

Participation in Computer Mediation Curriculum

A Report to CAUCE Research Committee

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Introduction

The overall purpose of this research project was to explore the nature of graduate student participation in a Computer Mediated Curriculum (CMC) course. The course, CTED 655 *Leadership in Organizations* was a core course in the Master of Continuing Education: Workplace Learning program offered by the Faculty of Continuing Education, University of Calgary. Data were gathered over three years (1995, 1996, 1997) involving a total of 51 female and 14 male students. Data were gathered from on-line bulletin board class transcripts from weeks two, six, and ten of the thirteen week *Leadership in Organizations* course.

The following questions guided the research: What is meant by participation in the virtual classroom when such participation is conducted on-line and the interaction is text-based? What specific challenges and barriers exist in CMC instruction that are similar and different from participation in traditional face-to-face (F2F) classrooms? Are there differences in students' participation in CMC by quantity and by quality, and do these vary by gender? What are the experiences of students in the CMC environment, and how do they develop their learning process in CMC instruction? These questions led to the following specific objectives:

1. To develop understanding of the experiences, values and needs of female and male students in CMC instruction
2. To document the participation process through which female and male students achieve success in CMC instruction

¹ Thanks to Marilyn Tobin, PhD Candidate, for her assistance in working with the data. Dr. Gougeon joined Dr. Hutton in March 2001 to comprise a research team.

3. To gain insight into the ways in which female and male students respond to the complex dynamics of CMC instruction
4. To generate new approaches to understanding and facilitating female and male students' learning through linguistic analysis and group dialogue methods
5. To help develop the limited knowledge base of female and male students' experiences in CMC instruction and CMC instructional processes.

The framework for analysis of the data was drawn from the field of socio-linguistics. Studies in this field focus on typical responses of people, with the understanding that for every generalization or description of a population, there will be many exceptions.

Framework for Analysis

Deborah Tannen (1990, 1995) studied the impact of socialization of women and men, and she described stereotypical feminine and masculine communication patterns. Tannen's (1990) framework of female and male communication (See Figure 1) may be simplified as follows: Both females and males have felt needs. Females are generally socialized to feel a primary need for connection while males are generally socialized to feel a primary need for status. To meet their need for connection, females create intimacy with others; while males meet their need for status by establishing distant or independence from others. Females tend to establish intimacy by emphasizing symmetrical relationships, built upon similarities; while males tend to establish independence by emphasizing asymmetrical relationships, built upon differences. Females generally interact in a manner where there exists horizontal or equal alignment among others whereas males generally interact in a manner where they are one-up and others are one-down in alignment.

Tannen's sociolinguistic communication framework is compatible with learning theory, in that learning is enhanced when students possess higher levels of self-esteem, and

self-esteem is directly proportional to a person's ability to meet their emotional and psychological needs (Battle, 1992; Gilligan, 1982; Hutton et al, 1993, & Steinem, 1993). Having found Tannen's framework useful and accurate in understanding face-to-face classroom interaction, the researchers planned to use Tannen's framework to guide them in identifying gendered linguistic themes from the text data taken from the bulletin board from CMC courses. The bulletin boards contained the computer mediated text-based conversations among the students.

Tannen's Framework Figure 1

Men have different needs than women.

Women need to establish connection;

they do this through intimacy;

intimacy is created by establishing similarities;

sharing experiences, aligning equally & symmetrically;

talking to establish rapport.

Men need to establish status;

they do this through independence;

independence is created by establishing differences;

being unique, aligning one-up/one-down & asymmetrically;

talking to report facts & ideas.

Discussion

How will Tannen's framework inform the analysis of the text data from the course discussions contained on the bulletin boards? Will differential needs of women and men as outlined by Tannen be demonstrated in the on-line conversations? Examples of Tannen's framework that the researcher found to be valid in face-to-face communication include: Men tend to use "I" while women tend to use "we." Men tend to "tell" while women tend to "suggest." Men tend to talk in public while women tend to talk in private. Tannen noted that men constantly scan their environment (like radar scanning the horizon) for signs of possible put-downs. Women on the other hand are most aware of evidence of threats to connection. When men share their personal feelings in public, other men may feel uneasy, for sharing personal feelings places one in a one-down alignment --- being vulnerable.

