

WOMEN, LANGUAGE AND SOCIAL ROLES

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LANGUAGE AND GENDER

‘Language is a medium of socialization. Essentially, as a child learns the language of his or her culture, he or she is also learning how to think and behave as a member of that culture’. (Renzetti Curran, 1995)

The focus of the article is the language, gender, linguistic behavior and social roles, how the language expresses our culture’s underlying values and expectation about gender. It shows how sexism and anti-sexism may be contained in the language use.

Language discretely transmits subtle messages about sex roles in the society. Even in the fetus the unborn babies get the messages through language according to their sexes from the society. The parents buy sex appropriate clothes, toys, furniture etc., speak to them as girls and boys, even use the proper music for them. The most powerful messages about sex-appropriate behavior are transmitted to children by language. Our culture is demonstrated by our language and by means of the language we express our thoughts, feelings, ideas, describe the world, and evaluate the people surrounding us.

‘Language provides the basis for becoming both social beings able to act and interact with others and independent, autonomous beings, because it is the means by which people know themselves and others.’ (Virginia Sapiro, 1994)

By above mentioned quotation the author shows the importance of communication in people’s lives and its undeniable role for building balance between the individual and society. She considers the society scattered without communication would be a collection of unconnected individuals.

Nobody can deny the importance of the language in the people’s lives and women are not exceptions. Although girls and boys study together, are taught by the same teachers, read the same books, use the same dictionaries but speak differently. *“The meanings of words are not in the words; they are in us” (S.I. Hayakawa, 1949).*

Studies on gender and language have shown differences in women's and men's speech, according to some researchers it should be accepted as natural because of their different position in the social structure, encountering differential opportunities and constraints.

Today it will be a pointless research to find any society where the neutral language, non sexist language is used. Sexism is perpetuated in many ways. Even in the rather egalitarian countries women's language differs from men's language. Words mean different things for different sexes.

Linguistic sexism refers to ways in which a language devalues members of one sex, almost invariably women. Linguistic sexism involves defining women's "place" in society unequally and also ignores women.

Consequently the sexism influenced the language, so one of the important factors of male dominance over the women is the sexist language. The sexism in the language reflexes itself in the different forms: to consider the women's speech less important, ignore, judge or stereotype it. The major barrier to intergender communication is our very natural tendency to judge, evaluate, and approve (or disapprove) the statement of the 'other' (woman) gender.

DIFFERENT SPEECH STYLES AND DIFFERENT SOCIAL ROLES

Different adjectives are used for women and men and those different professions, use different behaviors, different speech styles, different gestures; different mimics can be considered masculine or feminine.

Many studies were intended to discover deficiencies in women's speech. The main stress of such research is that there is something incorrect with women's speech because it is different from that of men. Men's speech is taken as normative; therefore, speech that is different must be deficient and should be judged.

"'Women's language' is that pleasant (dainty?), euphemistic never-aggressive way of talking we learned as little girls. Cultural bias was built into the language we were allowed to speak, the subjects we were allowed to speak about, and the ways we were spoken of. Having learned our linguistic lesson well, we go out in the world, only to discover that we are communicative cripples-damned if we do, and damned if we don't". (Robin Lakoff, 1986)

By the above mentioned quotations the author points that the difficulty of woman's language shows if this language is not used by women in the appropriate way they could be ridiculed and criticized for not being feminine, if they do learn all unassertive language of their sex, they will be ridiculed for not being unable to think clearly, unable to take part in a serious discussion, and therefore unfit to hold a position of power.

Women and men differ in their speech style and talk about different topics. Typical characteristics associated with male speech are considered more dynamic, but characteristics associated with female speech are considered more aesthetic. Men talk about sports, politics, their business but women tend to talk their psychological states e.g., feelings. Each sex sees the other sex's speech style as uncomfortable. Men can not listen to women's speech about feelings considering it illogical; women see men's speech monotonous and boring.

