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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the effect of the sex of an oral interpreter and the sex of the dramatic character portrayed on audience evaluation of performer effectiveness and audience comprehension of the passage presented. Two interpreters, one male and one female, each performed six monologues, three of which were feminine and three of which were masculine in nature. The audience consisted of 275 undergraduate members of a communication arts and sciences class at Queens College in New York City. Each of 12 randomly selected groups drawn from this audience pool viewed one videotaped interpretation of a dramatic monologue. Analysis of data revealed that a significant interaction effect existed between sex of interpreter and sex of dramatic character depicted, with regard to subject ratings of performer effectiveness. Similarly, audience comprehension of the passages varied on the basis of the sex of the dramatic character portrayed. (Author/KS)

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Abstract

Male and female oral interpreters are often called upon to suggest both male and female characters. The purpose of this paper was to determine how this primary interpretive convention affected audience evaluation and comprehension of the interpretive event. Results indicated that there was a significant interaction effect between sex of interpreter and sex of dramatic character on subject ratings of performer effectiveness. A significant main effect for the sex of the dramatic character being interpreted on audience comprehension of the passages was also found.

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Controlled experimentation has received limited use by specialists in oral interpretation. Researchers and theorists recognizing this lack of study have noted that oral interpreters ought to improve their ability to apply experimental or quasi-experimental methods to research in the field.<sup>1</sup> More specifically, researchers have emphasized that oral interpretation is sorely in need of a body of literature which describes the nature of the performer-audience relationship with greater accuracy.<sup>2</sup> In other words, since the effectiveness of the interpretive act is evaluated partly on the basis of listener response<sup>3</sup> researchers have recognized that practitioners in the field ought to examine some of the variables which help determine or precipitate this response.<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, however, the performer-audience relationship has been one of the most neglected aspects of interpretive theory.<sup>5</sup> For this reason, this investigator believes that a more complete understanding of it will result in more effective interpretation performances.

Far too often, the aspects of the art of interpretation that are most in need of experimental research have coincided with those aspects of the art that modern interpreters have avoided examining--notably the techniques and conventions of interpretive communication.<sup>6</sup> For example, Timothy J. Gura observed in a recent article that many interpretation theorists

have chosen to ignore the genre of drama.<sup>7</sup> Yet, as we know, interpreters are often called upon to perform drama, and are expected to rely upon a wide range of performance conventions when doing so. One particular solo-interpretation of drama convention is the practice of male and female readers assuming male roles, female roles and male and female roles. This practice underlies a basic theoretical assumption of the art,<sup>8</sup> and in part serves to define the art.<sup>9</sup> This basic practice also supports the theory that interpretation is a "suggestive" rather than a "portraitive" medium.<sup>10</sup> The interpreter's role is to suggest persons and actions to the imaginations of an audience, not to portray them for an audience. In other words, interpretation theorists note that unlike the actor, the oral interpreter does not pretend to be another person; instead, he retains his own identity and is accepted by his audience as himself. This researcher sought to determine how this primary interpretive convention affected audience response to the interpretive event. To date, the effectiveness of this practice as received but scant experimental attention.<sup>11</sup>

Accordingly, the specific purpose of this study was to investigate whether the sex of an oral interpreter and the sex of the dramatic character suggested compounded to affect audience evaluation of performer effectiveness and audience comprehension of performance. The following six hypotheses were tested:

- 3
1. There will be no significant main effect for the sex of the interpreter on subject ratings of performer effectiveness.
  2. There will be no significant main effect for the sex of the dramatic character being interpreted on subject ratings of performer effectiveness.
  3. There will be no significant interaction effect between sex of interpreter and sex of dramatic character on subject ratings of performer effectiveness.
  4. There will be no significant main effect for the sex of the interpreter on audience comprehension of the passages.
  5. There will be no significant main effect for the sex of the dramatic character being interpreted on audience comprehension of the passages.
  6. There will be no significant interaction effect between sex of interpreter and sex of dramatic character on audience comprehension of the passages.

### Methodology

The research procedure was developed in six main stages: the selection of the materials for oral interpretation; the selection of the interpreters; the selection of subjects; the selection of the instruments to measure audience evaluation and comprehension of performance; the testing of the subjects and the treatment of the data.

