LANGUAGE AND GENDER

Routledge Applied Linguistics is a series of comprehensive resource books providing students and researchers with the support they need for advanced study in the core areas of English Language and Applied Linguistics.

Each book in the series guides readers through three main sections, enabling them to explore and develop major themes within the discipline:

- Section A, Introduction, establishes the key terms and concepts and extends readers' techniques of analysis through practical application.
- Section B, Extension, brings together influential articles, sets them in context, and discusses their contribution to the field.
- Section C, Exploration, builds on knowledge gained in the first two sections, setting thoughtful tasks around further illustrative material. This enables readers to engage more actively with the subject matter and encourages them to develop their own research responses.

Throughout the book, topics are revisited, extended, interwoven and deconstructed, with the reader's understanding strengthened by tasks and follow-up questions.

Language and Gender:

• presents an up-to-date introduction to language and gender; • includes diverse work from a range of cultural, including non-Western contexts and represents a range of methodological approaches;
- gathers together influential readings from key names in the discipline, including Mary Haas, Deborah Cameron and Mary Bucholtz.

Written by an experienced teacher and researcher in the field, *Language and Gender* is an essential resource for students and researchers of Applied Linguistics.

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ROUTLEDGE APPLIED LINGUISTICS

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Language and Gender An advanced resource book

Jane Sunderland

To Graham and Emily

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Series editors’ preface

The Routledge Applied Linguistics Series provides a comprehensive guide to a number of key areas in the field of Applied Linguistics. Applied Linguistics is a rich, vibrant, diverse and essentially interdisciplinary field. It is now more important than ever that books in the field provide up-to-date maps of what is an ever-changing territory.

The books in this series are designed to give key insights into core areas of Applied Linguistics. The design of the books ensures, through key readings, that the history and development of a subject is recognised

while, through key questions and tasks, integrating understandings of the topics, concepts and practices that make up its essentially interdisciplinary fabric. The pedagogic structure of each book ensures that readers are given opportunities to think, discuss, engage in tasks, draw on their own experience, reflect, research and to read and critically reread key documents.

Each book has three main sections, each made up of approximately ten units:

A: An **Introduction** section: in which the key terms and concepts that map the field of the subject are introduced, including introductory activities and reflective tasks, designed to establish key understandings, terminology, techniques of analysis and the skills appropriate to the theme and the discipline.

B: An **Extension** section: in which selected core readings are introduced (usually edited from the original) from existing key books and articles, together with anno tations and commentary, where appropriate. Each reading is introduced, annotated and commented on in the context of the whole book, and research/follow-up questions and tasks are added to enable fuller understanding of both theory and practice. In some cases, readings are short and synoptic and incorporated within a more general exposition.

C: An **Exploration** section: in which further samples and illustrative materials are provided with an emphasis, where appropriate, on more open-ended, student centred activities and tasks, designed to support readers and users in undertaking their own locally relevant research projects. Tasks are designed for work in groups or for individuals working on their own. They can be readily included in award courses in Applied Linguistics, or as topics for personal study and research.

The books also contain a detailed Further Reading section, which lays the ground for further work in the discipline. There are also extensive bibliographies.

The target audience for the series is upper undergraduates and postgraduates on Language, Applied Linguistics and Communication Studies programmes as well as teachers and researchers in professional-development and distance-learning programmes. High-quality applied research resources are also much needed for teachers of EFL/ESL and foreign-language students at higher-education colleges and universities worldwide. The books in the Routledge Applied Linguistics series are aimed at the individual reader, the student in a

group and at teachers building courses and seminar programmes.

We hope that the books in this series meet these needs and continue to provide support over many years.

The editors

Professor Christopher N. Candlin and Professor Ronald Carter are the series editors. Both have extensive experience of publishing titles in the fields relevant to this series. Between them they have written and edited over 100 books and 200 academic papers in the broad field of Applied Linguistics. Chris Candlin was President of AILA (International Association for Applied Linguistics) from 1996 to 2002 and Ron Carter has been Chair of BAAL (British Association for Applied Linguistics) since 2003.

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Acknowledgements

UNIT B1.1

Haas, M. (1944) ‘Men’s and Women’s Speech in Koasati’, *Language* 20.

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UNIT B1.2

Milroy, L. (1980) from *Language and Social Networks*, reprinted by permission of Blackwell Publishing.

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UNIT B3.1

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UNIT B6.1

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UNIT B6.3

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UNIT B7.1

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UNIT B8.2

Stokoe, E. and Smithson, J. (2001) from 'Making gender relevant: conversation analysis and gender categories in interaction', *Discourse and Society* 12 (2). Reprinted by permission of Sage Publications Ltd and the authors.

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Bucholz, M. (2002) from 'Geek feminism', in S. Benor, M. Rose, D. Sharma, J. Sweetland and Q. Zhang (eds) *Gendered Practices in Language*, CSLI Publications. Copyright (c) 2002 CSLI Publications. Reprinted by permission of the publishers.

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How to use this book

Language and Gender: An advanced resource book provides a rich diversity of material for students in this field, particularly those who wish to contribute through their own research as well as learn about and appreciate the significance of others' work.

Like other resource books in this Routledge Applied Linguistics series, *Language and Gender*is divided into three sequential sections:'Introduction' (Section A),'Extension' (Section B) and 'Exploration' (Section C). (See also the series web site: <http://www.routledge.com/rcenters/linguistics/series/ral.htm>.) This particular resource book is additionally divided into four parts – Background, Gender, Language and Research – and into ten units, one or more of which constitutes each of the four parts. Each unit is developed over the A, B and C sections.

The Introduction 'A' units establish key terms and concepts, provide a discursive summary and overview, and preview what is to come in the corresponding extension ('B') and exploration ('C') units. The extension 'B' units provide extracts from a range of original texts, the majority 'classic' and influential, others less known but nevertheless showcasing excellent illustrative work. The exploration 'C' units allow students to engage very actively with the subject matter of the 'A' and 'B' units and to take their study further in a range of independent ways, through desk and field research.

It is not necessary to have read the corresponding B unit before undertaking a research project from a C unit, neither is it necessary to have read the corresponding A unit before reading the extracts in a B unit. However, these preparatory uses are recommended. It is also not necessary to work through the ten units sequentially; they can be chosen according to interest and purpose, and according to the reader's experience in the field to date. There is extensive cross-referencing throughout the book.

Language and Gender: An advanced resource book does the following:

- It shows the development of the field, in particular the changing foci: from 'sexist language' and 'gender differences in talk' to *discourse* (informed both by post-structuralism and critical discourse analysis [CDA]) and the social/textual/ linguistic construction of gender.

- It highlights the interdisciplinary nature of gender and language study, in particular by focusing on different theoretical approaches: CDA, conversation analysis (CA), feminist post-structuralist discourse analysis (FPDA), discursive psychology and corpus linguistics.
- It gathers together influential key readings as well as illustrative new work, from, *inter alia*, Robin Lakoff, Mary Bucholtz, Sara Mills and Celia Kitzinger. • It encourages students' own critical questioning and problematising of work in the gender and language field.
- It facilitates students' own research in a range of ways and promotes their own contributions to gender and language study.
- It includes a very substantial Bibliography, as well as many references through out the exploration 'C' units. These allow students to follow their interests and to take their studies forward on an independent basis.

The ten unit topics are as follows.

Part 1 'Background', comprising:

- early work on gender and language (Unit 1)
- the influence of feminism and feminist linguistics (a) (Unit 2) • the influence of feminism and feminist linguistics (b) (Unit 3).

Part 2 'Gender', comprising:

- developing understandings of gender (Unit 4).

Part 3 'Language', comprising:

- developing understandings of language: language change (Unit 5) • developing understandings of language: context (Unit 6)
- developing understandings of language: discourse and discourses

(Unit 7). Part 4 'Research', comprising:

- approaches to gender and language research (Unit 8)
- data and data sites (Unit 9)
- written texts (Unit 10).

Needless to say, the four parts are not mutually exclusive in their concerns. Research is a feature throughout, becoming an explicit focus in Part 4.

Much of the documented research on gender and language today has

been done by, and even with, people from 'Western' countries, and 'language' often means 'English'. Although this book cannot rectify this situation (and, like others, is probably guilty of perpetuating it), it is emphasised throughout Section C, 'Exploration', that the

language researched by readers, in most of the research projects, does not have to be English – and researching other languages is encouraged.

Students' own experience is drawn on throughout the book. It would be bizarre if this were not the case. As Deborah Cameron writes,'Men and women are members of cultures in which a large amount of discourse about gender is constantly circulating' (1997a: 60). Although not everyone may not see it in this way, anyone who reads newspapers, watches television and indeed converses with others can hardly escape participating in that 'discourse about gender'. One aim of this book is to see that participation is itself a valuable resource for gender and language study, and to help readers articulate and theorise their experience accordingly.

SECTION A: INTRODUCTION

The 'Introduction' units, distributed across this resource book's four parts – 'Background', 'Gender', 'Language' and 'Research' - are written not only for those relatively new to the gender and language field, but also for those who would benefit from an updated summary of the unit topic. Broadly, they deal with relevant concepts and terms (in particular, meanings of 'gender', but also 'context','feminism', 'discourse'), and lay the foundations for the 'B' and 'C' units that follow (see 'How to use this book'). Most units include some sort of historical perspective. Gender and language study may be a young field, but since the early 1970s it has developed apace, creating an expanding paradigm which draws on a wide range of disciplines and theoretical and methodological approaches. Interestingly, new developments have not only built on their predecessors but have also been premised on challenges to those predecessors. The result is a field with practitioners whose contributions can be seen as located at different diachronic points, resulting in ongoing yet hopefully productive tensions. One ongoing debate, for example, is the role of the study of gender and language in what might be described as emancipatory feminism; another is whether CA is an appropriate approach for the feminist project that gender and language study is often seen to be.

These introduction 'A' units are in part 'springboards' for the extension 'B' units, since the latter are previewed and, importantly, contextualised

here. Interspersed with the texts are ‘Follow-Up Tasks’ and ‘Reflection Tasks’. Many of these invite and encourage the reader to critically question what they are reading, to draw on their own prior reading or experience, or to develop their own perspective on an issue. Active reading is thus a desideratum of both the introduction ‘A’ units and the extension ‘B’ units.

SECTION B: EXTENSION

Following on from the introduction ‘A’ units, which look at key concepts and terms, and at the historical background to various approaches and foci of research, the

corresponding extension ‘B’ units take these further through illustrative readings. For each ‘B’ unit readers would benefit from studying the corresponding ‘A’ unit first. Particular readings from the ‘B’ units can (sometimes, should) also be read before starting particular ‘C’ exploration tasks, and readers are given directions here.

