Investigating the Structure of Women’s

Conversation: The Case of Women

Friends in Khartoum

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Dedication

To my late father, source and sustenance
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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the way Sudanese women interact in private conversations. The study intends to achieve four objectives. The first objective is to examine the use of simultaneous speech (interruptions, overlaps, and simultaneous starts) by Sudanese women. The study tries to show the degree of the usage of these linguistic strategies and their functions in casual speech. The second objective is to investigate the use of hedges, tag questions, and minimal responses and their functions in women’s talk. The third objective is to examine the process of co-operation initiated in the actual interaction. The fourth objective is to explore the relationship between the women’s linguistic behavior and the maintenance of intimate social relationships among them.

To achieve the objectives specified, the study adopted descriptive and qualitative research methods. Recording was used in data collection as it is the most reliable method in such kinds of studies. The recording covered forty-one women from different age groups and educational levels. The subjects were divided into three groups (named as Maya, Malak, Homy) according to their ages. The total period of the recorded data was twenty-three hours and thirty minutes. One hour transcribed talk from each group was used in the process of data analysis (three hours in total). The selection of the samples was based on the occurrence of the linguistic devices to be examined. The data have been transcribed, transliterated, and translated into English. The Conversation Analysis approach was adopted in analyzing the data.

The study came up with a number of interesting findings. The most important of which is that the subjects tended to break the rules of turn-taking by using interruptions, overlaps, and simultaneous starts. The women studied were found to have used hedges, tag questions, and minimal responses intensively. The analysis has shown that Sudanese women use hedges much more than the women in the West do. Results also suggest that the women in the sample used these linguistic functions to co-operate in completing
communicative tasks during natural interactions, and to enhance intimate social relationships among them.

Based on the results reached, the study suggested areas for further research in the Sudanese context. First: replicating the same study in mixed-sex conversations. Second: the use of hedges, tag questions, and minimal responses needs to be investigated among women in other parts of the Sudan to cover different varieties of Sudanese Arabic. Third: the rules of turn-taking in conversation can be tested among rural uneducated women. Fourth: the use of interruption as a tool of domination in mixed-sex conversations needs to be examined.
ملخص الدراسة

تتضمن هذه الدراسة أربعة أهداف تتمثل في أحاديث النساء السودانيات (الخاصة)، فالهدف الأول منها يمثل في تداخل أحاديثهن ومقاطعه بعضهن لبعض في الحديث وعدم ترتيبته له في البداية، بحيث تتم المقاطعة والمداخلة والبدايات المتواصلة (المتزلجة) دون استراتيجية متبعة في اللغة. والهدف الثاني هو التحقق والبحث عن طريقة مدهن للكلام، والأسئلة المرتدة، والردود القصيرة المقتضبة. والهدف الثالث هو التحقق في عملية التعاون الناشئ من التفاعل الفعلي في حديث النساء. أما الهدف الرابع فتمثل في كشف العلاقة بين سلوك النساء اللغوي وخلق العلاقات الاجتماعية المحمية بينهن.

لتحقيق أهداف الدراسة سالفة الذكر اتبعت الدراسة أساليب البحث الوصفية والنوعية، حيث استخدم التسجيل في جمع البيانات لكونه الطريقة التي تناسب طبيعة الدراسة. وتم تسجيل أحاديث واحد وأربعين امرأة في فئات عمرية متنوعة، ومستويات تعليمية متنوعة، ومن ثم قسمت إلى ثلاثة مجموعات منبت (مايا، ملك، هومي) وفقًا لأعمارهن. بلغت فترة المدة الزمنية للمادة المسجلة ثلاثة وعشرون ساعة وثلاثون دقيقة، وقد استخدم حديث مديته ساعة واحدة لكل مجموعة في عملية تحليل المعلومات (ثلاث ساعات في الإجمالي). وقد اعتمد اختبار العينات على وجود الأدوات اللغوية المراد التحقق بالبحث فيها، وكتبت حرفيًا ثم ترجمت لإنجليزية، كما تم استخدام منهج تحليل الحديث في التعامل مع المعلومات.

توصلت الدراسة إلى نتائج مثيرة لتغيير النسائيات السودانيات يمكنها استخدام المقاطعات، والتبادلات، والبدايات المتواصلة (المتزلجة). أن النساء اللائي تم تغريد محاضرة من Syncوالأسئلة المرتبطة، والردود القصيرة القصيرة أكثر. كما أظهر التحليل أن النساء السودانيات يستخدمن هذه التدخلات أكثر مما يفعل النساء في الغرب. أظهرت نتائج التحليل أن النساء اللائي أجريت عليهن الدراسة استخدمن هذه الوظائف اللغوية في مهام التواصل أثناء أحاديثهن المحيطة بالتحديات الاجتماعية ولغوية.

بناءً على النتائج يقترح إخضاع بعض المجالات إلى مزيد من الدراسة في السياق السوداني، والتي تشمل إعادة نفس الدراسة في المحادثات التي تشمل النساء والرجال. يحتاج هذا الكلام والأسلوب المرتدة والردود القصيرة الشائعة إلى مزيد من التحقق والبحث عن هذه الدراسة بين النساء السودانيات في أماكن مختلفة من السودان لتنبغ النهج المختلفة. دراسة استخدام مقاطع الكلام كأداة للسيطرة على الحديث في المحادثات المختلطة من الجنسين (نساء ورجال).
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<table>
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<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CAT</td>
<td>Communication Accommodation Theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAT</td>
<td>Speech Accommodation Theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CofP</td>
<td>Community of Practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RP</td>
<td>Relational Practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CA</td>
<td>Conversation Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDA</td>
<td>Critical Discourse Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MCDA</td>
<td>Membership Categorization Device Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TCU</td>
<td>Turn Constructional Unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRP</td>
<td>Transition Relevance Place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TESOL</td>
<td>Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSPAE</td>
<td>Corpus of Spoken Professional American-English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WL</td>
<td>Women’s Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PWC</td>
<td>Professional Japanese Women in Charge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEU</td>
<td>Survey of English Usage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCT</td>
<td>Personal Construct Theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISDN</td>
<td>Integrated Services Digital Network</td>
</tr>
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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1.0 Overview

Since the early 1970’s, researchers have considered the belief that males and females speakers differ in their communication behaviors leading to the existence of different speech communities (Weatherall, 2002). Language has been viewed as reflecting men’s power and social advantage and women’s lack of power and social recognition (Lakoff, 1975). Research on gender differences has shown that power is evident in language use. In the study of speech style, for instance, men were found to employ interruption in mixed-sex speech as a means of controlling the floor in conversation depending on their assumed power and dominance. This makes men’s voice gets heard and their language becomes powerful. Men’s silence, on the other hand, can be interpreted as an instrument of practicing power within the family. A woman may perceive a man’s silence as a way of ignoring her talk by not taking into account her view when discussing a certain issue in order to emphasize her subordinate status. This suggests that conversation pattern can reflect gender inequality (Coates, 1993).

Feminists argue that language does not only reflect men’s power, but also establishes and maintains negative attitudes towards women and their social status (Weatherall, 2002). Women’s speech is believed to be degrading and trivial and easy to ignore. Accordingly, women have been ignored in the structure of language itself. That is, masculinity forms such as chairman, mankind, guys, etc, are used when referring to people in general or persons whose gender is unknown (ibid). Another way of women marginalization in language in most of the Arabic world is referring to them with the names and titles of their fathers or husbands (e.g. daughter of x, wife of x) while men are addressed with their immediate names. Lackoff (1975) argues that women’s language is inferior to men’s. Women’s speech style conveys weakness, uncertainty and
unimportance while men’s language is described as direct and clear. Lakoff maintains that women use more precise color description (e.g. mauve, beige), empty adjectives (e.g. divine, lovely) than men. At the syntactic level, women use more tag questions and hedges (e.g. sort of, you know) than men.

There are two approaches to gender differences in language that reflect women’s status: The Dominance approach to sex differences in speech, proposed by Lakoff (1975), which is concerned with the importance of power between the two sexes, particularly the belief that women tend to occupy a marginal and powerless position in their community. In other words, the dominance approach maintains that the way women speak reflects their subordinate status. Maltz’s and Borker’s (1982) Cultural approach, on the other hand, emphasizes the idea that women and men belong to different subcultures. In linguistic terms, the differences in women’s and men’s speech are interpreted as reflecting and maintaining gender subculture. The cultural approach is also known as the difference approach in the literature. It is based on a sociolinguistic framework that views gender differences as cultural products which complicate communication. These differences resulted from the separation of boys and girls in the peer groups of childhood and adolescence. The cultural approach pays no attention to power and focuses on how women and men are separated in society (ibid).

With what have been discussed in mind, the present study focused on Sudanese women’s speech, particularly the way in which conversations are conducted. I examined some patterns of linguistic behavior of Sudanese women in mundane talk.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Women’s style of speech that deviates from the norms of conversation had been viewed negatively. It was seen as unassertive and weak (Lakoff, 1975). Now, this style is regarded as a strategy of making extended conversation and maintaining good social relations (e.g. Coates, 1989, 1993, 1996; Holmes, 1984; Tannen, 2007). In the Sudan, women tend to be intimate, supportive, and co-operative. This nature is reflected, more or
less, in the language they use. Sudanese women use many euphemisms in order to show their interest in the topic under discussion, and confirm each others’ opinions, even if they do not see eye to eye in some views. In other words, women employ some linguistic functions to create intimacy and socialization. This study argues that Sudanese women tend to deviate, in their casual speech, from what is known in discourse as Co-operative Principle (Grice, 1975). The Co-operative Principle is a general principle which governs conversations. It describes how people interact with one another and how they behave in normal conversation (Brown and Yule, 1983). The principle comprises four parts known as maxims, allowing effective conversation: maxim of quality (truth), maxim of quantity (informative), maxim of relation (relevance), and maxim of manner (clarity).

The deviation of co-operative principle may be attributed to the talkative nature of some women who believe that social relations can be created and maintained via language. Generally, when Sudanese women engage in friendly conversations, they tend to break the rules of ‘turn-taking’ by using features of simultaneous speech (interruptions, overlaps, simultaneous starts). In addition, they employ some linguistic devices such as hedges (sort of, I think, etc.), minimal responses (yeah, right, etc.), and tag questions. In this perspective, each interlocutor tries her best to get involved in the conversation. In fact, these behaviors are observed in the speech of all women in the Sudan regardless any differences such as education and age. Thus, the main assumption I have in mind is that Sudanese women’s linguistic behavior has a role to play in creating co-operation and intimate social relationships among them.

The study has focused on some linguistic functions used by women during casual conversations. First; ‘turn-taking’ is among the main functions subjected to detailed investigation to see how many Sudanese women attend to its rules, considering features of simultaneous speech. Second, some linguistic devices (hedges, tag questions, minimal responses) are to be examined in Sudanese women’s speech to explore their functions during interaction.
With the arguments discussed above, the present study focused on how simultaneous speech (interruptions, overlaps, simultaneous starts) alongside some linguistic devices (hedges, tags, minimal responses) function within Sudanese women’s interactions. In other words, the research will examine the use of these linguistic behaviors by Sudanese women in casual conversations. The problem will be addressed from different angles such as how Sudanese women violate or observe the rules of conversation and how they deal with the ‘turn-taking’ organization. Moreover, the study intends to investigate the different usages of hedges, tag questions, and minimal responses.

1.2 Research Objectives

The present study sets out to achieve the following objectives:

1- To examine the role of the rules of turn-taking in organizing conversation, regarding simultaneous speech, in Sudanese women’s interaction.
2- To explore the function of hedges, tag questions, and minimal responses in Sudanese women’s talk.
3- To investigate the process of co-operation in Sudanese women’s casual conversations.
4- To see if the linguistic behavior of Sudanese women plays a role in enhancing social relations among them.

1.3 Research Questions

To achieve the above objectives, the study tries to answer the following questions:

1- What is the role of turn-taking in organizing the speech of Sudanese women?
2- What are the functions of hedges, tag questions, and minimal responses in Sudanese women’s talk?
3- How do Sudanese women co-operate in their friendly interaction?
4- Does Sudanese women’s linguistic behavior play a role in enhancing social relations between them?
1.4 Research Hypotheses

In answering the research questions, the following hypotheses have been formulated:

1- Sudanese women tend to violate the rules of turn-taking by employing simultaneous speech in their private conversations.
2- Sudanese women use a considerable number of hedges, tag questions, and minimal responses in friendly talk.
3- Sudanese women work co-operatively during interaction.
4- Sudanese women’s linguistic behavior promotes intimate social relations among them.

1.5 Significance of the Study

Most of the studies on language and gender have been conducted in the West among middle-class heterosexual women and men. The main focus of these studies was to examine conversational behavior in mixed-sex talk. For instance, Zimmerman and West (1975), and Tannen (2007) have found that men used interruptions extensively to dominate conversations as a means of power control. Swann’s (1989) study of mixed-sex classroom’s discourse shows how the boys took more turns at talk than the girls did. Similarly, in studies of family conversations, Erickson’s (1990), and Greif’s (1980) findings have demonstrated male domination in talk. Moreover, Beattie (1982) has empirically proved, when analyzing Margaret Thatcher’s interview, that women get interrupted by men even when they are in political leading positions.

Coates’s (1989) findings show that minimal responses were found to be used more often by women who were friends and equals. Moreover, the women under the study used hedges to show confidence or lack of confidence of the truth of the proposition. Brown (1980), in a study of mixed-sex talk in the Mayan community in Mexico, has proved empirically that hedges are used by women more than by men since women are more polite in this community. In examining mixed-sex conversation, White (2003) has
found out that women produced tag questions to facilitate interaction because women were more attentive in keeping conversation going on. Cameron et al. (1989) have come to similar results when examining tags in SEU sample. Findings show that women used facilitative tags since they played the role of facilitators in interaction while men were tended to adopt modal tags. Dubois and Crouch (1975), on the other hand, show that tag questions were used significantly more by women than by men. Having demonstrated some previous studies on gender and language, the need for similar studies in non-Western setting is urgent in particular in all-female interaction since it is rarely found in the literature. For example, Coates (1989; 1993; 1996), when examining women’s conversations, notes that women friends talk collaboratively and their speech can be described as co-operative.

This study is hoped to fill in the gap by investigating the usage of some linguistic functions in casual conversations by Sudanese women. The study is expected to contribute to the literature on language and gender by exploring the role of cultural practices in constructing conversations in Sudanese women’s communities. This kind of study, to the best of my knowledge, is rare in the Sudanese libraries. Most of gender related issues tackled by researchers have ignored the actual use of language among all-female interaction.

1.6 Limits of the Study

The present study is limited to investigating the usage of certain linguistic functions in women’s conversations in a Sudanese context in Khartoum. The main focus is on the violation of ‘turn-taking’ organization by employing features if simultaneous speech (interruptions, overlaps, simultaneous starts). Hedges, tag questions, and minimal responses are under the focus too.
1.7 Research Method

Conversation analysis (CA) is a discipline that studies speech in conversations. It deals with the description and analysis of any particular phenomenon (e.g. interruption) found in social interactions (Have, 2007; Liddicoat, 2007). CA emerged out from the ethnomethodological tradition in sociology developed by Garfinkel (1964; 1967; 1988). Ethnomethodology is a field of sociology which studies the resources, practices, and procedures produced by members of a society (Garfinkel, 1967). It focuses on small-scale social order, emphasizing individuals’ understanding of the situations and messages in their shared world. It also shows the participants’ interpretation of social actions and how they relate meanings to these social actions (Boden, 1990; Clayman & Maynard, 1995).

Schegloff (1992) has developed, from his lectures on conversations in the early 1960s, an approach to the study of social actions. This approach studies social order obtained through the practice of everyday speech. Since then, CA emerged as an independent area of investigation oriented towards interpreting the organizational structure of speech. The organizational structure of speech has influenced a number of social sciences particularly those related to human communication (Lerner, 2004). CA shows how order is obtained in social interactions based on micro-analytic studies (Clayman & Maynard, 1995). CA stresses the significance of the situation in which speech is produced. Have (2007) argues that CA differs from other approaches such as the quantitative approach in a number of ways as follows:

1- CA operates closer to the phenomenon being tested more than other approaches. This is because it gives more detailed description of interactional activities, recordings, and detailed transcripts, rather than counting a phenomenon quantitatively.
2- CA works on naturally occurring data rather than experimental data such as interviews.
3- CA perspective is organized, when people talk they engage in a collectively organized acts which explain how, and not why, people act as they do.
4- CA does not study language as a linguistic system, but it examines oral language in natural situations.
For the above argument, I avoided the quantitative approach in the present study since it only deals with the occurrence of the phenomenon, and then summarizes it. To the best of my knowledge, many of the previous work on language and gender adopted quantitative approach which did not give a detailed account of the social factors that affect speech behavior. CA, however, allows a reasonable description of a linguistic feature and how this feature operates in social interaction. This is done through analyzing full transcripts of casual speech, rather than depending on predetermined experimental data such as that of critical discourse analysis (henceforth, CDA; see Wooffitt, 2005).

Wooffitt argues that CDA is a qualitative approach that works with non-interactional data. It deals with a highly political agenda, aiming to expose the ideology of groups in power using official documents and the press. However, CA relies on interactional data rather than textual material. It works with mundane talk, avoiding materials of social importance (ibid). Mundane talk could be organized in a way that describes the tested linguistic functions and determines the purpose of the production. Therefore, in this study, I will focus on CA approach, attempting to describe how the linguistic behavior of Sudanese women functions in a natural setting.

Schegloff (1993) opposes the idea that CA adopts quantification analysis that depends on statistic description. Instead, when working with a collection of actions in talk, analysis should be described qualitatively. Heritage (1995) argues that quantification of results is problematic because of the nature of the cases examined. For instance, simultaneous speech could be carried out for a variety of purposes. When a phenomenon occurs in conversation, the pattern should be examined systematically since it would occur in different contexts. In this sense, I examined certain linguistic features systematically among three conversational groups. Then, the conductive approach discussed by Have (1991) and Heritage (1988) was followed in analyzing Sudanese women’s talk since it shows the regularities of conversational organization in actual interactions.
Regularities in conversations are normative, that is interactants’ behaviors are considered to be ordered actions in the social world (H ave, 2007). So, in CA, deviant cases that found in conversations are not viewed as exceptions, but as an indication of orderliness (see Schegloff, 1968). Following this view, I describe simultaneous speech not as a deviant phenomenon, but a normative regular behavior in conversations. That is, there is tolerance for the use of interruptions, overlaps, and simultaneous starts in Sudanese women’s context. Women view such a usage positively as it shows their active participation in friendly talk. In comparison, in some Western societies deviation in turn-taking is viewed negatively and participants who interrupt are considered to be impolite (see Carroll, 1988; Kohonen, 2004; Wieland, 1991 for comparison).

Having demonstrated the main arguments and assumptions of CA, I found this method appropriate for analyzing my data. I will depend on the qualitative approach to describe and discuss the linguistic phenomena at hand.

1.7.1 Data Collection

a- Subjects

The data analyzed here were derived from ethnographic study carried between March 2010 and January 2011. The study included female friends’ meetings in different areas in Khartoum. Women’s communities in Sudan are considered to be cohesive with closely tight social net-works. This is depicted in their shared social practices in various situations. Generally speaking, Sudanese society emphasizes the importance of cooperation on social occasions especially among women. For instance, one of the social practices found predominantly among Sudanese women is the financial support granted to a friend on occasions such as giving birth, weddings, and cases of mortality. Women friends would also agree on having a meal with the woman who has that occasion. The women prepare a meal; each specifies the dish she is going to contribute. Then, as a collective group, the women share their friend her happiness or sadness. This situation would be a good soil for friendly conversations.
One of the most noticeable practices in Sudanese women’s communities is that, in cases of death, women tend to visit the mourning family and stay with them for some time. This is due to the belief that mourning people should not be left alone to face lament. The practice is performed especially in the first three days when women stay in a mourning house for the whole day. Women continue visiting the mourning family in the following days, but for short periods of time. In the mourning house women sit in groups engaging in private interactions. The dominant discourse is, more or less, centered on others who have experienced the same grief. In such a situation, the linguistic practices reflect Sudanese women’s group solidarity.

The study focuses on single-sex interactions. The subjects of the study were urban women, from Khartoum city, of different age groups (between eighteen and eighties), ranging between uneducated (only one participant in her eighties) and educated at various levels. The total of the subjects were forty-one women divided into three groups according to age. The three groups had been given special names for identification throughout the process of analysis.

a- Homy group, consisted of eighteen participants aged between fifties and eighties. All women in this group were below university level except the researcher.
b- Malak group, included twelve educated women, university and post-graduate levels, ranging between late thirties and sixties.
c- Maya group, comprised eleven university and post-graduate students aged between eighteen and thirty years old.

b- Instrument

The present study depends on data collected via recording actual conversations. This is because recording is the best method for doing conversation analysis. Have (2007) argues that audio-recording plays an important role in the emergence of CA as an independent discipline. However, some conversational analysis researchers have used video-recordings to study the visual aspects of interactions (see Goodwin, 1981; 1987; 1996;
The researchers believe that, to make the analysis complete, visual details such as eye gaze, gestures should be considered in analyzing face-to-face interactions. But, we think video-recording would render the subjects to speak cautiously rather than naturally. Subjects may not feel at ease with the video-camera filming them. As a consequence, the emerging talk could not be spontaneous which jeopardizes the objectives of the study. Therefore, I found researcher’s observation an alternative tool to accompany recordings as it helps in giving good account of some acts that might be useful for the analysis. Coates (1996) argues that feminist scholarship emphasizes that knowledge obtained through engagement provides greater insights and interpretation. She adds that ethnographers do ethnography in their own societies. In this sense, I acted as a participant observer in the process of the recordings (except one group- Maya).

Recording provides multiple examinations that lead to systematic analysis. This is because recording permits playing and replaying the talk for transcribing, analyzing, and cross checking. In addition, researchers can return to the data with new insights and ideas, using the same recording (Liddicoat, 2007). Repeated listening to the same data leads to a full interpretation of the talk (Hopper, 1988; Psathas, 1995). While recording conversations, some information should be reported. This information includes time, date, place of recordings, and the identification of the participants (Have, 1999; Psathas & Anderson, 1990). The researchers assume that participants’ identification is problematic for ethical reasons. Therefore, pseudonyms were used to identify the informants.

The data of the present study were obtained from recording women’s interactions. High quality audio-tape recorder was used to record, index, and present a database for the work. The audio-tape used was of a small size which allowed me to put it in a suitable place during the recording process. Additional data, background information, were considered a useful tool in the actual analysis. Researcher’s observation would also be in the core of the analysis because it took account of non-verbal acts accompanying the speech.
Transcription, on the other hand, is important for understanding the findings in CA since it shows different consideration of casual speech. Transcription is a secondary data representing the primary data of the recorded conversation (Liddicoat, 2007). Transcription is modified constantly while repeating listening. Heath & Luff (1993) argue that transcription represents the talk to be analyzed, helping the researcher to notice features of the transcribed talk. This provides a detailed analysis which cannot be achieved otherwise. In my study, following some conversationalists (e.g. Ehlich & Switala, 1976; Gumperz & Berenz, 1993; Mishler, 1991), there were some instances where I transcribed the same interaction differently according to the purpose of the analysis. Heritage (1984) argues that the system of transcription should not have many symbols which might be difficult for others to understand. To avoid this problem, I adopted a simple system used commonly in CA with minor modifications (Jefferson’s, 1985; 2004, transcription system).

c- Procedures

The recordings covered the period between March 2010 and January 2011. The duration of the recorded interactions was about twenty-three hours and thirty minutes. The actual data used for the analysis were selected from one hour transcribed talk from each of the groups under investigation (three hours in total). The settings of the recordings were varied- a university campus, a university classroom, a university teaching staff office, mourning houses, and friends’ houses. The recordings were made in mid-days and at evenings. Recordings were made with a high level of confidentiality concerning participants’ identities. Pseudonym was used to identify the participants (using the initial letters of the informants’ names). Following Coates’s (1996), conversations had been recorded surreptitiously in order to get natural data. For ethical reason, after recordings were completed, all participants were informed that a recording had been made for research purposes, and asked whether they allow me to use the recording in the study. All participants agreed that the data be used for research agenda.
The recording was not an easy task. I faced a number of difficulties during the process. The first trial of recording was completely a failure because the interactants were sitting near an air-cooler which was making noise, leading to a distorted recording. On another occasion, while recording was taking place, there were children playing around, making a lot of noise which made it difficult for a successful recording to be completed. However, I became more cautious about securing suitable situations for my recording sessions. Another obstacle I encountered was when the number of participants increased it became difficult to make sense of the recorded speech. In these cases, it took me a long time playing and replaying the tape to grasp the examined features. Recordings obtained from the three groups were as follows:

a- Maya group, I made recordings in two different settings. The process was completed in each setting by one of the participants rather than the researcher. This helped in obtaining natural talk since the participants who made the recordings were peers. In this group’s conversations, I found some difficulties identifying the participants when playing the tape, and tracing the examined features without the help from the assistants who conducted the recordings. The recordings occurred in mid-days between October 2010 and January 2011:

1- Three conversations among six undergraduate students in three different days at the University of Khartoum campus. The number of the interactants of the three interactions was four, three, four, respectively.
2- Interaction between five post-graduate students at Omdurman Ahlia University.

b- Malak group, recordings in this group were made during March and July 2010 in different settings in Omdurman:

1- Three women’s talk in a mourning house at evening round a tea-table. The recording was clear, containing rich data. This was because the women were sitting close to each other, and away from any possible distraction.
2- Three conversations in three different mid-days among university teachers at Omdurman Ahlia University. The number of the participants of the three interactions was four, four, three, respectively. However, one of the recordings was corrupted.
3- Talk in a mid-day among eight women, from the same teaching staff, was collected during a visit to a colleague who had an operation.
4- Three women’s talk occurred in a mid-day in a house of one of the participants. Here we had difficulty trying to make sense of the recording due to some noise caused by a fan during the recording process.

c- Homy group, the conversations took place between March and September 2010 in different settings:

1- Conversation in a mourning house in Omdurman occurred in the evening involving three women.
2- Interaction at noon between six women in another mourning house in Omdurman.
3- Three women friends talked at evening in a house in Burri neighborhood, Khartoum.
4- Talk in a mid-day between four women relatives in a house in Ummbadda, Omdurman.

1.7.2 Data Analysis

a- Data organization

Organizing the data was the most difficult task in the entire work because representing the data to be analyzed needs a lot of efforts and concentration. Listening to the recorded interactions took a long time, playing and replaying the tapes to capture the features to be examined. Data used in the study were not selected randomly, but according to the occurrences of the tested linguistic behaviors. Each phenomenon in question was taken from each group under investigation. Then, each of the linguistic features chosen was systematically represented in extracts (one from each group). After sorting out the examined features in women’s speech, the selected data were transcribed, transliterated, and translated into English. The transcription system developed by Jefferson (2004) was
used to represent the selected data. Yet some modifications were made to meet the need of the analysis.

To represent the recorded utterances accurately, I followed Liddicoat’s (2007) approach which adopts a modified orthography in representing the data. This approach is useful in noticing language features in conversations. In my case, I used an orthographic system of the colloquial Arabic spoken in Khartoum in the process of transliteration which is hoped to represent the speech as it was uttered. Following Have’s (2007), free translation was carried out rather than word for word because the systems of the two languages, Arabic and English, are different.

The conversations from which the extracts were taken have been defined. Each extract has been transcribed, transliterated, and translated. The lines of the turns are numbered, and the initial letters of the participants’ names are used to identify them.

For the purpose of the analysis, I classified the phenomena in question into two categories. The first contains features of simultaneous speech (interruptions, overlaps, simultaneous starts) while the second covers the other linguistic devices (hedges, tag questions, minimal responses). In the transcription process, the tested features of simultaneous speech have been identified using symbols. For instance, interruption took a red square bracket. The same symbol was used at the beginning of the interrupter’s utterance, immediately under that of the current speaker. This helped in identifying the points in which interruptions occurred. In the second category (hedges, tag questions, minimal responses), the same procedure has been followed. However, the focus here was on the utterances rather than on the symbols since my interest was in the words used as hedges, tags, and minimal responses. As a result, the words representing each device took a certain color in an attempt to distinguish them from the rest of the words in the extract.
b- Analysis procedures

After collecting the required data and having them transcribed, transliterated, and translated, the actual analysis began. I needed to find the appropriate patterns and explicate the logic behind them. Then I began building a database argument about the linguistic behavior of Sudanese women in interactions. To this end, I adopted the single-case example, proposed by Psathas (1995), to describe the way conversational practices operated in a particular case (e.g. interruption). Psathas suggests that one can establish a collection of similar actions by following a single-case example. In the present study, from a single-case analysis, using speech of one group, I obtained similar actions from the other two groups. In this sense, I used, first, data of one group (Maya) to explain and discuss a phenomenon to be examined then the same procedure was replicated among the other two groups (Malak, Homy). In so doing, every linguistic pattern in question was examined systematically. Moreover, to show how linguistic practices work in social interactions, Sudanese women were taken as a community of practice throughout the analysis.

My observation contributed effectively to the analysis since it helped in noticing different functions of the examined behaviors. In the first part of the analysis, features of simultaneous speech (interruptions, overlaps, simultaneous starts) have been classified according to their purposes. While conducting the analysis, interruptions have been classified into five types, overlaps into five, and simultaneous starts into four types. In the second part, a detailed description of the use of hedges, tag questions, and minimal responses has been attempted. Four functions of each device have been identified in social interactions. Then, each feature has been systematically examined among the three groups.

1.8 Research Outline

This study consisted of five chapters. In Chapter One, I give introductory notes on the research problem, objectives, questions, hypotheses, significance, limitation, methods,
and research outlines. Chapter Two gives a detailed description of the theoretical framework on which the study is based. Issues such as language and gender, men’s and women’s talk, causes of gender related linguistic differences, and conversation analysis are discussed. In Chapter Three, some empirical works done in the field of language and gender are reviewed. Chapter Four is devoted to data analysis, discussion, and interpretation. Chapter Five gives a summary of the findings, conclusions of the study and recommendations.
CHAPTER TWO

Theoretical Framework

2.0 Introduction

This chapter aims at reviewing the main theories of language and gender. The chapter is divided into three parts- language and gender, conversation analysis, and linguistic devices.

2.1 Language and Gender

The earliest concern about gender and language is traced to linguistic and to feminist theories. Weatherall (2002) emphasizes the important relationship between gender and language. She argues that the relationship is essential for understanding and challenging sexism. The gender issue started as a field of investigation and developed during the second wave of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s. Later on, two important issues have divided research in the field into two streams: the nature and significance of gender bias in language, and the nature of gender differences in language use (ibid).

Lakoff (1975) points out that the marginality and powerlessness of women is reflected in the ways women and men are expected to talk as well as in the ways women are spoken of. Weatherall (2002) maintains that the feminists’ insights believe that power relation between men and women is reflected in the language of the respective community. Moreover, feminist language researchers believe that men’s power is found in the language they use in different ways.

In the belief that women are seen to be deficient as speakers, Weatherall (2002) argues that language differences can be viewed as deficits in women’s speech. For instance, in the Western World women are thought to be talkative and their speech is trivial. There
are many proverbs that support this view (e.g. a woman’s tongue wags like a lamp’s tail). Jespersen (1922) notes that women have more limited vocabulary than men, use simple sentences, and speak without thinking which leads to incomplete sentences. Moreover, Lakoff (1975) writes that women’s speech style conveys weakness, uncertainty and unimportance. She considers women’s language as inferior to men’s language which is direct and clear. As such, Lakoff views differences in women’s and men’s speech as a reflection of their different status in society.

Spender (1980) states that in the past men had control over language (as philosophers, orators, politicians, grammarians, linguists, lexicographers, etc.) and they encoded sexism into language to convey their male supremacy. Therefore, men tend to challenge norms of language and communication because they are in more powerful positions compared to women. Weatherall (2002) claims that the early feminist language researchers believe that patterns of language and communication reflect gender differences in social power and the different cultural values related to men and women. Many feminists still believe that language reflects men’s power as well as establishes and maintains negative attitudes towards women and their secondary social status (ibid).

Under the discussion that language is associated with power, Weatherall (2002) argues that the ideological power of language is the conventions of speech. The important point here is that gender bias in language is obviously a political rather than neutral or trivial issue. That is, language tends to demean women in order to keep her inferior in society. For example, the naming system (e.g. a woman takes her husband name), or titles, such as mentioning Mr. before Mrs., are used as a means of degrading women position in society. A similar point is made by Cameron (1995) who argues that rules about language and standards of correct speech are important in understanding the norms of speech that are linked to power and privilege in society. Thus, standards of suitable ways of speaking are essentially ideological and norms about speech are strong forces which influence peoples’ perception and evaluation of others.
Brown (1980) assumes that negative politeness is found among people of inferior position (women). That is, speakers apologize for intruding by using impersonal structures such as hedges. This assumption is confirmed by O’Barr and Atkins (1980) who observe that male and female witnesses differ in their linguistic usage. Accordingly, lawyers treat female witnesses as a special case which put women in inferior status. This observation led them to focus on the features that characterize female’s language. O’Barr and Atkins name these features Women Language (WL) based on Lakoff’s (1975) description of females’ language listed as follows:

1- Hedges (e.g. sort of, I think).
2- Super polite forms (e.g. would you please).
3- Tag questions.
4- Empty adjectives (e.g. divine, sweet).
5- Direct quotations.
6- Emphatic “so” and “very”, and intonational emphasis.
7- Hyper correct grammar and pronunciation.
8- Question intonation in declarative contexts.
9- Lack of a sense of humor (e.g. on telling jokes).
10- Special vocabulary (e.g. specialized color terms).

According to O’Barr and Atkins (1980) women’s usage of powerless language is due to their powerless position in society rather than to their gender. West (1984a; 1984b) takes a different view. The researcher investigates whether women in powerful position in society can take a dominant role in conversation. Analyzing doctor-patient conversation, West found that doctors regularly interrupt their patients unless the doctor is a female and the patient is a male and white, in which case the doctor is interrupted. This finding shows that even when a woman is in a powerful position in society, her gender, not her status, is responsible for interruption. Going on the same line, Woods (1989) claims that gender proved to override status. Woods made recordings of conversations between work colleagues of different occupational status. Results show that the man dominated the floor, whether he was a boss or a subordinate. This study demonstrates that low status
men do not use powerless language; instead, they dominate conversation by using powerful language such as interruptions.

Zimmerman and West (1975) maintain that men tend to dominate speech by using more interruptions as a means of controlling talk in mixed-sex conversation, and by speaking more than women. Zimmerman and West believe that, in mixed-sex speech, men’s topics are more dominant while women play a supportive role. For instance, when a man introduces a topic which is related to men’s domain such as politics or sports in mixed-sex conversation, women tend not to interfere by introducing female’s topics (e.g. family or personal issues). Rather, they facilitate conversation by supporting and commenting on the existing male’s topic. Thus, gender differences in speech are interpreted as differences of power between women and men (ibid).

West and Zimmerman (1977) assume that the use of interruption is due to gender differences. They perceive gender and power as inevitably linked. Interruptions which are practiced daily in our conversations are gestures of power. This linguistic behavior helps in forming the female’s subordinate status. However, West and Zimmerman maintain that the use of interruptions is not related only to gender differences and that it can also be found in other speech such as that between parents and children.

Jones (1980) describes Gossip as a way of women’s speech covering topics, their roles as women, and about their personal issues. Weatherall (2002) illustrates the notion of women gossip by the proverb “tell nothing to a woman unless you would have the world know”. Moreover, Coates (1993) argues that the term gossip is used anthropologically to mean maintaining the unity and values of social groups. Jones (1980) explains gossip in terms of the relations between settings (e.g. home, supermarket), participants (e.g. women), topics which emerged from women’s role as wives and mothers, and function. Tannen (2007), on the other hand, claims that women’s gossip occurs when they talk freely and too much in private conversation. Therefore, women do and strengthen their existed friendships by gossip and talking about their family matters and other friends. By doing so, women can create intimacy and good socialization within them.
Swann (1989) assumes that dominance in speech may be practiced in different ways, both linguistically and non-linguistically. Any analysis of male dominance of talk should take into consideration the different conversational features of non-verbal behavior, such as contextual factors (e.g. seating arrangements and any activities that accompany the speech). Swann believes that power relation can be responsible for the linguistic differences between males and females. She maintains that women have been considered as powerless social groups not only in studies of male-female conversations but also in further studies of women’s position in society. Men hold more powerful positions in society, and women have less chance to occupy high positions in the government/authority even when they are educationally equal to men (ibid). Moreover, both women and men view men as the dominant sex. So when gender is salient in conversation, when it seems to be seen as a woman or a man regardless of their occupations, men often dominate speech (ibid). Woods (1989) believes that male’s dominance in conversation can be due to the fact that men hold higher position than women. Based on the model of conversational ‘turn-taking’ proposed by Sacks et al. (1974), Woods summarizes the differences between men and women in the following points:

1- In mixed-sex conversation, men who hold higher status than women are selected to speak or self-selected to speak more than women.
2- Men tend to interrupt and overlap more than women.
3- Men speak through Transition Relevance Place (a place where speaker change occurs, see Liddicoat, 2007) more than women. That is, they continue to speak without a pause between unit-types.
4- Men take up speakership more than women.
5- Men receive more assent terms than women.

Coates (1996) states that since men’s discourse are dominant, women see themselves in relation to men. However, dominance of women’s discourse takes place only when the function of discourse is in favor of men. Women only have importance if they are in the positions of mothers, wives or daughters, otherwise, they are marginalized. According to Holmes (2006), in the last two decades women began to occupy roles with real power,
responsibility, and status in professional organizations. Holmes examines the relationship between leadership and gender, as well as gender styles in leadership discourse. Holmes suggests that the key requirements of effective leadership are depicted in masculine style. This is because men are decisive in directive-ness and giving instructions. Holmes proposes two ways of giving instructions in the workplace in relation to gender. The more direct ways of speaking index masculinity while more indirect styles tend to be feminine. Linguistic forms such as imperatives (e.g. check that out) or need statements (e.g. I need to see the file) index masculine style of giving instructions or asking someone to do something. This direct masculine discourse strategy makes managers more confident and authoritative as leaders. When giving directives, females leaders use less direct discourse strategies, which include some features such as interrogative rather than imperative forms (e.g. can you write that up a bit neater?), modal verbs (e.g. we might need some more help), and paralinguistic features such as hesitations and pauses. These indirect forms index more feminine style in doing leadership (ibid).

Holmes (2006) argues that the strategy of giving directives can be done in a work place meeting either by an authoritative masculine style or an empathetic feminine way. That is, as women have the sense to understand other’s feelings, they use language strategy which enables them to direct their employees regarding their status. This means that women tend to use mitigated, hedged and indirect forms for giving directives that index their feminine style in leadership. Both male and female leaders’ styles work effectively in practicing leadership. However, some women in leadership positions adopt masculine style in directing their workers. These women believe that the choice of male strategy is a skilful means of giving directives. By so doing, women work in men’s domain which is far from the women-friendly realm (ibid).

Berryman-fink (1997) further states that workplace organizations operate on masculine assumptions and ways of life. In other words, a men’s world is conveyed in their workplace. Speech style is one of the most prevailing behaviors men adopted within their organizations. Women who seek effective leaderships and success in workplace adopt a male model in the belief that leaders should use masculine domination and authoritarian
styles of behavior. These women, Berryman-fink argues, often dress in ways that indicate their wish to be identified in the realm of male-dominated business. They tend to talk in the same way men do as well.

More interesting, Berryman-fink (1997) claims that some women challenge the gendered discourse found in their workplace in different ways. They believe that in order to be treated with respect, women need to prove that they can do the job better than their male colleagues. In other words, women adopt male strategies in order to claim leadership. At the same time, they contribute to de-gendering these male model strategies. Women perceive the authoritative style as a leadership discourse rather than a male style. However, Berryman-fink claims, some senior women show their femininity clearly and look confident in different ways within the workplace conversations, imposing a feminine sphere in the presence of their male colleagues.

According to Holmes (2006) effective leadership involves communicative behaviors associated with both male and female communication strategies. Rosener (1990) claims that women use a style of leadership which fulfills their intentions to share power in the workplace. However, in some cases women need to be decisive even though their style tends to be flexible. Holmes (2006) goes on to say that people practice leadership in various ways and that they are influenced by a number of different factors such as ethnicity, social class, age, seniority and the workplace experience.

### 2.1.1 Sexist Language

In the belief that language treats women and men differently, feminists have shown growing concern with the ways in which women and men are represented in language. This can be seen in the frequent use of affection words (e.g. darling) when addressing women, and women’s renaming after marriage (Weatherall, 2002). The relationship between language and sexism in society is noticeable. According to Weatherall, during 1970s and 1980s social science research investigated the psychological significance of using the term “man” to refer to a person whose gender was unspecified or unknown. de
Beauvoir (1952), on the other hand, notes that in male dominated cultures the term “man” represents both positive and neutral relationships between language and sexism when representing human beings in general.

Many forms of sexist language are identified by the American Feminist Movement of the late 1960s, and many works on the topic have appeared since then. Henley (1987) classifies sexist language into three types:

1- Language that ignores women.
2- Language that defines women narrowly.
3- Language that depreciates women.

Weatherall (2002) renames the first type invisible women, in the sense that women have been absent as subjects of stories or topics of articles. Analyzing the content of samples of newspapers, Caldas-Coulthard, (1995) finds out that news items were more likely to be written by men and about men. Men are often quoted as saying things as well as being the agents of actions more often than women. Weatherall (2002) adds that women are not only ignored as writers or subjects of stories but are also marginalized as active agents.

Women’s marginalization is confirmed by Spender (1980) who argues that women historically were not the influential thinkers and had no chance to influence language. This does not mean that women have no great thoughts or important intellectual contribution, but the knowledge that women have produced and the meaning they have generated are not as often published as those produced by men. Spender relates the reason to the fact that women have less access than men to the technologies and institutions which transmit information from one generation to another.

Another aspect of women’s low status in language is cited by Weatherall (2002). According to Weatherall, there is a mass use of masculine forms, such as chairman, mankind, guys, fireman etc., when referring to people in general or a person whose gender is unknown or unspecified. Such forms are called Masculine Generics which are
grammatically correct to refer generally to unspecified person or a group of people. Instead, neutral terms such as chairperson and humans can be used to refer to men and women without showing any gender bias (ibid).