Additionally, themes found to be valid by Tannen (1990) include the following: Men tend to talk about things (sports, technology) while women tend to talk about relationships (people, feelings). Tannen called this phenomenon report-talk and rapport-talk. Males report-talk to establish their expertise and hence, their status; females rapport-talk to establish relationships and hence, connection. Both men and women tend to talk about things they think will be considered important to others: Men tend to talk about new information to the group while women tend to reflect back information that is intended to make others feel more comfortable.

Not everyone wants to be a competent communicator. For instance, people who seek independence are not as interested in how others feel as they are what they can do for them. Underlying all communication is the awareness of status for these people. A concern for people can easily be derailed when circumstances change. Will these patterns show up in female and male on-line conversations?

The following categories emerged from the discussion of Tannen's framework in face-to-face settings:

Women tend to show appreciation
Referring to others by name
Personal thank you
Direct complement
Express encouragement i.e., good luck

Men tend to avoid emotionality
Do not refer to others directly by name
Do not make empathic statements
Ask for what they want or need

Women tend to establish similarities
Build on the strengths within the group
Agree with others work
Quote group members' work

Men tend to establish differences
Invoke outside support (quote others)
No comment on other's work
Disagreeing with others

Women tend to suggest
Use 'we'
Inclusive language
Hesitant to speak publicly

Men tend to tell
Use 'I'
Exclusionary language
Men talk more and are often first

Women tend to apologize
Express doubt
Self deprecation

Men tend to boast
Express confidence
Hide insecurities

Women tend to talk about relationships
People, feelings
Rapport talk

Men tend to talk about things
Sports, technology
Report talk

Women's humour tends to be self directed
Humour is expressed as a personal
put-down

Men's humour tends to be outward focused
Humour is directed at others as a
put-down
Teasing others is a common practice.

The stereotypical communication styles of females and males in face-to-face situations provided a greater depth of understanding how to build supportive relationships across

Table 1 Frequency of Conversational Patterns By Gender

	Year	Female (n=16.1)			Male (n=4.1)		
		Week			Week		
		Two	Six	Ten	Two	Six	Ten
Women tend to show appreciation	1995	10	40	16	02	07	04
Referring to others by name	1996	14	78	18	01	03	06
Personal thank you or a direct complement	1997	13	36	24	00	04	05
Express encouragement i.e., good luck							
Men tend to avoid emotionality	1995	00	00	00	01	00	00
Do not refer to others directly by name	1996	00	01	00	01	06	00
Do not make empathic statements	1997	00	00	00	01	00	
Ask for what they want or need							
Women tend to establish similarities	1995	23	81	39	09	10	09
Build on the strengths within the group	1996	20	135	56	01	15	08
Agree with others work	1997	16	70	28	02	04	01
Quote group members' work							
Men tend to establish differences	1995	13	16	09	02	08	07
Invoke outside support (quote others)	1996	07	36	13	03	13	15
No comment on other's work	1997	13	36	24	00	04	05
Disagreeing with others							
Women tend to suggest	1995	12	19	08	05	07	01
Use 'we'	1996	04	19	13	00	02	05
Inclusive language	1997	09	12	08	05	03	00
Hesitant to speak publicly							
Men tend to tell	1995	09	15	07	05	05	07
Use 'I'	1996	01	04	04	02	12	08
Exclusionary language	1997	03	18	06	03	08	04
Men talk more and are often first							
Women tend to apologize	1995	05	14	11	00	02	02
Express doubt	1996	10	58	20	00	02	06
Self deprecation	1997	14	23	12	05	01	00
Men tend to boast	1995	00	00	00	00	00	00
Express confidence	1996	00	06	00	00	02	00
Hide insecurities	1997	00	00	00	00	00	00
Women tend to talk about relationships	1995	16	17	20	04	10	03
People, feelings	1996	17	62	17	06	06	02
Rapport talk	1997	15	23	19	07	06	04
Men tend to talk about things	1995	06	09	12	03	07	04
Sports, technology	1996	03	07	08	01	11	05
Report talk	1997	09	08	07	00	04	02
Women's humour tends to be self directed	1995	00	17	04	01	01	00
Humour is expressed as a personal put-down	1996	08	08	01	01	01	01
	1997	02	17	05	00	02	00
Men's humour tends to be outward focused	1995	00	02	06	01	04	03
Humour is directed at others as a put-down	1996	05	07	04	04	06	06
Teasing others is a common practice.	1997	12	05	01	02	02	00

