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GENDER AND POWER IN THE USE OF INTERRUPTIONS AMONG THE LUHYA OF KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Language determines the way we view the world around us, how we categorize and stratify ourselves in the society is a result of the kind of mindset that our culture has inculcated in us. Language is the medium of our culture; the stereotypes and prejudices that bedevil our culture are transmitted and repeatedly reinforced through language. Patriarchy characterizes most African and western societies and its focal point is a belief that condones male supremacy and dominance over women therefore perpetuating gender inequalities that exclude women from key decision making processes. It is not clear however; whether men are actually superior to women. The main objective in this study is to establish how notions of power and powerlessness are manifest in the use of interruptions from a call-in show corpus among the Luhya of western Kenya. A mixed method approach is used to collect and analyze both quantitative and qualitative discourse data. The Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is used focusing on communicative features that play a role in the production of dominance by one group over another. It views language as a form of social practice that focuses on the ways social and political domination are reproduced by text and talk. The current study reveals that in as much as there are differences in the speech in the use of interruptions, other factors including age, status, and economic prowess other than gender can determine the way one speaks in general conversation. The findings reveal that men are dominance oriented, more assertive and competitive in their speech while women were found supportive and cooperative but this is dependent on the context. It is recommended that future studies in language and gender must take into account the variety of contexts and other external factors. More studies need to be done in different contexts to examine gender behaviour on the discourse level.

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INTRODUCTION

Language determines the way we view the world around us, how we categorize and stratify ourselves in the society is a result of the kind of mindset that our culture has inculcated in us. Language is the medium of our culture; the stereotypes and prejudices that are embedded in our culture are transmitted and repeatedly reinforced through language. Patriarchy characterizes most African and western societies and its focal point is a belief that condones male supremacy and dominance over women therefore perpetuating gender inequalities that exclude women from key decision making processes. Eckert (2006) asserts that significant asymmetries in the promotion of human rights, access to resources, decision making, health status and schooling persists worldwide especially in the developing countries. Eckert (2006) identifies the influence of language as the most powerful means of structuring public consciousness. She claims that the socio-economic consequences of andocentric language (linguistic sexism) are

adverse and relegate and subvert women to a lower tier with men. In the 20th century, verbal harassment and abuse on the ground of sex have been increasingly recognized as a form of linguistic discrimination.

The Kenyan scenario is not different from the above. According to the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics census records (KNBS 2009), with a total population of 38.6 million people, of which slightly above 50% are women, the Kenya Policy on Gender and Development has failed in its mandate to provide a framework for the state to address gender imbalances and inequalities. Legal literacy among women is low and often results in many women being unaware of their rights, and are expected to abide by customary laws, which often discriminate against them (AFDB, 2007). The introduction of Free Primary Education (FPE) in 2003 has created a near gender parity at the lower level in most parts of the country though these gains are lost at the secondary and tertiary levels. In response to international protocols (UN 2010, UNESCO 2010) many countries are enacting laws banning any form of discrimination. However, it has been difficult to distinguish discrimination on the grounds of sex from discrimination on other grounds, such as social class, race, disability or language

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(Smith, 2006). Differences in conversational styles between men and women can actually turn out to disadvantage women (Spender, 1980). Globally, language perpetuates male dominance by ignoring, trivializing and sexualizing women (Lakoff, 2004). Language stereotypes abound: women are polite, talkative and gossip while men are dominant, assertive and vulgar (Cameron, 1998).

In Africa, the patriarchal nature of cultures and by extension languages have marginalized women and denied them access to economic empowerment, leadership and governance (Salifu, 2010). It is not clear whether men are actually superior and should therefore domineer over women in the way they use their language. There is a lacuna of empirical evidence warranting further research to pin-point whether it is language that causes dominance and subservience or other social factors. The aim of this study was to investigate how participants use interruptions in mitigating their face needs. In order to achieve this main objective, it was necessary for the study to use the following specific objectives:

- i. To assess how notions of power and powerlessness are manifested and conceived through the use of interruptions.
- ii. To ascertain if any relationship exists between the socio-cultural background of an individual and the gendered use of linguistic forms.

This study is guided by the following research questions:

- i. How are notions of power and powerlessness created and conceived in the use of interruptions?
- ii. Is gender differences manifested based on socio-cultural backgrounds of the people involved in a conversation?

Luhya refers to both the people and their language. There are 16 (and by other accounts, 19, when the Suba are included) dialects that make up the Luhya each with a distinct dialect. Mulembe FM radio broadcasts reach across East Africa. Most of the programmes broadcast on this station are in the central dialects of LuWanga, LuMarama and LuTsotso.

Research Methodology

This study employed both qualitative and quantitative research methods on the case study of Mulembe FM radio station call-in programme using content analysis research design to analyze discourse data. The basic type of discourse analysis used was the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA focuses on the communicative features that play a role in the production of dominance by one group over another (Fairclough, 2001). It views language as a form of social practice that focuses on the ways social and political domination are reproduced by text and talk. The presumption here is that language and power are entirely linked. CDA does not limit its analysis to specific texts or talk but systematically relates these to structures of the socio-political context (Fairclough, 2001). The study uses a corpus of data recorded from Mulembe FM call-in live programme. The study collected information on a wide range of themes, each theme being investigated only on the particular aspect of consideration. The aim was to investigate how

politeness strategies in language are used in creation of a gender identity. The data is drawn from recorded and transcribed radio call-in programmes in Luhya language broadcast on the Mulembe FM radio over the period between June and August 2011. The target population for the study consisted of all broadcasts in vernacular languages in Kenya and specifically call-in programmes aired on Mulembe FM in Luhya language for the period between June and August 2011.

