

“He said, She said”: In this video, linguist Deborah Tannen discusses her research on the conversational rituals of men and women. The six main parts to the video are listed below along with some questions to guide your viewing.

1. Boys and Girls

- a. Describe the key distinction between the ways boys and girls sit when talking to their best friends.
- b. Why does Tannen open with this example? How does this pattern set the stage for the rest of her analysis of communication between women and men?

2. Status and Connection

- a. What is the key distinction Tannen makes about the character of boys’ and girl’s play?
- b. Discuss Tannen’s examples of boys and girls at play. What do these examples demonstrate about the use of language to negotiate status and establish connection? (Bear in mind that the same way of speaking can do both at once.)

3. Directness and Indirectness

- a. In this section Tannen introduces the terms “message” and “meta-message.” Define and explain these terms.
- b. Define and discuss how Tannen uses the concept “negotiating out” and “negotiating in” with regard to making decisions.
- c. When does Tannen suggest men are more likely to be indirect than women? Relate these patterns back to the perspectives of status and connection.

4. Public and Private Talk

- a. Discuss the scene in which a woman and a man answer the question, “How was your day?” Why do they often give such different responses?
- b. How does Tannen define and distinguish “public talk” and “private talk?” With reference to these concepts, how do women’s and men’s uses of language often differ?

5. Ritual Opposition

- a. What is ritual opposition?” Connect this idea back to the way girls and boys play as children. Also relate this concept to the perspectives of connection and status. How does ritual opposition play a role in negotiating status and creating connection?
- b. What does Tannen mean by “re-frame” and “re-key?” Can you think of examples where re-framing helped improve a situation?

6. Conversational Style

- a. Tannen concludes that men often feel women are trying to dominate them when women think they are trying to be equal. Discuss how this happens. Given other material we’ve covered, what do you think the differences she highlights represent? That is, where do they come from? What do you think Howard et al. (Sex, Power, and Influence Tactics in Intimate Relationships) would conclude about these differences?

This is a potential essay question for the next exam:

According to research presented by Deborah Tannen in her video “He Said/She Said,” men and women have different “objectives” in conversation. According to her research, what is the primary objective for men in talk? For women? What do you think Howard et al. (Sex, Power, and Influence Tactics in Intimate Relationships) would conclude about these differences?