

# The Power of Talk in King and Rose's Short Stories

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The power of talk depends on one's dominance, control and confidence. In various situations, we might say that men are more powerful than women in communicating. We may also say that these days everything has changed, and women are more powerful speakers than men while others believe that men and women are equal in their communication style. This study examines two modern short stories: *The American* by Stephen King and *The British* by Christopher Rose. Both show that there is power of talk between men and women in conversations, however each expresses it in a specific way. The aims of this study include examining the powerful features of talking for both genders, recognising whether men or women are powerful communicators or whether both genders are equal in their communication style and to investigate whether all strategies used by both genders are employed by the two authors. In order to achieve these aims, a new model is developed based on several studies available in the literature. The main conclusion is that currently, women are not as submissive as they were in previous centuries. Men are not the only powerful communicators equipped with dominance and control in various situations. In contrast, men use a powerless style whereas women use a powerful style in special situations, even within cross-gendered communication.

**Key words:** *Power, talk, communication, gender, conversation, short stories.*

## Introduction

According to Kalbfleisch and Cody (2012), the notion of power is found in many different fields in life, "there is power in a word or gesture." There is power "when women and men live together, talk together, or are simply in each other's company." In addition, there is power while smiling and negotiating. Power in language is an abstract pattern that exists in how we talk and what we hear. There is also power in who we talk to and /or treat others as

close friends or strangers. Craig, Blankenship, and Lewis (2015) interpret power as culturally dependent on the gender of the communicator. However, Williams (2013) considers “language as a powerful device” because it reflects the ideologies of the speakers. Borisoff and Chesebro (2011) adopt the power of communication and gender issues must be realised in different ways since questions of gender, and power are now essentially linked to other social issues. According to this perspective, they indicate two ways. First, gender and power must be understood, not only in terms of American culture but also globally. Second, beyond this global placement of gender and power issues, the sociocultural context of gender itself has also been reassessed and must be viewed as related to other social systems.

From the Darwinist maxim, “survival is for the strongest”, Hooks (2014) speculatively asserts that human beings of both genders are trying to survive in small as well as large communities. The author’s belief maintains the survival structure of dependency, weakness, strength, power and powerlessness” as sited for the standard “paradigm of the dominance.” This meditation does not position women out of the pattern of dominance since they are the creators of social relationship. In contrast, , Craig, Blankenship, and Lewis (2015) generalise that “women who use powerless language may be reifying a low-power position and ultimately be less persuasive” and “for men who use tag questions may simply be drawing attention to the message” then making the listener regard what is being said by paying more attention. While Cameron and Shaw (2016) declare that due to their gender, women lack the ability to talk with authority, they may avoid speaking out in public in order not to be obliged to risk men’s behaviour, which will have reverse social consequences. Finally, Hosman (2015) signifies that the “moral approach looks at powerful and powerless speech styles as a united whole .”

### **Powerful Talking**

The power of the speaker changes the interpretational linguistic styles; therefore, a powerful person may be successful when “increasing the information process about a message as well trusting him or herself and “be able to persuade the audience.” As the author clarifies “a powerful speech style is seen to be more dominant than a powerless style” and in communication “part of power and dominance is control” (Hosman 2015).

Cameron and Shaw support the argument that (2016), “women spoke more in all-female groups than in mixed groups.” However, in mixed groups, those women might speak more powerfully whenever they are encouraged and agreed to by others. Through citing research, Cameron and Show find that men are more “resilient” and powerful than women when they face “negative feedback.” Theoretically, women are powerful communicators when they feel supported . By contrast, men are not disadvantaged in their communication by lacking support. Moreover, a powerful speaker should not be affected in their communication by

others but be more self-sufficient . Similarly, Simpson and Mayr (2009) state that power in spoken discourse “the more powerful person in an institutional setting constraining the contributions of less powerful participants(s).” In summary, a powerful speaker controls the topic.

