The Effects of Filler Words and Conversational Interruptions Among Genders on College

Students at Seton Hall University

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Abstract

This study investigated the use of filler words such as "like" and "um" amongst male and female participants in accordance with the tendency to be interrupted, feelings towards interruptions, and speaking up after an interruption. Specifically, we looked at whether students felt they used filler words often based upon gender. Finding that there was no correlation here. We also explored how often do males vs females find themselves being interrupted, and if their response correlates with being angry and or annoyed. As well as feelings of discouragement following an interruption when speaking. We found that most participants reporting they feel most interrupted amongst friends rather than in school or work environments. Lastly, we discovered the majority of students who took the survey felt more nervous and intimidated when having a male figure in power, rather than a female boss or professor. Use of filler words, intimidation and interruption responses are discussed.

Keywords: interruption, filler words, gender, students, intimidation.

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Filler words (I mean, you know, like, uh, um) are commonly used in spoken

conversation. Via an Electronically Activated Recorder (EAR), which sampled participants'

language in daily conversations, found that words like filled pauses words (uh, um) were used at

comparable rates amongst genders and ages but discourse words (I mean, you know, like) were

used more amongst women and younger participants (Laserna, Seih & Pennebaker, 2014). It is

important to monitor everyday spoken language, which is why a recording tool is optimal for

proper research. This journal finds that women often use certain filler phrases more than men out

of consciousness and politeness.

Also relating to our study, men were significantly more likely than women to use

interruptions in a meta-analysis study (Anderson & Leaper, 1998). Thus, gender emphasizes the

importance of situational moderators on gender-related variations in social behavior. In a similar

study regarding effects of conversational interruptions based on gender, interrupters were seen as

less sociable and more assertive, more masculine, and less feminine than individuals who did not

interrupt (Robinson & Reis, 1989). The importance of varying genders regarding conversational

interruption comparison is seen as significant, as it is viewed more as a male than female trait

amongst studies. While another study examined similar patterns via task oriented experimental

groups, results showed that gender inequality in task-oriented discussions was often presented as

attempts of power (Smith-Lovin & Brody, 1989). Thus, it is important to examine the reasoning

behind interruption use amongst genders to examine the causes and intent, which concluded to be for exertion of power in this particular study.

Another study utilized a Likert-type scale to measure attitudes toward woman as university professors. Students indicated that attitudes towards that of female professors were more favorable due to lower levels of dogmatism (Brant, 1978). In our study we measured students' feelings on whether they felt more nervous or intimidated when having a female or male professor. These results coincide with our study as participants reported to feeling more intimated and nervous in front of a male professor or boss.

Method

Design

This association study examined the use of filler words ("like", "um") amongst different genders (male and female)

Participants

Participants included 26 students among undergraduate students at Seton Hall University.

Materials

The study used five Likert-scale formatted questions, four forced choice options and three open ended questions, equaling 12 total.

Procedure

Participants of this study participated through an online survey. They were asked to answer four forced choice option questions, three open ended questions and then rank set of 5 statements based on a 5-point scale.

Results

The mean and median value for various survey questions is listed in Table 1. Table 2 shows the correlation matrix. Figure 1 labels settings of interruptions and Figure 2 labels power intimidation amongst gender. The results are shown using descriptive statistics and a correlation matrix. The correlation matrix shows a significant correlation between speaking up, and filler words, $r(24)=-0.795$. Participants who admitted to often using filler words, felt as if they also find themselves being interrupted while speaking. Another significant positive correlation was observed between interruption and upset interruption, $r(24)=0.556$. The more that participated agreed that when they often find themselves being interrupted, they are likely to feel upset or discouraged. There was also a significant correlation between speaking up and upset interruption, $r(24)=-0.43$. The more that participated agreed that they speak up the more likely participants agreed feeling upset or discouraged when being interrupted. The majority of participants reported being interrupted more amongst friends and had more feelings of intimidation towards male professors and bosses. No other effects in this study were found to be significant.

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Discussion

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Our results showed no correlation between the use of filler words regarding gender, as well as the rate of interruption per male or female. As seen in other studies with larger groups of

participants, women are seen to use filler words more than men (Laserna, Seih & Pennebaker, 2014). Also apparent was the majority of students feeling more intimated and nervous when a male is in a power position, rather than a female. Other studies show that women are more favorable when it comes to having a power role, such as professor due to higher levels of dogmatism (Brant, 1978).

Our study was able to utilize a very specific focus group of uniquely, undergraduate students at Seton Hall University. This may be too small of a sample size to have enough validity. Other studies were able to utilize larger sample sizes to more thoroughly depict feelings and attitudes of participants better accurately (Anderson & Leaper, 1998).

While, our construct validity is strong due to the utilization of the Likert-scale, to measure accurate feelings of students participating in the survey. The scale allows for a 1-5 rating from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". Similarly, in another study we see the Likert-type scale as a dependable way to measure attributions toward an interrupter vary according to gender and status (Robinson & Reis, 1989). As for external validity, our study was not strong because of the small sample size of only 26 students enrolled at Seton Hall University. With a larger sample size, results may have been more diverse and varied. Although, participants were unaware what the studying would be testing and if gender would play a key factor in results. As for statistical validity within our study, results seemed appropriate and reasonable regarding filler word use and interruptions amongst genders.

