

Back Channeling Speech Style Used by Colleen McGuire as the Main Character of the Novel *Savage Land*

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Abstract

This research discusses about one of the speech styles of feminine gender while having a conversation, which is back channeling. The data used to be analyzed in this research is taken from the dialogues and the narration of the main character named Colleen McGuire in the novel *Savage Land* written by Janet Dailey. Qualitative method was used in doing this research because the data are presented in the form of written words or verbal expressions. The result of this research shows that Colleen McGuire as the main character of the novel *Savage Land* used back channeling in her dialogues and narration. Out of 31 data, it shows that there are 16 data where she uses “nodding” gesture, 9 data where she uses the word “yes”, 3 data where she uses the word “all right”, 1 data where she uses the word “okay”, 1 data where she uses the word “right”, and 1 data where she uses the word “right away”.

Keywords: *back channeling, feminine gender, speech style*

Introduction

Language is a dynamic system that is inherent in every human being to communicate with others because it is influenced by biological, socio-cultural, affective, and everyday contexts. It cannot be denied that there is often some difficulties in understanding the opposite sex. The differences in communication between men and women often lead to misunderstandings. There is no better or worse between men and women. Both of them are actually all the same. It's just that there is such a difference in the way they communicate between the two. Each of these differences makes the two sexes have their own uniqueness. These differences may be influenced by several factors, such as biological factors (body structure, brain, heredity) and environment (social, cultural parenting). However, whatever the factor is, there are several characteristics of communication between men and women.

Both men and women have their own difficulties when communicating with each other. For getting an effective communication, they must understand one another. One of the reasons that make it quite difficult to have an effective communication is their gender. To overcoming the communication barrier, the first step which has to be done is to identify the communication patterns used by male and female. Men and women tend to have a different language. Men tend to demonstrate that they are in the dominant position, so their verbal behaviour is often considered to be more aggressive. Women have a submissive role both at home and in their workplace. Therefore, their verbal behaviour is considered as less aggressive than men. There is an assumption regarding

common stereotypes that women talk more than men. Therefore, special terms often appear that are used for women's conversations, such as gossiping, etc. However, the term is rarely used to mention the activities of conversation done by men. The term 'gossiping' implies that women's conversation is abundant, but has no meaning.

Ronald Wardaugh (2006) states in his book which is entitled *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics* that there are no 'single-style' speakers of a language because every individual controls and uses some of linguistic styles and nobody will speak exactly the same way in all situations. He explains that 'styles' of speech can be ordered along a single dimension measured by the amount of attention speakers are giving to their speech. When people are more 'aware' of the things they are saying, their speech style will naturally become more 'formal'. Furthermore, Bourdieu (1991), in his book which is entitled *Language and Symbolic Power*, says that languages are symbolic marketplaces in which some people have more control of the goods than others as some particular languages or varieties have been given with some power which is more symbolic than others, so those languages or varieties have a superb value, such as standard languages, particular accents, a certain gendered speech style, and a definite type of discourse.

According to Edelsky (1997), many of the sociolinguists have collected some clear evidence which prove that men and women tend to use different speech style when they have a conversation. By this difference, it is known that men and women seem to have different linguistic features in their conversations and it has been agreed by the sociolinguists that such different features used by each of genders can be greatly determined by the gender.

A research entitled *Gendered-Linked Differences in Speech Styles: Analysing Linguistic and Gender in the Malaysian Context* was conducted by Michael Angelina Subrayan in 2010. She aims to look at the differences in speech styles of Malaysian men and women. She says that women and men typically employ different linguistic style. The research clearly states that gender-specific patterns of behavior still becomes the relevant factors and social variables which are very important to be analyzed through the most common cultural codes of society, which is its language. The term which is used to describe sex based on socially constructed categories is called gender. There are two genders which are known by the societies, namely masculine and feminine. This research's limitation is only to describe the different usage of language which is commonly used by women and men as speakers. This research gives special attention to five linguistic features used by men and women, namely questions, hedges, adjectives, verbosity and politeness.