Again, then, following the four-way division of the resource book, the extension ‘B’ units focus on ‘Background’, ‘Gender’, ‘Language’ and ‘Research’. The different extracts are all ‘key’ but for different reasons, including their theoretical approach and/or methodology, as well as empirical findings. Most units contain two or three extracts. The selection has been designed to allow students to read in the original a wide range of extracts from books, chapters and articles - in some cases, almost the whole chapter or article. Importantly, although all centre on both language and gender, the meanings of ‘language’ and of ‘gender’ vary from one extract to another, and the reader is encouraged to be alert to this diversity.

As regards selection, some extracts originally identified as highly desirable or very suitable were simply too expensive as regards copyright fees, or the authors were only willing for them to be included in their entirety (impossible in a book containing a large number of extracts). The extracts eventually chosen include both ‘classic’ and less well-known but nevertheless indicative work. Two pieces (those by Sara Mills and Puleng Hanong Thetela) have been commissioned especially for this resource book. All but one (Alma Graham’s ‘The making of a non-sexist dictionary’) were written as academic pieces. Most of the extracts were written in the second half of the twentieth century, but there is also earlier work (Mary Haas’s ‘Men’s and women’s speech in Koasati’), and several pieces are from the first few years of the twenty-first century. Some extracts were originally targeted at readers working in the ‘obvious’ disciplines of

Sociolinguistics, Applied Linguistics (in the broad sense) and Women's Studies; others in the less obvious ones of Literature, Language Education and Psychology. This is in accordance with one aim of this book: to acquaint the reader with work from different disciplinary as well as different theoretical and methodological traditions.

These extension 'B' units allow the authors to make their points for themselves. As both experienced and less experienced researchers know, reading the original article after having become very familiar with references to it in other work can be a salutary and exciting experience. The reader may find that the work in question has been misinterpreted; alternatively, it may have been cited so selectively that, without the proper context, any critique is unfair. Alternatively, the work may have been celebrated without due consideration of its problematic nature, evident only in further reading. And, almost certainly, the reader will not only come across the 'famous', classic, endlessly recycled quotations, but will have the refreshing experi ence of coming across *other* groups of words identifiable as potential quotations for her or his own work. And, sometimes, there is the 'buzz' of simply reading first hand, in the writer's own words, something actually written by someone who has made a real difference to the field.

Preceding, punctuating and following the extracts are, variously, 'Before you read', 'Reflection', 'While you read' and 'After you've read' tasks. These, we hope, will help the reader to engage critically with the text: to anticipate the range of directions an extract might take; to question conceptualisations; to recognise the limitations and constitutiveness of a given methodology; to distinguish problems of presentation from problems of content; and to be able to identify what an extract has to offer the gender and language field and/or the reader's own research.

SECTION C: EXPLORATION

Following the four-part structure of the book into 'Background','Gender','Language' and 'Research', the purpose of Section C, 'Exploration', is to allow readers inde pendently to take further a selection of the topics raised in Sections A and B, and to be able to do so at various levels, in various ways and directions, and to various extents and depths. Readers do this through research tasks, which allow them to become familiarised with a range of research practices in a very immediate way. They will develop research competencies, including those of principled data selec tion, careful and ethical data collection, and systematic and reflexive data analysis. They will hopefully continue to broaden and raise their awareness of the diverse field of gender and

language in an informed and critical way, being able to use insights gained from their own hands-on research projects to constructively critique the work of others.

Readers will draw on their own personal and academic agendas in making their selections of which research tasks to carry out. Underlying their own work may be an intention not only to understand more about the workings of language in relation to gender, but also to develop further their understanding of the multiplicity of meanings of 'gender' itself. And, for some, the relationship of gender and language research to the broader, emancipatory 'feminist project' will always be an issue.

The research tasks can be used for a variety of specific purposes. They can suggest or constitute assignments with a clear research component; they can also be the basis for more substantial and extended Masters-level research. Developed, they can provide the germ of doctoral work. In higher-education institutional contexts, some may form the basis for seminar tasks, to be done individually, in small groups, or by the seminar group as a whole. Other tasks may provide suitable extensions of seminar work.

The tasks take the form of desk research and field research, and combinations of these. Desk research often involves the tracking down of others' work beyond what constitutes usual 'library research'. Field research may also include this, but additionally requires the collection (or selection/generation) and/or analysis of empirical data. The research tasks are carefully contextualised in association with particular theoretical and methodological approaches. They also draw on the different understandings of 'gender' addressed particularly in the Unit 4 units.

These research tasks do not automatically assume that the 'corresponding' intro duction 'A' units have been covered, although study of the corresponding 'A' unit often provides a useful starting point for those unfamiliar with the task topic. Several tasks do require the reading of at least one of the extracts in the corresponding extension 'B' unit.

The tasks make use of the World Wide Web in various ways, and it is assumed that students are familiar with search tools and are able to search creatively and to follow up links. It is probably gratuitous to remind readers of the value and relevance of the World Wide Web for academic work: there are downloadable articles, assignments and lecture notes all there for the reading. Evaluating all these and using them selectively is part of library research today. For this reason, lengthy bibli ographies are not included with each task, although key references are included with many.

A good, general starting point is the *Gender and Genre Bibliography* (<http:// www.ling.lancs.ac.uk/groups/clsl/current.htm>). Published as a *Centre for Language in Social Life Working Paper 126* at Lancaster University, UK, this covers references to gender and language in relation to a large number of written and spoken genres ('genre' is used here in a very broad sense). The current (2006) edition of the *Bibliography* is the third. This bibliography is downloadable, and free. A second useful web site is that of the 'Language and Gender' page link to the homepage of the International Gender and Language Association (IGALA) (<http://www. stanford.edu/group/igala>). This provides details of a range of publications, including several downloadable ones.

Several other web sites have been listed, although it is recognised that these are not as stable as one would like. These include the web sites of various corpora, including the British National Corpus (BNC) and the Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English (MICASE). Several tasks require the use of corpora, and it is hoped that readers will become familiar with this mode of investigation, if only as a supple mentary source of data for many research projects.

The last use of the World Wide Web is as a publication outlet for the outcomes of readers' own research tasks. Members of existing 'Gender and Language' courses are encouraged to set up a web site, with links to as many other sites as possible that constitute resources for the study of gender and language (for example, the two mentioned above), and with a member or members of the course taking respon sibility for the site. Students can then post their work on the site – and can ask
for comments from readers worldwide. Alternatively, readers working with the book on their own might like to post their work on their homepage, or to set up a homepage for this purpose.

SECTION A
Introduction

Unit A1
Early work on gender and language

A1.1 PROVERBS, QUOTATIONS AND FOLK-LINGUISTIC BELIEFS

Gender and language had been linked in scholarly writings well before the second wave of the Women's Movement began in the late 1960s and early 1970s (for example, Jespersen 1922, Labov 1966). Further back, popular understandings of gender and language had existed probably for centuries before 'gender and language' was considered worthy of study. I am referring here both to prescriptive ideas of how women and men should speak, and to 'folk-linguistic' ideas about how they actually do (apparently differently). Proverbs captured these folk-linguistic ideas, often referring disparagingly to women's verbosity. Jennifer Coates (1993: 16) cites the following (some of which have fallen out of use):

- 'A woman's tongue wags like a lamb's tail' (England).
- 'The North Sea will be found wanting in water than a woman at a loss for a word' (Jutland).
- 'Many women, many words, many geese, many turds' (England).

To these we can add:

- 'Three women make a market' (Sudan).
- 'Three women together make a theatrical performance' (China).
- 'Women are nine times more talkative than men' (Hebrew).

There is, of course, no evidence to support past assumptions of women's verbosity, and claims must be seen in the wider social context of expectations of the desirability (or otherwise) of women's talk. Sweepingly, but probably with a grain of truth, Dale Spender writes 'The talkativeness of women has been gauged in comparison not with men but with silence [so that] any talk in which a woman engages can be too much' (1980: 42).

Negative representations and evaluations of women's talk may disguise a concern not so much with their use of time, or this manner of conducting themselves, as with what they were saying (and about whom). The *content* of women's talk has certainly met with conventionalised rebuttals. Examples from traditional China, Russia and Japan include:

■ ‘Women’s and children’s opinion’ (China). ■ ‘A woman’s tongue spreads gossip fast’ (China). ■ ‘Men talk like books, women lose themselves in details’ (China). ■ ‘Never listen to a woman’s words’ (China). ■ ‘The tongue is babbling, but the head knows nothing about it’ (Russia). ■ ‘Three inches of a woman’s tongue can slay a man six feet tall’ (Japan).[1]

Also worthy of mention are those writing systems in which several characters are gendered: the Mandarin Chinese character for ‘harmony’ (with its implied verbal component), for example, shows one woman under one roof:[2]

Figure A1.1

Explicit reference to women’s use of language can be found too in fiction, for example in the words of characters created by Sophocles, Chaucer and Shakespeare:

■ ‘Silence gives the proper grace to women’ (Sophocles, *Ajax*). ■ ‘As men/Do walk a mile, women should talk an hour/After supper. ’Tis their exercise’ (Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, *Philaster*, II.iv). ■ ‘How hard it is for women to keep counsel!’ (Shakespeare,*Julius Caesar*, II.iv.9). ■ ‘Her voice was ever soft,/Gentle and low, an excellent thing in woman’ (Shakespeare, *King Lear*, V.iii.274). ■ ‘She has brown hair, and speaks small like a woman’ (Shakespeare, *Merry Wives of Windsor*, I.i.48).

Fictional utterances cannot be read ‘straight’, or as straightforwardly reflecting the view of the author: Shakespeare may not have concurred with these representa tions expressed in *Julius Caesar*, or by King Lear. Further, the ‘value’ of these views must depend on whether they are articulated by characters who are themselves represented positively or negatively, and, of course, by how these characters are played in a given stage production. However, their articulation in these fictional texts is a reminder of the long-running, traditional discursive practice of disparaging women’s talk, and constitutes a recycling of this discourse (see Unit 7 on ‘Discourse and Discourses’).

On a different level – since it concerns linguistic proficiency rather than language use – is John Milton’s ‘One tongue is sufficient for a woman’, apparently his response

SECTION
A

when asked whether he would instruct his daughters in foreign languages. Samuel Johnson similarly claimed that ‘A man in general is better pleased when he has a good dinner than when his wife talks Greek’. Johnson’s more famous pronounce ment is, however, ‘Sir, a woman’s preaching is like a dog walking on his hind legs. It is not done well, but you are surprised to find it done at all’ (apparently a response to Boswell). This claim is often recycled to make a point

about something which is not done well, but which provokes surprise in the mere fact of its being done. Both Johnson's quotations can of course be read as much as comments on men (or at least on Johnson!) as on anything else.

