

HESITATIONS AS GENDER MARKER: A DISCOURSE INTONATION APPROACH

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Abstract: *Discourse intonation is an approach to the study of intonation beyond segmental level and it is not limited to tune. It includes discourse features like hesitation. Hesitation is a common but complex spoken language phenomenon. It is a part of idiosyncratic linguistic manifestations. Various studies on hesitation approach the concept from pragmatic point of view. From discourse intonation point of view, the study investigated whether or not hesitation as a discourse intonation strategy could be used to mark gender differences. It explored hesitation from three parameters –type, position and structure. Data was drawn from three Nollywood films. The speeches of the males and the females were subjected to perceptual and acoustic analyses. The study found that there were significant differences in the type and position of hesitation as deployed by the males and the females in the selected films. While the males deployed more lexical and quasi-lexical hesitations at initial position, the females deployed more silent and action hesitations at medial position. But there was no significant difference in the structure of hesitation deployed by both genders. Hence types of hesitation and positions of hesitation could be adopted as gender marker.*

Key Words: *Hesitation, discourse intonation, gender marker, Nollywood films.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Gender markers are different concepts that define masculinity and femininity. Expectedly, language and gender identity cannot be divorced. Language has played and still playing vital roles in gender construction. This paper however, presents the results of a study on hesitation as a gender maker from discourse intonation point of view. It reports how the males and the females deployed hesitation in these Nollywood films titled *Compound Fools, Caro's Workshop* and *Mr. & Mrs.*

Gender identity is how persons identify and express their gender. Commonwealth of Australia (2014) describes gender identity and expression as how a person expresses their gender identity, or the characteristics (e.g. mannerisms, dress etc) that allow someone to identify another person's gender. It encompasses a person's level of masculinity, femininity

Nsibirano (2009) submits that gender identity is expressed in the use of Information Communication Technology because more female develop cold feet towards it.

Apart from genital organ that herald the sex declaration at birth, gender is determined by a number of cues like dressing, body shape, voice, mannerisms. Very often than not, the hesitation a person uses is part of their mannerism and therefore express gender identity. Gender identity is determined by gender expression.

1.1 Hesitation Overview

Hesitation is not only a common phenomenon in second language situation. It occurs in the speeches of the native speakers (Hieke 1981), although it is more prevalent in the speeches of L2 (Wiese 1984). Hesitation can be voluntary or involuntary stoppage/pause perceived in the utterance of a speaker in a connected speech. It can occur at the beginning of an intonational phrase (IP), this is known as false start. It can occur at the middle of an IP this may be sound, silent or action filled. It can also occur at the end of an IP as silence or turn taking cue. Hesitation can be planned or unplanned in communication process. Hesitation occurs when the speaker is thinking but plan to continue speaking. In other words, it is often due to the need to plan what the speaker is going to say next or how best to say it. It can also be a technique to change the topic of the discourse or to allow for a rethink in order to change what has been planned earlier. It is also often the result of difficulty in recalling a word or expression accurate for the topic under discussion Gbadegesin (2018). Sometimes, hesitation occurs when a speaker lacks the appropriate words to use or struggles with cognitive or verbal planning. It can occur at any point of the intonation group, not necessarily at the end like a pause.

Hesitation is the perceived gap that exists within a speaker's line. It shows as a period of inactivity in the wave length of the acoustic analysis picture (Gbadegesin 2018). Hesitations are pauses of varying lengths, which are filled or unfilled (Khojastehrad 2012). Hesitation may occur when a speaker finds himself/herself in a position where he/she lacks the words to use or struggles with cognitive, emotional or verbal planning. Even native speakers fill hesitations when they speak and use fillers (Rieger, 2003).

1.2 Functions of Hesitations

Researches on hesitation establish that the reasons for the use of hesitation vary from one person to another and from one conversational context to another (Clark and Fox Tree 2002; Menyhárt, 2003; Lai, Gorman Yuan & Liberman, 2008). Beyond anything else, especially in the English home videos in second language situation like Nigeria, hesitation assumes the important role of a communication strategy. It is deployed to help the speaker maintain conversational dominance (Khojastehrad 2012). Richards and Schmidt (2002) observe that hesitation as a communication strategy helps to compensate for weaknesses in building and maintaining efficient communication, and enables the speaker to make up or improve breakdowns in communication efficiently.

