

# Language and Gender: Analyzing Male and Female Speech in a Debate Setting

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## ABSTRACT

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Gender and language are a topic that continues to be relevant among scholars. This study examines the influence of gender on communication styles in a debate uploaded on Youtube titled "Can 25 Liberal College Students Outsmart 1 Conservative? (feat. Charlie Kirk)". The research is guided by Deborah Tannen's theory of report talk and rapport talk. This research focuses solely on the first premise about abortion. The participants include five female and three male students, along with Charlie Kirk. Qualitative content analysis was used, with the dialogues transcribed and manually coded. The results align with the generalization that men often use report talk, while women lean toward rapport talk. However, the findings also reveal that both genders can switch styles depending on the situation. This study highlights the role gender plays in shaping communication strategies during debates. Although the sample size and analysis duration are limited, the findings offer valuable insights into gender communication in formal settings.

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## I. Introduction

Language adapts constantly to reflect changes in society. Humans are continually creating new expressions and novel utterances by manipulating their linguistic resources to describe new objects and situations [1]. We acquire language unconsciously through cultural transmission during childhood, formal education, and social interactions [2][3][4]. As each society adheres to different culture and traditions, it influences the basis norms held by that society. These beliefs and expectations are also applied to gender roles and behaviors, shaping what men and women supposed or not supposed to do [5]. Tannen [6] identify these differences in terms of language used, and refers to this as report talk for men and rapport talk for women.

In a cross-cultural conversation, conflict may arise due to different communication styles. Women value on intimacy while men tend to emphasize independence, leading to misunderstandings in mostly relational contexts [6]. Conversely, in structured situations such as debates, conflict occurs between opposing sides due to differing arguments over a given premise. Debate, as a narrower concept of communication, relies heavily on argumentation [7]. Since arguments should be presented in a logical manner [8], it is intriguing to examine how gender might impact debates.

Several researchers have previously examined debates. One study, titled 'Transitivity Analysis of the Presidential Debate between Trump and Biden in 2020', employed qualitative methods to analyze the data [9]. The aim was to investigate the various types of transitivity processes utilized in the debate and to identify the most prevalent one. Another study, titled 'A Study of Assertiveness in a Debate Setting', primarily used qualitative methods focused on text analysis [10]. This research

examined the arguments made during a debating event involving senior high school students, adhering to the World School Debating Championship style.

Additionally, gender language styles are also often analyzed. An article titled 'Gender Language Differences Found in Rans Entertainment Podcast' utilized qualitative methods for its analysis [11]. The findings indicated that male speech included 7 instances of status, 1 of independence, 2 of advice, 1 of information, 1 of orders, and 9 of conflict. In contrast, female speech consisted of 1 instance of support, 1 of understanding, 4 of feelings, 1 of proposals, and 3 of compromise. Another article, 'Differences in Language Conversation Use by Gender', relying on a literature review to analyze the data [12]. The analysis concluded that gender influences conversational language, evident in various social paradigms.

Despite these contributions, researchers could not find any studies specifically examining debates through the lens of gender language differences. Therefore, this study will analyze the communication styles of men and women in the debate video titled 'Can 25 Liberal College Students Outsmart 1 Conservative? (feat. Charlie Kirk)' on Youtube ([https://youtu.be/68aej2qmCtw?si=11b1tLh\\_oibuksrF](https://youtu.be/68aej2qmCtw?si=11b1tLh_oibuksrF)). In this setup, a man is seated in the center, surrounded by students eager to engage him in debate. Due to time constraints, this research will focus solely on the first prompt regarding abortion, which claims that "abortion is murder and should be illegal". It is a topic currently generating significant discussion on social media.

Language grows rapidly due to dynamic environments where new technologies, ideas, and cultural trends frequently emerge. As a result, it is essential to stay updated on these changes and trends. This research aims to explore the ways in which gender affects communication styles and argumentation in the latest debate case. By examining these differences, the study seeks to contribute to a broader understanding of language and gender, highlighting the implications for public discourse and the representation of diverse voices in debates.

