НАПРЯМ 3. РОМАНСЬКІ, ГЕРМАНСЬКІ ТА ІНШІ МОВИ І ЛІТЕРАТУРА

DO FEMALE CINEMATIC CHARACTERS SPEAK MUCH?

Berezhna M. V.
Candidate of Philological Sciences,
Associate Professor at the Department
of English Translation Theory and Practice
Zaporizhzhia National University
Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine

Language is one of the most frequently used means to express one's thoughts. Guided by thoughts, people use different expressions. Two people might speak about the same thing and use completely different expressions, which might reveal their (c)overt feelings about things from the real world [1, p. 1417]. Numerous social factors define a person's language; gender being one of them. Gender differences in verbal behavior have been a focus of scientific research since Lakoff [5] proposed the deficit model of women's language powerless in comparison to men's.

One of the most recognizable gender stereotypes is the preconception of female talkativeness. It is deeply ingrained in Western folklore and often considered a scientific fact [3, p. 82]. However, the investigation of gender differences in the amount of talk has not always supported this widely held cliché. Results have been far from consistent: some studies have found that women talk more than men, at least in some circumstances, some revealed that men talk more than women, and several studies have found no difference between the sexes in the amount of talk [2, p. 281].

The present paper aims to examine if the language of male and female leading characters in contemporary mass culture cinema differ in terms of word count. For the research, fifty-six mass culture films were selected out of the top 200 highest-grossing movies (1999–2023). The language used by thirty-five female and twenty-one male leading characters was examined. The analysis was done with the software *LIWC-22*.

In the first printing of her book *The Female Brain* (2006), neuropsychiatrist Brizendine reported that 'on average girls speak two to three times more words per day than boys' [4, p. 36] and 'typical men speak

fewer words and have less verbal fluency than women' [4, p. 131]. These statements provoked further investigations into the topic. James and Drakich reported that out of available (in 1993) fifty-six studies, dealing with adult mixed-sex interaction males were found to talk more than females overall in twenty-four studies. In ten studies, they were found to talk more in some circumstances, with no difference in other circumstances. In three studies sometimes males and sometimes females talked more. In one study sometimes males, sometimes females, and sometimes neither talked more. Sixteen studies found no difference between the sexes overall in the amount of talk. Only two studies found females to talk more overall [2, p. 284]. In recent profound research conducted with *LIWC*, the received data fail to reveal a reliable sex difference in daily word use. Women and men use about 16,000 words per day on average, with very large individual differences around this mean [3, p. 82].

In the present research, the numbers support the idea that men speak more than women. The average number of words, uttered by male leading characters amounts to 2325 words, while the mean said by female heroines equals 1891 words. Considerable diversity of the numbers within the female group is worth noticing. While the number of words spoken by male characters varies from 4138 (Tony Stark in *Iron Man*, 2008) to 1272 (Tony Stark in *Avengers: Infinity War*, 2018), the number of words uttered by female characters differs from 4302 (Dory in *Finding Dory*, 2016) to 295 (Maleficent in *Maleficent: Mistress of Evil*, 2019).

Another interesting tendency concerns the correspondence between the role of the character and the number of words they speak. In the case of male heroes, the number is higher when the cinematic story revolves around the adventures of a single hero, and lower when the hero leads a group of almost equally important characters (the mentioned example of Tony Stark in the titular and group hero films). The tendency is nearly non-existent in the group of female-led films.

Also worth mentioning is the tendency to present a female heroine as the titular or leading character and grant her fewer words than other characters. For example, Lucy Pevensie is the leading character of *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (2005); however, the plot revolves around the redemption story of her brother Edmund and the leading figure of their group is her elder brother Peter, who speaks the most of the characters. In *Maleficent, the Mistress of Evil* (2019), five secondary characters (three male and two female) speak more words than Maleficent, the title heroine. The secondary male characters also speak more than the leading heroine in *The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn Part 1* (2011), *Snow White and the Huntsman* (2012), *Fifty Shades of Grey* (2015), *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story* (2016), *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* (2015), *Star*

Wars: The Last Jedi (2017), and *Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker* (2019). In the group of films with a leading male character, two cases were found when a secondary male character spoke more than the hero: Tony Stark in *Captain America: Civil War* (2016) and Fridge in *Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle* (2017). The cases when a secondary female character spoke more than a leading male character were not found.

