



Back-channeling in Celebrities Interviews: *A Socio-discoursal Study*

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Received 06/02/2024
Published 15/02/2025

Keywords:

backchannel,
male,
female,
functions,
types.

Abstract

Conversation is an act in which two or more interlocutors take turns. Each one of them speak at a time; hence the act is not something arbitrarily done. However, there might happen some problems when certain interlocutor competes for taking the turn. Conversely, the interlocutor may contribute in some way to the conversation's success and continuance. They assist and facilitate the speaker's speech by employing backchannels.

The current study aims to investigate and analyze backchannels used in the conversation of native speakers (celebrities). The purpose of this study is to look at how different genders employ this language phenomena. To achieve this goal, the researcher looks at a few chosen interviews with famous actors, fashion designers, and politicians. The results reveal that females tend to use backchannels more frequently than males do. Also, the use of verbal backchannels is proved to be more frequent than that of non-verbal.



About the Journal

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1. Introduction

The term backchannel was first initiated by the linguist Victor Yngve's (1970) who use it to refer to conversational turn-taking. It is used extensively in linguistics to refer to the verbal (e.g., yes, uh huh) and nonverbal (e.g., head nods, smiles) feedback used by the listener. Their user, however, does not have the intention to claim for the floor but s/he uses it to show his/her awareness of the speaker's utterances, i.e., s/he is a tentative listener. Simply speaking, they represent feedback to the current speaker that his/her message is received. Feedback, in this realm, is defined as "the process whereby a receiver's reactions to a message are picked up by the sender and monitored, so that adjustments can be made if necessary" (Wales, 2001, p. 147). As such, these expressions are important to the development of the spoken dialogue system since the synchrony they make the speaker feel comfortable and keep the dialogue on . Backchannels can be used to perform various functions. They can be used to indicate the listener's agreement to what is said, or they can refer to his/her assessment such as surprise, interest and sympathy as well as other functions .

As far as gender is concerned, studies proved that there is a differentiation between male and female's speech (Maltz & Borker 1982, Tannen 1986, 1990, and 1994, Cameron 1998). Cameron (1998:258), for example, asserts this differentiation when she claims that male use female's style when talking to other men of superior status. Similarly, West and Zimmerman (1987, p.140) support the same idea when they say: "A person's gender is not simply an aspect of what one is, but, more fundamentally, it is something that one does, and does recurrently, in interaction with others". Female's speech is characterized as being more friendly, interactional, relational, participatory, and collaborative in comparison to that of males. Therefore, this study is intended to investigate the effect of gender differentiation on the use of backchannels by celebrities while being interviewed. It aims to answer the following questions :

1. Does gender have an effect on the use of backchannels ?
2. Which one of the two genders use backchannels more?
3. What is the most frequently used type of backchannels ?

To answer these questions the researcher chooses (10) interviews with celebrities to investigate and analyze the use of backchannels. The chosen sample includes persons of both gender: (5) male participants and (5) female participants .

As for the problem of the study, it lies in the fact that there is no study that is conducted to investigate the effect of gender on the use of backchannels in the English community as far as the researcher knows .

This study is based on the hypotheses that

1. Gender has an effect on the use of backchannels .
2. Females tend to use backchannels more than male do due to their willingness to accommodate or to maintain social relations.
3. Continuer is the most widely used type of backchannels.

2. Literature Review

Studies on conversation analysis were mainly focused on the speaker and his/her contribution into the conversation. Nonetheless, studies had shifted the attention towards the listener and his/her collaboration and participation in the conversation. Consequently, studies have investigated the phenomenon of backchannels as it is related to the listener and not to the speaker. These studies examine, analyze and investigate this phenomenon from different perspectives. In their study, Dittmann and Llewellyn (1968) distinguished the types of backchannels which are: those single responses that are made either verbally or by a head nod, those that are considered as joint responses in which both vocalization and a head nod co-occur. For them these backchannels have three functions: listener's wish to interject a comment or question, listener's response to some need in the speaker for feedback, or a signal

of attention (ibid: 82). Yngve (1970) coins the term backchannels. He claims that head nods can occur either simultaneously with some backchannel expressions or can occur separately to stand as a backchannel by itself. He further explains the functions of backchannels which he summarizes into: to express agreement, attention or interest or to facilitate the talk of speaker.