## II. Method

This study used a qualitative method with a content analysis approach. The data was gathered from a Youtube video titled "Can 25 Liberal Students Outsmart 1 Conservative? (feat. Charlie Kirk)", uploaded by Jubilee on September 8, 2024. Due to time constraints, researchers only selected the first premise of the debate about "Abortion is murder and should be illegal". This selection was influenced by its recent social media attention and its relevance to discussions on gender.

The participants included 8 students and Charlie Kirk, as detailed in the Table 1.

Table 1. The research participants

| <i>Participant</i> | <i>Name</i>  | <i>Male</i> | <i>Female</i> |
|--------------------|--------------|-------------|---------------|
| Student 1          | Juliana      |             |               |
| Student 2          | Naima        |             |               |
| Student 3          | Dean         |             |               |
| Student 4          | Lily         |             |               |
| Student 5          | Dedan        |             |               |
| Student 6          | Maddie       |             |               |
| Student 7          | Parker       |             |               |
| Student 8          | Maren        |             |               |
| Charlie Kirk       | Charlie Kirk |             |               |

The dialogue was transcribed into written form, and a 20-minute segment from the total 1 hour and 30 minutes was selected for analysis. Researchers manually employed coding techniques to break down the data into manageable parts. Deborah Tannen’s theory served as the framework for categorizing the data, distinguishing between report talk for men and rapport talk for women. The frequency of these communication styles in the participant’s arguments is presented in tables. Based on those results, researchers drew the conclusion.

Though the sample size was limited, the findings offer insights applicable to other debate settings where gender and communication styles are significant factors. To ensure validation, researchers conducted multiple reviews of the coding process.

### III. Results and Discussion

This section presents the frequency of report talk and rapport talk features as demonstrated by Charlie Kirk and the students during their 20-minute debate. Despite Tannen’s generalization that women predominantly utilize rapport talk and men favor report talk, this study reveals that both genders can switch between communication styles in a debate setting.

This phenomenon has also been explored by previous studies. Research on female leaders by Eagly and Carli [13] shows that women often blend both rapport and report talk in leadership positions. In decision-making processes, women might use report talk to convey expertise, give directions, or assert their authority when leading teams or organizations. In academic or intellectual contexts, Holmes [14] found that female scholars frequently engage in assertive and informative speech in explaining concepts or defending their arguments.

Consequently, Table 2 below presents the frequency of report talk features employed by both men and women. The findings reveal a significant gap, with men predominantly using report talk. However, on several occasions, women also adopt this style to present relevant data while defending their stance and expressing disagreement.

Table 2. Report talk features

| <i>Features</i> | <i>Men</i> | <i>Women</i> |
|-----------------|------------|--------------|
| Information     | 26         | 6            |
| Orders          | 14         | 4            |
| Conflict        | 3          | 2            |
| Advice          | 2          | 5            |
| Independence    | 2          | -            |
| Status          | 11         | 2            |
| Total           | 58         | 19           |

Based on the table above, report talk features were observed more frequently in men, with 58 instances, compared to 19 instances in women. This aligns with Tannen's theory that men tend to focus on factual information, status, and authority in conversations [6].

Similar to how women can shift to report talk when necessary, men also employ rapport talk in certain contexts. In a workplace context, Fletcher [15] noted that successful male leaders often use relational practices like listening and providing emotional support to enhance team performance. In addition, Coates [16] found that when men talk with their male friends, they sometimes share personal stories, express vulnerability, and seek emotional support as well.

In relation to this, Table 3 below presents the frequency of rapport talk features employed by both men and women. The results indicate that while men may not engage in rapport talk as much as women, they do convey understanding and appreciation for their interlocutor’s arguments.

Table 3. Rapport talk features

| <i>Features</i> | <i>Men</i> | <i>Women</i> |
|-----------------|------------|--------------|
| Feelings        | 2          | 6            |
| Proposals       | 3          | 2            |
| Compromise      | 1          | 3            |
| Understanding   | 2          | 4            |
| Intimacy        | -          | -            |
| Support         | 4          | 2            |
| Total           | 12         | 17           |

In the debate centered around the premise “abortion is murder and should be illegal”, the arguments made by both male and female participants were analyzed using Deborah Tannen’s six-contrast in men’s and women’s language [6]. Both genders demonstrated some degree of rapport talk. Men used it 12 times, while women used it 17 times, indicating that while women leaned more toward rapport talk, men also employed it when the context required.