### **Powerless Talking**

Cameron and Shaw (2016) view a powerless communicator as being affected “numerically in the minority of his or her gender. For Hosman (2015), “ by using a powerless speech style, or any of the components, such as hedges, a speaker allows the listener to make inferences or draw implications about a speaker’s power or dominance.”

In a conversation amongst unequals , the bases of the conversational interaction can be different from ordinary conversations. A defect in “discoursal rights,” obligations to comply with others and avoiding “interpretations or silence” affect a person negatively to be a less powerful communicator (Simpson and Mayr 2009).

### **Cultural Communication of Gender**

Yule’s viewpoint is that the interactional styles of gender are described by some writers through conversations between the two genders as a form of cross-cultural communication (Yule 2010). He believes that :

If we want to be deprived of miscommunication in this process, we must all try to realise the impact of cultures we inherit and the creativity of language that we are also given so that we discover new ways of articulating those cultures.

In the second half of the twentieth century, many women felt that they were faced with contradictory ideologies of how to be depicted successfully in different aspects. On the one hand, they want to celebrate their womanliness, in terms of their traditional femininity including kindness, beauty and sensitivity. On the other hand, they want to be equal to men, in the sense that they want to “demonstrate their internalisation of positive (masculine) qualities such as rationality, assertiveness and strength.” Thus there are currently plenty of powerful women in the USA. This growth in women’s power and assertiveness “star to admiration for being “real life” women leaders (Williams 2013).

In a “newer paradigm”, Cameron and Shaw (2016) agree with Gamble and Gamble’s (2014) argument that the sociolinguist Deborah Tannen focuses on middle-class European American women concerning observations of the difference between men and women’s conversational style. “Men typically engage in a contest for control and independency or

jockey for status,” while women discriminate “greater value” on independence, connotation and being engaged in the conversation. In this instance, men and women are reflected in their individual concerns.

### **Men’s Style of Power Talking**

Men’s socialisation appeals to a style of strength, toughness and independence; therefore, they seem forceful and authoritative (Yule 2010, Gamble and Gamble 2014). Through their speech style, men are depicted as well-skilled, knowledgeable and competent, and they use “the distinctive prosody and syntax of sport commentary”(Williams 2013).

Men use more direct speech and assertions. They employ “report talk” and emphasis on the content level. In addition, they use minimal responses more than women, as “yeah, um hmm, etc.” However, Aitchison (2004) believes that friendly women are more likely to maintain the conversation flow by saying minimal responses such as “mmm, aha, or yes.”

### **Women’s Style of Power Talking**

Stylistically, women are more flexible than men. They prefer interacting in ways that keep the solidarity of the conversation. They tend to focus on effective functions more than men do. Linguistic devices are used by women more to stress coherence. Women prefer to use higher-prestige techniques. They are socialised “to be more careful of social status, and to be more sensitive”(Yule 2010).

Women use indirect requests instead of asking for something, as in “I’m hungry” instead of asking for some food as well as using fewer sensitive forms than men. Unlike men who are minimally responsive, women employ “rapport talk” focusing on the relationship level between communicators. Moreover, they are highly responsive through phrases, nodding and eye contact which sustain understanding while they converse. (Gamble and Gamble 2014, Wood and Fixmer-Oraiz 2018). Lakoff (1973) has identified that women are less likely to tell jokes, i.e. they have a poor sense of humour. Similarly, Simpson and Mayr (2009) claim that “women have a tendency not to tell jokes.”

