebook Mobile

Figure 3.7. Proposing meaning

Edy LocoMonster
be peteng...ngaso malu xixixixixi ;-*
January 15 at 9:21pm · See Friendship

Gracefully Yuliastuti ente ne ing nyak ajak ngaso......
Sunday at 8:48am

Figure 3.8. Ordering

3.6 Conflict vs Compromise

Tannen (1990) notes that for men, being in conflict means that being involved with each other. Conflict is the necessary

means by which status is negotiated. So it is to be accepted and may even be sought, embraced, and enjoyed. It is valued as a way of creating involvement with others. To most women, however, conflict is a threat to connection. It is to be avoided at all costs. Disputes are preferably settled without direct confrontation.

Figure 3.9 shows that on January 3rd, Edy up dated his status concerning on the people who were playing with fire works while the new years celebration had been over for three days. Widnyana, male, gave a comment that showed open confrontation with Edy's concern by saying "liunan protes cai…yen dot breng je cai…" ('If you want to follow it, just do it…too many complaints!') Widnyana involved himself by giving such comment that raised conflict between him and Edy. Yet, Edy felt that Widnyana's way was acceptable as he did not show further respond in regards with Widnyana's comment. Besides Widnyana, Dian, female, also commented to Edy's concern by saying "stok kembang api dagange enu liu kak" ('The fireworks sellers has lot of stock to be sold'). Dian, as most women do, did not raise a comment that could possibly trigger a conflict with Edy's concern. Her comment displayed that she was having the same experience about the fire works and was giving possible reasons for that happening instead of raising conflict as what Widnyana had done. Widnyana and Dian were trying to involve in Edy's concern

towards the fire works by using different ways, conflict and compromise.

Figure 3.9. Conflicting

4. Conclusion

The findings show that Tannen's six areas of conflicts also exist in written conversation. Edy, when having interaction with his friends, shows strategies in maintaining his status of being independence by showing superiority, disagreement, and making jokes. Other men involved in this study also displayed strategies in maintaining their status such as by giving advice and raising conflict as the way for an involvement. In the other hand, Yuliastuti showed strategies to establish connection and to build intimacy by being supportive in conversation, building the feeling of close with others, and seeking for understanding from others.

Other women involved in this study displayed strategies in establishing connection by being supportive, being indirect in ordering others, and by compromising others' concern.

The existence of six areas of conflict in written conversation recorded on Facebook has given confirmation that gender is a strong language feature that affects the way people use it in their communication both spoken and written. Tannen (1990) notes that by knowing the influence of gender on language, we will be able to narrowing the gap between men and women, so that genuine understanding can be achieved.

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