Task A1.1.1: Follow-up task

➢ Try and find examples of use of the second Samuel Johnson quote on the web. For a discussion of the quote, and others, and indeed of Johnson, see <http://www.samueljohnson.com/dogwalk.html#53>.

Ideas about how women do speak tend to shade into 'prescriptive' ideas of how they should (as several of the proverbs illustrate). Saint Paul, for example, is reported to have said (presumably to an audience of patriarchally minded men): 'Let your women keep silence in the churches' (1 Corinthians 14:34). Prescriptive ideas about women's language use have also been institutionalised in etiquette books. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, these routinely advised women against public speaking, to tailor their talk to the interests of their (male) guests, to ask facilitative questions, and to listen rather than speak (Cameron 1995a, Eble 1976, Kramarae 1981). Rather differently, prescription is evident in the content of well-intentioned assertiveness training courses for women (Cameron 1992b).

Task A1.1.2: Reflection task

➢ Think of and note down your own examples (in any language) of the following which focus explicitly on the way women and men do and should talk:

- proverbs
- works of fiction, films, plays or songs
- religious texts
- assertiveness training sessions or texts.

A1.2 ACADEMIC WORK ON LANGUAGE USE AND GENDER

Coates (1993: 17–19) draws our attention to several educated eighteenth-century contributors to the English newspaper *The World*:

- Richard Cambridge (1754) refers to '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.'
- 'Anonymous' (1756) complains of women's excessive use of certain adverbial forms (vastly, horridly, abominably, immensely, excessively).
- Lord Chesterfield (1754) complains that women change words' meanings (vastly glad, vastly little).

Task A1.2.1: Reflection task

➢ Assuming that there is some substance to these observations, consider and note down how you might read the linguistic behaviour described here in a positive light.

➢ Can you think of any way of empirically investigating these claims about apparent gender differences in language use in the eighteenth century?

➢ Can you think of any apparently contradictory phrases like 'vastly little' that are evident in English or any other language today? Are these evaluated in any particular way? Are they associated with particular groups of speakers?

Letters to newspapers about women's language use will inevitably reflect (and recycle) folk-linguistic ideas. However, scholarly work is also prone to this. The Danish linguist Otto Jespersen has been taken to task here (for example, in Coates 1993). Jespersen included in his 1922 monograph *Language: its nature, development and origin* a chapter called 'The woman' (needless to say, this was not matched by one called 'The man'). He made various claims about gender differences or ten dencies in talk: that women have smaller vocabularies, show extensive use of certain adjectives and adverbs, 'more often than men break off without finishing their sentences, because they start talking without having thought out what they are going to say', and produce less complex sentences (Jespersen 1922: 251). Jespersen's own observations were based largely on impressionistic 'data' (and literary texts), reflecting ideas and epistemologies that existed at the time for the study of language. Analyst and native-speaker intuitions were then more than acceptable substitutes for empirical data (as they continued to be for several decades, and still are in certain branches of linguistics – see Robin Lakoff's perspective on this in Unit A2).

In a very different tradition, serious empirical fieldwork on language was being carried out in the early twentieth century by contemporaries of Jespersen: ethno graphers, anthropologists and linguists interested in Native American languages in particular, who also documented gender differences. Mary Haas, for example, studied Koasati (a Native American language spoken in Louisiana) by working with its speakers. Her article 'Men's and women's speech in Koasati' was published in *Language* in 1944. An extract appears as Text B1.1.

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Several studies of this kind identified what later came to be called ‘sex-exclusive’ linguistic features, that is, features used only by women, or only by men, within a given speech community. Jespersen famously quotes the case of the Carib Indians of the Lesser Antilles (West Indies), whose language was documented by Rochefort in 1665:

he says that ‘the men have a great many expressions peculiar to them, which the women understand but never pronounce themselves. On the other hand, the women have words and phrases which the men never use, or they would be laughed to

scorn. Thus it happens that in their conversations it often seems as if the women had another language than the men'.

(1922: 237)

It is interesting, if Rochefort is to be believed, that the reason men avoided certain 'feminine' words and phrases was to avoid ridicule, since this was not cited as a motivating factor for women. Such 'rigid boundaries' surrounding masculinity can still be seen, including in 'Western' cultures (see Unit C9.4).

An often-quoted example of modern sex-exclusive language features is the use of certain particles and pronominal forms in standard Japanese (see, for example, Ide 2003). However, there is change and resistance here, some women intentionally producing 'men's' forms (see Ozaki 1998, Okamoto 1995). Furthermore, this phe nomenon does not occur in all dialects of Japanese (McMahill 2002).

Task A1.2.2: Reflection task

➢ Are you familiar with a language with sex-exclusive features? If so, what are these? Is this phenomenon undergoing change, in your experience?

➢ What happens if men do produce 'women's features', and vice versa? Are children, and adult learners, taught to use these features 'appropriately'? If so, how?

➢ If you are not familiar with a language with sex-exclusive features, can you think of examples of ways in which women and men *tend* to use a language with which you are familiar differently? In what way?

'Sex-exclusive' uses of language occur rarely and contrast with the much more common (and frequently studied) 'sex-preferential' uses. These refer to differential tendencies, that is, ways in which women and men tend to talk differently from each other in a given context. 'Sex-preferential' phonetic, intonation, lexical, syntactic and wider interactional tendencies have been identified (see Units A2, B2).

Importantly, any such tendencies will always be small in comparison with women's and men's tendencies to speak similarly (otherwise communication between women

and men would break down).'Tendencies' also entails variation within women and within men, that is, intra-group diversity. This diversity was underplayed in the past, and even now Gender and Language researchers (see Unit A2) have to work to stress its importance.

The topic of women's and men's speech has been of particular interest to sociolin guists. Issues include gender-differential tendencies in style-shifting (for example, between formal and casual speech), use of prestige and stigmatised variants, linguistic conservatism, who leads language change (see below) and the positive and negative evaluation of such change.

William Labov's (1966, 1972a) and Peter

Trudgill's (1972a) empirical studies of variation in language use were particularly important and influential here. In his paper 'Sex, covert prestige and linguistic change in the urban British English of Norwich', Trudgill correlates 'phonetic and phonological variables with social class, age, and stylistic context' (1972a: 180). However, following Labov, he was also interested in biological sex as a sociolinguistic variable.

Trudgill's methodology was quantitative, based on a large-scale interview study (a random sample of sixty people). Looking at the variable (ng), for which there are two pronunciations in Norwich English ('walking', the prestige form, and 'walkin''), Trudgill found that women tended to use the prestige form more than men (women over thirty years of age also tended to use the prestige forms of the other phonetic variables he studied more than men). He also found that women (more than men) tended to over-report their pronunciation, that is, when asked about their pro nunciation, said they produced more 'prestigious' sounds than they actually did. However, of particular interest, and a source of past controversy, is not so much these findings as his explanation. Again following Labov, this included that,'Women in our society are more status-conscious than men, generally speaking . . . and are therefore more aware of the social significance of linguistic variables' (1972a: 182).

This has merited considerable feminist critique. Deborah Cameron in *Feminism and Linguistic Theory* (1992b) suggests rather that,'the women's assessments might . . . have reflected their awareness of sex-stereotypes and their consequent desire to fulfil "normal" expectations that women talk "better"' (1992: 63) – something rather different. With the benefit of hindsight, then, we can legitimately question Trudgill's explanation of women's greater 'status-consciousness'. Cameron also critiqued Trudgill's research methodology, in particular the way he identified the social class of husbands and wives.

Contrasting claims have been made about women's and men's linguistic con servatism (for example, Pop 1950). Work on leadership in language change includes that by William Labov (1966, 1972a, 1972b, 1990) in the USA. Looking at use of the short vowel (a), Labov (1966) found that women in New York tended to style-shift far more than did his male informants, and that they tended to be less conservative linguistically: they were in fact initiating change by using an 'advanced' vowel form

in casual speech (the merging of /ih/ and /eh/). In contrast, and a reminder of the variability of any gender–language relationship, Labov's (1962, 1972b) study of

the two diphthongs (aw) and (ay) in Martha's Vineyard showed men to be leading change. In another reminder of variability, in his (1990) paper, 'The intersection of sex and social class in the course of linguistic change', Labov notes that whereas men tend to use more non-standard stable forms than women, when it comes to linguistic change, women will innovate, in part by favouring new prestige forms 'from above'.

Other relevant empirical work on linguistic variation and gender has not been carried out from a feminist perspective but has nevertheless contributed to the broader 'feminist project'. This includes work by Susan Gal (1978), Anne Bodine (1975a, 1975b) and Lesley Milroy (1980). The Gal and Bodine studies are summarised below; an extract from Milroy can be found in Unit B1.2.

In a classic study, Gal (1978) investigated language variation in the village of Oberwart, on the Hungarian and Austrian border. Looking at social networks, she found that young Hungarian women in Oberwart spoke German in a much greater range of situations than did young Hungarian men (and older Hungarian women), and that they married out of their original speech community more than the men (for whom Hungarian still had something to offer). Highlighting the importance of the local, and indeed of social practice, Gal's study anticipated the later 'com munity of practice' (CofP) notion. Explored in Unit 6 (with an extract from a key reading in Unit B6.2), CofP can be seen as going beyond the notion of 'speech community' to include non-linguistic social practices. It has been defined as

> an aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement in an endeavour. Ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs, values, power relations – in short, practices – emerge in the course of this mutual endeavour. . . . [A] Community of Practice . . . is defined simultaneously by its membership and by the practice in which that membership engages. (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1998: 490)

CofP has become an important notion for gender and language study: as a 'site' which is meaningful for its members, it is also an 'epistemological site' which is fruitful and theoretically coherent for researchers.

Task A1.2.3: Reflection task

➢ Think of a CofP or speech community with which you are familiar in which more than one language is spoken. Are choices and patterns of distribution of these languages gendered in any way?

Anne Bodine (1975b) carried out a survey of ethnographic work on languages in non-European societies, looking not only at the sex of the speaker, but also of the

addressee, and even of the 'spoken about'. Anticipating later developments in gender and language study, she claimed that gender differentiation (especially that not occurring in the ethnographers' own languages) was often overstated (see also Hall 2003).

