

**GENDER DIFFERENCES IN PARTICIPATION  
IN DISCUSSION GROUPS IN FRESHMAN ENGLISH  
CLASSES AT ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY**

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**Gender Differences in Participation in  
Group Discussions in Freshman English  
Classes at Addis Ababa University**

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**ABSTRACT**

The study aimed to find gender differences in verbal participation in discussion groups in Freshman English classes at Addis Ababa University. It also aimed to find differences in assertiveness between male and female students and correlations between assertiveness and verbal participation. Statistical analysis of interactional turns in the videotapes of discussions of majority- female, majority-male and half male-half female groups showed no gender differences. Similarly no significant statistical differences between male assertiveness and female assertiveness were found. Also correlations between assertiveness and verbal activity were found to be generally weak.

## CHAPTER ONE

### 1. Background of the Problem.

For some time now multidisciplinary interest in gender issues has been on the rise internationally. A significant part of this interest has been in the area of women's education. A number of studies indicate that Ethiopian females lag behind their male counterparts academically for several gender-related reasons (Tsigie Haile 1989; Seyoum Tefera 1991; Genet Zewde 1991).

One major area this female academic underachievement becomes apparent is the classroom. While they are not intellectually inferior, female students do not, nonetheless, seem to assert themselves through positive initiating behaviours as in class discussions. (Maccaboy and Jacklin, 1974; Lockhead and Hall, 1970; Woods and Hammersley, 1993). Teachers like assertive boys most, and assertive girls least. (Spratt 1994). Teachers also hold negative attitudes about the academic potential of female students and mirror the society's gender biases into the classroom. (World Bank, 1996). Research in university lecture halls reveals more overall teacher attention to boys and more active participation by boys. (Bailey, 1993). The same research shows that boys receive disproportionately higher attention also in kindergartens, elementary and secondary schools.

Reports of gender inequity in education appear to be universal, but the imbalance seems to be greater in developing countries, like Ethiopia, where schools reflect and promote society's low expectations of girls through exclusion, avoidance and marginalisation.

(World Bank, 1996). Whereas, despite their gender-related problems many European and American girls get better grades and are more likely to go on to college than boys, few Ethiopian girls succeed in their school career and join institutions of higher learning. (Betz and Fitzgerald, 1987; Seyoum, 1991). While Tsige Haile's (1991) research does indeed throw light on the general inferior academic performance of females, it does not touch on the English class. There is no other Ethiopian research on the differential status of girls in the Freshman English classroom at Addis Ababa University. In so far as English language proficiency is decisively important in the Ethiopian University students' career, the status of females in this regard needs to be addressed as part of the general academic status of female students.

## **1.2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

According to statistics available, Addis Ababa University is male-dominated whether this be at the science campus or at the social sciences campus where the number of females is relatively higher than at the science campus. In the first semester of 1995-96 there were 224 female and 469 male first year students on the social science campus. On the science campus there were 119 female ( half of them from Addis Ababa ) and 852 male freshman students. Many of the female students joined the University with relatively lower ESLCE grades ( minimum for girls 3.0; minimum for boys 3.2 ) through the Affirmative Action Program instituted by the Ministry of Education. Nevertheless even though the current female figures are far higher than in the earlier years , Addis Ababa University continues to be largely a males' world.

In situations where there are more males than females, gender becomes more important to interpersonal interactions than such things as one's status as a student and where gender becomes an important factor in interactions, usually the person of the "wrong sex" suffers. ( Betze and Fitzgerald ,1987). Thus in male-dominated educational settings male dominance is a significant problem for females. It is significant because it impacts on girls' verbal participation in all forms of academic interaction: pair work, group work, and teacher-class discussions. Male dominance means that girls interact less and speak less in mixed-sex groups despite their verbal superiority. This problem is widespread. As Kelly writes:

... in several countries, in various socio-economic groupings, across all subjects in the curriculum, and with both male and female teachers ... Boys get more of all kinds of classroom interaction.

(Kelly (1988) cited in Sunderland 1994: 149)

### **1.3. Purpose of the Study**

The study aims to investigate the extent to which Addis Ababa University first-year female students participate in group activities in English language classes as compared to boys and to find out the factors responsible for any imbalance in participation levels. More specifically the study aims to find out:

- A. The Differential Participation of Boys and Girls in Male Majority Groups
- B. The Differential Participation of Boys and Girls in Female Majority Groups
- C. The Differential Participation of Boys and Girls in Half Male-Half Female Groups
- D. The Differential Degrees of Assertiveness of Boys and Girls

E. Any Possible Correlations Between Assertiveness Scores and Levels of Participation of Boys and Girls

**1.4. Importance of the Study**

In many cross-sex verbal interactions, research reports show girls interacting less and being silenced by boys, leading to girls' lesser verbal involvement in group activities. This problem of girls' reticence becomes all the more important when one considers that language use is an important part of language learning.

That girls produce fewer interactional turns may mean that they fail to benefit from learner-centered, co-operative activities that are now recognised to be beneficial for language acquisition. If girls cannot equally benefit from mixed-sex communicative activities, it may be that communicative methodology has little to offer for girls. The problem is important because male verbal dominance as reported in several studies may stand in the way of female students' rights for equitable language learning and practising opportunities.

The study is also important because it may help to show how boys and girls respond to others and to one another in small group situations. Also the study may reveal the effects of group sex composition upon verbal interaction and participation in groups and the interplay of group sex composition with individual differences in dominance.

