
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Gender Dynamics in Face-to-face and Online Turn-taking

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| ABSTRACT

This article explores the gendered turn-taking patterns of men and women in two communicative environments: an online group chat and a face-to-face university classroom discussion among Moroccan students. Referencing from sociolinguistic theories and conversation analysis to examine how these two genders navigate conversational floor-taking in distinct interactional modalities. Men are more likely to dominate face-to-face conversations through longer turns and interruptions. Women, however, tend to prefer more supportive styles of communication. The rapid emergence and evolution of digital communication have created new dynamics that affect the interactional norms of gendered discourse. This paper aims to analyze the various cues that influence the transmission of gendered discourse, such as turn initiations, response timing, interruptions, and overlaps, to reveal both the divergence and continuity in gendered discourse. The findings indicate that while the offline interactions reproduce traditional gender asymmetries, online space creates more opportunities to participate in more equal ways. This study provides valuable information on how gendered discourse unfolds within socially interconnected and contextually distinct environments.

| KEYWORDS

Gender, turn-taking, face-to-face interaction, digital communication, conversation analysis, sociolinguistics, multimodality

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

Gender significantly influences communication styles, shaping how conversational turns are taken, maintained, or disrupted. In traditional face-to-face contexts, men frequently dominate by speaking for longer durations, interrupting more often, and controlling topic flow (Zimmerman & West, 1975; Tannen, 1990). Women, on the other hand, tend to use supportive strategies such as affirmations and backchanneling (Coates, 2004). These asymmetries are not universal; context and culture play important roles in mediating how turn-taking unfolds (Holmes, 2006; Walters, 2016). The escalation of computer-mediated communication (CMC), particularly platforms like WhatsApp, has raised questions about the nature of gendered norms in contemporary communication. It challenges whether gendered norms are reinforced or redesigned in digital spaces. While WhatsApp is known for its combination of asynchronous and synchronous elements, it also complicates the traditional notion of dominance in conversations. This study investigates how Moroccan University students (female and male) rotate turn-taking across face-to-face and WhatsApp group interactions.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Disparities in Gendered Language

According to (Tannen, 1990), both men and women use different communication strategies. For instance, men's speech tends to be focused on information and competition, while women's are more likely to build rapport. Lakoff (1975) noted that women's use of tags and hedges was linked to linguistic insecurity. However, later scholars, including Holmes (1995), reinterpreted these as

tools for solidarity. Zimmerman and West (1975) showed how men tend to interrupt women more often, which reinforces dominance. Coates, on the other hand, emphasized the collaborative methods women employ.

2.2 Turn-Taking in In-Person Dialogues

Turn-taking was first established by Jefferson, Schegloff, and Sacks (1974) as an organizational principle of talk. Face-to-face studies highlight the frequent interruptions and extended speaking periods for men (Coates, 1998). Nonetheless, Moroccan sociolinguistic practices are not always considered in the context of turn-taking. For instance, overlaps may signal engagement instead of disruption (Jamili, Benali, and Rachidi, 2023). They also play a key role in negotiating turns (Elouakili, 2017).

2.3 Turn-Taking in Digital Communication

The dynamics of digital communication are often changed by platforms such as WhatsApp. Without gesture, prosody, or gaze, interaction relies on timing, textual cues, and multimodal affordances (Herring, 1999; Dresner & Herring, 2010). Asynchronous exchanges can help reduce interruptions and enable delayed responses, which can democratize participation. Gender disparities still persist, with women more likely to employ emojis and expressive punctuation and multimodal techniques. Men, on the other hand, may lean toward authoritative tones or direct approaches (Darics, 2010; Kiesling & Johnson, 2010).

2.4 Research Gaps and Objectives

Although there are plenty of studies on turn-taking in Western contexts, little research has been conducted on Morocco, as its sociolinguistic traditions are influenced by Francophone, Arabophone, and Amazigh traditions. This study aims to fill this gap by examining how students in Morocco navigate gendered turns on both offline and online. The study will look into WhatsApp's turn-taking behavior in terms of gender differences and topic discussions. It will also investigate how technological affordances affect turn-taking.