Duncan and Fiske (1985) extend the items that are to be considered as backchannels. Thus, they add brief statements, head nods sentence completions, requests for clarification, and shakes as well as short expressions such as "m-hm" to list of backchannels .

Maynard (1990) conducts a cross- cultural study to examine the use of backchannels in two cultures, namely; Japanese and American. His conclusion is that in casual conversation, Japanese uses brief comments and head movements more frequently than the Americans. Therefore, he concludes that there is a difference in the relevant contexts for listener backchannels in each speech community. On the other hand, Drummond and Hopper (1993) checks the main uses of certain backchannels expressions and he concludes that "yeah" is used to indicate speakership incipency whereas "mm hm" is used to indicate passive recipiency .

In an attempt to examine the accommodation, occur between Japanese men and woman, Kogure (2003) conducted a study that is based on the use of backchannels. As a research procedure, five male, five female, and five mixed-sex participants were split up into three different dyadic discussion types by the researcher, who instructed them to spend thirty minutes discussing a certain subject. In his study, he focused on five different types of backchannels, such as short comments like hai ('uh-huh'), reactive expressions like soo desu ka ('I see'), repetitions, and gender disparities in backchannel usage that were more

Backchannels

Yngve uses the term backchannel as there is a main channel of the conversation and these short expressions are “back” channels that that exist concurrently as supportive and collaborative form of dialogue .

Since its being coined by Yngve (1970), backchannel has been defined differently by different scholars. For Forbes and Cordella (1999, p. 282) the term back-channel refers to “a participant communicates agreement with the speaker without interrupting their turn. These short utterances reflect appreciation of what is being said". Back-channel expressions "examined are limited to uh-huh's and the like, brief comments, punctuated head movements, and laughter," according to Maynard (1990, p. 397). "The person who has the turn receives short messages like yes and uh-huh without relinquishing the turn," Yngve adds in his explanation of backchannels. As he transmits the brief signals on the back channel, the partner is obviously not only listening but also speaking from time to time (Yngve, 1970, p. 568).

As for the expressions that can be included under the umbrella term of backchannels, scholars also are not in a full agreement about what to include and to what to exclude. Yngve, for example, limit backchannels to short utterances such as 'yes' and 'uh-huh', others extend the limit to include brief messages such as 'I see' (e.g., Maynard, 1990). Still other researchers expand the limit to include longer utterances such as repetitions (e.g., Hirokawa, 1995; Clancy, et. al, 1996). Clancy et al. (1996), for instance, names five categories of listener's utterances (a) continuers; (b) reactive expressions, e.g., 'oh really'; (c) collaborative finishes'; (d) repetitions; and (e) resumptive openers.

Furthermore, Ike (2010, 206 cited in Kidd, 2016, p. 289) pinpoints the main characteristics of backchannels which are:

1 .A backchannel is a brief vocal or nonverbal statement made by the listener in response to the speech of another interlocutor. As long as they exhibit one of the backchannel functions, head movements like nodding and shaking are included. In other words, the head movement

doesn't address any specific question or dispute the speaker's statements.

2. The floor is not necessary for a backchannel. In other words, it doesn't start the conversation.

3. It is not required to acknowledge a backchannel.

4. Continuer, acknowledgement, agreement, judgment, and emotional reaction are the main categories of backchannel functions.

As a result, backchannels can be described as being an indication and stimulation for the speaker that the partner is listening and hence the continuity of the conversation will be guaranteed.