## CHAPTER TWO

### 2.1. REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

#### 2.1.1. Sex/Gender Differences

Before any discussion of sex or gender differences a discussion of gender and sex may be in place. The terms "gender" and "sex" have been variously defined and interpreted. Often they are interchangeably used in the literature to refer to biological maleness/femaleness. In more recent literature there are more references to "gender" than to "sex". Gender is often preferred because it appears more comfortable. Very often the distinction is more than a matter of convenience.

For many 'sex' is used in connection with the biological categories of male and female while gender is a cultural construction used in reference to socio-cultural attributions of male/female sex. But this dichotomy is too complicated to be acceptable by all. For instance Treichler and Frank (1989) are not satisfied with the use of sex in relation to biological characteristics and gender in connection with socio-cultural designations. To them the terms are "complex and overloaded". Sex may be defined as a basic biological distinction, but this distinction proves inefficient when one considers sexually ambiguous infants. Also there is Money's (1989) concept of "psychological sex", the individual's self-image, and social sex, the complex of attitudes and expectations that a society attaches to maleness and femaleness" (Frank and Treichler. 1989:11). In the intention of Money (1989) who first used "gender" in connection with both biological and behavioral traits, the term would be generic including, among others, legal, genital and vocational elements. But most social scientists use sex to refer to the biological division between males and females and gender to refer to boys and girls, men and women-a division created by society and culture. Whatever the problematic dichotomy, more important has been the study of sex/or gender differences in several human domains. We can in general distinguish between stereotypical and actual distinctions between men and women.

There is an almost universal belief that men and women have innate characteristics that typify them. For instance, women are often described as weak, submissive, dependent,

emotional, co-operative. (Weber in Abebayehu, 1995). Even according to some feminists women are more caring, more attuned to personal relationships; less concerned about success, more oriented to the home. (Betze and Fitzgerald, 1987). Men, on the other hand, are considered "independent, aggressive, dominant, strong, competitive, adventuresome, physically strong and decisive" (Bukatko and Marvin, 1992:58); Abraham (1995) presents the descriptions of seven British secondary school teachers of what they call most typical girls.

lacking in confidence, neat, fussy about their work and totally co-operative, conscientious, more ready to accept the teacher's wishes, very bright and very pleasant, but do not say much and very studious, very silly and gigglish, quiet and timid.

(Abraham 1995: 63)

Research into sex differences in certain academic domains and their causes has come up with more actual differences. Maccaboy and Jacklin (1974) conclude that while the two sexes do not differ in overall brainpower, females show higher scores on verbal ability tests. According to them, boys are 3-4 times more likely to stutter than girls . And in modern languages, girls outperform boys at all educational levels. (Hughes and Preston in Sunderland, 1995). But whatever sex-based differences there are ,they do not clearly appear until adolescence by which time children will have learnt culturally appropriate sex roles. (Betze and Fitzgerald ,1987). For instance Sherman's (1979) sample of 9th and 6th graders showed no sex based cognitive differences. With regards to educational attainments, it appears that sex-based attainments differ culturally. In western cultures in general

the school progress of girls is superior to that of boys. Girls less frequently need to repeat a grade and girls are more likely than boys to be accelerated and promoted. In college,

women consistently receive higher grades than do men in major fields ranging from the humanities to the exact sciences

(Betz and Fitzgerald, 1987: 100)

In Ethiopia, college girls, due to various socio-cultural reasons, are more likely than boys to be forced to withdraw or be dismissed (Tsige Haile 1991) which appears to be a very serious case of what Betz and Fitzgerald (1987) call "females' chronic under-utilization of their abilities and talents". It is perhaps this underutilisation of their potential which has contributed to females' lower levels of self-esteem which several studies have reported. (Richman, Clark and Brown, 1984).

In an examination of stereotyping in several books one often comes across "disempowering discourse roles for female characters i.e. women and girls speaking less than boys and men, initiating less in mixed-sex dialogues and exemplifying different and less assertive language functions" (ETHEL, 1980 cited in Sunderland 1994:55). It seems such stereotypes have made the verbal superiority of girls merely theoretical.

### **2.1.2. The Value of Discussion in Language Learning**

Lectures in the language classroom, essentially solo performances, have been called an anachronism. They have been criticised for passivising the learner in the language learning process. (Berliner, 1988). Berliner mentions a students' editorial that mentions "our absurd lecture system" and an article that mentions that "only a very small number of students ever spoke or raised questions". The force of such anti-lecture criticisms has

been so strong that a more acceptable alternative has been offered by educationists in Britain, USA and other countries.

In the area of language pedagogy, the new alternative has come in the form of a communicative approach to language teaching. The new approach has a basic tenet that students should take an increasingly greater responsibility for their own learning. It calls for students' greater involvement in learning through student-student, student-teacher discussions of ideas, facts, opinions, feelings etc.

Gage and Berliner cited in Bellon et al (1992) consider improving spoken ability as a very important aim of discussion. This language improvement is possible through the opportunity students get to learn speaking clearly, audibly, correctly and logically. Gage and Berliner (1992) also believe that "discussion groups can help students clarify and improve their ability to communicate in written form through group editing and feedback." p. 180. Also Penny Ur (1981) mentions three aims of discussion.

- a) efficient fluency practice
- b) achieving an objective (talking of serious matters)
- c) learning from content (information)
- d) discussion skills

Day (1984) commenting on the same subject writes that there is a widespread assumption in the ELT profession that participation in discussions leads to greater acquisition. Lier (1988), for instance, writes that:

the interaction model of language acquisition holds that language learning occurs in and through participation in speech events, that is, talking to others, or making conversation, is essential.

