# AN ANALYSIS OF RESPONSES TO PERSONAL PROBLEMS ADOPTED BY FEMALE AND MALE STUDENTS OF ENGLISH STUDY PROGRAM OF FKIP UNIVERSITAS BENGKULU 

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#### Abstract

The objectives of this study were two folds; first; to find out English expressions usedd by male and female students of the English Study Program in responding to personal problems; second; to identify whether male and female students responses to personal problems were similar or different.The subjects were English Study Program at the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education of Bengkulu University. The total numbers of subjects were ten persons; five male and five female. Data were collected by audio-recording natural conversations informal situations outside classroom. The results show that there were differences and similarities in responding to personal problems between male and female.


## Keywords: Responses, Personal Problem, Gender, English Study Program.


#### Abstract

Abstrak: Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah pertama; untuk mengetahui ekspresi bahasa Inggris yang digunakan oleh siswa dan siswi dari Program Studi Bahasa Inggris dalam menanggapi suatu masalah,kedua; untuk mengidentifikasi apakah tanggapan siswa dan siswi untuk suatu masalah sama atau berbeda. Subyek penelitian adalah mahasiswasiswi Program Studi Bahasa Inggris di Fakultas Keguruan dan Ilmu Pendidikan Universitas Bengkulu yang berjumlah sepuluh orang; lima laki-laki dan lima perempuan. Data dikumpulkan melalui percakapan di luar kelas. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa ada perbedaan dan persamaan dalam menanggapi masalah pribadi antara pria dan wanita.


Kata Kunci: Tanggapan, Masalah Pribadi, Jenis Kelamin, Program Studi Bahasa Inggris.

## INTRODUCTION

Communication is a tool for people to interact one another. One of the application forms of communication is conversation. A conversation is a daily activity that involves two or more people in which they share. Conversation between two or more people follows certain conventions. However, the
convention will vary according to the culture and subculture of the speakers.

Moreover, there have been some claims that sexes also contribute to show people interact in a conversation.Tannen, (1990) states that, in a conversation between close friends or intimate partners, women and men respond differently to personal
problems, based on their perception of what is most helpful or supportive. She claims that women discuss their problems more than men do. Furthermore, Coates (in Tannen, 1990) concludes that men tend to use advice more often than women do, and women" express and expect to receive sympathy more than men do".

According to Tannen (1990), women prefer to respond to someone's problems by giving comfort, describing similar personal situations and offering matching problems. She also contents that women see sympathy as a way of showing support, while men respond negatively to it, preferring advice.

Men and women are completely different creatures. The construction of gender causes some differences between men and women in many aspect of life. It also leads to create differences in communication especially in conversational styles.

The way they speak, express themselves, share their ideas, state the opinion, and the way they talk, speak, express themselves, share their ideas, state the opinions and the way talk to each other is totally different. Those differences in language contribute a unique value to them as human being created in god's image in which they have to share to each other.

Tannen (1950:50) specifies number of different general principles that differentiate males and females speech style to communicate, those differences can be seen physically.

On the other hand, the concept of gender is used to transform males and females human being into social
participants as men and women assigning them roles and cultural values. This process of transformation involves expectation and evaluation of behavior, societal attitudes, roles and their participations in family and community life.

According to Bonvialin (1998: 249) gender can be distinguished from sex. People usually use the word "sex" if they want to emphasize the physical differences between males and females.In the linguistics field, gender differences in conversational styles have been documented for many years.

Males and females are claimed to respond differently when their friends share their personal problems. There are two language functions that are usually used to respond such a situation, sympathy and advice. On the contrary, the society thinks that males have a tendency to give advice than sympathy. Males are described as more concerned with establishing and maintaining social states or power.

When their friends share personal problems, males will consider that those friends need some help to solve the problems. They will speak straight forward and directly discuss the point of the conversation and they will convey their advice automatically to their female friends. They provide more encouraging feedback than males do. They are also more active than males to enlarge and develop the topic of the previous speakers rather than to challenge them.

This study concerns in this context with the topic of male and female similarities and differences in responding to personal
problems, especially students of English Study Program FKIP Universitas Bengkulu. This topic is rare, therefore it will be a great value if information about the topic could be revealed.