Method and Procedures

The collected Data

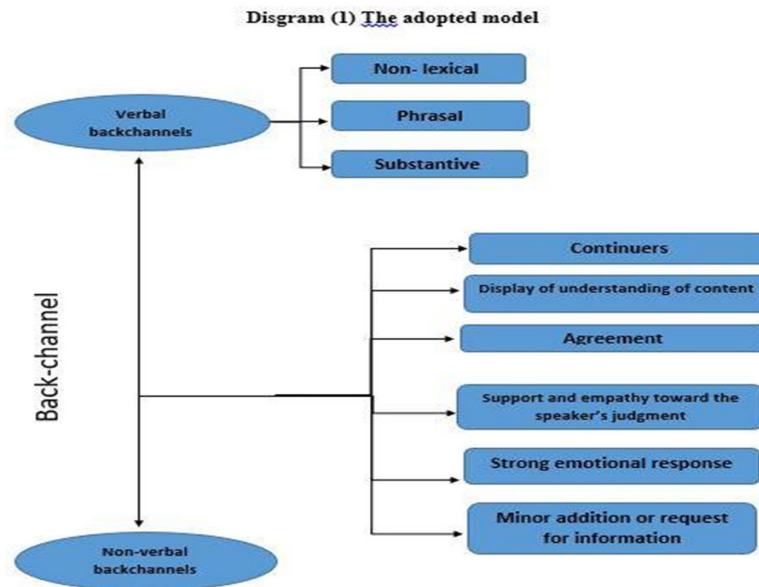
In order to reach the results, the researchers have selected interviews with (10) celebrities: (5) males and (5) females. These interviews are available online. The following are the titles of these interviews:

1. Will Smith's Full Interview with Ellen.
2. Hillary Clinton on Being 'Emotionally Drained' After Talking Monica Lewinsky Scandal for Docuseries
3. Jennifer Aniston on David Letterman Most Hilarious Interview.
4. Jimmy Kimmel's full interview with President George W. Bush.
5. Jimmy Kimmel's full interview with Michelle Obama.
6. Jessica Simpson drunk on Ellen.
7. Leonardo DiCaprio on Ellen 2016 full interview!
8. Guest Host Jennifer Lawrence Interviews Kim Kardashian West
9. Johnny Depp on The Ellen DeGeneres Show - FULL INTERVIEW (2012/05/08).
10. Jimmy Kimmel's Full Interview with Kanye West.

The researcher limits the study to investigating all the available verbal backchannels in these interviews but she calculates and investigates only the head nodes as non-verbal backchannels. Other non-verbal backchannels such as eye gaze are not accounted.

The Adopted Model

The model adopted in this study has classified the types of backchannels into two main types, namely; verbal backchannels and non-verbal backchannels. Furthermore, the study is based on Young's 2004 in which verbal backchannels are divided into three types: non-lexical, phrasal, and substantive. In addition to this, Maynard's (1997) classification of the type of the verbal backchannels is also involved in the model. In Maynard's (1997) classification backchannels are divided into six main types which are: (a) Continuers; (b) displaying understanding of content; (c) agreement; (d) support and empathy towards the speaker's judgment; (e) Strong emotional response; and (f) Minor addition or request for information.



Data Analysis and Discussion

According to the adopted model backchannels are divided into two basic types: verbal backchannels and non-verbal backchannels. Verbal backchannels these are short expressions that can be divided into three types: non-lexical, phrasal, and substantive (Young, 2004). Sounds like 'uh-huh' and 'hmm' are examples of non-lexical vocalized backchannels since they have no referential meanings but still verbalizes the listener's attention. Such expressions are produced frequently by listeners involved in conversations and they usually co-occur with gestures (Ward, 2006). Phrasal backchannels comprise simple words or phrases such as 'wow' and 'really'. While, the substantive backchannels are expressions that have referential content and occur when the listeners ask for clarification (Hoffman & Verdooren, 2018, p. 164).

The abovementioned division is a structural one, however, the adopted model classifies backchannels according to their discourse functions. According to the model, verbal backchannels are divided into five types :

Continuers: Schegloff (1982) identifies some backchannel expressions to be continuers in their function. This kind of backchannel is defined as a brief verbal form, a repetition of the same form, or a combination of other forms. These can be used by the listener to show that s/he is listening attentively. Examples of this type are: Mm hm, Uh huh, yeah, yeah, Ooo, and Ahaa; with a fall rising intonation contour. Since these final concepts contain the same expressions but are not repeated, what sets these expressions apart from what are known as fillers and disfluency markers is the repetition of the same form or the combination of several forms (Ward, 2004). For example, in an interview with Ellen, Hillary Clinton shows her being attentive listener ;

Ellen: The president was just--
Trump was just acquitted by the Senate of his impeachment.
H: mm huh

Ellen: Does that surprise?
Ellen: Did you expect that?

