# **Relationship between Gender and Language**

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# Abstract

There is a close connection between the structures, vocabularies and the ways of using language and the social roles of men and women who speak the language. Why there are different varieties for men and women. Do men and women use language in the same way? Why do these differences arise? Is it because of the structures of that language? Or because of the norms of the society, which prescribe the ways men and women should use language. First question gives rise to another question: 'Is it possible to describe a particular language 'sexist'? The second question also produces another question: 'Is it possible to label the users of that language and the norms regulating the use of language as 'sexist'. These questions are actually the issues of discussion on gender and language. Besides, how can we avoid sexism in language is also a concern of the discussion. We examine gender differences in language use in light of the biological and social construction theories of gender.

**Keywords**: Gender, Politeness and Stereotypes, Pronunciation, Interruptions, Competitive, cooperative, Construction of gender, social construction, biological, language differences, Dominance, Status and Power.

# Introduction

Certainly, women's speech differs from men's speech; and women and men use language differently due to the styles, registers, and the way of using language, interaction, thought, culture, and linguistic attitudes gender, politeness and stereotypes. In fact, there is a number of close relationship between Gender and language. Another word, men's way of using language and women's way of using language is different. It is because of structure of the language, norm of the society or people of the society who use the language. Moreover, gender (male-female) is socially constructed. Because of the social institution or taboo, we find variations/differences between men and women. In addition to, men's style of speaking and women style of speaking are deeply rooted in power structure. In the following passages, I will give some arguments in favor of my statements.

# Studies of language and gender:

The study of gender and language in sociolinguistics is often said to have begun with Robin Lakoff's 1975 book, Language and Woman's Place, as well as some earlier studies by Lakoff.

The study of language and gender has developed greatly since the 1970s. Prominent scholars include Deborah Cameron, Penelope Eckert, Janet Holmes, Deborah Tannen, and others.

Women's Language, Confidence and Status Conscious

Women, according to some social dialectologists' suggestions, are status conscious and that this is reflected in their use of standard speech form. Robin Lakoff, an American linguist, suggests almost the opposite. She argues that women are using language which reinforces their subordinate status; they are 'colluding in their own subordination' by the way they speak. In fact, it is English language and patriarchal society is responsible for colluding women status and confidence.

# Pronunciation

Social dialect research focuses on difference between women's and men's speech in the areas of pronunciation and morphology with some attention to syntactic constructions (such as multiple negations). Brend (1975) claims that the intonation pattern of men and women vary. Robin Lakoff shifts the focus of research on gender difference to syntax, semantics, and style. She suggests that women's subordinate social status in American society is reflected in the language used about them. She identifies a number of linguistics features which she claims are used more often by women than men, and which in her opinion express uncertainty and lack of confidence.

According to Robin Lakoff, Women's use of both Hedging and boosting devices present the lack of confidence. Lakoff suggests that women's speech is characterized by linguistic features such as following:

1) Lexical hedges or fillers, e.g. you know, you see, sort of, well.

2) Tag questions, e.g. She's very nice, isn't she?

- 3) Rising intonation on declaratives, e.g. it's really good?
- 4) 'Empty' adjectives, e.g. divine, charming, cute.
- 5) Precise color terms, e.g. magenta, aquamarine.
- 6) Intensifiers such as just , and so ,e.g. I like him so much.
- 7) 'Hypercorrect' grammar, e.g. consistent use of standard verb forms
- 8) Avoidance of strong swears words, e.g. fudge, my goodness.

# 9) Emphatic stress, e.g. it is a BRILLANT performance.

Here, all are hedging devices except the boosting devices –intensifiers and emphatics stress. Lakoff argues that women's use hedging device to express uncertainty, and they use boosting devices to persuade their addressee to take them seriously. Women boost the force of their utterances because they think that otherwise they will not be heard or paid attention to. So, according to Lakoff, both hedges and boosters reflect women's lack of confidence. Lakoff also says that women may answer a question with a statement employing the rising intonation pattern usually associated with making a question rather than the falling intonation pattern associated with making a firm statement.