Bodine (1975) argues that masculine generics have come into being as a result of some efforts by particular grammarians since the eighteenth century when the first grammatical rule has emerged to support the use of masculine pronoun to refer to people in general or a person whose gender is unknown. Kirby (1746: cited in Bodine 1975: 135), an English language grammarian, notes that the masculine person can be comprehended as both male and female. Since 1850, Kirby’s rule, the use of masculine generic forms, was introduced as legal usage by a British Act of Parliament.

Despite the work of the prescriptive grammarian movement to remove he and she or they as gender-specific referent, the forms are still used, especially in spoken English (Weatherall, 2002). By and large, since 1970s the formal grammatical rules have been criticized. Feminists view masculine generics as both vague and discriminatory since they could be interpreted as masculine specific or neutral and sometimes they could not be understood as referring to a woman at all. For example, when we are speaking about a student in general, we usually use the pronoun he that can be interpreted as referring to a male, ignoring female students (ibid).

Masculine generic forms are found in children’s conversations. Weatherall (2002) states that in children’s conversations, 88% of personal reference terms which children use are male terms. Children use male terms when they personalize objects (e.g. the train is Mister train, a toy dog is called Tom). Moreover, both girls and boys refer to each other as guys. Masculine impression of the world can be related to the prevailing of male characters in children’s stories and the masculinization of children’s toys (ibid). Nilsen (1977) believes that the sexism found in children’s books and classroom materials gives the children the impression that males are more important than females. Such orientation to males is responsible for gender inequality between boys and girls that grows with them to adulthood which causes men’s domination over women.
Weatherall (2002) mentions another aspect of language which emphasizes male prominence: in parallel gender constructions, the usual order is to place male’s terms first (e.g. brother and sister, husband and wife, host and hostess). Generally, the historical root of placing male terms first is traced back to the work of prescriptive grammarians. Wilson and Neg (1988) argue that because men are historically considered worthier in societies than women, they are placed and set first. But sometimes the rule is reversed for particular reasons. Smith (1985) adds that, ladies come before gentlemen in Shakespeare’s terms to show the etiquette in the upper class.

McGuire and McGuire (1992) suggest that people word-order preference reflects cultural beliefs. For instance, in traditional female domains, such as the family domain, a more pronounced female primacy is preferred (e.g. Mum and Dad) while outside the family male primacy is common (e.g. Mr. and Mrs., male and female). Such female primacy may be related to the fact that the mother is the heart of the family, regarding her role and domination at home. Male prominence, on the other hand, is traced back to the traditional thought that a man is the breadwinner and he is occupying a powerful position as well (Weatherall, 2002).

The second type of sexist language is identified by Key (1975). Key maintains that the narrow definition of women in language is described in terms of their appearance as well as their family relationships, whereas men are viewed in terms of what they do. Alford (1987) argues that, in cultural traditions, naming is an important aspect of the study of languages because it reflects the world view and cultural insights in societies. The types of naming and the ways they are used in conversations vary from society to society. For example, in English cultures, naming practices reflect the patriarchal nature of society.

There is an inequality system of naming in English speaking societies that defines women narrowly. Baron (1986) claims that in English societies, women take their husbands’ surnames after marriage. Sometimes a woman can be referred to by her husband’s first name (e.g. Tom’s wife). Weatherall (2002) believes that a woman taking her husband’s name after marriage means that she is only an extension of her husband or
part of his estates. Consequently, a woman is described as both subordinate and invisible. Another problem with this practice of naming is stated by Spender (1980) who believes that the practice of naming creates difficulties in tracing maternal rather than paternal descents. That is, when the children grow up they would be only familiar with their paternal descent. They may identify their paternal grandfathers’ names to the fifth or sixth ones easily, but are not able to recognize their maternal grandfathers’ names (ibid). In fact, this naming system is not practiced in Arabic and Islamic societies where women usually keep their original or maiden names after marriage. By doing so, women keep their own identity, and their children can trace their maternal and paternal grandfathers’ names as well.

Weatherall (2002) writes that there are some women who resist traditional name changing practices, as it conveys inequality. Research on women’s surnames has focused on two different aspects of marital name changing. First, there is the attitude of people towards women who defy conventions; some people believe that it is not a problem for women to keep their own names. Men are less accepting the idea that women should keep their original names. Second, there is women’s decision to change or not to change names after marriage.

Kline, Stafford, and Reiss (1996) have compared women who were name-changers to those who were name-keepers. They found that name-keepers were obviously older and more educated and had higher incomes than name-changers. On the other hand, women who change their names view name changing as symbolic of the partnership between men and women. However, both categories do not differ in terms of love towards their husbands and perception of their mutual control levels. Name keepers consider, more or less, the issue of identity when dealing with marital naming.

To conclude, I think the practice of marital naming is a way of degrading women. Such a practice eradicates women’s identity. Ignoring women’s original names is the starting point of husbands’ domination. That is, when a wife takes her husband’s name, the husband gets the feeling of ownership of the woman, then he would practice his power.
over her. In contrast, keeping women’s own names after marriage does not mean that marriage or family relationship is not tied or strong. Rather, it is a kind of keeping women’s identity as actual members in society, besides keeping partnership.

Another feature of naming conventions in English which defines women in relation to others is discussed by Weatherall (2002). *Mrs.* and *Miss.* are used traditionally as titles that precede women’s names to indicate whether they are married or single, whereas the equivalent title *Mr.* comes before men’s names whether a man is married or not. A recent strategy to remove this inequality in titles is the emergence of the unmarked title *Ms.* Since 1960s *Ms* has been adopted by women who object to having a marked title for marital status. Dion and Schuller (1990) have found in a study that working women who prefer the title *Ms* are judged by business people to be like a man, and their personality traits are equal to those of successful managers.

Apart from surnames and titles, personal naming is another aspect of naming conventions. Weatherall (2002) argues that some studies have suggested that there are stereotypes associated with names. Such stereotypes may affect a person’s self concept and the perception and behavior of others towards the people who have those names. Petrie and Johnson (1991) have found, in a British study, that there is a relationship between the perception of sex typing of a name and to what extent the person with that name is sex typed. A study by Zweigenhaft, Hayes, and Hagan (1980) compares self-ratings of men and women with ambiguous names (e.g. Kim, Leslie) with those of men and women with clearly gendered names (e.g. Mark, Pam). They found that there are no differences between men with ambiguous names and those with gender-clear names in self-ratings. But women with ambiguous names tend to rate themselves higher in status and lower in femininity than women with clearly gendered names.

The third aspect of sexist language that affects women negatively is women being depreciated by language. Henley (1987) claims that language might demean women as well as ignores and define them narrowly. Evidence of this, as stated by Weatherall (2002), is that in English language masculine forms of words have more positive
connotation than feminine ones. Lakoff (1973) supports this view with examples. She compares the connotation of bachelor and spinster, master and mistress, lord and lady to illustrate the positive connotation of males’ forms. Moreover, words that have the same form (e.g. professional, secretary) have male positive connotation when attached to men than to women. Such perception is applied to some words that are used to refer to the opposite gender. For example, “tomboy” has positive connotation while “sissy” is used as insult (ibid).

Weatherall (2002) maintains that language provides evidence of social and moral order where men and masculinity are valued more than women and femininity. She argues that English has fewer linguistic forms that are used to indicate gender compared to French, German, and Arabic. For instance, gender can be marked in English by the use of suffixes to indicate femininity such as –ess (actress, waitress) and –ette (suffragette), or by the use of adjuncts (e.g. woman doctor, male nurse). However, Schulz (1975), and Spender (1980) state that some researchers criticize the use of adjuncts in marking femininity. For these researchers, such a usage implies that the world is male unless proven otherwise.

Conversely, some researchers criticize the addition of feminine suffixes and adjuncts for they have weak, diminished, and trivial effects (Weatherall, 2002). Stanley (1977) maintains that such feminine markers create negative semantic effect for women. Thus, language marks women as being different regardless of what they do (e.g. female surgeon, woman lawyer) or less important than men who do the same thing (e.g. waiter vs. waitress, steward vs. stewardess). In the case of adjuncts, Weatherall (2002) argues that gender marking is sexist and it provides information about normative gender roles in general. For example, masculine markers may be used as an indication of a man entering a stereotypically women domain (e.g. male nurse, male prostitute).

Weatherall (2002) suggests that the use of adjectives is another technique in English society that indicates the gender of a person (e.g. pretty, charming, emotional), adjectives which are employed to describe women or children but not men. Words like strong and tough are used in describing men. But when these males’ words are used to describe
women, they diminish their femininity. However, using such masculine terms to describe women can be interpreted as feminine in the sense that there is a link between being a female and being strong and powerful (ibid).

2.1.2 Gender Differences in Language

In the 1960s and 1970s feminists were interested in sex differences in language. Weatherall (2002) believes that gender differences in language cover a wide range of language (gender and voice, verbal ability, etc.). Linguists, on the other hand, are more interested in sex variation at the phonological, syntactic and semantic levels. There are two central themes for sex differences in the literature. First, biological essentialism/determinism which focuses on the biological causes for sex differences (e.g. voice differences). Second, social disadvantage for women which focuses on the way sex differences are used to disadvantage women. That is, priority is given to men in language use such as the naming system (e.g. Mrs. Tom) and titles (e.g. male and female) (ibid).

Weatherall (2002) claims that gender essentialism may either take the form of biological essentialism, where natural processes (e.g. genetic, physical) are the primary causes of gender, or social processes, where learning and modeling lead to the development of gender. It is assumed that sex differences in verbal ability and voice have biological origins while gender differences in speech are the result of different social practices of boys and girls (ibid). Halpern (1994) maintains that some researchers take an essentialist approach to gender differences. The aim of their work is to explore cognitive and behavioral sex differences. According to Halpern, the differences in verbal ability between women and men can be traced back to the assumption that there are brain differences between males and females. But gender researchers assume that there are relationships between brain structure and the psychological function of the brain (ibid).

On the belief that there are sex differences in verbal ability, Weatherall (2002) argues that females are better in verbal ability than males. Maccoby and Jacklin (1974) believe that there are no sex differences in verbal ability until about age 10 or 11 but from high
school to college years girls tend to be more skillful in their verbal ability than boys. Two decades later, Halpern (1994) argues that girls are verbally skilled at age 1 to 5, and then girls talk at an early age producing long utterances. Moreover, cultural stereotypes of women as chatters, gossips and nags are evidence of females’ verbal skills as well as their ability of effective interpersonal communication (Weatherall, 2002). Coates (1993) adds that gender differences are found in children speech and that girls acquire language at a faster rate than boys.

Stewart (1973) has studied an American mother and her children of 9 to 18 months. The researcher found that the language skills of girls in terms of comprehension and vocabulary were higher than those of boys. Stewart relates this finding to the fact that girls are more involved in interaction with mothers. Nelson (1973) maintains that girls acquire vocabulary much faster than boys. Another study by Perkins (1983) on modal expressions shows that girls used modals more than boys did. Weatherall (2002) adds that girls not only acquire language faster than boys but also they are superior at any age in terms of comprehension, size of vocabulary, reading ability and using complex expressions as modals.

Weatherall (2002) argues that there is a strong social learning element in speaking style which can be used to identify the sex of the speaker. Social learning impacts on voice lie in the notion of pitch rate. Evidence of the social learning element of voice pitch is demonstrated by Graddol and Swann (1989) in cross-cultural studies. Graddol and Swann maintain that there are differences in the average speaking pitch across cultures. For instance, the average speaking pitch of American men is lower than that of Polish men. Another study by Ohara (1992) on gender and pitch levels, shows that Japanese women use higher pitch when speaking in Japanese than when speaking in English. Japanese speakers control their pitch levels to cope with social norms and for different perceptions about femininity and pitch in the two cultures (ibid).

Weatherall (2002) discusses another point regarding women’s speaking in low pitch. She believes that lower pitch used by female politicians can be interpreted as a way of
social desirability associated with men’s voice. Coates (1989) perceives this behavior of these women as assimilation to men’s norms. It is a way to increase their prestige. Margaret Thatcher, the classic example, was trained to speak in lower voice which supports the idea that low pitch is considered as desirable, particularly for a prime minister. This deviation of pitch level can be seen as a way of coping with particular social norms, and a trail to maintain prestige on the women’s part (Weatherall, 2002).

Based on politeness model by Brown and Levinson (1978), there is another explanation of women speech which involves an idea that is basic to the way language is used for communicative purposes. The notion of politeness model ‘face and power’ is a key factor in the speech differences between men and women. Brown and Levinson define face as the public self image which any participant likes to claim for her/himself. It consists of two aspects- ‘negative and positive’ face. Negative face means the desire for freedom of action and freedom from imposition. Positive face means the desire for approval. Power, on the other hand, is an asymmetric social dimension of relative power. In other words, the speaker can be perceived as, more or less, powerful than the addressee. Deuchar (1989), on the other hand, claims that there are four assumptions that explain the notion of face and power:

1-participants like to protect their own face in an interaction.
2-attention to other’s face is affected by power in relation to other.
3-attention to other’s face may cause damage to one’s face.
4-women have less relative power than men.

Brown and Levinson (1978) are interested in the speaker’s attention to the addressee’s face when the speaker performs what Brown and Levinson call a Face Threatening Act. For instance, a request to borrow money is a face threatening act as it may offend an addressee’s negative face. The speaker may introduce the request by an apology which is a politeness strategy that has the effect of paying attention to the addressee’s negative face. Deuchar (1989) argues that Brown’s and Levinson’s model relates such strategy to the power of the speaker and addressee- the more powerful is the addressee in relation to
the speaker, the more attention the addressee receives to her/his face from the speaker, and the less attention the speaker’s face receives from the addressee. So, a powerless speaker would pay attention to the addressee’s face by politeness when making a request to borrow money, but might not receive the same attention when receiving a request (ibid). Therefore, powerless participants in conversation receive little attention to their own face.

Assumption three states that whereas powerless speakers pay attention to the face of the addressee by politeness strategy, they cause damage to their own face (Deuchar, 1989). The fourth assumption suggests that because women are powerless speakers, they receive little attention. As such, powerless speakers damage their own face when they pay attention to others’ face (ibid).

Deuchar (1989) points out that the use of standard speech as a prestige variety can protect the face of the powerless speaker without attacking the addressee’s face. However, it can only threaten the addressee’s face if it involves what Giles (1973) calls ‘accent divergence’ strategy from the less standard speech of the addressee. Giles describes accent divergence as the exaggeration of pronunciation differences between the speaker and the addressee in order to dissociate oneself from the other when there is a threat to one’s positive face. Divergence can be either upward movement towards the standard or downward movement away from the standard. Upward ‘accent divergence’ would happen when the addressee speaks a non-standard speech, and so, likely to have less power than the speaker. Generally, this strategy would only be used by women in relatively powerful positions (ibid).

Upward ‘accent convergence’ is the second strategy described by Giles (1973) in terms of intentions and social desires. This strategy is used by the speakers to modify their pronunciation to be like the addressee’s more prestigious form in order to gain approval. Women and powerless people tend to adopt this strategy. Giles assumes that politeness strategy can be seen as positive since it pays attention to the positive face of the addressee, as well as protecting the speaker’s face. So women use standard variety, and
by doing so they protect their own face, and sometimes they pay attention to the addressee’s face as well (ibid).

Considering Deuchar’s (1989) socio-linguistic explanations of sex differences in speech, there is another view by Cameron and Coates (1989) who suggest three main explanations to demonstrate the differences in speech between men and women in relation to the standard variety:

1- Conservatism; suggests that women stick to the older forms of language because they are more conservative than men. Jespersen (1922) asserts that women’s conservatism and modesty do not allow them to be innovative in language, whereas men coin new expressions. Women’s speech is closer to the prestige standard pronunciation than men’s in urban societies which indicates conservatism among middle-class women. The prestige standard variety indicates the opposite among working class women. For those women, the standard variety represents innovation where a conservative pattern should preserve a vernacular variant (ibid). Cameron and Coates (1989) argue that the contrast between middle class and working class women’s perception of conservatism makes conservatism as an explanation of sex differences in speech inadequate. In other words, for middle class women standard means conservative whereas for working class women vernacular indicates conservatism (ibid).

2- Status; Cameron and Coates (1989) argue that women use prestige variants more than men. Females show style shift of some patterns in order to gain status through their speech style. Sometimes, this style shift is expressed in the belief that women’s speech is hypercorrect (ibid). Trudgill (1974) states that women may be more status-conscious than men because society sets higher standards for female behavior such as politeness. Moreover, women’s life style which focuses on domestic and family issues gains some status in itself. Cameron and Coates (1989) believe that women are forced to acquire status by other means such as speech patterns. Therefore women’s sensitivity to linguistic norms is due to their feeling of inferiority in societies.
Cameron and Coates (1989) compared the speech of low middle class and high status women. Lower middle class females are hypercorrected in their linguistic behavior so as to be nearer to the prestigious standard form as a compensation for their low status. In contrast, men would not be perceived as inferior when they use vernacular forms. Working class men use non-standard varieties which possess covert prestige (ibid). Trudgill (1974) concludes that non-standard language is linked to the working class men as it has connotations of masculinity.

3-Solidarity; Cameron and Coates (1989) argue that women are not usually exposed to the same pressure to use vernacular norms as men do in their work place. Milroy (1980) emphasizes the importance of solidarity as a factor that influences language use. Furthermore, the notion of social network, that is to see individual in relation to the group she/he is associated with, supports our understanding of linguistic variations. Thus, the closer-knit network that working class men have traditionally belonged to, acts to maintain vernacular norms (ibid). Cameron and Coates (1989) maintain that this does not mean that women’s speech is closer to the standard form than men’s because women belong to weaker networks which are less efficient in maintaining linguistic norms. However, Milroy (1980) claims that sex differences in speech can be explained with the influence of the networks. That is, men maintain vernacular norm since they belong to a tighter-knit network while women use less vernacular because they have a looser-knit network.

2.1.3 Explanation of Differences

To account for gender differences in speech, Weatherall (2002) suggests two explanations:

1-The ‘dominance approach’, which focuses on power and social status as essential factors in explaining gender difference in speech. Coates (1993) defines dominance approach as the explanation of women’s and men’s speech style in terms of men’s dominance and women’s subordination. That is, women tend to occupy a marginal and
powerless position in their community. In other words, the dominance approach emphasizes women’s subordinate status which can be depicted in their speech. Lakoff (1975), who is a pioneer of the dominance approach, states that while women have marginal and powerless social position they attempt to use particular linguistic forms characterized as tentative and lacking confidence and authority. Thus, women’s speech is a reflection of their subordinate status.

Weatherall (2002) claims that in some situations gender and power got confused. For instance, women in powerful position may not use powerless language, and low status men may use features related to women’s speech. In addition, Aries (1996) points out that although there are many differences between men’s and women’s speech, gender may not be responsible for these differences. Such differences could be due to power relations and social roles of women and men.

Weatherall (2002) assumes that focusing on powerless language instead of gender differences functions in two different ways which disadvantage women. First, focusing on power gets the attention away from gender and other social categories. Second, the dominance approach views women as unassertive. For instance, women’s low status and poor performance in business are a result of not asserting themselves. As such, assertiveness is a communication style where talking like a man is a way to success. Crawford (1995), and Leet-Pellegrini (1979) conducted studies to test conversational dominance in mixed-sex conversation. Results show that in mixed-sex talk, male speakers dominated conversation for they used a speech style based on power. In contrast, female speakers’ speech style was based on solidarity and support.

The notion of ‘silence’ is another strategy that shapes conversation dominance. Coates (1993) argues that silence is a strategy used by men to dominate conversation. It is a weapon of power. Sattel (1983) believes that American men use silence when they feel their position is threatened. Weaterall (2002), on the other hand, believes that women’s silence indicates powerlessness and passivity. However, in some settings such as job interviews, oral exams, or police interviews the silent listener may have power.
2-The ‘cultural approach’ is another explanation, proposed by Maltz and Borker (1982), that deals with gender differences in speech styles. It relies on the idea that women and men belong to two different subcultures. Weatherall (2002) claims that the cultural approach perceives gender differences in speech as cultural differences which complicate communication. She believes that gender communication problems are due to the notion of cultural differences and miscommunication. Generally, Miscommunication theory is based on the assumption that since women and men communicate across a cultural divide, miscommunication between them occurs as a result of cultural differences. Hence, the cultural approach and miscommunication theory suggest that women and men experience misunderstanding when they speak to each other (ibid).

Tannen (2007) notes that differences in sex conversational styles are a result of different genderlects rather than different dialects. Adults learn how to speak since childhood. Girls and boys are raised in different worlds of words. That is, because girls and boys usually play in single-sex groups, their linguistic behaviors develop differently. Moreover, parents speak with them differently and accept different languages from them. For example, parents may direct their sons by using authoritarian language while they may adopt intimate style in directing their daughters.

Goodwin’s (1990) study of the talk of African-American working class boys and girls playing in neighborhood indicates that girls and boys tend to co-ordinate their activities in different ways. In organizing tasks, boys use imperative linguistic forms in directing other boys they play with (e.g. Gimme that). In contrast, girls employ directives that minimize differences among them (let’s go, how about doing this). So girls formulate requests as proposals or suggestions rather than orders. This means that children learn to speak from their parents as well as from their peers (ibid).

Maltz and Borker (1982) note that the differences in the speech of American women and men arise from the distinctive norms, conceptions and interpretations of friendly conversations they learn from the segregated subcultures (i.e. girls and boys peer groups). So the subculture of girls stresses co-operativeness and equality, and it encourages active
listening. The subculture of boys, in contrast, emphasizes dominance and competition. Thus, women and men groups develop different conversational norms resulting from subcultural differences. Based on this view, Weatherall (2002) suggests that women adopt a co-operative speech style since their subculture creates and develops equality and closeness relation. Men, on the other hand, adopt competitive style which emerges from their harsh subculture.

Weatherall claims that research on cultural approach, rather than dominance approach, suggests that women’s speech is confident, facilitative, and supportive rather than differential, confused and uncertain. Thorne (1990) criticizes research on mixed-sex communication based on the separation of the worlds of boys and girls in their peer groups during childhood and adolescence. Thorne views the separation as not clear cut, and that peer groups playing in the neighborhoods and in the families are more mixed-sex. Weatherall (2002) criticizes the dominance approach because it draws attention away from gender as an important issue in language research. In addition, by focusing on power, the dominance approach encourages women to speak like men in order to gain power. An additional criticism of the dominance approach is that it tends to ignore how gender interacts with other social factors such as ethnicity, class, age and sexual orientation (ibid).

2.1.4 Identity in Speech

People generally evaluate women and men speakers according to their speech. Weatherall (2002) assumes that speech cues can be used to identify the gender identity of the speaker. Kramer’s (1978) study on perceptions of women’s and men’s speech found that American teenagers perceive men’s and women’s talk differently. That is, men’s speech is viewed as logical, concise and touching important topics. Women’s speech, in contrast, is emotional, flowery, confused and wordy.

Aries (1996) has examined the speech style of men and women of Anglo-American cultures. Aries found that men’s speech is considered as a ‘report-talk’ whereas women
speech is a ‘rapport-talk’. Tannen (2007) defines report-talk as a public speech used in formal conversation where the participants are many and of different status, and they may not know each other as well. Rapport-talk usually occurs in private conversation where participants are few, equal in status, and they often know each other. The difference between public and private speaking, or report-talk and rapport-talk, can be interpreted in terms of status and connection. That is, when women feel safe and close with friends, they are more comfortable speakers. Men, in contrast, feel comfortable as speakers when they need to maintain their status among the group (ibid).

Lawrence et al. (1990), conventional psychologists, discuss two types of hypotheses in order to evaluate women’s and men’s speech— the sex stereotype hypothesis, and the sex dialect hypothesis. The sex stereotype hypothesis maintains that the gender of the speaker is responsible for different evaluative responses on the listeners’ part. The listener evaluates women’s and men’s speech in relation to the gender of the speaker. In other words, the listener’s judgment is influenced by the speaker’s gender. The sex dialect hypothesis, on the other hand, relates different evaluations of women and men to differences in their speech patterns. The listener’s judgment is affected by women’s and men’s different linguistic behaviors. However, Lawrence et al. believe that both hypotheses need to be taken into account in order to evaluate and judge the speaker’s speech.

2.1.5 Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory emphasizes that the way people think and act depends on their own social groups (Weatherall, 2002). An essential aspect of the theory suggests that different social groups differ in power and status which they have in society. Coates (1993) argues that social psychologists believe that people obtain their social identity through their membership of different social groups, which should be compared with other groups.

Tajfel (1974; 1978; 1981), a social psychologist, has developed a theory of Inter-Group relations and social change. The theory is concerned with the poor self-image of groups
that have inferior social identity. Thus, the theory predicts women’s position in society as well as their linguistic usage since they belong to the inferior social groups. Tajfel demonstrates two strategies which show the positions of the members of an inferior social group. Inferior women can accept their position in society or reject it. The first strategy states that if women accept their inferior status, they will try to gain self-esteem and positive self-image by acting as individuals not as a group. They may either measure themselves against members of their own social group, or they may try individually to join the superior group. The second strategy suggests that if women reject their inferior position in society, they will try as a group to change things. Tajfel proposes three ways in which women can do this:

1- Women try to be equal to the superior group and to adopt their identity’s values (the assimilation strategy).
2- They can redefine the characteristics that have been defined negatively, and give such characteristics a positive value.
3- They can create a positive image for themselves by creating new dimensions for comparison with the superior group. The following diagram summarizes Tajfel’s theory:

Tajfel’s theory of Inter-Group relations and social change
(Source: Coates, 1993, p. 9)
Coates (1993) states that the first strategy, by which women accept their inferior social position, shows that women compare themselves with other women to gain a positive self-image. The comparison can be in terms of cooking, child care, sewing and personal appearance. Sometimes, a woman who accepts inferior status for women, as a group, may leave the women’s group and may be accepted by men. This phenomenon happens in the business or political world. Such phenomenon, which has been called Tokenism, is achieved only by individuals and not by the whole membership of the group (ibid).

The second strategy concerns women who reject their inferior social status. This rejection is illustrated by Coates (1993) in three ways. First, with regard to language and identity, assimilation strategy is adopted by women with high profession status or those working in politics. Such women may try to assimilate with the superior group in order to achieve equality. This can be done in the following ways:

1-They tend to speak in a low pitch to make their voice deeper.
2-They use taboo language and swearing.
3-They speak in assertive way.
4-They use men’s prosodic features (e.g. falling intonation patterns).
5-They speak about male’s topics (e.g. business, politics, and economics).
6-They exploit the use of non-standard accents.

The second and third way of women’s rejection of their inferior position go together; inferior women may succeed in re-evaluating negative characteristics. They give such characteristics positive value and create new dimensions for comparison in order to gain a positive self image. Some women value females’ stereotyped features (e.g. gentleness, sensitivity, caring for others), which leads to re-evaluating males’ stereotyped qualities (e.g. aggression, competitiveness) since these male qualities are not always accepted by society (Coates, 1993).

Generally speaking, Williams and Giles (1978) maintain that social identity theory can be taken into account in showing that women’s diverse actions and perspectives in a
feminist age are clear strategies for promoting social change. Women act to gain their social identity through different behaviors within their membership of different social groups. Weatherall (2002) argues that William’s and Giles’s (1978) application of social identity theory to women is a framework that can be used for understanding the relationship between gender identity and language. Williams and Giles claim that women had accepted their secondary status in society before the Women Liberation Movement of the 1960s and 1970s. But since then, many women have tried to reach a positive social identity by individual means either by comparing themselves with women in different dimensions or by disassociating themselves from other women and indulging in men’s domain (ibid).

Coates (1993) argues that in the past, women’s co-operative strategy in speech was viewed negatively. It was seen as unassertive and weak. However, such style is now valued positively. By adopting co-operative strategy in speech, women maintain good social relations in the sense that women’s socialization is constituted through co-operative interactions. Coates supports this point with an example of doctor-patient talk. When a doctor was a male, he used an authoritarian and less sensitive speech style with the patient than that of a female doctor. Consequently, the patient was more co-operative with the female doctor.

2.1.6 Accommodation Theories

In order to understand the relationship between language and identity, Weatherall (2002) recommends the consideration of explaining language variation and identity in interaction, namely ‘communication accommodation’ theory (henceforth CAT). CAT, proposed by Giles and Coupland (1991), is a theory that concerns social identity and gender identity. This theory is strongly influenced by social identity theory. CAT is based on the assumption that language is an essential marker of social identity. It is a framework for understanding the relationship between social identity and language variation in interaction. CAT can also show the influence of social identity on speech
styles, and explain sex differences in language use. Sex differences in talk are found in forms of topics, vocabulary, structures, prosodic features, etc. (ibid).

‘Speech accommodation’ theory (SAT), proposed by Giles and Smith (1979), is another approach that is used to study the relation between individuals and different social psychological processes that influence language use in any interaction. According to Giles and Smith, SAT consists of four social psychological aspects explaining language use:

1-Similarity-attraction theory- relies on the notion of speech convergence. We try to speak in the same way as the speakers do as we want to be approved by them. For instance, a boy may speak politely and avoid taboo language in order to get the girl’s attention. However, this way of speaking may drop the masculine markers that identify the boy as a male.

2-Social exchange theory- convergent speech acts can only happen when there are advantages of a change. Carli (1990) conducts a study to show the benefits of using a convergent speech style by women. Carli finds out that women’s convergence of tentative speech style is more persuasive when they speak to men than to women.

3-Causal attributive theory- maintains that any speech shift would be evaluated and perceived. Sometimes changes in speech style may be due to a hidden intention of the speaker. For example, a boy may speak politely when the girl’s mother is around so as to gain the mother’s positive attitude towards him rather than to attract the girl.

4-Social identity theory- Giles and Smith (1979) point out that in a situation where group membership is considered, speech divergence, moving your speech style to make it different from the addressee, is required. Women may exaggerate their language stereotype in mixed-sex conversation in order to mark their social identity as females. This speech style shift is a strategy that marks women as distinct from other social groups.
2.1.7 Speech Communities

To explain gender differences in speech, Cameron (1985) emphasizes the concept of social networks which encourage linguistic change and on the notion of speech communities. Women’s usage of standard linguistic forms and men’s usage of non-standard can be explained in relation to the social context in which women and men are involved. The social network or speech community explanations suggest that gender differences in the use of standard and non-standard speech can be attributed to the different linguistic influences that people encounter. Therefore, the speech community explanation of gender differences in phonological variation can be discussed in relation to the influence of social contact in speech (ibid).

Weatherall (2002) points out that, one problem with the speech communities explanations is that gender identity is reduced to a position within a social structure in which a woman or a man is regarded as a social address. That is, the sex of the speaker has no influence in shaping her/his language. However, sociolinguistic researchers are interested in some linguistic variation within gender categories, such as the Intra-Gender group variation which doubts treating gender identity as a mere social position (ibid). Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992) have examined the role of language in social practices. The researchers note that sociolinguistic variables are passive markers of the speaker’s placement in the social hierarchy (e.g. socioeconomic hierarchy). So, speakers tend to make strategic use of sociolinguistic markers so as to affirm their membership in their own social group. This leads us to the notion of Community of Practice.

2.1.8 Community of Practice

A Community of Practice (henceforth CofP) as defined by Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992); Lave and Wenger (1991); and Wenger (1998) is a community of people who are engaged in mutual practices such as beliefs, values, ways of doing things, and speaking. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992) reject the concept of social identity as the main explanation of speaker’s identity. They argue that activities in which members of speech
community are involved should be given their due consideration, suggesting Community of Practice as an alternative. Therefore, connection between linguistic behaviors and social practices is the most significant aspect of their work. CofP admits a range of social and linguistic phenomena that are not analyzed in other theoretical models. Weatherall (2002) points out that CofP is defined as a combination of people who meet round some type of mutual engagement or project. The difference between speech community and CofP is that the former is defined only by its membership while the later is defined by its members and the practices shared by them. Shared social practices in a CofP are mediators that link the relationship between language and identity. This belief is consistent with feminist views that gender identities are not pre-determined or stable. Rather, people may engage or disengage in identity practices across times and places (ibid).

Eckert’s (2000) study of an American high school community can be thought of as a good example of CofP. Eckert notes that the school life of the students can be classified into two social identity categories- Jocks (adolescent middle class that succeed through school-related activities), and Burnout (who are associated with working class ideals, and whose lives are discussed in their local neighborhood more than in school). Eckert assumes that the distinctiveness of the two social identity groups can be marked by different involvement in school activities (e.g. sport, taking drugs), and their phonological variations. Eckert claims that the social meaning associated with phonological variations is a reflection of the students’ group membership. Social categories are pre-existent within the social structure. So the students have stable identities of jocks and burnouts. Those two identities are expressed by phonological variants present in their accents (ibid).

Holmes and Meyerhoff (1999) suggest that the key dimensions of CofP are- mutual engagement through regular interactions; a joint activity where there is mutual engagement; and a common channel of linguistic behavior for making meaning. Weatherall (2002), on the other hand, claims that applying CofP to the study of gender means that gender cannot be isolated from other aspects of social identity. Instead, there
is a strong emphasis on the dynamism of gender identities. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992) maintain that CoP framework is a constructionist approach to the relationship between language and identity. They perceive gender practices as constructing members of a community, either as women or as men, as well as maintaining relations between and within each sex. Thus, gender identity is constructed through the activities of communities (ibid). Freed and Greenwood (1996) notes that language and gender studies conducted in natural settings may find differences in women’s and men’s speech, simply because women and men are frequently engaged in different activities and not because of any differences in women and men themselves.

While Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992) believe that the CoP approach to identity and language is constructionist, some researchers consider it as essentialist. For instance, Bucholtz (1996, 1999), in her study of nerd identity, argues that the structural notion of identity used to explain linguistic variation is inadequate in examining the nerd student she studied. Bucholtz observes that nerd students claim their identity through a complex and dynamic set of practices, such as using formal language and complex vocabulary as unique indicators of their identity. In addition, clothing is one of the nerd explicit practices that distinguish nerd students from the dominant clothing styles of other students. Bucholtz concludes that identity exists prior to language, and identification as a nerd is constructed within other identity practices. That is to say, identity (e.g. nerd) is constructed within different practices (e.g. clothing, different activities) which are reflected in the language they use.

2.1.9 Relational Practice

In relation to work place interaction, Holmes (2006) defines the notion of Relational Practice (RP) as the ability to work effectively with others, and to understand their emotional contexts at work. RP is associated with women’s interaction at the work setting as females develop a co-operative speech style in order to gain equality and support. Hence, RP is feminine in function and style, and so it is a gendered behavior. RP is also known as Emotional Intelligence. Holmes describes RP as a means of being friendly or
supportive and considerate, allowing people to work successfully. Fletcher (1999) identifies four categories of RP; Preserving, mutual empowerment, creating team, and self-achieving. Holmes (2006) defines the first three categories as follows:

1-Preserving means doing boring but necessary work. Fletcher (1999) maintains that preserving is a spontaneous behavior that reserves and progresses the work, keeping it from being delayed. It is a relational work involved in expecting problems and preventing failure so as to preserve the work and increase its chance of success.

2-Mutual empowerment is another type of RP which focuses on activities, such as making good relations between people at work place that can help in achieving the desired goals. It is an effective networking that is used to support, guide and benefit others in their work. For instance, a manager may ask the employees for their opinions on a particular problem in an attempt to encourage them to think of the best solution rather than using directives. Such a strategy will give better responses to the issue under discussion as well as improve the performance. Fletcher perceives this activity as gendered as it is associated with women in the work place.

3-Creating team- Fletcher (1999) uses the term creating team to discuss the activities directed at creating good work place relationships. Creating team contains all unobserved behaviors which can unify the group and develop some activities such as listening and responding to information that is not related to the work. By so doing, a reasonable level of collaboration and co-operation is maintained, which facilitates interaction in the work setting. Holmes (2006) claims that people at work use different discourse strategies such as small talk and social talk (e.g. humor, entertainment stories or anecdotes) to maintain strong relation with their co-workers. However, Holmes believes that small talk is a feminine linguistic feature functioning as a means of achieving intimate relations within the work place.
2.2 Conversation

Conversation is a means of creating social relation among people in any particular society in order to facilitate their living. Coates (1996) defines conversation as a form of social practice and through talk we maintain our social structure as well as our social relation. Conversations between women friends are varied in topics. Women’s talk is mostly about people and personal experiences. Females feel that there are not set rules for doing conversation. Coates claims that women’s talk is about everything and anything, and that is because women topics can turn up in any conversation due to the local circumstances. Women conversation can progress randomly from topic to topic. Some topics are linked quite coherently, but some are changed abruptly depending on the situation. For instance, women at a meal can suddenly change the topic of conversation to speak about how nice the salad is.

Coates (1996) analyzes conversation between women friends in terms of two components- narrative and discussion. So, most speech between women friends can be described as stories or discussion. The internal structure of the story entails a beginning, middle, and an end, whereas a discussion includes parts where everyone shares in over a particular issue. All participants are involved in the discussion. The internal structures of the topics in women friends’ conversation vary from topic to topic. That is women friends explore a big range of topics through telling stories and through discussion (Coates, 1996).

Coates (1996) discusses another aspect of women’s conversation. She claims that women friends’ talk is characterized by Balance and Sharing. By sharing Coates means the sharing of turns and times between speakers. That is, one person says something and the other responses by similar speech, telling something from their experiences, unless the first person needs more time, then the turns will not be equal. The shared turns’ pattern is symbolized by Coates as x1+x2+x3. The significance of this pattern, Coates argues, is that participants in talk mirror each other’s contributions in matching contributions of their own via monitoring of what each other says. Mirroring pattern...
happens at all levels of speech. The following example illustrates a mirroring pattern at the turn level:

Turn 1: my back is connected with my periods/ (Becky)
Turn 2: so’s mine/ I get really bad backaches down there/ (Jessica)
Turn 3: so do I get backaches/ I can’t go like that and I can’t go like that and I just((xx)) a back rest/ (Claire)

(Source, Coates, 1996, p. 79)

This sequence of turns is represented as BA1+BA2+BA3 (BA stands for backache). The three speakers share the talking time. The turns match each other. That is, Becky introduced the subject of backache. Jessica and Claire commented that they had the same experience. Thus, turn 2 and turn 3 were direct repetition of Becky’s opening theme. Both turns mirrored what Becky said. So, women say whatever they feel which returns in the form of mirroring utterances. By balance Coates (1996) means the balance of linguistic parallelism (e.g. the backache) that maximizes solidarity between the three friends as they share the same experience. Therefore, women’s talk is developed through series of matched turns. Each turn results from the previous one and adds something new to the general theme in a well organized pattern (ibid).

2.2.1 Conversation Analysis

Conversation Analysis (henceforth CA) is an approach that studies speech in interaction. Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974) have described a transcription system which is suited to the analysis of talk. Such a system is a useful tool that shows how language is used in social interaction. Have (2007) argues that conversation analytic work should be done through making detailed transcriptions of recorded interactions by using a set of conventions developed by Sacks et al. (1974). Speech should be described in relation to Grice’s (1975) Co-operative Principle. Co-operative principle is a general principle which governs conversation. It shows how people behave in normal conversation.
operative principle is divided into four conventions known as Grice’s maxims (Brown and Yule, 1983). Grice’s maxims are four types- maxim of quality (truth), maxim of quantity (information), maxim of relation (relevance), and maxim of manner (clarity). Coates and Cameron (1989) claim that Grice’s conversational maxims entail that speakers’ main goal is to exchange information.

There is a distinction between public and private discourse in relation to gender differences. That is male speech is associated with public discourse where the main aim is to exchange information. Women, on the other hand, are involved in private discourse since their aim is not to exchange information. Women’s talk functions to create and maintain social relationship, as well as re-affirming and strengthening the existed friendship (ibid). Co-operativeness is a clear feature in conversation. Grice (1975) uses the term Co-operative to emphasize the fact that conversation can only occur if two or more participants agree to co-operate in talk. Coates and Cameron (1989) maintain that co-operativeness in this sense can only refer to a particular kind of conversation, that is, where speakers work together to produce shared meaning.

Competitiveness, in contrast, is used to describe a style of conversation where participants contradict each other more often. Competitive style is found in all-male discourse (Coates and Cameron, 1989). Nunan (1993) maintains that CA describes and explains the way in which conversation works, that is, how participants produce understandable utterances and how they are able to interpret others’ utterances as well. Moreover, Liddicoat (2007) argues that CA assumes that there is order in conversation, and that it is neither random nor unstructured. Participants construct their conversation in orderly ways.

Sacks and Schegloff (1979) discuss the notion of ‘recipient design’. The idea is that participants in conversation design their talk in a way to be understood by interlocutors according to their shared knowledge. Boden (1994) adds that recipient design is a resource that speakers use to design talk and a resource listeners use to interpret talk as they are directed to hear a turn which is designed for them. Recipient design is a
prominent feature of talk, and it is one aspect of the orderliness of conversation (ibid). Liddicoat (2007) claims that conversation analysts believe that there is no inherent distinction between formal and informal talk, rather they see talk in conversation as a social process which is organized to understand the social situations in which talk is used. Weatherall (2002) believes that CA focuses on studying language and social interaction. CA assumes that the organization of everyday conversation is independent and socially structured (ibid). CA concentrates on how people understand their social worlds, and its objectives show how actions, events, etc. are produced and understood (Pomerantz & Fehr, 1997). Weatherall (2002) points out that gender is one of the activities CA is particularly integrated in. CA looks at how meaningful social speech is produced and understood, based on participants’ shared cultural knowledge (ibid).

Sacks (1972) suggests that a strand of CA, ‘membership categorization device analysis’ (MCDA), studies how participants can interpret a piece of text in the same way. For instance, the sentences “The baby cried. The mother picked him up” are understood as referring to the baby’s mother, where MCDA makes inferences about family to achieve the intended meaning.

According to Weatherall (2002), CA is based on the model of communication as a joint activity. It deals with how participants produce joint achievements in interaction such as conversational openings and closings, requests, storytelling, etc. Gender is one of these joint achievements. The sequence in talk is a major focus of CA since each utterance (or gesture) is interpreted as a contribution to the joint activity by different participants. The significance of a sentence, utterance or gesture is indexical. That is, it is dependent on the situational conditions of its production. The unfolding of an interaction depends on the understanding of a current speaker’s speech by the next or a subsequent speaker. So, participants show that they are engaged in a joint activity by displaying their understanding of the utterance in some way, even if the next speaker’s understanding deviates from the original speaker’s idea, where the original speaker offers correction (ibid).
Another feature of a conversation analytic approach which is discussed by Weatherall (2002) is the notion of normative rules. Rules in CA such as ‘turn-taking’ and unfolding sequence are normative and interpretive rather than descriptive in linguistic sense. Normative rules offer reference points for participants to treat actions as deviant. Such rules allow participants to justify actions or to complain about violations. The following extract displays a normative rule:

TR: can I just grab th- just grab that phone
TR: sorry about that
CT: that’s okay

(Source, Weatherall, 2002, p. 108
{Adapted from Stubbe et al., 1999})

The apology indicates that TR’s answering the phone violates a normative rule. That is, the phone should be grabbed by its owner. Thus, TR broke the norm by grabbing CT’s phone.

