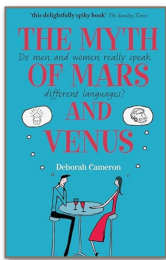


WEEKLY ENGLISH PRACTICE

THE MYTH OF (men are from) MARS AND (women are from) VENUS

Coach John considers the facts about how women and men talk. Are we really so different?

Since the 1990s, there has been a renewed interest in understanding whether men and women speak the same language and if they can truly communicate. This has led to the popularity of self-help and psychology books, such as John Gray's "Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus".



These books depict men and women as alien beings and their conversations as a series of misunderstandings. The success of these books has resulted in a **thriving** industry

offering advice, seminars, **retreats**, helplines, and dating services. Popular science books also explore the biological differences between men and women, suggesting that their communication styles are influenced by their brain wiring.

However, Oxford professor Deborah Cameron asks if there is evidence to support the idea that men and women communicate differently.

She asked two important questions: **Do women and men really speak so differently?** In 1988, Hyde and Linn's meta-analysis found that gender differences in verbal ability were negligible, representing a small fraction of a standard deviation.

According to linguist Jack Chambers, the difference in verbal abilities between male and female speakers in a population is only about

0.25%. This means there is a 99.75% **overlap** in abilities. So, it is highly likely that any verbal abilities seen in a woman can also be found in a man. Generalisations such as "men interrupt more" or "women talk more" **downplay** the similarities between genders and ignore the variation within each group. Focusing solely on differences between men and women is **misleading** and common but should be avoided.

Do women really talk more than men?

Observing both sexes in a single interaction and measuring their contributions allows for a reliable way to generalise about which sex talks more. This method eliminates extraneous variables and enables a comparison of male and female behaviour under the same contextual conditions. Multiple studies using this approach have found that men tend to talk more than women. A review of 56 research studies supports this common **finding**.

What are Deborah Cameron's conclusions?

The belief that women talk more than men is a social prejudice, similar to how evolutionary psychology takes today's prejudices and applies them to prehistory. Critics of the evolutionary approach argue that feminists and politically correct individuals refuse to consider biological causes for sex differences. But their stories have a basic flaw: they are based not on facts, but on myths. *Adapted from The Myth of Mars & Venus*

by ECP coach



John Hird

Word list

thriving: (adj) prosperous and growing

retreat: (n) a place for quiet thinking or privacy

overlap: (v) to have something in common or come together partly with (another)

downplay: (v) to treat or speak of (something) so as to reduce emphasis on its importance, value, strength, etc

misleading: (adj) intended to deceive:

finding: (n) something that is found or ascertained

patterns: (n) a recognisable combination of actions, qualities, etc., characteristic of a particular person or population

debunk: (n) to show (something) to be false or exaggerated; expose

enlightened: (adj) factually well-informed, tolerant of alternative opinions, and guided by rational thought

Let's chat about that!

1. Give a summary of the text to your coach and/or classmates.
2. Had you heard about the "Men are From Mars, Women Are From Venus" theory" before reading the article?
3. According to the article; do women and men really speak so differently??
4. Do the studies and statistics back up the claims that women speak up more than men?
5. Read the text on page 2. What are the conclusions? Are you surprised by them?
6. Why do you think some people (mostly men!) still support the "Mars/Venus" false science myth?

Male-Female Communication: Debunking the Mars-Venus Myth

Myth 1 Females talk more than males

Fact: A review of 56 research studies found 34 that reported that men talk more than women, with females talking more than males in only two studies. A more recent University of Arizona study in the journal Science reported that both genders speak almost the exact same number of words daily (16,000).

Myth 2 Females are more verbally skilled than males

Fact: While a 2005 meta-analysis of studies on gender differences in verbal/communicative behaviour by Janet Shibley Hyde found a moderate effect size favouring women, it also revealed that there was a close to zero effect for reading comprehension, vocabulary and verbal reasoning.

Myth 3 Females seek to connect with others, while males use language with the intention of accomplishing things.

Fact: Studies indicate that the genders may differ in **patterns** because they're engaged in different activities or are playing different conversational roles. These differences don't necessarily appear when males and females are doing the same things or playing same roles.

As the research shows, the language skills of men and women are nearly identical. Yet the myths they **debunk** are still used to support the premise that the genders are regularly misunderstanding each other due to mere genetics. With the media fully on-board the Mars/Venus bandwagon, "failure to communicate" across genders has

been used to explain everything from why men don't take out the garbage upon request to why a rapist didn't understand his victim's attempts to resist. Ultimately, both genders suffer. Men are sized up as inarticulate, aggressive Neanderthals, incapable of feeling emotions and being sensitive. Women are criticised for being overly cooperative and caring doormats.

Such discrimination shapes beliefs and influences actions, both personally and professionally. Anybody who is truly **enlightened** and who knows anything about males, females and relationships knows that that is all wrong. Still, the Mars/Venus phenomenon continues to make millions. When will we let science command the "he versus she" communication conversation?