This difference is especially felt in the cross gendered groups. Men talk more and very frequently interrupt their female respondents. If a man speaks, other men do not interrupt his speech, they take their turns but if a woman speaks, men not only talk more but also answer the questions not addressed to them.

Various researchers have described women's speech as being different from that of men. But Ronald Wardhaugh assumes that there is a bias here: men's speech usually provides the norm against which women's speech is judged. He supposes that they could just as well ask how men's speech differs from that of women, but investigators have not usually gone about the task of looking at differences in that way. He points any view too that women's speech is trivial, gossip-laden, corrupt, illogical, idle, euphemistic, or deficient is highly suspect; nor is it necessarily more precise, cultivated, or stylish-or even less profane-than men's speech. But naturally, such judgments lack solid evidentiary support.

There are a lot of examples in the history differentiating women's speech style from men's and it should be adequate according to one's position, that means that the speech style should be adequate for the social role which is fulfilled. For example her/his speech style looks like a poet, singer, teacher, governmental officer, military officer etc. 'Margaret Thatcher's was told her voice did not match her position as British, she sounded too 'shrill'. She was advised to lower the pitch of her voice, diminish its range, and speak more slowly, and thereby adopt an authoritative, almost monotonous delivery to make herself heard. She was successful to the extent that her new speaking style became a kind of trademark, one either well-liked by her admirers or detested by her opponents. (Ronald Wardhaugh, 1986)

We can argue that female and male speech styles differ (born or bred? nature or nurture) but it will be very important not to forget that differences in their speech sometimes are artificially made if we try we attempt to avoid it. Gender makes the difference in the impact of the speech.

GENDERLECTS

“Some communication researchers argue that the gender differences in communication are so great we talk about male and female dialects within the English language” (Lakoff, 1975).

Some researchers claim that women and men use different vocabularies because they think differently, because they have different tastes. As the language is the dress of the thought women and men also being different ‘thought designers’ create them differently. For example, if a man is satisfied by saying, ‘This young guy is good looking’, while a woman uses more accurate words saying ‘In my opinion, this young guy is attractive.. Men are often direct than women in conversation. A man might say, ‘I think you’re wrong on that point.’ A woman might say, ‘Have you looked at the marketing department’s research report on that point?’ (the implication is the report will show the error). Men frequently see female indirectness as “secret” or “coward”, but women are not as concerned as men with the status and one-upmanship that directness often creates.

The difference of words applied to women and men may have positive or negative meanings. Different adjectives are used for men and women, different occupations, different behaviors and different ways of standing and sitting are allocated as feminine and masculine. Words and implied meanings of words form our feeling and thinking about women and men. Sometimes the people act in accordance with the label given to them.

“The words associated with men have very different connotations than those associated with women, and the latter are uniformly negative and demeaning. The male words connote power, authority, or a positively valued status, while most of the female words have sexual connotations. Interestingly, many of these words originally had neutral connotations.” (Renzetti Curran, 1995). A lot of words can be given as examples, debased (semantic derogation) so the women are associated with things negative, and men with things positive. Some of these words inform us about the women’s status, position in the society, The same words change the main meaning when we use it with women, e.g., shrew-“an ill-tempered scolding woman” but when we use it with men, shrewd-clever, discerning awareness. The authors give the next examples such as; patron (a supporter, champion, or benefactor etc) and matron (is someone who supervises a public institution, such as a prison, or is simply an old woman), master

(someone who has achieved consummate ability in your field), mistress (an elderly paramour). Originally master and mistress had the same meaning –“a person who holds power over servants”. Men are defined in terms of their power in the occupational world, women in terms of their sexual power over men. And the authors ask which would you rather be: an old master or an old mistress? Here ageism combines with sexism to doubly disadvantage women in the society.

Using the words woman/female and man/male as adjectives, especially when we use them before professions it immediately changes the meaning of the sentences. (a woman doctor, a man doctor or a woman driver or a man driver etc). Sometimes these words conjure up negative or positive abilities and negative stereotype is mostly attached to the words which used with woman.