2.2.2 Conversational Organization

Kitzinger and Frith (1999) examined the usefulness of CA to feminist work within the field of gender and language. Their work is interesting because it develops a critique of miscommunication theory. Kitzinger and Frith suggest that the differences between men’s and women’s speech cause misunderstanding in cross-gender interactions, and thus create confusion, frustration and tension. Weatherall (2002) argues that an essential CA finding is that many conversational actions happen in pairs (e.g. greetings). Moreover, there are more complicated paired actions including questions followed by answers, requests followed by consents or rejections, and invitations which are accepted or refused. These kinds of actions in conversation are termed technically as ‘adjacency pairs’. The norm that structures the use of adjacency pairs and organizes interaction is that a first part (e.g. a question) requires a second part (e.g. an answer).
Sometimes a norm is breached if a question fails to get an answer or if a greeting is not followed by a greeting. Affirming Kitzinger’s and Frith’s (1999) assumption of miscommunication theory, Weatherall (2002) believes that misunderstanding in mixed-sex conversation is not due to the differences between men’s and women’s speech styles. Rather, it occurs when the norm is breached, where an adjacency pair is not sequenced in a normative way. Heritage (1984) demonstrates cases where initial questions failed to elicit responses. Heritage’s example below illustrates the normative character of the adjacency pair structure. Notice that when the initial question failed to elicit any response the questioner repeated the question and re-repeated it until an answer was finally gained.

A: Is there something bothering you or not
A: Yes or no
A: Eh?
B: No

(Source, Weatherall, 2002, p.109 {Adapted from Atkinson and Drew, 1979})

Heritage (1984) discusses another case where a question is responded to with another question instead of an answer. That is, sometimes a question may not be followed by an answer. Rather, the recipient may respond with another question which can be treated as an insertion sequence asking for explanation. For instance, the question “would you like an ice cream?” can be responded to with the question “what flavors are there?” The most important point in this type of extended sequences of questions and answers is that each utterance is related to the previous one. Therefore, the answer to the question may not occur in the adjacent utterance. Rather, it would occur after some sequences of utterances (ibid).

Within the notion of adjacency pair, there are alternative responses for the second part. For example, a request can be granted or denied; an invitation can be accepted or rejected. Weatherall (2002) points out that conversation analysts have found that there are two patterns of different responses. These patterns are termed ‘preference structures’.
Such preferred structures include preferred actions and dis-preferred actions. Preferred action’s structure is straightforward; it carries simple reply without hesitation (e.g. the preferred response of invitation is an acceptance). Dis-preferred responses, in contrast, have more complicated structures. Such responses are produced after pauses or hesitations, appreciations and apologies, or explanations. The following extract shows the declining of an invitation as an example of dis-preferred response:

B: ah if you’d care to come over and visit a little while this morning I’ll give you a cup of coffee.
A: hehh well that’s awfully sweet of you, I don’t think I can make it this morning. hh uhm I’m running an ad in the paper and- and uh I have to stay near the phone

(Source, Weatherall, 2002, p. 109
{Adapted from Heritage, 1984})

The dis-preferred response started with appreciation “that’s awfully sweet of you”, then the mitigated declination “I don’t think I can make it this morning”, and finally it showed why the invitation was declined. “….I have to stay near the phone”. Weatherall (2002) argues that refusals are typically hesitant, indirect and mitigated, and the members have culturally shared knowledge about how to deal with refusing a request. CA has shown that hesitation and indirectness used when declining requests or refusing invitations are forms of speech acts that are socially accepted. It is worth mentioning that in preference structures, preferred responses are not only agreements or acceptances, and dis-preferred responses are not always disagreements or turning down. For instance, in the case of accusations, the preferred response is denial since it implies freedom from being accused. Dis-preferred response, on the other hand, is approval of guilt as guilt leads to punishment (Weatherall, 2002).

Regarding language and gender, Kitzinger and Frith (1999) believe in communication competence of both men and women. They assume that speakers have the ability to produce and understand refusals as refusals, even when participants are hesitated or
indirect. Although miscommunication theory assumes that misunderstanding between men and women occurs because they speak different languages, this assumption seems to be incorrect because both men and women have shared knowledge about the way social actions, such as refusal, are done in conversations (ibid).

### 2.2.3 Gender and Context in CA

Weatherall (2002) argues that CA considers gender as one of the characteristics of the speakers which contributes to the features of the interactional context that may influence the speech style used. In CA social and contextual factors (gender, participants, age and ethnicity) are not analyzed independently but as resources that are relevant in a normative interpretive way. Context is not seen as given prior to interaction, rather, it is constituted by the interaction itself, as the following example illustrates:

CT: yeah um yeah I want to talk to you about um oh it’s a personal issue um + well i – the decision to make um jared acting manager while joseph is away.

(Source, Weatherall, 2002, p. 114 {Adapted from Stubbe et al., 1999})

CT’s utterance (it’s a personal issue) indicates that this is an institutional interaction because it implies that there is a distinction between personal and non-personal issues. Hence, this example shows that the interaction defines the context. Analysts do not need to look outside the interaction to understand the context because participants share understanding of different aspects of context that are relevant for them (ibid).

The notion of ‘noticing’, as discussed by Weatherall (2002), refers to moments where participants orient to something relevant to the interaction. In this sense, ‘gender noticing’ is the moments when gender is seen as relevant to the interaction. Schegloff (1997) claims that the conversation analytic approach to context entails that, social categories such as gender, age, and ethnicity should only be used in an analysis when speakers make them clearly relevant features of the conversational interaction. Analysts
avoid seeking the influence of predetermined categories in conversation (e.g. gender, power, sexist language), and analyze only the speaker’s obvious orientation which is relevant to the interaction. However, CA approach suggests that the study of gender is restricted to interaction where participants orientate to it as something linked to the interaction (ibid).

Hopper and LeBaron (1998) argue that gender relevance is gained via a sequence of speech called noticing series. Hopper and LeBaron suggest that the sequence through which gender as a conversational action is achieved has three phases; it begins with a peripheral gender activity, followed by a gender noticing, and finally an extension of gender relevance. The following conversation explains the three phases:

1: Mary: look in: (0.6) it’s at the very top of one a those ba:re hhh bushes there.
2: Cissy: ^O::h
   ((long pause))
3: Mary: (I’v e lost him
4: Cissy: pardon?
5: Mary: I’ve lost the one that [was singing
6: Cissy: [He was-(0.2) he was so pla:n, hh
   Wasn’t he (1.8) I’m saying he, it might be a she, huh huh huh
7: Mary: = if it sings it’s a he.
8: Cissy: Oh is it really?
9: Mary: there are very few female birds that sing, which is one of those hh sa:d things
10: Cissy: Oh I didn’t notice that?

(Source, Weatherall, 2002, p. 115
   {Adapted from Hopper and LeBaron, 1998})

In the above example the peripheral gender activity appears in lines 1 to 5, where Mary used three different terms (it, him, and one) to refer to the bird. In line 6 Cissy referred to the bird using the masculine pronoun (he). Then the next step, gender noticing, occurred
later in line 6. The last phase, the extension, occurred from line 7 to 10 where the discussion about the sex of the singing birds took place. Hopper and LeBaron (1998) believe that gender seems to be so natural in talk, and it is performed in every day interaction. Gender is indexed in speech by language resources (e.g. Personal names, terms of address and reference). Gender noticing series does not result by a speaker as a clear thing. Instead, it results in gender creeping into speech (ibid).

2.2.4 Turn-Taking in Conversation

Liddicoat (2007) argues that speakers’ change is the most noticeable feature of conversation. The change in speech is known as ‘turn-taking’. Normally, only one person speaks at a time and transition in speech from participant to another happens with few gaps and little overlaps. However, sometimes gaps and overlaps occur to indicate that something additional is happening. Liddicoat points out that speaker’s change is a normative process which is achieved by participants in conversation. This suggests that turn-taking behavior is a socially constructed behavior rather than a physical or psycholinguistic process (ibid).

One person speaking at a time does not cause problems in understanding. Sometimes it would be very unusual when one person speaks at a time. For instance, responses to greetings addressed to a group can be overlapped regularly and unproblematically. Such overlapping does not violate turn-taking regularity (Liddicoat, 2007). Turns length is not fixed, rather, it is varied. Sometimes a turn can be a single word, another time it can be a long sentence. Moreover, the content of the turns is not fixed in advance. Speakers’ speech varies in everyday conversation, except in pre-specified contents in rituals or fixed turn length in debates (ibid). Turn-taking works at each next bit, rather than the whole conversation. The action of turn-taking runs internally in conversation by participants. It is organized locally at the moment of its occurrence by participants and managed interactionally through the process of interaction between the participants (ibid).
Liddicoat (2007) points out that turn-taking in conversation is an orderly, rule-governed process. Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974) propose a model of turn-taking system to examine the ways in which speaker’s change happens. The model consists of two interrelated components that are linked by a set of rules:

First, turn constructional component- to understand how turn-taking works in conversation one should understand that turns at talk are made up of stretches of language which can vary in terms of their structures. Sacks et al. (1974) maintain that turns are made up of units, which they call ‘turn constructional units’ (TCUs). Different grammatical units (words, phrases, clauses, sentences) can function as TCUs in the sense that people do not only talk in sentences but can also use different structures to construct their talk. This can be seen in the following extracts:

[lunch]
Joy: hh. So we decided tuh go to that place th’s ju’s
opened up
Harry: where’s that
Joy: over near dee jays.
Harry: oh I haven’ seen ‘t.

(Source, Liddicoat, 2007, p.55)

This extract contains TCUs which are sentences (the first two turns), and a prepositional phrase (the third TCU) which is complete at the point of its occurrence. This prepositional phrase shows an appropriate contribution in conversation. The next example illustrates a case where a linguistic form, that does not usually stand alone, can be considered a TCU:

 Ther: What kind of work do you do?
 Mother: Food services
 Ther: At?
Mother: (A) / (uh) post office cafeteria downtown
main post office on Redwood

Ther: Okay

(Source, Liddicoat, 2007, p. 55)

In this extract, whereas ‘at’ is a linguistic unit that does not give sense in isolation, it functions in this context as a complete TCU. That is, a single word functions as a full unit in this conversation at the point of its occurrence. Therefore, the context decides whether a piece of talk is organized as complete at a particular point in talk or not (ibid).

Liddicoat (2007) points out that the notion of ‘possible completion’ refers to the point in which speakers are able to project where a TCU will be possibly completed. Such projection is important for the organization of turn-taking. Sacks et al. (1974) assume that an utterance can be possibly complete in three main ways - it may be grammatically complete, it may be intonationally complete, and the most importantly, the TCU needs to be complete as an action, that is, it must do what needs to be done at this point in the conversation.

Selting (1998) argues that the role of prosody is the most important feature in turn-taking that determines whether a turn is completed or not. Moreover, Selting believes that the talk should be syntactically, semantically and pragmatically complete. Goodwin (1981) maintains that turn completion can be linked to a combination of gaze and syntax in face to face interaction. According to Goodwin gaze is important because it helps to determine whether the end of a turn reaches a possible completion or not. Liddicoat (2007) notes that participants in conversation project possible completion, not actual completion. Actual completion can never be projected because speakers do not know in advance where a turn will end. Rather, they project where it could end.

Liddicoat (2007) assumes that the notion of possible completion is linked to the notion of ‘transition relevance places’ (TRPs). That is, the point in which speaker’s talk is
possibly complete is the same point where speaker’s change is a possible next action. TRP is a place where speaker’s change could occur, and not must occur. Speaker’s change that happens at a TRP will not be perceived as interruptive. So speaker’s change is not an appropriate action except at the possible completion of a TCU (ibid).

Second, turn allocation component is the second component of the model of turn-taking system that proposed by Sacks et al. (1974). It is the idea that, at any TRP there are some strategies in which a next speaker can have a turn to talk, as follows:

1- A current speaker can select the next speaker- This can be done through the way the talk is designed, such as form of questions. When a current speaker produces a question, s/he produces a type of action that requires a relevant next action (an answer) which is performed by the next speaker. Liddicoat (2007) claims that a question may not be addressed to a particular participant, but it can be addressed to a group. Then, anyone can be a next speaker. However, a current speaker can design the talk in a way that selects a next speaker. This can be achieved by using address terms (e.g. a name or the pronoun “you”) as well as non-verbal cues (e.g. gaze direction). The following extract demonstrates such a strategy:

[Lunch]
Joy: Have yuh got the papers for the meeting ye’
Carol?
Carol: Yeah=they came in th’s morning.

(Source, Liddicoat, 2007, p. 64)

Here, Joy selected Carol as a next speaker by using two strategies- the name and the question form.
2- If the first turn is not designed to select a next speaker, anyone of the participants can self-select as a next speaker. That is, a participant becomes the next speaker without any indication from the previous talk as in the following extract:

[SF:ST:4]

(0.2)

Sue: \textbf{Ggo :d whadda Day.}
Trish: \textbf{hh whadda wee[ :k.}
Mary: \textbf{[yeh than’ g (h) od I’ s Fr (h) [ i day}
Sue: \textbf{[ hh . Huh}

(Source, Liddicoat, 2007, p. 66)

In the above extract, Sue self-selected as a next speaker after a brief silence. Her speech did not select any next speaker which resulted in Trish’s immediate self-selection.

3- The third strategy is that if self-selection does not occur by other participants, the current speaker may take another role and continue speaking as shown in the next extract:

[Car conversation]

Sasha: \textbf{reminds me of this guy I used to go out with}
\hspace{1cm} \textbf{(when I was in school)}
\hspace{1cm} (2.2)
Sasha: \textbf{he was real nut case [as well.}

(Source, Liddicoat, 2007, p. 67)

Here, Sasha’s turn was possibly complete and she did not select a next speaker. Then, she self-selected to have another role since no other interactant self-selected which created a long silence.
Sometimes a speaker continues speaking beyond the TRP which creates Multi-TCU turn (Liddicoat, 2007). That is, the speaker may extend his/her turn by producing more than one TCU in the same turn. The following extract illustrates this phenomenon:

[Lunch]
Harry: so did-did you ask him if he w’d do the session next week
Joy: I tried. He’s sorta got a lot on’t the moment
Harry: hhhh well we’ll jus haftuh think of somethin’ else ‘f’ e can’ do it.

(Source, Liddicoat, 2007, p. 74)

In this extract, Joy’s answer contained two TCUs; “I tried”, which proposes speaker’s change, and “He’s sorta got a lot on’t the moment”. The first TCU implied some more explanation from Joy which was produced as the next TCU. This also suggests that Joy continued as a speaker because Harry did not take a role as a next speaker at the end of Joy’s first TCU “I tried”.

Multi-turn TCU, on the other hand, is a situation where a TCU can be distributed over more than one turn at talk. Lerner (1991, 1996) suggests compound TCUs with two-part formats where this could be possible, such as if........then and when........then constructions as the following extract demonstrates:

[Lerner (1996) Smith: Thanksgiving]

Lynn: when you don’t get any appreciation back from teachers, well its like ferget it.

(Source, Liddicoat, 2007, p. 76)

This TCU is made up of two components (turns); “when……teachers” and “well……it”. The first component has its own projectable possible completion, and it can project a
possible proposition for the final component “well….it”. Lerner (1996) argues that these units provide both possible completion and projectable possible completion.

### 2.2.5 Simultaneous Speech

According to Coates (1993), simultaneous speech occurs when two or more speakers speak at the same time. Simultaneous speech can be a source of miscommunication between men and women in mixed-sex conversation. It has different implications for male and female speakers. For men, it is a way of grabbing the floor in conversation. In this case, simultaneous speech is considered as interruption for domination hence it is a violation of the current speaker’s right to complete the turn. On the other hand, women’s talk contains frequent simultaneous speech (e.g. interruptions, overlaps, simultaneous starts), but it cannot be described as a source of domination. For instance, women produce enthusiastic comments during another speaker’s turn. Such behavior is not considered as a way to deny the current speaker the right to finish the turn. Rather, it provides evidence of active listening and good participation (ibid).

Edelsky (1981) divides conversations into two types of ‘floors’- Floor one, where one speaker dominates conversation, and floor two, where two or more speakers speak simultaneously in a given text. Tannen (1984), on the other hand, states two types of speech- More information-focused, where the main aim of speech is to inform the participants, and more interaction-focused, when the goal of interaction is socialization. The second type may involve more than one participant speaking simultaneously. The next extract demonstrates a case of simultaneous speech:

B: I mean that[was just =no+
D: [you just can’t say that=

(Source, Coates & Cameron, 1989, p. 109)

In this case, D’s completion of B’s talk results in simultaneous speech.
Liddicoat (2007) believes that, in simultaneous talk both speakers cannot hear each others’ talk since both speak simultaneously and do not listen to the other’s talk. But Coates (1989) thinks that simultaneous speech does not threaten understanding since participants are familiar with each other and with the way conversation is designed. So, interlocutors are able to get the message. Coates affirms that simultaneous speech happens because speakers prefer to affirm collaborative talk rather than giving the floor to another speaker. Coates concludes that simultaneous speech is a strategy that women use in order to work together to produce shared meaning.

2.2.5.1 Interruptions

Interruption is a feature of simultaneous speech. Coates (1993) regards interruption as a violation of turn-taking rules. Interruption occurs when a next speaker starts to speak while a current speaker is still speaking. Thus, interruptions break the system of the conversational model. The interrupters do not only prevent speakers from finishing their turn but also take the turn for themselves, as the following extract, between a male and a female, demonstrates:

Female: it just strikes me as too 1984ish y’know to sow your seed or whatever (#) an’ then have it develop miles away not caring i [f

Male: [now:: it may be something uh quite different

(Source, Coates, 1993, p. 109)

Zimmerman and West (1975) define interruption as any simultaneous speech which starts before the word preceding a TRP, and it is a violation of the speaker’s turn at talk. In the following example, Zimmerman and West classify B’s utterance as an interruption:

A: I don’t know what you’re talking about OK tell me
What it’s all about
B: just throw a dice just throw a dice

(Source, Coates & Cameron, 1989, p. 125)

Beattie (1981) uses different criteria to identify interruption which depend on the idea of completeness. That is, interruption occurs when the current speaker’s turn is left incomplete, and the next speaker interrupts to complete it. Completeness is judged to be reached on the basis of verbal and non-verbal cues, but this judgment is made at the point when the first speaker stops speaking rather than where the second speaker starts. Therefore, the above example would not be classified as an interruption according to Beattie, but the next one would:

A: . . . so he (.) he gives the impression that he he wasn't
   able to train them up. [Now
B: [He didn’t try hard enough heh
   heh heh.

(Source, Coates & Cameron, 1989, p. 126
   {Adapted from Beattie, 1983: 115})

Coates (1993) believes that women’s silence, in mixed-sex interaction, is an effect of men domination. Generally, men’s domination is depicted in a form of interruption. Swann (1989) maintains that any interpretation of conversational features should be context-specific. For instance, sometimes interruption may be an indicator of conversational dominance. In other circumstances it may not. It seems that conversational dominance is practiced in different ways, both linguistically and non-linguistically (e.g. contextual factors such as seating arrangement and any activities that accompany the talk) (ibid).
Coates (1993) assumes that men seldom interrupt each other. But when they talk to women, in mixed-sex conversation, they tend to interrupt them as some sort of domination. By contrast, women usually do not interrupt men’s talk while they do with other women in their casual conversations. Therefore, women do not tend to violate men’s turn. Rather they wait for men to finish their talk (ibid).

Coates (1989) maintains that interruption is a strategy of either taking the floor where the aim of the participants is to grab speakership in public domains, or maintaining good social relationships in private conversations where participants are equals. In such cases, the aim of interruptions is not to take the floor for domination, but to participate in conversation.

Schegloff (2000) suggests a set of resources that can be used for keeping the floor when interruptions occur. Schegloff classifies the resources that resolve interruptions into two types as follows:

1- Hitches- cutting off the speech with an oral stop (a glottal or velar stop), prolonging an utterance, repeating a prior talk.
2- Perturbations- increased volume, higher pitch, faster or slower pace of talk.

The next extract shows a case of interruption resolution device:

[Car conversation]

Sasha: [oh yea:h, an there’s a tree: as well] so it
      is a [bad ] spot
Nick:     [yeah.]
Elvis:    yea[h, it is].
Nick:      [this-th]is pedestrian didn’ have right of way but I thought (.) okay
          I’ll be polite an stop,

(Source, Liddicoat, 2007, p. 92)
Here, Nick repeated the beginning of his turn “[this-th]is”. This device allowed his talk to emerge from the interruption with Elvis’s prior speech.

2.2.5.2 Gaps and Overlaps in Turn-Taking

Liddicoat (2007) argues that there are some cases where transition spaces appear longer than normal (gaps) or shorter than normal (as in the case of overlap). Gaps occur as a result of silence. Silence is interpreted in different ways in different contexts. When silence occurs at the end of a completed action in talk as after an answer to a question, it is not attributed to any participant. But when an answer is not produced, silence is attributed to one of the participants. On the other hand, when the transition is further reduced, it creates overlapping talk between the current speaker and the next one. Liddicoat defines overlapping talk as an interactional phenomenon that is produced by the speakers together. White (2003) argues that overlaps can be a sign of supportive interaction. Tannen (1994), on the other hand, describes overlapping speech as a high-involvement style in conversation in which a faster overlapping pace is preferred. So, overlaps do not create problems since they do not violate the turn-taking system whereas interruptions do. Liddicoat (2007) illustrates some cases where transition spaces are reduced creating overlaps. The following example shows a case of overlap:

Penny: o:kay. I’ll see yuh.
Agnes: A: : I? right [ dear,
Benny: [ Bye bye,
Agnes: Bye bye,

(Source, Liddicoat, 2007, p. 82)

It appears, in this extract, that the overlap resulted from the current speaker that continued beyond a TRP, rather than the next speaker’s early entry in speech, which reduced the transition space. Thus, the resulted overlap was short and was not treated as problematic, and then, did not need to be repaired. In comparison, while overlap occurs just prior to a
possible completion in the TRP, interruption happens prior to the beginning of the transition space (ibid).

### 2.2.5.3 Simultaneous Starts

Liddicoat (2007) points out that one type of simultaneous speech is simultaneous starts by two or more self-selecting speakers. This occurs when the prior speaker does not select a next one, and as a result, two or more speakers start at the same time as in the following example:

X: is that who we **use** to do those dividers
Y: yeah.

\( (0.9) \)

Y: [ and she] said it took- they didn’t do-(.)
X: [ well ]
Y: very good **proof** reading or anything

(Source, Liddicoat, 2007, p. 88)

Here, two speakers began TCUs at the same time. The second speaker’s talk was designed to be produced after a transition space, that is, after a pause. Y’s turn was complete and should be followed by X’s turn. But Y self-selected to produce a second turn which created a simultaneous start with X’s.

### 2.3 Linguistic Devices

There are some linguistic devices that women adopt in their interactions. Lakoff (1975) describes these devices as women’s speech styles since they are used much more by women than by men. The following are some linguistic patterns behaviors found in women’s discourse.
2.3.1 Hedges

Hedges are linguistic forms such as I think, I’m sure, you know, sort of, perhaps, that show the speaker’s certainty or uncertainty about a certain issue (Coates, 1993). The following example from a radio interview shows how hedges express certainty:

and that way we’d get rid of exploitation of man by
man all that stuff/ you know/ you’ve heard it before

[radio interviewee describing past experience]

(Source, Coates, 1993, p. 117)

Here you know expressed speaker’s confidence, or certainty. The following example of a young woman talking to a close friend illustrates uncertainty that gained by using hedges:

and it was quite// well it was it was all very
   embarrassing you know

(Source, Coates, 1993, p. 117)

In this example, you know expressed uncertainty. Lakoff (1975) argues that women use more hedges than men for they are socialized to believe that asserting themselves strongly in conversation is not good, ladylike, or feminine. Some researchers believe that in some situations women’s usage of more hedges is due to the situation. For example, when speakers intend to show their certainty about some point, they use more hedges. But one should also consider that more frequent use of hedges is a weakness (Coates, 1993).

Holmes (1987) maintains that hedges are multi-functional which is to be taken into account in the analysis of gender differences in talk. In fact, Holmes opposes Lakoff’s (1975) assumption that women use more hedges than men, and that they use them
because they lack confidence. Holmes (1987) emphasizes that women use of hedges (e.g. you know) is due to their confidence in supporting their point under discussion. Coates (1993) notes that men use less hedges than women for they avoid speaking about personal issues. Rather they speak about impersonal topics (e.g. current affairs, sports, travel). Women’s use of hedges, in contrast, is associated with their personal experiences where they need to be more confident (ibid).

2.3.2 Tag Questions

Women are thought to have used more tag questions to compensate for their weakness. Coates (1993) argues that the function of tags is to draw speakers into conversation and to keep talk going, as well as to help participants to be in tune with each other. Some researchers believe that women, who are powerless members of society, use more questions than men. Such claim is initiated by Lakoff (1975), who believes that tag questions which do not seek information are weak forms. In as much as tags are expressions of tentativeness and unassertiveness, they are typically feminine since women speech is characterized as tentative and lacking assertion. Tag questions then, minimize the strength of assertion (ibid). Consider the two examples below:

(12a) The crisis in the Middle East is terrible.
(12b) The crisis in the Middle East is terrible, isn’t it?

(Source, Coates, 1993, p. 119)

Lakoff (1975) claims that women tend to use sentence like (12b) that contains tag question more than men. Conversely, Coates (1996) argues that one of the tags’ functions which is found in women friend’s talk, is to invite other speakers to participate in conversation as:

[Talking about the way talk changes when a man joins in]
Liz: but it does change doesn’t it?
Anna: yeah/

(Source, Coates, 1996, p. 192)

In this example the tag resulted in a response from another participant. This type of tags is called by Holmes (1984) Facilitative Tags because speakers use them to facilitate the participation of others. Holmes analyzes tags in terms of expressing ‘primarily modal’ meaning, and ‘affective’ meaning. Tags with a primarily modal meaning show the speaker’s certainty about a particular proposition. Such kind of tags is called speaker-oriented since they ask the participants to confirm the speaker’s proposition as:

(13) She’s coming around noon isn’t she
(Husband to wife concerning expected guest)

(Source, Coates, 1993, p. 120)

Tags that function as affective, on the other hand, express the speaker’s attitude to the addressee. They are known as addressee-oriented. This can be done either by supporting the addressee (facilitative tag) as:

(14) The hen’s brown isn’t she
(Teacher to pupil)

Or by minimizing the force of negatively affective speech acts (softening tag) as:

(15) That was pretty silly wasn’t it
(Older child to younger friend)

(Source, Coates, 1993, p. 120)
Holmes (1984) believes that if one considers the relationship between participants and facilitators, one will find out that those (facilitators) who are responsible for keeping talk going smoothly use more tags than non-facilitators. Holmes notes that women use tags more than men when they act as facilitators. Moreover, Coates (1996) contrasts Lakoff’s (1975) assumption that questions are weak forms. Recent discourse analysts view questions as powerful linguistic forms. For example, Cameron et al. (1989) have found, in some studies, that powerful speakers in asymmetrical talk (e.g. talk between people who are not equal such as doctors, teachers, and presenters of TV discussion programs) use more questions to seek information than powerless speakers.

2.3.3 Minimal Responses

According to Coates (1993), minimal responses, such as *yeah, mhm*, are ways of indicating the listener’s positive attention to the speaker. That is, the listener has an active role in conversation. Zimmerman and West (1975) add that a well-placed minimal response indicates active attention from the listener, while a delayed minimal response signals a lack of interest or a lack of understanding. Coates (1993) believes that women use well-placed minimal responses in interaction since they support each others’ talk. In contrast, men use fewer minimal responses; for them, these forms mean only I agree with you. The following extract demonstrates the use of minimal responses by the speaker to facilitate telling a story:

and this put her into a bit of a flap (*mhm*) so before she could do anything about this she has to pull forwards (*mhm*) in order to er to open the gates so she took the car out of reverse, put it into first gate (*yeah*) and pulled forward very gently (*yeah*).

(Source, Coates, 1993, p. 122
{Adapted from Crystal and Davy, 1975})
The different use of minimal responses by men and women creates miss-communication in mixed-sex speech. Whereas men think women agree with them for they use more minimal responses, women accuse men of not listening because they employ fewer minimal responses (Coates, 1993). Furthermore, Coates (1989) assumes that the use of minimal responses in women’s talk characterizes women as equals and friends. Thus, women use such linguistic forms to show their active listening as well as to support each other.

Coates (1989) suggests that the same form of minimal responses functions differently in different contexts. That is, in casual conversation, minimal responses can be used to support the speaker and to indicate the listener’s active attention. In narrative, however, minimal responses can have different meaning where listeners use some of them to signal a particular stage of the story. So, when minimal responses are used, they indicate agreement among participants in a particular stage of the conversation. Women’s usage of minimal responses is a strategy of marking women understanding of different stages of the conversation such as accepting a new topic or acknowledging the end of a topic (ibid).

By using minimal responses, women show their sensitivity to the interactional process. Females tend to use these linguistic forms where they are suitable. For instance, in mixed-sex conversation, the use of minimal responses by women becomes weak since women’s skill as active listeners vanishes as a result of men’s domination of the communication event (ibid).

Coates (1989) points out that linguists claim that any linguistic form is multifunctional. Therefore, linguistic forms (e.g. hedges, tag questions, minimal responses) that are used in the females’ discourse should be interpreted according to their functions. In sum, since the aim of women’s talk is to consolidate friendship, they prefer to use these linguistic forms which promote such end.
2.4 Chapter Summary

In this chapter the contributions made by feminists and conversation analysts to language and gender has been discussed. The chapter is divided into three parts. The first part has focused on the relationships between language and gender assumed by different social psychological and sociolinguistic perspectives. Social identity theory, accommodation theories, speech communities, community of practice, and relational practice have been covered. The second part concerns conversation analysis, rules of conversation, focusing on turn-taking with special reference to features of simultaneous speech. This is shown in interruptions, gaps and overlaps, and simultaneous starts. In the third part, linguistic devices (hedges, tag questions, minimal responses) are also introduced as linguistic behaviors that should be examined in analyzing the speech of women friends.

In the coming chapter we will review the previous empirical studies done in the field of gender and language with special focus on women’s speech.
CHAPTER THREE

Previous Studies

3.0 Introduction

This part contains some works which are done in the area of language and gender. It highlights different aspects of men’s and women’s conversational behaviors that contributed to the differences and/or similarities in their talk. Different studies of women interactional features in various contexts have also been viewed.

3.1 Research on Sex Differences

Since 1970’s most of the linguistic research on sex differences has focused on how different women’s language is from men’s language, which is considered to be the norm. But Mizokami (2001) took another view, assessing some sociolinguistic research in sex differences. Mizokami argues that there are no sex exclusive differences in speech. The researcher attempts to prove that women’s language is not a product of proper research, but is a product of the androcentric ideology which works to suppress women. The main aim is not to prove that women speak exactly the same as men do. Rather, it is to show how stereotypes of women’s speech in sociolinguistics are more unfairly exaggerated.

Mizokami criticizes the work of Zimmerman and West (1975) who have analyzed casual mixed-sex conversations on a campus, in that they reported that ninety-six per cent of interruptions were produced by men. They regard interruptions as devices used for exercising power and control in conversations. However, Mizokami notes that researchers should not use mechanical definitions to identify interruptions. Instead, they must take account of the context in which the conversation occurs, which includes the participants’ intention.
According to Mizokami, interpretive analysis interpretation should depend on the situation, setting, and the relationship between the participants since the same linguistic strategy has different interactional purposes and functions in different contexts. Mizokami suggests that researchers should abandon the assumption that there is a fixed one-to-one relationship between a particular linguistic strategy and its function. Therefore, the assumption that women use fewer interruptions in mixed-sex talk because of their inferior position should not be considered as a scientific truth, but as an androcentric product trying to place women in a subordinate position in conversations as the dominance approach emphasizes.

Another criticism is that researchers who have studied the use of tag questions assume that tags have only one function, namely tentativeness, which stresses women’s inferior social position since they use tags more often. Mizokami argues that tag questions actually represent multifunctionality and diversity of meaning. Commenting on Holmes’ (1984) study of tags, the researcher claims that the use of tags does not always depend on the speaker’s sex, as many linguists believe, but on the speaker’s role in conversation. She supports her claim by Cameron et al.’s (1989) findings that the participants’ usage of tags depends on their ages, occupations, etc., rather than men’s domination and women’s subordination.

Mizokami believes that Japanese sociolinguistic research on sex differences seems to have the same problems as English sociolinguistics. That is to say, researchers have tended to reveal cultural stereotypes by confusing between the socially expected speech of women and the actual speech of women. For instance, Hori (1986) empirically has proved that women speak more politely than men and that they rarely used forms which lack politeness. This work is criticized because Hori used questionnaire method in collecting her data which led her to obtain stereotypical features of women’s speech since the informants were likely to give socially expected answers rather than the actual ones. Another problem with Hori’s method was related to her choice of the informants; they were all middle-aged or older who tended to use more polite language. This means that
younger women may be less likely to speak politely than older women which is not the case in all situations.

Mizokami (2001) concludes that most of the research on gender differences in language use is based on the assumption that there is a simple one-to-one relationship between particular linguistic behaviors and their communicative functions. In so doing, researchers have correlated the frequency of these strategies with the sex of the speakers. By using men as the norm and women as a deviation criterion, researchers have explained their results in relation to the dominance approach or the difference approach in order to prove how women’s language is inferior to or different from men’s. Finally, Mizokami claims that the notion of women’s language may not be a scientific truth. Then, silent, unassertive, indirect, polite and supportive women in conversation can be seen as a result of the androcentric ideology. The researcher recommends that feminists should not stress only the significance of sex differences in research. Rather, they should study how women and men are similar, and how women differ among themselves.

3.2 Gender Differences in Talk

Most of the research on sociolinguistics has focused on gender differences in talk, with great emphasis on different features that characterized women’s language. White (2003) has conducted a study to examine the usage of key linguistic functions, and how women use them to demonstrate solidarity in a casual conversation context. A sample of natural spoken conversation among three native speakers of English was analyzed. The participants, one woman and two men, were co-workers of equal status. They engaged in a casual speech during lunch. White’s analysis has focused on the linguistic features of conversation, especially those used by the female, and their use in controlling conversation or facilitating interaction. The main question the study has tried to answer is- did the woman’s usage of these features stem from deficiency in her language, as the dominance approach suggests, or was her speech simply different as a result of a different interaction style?
Findings show that the woman in the study used questions instead of commands in directing others as a way of creating solidarity. This finding confirms Tannen’s (1986) who argues that the use of questions can be considered as a sign of powerfulness rather than powerlessness, opposing Lakoff (1975) who believes that women use questions as strategy of the powerless that convey their deficiency. Moreover, tag questions produced by the woman were not seen as expressing uncertainty, as Lakoff claims, but rather as a facilitative behavior which provided support for the participants. Such usage of tags supported the claim that women are more attentive at keeping conversation going.

There were two cases in which the woman under the study self-corrected herself, which showed sensitivity toward standard speech. The men, on the other hand, tended to use non-standard linguistic variety that is defined by Labov (1996) as ‘covert prestige’. These results strongly support Trudgill’s (1983) concept of ‘hyper-correction’. That is to say, women are more status-conscious than men, and therefore, are more sensitive to the standard linguistic norms. Thus, the difference between women and men in the use of certain linguistic styles shows how women attempt to gain status through opposing speech patterns.

By using minimal responses, one of the men went against the norms of male’s speech strategies when he took the women’s role as facilitators. So, this man was more supportive and less competitive in the discourse process. According to White, this could be due to the influence of the context. That is, the goal of the man in question was to focus on group solidarity since he engaged in a small group interacting in a casual context.

Examining the claim that women tend to break the rules of turn-taking procedure less frequently than men, and are interrupted more than men in mixed-sex interaction, White notes that not all simultaneous speech is fight for power, and overlaps can create connections and solidarity between speakers. The female participant, under the study, was interrupted a total of eleven times whereas a male was interrupted only once. But many researchers would not consider this as interruption at all. So, it was a sign of active
listening rather than threatening the current speaker’s turn. In addition, many overlaps occurred naturally and did not attempt to take the current speaker’s right to a turn. Thus, overlaps indicated active participation, and it could also be regarded as enthusiasm strategy rather than being intended to cut the woman off. The analysis also suggests that the simultaneous speech produced by the female participant was not a disruptive, but rather a feature of active listenership.

Based on these findings White concludes that the differences in the use of certain linguistic functions (e.g. interruptions, overlaps, tag questions, etc.) between women and men cannot be attributed to the dominance approach. Therefore, all of the functions used by the men and the woman in the study could be interpreted in the framework of the difference approach. That is, the speech strategies used by the woman or/and the men differed due to the contrasting interaction purposes of each sex.

Considering Sudanese discourse, both dominance and difference approaches can be found when analyzing males’/females’ linguistic behaviors. In mixed-sex talk, Sudanese men tend to dominate conversation by adopting some linguistic strategies such as interruption. Women, on the other hand, speak differently with men. They display their sensitivity to the language by using some politeness strategies such as hedges since they are socialized to speak differently from men.

Regarding the notion that women use tag questions more often than men do, Dubois and Crouch (1975) have tested the assumption that there is a connection between tag questions and females’ linguistic usage. They have used data taken from discussion sessions following various formal papers given at a conference. Dubois and Crouch have listed all examples of formal tag questions (e.g. probably industrial too, isn’t it?) as well as informal tags (e.g. Right? Ok?).

Results show that a total of thirty-three tags, which were recorded, were produced by women. Fifty-nine per cent of the tags used by women were facilitative tags (tags which are produced to facilitate conversation not for seeking information). On the other hand,
sixty-one per cent of tags produced by men were modal tags which expressed uncertainty. So, these findings confirm the assumption that tag questions are used significantly more by women than by men. The researchers support Lakoff’s (1975) belief that tag questions which do not seek information are weak forms. They note that women in question who used tags, in particular facilitative tags, more than men were considered to be powerless speakers.

Two separate case studies have been conducted by Cameron, McAlinden, and O’Leary (1989) to discuss the idea that women use more tag questions than men do because tags, in many contexts, indicate tentativeness and approval-seeking. The first study was conducted to examine the use of tag questions in casual conversations. The study was based on a corpus of nine texts of five-thousand words, each from the Survey of English Usage (SEU) conversation corpus based at University College, London. Three texts of male speakers only, three female speakers only, and three of speakers of both sexes have been formulated.

The aim of the study was to discover what sex differences there were in this group’s use of tag questions. Cameron et al. (1989) have classified tag questions in their study as either modal (tags which request information or confirmation), or affective (tags used to facilitate talk). The researchers’ results show thirty-six per cent of tags were produced by women, and sixty per cent by men. The women in the SEU sample tended to use facilitative rather than modal tags since women are more facilitators in conversation than men. So, the roles of facilitators were marked more by women than by men. However, Cameron et al. have found that whenever men took a facilitating role, they were able to produce a large number of facilitating tags. Therefore, the use of facilitative tags correlated strongly with conversation role, rather than with gender per se.

The second study was conducted to introduce the variables of conversational role and differential status, in addition to the variable of gender. The aim of the study was to test tag questions not in terms of sex differences but by discourse analysis, investigating unequal encounters. That is, speech situations where one participant controls talk as in
courtrooms, classrooms, etc., where the powerful participants use an extraordinary large number of tags. Cameron et al. (1989) assume that tag questions function as interactional resources of the powerful rather than the powerless in conversation.

The study used a database of nine hours recorded unscripted talk from three different broadcasting settings- a medical radio phone-in where the participants’ roles were of doctor and caller/client; classroom conversations recorded for Open University educational TV, roles of teacher and student; and a general TV discussion program, roles of presenter and audience. In each case of these unequal encounters, one participant who had the power and status, measured in terms of social class, occupation, and age, was responsible for leading the discussion. But the TV presenter was the exception since studio audience members and invited guests varied in their social status. The settings were varied in their interactional tasks which gave insights into the function of tag questions in different contexts.

Cameron et al.’s (1989) findings affirm the notion that men use modal tags more than women while women tend to employ facilitative tags. However, the differences between the powerful and the powerless participants in tags’ usage, regardless of their gender, were striking. That is, no powerless person of either sex used facilitative tags in any of the three settings. In contrast, powerless participants used modal tags. The researchers consider the results of their study as supporting the claim of some discourse analysts, like Harris (1984), that tag questions are associated with the rights and responsibilities of powerful speakers.

To conclude, Cameron et al.’s (1989) case studies reveal- first, the complex relationship between the linguistic form and its communicative function. For instance, one cannot state what a tag question does prior to its occurrence in a given context. Second, the patterning of a particularly linguistic form should be analyzed in relation to different variables in addition to gender such as participants’ roles, objectives of interaction, participants’ status, and so on.
Considering gender differences in formal context, Yaguchi, Iyeiri, and Okabe (2004) have investigated gender differences in American English spoken by educated speakers in public contexts. The researchers have used the Corpus of Spoken Professional American-English (CSPAE). The CSPAE used in this study contained speeches and conversations in four different professional settings, held between 1994 and 1998. The CSPAE included two-million-word transcriptions for press conferences at the White House, college faculty meetings, and two kinds of nation-wide college teachers’ meetings; one on mathematic tests and the other on reading tests.

The study has investigated some aspects of language use in the above settings. These aspects will be discussed as follows:

First; Yaguchi et al., in 2003, have examined how much men and women talked in mixed-sex settings in CSPAE. However, the speech type in the White House is not investigated since it was an address made by one speaker to many journalists. By analyzing the remaining three academic settings, the researchers have found out that each speech setting showed a consistent male\female dominance pattern. In the faculty meeting and the mathematics committee, men were found to have talked more than women as a sex group, as well as individual speakers. By contrast, women talked more than men in the reading committee as a sex group and as individual speakers. Women’s dominance in speech was found to be the highest in the reading committee followed by the mathematics committee and the faculty meetings respectively. The researchers note that when there were far more women than men, women may have felt more comfortable and therefore talked more.