To better explain the findings, the following dialogues illustrate how these contrasts are evident.

### 3.1 Information vs. Feelings

Men often prefer to discuss facts or activities, while women may place more importance on emotional resonance. In debates, even though participants typically present information to support their arguments, gendered communication tendencies can still emerge. The following dialogue demonstrates how the man asks for factual information but receives an emotional response from the female student.

#### Student 2

3:22 – 3:32

Charlie: What does fetus mean in Latin?

Naima: What the? I’m sorry is this a–

Charlie: It means little human being.

Naima: His smile is very creepy

In this exchange, the man seeks for **information** while the woman expresses her **feelings**. Charlie asks for a factual response, but instead of answering, Naomi reacts emotionally. She expresses discomfort with Charlie’s smile, which she finds unsettling because it occurred unexpectedly during a serious discussion.

Conversely, while men tend to focus on providing information, they can also express emotions, just as women can convey information [6]. The following example shows the male participant reacting emotionally to the female student’s comment

#### Student 8

20:14 – 20:57

Charlie: 5-year-old child can’t get pregnant.

Maren: Actually, they have, and they have given birth. There is one recorded case of a 5-year-old girl who gave birth.

Charlie: Is that common?

Maren: Not common. It’s common for a 5-year-old to get raped sometimes and they get pregnant. I think they should be able to have medical access to something that could save not only just their life but like their livelihood.

Charlie: How many, I'm curious-  
Maren: I hope your daughter lives a very happy life and gets away from you.  
Charlie: Okay, so, that is really nasty. So, her belief system, just so we're clear, is that-  
Maren: The times up.  
Charlie: Yeah, no I got it. It's fine. I mean that's insanely nasty and we'll talk again.

During the debate, the female student conveys **information**, while the man exhibits **feelings** of discomfort [6]. Notice how she uses a recorded case to support her argument. However, by the end of the conversation, she shifts to expressing emotions, wishing that his daughter would get a life away from him. This reaction stems from Charlie's earlier statement, where he said he would still choose to have the baby delivered, even in the case of his daughter being raped. As a father, Charlie responded with discomfort and found her comment highly offensive.

### 3.2 Orders vs. Proposals

Men, being task-oriented, usually focus on efficiency and clarity when addressing a problem. They tend to issue direct and clear orders without any ambiguity to get things done [6]. In contrast, women avoid giving orders. Instead they offer suggestions, as they believe this approach is more likely to be accepted. They encourage group discussions to ensure that everyone's input is valued. The dialogue below illustrates how the female student offers proposals, while the man gives orders.

#### Student 8

17:38 – 17:50

Charlie: Hi, how are you? Nice to see you.  
Maren: So, I just have one question. There's like in any case, you don't think there's any case where abortion should be legal?  
Charlie: There's a very very rare couple cases where-hold on a second, hold on.

Instead of explicitly stating her argument, Maren subtly encourages Charlie to consider about certain situations where abortion may be necessary for specific reasons. When he tries to respond, she interrupts him, leading him to order her to slow down and let him finish speaking. In this case, the female student uses **proposals**, whereas the man resorts to giving **orders** [6].

Despite the general trends, women can also give orders, while men may take a gentler approach in discussions as demonstrated below.

#### Student 7

14:28 – 14:44

Charlie: Can you name the verse?  
Parker: So, well I can't name the verse but the particular conditions that are enlisted in the Bible are that you have to beat physical maturity and emotional maturity, which is extremely vague and throughout the society has been seen-  
Charlie: So, there is not a verse but let's kind of go back to, well, generally agreed upon 18 years old.

#### Student 8

19:12 – 19:21

Charlie: The worst thing to do to the daughter is to then say, 'Hey! We're gonna go murder the being inside of you?'  
Maren: They wouldn't even know like, listen.  
Charlie: They wouldn't know?  
Maren: Listen, listen, listen.