Making reference to dictionaries the definitions of the word man gives us many ideas about linguistic sexism. Traditionally the main meaning of this word and word combinations with this word mainly implied human being in general, regardless of sex.

A man 1. an adult human male; 2. a human being of either sex; person 3. (a) the human race: (b) the people of a particular period of history. 4. (The Man) informal group or person in a position of authority over others, such as a corporate employer or the police. Usually, the form –man was combined with the words denoting an occupation or role (a chairman, fireman, policeman, layman, sportsman etc). Today as the usage of these words are considered as sexist, alternative gender-neutral terms are used instead (firefighter, police officer, sportsperson etc). As linguistic sexism became one of the main fields of gender inequality the generic use of man was considered problematic, sexist and it was replaced by adequate gender-neutral words. Unfortunately it is not so easy to replace all these sexist terms by non sexist ones in some compound words with man (adequate alternatives are not easily found e.g., manpower).

We can find some gender-related peculiarities of the language in the following phrases using the term man, mainly in the meaning of human being;

Is someone's man- being the person perfectly suited to a particular requirement or task;

Be man enough to do- is brave enough to do;

Man of the house-the male head of the house;

Man of the moment- a man (in the meaning a human being) of importance at a particular game; (Oxford Dictionary of English, 1998) so using the term man in the phrase we emphasize the meaning.

“In the same ways as words and speech patterns used by women undermine her image, those used to describe women make matters even worse. Often a word may be used of both men and women (and perhaps of things as well); but when it is applied to women, it assumes a special meaning that, by implication rather than outright assertion, is derogatory to women as a group” (Robin Lakoff, 1986).

Now taking the term woman in parallel with man makes the picture clearer.

On the contrary, looking at the dictionary, the definition of the term of woman we find some definitions diminishing its meaning

A woman-1. A female who is paid to clean someone’s house and carry out other domestic duties; 2. A man’s wife, girlfriend, or lover. Some derivatives: womanish derogatory suitable for or characteristic of a woman; womanize (of a man) engage in numerous casual sexual affairs with woman, used to express disapproval) etc.

It will be very interesting take one euphemism for woman which is very alive lady and its masculine counterpart gentleman or gent.

Traditionally, lady is used instead of woman for making the things to sound more polite but it’s another meaning (helpless, dependent etc) is not used for positive implications recalling the period of chivalry.

Gentleman has positive implications of high social status or being cultural mannerly, while its counterpart, lady, has negative connotations and can be used more freely. Another example, lady of the night euphemistic a prostitute. All derivatives of gentle and phrases with the term of gentle imply the positive meaning.

Linguistic sexism is one of the largest problems of the language and semantic derogation is one of the elements of it. For devaluing the woman’s speech linguistic sexism plays a big role.

Paralanguage and gender

Women and men's different styles do not suffice only in verbal language but also in non-verbal patterns of speech. So the language transmits the messages for women and men by intonation pitch and speed of speaking, hesitation noises, gesture, facial expression etc. Women use more facial expressions demonstrating more emotions in gestures and mimics. What differences are observed? For example when women are stared by men they can not keep on looking at their male respondents' eyes, they drop their eyelids. While speaking women smile frequently, they smile not only with their mouth but with eyes. Some researchers claim that smiling is the sign of submissiveness and by smiling they reconfirm their subordinate status.

People's knowledge, certainty about some points can be turned out according to their intonation. Being intermediate between the statement and question women traditionally use the raising tone or pause for confirmation, and it is accepted by their respondents to be uncertain to be believed or lacking full confidence on their sayings.

Moreover, a space is one of the main elements of non-verbal speech and the bigger the amount of space the higher the status. Men occupy more space than women do, not just because of the reason men are physically larger than women but also men occupy, use, and move differently from women. People of relatively high status act as though they have a right to more space or territory than do people of relatively low status. This model is reflected by men and women.