Another research was conducted by Minxia Wang entitled *A Study on Gender Differences of English Speech Style in Public Places* in 2010. The objective of the research is: 1) to carry out a contextualized research of speech differences between men and women in the English language, 2) to try to explain the differences of speech style based on gender, and 3) to discuss the benefits or practical implications of the research. This research uses three sociolinguistic research methods: conversation analysis, questionnaire and interview. The results of the research show that there are different speech styles between men and women in public contexts. It is found that men tend to provide much more talk than women in their conversations with women. Men also tend to always violate the turn-taking model and take more turns in order to take control of the conversations. It is also found that women tend to have a broader topics to discuss in the same-sex casual conversations than men does.

Researches focusing on the relationship between language and gender was pioneered by Robin Tolmach Lakoff. In his book entitled *Language and Women's Place* (2004), he puts forward a theory about the existence of women's language. Lakoff says that the emersion of the differences of language use between men and women are underlined by many things. It is described in his book that male language is more assertive, mature, and men like to speak openly with the right vocabulary. However, the language used by women is not assertive, not openly (using figurative words), and is careful when expressing something. Women also often uses finer and polite words or through cues (metapesan). In addition, according to Lakoff, if a woman feels unsure of a problem, she will question herself and not have confidence in themselves.

Referring to those two research which have been mentioned above, this research aims to find out one of the feminine's speech styles, namely back channeling, which is used by Colleen McGuire as the main character of the novel *Savage Land*. Colleen McGuire is a woman and is known to have feminine traits in the story of the novel. It is expected that she would obviously tend to use back channeling in her conversation when she is communicating with other characters in the novel. This research is expected to give more knowledge about feminine speech styles, especially back channeling as one of the feminine speech styles.

Method

This research uses a qualitative method because this method has a quality of analytic-descriptive. According to Bogdam and Taylor (1975), qualitative method is a research procedure that produces descriptive data such as written words or verbal expression from the people and their behavior that have been observed.

The researcher uses documentation as a technique of collecting data. According to Sugiyono (2008: 240) documentation is a way of collecting data by writing down and picturing to get certain information needed. The data source that is used in this research is taken from the dialogues and the narration on the novel *Savage Land*. The novel was written by Janet Dailey and was published by Mills and Boon Limited in London in 1974. This novel consists of 186 pages. In collecting the data, the writer took several steps as below:

1. Reading the novel *Savage Land* in order to understand the story before deciding the problems to be analyzed.
2. Recognizing the data and underscoring the dialogues and narration of Colleen McGuire as the main character in the novel as she is encountering with the other characters.
3. Identifying one of the feminine gender's speech styles, namely back channeling, used by Colleen McGuire as the main character of the novel *Savage Land*. The writer identifies the back channeling speech style of the main character seen from her dialogues and the narration in the novel.

While, the procedures in analyzing the data are:

1. Classifying the data about one of the feminine gender's speech styles, namely back channeling, used by the main character based on Anthony Giddens' theory.
2. Analyzing the back channeling speech style of the main character seen from her dialogues and the narration in the novel according to Anthony Giddens' theory.
3. Drawing a conclusion.

Results

According to Giddens, gender is divided into two types, which are masculine and feminine. There are some differences of masculine and feminine types of speech. First, masculine speech is competitive, while feminine speech strives to achieve harmony. Second, masculine speech emphasizes independence, while feminine speech seeks consensus. Next, feminine speech is polite and indirect, while masculine speech is blunt and direct. Then, detailed descriptions are feminine, while brief summaries are masculine. And the last is masculine speech is detached, while feminine speech is emotional. Cornell (1993) then proposes a non-unitary model of gender; both femininity and masculinity vary, and understanding their context-dependent variety is regarded as central to the psychology of gender.

Feminine speech styles in communication tend to seek for common ground and make some connections. Giddens states that there are three kinds of feminine speech that serve to find common ground in communication, namely:

1. Back channeling is the use of words or phrases that show agreement, indicate comprehension, or encourage a speaker to continue. Common interjections like “right” or “mm-hmm,” or even a gesture of nodding can also be categorized as back channeling.
2. Tag questions are brief, rhetorical questions which are placed at the end of declarative sentences. When someone is adding an “isn’t it,” “okay,” or “weren’t you” at the end of her/his statement, that means she/he are using the tag questions. When someone uses tag questions, she/he tends to aim on communicating her/his slight uncertainty or softening the severity of a request.
3. Hedges are modifying words, such as “like,” “you know,” or “sort of” that are usually used to lessen the impact of what someone said.