Second; in 2003 Iyeiri has investigated the distribution of the phrases “different from” and “different than” in the four settings. Results show that in all of the settings women used “different than” less frequently than men. However, the differences were very slight in the reading committee. In the White House, female speakers did not use “different than” even once. The proportion of “different than” by all of the female and male speakers was found to be the lowest in the White House and the highest in the reading
committee meetings. So, since women were dominating speech in the reading committee meetings, this means that, as the researchers claim, women employed formal forms (e.g. different from) more than men did. But generally, the speech style was more formal in the White House and more casual in the reading committee.

Third; in 2004 Yaguchi et al. have examined the relation between the use of “sort of” and “kind of” and gender differences in respect to the degree of formality of the CSPAE context. They find that there were many occurrences of “sort of” and “kind of” in the CSPAE. Some were used as hedges while others were softening the utterances. They claim that sometimes “sort of” and “kind of” were not seen as hedges since hedges can be removed without changing the meaning of the sentence. In such cases “sort of” and “kind of” could not be left out because the meaning would be changed. The researchers made a distinction between the usage of these phrases as softeners and as hedges. Softeners were used to avoid directly pointing out the referent (e.g. it’s one that can make commentary to indicate why these sorts of questions do occur in nature). Hedges, by contrast, qualified the content of the utterance (e.g. that’s what he just asked. And I kind of dodged it…. I dodged, but hinted).

The plural form of “sorts of” and “kinds of” were also used to soften the tone. They could also give the lexical meaning of “type(s) of” rather than expressing a pragmatic function (e.g. if you’re doing any other kinds of teaching activities or any other kinds of activities that legislator would benefit from observing…..). Yaguchi et al. (2004) add that it was difficult to draw a line between hedges, softeners, and lexical use of “sort of” and “kind of” since the CSPAE had only transcribed texts. Thus they classified the three usages according to the grammatical form.

Findings show that the speech settings, not the gender, determined the frequency of “sort of” and “kind of”, where each sex group showed a very similar frequency in the same speech setting. These finding confirm O’Barr’s and Atkins’s (1980) results of their study on hedges which support the notion that the social position, rather than gender, is an important factor in determining the speech style. The researchers note that the finding
that the White House press conference was more formal than the faculty meetings seems not to be true since women used more hedges in communicating with the White House. However, women used more hedges because they wanted to avoid being assertive. These women were supposed to be the cautious speakers in terms of formality. In this case the hedges “sort of” and “kind of” could not be presumed as related directly to informal talk or casual settings. Rather, the functions of these hedges were considered as markers of how unassertive the speaker’s talk was. On the other hand, men in the White House tended to speak assertively. Thus, they employed the least use of “sort of” and “kind of”.

These results support Baalen’s (2001) findings in examining the use of hedges in a mixed-sex discussion program on British TV. Female experts were found to have used more hedges than the female non-experts, while male non-experts used them more than their expert counterparts. These findings also are found to be the same as Coates’s (1996) findings in a similar study. That is, professional females tended to downplay their authority and hedge their utterance in order not to sound assertive and to show collaboration whereas men tended to boast their expertise. Likewise, when it came to the setting level, the speakers in the White House press briefings and the faculty meetings talked very assertively. It seems that the two settings forced the speakers to behave in this way. In contrast, the reading committee seemed to engage in the most unassertive talk as the high frequency of “sort of” and “kind of”, in both sex groups, indicated. However, in the academic meetings, women did not show their feminine profile, and they tended to talk assertively as experts.

Yaguchi et al. (2004) conclude that the White House speakers attempted to use the softeners “sort of” and “kind of” less frequently than the reading committee speakers. Such findings agree with Iyeiri et al.’s (2003) findings, in that softeners were markers of the speech setting informality, while hedges “sort of” and “kind of” were indicators of unassertive talk. They add that the White House press briefings speakers avoided using softeners while they sometimes used hedges. In all settings, women were found to be more careful about using softeners than men, and they used them less frequently than their male colleagues.
In order to examine powerful and powerless languages, O’Barr and Atkins (1980) have studied the linguistic differences between female and male witnesses in courtroom. They have analyzed transcripts of 150 hours of trials in a North Carolina superior criminal court. The researchers used Lakoff’s (1975) framework of describing women’s language (WL) which comprises ten features. Results suggest that not only did some female witnesses use high proportion of women language features, but also some male witnesses did. This means that WL features do not necessarily characterize women’s speech.

O’Barr and Atkins (1980) conclude that Lakoff’s (1975) description of such features as women language is inaccurate. Their data show that the frequency of women language features in the speech of the witnesses correlated not with sex, but with the speaker’s social status and their previous courtroom experience. One of the witnesses, for instance, was a pathologist, a highly educated professional woman who used to be an expert witness. So, her low usage of women’s language was due to her high social status, as well as to her courtroom experience. Two other witnesses, on the other hand, who both tended to use many of these features, had low social status and little courtroom experience. One of them was a housewife and the other was an experienced ambulance attendant. Based on the findings, O’Barr and Atkins (1980) rename women linguistic features as ‘powerless language’. This is because women, in many societies, have less power than men. Thus, the status of women in society is responsible for shaping their speech rather than their sex.

3.3 Classroom Discourse

Some researchers have examined the speech differences in mixed-classroom discourse. For instance, Swann (1989) has analyzed participation in classroom talk between boys and girls. The study intends to examine the following:

1-The mechanism of turn allocation and turn exchange that support male’s domination of classroom talk.
2-The roles played by different participants (girls, boys, and the class teacher) in the achievement of such interactional dominance.

Data were collected from video-recordings of two twenty-minutes’ sequences of small-group teaching with primary school children. The recorded sequences were from two different schools. One of the sequences, which Swann called the Pendulum sequence, was recorded in the East Midlands. The other, the Mining sequence, was recorded in the North-East of England. Participants in the pendulum sequence were six children (three girls and three boys) aged between ten and eleven years, and a female teacher. The mining sequence, on the other hand, involved eight children (four girls and four boys) aged from nine to ten, and a female teacher.

Since the sequences were video-recorded, one could observe the teachers’ and pupils’ verbal and non-verbal behaviors as well as any other activities that might contribute to the interpretation of what was going on. For instance, seating arrangement enabled the teacher to face the boys in the pendulum sequence. In the mining sequence, by contrast, the teacher was standing but turned more often towards the boys.

Findings show that the boys took more turns than the girls. However, there were quiet boys and more talkative girls. In the pendulum discussion, the boys chipped much more than the girls. In the mining sequence, talk seemed to be under the teacher’s control, and students (of either sex) rarely chipped in. The boys were selected by the teacher to speak more often, but this seemed to be related to the boys’ ability to raise their hands more decisively and earlier than the girls. Swann notes that hand-rising strategies were crucial in obtaining speaking rights. Moreover, gaze was an important interactional mechanism in both sequences.

The study demonstrates that non-verbal behaviors and other factors that accompanied talk such as seating arrangements and the positioning were mechanisms that supporting boys’ domination in speech. Swann believes that many studies based on audio-recording and transcripts cannot take into account the non-verbal features of speech or any
accompanying activities. Thus, she recommends the use of video-recording because video-recording can give a more comprehensive picture of the immediate speech event. However, I think when studying speech behavior in casual conversations audio-recording is preferable in the sense that participants would not speak spontaneously if they know recording takes place.

Mchoul (1978) has studied the organization of turns at formal talk in the classroom environment. The aim of the study was to examine some modifications of Sacks et al.’s (1974) rules of conversation for the organization of turn-taking. It shows how these modifications narrowed conversation’s open-endedness, adopting greater instances of gaps and minimizing instances of overlaps. The researcher argues that the rules of turn-taking provide a systematic basis for the feeling of speech formality that researchers and participants may have in certain social situations such as classroom talk. The analysis is based on three technical differences between classroom discourse and natural conversation. The potential of gap and pause is maximized, the potential for overlap is minimized, and the permutability of turn-taking is minimized. This means that turn-taking organization is under the teacher’s control.

The data consisted of audio-recordings of small group lessons made by the researcher in comprehensive schools in Liverpool in 1974. Transcripts and video-recordings of lessons in Canberra (Australia) high schools, made by J. Mitchell in 1976, were also used in the study. The teachers had greater participation rights than all the students. The researcher has taken samples from the data that showed formality among participants. The formality principle demonstrated how the maximized/minimized participation rights were realized in terms of turn-taking.

Findings show that turn-taking system in the classroom exchanges was minimized. Yet there were many instances of gaps and little occurrence of overlaps which created the feeling of formality. Mchoul (1978) emphasizes that the violation of the turn-taking rules in the classroom’s talk permitted and obliged only the teachers to initiate topics and to maintain or change these topics. He adds that the social identity contrast (teacher/student)
was expressed in the turn-taking system in terms of differential participations rights and obligations. This differential was found to depend largely on teachers’ access to the use of ‘current speaker selects next speaker’ technique. So, Mchoul findings confirm Sacks et al.’s (1974) prediction, regarding the turn-taking/social-identity relationship. The researcher recommends that more work is needed in the formal situations and in the way participants’ social identities are made relevant in turn-taking in conversations.

Tannen (2012) evaluated some studies on related patterns in classroom discourse. The main assumption of the author is that gender-related patterns in language should be discussed in relation to ethnic, class, regional, and age differences. These factors influence speaking styles, sexual orientation, professional training, and individual personality. Tannen criticizes research on gender and language which were tempting to isolate specific linguistic strategies (e.g. interruptions, tag questions, indirect speech acts, and the amount of talk produced) then counted up the occurrences of these features in the speech of females and males. As a result, researchers came to conclusions depending on self evaluation. Tannen claims that there are many reasons why such an approach is not enough to account for the dynamics underlining different linguistic patterns. That is to say, a linguistic feature that can be used for one purpose can also be used for another purpose. For instance, interruption can be used as a strategy for taking the floor, but in some occasions it is used to indicate active listening or for enthusiasm.

Tannen (2012) also regards overlap as a linguistic strategy that is relevant to the Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) class, in which students are likely to have very different cultural backgrounds. Consequently, there are very different assumptions and habits with respect to the usage of overlaps. Tannen prefers to use the term overlap instead of interruption since interruption is interpretive. It implies that a second speaker is violating the conversational rights of the first speaker who interprets it as a trial of domination, which is not always the case. Tannen notes that although many researchers have found that men tend to interrupt women more than the reverse, James and Clarke (1993), in some studies of interruptions and gender, observe
that researchers who compared all-female to all-male conversations have found a higher rate of interruptions in all-female conversation.

It seems this is the case also in the Sudanese women’s conversations in that they use interruptions in their friendly talk. Interruptions are used for support, to show active listenership, and to reinforce the speaker’s point rather than taking the floor only for domination.

Tannen (2012) emphasizes that in analyzing any interactional feature, one must take into account the context in which a linguistic strategy is used, the conversational styles of the participants, and the interaction of these styles. She adds that researchers should focus on what Bateson (1972) calls the Corner of the Eye. That is, one should begin with not only looking directly at features associated with gender, but rather by observing other dynamics of interaction, and how women and men tend to use certain patterns.

Tannen (2012) also believes that the framing approach (Bateson, 1972; Goffman, 1974; Tannen, 1993) is the most appropriate strategy for studying women’s and men’s language. For instance, Kuhn’s (1992) study of the classroom discourse of professors at US and German universities finds the language used by the US women professors more assertive than that of their male colleagues in giving students direct orders at the beginning of the term. But deeper analysis led Kuhn to observe that the women professors spoke of the requirements of the course as if these were handed down directly from the institution. That is to say, their assertiveness in directing the students relied on the fact that the requirements were from the institution and not from the professors.

The framing approach then led the women to direct the students, without hedging, on how they could fulfill the requirements. Men professors, by contrast, framed the requirements as decisions they personally had made. In other words, the significant distinction in the classroom discourse of the women and men professors in Kuhn’s study relied not only on the linguistic forms of their discourse, but on the way women and men
positioned themselves with respect to the requirements and the students. Thus, the linguistic forms they chose could only be understood in the light of that framing.

I believe that, in analyzing mixed classroom discourse, researchers should consider different aspects such as ethnicity, class, cultural background, age differences, and students’ personalities, as well as the role of the teacher. Different linguistic strategies should not only be analyzed in relation to the speaker’s sex. Rather, conversational analysts should pay attention to the immediate context regarding participants, and any other features that accompany the speech.

3.4 Family Discourse

Erickson (1990) has examined the differences in communicative competence between girls and boys within the family context. He assumes that male children are socialized to dominate conversation with the active support of female participants (mothers, sisters, etc.). Erickson has analyzed dinner-table conversation of a large Italian-American family, consisting of a mother, father, four sons (aged between seven-fourteen years) and a daughter (aged nine years). A female researcher was also present, as a guest, at the meal. The conversation included a series of narratives. One set of narratives focused on accidents experienced by some members of the family when riding their bikes. The initial story was told by the youngest boy, followed by stories from the elder boys. Finally the father told a dramatic story from his own experience. The mother, daughter, and the female guest acted as attentive audiences for the story-tellers.

Findings show that the stories narrated functioned as a display of male dominance which was achieved collaboratively by the whole family. That is, the active listening from the family side supported male domination. This finding confirms the notion that women talk less in mixed-sex interaction. However, early research on this area reported in the talkativeness of pre-school girls. Smith and Connelly (1972) argue that young girls are both talkative and fluent. They talk more than boys to their mothers as well as to other children before the age of four, but after that such differences disappear.
To examine the effect of the context in the family discourse, Wells (1979) has studied adults’ talk with children. He analyzed all conversations that occurred in a long-term study of three-year-old children in Bristol. The conversations were categorized according to who initiated them (e.g., child or adult), and according to the context (e.g., a meal time, watching television, playing with another child, etc.). Thirty per-cent of the conversation sequences were initiated by adults (usually by the mother).

The analysis shows significant differences in the contexts in which adults addressed girls and boys. Half of the sequences initiated with girls were in non-play context. The sequences initiated with boys, on the other hand, mostly occurred in the context of play. These findings suggest that adults emphasize more useful and domestic activities in their interaction with girls while the emphasis with boys is towards a range of different physical environmental activities (e.g., playgrounds). These findings confirm Wells’ (1979) assumption that adults’ conversations with girls and boys may be significantly affected by the context.

A research on interruptions found no significant differences between girls and boys whereas parent-child differs significantly when engage in parent-child conversation. Greif (1980) has studied sixteen middle-class children, aged between two and five years, in conversations with their mothers and fathers. Results show that the fathers usually interrupted his children more than the mothers, and that both parents interrupted the girls more than the boys. When speaking simultaneously, the parents were significantly more likely to continue talking than the children. Moreover, the father-and-child pairs were more often engaged in simultaneous speech than the mother-and-child pairs. Finally, both mothers and fathers were more likely to engage in simultaneous speech with daughters than with sons. So, regarding the notion that men use interruption to control conversation, it was obvious that the fathers under the study tried to grab the floor more than the mothers by using this linguistic behavior. But both parents tended to control talk more with their daughters than with their sons adopting such a strategy. Greif concludes that the implicit message to the girls is that they are more interruptable and that their right to speak is less than that of the boys. However, when equal participants (e.g., girls and boys
instead of parent-child) engage in simultaneous speech, such linguistic behavior is likely to symbolize solidarity and co-operation rather than domination.

3.5 Language Varieties

Many researchers have examined the speech of second-generation immigrants in different societies. For instance, Deuchar (1989) has conducted a study to examine the speech of the British Blacks in Dudley community in the West Midlands. Deuchar assumes that Patois speech is not used by British-born Black adolescents in Dudley in the West Midlands. Instead, Patois is reserved only for the older generation. These assumptions are based on the observations of white people such as teachers interacting with young Black people in formal settings (e.g. schools).

The aim of the study was to record the speech of a cross-section of young British Black people. Data collection was from a wide range of situations, differing in both formality and the racial origin of participants. The speakers in the sample were British-born Black people whose parents had come from Jamaica. They were between the ages of sixteen and twenty-three, and were living in Dudley, West Midlands. A total of twenty young women and twenty-four young men took part in the recordings. The subjects had been selected from former pupils of subnormal schools and polytechnic students. They had different attitudes towards white people and society. They varied in their social networks from those who socialized with Black only to those who had regular contacts with white people.

The corpus of data was from the following situations- in a formal interview with a white fieldworker, in a formal interview with a Black fieldworker, in an informal racially mixed conversation, alone in single-sex peer-group conversation, and in an informal conversation with the Black fieldworker. The patterns of language use which emerged were found to vary with both formality and ethnicity.
Results show statistically significant relationships between frequency scores and three different explanatory variables - network relations, attitudes towards mainstream white society, and the interaction of education and sex. The more integrated the speaker into the Black community, the more frequent the use of Patois was likely to be. Similarly, the more critical the attitude of the speaker towards the mainstream white society, the greater the use of Patois variants. The effect of education was not clear cut. However, Deuchar (1989) notes that education decreased the use of Patois variant in young men while it had no effect on the speech of young women. Deuchar concludes that sex was not an important factor in the linguistic behavior of the speakers in question. Finally, based on the research findings, Deuchar recommends that sex, as a variable, should be addressed in both research design and fieldwork. That is to say, the effect of sex on patterns of language use should be thoroughly investigated.

Another study of vernacular usage by adolescents is conducted by Cheshire (1978) who has examined the speech of adolescents in Reading, Britain. Cheshire’s study has covered girls and boys which enabled her to examine gender differentiation in vernacular usage. The work was based on three groups of adolescents. The data were collected through long-term participant’s observation. The speech of working-class adolescents peer groups was analyzed. Three groups, two of boys and one of girls, were located in two adventure playgrounds in Reading. Cheshire visited the playgrounds two or three times a week for nine months using a tape recorder in collecting her data. She examined non-standard morphological and syntactic features from the collected speech. She used in her study examples of eleven variables - non-standard -s, non-standard has, non-standard was, negative concord, non-standard never, non-standard what, non-standard do, non-standard come, ain’t=auxiliary have, ain’t=auxiliary be, and ain’t=copula.

Findings show that non-standard forms were used less often by the girls than by the boys. This finding confirms the belief that female speakers are closer to standard norms than male speakers. Cheshire has also examined the social networks these adolescents belonged to. Each boy was asked which friend he spent most of his time with. On the basis of their response, she divided the boys into three groups - core members, secondary
members, and non-members. She has investigated the relationship between the use of non-standard linguistic features and peer group status. Some positive correlations of the most frequently occurring non-standard features in the boys were found.

Cheshire (1978) believes that not all non-standard features of Reading English necessarily serve as markers of peer group status. In order to investigate which variables function as markers of vernacular loyalty, she has constructed a vernacular culture index based on six factors: skill of fighting, carrying of weapons, participation in minor criminal activities, sort of job preferred, style (dress, hairstyle), and swearing. To test the use of the features in question, the boys were divided into four groups. Group one were boys who were close to the norms of vernacular culture, and group four were boys who were not.

Findings indicate that six of the non-standard features of Reading English were closely linked to boys’ involvement in the vernacular culture. However, girls did not form structural peer groups like the boys. All the girls in the studied group knew each other, but they tended to break up into pairs of best friends. So, in terms of social networks, boys were found to belong to structured peer groups whereas girls belonged to a much less tightly knit group. Thus, the vernacular culture index which Cheshire used to measure the boys’ adherence to vernacular values could not be used for the girls. Although girls took part in boyish activities such as stealing and setting fire to the playground, their attitudes to such activities differed from the boys. In other words, they did not value the vernacular norms of toughness and violence in the same way the boys did.

Finally Cheshire (1978) has made a distinction between the girls who stuck to the vernacular norms and those who did not. Three good girls of the group did not swear, steal, or set fire. There were five features which were used more by the bad girls than by the good ones. These features were: non-standard -s, was, come, negative concord, and ain’t as copula. Furthermore, non-standard come functioned as a marker of vernacular loyalty among the bad girls, but was never used by the good girls. For the boys, the use of
this form was invariant. *ain't* too was found to function as a marker of vernacular for girls, but not for the boys. Non-standard *never* and *what* functioned only loosely as markers of vernacular loyalty for the boys while for the girls they were not markers at all.

Based on the assumption that adolescents are more consistent vernacular speakers than adults, Cheshire concludes that different speakers exploit the system in different ways. While non-linguistic features act as markers of vernacular loyalty for both females’ and males’ adolescents in Reading, there are other non-standard linguistic features which act primarily as gender markers. That is to say, they function as markers of vernacular loyalty only for girls or only for boys. Thus, these results seriously challenge the common notion that members of the speech community can be defined in terms of shared norms.

### 3.6 Turn-Taking in Conversation

Much work in the area of conversation analysis has been done on the model of turn-taking and its irregularities. Researchers have focused on these irregularities in examining gender differences in language. For instance, Zimmerman and West (1975) have studied the irregularities of conversation by analyzing some collected transcribed talk, in terms of Sacks et al.’s (1974) model (i.e. turn-taking). Their main assumption is that men tend to take the floor in mixed-sex conversation by breaking the rules of conversation.

The data were collected through thirty-one taped conversations involving two participants in coffee shops, drug stores, and other public places in the campus of the University of California. Ten conversations took place between two women, ten between two men, and eleven between a woman and a man. Findings show that there were significant differences between the conversations involving two speakers of the same sex and those involving one speaker of each sex. These differences appeared to have been in overlaps and interruptions. In twenty conversations between two speakers from the same sex, there were twenty-two overlaps divided into twelve and ten between the participants. Similarly, there were seven interruptions, three of which involved the first speaker and four the second one.
These results, however, are in contrast with the conversations involving one woman and one man. In these eleven cases there were nine overlaps and forty-eight interruptions. All the overlaps were caused by the male speaker, and forty-six of the forty-eight interruptions were cases of a man interrupting a woman. For Zimmerman and West, men rarely interrupt one another, but when they talk to women they use interruptions and overlaps as strategies of domination.

Based on these results, Zimmerman and West (1975) suggest that since most interruptions are produced by men in mixed-sex conversation, the speaker who falls silent is usually a woman. Examining silence by using the same data, Zimmerman and West find that the average silence in single-sex interactions lasted for 1-35 seconds while the average silence in mixed-sex conversations lasted for 3-21 seconds. The resulting silence was found to be caused by two kinds of minimal responses—well-placed and delayed. The function of the former was to demonstrate active attention and support for the speaker’s topic. Delayed minimal responses, by contrast, signaled a lack of interest in and a lack of support for the speaker’s topic. The researchers conclude that in mixed-sex conversation, men infringe women’s right to speak, especially in finishing a turn.

Beattie (1982) has presented some analysis of the speech and conversational styles of two of Britain leading political figures, Margaret Thatcher and Jim Callaghan. The study has focused on conversational turn-taking of the two politicians’ speech, and other aspects of speech that are relevant to turn-taking. The researcher is interested in deviations from turn-taking rules which specify only one person who should talk at a time. He argues that the mechanism of turn-taking in political interviews is of crucial importance for people’s interpersonal perception.

The data were drawn from videotapes of two televised interviews broadcast in April, 1979. James Callaghan, then Prime Minister, was interviewed by Liew Gardner for the ‘TV Eye’ program. Margaret Thatcher, then a leader of the Opposition, was interviewed for the same program by Denis Tuohy. There was a general election in Britain at the time of the interviews. Both interviews lasted in 25 minutes and were held in different
locations. Mr. Callaghan was interviewed in the official residence of the British Prime Minister. Mrs. Thatcher, on the other hand, was interviewed in a television studio.

The researcher video-recorded these interviews then analyzed the resulting conversations using a Sanyo Video-Edit machine. The time of each speaker-switch was noted and the accompanied speech was transcribed in details. Notes were also made on the transcripts of relevant non-verbal behaviors. Pauses which were performed by the two politicians, from the beginning, middle, and end of the interviews, were counted in order to calculate the speech rate and articulation rate.

Beattie (1982) notes that there were significant differences between the interruptions which occurred in the two interviews. Mrs. Thatcher was interrupted by her interviewer almost twice as much as she interrupted him. Jim Callaghan, by contrast, interrupted his interviewer more than he himself was interrupted. Furthermore, both politicians tended to use overlaps more frequently. Beattie suggests that the overlaps acted as a reflection of dominance relationships in conversation.

There is a strong belief that the characters and personalities of the politicians can be understood on the basis of their conversational strategies. This is what Beattie argues about the influential interpersonal perception in relation to turn-taking style. Thus, although Margaret Thatcher was interrupted by her interviewer more than she did, she was perceived by the viewers as dominant in conversation. This perception aroused from the observation that she tried to finish her point nevertheless her speech was punctuated by butting-in interruptions from her interviewer. By so doing, she often won the battle for the floor when she was interrupted.

The researcher adds that the cause of the high frequency of interruptions in Mrs. Thatcher’s interview might stem from her unintentional Para-linguistic and non-verbal behaviors which were thought to be at a point of TRP that led to speaker-switch. Moreover, many of the interruptions occurred in this interview were found at the end of the clauses where she used hand gesture only after the interruptions began so as to
continue on her talk. In addition, she used some filled pauses (e.g. ah, err, um, etc.) at the end of her turns in order to gain more turns.

Findings show that the frequent occurrence of the interruptions in Mrs. Thatcher’s interview was due to the phenomenal notion that women are interrupted more often than men are, and that men usually dominate speech in mixed-sex conversation. So, despite the fact that Mrs. Thatcher was the leader of the opposition at the time of the interview, and with all the power she had, she was still a woman to be dominated by men.

O’Conaill, Whittaker and Wilbur (1993) have analyzed the effects of video systems on conversations. They compared some linguistic behaviors between face-to-face communication and two video-conferencing systems. The first system was Integrated Services Digital Network (ISDN), and the second was Optical Transmission and Video-Switching technology. The researchers aim was to discover how the different channels properties affect the spoken communication. Findings show that, when comparing the speech of the video systems to that of face-to-face interaction, the ISDN system was found to have longer turns, and fewer interruptions, overlaps, and minimal responses. Communication through the system of broadcast quality was similar to that of face-to-face discourse. Overlaps occurred predominantly at the projected completion in cases where speakers had difficulties in finishing their turns. In such situations, other participants used overlaps at the TRP to complete the prior speakers’ talk, producing similar information. The researchers conclude that overlaps and pauses may create misunderstanding in the context of intercultural face-to-face communication.

Kohonen (2004) has studied turn-taking in conversation in intercultural talk. The researcher has examined the way in which turn-taking works in French language. The data were collected from conversations in the French language among three participants recorded in 1988. Data used from the corpus included three recordings of dinner-table conversations. Participants were two females, French and Finnish, and a French male, all about thirty years of age. Findings reveal that the majority of interruptions, overlaps, simultaneous starts, and shared laughing were produced to facilitate interactions.
Moreover, the researcher suggests that different language groups have different speech behaviors. This confirms O’Conaill et al.’s (1993) findings that pauses and overlaps may create misunderstanding in intercultural discourse.

Kohonen (2004) has compared her findings to some researchers’ such as Wienland (1991) who argues that simultaneous turns are common among French speakers, who consider the absence of this phenomenon as a sign of impoliteness in conversation. Carroll (1988), on the other hand, notes that interruptions are not usually seen as impolite behavior among French speakers, rather they have the role of punctuation marks. Kohonen (2004) believes that Kerbat-Orecchioni’s (1996) argument goes in line with Carroll’s and Wienland’s. That is, in French conversation, there is tolerance for interruptions and overlaps. Kerbat-Orecchioni has made a comparison between French and German speakers. French speakers viewed these behaviors as a sign of active participation while the Germans interpreted them as aggressive behaviors.

Deng (1998) has studied overlapping speech in Australian and Chinese conversations. The researcher argues that Australian English speakers are similar to American English speakers in their conversational behavior. For instance, they follow the rules of turn-taking in talk which consider overlaps as a sort of deviation (see Sacks et al., 1974). The data used in the study were from three dyadic (two equal sides) conversations. Fifteen in Australian-English and fifteen in Mandarin-Chinese. Single-sex and mixed-sex talk were collected. Participants were university colleagues, under graduate students. Results show that Chinese and Australians differed in their adoption of overlaps due to cultural differences. Chinese speakers used more overlaps than Australians. The results also reveal that both Australians and Chinese speakers employed transitional overlaps more than non-transitional ones.

Deng (1998) has reviewed five studies related to his respective field of investigation. First, Ulijin and Li (1995) have studied interruptions and overlaps in intercultural multimember party business negotiation between Chinese and Finns, and Chinese and Dutch. It was observed that Chinese speakers used more interruptions and overlaps as a
convention of their language and culture. Second, Graham’s (1993) findings go in the same line when he compared the use of overlaps among people from ten countries in business negotiations where Chinese was ranked the fourth.

Third, Reisman (1974) finds out that people in Antigua, West Indies, do not follow the rules of turn-taking. That is, interruptions in this culture can happen anywhere and at anytime during conversations while the interrupted persons are not offended. Reisman called this phenomenon ‘contrapuntal conversations’. Fourthly, Wieland (1991) has studied turn-taking styles of French and American advanced learners of French in dinner-table English conversation. The researcher finds that French speakers used more interruptions than their American counterparts. Fifth, Testa (1988) has examined overlapping speech across cultures. Testa compared the use of overlaps between Italian and British speakers. She finds that there was no difference between the two speakers in the usage of overlaps.

Gardner and Mushin (2007) have examined overlapping speech in an indigenous Australian language, Garrwa, which is spoken in the South-Western Gulf of Carpentaria region. The data included four audio-recorded conversations in Borroloola between two elderly Garrwa women. The women were found to have mixed languages (Garrwa, Kriol, and Aboriginal English) in their daily speech. Video-recording conversations involving three Garrwa women were also carried out. Findings reveal that the occurrence of overlaps in this culture showed many similarities to that of North American and British speakers. The researchers claim that the most type of the occurred overlaps was that at the transition place. The researcher adds that simultaneous starts were also common among Garrwa women. Gardner and Mushin conclude that some cultures such as East European and Mediterranean can tolerate simultaneous starts and overlapping speech. Yet this is not always the case in other cultures like North American and British English speakers. Many Asian cultures, they argue, have little tolerance to these strategies.
3.7 Silence Phenomenon

By examining the notion of silence, Spender (1980) has explained the myth of talkative women by suggesting that men have the right to talk while women are expected to remain silent in mixed-sex conversation. Then talking at any length will be perceived as talkativeness in women. In order to examine this phenomenon, Spender has studied an electronic discourse, a discussion via computer among academics in the United States. A discussion of men’s literature which lasted for five weeks was analyzed. Men’s contribution was 70% of the total words in this discussion. However, there were two days in which women dominated the floor. The resulting distribution, with men claiming they were being silenced, suggests that women and men did not have equal chances to speak. By contributing more than men in the two days, women in the group contradicted the assumption that men are, in most cases, in full control of public discourse. This finding contradicts Zimmerman’s and West’s (1975), that men often grab the floor in mixed-sex conversation by interrupting women who resort to silence, accepting men’s topics.

DeFrancisco (1991) has studied the notion of silence from another angle. That is to say, silence can be seen as one factor of conversation dominance among couples. The main assumption is that conversation dominance is achieved through silence more than through grabbing the floor when the subjects are married couples. DeFrancisco asked seven married couples to tape themselves at home for a week. Then she interviewed each of the participants on their own, and asked them to comment on extracts from their recorded speech. One case shows that the man failed to give any responses, not even a minimal response, during his wife’s story. Instead, he interrupted her story by leaving the room.

Findings show that the women worked harder than the men to keep the conversations going, but were less successful at achieving this. That is, although the women talked more than the men and introduced more topics, their topics were rarely accepted by their husbands who kept silent. DeFrancisco concludes that men use silence as a strategy to control domestic conversations. However, in public conversations men control talk by speaking more than women. This view is adopted by Zimmerman and West (1975) who
believe that men dominate speech by introducing more topics and speaking more than women in mixed-sex conversation. However, this is not the case when the participants are married couples. In such a situation, talkative women dominate the conversation while husbands remain silent.

By and large, a woman may perceive the man’s silence as a way of ignoring her talk, attempting to emphasize her inferior social position. Regarding Coates’s (1993) belief that silence is a weapon of power, a woman may feel that her husband uses silence in order to demonstrate his power and dominance, as the superior member in the family, by not taking into account her views when discussing a domestic issue.

3.8 Women’s Linguistic Strategies

Examining women’s talk, Coates (1989) has analyzed a recorded conversation of a group of women friends called the Birkenhead group. The members of the group were white middle-class who met once a fortnight at each others’ houses in the evening for talk. Coates belonged to this group since 1975 which enabled her to record a 135 minutes talk. The recorded topics ranged from discussions of TV program to mothers’ funerals and child abuse. Coates had three aims. The first was to see whether the evidence support Jones’s (1980) description of gossip. According to Jones, gossip is women’s language use in natural conversation (language use in terms of the relations between setting, participants, topic, and form and function). Secondly- to discover the formal features that are typical of all-women’s discourse, and the thirdly- to explore the notion of co-operativeness in women’s speech.

Findings show that the formal features which were found in all-females’ conversations can be considered as co-operative styles. The features are summarized as follows:

1-Topic development- after analyzing five participants’ talk about mothers’ funerals, Coates (1989) suggests that women build progressively on each other’s contribution. That is, topics are developed jointly and shifts between topics are gradual rather than abrupt.
2-Minimal responses- are found to be used more often by women who are friends or equals. In addition, women tend to use minimal responses in two different ways- first, in interaction-focused discussion where they are used to support the speaker and to indicate the listener’s active attention. Secondly, in narrative or more information-focused talk where minimal responses are used less frequently, and when they are used, their function is to signal agreement among participants that a particular stage of conversation has been reached.

3-Simultaneous speech- Coates finds out that simultaneous speech in the funeral episode illustrates the way in which all speakers worked together to produce shared meanings.

4-Epistemic modality (hedges)- the prime function of epistemic modality (perhaps, I think, sort of, etc.) is to indicate the speaker’s confidence or lack of confidence in the truth of the proposition. Coates finds that women used these linguistic forms to hedge assertion in order to protect both speakers’ and addressees’ face.

Coates (1989) concludes that women’s talk can be described as co-operative. She argues that females’ interactions deal with shared experiences, and that women’s speech encourages mutual support and co-operation. The study makes the following recommendations:

1-The study of women’s language should be done in different societies since the majority of the studies, so far, have concentrated on white educated women in the United States and Britain.
2-Variation in women’s language in relation to age, class, ethnic groups needs to be examined.
3-The notion of co-operativeness should be tested against variables such as age, class, and ethnicity.
3.9 Politeness Language

In the belief that women are more polite than men, Brown (1980) has studied the language of women and men in the Mayan community in Mexico. The researcher argues that the linguistic markers of politeness are good indicators of social relationships. Women usage of more polite forms than men in mixed-sex conversation indicates that they perceive men as socially superior and distant. So, they are involved in more face-threatening acts. Brown has examined Tzeltal, the language spoken by Mayans, in relation to the class of particles which operates as adverbials and modifies the face of the speech act. That is, the particles either strengthen or weaken the force of what is said (e.g. I really promise……., or I perhaps promise…….).

Brown (1980) has tested three hypotheses- women use more strengthening particles when speaking to women (that is, pay a lot of attention to women’s positive face wants), women use more weakening particles when speaking to men (that is, pay a lot of attention to men’s negative face wants), and women speaking to women use more particles than men speaking to men. Then Brown has compared spontaneous speech of male and female speakers in mixed and single-sex pairs considering the status of participants, the kind of relationships between them, and the speakers’ knowledge of the topic (all speakers hedged more when they knew less about the topics). Results confirm Brown’s third hypothesis that women use more particles in single-sex interaction than men do. Since particle usage in Mayan is an index of politeness, women’s used of more particles than men suggests that they are more polite than men in this community. However, the data did not confirm the researcher’s other two hypotheses.

3.10 Gender Discourse at Work

Woods (1989) has studied the variables of gender and occupational status and their influence on patterns of floor apportionment. The aim of the study was to examine how power and status of conversational participants have a strong effect on the way in which interaction is organized. The data were collected from nine recording conversations
between work colleagues of different occupational status. The recorded conversations were designed as follows:

1- Three conversations involved one female of high occupational status with one male and one female subordinate.
2- Three involved one male of high occupational status with one female and one male subordinate.
3- Three controlled conversations between the three females who had been recorded in both boss and subordinate positions; three males who had been recorded in boss positions; and three males who had played subordinate role twice in the previous conversations.

The recordings of same-sex controlled conversations involved near-equal occupational status participants, and thus provided a control against which the effect of the power base of occupational status could be measured. The recorded interactions were made of varying length between fourteen and thirty-two minutes. A passage of two minutes was selected randomly from each recording. Findings show that:

1- Occupational status did not affect speech selection. That is, boss participants were not selected by others. Subordinate women were selected more often than boss women.
2- Occupational status influenced the frequency of interruptions which helped in giving the floor to the boss participants. But, patterns of unsuccessful interruptions demonstrated the overriding power of gender. However, both females and males in boss positions were interrupted less than their subordinates.
3- Males spoke through TRPs more often than females and so held longer turns.
4- Males tended to speak after a pause more frequently than females.
5- Men received much more assent terms (minimal responses) than females.

Woods (1989) concludes that when gender and occupational status are at work, gender tend to influence the floor apportionment. In other words, although women, in the study,
held high status occupational positions, subordinate males controlled the conversations by having longer turns. Accordingly, Woods recommends that features of male domination in speech should be examined, not only in terms of men’s speech behaviors but also in terms of the females’ role in this domination. Comparing to Sudanese discourse, I argue, women have a significant role in men’s domination in talk. They go with the norm in keeping men interrupting them since men are seen to be the superior members in society.

It is argued that a directive speech act is considered to be a highly face-threatening act which entails great potential for damaging the addressee’s face. This argument inspired Takano (2005) to study the strategic use of directives by professional Japanese women in positions of authority and leadership. Takano assumes that Japanese women in leadership positions suffer from a sociolinguistic dilemma in choosing between the culturally prescribed feminine ways of speaking, and the communicative need to talk powerfully from their occupational status. So, communicative dilemmas in highly face threatening situations would confront Professional Japanese Women in Charge (henceforth PWC).

It is noted that the majority of the past studies were concerned only with the sentence-level analysis of directives, that is, characteristics of morphosyntactic structures. In this study Takano has presented the PWC’s usage of directives with great emphasis on the occurrence of other pragmatic devices, as well as contextual factors. The assumption is that a speaker could elaborate a single directive act by exploiting a variety of other linguistic means, and the strategic roles these linguistic means play in the actual context of use.

The data were collected from nine work places in three cities in Japan for three months during the summer of 1994. Different methods were used to collect the data. First, direct participant observations of interactions were conducted. Second, tape-recorded speech was employed in order to have a variety of contextual extra-linguistic factors. Third, the subjects were asked to tape-record their everyday interactions. Fourth, some speech samples from professional Japanese men, as a controlled group, in similar occupational
status were obtained. In addition, extracts of workplace directives from some footage of three two-hour long television programs broadcast in Japan were also used in this study. A total of 752 directive speech acts and exchanges, both preceding and following the directives, were transcribed along with detailed contextual information taken from the researcher’s observations.

Findings show that PWC’s directive strategies were characterized by polite and differential structures. The women adopted various solidarity-focused approaches to promote collaborative rapport talk, mitigating power/status asymmetries with their subordinates. PWC’s choices of particular directive strategies were found to be context-defined as they were subjected to socio-cultural norms of indirectness and politeness. That is to say, the PWC defined a context in which it was natural for subordinates to respond voluntarily to the requested acts. Thus, PWC tended to vary their language use in ways that dealt with face-threatening elements in the immediate context of use. In highly face-threatening situations, polite language played a dynamic role in negotiating power between PWC and their subordinates.

Takano (2005) notes that most of the past studies on PWC’s directives have focused on the use of negative politeness strategy. However, this study reveals that both negative and positive politeness strategies were found to be in the PWC’s language behavior. These aspects of investigation are effective if we put into consideration Person’s (1988, 1989) claim. That is the adoption of negative politeness strategy as marker of difference and respect; help enhance the speaker’s prestige and power. Positive politeness strategy, as marker of solidarity and rapport, on the other hand; reduce social distance and evoke favorable and warm response or support from the subordinates.

The researcher concludes that these findings refute the prior assumption that indirect, polite ways of speaking are automatically linked to the speaker’s powerlessness in communication. It is noticeable that Takano’s finding confirms Holmes’ (2006) notion of relational practice (RP) that describes women relationships at the work-place. That is,
women (bosses or subordinates) tend to be co-operative and supportive which encourage them to work successfully, and that their speech style helps in promoting such end.

3.11 Community of Practice

Since gender cannot be isolated from other aspects of social identity, Community of Practice (CofP) should be applied in the study of gender. According to this perspective Matsumoto and Britain (2001) have examined the gender paradox, proposed by Labov (1990), that women are sometimes conservatives and sometimes innovative in terms of linguistic variation and change. The study has focused on CofP in multilingual-Japanese-Palau in the Western Pacific. Palauan, the Austronesian indigenous language, spoken in the islands, resulted from a century of colonial domination by Spain, Germany, Japan, and the U.S. respectively.

Matsumoto and Britain (2001) note that although Palau finally became an independent nation in 1994, the impact of Japan and the U.S.A. still exists there. English remains the official language along with the indigenous language (Palauan). Japanese is taught at Palauan schools as a foreign language. So, the colonial nations contributed in forming multilingualism in Palau. Most of the old people in the islands were Palauan and Japanese speakers, but since 1945 the youngsters became bilinguals in Palauan and English (as a second language).

A variety of data were gathered in Koro, the Palauan’s capital in 1997 and 1998. The data involved six months of participant’s observations, 121 interviews, 233 questionnaires, and 864 hours recording of spontaneous conversations and many hours of informal discussions with Palauans of all ranks. Only the relevant data were selected to investigate the gender language behavior in the returnee community. Returnees are those who returned back to Palau after WWII. They are half Japanese, half Palauan.

Matsumoto and Britain (2001) have studied the social changes in Palau that contributed to the formation of the current multilingualism among the returnee community with
special reference to conservatism and innovation of women. They claim that gender paradox is methodological rather than real since ethnographic investigation identified the conservative and innovative linguistic behaviors in the local context, and defined women and men, as members of social groups, on the basis of their social roles and social practices in the community.

The study has focused on different social variables which affected language behavior in the local context such as sex, generation, age, perceived ethnic identity, social networks, self rated oral language ability in Japanese, and actual language use in family conversation. However, sex and generation were the key variables since each family under study had three generations. Each generation contained both females and males. Age was a crucial variable that influenced language use in Palau because, with a series of dramatic colonial transitions, each generation of a particular life stage had a different experience from the other generations. Thus, the subjects are classified into four age groups considering the speakers’ experience of the historical events. The researchers have dealt with fifteen people from three returnee families, taking three generations from each family.

