

gender pairs taped in "natural settings," found that men interrupt 98 per cent of the time and are responsible for 100 per cent of the overlaps in conversation.

McGill student and former undergraduate representative to McGill's Board of Governors, Amy Kaler spoke about her experiences with men dominating conversation on students' council and the Board.

Kaler says "men are more active participants" than women in discussion at meetings and points out that men do most of the interrupting: "Technically, you can't interrupt anyone on Council, but people do. I can't ever recall seeing a woman interrupt a man, but there's a number of men on council who I've seen interrupt (people) constantly — it's my guess that they interrupt women more than men," she said.

Carlene Gardner of McGill's women's centre said she thought one of her classes was made up of an overwhelming majority of men because they were doing most of the talking. "One day, I looked around the class and discovered there were only three or four men in the class."

Some men even go to the extremes of interrupting entire meetings: Last February, some women were meeting in the Women's Union office at McGill, when one man walked in and brought the entire meeting to a halt. "The man seemed completely oblivious to the fact that a meeting was in progress," says Gardner, "and by interrupting it, he intimidated to the women present that his concerns were somehow more important than theirs."

Men not only do most of the interrupting (and the talking), but they often choose *what* to talk about. Public relations consultant Pamela Fishman found that not only did women ask 70 per cent of the questions, but that men succeeded more often in starting conversations and keeping them going. Fishman taped 52 hours of conversation between

three couples, a social worker and five graduate students, who consented to having tape recorders in their apartments.

"At time I felt that all the women did was ask questions ... I attended to my own speech and discovered the same pattern," said Fishman.

Fishman discovered that women asked the question "D'ya know what?" with great frequency. Pfeiffer describes in his article how other research by other investigators found that children frequently use this phrase to communicate with their elders. "It serves as a conversation opener, calling for an answer like 'What?' or 'No, tell me,'" a go-ahead signal that they may speak up and that what they have to say will be heeded."

Fishman also discovered why women need such reassurances from men: In the 76 efforts in taped conversation to start conversations or keep them going, men tried 29 times and succeed 28 times, while women tried 47 times, sometimes for as long as five minutes, with dead-end results 30 times. "It could have been worse," wrote Fishman. "Each of the male subjects in this experiment professed sympathy for the women's movement."

Men are also renowned in these various studies for appropriating women's ideas. Cheris Kramarae, a professor of speech communication at the University of Illinois and co-author of *The Feminist Dictionary*, told *Science '85* what happened when, as the only woman member of an important university policy-making committee, she tried to communicate with the chair(man) before the start of the meeting. Kramarae asked for certain items to be added to the agenda, but when the chair paid no attention to her, she "gave up." Once the meeting started, he featured her ideas in a review of the agenda and, turning to a male colleague, said: "I don't remember who suggested these changes. I think it was Dick here."

Kramarae says women are often heard but not listened to, "as if you were speaking from behind a glass." She adds that women will often not be listened to in a meeting

until a man professes agreement with her ideas.

Kaler agrees: "A woman will say something, a man will like it, and *then* it becomes valid."

As a result, said Kaler, "women end up competing for the attention of men because their ideas have a better chance of being implemented if men support them. It's unfortunately an easy pattern to fall into — even in non-hierarchical forms of organization, conversation seems to revolve around men."

Kaler says women should try to decentralize meetings by talking directly to other women in the room during a meeting and not men. "To stop men from dominating things all the time, women should try to bring other women into the decision-making process by nominating them for positions of responsibility, backing up their ideas, in short, providing the support network which men usually give each other."

Henley and Thorne point out that women are more likely to disclose more personal information to others than men, whereas men "manipulate others by keeping their cool and maintaining an unruffled exterior." Women have been socialized to display their emotions, their thoughts and ideas, but giving out this information about themselves "especially in a context of inequality, is giving others power over them," write Henley and Thorne.

Kaler says that men and women both speak emotionally, but that "women are less subtle about it."

Women have traditionally been found to be more sensitive than men to non-verbal cues. "perhaps because their survival depends on it," say Henley and Thorne. Women's "socialization to docility and passivity makes them particularly likely targets for this subtle form of social control ... their close contact with men, for example as wives and secretaries, entails frequent verbal and non-verbal interaction with those in power," Henley and Thorne add. Body language communicates status and power, and the fact that women are more likely to avert their eyes in conversation and take up far less physical space

than men — gestures of submission, they write — should be seen in context of a sexist society and as a result of sexist socialization.

"The tendency to hesitate, to apologize and to disparage one's own statement are examples of conversational patterns associated with females and with subordinate persons in general," continue Henley and Thorne.

Kaler offers advice to other women about how to combat this pattern: "The biggest thing to overcome is the fear of saying just one thing that can be seen as 'dumb' and to not apologize for speaking."

"You have to try to make yourself realize that if you have an idea, go for it. It's worth taking the risk to say you might be rejected," adds Kaler. It is also important, she says, to be aware of the dynamics of a meeting or a conversation, "to see if the others notice that men, for example, are doing all the talking."

Kaler also has good advice for women who find themselves being interrupted constantly: "Keep speaking and keep raising your voice until it is so embarrassing for the man to interrupt that he stops. When he stops, lower your voice to a normal level again. They'll get the hint," she says. Asked if women have to start talking and acting like men to be listened to, Kaler says that it if "unfortunate," but "if you're dealing with men and want to be part of the decision-making process, categorically yes."

"Talking like a man," she says, "means that people take you more seriously — if you're more decisive, speak louder, don't turn statements into questions, swear and make eye contact," you will be seen "almost as androgynous." As a result, your ideas will end up having more of an impact, Kaler adds.

Henley and Thorne point out however, that there is a tendency for many people and researchers to see male speech patterns as a norm and female speech patterns as a deviation from that norm. Male speech patterns and behavior tend to be seen as correct because they are seen as the norm, they explain.

Women of so-called 'indeterminate gender' — those

who challenge sexist stereotypes of women's use of language — may get listened to more by men as Kaler suggests, but they also threaten men, who are used to having the ball in their court.

The question of how women should attempt to close what Pfeiffer calls the "conversation gap" between the sexes becomes central to any discussion of differences between male and female language use. It is also a difficult question: Should women mimic male conversation patterns and body language, or should they concentrate on fighting the worst abuses of male speech patterns? Or, should they attempt to do both?

These questions and questions like them will continue to occupy the attention of many feminists until such time as total equality between the sexes is reached. Yet, fighting sexist stereotypes with regard to language use is part of the struggle against a sexist society.

What follows from this conclusion is that women must challenge men's tendency to dominate conversation and physical space; while mimicking men in the short term to force them to listen.

However, men have ways of dealing with women that challenge, and thus threaten them. A woman may be told by a man that because she is interrupting him, he has every right to continue to interrupt all women all the time. Thus, it could be said that it is a bit of a contradiction for women to utilize male language-use tactics in order to challenge male speech patterns.

Whatever path women choose to take on the road to eliminating sexist speech patterns on the part of men, men must be more receptive to criticisms of their dominance through language use and recognize that women are the only legitimate articulators of their own oppression. After all, women are the victims of sexism and therefore are more able to recognize its manifestations. Men must learn to *listen* to women and listen to themselves, looking for examples of sexism in their behavior.

It is not women's responsibility to change men; it is men's responsibility to change themselves.