Hesitation, as a communicative strategy, can be used to fill gap created by phonological, linguistic, psychological, conversational, cognitive, emotional or idiosyncratic reasons. In other words, it signals that the speakers' next speech is under construction (Nicholson et al, 2003). Hesitation can be employed for hyper-correction. This hyper-correction can be either corrective repair or anticipatory repair. While anticipatory repair is common to the advanced speakers, a corrective repair is common to beginner and average speakers (O'Connor 1988; Khojastehrad 2012). This happens when the speaker makes some mistakes and wants to make correction. Commonly, the hesitation used in this type of situation is called restart (Maclay & Osgood 1959). Examples include: sorry, I mean, excuse me, rather, I mean to say etc. However, it is not in all cases that these serve as sound fillers deployed for self-correction. Hesitation can be employed to ensure a good structure and link in conversation. It is used to terminate a turn, hold on the conversational control, switch to another topic etc. Common among the fillers in this category include: now, anyway, so, actually, I mean, basically. Some filler are used by some people as mannerism; it is their conversational idiosyncrasy.

Emotionally, hesitation is deployed as a restraint from emitting a wrong language behavior. This is very common to silent/unfilled hesitation. It is common to the female speakers of English in Nollywood films. It may also be deployed to achieve a change of topic.

1.3. Discourse Intonation and Hesitation

Raúl (2015) opines that:

Discourse intonation advocated the study of intonation from the point of view of the user, its function in context and its communicative value. Discourse intonation approached English intonation as a well-defined set of prosodic features that the speaker can choose (pg 35).

Discourse intonation is a method of expressing various meanings, emotions or situations. Discourse intonation shifts focus from form of intonation to function of intonation (Chun 2002). Just like Roach (1992) observes discourse intonation assumes almost the same status with discourse approach to prosodic study. To explore discourse intonation and for better understanding, there is needs to include hesitation as one of its features. Hesitation accounts for the importance of planned and unplanned pauses in the intonational phrase. Discourse intonation reflects the social and situational contexts of an utterance. Discourse intonation, with specific reference to hesitation, is so crucial to how a listener understands what is said as well as appreciates the proficiency of a speaker. Discourse intonation allows for analysis of speech beyond phoneme level, it includes acoustic analysis of pauses and their role within an intonational phrase. Discourse intonation is the pragmatic use of intonation for speech analysis. It is a process of choosing and interpreting intonation patterns and pauses based on the context of its usage.

Hesitation, as a discourse intonation feature, allows the speaker to express his/her semantic intention and to realize certain communicative purposes. Social variables come into play in discourse intonation choices; it reflects the social identity of the speaker in terms of gender, age, career, education, occupation or position in the society.

1.4. Gender Markedness

Society and culture create gender roles, and these roles are prescribed as ideal or appropriate behavior for a person of that specific sex. Joanne Winter & Anne Pauwels (2007) observe that more recent studies of multilingualism, second language learning and language maintenance have moved beyond the investigation of gender roles to looking at gendered identities. One of the aspects of language that marks gender is dominance. Hesitation is one of the features of dominance. While the males are concerned with conversational power and dominance, the females are concerned with relationship. In communication, the males want to be respected while the females want to be liked and involved. Hence, there is a conversational politeness tendency that characterizes the females' conversation as against notable conversation dominant tendencies that characterize the males' speeches. O'Barr and Atkins (1980) submit that the females' language is weak while the males' language is strong. This may be because of emotionality and assertiveness that characterize the females' and the males' speeches respectively (Gbadegesin 2018).

2. METHODOLOGY:

2.1 Participants

Participants of this study comprised nine (9) actors and nine (9) actresses from three selected Nollywood films. Some were protagonists, some antagonists, some major characters while others were minor characters. They were all

educated speakers of English as a second language within the purview of the definition of this study. An educated speaker within the purview of this study is a person who communicates fluently in English language from secondary school leaver and above. The participants spanned across the South-South, South-West and South-East geo-political zones of Nigeria.