(Lier, 1988: 74)

Lee (1985) mentions several comparative empirical studies of teacher-fronted activities with pair/group work that involved interaction (Doughty & Pica 1986; Porter 1986; Rulon and Mc Creary 1986). According to Lee, these studies show that the participants in the pair/group work had more chances to use language for communication. Pair and group-work made possible negotiation which yielded "more content clarification, confirmation checks, and comprehension checks (linguistic evidence for the interpretation of meaning)" ( Lee, p. 438).

But participation may not always involve verbal contribution. It is possible that in a group interaction participation may be "at times visible, at times not". ( Lier 1995: 91). It may also be said that the bigger the group the lesser the benefits are for the average member. For instance in a whole class discussion the verbal output or chances of producing this may be reduced for the average participant , with the result that only the teacher and the most vocal students are actively involved which may result in many tuning out. This, however, does not include the invisible participation of many nonspeaking members. May be some learn by listening, many by speaking.

It seems right that if we believe participatory speaking is essential, whatever drawbacks there are of whole class student-teacher discussions can be atoned for through the formation of small groups of students engaged in communicative activities that involve meaningful negotiation that contributes to language acquisition.

In this connection one may ask what is it that makes a discussion work. According to Ur a discussion that works is one in which "as many students say as much as possible" (Ur 1981:3). One can see at least two important variables in discussion: Topic and sex composition. The nature and type of a discussion topic can affect the length and verbal productivity of the discussion. Manifestly topics on a specialist subject may not lead to interesting and lengthy discussions, nor will topics in which the students are not interested. Similarly group sex composition (i.e. female: male or male:female ratio) may have a bearing on the individual and the overall verbal output in the group. Is sexual homogeneity a disadvantage or heterogeneity an advantage and for whom? The next topic reports research literature on the subject.

### **2.1.3. Gender Relations and Verbal Interaction in Mixed-Sex Groups**

Gender interactions are a very important phenomenon in the classroom in particular and in the school compound in general because much of the learning that takes place is embedded within them. Studies into friendship systems in the primary and middle secondary years show that classroom friendships and play groups tend to be unisex. (Best, 1983; Etaugh & Liss, 1992; Maccaboy and Jacklin, 1987; Thorne, 1993; cited in (Bailey,

1993). Summarising the cross-cultural literature on the same subject of gender relations, Maccaboy (1990) also writes:

Fairly distinctive styles of interaction develop in all-boy and all-girl groups. Thus the segregated play-groups constitute powerful socialisation environments in which children acquire distinctive interaction skills that are adopted to same-sex patterns .. the distinctive patterns developed by the two sexes at this time have implications for the same-sex and cross-sex relations that individuals form as they enter adolescence and adulthood.

(cited in Bailey 1993: 516)

Jones and Smart (1995) argue that girls have higher confidence in their same sex groups than in mixed sex groups. They also consider confidence as a major factor affecting girls' levels of participation in maths classes. According to them, girls' confidence which may be conveyed through acts of assertiveness is not usually perceived positively as it is contrary to cultural expectation which is reserve not freedom. This stereotypical expectation has resulted for girls in what Jones and Smart (1995) call "learned helplessness" i.e. crippling low levels of self-confidence.

However, some researches on the relationship between assertiveness and gender show that college females are significantly more assertive than college males. ( Stebbins, Kelly, and Tolor, 1977). Misgina (1994) also found a similar condition at Addis Ababa University where female students scored higher than males on tests of assertiveness. But other studies (Kimble ,1984 ; Mathison and Tucker ,1982) report greater male assertiveness in public situations and greater female assertiveness in private interpersonal settings. In a different

finding, Lohor and Stauffacher ( in Mesgina 1994) state that assertiveness is positively correlated with only masculine sex role characteristics, not sex.

But it has been suggested that sex be seen as a status indicator. After a review of the literature, Unger (1975) concluded that male-female interactions bear a striking similarity to interactions between people of superior-inferior status. Men in a mixed-sex discussion group feel they are interacting with inferior partners while women feel they are conversing with their superiors. Eagly and Wood also write:

When individuals enter a group their interaction is affected by perceived status because status clues lead people to have expectations about each others performance. In particular higher status people are expected to contribute more effectively to the group's task and consequently are given and take more opportunities to participate. This may have an implication for analysing men's and women's interaction...

( Eagly and Wood, 1985: 227 )

In their American research Hazen and Kahn (1975) show conditions under which men discriminate against women as discussion partners. Their research showed that men liked competent women only when they were not threats to their superior status or competitiveness. More competent women were often singled out for exclusion from group tasks involving competition. Hagen and Kahn (1975) thus concluded.

Men do not like competent women in competitive contexts and thus both discriminate and attempt to punish them by exclusion from the group

(Hagen & Kahn, 1975: 35)

Dion quoting Aries' (1976) study of native speaker situation showed that the interpersonal styles of males and females vary noticeably in unisex and mixed - sex groups. Interactions of all-male groups mainly demonstrated a fight for status, power and competitiveness as seen in group members learning to bring about dominance, to concentrate on topics of aggression and leadership and to talk to groups, not to individual members. Conversely, in exclusively female groups there was more openness and intimacy and fairness in the distribution of turns, and no dominance over group discussions. In contrast, mixed-sex interactions demonstrated an unmistakable status difference between males and females. Women directed their turns principally to males and males produced and received more turns than women. In an Ethiopian EFL college study, Michael Daniel (1993) reported that majority female groups chose males as their spokespersons showing their confidence in males.