It is clear that Hillary does not claim for the floor but she only wants to show that she is listening to what is said. In addition, Hillary uses other continuers which are non-verbal, for example ;

Ellen: And like you said, this is just people doing what's right and what's—

Hillary: head nod

Ellen: I mean, Mitt Romney is a Republican .

Hillary: head nod yes

Ellen: The fact that he is standing and saying, no, this is not right,

The head node is an example of the non-verbal backchannel which is used to function as a continuer .

Displaying understanding of content: These backchannels whether lexical or non-lexical are used by the listener to signal his/her understanding of the message of the speaker. For example ;

Ellen: we took into account that there's going to be a lot of that so we accounted for the time

Johnny: hhhhhh

Ellen: I know that you're a pretty private guy, pretty quiet guy and most of your off time is spent being very quiet.

In this extract, Johnny Depp who was interviewed by Ellen, uses laughing as an indicator to display that he understands the message.

Agreement: The listener's agreement to what is said can be signaled by the use of backchannels whether verbal or non-verbal. That's exactly true, I think so too, You're (so) right, How true, Too true, I agree, Right, and Yeah as well are examples of backchannels that can serve for such kind of backchannels.

Jennifer: Yeah, it's really cold in this studio, I'm going to talk to jimmy about it.

Kim: It is .

Jennifer: I have a weird reaction where I sweat when I get cold.

So I'm afraid if anybody at home is wondering why I'm sitting this way, it's not for my breasts.

The famous artist Kim Kardashian uses the utterance 'It is.' to signal that she agrees with what is by Jennifer Lawrence, the host .

Letterman: You have to make the determination at some point is the average on the bad side or is it on the good side and if it's on the bad side--

Jennifer: Right

Letterman: Even then do you have the courage to actually leave the comfort of that relation you have to make sure every step .

In the above example, Jennifer Aniston uses the word 'right' to show her agreement to what is said by the host and not to take the floor .

Support and empathy towards the speaker's judgment: When a listener wants to show his empathy or support to what is being said by the speaker, s/he uses certain backchannels to show it. Both verbal and non-verbal backchannels can be used in this case .

Ellen: That's what George Bush would look like incredibly stolen

J: I think so

Ellen: may be right and Edward Scissorhands what did you think about with that was a combination it was it was the you know the idea of like newborn really like a new boy seeing things for the first time

In this example, the host is talking about a certain movie casted by her guest, Johnny Depp. She humorously supposes that George Bush would look like stolen; an utterance which is based on Depp's previous utterance where he says that he is inspired by the stoned George Bush when acting 'Willy Wonka's character. The utterance 'I think so' is used to mark's support to Ellen's intended message .

Strong emotional response: Laughs and exclamatory statements are used by the listener to represent his emotion to what is being said. Words like Wow or Great are examples of this type .

Letterman: You do you need to call it I one time was it a film and I cracked my sternum laughing laughing so hard whatever back attacked me

J: Wow

Letterman: yeah but it's a good you and Vince have tremendous a chemistry on-screen and it's a great and it's a great story and probably a lot of people---

In talking about some of the rumors about her, Jennifer Aniston tries to display her astonishment with what the host is jokingly saying .

Minor addition or request for information: In certain cases, the listener might need to correct what is said by the speaker or s/he might need some clarification or s/he might want to add something to complete the utterance. In such cases, backchannels are needed since the listener is not claiming for the floor but to do either of the above needs .

Jimmy: I was looking at Dick Cheney while that was happening, he seemed to be enjoying that poncho moment.

Bush: helping me with the poncho ?

Jimmy: Well, he wasn't so much helping you, so much as glaring at you. Jeb Bush is a guy that I'm friendly with.

In this interview with George Bush, the host is jokingly referring to Dick Cheney's role in the time of Bush's Government. Bush uses this substantive backchannel to ask for clarification so that he can understand what is said .