Gender–language relationships have been the focus of pre- and non-feminist work in several areas other than language use. These include what might be called 'linguistic gender' (for example, considerations of gender-marking, of 'natural' and 'grammatical' gender, and of 'generics' such as 'man' in different world languages, see Corbett 2004). They also include questions of verbal ability in girls and boys (largely in first-language

acquisition, for example, Maccoby and Jacklin 1974) and in female and male language learners of all ages (for example, Ekstrand 1980). There is also work on gendered language use by parents with children (for example, Greif and Gleason 1980). While such work tends (if unwittingly) to be very much in the 'gender differences' tradition (see Unit 2 for critiques), it has nevertheless provided useful data, as well as a standpoint from which to develop more dynamic conceptualisations of gender–language relationships.

NOTES

1. The source of most of the Chinese proverbs is Kaye (1989). I am also grateful to Hu Yining for supplying others. Another source is Mineke Schipper's *Never Marry a Woman with Big Feet* (2003).
2. Taken from <http://www.zein.se/patrick/chinen11p.html>.

Unit A2
The influence of feminism and feminist linguistics (a): Robin Lakoff, Dale Spender, 'deficit' and 'dominance'

A2.1 THE FEMINIST CONTRIBUTION

While empirical and other work on gender and language existed well before the modern Women's Movement (see Unit A1), in the 1970s this heralded a new, important and feminist impetus to language and gender study. The 'second wave' of the Women's Movement – in its early stages known as the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) – began in the late 1960s, prompted in large part by the Civil Rights Movement in the USA;[1] and the late 1960s and the 1970s were a time of feminist[2] protest in many Western countries.

Feminism has acquired negative associations, entailing situated notions such as 'being anti-men'. Nevertheless, progressive reforms are ongoing and worldwide, symbolised by initiatives such as International Women's Year (1975); and 'gender equality' has been substantially taken on board by aid agencies and organisations such as the World Bank and the British Council. As early as 1975, The Pacific Women's Conference, held in Suva, Fiji, passed resolutions on women and the family, health, religion, education, work, the law and politics. More recently, the 1995 Beijing Conference on Women (The United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women), had as its slogan 'Action for Equality, Development and Peace'. Although 'equality' is open to interpretation, its inclusion was crucial. Though its impact may have been marginal in the 'West', women in many African countries acclaim 'Beijing' as an important landmark and attest to its influence on the way people now think and talk about gender issues.

Language was a particular feature and target of Western women's movements. The American feminist Robin Morgan claimed strongly in 1968 in *Going Too Far* that, 'The very semantics of the language reflect [women's] condition. We do not even have our own names, but bear that of the father until we exchange it for that of the husband' (1977: 106). By 1970 Emily Toth was railing against 'one-man tents', and Germaine

Greer, in her famous *Female Eunuch* (1972), notes how 'terms of endearment' for women are also terms for food ('honey','sweetie'). Through lexical items such as 'Mrs/Miss','son-of-a-bitch' and 'manageress', the English language was said to 'define, degrade and stereotype' women, and through the so-called 'generics'

'he' and 'man', to render them invisible (see in particular Miller and Swift's *Words and Women* [1976]).

Task A2.1.1: Reflection task

➢ Think of a language other than English. Do features exist in this language which can be seen as having the capacity to 'define, degrade or stereotype' women, or to render them (relatively) invisible?

➢ If so, is there resistance to such features?

➢ Are language practices changing here?

An early assumption surrounding 'sexist language' items was that language could influence both thought and behaviour. Sexist language was seen to do so for the worse. This analysis led to the adoption or creation of alternative linguistic items – for example,'Ms' as a title for all women, married or single;'manager','spokesperson' and 'chairperson' to refer inclusively to both women and men; 'he or she' and 's/he' to avoid the 'masculine bias' of the 'generic he'. These alternatives were not only used by committed individuals in their speech and writing, and documented in feminist books such as Miller and Swift's *Handbook of Non-Sexist Writing* (1989), but also appeared as elements of institutional codes of practice (with such titles as 'Guidelines for Inclusive Language'). The then UK Lancashire Polytechnic (now University of Central Lancashire) produced a 'Code of practice on non-gender specific terminology' in 1987. This considered telephone listings, forms of address (written and spoken), procedures in meetings and letters, and noted that 'the use of "love,""dear" and "darling," to female colleagues often implies a lack of equality and mutuality' (p. 2). These interventions were not without their opponents. Commentaries and letters about this code appeared in both the local and national press, making reference to 'cultural dictatorship', the 'frustrated spinsters' (who had put the document together), and claiming that '*Luv* lacks gender, *dear* is sexless and *darling* is neutral' (italics added).[3]

The early backlash was in its turn resisted, most notably in the academic sector by critical analyses of those arguments mounted against non-sexist language. The earliest was Maija Blaubergs' (1980) 'An analysis of classic arguments against changing sexist language' (see also Blaubergs 1978). In a later, less well-known paper, Nancy Henley (1987) identified six arguments against changing the language, refuting each in turn. Challenging the argument that 'Linguistic sexism is superficial and trivial', for example, Henley writes, 'Studying sexism in language is not a diversion from study of important problems, but it does need integration with other areas of inequality so that the larger picture may be pieced together' (1987: 8).[4]

New syntactic possibilities, new lexicalisations and re-presentations of familiar ones also appeared in grammars and dictionaries (see Sunderland 1994b). *The*

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Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language (1985), for example, describes ‘singular they’ (for example, ‘Everyone should bring their deposit on Monday’) as ‘now increasingly accepted even in formal usage’. Non-sexist items have on the whole,

however, remained alternatives to, rather than replacements for, sexist language items (see Unit 5), though they may have reduced in frequency.

As part of the campaign for non-sexist language in English, the following alternative items thus came into use:

Table A2.1

Alternative item	*Intended to replace*	*Reason*
Ms	*Miss/Mrs*	to achieve equivalence with *Mr* and to end the practice of women being 'defined' by their marital status
chairperson	*chairman*	to put an end to the 'think male' *spokesperson spokesman* phenomenon, and the 'rendering *barperson barman* invisible' of women (especially as referents for women)
s/he, 'singular *they*'	'generic *he*'	as above

To these we can add the practice of standardising 'marked' female terms:

Table A2.2

Alternative item	*Intended to replace*	*Reason*
doctor	*lady doctor*	to achieve equivalence with *usher usherette* 'masculine' terms, and to end the *flight attendant air hostess* practice of 'trivialising' and 'marking' feminine terms

Task A2.1.2: Reflection task

➢ In what way are these alternative items used today? Complete the chart below from the point of view of your own living and working situation.

➢ Consider how (if you are female) you react to being given a title (Miss, Mrs, Ms) you do not use or like.

➢ Consider whether, as a teacher, you would (or do) teach 's/he' and 'singular they'. If 'Yes', what would/do you say about these items?

	Ms	*chairperson*	*s/he 'singular' they*	*flight attendant*
Do you use this, ever?				
If so, in what context(s)?				
With whom?				

To/Of whom?

Who do you know who typically uses it?

What is your attitude to the term? What do you see as its value today, if any?

Other language-related practices included rather more direct action in terms of painting out sexist words and slogans on billboards and replacing them with others. The Fiat billboard ad 'If it were a lady, it would get its bottom pinched' famously received a spray-painted addition of 'If this lady was a car she'd run you down' – immortalised by photographer Jill Posener (see Sunderland 2004).

A2.2 ROBIN LAKOFF AND *LANGUAGE AND WOMAN'S PLACE*

These early feminist concerns (of both linguists and activists) were largely with the English language as an abstract system (*langue*), and with replacements (or at least alternatives) that would represent women in a more inclusive and positive way. However, feminist linguists soon took an interest in naturally occurring language use (*parole*) – particularly that between women and men. Robin Lakoff's *Language and Woman's Place* (1975, see also Text B2.1) considers questions of non-sexist language, but is best known for its explorations of what have since been widely referred to as 'gender differences in language use'. Sections of this work had originally

appeared as an article two years previously, but by 1975 the political climate and developing field had more than created readiness for a book devoted to gender and language written (at least in part) from a feminist perspective, and Lakoff's was the first monograph (indeed, first complete book) on gender and language. It is now widely critiqued on many counts – including that in some ways it represents women's language use as 'deficient', relative to that of men – and is sometimes cited as exemplifying a 'deficit approach' to studies of women's talk (along with the work of Jespersen and

Trudgill, see Unit A1). This is, however, to miss the clear 'male dominance' elements of the book (see below, see also Text B2.1).

Language and Woman's Place is widely acknowledged as an important pioneer work that carried (and still carries) wide-ranging influence (as the frequency of its academic citations illustrates). Its importance has been further attested by the publication of a second edition (2004). Edited by Mary Bucholtz, this includes a series of new, short contributions by key gender and language researchers, a new 'Introduction' and annotations of the original first edition text by Lakoff herself.

A2.3 DALE SPENDER AND *MAN MADE LANGUAGE*

Five years after *Language and Woman's Place* came out of the USA, a rather more hard-hitting book, Dale Spender's *Man Made Language*(1980), appeared in the UK. Spender had been a secondary-school teacher, and the book includes an important educational dimension. Aiming less at an academic and more at a popular audience, this work represented what can be seen as a radical feminist position. Writing from an explicitly feminist, committed perspective, Dale Spender was uncompromising in her early claims. Like Lakoff, Spender wrote about sexism in the English language and gender differences in language use. She saw both as operating to the clear disad vantage of women, contributing to women being effectively silenced. Largely reporting and bringing together others' findings, Spender focuses on how, in mixed sex talk, men dominate the conversation, interrupt their conversational partners and are more successful at having the topics they bring up, taken up. This corre sponds to what is now known as the '(male) dominance' approach characteristic of studies of language use and gender in the 1970s (and drawn on well into the 1980s and even the 1990s).

Through *Man Made Language*, Dale Spender did a great deal to popularise the study of gender and language in the UK and beyond. She was a prolific writer – in the same year that *Man Made Language* was published she also published (with Elizabeth Sarah) an edited collection: *Learning to Lose: sexism and education* and sustained an impressive publishing record throughout the 1980s. Her later books include (and the titles are illustrative of her stance): *Men's Studies Modified* (1981), *Invisible Women* (1982, 1989), *Feminist Theorists* (1983), *Women of Ideas and What Men Have Done to Them* (1983, 1988), *There's Always Been a Women's Movement this Century* (1983), *Time and Tide Wait for No Man* (1984), *For the Record: the making and meaning of feminine knowledge* (1985), *Mothers of the Novel*

(1986), *The Education Papers: women's quest for equality in Britain (1850–1912)* (1987), *The Writing or the Sex?: or why you don't have to read women's writing to know it's no good* (1989) and *Nattering on the Net: women, power and cyberspace* (1995).

