

UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

GENDER REPRESENTATIONS OF DISPLEASURE:

"Women 'throw tantrums', while men just 'get angry'."

A Candidate thesis

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GENDER REPRESENTATIONS OF DISPLEASURE:
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Tämä kandidaatin tutkimus pohjautuu stereotypiaan miehen ja naisen tunne-eroista: "Naiset saavat kiukkupuuskia, mutta miehet tulevat vihaisiksi".

Tutkimuksen tarkoitus oli selvittää stereotyyppisten sukupuoli-representaatioiden paikkansapitävyyttä englanninkielisessä kaunokirjallisuudessa ja uutisteksteissä. Tämä on sekä kvalitatiivinen että kvantitatiivinen korpustutkimus, joka kartoittaa naisten ja miesten kiukkupuuskien ja vihan representaatiota hakusanoilla *tantrum*, *tantrums* ja *angry*. Tutkimusaineisto oli peräisin sekä mies että naiskirjailijoilta.

Vaikka tutkimus pohjautuu korpukseen (BNCWeb), se on pohjimmiltaan kuitenkin sosiolingvistinen. Tutkimuksen taustalla vaikuttavat naistutkimus ja diskurssianalyysin kriittinen suuntaus. Ajatus on, että kieli nähdään todellisuuden rakentajana ja kuvaajana.

Korpuksen tulokset eivät paljastaneet suurta numeerista eroa sukupuolten representaatioiden välillä. Tulokset osoittivat merkittävän eron tavasta, jolla heistä puhutaan tai kirjoitetaan. Miehet näyttivät ulospäin vihansa naisia helpommin. Etenkin kiukkupuuskat olivat naisille häpeällisiä ja yleisen etiketin vastaisia, kun taas miehet kuvattiin häpeämättöminä ja lapsellisina.

Tulokset olivat aiempien tutkimuslöydösten kaltaisia; miehet representoitiin aggressiivisempina ja itsevarmempina kuin naiset, jotka olivat herkempiä ja varovaisempia. Tulokset herättivät pohtimaan stereotyyppien vahvaa läsnäoloa kaunokirjallisuuden ja uutiskirjoittamisen genreissä.

Asiasanat: Gender, critical discourse analysis

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1. Introduction

The sentence "Women 'throw tantrums', while men just get angry." was mentioned by the comedian Paula Poundstone in NPR's (i.e. National Public Radio) comedy quiz show "Wait Wait...Don't Tell Me!" in December 2008. When hearing this assertion on human behaviour, one immediately seeks to make sense of it, and before you know it, a broad smile appears on the listener's cheeks. Naturally, the reaction can be either positive or negative depending on the listener's gender and outlook. The fact that it has such an immediate associative impact on the hearer is interesting and needs to be examined closely. As, Dwight Bolinger (1980: 7) points out: "[...] what it is trivial linguistically and practically may be elevated to importance socially."

In this study, I will look at whether the comedian's utterance on gender differences is justifiable by examining the hits in the British National Corpus (BNC) under the genres of fiction and newspaper writing. The model which I will be using consists of three parts: quantitative analysis of the content, qualitative analysis of the content, and analysis of the sexism in the language. The question arises: Are there any particular gender representations on display in The BNC corpus on adult emotions on anger? I will be using discourse analysis to search for gender representations connected to tantrums and anger through written public language, in order to uncover persistent stereotypical beliefs and views, especially of the female gender. Earlier studies on gender representations children's fiction have produced interesting findings similar to the findings of this study. It is suggested that men are more often depicted as strong and active, while women represented as passive and helpless (Sunderland: 1994). This female characteristic was apparent in the BNCweb results, which indicate that gendered stereotyping has strong cultural and educational roots also.

Due to the fact that the words *tantrum* and *angry* are not equal in what they designate they must be defined to make any logic out of the mentioned utterance. In other words, *tantrum* is more 'loaded' (Bolinger: 1980) with

meaning than *angry*, as it has the unfavourable implication of infantile behaviour. Therefore, the emphasis of this study is on the representation of *tantrum*, but as it is defined as “a sudden period of uncontrolled childish anger” (Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary), the BNC hits on *angry* will be also dealt with at some length.