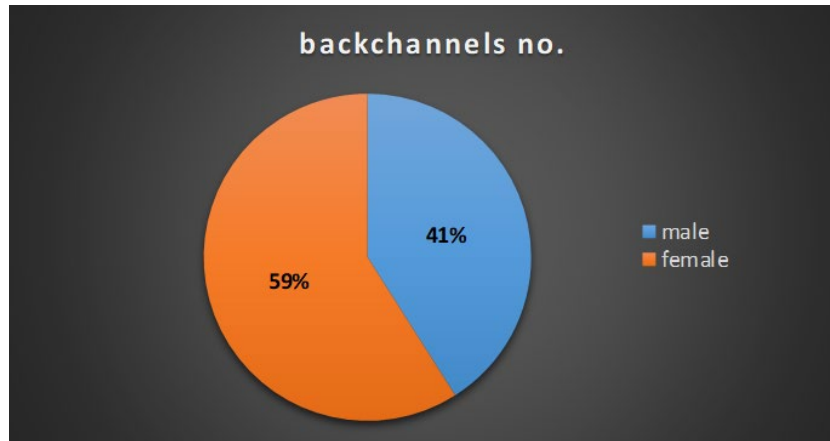
The Results

The results reveal that female use backchannels more than male do. Out of (139) backchannels collected from the interviews; there is (82) backchannels belong to female and the ratio is 41% while male's contribution comes with (57) backchannels with 59% as a ratio. The following table and diagram can show these facts:

Table (1) Frequency of backchannels in both gender types

Main types of backchannel	Backchannels no.
Male	57
Female	82
Total	139

Chart (1) The percentage of backchannels in both gender types

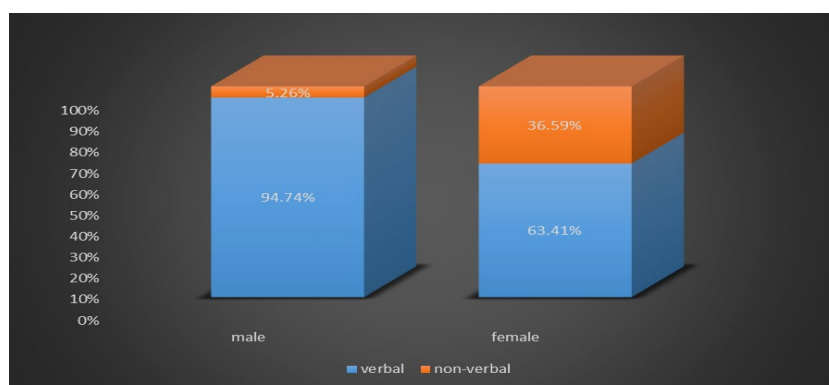


As far as the main classification of backchannels is concerned, verbal backchannels come with higher records in both male and female’s utterances although their records in female’s utterances is recognizably high whereas in male’s utterances is very few. The occurrences of verbal backchannels in male’s utterances is (54) which constitute 94.74% of the whole data while their occurrences in female’s utterances is (52) which constitute 63.41%. Non-verbal backchannels, on the other hand, appear (3) times in male’s utterances with a ratio of 5.26% and in female’s utterances, they appear (30) times with ratio of 36.59%. The following table and chart show these results:

Table (2) Frequency of verbal and non-verbal backchannels

Main types of backchannel	male	female
Verbal	54	52
Non- verbal	3	30
Total	57	82

Chart (2) The percent of verbal and non-verbal backchannels



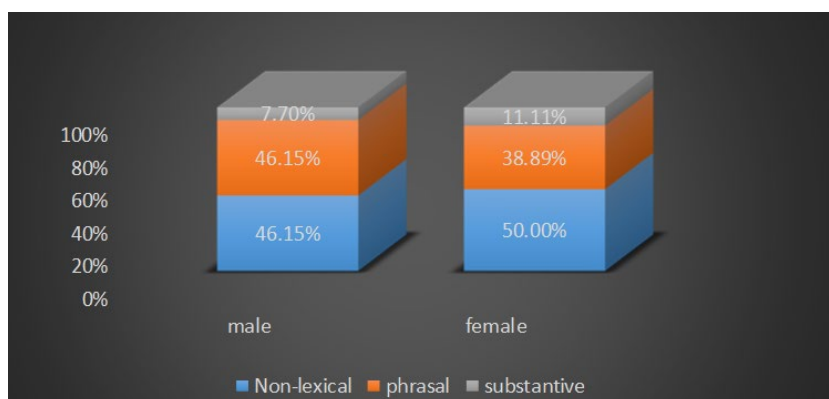
Concerning the classification of the verbal backchannels, the results show that in male’s data non-lexical and phrasal backchannels record the same frequencies and hence the same ratio; each of them record (24) occurrences and 46.15%. The substantive backchannels record (4) occurrences with 7.70% percent. In female’s utterances, non-lexical backchannels occur (27) times and this constitutes 50% of the data and hence they represent the highest frequency and percentage as well. Phrasal backchannels, as another type, come up with (21) occurrences and