Chapter 5 of *Man Made Language*, 'Language and reality: who made the world?' begins with a useful, and in part philosophical, discussion of the partiality of science. Spender cites with approval Chalmers' claim that 'theory precedes observation' (1978), arguing that theories and categories are not gender-neutral, and that,'When there are a sexist language and sexist theories culturally available, the observation of reality is also likely to be sexist. It is by this means that sexism can be perpetuated and reinforced as new objects and events, new data, have sexist interpretations projected upon them' (Spender 1980: 141).

This of course begs the question of the origin of sexist language, theories and categories. Rejecting 'mere accident', Spender continues:

I would reiterate that it has been the dominant group – in this case, males – who have created the world, invented the categories, constructed sexism and its justification and developed a language trap which is in their interest. ...Males . . . have produced language, thought and reality. Historically it has been the structures, the categories and the meanings which have been invented by males – though not of course by all males – and they have then been validated by reference to other males. In this process women have played little or no part.

(1980: 142–3)

Task A2.3.1: Reflection task

➢ In privileging patriarchy as a dominant force in shaping both cognitive and social structures, Spender is de-privileging social class and ethnicity. To what extent do you support her argument?

Spender provides some linguistic evidence for her claim that men are in part responsible for linguistic sexism, at least in the grammar of English. She cites the work of sixteenth-, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century male grammarians, who inscribed the following notions into their grammars:

- The male term should 'precede' the female (for example, 'husband and wife') (Wilson 1553).
- One reason for this was that the male was the 'worthier' gender (Poole 1646). ■ The male gender was 'more comprehensive' than the female (Kirkby 1746).

Spender thus successfully demonstrated that 'intervention' in the language is not only something that twentieth-century feminists tried to do. These grammars may

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not have produced their hoped-for results, of course, but may have had other (related) effects. Spender wrote,'the rule was there, it had been recorded, and it was extremely useful for the nineteenth-century grammarians who vehemently took it up and insisted on rigid adherence to this rule in the name of grammatical correctness – another invention of the dominant group which legitimates their prejudice!' (1980: 149).

A grammatical rule, of course, cannot legislate for understanding, and Spender provides empirical evidence that 'generic man' and 'generic he' are not (probably, cannot be) as generic (or 'comprehensive', in Kirkby's words) as is sometimes claimed. For example:

Alleen Pace Nilsen (1973) found that young children thought that man meant male

people in sentences such as ‘man needs food’. . . . Linda Harrison found that science students – at least – thought male when discussing the evolution of man, they had little appreciation of the female contribution even when explicitly taught it (1975).

(1980: 152)

Task A2.3.2: Reflection task

➢ What is your own response to the utterance ‘Everyone knows he has to decide for himself’? (Let us assume this is said in the context of voting in an election.) If you are female, do you feel entirely included? Do you have to ‘read against the grain’ (for example, do some rhetorical and/or cognitive work) to feel included by this sentence? If you are male, do you read this as referring to both women and men? Can you imagine how a woman might feel?

Like *Language and Woman’s Place, Man Made Language* was thought-provoking and influential. Like Lakoff, Spender was a pioneer in the field, and, like Lakoff, her work has been widely critiqued. This was in part because of Spender’s representation of the English language as a gender-biased system (as opposed to a linguistic system within which usages have acquired a masculine orientation), and in part because of her determinist stance and insufficient acknowledgement of the fact that meaning can never be fixed. Spender was articulating a form of social constructionism redolent of a strong version of the Whorfian hypothesis: that language and cate gories shape how people see the world, and that a sexist world has been created by men, the inventors of those categories.

Critique was accordingly voiced of Spender’s view of language as somehow constructed by a conspiratorial patriarchy. And, in their classic, early post structuralist critique, ‘Linguistic, social and sexual relations: a review of Dale Spender’s *Man Made Language*’ (1981), Maria Black and Rosalind Coward further attack Spender’s notion of gender, arguing that Spender’s highly monolithic view of patriarchy and gender relations and her emphasis on ‘pre-given groups’ (males) ‘give[s] us no real purchase on how ideologies participate in the production of groups and secure identification with the subject positions produced there’ (1981: 72). Black and Coward additionally saw Spender’s model of language as looking at etymological data in isolation from relevant social and linguistic changes and uses. They argued:‘We have to understand not just histories of words, but the relationship of terms to other terms, the relationship between terms in statements, the relationship between statements’ (1981: 82).

If meanings are seen as produced in ideologies, so that, for example, it is not only men who may define childbirth as an ‘ultimately satisfying’ experience for women (as Spender claims), both men and women

can be seen as capable of claiming this, as well as of emphasising the pain. Different men's and women's
articulated positions depend on the discourses to which they have access and on which they draw (see also Sunderland 2004). Black and Coward were thus forerunners of a *discourse* approach to gender and language (see Unit 7); certainly they anticipated the importance the notion of discourses was to have for gender and language study.

NOTES

1. The 'first wave' refers rather Anglocentrically to the British women's suffrage movement in the early part of the twentieth century. 'Third wave' has now been applied to what might be seen as a form of 'post-structuralist feminism', in which it is fully recognised that a given form, representation or manifestation, seen as sexist by some, may have a myriad of possible alternative meanings, including to feminists (Mills 2002a, b, also Unit B5.2, Sunderland 2004).
2. The word 'feminism' had been around since as early as the nineteenth century, but now came into its own.
3. Thanks to Marilyn Martin-Jones for this data.
4. A retrospective backlash can be seen in the more recent and frequent 'knee-jerk', dismissive accusations of 'political correctness'. This notion, which seems so unprob lematic to those who draw on it with a view to discrediting proponents of both non-sexist and non-racist language (and other progressive practices), has now been thoroughly problematised (see, for example, Cameron 1995a, Suhr and Johnson 2003), at least
in academia. Sadly (for many), it remains triumphant in many other discourse(s) communities.

Unit A3
The influence of feminism and feminist linguistics (b): Daniel Maltz and Ruth Borker, and 'difference'

The '(male) dominance' approach to gender and language (on which Dale Spender [see Unit A2] was drawing, and to which she contributed in her emphasis on the conversational 'silencing' of women) was very much a child of its time, deriving from the concerns of the Women's Movement (with its early language of 'patriarchy' and 'sexism') and resonating with feminist interests. As Deborah Cameron later wrote, 'dominance . . . represented [a] particular moment [. . .] in feminism: dominance was the moment of feminist outrage, of bearing witness to oppression in all aspects of women's lives' (1995b: 39). Also working within this approach, Pamela Fishman (1978, 1983, see Unit B2.3) famously characterised women's contribution to mixed-sex talk as 'shitwork': 'Women do support work while men are talking and it is the women who generally do active maintenance and continu ation work in conversations' (1983: 98).

Work in this tradition largely saw women's talk in relation to that of men. However, although women may tend to talk distinctively (though this will always vary with context, one contextual factor being one's interlocutor or co-conversationalists), they may also talk differently in conversation with women than with men. As Jennifer Coates wrote: 'it is very important that we do not conflate the "women's language" said to be typical of mixed-sex interaction with the "women's language" which characterizes all-female discourse' (1989: 121). Generalisations about women's talk (even assuming these are possible) cannot come out of findings about mixed-sex talk (or indeed single-sex talk) alone. Correspondingly, the nature of single-sex talk cannot be simply inferred from the way women (or men) talk in mixed conversation.

Coates has been concerned to redress the focus on mixed-sex talk with a focus on women's talk (she has written many articles on the talk of young and older women, and a book entitled *Women Talk* [1996], followed by *Men Talk* [2003]). Her work addresses her own claim that although Maltz and Borker (1982) refer to language being acquired and developed in single-sex groups (see Unit B3.1), they do not provide empirical evidence

for this, evidence which is important in order to avoid the creation of new linguistic myths (1989: 95).

Work in the 'dominance' tradition has further been accused of representing women as passive and as victims and of using women's 'subordination' as a complete and 'pan-contextual' explanation for characteristics of mixed-sex talk (see Cameron 1992b, Talbot 1998). With a hindsight informed by post-structuralism, women's silence (absolute, or relative to that of men), for example, can sometimes be read as actively subversive rather than enforced, in some cases and contexts a meaningful and active strategy of resistance.

Task A3.1: Reflection task (language use and gender)

➢ Consider three contexts in which, in your experience, men and women (or boys and girls) tend to talk differently, and how. List these contexts and associated differences.

➢ Choose one 'difference in a context' from your list. Now list possible contextual features that may be relevant here. For example, who is talking to whom, where, when, doing what (Hymes 1972)? If this feature were changed, would the difference still obtain?

➢ Do you think there is an element of 'male dominance' in the 'difference' you have identified?

➢ Now describe your 'difference' to a friend. Does he or she think that this would obtain in any other context, and, if so, which, and why?

➢ What does this task suggest about linguistic variation between women and men?

The '(cultural) difference' approach, in contrast with '(male) dominance', was rela tively unconcerned with masculine verbal power. It was thus more in tune with traditional variationist sociolinguistics, which was never designed to address the notion of 'dominance' and hence was ill equipped to deal with it (see Cameron 1992b). Variations on '(cultural) difference' can be seen in the work of Jennifer Coates (1996), Janet Holmes (1995) and Deborah Tannen (1991). A key influence here (particularly on Tannen) was Maltz and Borker's 1982 paper, 'A cultural approach to male-female miscommunication' (see Unit B3). Maltz and Borker claimed that girls and boys grew up largely in different 'sociolinguistic subcultures', and that any communication problems in women's and men's talk can be related to Gumperz's notion of 'interethnic communication' (for example, 1978b) – namely, that problems between people of different ethnic groups 'are the result of differences in systems of conversational inference and the cues for signalling speech acts and speaker's intent' (Maltz and Borker 1982: 201). Seeing women and men as members of different 'speech cultures' comparable to those of speakers of different languages, however, requires examination

(see Unit C3).

In contrast to ‘dominance’, Cameron writes that ‘[cultural] difference was the moment of feminist celebration, reclaiming and revaluing women’s distinctive cultural traditions’ (1995b: 39).‘Cultural difference’ researchers and theorists aimed not only to describe (rather than critique), but also sometimes to positively evaluate women’s talk, in particular all-women talk (for example, some work of Janet Holmes and Jennifer Coates). Coates is concerned not to denigrate women (however unintentionally), for example not to represent them as deficient language users (which Jespersen and Lakoff have been seen as doing), or as victims (an accusation sometimes directed at ‘(male) dominance’ work). Coates celebrates women’s talk in the interesting, bold (but controversial) claim that ‘All-woman conversation . . . has as its chief goal the maintenance of good social relationships’ (1989: 98). Coates uses empirical evidence to support the notion of women’s linguistic cooperativeness, accomplished in different linguistic ways; her paper ‘Gossip revisited’ (1989) concluded: ‘It seems that in conversations between women friends in an informal context, the notion of co-operativeness is not a myth’ (1989: 119).