Other research also shows that males receive help from females when they ask for it, but males ignore females' requests for help, (Wilkinson, Lindow and Chiang, 1985 quoted in Sunderland 1994). In a different research Lockhead and Harris (1984) concluded that while mixed-sex grouping creates opportunities for boys to dominate, such grouping makes females subordinates. The benefits of mixed-sex grouping for girls may be limited by the domineering behaviour of boys.

The oral inactivity of girls in mixed-sex groups and classrooms is well-documented. Lockhead and Hall ( 1970) conclude from their review of research that males in discussion groups tend to initiate more turns, have greater influence and be more task-oriented than

females. In a review of more recent literature on mixed sex groups that Lockhead examined using collaborative tasks of 64 databases, 45 showed greater male activity, influence or leadership, 9 showed greater female activity, and 11 showed no sex differences.

In another research on teacher-student interactions in relation to sex, race and grade level, Irvine (1986) indicates that male students initiate more positive and negative interactions with teachers than do female students. They also quote Brophy and Everston (1981) whose study suggests that boys are more likely than girls to be provided public response opportunities. The researchers argue that because boys are active and salient and perceived by teachers as potentially disruptive, they are frequently provided response opportunities as a method of maintaining appropriate classroom discipline. They add that, on the other hand, the compliance and inactivity of female students results in fewer opportunities for them to be called on to respond.

In a study of sex differences in interaction and achievement in co-operative small groups in maths, Webb (1970) reports uneven participation and verbal attention. Here participation related to male-female ratio in the study groups. Interestingly, female and male students showed the same participation patterns in groups with the same number of male and female students. The balance was, however, not maintained in majority female groups. Females directed most of their interaction to males whereas in majority male groups, male students tended to ignore girls.

In a study of gender balance in teacher fronted classes, Woods and Hammersley (1993) report that male students took 50 turns (70%) while female students produced 18 turns (24%). In fact, this does not indicate the whole extent of differential participation since girls outnumbered boys. Assuming that there were equal participation, one would expect more than half (55%) and 45 of the turns to be produced by girls.

In her assessment of the general academic performance of female students in higher education institutions in Ethiopia, Tsige Haile (1994) reports similar patterns of female obscurity. The majority of the girls polled stated that they do not ask or answer questions in class pivotally due to fear of their classmates and teachers and lack of confidence. In fact ,interestingly females' tendency to suffer from angoraphobia ( fear of crowds ) and other phobic conditions is documented. According to Dillon (1985) phobic conditions may arise more in women than men due to society's stereotyping of women as helpless and dependent.

Thus explaining the situation of female learners Sunderland (1994) writes that the classroom as a whole:

is gendered in a way that disadvantages the female learner. The dominance of patriarchal values and their consequences: gender practices, roles and relations and identities seem to be no encouragement to female students.

(Sunderland 1994: 6)

Sunderland argues further that multifaceted gendering is brought about and reinforced by the English classroom. The fact that the English language itself is gendered may lead to

gendered outlook of the world and gendered use of the language as reflected in the gender-differentiated use of language in conversations and discussions.

Research reveals that in general women as discussion partners collaborate, facilitate and seek agreement, while men tend to overtalk, interrupt and disagree with their conversational partners. ( Coates, 1986; Holmes, 1990 ; Spender, 1980a, Jannen, 1990) in Sunderland (1994). It has often been said that interruptions in verbal interaction communicate domination and that women get interrupted more often than men. Women typically use rapport establishing strategies. Thus Holmes (1994:156) calls female interaction strategies "talk-support strategies" and part of the male interaction strategies "talk-inhibition strategies" - strategies that serve to monopolise talk-time. In a study that validates the classification of male-female strategies, Holmes (1994) examining Munro's audiotapes of small mixed-sex interactions in an EFL situation came up with far greater male interruptions than female ones. In a different analysis of the same tape, Holmes found out that although both sexes asked more "response restricting questions" than " facilitative questions", more response restricting questions came from the men (88%) than from the women (66%). Given this finding "teachers need to be aware that typically it is women students who are the victims and men the perpetrators of the unsupportive and disruptive talk strategies" (Holmes 1994: 159). Holmes concludes that " in the ELT context where opportunities for practising speaking are vital, it is worth considering ways in which one could counteract the negative effect such strategies may have on female learners" (p. 168).

## CHAPTER THREE

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Subjects

The subjects were male and female first year students at Addis Ababa University College of Social Sciences taking Freshman English 102. They came from Addis Ababa (15 boys and 15 girls) and the Regions (15 boys and 15 girls); Addis Ababa and Regional private schools (12 boys and 12 girls) and Addis Ababa and Regional government schools (18 girls and 18 boys). In all they were thirty males and thirty females of diverse social, economic, cultural and educational backgrounds. Sampling was both purposive and random. Firstly, out of a total of 21 Social Science Freshman sections 10 sections with a female threshold figure of 12 were purposively selected. Then, out of these sections with a minimum female number of 12, 5 were randomly selected. Next out of the minimum of 12 females, 6 in each section were purposively selected. Similarly, males in the selected sections were purposively selected to match the females in respect of school background, region and numerical suitability in mixed sex grouping (sex ratio). The sixty male and female subjects constituted 8.5% of the Social Science Freshman population. All had a self-reported ESLCE English score of A.