Humm (in Sunderland, 1994) defines gender as cultural shaped group of attributes and behaviors given to the male or the female. According to Sunderland (1994) women and men use the resources' of English rather differently in many contexts, for example in the length of their utterances, and the amount and quality of the feedback they provide. It indicates that gender stereotypes may be transmitted by the teacher, or may be reflected in classroom materials.

Maltz and Borker (in Tannen, 1994) said that boys and girls have very different ways of talking to their friends. Although they often play together, boys and girls spend most of their time playing in same sex groups. And although same of the activities they play at are similar, their favorite games are different, and their way of using language in their games are separated by a world of difference.In a conversation, women ask questions, introduce topics and make active listening signals. While men interrupt, delay, or omit backchannel support reject topics offered by women and hold the floor longer (Fishman, 1983).

In their Groups, Sheldon $(1990,1992)$ states that male and female have different norms of communicative competence, boys' being based on competition, girls' on cooperation. These differences have been shown to develop in very early childhood.

Gender is the range of characteristics pertaining to, and differentiating between, masculinity and femininity. Depending on the context, these characteristics may include biological sex (i.e. the state of being male, female or intersex), sex-based social structures (including gender roles and other social roles), or gender identity.

The social sciences have a branch devoted to gender studies. Other sciences, such as sexology and neuroscience, are also interested in the subject. While the social sciences sometimes approach gender as a social construct, and gender studies particularly do, research in the natural sciences investigates whether biological differences in males and females influence the development of gender in humans; both inform debate about how far biological differences influence the formation of gender identity.

In 1926, Henry Watson Fowler stated that the definition of the word pertains to this grammar-related meaning: "Gender...is a grammatical term only. To talk of persons...of the masculine or feminine [gender], meaning of the male or female sex, is either a jocularity (permissible or not according to context) or a blunder."However examples of the use of gender to refer to masculinity and femininity as types are found throughout the history of Modern English.

Gender identity refers to a personal identification with a particular gender and gender role in society. The term woman has historically been used interchangeably with reference to the female body, though more
recently this usage has been viewed as controversial by feminists.

There are qualitative analyses that explore and present the representations of gender; however, feminists challenge these dominant ideologies concerning gender roles and biological sex. One's biological sex is directly tied to specific social roles and the expectations.

Judith Butler considers the concept of being a woman to have more challenges, owing not only to society's viewing women as a social category but also as a felt sense of self, a culturally conditioned or constructed subjective identity. Social identity refers to the common identification with a collectivity or social category that creates a common culture among participants concerned.

According to social identity theory, an important component of the self-concept is derived from memberships in social groups and categories; this is demonstrated by group processes and how inter-group relationships impact significantly on individuals' self perception and behaviors.

The group people belong to therefore provide members with the definition of who they are and how they should behave within their social sphere. Categorizing males and females into social roles creates a problem, because individuals feel they have to be at one end of a linear spectrum and must identify themselves as man or woman, rather than being allowed to choose a section in between.

Globally, communities interpret biological differences between men and women to create a set of social expectations
that define the behaviors that are "appropriate" for men and women and determine women's and men's different access to rights, resources, and power in society and health behaviors.

Although the specific nature and degree of these differences vary from one society to the next, they still tend to typically favor men, creating an imbalance in power and gender inequalities within most societies. Many cultures have different systems of norms and beliefs based on gender, but there is no universal standard to a masculine or feminine role across all cultures.

Social roles of men and women in relation to each other based on the cultural norms of that society, which lead to the creation of gender systems. The gender system is the basis of social patterns in many societies, which include the separation of sexes, and the primacy of masculine norms.

Philosopher Michel Foucault said that as sexual subjects, humans are the object of power, which is not an institution or structure, rather it is a signifier or name attributed to "complex strategically situation". Because of this, "power" is what determines individual attributes, behaviors, etc. and people are a part of an ontologically and epistemologically constructed set of names and labels. Such as, being female characterizes one as a woman, and being a woman signifies one as weak, emotional, and irrational, and is incapable of actions attributed to a "man".