3. Methodology

This research employs a comparative case study design (Yin, 2018). The goal of this study is to examine the interactional dynamics among two groups of University Moroccan students who participated in two communication contexts: one of which was a WhatsApp group chat, and the other was a classroom discussion. Sixteen participants (8 men, 8 women), aged 18–22, enrolled in the same first-year course, were selected, with prior familiarity facilitating naturalistic interaction (Bryman, 2016). The data included 27 hours of WhatsApp group chat, and a 75-minute discussion about work and migration, which were mainly conducted in French, Arabic, and English. Although the total time spent interacting varied significantly between the two settings, the number of conversation turns was relatively similar. The dynamics of both platforms reflect the temporal changes that occur in different forms of communication. For instance, while online exchanges are typically slower and more asynchronous, participants in both settings tend to carry out multiple short messages that mirror their face-to-face movements. The results of this study suggest that the digital affordances affect the interactional structure and turn-taking behaviors of participants. The analysis of turn-taking practices was carried out using the CA principles (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974), which also included quantitative measures such as the number of interruptions, message lengths, and overlaps. The results of the study were presented through qualitative excerpts, which were used to illustrate the various interactional nuances and patterns.

4. Results and Analysis

4.1 Turn Initiation and Participation

Table 1 presents participation across both modalities. The WhatsApp group, which consisted of approximately 382 turns, displayed a strong female presence (64.6%), whereas the face-to-face interaction, totaling 311 turns, remained male-dominated (58.2%).

Metric	WhatsApp (27h42m)	Face-to-Face (1h15m)
Total Turns	382	311
Male Turns	135 (35.4%)	181 (58.2%)
Female Turns	247 (64.6%)	132 (41.8%)

Table 1: Number of turns

On WhatsApp, women initiated and maintained the flow of discussion. Female Participants took on organizational and supportive roles, guiding others through practical issues (sharing deadlines, links, and instructions). The tone was cooperative and humorous, with females managing information exchange and coordination. In contrast, the classroom discussion was characterized by male dominance, longer turns, and topic control. Female participants contributed regularly but tended to produce shorter, supportive comments rather than extended analytical arguments.

4.2 Interruptions and Overlaps

Interruptions and overlaps were frequent in the classroom but absent on WhatsApp due to the platform's sequential structure. Table 2 illustrates the stark contrast: men were responsible for the majority of interruptions offline. This reinforces established findings (Zimmerman & West, 1975) that interruptions are a key mechanism of male dominance.

Metric	WhatsApp	Face-to-Face
Interruptions Made	0	45
Interruptions Received	0	36

Table 2: Interruptions

For example, in the classroom, a female participant proposing an alternative view was interrupted mid-sentence by a male peer redirecting the discussion. Online, the absence of simultaneous talk redistributed participation opportunities, enabling every message to be read and acknowledged.

4.3 Response Timing and Message Length

Timing and turn length further distinguished modalities. Table 3 summarizes differences: WhatsApp allowed delayed responses averaging 3–10 minutes, while face-to-face required immediate replies. Messages on WhatsApp were shorter (8–12 words) compared to classroom turns (14–18 words). This reduction of immediacy lowered the pressure to compete for the floor, particularly benefiting female participation.

Metric	WhatsApp	Face-to-Face
Avg. Message Length	7–12 words	15–20 words
Response Delay	1–10 min	<10 sec

Table 3: Timing and Turn Length

In WhatsApp interactions, delayed exchanges allowed more reflective and inclusive contributions, as participants could join without the pressure of immediate response. In contrast, the rapid pace of classroom talks privileged faster and more assertive speakers, usually male participants. On WhatsApp, participants took advantage of asynchronous timing, responding when convenient and often building on each other's posts with emojis, laughter ("hahaha"), or supportive reactions. This rhythm encouraged reflection and inclusion, particularly for female participants, who responded more frequently and creatively. In contrast, classroom conversation demanded immediacy, rewarding assertiveness and fast responses. Men thus occupied more speaking time, while women's turns were shorter and sometimes overlapped or interrupted.