38.89% and the substantive backchannels record (6) occurrences with 11.11% percent. These results are shown in the following table and chart:

Table (3) Frequency of types of verbal backchannels

Secondary types of backchannels	Male	Female
Non-lexical backchannel	24	27
Phrasal backchannel	24	21
Substantive backchannel	4	6
Total	52	54

Table (3) The percent of types of verbal backchannels



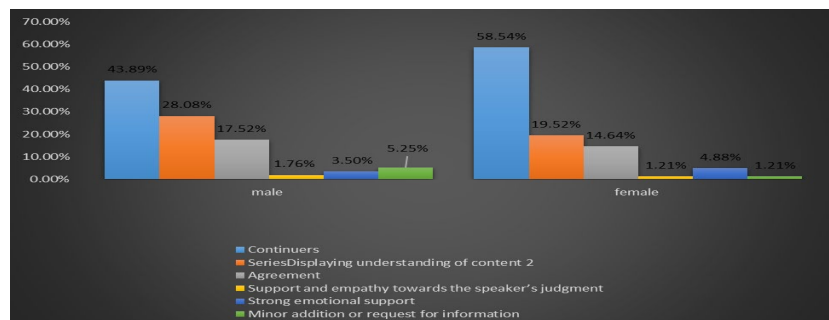
Still there is a secondary classification of backchannels whether verbal or non-verbal. Continuer ranked highly in the data of both gender types. It occurs (25) times with 43.89% percent in male’s utterances and it records (48) occurrences with 58.54% percent in female’s utterances. What comes next is “Displaying understanding of content”. It constitutes 28.08% percent with (16) occurrences in male’s utterances and 19.52% percent and (16) occurrences in female’s utterances. What is ranked third is ‘agreement’ which appears (10) times with 17.52% percent in male’s utterances. In female’s utterances, however, it appears (12) times with 14.64% percent. ‘Support and empathy towards the speaker’s judgment’ appears (1) time in both male’s and female’s utterances but it respectively constitutes 1.76% and 1.21% percent of the collected data. Another type is ‘strong emotional support’ which occurs (2) times with 3.50% percent in male’s utterances and (4) times with 4.88% percent in female’s utterances. Finally, ‘minor addition or request for information’ records (3) occurrences with 5.25% percent in male’s data and (1) occurrence with 1.21% percent in female’s data. The following table and chart show the above results:

Table (4) Frequency of secondary types of backchannels

Secondary types of backchannels	Male	Female
Continuers	25	48
Displaying understanding of content	16	16
Agreement	10	12
Support and empathy towards the speaker’s	1	1

judgment		
Strong emotional support	2	4
Minor addition or request for information	3	1
Total	57	82

Chart (4) The percent of secondary types of backchannels



Conclusions

The analysis and results reveal that females use backchannels more frequently in comparison with males' number of uses of these backchannels. This result can be traced to the fact that females usually tend to be more polite and since the use of backchannels is an indicator of politeness, we notice their higher frequencies in females' speech. In this way females are considered as attentive listeners who do not interrupt for the sake of claiming for the floor but to mark their interest in what is being said .

Moreover, verbal backchannels are used more frequently than the non-verbal one but this result cannot be said to be accurate since the researcher does not account for all kinds of non-verbal backchannels because they require certain techniques to be measured; something which is out of the ability of the researcher. Eye gaze for example might be measured to see whether it can be considered as a backchannel or not .