Butler said that gender and sex are more like verbs than nouns. She reasoned that her actions are limited because she is
female. "I am not permitted to construct my gender and sex willy-nilly," she said. "This is so because gender is politically and therefore socially controlled. Rather than 'woman' being something one is, it is something one does." More recent criticisms of Judith Butler's theories critique her writing for reinforcing the very conventional dichotomies of gender.

If men and women are so similar, one might wonder about the factors that lead stereotypes about vast sex differences to persist. Belle suggests that we tend to focus on the differences when we are faced with two of anything (1985). This explains why stereotypes remain or take over when the differences are, in fact very small.

The purpose of the present study, then, was to compare men's and women's selfreports of their relationship behaviors and attitudes to the stereotypes ascribed to them by the opposite sex. Specifically, questionnaires were used to as seas how men and women self report their attitude towards marriage, levels of commitment, and fidelity.

Participants were then asked to complete the same questionnaires as the imagined a member of the opposite sex would respond. These responses represented the perceptions or stereotypes that men and women hold about the opposite sex.

It was hypothesized that stereotypes reflected by participants' responses as the opposite sex would be inconsistent with the actual attitudes represented by the self reports. For example, it was hypothesized the women would perceive men as deeply
ambivalent about marriage, while men (like women) would self-report positive attitudes toward marriage. Consistent with the gender similarities hypothesis, we hypothesize that men and women will not differentiate their self-reported attitudes towards marriage, commitment, or fidelity. If they do differ,

The differences will be very small. However, we believe that people will still hold these stereotypes and those women will perceive men as having more negative attitudes toward marriage, lower commitment, and lower levels of fidelity than men themselves report. In addition, men will perceive women as having more positive attitudes toward marriage, higher commitment, and higher levels of fidelity than women themselves report. To date, the question of stereotype accuracy has gone largely unexplored. Only a handful of studies have looked in depth at the extent to which people's stereotyped perceptions of men and women match reality or, instead, overestimate sex differences (Hall and Carter, 1999).

The few studies that have been done suggest that people may not overestimate sex. Some believe society is constructed in a way that splits gender into a dichotomy via social organizations that constantly invent and reproduce cultural images of gender.

Joan Acker believes gendering occurs in at least five different interacting social processes:

- The construction of divisions along the lines of gender, such as those produced by labor, power, family,
the state, even allowed behaviors and locations in physical space
- The construction of symbols and images such as language, ideology, dress and the media, that explain, express and reinforce, or sometimes oppose, those divisions
- Interactions between men and women, women and women and men and men that involve any form of dominance and submission. Conversational theorists, for example, have studied the way that interruptions, turn taking and the setting of topics recreate gender inequality in the flow of ordinary talk
- The way that the preceding three processes help to produce gendered components of individual identity, i.e., the way they create and maintain an image of a gendered self
- Gender is implicated in the fundamental, ongoing processes of creating and conceptualizing social structures.
Natural languages often make gender distinctions. These may be of various kinds, more or less loosely associated by analogy with various actual or perceived differences between men and women.
- Most languages include terms that are used asymmetrically in reference to men and women. Concern that current language may be biased in favor of men has led
some authors in recent times to argue for the use of a more Gender-neutral vocabulary in English and other languages.
- Several languages attest the use of different vocabulary by men and women, to differing degrees. See, for instance, Gender differences in spoken Japanese. The oldest documented language, Sumerian, records a distinctive sub-language only used by female speakers. Conversely, many Indigenous Australian languages have distinctive registers with limited lexis used by men in the presence of their mothers-in-law (see Avoidance speech).
- Several languages such as Persian are gender-neutral. In Persian the same word is used in reference to men and women. Verbs, adjectives and nouns are not gendered. (See Gender-neutrality in genderless languages)
- Grammatical gender is a property of some languages in which every noun is assigned a gender, often with no direct relation to its meaning. For example, the word for "girl" is muchacha (grammatically feminine) in Spanish, Mädchen (grammatically neuter) in German, and cailín (grammatically masculine) in Irish.
- The term "grammatical gender" is often applied to more complex noun class systems. This is especially true when a noun class
system includes masculine and feminine as well as some other non-gender features like animate, edible, manufactured, and so forth. An example of the latter is found in the Dyirbal language. A system traditionally called "gender" appears in the Ojibwe language, which distinguishes between animate and inanimate, but since this does not exhibit a masculine/feminine distinction it might be better described by "noun class." Likewise, Sumerian distinguishes between personal (human and divine) and impersonal (all other) noun classes, but these classes have traditionally been known as genders.