There are several call-in programmes broadcast on Mulembe FM dealing with different economic, political and social issues on a daily basis. Mulembe FM radio station has an average of 15 hours per week of call-in programmes which run between 30 minutes to one hour averaging about 60 hours in a month. The data for this study came from 15 purposively sampled episodes of the call-in programmes in Luhya language on Mulembe FM that run between June and August 2011. In total, 15 hours of audio-taped material was collected of which 12 hours was talk time whereas 3 hours was for commercials and music interludes. The talk time formed the corpus for this study.

Table 1. Sample of Episodes and Participants on Mulembe FM Call-in Shows

TOPIC	FRQ	CALLERS			
		HOST		CALLERS	
		M	F	M	F
Politics	3	1	1	8	2
Economy	2	2	0	7	3
Health	2	1	1	2	6
Marriage	2	1	1	4	5
Sports	2	2	0	6	2
Education	2	1	1	4	5
Culture	2	1	1	3	3
TOTAL	15	9	5	33	26

M-male, F- female

(Source, field survey)

The data collected by use of primary means formed the backbone of this study and therefore the study relied more on the information collected through this source. Primary data was generated through Audio-recording of broadcast call-in programmes. Secondary data was generated from documented sources in form of previous research works done elsewhere and this provided the ethnographic information on Luhya cultural background and communication styles. The research relied the Royal Media Services (owners of Mulembe FM) library and related information from journals, magazines, newspapers and the internet. Focus was also placed on any information on the genre of broadcast interviews, media outlets and output.

The format of the analyzed phone-in programmes is such that the host invites callers (members of the public at large) to become involved in discussions with invited guests on the current social, economic, political and cultural issues which feed the public discourse in the country. The structure of the call-in-programmes comprises of an introductory section in which the host introduces the guest thus setting the range for the subsequent callers input in the form of a question, comment or remark. The ensuing callers' contribution forms the main part of the programmes and the object of the present analysis. Data was analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. The two paradigms quantitative and qualitative were drawn in a

complementary fashion noting that the choice of a paradigm depends fundamentally on the purpose of the research envisaged and on the nature and focus of the research questions (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). In quantitative research is said to be controlled, objective, generalizable, outcome oriented and assumes the existence of facts which are somehow external to and independent of the researcher (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Qualitative analysis involved translation of the corpus from Luhya into English and categorizing it into themes based on the objectives of the study. The generated data has to undergo transcription, collating, editing, coding and finally be used to write the final report.

Quantitative research produces numerical data, data which is amenable to statistical analysis (Jwan and Ong'ondo, 2011). Qualitative research seeks to generate an understanding of the various possible meanings of a subject (focus of the study) in its natural setting, without undue manipulation of conditions of existence. The qualitative paradigm is a flexible approach that seeks to generate and analyze holistic data on an issue of interest using sufficiently rigorous, trustworthy and ethical methods and techniques. The data generated through tape recording was grouped according to the research objectives. Thereafter, frequency distribution was used to calculate the percentages.

1. Theoretical Framework

A number of scholars including Lakoff, Cameron and Tannen had already begun to explore the complex ways in which language and sex are linked (Lakoff, 1973). Lakoff's (2004) article "Language and Woman's Place", made an important distinction between language about the sex, and language by the sexes, i.e. differences in the way women and men use language. The investigation and identification of differences between men's and women's conversational styles date back across time. Grey (1998), states that it was in 1970s that comparison between female cooperativeness and male competitiveness in linguistic behaviour was noticed. From the researches, Lakoff (2004), proposed theories on the existence of women's language.

The dominance approach (Lakoff 1975, Coates 1989 and Tannen 1990) interprets linguistic differences in women's and men's communicative competence as a reflection of men's power and women's subordination at both personal and institutional levels. The difference approach emphasizes the idea that women and men belong to different culture groups. The linguistic differences are seen as reflecting two distinctive communicative subcultures. The use of interruptions is generally explained by the relative power of the participants which derives from their social status. The higher incidence of interruptions, thus, is seen in the relatively high social and economic status of men. Women, on the other hand, are powerless regarding their social position. This is reflected in fewer interruptions in cross-sex conversations. Similarly, as Lakoff (2004), Trudgill (1983) and others have pointed out, low social status is often characterized by passivity and low vitality. This in turn results in the wish to be accepted by the dominating group. Nevertheless, personality differences have to be considered as well. Individual subjects react differently in

certain situations. In addition, maleness and femaleness are not discrete categories.

Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2005) introduce the term gender order in which they assert that gender is embedded in all institutions, actions, beliefs and desires that go along with the mapping of language use through communication, interaction and establishment of the social order. Language entails the construction and existence of patterns of relations that develop over time through which are defined male and female, masculinity and femininity, while simultaneously structuring and regulating people's relation in society (Shitemi, 2009). A study of language and gender therefore treats language as an instrument of articulating and reflecting the various gender orders and resultant categories, it also looks at language as what constructs and maintains these categories.