#### 3.2. Instruments

3.2.1 Assertiveness Scale. A 21-item assertiveness scale by Kammerman et al (1991) was adapted. This involved the replacement of six-culture specific items with culture-fair ones

from Mesgina (1994). Two examples of the scale are 1) " When I meet new people in social situations I initiate introductions and start conversations." 2) " I would freely offer information or my opinion in group discussions even if I did not know the other people very well". The adapted scale was found to have a significant reliability co-efficient of .71. The subjects were asked to respond on a 4-point scale. Never (0,4); Rarely (3,1); Sometimes (2); Usually ( 1,3 ); Always (4,0). As two different examples the following items would be scored as follows: 1) I avoid asking questions in class fearing that they just won't sound right. Never (4); Rarely (3); Sometimes (2); Usually (1) and Always (0). 2) If my instructor made ,in my opinion an unfair request, I would express my feelings to him/her. Never (0); Rarely (1) ; Sometimes (2); Usually (3); Always (4). There would be a minimum 0 and a maximum 84 assertiveness score. Based on Kammerman's scoring key, assertiveness scores were divided into four categories.

66-84 Very Assertive

44-65 Somewhat Assertive

22-43 Somewhat Unassertive

0-21 Very Unassertive

Except for two females, all subjects completed and returned the scale.

### **3.2.2 Interviews**

Slightly gender-differentiated six-item structured interviews were administered to 15 % of males and females in the selected sections . The interviews related to information about the

subjects' cultural orientation , their perceptions of their mixed-sex group and their academic ability as girls and boys and whether membership in a group affects males and females differently. Three examples are 1. If you were given the freedom to join the discussion group of your choice, would you prefer a) a girls only group b) a boys only group c) a mixed group of boys and girls. Why ? 2. Do you believe that boys are generally better than girls as students and as discussion partners? 3. Do you think your individual participation decreases when there are fewer girls or increases when there are more girls ? How ? The interviews with the female subjects were held by a female colleague whereas the interviews with the male subjects were conducted by the researcher himself. The rationale was that both males and females would feel freer and communicate more genuinely with members of the same sex.( see Appendix - for the Interview Schedule).

### **3.3. Procedure**

The subjects were not informed about the purpose of the study so that they behaved naturally. They were helped to divide themselves into three groups. Subjects from private schools in Addis Ababa who normally come from high income families, and subjects from government schools in Addis Ababa and regional government schools presumed to come from more or less average income families formed their own exclusive six-person mixed-sex groups. These groups were majority female ( 4 girls, 2 boys); majority male ( 4 boys, 2 girls) and half male half female ( 3 girls, 3 boys). Six groups were balanced for sex ; two groups were majority-male and two other groups were majority female. There were

more of half male-half female groups because real gender differences, if any, might be expected in situations where there are equal numbers of males and females. There were fewer groups unbalanced for sex because the impact of sex composition ( sex ratio ) on male and female participation is of secondary importance to the study.

To reduce the distracting effects of the videocamera on the verbal data required, all groups were fake-filmed in four sessions, so they got used to it. In the actual data gathering rounds, the subjects were given choices of topics for discussion. The topics chosen were: 1) " Can Africa Ever Develop ? " 2) " Are Women Really Inferior to Men ?" 3) " Who should Solve University Students' Problems ?" and 4) " Is Education Oxygen ?" There were no rules set for discussion. The subjects were told that every one was free to start or conclude the discussion. The ensuing discussions of the chosen topics were videotaped for 20 minutes. Then the interactional turns were transcribed and divided into short turns ( one complete sentence , question or phrase) and long turns ( contributions longer than one sentence) and frequency counts thereof made. The means and standard deviation were computed and the means of the various groups t-tested. Also the means of the assertiveness scores of the various groups were computed and correlations made between the verbal means and the assertiveness scores.

### **3.4. Definition of Terms**

Assertiveness :           The ability to communicate one's thoughts and feelings confidently without violating the rights of others.

- Turn : A verbal contribution in group discussion.
- Short Turn : A verbal contribution in group discussion which is a sentence or less than a sentence.
- Long Turn : A verbal contribution which is longer than a sentence.
- Sex : Biological maleness or femaleness.( more in literature review)
- Gender : A socio-cultural construction referring to the division and relationship between boys and girls and between men and women.(more in literature review)
- Participation : Verbal contribution or involvement.
- Gender Differences : Statistically significant differences between the mean verbal scores of boys and girls.

### 3.5. Acronym

ESLCE Ethiopian School Leaving Certificate Exam

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Results and Discussion

#### 4.1. Results

The first part of this chapter presents the data in tables with ensuing interpretations and the second part discusses the results.

**Table 1: Turns of Males in Majority Female and Majority Male Groups**

Short Turns					
Groups	Cases	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error	T-Probability
Males in Female Majority	5	.60	1.34	.60	.851
Males in Male Majority	4	.75	.96	.48	p > .05
Long Turns					
Groups	Caes	Mean	SD	SE	T-Probability
Males in Female Majority	5	2.20	.84	.37	.183
Males in Male Majority	4	1.50	.58	.29	p > .05
Total Turns					
Groups	Cases	Mean	SD	SE	T-Probability
Males in Female Majority	5	2.80	1.92	.86	.622
Males in Male Majority	4	2.25	1.26	.63	p > .05

Table 1 shows that the mean differences of the short, long and overall turns of males in majority female and majority male groups are statistically insignificant. [P = .851 for short

turns; .183 for long turns; and .622 for total turns]. This means that considering turn length, males in both majority male and majority female groups have shown the same performance.