### Politeness

Women use certain patterns associated with surprise and politeness more often than men. Women's language was described as weak, unassertive, tentative, and women were presented as losers, as victims (Coates 1998:413). Holmes (1995) characterizes women's speech as more polite than men's. Researchers argue that the women use more tags than the men. But they do not use them for the same purposes as the men. Women put more emphasis than men on the polite or affective functions of tags, using them as facilitative positive politeness devices. Men, on the other hand, use tags for the expression of uncertainty. In a study of Mayan community in Maxico, for instance, overall the women used more politeness device than the men, so the pattern seemed to resemble the Western pattern. But, increasingly, the men used far fewer politeness forms to each other than to women. So, male talk to males was relatively plain an unmodified. In this community, 'men's talk' could be seen as the unusual variety rather than women's talk.

# Interruptions

There are many features of interaction which differentiate the talk of women and men. Women tend to interrupt less in conversation and "to be more attentive listeners, concerned to ensure others get a chance to contribute" than men (Holmes 1995: 67). Despite the widespread stereotype of women as the talkative sex, and proverbs which characterize women as garrulous. Women's tongues are like lambs' tails, they never still' most of the research evidence points outs the other way. In a wide range of contexts, particularly non-private ones such as television interviews, staff meetings and conference discussions, where talking may increase your status, men dominate the talking time. In the same gender interruptions are pretty evenly distributed between speakers. In same-sex pairs: a) Men argue more with other men, b) Women are more dramatic with other women.

A number of studies show that in cross-sex interactions, men frequently interrupt women but women much less frequently interrupt men. In cross-sex conversation, women ask more questions, encourage others to speak, use more signals like- '*mm hmm*' to encourage others to continue speaking, use more instances of *you* and *we*, and do not protest as much as men when interrupted. Men interrupt more, challenge more, dispute, and ignore more, try to control what topics are discussed, and make categorical statement. That is, in the cross-sex interactional patterns in conversation, men and women seem to exhibit the power relationship that exists in society, with men dominating and women subservient. There is no doubt that men are still doing most of the interrupting. In other contexts, too, it has been found that men interrupt others more than women do. In departmental meetings and doctor-patient interactions, for instance, the pattern holds. Women get interrupted more than men, regardless of whether they are the doctors or the patients. In exchanges between patients and children, fathers do most of the interrupting, and daughters are interrupted most- both by their mothers and their fathers. However, most of the men speak more often and for longer than most of the women. Most of men interrupt more than the women. While men and women are both guilty of interrupting, there are some significant differences:

- Men interrupt, overall, more often than women.
- Men interrupt other women more often than they interrupt men.
- Men are more successful at taking and maintaining the floor.

• Women's interruptions take the form of questions and/or supportive statements (yeah, right, I see, is that so, etc.).

Holmes (1992), on the other hand, found that in doctor-patient conversations female doctors were interrupted more often than male physicians. In addition, in business organizations, men but not women tended to dominate the interactions. West (1998) came to similar conclusions in her study of interaction between doctors and patients.

#### **Competitive vs. cooperative**

It is found that women are more supportive and cooperative conversationalists; and men are more competitive conventionalists. A research on the Malagasy community, women's speech is more direct than men's. It is women who handle the bargaining necessary in the market-place, and it is the women who deal with family arguments and disagreements. Men's speech in this community is indirect and circumlocutionary. In general, research on conversational interactional reveals women as cooperative conversationalists, whereas men tend to

be more competitive and less supportive of others.