Shitemi (2009) argues that gender discourse has tended to focus on the dichotomy between male domination on the one hand and gender separation and difference on the other as dialogue continued to revolve around overt and covert aspects of gender practice and labeling. She maintains that focus on the difference of separate gender cultures and emergent distinct gendered identities dislodge the dominance and structure of the male privilege downplaying the importance of difference in gender related experience and belief. She insists that gender is fluid, changing and variously maintained in practice.

Tannen (1994) provides much research on the concept of misunderstanding in the dual-culture approach. According to her, the language of women is 'rapport-talk', where establishing connections and promoting sameness is emphasized. Men, on the other hand, use language described as 'report-talk,' as way independence while exhibiting knowledge and skill (Tannen, 1990: p 85). The contrasting views of relationships are apparent: negotiating with a desire for solidarity in women, maintaining status and hierarchical order in men. The frustration that occurs between women and men in conversation can be better understood 'by reference to systematic differences in how women and men tend to signal meaning in conversation (Tannen, 1994: p7). When these meaning signals are misunderstood, communication breakdown occurs.

Interruptions

Interruptions are generally considered to be "violations of the rules of conversation". According to Sacks', Schegloff's and Jefferson's (eds) (1974), model of the structure of conversation, turns of speech are assigned such that the current speaker has the largest options. It is important that the gap between turns be kept short. This may lead to overlaps at the end of the first speaker's turn and the beginning of the next speaker's turn. By observing the no gap-rule overlaps in conversations are generally considered as facilitating.

Lakoff (2004) distinguishes the relationship between interruptions, overlaps and minimal responses as a gradual one on a scalar dimension.

1. Outright interruptions

2. Overlaps in which the second speaker takes the floor by default (i.e. based on an ensuing silence of the first speaker)
3. Overlaps that allow for a soft transition between the first and second speaker
4. Overlaps at the end of the first speaker's turns that are supportive and may encourage the speaker to continue
5. Minimal responses during a turn

(Based on Zimmerman and West 1975, p115-116)

Lakoff's hypotheses, however, have both pros and cons. Men's language as put by Lakoff is assertive, adult and direct, while women's language is immature, hyper formal or hyper polite and non-assertive. But such conclusions are questionable, Michaelson and Poll (2001), emphasized on the dynamic nature of speech of men and women by stating that the 'rule of politeness' governing face-to-face conversations seems to be less binding when there is no physical presence.

Powerful and Powerless Language

Early linguists argued that there was a more or less simple correlation between males and power and females and powerlessness (Lakoff, 1975; Spender, 1980). However, If we consider the notion of the dispersion of power, that is, the spread of power throughout a society, rather than the holding and withholding of power by individuals, we will be able to move towards an analysis which will see language as an arena whereby power may be appropriated, rather than societal roles being clearly mapped out for participants before an interaction takes place. In engaging in an interaction, we are also at the same time setting ourselves for a position in relation to the power relations within the group and within the society as a whole. It is possible for someone who has been allocated a fairly powerless position institutionally to accrue to themselves, however temporarily, a great deal of interactional power by their verbal action, their confidence, their linguistic directness, as well as through the use of the seemingly more feminine linguistic display of care, concern and sympathy, described as cooperative strategies or rapport talk. (Coates 1998; Tannen 1991). Language reflects and contributes to the survival of the stereotype. To cite just a few examples, there are lexical differences in the way we talk about men with power, versus women with power.

Gender is just one of many socio-cultural factors influencing linguistic behaviour, and should not be analysed in isolation from other non-linguistic variables. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1998) further proposed to think about language, gender and their interaction as "living social practices in local communities", and to abandon "assumptions that gender can be isolated from other aspects of social identity and relations, that it means the same across communities, and that the linguistic manifestations of that meaning are also the same across communities" (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1992). Any single linguistic feature (such as interruption) may carry different social meanings across culture or even within the same culture. If we "essentialize" Mendoza-Denton (1995) or "universalize" Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992) all women into one group and all men into another while ignoring their other social

identity (such as ethnicity), it is highly possible that we may mechanically link one linguistic feature to a certain group such as, interruption and dominance to male.

Joel Sherzer (1987) has suggested one useful overarching generalization: that in any community the normal linguistic behaviour of women and men will be represented in ways congruent with the community's more general representation of the essential natures of the two groups. If women are said to be "naturally" modest, for example, their speech will be represented as expressing that modesty - community members may explain that "women don't like to speak in public," for instance. In observed reality, there may be little evidence for this generalization, or the evidence may be contradictory. Or it may be that women do indeed behave "modestly," precisely because the representation of women as modest has the force of a norm, which is enforced in various ways (e.g. denying women the opportunity to practice speaking in public, or sanctioning individual women who are insufficiently reticent). Sherzer (1987) also points out, while the assumption that women's language proceeds from women's nature is culturally very widespread, there is considerable cross-cultural variation in precisely what "women's nature," and therefore women's language, is taken to consist of. Jespersen thought women more "refined" than men, and claimed that this was reflected in women's instinctive avoidance of crude, vulgar, and abusive language.

Kitetu and Sunderland (2008) in a study done in Kenyan schools on "Gendered Discourses in the Classrooms: The importance of Cultural Diversity" assert that there is open and acknowledged sex discrimination but this is seen as something positive, part of what forms the core of society, and that most Kenyans are not willing or ready to let go of. They further contend that most Kenyans view gender differentiation as a normal, unproblematic, natural and therefore all right. They further say that gender stereotyping has been seen as having the potential to disadvantage women and girls as learners. They state that gender difference may indeed be a warning flag for inequity, automatic suspicion for such difference may run counter to the deeply held beliefs of cultures in which discourse of equal opportunities is an unfamiliar one. They add that in some sociolinguistic contexts, gender differences are celebrated and enjoyed by both men and women.