In the first conversation, the man uses **proposals** instead of orders [6]. He softens his request for the student to provide a verse from the Old Testament that legalizes child marriage by starting with "can". When Parker is unable to provide one, he subtly encourages him to agree upon general minimum age requirement for a child to get married.

Meanwhile, in the second debate, the female student gives a straightforward **orders** with just one word, “listen”, as Charlie interrupts her before she can complete her thought.

### 3.3 Conflict vs. Compromise

Tannen believes that men are typically more comfortable with confronting others directly and stating disagreements. They often engage in debates to assert and solidify their positions. On the other hand, women usually prioritize maintaining harmony in their relationships [6]. The following dialogue shows how the man sparks conflict, while the woman expresses disagreement through compromise.

#### Student 1

1:07 – 2:07

Charlie: Abortion is the forcible ending of the viability of a being in utero, otherwise known as a fetus, do we agree that's what abortion is?

Juliana: Okay, yeah.

Charlie: Okay, great. And then murder is the intentional taking of life, different than killing or sudden death. So, murder would be the intent with intent taking another life, do we agree with that?

Juliana: Yeah, okay.

Charlie: And then we agree that murder in general in society should be illegal.

Juliana: I do want to preface that I'm a Catholic. So, I think one really important thing that the Bible says is to not judge and just going back to the topic. I think there's a big difference between you know cells in utero than a living breathing existing being and while I do believe it's murder and that's just my personal belief right? I don't believe in telling people what to do with their bodies, that's not up to me and it's not up to us as well as Christians to judge.

Charlie: Should we prevent murder in society?

Juliana: For sure, yeah.

Charlie: Then it should be illegal.

In the debate above, Charlie sparks **conflict** while Juliana seeks **compromise** [6]. From the outset, Charlie controls the conversation by steering the discussion in opposing abortion. In response to his points, the female student argues that she sees cells in utero as distinct from a living, breathing person. She also acknowledges that she views abortion as murder but doesn't force her beliefs, understanding that others may think differently. Charlie, who disagrees with her, continue to stress his argument, strongly standing by his beliefs.

Influenced by factors beyond gender, men may opt to compromise during debates, while women strongly assert their arguments as shown below.

#### Student 5

9:24 – 10:08

Dedan: I would say with abortion, I think it is very complicated, but I think the issue that I have primarily with your stance of being pro-life. There's no nuance, there's women who are being forced to travel hundreds of miles to access abortion care. Even in cases of rape in certain states, they're not giving any sort of allowance for that. And I think, you know, a lot of people who are pro-life, they say that they're pro-life but I feel like they're really pro-birth. Because you know with firearms, the United States has some of the highest firearm deaths out of OECD Nations, right? We can acknowledge that that's for children who are actually living and breathing. But I feel like while yeah it is, I can definitely see your point. I just think that it should be allowed in some circumstances.

#### Student 6

12:09 – 12:26

Maddie: Okay so the best way to decrease abortions happening is proper sex education, Limiting abortion and making abortion illegal does not actually decreasing the amount of abortions that happen.

Charlie: So, what is your evidence?

Maddie: What is my evidence of that?

Charlie: Because we have increased sex education last 30 years. We have-

Maddie: No, our sex education is so bad in America.

The first male student, Dedan, opposes the idea that abortion should be prohibited. He argues that factors such as the long distance to abortion care and the presence of firearms make it reasonable to allow abortion. Although Charlie holds an opposing view, he acknowledges the validity of Charlie's argument and does not force his own opinion. In this instance, Dedan employs **compromise** to convey his disagreement [6].

The second female student contends that the way to reduce abortion is not by making them illegal but by enhancing sex education. Charlie counters her argument by claiming that sex education has already improved in recent years. She firmly disagrees and clearly expresses her stance. In this situation, the female student maintains her position strongly and welcome **conflict** [6].

### 3.4 Advice vs. Understanding

When someone talks about their problems, men often give solutions as a way to show their skills or knowledge. However, when women complain, they usually just want someone to listen and validate their feelings, not offer solutions. The following dialogue demonstrates how the female student seeks understanding, while the man attempts to offer advice.