A pilot test for the purpose of selecting the dramatic monologues to be used in the study provided the researcher with six equally readable monologues, of which three were clearly masculine in nature and three were clearly feminine in nature.<sup>12</sup>

The subjects were 275 undergraduates enrolled in twelve sections of Communication Arts and Sciences I (C.A.S. I) at Queens College. Two extremely competent interpreters, one male and one female, were chosen from a pool of six readers on the basis of an interpreter selection test administered to a panel of five interpretation instructors. Each of the chosen interpreters was videotaped while performing the six selected monologues. In all, twelve videotapes were made (2 interpreters x 6 monologues).

The twelve randomly selected C.A.S. I sections were randomly assigned to view one of the twelve videotaped performances. Each performance was approximately five minutes in length. Since each section heard and saw only one speaker, order effects did not need to be controlled for.

The data were collected in a manner consistent with the purposes of the study. The Reader Evaluation Form developed by Roland<sup>13</sup> was used to assess perceived performer effectiveness. A cloze procedure form<sup>14</sup> was used to assess audience comprehension of performance. The scoring method in this study was based on the scoring guidelines provided by Taylor.<sup>15</sup> Only exact word replacement of the deleted word was counted as correct. Since Taylor recommends that the same number of words be used from each sample, only the first 400 plus words of each selection was employed. The sentence in which the 400th word occurred was reproduced in full.<sup>16</sup> In addition, the first ten words of each monologue were presented without any deletions. From then on, each fifth word, beginning with the eleventh word, was deleted and replaced by blanks of equal length.<sup>17</sup> One point was scored

for each fill-in which exactly matched the omitted word. Points were then summed and this total constituted a subject's cloze score.

The data generated from each of the three "masculine" passages and from each of the three "feminine" passages were combined and then tested for homogeneous variances. Since no significant differences emerged, a 2x2 factorial design for effectiveness and comprehension was used to test each of the stated hypotheses. The statistical method of analysis of variance was used to analyze the data. Fortran program CPS A02 for unequal cell N's was employed. In each case, the .05 level of significance was used as the level of retention or rejection of the null.

### Results

The results of the Analysis of Variance that was used to test the three hypotheses that are related to the dependent variable of performer effectiveness are contained in Table 1.

Results indicate that there were no main effects on the dependent variable of audience evaluation of performer effectiveness. Therefore, hypothesis one, there will be no significant main effect for the sex of the interpreter on subject ratings of performer effectiveness, and hypothesis two, there will be no significant main effect for the sex of the dramatic character being interpreted on subject ratings of performer effectiveness, were not rejected. As further illustrated in Table 1, there

was a significant interaction between sex of interpreter and sex of dramatic character on subject ratings for performer effectiveness at the .05 level of significance. Therefore, hypothesis three, there will not be a statistically significant interaction effect between sex of interpreter and sex of dramatic character on subject ratings for performer effectiveness was rejected.

Table 2 presents the means for dramatic character and interpreter by sex for the audience evaluation of performer effectiveness variable. An examination of Table 2 discloses that male and female performers are both judged to be somewhat more effective when performing a character of their own sex than they are when performing a character of the opposite sex. In addition, the total mean evaluations of female interpreters and female characters was greater than the total mean scores of male interpreters or male characters.

As a consequence of the analysis of variance F test having indicated significant differences for interaction, it was decided to employ the Newman-Keuls Test for pairwise comparisons in order to investigate the locus of the interaction.<sup>18</sup> The results of the Newman-Keuls test in which all pairs of treatment means were compared may be found in Table 3. An examination of Table 3 discloses that the female interpreter was judged to perform female roles significantly better than the male interpreter was judged to perform female roles, but that the male interpreter was not judged to perform male roles significantly better than the female interpreter was judged to perform male roles. Thus, the female interpreter,



like the female member of society in general, may be beginning to be perceived to perform in ways that parallel rather than complement the perceived role of the male interpreter. In effect, the trend may be for her to develop a more androgynous approach to the art.

Table 3 also reveals that there was no significant difference between audience judgments of the male interpreter's effectiveness when performing male parts and his effectiveness when performing female parts. Thus, besides witnessing the beginning of a decline in "men only" roles, we may also be witnessing the beginning of a decline in "women only" roles. Men, today, may no longer feel as compelled to adhere to male stereotypes which in the past, may have caused them to be aggressive, competitive or to suppress tender feelings.<sup>19</sup> Consequently, all character parts may be assuming more of a "unisex" appeal for interpreters and audiences. The assignment to interpreters of characters of both sexes may have become more negotiable than in the past.<sup>20</sup>

The results of the Analysis of Variance that was used to test the three hypotheses that are related to the dependent variable of audience comprehension of the dramatic passages are contained in Table 4.