gender in the classroom. If women and men are found to have similar or fundamentally different communication styles via on-line communication in a CMC environment, then it will be important to understand these similarities or differences.

The preliminary data from CMC courses over three years are presented above in Table 1.

Preliminary Observations

The above categories were used to organize the textual data that students wrote as part of each course during weeks two, six, and ten. The number of times students displayed each communication pattern were calculated (See Table 1) and the resulting quantitative data were explored and analyzed. Over the three years the classes had an average of 16.1 females and 4.1 males. In order to investigate a relationship between females and males for a category, frequencies of female and male communication patterns were totaled over the three years and compared as a ratio. The subsequent ratio was compared to the average female/male ratio in the classes (16.1/4.1 or 3.9/1) in order to determine and identify stereotypical communication patterns (See Table 2).

Following are the major findings categorized using Tannen's framework. The ten findings that support Tannen's face-to-face communication framework are presented first:

Tannen predicted that women, more than men, would tend to show appreciation by referring to others by name and directly complementing when communicating face-to-face. Female students in the three classes displayed the same tendency over male students during on-line communication, for the ratio of frequency of observed use of this pattern of communication was 7.78 to 1.0 whereas the predicted pattern based on the number of females and males in the classes was 3.9 to 1.0.

Tannen predicted that men, more than women, would tend to avoid emotionality in face-to-face conversation. Since the category was defined in negative terms by the lack of a characteristic, few examples were evident, but the observed ratio was 1.0 to 9.0 when there were four females for every one male in the classes. Therefore it can be stated that male students displayed this characteristic pattern when communicating on-line as well.

Tannen predicted that women, more than men, would tend to establish similarities in relationships when communicating face-to-face. The observed pattern during on-line communication for women was 7.93 times the frequency of establishing similarities by men when there were only 3.9 times the number of women in the sample. Therefore students reflected Tannen's predicted pattern in establishing similarities when communicating on-line.

Tannen predicted that men, more than women, would tend to establish differences in face-to-face communication. From the observed data it was evident that men demonstrated this pattern of on-line communication twice as much as it was predicted. So it may be concluded that there is a relationship that supports Tannen's prediction for males who are communicating on-line even though it is not a strong relationship. So men tend to communicate on-line by establishing their differences from others rather than by establishing similarities.

Tannen predicted that men, more than women, tended to tell people things directly during face-to-face communication. There was support for this prediction in on-line communication as men displayed three times this behaviour than was predicted. Therefore men tended to use exclusionary language and contribute to a conversation first during on-line communication.

Tannen predicted that women, more than men, would tend to apologize, express doubt, and be self deprecating in face-to-face communication. The observed data of on-line communication supported this prediction as women, who were 4 times the number of men in the sample, displayed nearly 10 times the frequency of this behaviour.

Tannen predicted that women, more than men, would tend to talk about relationships, feelings, and people employing rapport talk in face-to-face communication. It was predicted that women would display this pattern of communication in on-line communication by approximately 4 to 1 and the pattern of communication was observed at a ratio of 5.42 to 1. Therefore it may be concluded that while on-line, women

demonstrated a greater tendency to talk about relationships, but that this group of graduate male students did also.