Women and men stand differently, sit differently. Women try to sit more compact, but men sprawl out. Men stand with their legs apart, women stand with their legs together.

The etiquette, some forms of chivalry emphasize the passive and active nature of feminine and masculine roles. The man always has control over the situation but in contrast the female waits to be helped, thus they accomplish their stereotyped roles. Shortly, verbal/non-verbal language influences a person's behavior.

LINGUISTIC BEHAVIOR AND GENDER

While women and men are citizens of different sociolinguistics sub-cultures they act in certain ways. Is language behavior 'nature or nurture?' Language behavior is not biological behavior; it is social, learned, gained behavior. Linguistically speaking females and males learn how to be girls and boys, how to become

feminine and masculine, from their early childhood. As a result, language behavior reflects the social dominance of men, weakness of women. So according to popular saying 'women are not born as women but the society make women become women'.

Deborah Tannen also affirms that women and men have been raised to live in the different sub-cultures. Consequently, 'cross-cultural communication,' Tannen claims can be difficult. In various interesting and entertaining accounts, Tannen has tried to show how girls and boys are brought up differently. Part of the socialization process is learning not only gender-related activities and attitudes but gender related language behavior.

According to some researchers males and females had a different kind of ethics as women's and men's use different moral language and it influences their behaviors. As typical female moral perspective contrasts typical male moral perspective women think about particular people and their relationships and how they will be affected. Women believe that moral problems can be solved by talking about them and by trying to understand the perspectives of others. Caring and compassion are key virtues. The primary moral obligation is not to turn away from those in need. Men are more inclined to talk in terms of fairness and justice and rights. They ask about the overall effects of some action and whether the good effects, when all are considered, outweigh the bad. The moral realm would then be similar to the public field of law and contract. Impartiality and respectfulness are key virtues. The primary obligation is not to act unfairly. And, of course everybody can examine their own experience to see whether the males and females they know seem to talk differently when discussing moral issues. It is explained that they have different concepts of the self and their gender identity. So males tend to separate themselves from others and possess a sense of self as independent but females do not want to separate themselves from others (mainly from mothers) and see themselves as attached and connected to others.

In the book 'Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace', Sara Ruddick points the link between mothering and the children's morality. Like many researchers she also thinks mothering is not only biological phenomena but also social one. From the elements of maternity and women's being the first child rears children's morality mainly depend on their mothers. According to Sara Ruddick maternal practice results in "maternal thinking," which is "vocabulary and logic of connections" that arises from "acting in response to demands of their children (Sara Ruddick, 1989). Mothers' adequate vocabulary facilitates their ability to speak about their experiences and perceptions and it foster their children's ability to listen and develop their moral development. This language plays a significant role in children's socialization and stereotyped gender roles.

What is bad for girls might be normal for boys e.g., it is not surprising male infants who could hardly talk they are taught to swear and it gives pleasure to surroundings. On the contrary the attitude can not be favorable toward females who use the lewd language. Girls' and boys' swearing are evaluated differently by the society, if girls swear their parents are immediately blamed for their daughters' misbehavior.

The Media also has much significance for stereotyped gender roles. The media and language re-create culture, much of this socialization took place through the Media and the sex stereotyped behavior portrayed by means of Media language. This language is mainly used as a means of diminishing women. Men are judged according to their work but women are assessed according to their appearance, which includes language. The Media is full of these examples.

We see sexist news in the Media even in the column of crime news; sometimes we face the direct messages focusing more on the females' appearance than the real motives causing this crime. For example, newspapers or TV give the news about death of female and male differently. "Mini-skirted young girl Ann Brown murdered" and people get the impression that the mini skirt and her death are interrelated (if the girl had dressed a 'solid clothes' she would not have been killed). "Young professional journalist Peter Smith murdered". Accent was laid on the honorable profession of the young specialist. The message is clear; a man who killed this girl is justified in the hidden way but a girl is blamed for her immoral clothes even after death. What startling approach?