2. Data

The data used in this study is from the British National Corpus, which consists of circa one hundred million words of written and spoken data. I chose corpora as my data resource, because it is a public databank and thus its data has not been pre-selected to ‘confirm existing conscious biases’ (Baker: 2006) for this particular study. On the other hand, as the corpus itself is a human construction, it is consciously or unconsciously biased anyway you look at it. One must remember that the findings of this study likewise depend on the original raw data and the criteria that were used in compiling the corpus. Another important point to bear in mind when doing corpus-based analysis of language is that meanings change over time (Baker 2006) together with the changing attitudes of society at large.

Since the focus of the study was to find cultural and social representations on female tantrums and male anger in written format, I restricted the BNCWeb interface search to fiction and newspaper writing. This was for the simple reason that these two text types had the most hits on adult temper tantrums. The other categories, for example academic and non-academic prose matched the query mainly on temper tantrums tagged as medical conditions or as child behaviour.

The total hits on *angry*, *tantrum* and *tantrums* were inspected for any instances that were unidentifiable for their gender, which were labelled as neutral. The final raw data was then counted and categorized so that not only each angry male and female, but also each male and female temper tantrum was examined and numbered. All the neutral hits were counted to indicate the extent of the possible margin, which alters the findings and analysis to some degree.

Last but not least, the hits that marked the sex of the author and the sex of the intended audience were examined and included in the study, since there was a distinction between the genders.

3. Method

When examining the BNC results I attempted to apply discourse analysis, which is a broad term that needs defining whenever it is applied. In this particular study, discourse analysis is perceived to constitute for the use of language in speech and writing as a form of 'social practise':

Describing discourse as a social practise implies a dialectal relationship between a particular discursive event and the situation, institution and social structure that frame it: the discursive event is shaped by them, but it also shapes them. That is discourse is socially constituted, as well as socially conditioned. (Wodak, 1996: 17)

The interlocking relationship between the particular discourse (in this case the gender representations of negative emotion in written texts, and the social and cultural reality that we constitute of), is what sustains and reproduces the social status quo. For this particular study I will be examining the persistent gendered views and beliefs that we come across in written texts.

They are manifested in the apparent representations of gender dichotomy and with a possible hierarchy between the two. Black and Coward (1981) view language not as sexist per se, but as the basis for producing discourses, which sustain the different categorizations of women and men. Likewise, Mills (2002) sees language as a cultural edifice, which has historically been compiled by men; it may not only be bias towards the female gender, but also towards the male gender presentations. Thus, feminist tradition does not want to underline the biological difference (sex), but more so, emphasize the social, cultural and psychological differences that define gender.

As a word of caution Baker (2006) points out that discourses are not to be associated with real 'beliefs' or 'opinions' that present us with a valid essential gender identity. More so, the findings in this study try to search for the ambiguities of gender positions that are apparent in our society and culture. In this way, the researcher is also part of the many conscious and unconscious discourses that he himself is also part of. Therefore, the analysis of this study is only one possible analysis, and that's why one must remember that the data can have different connotations to different readers (Baker 2006).

4. A cultural model of anger

Kövecses (1987: 24-27) has characterized the folk understanding of anger in four different languages. Based on the linguistic evidence made on metaphors on emotion in English, Hungarian, Japanese and Chinese, they discovered a general schematic cognitive and cultural model, which indicate that all four cultures conceive of anger as something that is somehow expressed. The three stages of the model render into the following form:

Cause → Existence of Emotion (as forceful entity) → Expression

As is apparent, the model reflects the *causality* of the emotions building up to anger. Starting out with the situation which then triggers the emotion of anger, thus to the final result: the expression of anger. In between the two latter stages, there are attempts to control the anger. These are called 'control components' which in the end determine the control the final action: the control or loss of control. The realization of this model is that there are two different active stages in anger, one being mental turmoil and the other physical expression, and they have a causal and natural connection.

Thus, there is a problem of *coherence* in the sentence "Women throw tantrums..." because when stating a difference between the two genders, the speaker has marked the two expressions as kind of opposite pairs (tantrum vs.

angry) by relation to their genders (female vs. male). However, looking at the definition in dictionaries (The Cassel Encyclopaedia Dictionary published in 1990 and The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English published in 1978), the word *tantrum* is defined as a “fit”, “outburst” or “attack” of anger, “ill-temper” or “flared up hysterics”, which implies the existence of an *external* force or an action. *Anger* however, is defined as “passionate displeasure” or even “pain”, which does not necessarily imply an external action but to a great degree an *internal* emotion. So, when making sense of the comedian’s utterance, one may view the male reaction as more hostile, and thus less approved social behaviour than the female equivalent of anger.