The selection of the participants/subjects was based on a number of considerations. Firstly, the social statuses of the casts were considered. Secondly, the participants' roles were considered, this gave opportunity to examine wider conversational situations. Thirdly, every scene had cultural background information upon which the characters operated. The information lent credence to everything that transpired in that scene. The background knowledge served as discourse premises. This gave the context to interpret hesitation as a discourse intonation feature deployed in the extract. For instance, the background may be argument, marriage proposal, traditional rites, request, protest etc. Gender consideration allowed for the investigation of gender. All the extracts featured both the males and the females prominently at different conversational situations.

2.2 Data Collection

The study drew its data from three (3) purposively selected English-medium Nigerian Home Videos (Nollywood films). English-medium films were chosen because the study sets out to investigate hesitation in English discourse intonation on the one hand and because they contained dialogues involving the male and the females in different contexts on the other hand.

The films were also chosen because they comprised reflections of many real life situations (Adeyemi 2006) that could not be found on one spot.

The films are:

1. Caro's Workshop
2. Compound Fools
3. Mr. & Mrs.

2.3 Procedure

The selected films were watched from the beginning to the end to have the panoramic view of their contents and to study prosodic features that went with the spoken language. Hesitations were first identified through perceptual analysis. The various scenes that contain hesitation were identified and then transcribed them from sound waves to written form. The video clips of the identified hesitation were extracted. The researcher watched the extracted video clips with their accompanied transcribed forms. Based on perceptual observations, symbol (#) was inserted to indicate hesitation within the intonation phrase. The extracted dialogues were subjected to perceptual and acoustic analyses using SFS/WASP speech analyser. Secondary data included journals, books and the Internet. Theoretical insights were drawn from the discourse intonation theory of Brazil, (1994).

3. FINDINGS:

Hesitations observed in this study were analysed using three parameters:

- i. Hesitation Types
- ii. Hesitation Positions
- iii. Hesitation Structures

3.1 Analysis of Hesitation Types

Based on the perceptual analysis of the hesitations in the selected films, the following hesitations were identified:

3.1.1 Lexical Hesitation: It occurs when the speaker employs the real word to fill the gap while thinking and planning on what to say next. It is a real word that is not used to mean anything but to fill a space. Examples include: 'well', 'you see', 'you know', 'okay' etc.

Example:

Mrs Brown: I did your family a favour

Ken: See to be divorced take longer than this

Mrs Brown: Don't force me to force you out of my office

Ken: See what I mean is this

Mrs Brown: What I should get is a gratitude not an attitude

Ken: See I am losing my sanity

Ken used the word 'see' as lexical hesitation not that he was showing any object to his listener. The above example of Ken's deployment of lexical hesitation illustrated the nexus between lexical hesitation and hesitation at the initial position.

3.1.2 Quasi-lexical: This is non-word. It indicates uncertainty, processing or to hold on to the conversational ground while thinking of what to say next. Examples include: ah, eh, ehm, uh, gosh, um, etc. Caution should be exercised in

dealing with these words. Some of them have other functions other than this. For example, they can be used to ask question, response to question, expression of surprise and other discourse cues. It only functions as sound filler when it indicates speaker's hesitation. It can occupy the whole turn of a speaker in conversation; when that happens, it will be response not hesitation.

Example:

John: Ehm wait Mr Davidson

Rom: Yes

John: Ehm sorry to disturb you.

John, in his two lines, deployed quasi-lexical hesitation arising from the natural dis-fluency which may characterize the process of requesting for the help of a totally new person.

3.1.3 Repetitive Hesitation: This is hesitation where the speaker repeats either lexical or quasi-lexical item(s) to fill an unwanted gap within an intonational group.

Example 1: Cheta: My pleasure,/ sorry I... I thought that car belongs to someone else//

Cheta deployed Lexical Repetition in form of hesitation. The hesitation was occasioned by the difficulty most men express when there is need to bury their ego and say sorry when it is obvious they are wrong.

Example 2:

Amaka: The Landlord increased the house rent/ they couldn't pay/ he gave the quit notice/ and the house is now empty.