#### Topic of conversations between Men and Women

In conversations involving members of both sexes, men speak more than women. The topics of the conversations also vary. Men-men: competition and teasing, sports, aggression, business, politics, legal matters, taxes. Women-women: self feeling, affiliation with others, family and social life, books, food and drink, life's troubles, and life-style. Adjectives such as *adorable, charming, divine, lovely,* and *sweet* are commonly used by women than by men. They also add tag questions very often for the same reasons: the sense of being unsure and insecurity. There is a widespread belief that women talk more than men. 'Men have been shown to talk more than women in settings as diverse as staff meetings' (*Eakins and Eakins 1978*), television panel discussions (*Bernard 1972*) and husband-and-wife pairs in spontaneous conversation (*Soskin and John 1963*). Evidence suggests that men and women tend to discuss different topics (*Aries and Johnson 1983; Seidler 1989*). For example, men tend to talk about sport, politics and cars, whereas women tend to talk about child-rearing and personal relationships.

# 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. In writing, however, both genders use rhetorical questions as literary devices. For example, Mark Twain used them in "*A War Prayer*" to provoke the reader to question his actions and beliefs. Tag questions are frequently used to verify or confirm information; though in women's language they may also be used to avoid making strong statements.

# Turn-taking

As the work of Victoria DeFrancisco shows, female linguistic behaviour characteristically encompasses a desire to take turns in conversation with others, which is opposed to men's tendency towards centring 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-sex 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 (1990) observes that girls and women link their utterances to previous speakers and develop each other topics, rather than introducing new topics. However, a study of young American couples and their interactions reveal that while women raise twice as many topics as men, it is the men's topics that are usually taken up and subsequently elaborated in the conversation.

#### 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 non-self disclosure and professing advice or offering a solution when confronted with another's problems. Female-only discussion groups displayed more self-disclosure and coalition language than did male-only or mixed-gender groups (Savicki, Kelley, & Oesterreich, 1998, cited in Eun-Ju Lee 2007, p-517). According to expectation states theory (Berger, Fisek, Norman, & Zelditch, 1977; Wagner & Berger, 1997), men enjoy greater advantage over women in exerting social influence due to the differential performance expectations (cited in Eun-Ju Lee 2007, p-519).

Both 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. 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.

#### Listening and attentiveness

It appears that women attach more load 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 sex 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.

When men talk, women listen and agree. However men tend to misinterpret this agreement, which was intended in a spirit of connection, as a reflection of status and power. A man might conclude that a woman is indecisive or insecure as a result of her listening and attempts of acknowledgment. When in all actuality, a woman's reasons for behaving this way have nothing to do with her attitudes toward her knowledge, but are a result of her attitudes toward her relationships. The act of giving information frames the speaker with a higher status, while the act of listening frames the listener as lower. However, when women listen to men, they are not necessarily thinking in terms of status, but in terms of connection and support.

### Difference

Maltz/Borker conclude that the differences between men's and women's speech can be explained using an anthropological approach in the study of "culture and social organization."

Holmes (1998) points out this approach to formulate a set of sociolinguistic universals. Among these are:

- 1. Women and men develop different patterns of language use. (1998: 462)
- 2. Women tend to focus on the affective functions of an interaction more often than men do. (1998: 463)
- 3. Women tend to use linguistic devices that stress solidarity more often than men do. (1998: 468)
- 4. Women tend to interact in ways which will maintain and increase solidarity. (1998: 472)

5. Women are stylistically more flexible than men. (1998: 475)

Whereas Maltz/Borker and Holmes see the difference approach from a cultural point of view, Chambers (1992) gives a biological explanation. Claiming an innate, albeit small, neurological advantage for women, Chambers assumes that this advantage is realized in the use of verbal skills and transferred to other behavioral skills. Using data from studies in Detroit and Belfast, from Japan and the Middle East, Chambers argues for a sex-based analysis of variability. Although pointing to the tentative nature of this explanation he claims that female precocity in verbal skills beginning in infancy predisposes them to apply their verbal skills to all kinds of situations as they grow up (Chambers 1992: 201).