Here are the data found in the novel *Savage Land* that represent back channeling done by the main character, Colleen McGuire:

Tabel 1. Data of back channeling used by Colleen McGuire

No	Dialogue	Page
1	“I’ll see if I can find us something to eat while you finish undressing,” he said, and turned his head to look at her. “You are hungry?” Coley noded hesitantly up and down, never taking her eyes off the stranger.	19
2	“Your hair needs a good styling, too,” she remarked to Coley’s red-faced reflection in the mirror. “Now, don’t you go getting all upset about it. If your dear mother, Rosalie, were here you know she would have seen that your hair was properly cut.” Coley noded silently, hanging her head so that her aunt couldn’t see the moistening eyes.	31
3	Tony grimaced playfully as he followed her glance. “Where were you going, the dining room?” She noded ,	33

No	Dialogue	Page
4	"Of course, but bringing it up won't make you or Benjamin feel any better about it, now, will it?" reasoned Aunt Willy. "No," Coley agreed, wiping the tears from her cheeks and smiling into the jewelled eyeglasses. "I have an idea. Benjamin always likes some tea before dinner. Why don't you go to the kitchen and have Maggie fix a pot? Then you can take it to him as a sort of peace-offering." "All right."	38-39
5	"Put a cold cloth on those eyes of yours first," instructed Aunt Willy, rising as Coley did. "Otherwise he'll recognize those red eyes and swollen lids as the result of a good bout of tears and will feel twice as guilty." "Yes, Aunt Willy," Coley called back, already hurrying back towards the white house.	39
6	"Thank you," he said as she set the tray down on his desk. "You can go now." She nodded and turned towards Jase.	41
7	"When I was out there cleaning the barn, I thought about how he can't even get out there to see if I'm doing my job. He's got to be hard or everything he's worked for will crumble away. Do you know what I mean, Coley?" She nodded.	44
8	"Come on," her brother said, taking hold of her hand and pulling her off the bed. "You'd better clear out. I've got to shower and change yet and your jabbering is holding me up. I'll meet you downstairs." "Okay." She left the room meekly, not yet willing to put her her thoughts into words.	44
9	"I'm sure Colleen will enjoy the shopping trip," Jase said, sending a small smile of assurance in Coley's direction. "Of course she will. All we girls do." Aunt Willy stretched her red mouth into a playful, conspiratorial smile. "Yes, it will be fun." Coley's words trembled only a little, but she knew it was enough to betray her.	49
10	As the chairs scraped the polished wood floor, Ben turned to Coley. "Well, are you going to help me or not?" She nodded slightly and stepped behind the wheelchair to lead the entourage out to the porch.	49
11	"Are you really Ben's grandson?" "Yes." His smile as he answered was cynical with a bitter twist to the corners of his mouth. "You find that hard to believe, don't you?" She nodded silently.	52

No	Dialogue	Page
12	"tony and your brother must be swimming. Would you like to go and see?" She nodded agreement and they turned towards the house.	54
13	"Oversleep?" he asked as Coley walked shyly to the edge of the pool. She nodded sheepishly before shrugging off her terry-cloth robe to reveal the two-piece swimsuit with its bright yellow flowers.	66
14	"Sure. But you'll have to change into some jeans. Those shorts aren't exactly the thing for a barn," Danny stated. "Right away," Coley cried happily, pushing her chair away from the table.	72-73
15	"Misty likes you," Jase commented, while Danny stood back, silently shaking with ill-concealed humour. "Just a few turns around the corral wouldn't do any harm." "Oh, all right," Coley agreed, slightly ashamed of her reluctance.	79
16	Suddenly he smiled at her, his thin lips curling back to reveal a large expanse of white teeth. "How did we get on such a morbid subject when we both were enjoying the ride? <i>Quien sabe</i>, huh? I'll tell you what, you stay here and watch the colts play while I ride over the hill and check the pump on that water well." Coley nodded a quick agreement.	97
17	"And you feel I did the right thing, agreeing to his decision?" he asked. "Yes, I do. It's time you two stopped lashing out at each other, trying to draw the first blood. He's an old man, Jase," Coley said earnestly.	114
18	"He's a Savage," retorted Jase angrily, "and no Savage needs pity." "All right, compassion then," Coley inserted quickly, feeling a little flare of temper herself.	114
19	"There's an invisible line that runs from the house to the stables and I don't want to ever find you off that path. If I do, you can consider anything outside of the house yard off limits. Do you understand?" "Yes," Coley answered weakly.	118
20	"They have over five hundreds different varieties. And all colours, from the whitest white to reds so dark that you wouldn't be able to spot them if they were floating in a pool of oil. George took me there several times in October when they have their festival. You really must go there some time and walk through Tyler Park in downtown," Aunt Willy urged with a wave of her shearers. "It's an experience you'll never forget." Coley nodded absently, not able to mount much enthusiasm for the thought.	127
21	Aunt Willy laughed lightly as she drew Coley by the arm into the circle of people gathered around her. "This is Ethel Merrick, one of my dearest friends, her husband Bob, and her two girls, Rachel and Roberta," Coley nodded pleasantly to the two warm, sun-weathered faces of the couple	130-131