Rom: You'll KILL me o/ I'll PAY, I'll PAY/ I will pay immediately/ in fact I can I can I can pay today// How do I SEE the landlord?/

There are two Lexical Repetitions as a result of Excitement

3.1.4 Action-filled Hesitation: It is a silent hesitation that co-occurs with an action. It occurs when the speaker decides to compliment the utterance with body language, gesture or gesticulation. The perceived gap is as a result of the speaker pointing to something, or demonstrating the utterance further with the use of body language.

Example: Susan: Your friends come here every Sunday, I feed them, and they left with these (#) dirty dishes.

The pause between 'these' and 'dishes' were not left unfilled with any lexical or quasi-lexical item. Susan used her body language by pointing to the many dishes. This showed the enormity of the task and justified the reason why she needed a help. This if further illustrated below with acoustic picture:

Action Hesitation

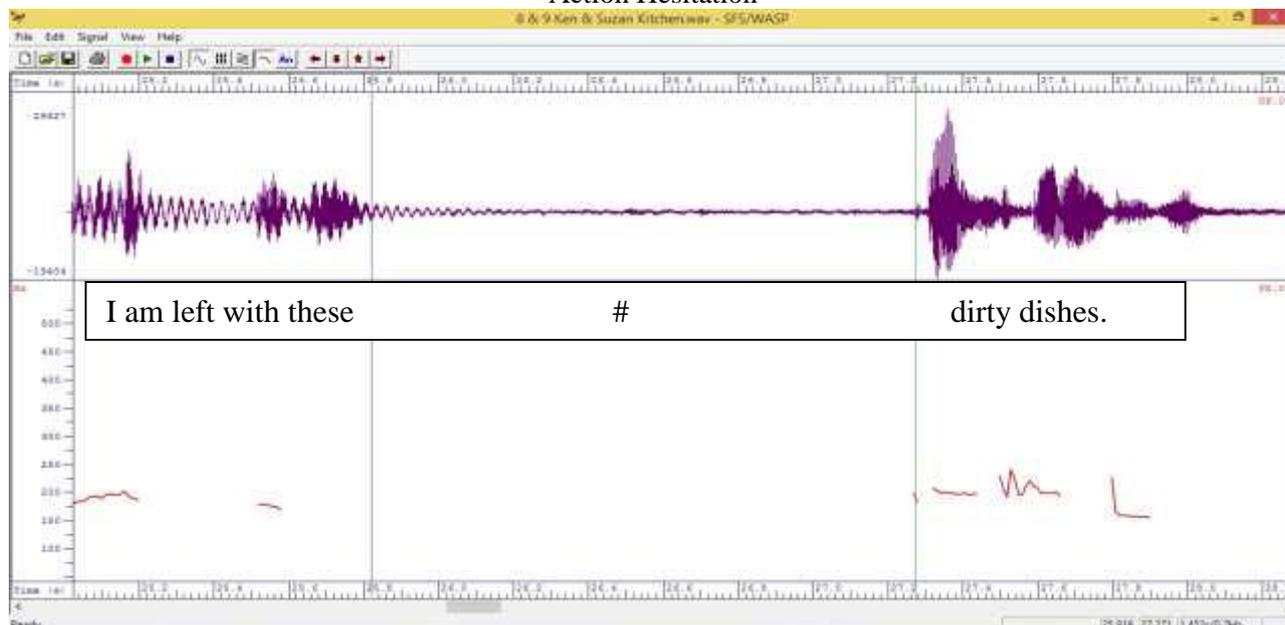


Fig. 1

Fig. 1 shows the spectrographic picture of action hesitation as deployed by Susan in *Mr. & Mrs.* The waveform in the picture shows that there was a pause between 'these' and 'dirty'. The pitch tract also confirms that there was a period of silence in the utterance. The spectrograph picture shows that 1.452s represented a period of silence before the speaker continued in an utterance of a total duration of 3.451s. While she hesitated, she pointed to the dishes, calling the attention of the listener to the enormity of the task ahead of her. She by this act justified why she needed a house-help. The hesitation is action filled unlike silent hesitation where the speaker does not demonstrate.

3.1.5 Silent Hesitation – This is otherwise known as unfilled hesitation. The perceptual analysis shows that there is a perceived pause.

Example 1:

Ken: Your duty as my wife does not end in the kitchen you know.

Susan: (#) Why do you torment me Ken?