Findings show that sex and Japanese language ability played important roles in complex social practices in the local context which affected language use. Matsumoto and Britain (2001) note that although the average use of Japanese among female speakers was higher than that of males, sex was not directly associated with language behavior; rather, it mirrored complex social practices. By applying ethnographic observation to test the social meaning of using Japanese by different generations, it is found that the use of Japanese by the grandparents and parents represented conservative behavior. For these generations, Japanese language indicated maintenance of their mother tongue or ethnic home language. For children, on the other hand, Japanese conveyed innovative behavior that implied the adoption of a prestigious foreign language, which assured job opportunities. Therefore, language behaviors by both the young and the old are motivated by different and divergent social and economic considerations.
Labov (1990) takes another view in highlighting the paradox in the linguistic behavior of women. He believes that women led linguistic changes, whether changes in formal styles towards prestigious standard varieties, or changes in conversational styles towards non-standard norms. But Matsumoto’s and Britain’s (2001) ethnographic investigation demonstrates that the Japanese-Palauan returnees used the language which was available to them within their community environments. Grandmothers, for instance, made linguistic choices based on the context of a particular communal history in which they acquired a colonial language and the social role they played in their immediate community (e.g. to educate their children the ethnic traditions and values). Grandfathers, on the other hand, made choices in different contexts. Some employed Japanese as a mother tongue, while others had no choice but to learn English in order to support their families. Daughters made choices in the contexts of both schools (learning Japanese as a foreign language) and private job sectors which required Japanese. Sons, by contrast, made a choice in public governmental jobs where mastery of English as an official language was needed.

These findings are compared with a study by Holmes and Harlow (1991) on gender paradox in bilingual or multilingual communities. It reveals that first generation women in immigrant communities tended to use the ethnic language more than men in their daily communications at home. This is because their roles were to look after children and the elderly, as well as to transfer their ethnic traditions and values to their children. Second-generation women, by contrast, tended to adopt mainstream language more than men so as to improve their social status. In this sense, first-generation women were conservatives while the second were innovative. Matsumoto and Britain conclude that women are sometimes conservatives and sometimes innovative, depending on the context and the social and economic practices in a given community, rather than their gender.

It is argued that ethnicity cannot be understood if it is separated from social practices, since ethnicity is often related to language, race, and cultural tradition. De Fina (2007) has studied Code-Switching and the construction of ethnic identity in an Italian CofP. The researcher has examined the constructed Italian ethnicity as a central element in the
collective identity of an all-male card-playing club. She claims that code-switching into Italian is used as an important index of ethnicity in socialization practices related to the game, as well as in official discourse by the president to the club members.

The analysis of the study was based on a discussion of the central role of ethnicity in the construction of a collective identity for the club which was composed of Italian and Italian-American members, and the linguistic strategies used to index it. The analyzed data were derived from ethnographic study of the club, 11 Circolo della Briscola in Washington D.C., covering the period between 2002 and 2003. De Fina has participated in the Briscola nights as an observer, taking notes, interviewing club members, and making audio and video recordings of games and other types of interactions. The data used in the study were from one video-taped and five audio-taped sessions of about two hours each.

De Fina (2007) notes that the most significant practices in the life of the club were: organizational practices (including the place decoration, food preparation, etc.); discourse practices (social activities such as public addresses or story telling); and socialization practices (organized activities addressed to the socialization of the new members of the club such as those related to the teaching of the games). These practices were found to be performed through symbols of Italian identity that index Italianness. It is noted that the members of della Briscola not only met to play, but also met to play in a place that underlined their Italian origins.

Considering organizational practices, the food practices were presented traditionally, as shown by the choice of menus which offered Italian or Italian-American dishes. This was depicted in the practice of bringing food made at home, and the preparation of specific Italian foods related to traditional religious occasions. Thus, food was also at the center of discourse in the Circolo since the members tended to make comments and discussed it at every meeting. It contributed to the perception of Italian identity as a collective point of reference that defined membership into the club. Another set of organizational practices shared in the construction of a collective ethnicity was the production of printed materials.
such as badges and T-shirts for the players. These practices indexed Italian identity through the use of colors and other symbols.

As language use plays an important role in indexing ethnicity, De Fina has focused on the strategic use of code choice and switching in public discourse and socialization practices to illustrate how Italianness was constructed as a central feature of the club’s identity. However, the analysis of language use in the Circolo indicated that there was no necessary association between the use of Italian and the expression of in-group solidarity. The study shows significant associations of language varieties with activity domains which were partly dominated by English as lingua-franca. Therefore, in public domains, topic of general interest, by the president or other individuals, were mostly presented in English. However, switches into Italian occurred frequently although Italian was not the basic language. On the other hand, in informal conversations and during the games, Italian was the dominant language. The use of dialect was less frequent and more marked since most of the club’s members either did not speak any dialect or did not speak the same one.

De Fina finds that language choice did not necessarily depend on situational factors such as linguistic competence. That is, there were many cases in which men tended to speak Italian although they were not fluent in it, whereas some men born in Italy employed English language more often. She notes that the emphasis on Italianness in the game domain was found to be central to the construction of a collective ethnic identity of the group whose main objective was to play cards. For this reason, social practices related to this traditional game, including language, were powerful sites for identity construction. Hence, a good card player in the club attempted to speak at least the basic words of the game in the native language. Furthermore, the use of Italian jargon for the cards projected the players as competent in the game. The researcher concludes that both linguistic and non-linguistic acts were used to claim membership in this Italian community.

Meyerhoff (1999) has examined the distribution of speech acts based on the word ‘sore’ (meaning sorry) in Bislama, the Creole language spoken in Vanuatu in the Pacific. She
assumes that women in this region use ‘sore’ more frequently than men do. The researcher has studied the social and linguistic significance of apology routines within the context of a CofP in Vanuatu (formerly New Hebrides SW Pacific). Meyerhoff argues that ‘sore’ which originally derived from English ‘sorry’ has several meanings in Bislama (apology, empathy, missing someone or something). However, the social distribution and function of ‘sore’ are regarded as an apology in the framework of politeness theory proposed by Brown and Levinson (1978).

Meyerhoff (1999) indicates that although some researchers consider ‘sorry’ as a negative politeness strategy, it also functions as a positive politeness strategy agreed upon by the shared community norms. For instance, in Bislama, when ‘sore’ is used in the sense of empathy, its function does not express negative politeness since negative politeness strategy stresses the social distance between the participants. Then, ‘sore’ can be used to reduce the effect of imposition of the request, while empathetic ‘sore’ is used as a positive politeness strategy to demonstrate intimacy among the participants. Meyerhoff adds that the bi-functionality of ‘sore’, as both positive (empathy) and negative (apology) politeness strategies, seems to develop the meaning ‘to miss someone’ that ‘sore’ also means in Bislama.

The data were collected from thirty-five tokens, a transcribed corpus of casual conversations. Findings show that the most frequent users of ‘sore’ were women. The three meanings of ‘sore’ were exemplified in the corpus, but only four of the tokens were uttered by a man in a short conversation. The man used ‘sore’ only when it meant to miss someone or something. Women, on the other hand, used it with all the three meanings (apology, empathy, missing). There was also one example of a man using ‘sore’ in the sense of apology to express a negative politeness. Generally, both women and men used ‘sore’ to apologize and to express the fact they missed someone. However, women, but not men, used ‘sore’ to signal empathy. The corpus of the conversations in question contained eighteen tokens of empathetic ‘sore’ which means that more than half of the tokens women uttered had this function. By so doing, women in the study emphasized the fact that women are more intimate and supportive.
Meyerhoff adds that empathy is a gesture of group strength realized at the personal level. Expression of empathy was found to be in women’s speech more often than in men’s. This finding confirms the fact that women are exposed more than men to issues that demand empathetic responses. This principle seems to underlie the distribution of ‘sore’ in Bislama. Traditionally, the social roles played by women and men in Vanuatu were constituted through sex-preferential behaviors. That is to say, women are seen as growers and nurturers, and they make use of this nurturing behavior such as the adoption of the empathetic ‘sore’ to display care for individuals or the family which is valued positively by the community. Men, by contrast, tend to express empathy using other linguistic strategies by passing judgments of evaluation (e.g. that’s good, that’s terrible).

Meyerhoff (1999) concludes that ‘sore’ as an expression of empathy is a performative act. Women’s and men’s choices to express empathy are reflexive, reflecting women’s nurturance and men’s agentivity.

Ehrlich (1999) has investigated the utility of Eckert’s and McConnel-Ginet’s (1992) concept of CofP for analyzing the language used by women in a sexual assault tribunal. She demonstrates how the questions asked by the tribunal members (a male and a female faculty member) functioned to reframe and reconstruct the events in question as consensual sex. In the analysis, the researcher considered different kinds of CofP in which the women participated (i.e. the tribunal member vs. the complainants) as a way of understanding different speech strategies that emerged in the talk of this sexual assault tribunal.

The data were transcribed from audio-tape recordings of a disciplinary tribunal at York University (Canada), dealing with this sexual harassment. Two charges of sexual harassment had been brought against a male student (the defendant) by two female students (the complainants). The tribunal members hearing the case consisted of a man who was a faculty member in the Faculty of Arts, and a woman graduate student in the Faculty of Arts. The defendant had been accused of two instances of acquaintance rape. These two instances occurred in the women’s dormitory rooms. The questioners in legal
contexts had the power to allocate turns, to frame the topics of questions, and to restrict the nature of responses through the syntactic manipulation of questions.

Ehrlich (1999) has focused on two themes—inaaction of the complainants, and the minimizing of the complainants’ fear of the defendant. First, the female member wanted to make sure that the women did not try to resist the defendant by pursuing some ‘options’ (locking the door, putting the defendant on the floor) which showed their behaviors as lacking in appropriate resistance. Second, the explanation of women passive behavior (i.e. their extreme fear of the defendant) was minimized through questions that reduced the paralyzing and the common nature of women’s fear. The questions enabled the faculty members to construct an interpretive frame which minimized the complainants’ acts of resistance, and then reconstructed the event as consensual sex.

The researcher indicates that research on courtroom discourse and doctor-patient discourse highlight the power of the questioners in these settings (the lawyer or judge, or the doctor) to control conversations. Likewise, it was noticeable that the tribunal members were free to control the talk without being interrupted or cut off. This observation is typical of a study by Fisher (1986) who compares a doctor/patient interaction to a nurse-practitioner/patient interaction. This study shows that the doctor, more than the nurse-practitioner, interrupted and questioned the patient in a way that allowed a very limited exchange of information, and left the way open for the doctor to structure subsequent exchanges. The nurse-practitioner, by contrast, used open-ended questions, allowing the patient to share in interaction.

Ehrlich (1999) notes that by focusing on the ‘options’ not chosen by the complainants, the woman faculty member succeeded in characterizing the women’s behavior as lacking in resistance. Moreover, in both interactions (through the male faculty member’s questioning and the tribunal’s written decision) the complainants’ feeling of fear was minimized, which indicated that their lack in resistance was not due to any state of fear. However, the ideological frame structuring the tribunal process failed to acknowledge women’s response to the threat of sexual violence. That is, they focused on women’s lack
of resistance and ignored their fear, paralysis, and humiliation of unwanted sexual aggressions. So, by ignoring women’s state of fear, the tribunal members failed to acknowledge women’s submission to men’s sexual aggression which often occurs in a context where physical resistance can create the risk of injury and violence. Therefore, the questions asked by the two tribunal members stemmed from a complete ignorance of the complainants’ experiences. That is to say, although both of the female tribunal member and the complainants were of the same sex, they belonged to different CofP which created very different perceptions.

The researcher concludes that the discourse that dominated the tribunal was co-constructed by a man and a woman faculty member belonging to the same CofP. In other words, they were engaged on a regular basis in university disciplinary tribunals. Thus, both of them jointly constructed an interpretive frame which minimized the complainants’ resistance. Ehrlich (1999) believes that people adopt new ways of being women and men, gays and lesbians, and heterosexual. Women change the ways of being feminist, or being lovers, mothers, or sisters as they participate in different ways in the various CofP in which they belong. For instance, in becoming a professor of linguistics, a woman may change her ways of being a woman, and perhaps of being a wife, lover, or mother. So, by considering the very different kinds of CofP in which the women in question participated (i.e. the tribunal member vs. the complainants), one can understand the different discourse frames that emerged in the talk depending on the various perceptions resulted from the different CofP.

Within the framework of CofP, Bucholtz (1999) has analyzed the linguistic practice associated with the social identity of nerd girls. Nerds, in the U.S. high schools, refer to the intelligent students who seek knowledge, and compete to be outstanding in class. Nerd girls, unlike other students, are characterized by silliness. They are less constrained to peer-group law, tending to wear shirts and jeans which are neither tight nor baggy, and wear bright primary colors. The researcher illustrates how members of a local community of female nerds at a U.S. high school negotiate gender and other aspects of their identity through different practices. Bucholtz argues that nerd identity is not a stigma imposed by
others, but a purposefully chosen identity which is achieved and maintained through language and other social practices. She notes that nerds in U.S. high schools are not socially isolated or unaccepted, but they are competent members of a distinctive CofP.

It is argued that nerd identity should be examined within the CofP framework which permits us to draw on the linguistic and social information that are necessary to understand the production of nerd identity. Bucholtz (1999) claims that linguistic practice can reveal important social information which cannot be found in examining other practices in a community alone. There is, for instance, Eckert’s and McConnell-Ginet’s (1999) study of Jocks (over achieving students who are oriented to middle-class values) and Burnouts (under achieving students who are oriented to work, rather than college after high school). The two group members were united in a single CofP since their goal was to be ‘cool’. Both of the groups showed different rates of Vowel Shift that are widened in the Northern Cities. The use of vowels helped Burnout girls construct their identity as being tough and streetwise. The boys, on the other hand, displayed their toughness through physical confrontations. The researchers argue that female Burnout indexed their identity through language since physical violence is viewed as inappropriate for girls.

Bucholtz (1999) defines the social identity of the nerds, and describes their phonological, syntactic, lexical, and discourse practices through the use of some linguistic strategies. She classifies nerds’ linguistic indices into two kinds. First, ‘negative identity’ practices which are those that individuals adopt to distance themselves from rejected identities. Second, ‘positive identity’ practices which are those in which individuals are engaged in order to construct a chosen identity. The data were taken from ethnographic fieldwork, since ethnographic methods are crucial to the investigation of CofP. The data collection took place during 1994-1995 academic years at a California high school, Bay City High. The participants were four central members of a small cohesive friendship group (Fred, Bob, Kate, and Loden), and two peripheral members (Carrie and Ada). All the girls were European American, except Ada who was Asian American.
The same group also formed a club, called the Random Reigns Supreme Club. The club was described as anti-club because its structure differed from the structures of most social clubs, which bring together different people to perform shared activities. The members of the nerds’ club emphasized the randomness of the club’s structure, as they rejected specialized activities (e.g. games). Instead, the club’s activities were organized around the members’ daily practices such as studying and reading novels. It had no ongoing projects and no official meetings. The language used by the girls members not only marked their nerd identity, but also expressed their separation from outsiders.

Findings show that the negative identity practices disassociated nerds from non-nerds, especially from ‘cool’ teenagers. Positive identity practices, by contrast, contributed to the speakers’ construction of intelligence which was the primary value of nerd identity. Hence, many positive identity practices in which nerds engaged displayed intelligence. Moreover, the community value placed on intelligence was reflected in non-linguistic identity practices oriented to school books and knowledge.

Bucholtz (1999) concludes that nerdness, like all identities, is a struggling domain. That is, the speakers either struggle to share nerds’ value, via positive identity practices, or to distance themselves from nerdness, via negative identity practices. This conflict reveals the heterogeneity of membership in the CofP. Some nerd practices such as being a good student agree with the larger social order, while others such as rejecting femininity resist it. Thus, the linguistic practice works alongside other social practices to produce meanings and identities.

Freed (1999) has studied the connection between CofP and pregnant women. She argues that the CofP that operates in the lives of pregnant women constitute the communities of doctors, health professionals, family members, etc, who have well defined opinions about pregnancy. These communities have a variety of insights about women and pregnancy while pregnant women themselves do not constitute a CofP. The researcher has analyzed pregnant women’s stories to describe how they felt when they were pregnant and how they were treated by family, friends, co-workers, and various
health professionals. They were white middle-class American women who lived in New Jersey, between forty and forty-two, and each had at least one child. These women shared with other pregnant women their physical state of pregnancy, but their experiences of pregnancy and the language they used to describe it were quite diverse.

The stories told by these women revealed their awareness that other people were attempting to define and construct their experiences for them. Most of the women interviewed showed disagreement between themselves and other groups. By contrast, some were comfortable with the dominant cultural beliefs that were expressed by others. Among the different communities or groups, that individual women identified as having different views about pregnancy, were general practitioners, as compared to obstetricians; midwives, as compared to doctors; medical personnel in large hospitals treating clinic patients, as compared to doctors treating private patients; African-American women, as distinct from European-American women; nuns in catholic hospitals; and women’s mothers.

Freed (1999) notes that different communities revealed the speakers’ awareness of conflicting views about pregnancy and childbirth. There were reports in the narratives about others who offered advice which made the women perceive their own experiences of pregnancy as being negatively evaluated as a result of others’ views of how they should feel and behave. For instance, a discussion about breast-feeding between a pregnant woman and her mother showed a significant difference in their attitudes towards it. Breast-feeding was important for the pregnant woman while it was disgusting for her mom. A narrative of European-American woman indicated that different communities held different views of pregnancy. She contrasted the reactions to her pregnancy of the African-American women with those of her white co-workers. She was not able to share her interest in natural child-birth with the African-American women which set her apart from them.

Freed (1999) finds that women’s stories revealed the embedded belief systems and an essentialized dominant discourse about pregnancy and pregnant women in the U.S.A. She
emphasizes that pregnancy is not a unitary phenomenon; rather, it is one created and constructed by local communities to which different women belong, as well as by other CofPs of which these women are not members. Hence, women’s stories provided evidence of the conflicts between various communities, each of which attempted to shape women’s experiences on their behalf.

The researcher concludes that the dominant cultural beliefs about pregnancy are susceptible to various kinds of social changes. Gardner (1994) claims that the dominant discourse about the pregnant women, at a time, constructed all aspects of the physical, psychological, and moral character of the child they produced. In addition, the transition in the past twenty-five years from the medicalized doctor-centered view of pregnancy to the natural child-birth movement that emerged during the second wave of feminism is an example of how social forces can affect the construction of pregnancy. Essentialism, however, defines all women as the same in pregnancy and child-birth. Finally, women’s stories of pregnancy can be used to examine how this life experience is constructed for and by women. Hence, the narratives revealed the conflicting definitions of pregnancy that exist in different CofPs.

Fishman (2000) has studied the constructing mundane (ordinary) culture of Israel. She assumes that Hebrew speakers in Israel are creating shared understandings of everyday life through talk. The aim of the study was to analyze a corpus of ‘plain’ talk (natural conversations), which reflect a sociocultural context, in relation to Personal Construct Theory (PCT), a theory which suggests that humans are continually constructing and testing their own individual images of reality.

Data were drawn from twenty-four conversations, recorded by a male student called J, at a university in the north of Israel. J was among the students who were in their forties, married, working full time in education. His cultural experiences were typically of many of the students in the Faculty of Education. The recorded conversations occurred in different contexts. Eight conversations were recorded in public places; the university, a neighborhood bank, a supermarket, a pharmacy at a clinic, a teacher’s room at a school,
and a travel agency. Seven conversations were recorded in different people’s homes. In addition, there were conversations that were carried out on cars and trains.

The recorded speech was carried out at different times of the day; conversations between colleagues and clients were recorded during working hours, university talk in the late morning, train conversations in the afternoon, and home conversations in the evening. Participants relationships differed; colleagues, partners, acquaintances, neighbors, and friends. Topics were various, including personal topics, political issues, social division of labor, the crucial elements of culture, and the significance of education. Among the topics, there was a discussion between partners about their children’s behaviors at school, colleagues talked about professional competence, and acquaintances about the battles between the Israel army and the Hizballah guerillas in the Security Zone of South Lebanon.

Fishman (2000) notes that talk constructed the manners, conditions, and relations of the speakers. Almost half of the constructs reported on manners were in forms of expressions of affection (e.g. insulted-accepting, loving-uninterested). Construction of political Conditions was shown in the context of Israel daily life as a reflection of the media. They provided a construct of mutual understanding versus threats. Peace was perceived as dangerous while war was understood to be necessary. In a conversation about children, there were implicit and explicit references to some behaviors that were acceptable in some situations, while there was a need to discover explanations about behaviors which were going against the norm.

Participants’ relations, which constructed different attitudes about various issues, were depicted in conversation between couple in their negotiation about a birthday present. Their speech displayed different interpretations of the meaning of marriage. The husband perceived marriage as rational which violated his wife’s Hollywoodian imagery. Moreover, same-sex relationship was found in speech between this wife and her friend who was considered by the husband as a threat, since this friend supported his wife’s attitude.
Fishman (2000) finds that plain talk provides a strong evidence of some insights that contribute to the making of cultures. These insights emerged from people’s perceptions, ideas, and beliefs within their immediate CofPs. The emergent culture of Hebrews stemmed from various conventions. So, participants are influenced by these conventions which initially restrain what is to be thought of, and then what could be talked about. However, some manipulate their talk to create a community of their own. Fishman concludes that plain talk presents and represents stories that constitute history, which plays a role in constructing every-person’s identity. People who are involved in plain talk are claiming their rights to tell their stories. By so doing, they are shaping and reshaping their culture which is constructed through language and interactions.

It is obvious that CofP is the most applicable framework that researchers should adopt in studying the various linguistic behaviors in any particular community. It helps in identifying speakers’ identities through their strategic use of language. Then, CofP should be considered in analyzing speech as well as other social practices.

3.12 Chapter Summary

In this chapter we have reviewed some previous empirical studies in the field of language and gender with great emphasis on women’s talk. The chapter has covered research on mixed classroom discourse, children’s talk within the family context, the use of vernacular in some communities, turn-taking and rules of conversation, usage of key linguistic functions (tags, minimal responses, hedges, etc.), polite language, and women’s language in different contexts with reference to the powerful and powerless languages. Works on CofP have been demonstrated thoroughly to eliminate the construction of different identities through various linguistic and non-linguistic practices.

Since the emergence of the field of language and gender in 1970’s, much of the work, in particular women’s language research, has covered the White middle-class society. Because African communities have been neglected in this field, we are interested in filling this gap by studying Sudanese women’s conversation in relation to turn-taking
system, as well as other linguistic devices that they tend to adopt in their interactions. The following chapter will deal with data analysis, discussion and interpretation. Relevant data to the conversational organization in relation to turn-taking, with special reference to features of simultaneous speech (interruptions, overlaps, simultaneous starts) adopted by Sudanese women will be demonstrated and discussed. The chapter also covers the analysis and discussion of Sudanese women’s usage of hedges, tag questions, and minimal responses in their private conversations.
CHAPTER FOUR

Data Analysis, Discussion, and Interpretation

4.0 Introduction

This chapter deals with the analysis of the linguistic functions in question used by Sudanese women in their interaction. I will focus on the analysis of some spontaneous conversations of women friends in Khartoum represented by three groups (Maya, Malak, Homy). The analysis is based on selected extracts from the data recorded. In this part, I will focus on three features of simultaneous speech, namely, interruptions, overlaps, and simultaneous starts.

4.1 Simultaneous Speech

4.1.1 Interruptions

It has been widely documented in the literature (see chapter 3) that interruptions, adopted by women friends in their casual speech, play a crucial role in maintaining good social relations (Coates, 1989; 1996; Tannen, 2007). But Zimmerman and West (1983) argue that interruption is a strategy that people adopt for exercising power and control in conversation. Interrupting a current speaker is a violation of the turn-taking rules in that the current speaker is denied his/her turn. Liddicoat (2007) argues that interruption is a miss-cue in the turn-taking system, when a next speaker interrupts the previous speaker’s turn. But this violation occurs, more or less, by men who dominate conversation in mixed-sex talk (see Zimmerman & West, 1983). However, when women engage in mundane talk, they adopt interruptions as a strategy to support each other’s speech, attempting to enhance good social relations. In this sense, interruptions can be regarded as a sign of high involvement in conversations (Tannen, 2007). I will discuss this
phenomenon in relation to the Sudanese women’s context by demonstrating instances of interruptions that were found in my data and the functions they served.

4.1.1 Eliciting talk

The data at my disposal suggest that interruption to elicit talk is common in Sudanese women’s conversations. It is a strategy women employ to encourage participants who are not highly involved in conversation to share in talk, or to elicit some information that the recipient wants to know. The following extracts from the three groups under investigation illustrate this use of interruption.

a- [Maya: two young women talked about a facial cream]

1-N: i? na ga•di:n naji:b ? (:nista•mal EM(EM)EM lo:s<shan
1-N: we bring(.)we use um EM(EM)EM lotion
2-R: <? :y EM lo:shan
2-R: yeah EM lotion
3-N: awwal ? ? ja bi(,)allakhdar da(.)…[……
3-N: first(we use) with(.)the green one(.)……
4-R: [allakhdar ↓z? tu(.)ana//
4-R: the green one, itself(.)i
5-R: m? jibtu fillij? za(.)<•amaltu yo:mein bas(.)//
5-R: brought it in the holiday(.)i used it for only two days(.)
6-N: u:
6-N: yeah
7-R: my face’s colour became, no(.)my face became red, red
8-N: [fata? leik washshik?
8-N: did it enlighten your face?
9-R: [a? mar(.)? aww? li waggafu(.)•amal ley ? as? siyya………
9-R: red(.)i stopped it immediately(.)it caused me allergy……
I can discuss this extract under the notion of Community of Practice (henceforth CofP, participants have mutual engagement of particular practices within their community; see Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 1992) in that both N and R share the same practice of using facial treatments since they are young, caring about beauty. Then, the resulted interruptions were due to their shared experience with this product rather than for domination. So, at the moment N (3) mentioned “green lotion” R (4) entered her Turn-Constructional Unit (TCU; a turn at talk which is made up of units of language; word, phrase, sentence; see Sacks et al., 1974) to show her experience with the same type of the product. R (4) slowed down the pace at “↓z? tu” (itself), which was central to her turn. Then, slowing down the pace was employed to emphasize that R used the same kind of cream.

It is obvious that elicitation of talk occurred when N (8) interrupted R enquiring about the effect of the cream. R’s (7) utterance “washshi da biga lo:nu” (my face’s colour became) occurred simultaneously with N’s (8) question “fata? leik washshik?” (did it enlighten your face?). With her question, N attempted to elicit more explanation from R since she was eager to know the effect of the cream on the face. Because R was speaking and listening at the same time, she abruptly cut herself off to answer N, after N finished her enquiry, saying “↑la’” (no) in a relatively faster pace so as to keep her turn. Then, R completed her speech, explaining the product’s negative effect on her face by stressing “a? mar” (red), and repeating it twice. By so doing, N succeeded at eliciting the information she needed from R about the cream.

There were some instances where interruptions for eliciting talk occurred to encourage inactive participants to share in conversation. This is what happened in the next extract.

b- [Malak: conversation about making henna]

1-S: R ? aba•an min el•iris(.)t? ni(.)al? inna di m? sh? fata
1-S: for sure, R, from the wedding(.) did not, any more(.) see henna
2-M: ley[y]? R mabtakhutiya?
2-M: why, R, don’t you put it on (henna)?
3-R: $m? \ bat? \ anna \ illa \ bilmu[n? \ sab? \ t$
3-R: i don’t put it on, except on occasions
4-M: $mabta? \ ibiya?$
4-M: don’t you like it?
5-R: mush $m? \ ba? \ ibba \ hi ? \ ilwa \ ew \ ba? \ ibba \ l? \ kin$(stops)
5-R: it’s not that i don’t like it, it’s nice and i like it, but(stops)
6-M: m? $indik \ wakit$
6-M: you don’t have time (for it)
7-R: m? $indi \ ya\ni(.)iza\ mat? \ annanta[m? \ indi\ mushkila$
7-R: it’s not, like(.)if i don’t put it on, it’s not a problem
8-H: $bitkkassil(.)bitkkassil$
8-H: she gets lazy(.)she gets lazy
9-M: u hu r? jlik?
9-M: and what about your husband (whether he likes it)
10-R: ihi (embarrassing sound)

This extract should be viewed in relation to Schegloff’s (1979) notion of Recipient Design (participants design their talk in a way to be interpreted by each other due to their shared knowledge). S (1) designed her speech in a way that criticized R indirectly for not putting on henna. Structurally, S’s utterance did not give this meaning directly, but it did pragmatically. That is to say, S’s (1) “……m? sh? fata” (did not see it) indicated that R was not putting on henna.

S’s (1) talk appeared to be oriented to all participants, and she did not select R as a next speaker. Then, M (2) self-selected and asked R directly, uttering “ley y? R mabtakhutiya?” (why, R, don’t you put it on?). At the beginning of M’s turn, R (3) interrupted her, responding to S’s criticism, to clarify that she was just putting on henna on occasions. By and large, R’s response to S’s previous talk arouse from her interpretation of S’s intended meaning (criticism). Therefore, R’s (3) clarification
resulted from S’s (1) talk rather than M’s (2) enquiry since she began to talk immediately after M started her turn, without hearing what M said.

M cut (4) R off before R’s speech reached its possible completion, asking “mabta? ibiya?” (don’t you like it?) so as to elicit more talk from her. R (5) disagreed with M’s enquiry, adding more explanation, but she dropped out at “l? kin” (but), leaving her turn incomplete. In order to encourage R to speak, M (6) self-selected, inferring what suited R’s (5) utterance “? ilwa ew ba? ibba” (it’s nice and i like it), proposing “m? ·indik wakit” (you don’t have time) as a possible completion of R’s turn. At this point, R (7) started the next turn uttering the same first word of M’s prior proposition “m? ·indi” (i don’t have) then she explained her point. H (8) interrupted R for more elicitation where R (7) said “iza mat? annanta” (if i don’t put on henna), inferring “bitkkassil(.bitkkassil” (she gets lazy(.)she gets lazy) which she produced simultaneously with R’s utterance “m? ·indi mushkila” (it’s not a problem). Notice how H (8) mis-proposed R’s explanation when she entered R’s (7) Multi-turn TCU (i.e. a single TCU can be constructed as more than one turn at talk; see Liddicoat, 2007), if………..then structure, at the second part format at where both spoke simultaneously.

R: iza mat? annanta [m? ·indi mushkila
R: if i don’t put on henna then, it is not a problem
H: [bitkkassil(.bitkkassil
H: she gets lazy(.)she gets lazy

In order to keep the conversation going on, the participants M (4) and H (8) interrupted R, using two strategies to elicit talk from her, question and comment. This is because R was shy, and then she was not an active participant in the conversation. That is, she would wait for the others to invite her to talk which what made her friends struggle to elicit talk from her. In this sense, the emerging interruptions were not for power and control over floor, but rather, for encouraging R to keep on joining in conversation.
Another purpose of interruption for eliciting talk is completing a story being told. This is obvious in the following extract.

c- [Homy: conversation between women friends about magic work]

1-B: shufti(,) ay? m Y(.)...[……(stops)
1-B: you see(.)since Y(.)……….(stops)
2-F: [yalla el? y? t(.)g? l leik ghur? n ella da
2-F: it’s the Quran verses(.) God’s Quran
3-B: zaml? :n(stops)
3-B: a long time ago(stops)
4-F: [wall? y y? M(.)wall? y alghur? n bi‘? lij
4-F: really, M(.)really, Quran heals (from magic deeds)
5-B: yalla ? ara[ba? leio ↓bitabki//
5-B: then she (a woman) called him (the sheikh, a religious man), crying
6-M: [bi‘? lij
6-M: it (Quran) heals
7-B://[(-)m? //
7-B: (-)she
8-F: alghur? n bi‘? lij
8-F: Quran heals
9-B://ga[µtashu:f elka•ba(.)su:d? niya
9-B: couldn’t see the kaba (God’s house), she’s Sudanese
10-A: [bi‘? lij(.)[…..
10-A: it heals(.)…
11-M: ↑g? lat shinu
11-M: what did she say?
12-B: gat le ebgi:t m? ga•dashu:f elka•ba………
12-B: she told him that she couldn’t see the kaba………
In this extract, although F, M, and A ignored B’s story at the beginning supporting each other’s turns, B did not stop talking. F (2) initiated interruption, then M (6) and A (10) supported F’s view as B tried to continue speaking. At the point where B (9) uttered “su:dn yiya” (Sudanese), M (11) got attracted by her story and interrupted A, asking B “‘†g? lal shinu?’” (what did she say?). M’s utterance emerged in a fast pace, trying to stop the other participants and to elicit more information from B since the topic became interesting for her. At this point B got the chance to go on with her anecdote.

Despite the violation of the speaker’s turn, this extract does not show a case of interruption for domination. Rather, it is a type of simultaneous speech by women who wanted to display their shared knowledge about magic. By and large, M’s (11) question was not only for enquiring about what the woman said, but it also functioned to elicit the whole story from B.

It is noticeable that the conversation was oriented to tell stories about others within the participants’ community. Generally, in their story-telling, women adopt interruptions as a strategy that enables them to hold the floor till they finish their stories. However, in this particular case, B continued on her story although F, M, and A kept cutting her off.

4.1.1.2 Gaining solo speakership

Interruption is not always a miss-cue in the turn-taking system, but it can be placed inappropriately in a speaker’s turn where a change does not occur at the possible completions (Liddicoat, 2007). In conversation, speakers can continue to speak beyond a possible completion of the same TCU. Ford et al. (2002) argue that talk which continues beyond the first TRP (a place where speaker’s change occurs) may be designed as a further bit of talk of the same TCU. This is what sometimes makes another participant enters, unintentionally, into a prior speaker’s turn which may create instances of solo speakership. I will demonstrate this kind of interruptions in the following extracts.

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a-[Maya: university girl’s students discussed a facial treatment]

1-N: da g? l leim m? ? anbilok illa lamman(.)lamman ˓amalu//
1-N: he (a doctor) said it’s not sun block, when(.)when they made
2-N://elkiu:ti:n da ˒? rfa ta·mali eshnu?[(.)tablæ·iya ewtanu::mi(.)//
2-N: the Cutin you know what to do?(.).just take it (the pill) then sleep(.)
3-S: [da m? kha? ar
3-S: it’s dangerous
4-N://bitllabibus kida ngh? b kida(.)nigh? b lo:nu labani ewbuni//
4-N: she (a doctor) let them put on a veil(.)a blue and brown veil
5-N://(.)bas kida/
5-N: (.).just like that,
6-S: [da eshnu?(-)da eshnu?
6-S: what is this?(-)what is this?
7-N: and covers her (a girl) face, and the like, and must not expose to the sun for
8-N://shahrei::n(.).nih? ’i[(.).le mu:dat tal? ta yo:m tag·ud filbeit//
8-N: two months(.).never(.).stay at home for three days
9-R: how come?
10-N: never, inside, in dark
11-R: asma·i(stops)
11-R: isten(stops)
12-N: l? kin matshu:fi washsha biga keif
12-N: but, see her face, how it became

In this case, the solo speaker was the participant who got interrupted. So, N acted as a solo speaker of the conversation in spite of the four attempted interruptions. The first two interruptions were made by S (comment (3), question (6)), while the other two were made by R (question (9), trial to take the floor (11)). However, the four interruptions seemed to
be signs of active listening rather than cutting the speaker off only for claiming a turn. This is because the interactants who interrupted did not show any kind of insistence on floor apportionment.

Further analysis revealed that, in order to be a solo speaker, N produced a complex utterance which itself represented a single turn. She employed Multi-TCU turn (a speaker may produce more than one TCU in a turn; see Liddicoat, 2007). So, N’s whole turn “da g? l leim (1)……elw? ? a em? allima (10)” (he said……in dark) constituted four TCUs, and hence, could be possibly complete at different trajectory points. This led S (3,6) and R (9,11) to attempt to enter at these points. In other words, N’s talk was possibly complete in both its syntax and as an action at four points; “ta·mali eshnu?” (what to do?) (2), such a question did not require an answer from the interlocutors, rather, its purpose was to gain their attention. The same was true at “lo:nu labani ewbuni” (it’s blue and brown) (4), “nih? ’i” (never) (8), and “kh? li? juwa” (never, inside) (10), which were also possible completions. This means that N’s turn at talk had been designed to be continued beyond possible completions. In this sense, S and R entries into N’s turn resulted from these possible completions rather than aiming to cut her off. Generally, Sudanese women adopt many more interruptions in their mundane talk when the topic is hot. Evidence of this is what happened to N’s turn when S and R interrupted her four times as the topic looked interesting.

Liddicoat (2007) argues that success in interruption strategy is often seen in terms of who becomes the solo speaker after the occurrence of interruption. He gives an example of car conversation showing how speakers, in cases of interruptions, designed their talk in order to bring it to its projected completion with no hitches or perturbations. That is, the speakers did not adopt any resolution devices (e.g. repetition, faster or slower pace of talk, etc.). Instead, they just kept talking as solo speakers till they completed their talk.

b- [Malak: discussion about S’s sister in law]

1-A: ? assi y? S(.)ya·ni(.).law inti(.).jitti[.](.)…(stops)
When A (1) began to speak, H (2) interrupted her criticizing S for having lived next to her sister in law’s house from the beginning. Then M (4) entered H’s (3) turn at a possible completion, “k? n ghala? ” (was wrong), describing sisters in law as envious and jealous. At this point, both H and M spoke simultaneously in a solo mode. Although the topic concerned S, H (2) started her entry into A’s turn by directing her speech to A saying “hu law y? ust? za A” (if it was, teacher A). By so doing, she paid attention to A’s face for interrupting her. M (4), on the other hand, cut H (3) off, directing the talk to S whose topic was about. H repeated her prior talk “k? n ghala? ” (it was wrong), when M interrupted her, as a device to emphasize her role and to seize the turn as a solo speaker, but M did not stop. This situation can be described as a case of two solo speakers since both M and H were speaking at the same time.

c- [Homy: conversation about moving to new houses]

1-A: now, S(.)like(.)if you(.)you(.)…(stops)
2-H: [hu law y? ust? za A(.)min//
2-H: if it was, teacher A(.)from
3-H: elawwal k? n ghala? [(.)min elawwal k? n ghala? ()//
3-H: the beginning, was wrong(.)from the beginning, was wrong(.)
4-M: you know(.)sisters-in-law are
5-H: k? n imshi ishtari insh? Ila shagga tamli:k(.)ba·i:d
5-H: he should have bought a flat, far (from S’s sister-in-law)
6-M: envious and jealous, so much(.)yeah
As A talked about the situation at the time she moved to her new house, E (9) interrupted her at a point where her speech was possibly complete. At this point, E became a solo speaker as she designed her talk in a monologue mode. That is, she started her turn (9) saying “I? kin elma? ar ? a-ab(//)” (but rain is hard), stressing in a low voice “? a-ab” (hard) in a painful tone. This indicated that she was suffering from being unsecured from rain when she moved to the new house which had no windows at the time. Then after a pause she (10) made her next utterance “m? fi shab? bi:k?” (without windows?) in a question form. At this point, she appeared as both a solo listener and a solo speaker where she asked and answered herself (10) saying “wall? y elma? ar ? a-ab khal? s” (rain is really very hard). By asking and answering herself, E (10) employed Multi-turn TCU construction. That is, her speech was distributed over more than one turn at a talk, adopting compound TCU with two-part formats; when........then construction as follows:

when there are no windows then rain is really very hard
Solo speakership could also be achieved in other cases where participants interrupt one another, resulting in more than two speakers speaking simultaneously. In my data three women friends were found to have spoken simultaneously, saying different but related things at the same time. Consider the extracts below which give convincing evidence for my assumption.

a- [Maya: three women talked about weight-loss centers]

1-S: you know, they(fat people)(.)they do exercises, i believe that
2-S://elw? ? id fi:hum binu:t
2-S: they would die (because of hard exercises)
3-M: ? :y=
3-M: yeah
4-S: they run(.)and carry(.)the carry things (as they run)
5-M: some of them run(-)they carry heavy things
6-R: [lamman kutta//
6-R: when i was
7-R: working(.)didn’t my aunt use to drive me?(.)i had never
    been fat(because she used to go to a losing weight centre)

Here S (4) talked about fat people who wanted to lose weight at centers where they were given tough exercises such as running while holding heavy things. Then M (5) interrupted S at the beginning of her turn, at the point where S uttered “ijru(.)wi” (they run(.)and), in order to confirm S’s talk uttering “w? ? di:n bijjari…” (some of them run…). R (6) cut M off in an attempt to show her experience. This was a clear instance of three women speaking simultaneously in a solo speaker mode. Interrupted talk emerged because the women shared the experience of visiting these centers as members. So, S (4)
explained how fat people run, carrying heavy things, then M (5) confirmed S by restating her speech, and then R (6) supported the topic by giving her experience as an example.

Liddicoat (2007) argues that when interruption occurs speakers cannot hear each other. But this does not threaten understanding because the participants are familiar with each other and with the way talk is organized. Similarly, these women’s CofP allowed them to understand each other apart from speaking simultaneously. In this sense, interruption is a strategy speakers adopt while producing shared meaning.

b- [Malak: discussion about R’s disobedient daughter]

1- M: m? kullu shi indi si n
1-M: everything has its age
2-R: <ish[mi-na fi: di saghayra//
2-R: why is she young in this (caring)
3-N: [shab b(.)shab b
3-N: it’s the youth(.)it’s the youth
4-R://u fi: di ma esghayra?= 4-R: and in that (make up) is not young?
5-M:=khal? s da wakitum inti kam? n y? R[……..(stops)
5-M: it’s their time (the youth), R……………….(stops)
6-N: [l? kin wall? ::y hi m? (stops)
6-N: but, really she is not(stops)
7-R: [l? kin elmiafru?: taku:n ? ani:na//
7-R: but she must be kind
8-R://ma-a akhw? na
8-R: with her brothers

In this extract, both M and N contrasted R’s view. N (3) supported M’s (1) first utterance when she interrupted R (2) to say “shab b(.)shab b” (it’s the youth(.)it’s the youth). She repeated the word “shab b” enthusiastically to affirm her view. Then, after M (5) latched
R’s utterance, both N (6) and R (7) cut her off at the same time, creating three solo speakers. M dropped out after a while as she failed to continue. N (6), on the other hand, tried to gain speakership by prolonging her utterance “wall? ::y” (reaally) but she did not succeed because R (7) persisted to complete. The occurrence of three simultaneous turns, in this extract, was not only for controlling the floor, but rather it was an indication of high involvement in conversation since the topic was interesting. This finding sharply contrasts Zimmerman’s and West’s (1975) study of mixed-sex conversation on a university campus. The researchers find that 96% interruptions, that produced by men, were used to control the floor in conversation.

c- [Homy: interaction about healing from magic works]

1-B:.....<bigi:t ew? ? ib ma•? w
1-B:..... i became punctual with him (the sheikh)
2-T:   <? :y
2-T:   yeah
3-T: ya•ni etw? ? ib[addowa •asal waddowa mo:ya tista? ? amma beia
3-T: like, to be punctual, he gave her honey and water to wash with
4-B:     [awwal m? khalla? ? a(.)[g? l leyya khalli? i//
4-B:     when i finished it(.)he said complete
5-A:     [itti(.)itti el-ein//
5-A:     you see(.)you see
6-B://el•asal(.)itkhalla? i min el? ? ja el•indik(.)u ba•dein ta•? li ley
6-B: the honey(.)complete what you have(treatment)(.)then come
7-A://mabtaktul?(.)hei(.)itti g? yla el-ein mabtaktul?(.)..........  
7-A: doesn’t evil eye cause death?(.)hey(.)don’t you think evil  
   eye causes death?(.)................