2. Findings and Discussion

The main aim of this objective is to discuss gender differences in the use of conversational interruptions strategies are used by the speakers to create their gender identities. In the first section the differences are discussed and analyzed quantitatively based on the data collected from the call-in- shows. In the second part, the results both from the corpus are discussed qualitatively.

Amount of Speech

The overall amount of time spent on the corpus was measured in terms of minutes and there were 720 minutes of talk time on the whole corpus. It is necessary to measure the amount of talk time since normal conversation will include interruptions,

silence, floor-holding and minimal responses. There were 12 hours of talk time collected for this study. The overall distribution of amount of speech between the genders is presented in figure1. The Units are in minutes.

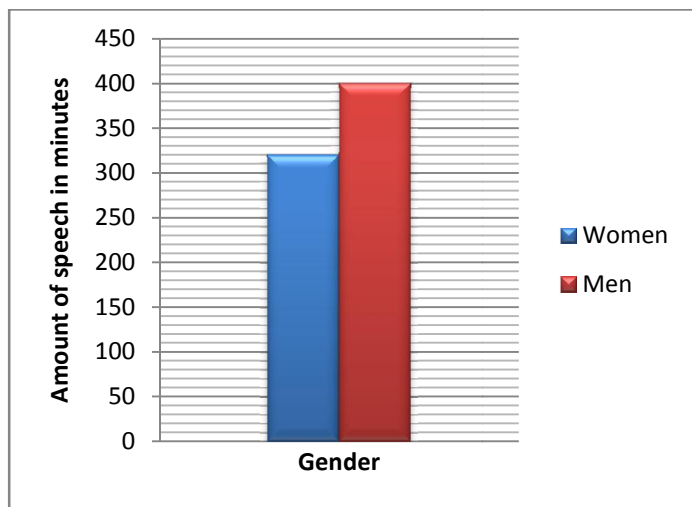


Figure 1. Distribution of Amount of Speech by Gender (N=720)

The figure above shows that the overall talk time spent on Mulembe FM call-in programmes is not evenly distributed between the genders. Men talked more on the corpus (55.8%) compared to women (44.2%). This could mean that Luhya men from the data above out talked women.

This could be in agreement with Biard (1976) who noted that there is a distinction between men’s and women’s communication in that males are encouraged to be independent, aggressive, problem oriented and risk taking. They are more active and aggressive verbally while females are taught to be non-competitive and passive. This distribution however could be dependent on other factors like who was hosting the programme, who were the guests and what their topic of discussion was, who interrupted more. Factors of topics can determine the amount of talk either gender can contribute to and this is also dependent on the interest of the callers and their inclinations.

Interruptions

The analysis of data here tries to provide a source of information to understand if men interrupt women more. In this study, I will first look at the overall distribution of interruption by gender.

The results in the pie-chart given above clearly show that interruptions are not symmetrically distributed between the genders. Figure 2 demonstrates a dramatic asymmetric pattern: there are 143 interruptions by male speakers and only 70 interruptions by female speakers. However, it is also important to examine interruptions in terms of the gender of the interrupter, for it is possible that males speaking with females orient themselves to the role of listener differently than they do with one another.

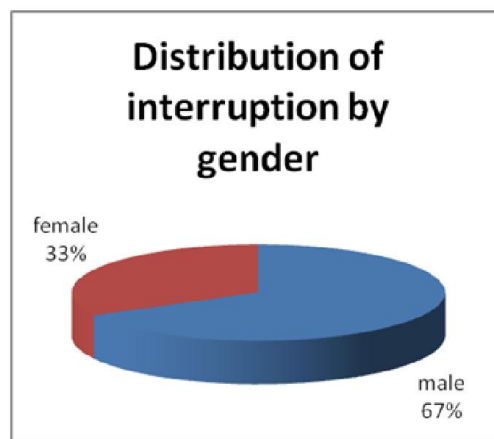


Fig. 2. Distribution of Interruption by Gender

Table 2 shows the distribution of interruptions by the gender interrupter.

Table 2. Distribution of Interruptions by Gender of the Interrupter

Gender	Frequency
Mm	100(46.94%)
Mf	43(20.18%)
Fm	46(21.59%)
Ff	24(11.26%)

M/F: Interrupter, m/f: Interrupted (Source: Field notes)

The result is also significant between gender groups. Nonetheless, contrary to the assumption in language and gender literature that men interrupt women more than women interrupt men and that by their nature, women are polite in their conversation and take into account the face needs of those they are talking to, table 2 shows that males actually get interrupted significantly more often, or in other words, interruptions are more likely to happen when the one who is interrupted is a man. Combining the results of figure 3 and Table 2, we may conclude that a large percentage of interruptions are directed by males against other males.

The results show that each gender groups of interrupters treated the other group differently from their own group. It is confirmed that males interrupted other males most frequently, accounting for nearly half of all the interruptions in the data (46.94%). The interruption between males and females compared to females and males was almost equal with males interrupting females less (20.18%) than females interrupting males (21.26%). In contrast with males’ interruption behaviour, females appeared to interrupt less frequently when the interrupted was of the same sex (11.26%).