To sum up above, the researcher can say that women and men use the resources of English rather differently in many contexts, this mean that gender may be transmitted by the teacher or may be reflected in classroom materials. It can be shown for example boy's being on competition and girls' on co-operation.

Problem is a situation that is unsatisfactory and causes difficulties for people (Cobuild Essential English Dictionary, 1989). In conversations, between close friends or intimate partners, women and men respond differently to discussions of personal problems, according to their perception of what is most helpful or supportive (Tannen, 1990)

Furthermore, in conversation, someone responds to personal problems, for example:

1. Richard : God, I'm going to fell so bad for her if she stays home.

Todd : She's not going to stay home, it is ridiculous. Why doesn't She just ask somebody?
2. A : Hey............what is the matter?

B $\quad:$ I failed another test. I never pass my tests What should I do?
A : Well, first you ought to study more
B : But, how should I study?
A : You ought to find a quiet place and you shouldn't talk to any onewhile you are studying
3. $\mathrm{A} \quad:$ How do you feel?

B : Not, bad, but I wish I felt better
A : I wish you had a nicer room
B : The room is ok, but I wish I weren't here at all

In a brief dialogue above, in responding to personal problems commonly begin with: Why don't you..... or You should, you ought to, I wish, I know how you feel, ...

Yeah, I know...and phrases such as I'm sorry, and that's too bad (Kerekes,1992). She also said that responses were subsequently categorized as sympathy,
advice, and a combination of both or neither according to their gender. Gender differences in responding to personal problems in English language. According to Tannen (1990), in a conversation between close friends or intimate partners, women and men differently to discussion of personal problems, according to their perception of what is most helpful or supportive.

She also stated that women prefer to respond to someone's problems by giving comfort, describing similar personal situations and offering matching problems. Women see sympathy as a way of showing support. While men respond negatively to it, preferring advice. In addition, Coates (in

Tannen, 1990) states that women often discuss their problems more than men do. He claims that men use advice and women "express and expect to receive sympathy".

Women tend to focus on the connection element of a conversation, while men focus on status, or saving face. Consequently, their interpretations of a given speech act can be quite contradictory. It means that female and male both want to get their way, but they tend to do so differently. For example; female are openly cooperative but male to be openly competitive in their conversation.

Furthermore, in conversation female and male respond to personal problems are different, as shown in the following extract: Female conversation:

Nancy : God, it was bad. I couldn't believe she made me go home
Sally : I thought it was kind weird though, I mean, one minute we were going out and the next minute Nancy's going, "Excuse me, gotta be going..."(both laugh) I didn't know what was going on, and Judy comes up to me and she whispers (the whole place knows)" Do you know that Nancy's going home? And I go, "What?( Both laugh) " Nancy's going home " I go, "why? She goes " Her moms making her" I go (makes a face ) ". She comes back and goes, "Nancy's left." Well, I said, "well, that was a fine thing to do, She didn't ever come and say goodbye." And she starts boiling all over me. I go (Mimicking yelling). " All right!!!" She was upset Judy. I was like "god "
Male conversation :
Richard : God, I'm going to feel so bad for her if she stays home
Todd : She's not going to stay home, it is ridiculous. Why doesn't she just ask somebody?

In a brief dialogue above, a conversation between boys and girls of the same age shows how differently they respond to each other expressions of problem (Tannen, 1990). In addition, the

Patsy : "Well, I know how you feel
Eleanor : "You do?"
very different ways that women respond to the felling of problems is dramatized in a short story, New haven," by Alice Mattison (Tannen, 1990). For instance:

Patsy : In a way, I do, well, I should tell you. I've been sleeping with a married man from two years.
From a conversation above, Tannen (1990) said that women respond to someone's problems by giving comfort, matching her experiences, reinforcing their similarity (example: confirming, Eleanor's feelings) and offering matching problems.