A future study could be done amongst observed groups, rather than simply handing out a survey with self-report data. Similar studies were able to utilize taped conversations and rated

conversants on masculinity and femininity according to the Personal Attributes Questionnaire, and on competence, sociability, attractiveness, and traditionality (Robinson & Reis, 1989). We would also predict here that when using a larger sample size via an observational study, results could be seen as more accurate due to similar studies which showed women utilizing filler words more and men use interruption tactics as an assertion of power dominance.

References

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Table 1

Table Depicting the N, Mean, Median, Standard Deviation, Minimum and Maximum of the Survey Questions Utilized

Descriptives	Mean	Median	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Filler words	3.77	4.00	1.07	2	5
Interruption	3.38	4.00	1.03	2	5
Upset interrupt	3.54	4.00	1.03	2	5
Speaking up	2.50	2.00	1.36	1	5

Table 1. Shows the N, mean, median, standard deviation, minimum and maximum measure results of questions given to students who participated in our survey.

Table 2

Table Depicting the Correlation Matrix

Correlation Matrix		Filler words	Interruption	Upset interrupt	Speaking up
Filler words	Pearson's r	--			
	p-value				
Interruption	Pearson's r	0.304	--		
	p-value	0.132			
Upset interrupt	Pearson's r	0.372	0.556	--	
	p-value	0.061	**0.003**		
Speaking up	Pearson's r	-0.795	-0.430	-0.314	--
	p-value	**<.001**	**0.028**	0.119	

Table 2. shows the correlation matrix amongst questions asked via a Likert-type scale.

Figure 1

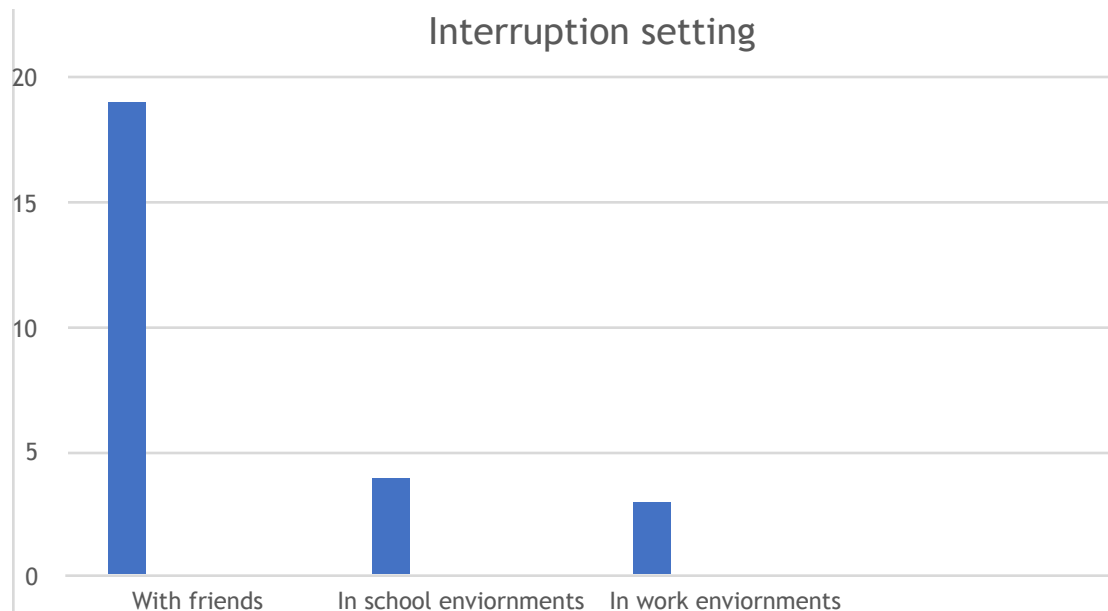The Figure Shows Which Setting Participants Find Themselves Being Interrupted Most

Figure 1. shows which setting participants feel most interrupted in. Showing most participants feel most often interrupted amongst friends.

Figure 2

The Figure Shows if Participants Feel More Intimidated When Having a Male or Female Professor/Boss

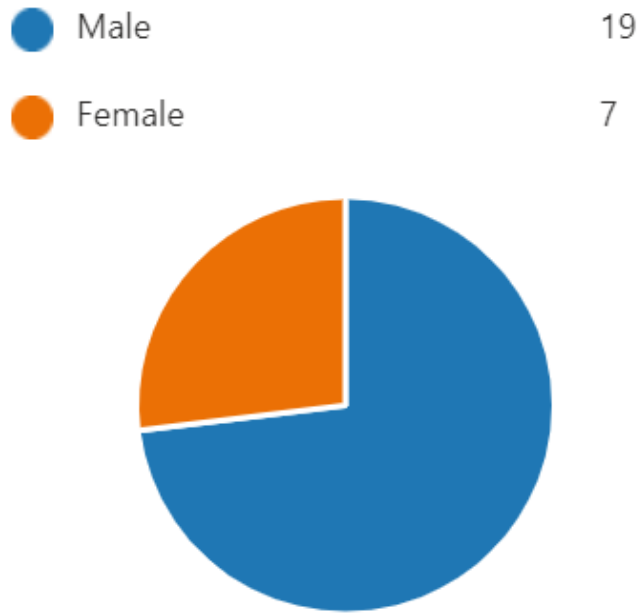|		
🔵 Male		19
🟠 Female		7

Figure 2. shows participants feeling more intimated and nervous when having a male professor or boss as the person in power.