### **The Model**

This study adopts some of the following theories by various authors:

1. In her book *Language and Women’s Place* (1973), Lakoff introduces a “gender deficit model” for women’s speech (Lakoff 1973). In other words, she argues that women have weak language, which reflects their subordinate status in society. This model includes:

- a. Hedges: phrases like “sort of,” “kind of,” “it seems like.”
  - b. Empty Adjectives: “divine,” “adorable,” “gorgeous,”
  - c. Super-Polite Forms: including “would you mind,” “.... if it’s not too much to ask,” “is it ok,” “if....?”
  - d. Apologise more: “I’m sorry, but I think that.....”.
  - e. Speak less frequently.
  - f. Avoid cursing or expletives.
  - g. Tag questions: as in “you don’t mind eating this, do you?”
  - h. Hyper-correct grammar and pronunciation using prestige grammar and clear articulation.
  - i. Indirect requests: “wow, I’m so thirsty –really asking for a drink.”
  - j. Speaking in Italics: using a tone to emphasise certain words such as “so,” “very,” “quiet.”
2. Simpson and Mayr (2009) agree with Lakoff (1973) and add that women do not have a tendency to tell jokes or understand them. What is more, they (ibid:19) introduce two main “schools of thought” concerning crossed-gendered language which include “dominance” and “difference.”. Through dominance, they display domination over men through their linguistic behaviour. In return, difference is specific to women, i.e. women tend to be politer than men . Holmes (1995) supports this view through *Women, Men, and Politeness* by providing studies of social gender differences through linguistic politeness.
3. In addition, in her book *You Just Don’t Understand: Women and Men in Conversation* Tannen (1990) maintains that:

Females engage in rapport-talk- a communication style meant to promote social affiliation and emotional connection while men engage in report talk - a style focused on exchanging information with little emotional import.

### **Strategies of Power Talking**

Differences in performing communication between men and women are due to the various cultural groups that the men and women are socialised in employing contrasting communication styles (Shi and Langman, 2012). Yule (2010) maintains that in cross-gender interaction, certain features become very prominent, so that “in the same-gender discussion, there is little difference in the number of times speakers interrupt each other.”.

Men’s social status encourages them to acquire particular linguistic strategies thus keeping their power. Contemporaneously, they reinforce women’s relatively powerless social position. Men tend to use various competitive or “non-cooperative strategies,” such as “no response, interruption, inadequate or delayed response and silence to control conversations” (Shi and Langman 2012). They take longer turns and more time in talking. Wood and

Fixmer-Oraiz (2018) as well Yule (2010) add that in religious events in many social contexts, “men may be the only ones allowed to talk.”

Concerning women, Shi and Langman (2012) argue that “women tend to speak a powerless language”, which is described as uncertain, weak, and excessively polite, relying on hedges, tag questions, emphatic stress, and hypercorrect grammar. Williams (2013) highlights several linguistic researchers’ discoveries concerning women attempting to merge aspects of “traditional femininity” and “resistant femininity” to retain “relationships and “sociability” while achieving their targets.

Firstly, concerning tag questions, Craig, Blankenship, and Lewis (2015) claim that the use of tag questions is a predominant example that is attracted to characterise not only feminine speech pattern but also a powerless linguistic style. However, the authors argue that:

Recent work about tag questions provides an example of a linguistic style that may influence persuasion positively or negatively depending on the role of the tag question and the likelihood of the recipient’s initial elaboration, suggesting that tag questions may be more powerful than once thought.

Schulze (2015) maintains that “interacting reveals two descriptive and analytical dimensions of social relation or interaction: the vertical dimension of power and the horizontal dimension of solidarity.” Simpson and Myre adopt Lackoff’s belief that women use a lot of tag questions as a general sign of their insecurity and “uncertainty” (Lakoff 1973, Simpson and Mayr 2009).

Secondly, interruption is another common device, which reflects the dominance of a speaker. Interruption is defined as a display of dominance or sometimes as a male “violation of female speaking rights,” although they argue that other researchers have suggested that interruptions during communication occur occasionally and “evidence co-operation rather than dominance.” What is more, these occasional disruptions are neither perceived by the person interrupting nor the person interrupted as a mark of violating the latter’s speaking rights.

Thirdly, the formulation is the “conventional privilege of people with institutional power.” They serve to realise what has been clarified from communication. The formulation is also a controlled device when making others accept and agree with one’s speech, thereby authenticating their options for more talking parts (Simpson and Mayr 2009).