#### Student 8

19:00 – 19:37

Charlie: Hold up. Abortion is not a victimless crime. The point is how you were conceived is irrelevant to what human rights you get.

Maren: But-

Charlie: Hold on a second. If a person conceived in rape walks down the side of the street, it's not like they don't get the first Amendment rights or second Amendment rights or-

Maren: It's not about that person.

Charlie: The worst thing to do to the daughter is to then say, 'Hey! We're gonna go murder the being inside of you'?

Maren: They wouldn't even know like, listen.

Charlie: They wouldn't know?

Maren: Listen, listen, listen.

Charlie: But wouldn't it be a better story to say something evil happened and we do something good in the face of evil, instead of saying we're gonna to the evil and then murder the being because we're gonna pander to the evil? No. What makes the West great is we do good after evil not evil after evil.

In the debate above, the female student asks for **understanding**, while Charlie responds with **advice** [6]. She attempts to explain that abortion isn't only about the baby, but also the struggles the woman endures in carrying the child, especially in cases of rape. Rather than listening and empathizing with her perspective, Charlie advises that responding to wrongdoing with kindness is a better solution.

However, this contrasts happens to shift during the debate with other students, as demonstrated below.

#### Student 3

5:42 – 6:15

Dean: So first of all I'd like to refine our terms. I have two points to bring up after that though. So you define murder is like intentionally like killing a human being. I think that's

a very poor way to define murder because if someone were to like break into my home, and point a gun at the heads of me and everybody I love, and I intentionally kill them to prevent them from killing my family, I don't think I murdered them, right? So, I would define murder as the unjustified termination of a human life.

Charlie: You're making a good point. Let me further clarify then, so self-defense is very warranted. I can see where you're going to go with how that has to go with abortion, but we can go down that journey in a second.

### **Student 6**

*12:54 – 13:20*

Maddie: No, I'm saying if you actually wanted to decrease the amount of abortions that happen, you wouldn't be advocating for a like to make abortion illegal. You'd be advocating for-

Charlie: Does that logic apply to stealing, looting, kidnapping, arson, and murder?

Maddie: Well actually it does. Because those are results of different societal issues that you should be educating yourself on rather than making it illegal-

Charlie: So, should we make kidnapping, arson, burglary, murder legal because they're symptoms of something else?

Maddie: We should be helping society heal from those things.

In the first debate, Charlie shows **understanding** towards Dean's analogy and how it relates to abortion. However, he focuses more on logical understanding rather than empathy.

In the second debate, the female student gives **advice** on how to reduce abortion. She believes making it illegal won't stop people from doing it and propose addressing the root issue by educating society.

### **3.5 Independence vs. Intimacy**

Men often try to avoid appearing weak by acting independently. They feel embarrassed to complain or ask for help, as it can seem incompetent and hurt their self-esteem. In contrast, women value intimacy in relationships. They are willing to share their daily lives or personal matters because it helps them feel closer to others. The following dialogue illustrates how the man maintains his independence.

### **Student 7**

*16:14 – 16:24*

Parker: Should the pedophiles go to prison?

Charlie Kirk: From 1904, how many pedophiles are alive from 1904?

Parker: They're not alive, right? I mean like if you could go back in the past, hypothetically speaking, and you could put them in prison, would you put them in prison?

Charlie: I would have killed them myself if I was alive back then.

It can be seen that Charlie firmly asserts his **independence** by protecting his status as a man. When Parker asks if he would imprison pedophiles if given the chance to go back in time, he replies that he would rather kill them himself than just put them in prison.

Researchers found no evidence of independence in women or intimacy displayed by both genders during their debate.

### **3.6 Status vs. Support**

According to Tannen, men often see the world as a competitive place. They seek to establish themselves as authoritative by setting boundaries. When men compete to show power, women seek comfort and support. They value emotional support by using language to encourage empathy and understanding. The following dialogues show how the man strives to maintain his status, while woman seeks support.