Results contained in Table 4 indicate that there was one main effect and no interaction effect. Consequently, Hypothesis four which predicted that there would be no significant main effect for the sex of the interpreter on audience comprehension of the dramatic passages, and hypothesis six which predicted that there would be no significant interaction effect between sex of interpreter and sex

of dramatic character being interpreted on audience comprehension of the dramatic passages were not rejected. However, hypothesis five which predicted that there would be no significant main effect for the sex of the dramatic character being interpreted on audience comprehension of the dramatic passages, was rejected.

Table 5 presents the means for dramatic character and interpreter by sex for the audience comprehension of performance variable. An examination of Table 5 showing the means of the sex of dramatic character and the sex of the interpreter indicates that the female character's passages were better comprehended by the audience regardless of whether the passage was performed by a male or by a female interpreter ( $p < .001$ ). This result is particularly interesting since pre-tests had established that there were no significant differences in the mean cloze scores for male and female monologues. In fact, the overall mean difference between monologue sets was .62, and this insignificant difference favored the male monologues. Various factors may be conjectured to account for this unexpected result. It may be that today we are so attuned to receiving information concerning women, that audiences necessarily paid more attention to the monologues belonging to female characters that were performed by male or female interpreters than they did to the monologues belonging to male characters performed by the same male or female interpreters. Thus, one should not overlook the possibility that the impact and pervasiveness of the women's liberation movement was influential in producing the disparate results. Results may also be related to the work of Cherris Kramer who notes that it is too often assumed that women's

speech is inferior to men's speech.<sup>21</sup> This belief may have unconsciously motivated the audience to listen more carefully to the monologues of the female characters since it was expected that female characters would probably display<sup>a</sup> an ". . . inability to reason 'logically.'"<sup>22</sup> Thus, the very fact that verbal activities of women have been ridiculed may have served to further precipitate audience concentration on the feminine monologues. On the other hand, it is possible, as Kramer also states, that women are theoretically more interesting and complicated than men simply because they employ numerous deceptive strategies in order to attain their goals and wield some influence. This theory would also partially account for the added attention that audience members apparently paid to the monologues of the female characters. Another possible explanation<sup>is</sup> related to the work of Whittaker and Meade who note that the sex of the communicator, in this case the character, is not nearly as apparent in written communication as in oral communication.<sup>23</sup> Thus, it may well be that subjects who completed pre-test cloze procedure forms without having heard and seen the monologue performed, may not have even noticed whether the character speaking was male or female.

### Conclusion

The findings of this study can be of benefit to oral-interpretation practitioners. It appears that the conventions of the art of oral interpretation offer men and women the unique opportunity to further free themselves from standard sex roles, and thus, allow themselves to become "androgynous." Indeed, Lee, a major theorist of the field has posited the belief that any interpreter worthy of the name should be able to suggest characters of both sexes quite

satisfactorily to the audience.<sup>24</sup> This study has provided some support for this precept since results indicated no significant differences between either the male reader's ability to perform a male role and his ability to perform a female role, or the female reader's ability to perform a female role and her ability to perform a male role. Thus, the study has shed some light on the performer-audience relationship.

The study has also demonstrated that while ". . . some materials are 'wrong' for certain readers, 'right' for others, being right for a reading or a role is not simply a matter of physical suitability. . . ."<sup>25</sup> In fact, results of this study have shown that a female interpreter is perceived to perform male monologues as effectively as her male counterpart. The male interpreter, however, is not perceived to perform female monologues with the same degree of effectiveness as the female interpreter. This result may be related to the fact that today's audiences, in general, have probably been less exposed to this type of a performance variation. It is noteworthy that the idea that roles be assigned according to matching genders is beginning to lose credence, even though results indicate that this process is not yet complete.

In addition, this investigation has not led to a complete confirmation of the practical belief that the audience accepts the interpretive artist only as himself rather than as the "source" of the lines.<sup>26</sup> If this belief had been completely confirmed, results would have indicated that there was no statistically significant main or interaction effects between sex of interpreter and sex of dramatic character on subject ratings for performer effectiveness and comprehension. As indicated, this was not the case. Rather, results suggest that an audience's ability to imagine and recreate the suggested literary experiences in its

mind is related, in some way, to the sex of the interpreter and the sex of the part performed. In other words, this study has shown that the audience's ability to fulfill the potential of the literary experience in their own imaginations is directly related to specific sex-of-character/sex-of-interpreter combinations. Audience preferences, as demonstrated through ratings of interpreter effectiveness, indicate that it is more involving for the female interpreter to perform female roles than for the male interpreter to perform these parts; such practices apparently make it easier for audience members to realize their expected participation in the dramatic literature.