There is now a myriad of non-academic books which not only embrace but enthusiastically promote the notion of ‘gender differences’. The original bestseller was probably Tannen’s (1991) *You Just Don’t Understand!: women and men in conversation*, but we now also have John Gray’s *Men are from Mars and Women are from Venus* (1992; now expanded to a whole series), as well as Allan Pease and Barbara Pease’s series which includes *Why Men Don’t Listen and Women Can’t Read*

Maps (2001), *Why Men Lie and Women Cry* (2003), and *Why Women Can't Read Maps and Won't Stop Talking* (1999). This last is described on the publisher's and distributors' web sites as a 'little book of advice for men on how to get on with their partner'. It would of course be interesting to know the proportion of purchasers who are in fact men.

Unit A4
Developing understandings of gender

A4.1 GENDER, LANGUAGE AND THE 'FEMINIST PROJECT'

Feminism has inspired gender and language study since the late 1960s (see Units A2 and A3), but there have been different feminisms, with different natures and objectives, not only historically, over time, but also at the same point in time, and this continues to be so (see, for example, Tong 1992). Different feminisms have had different impacts on gender and language study. For example, Dale Spender's (1980) approach (see Unit A2 and Unit B2.2) can be seen as a radical feminist one, embracing the notion of patriarchy as primary in women's 'struggle' – rather than, say, class, which has been of prime importance to socialist feminists.

However, as Cameron (1997b) points out, what different feminisms have in common is not just an interest in women and men, girls and boys, and gender relations, but also a critical interest. This extends to social arrangements and power relations, although notions of power (who has it, can have it and how it is exerted) similarly vary with different forms of feminism (see below).

Different phases of feminism can be seen as the driving force behind the retro spectively named '(male) dominance' and '(cultural) difference' approaches to the study of gender and talk (see Units A2 and A3). To bring together her quotes from these two units, Cameron notes that, 'Both dominance and difference represented particular moments in feminism: dominance was the moment of feminist outrage, of bearing witness to oppression in all aspects of women's lives, while difference was the moment of feminist celebration, reclaiming and revaluing women's distinctive cultural traditions' (1995b: 39).

For 'dominance', power, in a fairly monolithic sense, was a crucial analytical concept; for 'difference' it was not (though elements of power were variously acknowledged). However, of both, Cameron adds, 'Their moments have passed' and 'the theories which underpinned them are no longer sufficient' (1995b: 39). Insufficient theories had in particular precluded adequate understandings of gender.

Feminism in general and feminist theory in particular also drove the subsequent critique of 'dominance' and 'difference' as a *single* approach, with more in common than not. *Both* were prefaced on a binary notion of gender, entailing an investigative

focus on differences. Though this was well intentioned ('dominance' studies attempting to expose oppressive differences, 'difference' studies to identify positive ones), both can be seen in one sense as anti-feminist with their socially essentialist focus on the binary nature of gender: conservatives too love to hear and talk about gender differences. As Cameron points out, 'every word we say on the subject of difference just underlines the salience and the importance of a division we are ultimately striving to end' (1992b: 40; see also Unit B4.1).

Task A4.1.1: Reflection task

➢ Is the idea of 'gender differences' a popular one in your society? (Is it perhaps a

positive one? Consider '*Vive la différence!*') Is it a popular idea in other societies you are familiar with?

➢ Consider different manifestations of 'gender differences'. Can you recall a recent occasion when the idea of 'gender differences' was drawn on explicitly (for example, in the media or in a conversation: 'Men are like this, women are like that')? Were tendencies (as opposed to absolutes) acknowledged?

Empirical work on contextually varying performances of gender (and indeed sexuality), including by the same individual, has thoroughly disturbed notions of gender as even socially essentialist. And gender and language study has now largely moved on from a drive to identify gender differences in all sorts of contexts. Newer understandings of gender as identity, and identity as multiple, fluctuating and continually being constructed, have made 'difference' and 'dominance' appear crude and inadequate. Subsequent challenges to the notion of identity (for example, Butler 1990, 1999), with a focus on performance, have shifted the field yet again towards a more post-structuralist concern with how gender is performed, constructed, enacted and/or displayed in spoken and written texts. Here, the sex of the speaker/ writer may be of little or no interest. To this we can add the important contribution of the notion of *discourse* to modern gender and language study, in particular discourse's ongoing constitutive potential. To quote Mary Bucholtz, 'More recent [language and gender] scholarship . . . recognize(s) that gender identity is at once more specific than most 1970s feminism realised and more fluid than much 1980s feminism allowed' (1999b: 4, Unit B4.2). This is an acknowledgement not only of the early broad-brush studies of 'women's talk' and 'men's talk', but also of the later lack of recognition of the possibility of displayed and shifting identities.

The role of theory is of interest here. Early second-wave feminism may have prompted gender and language study, but the field can be seen as having lagged behind both post-structuralist and feminist theory in terms of different possibilities for gender. Bucholtz identifies as one reason the 'scientific urge' of much linguistic research, noting that in the USA linguistic research 'has been much slower than the other social sciences to shift its focus from the "science" to the "social" aspect of its intellectual mandate' (1999b: 3, see also Unit B4.2). This is true of the UK too (where most linguists work in Faculties of Humanities rather than of Social Sciences), less so of Continental Europe. Current conceptualisations of Gender and Language (performance, construction of identity in discourse and the relevance of non linguistic social practice – for example, in particular CofPs) though, show that the field is now being shaped quite significantly by feminist theory. These concep tualisations actively contest the idea of gender as being something other than a binary, biologically shaped or socially determined entity, consisting of a monolithic masculinity and femininity.

A4.2 UNDERSTANDINGS OF GENDER

What, then, are some possibilities for gender?

Task A4.2.1: Reflection task

➢ How many post-gender collocates can you think of? For example, the phrase ‘gender role’ used to be encountered frequently. What others can you think of? Make a list. Then turn the page.

➢ Here are some possibilities – add yours to the list.

gender relations gender representation
gender identity gender construction
gender difference(s) gender performance
gender tendencies gender display

Rather than relying solely on intuition, we can supplement this list by looking at uses of *gender* as shown in a corpus of spoken or written language, for example, British National Corpus (BNC), Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English (MICASE), as well as the LOB, FLOB, BROWN and FROWN corpora of 1960s/1990s American and British English (1 million words each). A Lancaster University web site lists still more

corpora (<http://www.comp.lancs.ac.uk/ucrel/corpora.html>). Typing in 'gender' will not only confirm whether these collocates occur in actual language use (plus how frequently, and in what linguistic context), but will show still other, unpredicted collocates.