Susan deployed silent hesitation to allow her control her temper and maintain conversational politeness. She was courteous of what to say to her husband even when he had infuriated her.

Silent Hesitation

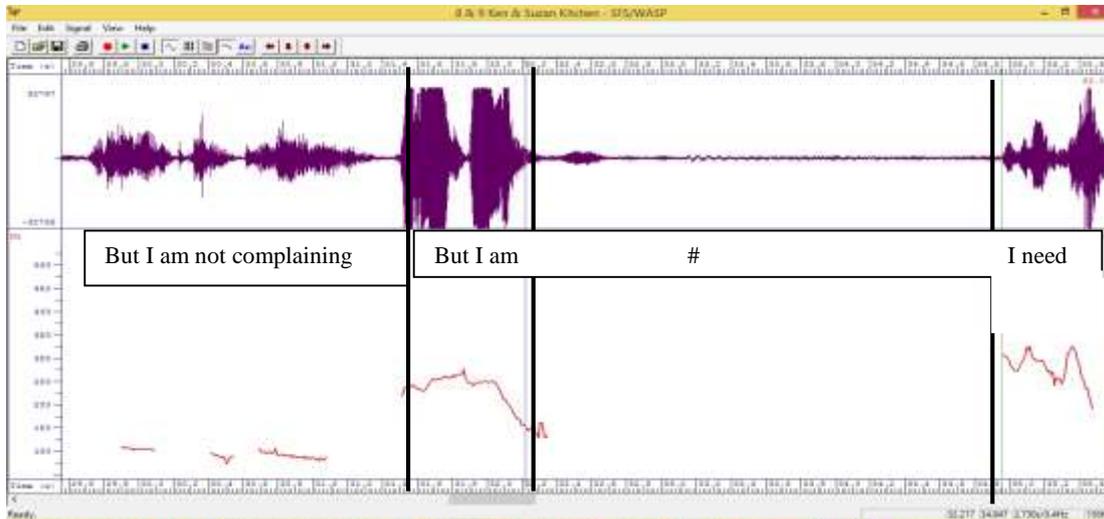


Fig. 2

Ken: But I am not complaining

Susan: But I am # I need help

The acoustic details presented in Fig. 1 above explicitly demonstrate silent hesitation. Both the pitch track and wave form showed that there was a period of inactivity in Susan’s utterance. The token was produced in 5.949s while the silence was observed was 2.559s.

3.1.6 Elongation: Unfilled hesitation, otherwise known as elongation hesitation, occurs when a lengthening of vowel or the whole word is perceived within an intonational group. Example: Rom: WE # hope so/ of course
 Elongation is the most rarely deployed hesitation by both the males and the females. It was perceived in the perceptual analysis that the speaker involuntarily elongated ‘we’ to allow for cognitive organization or to prepare what comes next.

Table 1 A Summary of Gender Hesitation Types Distribution

	Lexical	Quasi-lexical	Repetition	Action	Silent	Elongation	Total
Male	26	18	11	1	1	2	59
Female	7	8	9	15	19	2	60

Table 1 presents the results of the hesitation types distribution as deployed by both the males and the females in the study. The results show that both the male and the female speakers of English in the selected Nollywood films usually deploy various types of hesitation at different degrees.