**Table 2: Turns of Females in Majority Female and Majority Male Groups**

Short Turns					
Groups	Cases	Mean	SD	SE	T-Probability
Females in Female Majority	12	.83	1.53	.44	.651
Females in Male Majority	4	.50	.71	.50	p > .05
Long Turns					
Females in Female Majority	12	1.50	1.31	.38	.71
Females in Male Majority	4	1.50	1.44	1.00	p > .05
Total Turns					
Females in Female Majority	12	2.33	2.15	.62	.341
Females in Male Majority	4	1.50	.71	.50	p > .05

Table 2 shows that a t-test of short, long and total turns of females in majority female and majority male groups indicates statistically insignificant mean differences. [.651 for short turns; .71 for long turns; .341 for total turns]. This indicates that female performance in majority female and majority male groups in terms of short and long turns is statistically the same.

**Table 3 . Turns of Males in Majority Male and Females In Majority Female Groups**

Short Turns					
Groups	Cases	Mean	SD	SE	T-Probability
Males in Male Majority	4	.75	.96	.48	.901
Females in Female Majority	12	.83	1.53	.44	p > .05
Long Turns					
Males in Male Majority	4	1.50	.58	.29	1.00
Females in Female Majority	12	1.50	1.31	.38	p > .05
Total Turns					
Males in Male Majority	4	2.25	1.26	.63	.93
Females in Female Majority	12	2.33	2.15	.62	p > .05

Table 3 displays that there are no statistically significant differences between the short, long and total turns of males in majority male and females in majority female groups. [P = .901 for short turns; 1.00 for long turns and .93 for total turns]. Males in majority male and females in majority female groups have nearly the same means of short, long and total turns.

**Table 4: Turns of Females in Majority Male and Males in Majority Female Groups**

Short Turns					
Groups	Cases	Mean	SD	SE	T-Probability
Females in Male Majority	4	.50	.71	.50	.90
Males in Female Majority	5	.60	1.34	.60	p > .05
Long Turns					
Females in Male Majority	4	.50	.71	.50	.90
Males in Female Majority	5	.60	1.34	.60	p > .05
Total Turns					
Females in Male Majority	4	1.00	1.41	1.00	.43
Males in Female Majority	5	2.20	.84	.37	p > .05

Table 4 shows that the means of the short, long and total turns of females in majority male and males in majority female groups are not statistically significantly different. In other words, considering all forms of turn length, females and males as minorities showed no differences in participation.

**Table 5: Turns of Males and Females in Half Male-Half Female Groups**

Short Turns					
Groups	Cases	Mean	SD	SE	Probability
Males in Half-Male -Half Female Groups	18	.80	1.32	.30	.58
Females in Half Male-Half Female Groups	18	1.13	1.96	.49	p> .05
Long Turns					
Males in Half-Male -Half Female Groups	18	1.80	1.61	.36	.37
Females in Half Male-Half Female Groups	18	1.38	1.24	.30	p> .05
Total Turns					
Males in Half-Male -Half Female Groups	18	2.60	2.62	.59	.92
Females in Half Male-Half Female Groups	18	2.50	2.92	.73	p> .05

In Table 5, we can see that there are no statistically significant differences between the short, long and total turns of males and females in half male - half female groups. [ $p = .58$  for short turns;  $.37$  for long turns;  $.92$  for total turns]. This indicates that in the groups controlled for sex, no gender differences are observed in the production of short, long and total turns.

**Table 6: Turns of Males and Females (general)**

Short Turns					
Groups	Cases	Mean	SD	SE	T-Probability
Males	29	.76	1.24	.23	.59
Females	30	.97	1.71	.31	p > .50
Long Turns					
Males	29	1.83	1.39	.26	.215
Females	30	1.40	1.22	.22	p > .05
Total Turns					
Males	29	2.59	2.32	.43	.73
Females	30	2.37	2.50	.46	p > .50

According to Table 6, the mean differences between the short, long and total turns of males and females are statistically insignificant. [ $P = .59$  for short turns;  $.215$  for long turns;  $.73$  for total turns]. This means that there is no difference in the means of short, long and total turns obtained by males and females.

**Table 7 A: Assertiveness Frequency (Males)**

	Cases	%
Somewhat Unassertive	9	30.0%
Somewhat Assertive	19	63.3%
Very Assertive	2	6.7%
	30	100.0%

**Table 7B Assertiveness Frequency (Females)**

	Cases	%
Somewhat Unassertive	11	36.7%
Somewhat Assertive	17	56.7%
Missing	2	6.7%
Total	30	100.0%

**Table 7C T-test of Assertiveness of All Males and Females**

Short Turns					
Groups	Cases	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error	T-Probability
Male	30	47.67	8.80	1.66	p > 0.05
Female	28	47.79	8.79	1.66	

Table Seven A and B show that 30% of males are somewhat unassertive, 63.3% somewhat assertive, and 6.7% very assertive. In contrast, 36.7% of females are somewhat

unassertive, and 56.7% somewhat assertive. There are no very unassertive males or females. While there are no very assertive girls, there are two such boys. Table 7 C also shows that the mean assertiveness scores of males and females are not statistically significantly different.