Tannen predicted that men, more than women, would tend to talk about things when in face-to-face conversation. The observed data show that men tended to talk about things twice as much as they were predicted to while in on-line communication. Therefore, while in communication on-line, men tended to talk about things, technology, sports and engage in report talk more than women as predicted by Tannen.

Tannen predicted that women, more than men, would tend to use humour that is self-directed and interpreted as a personal put-down in face-to-face communication. The observed data supported this predication in on-line communication. Women displayed nearly nine times the use of self-directed, self-deprecating humour when they were predicted to use it only four times more than men which would be attributed to the difference in sample size.

Finally, Tannen predicted that men, more than women, would tend to use humour that tended to be outward directed, as putting down others and teasing in face-to-face communication. The observed data provides evidence that men, more than women, use this type of humour in an on-line environment too. Men used it nearly 2 ½ times their predicted use.

The two findings that did not support Tannen's face-to-face communication framework are presented next:

Tannen predicted that women, more than men, would tend to make suggestions then be direct and tell people during face-to-face communication. There was no support for this prediction in the observed data. Although it is clear that women tend to use more inclusive language, this group of graduate students did not hesitate to speak publicly.

Table 2 Comparison of Conversational Patterns By Gender

Women tend to show appreciation	Expected ratio	3.9/1.0
Referring to others by name		
Personal thank you or a direct complement	Observed ratio	7.78/1.0
Express encouragement i.e., good luck		
Men tend to avoid emotionality	Expected ratio	1.0/0.25
Do not refer to others directly by name		
Do not make empathic statements	Observed ratio	1.0/9.0
Ask for what they want or need		
Women tend to establish similarities	Expected ratio	3.9/1.0
Build on the strengths within the group		
Agree with others work	Observed ratio	7.93/1.0
Quote group members' work		
Men tend to establish differences	Expected ratio	1.0/0.25
Invoke outside support (quote others)		
No comment on other's work	Observed ratio	1.0/0.53
Disagreeing with others		
Women tend to suggest	Expected ratio	3.9/1.0
Use 'we'		
Inclusive language	Observed ratio	3.74/1.0
Hesitant to speak publicly		
Men tend to tell	Expected ratio	1.0/0.25
Use 'I'		
Exclusionary language	Observed ratio	1.0/0.75
Men talk more and are often first		
Women tend to apologize	Expected ratio	3.9/1.0
Express doubt		
Self deprecation	Observed ratio	9.28/1.0
Men tend to boast	Expected ratio	1.0/0.25
Express confidence		
Hide insecurities	Observed ratio	1.0/0.33
Women tend to talk about relationships	Expected ratio	3.9/1.0
People, feelings		
Rapport talk	Observed ratio	5.42/1.0
Men tend to talk about things	Expected ratio	1.0/0.25
Sports, technology		
Report talk	Observed ratio	1.0/0.54
Women's humour tends to be self directed	Expected ratio	3.9/1.0
Humour is expressed as a personal put-down		
	Observed ratio	8.86/1.0
Men's humour tends to be outward focused	Expected ratio	1.0/0.25
Humour is directed at others as a put-down		
Teasing others is a common practice.	Observed ratio	1.0/0.69

Perhaps the predominance of female students in the classes set a tone of acceptance and cooperation whereas a predominantly male class might set a tone of competition.

Tannen predicted that men, more than women, would tend to boast, express confidence, and hide their insecurities in face-to-face communication. For this group of graduate students, males did not display evidence that they used this style of communication any more than women in on-line communication.

Therefore, of the 12 predictions for face-to-face communication by Tannen, 10 were supported by the data gathered from three on-line courses. The predictions not supported were males would tend to boast, express their confidence and hide their insecurities and women would tend to make suggestions and be hesitant to speak publicly. Since Tannen's work reflects the general population of people with a wide range of educational background in the USA, whereas this sample is of people educated at the graduate level only, it may be hypothesized that women would be less hesitant to speak publicly and men would be more sophisticated in addressing their insecurities.

