

LANGUAGE AND GENDER

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ABSTRACT: *The differences between men and women in using language have been studied long time before. This paper is an attempt to investigate variations in gender language use. In addition, it highlights the definitions of some gender-linguistic terms. On the basis of these differences and changes, the paper also tries to make some explanation to these differences and changes. Issues such as the following have been covered in this paper: Differences in men's and women's speech, Women talk more/less than men, Women break the 'rules' of turn-taking less than men, Women use more standard forms than men, and Women's speech is less direct/assertive than men's. Moreover, it discusses matters such as: the differences from the aspects of pronunciation, intonation, vocabulary, syntax, manners, attitudes, and non-verbal differences in using language between men and women.*

KEYWORDS: Gender, turn-taking, standard forms, assertive.

INTRODUCTION

Çakici (2011) cites that since the early 1990s, the theme of men and women metaphorically 'speaking different languages' has become very common in popular culture. According to books like *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*, women love to talk, whereas men prefer action to words. Women view talking as a way of connecting with others emotionally, whereas men treat conversation either as a practical tool or a competitive sport. Women are good at listening, building rapport with others and avoiding or defusing conflict; men confront each other more directly, and are less attuned to either their own or others' feelings (Gray, 1992: 21). More recently, a new wave of popular scientific writing has linked these observations to differences in the way male and female brains work (Baron-Cohen, 2003; Brizendine, 2006). One study of Australian school children's attitudes to foreign language learning found that pupils as young as 12 knew all the 'Mars and Venus' clichés. 'Girls can do languages – that's how their brains are', said one boy. Another commented: 'Girls enjoy talk: it's what they do, what they're good at'. Most of the girls agreed that 'boys are hopeless communicators!' (Carr and Pauwels, 2006: 146).

Observations of the differences between the way males and females speak were long restricted to grammatical features, such as the differences between masculine and feminine in morphology in many languages. However, in the 1970s women researchers started looking at how a linguistic code transmitted sexist values and bias. Lakoff's work (1975) is an example of this; she raised questions such as: Do women have a more restricted vocabulary than men? Do they use more adjectives? Are their sentences incomplete? Do they use more 'superficial' words? Consequently, researchers started to investigate empirically both bias in the language and the differential usage of the code by men and women.

Xia (2013) cites that over the past thirty years, and as a result of the women's movement, gender issues have become connected with the issue of language. Gender studies and language studies are both interdisciplinary academic field. The study of language began from thousands of years ago, while the study of gender is quite short. "Gender studies have developed differently, achieving the

greatest influence in North America; the „era of feminism“ that began in the late 1960s and affected academic and public life as well as „high“ and popular culture has been instrumental in shaping the historical and scholarly context of its generation. Feminist work has entered and had an impact upon almost every academic discipline.” (Flotow, 2004. p.1).

Differences in men’s and women’s speech

General comments

The issue of women interacting differently from men has been discussed for hundreds of years. However, feminist movements in the 1960s realized that language was one of the instruments of female oppression by males. As a matter of fact, language not only reflected a patriarchal system but also emphasized male supremacy over women. Most of the works analyzing language were to do mostly with male language production. Labov’s works (1972a, 1972b), for instance, described mostly the speech of men. However, other linguists, such as the ones cited below, started to become interested in observable differences in language production depending on the sex of the speakers.

Women talk more/less than men

According to Cameron and Coates (1985), the amount we talk is influenced by who we are with and what we are doing. They also add that if we aggregate a large number of studies, it will be observed that there is little difference between the amount men and women talk. On the one hand, in a recent study, Dr. Brizendine (1994) states that women talk three times as much as men. On the other hand, Drass (1986), in an experiment on gender identity in conversation dyads found that men speak more than women.

Women break the ‘rules’ of turn-taking less than men

Studies in the area of language and gender often make use of two models or paradigms - that of dominance and that of difference. The first is associated with Dale Spender (1980), Pamela Fishman (1980), Don Zimmerman and Candace West (1975), while the second is associated with Deborah Tannen (1984). Dominance can be attributed to the fact that in mixed-sex conversations, men are more likely to interrupt than women. It uses a fairly old study of a small sample of conversations, recorded by Don Zimmerman and Candace West at the Santa Barbara campus of the University of California in 1975. The subjects of the recording were white, middle class and under 35. Zimmerman and West produce in evidence 31 segments of conversation. They report that in 11 conversations between men and women, men used 46 interruptions, but women only two. The difference theory was also summarized in Tannen’s book *You just don’t understand* (1990) in an article in which she represents male and female language use in a series of six contrasts:

- Status vs. support

This claims that men grow up in a world in which conversation is competitive - they seek to achieve the upper hand or to prevent others from dominating them. For women, however, talking is often a way to gain confirmation and support for their ideas. Men see the world as a place where people try to gain status and keep it. Women see the world as “a network of connections seeking support and consensus.”