No	Dialogue	Page
	and smiled at the two dark-haired girls, one a little older than herself and the other a little younger.	
22	As she saw the questioning look in Coley's eyes, she added reluctantly, "You probably don't know it, but she dated Jason quite regularly before the accident. At least that's the way the gossip goes. I heard she dropped him when the scandal started flying, but I really don't know. It was before my time. Oh, here come the boys. Looks like Dick won out. Come and sit with us, Coley," Jill invited as the two boys minus Tony walked up to them, their arms laden with plates and drinks. Coley nodded agreement.	133
23	"If these cattle prices hold, we'll have a real nice profit this year," Ben commented, without taking his gaze from the books he was studying. When Coley failed to reply, his hawk-like eyes glanced at her above the steaming cup he brought to his lips. "Well, aren't you going to say anything?" "What?" Coley asked in a dazed voice before remembering just what he had said. "Oh, yes, that will be great."	147
24	"But he didn't do that," Coley cried, the hurt choking her breast. "That's your heart speaking, not your head," Uncle Ben mocked cynically. "Yes, yes, it is!" Coley announced with a shrill cry, hopping agitatedly out of the chair to stand before him, her fists clenched in anger.	149
25	"Coley, my child," Ben whispered, a gnarled hand beckoning at her freely to come closer and lessen his exertion of talking. "You're not to blame yourself for what happened." Coley nodded numbly, blinking valiantly to hold back the tears. "No matter what happens, you're not to blame, do you hear?" "Yes, Uncle Ben," Coley answered hoarsely, and looked imploringly at Jase.	155
26	"Coley, my child," Ben whispered, a gnarled hand beckoning at her freely to come closer and lessen his exertion of talking. "You're not to blame yourself for what happened." Coley nodded numbly, blinking valiantly to hold back the tears. "No matter what happens, you're not to blame, do you hear?" "Yes, Uncle Ben," Coley answered hoarsely, and looked imploringly at Jase.	155
27	"It looks as if we're going to have a full moon tonight." But his eyes were studying Coley's face. "Yes, it does, doesn't it?" she agreed, looking up into the darkening heavens at the pale moon.	168
28	"Coley, what are you doing out here?" Danny's voice called out to her. "Jase just told me you wouldn't be coming in to join the party." "That's right," Coley replied in a tight little voice that threatened to betray her emotional state.	174
29	"I have the feeling that you were in my study yesterday morning. Am I right?" Coley nodded her head affirmatively at his question. "I take it you heard part of a	179-180

No	Dialogue	Page
	conversation between Jase and myself.” Again she nodded.	
30	“I have the feeling that you were in my study yesterday morning. Am I right?” Coley nodded her head affirmatively at his question. “I take it you heard part of a conversation between Jase and myself.” Again she nodded .	179-180
31	“And now that you know differently,” he said blandly, “what am I supposed to do? Forgive you?” “Yes,” Coley answered breathlessly.	183

Discussion

There are 31 data found on the novel *Savage Land* that shows that the main character, Colleen McGuire, uses the back channeling while she is having conversations with other characters in the novel. Giddens states that common interjections like “right” or “mm-hmm,” or even a simple nod of the head are back channeling that can be used to show agreement, indicate comprehension, or encourage a speaker to continue.