Finally, hedges have a “facilitative function.” They keep the flow of a conversation going. For example, using “sort of,” “kind of,” “well,” “you know,” or “I guess.” Facilitating can be

achieved by a subordinate speaker in the conversation, whether feminine or not (Simpson and Mayr 2009).

## Data Analysis

### *King's Premium Harmony* *Theme*

King published this story in 2009 in a magazine. It describes the ordinary theme of marriage. In other words, it is about a regular couple who have been together for ten years arguing about ordinary things in life. Like any couple, they suffer from life redundancy and a lack of passion .

What makes this story attractive is that Ray and Mary's life runs in the same routine . Both are addicted to something to escape from the monotony of their life, Ray to smoking and Mary to junk food. They do not try to break that monotony, instead they keep quarrelling even about trivial details. Mary dies as a result of her addiction without any reaction from Ray from the loss. In this story, King leaves the reader in a state of shock as Ray remembers his wife as an unbearable person,; dying of a heart attack. Ironically, he feels free to smoke whenever and wherever he wants to. King leaves the reader with the truth that life is fragile with unexpected endings (Students, 2012).

## Analysis

### *A. The powerful Style*

From table (1), it is clear that:

1. Interruptions by men consist of (0%) which means that the main character never interrupts his wife. However, another man has been interrupted by other women to a ratio of only (14%).
2. Report talk (direct request), shows the highest percentage in the table (85.7%) for men but (71.4%) for women. This indicates that men use report talk more than women . This corresponds with Gamble and Gamble's view as well Wood and Fixmer-Oraiz regarding styles of communication. However, the percentage of men and women using report talk is approximate (Gamble and Gamble 2014, Wood and Fixmer-Oraiz 2018).
3. Formulations are used equally by men and women. More than once, the hero tries in vain to convince his lady in all situations except one i.e. the lady convinces the man in one attempt.

4. Men do not pay attention to hyper-correct grammar in their verbal communication. The percentage of using 'ain't' by men is (14.28%) while women have a null percentage. The ratio of 'double negatives' by men is (57.14%), which shows that men use less 'double negatives' since women use (66.6%).
5. Intensifiers are a common device reflecting the speaker's dominance, women tend to use intensifiers to a greater extent than men e.g. (33.3%) for women and (28.5%) for men. This is due to the fact that women try to create their own sense of dominance while talking.

### ***B. The Powerless Style***

1. Rapport talk (indirect request) is used by women more than men (100%) for women and (65.71%) for men.
2. Tag questions attract characterisation not only of the feminine speech pattern, but also a powerless linguistic style (Craig, Blankenship, and Lewis 2015). However, men's use of tag questions is 14.285 % whereas women do not use them at all.
3. Hedges indicates powerless communication. Men use 'I guess' with a ratio of (0%) whereas women's use is (33.3%). As a result, men talk more confidently than women. In the conversations of *Premium Harmony* (King 2009), strange women tend to use 'I guess' in cross-gender communication. The use of 'well' occurs by men at a percentage of (57.14%) less than women. This shows that women try to maintain the conversation more than men do.
4. With high responses, 'yes' is used only by men with a ratio of (42.25%). That is contrary to what was mentioned previously regarding women's tendency to use more elaborate responses and men tending to use minimal responses.

**Table 1:** The Power of Talk in King's *Premium Harmony*

Gender	Interruptions	Percentage	Report Talk	Percentage	Formulations	Percentage	Total
Men	0	0%	6	85.7%	1	14.2%	7
Women	1	14.2%	5	71.4%	1	14.2%	7
Gender	Ain't	Percentage	Double Negatives	Percentage	Intensifiers	Percentage	Total
Men	1	14.28%	4	57.14%	2	28.57%	7
Women	0	0%	2	66.6%	1	33.3%	3
Gender	Rapport Talk	Percentage	Tag Questions	Percentage	Total		
Men	6	85.71%	1	14.28%	7		
Women	4	100%	0	0%	4		
Gender	Hedges		Elaborate responses	Total			
	I guess	Percentage	Well	Percentage	Yes	Percentage	
Men	0	0%	4	57.14%	3	42.85%	7
Women	1	33.3%	2	66.6%	0	0%	3