- Independence vs. intimacy

In general, women often think in terms of closeness and support, and struggle to preserve intimacy. Men, concerned with status, tend to focus more on independence. These traits can lead women and men to starkly different views of the same situation.

- Advice vs. understanding

Deborah Tannen claims that to many men a complaint is a challenge to find a solution: “When my mother tells my father she doesn't feel well, he invariably offers to take her to the doctor. Invariably, she is disappointed with his reaction. Like many men, he is focused on what he can do, whereas she wants sympathy.” (Tannen 1984:180).

- Information vs. feelings

Culturally and historically speaking, men's concerns were seen as more important than those of women, but today this situation may be reversed so that the giving of information and brevity of speech are considered of less value than sharing of emotions and elaboration.

- Orders vs. proposals

It is claimed that women often suggest that people do things in indirect ways - “let's”, “why don't we?” or “wouldn't it be good, if we...?” Men may use, and prefer to hear, a direct imperative.

- Conflict vs. compromise

This situation can be clearly observed in work-situations where a management decision seems unattractive - men will often resist it vocally, while women may appear to accede, but complain subsequently. In fact, this is a broad generalization - and for every one of Deborah Tannen's oppositions, we will know of men and women who are exceptions to the norm.

Women use more standard forms than men

In the literature, Trudgill (1972) found a kind of sex differentiation for speakers of urban British English. His study demonstrated that “women informants”... use forms associated with the prestige standard more frequently than men”. His study also discovered that male speakers place a high value on working class nonstandard speech. He offers several possible reasons for the finding that women are more likely to use forms considered correct: (1) The subordinate position of women in English and American societies makes it “more necessary for women to secure their social status linguistically”; and (2) while men can be rated socially on what they do, women may be rated primarily on how they appear – so their speech is more important. As for American literature, research has not shown a noticeable difference in terms of the usage of standard forms by men and women.

Women's speech is less direct/assertive than men's

In 1975, Robin Lakoff published an influential account of women's language in her book entitled *Language and Woman's Place*. In another article she published a set of basic assumptions about what marks the language of women. Among them she made some claims that women (Lakoff, 1975:45-79):

- Hedge: using phrases like “sort of”, “kind of”, “it seems like”, and so on.
- Use (super)polite forms: “Would you mind...”, “I'd appreciate it if...”, “...if you don't mind”.
- Use tag questions: “You're going to dinner, aren't you?”
- Speak in italics: intonational emphasis equal to underlining words - so, very, quite.
- Use empty adjectives: divine, lovely, adorable, and so on
- Use hypercorrect grammar and pronunciation: English prestige grammar and clear enunciation.
- Use direct quotation: men paraphrase more often.
- Have a special lexicon: women use more words for things like colors, men for sports.
- Use question intonation in declarative statements: women make declarative statements into questions by raising the pitch of their voice at the end of a statement, expressing uncertainty. For example, “What school do you attend? Eton College?”
- Use “wh-” imperatives: (such as, “Why don't you open the door?”)
- Speak less frequently

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- Overuse qualifiers: (for example, “I think that...”)
 - Apologize more: (for instance, “I’m sorry, but I think that...”)
 - Use modal constructions: (such as can, would, should, ought - “Should we turn up the heat?”)
 - Avoid coarse language or expletives
 - Use indirect commands and requests: (for example, “My, isn't it cold in here?” - really a request to turn the heat on or close a window)
 - Use more intensifiers: especially so and very (for instance, “I am so glad you came!”)
 - Lack a sense of humor: women do not tell jokes well and often don't understand the punch line of jokes.

Holmes (2001) and O’Barr and Atkins (1998) have both constructed similar lists of Lakoff’s work on “women’s language”. As can be noted, some of these statements are easier to verify by investigation and observation than others. It is easy to count the frequency with which tag questions or modal verbs occur. However, Lakoff’s remark about humor is much harder to quantify - some critics might reply that notions of humor differ between men and women.

In their study, O’ Barr and Atkins (1980) looked into courtroom cases and witnesses' speech. Their findings challenge Lakoff’s view of women's language. Doing some research in what they describe as “powerless language”, they show that language differences are based on situation-specific authority or power and not gender. It is also evident that there may be social contexts where women are (for other reasons) more or less the same as those who lack power. As a matter of fact, this is a far more limited claim than that made by Dale Spender (1980), who identifies power with a male patriarchal order - the theory of dominance.