The findings have also demonstrated that audience judgments of performer effectiveness are not necessarily tied to audience understanding of the performed passages. As Brooks notes, it may be that ". . . it is possible to understand without appreciating, just as it is possible to appreciate without understanding."<sup>27</sup>

The results of this study have hopefully stimulated those involved in the art of oral interpretation to begin to re-examine and re-evaluate some of their beliefs about the field. Many of the art's present practices have survived due to tradition and/or intuition. However, traditional attitudes are not necessarily "right" attitudes. They, too, need to be subjected to periodic re-evaluation and re-interpretation. Frozen evaluations should not be allowed to imprison the living art form of oral interpretation. For this reason, more empirical work is needed in order to adequately test "the obvious." As Cronkhite so aptly stated, "We must reject the notion that empirical methods can produce nothing of value to the artist."<sup>28</sup>

Table 1

2x2 Analysis of Variance of Sex of Interpreter  
and Sex of Dramatic Character for Performer  
Effectiveness Variable

Source of variation	Degrees of freedom	Sum of squares	Mean squares	<u>F</u>	<u>p</u>
Rows (Sex of Character)	1	100.987	100.987	1.23	ns
Columns (Sex of Interpreter)	1	210.799	210.799	2.56	ns
Interaction	1	304.767	304.768	3.70*	<.05
Error	271	22331.953	82.406		
Total	274	22948.506	83.754		

\* Significant at .05 level.

Table 2

Table of Means of Performers and Characters  
by Sex for the Evaluation Variable

Character	Performers		Mean of Total
	Male	Female	
Male	51.503	51.152	51.330
Female	50.609	54.488	52.549
Mean of total	51.059	52.820	

Difference between female and male performers = 1.761

Difference between female and male characters = 1.219

Table 3

Newman-Keuls Test for Differences Among Means

	$X_3$	$X_2$	$X_1$	$X_4$
$X_3 = 50.609$	--	.543	.899	*3.879
$X_2 = 51.152$			.456	3.336
$X_1 = 51.503$				2.980

\* Significant at .05 level.

Table 4

2x2 Analysis of Variance of Sex of Interpreter  
and Sex of Dramatic Character for the  
Audience Comprehension Variable

Source of variation	Degrees of freedom	Sum of squares	Mean squares	F	p
Rows (Sex of Character)	1	2507.967	2507.967	24.673***	<.001
Columns (Sex of Interpreter)	1	90.994	90.994	.895	ns
Interaction	1	100.398	100.398	.998	ns
Error	271	27546.659	101.648		
Total	274	30246.018	110.387		

\*\*\* Significant at .001 level.

Table 5

Table of Means of Performers and Characters  
by Sex for the Comprehension Variable

Character	Performers		Mean of Total
	Male	Female	
Male	42.476	44.848	43.662
Female	49.766	49.710	49.736
Mean of total	46.121	47.278	