To sum up above, the use of responses to personal problems by male and female indicates that there were indeed a differences and similarities in a conversation. Women see sympathy as a way of showing support, while men respond advice. Men and women both change their use of responses to personal problems when they make a conversation with their partner. And also both of them used similarities expressions such as "You should...., I'm sorry..."
In this study, the researcher will use the same method, but the researcher just follow Tannen's teory. In some conversation with the partners, there are many topics that appeared. In respond to the problem is varied between one another especially males and females.

Tannen (1990: 121) states that claims have been made in conversations between close friends or intimate partners, women and men respond differently to a discussion of personal problem.It shows that women and men have different responses and women see sympathy as a way of showing support, while men respond negatively to it, preferring advice.

In order to support Tannen's claims about gender differences regarding sympathy and advice, Kerekes (as cited in Sunderland 1994: 43), states that gender differences in responding to problem would have to be shown that at least in certain contexts women do indeed use more sympathy than men, and that men use more advice. It would also have to be shown that in such contexts women perceive sympathy as a more supportive way of responding to someone's trouble than giving advice, while the opposite would be shown for men.

In You Just Don't Understand Tannen (1990:122) writes that females are claimed to discuss their problems more than males do, while males tend to use advice more than females do. Females purportedly express (and expect to receive) sympathy more than males do. That is, females prefer to respond someone's trouble by giving comfort, describing similar personal situations and offering matching troubles.

Tannen also claims that female see sympathy as a way of showing support, while males respond negatively to it, preferring advice.

TABLE 1: SYMPATHY AND ADVICE

| SYMPATHY | ADVICE |
| :--- | :--- | :--- | :--- |
| 1.Sympathy is a form of caring. It <br> implies pity. We express concern <br> and ask what we can do yet are <br> grateful their problems are not ours. <br> This perpetuates the fear that we <br> could and tear the same situation, <br> and keeps us waiting to avoid the <br> truth of their experience. | Advice is a form of relating personal <br> opinions belief system, personal values <br> and recommendations about certain <br> situation relayed in some context to <br> another person, group or party often <br> offered as a guided to action or conduct. |
| 2.Sympathy is an emotional <br> attachment to a subject and is <br> commonly associated with an <br> irrational response. | 2.Advice is what we ask for when we <br> already know the answer but wish we <br> didn't. |
| 3.Sympathy exists when the feelings <br> or emotional. | 3.There are some steps to give an advice <br> to someone has troubles: listen to the <br> person asking for advice, empathize. |
| 4.Sympathy of one person give rise <br> to similar feelings. | 4.Be honest is one solution in responding <br> personal problem. |
| 5.Sympathy is an original instinct in <br> our nature. | 5.Set a good example is also solution in <br> responding problem. |

TABLE 2: GENDER DIFFERENCES IN CONVERSATIONAL STYLE

|  | FEMALE | MALE |
| :---: | :---: | :---: |
| 1. The length of sentences | Women's speech is characterized by more indirect, elaborate and focused in relationship. It means that female talk something else before they point out the subjects. Because female act more indirect, so they usually use long sentence when they speak. | Men's speech is more direct, succinct, personal and task oriented. The simple sentences that they produce are shorten than women. |
| 2. The use of question tags | Women often use tag question for addressed oriented goals as a strategy to attach the listener. | Men often use tag question for speaker oriented goals, to confirm information for themselves. |
| 3. The discussion topics | Women like to talk about personal and domestic subject, relationship, <br> Problems about close friend and family, health, clothing, food, male and other female | Men like to talk about business dealing with job, politic, sport, such as football and basketball. |
| 4. The use of polite words. | Female's characteristic that tend to be more polite make them more careful when they are talking with their partners. Women are believe to use a good grammar and enunciate clearly, to speak politely, rapidly and emotionally. Female talk too much, they avoid talking about something that hurts their partners feeling. | They talk whatever they like although it hurts people's feelings. Empirical research has shown that men are believed to have demanding voices, to be dominating, authoritarian, forceful, boastful, and to use swear words and slangs. |

Female's characteristics that tend to be more polite make them more careful when they are talking to their partners. Women are believed to use good grammar and enunciate clearly, to speak politely, rapidly and emotionally (Edelsky, 1993: 18). Females talk too much, but they are pleasant rival to talk with. They avoid talking about something that hurts their partner feelings. Apology becomes the main important thing when they do something wrong.