In this example, the same story was pursued by two speakers at the same time. So, both speakers were in speakership and not listening to each other. T (3) paraphrased B’s (1) utterance and continued to complete the event since she participated in the event B was
describing. B (4) entered T’s turn to show her own experience, but T did not stop. This interruption created a situation in which two solo speakers were telling the same story simultaneously. That is, after B (4) interrupted T, she started to tell the story at the same time T was speaking. Then, at some point, A (5) tried to stop both speakers to comment on the evil eye but neither of them dropped out, resulting in violation of the turn-taking rules. In other words, all participants were speaking simultaneously as solo speakers, and there was no recipient of the talk at all. In addition, A (7) tried to get the attention by uttering “hei” (hey) then repeated her earlier talk to gain time till the other participants would reach the completion point, and then she could be followed. She tried in vain to phrase her talk in the form of question to make it more forceful.

Discussing the nature of stories of shared experiences, it is found that since T participated in the event being told, she contributed to the talk. The role of the narrator B was interactionally complex. That is to say, both B and T were competing to narrate the same story employing interruption strategy, which led to a violation of the rules of conversation organization. Cheepen (1988) calls this phenomenon ‘Dialogic’ in which the distinction between the story-teller and the hearer becomes ambiguous.

The three extracts demonstrate cases where three participants spoke in a solo speakership mode after interrupting one another at some points. In Maya’s and Malak’s interactions, the emerging talk did not continue for long. In Homy’s conversation, by contrast, the interrupted speech was relatively long because the women engaged in a narrative interaction. However, whether the topic was a story or a discussion, interruptions did not affect communication since these women friends spoke collaboratively within their CoP which determined their social structure. In general, the findings confirm a good number of feminists’ assumptions (e.g. Coates, 1989; 1996; Tannen, 2007) in that women construct their social structure through their friendly talk.

Generally speaking, solo speakership is a strategy that Sudanese women adopt during gossip. In such a situation, they use interruptions to gain the floor apportionment of the conversation as solo speakers, especially when talking about an interesting topic.
4.1.1.3 Topic shifting

Topic shift can be a source of interruptions in women’s conversations. Coates (1996) argues that women’s talk can be developed randomly from topic to topic. When women friends engage in gossip, they may adopt interruptions to speak about topics emerging within their talk. Some topics may be linked coherently, while others can be changed abruptly. The following extracts demonstrate this phenomenon.

a-[Maya: conversation about gold mining]

1-R: y? bit ga·d e? la·u(.)ga·d e? la·u bi: dahab kimmiy? t
1-R: you see, they get(.)they get (the miners) a lot of gold
2-S: but it costs, it costs, it costs (mining) their lives(.)death or life
3-R: now there is an accusation case of somebody(stops)
4-S: it costs your life, either this or that(.)either death or(stops)
5-R: [r? f:i:n fi//
5-R: an accusation
6-R: of(.)someone who sold them(.)like(stops)
7-S: [leih?[....
7-S: for what? (this risk)....
8-N: [y? khi//
8-N: you see
9-N: D’s friends got a lot of gold(.)a huge amount(-)
10-N://jo r? j:i:n s? lmi:n(.)[....
10-N: they got back safe(.)...
11-R: [hujjir? m bei tis:i:n bei tis:i:n milyo:n]
11-R: the gram(of gold) is ninety million
12-S: [gari:b el....]
12-S: it’s about…

[Continue on discussing gold price]

As R talked about gold mining, S (2) self-selected as next speaker describing mining as being dangerous. She started with the contrasting conjunction “l? kin” (but), then she repeated “fiya” (it causes) twice, searching for the right word “? ay? tum” (their lives). Then, R (3) started to talk about an accusation case, where S (4) interrupted her. She stressed “? ay? tik” (your life) in an attempt to emphasize her opinion. Then, R (5) cut S off telling an incomplete story about someone who had been accused of a gold mining case. R (6) slowed down the pace at “↓elga? ? iya” (the accusation) to grab the attention. S (7), in turn, interrupted R talking about the mining risk as R dropped out, leaving the story incomplete. N (8) entered S’s turn to shift to a new story about some people who had got a lot of gold from mining and came back safe. N’s (10) utterance “jo raj:i:n s? lmi:n” (they got back safe) was a result of S’s (2,4) previous discussion about the risk of mining which indicated that there was no risk in mining. As N continued, R (11) interrupted her, shifting the topic to the dramatic increase of gold price. This shift to gold price occurred as a reaction to N’s (8,9) prior story about the people who got a large amount of gold.

In this interaction the topic had been shifted three times. R (1) started with a discussion, then R (3) shifted to a story, then N (8) told another story, and R (11) finally discussed gold price. By and large, the shifts in (8) and (11) occurred as a result of interruptions. This conversation, therefore, consisted of a discussion about gold mining, a story of a case of accusation about gold mining, a story of people who got a lot of gold, then a discussion of gold price.

b- [Malak: interaction about old women and pregnancy]
1-N: alla[idiyawall? y sa-ba……
1-N: hope god gives her (a baby)(it’s really hard (not having children)……
2-M: [ummah? tna deil m? biwli du ilkhamsi:n//
2-M: our mothers had babies till their fifties
3-M: till they got unfertilized they could have babies, right?(.really, this W,
4-N: [? :y(.)hay y? yumma/
4-N: yeah(.)it’s
5-M://BANAT AKHWATA akbbar minna
5-M: her nieces are older than her
6-N://hu ya-ni s? kit[……
6-N: it’s, like, just…..
7-R: [awwal ? ifil(.)-ash? n elawwal[…. 
7-R: the first baby(.)for it’s the first one…..
8-N: [alawwal(.)//
8-N: the first one(.)
9-N: a woman(.)there is a woman in her eighty, she was seen in 
10-R: [ash? n hi m? wildat gabul kida 
10-R: for she has never had a baby
11-N: Jazira channel(.)eighty years, she had a dead baby(-)it was dry
12-R: [sajamik gu:l leya
12-R: (a pity expression)
13-N: i think the baby stayed inside her more than thirty years(.)…..

In the above extract, the occurrences of interruptions to shift the topic can be seen in four situations. First, after N (1) told a story about a woman who could not have babies, M (2) interrupted her shifting to discuss an old women pregnancy. She gave examples of old mothers to support her view that old women can have babies. M used different strategies
(slow down the pace of talk, stress, speed up, and loudness) successively to attract the interlocutors’ attention, and to keep her turn. In doing this, she slowed down the pace of "↓lilkhamsiːn" (till their fifties), and stressed “lamman” (till). After N (4) interrupted M (3), she speeded up “↑wall? y W di” (really, this W) in order to stop N. When N did not drop out, M (5) raised her voice at “BANAT AKHWATA” (her nieces) to take the floor apportionment but N (6) completed her turn.

Second, R (7) cut N off shifting back to N’s previous story when she clarified “awwal ? ifil(.)-ash? n alawwal” (the first baby(.)for it’s the first one). Considering the notion of ‘recipient design’, R designed her speech to be interpretive by her recipients. That is, although the syntactic structure of her utterance “awwal ? ifil(.)-ash? n elawwal” (the first baby(.)for it’s the first one) did not agree with its semantic meaning (i.e. the first baby usually comes in an early age), the utterance appeared to be meaningful. In other words, it is common that a woman can have a baby in an old age if she has the first one when she was young. This was what R intended to convey as a response to M’s (2) previous speech “ummah? tna deil…” (our mothers…).

Third, N (8) interrupted R to stress her opinion by saying “alawwal” (the first one) then shifted abruptly to tell a case of an old woman who had a dead baby in her womb for thirty years. N began her talk saying “↓w? ? da” (a woman), without any introducing elements in order to avoid other participants’ competitions. She introduced a new theme in a relatively slow pace in order to attract the recipients’ attention. Fourth, R (10) cut N off shifting back again to her previous story where she uttered “-ash? n hi m? wildat gabul kida” (for she had never had a baby).

c- [Homy: conversation about moving to new houses]

1-A: dakhkalna el•afash u ga•adna<(.)……..//
1-A: we put the furniture and settled(.)……
2-M: <u:
2-M: yeah

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In this extract, A started the discussion telling her experience when they moved to their uncompleted house. E’s (4) enquiry about the windows appeared as a result of her own experience. That is, when she moved to the new house, there were no windows. Here E’s question functioned as an invitation for A to tell what had happened to her. A (7) cut M off at the beginning of her turn, shifting suddenly to tell how her uncle used to come to see them in the cold days.

In spite of their adoption of interruptions for shifting from one topic to another, this women’s talk was considered to be comprehensible, signaling active participation through the emergence of various related topics. The findings confirm Coates’s (1996) in that women sometimes used interruptions as a means of shifting from a topic to another. Apart from the use of interruptions to shift topics gradually, abrupt shift of topics is widely noticed in the conversation of women friends in the Sudan.

4.1.1.4 Telling a similar story

Women friends mirror each other in their conversations. Mirroring in women’s discourse means one participant tells a story while another responds with a similar story from her
own experience (Coates, 1996). The story teller has the right to the floor, but since women friends talk collaboratively, they may interrupt the narrator in order to mirror her with a similar story. The following extracts give examples for such a phenomenon.

a- [Maya: women’s interaction about losing weight]

1-S: g? lu ley ag·udi filw? ? a(.)wad·aki kida
1-S: they told me to sit on the floor(.)and press the ground
2-N: la la la[wall? y
2-N: no, no, no, really (not like this)
3-M: [? a[rrikiya
3-M: move it
4-S: [arriy? ? a
4-S: the exercise (that she explains)
5-N: earlier, yeah(.)there’s(.)there’s some one(.)
6-N://shuf[ti(.)igu:l leik a·mali kida
6-N: you see(.)they say do like this (shows them the move)
7-M: [wa? rabi bil? ei? a//
7-M: and hit the wall (with the hips)
8-M://(.),bar? u ebgu:l leik<(.)? a? rabi//
8-M: (.),also, they say(.),hit (with the hips)
9-S: <? :y(-)a:
9-S: yeah(-)um
10-M: stand at the wall, too(stops)
11-N: [? y(.)? yni y? y? y? S
11-N: loo(.)look, S
12-S: ? [...] (stops)
12-S: um… (stops)
13-N: [zam? nik ana lamman masheit elmma? ? ad (.),ana kutta//
earlier, when i went to the losing weight centre. i was too fat.

In the above extract, the topic under discussion was interesting for all of the participants since they shared some knowledge about how to lose weight. S (1) began by telling her experience, how she lost weight, then N and M added new information to the topic. N (5) started her turn, saying “zam? :nik……” (earlier……), then M (7) interrupted her adding “wa? rabi bil? ei? a” (and hit the wall). N’s (11) utterance, on the other hand, was an attempt to get S’s attention since S had a similar experience. N (13) finally found a chance to tell her story after cutting S off. In fact, N’s (5) talk “zam? nik ? :y….…” (earlier, yeah…. ) worked as an introduction to her story. The word “zam? nik” (earlier) had been repeated in (13) as a means of taking turn in the conversation. Therefore, N’s story emerged as a result of mirroring S’s story because both shared the same experience.

b- [Malak: H mirrored S’s story with a similar anecdote]

1-S: you see i set the alarm(....)when i got up in the morning
2-M: [aleik ella?(-)ma? ? i:ti?
2-M: really?(-)didn’t you wake up?
3-S://y? yumma elmo:[ya di:k(//
3-S: i found the water(.)
4-M: [alazz? n azzan(.)wass? •a kam itti ebtagu:mi?
4-M: Azan was called out?(.)when do you get up?
5-S://b? ::r<da
5-S: very cold
6-H: <itti m? shufti(,)ana bit ukh[ti g? mat(stops)
6-H: you see(.)my niece got up(stops)
7-S: [numta(,)a? in wa? da
7-S: i slept(.)i think at 1 am

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8-H: ? a? ak fi:[nī(stops)
8-H: she laughed at me(stops)
9-M: eat then sleep(.)should you get up again?
10-S: la ? (:)[kutta mit-ashshiya… (stops)
10-S: no um(.)i ate…(stops)
11-H: you see, um, yesterday my niece(,)…………

Here, S (1) narrated how she did not hear the alarm at mid-night which she set to drink water before morning Azan. H (6), on the other hand, tried to use a reduced transition space to gain early entry to her turn at talk in order to tell a similar story. She started her turn by saying “itti m? shufti” (you see), but none of the participants listened to her. Rather, both S and M continued on S’s story as H dropped out. H (8) seized the floor again and started telling her story. At this point, M (9) interrupted H, selecting S as a next speaker when she suggested that S should eat before going to sleep. Then H discontinued because nobody seemed to listen to her story. Eventually, H (11) gained speakership when she interrupted S, restating her opening theme “shufti yalla” (you see) to show that the turn was hers.

c- [Homy: interaction about mirroring stories about magic]

1-B: he(the sheikh) said to them: your daughter is still alive(.)but
2-B://al-mal leya el-amal da eymu:t
2-B: she won’t appear(.)unless the one who did her this magic dies
3-F: wi? y? t ismalla yahn? ya fi[kam? n(stops)
3-F: i swear to God, there is also(stops)
4-M: [imu:t?
4-M: dies?
5-B: imu:t(.)azzolo al-amal leya(.)gu:l leik k? n m? tat//
5-B: dies(.)the one who did her the magic works(.)if she dies
6-B://[hi……….ew ebtaji//
6-B: she…..and will come back (home)
7-F: really, it’s said there’s a woman, M(stops)
8-B://(.)u k? n m? tat ba-ad miyyat sana elmara di//
8-B: (.).and if she were to die after a hundred year, this woman
9-F: [M, gu:l leik fi w? ? da(stops)
9-F: M, it’s said there’s a woman(stops)
10-B://? ataji(,.).l? kin kida mabtaluwa
10-B: would come(.).otherwise, you will not find her
11-F: [y? M(stops)
11-F: hey, M(stops)
12-F: .? yn<i
12-F: look
14-B: saba-a ew·ishri:n sana ayi[shi………(stops)
14-B: twenty-seven year, anything…….(stops)
15-F: [mara(.)^wall? y elbit gat leik………
15-F: a woman(.).really, the girl said………

This extract shows a case of women friends trying to tell two different stories. Each story was unknown by the other participant. B dominated the conversation since she initiated the story-telling. M listened to her and ignored F as F continued on her trial to hold the floor using interruptions. Moreover, M encouraged B to continue; at the beginning she (4) supported B by asking “imut?:” (dies?). Later, after B (10) completed her turn, M (13) commented on B’s story using the exclamation expression “↓? ub? ? n ell? h” which gave B (14) a chance for another turn. F, on the other hand, employed interruption strategy four times (7,9,11,15) to take the floor where she succeeded at the fourth (15)
attempt. In addition, F (15) persisted to tell her story by employing a speeding up device so as to lead B to stop.

It seems that these women’s tolerance of four trials of interruptions was due to the socio-cultural belief. That is, in this society women break the rules of turn-taking as a strategy for helping in creating solidarity among them. Then, societies determine the amount of interruptions that is acceptable. For example, Ulijin and Li (1995) have examined interruptions in intercultural multimember party business negotiations between Chinese and Dutch. The researchers note that the Chinese attempted to interrupt as a convention of their language and culture. Deng (1998) confirms this, saying that Chinese speakers display relatively high rates of interruptions in conversations in comparison to speakers in other cultures.

4.1.1.5 Commenting

Comments on the speaker’s talk while speaking occur frequently in Sudanese women’s discourse in a way that does not threaten a speaker’s turn. Interrupting comments in Sudanese women’s interactions serve as a means of expressing solidarity and support. This will be proved by analyzing the next extracts.

a- [Maya: three women friends’ talk about R’s (a friend) wedding]

1-N: shufti el-aruy:s k? nat(stops)
1-N: you see the bride was(stops)
2-E: [wal]? y R? ala-at/
2-E: really R looked
3-J: [libsat ? ilu
3-J: she dressed nicely
4-E://? ilwa y? khi
4-E: beautiful
5-N: [libsat ? ilu shadi:d(,)m? kida wall? y
5-N: she dressed very nicely(.)it’s not as that (beautiful)
This extract shows a case where one participant reacted to two other participants’ comments in one turn. E (2) entered N’s turn commenting that R looked nice in her wedding day. J (3) interrupted E immediately when she started to speak saying “libsat ? ilu” (she dressed nicely). After J finished her turn and before E’s utterance reached its possible completion, N (5) interrupted E (4) at “? ilwa y? khi” (beautiful) to acknowledge J’s comment saying “libsat ? ilu shadi:d” (she dressed very nicely). At the point where E (4) completed her turn, N (5) disacknowledged her in the same turn uttering “m? kida wall? y” (it’s not as that).

In the above extract, N’s (5) turn is seen as a Multi-TCU turn in that she continued speaking after the pause to produce a new TCU. So, N’s contribution in this conversation contained two TCUs in one turn; “libsat ? ilu shadi:d” (she dressed very nicely) and “m? kida wall? y” (it’s not as that). Thus, the first TCU of her turn was a response to J’s (3) interrupting comment “libsat ? ilu y? khi” (she dressed nicely) while the other TCU was a response to E’s (2,4) interrupting comment “wall? y R ? ala‘at ? ilwa” (really, R looked beautiful).

The extract shows how N addressed two recipients in one turn at talk. This was depicted in N (5) acknowledging J’s (3) comment and disacknowledging E’s (2,4) comment in a Multi-TCU turn. In addition, it also shows the way N listened and spoke simultaneously. That is, N’s (5) response to J’s (3) comment coincided with E’s (4) utterance “? ilwa y? khi” (beautiful) which N reacted to later in the same turn indicating that she heard it while she was speaking. This linguistic behavior is highly characteristic of Sudanese women as having the ability to listen and speak at the same time.

b- [Malak: talk about the danger of the electronic devices’ waves]

1-A: elm? :ykruweiv bar? u(.)al la attalafo:n? t(.)ya-ni]…..
1-A: the microwave too (is dangerous)(.)the, er, the phones(.)like…. 
2-M: [kha? ara(.)//
2-M: they are(phones)dangerous(.)  
3-M://ana bas ti? t elmakhadda  
3-M: i just (put the phone) under the pillow  
4-Y: ana z? :ti bakhuttu ti? t elmakhadda  
4-Y: me too, put it under the pillow

Here A talked about the dangerous effect of the waves that produced by the electronic devices. M (2) interrupted her to comment on what she said uttering “kha? ara…..” (they are dangerous….). Then M (3) explained covertly that she put her phone under the pillow. Y (4) displayed her full attendance when she said “ana z? :ti….” (me too…) anticipating what M (3) denoted by “ti? t elmakhadda” (under the pillow), that is she put the phone under the pillow.

c- [Homy: conversation about F’s son illness]

1-F: lamman nawadi:w[(.)ma ↓ebnawadi:w al-il? j? t barra//  
1-F: when we take him (to the doctor)(.)we take him for curing (abroad)  
2-A: [khalla(.)……]  
2-A: he stopped it(.)…..  
3-F://ni? na eddikto:r[g? l(.)k? n ·indu el? asasiya(.)//  
3-F: the doctor said(.)he had allergy(.)  
4-T: [it·aggad minnu  
4-T: he found it (the medicine) useless  
5-F://l? kin mush it·aggad(.)addikto:r g? l akheir(.)//  
5-F: but, he didn’t find it useless(.)the doctor said it’s better(.)  
6-F://akheir ‿? ljuwa bitru:ʔ (.).assi l? kin……  
6-F: better to cure it, it will vanish(.)but now……

This conversation shows how Sudanese women friends get involved in interactions. That is, all participants are active listeners even when they take the role of speakers. In this extract, when T (4) interrupted F commenting “it·aggad minnu” (he found it useless), F
did not tail off. Rather, she immediately cut herself off, disacknowledging T's contribution. F (5) started her reaction to T's comment by uttering “I? kin” (but), trying to contrast T's proposition. By saying “I? kin” (but), F linked her prior talk to her disagreement with T before completing her anecdote without hesitation. As such, F disacknowledged her co-participant’s comment while holding her turn.

Interruptions for the purpose of comments in the present study were found to be high among the three groups under study. This type of interruptions showed women’s high involvement in interactions. This finding is consistent with Coates’s (1996) assumption that comments function as a sign of active participation, posing no threat to the current speaker’s turn.

To conclude, there is a mass use of interruptions in Sudanese females’ talk since it is viewed positively in Sudanese culture. Similarly, the acceptance of interruptions is found in many cultures such as East European, Italian, Greek, Spanish, South American, Slavic, Arab, African, etc (Tannen, 2007). Reisman (1974) argues that turn-taking rules are not followed in Antigua, West Indies. Interruptions in this culture could happen anywhere and anytime, and the person who interrupts is not considered to be offending. Reisman calls this phenomenon ‘contrapuntal conversations’. Moreover, Kohonen (2004) argues that different language groups have different concepts towards the rules of turn-taking. Then, breaking these rules is viewed differently among cultures, and may create misunderstanding in conversation. By comparing the deviation of turn-taking between French and Germans, Kohonen claims that the French view it as an indication of active participation while the Germans perceive it as aggressiveness. In addition, Kohonen has assessed some works about interruption’s acceptance in different cultures. For instance, Wieland (1991) has studied turn-taking rules in conversation among French and American advanced learners of French language in dinner-table talk. Wieland finds that French speakers employed more interruptions than their Americans counterparts. Carroll (1988), on the other hand, believes that in French speech, interruption is not seen as impolite. Rather, it has the role of punctuation marks.
4.1.2 Overlaps

Overlapping speech is an interactional strategy which is produced by speakers together (Liddicoat, 2007). It is an important feature of women friends’ talk. Women adopt overlaps when they are totally involved in conversation, creating a harmonic context. Coates (1996) describes, metaphorically, overlapping speech as many instruments playing different tunes which are matched together harmonically. Unlike interruption, overlap does not violate the turn-taking system. Rather, it creates an interactional effect that maximizes solidarity between participants (Coates, 1989). There were many instances of overlapping talk in the data under investigation classified according to the effects they created in conversations. This will be explained in this section, with special focus on certain features of overlapping speech.

4.1.2.1 Balance and Sharing

When Sudanese women adopt overlaps in mundane talk, they may create what Coates (1996) calls ‘balance and sharing’ in which turns and time are shared between speakers. The three extracts below show instances of this particular type of overlaps.

a- [Maya: three friends commented on their university]

1-N: the university became boring, H
2-H: ajj? m-a bigat bei?
2-H: the university became boring
3-S: <ajj? m-a bigat bei? shadi:d
3-S: the university became boring, so much

Coates (1996) argues that speech develops via turns which are sometimes oriented to what has been said by repeating the grammatical structures and the key words of the first
Coates suggests that a sequence of such turns of women’s talk can be expressed by the formula- \((x_1+x_2+x_3)\). Following this formula, the sequence of turns in the above extract may be shown as \((B_1+B_2+B_3)\), where B stands for “ajj? m-a biqat bei?” (the university became boring). Here, these friends did not just affirm each other by uttering parallel talk, but they also mirrored each other’s utterance in spite of the occurrence of overlap. N (1) introduced the comment on the university, H (2) repeated N’s comment then S (3) overlapped H trying to emphasize the same comment. By so doing, both turns 2 and 3 were produced as direct repetition of N’s opening theme “ajj? m-a biqat bei?” (the university became boring). Note how the linguistic parallelism (lexically, structurally, semantically) of the turns was designed to convey solidarity between the three friends where both H and S mirrored N’s utterance.

b- [Malak: A said she was not a demanding wife]

1- A: ya•ni wala zay ennisw? n(.)wala gutta d? yra ri?: a/
1- A: not like other wives(.)i didn’t say i want perfume
2- A: not gold, not toubs (women’s cloth)
3- S: <wala d? yra dahab(.)wala d? yra tiy? b
3- S: not gold(.)not toubs

This extract is similar to the previous one in that S (3) overlapped A attempting to mirror what she said. The balanced and shared contribution was obvious when representing this sequence of turns as \(D_1+D_2\). D stands for “wala d? yra” (i don’t want). The resulted overlap showed the way S (3) mirrored A’s (1) utterance “wala gutta d? yra ri?: a” (i didn’t say i want perfume) in that she inferred, and then, uttered A’s (2) next utterance as A was producing it. Then, A (D1) and S (D2) shared the talking time, and mirrored, spontaneously, each other’s speech as well. Apart from the use of overlap uttering the same talk simultaneously, both participants worked to design their turns, regarding their immediate CofP, in a way that conveyed their shared knowledge of demanding wives.
c- [Homy: three women’s talk about a friend who had a baby girl]

1- E: j? bat bit ħinda khamsa ewlad
1- E: she gave birth to a girl, she has five sons
2- A: m? ʃa’ll? h(.)baraka ej? bat bit
2- A: knock on wood(.)great, she gave birth to a girl
3- M: ʃm? sha’llah(.)j? bat bit?
3- M:  knock on wood(.)did she give birth to a girl?

Unlike the previous extracts (a & b) that represent Coates’s formula \(x_1+x_2+x_3\) of balance and sharing, we shall represent this sequence of turns as \(J_1a+J_2b+J_3c\) since the structures of the three turns were varied. If \(J\) stands for the key utterance of the conversation “j? bat bit” (she gave birth to a girl), then \(J_1a\) (1) represented the news that their friend gave birth to a baby girl; \(J_2b\) (2) conveyed A’s happiness for her; \(J_3c\) (3), which emerged as a result of overlap, mirrored E’s (1) and A’s (2) utterances but in a form of question voice. No matter whether the first (extract a & b) or the second (extract c) formula was applied, both patterns were unique in that the participants in the three extracts adopted overlaps to mirror each other’s contributions through matching their own speech. Similarly, an example by Coates (1996) shows how women friends overlapped each other developing a topic of backache through a series of matched turns, each resulting from the previous one.

4.1.2.2 Completing a current turn

In women friends’ interaction women combine their voices to produce a single utterance (Coates, 1996). Such phenomenon is found intensively in Sudanese women’s speech when engaging in friendly interaction. This was clear when the women employed overlaps as a strategy to complete the current turn. The three extracts below serve as good examples for this claim.

"..."
a- [Maya: three women friends talked, commenting on some building]

1- N: mamshakhbitinna(.)kulu z? wya kida bi: lo:n(laughs)
1- N: they coloured it (the building)(.)each side has different colour
2- S: ꝉ mli:n kida ya·ni kida hum g? yli:n kida ebtabg<q(stops)
2- S: they did it, like, they think, like, it becomes(stops)
3- N: <mo:deil kida(.)? y
3- N: like a design(.)yeah

S and N in the above conversation co-operated to produce one turn by combining and blending their utterances. When S (2) uttered “ebtabga” (it becomes), N (3) overlapped her inferring what would come next. Then, N’s overlapping speech “mo:deil kida” (like a design) was made to complete S’s comment.

b- [Malak: conversation about a little girl who lost her father]

1- Y: they mustn’t say baba before her(.)and if a kid say baba…(.)
2- Y: wallakhw? t mab·arf an igu:lan//
2- Y: and the sisters (the girl’s aunts) don’t know what to say
3- Y: <le(stops)
3- Y: to(stops)
4- M: <liawl? dum shi<nu
4- M: to their kids, what to say
5- Y: <liawl? dun shinu
5- Y: to their kids, what to say

Here M, perfectly, monitored what Y said in that she (4) overlapped Y (3) in order to complete her talk. Then, M’s (4) utterance “liawl? dum shinu” (to their kids, what to say) matched, typically, Y’s (2,3) incomplete utterance “mab·arf an igu:lan le” (they don’t
know what to say to). Y (5), in turn, overlapped M showing her total agreement with M’s projected completion by repeating the same phrase.

c- [Homy: interaction about running water]

1- A: yalla(.)almo:ya(.)assi B di kulla eb? ag? a‘(.i)? na/  
1- A: you see(.)the water(.)B’s running water is on and off(.)our  
2- A:/mo:yatna m<a(stops)  
2- A: water does not(stops)  
3- E: <mab? ag? a‘(.i)la’nnu awwal n? s(.)j? tum mo:ya  
3- E: it does not stop(.)because you are the first  
who had running water

In extract c, it was the shared knowledge that made E’s (3) overlapping projected completion emerged. That is, since both A and E lived in the same neighborhood, they had the same knowledge about running water there. Therefore, E’s (3) overlapping utterance “mab? ag? a‘” (it does not stop) resulted from the shared knowledge about running water in the area.

The three examples demonstrate the way in which Sudanese women monitor what each other say, leading to the production of the same turn by two speakers. As such, these women friends conveyed their ability to talk in a more melding way. In fact, this level of collaboration can only be gained when interactants pay close attention to each other at the linguistic levels. For instance, the emergence of overlap in completing the prior utterance, in the three extracts examined, occurred because the women followed the meaning and the grammatical structure of what the previous speakers said. The occurrence of this type of overlaps in my data reinforces Coates’s (1996) claim that women show a high level of interpretation of the conversation to the extent that they contribute significantly to the completion of each other’s talk.
4.1.2.3 Ending a turn simultaneously

In women’s talk, there are some instances of overlapping speech where two speakers produce part of an utterance together, rather than one speaker starting speaking and another completes the utterance (Coates, 1996). Below are simple examples for this practice from my data where participants adopted overlaps producing simultaneously with the previous speakers their last utterance.

a- [Maya: discussion about the time of the clothes’ sale]

1- N: asseil intaha(.)<mush?
1- N: the sale is over(.)isn’t it?
2- J: <asseil fi: L ew E ya•ni(.)marratein fissana
2- J: the sale in L and E, like(.)twice a year
3- N: ? :y
3- N: yeah
4- J: at the end of the summer and at the end of the winter
5- N: <ashshita
5- N: the winter

This extract shows how J (4) and N (5) worked together to produce the last utterance simultaneously. This was because both J and N shared the same knowledge about the sale and its time. Hence, they acted collaboratively when N (5) overlapped J (4), uttering jointly with her “ashshita” (the winter). Similarly, Coates (1996) examines overlapping talk in a conversation between women friends about the funeral. The women used overlaps to complete each other’s talk which resulted in simultaneous speech.

b- [Malak: talk about the students’ carelessness]

1- M: shufti ya•ni ye? assisu:k inik inti ta•abik da//
1- M: you see, like, they make you feel that your effort is
2- M://bas m? (.)<hum mamrakkizi:n ma-? k
2- M: just, not(.)they don’t follow you (in the class)
3- A: <m? <mujdi
3- A: it’s useless
4- H: <m? mujdi
4- H: it’s useless

CofP is the most applicable discipline one should consider in discussing this extract. That is to say, the three women are teachers facing typical experiences while teaching. They encounter the same troubles with the students in the classroom. Bearing in mind this argument, A’s (3) overlapping talk “m? mujdi” (it’s useless) acted as a proposition that M (2) could end her turn with. H (4), in turn, overlapped A (3) at the end of her turn, uttering “m? mujdi” (it’s useless) almost at the same time with A’s. Then, A’s and H’s same projected completion happened because both had the same experience with the students.

c- [Homy: conversation about sifting out siphons]

1- A: beitna da a? lu mabnashfu? (.illa assi dakhalat//
1- A: we don’t sift out the siphon(.)but now appeared,
2- A://fi:o<elmo:ya
2- A: the water
3- E: <almo:ya
3- E: the water

As A told how they did not use to sift out their siphon, E (3) overlapped her proposing a possible completion “almo:ya” (the water) which they produced simultaneously. E’s overlap served as a piece of evidence that she understood the trajectory of A’s talk. So, E’s overlapping speech was a device of interpretation rather than a repetition of talk after a normal transition space.

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These extracts represent a good example of how utterances can jointly be constructed. In the first two extracts, the emergence of the overlapping talk cannot be said to belong to a particular participant. In Maya’s discourse, the participants drew on their shared knowledge about the sale’s periods in a year. In Malak’s conversation, on the other hand, the participants’ combined utterances resulted because of their shared experience with the students. Therefore, the main goal of Maya’s and Malak’s talk was not information exchange, but it was a way of creating what Tannen (2007) calls a ‘rapport floor’ since the participants were friends sharing the same experiences. In Homy’s interaction, however, E’s involvement can be attributed to her active listening as the floor was information exchange, and then, she did not know A’s experience in advance.

4.1.2.4 Searching for the right word

In cases where a speaker struggles to find the right word, other participant may employ overlap inferring the searched word. The conversations bellow show instances of this phenomenon.

a- [Maya: N talked about her cousin who lost his mother]

1- N: ba•ad ummu m? tat(.)wad •ammati(.)wad •ammati(.)//
1- N: after his mum passed away(.)my cousin(.)my cousin(.)
2- N: //? :<hin? y
2- N: umm, it’s
3- J: <A(.)? :y kallamti:n beio
3- J A(.)yeah, you told me about him
4- E: A(.)? :y
4- E: A(.)yeah
5- N: ? :y(.)A
5- N: yeah(.)A
In this conversation, J (3) overlapped N to help in finding N’s cousin’s name. J’s overlapping speech happened as a result of N’s (2) hesitation as she tried to recall the name (A). Since N had told J about her cousin before, J remembered his name, and hence, contributed in finding it. Then, all the speakers contributed to this chunk of talk in that once the right word (A) had been uttered by J, both E (4) and N (5) agreed with her. This is what O’Conaill, Whittaker, and Wilbur (1993) found when comparing some linguistic behaviors, including overlaps, using video conversations of conferences and face-to-face talk. Findings show that there were some instances where speakers found difficulties in finishing their turns. Then, some participants used overlap to help in finding the missing words.

b- [Malak: U told about her husband’s origin]

1- U: ? :y(.)wad(.)shinu m?  ba·rif(-)sammu(/)
1- U: yeah(.)son (her husband) (.)of what, i don’t know(-)they’re called(.)
2- U: employees of(,)the(,)the(,)the
3- M: <? uku:<ma
3- M: public sector
4- U: <aljazi:ra
4- U: the Jazira

Here M (3) overlapped U (2) guessing “? uku:ma” (public sector). This inference did not arise because she shared J’s knowledge about her husband’s origin. Rather, M’s proposition could be attributed to the common knowledge that there is a reasonable concordance between the word “muwa? ? afi:n” (employees) and “al? uku:ma” (the public sector). M’s inference, however, was not true as U (4) overlapped her at the TRP uttering the searched word “aljazi:ra” (the Jazira).
c- [Homy: M and T remembered their friends in old days]

1- M: yeah, really(.)and this(.)it’s not H(.)my friend was, it's(.)
2- M://assaghay<ra
2- M: the young one
3- T: <E
4- M: E(.)ew Y H
4- M: E(.)and Y’s friend was H

As seen in the above extract, M struggled to remember her old friend’s name, making four attempts to that end; “ew di” (and this), “mush H” (it’s not H), “ana k? nat ? a? bati ehn? y” (my friend was, it’s), “assaghayra” (the young one). Then, at the point where M (2) uttered “assaghayra” (the young one), T recognized which one M meant because she knew both friends (E and H). As such, T (3) overlapped her, uttering E where M (4) confirmed her.

In extracts a & c, the interlocutors’ inferences succeeded as they had knowledge about the topics, compared with the situation in extract b. M proposed the wrong word since she did not share U’s knowledge about the place in which U’s husband was raised, and hence, U found the word herself. So, because the women were conscious of the topics they were talking about, they employed overlaps contributing on finding the missing words. The same tendency is found by Coates (1996) who has analyzed women’s discussion about gay pop groups. Three of the women used overlaps to utter the word that a prior speaker was looking for.

4.1.2.5 Confirmation

There are some cases where women use overlaps to confirm one another in casual speech. Aries (1996) claims that women use, more frequently, affirmative overlap in casual speech as a means of supporting each other. Coates (1996), on the other hand,
argues that this type of overlaps is the most remarkable one that is found in women’s speech. Such phenomenon is very common in Sudanese women’s interaction as can be seen in the following extracts.

a- [Maya: young women talked about ladies’ hand bags]

1- N: :y hum(.)z? tum k? n -indum shuna? yad(.)shufti//
1- N: yeah, they(.)themselves (a store) had hand bags(.)you see
2- N: i will show you(.)you know the size of my pink bag?
   (pause)
3- S: albambiya y? ta?
3- S: which one?
4- N: albambiya(.)shan? a? i bi<t? •at ejjilid elbambiya el? ilwa
4- N: the pink one(.)my bag, the one of leather, the nice pink one
5- S: um(.)yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, it’s nice

This extract demonstrates a typical example of overlap for enthusiastic confirmation where S (5) uttered “? :y” (yeah) four times before saying “? ilwa di” (it’s nice). As N (1,2) described the hand bags, she asked whether S remembered the pink handbag of hers. Eventually, S (5) recollected N’s bag, and then, overlapped her uttering “? :y” (yeah) four times.

b- [Malak: three women’s interaction about tea thermoses]

1- M: kub? :r(.)? agg? t assa•u:diya deil
1- M: they are (the thermoses) large(.) the Saudi’s ones
2- N: :y
2- N: yeah
3- M: k? nu<•indi
In this extract, there were various trials of overlap when the women tried to confirm one another. Both N and R knew M’s thermoses. When M (3) uttered “k? nu i-ndi” (i had them), N (4) overlapped her producing the minimal response “? :y” (yeah) three times to confirm that she knew the thermoses in question. R (5), in turn, overlapped N suggesting that the thermoses were nice. At the point R uttered ”sam? ? t” (they are nice), M (6) used overlap to confirm her by saying “sam? ? t’ (they are nice). Then, N (7) overlapped M confirming both R and M that the thermoses were nice. By and large, the effect this kind of overlapping speech gave was, obviously, of strong confirmation since all the participants agreed that the thermoses were nice uttering the same description “sam? ? t” (they are nice).

The examined extract reveals that overlapping speech is an interactional achievement rather than a strategy which participants adopt to infringe the speaker’s right for the floor. (Liddicoat, 2007). Despite of the four trials of overlaps, there were no attempts to repair them because they did not threaten the speakers’ turn. This is what makes Tannen (2007) describes overlap as a high-involvement style in conversation where the use of overlaps is preferred.

c- [Homy: conversation about ceiling material]

1- E: khashab khafi:f(.)fi khashab k? n khafi:f
In the extract above, E (1) and M (2) talked about a kind of wood when A (3) overlapped M confirming both of what they said. A’s overlapping contribution can be interpreted as a way of displaying confirmation and support to her co-participants’ speech. By using overlap, A jumped into M’s talk enthusiastically to support and confirm her counterparts. This use of overlaps confirms Aries’s (1996) argument that women tend to use overlaps as a means of supporting and encouraging each other in conversations.

By examining these different types of overlaps, it is noticed that Sudanese women can tolerate overlapping speech when they engage in friendly talk. Overlapping speech is, therefore, perceived positively in Sudanese culture and women adopt it predominantly in their casual speech. This argument goes in line with the belief that there are socio-cultural differences regarding the use of overlaps. For instance, Gardner and Mushin (2007) have studied overlaps in the speech of the indigenous Australians’ context. It is found that the adoption of overlaps in this culture is similar to that of North American and British speakers, including overlaps that occur at TRPs. Similarly, Deng (1998) has analyzed talk of Australian, American, and British speakers in comparison to that of Chinese. Findings show that Australian English speakers; and American and British speakers do not differ in their conversational behaviors. That is, unlike Chinese speakers, they follow the rule of turn-taking in conversation and perceive overlaps as a deviation (see Sacks et al., 1974). Deng finds that Chinese adopted overlaps in their speech in a higher rate than that of Australians, Americans, and British.

Deng (1998) has made assessments of some works about the tolerance of overlapping speech among cultures. For example, Ulijin and Li (1995) have observed that Chinese speakers use more overlaps in their talk than Australians. Graham (1993), in a
comparison study of the use of overlaps, finds that Chinese are ranked the fourth within ten cultures in their usage of overlaps. In a similar study, Testa (1988) finds that there is no difference between Italian and British speakers in their usage of overlaps. More interestingly, Wieland (1991) argues that French perceive the absence of overlaps as a sign of impoliteness. In a similar fashion, overlapping speech is perceived as a supportive behavior in Sudanese women’s conversations. The participant who waits for her role and does not overlap her counterparts’ speech is considered to be unfriendly.

4.1.3 Simultaneous Starts

In this section I will examine one type of simultaneous speech which is occurred more frequently in my data. This type, however, is rarely found in the literature. It is a kind of simultaneous speech which is initiated by two or more self-selecting speakers. Following Sacks et al.’s (1974) model of the turn-taking system, simultaneous starts occur when a current speaker does not select the next speaker where two or more participants begin their turns at the same time. Wilson and Neg (1988) argue that simultaneous starts occur naturally and spontaneously in conversations. In Sudanese women’s conversations, there are many instances of this speech. The following extracts, from the three groups, present some instances of this phenomenon occurring for different purposes.