# **Gender Differences**

Verbal Qualities: In verbal communication, there are differences in the quality of speech used by men and women.

women.	
Men:	Women:
Talk loudly	Talk softly
Deep pitch	High pitch
Slow rate	• Fast rate
Downward inflection	Upward inflection
Relaxed tone	Strident tone
Powerful style	Powerless style

Non-Verbal Qualities: Similarly, there are differences in the quality of non-verbal communication used by men and women.

Men:	Women:
• Use more physical space	Yield physical space
• Stare	• Use moderate eye contact
Use commanding gestures	• Use acquiescent gestures
Hold their head straight	• Tilt their heads
• Keep a "poker face"	Use more facial expressions

# **Reasons of Difference**

There are some reasons of gender differences in language use. Three claims can be offered on this: first, that men and women are biologically different and that this differences has serious consequences for gender differences in language use. Women are predisposed psychologically to be involved with one another and to be mutually supportive and non-competitive. Men are innately predisposed to independence and power rather than to solidarity. Second, social organizations are built up on hierarchical set of power relationships. Men have the ascendency in such a system, which women usually do not. Language behavior reflects the social dominance of men. They try to take control, to specify topics, to interrupt, and so on. They do it with each other and they do it with women. Women feeling powerless, let them get away with it. Third, men and women are social beings who have learned to act in certain ways. Language behavior is largely learned behavior. Men learn to be men and women learn to be women. Most of the studies show that the differences between men and women in ways of interacting may be the result of different socialization and acculturation patterns and various gender assignedactivities. It would be a stereotype to call women's style as 'cooperative' and men's style 'competitive'. Most of the evidences suggest that men and women differ in the kinds of language they use because of their distinct roles in society. The more distinct the roles will be, the greater the differences. In societies that are less rigidly stratified and in which men and women's roles are less clearly differentiated, the reflection can be found in language also. Changes in society also reflect change in language.

# Dominance versus subjection, Status and Power

Most studies find that in mixed talks men tend to be more dominating than women. The dominance approach is supported mainly by variability on the basis of power. Power, on the other hand, is derived from social, economic and socio-historical status. Helena Leet-Pellegrini suggests a dichotomy between a male desire for conversational dominance with reference to male experts speaking more verbosely than their female counterparts – and a female aspiration to group conversational participation. According to Jennifer Coates, 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.

Conversation is not the only area where power is an important aspect of the male/female dynamic. Power is reflected in every aspect of communication from what the actual topic of the communication, to the ways in which it is communicated. Women are typically less concerned with power more concerned with forming and maintaining relationships, whereas men are more concerned with their status. A woman's communication will tend to be more focused on building and maintaining relationships. Men on the other hand, will place a higher priority on power; their communication styles will reflect their desire to maintain their status in the relationship.

According to Tannen's research, men tend to tell stories as another way to maintain their status. Primarily, men tell jokes, or stories that focus on themselves. Women on the other hand, are less concerned with their own power, and therefore their stories revolve not around themselves, but around others. By putting themselves on the same level as those around them, women attempt to downplay their part in their own stories, which strengthens their connections to those around them.

# The Use of Questions as a Controlling Strategy

Zimmerman/West (1975) and others state that just as male dominance is exhibited through male control of macro-institutions in society, it is also exhibited through male control of at least a part of micro-institutions (Zimmerman/ West 1975: 125). We see that one of the controlling mechanisms in micro-institutions is related to the strategy of interrupting. As men are interrupting more often than women, male dominance can be established in conversations. Thus, turns are claimed, topics are initiated and maintained by men or abandoned by women. In some cultures, on the other hand, questions may also be used as controlling mechanisms. Similar to the pressure by the *no-gap*-rule mentioned above exerted on the participants in a speech situation in these cultures, questions require answers in many conversational situations. When questions in form of facilitative rather than polite or modal tag-questions, therefore, are combined with a specific statement they can be used to maintain or to control the direction of the conversation. As women use this type of question more often than men, female dominance can be established.