LANGUAGE, GENDER AND STATUS

"The differences between women and men of interacting may be the result of different socialization and acculturation patterns. If we learn the ways of talking mainly in single sex peer groups, then the patterns we learn are likely to be sex-specific. And the kind of miscommunication which undoubtedly occurs between women and men will be attributable to the different expectations each sex of the function of the interaction and the ways it is appropriately conducted" (Ronald Wardhaugh, 1986).

Through the structure of the English language the two sexes are portrayed as differing widely in behavior and status. Females are traditionally characterized as less important, inept, passive homemakers; male, as more important, capable, active home providers. Throughout a child's rearing years, these messages are transmitted and emphasized through the language. Even in the egalitarian families where the parents are very democratic, not stereotyped and try to avoid

of sexist speech, other socializing factors influence on their children's behaviors and values. Analyzing all these factors we better understand why changing stereotyped behavior is so difficult regardless of our repeated attempts.

Traditionally, communication rules depend on the status rankings of the people interacted. Status and hierarchy rankings are reflected through communication behavior. By not taking the communication rules by a subordinate in relation to a superior's permission –may be viewed as disobedience. People who break these rules of interpersonal relations are considered impolite. Politeness is the act of granting the socially appropriate amount of respect to others depending on their relative status.

Age, education, and cultural background are very important factors influencing the language of a person who uses it and the definitions he or she gives to words. For example, the language of George Bush is undoubtedly different from that of the typical bank employee. The latter, in fact, would clearly have trouble understanding of Bush's vocabulary (so a lot of people with the same degree).

Analyzing these aspects, Deborah Tannen in his book, 'You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation' focus on differences of men's and women's speech and it's interaction with status. The quintessence of Tannen's research is that men use talk to emphasize the status, while women use it to create connection. Tannen points that communication is a continual balancing act, juggling the conflicting needs for intimacy and independence. Intimacy emphasizes separateness and differences. So, for many men, conversations are mainly a means to preserve independence and maintain status in a hierarchical social order. For many women, conversations are negotiations for closeness in which people try to seek and give confirmation and support. Tannen thesis are illustrated as followings:

Men frequently complain that women talk about their problems. Women criticize men for not listening to them. Men frequently stress their desire for independence and control by providing solutions. Many women, on the other hand, view telling a problem as a way to promote closeness. The women introduce the problem to get support and connection, not to get the men's advice. People follow many rules when they communicate and interrelate with each others. These rules depend on the situations whether they speak formally or informally, whether they speak to their bosses or their subordinates, unfamiliar persons or intimates. These rules are used to facilitate communication, take turns in conversations and follow the norms of politeness.

In majority patriarchal Asian societies in the mixed groups when men speak, women tend to keep silence. Women do not join this conversation and if in the

cross gendered group something urgent is to be said by a woman, she tries to speak in whisper. This tradition is not uncommon for Islamic societies. There is no any direct quotation about women's and men's speech in Koran but while reading the following quotation authentic Muslim women realize that keeping silence will be better than their adequate/non adequate speech.

“Men have authority over women because Allah has made the one superior to the others, and because they spend their wealth to maintain them. Good women are obedient. They guard their unseen arts because Allah has guarded them. As for those from whom you fear disobedience, admonish them and send them to beds apart and beat them. Then if they obey you, take no further action against them. Allah is high, supreme”. (N.J. Dawood, 1944-64, Koran, 4-34)

According to Islamic law the right behavior for Muslim women is to obey their husbands otherwise it will be sinful. Men's speech is always considered more important than women's in the Muslim world because men are the head of the family not women.

One more important element I'd like to bring to your notice that females are defined by the group with which they are associated. For example, the usual grouping of “women and children” suggests a dependent status. Women are referred to as possessions, as in ‘You guy, take your wife and children, and go to safer place’. In this example ‘women and children’ are shown as personal belongings of man.