4.1.3.1 Confirmation

While women are active participants in conversation, some of them may self-select at the same time to confirm the prior utterance. The following three extracts show this phenomenon.

a- [Maya: conversation about some nation (X) facing economic difficulties]

1- N: g? mu ya•ni ? ? jtein zay di i? ? arru yibi:•u ............
1- N: they(X),like, had to sell these two things(telecommunication)…..
2- R: {? :y(.)fallasu
Here, N did not select the next speaker as the floor was a general discussion. Both R and J self-selected speaking simultaneously to confirm N’s statement in different words. That is, R’s (2) contribution “fallasu” (they got broke) was a judgment of X’s current situation whereas J’s (3) utterance “k? nu ghany? ni:n” (they were rich) mitigated the force of the intended meaning, getting broke. Then, N (4) confirmed both of them by restating J’s utterance.

b- [Malak: discussion about R’s daughter]

1- N: zay ji:n? t E=
1- N: it’s (R’s daughter’s genes) like E’s genes
2- R:=|JI:NAT E ↓ bi? ? ab?
2- R: it’s typically E’s genes
3- M: her character is typically E’s

In this extract, R and M latched N’s talk simultaneously, confirming the claim that R’s daughter was typically like her father. However, R’s (2) contribution was much more forceful than M’s (3) in that she rephrased N’s utterance using three devices. She uttered “JI:NAT” (genes) in a relatively high voice, then slowed down the pace and stressed “↓ bi? ? ab?” (typically). Such devices can be interpreted as either a way to keep the turn or to emphasize, enthusiastically, N’s prior utterance. M’s (3) talk, on the other hand, was also a rephrasing of N’s view. Then, both M and R started to speak at the same time and continued speaking.
c- [Homy: T and M recollected their old days’ friends]

1- T: all? :geita bar? u(.)N(.)N garat ma•? y(.)bigu:l leya L
1- T: i met, too(.)N(.)N was my classmate(,)they call her L
   (pause)
2- T: {L(.)m? garat ma•? y
2- T: L(.)she was my classmate
3- M:{? :y L
3- M: yeah, L

T (1) spoke about her friends when she was young, mentioning one of her old friends (L). M did not take her role because she did not remember the friend T was talking about. To avoid silence, T (2) self-selected after a relatively long pause trying to remind M of L. At the point where T (2) started her turn, adding “m? garat ma•? y” (she was my classmate), M (3) began to speak simultaneously with T in order to confirm her uttering “? :y L” (yeah, L), when she finally remembered L. Moreover, T’s utterance can be seen as confirming her previous talk that is L was her classmate. It seems that, the emergence of silence after T (1) finished her turn could be attributed to M since she did not take a turn. As such, T (2) self-selected as the next speaker attempting to avoid lapse in the talk because M did not respond to her speech immediately.

4.1.3.2 Disagreement

In Sudanese women’s discourse, there are some instances where two or more participants start to speak at the same time so as to disagree with the speaker. The following extracts demonstrate such a phenomenon.

a- [Maya: university female students talked about some type of dresses]

1- H: the plain one (a dress) is nice(.)the light one
2- N: {la m? khafi:f
2- N: no, it’s not light (type of dress)
3- J: {1? kin la m? khafi:f zay da(.)manno: da(....
3- J: but it’s not light as this one(.)not this kind(....

The extract above shows that both N and J began their turns at the same time where they disagreed with H’s (1) assessment of a dress. They started simultaneously using the same words; N (2) “la m? khafi:f” (no, it’s not light), J (3) “1? kin la m? khafi:f…” (but it’s not light...). Such utterances showed that they disagreed with H’s talk, and at the same time, their agreement with each other. A similar result is obtained by Liddicoat (2007) who has found out that three speakers started at the same time after a prior speaker produced an assessment of a post-party. Then, three turns came to be launched simultaneously in order to disagree with the current speaker.

b- [Malak: conversation about M’s slimness]

1- R: bigi:ti rashi:gha y? M
1- R: you became slim, M
2- M: aleik ella?(.)rashi:gha wein?(.)siminta
2- M: really?(.)how come?(.)i got fat
3- R: {la la la(.)bigi:ti tam? m wall? y
3- R: no, no, no(.)you became nice
4- H: {masminti(.)ma a innik g? da filbeit
4- H: you didn’t gain weight(.)even though you stay at home

Here, M (2) disagreed with R (1) in that she lost weight saying that she got fat. Then, R (3) and H (4) self-selected simultaneously to disagree with M emphasizing that M lost weight. Moreover, R (3) showed her strong belief that M lost weight when she uttered “la” (no) three times before assuring M that she became nice. In this extract, R and H started simultaneously, and no one tailed off till their turns reached possible completions. This, however, contrasts Kohonen’s (2004) claim that when more than one participant
start to speak simultaneously, usually only one of the speakers continues holding the turn while the others stop. But this is not always the case in Sudanese women’s conversations where most of the simultaneous starts continue till the TRPs as the above example shows.

c- [Homy: interaction about magic works]

1- B: ashsheikh g? l ley(.)imkin iku:n el•amal ley zo:l(,)//
1- B: the sheikh said(.)the work (magic work) might be for someone else(.)
2- B://taku:ni itti •afa? ti:w
2- B: and you might tread on it
3- M: but it won’t touch you if you tread on it, but the meant person
4- F: {la m? ? asab ezzo:l
4- F: no, it’s not only for the meant person
5- B: {la m? kida
5- B: no, it’s not like this

In this extract, F (4) and B (5) disagreed with M’s (3) belief that magic work touches only the person for whom the work is done. The ladies began their TCUs at the same time trying to correct M’s knowledge about magic deeds. It seems that this shared knowledge came from their CofP in that this community believes in sheiks and in what they say such as magic work affects whoever touches it. Thus, their CofP led these women friends to adopt some terms concerning magic work such as B’s (1) “el•amal” (magic work). Then, this belief made both F and B self-selected as next speakers simultaneously, conveying their disagreement with M. In a similar way, Gardner and Mushin (2007) find that simultaneous starts were used in a community of some elderly indigenous Australian women. Wieland (1991), on the other hand, has studied the use of simultaneous starts among French and Americans engaged in French conversation. Wieland finds that this strategy was found among French speakers which contrast with American style in communication. But this is not the case in my data since the women were friends engaged in private interaction within their CofP.
4.1.3.3 Commenting

Comments are very common in Sudanese females’ talk which shows their full attention during speech events. Participants may self-select, commenting on a prior speaker’s talk. Such self-selection can be shown in cases where some participants start simultaneously to comment, uttering together the same or different words. This will be discussed within the following extracts.

a- [Maya: discussion about some facial cream]

1- J: hu biga(.bishi:l leyya elgishra
1- J: it (the cream)(.)removes the dandruff
2- S: { da ekwayis ? :y
2- S: it’s good, yeah
3- N: { da makwayis ? ayyeb(,)? ? ja ekwaysa
3- N: it’s good(,)good thing

After J (1) explained the cream’s effect, both S (2) and N (3) started to speak simultaneously to comment, displaying their impression about the cream. Both participants commented positively when they uttered “kwayis” (good) because the cream had a good effect on the face. Then, S’s (2) and N’s (3) response towards J’s experience with the cream was clear in their speech where they both joined speech at the same moment, expressing their own opinions. Kohonen (2004) has examined simultaneous starts between French and Americans adult students in dinner-table conversation in French language. After one of the participants commented on a film they have all seen, three interactants initiated their turns at the same time so as to comment on the prior speech.

b- [Malak: H told her friends how a student asked her to lend him her car]


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1- H: i said to him(.)i said: oh son(.)you asked for
2- H: something great(.)ask for something less
3- M:={u ley ya•ni?(.)ley ya•ni?
3- M: and why?(.)why?
4- A:={ ley jins el? ? j? t di?
4- A: why these things (asking such a thing)?

This extract illustrates a type of comment which is deviant from the ordinary comments, in that both M (3) and A (4) commented on H’s story in a question’s form. They started simultaneously adopting such type of not-seeking information questions to comment on this unacceptable request. M’s and A’s comments emerged simultaneously because H told her anecdote enthusiastically. In doing so, H (1) stressed “y? waladi” (son), and prolonged and stressed (2) “kabi::ra” (great) indicating that the student’s request was unacceptable. This is what made her co-participants initiated their turns at the same time, commenting on the event.

In this extract, both M and A latched H’s turn to comment on this interesting topic. However, their early entry into talk was not seen as a device for gaining the floor since participants adopted it unintentionally. Jefferson (1986) argues that simultaneous starts can be interpreted as a result of an application of the turn-taking rules rather than speakers beginning in interruption. In other words, two or more participants, in this particular case M and A, self-selected to talk simultaneously rather than one would start and the other cut her off.

c- [Homy: F spoke about the death of her neighbor]

1- F: l? kin shinu(.)alfayru:za(.)…yalla g? lu masha ↓ejjano:b….  
2- F: but what(.)the virus (that killed him)(.)…they said he went to the South….  
2- A: h? y wala ejjano:b wala shi(.)deil nisw? n el? illa elbigi-dan lilmiseil  
2- A: it’s not for he went to the South(.)these are the neighbours who say so
3- A: {h? y da el’jal
3- A: it’s his destiny
4- M: {l? awll? y y? rab
4- M: oh Gosh

A (2) disagreed with what F (1) said about the neighbor’s death emphasizing that this gossip was created by the women neighbors. Since the topic was interesting, A (3) constructed a new TCU to add some comment. At the same time, M (4) started commenting on F’s story. In so doing, A (3) disagreed with F assuming that it was not the South’s virus that killed the man but his fate to die in the South, while M (4) was satisfied with an exclamation expression.

4.1.3.4 Different contributions

There are some cases in which women self-select simultaneously, speaking about different issues but in relation to the topic under discussion. Then one speaker may tail off leaving the floor to the other as the following extracts demonstrate.

a- [Maya: university girls’ students talked about S’s bore]

1- S: ann? s kullum biku:nu lazi:zi:n()illa ana elkutta//
1- S: all (university students) were nice(.)except me, i was
2- S://awwal essana ghayy? za
2- S: boring at the beginning of the year
3- N: {bas fi:(.)bas fi: awwal essana j? yya agu:l leik kida……
3- N: just at(.)just at the beginning of the year, i would tell you so……
4- R: {ana batzzakkar(.)batzzakkar ley? ()? :(stops)
4- R: i remember(.)i remember that she(.)um(stops)

As S (1,2) talked about how she was boring at the beginning of the year, both N (3) and R (4) self-selected, beginning their turns at the same time so as to contribute to S’s talk.
Each one spoke about different issues related to the current topic. N’s (3) contribution was a confirmation of S’s speech while R (4) tried to convey her recognition of the topic, but she tailed off since she was hesitant, leaving the floor to N. This is because N was more confident than R about what she said which led her to hold the floor while R stopped. Notice how S’s (2) utterance “ghayy? za” (boring) depicted the social identity of these young women friends. That is, this word is one of the jargonized terms which is used predominantly, and particularly, by young females in the Sudan.

b- [Malak: discussion about coffee sets]

1- U: ana m? bagdar ashtari ? agim zay da la’nu M m? //
1- U: I couldn’t buy a set like this one because M wouldn’t
2- U: //? aykhalli:ni asta-malu
2- U: let me use it
3- H: m? ? ag qahwa!
3- H: it’s (the set) for coffee!
4- U: {M bishrab elgahwa(.)fi:(.)ajjabana walfan? ji:n umm? t najma
4- U: M drinks coffee(.)in(.)the traditional set, the one with stars
5- M: {ni? na(stops)
5- M: we(stops)

This conversation was about modern coffee sets. As U (4) began to show the interlocutors the coffee set that her husband liked to drink coffee in, M (5) self-selected simultaneously with her to contribute in the discussion trying to say what they prefer. So, M’s utterance “ni? na” (we) denoted that she wanted to show their way of drinking coffee but she dropped out leaving her utterance ambiguous as U continued. It is noticeable that M’s personality is low profiled which made her contribution in conversation poor. Then, she tailed off directly as if it was not her role to speak where U went on speaking. However, this did not mean that U aimed to dominate the discourse, but rather, she tried to complete what she was talking about earlier.
c- [Homy: conversation about cutting off the running water]

1- M: now there is no cutting off of the water
2- A: {mab? ag? a(.)(.)ma a enn? s
2- A: it hasn’t been off(.)like others’
3- E: {l? kin(stops)
3- E: but(stops)

The three women in this extract are neighbors, discussing the problem of the running water. M (1) stated that the water was then available. A (2) added that the water had not been off as the case with other areas. At the same point where A started her talk, E (3) began a TCU uttering “l? kin” (but) in an attempt to contrast M’s speech but she dropped out as A continued. It appears that E’s withdrawal was due to her uncertainty about her unuttered contrasted claim. This was clear when she produced the contrasted conjunction “l? kin” (but) then stopped. As such, she might feel that her speech would not be accepted by her co-locutors since they agreed with each other (water was then available).

This type of simultaneous starts, by and large, differs from the other types in that when participants started to speak simultaneously, each handled different point, one speaker dropped out leaving the chance to her counterpart. The dropping out could be attributed to the emergence of different talk by two or more speakers which each required to be comprehended by the other participants. Moreover, participants had also a role in determining who was to continue using different strategies such as eye gaze, and paying attention to the selected speaker. In the other types, however, neither speaker tailed off, instead, both continued speaking together.

To sum up the discussion so far, simultaneous starts are very common in Sudanese women’s discourse. The use of this strategy indicates that women participate actively in interaction to the extent that two or more participants may jump into talk at the same time.
in an attempt to share in conversation. By employing simultaneous starts, women work to display their understanding in different situations.

The next section will be the second part of the analysis which deals with some linguistic devices (hedges, tag questions, minimal responses) adopted by Sudanese women in their casual speech.
4.2 Linguistic Devices

In this part I will investigate the use of some linguistic devices in Sudanese women’s interaction. They are hedges, tag questions, and minimal responses. I will then classify each device according to its functions and use.

4.2.1 Hedges

It is argued that hedges, sometimes called epistemic modality (e.g. may be, sort of, I mean) are used frequently and sensitively by women in their casual speech (Coates, 1989; 1996; Holmes, 2006; Preisler, 1986; Tannen, 2007). Since women friends’ talk is characterized as supportive and collaborative, hedges play an important role in creating such functions. Women use hedges more than men in creating a supportive floor (Coates, 1996; Weatherall, 2002).


For practical reasons, I will divide the use of hedges that were found in the conversations of the three groups under study into four types according to their functions.

4.2.1.1 Uncertainty

The basic function of hedges is to signal uncertainty in the speech. That is, sometimes speakers hedge their talk to avoid certainty, as such, there will be different propositions. Women hedge when they are not sure about the truth of the proposition of their speech
The following are brief extracts from the three groups under investigation.

a- [Maya: discussion about an injection used for skin lightening]

1-S: al'? ugna di bitnnaghi ejjisim(.)ya•ni •irifiti?(.)//
1-S: this injection purifies the skin(.)like, you know?(.)
2-S://bigu:lu eshnu?(.)m? • rif(.)shinu kida(.)m? • rif//
2-S: what they say?(.)i don't know(.)kind of what(.)i don't know
3-S://mu? ? ? lilaksada(.)? ? ja zay kida(.)<m? • rfa
3-S: anti-oxidant(.)something like this(.)i don't know
4-N: <m? bitwaggif elhin? y(.)//
4-N: not, it stops, sort of(.)
5-N://al[al(stops)
5-N: the, the(stops)
6-S: [m? bitwaggif ? ? ja(.)wala kha? ara
6-S: it doesn't stop anything(.)it's not dangerous

The women in the above extract spoke about some kind of injection that makes women's skin light. As S (1-3) was not sure about the exact effect of the injection, she, strikingly, produced eight hedges in one turn “ya•ni, •irifti? bigu:lu eshnu? m? • rif, shinu kida, m? • rif, ? ? ja zay kida, m? • rfa” (like, you know?, what they say?, i don't know, kind of what, i don't know, something like this, i don't know). “m? • rif” (i don't know), in this context, was used as a hedge. N (4) overlapped S (3) starting by hedging her speech where she said “m? ” (not) trying to comment on S’s talk. “m? ” (not), here, was used as a hedge rather than a negative particle which is very common in Sudanese women’s talk. N (4) also had a doubt about her own proposition since she uttered, before tailing off, “elhin? y” (sort of), a hedge which is used for a missing reference. This led S (6) to interrupt her insisting that the injection was not dangerous.
The data confirm Brown’s (1980) finding in a study of the usage of hedges in Mayan community in Mexico. The women were found to hedge more when they knew little about the topic of their conversation.

b- [Malak: N said that Y could have come with them]

1-N: hi(.)hayya’ ley ya•ni(.)nashi:? a(.)d? yman bit bit ↓ya•ni(.)//
1-N: she’(.)j think, like(.)active(.)always is, is, like(.)
2-N://m? •inda elmarga mushkila[ithayya’ ley ya•ni etkhayyal ley//
2-N: going out is not a problem for her i think, like, i think
3-M: [] m? •inda mushkila
3-M: yeah, she has no problem
4-N://k? n mumkin taji em•? na
4-N: she could have come with us

In the above conversation, the use of hedges showed that N was uncertain, and that she needed support from the interlocutors to reveal the truth of the proposition. We can divide her turn into three acts; “hi(.)hayya’ ley ya•ni(.)nashi:? a” (she’(.)j think, like(.)active), “d? yman bit bit ↓ya•ni(.)m? •inda elmarga mushkila” (always is, is, like(.)going out is not a problem for her), “ithayya’ ley ya•ni etkhayyal ley k? n mumkin taji em•? na” (i think, like, i think she could have come with us). Here, N hedged her doubt about three propositions; Y’s being active, going out was not a problem for her, and coming with her friends. Notice the way the hedges “ithayya’ ley ya•ni etkhayyal ley” (i think, like, i think) were combined in the last chunk of her turn to show uncertainty of “k? n mumkin taji em•? na” (she could have come with us). This suggests that the doubt in this act was much more than that in the previous two acts.

This example supports Coates’s (1993) argument that when speakers intend to show their uncertainty about some point they use more hedges in one turn. Preisler (1986), on the other hand, carried out a study in mixed-sex conversation focusing on the expression of tentativeness. The results support the assumption that heavy use of hedges indicates
uncertainty. The women in Preisler’s study were found to use more hedges than men when they were uncertain about the topic under discussion. Similarly, N, in my example, used a good number of hedges because she was not sure whether Y would have accompanied them.

c- [Homy: discussion about the nationality of some people]

1-M: Su:d? niy:n walla m? ?(stops)
1-M: Sudanese or not?(stops)
2-N: Sa•u:diy:n
2-N: Saudis
3-M: ? :?
3-M: what?
4-N: I? kin m? .? rfa(.)i? tim? l(stops)
4-N: but i don’t know(.)probably(stops)
5-M: now, i don’t know(.)people say they are Sudanese

N (2) said that the mentioned people were Saudis then she (4) retreated after M (3) asked for clarification. N (4) employed some hedges which showed her doubt about the information she was reporting. It seems that N’s (4) doubt arouse when M (3) conveyed her misunderstanding, where she uttered “? ?” (what?), that is N might give the wrong notion. Then N said, before dropping out, “i? tim? l” (probably) in an attempt to express her doubt that the people in question were Saudis. M (5), in turn, hedged her doubt about the nationality of the people. Notice the words (4) “I? kin” (but), (5) “? assa” (now), “m? .? rfa” (i don’t know) were used as hedges. Generally, in the Sudanese context, the word “I? kin” (but) is mostly used as a hedge rather than as a co-ordinator.

In comparison, an example by Coates (1996) shows how three friends mirrored each other’s relative confidence in what the mother of one of them did through their choice of the adverb ‘probably’. The three friends used the adverb ‘probably’ as they believed that
the mother begged a milkman to give her lift to a funeral. Coates notes that the adverb ‘probably’ was used to express certainty. This is, however, not the case in my data where “i? timal” (probably) indicated an absolute doubt.

4.2.1.2 Sensitive speech

One of the strengths of hedges is that they can be used to take care of the feelings of all participants in conversation. This is what Coates (1996) calls Interpersonal Function of hedges. Coates draws on a model of communication developed by Brown’s and Levinson’s (1978) notion of ‘face’ needs. That is the need to be respected and free from imposition (Negative Face), and the need to be agreed with and liked (Positive Face). Tannen (1994) notes that since women speech style is supportive and co-operative, women tend to hedge their talk as a politeness strategy. In Sudanese women’s discourse, hedges play an essential role in protecting participants’ face, especially when discussing sensitive topics. That is, women adopt hedges to mitigate the force of the utterance when trying to pay attention to each others’ feeling. Consider the following extracts.

a- [Maya: conversation about N’s hair]

1-N: assi ana ba-ad m? ga? ? eitu(.)ghizir
1-N: now, after, not, i cut it (her hair)(.)it became thick
2-J: ? :y(.)bighzar<hu
2-J: yeah(.)it becomes thick (after cutting) it’s
3-N: <l? kin hu m? //
3-N: but it didn’t become
4-N://ghizir(.)l? kin hu a? llan a>sh? n elfo:g ya<ni//
4-N: thick(.)but, it’s, actually, because the upper (hair) like
5-J: <? ::y
5-J: yeah
6-N://shufti keif?(.)yalla hu <? jibni
6-N: you see how?(.)so, i like it (her hair)
As N feared that J might recognize that her hair did not become thick after cutting, she backed off her claim when she (3) overlapped J uttering “l? kin hu m? ghizir” (but it didn’t become thick). To protect her own face, N (4,6) used a number of hedges “l? kin, a? llan, ya?ni, shufti keif? yalla” (but, actually, like, you see how?, so), successively. In so doing, N wanted to shift the topic away from hair thickness to likeness, when she (6) said “yalla hu ? jibni” (so, i like it).

N’s adoption of this number of hedges, obviously, was not due to her doubt about the truth of the proposition since she was talking about her own hair. Rather, she could not predict how her friend would react to her claim that her hair became thick after cutting. So, by using hedges, N protected her negative face from being affected by disagreement. However, the situation was saved by J’s support where she (5) overlapped N, uttering a prolonged minimal response “? ::y” (yeaah).

Apart from women’s use of hedges in private conversations, they also adopt them in other contexts. This supports Holmes’s (2006) notion of ‘relational practice’ (RP; the ability to work effectively in work settings by developing co-operative speech style to gain support and equality). Holmes notes that women use hedges when giving directives to their subordinates in the workplace which show their feminine style in speech.

b- [Malak: discussion about R’s husband kindness]

1-M: really, he’s kind, R(.)but what?(.)(like(.)(like
2-M: he controls others(.)kind of, it’s inside him(.)
3-M: they (R’s husband family) like controlling others………..
4-R: ? ? ? (.)(u:.)(fi:lan
4-R: right(.)(yeah(.)(exactly

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In the above extract, M’s (1) use of the hedges “shinu?(.)ya•ni(.)ya•ni” (what?(.)like(.)like) did not indicate that she was not certain about the proposition (2) “eb? ay? ir’ (he controls others), but rather that she did not know whether her friend (R) would accept this harsh opinion on her husband. Hence, she did not want to offend R’s negative face. By employing the hedges, M also protected herself from being accused of describing R’s husband as a dictator. The hedge “ya•ni” (like), which M uttered twice, suggested that she could retreat from the critical position if it turned out to be unacceptable. In other words, she could deny what she said if R got offended by what was said about her husband. But R’s (4) response “???(.)u:(.)fi•lan(.)” (right(.)yeah(.)exactly), which showed her full agreement, released M’s tension.

c- [Homy: interaction about siphons in A’s area]

1-M: but, always the siphons in places like this (B), it’s said, like
2-M://fiya mo:ya m? binjja? shadi:d(.)? assi//
2-M: in wet areas, siphons would not succeed enough(.)now
3-M: my mam in Z, too, Y (M’s sister) dug it 3 times………
4-E: l? kin ? :(.B kulla itkhayyal ley f? yra
4-E: but, um(.)B, all of it, i think, has a wet soil
5-A: hi(.).shufti l? min dakhlat arabiyat eshsha? if(.)//
5-A: it’s(.).you see, when the sifting vehicle appeared(.)
6-A: they made in them (siphons) sort of, things (to destroy them
and then they may earn money from sifting out water)

M talked generally about how digging siphons in wet areas, like B, did not succeed. She used hedges to mitigate the force of the speech act attempting to protect A’s feeling since she lived in B. M’s (2) utterance “shadi:d” (enough), which implied that digging siphons might succeed, would protect her face if A disagreed with her that digging siphons
succeeded in her area (B). In addition, E (4) agreed with M that B had a wet soil. To avoid affecting A’s negative face, E (4) uttered “l? kin” (but) as a hedge, combined with her stammering sound “?:” (um) so that her remark would not be interpreted in a negative way.

E (4) inserted the hedge “itkhayyal ley” (i think) in the middle of her actual talk “B kulla f? yra” (B, all of it, has a wet soil) which also degraded the negative effect of her claim upon A. E was right to be anxious when A (5), immediately, challenged her and explained that the sifting tankers’ owners might be responsible for bad siphons, not the soil. A employed the hedges (5) “hi(.)shufti” (it’s(.) you see), (6) “etgu:!” (sort of) so as to mitigate her claim. By so doing, she could save the interlocutors’ (M and E) negative face and her own positive face since she disagreed with them.

It is obvious from the analysis of the three extracts that Sudanese women tend to adopt hedges as a strategy of observing each other’s feeling when discussing sensitive issues. In such situations, hedges index politeness. Brown (1980) notes that, in a study of the use of hedges in Mayan community in Mexico, women employed more hedges in single-sex interaction than men did. Such usage of hedges indicates that women are more polite in this community than men. Brown’s study confirms Coates’s (1989) when she examined women’s adoption of hedges in single-sex groups. Coates has found out that women used hedges more than men did. She argues that hedges are used to protect both the speakers’ and the addressees’ face.

4.2.1.3 Opening discussions

Opening discussion is another reason for the frequent occurrence of hedges in women friends’ interactions (Coates, 1996). That is, women facilitate the discussion by hedging the initial speech. This is what I found in my data where most of the talk was initiated by hedges. The following extracts show good examples of this use.
a- [Maya: N talked about new style hand bags]

1-N: look, shall i show you the nice hand bags that appeared now?
2-S: u:
2-S: yeah

(N going on describing the hand bags)

N facilitated the discussion by hedging her speech. The hedge “ˬ ynu” (look) initiated her talk as a starting point which helped in getting the participants’ attention. N put her utterance in a form of rhetorical question which worked together with the hedge to attract the addresses’ attention. By so doing, N tried to show that she was aware of the latest fashion. Consequently, S responded, uttering “u:” (yeah), a minimal response that meant ‘I’m listening’ rather than for confirmation. This, by and large, encouraged N to go on describing the new style hand bags.

b- [Malak: discussion about Y’s facing difficulty in fasting]

1-H: shufti ust? za Y jad bigat kiwwaysa()//
1-H: you see, teacher Y, really became better (in fasting)(.)
2-H://zam? n l? min fijj? m·a(.]kullum?  //
2-H: earlier, at the university(.)whenever
3-M: [lamman taku:n ? ? yma ya·ni?
3-M: when she was fasting, like?
4-H://talga leia m? su:ra….
4-H: she found a tap………
5-H: ? :y(.]ya·ni fijj? m·a(.]takub elmo:ya(.]fishsha·ar
5-H: yeah(.)like, at the university(.)she used to pour water(.)on hair
6-Y: bas(.)almo:ya(.)m?  bat? ammal el·a? ash
6-Y: just(.)the water(.)i can’t bear thirst
In this example, the hedge “shufti” (you see) that H began her turn with facilitated her following speech about Y’s facing difficulty in fasting. M’s (3) enquiry supported H’s speech when she inferred what H was talking about “? ? yma” (fasting). It seems that this inference arouse because the discussion was about Ramadan (the fasting month). In order to be moderate in her claim about Y, H (5) hedged her response to M’s enquiry saying “? :y(.)ya ni fijj? m a” (yeah(.))like, at the university) then went on describing Y’s earlier state when she was fasting. Y’s (6) “bas” (just) indicated that she partially agreed with H. So, her utterance “bas(.)almo:ya” (just(.))the water) implied that she could not, only, bear thirst when she was fasting and nothing else. Then, Y made it clearer when she added “m? bat? ammal el-a? ash” (i can’t bear thirst).

In the above extract, H (1) did not only hedge her initial utterance to facilitate talk, but she also (5) used a hedge “ya ni” (like) because she did not want to be firm about what she said. So, apart from hedging to facilitate the discussion, H also hedged to avoid assertion when saying that Y could not bear fasting.

This example shows, by and large, how women hedge their assertion. This was obvious where H (5) hedged her speech when describing Y’s state in fasting. This finding goes in line with the belief that hedges are markers of unassertive speech. Supporting this view, Yaguchi et al. (2004) have examined the hedges ‘sort of’ and ‘kind of’ in a White House press conference. Findings suggest that women use these forms so as not to be assertive. In a similar fashion, Baalen’s (2001) study of a mixed-sex discussion program on British TV shows that female experts used more hedges than female non-experts in order to downplay their authority.

c- [Homy: three women talked about B’s being affected by magic]

1-A: you know?(. )i tell you(. )i tell you(. )it’s not only an evil eye(. )
2-A: someone gave you a drink (magic drink)
3-M: ? :y m'g? l kida(.m? g? l ? : si? ir(/)
3-M: yeah, not, he (the sheikh) said so(.not, he said um, it’s magic(.)
4-M: //g? l ? ml:n leik •a< mal
4-M: he said someone did you magic work
5-B: <? :y(.g? l ley da •amal
5-B: yeah(.) he told me it’s magic work

To facilitate the discussion, A started the turn by hedging her prediction about B’s being affected by magic work. A uttered and repeated the hedge “addi:k kal? m” (i tell you), attempting to get the interlocutors’ full attention before suggesting her prediction. Through the strategic use of hedges, A managed to make her point without coming into conflict with the other participants. M (3), on the other hand, produced the hedge “m? ” (not) twice, and stammering “? : si? ir” (um, it’s magic) in order to be moderate if B would refute her claim. However, B (5) agreed with her friends’ prediction, emphasizing that the sheikh told her that her illness was due to a magic deed.

4.2.1.4 Searching for the right word

Hedges are also a helpful device that speakers adopt while searching for the right word that expresses an idea. Coates (1996) argues that the search for the right word is part of women’s intention to think about things in new ways. This hedges’ function will be considered in the following extracts.

a- [Maya: post graduate friends discussed an exam material]

1-S: yeah, he (the lecturer) gave us(.) gave us abbreviations
2-N: but, he said what?(.) he said, sort of(.) anyone will pass
3-S: ? ? ?
3-S: right
N (2) tried to explain what the lecturer said about the exam by using hedges. As she was searching for the right words that described the lecturer’s speech, N (2) used some hedges “I? kin g? l shiu?, hin? y” (but, he said what?, sort of). Then she, eventually, settled on “ayyi zo:l bib? i” (anyone will pass). So, the use of hedges helped N to gain some time before finding the searched words. Generally, the hedge “hin? y” (sort of) is used mainly when the speaker tries to find the right word.

b- [Malak: discussion about S’s classes]

1-S: m? kutta baji ela? ad(.)t? ni sh? lo minni
1-S: not, i was coming on Sundays(.)then they took it from me
2-M: aha?
2-M: so?
3-S: g? m elkhaw? ja da(.)al al hin? y(.)alvolantir g? I d? yru
3-S: then the foreigner, this one(.)the the, sort of(.)the volunteer said he wanted it (Sundays’ classes)

S (3) was trying to recall the name of the teacher who took her Sundays’ classes. She used the phrase “elkhaw? ja da” (the foreigner, this one). “da” (this one), in this context, acted as a hedge. After a short pause, S uttered the hedge “hin? y” (sort of) trying to find the next utterance. At the end she said “al volantir” (the volunteer) when she could not recall his name. Notice how S (3) struggled to gain time to recall the teacher’s name uttering the hedge “da” (this one), and repeating the article “al” (the), then hedged even further by pre-modifying “alvolantir” (the volunteer) with the hedge “hin? y” (sort of).

c- [Homy: conversation about a religious centre]

1-I: l? kin m? m? m? ? atalga leya nisw? n min wein imsiku leya//
1-I: but, not, not, not, how can she find women taking care of
2-I: elmarkaz bit? ?a?...[.....
2-I: her centre?........

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In this example, both I and E hedged their utterances searching for the right words. I (1) adopted “m? ” (not), as a hedge, three times in order to have enough time to find words that express her point “? atalga leya nisw? n…” (how can she find women…). E (3), on the other hand, interrupted her, saying what she believed about the responsibility of the religious centers. Strikingly, E used much more hedges than her basic speech. She uttered several hedges in one turn since she could not find a word that explained her view “rahba” (difficulty). Although the word “rahba” means fear, it meant in this context the difficulty that one faces in being in charge of a religious centre.

This example, by and large, supports the notion of multi-functionality of hedges. That is, hedges can perform several functions simultaneously. In this extract, E’s (4) last hedge “kida” (kind of) served two functions; uncertainty, and face need. In other words, E was in doubt that the word “rahba” (difficulty) might not be the appropriate word that fits in the context. In addition, this word might not be accepted by the participants. In this sense, E protected her positive face (the desire to be agreed with) by uttering “kida” (kind of).

Generally speaking, the use of hedges portrays the Sudanese women’s uniqueness in their adoption of this linguistic device. Their speech is not only marked by hedges, but sometimes they produce a flow of hedges without any interval. In their friendly talk, Sudanese females prefer to establish a collaborative floor, and to keep distances between themselves. To do so, they tend to hedge their talk as a device that enables them to reach that aim. This finding sharply contrasts Lakoff’s (1975) argument that women hedge their utterance because they are hesitant and do not have enough confidence in themselves.
4.2.2 Tag Questions

It is argued that tag questions are typically women’s form because women use them more than men do. This claim has been proven empirically by Fishman (1980) and Preisler (1986). Lakoff (1975) believes that tag questions decrease the strength of assertion, and they are associated with tentativeness. Mizokami (2001), in contrast, claims that tags represent multi-functionality and diversity of meaning rather than tentativeness. I will explore this view in Sudanese women’s discourse as represented in my data. This will be done by examining four functions of tag questions that occurred in conversations of the three groups under study.

4.2.2.1 Uncertainty

The major function of tag questions is to signal the degree of uncertainty among speakers. When speakers are uncertain about the proposition, they tend to tag their utterance in order to gain agreement or confirmation from the recipients. Coates (1996) argues that this use of tags creates a collaborative floor. The following extracts, from the three groups under study, demonstrate such a phenomenon.

a- [Maya: conversation about S’s mobile]

1-N: a? lan ana w? ? id m?  g? ·da aghayru
1-N: actually it’s (her mobile) the only one, i don’t change it
2-J: talafo:nik etsaraq(,)walla eshnu?
2-J: your mobile has been stolen(.)hasn’t it?
3-N: ? :y
3-N: yeah

J (2) was unsure that N’s mobile had been stolen. Tag question was used to express this doubt. Then, J showed her full doubt when she uttered “walla eshnu?” (hasn’t it?) while N (3) agreed with her. Holmes (1984) classifies tags such as the one shown above as
‘modal tags’ since they request confirmation or information from the addressee. This type of tags, according to Holmes, is speaker-oriented because it is designed to meet the speaker’s need for information. In this case, when speakers tag their utterances they display uncertainty which needs a response from the addressees.

b- [Malak: interaction about A’s sister (E)]

1-M: E di eddikto:ra mush?
1-M: E is the doctor, isn’t she?
2-A: la la(.)E di elkabi:ra
2-A: no, no(.)E is the elder one

Here, M was unsure about her prediction that the mentioned sister was the doctor. To express her uncertainty, she used the tag “mush?” (isn’t she?), in which A disagreed with her, saying that E was the elder sister. This type of tags is examined by Cameron McAlinden and O’Leary (1989) in a classroom context, within the framework of power relation. It has been found that students adopted modal tags so as to request reassurance from the teacher. Similarly, Swann (1989) has analyzed conversation of mixed-sex classroom to investigate the patterns of power relation. Results show that boys used tags more than girls did to show their domination. However, this tendency was not found in my data where all participants were friends and equal in status.

c- [Homy: speech about B’s healing from magic work]

1-A: raggada filbirish
1-A: he (the sheikh) laid her on a mat
2-T: filbirish(.)mush y? B raggadik?
2-T: in a mat(.)didn’t he, B, lie you down?
3-B: u:(.)g? 1 ley agudi(.)gara leyya……
3-B: yeah(.)he asked me to sit down(.)he read (Quran) for me……

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In this conversation, A’s (1) and T’s (2) turns acted, together, as one turn. That is, after A said “raggada filbirish” (he laid her on a mat), T (2) repeated A’s last utterance then she used the modal tag “mush?” (didn’t he?) to show uncertainty. B (3), in turn, responded to both A and T as she agreed with them, uttering “u:” (yeah) then went on her anecdote. Cameron et al. (1989) have studied similar tags in mixed-sex conversation in relation to conversational role and differential status, within gender variable. It is found that men scored higher than women did in modal tags. Moreover, powerless participants of both sexes scored higher than powerful participants did.

4.2.2.2 Checking the shared knowledge

There are some instances where tags function as a device for checking participants’ knowledge about a proposition in situation where all the participants are familiar with the topic they are talking about. Coates (1996) argues that the main function of this type of tag is to check the taken-for-granted-ness of what is said. The following extracts show some examples of this function.

a- [Maya: talk about a friend]

1-N: D nazalat hina mush?
1-N: D is enrolled here (in the university) isn’t she?
2-J: yeah, D(.)the fat one(.)ins’t she ?
3-N: D ? :y(.)D fi esku:l(.)mush?
3-N: D, yeah(.)in school of math(.)isn’t she?

In the above conversation, N (1) used the tag “mush?” (isn’t she?) to check J’s knowledge about D. J (2) confirmed N’s speech that she knew that D joined the university. Then, she tagged her speech to check the shared recognition of D, the fat girl that they both knew. N (3), again, adopted tag, checking that J knew D was in the school
of math. By so doing, both N and J kept checking each other’s shared knowledge about their friend, D.

b- [Malak: discussion about R’s not putting on henna]

1-R: la ana m? (.ya·ni(.)ba·ad marr? t masalan//
1-R: no, i’m, not(.)like(.)sometimes, for example
2-R://m? tit? annan aw m? titgayyaf//
2-R: doesn’t (a woman) put on henna or care about herself
3-R://la’nu za-l? na(.)juwwa nafsa mush kida?//
3-R: because she could be angry(.)inside herself, couldn’t she?
4-R://min<r? jila
4-R: with her husband
5-S: <mumkin indikeishan
5-S: it can be an indication (that she doesn’t put on henna
because she might be angry with her husband)

R’s comment on the woman who doesn’t put on henna was mid-tagged by “mush kida?” (couldn’t she?). She inserted the tag between “za-l? na(.)juwwa nafsa” (she could be angry(.)inside herself) and “min r? jila” (with her husband). This confirms the common belief that women don’t put on henna when they are not getting on well with their husbands. The use of tag question, here, shows that the participants shared the same view about the function of henna in women’s life.

c- [Homy: conversation about a neighbor who had a new baby]

1-M: H di<k? n wildat(.)mush?(.)jitti ebta·rifiya
1-M: this H, had a baby(.)didn’t she?(.)you know her
2-E: <? ::y
2-E: yeaah
3-M: wildat assi(.)mush?
In this interaction, while talking about H, M (1) tagged her utterance in mid-turn saying “mush?” (didn’t she?). By so doing, M attempted to see whether E knew that H had a baby. E (2), in turn, responded before M saying that H had a baby, which indicated that E was listening attentively as the dominant interaction was about H. Then, E overlapped M using a prolonged minimal response “? ::y” (yeaa) to confirm what she was saying. M (3), again, adopted tag to check E’s knowledge that H recently had a baby.

In comparison to the shared knowledge in formal settings, Dubois and Crouch (1975) have studied tag questions in mixed-sex discourse in an academic conference. The researchers refuted Lakoff’s (1975) claim that women use tags more frequently than men do. They found out that men used tags more than women did. This is not the case in my study since the context was casual talk between women friends.

4.2.2.3 Topic development

Tag questions are also adopted in developing an already existing topic. Participants may tag their speech to keep the conversation going on and to develop the topic under discussion (Coates, 1996). The following extracts show such a usage.

a- [Maya: J spoke about her friend, N]

1-J: ana gutta leikum -irifta keif(.)giebil d? yra a? ki leik//
1-J: i told you how i knew(.)earlier, i wanted to tell you
2-J: the story?(.)didn’t i?(.)then my friend, N, the naughty one
3-R: aha
3-R: yeah
J initiated a speech about her friend by reminding the interlocutors of what she told them before. After a pause, she produced the tag “mush?” (didn’t i?) as a device to keep developing the story about her friend. R’s (3) “aha” (yeah) was an invitation to J (4) to go on talking. This confirms White’s (2003) argument that women are very keen in keeping conversation going on. By analyzing mixed-sex conversation, White has found that tags which produced by a woman were not for expressing uncertainty. Rather, they functioned as a facilitative device in making the talk continues.

b- [Malak: interaction about M’s finger being injured]

1-M: now, you know, it’s the same finger (that was injured before), A(.)
2-M://da k? n ? aggat ettalja(.).mush?(.)shufti....... 
2-M: it was the ice one(.).wasn’t it? (a finger that once got hurt with a piece of ice)(.)you see........

Here, M told A how she cut her finger that had been cut before with a piece of ice. She developed her own anecdote using the tag “mush?” (wasn’t it?). By employing a tag question, M connected a present experience with a previous one (cutting her finger twice). In this situation, the use of a tag emphasized M’s role as a narrator of the story. This supports Mizokami (2001) in a study of the Mayan speech. Mizokami has found that the use of tags did not always depend on the speaker’s sex, but on the speaker’s role in the conversation.

c- [Homy: talk about B’s sudden sickness]

1-B: ….. ji:t(-)mush?(.)ba•ad m? ji:t//
1-B: ….i came back(-)didn’t i?(.).after i came back

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In the above extract, B showed her experience when she fell sick suddenly. To get the interlocutors’ attention, B tagged her utterance after a relatively long pause. The use of tag, here, can be interpreted as a strategy adopted by B to develop her anecdote. This type of tags is tested by Cameron et al. (1989) who examined the use of tag questions in a TV program about boxing. The researchers find out that the presenter tried to develop the topic by adopting tags in order to elicit a long reply from his guest. But in the present study, the women used tags as a strategy that enabled them to develop their own stories.

4.2.2.4 Drawing participants into talk

Sometimes women tend to adopt tag questions in order to draw the interlocutors into conversation. Holmes (1984) calls this type of tags ‘facilitative’ since it facilitates conversation by involving participants in the talk. Coates (1993) argues that facilitative tag may not give new information. Instead, it may have an important interactional function which leads other participants to get involved in the conversation. The following extracts demonstrate this use of tags.

a- [Maya: girls friends commented on some building]

1-N: those K (some group), their style (in building) is so nasty
2-R: ? ? ? (.)(mush)?
2-R: right(.)isn’t it?
3-N: now, you see what they did in the buildings of S?

In this interaction, R (2) used the tag “mush?” (isn’t it?) after she confirmed N’s speech as a device that made N (3), the initiator of the speech, take another role. So, R tried to
keep the conversation going on by employing facilitative tag. By adopting a tag, R displayed her full attention, which encouraged N (3) to add some new information to develop the existing topic.

