

Language and Gender

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Abstract

The relationship between gender and language has been studied with main focus on differences between the language of male and female from different angles with different methodologies.

The research findings lay different emphasis on the differences, but there are some problems in the researches. This paper will review the previous researches into gender differences, then point out the problems existing in methodology and research findings, and finally propose that researchers should pay more attention to the similarities between the languages of both genders, the similarities play the same important part as well as differences. As a point of departure, Gender and Language defines gender along two key dimensions. First, gender is a key element of social relationships often loosely linked to perceived differences between the genders. Gender relations are encoded in linguistic and symbolic representations, normative concepts, social practices, institutions and social identities. Second, gender is a primary arena for articulating power, intersecting in complex ways with other axes of inequality, like class, race, and. Gender is understood as multi-faceted, always changing, and often contested: the editors welcome discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of competing definitions of gender and of new analytical perspectives.

In methodological terms, there is no single approach that could be said to 'hold the field'. As research in this area can be more usefully to be divided into three main areas of study: first, there is a broad and sustained interest in the varieties of speech associated with a particular second, there is a related interested in the social norms and conventions that produce gendered language use associated with a particular gender is sometimes called a and third, there are studies that focus on the contextually specific and locally situated ways in which gender is constructed.

Keywords: language, gender, differences, similarities, dimensions

Language and Gender

What Are Language and Gender Studies?

"Regarding gender, extensive research on language , culture, and identity has sought to uncover 'the logic of the encoding of gender differences in languages,' to analyze the 'oppressive implications of ordinary speech,' to explain miscommunication between men and women, to explore how 'gender is constructed and interacts with other identities,' and to investigate 'the role of language in helping establish gender identity part of a broader range of processes through which membership in particular groups is activated, imposed, and sometimes contested through the use of linguistic forms . . . that activate stances.

Different approaches attributed in the language and gender studies

Deficit is an approach attributed to Jespersen that defines adult male language as the standard, and women's language as deficient. This approach created a dichotomy between women's language and men's language. This triggered criticism to the approach in those highlighting issues in women's language by using men's as a benchmark. As such, women's language was considered to have something inherently 'wrong' with it.

Dominance is an approach whereby the female gender is seen as the subordinate group whose difference in style of speech results from male supremacy and also possibly an effect of patriarchy. This results in a primarily male-centered language. Scholars such as Dale Spender and Don Zimmerman and Candace West subscribe to this view.

Difference is an approach of equality, differentiating men and women as belonging to different 'sub-cultures' as they have been socialized to do so since childhood. This then results in the varying communicative styles of men and women. Deborah Tannen is a major advocate of this position. Tannen compares gender differences in language to cultural differences. Comparing conversational goals, she argues that men tend to use a "report style", aiming to communicate factual information, whereas women more often use a "rapport style", which is more concerned with building and maintaining relationships.

The "dynamic" or "social_constructionist" approach is, as Coates describes, the most current approach to language and gender. Instead of speech falling into a natural gendered category, the dynamic nature and multiple factors of an interaction help a socially appropriate gendered construct. As such, West and Zimmerman describe these constructs as "doing gender" instead of the speech itself necessarily being classified in a particular category. This is to say that these social constructs, while affiliated with particular genders, can be utilized by speakers as they see fit.

How the communication style differs from one gender to another gender?

Communication styles are always a product of context, and as such, gender differences tend to be most pronounced in single-gender groups. One explanation for this is that people accommodate their language towards the style of the person they are interacting with. Thus, in a mixed-gender group, gender differences tend to be less pronounced. A similarly important observation is that this accommodation is usually towards the language style, not the gender of the person. That is, a polite and empathic male will tend to be accommodated to on the basis of their being polite and empathic, rather than their being male.

Women are generally believed to speak a better "language" than men do. This is a constant misconception, but scholars believe that no gender speaks a better language, but that each gender instead speaks its own unique language. This notion has sparked further research into the study of the differences between the way men and women communicate.

Speech practices associated with gender

Not all members of a particular gender may follow the specific gender roles that are prescribed by society. The patterns in gender and communication that follow are only the norms for each gender, and not every member of the corresponding gender may fit into those patterns.

Minimal response

One of the ways in which the communicative behaviors of men and women differ is in their use of minimal responses, i.e., paralinguistic features, which is behavior associated with collaborative language use. Men generally use them less frequently than women, and when they do, it is usually to show agreement, as Don Zimmerman and Candace West's study of turn-taking in conversation indicates:

Questions

Men and women differ in their use of questions in conversations. For men, a question is usually a genuine request for information whereas with women it can often be a rhetorical means of

engaging the other's conversational contribution or of acquiring attention from others conversationally involved, techniques associated with a collaborative approach to language use. Therefore, women use questions more frequently.

Turn-taking

As the work of Victoria DeFrancisco shows, female linguistic behavior characteristically encompasses a desire to take turns in conversation with others, which is opposed to men's tendency towards centering on their own point or remaining silent when presented with such implicit offers of conversational turn-taking as are provided by hedges such as "y' know" and "isn't it. This desire for turn-taking gives rises to complex forms of interaction in relation to the more regimented form of turn-taking commonly exhibited by men.