In majority of patriarchal societies when women marry, they traditionally lose their family names and take on that of their husbands. “Miss” or “Mrs.” (today more women use “Ms” as identity) tells something about their marital status but “Mr.” refers to simultaneously bachelor and married men. Marital status is so important for married women, even if the law does not require women to change their names, social pressure on them to do so can be very strong. After President Clinton's inauguration, public attention focused on the fact that his wife used her maiden name as her middle name.

Gender difference in communication and social interaction reflect the existence of hierarchical sex/gender system. Men direct the communication rules in a verbal (in conversation) and non verbal way (using of social space).

CHANGING BEHAVIOR PATTERNS TOWARD WOMEN

It is very hard to change usual habits, eliminate sexist language but if we want to build democratic, egalitarian society we need the democratic/egalitarian language, nonsexist language. First we have to seek the ways of eliminating the sexist language, especially generic use of man and he should be eliminated because such usage is ambiguous and confusing. Seeing these generic words makes readers think of males. Second, sexist language could be easily eliminated if the sexes would change their relationship. The main thing is not to exaggerate the differences female and male language and not to forget there are more similarities than difference in their language.

Gender-neutral language is sometimes labeled “inclusive” language because including this language the women include their own world. People who use gender-biased terminology hold stronger gender stereotypes about occupations and have a little bit negative attitudes towards non-traditional women than do those who use more inclusive language.

Children are exposed to danger of getting different gender messages as they start speaking. Women use more polite speech but men use more dominant speech patterns. It leads the children to accept males as dominant but females less important. These messages are reinforced by other aspects of socialization. Changing these stereotypes we will have to change our languages by changing gender appropriate vocabulary into gender neutral. Some steps were taken by the publishing new gender neutral guidelines, thesaurus, dictionaries etc. For example he/she instead he; recast pronouns into plural (their instead of his); changing sexist words into neutral ones (humankind instead of mankind). As social structure is changing sexist words describing occupations might be also expected to follow inevitably (e.g., chairman to chairperson). Neutral words are to be used as much as possible and the language should reflect this changing but gender neutrality of a word does not necessarily mean it provokes a nonsexist image or has a nonsexist meaning. In some languages people do not use sexist words as in English but it does not mean that males who speak these languages are less sexist than males who speak English.

Nonsexist language should be accompanied by the non sexist experience. We have to change not only the words we use but also the way of our thinking. Feminist/non feminist organizations should organize courses, seminars or trainings to help people to interrelate in a more egalitarian and respectable manners. Women are to be taught to express themselves more directly and clearly, men are to be taught to change their behavior patterns toward women.

Language changes because we change. Language is one part of our lives, language is always with us and we are always under the influence of the language.

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Summary

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The article is about language, sexism, linguistic behavior, social roles and how language expresses our culture's underlying values and expectation about gender. It shows how sexism and antisexism may be contained in language use, everyday conversation, newspaper reports, and written conversations. Linguistic sexism refers to the ways in which a language devalues members of one sex, almost invariably women. Linguistic sexism involves defining women's "place" in society unequally and also ignoring women. Many social factors affect language patterns.

Studies on gender and language have shown differences in women's and men's speech. According to some researchers it should be accepted as natural because of their different position in the social structure, encountering differential opportunities and constraints.

Women and men's different styles do not occur only in verbal language but also in non-verbal patterns of speech. So the language transmits the messages for women and men by intonation pitch and speed of speaking, hesitation noises, gesture, facial expression etc.

Gender difference in communication and social interaction reflect the existence of hierarchical sex/gender system. Men direct the communication rules in a verbal (in conversation) and non verbal way (using of social space).

As social structure is changing sexist words describing occupations might also be expected to follow inevitably. Neutral words are to be used as much as possible and the language should reflect this change. But the gender neutrality of a word does not necessarily mean it provokes a nonsexist image or has a nonsexist meaning.

Nonsexist language should be accompanied by the non sexist experience. We have to change not only the words we use but also the way of our thinking.

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Key words: language , gender, linguistic, behavior, social roles,