4.4 Multimodal Features

Multimodal features such as emojis, stickers, and message deletion played an important role in WhatsApp interactions. Table 4 shows their distribution, with women disproportionately using expressive cues such as emojis and stickers, while men occasionally deleted or reformulated their posts to control visibility.

Feature	WhatsApp	Face-to-Face
Emojis/Stickers	35	0
Shared Files	12	0
Deleted Messages	8	0

Table 4: Multimodal features

Women employed emojis and stickers frequently ("😊," "❤️," "👍") to soften tone, express humor, and maintain connection. Male participants also used humor but less elaborately. Such cues replaced gestures and prosody present in spoken talk, shaping a distinctly digital form of emotional communication. This aligns with broader findings that women employ multimodal cues to sustain engagement and solidarity (Kelly & Watts, 2015).

4.5 Comparative Insights

The contrasting nature of the two approaches reveals the difference in how conversations unfold. In the face-to-face discussion, topic initiation was predominantly controlled by male participants, who frequently steered the direction of the conversation and introduced new themes. In contrast, the WhatsApp group displayed a more balanced pattern, with both genders initiating topics; women, in particular, often took the lead in starting discussions and maintaining conversational flow. Interruptions, a hallmark of dominance in spoken exchanges, were frequent in the classroom setting and mostly carried out by men, reinforcing their control over the conversational floor. Unlike in face-to-face conversations, WhatsApp did not feature interruptions. Its sequential nature allowed every participant to participate without overlap. The format of turns also differed. While face-to-face conversations were

more competitive, WhatsApp interactions were shorter, more fragmented, and distributed evenly across all participants. Women were more likely to use supportive language, such as humor and expressions of agreement, in their classroom interactions. On the other hand, in WhatsApp, both genders used humorous or supportive responses, which were sometimes used ironically. These findings highlight how digital communication has democratized the norms surrounding participation, making it possible for more inclusive practices.

5. Discussion

The findings suggest that gendered conversational style and participation are influenced by communicative modality. In the classroom, interaction reproduced traditional hierarchies: men dominated through longer turns, frequent interruptions, and topic control, consistent with prior findings in gendered conversation (Holmes, 2006; Mills, 2003). In contrast, the WhatsApp group redistributed participation. Women were more likely to take turns, and they performed various tasks, such as organizing and emotional labor, in order to create more collaborative and egalitarian conversations that were rarely achieved in real-time settings. The use of technology enabled WhatsApp to foster a more inclusive environment and reduce the competition. Despite the dominance of women, the subtle gender-based dynamics of the interaction remained. Some male participants maintained their discursive authority through evaluative comments and problem-solving. This shows that online platforms can modify social hierarchies, but they do not completely remove them. The use of multilingual play highlighted the possibility of creating identities that are different from one another in digital spaces. Female participants developed strategies to sustain their connection and warmth, using emojis and code-switching as tools. supporting Herring & Stoerger's (2013) that women rely on digital cues to maintain their connection and visibility online.

6. Conclusion

According to the findings of this study, gendered turn-taking is more likely used in communicative elements in their interactions. Males had more dominant roles in face-to-face encounters, with frequent interruptions and longer speaking periods, which were similar to the traditional hierarchies found in sociolinguistic settings (Holmes, 2006; Mills, 2003). However, through the WhatsApp group, females were able to participate more actively. They were able to do so by using various cues such as message timing, to assert presence and influence the flow of the conversation. The findings indicate that even though digital platforms can partially eliminate gendered tendencies, they can't completely eliminate them. The goal of this study is to provide a deeper understanding of how sociocultural norms and communicative elements influence interactional dynamics. It also highlights the importance of combining quantitative and qualitative methods in comparative studies. The results can be used by designers and educators to improve the participation and efficiency of women in online or offline communication. It can also be utilized to investigate the effects of technological advancements on sociolinguistic practices in varying cultural and multilingual contexts. A longitudinal study is also feasible to study the interactions between gendered individuals over time.

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