The above findings are in line with the dominance approach proponents who claim that participants in a conversation use a number of strategies to achieve conversational goals and the use of interruptions is seen as the relative power of participants which is derived from their social status (Trudgil, 1978 and Lakoff, 1975). However, it is important to note that maleness and femaleness are not discreet categories but are socially

constructed and can be affected by other social factors like context, age, occupation and status.

Types of Interruptions

Interruptions do not always go together with dominance. In many cases, interruption is not meant to be a violation of another speaker’s rights to complete a turn on the floor or disregard for what other speakers have to say. Instead, it can indicate active listenership and involvement in the conversation. There are two types of interruptions with totally different functions: the dominance-related and the supportive/cooperative in nature.

Dominant and Supportive Interruption

Figure 3 shows the distribution of the two types of interruptions by the gender of the interrupter.

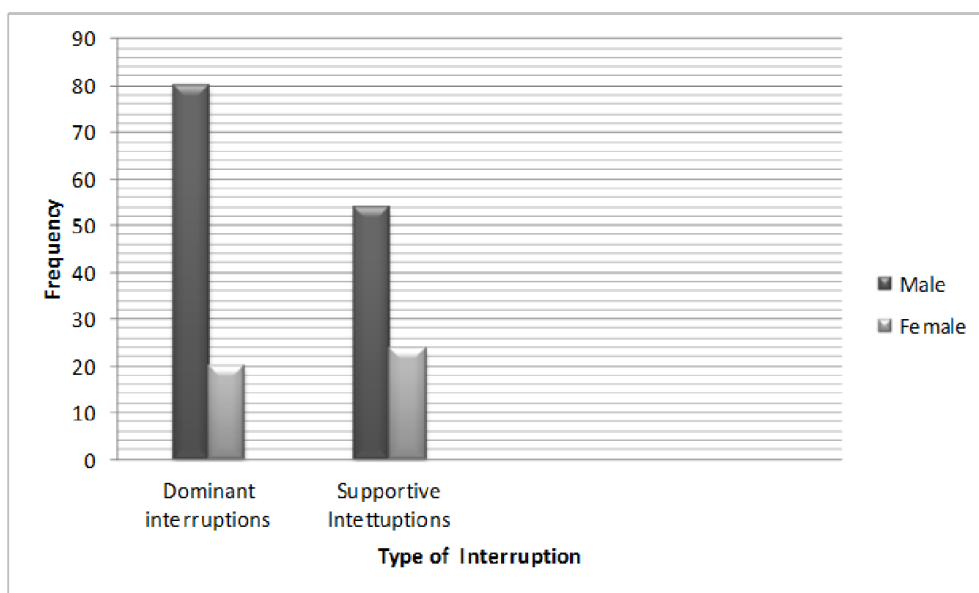


Figure 3. Distribution of Interruptions Types by Gender of Interrupter

The results indicate that men make dominant interruption significantly more often than women do (80 versus 20). Men also make more supportive interruptions than women (54 versus 24) but there is a difference between genders with regard to this type of interruption. This may suggest that males tend to be more dominance-oriented, which is consistent with the results above on amount of talk and turns and floors. Figure 3 also shows a difference in the distribution pattern of interruption behaviour within the gender. While males make significantly more dominant interruptions than supportive interruptions (81 versus 54.), females make roughly an equal proportion of the two kinds of interruptions (20 versus. 24.), which provides one more evidence that males are relatively dominance oriented.

The distribution patterns of the two types of interruption are also observed in terms of the gender of the interrupter, as indicated in Table 4 below;

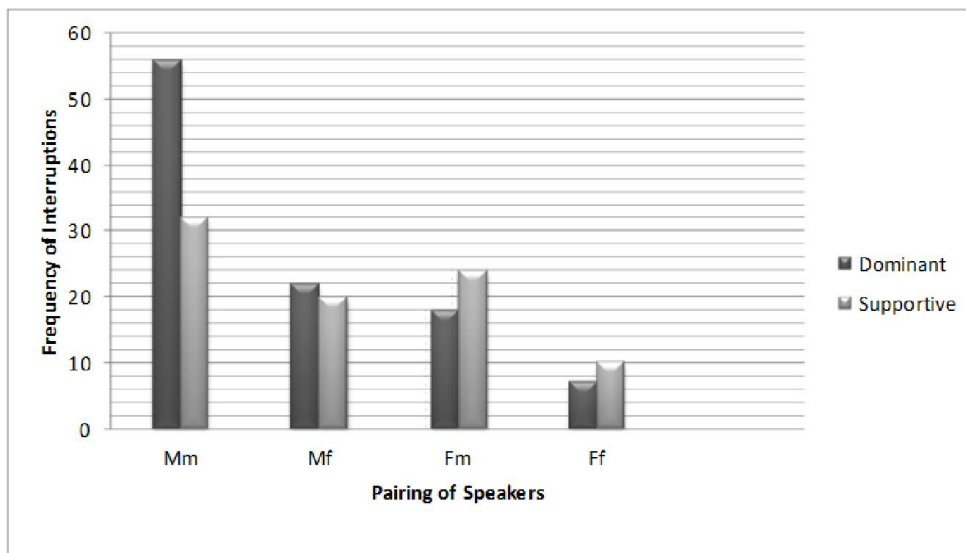
Table 4. Distribution Types by Gender of Interrupter

	Male	Female	%
Dominance interruption	72	28	100
Supportive interruption	51	49	100
Total	123	77	200

The results indicate that the men were not only more likely than women to interrupt; they were also more likely than women to be interrupted by a dominant interruption (72 versus 28). In addition, when men were interrupted, the interruption behaviour was more likely to be dominance – associated than supportive /cooperative in nature (72 versus 51), whereas in the females’ interaction, the dominance related interruption accounted for 28 and supportive for 49. It may be concluded that men would have to be more competitive when dealing with others in conversational interaction.