Not only does this inconsistency in reasoning expose the overgeneralization in gendered stereotyping of this kind, it also shows how language holds strong linguistic ideologies that differentiate genders. Susan Gal (1995: 188) points out that “what counts as opposite is culturally defined, and such definitions affect the form of the differences between the sexes.” Consequently, language carries these cultural notions of gender to the extent that they start to seem natural.

5. Who’s throwing tantrums?

The BNC search results under the category of fiction and newspaper writing on *tantrum* and *tantrums* gave altogether 84 hits from 73 texts, of which all the instances that associated with tantrums as medical disorders or as temper tantrums associated with children were excluded, showing the final count of 47 hits from 43 different texts.

The results were then examined dividing the instances depending on the agent behind the tantrum. The instances in which it was hard or impossible to determine the gender were grouped under the category neutral. The neutrality of these active agents was derived on the basis of gender-neutral personal pronouns (e.g. I, you, we and they), which appeared usually with declarations, such as the “humorous” sentence “I threw a carefully modulated tantrum.” (H9N 2463)

which suggests *control in losing control* or the condemning sentence “Save your rotten temper tantrums for those who deserve them.”(ACW 1330).

The final number of men and women throwing a *tantrum* or *tantrums* indicate to a miniscule difference between the two genders: men had a total of 13 hits, while women were represented to have them in 12 instances. As also the margin of neutral instances was as high as 46% of the total hits, it is rather impossible to draw conclusions on the basis on these results.

On the other hand, although the hits did not produce a clear division on gender representations in fictional and newspaper writing, examining the data by the distribution of the gender of the author, a discovery was found. From the total 43 texts, female authors used the word *tantrum* or *tantrums* 28 times in 27 texts compared to male authors, who used it 18 times in 16 texts. Thus the word was 21% more frequent in female writing. So, there is a slight difference of frequency in the use of *tantrum* or *tantrums* between male and female writers.

There was also a difference in the distribution over the gender of the intended audience. No hits were found in texts for intended male readers in either of the author categories. One can also note that mixed audiences received the total of 26 hits in 24 texts, which is 55% of all texts. However, writings that were intended solely for female readers and written by women received a result of 16 hits in 16 texts, which is approximately 37% of the total BNC hits.

6. Who's getting angry?

The BNC search results under the category of fiction and newspaper writing on *angry* gave altogether 2591 hits from 521 texts, from which all the instances that related to inanimate beings, animals or metaphors (such as “angry waves”, “angry lion”, “angry gold” etc.) were excluded, concluding with the final result of 1427 hits from 278 texts.

After this, the results were grouped into categories of male, female and neutral depending on the person in question. The instances in which it was hard or impossible to determine the gender were grouped under the category of

neutral. The neutrality of these active agents was decided on the basis of gender-neutral personal pronouns, as in “You're not angry with me?” (APM 1151) or by groups of people, as in the statement: “Angry customers ran riot in a High Street store after it ran out of mince pies.” (CBF 3135).

The final number of angry males and females did not indicate a significant difference: men had a total of 560 hits, while women were represented to have them in 501 instances. The margin of the neutral hits was rather high with 362 hits, which was 25% of total hits.

On the other hand, although the hits did not produce a clear division on gender representations, female authors used the word *angry* 959 times in 162 texts compared to male authors, who used it only 468 times in 116 texts. Thus the word was 67% more frequent in female writing. So, there is a significant difference of frequency in the use of *angry* between male and female writers, which is however debatable since, the numbers of male and female writers in the fiction and newspaper categories may not be balanced.

A concluding note on the perceived level of the texts is worth mentioning also. Generally the use of *tantrum*, *tantrums* and *angry* was most prominent in the low and medium level categories of difficulty, which influences the final findings. This was the case especially with *angry*, which produced over half of the hits in the low category. Not only does this suggest a difference in the use of language in books of different difficulty levels, but it also affects the final results because the frequency may differ also between individual books.