Changing the topic of conversation

According to Bruce Dorval in his study of same-gender friend interaction, males tend to change subject more frequently than females. This difference may well be at the root of the conception that women chatter and talk too much. Goodwin observes that girls and women link their utterances to previous speakers and develop each other's topics, rather than introducing new topics.

Self-disclosure

Female tendencies toward self-disclosure, i.e., sharing their problems and

experiences with others, often to offer sympathy, contrasts with male tendencies to self-disclosure and professing advice or offering a solution when confronted with another's problems.

Self-disclosure is not simply providing information to another person. Instead, scholars define self-disclosure as sharing information with others that they would not normally know or discover. Self-disclosure involves risk and vulnerability on the part of the person sharing the information. When it comes to genderlect, self-disclosure is important because genderlect is defined as the differences in male and female communication. Men and women have completely different views of self-disclosure. Developing a close relationship with another person requires a certain level of intimacy, or self-disclosure. It typically is much easier to get to know a woman than it is to get to know a man.¹ It has been proven that women get to know someone on a more personal level, and they are more likely to desire to share their feelings. It has also been said that people share more via technology. The phenomenon is known as Computer Mediated Communication, also known as CMC. This form of communication typically involves text only messages that tend to lose their nonverbal cues. Men and women are both more likely to self-disclose on the computer than they would be face to face. People are more confident when using Computer Mediated Communication because communication is faceless, which makes it easier to divulge information.

Verbal aggression

Aggression can be defined by its three intersecting counterparts: indirect, relational and social. Indirect aggression occurs when the victim is attacked through covert and concealed attempts to cause social suffering. Examples are gossiping, exclusion or ignoring of the victim.

Relational aggression, while similar to indirect, is more resolute in its attentions. It can be a threat to terminate a friendship or spreading false rumors. The third type of aggression, social aggression, "is directed toward damaging another's self-esteem, social status, or both, and may take direct forms such as verbal rejection, negative facial expressions or body movements, or more indirect forms such as slanderous rumors or social exclusion. This third type has become more common in adolescent, both male and female, behavior.

Listening and attentiveness

In a conversation, meaning does not reside in the words spoken, but it filled in by the person listening. Each person decides if they think others are speaking in the spirit of differing status or symmetrical connection. The likelihood that individuals will tend to interpret someone else's words as one or the other depends more on the hearer's own focus, concerns, and habits than on the spirit in which the words were intended.

It appears that women attach more weight than men to the importance of listening in conversation, with its connotations of power to the listener as confidant of the speaker. This attachment of import by women to listening is inferred by women's normally lower rate of interruption — i.e., disrupting the flow of conversation with a topic unrelated to the previous one — and by their largely increased use of minimal responses in relation to men. Men, however, interrupt far more frequently with non-related topics, especially in the mixed gender setting and, far from rendering a female speaker's responses minimal, are apt to greet her conversational spotlights with silence, as the work of Victoria DeFrancisco demonstrates.

Heterogenderual relationships

As described above, there are certain stereotypes society places on the way men and women communicate. Men are stereotyped to be more of a public speaker and leader, while women are stereotyped to talk more in private among their family and friends. For women, society views their use of communication as a way to express feelings and emotions. For men, society views their use of communication as a way to express power and negotiate status among other individuals. There are also certain societal stereotypes about how men and women communicate within a heterogenderual marriage or relationship. When a man and a woman are communicating within their relationship, the traditional language roles are altered. The man becomes more passive and the woman becomes more active. A man's stereotypical silent communication style is often disappointing for women, while a woman's emotionally articulate communication style is often seen as aggravating for a man. This creates the assumption that women and men have opposing communication styles, therefore creating society's cliché that men and women don't understand each other.

Dominance versus subjection

This, in turn, suggests a dichotomy between a male desire for conversational dominance – noted by Helena Leet-Pellegrini with reference to male experts speaking more verbosely than their female counterparts – and a female aspiration to group conversational participation. One corollary of this is, according to Jennifer Coates, that males are afforded more attention in the context of the classroom and that this can lead to their gaining more attention in scientific and technical subjects, which in turn can lead to their achieving better success in those areas, ultimately leading to their having more power in a technocratic society.

Politeness

Politeness in speech is described in terms of positive and negative face. Positive *face* refers to one's desire to be liked and admired, while negative face refers to one's wish to remain autonomous and not to suffer imposition. Both forms, according to Penelope Brown's study of the Tzeltal language, are used more frequently by women whether in mixed or single-gender pairs, suggesting for Brown a greater sensitivity in women than have men to face the needs of others. In short, women are to all intents and purposes largely more polite than men. However, negative face politeness can be potentially viewed as weak language because of its associated hedges and tag questions, a view propounded by O'Barr and Atkins (1980) in their work on courtroom interaction.

Reference

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