The above findings are in line with the difference approach that claims that there is a difference in the communicative behaviour of men and women by assuming existence of two sub cultures in the speech community. However, in a situation of cross conversation, women have an interest in maintaining the ‘face’ in an interaction thus taking into account the needs of the other participants (Brown and Levinson, 1987). Women would rather remain silent as a sign of politeness than try to wrestle the floor from the interrupter. The same could be interpreted to mean that women will always judge if an utterance is appropriate or not in relation to the perceived norms and situation (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 1999). Figure 5 presents a further breakdown of the gendered distribution of each type of interruption:

The largest number of interruptions is found in male to male (Mm) interactions, and among these interruptions, 56 of them are dominance-related while 32 of them are supportive interruptions.



M, F = Interrupter, m f= interrupted

Figure 5. Gendered Distribution by type of Interruption

Table 5. Distribution of Interruptions by Gender and Topic

Distribution of Interruption by Gender and Topic									
Topic	Episodes	Dominant Interruption				Supportive Interruption			
		Mm	Mf	Fm	Ff	Mm	Mf	Fm	Ff
T1 Politics	3	8	4	2	0	3	1	2	1
T2 Economy	2	10	2	2	0	2	2	3	1
T3 Health	2	7	4	3	0	5	2	4	4
T4 Education	2	2	2	0	2	1	3	0	2
T5 Marriage	2	5	1	1	0	0	0	2	3
T6 Sports	2	6	2	0	0	2	0	0	1
T7 Culture	2	2	1	1	0	0	1	1	2
Total	15	40	16	9	2	12	9	12	13

In contrast, there is little difference in the type of interruptions among other groups of interactions Male to female (Mf) (22 dominant 20 supportive), Fm (16 dominant 24 supportive), Ff (7 dominant and 10 supportive). Moreover males did not interrupt female speakers as frequently as they interrupted other male speakers. Not many interruptions are found in the Ff situations, which may suggest that women are in general more cooperative and less competitive than men when they interact with other speakers of the same sex.

One reason for this phenomenon is that men are competitive; both male speakers want to take the dominant role in the conversation. In this way, both of them hold the same authority in the conversation. As no one would allow the other to be dominant in a conversation, a balance or similar ratio of interruption would be resulted. Further on interruption was analyzed in terms of topic and type of interruption.

Distribution of Interruptions by Gender and Topic

The results from interruption behaviours are also in terms of conversational topics in which the two types of interruption occur, as shown below in Table 12.

The results have not revealed a conspicuous pattern of distribution across different situations. Due to the small number of observations involved in interruptions female (Fm or Ff); it is hard to give a full account of gender difference in interruption use in relation to conversational topics.

In general the Mm dyad has the highest number of interruptions (total 40) in all episodes while again the Ff dyad yields the highest supportive interruptions (total 13). If we further examine the distribution of interruptions on a per episode basis, we find that T2 economy yields the highest number of Mm dominant interruptions (10), while T3 health yields the highest supportive interruptions. For women, the purpose of interruption does not mean competing for speaking right. They just want to help or cooperate with each other by interruption. Therefore, they would give equal right of speaking to each other. When compared to men, women would be less likely to interrupt, even in the same-sex interaction. Women try to support each other or collaborate with each other by inserting facilitative interruption. They would support each other’s turn by interrupting with some supportive sentences, but not trying to dominate the speaker’s floor.

Women respect each other's turn and they try to wait until the end of one's sentence. So, women talk has a relatively lower frequency of interruption than that of men. Women respect each other's turn and try not to interrupt frequently.

Example	Luhya	Gloss
1	Omalire elio obolilenje?	Have you finished what you were saying?
2	Ako ni amangu, embara..	That's easy, I think...
3	Shoolakha emale?	Can't you let me finish?
4	Koo, ekhubolila mbu...	Hey. I am telling you...
5	Linda...	Wait.
6	Tawe, shikanyalikha	No, it is not possible
7	Ni ka toto, embara mbu	It's true, I think

Women may interrupt when they want to express their view through a question like in example 1; while men would simply stop current speaker by giving a solution, like in example 2. In this way, men are more likely to interrupt than women. All these reasons help to explain why male interrupt their fellow men and women more.

First, men are more likely to take the dominant role in a conversation. Men like to compete for the speaking right in order to control the topic of conversations. For example, men will adopt a louder voice to compete against the current speaker. Sometimes, a woman's speech is competed against and they get exasperated and show their frustration through a question as exemplified in example 3. This shows that women are less able to compete their turns of speaking and they would talk less. In this way, women are pushed to a listening role when men take over the floor.

Also, men like persuading women to believe in what they say, or when they fail, they simply give commands by interruption, example 6 attests to this. Men are more likely to ignore what had been said before and to stress their opinions. Moreover, men interrupt for criticizing others other than giving support. For instance, men will always explicitly display their discontent as shown in example 5 and 6 above. While women express their disagreement in a different way, they will wait until the end of one's utterance and use a supportive strategy like in example 7.