# **Construction of gender**

Sex is biologically determined. Sex differences are the differences based on biological/physical organs. Gender is a social construct involving the whole display of psychological, social and cultural differences between males and females. Differences between sexes are well recognized: Female: more fat, less muscle, not as strong, and weigh less compared to men. They are mature more rapidly and live longer. They have different voice quality and different vocal skill. But most of the differences may result from the different socialization process: longevity, voice quality. Phonological differences between men and women in almost all languages of the world,

for example, Hindi language-differences in word choice in various languages. Japanese women show they are women when they speak, with the use of the morphological inflections *ne* or *wa*. According to Sapir (1929), the Yana language of California contains special forms for use in speech either by or to women.

Some other sex-based distinctions such as actor-actress, waiter-waitress, and master-mistress are found in language. Some of these distinctions are reinforced by entrenched patterns of usage and semantic development. Master-mistress have quite different ranges of use and meaning Another pair of differentiation: boy-girl, man-woman, gentleman-lady, bachelor-spinster, widower-widow. Widower-widow has different use and meaning from the others. Lakoff cites that there are 'equivalent' words referring to men and women do have quite different associations in English language. "He's a professional" and "She's a professional".

# Gender as a Social Construct

Gender is a construct that owes its creation to a number of social institutions. Some of these include family, educational institutions, judiciary, religion, etc. In recent times, the media has emerged as a powerful constitutive agent of gender-related ideas and notions. Gender, unlike sex, which is based on biological division and is specific in character, is more amorphous in nature and is subject to change with reference to context and time.

# Sexist language

Who is 'sexist'? The people who use language or the language itself? Lakoff claims that English language is sexist language. That is why, women appear to be more submissive to men in respect of the use of language. For example, women are also often named, titled, and addressed differently from men. Women are more likely than men to be addressed by their first names when everything else is equal, or, if not by first names, by such terms as *lady, miss, or dear* and even *baby,* or *babe.* Women are said to be subject to a wider range of address terms than men, and men are familiar with them than with other men. Languages differ in whether they include gender distinctions for words referring to entities without biological sex (cited in Vigliocco 2005,p-515).

Language is accommodating enough for any kind of change and space so that any sex-biased expression or utterance can be made sex-neutral: chairman-chairperson, salesman-salesclerk, actor, etc. The extreme power structure of dominance in the structure and use of language can also be avoided by initiating some changes in language. So language itself is not sexist. It is the people who use languages may be sexist or not. Feminist movement demands the elimination of all kinds of discriminations – social, economic, linguistic, and so on done against women. There are many suggestions for avoiding sexist language. Morphological changes: Salesman/lady –salesperson/sales associate , Chairman – chairperson, craftsman-craftworker, fireman-firefighter, watchman-guard/security, mankind-humanity, manmade-artificial, and so on. Recently some women have tried to assert their solidarity going so far as wanting to 'reclaim' language for themselves. Spender has declared: "males, as the dominant group, have produced language, thought and reality". Penelope argues that women should reinvent language to their own purposes. Many feminists have tried to develop their own linguistics conventions, non-competitive, non-interruptive speech, in order to liberate 'women'. The emergence of "Ecriture feminine", which creates awareness among men and women.

#### Gender and Sex

Gender is a social construct whereas Sex is a biological term referring to the anatomical difference between a male and female. Gender is a political view of sex that is based on the binary division of male and female. This binary division apparently looks natural. The problem with this division, however, starts when one thing is considered inferior to the other which is regarded as superior.

Chanter (2006) states: "That is, biology, anatomy, physiology, nature, DNA structure, genetics, materiality, \_the body'— or however one expresses it – comes before, logically or chronologically. Social structures, gendered roles, historically gendered expectations and preconceptions, cultural mores, prescriptions and taboos on sexual behavior, and so on  $\parallel$ . Chanter, 2006, p- 43). So, we may say that, a biological given, sex (i.e., boy, girl, man and woman) provides the basis for constructing a social category which is called gender (attributes of masculinity and femininity).