**Table 8: Correlation between Assertiveness and Production of Turns**

	Short Turns	Long Turns	Total Turns		Short Turns	Long Turns	Total Turns
Male Assertiveness	-0.0159	0.1339	0.0717	Female Assertiveness	0.044	-.0384	0.012

According to Table 8, there is a general weak correlation between assertiveness and production of turns. Except for short turns, male assertiveness is weakly but positively correlated with verbal output. Female assertiveness, on the other hand, is weakly positively correlated with short and total turns, but weakly inversely correlated with long turns.

#### 4.2. Discussion

The research points to a gender equity in participation and assertiveness. This contradicts previous findings of Lockhead and Hall (1970) and Gass and Varonis (in Holmes 1995) of small group discussions in EFL situation. The present findings also contradict the results of a study by Holmes (1995) of small group discussions in Australian ELT classes most, but not all of which showed male dominance. Presumably, a few of the groups did not

show greater male activity. The present study validates the absence of male salience observed in these few groups. It provides that in all groups the means of the interactional turns of males and females are not significantly different. The short, long and overall turns of males in majority-female and males in majority-male groups gave t-values of  $p = .851$ ,  $.183$  and  $.622$  respectively indicating the absence of any gender imbalance in participation. Females in all groups produced a total of 72 short and long turns, which is only slightly smaller compared to the 75 short and long turns produced by males. The interview results, however, seem to suggest a gender disparity in participation. They indicate that 45.2 % of females and males feel that male students show greater involvement; 40 % think female students are verbally more active and 14.8 % think there is no gender imbalance.

The results clearly indicate that sex composition had no significant impact on the verbal activity of either boys or girls. Assuming that the greater the number of members of the same sex, the higher the confidence and the greater the verbal productivity of members of that sex, we might expect the boys in majority-male groups to produce more individual turns than the girls in that group and vice versa. However, it appears that sex or sex composition had no significant effect on verbal productivity. This might probably be owing to the ability of both males and females to feel fairly equally at home irrespective of the sex composition of their discussion groups.

Likewise, the short, long and total turns of females in majority female and majority male groups were not indicative of significant statistical differences. The t-test results of  $.651$  (for short turns),  $.71$  (for long turns) and  $.341$  (for long turns) suggest that the females in

male majority groups were as verbally active as the females in majority female groups who might be expected to be verbally more productive than the opposite sex because of their greater number and the greater confidence this might be thought to produce.

Comparisons of the verbal productivity of males in majority-male and females in majority-female groups in terms of short, long and total turns taken did not show any more statistically significant differences. A t-test produced p-value .901 (for sort turns), 1.0 (for long turns) and .93 (for total turns) which suggests that girls or boys in the majority had no advantage or dominance over their partners in the minority. T-values of .90 (for short turns), .43 (for long turns) and .25 (for total turns) also showed that females in majority-male and males in majority-female groups were not in any disadvantage. Also 85.5 % of the male and 82.3 % of the female students said their individual participation would not be affected by the sex composition of their group. However, 92% of the female and 95 % of the male interviewees preferred working in mixed sex-groups to single sex- groups which may be ascribed to the co-educational background of the respondents or their desire to forge cross sex friendships. Also 85 % of males and 82.6 % of females considered mixed sex grouping academically mutually beneficial.

The verbal turns of males and females in half male and half-female groups did not show any statistically significant gender imbalance. The t-values were .58 (for short turns), .37 (for long turns) and .92 (for total turns).

A general t-test for boys and girls as sex-groups showed no imbalance in participation. The t-values were .59 (for short turns) .22( for long turns) and .75 (for overall turns), which may lead to a conclusion that there are no gender differences in verbal participation. The equality in participation may be attributed to the female students' positive academic-self concept ( a trust in one's academic ability) and global self-concept ( a belief in one's overall worth ). Eighty nine percent of the interviewed females said they did not consider male students as academically superior to female students . This may be due to the fact that they have good scholastic records which may have proved to them that they can function academically as well as males. There is an assumption also that female students have a better English self-concept which may be taken as a subarea of academic self-concept. Another important factor leading to the absence of gender imbalance in participation could be the fact that nearly half of the female subjects come from the City of Addis Ababa which may mean that they have greater orientation about university education and life and higher chances of adjustment to the university atmosphere where they may function more freely and fully than provincial female students. Another relevant explanation may be that the City is less traditional than the regions and therefore more recognizant and appreciative of the academic abilities of academically successful female students.

A t-test result of assertiveness ( $p=0.97$ ) would also lead to a conclusion that boys and girls are equally assertive which would contradict some previous studies of Stebbins , Kelly and Tolor (1977) which showed that college females were significantly more assertive than males on the college self-expression scale. The results would also contradict a local study by Mesgina (1994) which showed that female Addis Ababa University students were more

assertive than male students which might be attributed to the exclusive assertiveness training given to female students. Also contributing to this imbalance could be the possibility that self-esteem ( which may be expressed in assertiveness ) is more strongly correlated to achievement motivation in female college students than male students.( Streiker and Johnson in Nancy and Fitzgerald, 1987). A stronger explanation could be that high degrees of self-worth characterise particularly females in male-dominated educational settings. (ibid.). This explanation becomes even more convincing when one considers that Addis Ababa University has been male-dominated for much of its history.