7. Social behaviour and gender

Baker (2006:71) points out that investigating concordances and keywords of a particular search term is an effective way to expose underlying discursive traits in a group of sentences. However, this is not a sensible method to identify possible undercurrents in this particular case. For the nature of the word *tantrum* and *tantrums* is that it appears either as the object of the sentence “He has stopped having tantrums.” (FYV 3602) or otherwise with the verb “throw” as in

“You will not scream and throw a tantrum.” (H9V 1284) Similarly, the adjective *angry*, although more adjustable in a sentence, was used either to modify a noun, as in “angry resentment” or as predicative adjective, as in “too angry to speak”. As the hits are also only a sentence long, it is impossible to detect the context surrounding the query. Although, what we can do is look at each result sentence and hopefully draw some pattern from the findings.

Although women and men are presented as having roughly the same amount of tantrums, there is a significant difference in the representation of their behaviour. It seems that men’s tantrums are external and openly expressed, while women tend to have a more introspective approach: females were usually represented as contemplating and rationalizing their actions. The following sentences narrate this gender trait specific to throwing a tantrum:

1. *“Anne felt an urge to throw the kind of temper tantrum she had been able to get away with when she was six years old.”* (ALJ 1157)
2. *“But she could not go home, given how she felt; fit to throw a tantrum.”* (BNC 1669)

In example (1), we can see that there is a potentiality for an external expression of emotion (“an urge”), which is nevertheless repressed by the female protagonist. Another interesting reference is at the end of the sentence: to throw a tantrum for her would be undoubtedly childish and unacceptable behaviour. The same necessity of self-control appears in example (2), in which the female protagonist rationalizes her inner turmoil. Here the modal auxiliary verb *could* denote possibility, but her calm reasoning points to the improbability of an external action. So, in both cases, females have a sense of face not only in public but also in private (“she could not go home, given how she felt”). From the modest of the total BNC hits, there was a tendency that women were represented in controlling their temper and conforming to the social etiquette of decent behaviour.

A similar phenomenon can be traced with the word *angry*, for females were represented as venting their anger in more cases than men, although generally anger was portrayed to be a more of an inner emotion than external action. While male anger was more apparent among the hits, in narration it was less elaborate and factual than the female equivalent, as in “he was furiously angry” or “his face was red, and he looked very angry”. Women however, received more description of their anger, as they were also “ashamed”, “frustrated”, “humiliated” or “confused”. The following sentence addresses this female trait:

1. *The Empress had ordered her to do whatever was necessary in order to leave with FitzAlan, and if she hadn't been so angry and confused that she had forgotten the threat to Edmund she would have complied.* (HH1 1641)
2. *She felt flushed and drained, angry and ashamed all at the same time.* (B0U 1094)

The aforementioned examples (1) and (2) express the heightened tendency towards self-awareness in female anger management, unlike male representations, women were ashamed and embarrassed of their emotions and rather than show it, they chose cover it. The following sentence illustrates this rather clearly: “She was angry enough to go into his room and accuse him; but she thought better of it, for he was shifty and quick and, besides, she did not want to see him.” (FRC 1944) Thus, females are depicted as emotionally laden to the extent of being emotionally paralyzed to act out, although on the other hand, women are represented as actively rationalizing and containing their feelings.

Compared to females, males are characterized as throwing temper tantrums openly in public whether or not their behaviour may seem infantile to onlookers. Men do not seem to contemplate social etiquette or politeness to the same degree as women:

1. *Then try, dear,’ Mrs. Browning urged, ‘not to get in a temper to match his, rise above the poor old gentleman's tantrums and meet his ravings with dignity.’* (ADS 1083)

2. *In fact 41-year-old Hesketh was arrogant, self-important and given to 'infantile tantrums and eye-popping rudeness. (CH6 3009)*

3. *And he is known for his after-match tantrums, which include an incident when he kicked down an advertising board. (CH3 7092)*

Examples (1) and (2) show men's tantrums as infantile and undignified ('[...] poor old gentleman [...] his ravings with dignity'), and as can be seen, in all the examples male characters are even notorious for their unaccepted behaviour ('a temper to match his', 'after match tantrums', 'given to infantile tantrums'). While women were hesitant to brake the social code of politeness, men tend to even flaunt their bad temper. Even if their behaviour is rude and aggressive, male tantrums are depicted as comical or even entertaining, as in the following sentence: "He'd probably given her pleasure with his tantrum."

So, it seems that men are represented to breach the lines of social acceptance more often than women. However, there is a gender free category of person that gets away with rude and aggressive behaviour: the celebrity. The BNC hits under newspaper writing gave accounts of temper tantrums by the actor Burt Reynolds, tennis player John McEnroe (notorious for his temper) and actress Tatum O'Neal and also The Duchess of York.