Discussion of the Data

Female and male students in the on-line courses showed several tendencies that are presented below.

Female Students

It was evident that women often needed to establish similarities with others. Alignment created by females in relationships was horizontal and they used tentative words, such as "I suggest, I wonder, and I am curious about" as precursors to offering their opinions. They used more slang in their written dialogue, such as "Boy, I got stuck; Wow, another week of insight; ha ha, whoo hoo!; Dang, can't remember; yikes; and I've blabbed on a lot." They tended to provide direct compliments to peers, although the males received far more compliments than they offered, i.e., "Thank you (name) for your excellent summary of the four chapters and your personal case examples. I find these examples helpful." Women showed a pattern of boldly making a statement of disagreement or assertively discussing their position on a topic, only to retract it with words depicting insecurity or

with direct self put-downs, i.e., “But how do I know?” and, “You are so fortunate that I am typing and not talking at this point.” Women consistently apologized for just about everything (being late to being intellectually inferior) and attacked themselves through self-deprecatory humor. For example, “Sorry in advance; and, I hope this makes sense. I’ve got an awful cold, so I sound delirious ... I’ll try to be intelligent next week.” Women, similar to men, also used humor as an external focus, i.e., “Briggs: be bloody careful what you measure.”

Women proactively established intimacy, i.e., they more often addressed their peers using their first names. They frequently used language that spoke from a personal context and proactively established rapport. Many responses made by women were written as fragmented thoughts, quoting others rather than synthesizing the ideas of others to substantiate their own opinions and learning. By week six of the courses, women appeared to use Tannen’s communication styles more than in weeks 2 or 10. This may be due to the intensity of the curriculum at that point in the courses, whereas in the second week they were forming a community of learners and by the tenth week they were beginning to wind up their work. One student commented that “I liken it to a marathon that starts out with the runners in a highly social spirit; confident, engaging each to her in conversations, running easily, and generally having a good time. Imperceptibly, the mood changes and past the half-way mark, conversations have died out, breathing is laboured, and the runners are focused on their personal strategies for finishing the race.” Similarly, the most intense communication patterns in the courses may exist in the middle and not at the end. Women seemed to treat their response sessions in the courses as extensions of a “chat room” as opposed to a more professional dialogue in an educational setting. Perhaps women had a greater tendency to reinforce a need to create and maintain connection through relationship leaving an impression that the content of the course was of secondary importance, creating a chat-room environment rather than a more serious, objective, studious environment.

Male Students

Tannen suggested that men need to establish status. It was clear that they received more peer feedback (directly as a compliment or indirectly through embedded references to their work) compared to women. Men tended to ask publicly for feedback directly from their peers, i.e., “What do you think about these ideas?” Whereas, no incidence existed in the data where a woman asked for public feedback. Perhaps because males were so outnumbered they felt somewhat uncertain, and in addition, perhaps women felt a greater need to support them.

Men created situations where they were able to report information to others. They tended to exude confidence in expressing their opinions, beliefs, and their on-line postings tended to be succinct and well substantiated. For example, a male student gave a 700-word historical sketch of leadership styles as demonstrated by Margaret Thatcher during the Falklands War. The sketch was presented with a formal and authoritative tone. Some men demonstrated an understanding of women’s workplace issues, i.e., “I’d definitely say that women in this organization have to mimic men’s approaches in order to get ahead.”

Men consistently established up-down alignments with others. They primarily used humor to demonstrated sarcasm and wit to poke fun at others. However, men could use sarcasm and wit to poke fun and in the end they demonstrated that they could still establish rapport with others. As the courses progressed into the sixth week, it was evident that men adapted their communication style somewhat. They appeared to use ‘feeling’ words increasingly. By this time in the course, they more frequently created dialogue about relationships in the form of Tannen’s (1990) rapport talk, as opposed to report talk. They made more statements that expressed doubt or strong emotions, i.e., “I sometimes feel guilty; at least I hope he was”; and, “Sorry to be so pessimistic.” However men did not give up more masculine communication patterns altogether by the sixth week. Men balanced connection-driven communication with status-driven communication and they continued to maintain separation from their peers as they communicated in ways that established their differences from others.