As a result of their study, O'Barr and Atkins (1980) concluded that the quoted speech patterns were neither characteristic of all women nor limited only to women. Therefore, the women who used the lowest frequency of women's language traits had an unusually high status (according to the researchers). They were well-educated professionals with middle class backgrounds. A corresponding pattern was noted among the men who spoke with a low frequency of women's language traits. O'Barr and Atkins tried to emphasize that a powerful position might derive from either social standing in the larger society and/or status accorded by the court.

Male-Female Difference in their Using Language

Xia (2013) cites that language reflects, records, and transmits social differences, so we should not be surprised to find reflections of gender differences in language, for most societies differentiate between men and women in various marked ways. The paper will examine the differences from the following aspects.

A. Differences in Pronunciation

Phonological differences between the speech of men and women have been noted in a variety of languages. Usually women's pronunciation is better than men's, such as the pronunciation of “-ing”. Shuy (1969) made a study in this field, and he found that 62.2% of men pronounced “-ing” in a wrong way, but only 28.9% of women didn't pronounce right. This can also be shown in the learning of the second language. Usually female students have better pronunciation than male students, and that can explain the reason why more girls choose to learn language as their major than boys. Generally speaking, girls exhibit a better ability in language.

B. Differences in Intonation

Women often like to speak in a high-pitch voice because of physiological reason, but scientists point out that this also associates with women's "timidity" and "emotional instability". Besides the high-pitch voice, women prefer to use reverse accent as well.

Example: Husband: When will dinner be ready?

Wife: Around six o'clock..

The wife is the only one who knows the answer, but she answers her husband with a high rise tone, which has the meaning "will that do". This kind of intonation suggests women's gentility and docility. The husband will surely feel his wife's respect. Lakoff (1975) says that women usually answer a question with rising intonation pattern rather than falling intonation. In this way, they can show their gentleness, and sometimes this intonation shows a lack of confidence. As a contrary, men like to use falling intonation to show that they are quite sure of what they are saying. Falling intonation also shows men's confidence and sometimes power.

C. Differences in Vocabulary

We can notice that men and women tend to choose different words to show their feelings. For example, when a woman is frightened, she usually shouts out, "I am frightened to death"! If you hear a man says this, you'll think he is a coward and womanish.

The differences in vocabulary can be shown in the following five aspects:

1. Color Words

There is special feminine vocabulary in English that men may not, dare not or will not use. Women are good at using color words that were borrowed from French to describe things, such as mauve, lavender aquamarine, azure and magenta, etc, but most men do not use them.

2. Adjectives

In our everyday life, we can notice that women like to use many adjective, such as adorable, charming, lovely, fantastic, heavenly, but men seldom use them. When a woman leaves a restaurant, she will say "It's a gorgeous meal". If a man wants to express the same idea, he may only say, "It's a good meal." Using more adjectives to describe things and their feelings can show that women are more sensitive to the environment and more likely to express their emotions with words, which makes women's language more interesting than men's sometimes.

3. Adverbs

There are also differences in the use of adverbs between men and women. Women tend to use such adverbs like awfully, pretty, terribly, vastly, quite, so; men like to use very, utterly, really. In 1992, Jespersen found that women use more so than men do, such as, "It was so interesting" is often uttered by a woman.

4. Swear words and Expletives

Maybe because women are gentle and docile, they usually avoid using swear words and dirty words. They believe that these kinds of words will not only make others uncomfortable and give an impression of "no civilization", but also destroy the relationship between her and others. Women always pay more attention to the grace of themselves and their use of language. We rarely hear that women utter such words like "damn, fuck you, hell," instead they use "oh, dear, my god" to express their feelings. Let us examine the following examples:

Woman: Dear me! Do you always get up so late? It's one o'clock!

Man: Shit! The train is late again!

We can often here similar ways of expressing shock in everyday life. Men tend to use more swear words than men. Women pay more attention to their manners and politeness of using language.

5. Diminutives

Women like to use words that have the meaning of “small”, such as bookie, hanky, panties. They also like to use words that show affections, such as dearie, sweetie. If a man often uses these words, people will think that he may have psychological problem or he is not manly.

Furthermore, women like to use words that show politeness, such as please, thanks, and they use more euphemism, but “slang” is considered to be men's preference.

From the study we can see that men and women have their own vocabulary choices in achieving emphatic effects. Though in the area of vocabulary, many of the studies have focused on English, we can not deny that sex differences in word choice exist in various other languages. People need to learn to make these distinctions in their childhood.

6. Pronouns

Women prefer to use first person plural pronouns when they suggest something, even when she suggests the other person, while men tend to use first person singular pronoun, and when he is suggesting the other person, he will directly use the second person pronoun.

Example: Women: We need to be in a hurry.

Men: You need to be quick.

D. Difference in Syntax

Though there are no specific rules that govern different gender to use different grammar, we can observe these differences in almost every language.