Traditionally, the prevalence of men on the conversational floor is explained by different communicative goals and verbal strategies. While for men it is important to assert status, women strive to establish and maintain harmonious relationships with others [2, p. 285]. Similarly, Lenard reports that men speak more than women in various types of public settings thus trying to establish themselves in a hierarchical order [1, p. 1419]. The findings might be relevant for the present research in the aspect of the genre of discussed films – action demands a more assertive style (thus men speak more), while romance demands a more affiliative style (thus women speak more). The hypothesis needs further investigation as available research does not support the idea. The paper by Li presents the findings of the number of words in the eight episodes of the American comedy-drama soap opera *Desperate Housewives*. Though the cinematic story follows the lives of four women, the received numbers manifest that men speak far more than women in the conversations of the TV series [6, p. 54].

Definitely among the factors defining the character's number of words can be named the running time and genre of the film, the status of the hero (individual or group), the screen time, tempo of speech, and individual characteristics of the hero, specifics of the plot, the personal style of the screenwriter and the number of other characters in the story. Thus, of potential interest might be films of the same genre and number of characters, made by the same director/story writer, but representing a male and female leading character. A relevant case study for further investigation might be two superhero films directed by Ryan Coogler and co-written by Ryan Coogler and Joe Robert Cole, *Black Panther* (2018) and *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* (2022). The first story presents a male character King T'Challa, second – his sister Princess Shuri; needing to protect their people, both characters become the legendary hero Black Panther.

As mentioned in the author's previous research [7, p. 25], *Black Panther* (2018), the superhero film concentrating on the adventures of black characters, may be considered revolutionary; even more so, its sequel *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* (2022), presenting a plethora of black female characters led by a black superheroine. The second film also represents the case when the leading female character in a superhero blockbuster is given more words than her male counterpart. Thus, in *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* Shuri pronounces 1990 words, while T'Challa in *Black Panther*

utters 1454 words. Even taking into account the difference in running time (respectively 161 and 134 minutes), Shuri utters 14% more words than T'Challa. The film might be an example of a new trend in mass culture cinematography when (leading) heroines are allowed to say more on the screen.

The received results are preliminary in a larger research intended to accumulate more statistics on the word count and verboseness of female/male characters, and the tendency over the previous twenty-five years to represent women in mass culture cinema.

References:

1. Lenard D. B. Gender Differences in the Length of Words and Sentences on the Corpus of Congressional Speeches. *Imperial Journal of Interdisciplinary Research (IJIR)*. 2016. Vol. 2, issue 9. P. 1417–1424.

2. James D., Drakich, J. Understanding gender differences in amount of talk: a critical review of research. In Tannen, D. (ed.) *Gender and Conversational Interaction*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993. P. 281–312.

3. Mehl M. R., Vazire S., Ramírez-Esparza N., Slatcher R. B., & Pennebaker J. W. Are women really more talkative than men? *Science*. 2007. Vol. 317, no. 5834. P. 82. doi: 10.1126/science.1139940

4. Brizendine L. *The Female Brain*. New York : Broadway Books, 2006. 279 p.

5. Lakoff R. Language and Woman's Place. New York : Harper and Row Publishers, 1975. 85 p.

6. Li J. A Sociolinguistic Study of Language and Gender in Desperate Housewives. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*. 2014. Vol. 4, no. 1. P. 52–57. doi:10.4304/tpls.4.1.52-57

7. Berezhna M. V. The Maiden Psycholinguistic Archetype (Marvel Cinematic Universe). *Науковий вісник Міжнародного гуманітарного університету. Сер. : Філологія*. 2022. № 58. С. 24–28. doi:10.32841/2409-1154.2022.58.6