This particular group of people in the research paper are mentioned because they parallel with the public acceptance of male tantrums, and thus may emphasize the imbalance in the gender representations of *tantrum* and *tantrums*. I shall not discuss the subject further, for the hits do not show a gender difference, and further more the group does not contribute to the search on gender specific patterns of the use of *tantrum* and *tantrums* as a generic model of behaviour for a male or female.

Conclusion

The present study was set to find out whether the utterance "Women 'throw tantrums', while men just get angry" holds true by examining the BNC on the words *tantrum*, *tantrums* and *angry*. The realization was that while there was no real difference in number, there was a representational difference of gender: the hits produced aggressive extrovert men and emotionally laden introvert women. The results showed a surprisingly clear representational pattern, which was the case in over half of the results of *angry*, which is rather prominent since the margin of gender neutral instances was high also. After defining the emotion of anger culturally, it was also apparent that it is either active or passive. On which grounds it could be deducted that, since male representations actively get angry and throw tantrums compared to submissive female representations, males are in fact the ones who throw tantrums, while also getting angry. Naturally, one must remember the minor scope of the study, as it was restricted to one corpus and to fiction and newspaper writing, thus the validity of the study may be debatable. One of the goals was to try out a model of analysis that would be constructed during the research process and in an interaction with the findings of the research material. This way the study produced exposed gendered representations, which would have remained uncharted, whether the BNC hits would have been just counted out purely for male and female hits. Needless to say the neutral margin was rather high on all three queries, so it would be absurd to generalise on these findings. However, as this is a small-scale study, I would go as far as to propose that Paula Poundstone's characterisation does not hold, as far as the BNC hits can be trusted.

For future study I would incorporate what Ekman and Friesen (1975) termed as "display rules", which may be helpful in understanding how these gendered representations sustain and reproduce in our culture. Display rules are understood to be culturally shared values about emotion, which are also culturally shared norms. Not only are they emotional expressivity, but also they are culturally shared guidelines that as Brody (1999: 227) points out "dictate how,

when and where we should interpret, experience, and communicate our emotional experiences.”

As is the case with representations of male and female anger in fiction and newspaper writing, studies on male and female language strategies reveal that while women use language that downplays their authority, men on the other hand, use language strategies that are traditionally associated with authority (Tannen: 1994). This would support feminist discourse, which sees language as maintaining these cultural gendered codes.

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Appendices:

Table 1. BNC hits for *tantrum* with results for sex of author, sex of audience, sex of agent (Him, Her and Neutral) and the perceived level of difficulty: low (L), medium (M) and high (H).

Author	Audience	Texts	Hits	Him	Her	Neutral	L	M	H
Male	Male	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
Male	Female	2	2	0	1	1	1	1	0
Male	Mixed	9	9	3	3	3	1	6	2
Female	Male	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Female	Female	8	9	0	3	6	5	4	0
Female	Mixed	6	7	3	1	0	1	4	2
		25	28	6	8	11	8	16	4

Table 2. BNC hits for *tantrums* with results for sex of author, sex of audience, sex of agent (Him, Her and Neutral) and the perceived level of difficulty: low (L), medium (M) and high (H).

Author	Audience	Texts	Hits	Him	Her	Neutral	L	M	H
Male	Male to male	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Male	Male to Female	1	2	0	2	0	0	2	0
Male	Mixed audience	4	5	4	0	1	0	0	0
Female	Female to male	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Female	Female to female	8	7	2	1	4	7	2	1
Female	Mixed audience	5	5	1	1	3	0	3	2
		18	19	7	4	11	7	9	4

Table 3. BNC hits for *angry* with results for sex of author, sex of audience, sex of agent (Him, Her and Neutral) and the perceived level of difficulty: low (L), medium (M) and high (H).

Author	Audience	Texts	Hits	Him	Her	Neutral	L	M	H
Male	Male	4	13	8	0	5	4	0	9
Male	Female	4	21	9	7	1	5	16	0
Male	Mixed	108	434	196	108	130	106	273	55
Female	Male	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Female	Female	89	670	217	304	149	532	111	4
Female	Mixed	73	289	130	82	77	120	115	54
		278	1427	560	501	362	767	515	118