## The Secret Motorcycle

### Theme

The story takes place at Roccia del Castelle, a calm town in the middle of Italy. That is why Giacomo de Fillipo chooses to live there. He keeps a motorcycle in the back of his mechanic's garage; it is his little secret because he found it abandoned by the side of the road. Surprisingly, a woman appears in the isolated town causing a shock to him by knowing his secret, i.e. the motorcycle. What is more, she asks him to take her to the sea. Her husband pleads for him not to take her by offering a pile of money. He sands baffled and confused with a flash back to about forty years ago; he remembers a story told by the mechanic and the owner of the bar at the same time about how he refuses the offer and takes the lady, the same lady, "with the long red hair" to a city by a sea to see a competition taking the second prize and to his amazement, it is the same large man who won the competition, and that lady kissed him saying to her husband that he lost the "bet" but told her that he won the competition. Rose closes the story with the thought that what is considered as a secret may be something else in the eyes of others, i.e. you may think that you are the main character in your life but a minor one in someone else's.

### Analysis

#### A. The Powerful Style

Powerful features in table (2) indicate that:

1. Interruption consists of a ratio of (50%) by men and null by women. However, an interruption between two men occurs only once i.e. in a same-gender communication not a cross –gender communication.
2. Report speech (direct request), is used by a (50 %) in men; it is clear that the hero in, *The Secret Motorcycle* (Rose 2011), is talking to a prestigious lady. The report talks used by this lady of (57.14%) reveals that she communicates with the hero by revealing that she has descended from prestigious British communities, so she tends to use report more than rapport talk.
3. In this short story, women have total ability to dominate and control, thereby convincing men in various situations. This is clear due to (42.85%) use in women in contrast to 0 % of men regarding formulations.
4. Intensifiers are used in (100%) by both genders.

### ***B. Powerless Style***

1. Rapport talk (indirect request) has (66.6%) higher use by then women (50%). This contrasts with what is mentioned earlier regarding women tending to use rapport talk more while men using it less.
2. In tag questions, the percentage of women is higher than men (50%) and (33.3%) respectively. This corresponds with the earlier discussion regarding tag questions.
3. Only ‘well’ is used in hedges, used by men alone. This is clear since the percentage use is (40%) for men and 0 % for women.
4. The same story contains minimal responses, specially ‘um hmm’, which are used only by men and never by women, as men’s use is (20%) in contrast to 0 % by women.
5. What is more, high responses are used y by men only and never by women with percentages of (40%) for men and 0 % for women. Unlike women, men use ‘yes’ while responding to others.

**Table 2:** The Power of Talk in *The Secret Motorcycle*

Gender	Interruptions	Percentage	Report Talk	Percentage	Formulations	Percentage	Total	
Men	1	50%	1	50%	0	0%	2	
Women	0	0%	4	57.14%	3	42.85%	7	
Gender	Intensifiers	Percentage	Total					
Men	3	100%	3					
Women	1	100%	1					
Gender	Rapport Talk	Percentage	Tag Questions	Percentage	Total			
Men	2	66.6%	1	33.3%	3			
Women	1	50%	1	50%	2			
Gender	Hedges		Minimal Responses		High Responses		Total	
	Well	Percentage	Minimum	Percentage	Yes	Percentage		
Men	2	40%	1	20%	2	40%	5	
Women	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	

## The Results

This study examines the topic of linguistic power through talking through two short stories published in the twenty-one century. One of the stories is American written by Stephen King entitled *Premium Harmony* (2009) and the other is British by Christopher Rose entitled *The Secret Motorcycle* (2011). Neither writers employ all strategies reflecting respect for each man and women regarding the theory of power talking.