Let us take MICASE (publicly available and free of charge), <http://www.hti.umich.edu/m/micase>. Here we find eighty-two occurrences of 'gender' (compared with 142 occurrences of 'sex'). If we look at the thirty-two of the eighty-two occurrences that are followed by a content word (and are not followed by a comma), we have the following list:

```
gender wars
mixed gender opera troupes
mixed gender audiences
gender definitions
gender-related issues
gender issues (3)
gender role(s) x 2
gender role attitudes
gender role advertising
gender portrayals x 2
gender analysis
gender bigoted
gender traditionalism
gender stereotypes (3)
gender relations
gender ideas
gender differences (2)
gender inequality (4)
gender boundaries (2)
gender-bending
gender dichotomy
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It is of interest that 'gender differences' occurred only twice. However, several of the other concepts assume and indeed entail the notion of gender differences: 'gender role(s)', 'mixed gender opera troupes/audiences', 'gender(-related) issues', 'gender inequality' and, we can assume, 'gender wars'. Even 'gender-bending' entails some sort of 'essentialist' starting point.

'Gender relations' carries the potential not just for differentiation and differential empowerment, but also dominance, disadvantage, and economic, educational and political inequality. This is true regardless of whether women and men live, learn and work alongside each other, or live largely parallel rather than 'integrated' lives. Potentially including relations at macro-, institutional levels, at domestic, familial ones, and in small-scale, brief interactions, 'gender relations' entails the potential for those relations to be maintained and perpetuated in part through language: precisely the point the '(male) dominance' school of gender and language study was making.

'(Male) dominance' entailed a focus on actual males and females and the 'differences' between them. The collocates 'gender portrayals', 'gender stereotypes' and 'gender ideas' refer rather to how gender, including alleged differences, is talked about (and thus textually constructed). These suggest that the idea of gender as a set of differences is being (at least) supplemented by a notion of gender as a construct, or idea, dissociated from dimorphically sexed human beings.

Portrayals, I suggest, are broadly synonymous with representation (see Unit A10). Gender representation is often achieved through stereotyping – for example, women may be represented in a particular way in a joke about their alleged verbosity, which relies on this folk-linguistic stereotype. (Needless to say, there is a gulf between representation and empirically established and documented 'reality', see

Cameron 2003.) Many representations seem to put women at a disadvantage. However, there is always the need for interpretation of a given representation, so that 'what is happening' in a text may be seen differently by one person and by her or his friend. This is to entertain a view of meaning as co-constructed, that is, not only by the text (and its producer), but also by the 'consumer' (the reader or listener). Given such 'co-construction', to talk about an 'effect' of any given representation (whether in fiction, on television or in a political speech) is always problematic.

Task A4.2.2: Reflection task

You may have had the experience of seeing an advertisement (for example, on television, on a billboard or in a magazine) which you did not at first understand. You may have asked someone to explain it to you. But you may not have accepted their explanation. Alternatively, two people might

have explained it differently. This is because there is often more than one way of ‘reading’ an advertisement (indeed, any text).

SECTION A

➢ Consider a recent representation of women or men in an advertisement. Do you feel this representation is largely progressive, conservative or mixed? Do you think there are different ways of 'reading' the representation?

It is worth noting the distancing from 'gender role' that is achieved by the addition of 'attitudes' and 'advertising'. These new noun phrases draw on (and thus recycle) the 'gender role' notion but also crucially suggest reflexivity towards and critique of the notion of 'gender role'. Gender roles are then not just a matter of 'common sense'.

There are, however, political implications, even dangers, with a focus on gender as constructed and performed, and an emphasis on fluctuating and multiple meanings. Such a focus can lead us away from one of the original tenets of (and reasons for) feminism: the notion of the systemic disadvantaging of women and girls (Jones 1993). And while we can comfortably say that some women are now in some contexts and ways very powerful (see Baxter 2003), and that the notion of patriarchy is far too blunt an instrument to address the diversity of power in women's social practices worldwide, to abandon a concern for disadvantage completely would invalidate the broader feminist project. Hence the ongoing need for judicious use of such terms as 'gender bigoted' and 'gender traditionalism' (and even 'gender roles').

Although 'gendering' was does not occur in the MICASE data, the words preceding 'gender' include the very post-structuralist phrase 'playing with the gender dichotomy'. This, especially when seen alongside 'gender boundaries', affords an

understanding of gender as not only very diverse and fluid (boundar*ies*), but also as a socially constructed (masculine/feminine) dichotomy that can be played with – so that the originally dichotomous 'either/or' may become 'both', 'neither', 'at this point in time only', 'who knows?' or even 'does it matter?' The verb phrase 'playing with' suggests both ludic intent and agency. Gender can also be seen as being 'in play', i.e. fluctuating and unpindownable, as well as being in play with other identity categories, such as ethnicity.

MICASE data comes solely from a university context (and thus cannot validly be compared with broader corpora of talk). Further, there is a limit as to how far examination of corpus data can go, since we do not know fully (beyond a few words of co-text) how the linguistic items in question were being used. Even the inclusion of a traditional phrase such as 'gender role' does not mean that it is being used in an uncritical, non-reflexive way; it may have been being critiqued (precisely what is happening in this unit). Similarly, the phrases 'gender dichotomy' and 'gender boundaries' may have referred to people's thinking about the notion of gender (the phrase 'gender definitions' certainly points to this).

Perhaps surprisingly,'gender identity' is missing from the MICASE list. Identity has become a very important concept in gender and language study, to a large extent replacing the fixed and socially or even biologically essentialist notion of 'gender role'. However, the concept of identity has itself been challenged, and from different quarters. The philosopher Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1999) is subtitled *The Subversion of Identity*; she emphasises the importance and crucial variability of performance (see below). Second, discursive psychology (for example, Edley 2001, McIlvenny 2002, Weatherall 2002, Wetherell 1998) has rejected the notion of identity as an individual's 'inner self ', being concerned rather with the socially shaped accounts an individual articulates. Such accounts may be variable and even contradictory. For discursive psychology, this is not a problem, but rather can be related to the different discourses by which an individual is 'positioned' (see Unit B9, also Baxter 2003).

'Performance', 'enactment' and 'display' do not occur either as collocates of gender, but are conceptually suggested by 'playing with the gender dichotomy'. Together, 'performance', 'enactment' and 'display' point to gender as viewable as performed/ enacted/displayed differences or tendencies, and accordingly provide a new set of ways of viewing the social and linguistic practices of women and men.

A4.3 POST-STRUCTURALISM AND THE STUDY OF GENDER AND LANGUAGE

Post-structuralism has provided a major challenge to essentialist notions of gender and has been crucial in the developing understanding of gender. With its emphasis on the constitutive nature of discourse it has thoroughly informed linguistic study – and indeed has been largely responsible for the 'linguistic turn' in many other disciplines. Post-structuralism is illustrated in Cynthia Nelson's extract on 'queer theory' (Unit B4.3) and Judith Baxter's extract on FPDA (Unit B7.3, see also Baxter 2002a, 2002b, 2003).

Baxter refers to post-structuralism as entailing a 'sense of scepticism towards all universal causes, its questioning of what "true" or "real" knowledge is, and . . . loss of certainty about all absolutes' (2003: 6). A key tenet is the rejection of the idea that

meaning is, or ever can be, fixed. Meaning is always provisional. Accordingly, knowledge is always (in this sense) constructed rather than discovered, hence the need for constant self-reflexivity on the part of the researcher. As regards the crucial role of language in post-structuralism, Chris Weedon famously characterised language as ‘the place where actual and possible forms of social organisation and their likely social and political consequences are defined and contested. Yet it is also the place where our sense of selves, our subjectivity is constructed’ (1987: 21). Seeing language as such is to work with a crucially constitutive model of language, that is, *discourse* (in the sense used by social theorists such as Michel Foucault [1972] and Norman Fairclough [2003]).

SECTION
A

Introduction

Task A4.3.1: Reflection task

➢ Consider the post-structuralist notion that language is potentially constitutive. In what possible ways can we understand 'constitutive'? Constituted where or in who/what? How? By whom or what?

Important post-structuralist work has been done by Chris Weedon (1987, 1996), Bronwyn Davies (1989a, 1989b, 1993, 1997, see also Unit B10.2) and Judith Butler (1990, 1999, 2004). Butler's influence extends far beyond the Gender and Language field, but her major contribution has been to queer theory (see Nelson's extract in Unit B4.3). Her contributions are intellectual rather than empirical. Like Deborah Cameron's, Butler's work, while feminist, is a constructive critique of different feminisms, with the aim of advancing feminism in a broad sense.

Butler is concerned to 'open up' conceptions of gender beyond those with 'hetero normative' (i.e. assumptions of heterosexuality) underpinnings: in particular to open up 'the field of possibility for gender without dictating which kinds of possibilities ought to be realised' (1999: vi). She explores and advocates the possibility of the divorce of gender from identity, the notion of gender identity being politically unproductive, advocating the alternative gender collocates of *performance* and *performativity*.

One of Butler's most overarching intellectual contributions to gender and language study is to problematise the concept of *woman* in

relation to heteronormativity. In Butler's most famous (and frequently cited) book, *Gender Trouble* (1990, 1999), she asks: 'Is the construction of the category of women as a coherent and stable subject an unwitting regulation and reification of gender relations? . . . To what extent does the category of women achieve stability and coherence only in the context of the heterosexual matrix?' (1990: 5).

In this rejection of what might be described as 'modernist' feminist politics, Butler is arguing that what the deployment of the category 'woman' can achieve will always be severely circumscribed, given the normatively heterosexual and thus limiting 'bias' of 'woman', for all women, which always recycles male–female dualism.

A4.4 GENDER AND SEX

An important relationship is that of gender to sex. Leaving aside the 'polite' use of gender to mean biological sex (and the regrettable phrase 'the two genders'), it is possible nevertheless (as many do) to see gender as a sort of social correlate of sex. In this view, biological males and biological females possess certain 'culturally' imbued characteristics which fall neatly into the same two biologically determined categories. This echoes notions of 'sex roles' (even of 'appropriate sex roles'),

and sex roles being 'learned'. Thus boys 'learn' to be brave, and girls to be good listeners.

Cameron (citing Nicole-Claude Mathieu 1989, 1996) points out that a 'correlational' relationship between sex and gender is usually seen in one of two possible ways: first, that gendered behaviour is 'built on' to pre-existing sex differences (as above), and, second, that the sex–gender relationship may be arbitrary, but that there will always be gender differences in behaviour, which then come to 'symbolise' sex (1997b). This sex–gender relationship entails differences or tendencies in what women and men do and say, stemming from the notion of gender as an idea about the importance of differentiation between women and men. Mathieu observes that 'There is here an awareness that social behaviours are imposed on people *on the basis of* their biological sex (as one of the "group of men" or "group of women")' (1996: 49, Mathieu's italics). Hence the very different (but important) patterns of gendered behaviour and relations in different cultural contexts. For example, in some contexts, painting buildings may be largely a female occupation and in others largely a male.

However, current conceptualisations are frequently much more complex than this (again see Mathieu 1989). A third possibility for gender is to conceptually dissociate the notion of gender from actual 'sexed individuals' completely, and rather to see it entirely as a set of articulated ideas about girls and boys, women and men, individually or collectively. The research focus is then on the ideas themselves, rather than on behaviour.

However, this conceptual focus returns us to the first and second understandings of gender in its implications. This set of ideas is taken up, impacting on the thinking and practices of groups and individuals, and on their representations and constructions of (male and female) others. Ideas about gender may be so important that they in fact construct biological correlates of sex (for example, muscles in men who lift weights because this is 'what men do'). A second case is that of newborns who cannot be straightforwardly identified as 'female' or 'male', in which medical professionals make the decision, perhaps extending this to

associated surgery (these days usually in discussion with the parents). These cases, though rare, make it possible to argue that since people see newborns through gendered, dimorphic eyes, sex, like gender, is socially constructed. The usual sex–gender distinction is similarly challenged by the practice of surgery on inter-sexed people to make them ‘female’ or ‘male’, and, more extremely by the practice of transsexualism. The question of the ‘social construction of sex’, and the role of gender in this construction, has been a long-running debate in gender and language studies (for example, Bergvall and Bing 1996).

SECTION
A

Introduction

Task A4.4.1: Reflection task

➢ Before you read on, consider and make notes on what other ways gender (or 'notions of gender') might be seen to 'construct sex'.