The present study shows that there is greater assertiveness variance among individuals regardless of sex than between the sexes which agrees with Lohor and Stauffacher's ( in Mesgina 1994) assertion that assertiveness is uncorrelated with sex , but correlated with masculine role characteristics. Assertiveness was also weakly correlated with verbal productivity for both males and females which may be attributable to the absence of gender disparity in assertiveness and participation.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Summary and Conclusion

The study aimed at establishing gender differences in verbal involvement in Freshman English mixed-sex group discussions. To this effect, majority-female, majority-male and half male - half female groups were formed. Interactional turns which were used to measure participation were divided into long and short turns. These were counted and the means for the females and males in majority-male, majority-female, half male -half female groups computed and compared. T-test results showed that gender did not produce any significant differences in verbal participation in all the groups in the study. Females in majority-male groups participated as well as females in majority-female groups and males in majority-female groups had statistically the same verbal means as males in majority-male groups. The same gender balance in verbal activity was maintained in discussions in half male - half female groups with respect to short turns, long turns and total turns.

The study also looked into assertiveness differences between males and females, but failed to find any such differences. Also correlations were performed to determine any relationships between assertiveness and verbal involvement, but no significant correlations were found either for males or females. The only significant correlations were between short turns and long turns (.55 ), short turns and total turns (.86) and long turns and total turns (.89). That is both male and female subjects who had many short speaking turns had as many long turns and vice versa ; those who produced many long turns had as many overall turns.

### **Implications for Further Research**

The study has considered only gender and assertiveness as likely factors affecting participation. However, there is an assumption that many variables, other than gender and assertiveness, may be at work in verbal participation in group discussions. Further research may consider with a more thorough description of subjects

1. Such factors as quality of background education, student intelligence, socio-economic class, and traditionality (city vs country).
2. A number of personality characteristics which may be associated with participation
3. Moreover, in view of the problem of generalizability from a college population it may be important to consider lower grade level subject pools.

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10	At parties and other social occasions I feel uncomfortable	A	B	C	D	E
11	In regard to necessary duties, I insist that a roommate take on a fair share	A	B	C	D	E
12	I avoid asking questions in class fearing that they just won't sound right	A	B	C	D	E
13	If my instructor made, in my opinion, an unfair request, I would express my feelings to him or her	A	B	C	D	E
14	During study hours I ask my doormates to conduct conversations elsewhere.	A	B	C	D	D
15	When I want to sleep I ask my friend/s to leave	A	B	C	D	E
16	I feel uncomfortable when someone gives me a compliment/ an appreciation	A	B	C	D	E
17	I would freely offer information or my opinion in group discussions, even if I did not know the people very well	A	B	C	D	E
18	I have difficulty communicating to an attractive person of the opposite sex	A	B	C	D	E
19	I refuse to give my text to a classmate or friend when I need it	A	B	C	D	E
20	I feel uncomfortable to tell a classmate that I have forgotten his/her name	A	B	C	D	E
21	I would feel uncomfortable explaining to a friend/boss/instructor a better way in ,in my opinion , of completing a specific task	A	B	C	D	E

**INTERVIEW**

The aim of these interview questions is to supplement a gender research currently being conducted. Since the success of the research depends on the truthfulness of your responses, you are kindly requested to answer the questions honestly.

## For GIRLS

1. If you were given the freedom to join the discussion group of your choice, would you prefer a) a girls only group b) a boys only group c) a mixed group of boys and girls. Why?
  
2. In many cases in English classes , girls and boys sit with members of the same sex and do not often mix. What do you think the reason is ?
  
3. From your own observation of group discussions in Freshman English classes who do you think participates more , girls or boys? A) Boys B) Girls
  
4. Do you see any disadvantages or advantages of working with boys in group activities ? If yes , what are these ?
  
5. Do you believe that boys are generally better than girls as students and as discussion partners?
  
6. Do you think your individual participation decreases when there are fewer girls or increases when there are more girls? How?

**INTERVIEW**

The aim of these interview questions is to supplement a gender research currently being conducted. Since the success of the research depends on the truthfulness of your responses, you are kindly requested to answer the questions honestly.

**For BOYS**

- 1.If you were given the freedom to join the discussion group of your choice , would you prefer a) a girls only group b) a boys only group c) a mixed group of boys and girls. Why?
  
2. In many cases in English classes , girls and boys sit with members of the same sex and do not often mix. What do you think the reason is ?
  
3. From your own observation of group discussions in Freshman English classes who do you think participates more , girls or boys?
  
4. Do you see any disadvantage or advantage of working with girls in group activities ? If yes, what are these ?
  
5. Do you believe that boys are generally better than girls as students and as discussion partners ?
  
6. Do you think your individual participation increases when there are more boys than girls in your group and vice versa ?

## ASSERTIVENESS SCORING KEY

ITEMS	NEVER	RARELY	SOMETIMES	USUALLY	ALWAYS
1.	4	3	2	1	0
2.	0	1	2	3	4
3.	4	3	2	1	0
4.	4	3	2	1	0
5.	4	3	2	1	0
6.	0	1	2	3	4
7.	0	1	2	3	4
8.	0	1	2	3	4
9.	4	3	2	1	0
10.	4	3	2	1	0
11.	0	1	2	3	4
12.	4	3	2	1	0
13.	0	1	2	3	4
14.	0	1	2	3	4
15.	0	1	2	3	4
16.	4	3	2	1	0
17.	0	1	2	3	4
18.	4	3	2	1	0
19.	0	1	2	3	4
20.	4	3	2	1	0
21.	4	3	2	1	0

**Assertiveness Categories**

66-84 Very Assertive

44-65 Somewhat Assertive


22-43 Somewhat Unassertive

0-21 Very Unassertive

## DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, declare that this is my work and that all sources of material used for the thesis have been duly acknowledged.

Name: Amanuel Gebru

Signature: 

Date: 26 June 1996