The theories of Lakoff (1973), West and Zimmerman (1987), Tannen (1990) and Holmes (1995) confirm that women are powerless communicators. However, the result of the two short stories reveal women to be powerful communicators. In this case, the two short stories support one other regarding those theories which state that women are powerless communicators in contrast to men. This is clear since Lakoff (1973) discusses the weakness of women's language in her book *Language and women's place*. She argues that women have weaker language which is reflected in their subordinate social status. She adds that women's weak language is manifested by using "hedges," "tag questions," "overtly polite forms" and "intensifiers." Craig, Blankenship and Lewis (2015) claim that the use of tag questions is a predominant example, and it is attracted to characterise not only feminine speech pattern but also a powerless linguistic style. On the other hand, the results of analysing *Premium Harmony* (2009), in table (1), show that men use tag questions (1, 14.28%) while women do not. In *The Secret Motorcycle* (2011), Table (2), the percentage of men's and women's use of tag questions are equal. In Lakoff's theory, intensifiers are

attracted to women's weaker language. However, in both stories intensifiers are used two or three times more by men, whereas there is only one occurrence by women in each story.

In spite of the fact that Simpson and Mayr (2009) are in agreement with Lackoff's view that women do not have the tendency to tell jokes, it is revealed through the two stories that neither men, nor women tend to tell jokes in normal circumstances. Therefore, there is telling jokes consists of 0 % in both.

There are two main rising schools of thought in cross-gendered language, one of them is about the dominance approach. West and Zimmerman's theory states that the dominance approach seeks to display the presumed dominance of men over women through their linguistic behaviour (West and Zimmerman 1987). However, the final results of the data show the dominance of women over men through their linguistic behaviour, which is clear in various situations in both stories.

Throughout interruptions in cross-gendered communication, they extemporise that there is a display of dominance or a male violation of female speaking rights. By comparing interruptions in both stories, it is clear that women interrupt men only once whereas men do not. In the second story, men and women do not interrupt each other, in contrast interruption occurs between two men, the same-gendered language. As a result, men do not interrupt women while communicating, which is in contrast to Simpson and Mayr's improvisation in which interruption is a male violation of female speaking rights.

On the other hand, men use more direct speech and assertions. They employ report talk and emphasis content 1. Women use fewer assertive forms than men and employ rapport talk focusing on the relationship level between communicators. Comparing the data results, it is clear that men use higher report talk, (6, 85.7%), than women (5, 71.4%), but the difference in use is negligible. However, men use rapport talk more than women. The results of men's use of rapport talk are supported by the second story, *The Secret Motorcycle* (2011) as men use less report talk than women with (1, 50%) and (4,37%) respectively. These findings are in contrast to what is adopted by other authors concerning report and rapport talk.

Gamble and Gamble (2014) and Wood and Fixmer-Oraiz (2018) extemporise that women are high responders and men are minimal responders when communicating. According to the data, the reverse is true, men are high responders (3, 42.85%) in the first and (2,40%) in the second instance whereas the women are not.

## Conclusions

The following conclusions are made based on the research results:

1. Neither King nor Rose's short stories employ all the strategies of power talk, which should be used by men and women. Telling jokes shows that a man or a woman controls the situation. However, King and Rose do not use the style of telling jokes in their stories. According to theories, double negatives and "ain't" are used by men and women as hypercorrect grammar, however their uses are only included in Rose's *The Secret Motorcycle*.
2. Strategies of powerful and powerless talking and the contrasting styles of men and women are not used as pointed out. For example, the high response style is used by men and rather than women in both stories. In addition, the percentage of using report and rapport talk have little difference, which means that men use rapport talk.
3. Currently women are not powerless communicators, and not as submissive as they were in previous centuries. Men are not the only ones who are powerful communicators or who have dominance and control in various situations.
4. The data analysis shows that while men use a powerful style of talking, women are equally likely to use do so even in cross-gendered communication.
5. The use of powerful and powerless strategies depends on the person and context in which communication occurs.



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