Out of those 31 data, it is found that there are 16 data in which she did the “nodding” gesture in responding her interlocutor. She used the gesture of “nodding” the most in representing back channeling in her conversation to show agreement on what was being said by the one spoke to her in the novel. For example, on data number 22 in which Coley was invited to join Jill and the boys:

*As she saw the questioning look in Coley's eyes, she added reluctantly, “You probably don't know it, but she dated Jason quite regularly before the accident. At least that's the way the gossip goes. I heard she dropped him when the scandal started flying, but I really don't know. It was before my time. Oh, here come the boys. Looks like Dick won out. Come and sit with us, Coley,” Jill invited as the two boys minus Tony walked up to them, their arms laden with plates and drinks. Coley **nodded** agreement.*

On the data above, it can be seen that when Jill said “...Come and sit with us, Coley,” at the end of her dialogue, Coley answered her invitation by nodding her head. She agreed to sith with Jill and the other two boys who already brought some meals and drinks.

Other data are also found when Collen uses back channeling when she is indicating that she comprehends what other characters says. For example, as written on data number 25 of the table above:

*“Coley, my child,” Ben whispered, a gnarled hand beckoning at her freebly to come closer and lessen his exertion of talking. “You're not to blame yourself for what happened.” Coley **nodded** numbly, blinking valiantly to hold back the tears. “No matter what happens, you're not to blame, do you hear?”

“Yes, Uncle Ben,” Coley answered hoarsely, and looked imploringly at Jase.*

On the data above, Ben said “You're not to blame yourself for what happened.” because Ben did not want Coley to blame herself for his condition which got worse after having an argument with her. Coley understood what he meant. She nodded because she comprehended that no matter what would happen to Ben was not her fault.

Besides giving gesture of “nodding”, it is also found that there are 9 data where Colleen used the word “yes” in showing her agreement while having a conversation. One of the example is on data number 31 on the table. Colleen and Jase were having a conversation. When Jase asked her *“what am I supposed to do? Forgive you?”*, Colleen answered him by saying “Yes”. She agreed when Jase gave an option of forgiving her.

Adding to those 16 data of nodding gesture and 9 data of using the word “okay”, there are 3 data where she used the word “all right” in responding what her interlocutor was speaking. She said the word “all right” to show agreement and to indicate comprehension on what was being said by the interlocutor as well. For example, on data number 4 on the table above:

“Of course, but bringing it up won’t make you or Benjamin feel any better about it, now, will it?” reasoned Aunt Willy.

“No,” Coley agreed, wiping the tears from her cheeks and smiling into the jewelled eyeglasses.

“I have an idea. Benjamin always likes some tea before dinner. Why don’t you go to the kitchen and have Maggie fix a pot? Then you can take it to him as a sort of peace-offering.”

“All right.”

On the data above, it can be seen that Colleen answered *“All right”* to what her Aunt said. Her aunt suggested Coley to serve some tea to Benjamin as a sort of offering so that both Benjamin and Colleen would feel better after they had the argument. Colleen agreed on that suggestion. She got it that her aunt’s suggestion might be a nice gesture to make peace with Benjamin.

The rest of the data found in the novel are 1 data of using the word “okay”, 1 data of using the word “right”, and 1 data of using the word “right away”. Those words are also used by Colleen in showing her agreement and indicating her comprehension to what the other characters say to her.

Conclusion

Gender, indeed, has some effects in communication, especially in speech styles. The styles that are used by females are generally back channeling, tag questions, and hedges. From the discussion section above, it can be seen that Colleen McGuire uses back channeling in her communication as a sign of seeking common ground and making connections with the counterparts. There are 31 data found in the novel where Colleen McGuire is using back channeling when she is communicating with the other characters in the novel. Out of those 31 data, it shows that there are 16 data where she uses “nodding” gesture, 9 data where she uses the word “yes”, 3 data where she uses the word “all right”, 1 data where she uses the word “okay”, 1 data where she uses the word “right”, and 1 data where she uses the word “right away”.

The researcher suggests for further researchers to analyze about the other feminine’s speech styles. Other researchers can also analyze about masculine’s speech styles.

Acknowledgment

First and Foremost, I would like to express my greatest gratitude to the Almighty God, Allah S.W.T, for giving spirit, strength, inspiration, and health to the researcher during accomplishing this research. I also would like to thank my family for years of on-going prayer, incredible support, patience, and love. Adding to that, I would like to thank the editorial team for considering this

article to be published. Last but not least, the researcher would like to deliver the greatest gratitude to Jurnal Sinesthesia for publishing this article.

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