1. Modulation

When a woman talks, she often takes what others think into consideration. She usually leaves a decision open rather than imposes her own ideas or claims on others. We often hear a woman say “well, you know..., I think..., I suppose...kind of, maybe I am wrong but..., etc.

When they want to get help from others, men and women express in different ways as the following:

Women: I was wondering if you can help me.

Men: please give me a hand.

From the above example we can see men tend to ask something directly, while women tend to be more polite.

2. Interrogative sentences

Women use more interrogative sentences than men do. Women look interrogative sentences as a strategy of continuing a good conversation. Lakoff (1975) pointed out that compared with men, women are more likely to use an interrogative sentence to express their idea, and they like to use tag questions, because tag questions can make the tone less tense. Fishman (1980) collected many couples' conversation tapes, and he found that women used three times of tag questions as men did. In these conversations, they were 370 interrogative sentences, among which women used 263, almost two and a half of times of men did. This point is similar to the difference in intonation between men and women. Just as Lakoff (1975) said that women might answer a question with rising tone, while men like to use falling tone to make a firm statement. According to Lakoff (1975), women tend to do this because they are less sure about themselves and their opinions than men. The different use of language also shows that women are more likely to be short of confidence. From another aspect, we can say that women are more polite and considerate than men.

3. Imperative sentences

A study observed a group of boys and girls on one street in Philadelphia, and the study found that the imperative sentences that the boys and girls use were different. The boys used a lot of imperative sentences but the girls used more “let's patterns”.

Example: Boy: Give me an apple!

Girl: Would you give me an apple?

Boy: It's time to go.

Girl: Let's go.

The research also found that girls prefer to use sentences with modal verbs, such as can, could, may. But they seldom use imperative sentences to give orders. To reduce the imperative tone, they use more adverbs like maybe, perhaps, probably.

4. Correctness of grammar

Women pay more attention to the correctness of syntax. While expressing her thoughts, she would make her utterance clear by using precise grammar.

Example: Woman: We are going to go to the park today.

Men: We are gonna to the park today.

5. Differences in Their Attitudes toward Language

Women pay more attention to using standard language than men do, so they are stricter with the rules of the use of language.

Example: Man: Are you comin'?"

Woman: Are you coming?"

Women tend to use the standard form. This point is emphasized in the difference of pronunciation. In Detroit, people like to use multiple negations, such as: I do not want none. Research found that men use much more of this kind of substandard form than women. This can be seen from movie "Forrest Gump. Influenced by the southern accent, Forrest often uses double negative to show negative meaning.

6. Non-verbal Differences: Differences in Manners

We have mentioned that women usually show politeness in their conversation, such as the use of "would you, please, etc." Besides this, women also show that they are reserved when they talk. The following table is based on the research of Zimmerman and West on the interruptions men and women made in a conversation.

	male	female	total
interruptions	46	2	48

We can see that men continued interrupting other's talk, instead women are more patient. Even though they want to talk, they will wait until others stop their talking. Generally speaking, in a conversation involving both sexes, women often play the role of patient listeners. They do not interrupt others often, but encourage others to talk. However, men are eager to be heard, which pushes them to catch as many opportunities as possible. Men do not like to be silent. This makes them appear to be more active than women. In other words, in a conversation involving both sexes, women tend to be silent.

7. Differences in Choosing Topics

In social interaction, men and women have different interests in choosing their topics. When men are talking, they are more likely to choose the topics of politics, economy, stocks, sports, current news. While women have more interest in talking family affairs, such as the education of children, clothes, cooking, fashion, etc. Women's talk is associated with the home and domestic activities, while men's is associated with the outside world and economic activities. Thus, while there is a popular prejudice that women talk more than men, empirical studies of a number of social situations such as committee meetings and internet discussion groups have shown the opposite to be true. Women may talk more in informal occasions than men, but they surely play the second role in the formal occasions and tend to speak less than men. Sociolinguists studied women's silence in public situations as well as the linguistic work they do in their partnerships (Spender, 1980). Besides these differences, other sex-

linked differences exist, such as women and men may have different paralinguistic system and move and gesture differently.

CONCLUSION

Gender as an analytical category continues to motivate researchers in many areas. This paper has seen the differences between the use of language of men and women from some aspects, and we can notice that there are many differences in using language between the two genders, and also there are some changes through time. We believe that with the development of society, there will be fewer differences in the usage of language. Language, as a tool of human communication, will be improving day by day, and this needs the effort of both men and women. "The establishment of women's studies" initiatives developed from this sense of women's commonality as well as from the realization that women were excluded from large parts of public and academic life." (Flotow, 2004. p.6). With more participation into the social life, business, academic field and so on, there will be other changes in the future. The changes in the language can show the improvement in women's social status.

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