Powerful and Powerless Language

The way each gender uses interruption can create notions of powerful and powerlessness, the assertive and supportive functions of language have been known to map out the power paradigm in conversations. Interruptions can also be broadly defined as either being assertive or supportive in nature.

Assertive and Supportive Functions by Gender

One way to observe gender differences in conversational assertiveness and supportiveness is to compare the gender specific distribution of time spent in interruptions with assertive and supportive functions. For example, if the intent of an interruption is to give information, make a statement or show a positive or negative opinion, it is deemed to be an interruption with assertive functions; if the intent of an interruption is simply to indicate listenership or encourage

others to go on talking, it is an interruption with supportive functions. The gendered distribution of time spent in interruptions with assertive and supportive functions is presented in table 6 below;

Table 6. Distribution of Interruption Functions by Gender

	Male	Female
Assertive Functions	347 (70.1%)	148.3 (29.9%)
Supportive functions	27.7 (20.4%)	107.8 (79.6%)
Total	374.7	264.1

Table 6 shows that men made significantly more interruptions with assertive functions than women did (347.7 minutes versus 148.3 minutes) whereas females made significantly more interruptions with supportive functions than males did (107.8 minutes versus 27.7 minutes). On the other hand, when we examine the distribution of utterance functions within genders, we can see that males produced significantly longer interruptions with assertive functions than interruptions with supportive functions (347.7 minutes against 27.7 minutes) whereas females also show a tendency of making longer interruptions with assertive functions, but the difference between these and supportive interruptions is so big (148.3 minutes versus 107.8 minutes). This is not surprising if we consider the results in the previous sections: males held the floor for longer periods of time and took longer turns than females; males made more dominance-related interruptions than supportive interruptions. Since interruptions with assertive functions are associated with dominance, power and control, it is reasonable to expect men to produce longer interruptions with assertive functions.

Assertive and Supportive Functions by Gender and Topic

Table 7 demonstrates the distribution of interruptions with assertive and supportive functions by gender and topic. The results are consistent with findings made above. Males are found to produce many more interruptions with assertive functions in the discussion of five of the topics. These are the same four topics in which they have already been found to talk more than females namely: T1 politics, T2 economy, T5 marriage and T6 sports. At the same time, males took longer turns and held the floor for longer periods of time. In the remaining three topics – T3 Health, T4 Education and T7 culture women held the floor longer.

However, the gender differences are significant in T3 and T4 a female-oriented topics, and in T7, which is a relatively neutral topic. Females are found to produce significantly more interruptions with supportive functions than males do in most the topics. Only in one topic, namely T6 sports, are the gender differences in these respect are not significant. It is notable that with T1 politics, T2 economics, T5 marriage, even though the analysis given earlier shows that men talked significantly more than women in these situations, women are found here to produce more interruptions with supportive functions. One interpretation would be that women participate very little in the discussion of these three topics, and when they talk; their remarks tend to be supportive rather than assertive in nature. In contrast, men talk a lot in these situations, but only a very small amount of their speech has the supportive element.

Table 7. Distribution of Utterance functions by Gender and Topic

ASSERTIVE FUNCTIONS			SUPPORTIVE FUNCTIONS		
Topic	MALE	FEMALE	Topic	MALE	FEMALE
T1 Politics	70.8 (97.0%)	2.2 (3.0%)	T1 Politics	3.5 (27.8%)	9.1 (72.2%)
T2 Economy	47.2 (92.0%)	4.1 (8.0%)	T2 Economy	3.3 (27.5%)	8.7 (72.5%)
T3 Health	22.7 (28.4%)	82.3 (71.6%)	T3 Health	5.4 (17.2%)	26.0 (82.8%)
T4 Education	17.6 (35.3%)	32.3 (64.7%)	T4 Education	2.8 (10.3%)	24.4 (89.7%)
T5 Marriage	29.0 (72.7%)	10.9 (27.3%)	T5 Marriage	5.1 (35.2%)	9.4 (64.8%)
T6 Sports	43.6 (76.5%)	13.4 (23.5%)	T6 Sports	3.0 (21.7%)	10.8 (78.3)
T7 Culture	23.8 (44.7%)	29.5 (55.3%)	T7 Culture	2.3 (27.4%)	6.1 (72.6%)

Again, this may suggest that men show more dominance and assertiveness in their speech style when they are involved in more male-oriented topics

In the table given above, it is evident that men made most assertive function interruptions in the topics of politics, economy, marriage and sports. Women made the least assertive function interruptions in politics (3%) and economy (8%) and they were assertive in health (71.6%), education (64.7%) and culture (55.3%).

The most supportive function interruptions were made by women in the topics of education (89.7%), followed by health (82.8%). In general, men were more assertive in topics that involved competitiveness (politics, sports, economy etc.) whereas women were adept in issues of child rearing like health, education and culture.