Difference between female and male performers = 1.157

Difference between female and male characters = 6.074

## Footnotes

- 1 Paul D. Brandes, "The Research: A Behavioral Approach," in Perspectives on Oral Interpretation, ed. John W. Gray (Minneapolis: Burgess Publishing Company, 1969), pp. 99-119; Martin Cobin, "Research Methods, Trends, Ideas," in The Communicative Arts and Sciences of Speech, ed. Keith Brooks (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Books, Inc., 1969), pp. 332-347; and Gary Cronkhite, "The Place of Aesthetics and Perception in a Paradigm of Interpretation," Western Speech, XXXIV (1970), 274-287.
- 2 David Allen Williams, "The Effects of Positive and Negative Audience Response on the Oral Interpreter: A Multiple Indicator Approach," unpublished dissertation for the Ph.D., University of Utah, 1971, viii.
- 3 Keith Brooks, Eugene Bahn and L. Lamont Okey, The Communicative Act of Oral Interpretation (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1975, p.35; Paul Hunsinger, Communicative Interpretation (Dubuque, Iowa: William C. Brown, Co., 1967), p.12.
- 4 Samuel L. Becker, "Experimental Studies in Oral Interpretation: A Critique," Western Speech, XXXIII (1969), 270.
- 5 Richard Haas and David A. Williams, The Study of Oral Interpretation: Theory and Comment (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1975), p.55.
- 6 Cobin, pp. 332-347; Brandes, pp. 99-119.
- 7 Timothy J. Gura, "The Solo Performer and Drama," The Speech Teacher, 24 (1975), 278-281; Textbooks that pay little or no attention to the solo performance of drama include Martin Cobin, Theory and Technique of Interpretation (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1959; Robert Seloolf, The Performing Voice in Literature, (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1966); Joanna H. MacLay and Thomas C. Sloan, Interpretation: An Approach to the Study of Literature (New York: Random House, 1972); Esther M. Doyle and Virginia Hastings Floyd, eds. Studies in Interpretation (Amsterdam: Rodopi NV, 1972).
- 8 Chloe Armstrong and Paul D. Brandes, The Oral Interpretation of Literature (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1963); Wallace Bacon, The Art of Interpretation (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972); Charlotte I. Lee, Oral Interpretation (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1971), and Virgil D. Sessions and Jack B. Holland, Your Role in Oral Interpretation (Boston: Holbrook Press, Inc., 1975).
- 9 Lee, p.334.
- 10 Otis J. Aggertt and Elbert R. Bowen, Communicative Reading (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1972), p. 30.



- 11 Paul Roland, "An Exploratory Study of Sex as a Factor Influencing Appropriateness in the Reader-Literature Complex," unpublished dissertation for the Ph.D., Southern Illinois University, 1967. This single study sought to investigate whether sex as manifested in readers and in poetic literature exercised an influence on audience judgments of appropriateness as shown by the audience's evaluation of performer effectiveness.
- 12 The monologues that had been rated as clearly masculine in nature were speeches by Torvald Helmer from A Doll's House, Jerry Kingsley from Middle of the Night, and James Tyrone from Long Day's Journey Into Night. The monologues that had been rated as clearly feminine in nature were speeches by Nora Helmer from A Doll's House, Betty Preiss from Middle of the Night, and Mary Tyrone from Long Day's Journey Into Night.
- 13 Roland, pp. 30-33; 80-81.
- 14 Wilson L. Taylor, "'Cloze' Readability Scores as Indices of Individual Differences in Comprehension and Aptitude," Journal of Applied Psychology, 41 (1957), 19-21.
- 15 Wilson L. Taylor, "Recent Developments in the Use of 'Cloze' Procedure," Journalism Quarterly, 33 (1956), 42-48; and Taylor, "'Cloze' Readability Scores as Indices of Individual Differences in Comprehension and Aptitude," 19-26.
- 16 Wilson L. Taylor, "'Cloze' Procedure: A New Tool for Measuring Readability," Journalism Quarterly, 30 (1953), 421.
- 17 In "Recent Developments in the Use of 'Cloze' Procedure," Taylor notes ". . . it appears that every fifth word deletion system spaces blanks as far apart as they need to be."
- 18 Roger B. Kirk, Experimental Design for the Behavioral Sciences (Belmont, Calif.: Brooks Cole Publishing Company, 1968), pp. 91-93.
- 19 Helen B. Schaffer, "Women's Consciousness Raising," in Editorial Research Reports on the Women's Movement, ed. Hoyt Gimlin (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 1973), p. 18.
- 20 Betty Vorburg, Sexual Identity: Sex Roles and Social Change (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1974), p. 3.
- 21 Cherie Kramer, "Sex Differences in Communication Behavior," A Paper Delivered at the Speech Communication Association Convention in Houston, Texas, December 30, 1975, mimeographed.
22. Ibid., p. 2.
- 23 James O. Whittaker and Robert D. Meade, "Sex of the Communicator as a Variable in Source Credibility," Journal of Social Psychology, 72 (1967), 33.
- 24 Lee, p. 334.

25 Gladys E. Lynch, and Harold C. Crain, Projects in Oral Interpretation (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1959), p. 296.

26 Keith Brooks, "The Communicative Act of Oral Interpretation," in The Communicative Arts and Sciences of Speech, ed. Keith Brooks (Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Books, Inc., 1969), p. 306; Aggertt and Bowen, p. 31; Lee, p. 328; and Jere Villeux, Oral Interpretation: The Re-creation of Literature (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), p. 26.

27 Keith Brooks, "The Communicative Act of Oral Interpretation," p. 308.

28 Cronkhite, "The Place of Aesthetics and Perception in a Paradigm of Interpretation," 274.