According to Tannen (1991:77), the language of conversation between women, is foremost a language of rapport (Tannen 1991:77). The purpose of it is to establish connections and negotiating relationships. Women tend to display similarities and matching experiences with each other, and in meetings, women tend to argue by using their own experience as evidence.

For most men on the other hand, language is a way to preserve independence and negotiate and maintain status in the hierarchy. According to Tannen (1991:92), men do this by exhibiting their knowledge and skill. And men also do it through "holding centre stage" by for example telling stories, joking or conveying information. Men in meetings for example, tend to argue by making categorical statements about right and wrong.

# Women, power and taboo language

Gender identity is a set of beliefs, behaviors and norms that permeate human activity. Each culture seeks to transform infants into masculine and feminine adults. Gender identity is a set of cultural prescriptions and expectations that specify how men and women, gays and lesbians, should behave. Gender identity, another word, is a person's private sense of, and subjective experience of, their own gender. This is generally described as one's private sense of being a man or a woman, consisting primarily of the acceptance of membership into a category of people: male or female. All societies have a set of gender categories that can serve as the basis of the formation of a social identity in relation to other members of society. In most societies, there is a basic division between gender attributes assigned to males and females. In all societies, however, some individuals do not identify with some (or all) of the aspects of gender that are assigned to their biological sex. In the past, cursing and aggression have been most closely identified with masculinity. Our cultures constrain how speakers communicate about sexuality. Sexuality is a taboo topic in the United States and words denoting sexual activity are avoided. Sexual speech is taboo because sexuality is taboo, not vice versa. Historically, American women have been expected to repress sexual thoughts, while men have been freer to use sexual speech.

Research on gender and cursing reveals three recurrent findings, men curse more than women; men use a larger vocabulary of curse words than women; and men use more offensive curse words than women (Jay, 1992, 2000, cited in Jule 2005).

# Gender-Culture-power

Gender relations of power are maintained through a set of institutional and cultural practices. The domination of men over women is a historical phenomenon. Whilst in recent decades, the feminist movement has sought to equalize the gender bias, there are still factors, both institutional and cultural, that serve to maintain this long standing imbalance. Cultural practices breed institutional barriers and vice-versa. It is necessary to make a distinction between sex and gender. In accordance with Oakley (1972), sex is a physical difference whereas gender operates on a psychological level. We are thus concerned with the factors in society that fuel people's attitude toward not just the physical difference but psychological differences between men and women. Furthermore, we are concerned with the knock-on effect this has for the institutional practices that cause gender-relations of power to remain so pervasive.

Dahlerup (1986), who defines feminism as the ideologies, activities and policies whose goal it is to remove discrimination against women and the male domination of society. It has problems because women (and even men) who would be classified as feminists according to this description explicitly refuse to be labeled as feminists. This may be because the media have succeeded in caricaturing feminism as an extreme form of men hating by unlovable, unattractive, humorless women. This point about the media is an important one. It raises the issues of the cultural practices as mentioned in the title.

Cultural practices are very important for maintaining gender relations of power. In many cases, these practices begin when children are very young. This occurs in many different forms such as language, toys and general stereotypes. Children receive preverbal clues as to their gender identity before they actually understand the difference. Differences in hair, clothes and scent provide children with this distinction from an early age. These differences set children up to develop into their specific gender.

#### Conclusion

There is a number of close relationships between Gender and language. Another word, men's way of using language and women's way of using language is different. It is because of structure of the language, norm of the society or people of the society who use the language. Moreover, gender (male-female) is socially constructed. Because of the social institution or taboo, we find variations/differences between men and women. In addition to, men's style of speaking and women style of speaking are deeply rooted in power structure. In addition, the personality of the individual and the vitality of the group are also involved in the explanation of variability in language use. Therefore, there is a close connection between the structures, vocabularies and the ways of using language and the social roles of men and women who speak the language.

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