In comparison, many researchers such as Cameron et al. (1989) argue that the use of facilitative tags can be restricted to conversational role rather than gender per se. This is obviously observed in my data when R played the role of facilitator by using a tag, which encouraged N to continue. Generally, one can argue that, in their friendly talk, Sudanese women can be described as facilitators. Similar finding is reached by Holmes (1984) and Fishman (1980) who contend that the role of the facilitator in conversation is played more by women than by men.

b- [Malak: interaction about a relative’s daughter]

1-N: fi ? assi farig kabi:r(.)mush?(.)bein K(.)//
1-N: now there’s a big difference(.)isn’t there?(.) how K(.)
2-N: was caring the kids(.)is W (K’s younger sister) like this?
3-R: la la la(.)wala leya da•wa(,)†wala leya da•wa
3-R: no, no, no(.)she has nothing to do with it(.)she has nothing to do with it

In the extract above, N tried to make her point more forceful so as to get the attention of the recipients. She mid-tagged her turn using the tag “mush?” (isn’t there?) before the main utterance. By uttering the tag, N intended to get R involved in the conversation. By so doing, N facilitated the interaction by drawing R into the conversation. R’s (3) response was obvious as she uttered “la” (no) three times before expressing her opinion about W’s attitude.
c- [Homy: A and E described their neighborhood]

1-A: m? fi sh? ri·? ala? (.)/
2-A: the main road was there but…..
4-E: all of it was a transport route(.),elshajarah bus stop

Here, M (3) acted as a facilitator when she adopted the tag “? ? ? ?” (right?) which helped, with the aid of eye gaze, in inviting E (4) to take part in the conversation and describe the situation in her neighborhood at that time. M intended to facilitate the interaction by employing a facilitative tag. This tendency has been reported by several researchers, even in mixed-sex discourse. For example, Cameron et al. (1989) argue that facilitative tags are used predominantly to draw participants into conversation. The researchers have examined tags in mixed-sex talk, based on a corpus from the Survey of English Usage (SEU) at a University College in London. They have found out that women adopted facilitative tags rather than modal ones to facilitate conversation. But when examining power relation among the participants, it is found that powerful participants in terms of social class, age, and occupation, of both sexes, used facilitative tags more than the other participants did. This confirms Harris’s (1984) claim that tag questions, in particular facilitative tags, are associated with powerful speakers. However, my data revealed that there was no power relation affecting the use of any kind of tags. In other words, all women who were engaged in conversations showed similar patterns in the use of this linguistic device regardless of age or educational differences.
4.2.3 Minimal Responses

Minimal responses (also known as back-channel, assent terms, positive feedback) such as ‘yeah, mhm, right’, are said to be signs of active listening. Minimal responses do not constitute a turn by themselves. Rather, they are a way of showing listeners’ active attention in conversation (Coates, 1993). This linguistic device is used in all types of conversations, especially in collaborative floors where participants are friends. Coates (1996) argues that minimal responses signal speakers’ high involvement in conversation. The use of minimal responses is very common in Sudanese women’s interaction. Sudanese women adopt them more frequently in their casual speech for different purposes. Minimal responses found in the data collected for the purpose of the present study were used to serve four functions.

4.2.3.1 Agreement

The main function of minimal responses is to signal the addressees’ agreement with the speakers. This type of minimal responses, Coates (1989) notes, comes at the end of the information unit. The following three extracts from my data demonstrate such a function.

a- [Maya: conversation about R’s losing weight]

1-S: really(.)you lost weight since last semester, right?
2-R: u(.)min essimistar elf? t
2-R: yeah(.)since last semester

In the conversation above, R agreed with S that she lost weight since last semester. She (2) showed her agreement by using the minimal response “u:” (yeah). For more confirmation, R repeated S’s words after uttering the minimal response.
b- [Malak: talk about R’s daughter kindness]

1-R: but Y is kind(.)she goes to anyone who has a problem
2-N: aywa(.)? ?
2-N: yes(.)right

In this extract, N agreed with R that her daughter was kind. To emphasize this claim, N (2) employed two minimal responses. First, she uttered “aywa” (yes). Then, after a short pause, she used the minimal response “? ? ?” (right). By so doing, she showed a full agreement with what was said.

c- [Homy: speech about a religious centre]

1-U: but sheikha N(.)has special things
2-U://ya·ni d? yra ya·malu leya masalan(.)? ab·an//
2-U: like, she wants, for example(.) for sure
3-U://m? d? yra ruj? l
3-U: she doesn’t want men (in her centre)
4-O: ? :y(.)? :y(.)? :y
4-O: yeah(.)yeah(.)yeah

Here, after U expressed her view about N, O totally agreed with her. O (4) emphasized her agreement by using the minimal response “? :y” (yeah) three times. In a similar example, Coates (1989) argues that this type of minimal responses is well-placed since it comes at the end of a chunk of talk (i.e. at the end of the information unit). Coates has found that women friends used minimal responses to serve listeners’ active attention. This is what happened in my data when the women showed their active attention by using minimal responses after the speakers finished their turns to express their agreement with them. This finding, however, sharply contradicts Zimmerman’s and West’s (1983) study
in mixed-sex conversation. The researchers have found that delayed minimal responses were used by men to indicate lack of interest and attention, and hence, reinforce male domination.

4.2.3.2 Supporting a current speaker

Supporting and monitoring the current speaker can be achieved by using different kinds of minimal responses. In this case, the use of minimal responses characterizes the speech of women who are friends (Coates, 1989). This usage is very common in Sudanese women’s conversations, especially during friendly talk. The following extracts show some examples of this phenomenon.

a- [Maya: conversation about some buildings]

1-N: el-im? r? ? elmalawwana
1-N: the coloured buildings
2-R: ? :y()mal? hi bas()? :y
2-R: yeah() just like a fun land() yeah

As N commented on some buildings, R supported her with the minimal response “? :y” (yeah). Then, she emphasized her support to N’s opinion about the buildings with another comment “mal? hi bas” (just like a fun land). To make a strong support, R ended her turn using the minimal response “? :y” (yeah) again. White (2003) has proved empirically that both women and men use minimal responses to support each other in conversation. White has examined such a usage in an interaction among English native speakers (two men and one woman). The men, in the study, were found to have used more minimal responses than the woman did.

b- [Malak: interaction about making tea for guests]

1-R: ana? assa eku:n -indi -adad kabi:r ba-mal sei<rmusein

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1-R: when i have many guests i make 2 thermoses (of tea)
2-M: <? :y seirmusein(.),? zim//
2-M: yeah, 2 thermoses(.),must be
3-M: yeah, right(.),yeah

In the conversation above, M displayed her careful following of R’s speech which resulted in being able to predict what R (1) was going to say. So, M (2) overlapped R at the TRP in an attempt to support her, uttering “? :y” (yeah) then produced the predicted utterance “seirmusein” (2 thermoses). M showed further support to R’s speech by saying “l? zim” (must be), then used three minimal responses at the end of her turn to express her full support. The extract contains a good example of the use of minimal responses in this friendly talk. It shows that Sudanese women use several minimal responses in one turn to ensure active support in conversation. This finding goes in line with Coates’s (1993) claim that women use more minimal responses to support the current speaker.

c- [Homy: talk about B’s sudden bad state]

1-B: bas(.)ba-ad shiwwayya...hum sh? yfi:n ? ? lti bigat m? ? abi:iiyya
1-B: then(.),after sometime…they saw my state was not fine
2-A: yeah, and the arms were not normal……

A supported B’s speech when she uttered “? :y” (yeah) then contributed to the completion of the story B was telling since she took part of B’s event. By so doing, A showed how she attentively followed B’s anecdote and, consequently, completed B’s state at that time. Similar finding is reached by Coates (1996) who has studied the use of minimal responses by five women friends. Coates has found that the minimal response “yes”, used by one of the women, was not just supportive, but also it helped in anticipating what the rest of the speech looked like.
4.2.3.3 Encouraging a speaker to speak

It is argued that women tend to encourage each other to speak in private conversations (Coates, 1996). As such, women usually adopt minimal responses as a device to encourage the current speaker to continue speaking. This can be observed in the following extracts.

a- [Maya: R spoke about her brothers’ illness]

1-R: allitnein(.)shufti(.)? i•fu ? i•fu ? i•fu
1-R: both of them (her brothers) you see(.)they got thin, thin, thin
2-S: u:
2-S: yeah
3-R: you see, now, just now(.)just now……

S (2) used “u:” (yeah) to encourage R to tell her story. R (3), in turn, completed the story about her brothers. Such a usage shows women’s sensitivity to minimal responses where they adopt them as a means to encourage the speakers to take the floor. Some research on minimal responses support this view (e.g. Fishman, 1980; Hirschmann, 1974; Strodtbeck & Mann, 1956; Zimmerman and West, 1975). Findings show that women adopted this device more frequently and with great sensitivity than men did. Coates (1989), on the other hand, notes that women use less minimal responses in mixed-sex discourse while employing them abundantly in purely-females’ talk.

b- [Malak: conversation about making tea for guests]

1-R: wall? y ana bashu:f mas? fat takubbi(.)ley awwal//
1-R: really, i see, when you pour (tea)(.)for the first
2-R: person, until the last one, tea gets cold(.)in the tea pot
In the extract above, M (3) overlapped R at a possible completion’s point, uttering “? a? i” (right) to encourage her to continue speaking. This example shows the multifunctional use of minimal responses. In this situation, the minimal response did not only signal the addressee’s agreement, but it also invited R to go on in the conversation about tea pots. Coates (1996) argues that minimal responses are not restricted to the end of a chunk of the talk but they can occur at other places as signs of encouragement. This was evident when M overlapped R uttering “? a? i” (right).

c- [Homy: interaction about B’s sudden illness]

1-B: ligi:t eddktor w? gif…….
2-M: u:
3-B: wasma deserialize fil ghur? :n…..

M used the minimal response “u:” (yeah) to encourage B to tell her experience when she fell sick. By so doing, M signaled her presence and participation in the conversation. This means that the use of the minimal response helped in smoothing the flow of the speech in this particular context.

**4.2.3.4 Starters of topics**

This usage of minimal responses is rarely found in the literature, yet it is common found in Sudanese women’s discourse. There are some instances where the next speaker uses
minimal responses to start a new topic related to the previous speaker’s talk. In this case, minimal responses act as hedges which facilitate starting a new topic as the following extracts demonstrate.

a- [Maya: conversation about cutting hair]

1-N: l? kin hu m? ghizir…..
1-N: but it (her hair) didn’t get thick (after cutting)……
2-J: yeaaah(.)i cut it (her hair) earlier(.)……

In this conversation, J adopted a minimal response as a starter to facilitate her next talk. This is because she aimed to change the direction of the speech from N’s experience to her own. To do this, J (2) used the prolonged minimal response “? ::y” (yeah), gaining some time before starting a turn in order to get the participants’ attention. Then, she spoke about her own experience when she cut her hair. It seems that the prolonged minimal response showed that J insisted on taking the floor apportionment to reinforce her contribution to the interaction.

b- [Malak: talk about Ramadan (the fasting month)]

1-Y: a? ? iy? m ana batjjarras minnu…. 
1-Y: i couldn’t bear fasting…. 
2-H: yeah, our cousin too(.….. 

Here, H began her turn with “? ::y” (yeah) as a starter for a story related to an earlier discussion (fasting). The function of the minimal response was to facilitate the next anecdote. This comes in line with the common belief that minimal responses are used to facilitate conversation (Fishman, 1980; Holmes, 2001; Tannen, 1990; Zimmerman &
West, 1975). Thus, women take the role of facilitators in their casual talk by adopting this linguistic strategy.

c- [Homy: two women spoke about moving to their new houses]

1-M: alma? ar wal barid(.)atzzakkar……
1-M: rain and cold(.)i remember……
2-A: :y(,)yalla iindi ukhti……
2-A: yeah(,)so, my sister……

It is obvious, in the conversation, that the minimal response “? :y” (yeah) was used to facilitate the flow of the talk. A started her turn by uttering the minimal response to move from M’s story about the hard time when she moved to a new house to another anecdote concerning her own sister. This suggests that, by employing minimal responses, participants can talk about different issues in the same conversation.

To sum up the discussion so far, women use minimal responses as an indication of active involvement in conversation. Some researchers note that minimal responses indicate active listening and full participation in interaction (e.g. Coates, 1996; Tannen 2007). In Sudanese women’s discourse, the use of this linguistic strategy is very noticeable to the extent that most of the women’s turns contain minimal responses. This confirms Holmes’s (2001) findings in her study of mixed-sex conversation that women used minimal responses four times as much as men did.

4.3 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have analyzed and discussed the tested phenomena in Sudanese women’s speech when they engage in mundane talk. By examining the linguistic behaviors in question, I have shown that Sudanese women break the rules of conversational organization. They tempt to use interruptions, overlaps, and simultaneous starts in their friendly interaction. I have also demonstrated that in the Sudan, women
tend to employ a considerable number of hedges, tag questions, and minimal responses in their private conversations. In the next chapter, I will summarize the results and findings and give conclusions, regarding the research objectives. Then, recommendations for further research in the related area will be stated.
CHAPTER FIVE

Summary of Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations

5.0 Introduction

This study is set out to investigate Sudanese women’s linguistic behavior in relation to turn-taking in conversation with special reference to features of simultaneous speech (i.e. interruptions, overlaps, simultaneous starts). Another related aim is to examine the use of other linguistic devices (hedges, tag questions, and minimal responses) by Sudanese women. The main hypothesis is that Sudanese women employ a co-operative speech style. They break the rules of turn-taking in conversation, and use specific linguistic devices for certain functions. This speech style, I claim, develops intimacy among women leading to strong social relationships.

The study is based on a corpus of recorded data collected from three women groups in natural conversations. The total number of participants was forty-one women. Data were collected with recording naturally occurring talk. The duration of the recorded talk was about twenty-three hours and thirty minutes. However, the actual data used for the analysis constituted one-hour transcribed talk from each group (three hours in total).

Have’s (2007) approach of conversation analysis has been adopted in the process of data analysis. This method is qualitative in nature, describing the phenomena to be tested. The researcher’s observation of the sociolinguistic practices of Sudanese women has also been taken into consideration in the analysis.

I have reviewed the major theme in the field of gender and language, including sexist language, gender differences in language, identity in speech, social identity theory, accommodation theories (communication accommodation & speech accommodation theories), speech communities, community of practice, and relational practice. Rules of
turn-taking in conversation have been reviewed with a special focus on interruptions, overlaps, and simultaneous starts. Different linguistic devices used by women (i.e. hedges, tag questions, minimal responses) have also been covered. The critical review of the various works done in the area of gender and language has provided, in one sense or another, useful insights into understanding the way in which Sudanese women behave linguistically.

The analysis has been organized into two parts. In the first part, following Sacks et al.’s (1974) model of turn-taking, Sudanese women’s talk, regarding interruptions, overlaps, and simultaneous starts, has been examined and discussed. In the second part, the use of hedges, tag questions, and minimal responses has been attempted. Eckert’s and McConnell-Ginet’s (1992) notion of Community of Practice (CofP) has been taken into account when analyzing the data. I have adopted the hypothesis that Sudanese women’s linguistic behavior reflects their social identity as a homogenous group regardless any differences. That is to say, women in the Sudan design their talk in a way that shows support and co-operation, which promotes tied social relationships among them. Finally, the results, and conclusions are linked directly to the objectives of the study which are:

1- To examine the role of the rules of turn-taking in organizing conversation, regarding simultaneous speech, in Sudanese women’s interaction.
2- To explore the function of hedges, tag questions, and minimal responses in Sudanese women’s talk.
3- To investigate the process of co-operation in Sudanese women’s casual conversation.
4- To see if the linguistic behavior of Sudanese women plays a role in enhancing social relations among them.

5.1 Summary of Findings
5.1.1 Simultaneous Speech

For the first objective, the analysis has revealed that Sudanese women tend to violate the rules of turn-taking in conversation by employing features of simultaneous speech such
as interruptions, overlaps, and minimal responses. This violation serves different purposes summarized as follows:

**a- Interruptions**

The analysis has shown that interruptions occurred so often among the women in my sample. Interruptions found in women’s conversations were as follows:

1- Eliciting talk: in this case, interruptions were designed to elicit some information, or to encourage an inactive woman to participate in the conversation.

2- Gaining solo speakership: occurred when speakers talked enthusiastically about an interesting topic and no one responded when interruptions emerged. Rather, all participants talked simultaneously in a solo speaker mode. That is, each one continued speaking without listening to the other. Interruptions for solo speakership were found in cases of two, and three speakers speaking simultaneously.

3- Topic shifting: when the conversation developed from a topic to another, participants used interruptions to change the topic under discussion.

4- Telling a similar story: happened when a participant interrupted a current interactant, telling a similar story to the one being told.

5- Commenting: is very common in Sudanese women’s interaction. Women cut the current speaker off to comment on something, acknowledging or disacknowledging each other’s contributions.

**b- Overlaps**

The analysis has revealed that the women under study used five types of overlaps in conversations for the following purposes:
1- Balance and Sharing: here overlaps occurred when participants worked to mirror each other’s contributions by producing similar utterances.

2- Completing a current turn: appeared in many cases where overlaps were used to complete current speakers’ utterances.

3- Ending a turn simultaneously: when participants were aware of the topic under discussion, some might overlap at the end of a current speaker’s turn producing the same utterance simultaneously with her.

4- Searching for the right word: occurred when a speaker struggled to find the appropriate word that helped get the message through. In this case, one participant overlapped to help her find the word needed.

5- Confirmation: women used overlaps in order to confirm what was said by a participant. This kind of overlaps was used intensively by the women studied.

c- Simultaneous starts

The analysis has shown that simultaneous starts were used more often by women in my sample during private conversations. This is, to the best of my knowledge, rarely described in the literature. The four types of simultaneous starts used predominantly in my data functioned as:

1- Confirmation: interactants self-selected and started to speak simultaneously to confirm what a current speaker said.

2- Disagreement: when some addressees disagreed with a current speaker, they started to speak at the same time to show disagreement.
3- Commenting: some speakers began their turns at the same time in order to comment on what was being said.

4- Different contributions: this kind of simultaneous starts happened when women were highly engaged in conversation, especially when trying to show their full interpretation of the topic under discussion.

5.1.2 Linguistic Devices

For the second objective of the study, the analysis has shown that Sudanese women use hedges, tag questions, and minimal responses in mundane talk for different purposes.

a- Hedges

Hedges were used in my data for the following functions:

1- Uncertainty: used when a speaker was not certain about the truth of the proposition. A speaker hedged her utterance to get either agreement or disagreement from participants.

2- Sensitive speech: women tended to use hedges as a politeness strategy when talking about sensitive private issues.

3- Opening discussions: hedges were used to initiate a talk (topic opening). This kind of hedging facilitates interactions.

4- Searching for the right word: hedges were employed when a speaker looked for the appropriate word in a given context.

b- Tag questions

Women in my sample used question tags for:
1- Uncertainty: Women in the study were found to have used question tags to show uncertainty.

2- Checking the shared knowledge: in situations where all participants were aware of the topic being discussed, a speaker might use tag question to test participants’ knowledge about the topic.

3- Topic development: tag questions were used when participants intended to develop the current topic.

4- Drawing participants into talk: women in our sample were found to have used tag questions to encourage participants to contribute to the discussion. This kind of tag is known as ‘facilitative tag’ since it facilitates conversation (Holmes, 1984).

c- Minimal responses

It has been found that minimal responses occurred frequently in the speech of the women studied. Minimal responses in my data were used for the following purposes:

1- Agreement: sometimes, minimal responses were used at the end of the information unit to indicate the participant’s agreement with the speaker. Coates (1989) argues that minimal responses are well-placed when they occur at the end of a turn.

2- Supporting a current speaker: the women in our sample tended to use minimal responses to support a current speaker.

3- Encouraging a speaker to speak: our data showed that minimal responses were also used to encourage a current speaker to go on speaking. This usage was prevalent in storytelling where women participants encouraged a speaker to go on telling a story.
4- Starters of topics: a good number of women in our sample employed minimal responses at the beginning of the turn to start a new topic (related to the current discussion).

5.1.3 Co-operation

For the third objective, the study has shown that Sudanese women adopt speech styles which help them develop co-operation in conversation. In their friendly talk, the women under study created a co-operative floor by participating actively in interactions. This might stem from the fact that Sudanese women tend to be co-operative. This tendency is reflected in their sociolinguistic behavior. That is to say, Sudanese women use some linguistic functions in ways that show how they work co-operatively in private interactions. Contrary to some researchers (e.g. Liddicoat, 2007), the analysis proved that simultaneous speech is not considered a mis-cue in conversational organization. Rather, it is a strategy that contributes to the initiation of co-operation in conversation. Co-operation is maintained through the use of interruptions, overlaps, simultaneous starts, hedges, tag questions, and minimal responses.

5.1.4 Intimate Social Relationships

For the fourth objective, the results have shown that Sudanese women develop intimate social relations during private interactions. In this community, women produce shared meaning when discussing personal issues. This is called ‘rapport talk’ (Tannen, 2007). In their getting together, Sudanese women talk about many issues relating to their daily life. Enhancing social ties is achieved with certain linguistic functions that facilitate interactions and create a friendly atmosphere. To this end, features of simultaneous speech (interruptions, overlaps, simultaneous starts) as well as other linguistic devices (hedges, tag questions, minimal responses) are used intensively in conversations. The analysis suggests that there was a high degree of compatibility between women’s linguistic behavior and the establishment of intimate social relations.
5.2 Conclusions

The conclusion to be drawn here is that Sudanese women tend to break the rules of turn-taking in conversations. Breaking these rules is a strategy adopted to maximize solidarity, and minimize the social distance between the participants (Coates, 1996). When a form of simultaneous speech (interruption, overlap, simultaneous start) occurs, it signals a high involvement in interaction in the part of the women. Because Sudanese women are familiar with the way their talk is organized, they do not perceive simultaneous speech as a sort of communication break-down. Rather, it is a sign of active participation in conversation. This finding goes in line with a number of studies in the literature (e.g. Coates, 1989; 1993; 1996; Kerbat-Orecchioni, 1996).

I have demonstrated that the use of interruptions, overlaps, and simultaneous starts in Sudanese women’s talk plays a role in enhancing intimate social relationships. Sudanese women do not consider the use of these linguistic functions as deviation and impoliteness. They employ these functions as a strategy that helps in developing a friendly atmosphere. Research in different parts of the world has come to similar results (see Carroll, 1988; Kohonen, 1978; Reisman, 1974; Ulijin & Li, 1995). Generally, the literature demonstrates that women use interruptions mainly to take roles in conversation as in Coates’s (1989; 1993; 1996). However, my data reveals that there were some instances where interruptions occurred to elicit talk from inactive participants (to participate in interaction). Moreover, in Sudanese women’s talk (represented in the population of the present study), interruption occurs much more than the other types of simultaneous speech whereas in Western societies overlap is used more than the other types of simultaneous speech (see Coates, 1989; 1996).

Having summarized the main results regarding the use of hedges, tag questions, and minimal responses, it is noted that Sudanese women show their feminine profile by using these devices frequently in mundane talk. More interestingly, the amount of hedges used by Sudanese women in interaction is incomparable to that used by women in the West (see Brown, 1980; Coates, 1989; 1996; Holmes, 1984; 1987; Preisler, 1986 for
comparison). The use of tag questions, by contrast, is found to be similar to that of the West (see Cameron et al., 1989; White, 2003).

The women in my sample used minimal responses heavily to support each other in interactions. This goes in line with the norm in the literature (e.g. Coates, 1989; 1993; 1996; Fishman, 1980; Hirchmann, 1974; Strodtbeck & mann, 1956; Zimmerman & West, 1975). In the speech of the women studied, the use of minimal responses appeared to have been extraordinary as a considerable number of them were noted in one turn (see Coates, 1996 for comparison).

At the end, the study has revealed that education and age have played no role in the choice of the linguistic functions examined. The women who participated in the conversations showed similar speech style although they belong to different age groups with different levels of education. Contrary to some studies (e.g. Cameron et al., 1989; Tannen, 2007), women in the Sudan do form a homogenous social group regardless of any demographical differences such as age, education, or class. In short, we may claim that Sudanese women use linguistic forms which help promote mutual support, cooperation, and intimate social relationships.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the results summarized in section 5.1, I forward the following recommendations:

1- Similar study needs to be conducted on mixed-sex conversations to see the differences between men’s and women’s speech behaviors during mundane talk.
2- The use of hedges, tag questions, and minimal responses needs to be investigated among women in other parts of the Sudan as the present study focused on Khartoum.
3- Studying turn-taking in conversation among rural uneducated women may provide interesting data that confirm my assumption that Sudanese women’s community is homogenous.
4- The use of interruptions as a tool of dominating conversation needs to be further examined among males and females in a Sudanese context.

5- Studying simultaneous speech in the classroom with special reference to the social distance between female teachers and students.

6- Investigating the function of hedges in directives by women in leading position in a Sudanese context.

7- Examining the influence of power in dominating conversations in work place in all-female’s talk may be of special importance for the literature in women’s discourse.
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APPENDICES

Appendix (1): Samples from the Recorded Episodes

a- [Maya: young women’s interaction about bringing cloths from abroad]

1-N: A j? t min assa-u:diya?
1-N: did A get back from Saudi?
2-H: they are coming on Sunday(.)i won’t get a chance(.)i missed a chance
3-H: like, in my life………
4-N: [leih hum j? y:n bitein?
4-N: why, when are they coming?
5-H: yo:m ela? ad
5-H: on Sunday
6-N: m? fi ? ari:ga etrasiliya leim?
6-N: is there any possibility to send them(money)?
7-H: A’s coming tomorrow(.)and B’s coming on Sunday
8-J: ? ab m? ::(.)? ab(stops)
8-J: ok, so(.)ok(stops)
9-N: {ya•ni eshnu?
9-N: so what?
10-R:{al ? iw? la eb? a? al ba•ad yo:m
10-R: the money transfer arrives in one day
11-H: the money transfer arrives in one day(.)do you believe it?().like, if i send it
12-H://bukra(.)bi? a? al|yo:m essabit
12-H: tomorrow(.)it arrives on Saturday

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13-J: [itti b? laghti(.)? ab hu m? mumkin eshtar u leik u tadi:m leim hina
13-J: so they can buy you (cloths) and you give them money here
14-N: khalli:m iji:bu leik
14-N: let them buy you (cloths)
15-H: she brought me(.)but not like, one would wants many things
16-J: (? y ya•ni yakhw? nna(.)? y(.)witti//
16-J: yeah, like(.)yeah(.)and you
17-J://Kam? n lamma m? taku:ni mirassila mayku:n •indik •ein tagu:li leya ji:bi lay///
17-J: too, when you don’t send (money) it’s difficult to say bring me
18-J://u ji:bi]ley u ji:bi ley
18-J: and bring me, and bring me
19-H: [la ebku:n •indi(.)m? m? m? (.).m? zay c? di(.)ya•ni(.)wad•]? :stop)
19-H: no, i can ask(.)not, not, not(.) it’s not normal(.)like(.)as in a situation(stops)
20-J: [ana gh? ytu ban? t//
20-J: for me, my cousins
21-J: bring me (cloths)(.)but i give them money, i say to them: bring me, and bring me
22-J://u ji:bu ley u ji:bu<ley
22-J: and bring me, and bring me
23-H: <zay ? aggat hin? k
23-H: like that one
24-J: albalad gh? lya ya•ni…. (stops)
24-J: the country (UK) is expensive…. (stops)
25-N: [gh? lya(.)]? assi esseil intaha
25-N: expensive(.)now the sale is over
26-H: [Lan? un c? rfa?
26-H: London, you know?
27-J: ? <:y
27-J: yeah
28-H: <istarli:ni(.)jineih irstri:ni[………
28-H: sterling(.)sterling pound
29-N: [asseil intaha(.)<mush?
29-N: the sale is over(.)isn’t it?
30-J: <asseil fi: L u E ya•ni(.)marratein fissana
30-J: the sale in L and E, like(.)twice a year
31-N: ? :y
31-N: yeah
32-J: at the end of the summer and at the end of the winter
33-N: <ashshita
33-N: the winter
34-H: d? k l? kin(.)? awwal intaha[………
34-H: but that one(the sale)(.)took a long time
35-J: [bit kh? Iti s? farat(.)ash? n abuwa m? t ? ab•an//
35-J: my cousin left abroad(.)because her father died, for sure
36-J//w ukhuta elkabi:ra g? t leya illa tamshi ma•? y(.)hi saghayru:na(.)g? lat(.)lamman//
36-J: and her oldest sister said: you must go with me(.)she is so young(.)she said(.)when
37-J: she got back(.)in July(.)at the end of the sale(.)she got a lot of things(.)she got many
38-J://u etshi:l
38-J: she got many things
39-N: you know, even in the sale things are not, like(.)not too cheap
40-J: [bil•aks(.)m? m? zay amri:ka
40-J: not like that(.)not like in USA
41-N: ? :y la amri:ka(.)amri:ka arkhas
41-N: yeah, no, the USA(.)the USA is cheaper
42-J: arkhas kati:r
42-J: much cheaper

b- [Malak: conversation about putting on henna]

1-R: sh? kalo:ni g? lu ley lei m?  mit? annina?
1-R: they blamed me, saying why don’t you put on henna
2-H: we blamed her(,)why don’t you put on henna?
3-S: R ? aba•an min el•iris(,)t? ni(,)al? inna di m?  sh? fata
3-S: for sure, R, from the wedding(,)not any more(,) see henna
4-M: ley[y]?  R mabthkutiya?
4-M: why, R, don’t you put it on (henna)
5-R:  [m?  bat? annan illa bilmu[n? sab? t
5-R:  i don’t put it on, except on occasions
6-M:  [mabta? ibiya?
6-M:  don’t you like it?
7-R: mush m?  ba? ibba hi ? ilwa ew ba? ibba l? kin(stops)
7-R: it’s not that i don’t like it, it’s nice and i like it, but(stops)
8-M: m?  •indik wakit
8-M: you don’t have time (for it)
9-R: m?  •indi ya•ni(.)iz?  mat? annanta[m?  •indi mushkila
9-R: It’s not, like(.)if i don’t put it on it’s not a problem
10-H:  [bitkkassil(.)bitkkassil
10-H:  she gets lazy(.)she gets lazy
11-M: u hu r? jlik?
11-M: and what about your husband (whether he likes it)
12-R: ihi (embarrassing sound)
13-R: he comments(.like), he says(.henna, not(~)but he says so
14-R: //u biskut
14-R: then he keeps silent
15-M: but it means he likes it(.)but would he quarrel with you (for it)?
16-R: bitkallam l? kin m? m? [.........
16-R: he comments but, not, not.........
17-M: [y? R(.R) wall? y m? ? a·ba(.shufti lamman ta·maliya
assi//
17-M: no, R(.R), really it’s not dificult(.)when you put it on, now
18-M: //wall? y itti(.y? R(.asma[·i ...........
18-M: really, you(.R,(.)listen……
19-S: [wan? innu g? l(.ma·n? i? ? ? yag
19-S: once he said so, it means he got angry
20-H: yeah, once he said so, it means he got angry(.)it’s not good
shaggh? la//
21-M: listen to me(.i, now, do you remember(.)sometimes on Wednesdays i had work
22-M://liss? ·a etein(.amshi l? zim akhutta ba·d(.elghada<akhutta
22-M: till 2 pm(.)i had to put it on(henna) after(.)dinner, i put it on
23-S: yeah(.M was known
24-S: //eb? innata bit? ·at elarbi·[.........
24-S: of her Wednesdays’ henna……
25-M: [shufti(.lamman ta·maliya yo:m(.l? (.awari:k y? R .....  
25-M: you see(.)when you put it on(.)no(.)will show you R…..
26-H: rattibi ru:? ik(.rattibi ru:? ik
26-H: organize yourself(.)organize yourself
27-M: yeah, like(.like, when you are free, have nothing to do(.)just put it on(.and sleep
28-H: [matkhaliya tamrug]  
28-H: don’t let it be removed  
29-M: [m? yo:m w? ? id fillisbu:]  
29-M: it can be only one day per week  
30-S: {lamman igna· minnik imshi ey·arris le w? ? da t? nya}  
30-S: when he finds you hopeless case, he would marry another woman  
31-M: yeah, it could be like this  
32-R: <hu m? bimshi ey·arris  
32-R: he wouldn’t get married  
33-M: «irifti keif?  
33-M: how do you know?  
34-S: «irifti keif?  
34-S: how do you know?  
35-M: m? fi zo:l hayin  
35-M: any one can do it  
36-R: let’s open a new page, S  
37-M: ? :y abdi(·)-aleik ella abdi  
37-M: yeah, begin it (putting on henna)(·)begin it  
38-R: la ana m? (.ya·ni(·)ba·ad marr? t masalan//  
38-R: no, i’m, not(·)like(·)some times, for example  
39-R: //m? tít? annan aw m? titggayyaf//  
39-R: doesn’t (a woman) put on henna or care about herself  
40-R: //la’nu za·l? na(·)juwwa nafsa mush kida?//  
40-R: because she could be angry(·)inside herself, couldn’t she?  
41-R: //min<r? jila  
41-R: with her husband  
42-S: <mumkin indikeishan  
42-S: it can be an indication (that she doesn’t put on henna because she might be angry with her husband)
43-M: ? :y bigu(.)ann? s bigu:lu <kida
43-M: yeah they say(.)people say so
44-R: <indikeishan da m?  indi= i don’t have this indication
44-R: 
45-M: =m?  indik el-arrafik minu?=
45-M: you don’t have it, who knows?
46-S: =aktibiya khal? s <ash? n ha ha
46-S: write it down (that you put on henna), so as, ha ha
47-M: <? :y ha ha ha ha
47-M: yeah, ha ha ha
48-R: it can be(.)um, a woman’s husband…. 
49-S: [ann? s mabtishtagil be innu r? jila ew m?
49-S:  r? jila(.)//
49-S: people don’t care whether the husband likes it(.)
50-S://be innik <aru:s
50-S: it’s just because you are just married
51-M: yeah, R
52-S: <aru:s mafru:? [takhutiya ? aww? li
52-S: a bride, you must put it on all the times
53-M: [ba-dein shufti lamma etku:n so:da bitkhutiya marra w? ? da bas
53-M: and when it is (henna) black, you just need to put it on once a week
54-S: mashall? h kutti biita-maliya kulli arbi iitti
54-S: knock on wood, you were putting it on each Wednesday
55-R: khal? s min aleila ? ? khutta
55-R: ok, from now on i will put it on
56-M: khutiya kulu esbu:;
56-M: put it on each week
57-S: yeah, put it on each week so as not to be removed
58-R: ok, you will see it (henna) black all the times
59-S: bas matkassili minna
59-S: don’t get lazy

c- [Homy: B talked about her sudden sickness]

1-B: ba•ad m? ji:t elbeit u r? j•a(•)ew ji:t kiwwaysa ji:t ligi:t leik
1-B: after i got back home(•)and became fine, i found
2-B://ann? s malmu:ma ew[…m?lkum gutta leim fishnu(•)]
2-B: the people crowded and…i asked them what happened(•)
3-A: [hi l? kin hu g? l leya eshnu(•)g? l leya eshnu]
3-A: what he (the sheikh) said is(•)what he said is
4-A://(•)g? l leya wall? y(•)hei esma•i(stops)
4-A: (•)he said to her, really(•) hey listen(stops)
5-B://wi•i:t(•)u •indana bit kh? l ebu:y di[k? nat g? •da ma•? na(stops)
5-B: i got conscious(•) and my father’s cousin was with us(stops)
6-A: [hei esma•i(•)g? l]
6-A: hey listen(•)
7-A://leya eshnu(•)g? l leya wall? y alleila k? n m? ana da(•)u hu
7-A: what he said to her is(•)he said to her, really if it was not me
8-A://g? •id r? jila(•)k? n •arras fi:ki ha ha(•)u bi? ? ak(•)bidu:r alhi? ? r
8-A: (•)her husband was there(•)he would marry another woman
     ha ha(•)he was laughing(•)he was joking
9-B: yalla ana ji:t ligi:t[……bigi:t kiwwaysa(•)amshi shu:fi(•)itkh? raj shu:fi(stops)
9-B: then i got back, i found…i became fine(•)go and see(•)go and see(stops)
10-A: [k? n err? jil •arras fi:ki(•)hu eb•arf(u•)k? n g? lu wakit zam? n]
10-A: the guy would marry another woman(•)he knows him(•)earlier,
11-A: //s? kni:n hina(.j)? m(.)j? m n? s H(.)hu z? tu n? s sheikh S deil wakit saghayyir(.)//
11-A: he was living here(.near(.near H(.)sheikh S himself, when he was young
12-A: before he left to, like, this one, the country that he traveled to(.so he said to her
13-A: //k? n ârras fi:ki ha ha ha
13-A: he would marry another woman ha ha ha
14-B: bas
14-B: that’s it
15-A: you see, she came walking on her foot, we were surprised
16-B: ? :y wall? y<s(.)…..masheit u ji:t
16-B: yeah, really(.)…….i went and got back
17-T: <y :y wall? y
17-T: yeah, really
18-M: mashall? h
18-M: knock on wood
19-B: i got back,finding my aunt D there and,like(.)what’s wrong(.)i said what happened?
20-A: [y? bit ho:y(.)hu ? assa(stops)
20-A: hey, girl(.)it’s, now(stops)
21-B: //fi eshnu?(.)g? I leyya(.)itti m? w? ya(.)gutta leim bi[shnu?(.)……
21-B: what happened?(.)he said to me(.)you were not conscious(.)i said of what?
22-M: [witti kutti m? w? y ja:jad?
22-M: and were you really so?
23-B: yeah, really, i, there were many things
24-M: [witti wala waga•ti wala ayi shi?
24-M: and didn’t you fall down or something like that?
25-T: and her(B)father was sleeping there(.)he said as B was chatting there, give me food

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26-T: …. i gave him (something to eat)(.)then he slept(.)he didn’t get up until B was back

27-B: [bigu kullum j? ry:n

27-B: all of them (her family) were running (to see what happened)

28-T://almustashfa(.)shu:fi[ …………

28-T: from the hospital(.)you see……

29-A: [baraka(.)k? n janna da

29-A: good(B’s dad didn’t know about her state)(.)he might get mad

30-T: bas n? m

30-T: then he fell asleep

31-B: yalla E ja(.)E ? arabna le j? na fiddiko:r

31-B: then, E came(.)we called him, he came to us at the doctor’s

32-A: ? :y

32-A: yeah


33-B: and my aunt, F, said to me: why B, your legs became so heavy?(.)i didn’t feel them

34-A: witti y? G amrugi ag•di fishsh? ri•

34-A: and G (B’s aunt) went and stayed at the street

35-B: l? kin •uyo:ni itghayyar wal khashum itghayyar

35-B: but, my eyes and my mouth became up normal

36-T: bas gumta gutta leya[y? (stops)

36-T: then i told her

37-M: [itti shuftiya?

37-M: did you see her(in that state)?

38-T: ? :y

38-T: yeah

39-B: yalla gummta[gutta leya y? R(stops)

39-B: then i said to her, R(stops)

40-T: [m? shufta ba•ad j? t hina ba•d ragadat

40-T: i saw her when she came here, when she lay down

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41-B: gutta leya y? [gutta leya ? :(.u fi•lan(.)u fi•lan//
41-B: i said to her, i said to her, um(.)and it was right(.)and it was right
42-T: [hi shakla m? B ya•ni m? B
42-T: she didn’t look like B, like, not like B
43-B://ana[sh? yfa enn? s itnein itnein
43-B: i saw the people like two (as if anyone seemed like 2)
44-A: [ana z? ti shufta
44-A: i, too, saw her (in that state)
45-T: ummi di z? ta sh? fata
45-T: my mother saw her too
46-B: bas ana min m? gutta leim y? jam? •a………
46-B: then, after i said………
47-T: wal khashum da ja bi: hina(.)wal •uyu:n deil…..
47-T: and the mouth (B’s) moved a side(.)and the eyes………
48-B: la elkhashum da ja hina ba•ad m? ji: elbeit(.)g? | mu sh? lo:ni sheil takkalo:ni//
48-B: no, the mouth became up normal here, after i got home(.)then they held me
49-A: | m? y? hu fil beit
49-A: yeah, it was affected at home
50-B://ba•ad shiwayya a? issa leik jismi m? shi munkamish(-)wal khashum//
50-B: after a while, i felt my body getting down(-)and my mouth
51-B://da[a? issa be…(.kida(.)ba•ad shiwayya t? ni m? ew•i:t bei ? ? ja(.)lamman
? i? i:t//
51-B: i felt it….(.)like(.)after sometime i didn’t feel anything(.)when i got conscious
52-A: [i• d di •ein essaw? d werram? d
52-A: it was a very bad evil eye
53-B: when i became conscious(.)i saw the doctor standing(stops)
54-A: [di y? [yumm[a•ein el-adu(.).y]? yumm[a•ein m? zayya shi
54-A: it’s a wicked evil eye(.)a very bad evil eye
55-B: [ligi:t eddikto:r w? gif(.)u H u Z
55-B: i found the doctor there(.)and H & Z

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56-M: dakhalti fi ghaybu:ba
56-M: did you go into a comma
57-B: wasma, Y tagra ley filghur? :n[w….
57-B: and i heard Y, reading me Quran and …
58-A: [g? yllinna bitmu:t
58-A: they thought she was dying
59-M: (exclamation expression), a very strange thing

Appendix (2): Transcription Conventions

The transcription conventions used for the conversational data are as follows:

1- = an equals sign at the end of one speaker’s utterance and at the start of the next speaker’s talk indicates the absence of a discernible gap. It is said to be a latched utterance.

2- //, //, // double slashes sign indicates one’s utterance is incomplete and will continue in the next line.

3- [ a square bracket indicates the start of interruption between utterances.

4- < an angled bracket indicates the start of overlap between utterances.

5- { an angled square bracket indicates the start of an utterance simultaneously with another utterance.
6- (.)  a micro pause.

7- (-)  a longer pause.

8- ↑  an upper arrow indicates faster pace of an utterance than the previous one.

9- ↓  a down arrow indicates slower pace of talk than the previous one.

10- underlined utterance indicates stressed talk.

11- CAPITALIZED utterance indicates loudness.

12- italicized utterance indicates quietness.

13- :  a colon sign indicates prolonging utterance.

14- …..  dots indicates missing utterances.
Appendix (3): Colloquial Arabic Letters Uttered in Khartoum

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