Besides, non-lexical backchannels proved to be more frequent verbal backchannels as compared with other types of verbal backchannels. This might be traced to the fact that these backchannels are widely used in contentful conversational speech to express support, surprise, or a need for clarification at the same time as someone else's conversational turn without causing confusion or interference .

Moreover, continuer backchannels are more frequent among other types. They are used for nothing more than pointing to the listener to continue speaking.

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ارجاع الدور في مقابلات المشاهير: دراسة اجتماعية-خطابية

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ملخص

المحادثة هي فعل يتناوب فيه شخصان أو أكثر على المحاوره. كل واحد منهم يتكلم في وقت محدد؛ وهكذا فان فعل المحادثة لا يتم بشكل عشوائي. ومع ذلك، قد تحدث بعض المشاكل عندما يتنافس بعض المتحاورين على أخذ الدور. وعلى العكس من ذلك، قد يساهم المتحاور بطريقة ما في نجاح المحادثة واستمرارها. حيث يمكن ان يساعد المتحدث من خلال استخدام استراتيجية ارجاع الدور (backchannel). تهدف الدراسة الحالية إلى دراسة وتحليل استراتيجية ارجاع الدور (backchannel) المستخدمة في محادثة المتحدثين الأصليين (المشاهير). الغرض من هذه الدراسة هو النظر في كيفية توظيف الجنسين المختلفين لهذه الظاهرة اللغوية. ولتحقيق هذا الهدف، يلقي الباحث نظرة على بعض المقابلات المختارة مع ممثلين مشهورين ومصممي أزياء وسياسيين. وتكشف النتائج أن الإناث تميل إلى استخدام القنوات الخلفية بشكل متكرر أكثر من الذكور. كما ثبت أيضاً أن استخدام القنوات الخلفية اللفظية أكثر شيوعاً من استخدام القنوات غير اللفظية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: ارجاع الدور، الذكر، الأنثى، الوظائف، الانواع.

گهراڻه وهی پۆله که له چاوپیکه وتنی که سایه تیبیه ناو داره کاندای: توژیڻه وهی کومه لایه تی-گۆفتاری

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پوخته

گفتوگۆ بریتیه له کرداریک که دوو کەس یان زیاتر به نۆره گفتوگۆ دهکەن. هه ره به که یان له کاتیکی دیاریکراودا قسه دهکەن؛ بهم شیوه به کرده ی گفتوگۆ کردن به شیوه به کی هه ره مه کی روونادات. به لأم رهنگه هه ندیک کیشه پووبدات کاتیکی هه ندیک له قسه که ران کیه پیک دهکەن بۆ ئه وهی بۆ وه رگرتی نۆره. به پیچه وانه وه، رهنگه قسه که ره به جۆریک له جۆره کان به شداری بکات له سه رکه وتن و به رده وامی گفتوگۆ که دا. ده توانیت یارمه تی بئنگۆ بدات به به کاره یانانی ستراتیژی باکچه نال.

ئه م توژیڻه وه یه ئامانجی لیکۆلینه وه و شیکردنه وه ی ستراتیژی باکچه ناله که له گفتوگۆی قسه که رانی زمانی دایکیدا (که سایه تیبیه ناو داره کان) به کارده هینریت. مه به ست له م لیکۆلینه وه یه ئه وه یه که سه یری ئه وه بکه ین که چۆن ره گه زه جیاوازه کان ئه م دیارده زمانه وانیه به کارده هینن. بۆ گه یشتن به م ئامانجه، توژیهر چاویک ده خاته سه ر هه ندیک چاوپیکه وتنی هه لپژێردراو له گه ل ئه کته ره به ناو بانگه کان و دیزاینه رانی جلو به رگ و سیاسه تمه داران. ئه نجامه کان ده ریده خه ن که مینه کان زیاتر له تیره کان زیاتر که نالی پشته وه به کارده هینن. هه روه ها سه لمینراوه که به کاره یانانی که نالی پشته وه ی زا ره کی زیاتره له به کاره یانانی که نالی نازاره کی

وشه سه ره کییه کان: دووباره ته رخانکردنه وه ی پۆل، تیر، م، ئه رکه کان، په گه ز.