Overall, our analysis indicated that there was increasing use of positive peer feedback, and feedback was strongly connected to previous comments made by peers. Within the on-line, Computer Mediated Curriculum context, by the end of the courses, masculine versus feminine attributes did not appear to be as polarized as they appeared at the beginning. Over the weeks, students moved toward a balance in the way they interacted with one another across and within genders. Comparing on-line conversations in the second, sixth, and tenth week of the three courses, it was evident that over the course, many students developed a sense of 'mindfulness' (Gudykunst, 1998) in their communication to establish a tactful atmosphere that supported one another.

Mindfulness

For competent communication to exist, people must be mindful of each other's needs and feelings and these needs and feelings must be supported by the communication itself. To be mindful of others, people must first know about themselves, what their fundamental needs are and how they tend to relate to others. For example, people may be categorized in three ways: Some prefer to control and be independent, some prefer to yield control and be dependent, and others prefer to collaborate and be interdependent. Being mindful of others requires being interdependent, and to be mindful, independent and dependent people must be prepared to change.

Pursuing competency in communication leads people toward a more interdependent orientation with others. Thus, people who prefer to lead or to follow, that is, to be more independent or dependent, must consider how they can become more collaborative or interdependent. Being interdependent allows for more options when communicating. For example, consider independent people who always need to reinforce status in daily interaction. They have few options in communication. If independent people interpreted messages to be challenges, they cannot easily ignore the part of the message that was perceived to be the challenge, and they would use a communication style that might re-establish status needs. On the other hand, if the message was interpreted by independent people to be a non-status message, i.e., one that does not provide information, one that is not a challenge, or one that is not related to status, like a personalized expression of a feeling, then the message would likely be coded as being less important and irrelevant.

Thus, independent people react to situations first with aggression to seek win-lose situations. They have few options for responding to communication around them. The data indicated that people learned mindfulness as the course unfolded and people learned to belong to a community of students committed to a purpose: to help each other and not learn independently.

As well, dependent people have few options in communication. From their perspective, issues of concern or looming crises are to be avoided, for in their experience stronger, more independent people take control. Dependent people perceive themselves to be one-down to independent, one-up people and they have been socialized to defer as in a victim role. Thus, dependent people tend to react to situations first by taking flight and then seeking lose-win situations. They have few options for responding to communication around them. More dependent students may be identified through linguistic patterns that demonstrate a high need to maintain a one-down relationship with others.

Interdependent people, however, have the most options to any situation when in communication. The first reaction interdependent people tend to have is to accept and honor the perspective of another. Accepting another's point of view and is inclusive and allows for open-ended discussion, sharing points of view and reaching consensus. They look for win-win situations. In such circumstances, interdependent people can listen to challenges to status and respond in many more ways than aggression. They can listen to expressions of feelings and consider these expressions the most important thing on the person's mind at that moment and treat these expressions accordingly. For example, expressions of anger are not seen to be challenges to status but authentic expressions of people at the moment. Thus anger can be heard with deeply felt empathy and not with defensiveness. As instructors of on-line courses, we must look for linguistic patterns of independent, dependent, and interdependent people and encourage interdependent communication styles.

While independent people may set goals of task actualization and control as the most important, interdependent people may hold competent communication as most important. Interdependent people typically function on many levels simultaneously. They consider the

needs of people close to them; the task at hand; and how best to communicate objective and relational information to each unique individual. Interdependent people support positive self-esteem. It is important to gain insight into how to shape the complex on-line, Computer Mediated Curriculum so self-esteem of students is supported and learning is enhanced for both women and men. Our findings indicate that in a self-contained group, sustained communication in a CMC context appears to foster interdependent, mindful communication, gender differences notwithstanding.

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