Assertive/Supportive Functions by Ratio of Men to Women

Conversational assertiveness and supportiveness can be further examined in terms of the ratio of men to women who participate in mixed-sex interactions. The results are presented in Table 8 below;

Table 8. Distribution of Utterance Functions by Ratio of Men to Women

Ratio	Assertive Function		Supportive Function	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
3 to 1	15.8 (97.1%)	0.49(2.9%)	0.2 (40%)	0.3(60%)
2 to 1	107.3(84.4%)	19.2(15.6%)	4.4(53.7%)	3.8 (46.3%)
1 to 1	197.4 (68.3%)	91.6(31.7)	17.5(18.4%)	77.5 (81.6%)
1 to 2	27.2 (41.8%)	37.8(58.2%)	5.6(17.4%)	26.5 (82.6%)

In Table 15 it is shown that, overall men made more interruptions with assertive functions than women, while women made more interruptions with supportive functions. It seems that the higher the ratio of men to women in an interaction, the higher the difference it makes in assertiveness behaviour between the two gender groups. As to supportiveness behaviour, it cannot be observed as clearly what effect the ratio of men to women has on interruptions with supportive functions that men did in the 1:1 situation. Women also produced significantly more supportive utterance than men

did in the 1 male 2 female's situation. It is possible that when more partners of same sex are present, they tend to be more relaxed and more close to their speech style in all-female interaction. However, so far no work has been done in the Luhya context on women's speech style in an all female situation. A challenging task for further research is to find out if an all female interaction in the Luhya context shows significant features of conversational supportiveness.

The findings in the above section are in agreement with, proponents of CoP; Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2005) assertion that gender is embedded in all institutions, actions, beliefs and desires that go along with the mapping of language use through communication and interaction. That language entails the construction and existence of patterns of relations. Women's being supportive does not mean that they are immature, hyper formal and hyper polite but it may possibly mean that they are interested in creation of rapport. It is also supported by Tannen (1994) who claims that the language of women is primarily rapport talk. Women talk to establish the connections and promote sameness while men talk is report talk which basically promotes the preservation of independence while exhibiting knowledge and skill. Again, it should be noted that females are interested in the image which the speaker or hearer would like to maintain. Women are geared towards mitigating against any face-threatening act thus their actions are concerned with demonstrating a desire to be liked, respected and appreciated (Odebunni, 2003, Brown and Levinson, 1987).

3. Conclusion

On the whole, males consistently demonstrate conversational assertiveness in the discussions of politics, economy, sports and culture. They are found to talk more on these topics, take longer turns and make more dominant interruptions, and produce more interruptions with assertive functions. This suggests that these topics are relatively male-oriented in Luhya society. Women show more features of conversational supportiveness in most of the situations. The topic of health and education is the only situation that initiates more assertiveness from the female speakers.

However, the current study only examines verbal interactions in radio call-in-shows. The context in which the interaction takes place is formally structured, although the interactions themselves are not formally task-oriented. It may be that this type of context affects expectations and beliefs about men's and women's verbal behaviour and may have produced more stereotypical gender behaviour. For instance, as mentioned before, men may be expected to be more intellectually competent than women in a situation such as call-in shows, and they may tend to act as authorities and give more statements, information and opinions than women.

The results above indicate that men tend to be more competitive when there are more male participants present in cross-sex interactions. Women are pushed to an essentially listening role when men seem to be competing for the talking time or the floor. Women are consistently less competitive and more supportive than men, regardless of the male to female ratio.

In addition to the perceived nature of the situation in which verbal interactions take place, there are other social factors that affect the language behaviour of men and women. Their performance might vary according to the underlying pattern of social relationships, the content of the interaction, the structure of self-other expectations, and /or other constraints on the contexts. This study mainly focuses on the factors that could have important effect on gender-differentiated performance—the topic of conversation, and the ratio of men to female who participate in the interactions.

4. Theoretical Implications and Recommendations

This corpus based study of radio call-in shows is one of the first attempts in the Luhya field to give a systematic, mixed methods study of gender differences in conversational interaction in realization of politeness. Since very little has been done on Luhya to address similar questions, it is difficult to compare the findings here with similar studies conducted by others. It is expected that future work in this field will re-examine the findings in this study and offer confirmations, further refinement, or challenges to the results obtained here based on a set of radio call-in shows. It is hoped that this initial study will contribute to the understanding of language and gender issues in the Luhya context, as well as to more general, universal characteristics of language and gender.

The current study reveals that Luhya men and women have different sets of norms for conversational interaction, and those socio-cultural factors play an important role in the gender differentiation in language. The work is representative of the new direction of linguistic research that recognizes the importance of social contexts. Nonetheless, the variety of contexts that might be helpful in understanding the encoding of gender in language, as well as the construction of gender through language, is virtually endless. In this study an attempt has been made to explore to a certain extent some contextualized situations, but there are many more that will need to await further research. Given the limited size of the project and the nature of data collection (radio call-in shows), it is not possible to address such issues as socioeconomic status,

age, occupation, education, call-in shows host dynamic, and so forth. The current study is viewed as laying the groundwork for the kind directions and questions to be answered and as part of the on-going research and inquiries into new areas of exploration in the interaction of language and gender. More studies need to be done in different contexts to examine gender behaviour on the discourse level. Such studies can include informal interactions between husbands and wives, casual conversations among same or cross sex friends, and forth.

All in all, language should not be treated as a closed system or studied without reference to “external” environmental factors. Future studies in language and gender are expected to extend into such areas as the social causes and consequences of gender difference in language, the acquisition of differentiated interaction patterns by boys and girls, and the development of differential communicative competence. The field will undoubtedly benefit from the growing interest in the sociolinguistic analysis of gender differences in speech and the contribution from informed and detailed studies of a language such as Luhya.

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