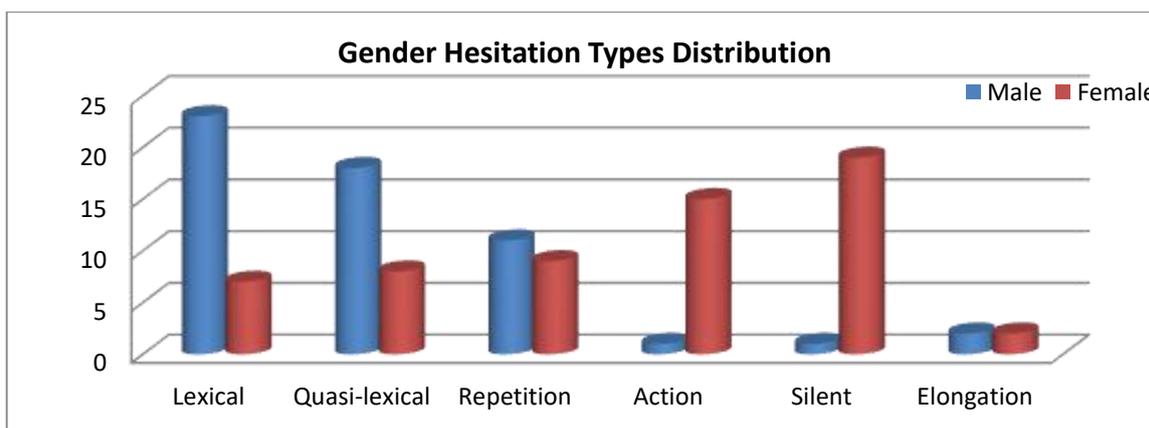


Fig 3

Fig.2 above shows that there is significant difference in the males and the females’ deployments of lexical, quasi-lexical, action and silent hesitations. The males deployed more lexical and quasi-lexical hesitation while the females deployed more of action and silent hesitations. The implication of this is that while lexical and quasi-lexical hesitations are associated with the males, action and silent hesitation mark female hesitation usage. The corollary to this is that lexical and quasi-lexical gravitate towards conversational control or dominance, silent and action hesitation show conversation politeness tendencies associated with the female gender.

3.2 Analysis of Hesitation Positions

Hesitation is one of the discourse intonation features observed in the Nigerian male and female speakers of English in Nollywood films’ discourse intonation deployments. The study identifies three hesitation positions and five different types of hesitation from the selected film extracts. There are also, structural kinds observed in the speeches of the males and the females in the selected films. They are:

a. Initial Position: The hesitation here is located at the beginning of the intonation unit

Example:

MIKE: Well,/ am working on it/, am working on something (Caro’s Workshop)

Mike opened his response with a false start which is a lexical hesitation. Though ‘well’ is a meaningful lexical item, the usage here has no specific meaning. It fills unwanted pause while the speaker arranges what to say.

b. Medial Position: The hesitation is located at the middle of the intonational group

Example

Mike/ why would Cheta choose a common shoe-maker over #me?

c. Final Position: The hesitation is located at the end of the intonational group

Example

Rom: It’s a very good place ehm ehm/, but what happen to the neighbours that were there before? (*Compound Fools*)

The speaker ended the first intonation group with double quasi-lexical hesitation before opening the second intonational group.

Table 2 A Summary of Gender Hesitation Position Distribution

	Initial	Medial	Final	Total
Male	30	23	6	59
Female	12	44	4	60

Table 2 above presents the results of where the hesitations deployed by the males and the females were located in the intonation unit. The females deployed hesitation at the middle of the intonational group more than at any other positions while the males deployed more hesitation at initial position.

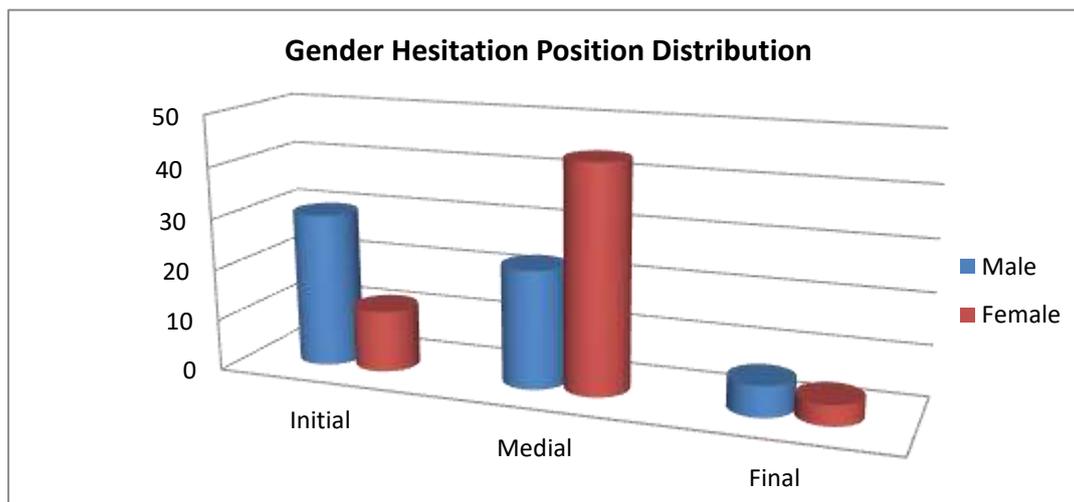


Fig.4

There is a nexus between lexical and quasi-lexical hesitations and initial position. The males deployed more hesitation at initial position while the females deployed more hesitation at medial position. Hence, initial position marks masculinity while medial position marks femininity. Both the males and the females rarely deployed hesitation at the final position.