## METHOD

Participants and contexts
The subjects were English Study Program at the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education of Bengkulu University. The total number of subjects were ten persons; five male and five female.All of them earned satisfying marks A in the English subject class they attended. This meant that they were assumed to be quite competent in English speaking ability.

In his book, Creswell (1994:1) says that qualitative research can be defined as an inquiry process of understanding a social/human problem based on building a complex. The focus of qualitative research is on the participant's perceptions and experiences, and the way they make sense of their lives.

In addition, Johnstone (2000:36) states that characteristic of qualitative research is that the research questions about how and why such as what language uses like, how it works, and what the functions are. The data were collected by audio-recording from natural conversation in informal
situations outside classrooms. The subject was firstly; provided with the situational cards. The situations described in the cards were written in English. The students were not informed exactly that the focus of the research was. This was done to lessen artificiality and to obtain as natural data as possible. Before collecting the data, the situational cards were trialed-out guarantee consistency of information collected.

Furthermore, before recording the data, the subjects were allowed to choose the third elicitation card. The subjects were given approximately three minutes to comprehend the message in the elicitation cards.

The data were analyzed as follow qualitative methods. Firstly, the recording were transcribed to find out the validity of transcription, then the researcher herself transcribed the recording by following Schrffin(1995).

The data were taken on outside classroom, at the campus. They were collected by audio-recording the conversations. Each participant was asked to choose one of the three. The cards were written in English and they described the task that each participant should do.

Later, they were independently conducted the conversation, the researcher showed up only to inform them about the time to stop, in recording the conversation, researcher used one tape-recorded.

Then, researcher divided participants into two sections, firstly, female conversation were consisting of two groups; two female and three female. Secondly,
male conversation was consisting of two

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS
Main Findings
From the result of the research, the responses to personal problems employed
groups; three male and two male.
by male and female students of the English Study program, as shown in table 1.

Table 1: The Responses to Personal Problems

|  | Frequency (\%) |  |
| :---: | :---: | :---: |
| Students | Female | Male |
| Female | $16(100 \%)$ | $13(81,25 \%)$ |
| Male |  |  |

Table 1 shows that responses to personal problems occurred in two groups, they are; male and male sex, where as female group 16 responses to personal problems occurred, and 13 responses to
personal problems occurred in male group. So, the highest use of responding to personal problems occurred in female group and the lowest occurrence in male group.

Table 2: Type of Expressing Employed by Male and Female

|  | Female (\%) | Male (\%) | Total |
| :--- | :---: | :---: | :---: |
| Functions | $13(65 \%)$ | $7(35 \%)$ | 20 |
| Constructive | $8(40 \%)$ | $12(60 \%)$ | 20 |
| Total | 21 | 19 | 40 |

Table 2 shows the number of responding to personal problems based on male and female expressions. Women increase their use of functions by thirteen expressions and men increase theirs by seven expressions. This finding way due to the fact gender expectations are changing. More specific, men and women are nowadays are expected to be more flexible in their behavior (Kessles and me

Kenna,1978). In short, people are expected to behave in more androgynous manner (Suwarno,1995).
CONCLUSION
The use of responses to personal problems by the participants in this case study indicates that there were indeed a differences and similarity in their conversation of men and women responses to personal problems occured. Women see
sympathy as showing supportwhile men prefer advice. However, both of sexes used similarities expression in responding to personal problems such as female expression; "I'm sorry to hear your problem, male expression; " I really sorry to hear that". From these facts, we could conclude that male and female students of the English study program in their conversations showns as female is the highest use of functions than male. But the highest use of constructive occured in male and the lowest occurance in female.

The following suggestions are proposed in order to give a new insight, firstly, discourse analysis and speaking class teachers should highlight the needs on these rules for developing a good cross-cultural communcation. Secondly, the use of these rules should be practiced in their english conversation, to maintain a good performance of speaking in English.

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