### **Student 7**



16:34 – 16:40

Charlie: It's not gonna be a constructive debate if you keep talking over me.

Parker: I was finishing my statement and you were talking over me.

#### Student 4

8:27 – 9:10

Lily: Whenever I'm talking about this discussion, I always go to the question of what about in the case of the mother when her life is in danger. Because I'm a big believer– I don't know I'm still iffy on if I think if it's murder or not, but even so I mean, I don't want to say murder is justified. Guys wait let me just get this one point and then you can vote me out, give me one second. Say the mother gets pregnant and she knows that if she gives birth, she's going to die. She has some kind of health complication, then what do you do?

Charlie: C-section, they go right below the belly button and they deliver the baby, and therefore she doesn't have to give birth. It's technically birth but it's much safer, so that's actually safer than an abortion procedure-

During the debate between Parker and Charlie, they frequently interrupt each other. Charlie eventually warns Parker that his interruptions are preventing a constructive discussion. In response, Parker defends his **status**, claiming he was finishing his sentence when Charlie interrupted him.

Meanwhile, during the debate between Charlie and a female student named Lily, the discussion lasts only a brief time. Lily attempts to express that she is not justifying murder but is considering the mother's health conditions. She asks the audience for **support**, urging them not to vote her out until she has finished her argument. Unfortunately, she still gets voted out after Charlie completes his response.

Despite this generalization, to some extent, women also uphold their pride while men show appreciation as demonstrated below.

#### Student 6

11:21 – 11:30

Maddie: It's not true. Because when you make abortion illegal it doesn't actually decrease the amount of abortion that happened.

Charlie: So, that's a nice talking point. In Texas, the numbers show differently, birth rate has gone up.

#### Student 8

19:21 – 19:50

Charlie: But wouldn't it be a better story to say something evil happened and we do something good in the face of evil, instead of saying we're gonna to the evil and then murder the being because we're gonna pander to the evil? No. What makes the West great is we do good after evil not evil after evil.

Maren: It's not about the being, the cells, it's about no no no, I'm speaking. No, I'm speaking. No, I'm speaking. No, I'm speaking. No, I'm speaking. No, I'm speaking. No, I'm speaking. No, I'm speaking.

In first debate between Charlie and the female student, he shows **support** by acknowledging her point. Whereas in the second debate with another female student, there are frequent interruptions. When Charlie interrupts her speech again, she aggressively reminds him that is speaking at the moment, that he should be quiet and listen. This proves that women can also assert their **status**.

Additionally, researchers find that men exhibit a higher frequency of both support and status in the first premise of the debate.

The findings of this study show that gender-based communication styles, as explained by Tannen's theory of report talk and rapport talk, appear in structured debate settings. Men often used report talk features like giving information, asserting authority, and giving orders. Women, on the

other hand, showed rapport talk traits such as expressing feelings, seeking understanding, and offering solutions. The study also found that both genders adjusted their speech styles depending on the discussion context. This flexibility highlights the complexity of communication beyond common gender stereotypes. Although the sample size and analysis period were limited, the results offer useful insights into how gender shapes communication in debates.

#### IV. Conclusion

Gender has been shown to influence everyday communication. The topic has intrigued linguists and scholars alike, as it affects our interactions and experiences. Recognizing the interest in this area, this study was conducted to examine how genderlect affects communication within the context of debate. Debate requires participants to exchange information and uphold their arguments over a given premise. However, this study shows that even in a structured setting that prioritizes logical reasoning, gender continues to influence a person's speaking style. The findings support Tannen's generalization that men tend to use report talk, while women often lean toward rapport talk. Interestingly, the research also reveals that both genders can switch their communication styles, a phenomenon that is not frequently highlighted in relevant studies. This insight can inform teaching strategies in communication, linguistics, and gender studies, encouraging a more nuanced approach to analyzing discourse. Additionally, the research can guide educators in promoting balanced participation in discussions, fostering a learning environment that values diverse communication styles. Future research could explore this further by studying different cultures and larger datasets to better understand how gender affects communication. Therefore, it is hoped that these findings will provide a broader understanding of genderlect in communication and inspire further research in this area.

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