3.3 Analysis of Hesitation Numbers

Hesitation structure is another dimension of the phenomenon of hesitation observed in the study. As observed from the perceptual analysis of hesitation in this study, there are three different structures the hesitation takes.

i. **Simple Hesitation** –This connotes that one hesitation form/type is deployed at a particular time at a particular place in the intonational group.

Example 1: Stephanie: # Tell me what to do/ (*Caro’s Workshop*)

There is only silent hesitation at the beginning of the intonational group.

Example 2:

Ken: *Well* (#), she was humble, homely, innocent, easy going and maybe good looks. (*Mr. & Mrs.*)

Ken deployed lexical hesitation

ii. **Compound Hesitation** –This connotes that two hesitation forms/types is deployed at a particular time and at a particular place in the intonational group.

Example:

Philo: Well/ # I wanted him to notice me/ is there any crime in that?// -(*Compound Fools*)

Philo combines ‘well’ (a lexical hesitation) with silent hesitation. This is not for want of words or cognitive arrangement of speech but to oppress Osai. She deployed the hesitation to indicate a deliberate act.

iii. **Complex Hesitation** –This connotes that three hesitation forms/types is deployed at a particular time at a particular place in the intonational group.

Example: Amaka: Okay GUESS first//

Rom: Okay ehm ... alright I think I have it. --(Compound Fools)

When Rom was faced with the task of guessing, he deployed quasi-lexical+ silent + lexical hesitations at one particular time and place. This shows the enormity of cognitive planning.

	Simple	Compound	Complex	Total
Male	43	12	4	59
Female	50	8	2	60

The males deployed more varieties of hesitation structures than their female counterparts. Complex structure hesitation is not very common in the speech of the males and the females in the selected Nollywood films. This may be because the participants were educated English speakers. Whether the complex structure will be more common to the beginners is a subject other researcher may look into.

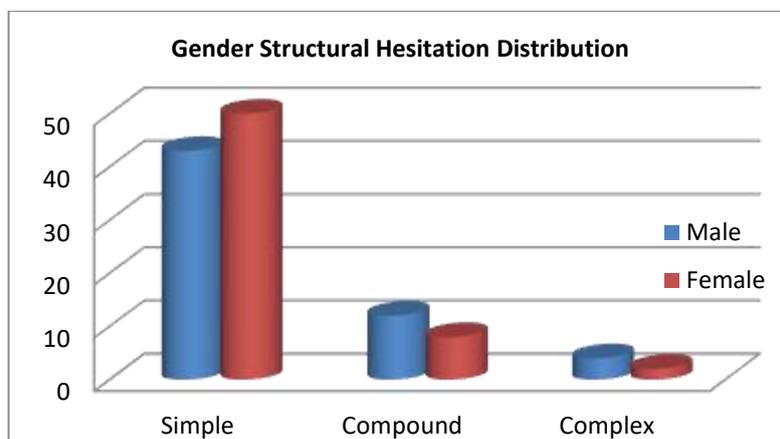


Fig. 5

Structurally, the females deployed more simple hesitation than their male counterparts. The males on the other hand deployed more compound and complex hesitation than the females. There are no significant differences in the deployments of structural hesitation hence, it cannot be used to mark gender.

4. CONCLUSION:

In summary, it was observed that both the males and the female deployed different types of hesitations at different locations with different structures. They deployed hesitation to perform myriad of functions. One of it is to signal the importance of what is about to be said. Another one is to express surprise. It is also deployed to show absent-mindedness. It attested to the conversational politeness tendencies in the females’ speeches and conversational dominance in the males’ speeches. Lexical and quasi-lexical forms of hesitation and initial position marked masculinity while action and silent forms of hesitation at medial position hesitation marked the female gender.

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