This conceptual third gender–sex relationship is more complex than the other two. Below I suggest two ways in which the analyst can separate gender from sex in his or her thinking. First, given that diversity within any group of women is always likely to outweigh the diversity between that group of women and a comparable group of men (and vice versa), and indeed that the similarities between a given group of women and a comparable group of men will always outweigh the differences, the very empirical meaningfulness of the category of gender can be called into question. It can only be socially constructed. Second, sex (in the form of a dominant sexual dimorphism) has a clear social significance, giving us gender as a culturally con structed idea or category. Sexual dimorphism is here to stay, that is, it is unlikely to change over the next (say) 10,000 years, but we cannot make this prediction of its social significance. It is possible to imagine gender disappearing if the social significance of sex declines. Sex does not have to be socially significant: eye colour, for example, and blood group, are normally not. Relatedly, Cameron (1997b) compares race (genetically transmitted) with racial categories (socially created throughout history). That the current ubiquity of gender is maintained, through the socially constructed significance of sexual dimorphism, may be because the notion/category of gender is in the particular

interests of some.

The idea of sexual dimorphism losing its social significance may seem far-fetched and utopian (or, to some, dystopian) – but note its correspondence to Julia Kristeva's third model of feminism (referred to in Unit B4.1). However, sexual dimorphism losing its social significance may need to be accompanied, or even motivated, by the disappearance of what has been called, following Adrianne Rich (1980), a discourse of 'compulsory heterosexuality', the assumption that we are all heterosexual. This assumption, which underlies much discourse on gender, arguably thrives on and in turn perpetuates the notion of difference (see Butler 1999, Hollway 1984, 1995).

Power interfaces with both gender and discourse. On the micro-level, power was of concern to '(male) dominance' analysts of mixed-sex talk such as Pamela Fishman (Unit B2.3); on the macro-level, it is key to critical understandings of discourse. The developmental notion of empowerment is important at both macro-/institutional and micro-/small-scale interactional levels.

A4.5 GENDER, LANGUAGE AND POWER

Task A4.5.1:
Reflection task

➢ Considering the reading and tasks you have done so far, make notes on some different ways in which the notion of power may be relevant to gender and language study.

➢ Consider the questions of (a) Who has power? (b) Can this change? (c) Might someone be simultaneously powerful and powerless? (d) What are some different forms power might take, linguistically?

Specific conceptualisations of power vary with theoretical approach. For critical discourse analysis (CDA), with its obvious applications to feminist linguistics (see Wodak 1997, Lazar 2004), power is crucially institutional (though other forms may be acknowledged), and material structures are important as well as discoursal ones. For the more recent 'Post-structural discourse analysis' (PDA), developed by Judith Baxter (2002a, 2002b, 2003, see also Unit B7.3), and the feminist variation of this (FPDA), the 'grand narratives' associated with CDA are rejected: power is in a continual state of flux, variable and multiple, so that a given participant in a given situation is positioned by and within a 'nexus' of discourses. She or he may thus be simultaneously powerful in one way and powerless in another (see also Foucault 1980). Power is not only associated with (say)

hegemonic masculinity.

A4.6 SO WHAT IS GENDER? WHERE CAN IT BE FOUND?

The list below represents a starting point:

- in differences (better, 'differential tendencies') between women and men, boys and girls;
- in similarities between women and men, boys and girls;
- in diversity within women, within men, within boys, within girls; ■ in aspects of linguistic dealings with (individual, and groups of) women, men, boys and girls, for example, how they are addressed, what is said to them ('hearer sex');
- in aspects of what is said and written about gender differences/tendencies, similarities and diversity;
- in aspects of what is said and written about (individual, and groups of) women, men, boys and girls (the assumption being that gender may be relevant in such spoken and written texts).

Task A4.6.1: Follow-up task

➢ Taking the above possibilities for gender, consider possible gender and language research projects with which each could be explored.

Unit A5
Developing understandings of language: Language change

A5.1 INTRODUCTION

Although the rate may vary, language is in a continual state of change: phonetic, syntactic, lexical, discoursal. 'Change' extends to such phenomena as the recent 'feminisation' of public discourse (Cameron

2000, 2003) in Western societies, and language shift in bilingual speech communities, which may sometimes be gendered (for example, Gal 1978, see also Unit A1). Although change usually refers to the way language is used, it extends to folk-linguistic views of and prescriptions about how it should be used.

Change can be seen as 'diachronic variation', that is, variation over time. Diachronic variation is related to synchronic variation – variation at a given point in time, the notion which underpins most sociolinguistic work. Prior to the 1970s, syn chronic variation included 'Language and sex' – a linkage comparable to, say, 'Language and social class' and 'Language and ethnic group'. (These are chapter headings in Peter Trudgill's *Sociolinguistics* [1974, 1983, 1995].) Lesley Milroy
(1980) similarly treated gender as an independent synchronic variable in her Belfast study (see Unit B1.2). However, whereas Trudgill focused on synchronic differences in language use between women and men, relating these to class, Milroy, having demonstrated synchronic differences within women, used these to show the importance of speakers' social networks (see below) as regards their work and outside-work lives.

As regards the question of which synchronic variant(s) will 'succeed' and thus contribute to diachronic variation, there has been a long-running debate on gender and language change (Trudgill 1972a, 1972b, Labov 1990). A question often asked is whether innovation is the province mainly of women or men. Labov, who has written on this at greatest length, concludes that women are leaders of most changes but in different ways (see also Cameron 2003). Whether or not innovation is valued, however, will vary with time, place and community – as well as, perhaps, with who does the innovating.

Sociolinguistics has something further to offer the field of gender and language change with the concept of 'social networks' (see Unit A1), which, together with

'speech communities', has conceptually contributed to the newer notion of CofP. Such approaches signal a move away from social class as the dominant sociolin guistic social category. Coming from the field of education, with an emphasis on learning, CofP has been drawn on significantly in gender and language study (see Eckert 2000, Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1999). In most CofPs, some members can be seen as core, others as 'peripheral', 'on the margins' (Eckert 2000) or 'lames' (Labov 1972b). For Labov,'lames' were members of a gang, but peripheral ones who did not follow its practices and norms in the same strict way as the core members. The role of such community members has been characterised as 'legitimate peripheral participation' (Lave and Wenger 1991), and there are implications here for change: the 'core' members may have the most non-standard speech but the peripheral

members (whose speech may be more standard than the core members but less standard than many speakers outside the CofP) may then help transmit linguistic variants from within to outside the particular community (again see Eckert 2000).

Most language change occurs in ways that are unplanned and about which there is very little public or conscious awareness – and most studies of change are not concerned with conscious intervention (for example, Labov 1991). But change may be consciously sought, encoded and/or institutionalised. Interventionist change ranges from the encodings of the early grammarians to the non-sexist language items proposed and implemented in the 1970s and 1980s (Unit A2). Both come under the heading of what Cameron describes as 'verbal hygiene' (documented in her 1995 book of the same name). This refers to prescriptivism, the phenomenon of how some people think others should speak and write, and attempts to achieve this.

In practice, it is hard to bring about widespread use of new linguistic usages and even harder to eliminate particular usages. 'Legislation' may not help. The early grammarians John Kirkby (1746) and Joshua Poole (1646) formally encoded sexist notions of 'firstness' (*man and woman*) as well as use of the 'generic *he*' (in contrast to 'singular *they*') in English grammars (Unit A2, see also Spender 1980, Bodine 1975a, 1975b). However, we do not know to what extent any changes in language use were due to these interventions. (What we can assume is that their interventions were in direct response to people using, for example, 'singular *they*'.) Feminist intentions to introduce non-sexist language items have similarly faced a range of challenges (see Unit B5). Prescriptive aims may thus not be achieved, and indeed the 'law of unintended consequences' may come into play, as in the use and understanding of 'Ms' (see Unit B5.3).

Below we look at language change in the form of two recent challenges: early feminist challenges to the sexist nature of various aspects of (the English) language (particularly in the 1970s), and more recent feminist and post-structuralist chal lenges to those early challenges.

A5.2 EARLY FEMINIST CHALLENGES

Prompted by the identification of sexist language as language that defined, trivialised and degraded women and rendered them 'invisible', the first feminist challenges can be seen as contestations of these. 'Invisibility' referred to the use of 'generics' ('man' and 'he') and 'man'-compounds, with their masculine bias (Spender 1980, Sunderland 1991). 'Defining' referred largely to the gendered asymmetry of adult 'titles', i.e. 'Mr' vis-à-vis 'Mrs' and 'Miss', 'trivialising' to asymmetries such as 'poet'/'poetess', and 'degrading' to 'pairs' like 'Sir/Madam' (only the latter has a double meaning, see Unit A2). Also challenged were dictionaries and grammars (see for example, Stephens 1990, Sunderland 1994b). These are of course 'prescriptive' works – at least in that they need to select – but are important for their repre sentation of what might be considered

the status quo and of more progressive forms. For many, such works carry (some) authority. This is particularly true of the huge population of speakers and learners of English as a second or foreign language, many of whom often consult English grammars and dictionaries.

Task A5.2.1: Follow-up task

➢ If English is not your first language, how much authority do English grammars and dictionaries carry for you, now? Have you ever used a grammar or dictionary with a query about gender in the English language?

➢ Whether the answer is 'Yes' or 'No', find out what is said about the use of 'singular they' in an English grammar (if you wish, a pedagogic grammar for learners of English) written in the past twenty years. In the light of your expe riences as an English language learner, are there any surprises here?

Contestation of 'sexist' items was accompanied by proposed alternatives. These became important institutionally in the 1970s and 1980s (for example, for pub lishers and universities), and documented in 'codes of practice'. Codes also often focused on age, ethnicity and disability and were sometimes seen as promoting 'inclusive language'. Many included 'checklists' of what was traditionally said (for example,'chairman'), and how it could be improved on (for example,'chairperson'/ 'chair'). These could only be, however, recommendations rather than bans and mandatory requirements.

As an example, as recently as 1998, the UK Society of Personnel Officers in Government Services (SOCPO) (<http://www.socpo.org.uk>), in conjunction with the Equal Opportunities Commission, the Commission for Racial Equality and the Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation, produced a document called *Language and Equality*. The sections were: 'Race and language', 'Gender and language','Disability and language','Age and language' and 'Sexuality and language'.

The 'Gender and language' section starts:

The central issue here is the predominance of forms and terms which exclude or denigrate women. It is now accepted as sound business practice that the talents and abilities of women are fully utilised at all levels in the workplace. To be able to do this effectively, an organisation must promote positive images of women both internally and externally. This is very difficult if women are excluded by the language an organisation uses.

It suggests the following improvements to traditional job titles:

Chairman: Chair
Fireman: Firefighter
Foreman: Supervisor
Workmen: Workers
Spokesman: Spokesperson

These five new titles are designed to address the problem of 'relative invisibility' of women (in the sense that the 'generic' compound term 'fireman', say, has for many a masculine bias). In an upbeat vein, the document notes, 'Many job titles or roles which are traditionally identified in male terms have non-gender-specific alternatives. What is required is the will to make the change. Once the change is made, the new terms will become accepted as natural and stop seeming awkward to remember'.

To linguists and social scientists, the last two sentences read naïvely. Not everyone has the 'will' to make the change, and the removal of awkwardness may only be achieved when 'traditional' titles are out of circulation altogether (within one institution is unlikely to be sufficient). However, the 'brief ' of writers of such documents is normally to convince and to bring about change. Upbeat rhetoric together with a lack of problematisation may have been seen as helpful here.

Language and Equality also warns against using different titles for men's and women's jobs when there is no difference in the work, critically citing the following negative examples:

Male job title Female job title
Assistant manager Manager's assistant
Technician Operator
Office manager Typing supervisor
Administrator Clerk
Chef Cook

These can be seen as modern equivalents of the 'semantic derogation' pairs traditionally used as examples in gender and language study, such as 'witch and wizard' (Schultz 1975), the 'female' item of a male–female 'pair' being derogated in one way or another.

SECTION A

Introduction

The fact that these were, and could be, nothing more than recommendations is one reason why new forms, such as

'chairperson', or 'chair', can (still) only be seen as alternatives to, rather than replacements for, items such as 'chairman'. However, given that even 'banned' words can always be used in some shape or form, any blanket ban would be counterproductive. Sexist language, for example, may need to be cited, may be used ironically or satirically, or may be used in works of fiction. Recognising this, the Australian Broadcasting Commission Code of Practice provided the following guidelines (the italics are mine):

2.2 Language. Variations of language favoured by different groups of Australians are valid and have their place in programs. On occasions, the language of one group may be distasteful to another. Use of such language is permitted provided it is not used gratuitously and provided the language can be justified in the context of, for example, *news and current affairs reporting, fiction, documentary, dramatisation, comedy and song lyrics*.

[. . .]

2.4 Discrimination. To avoid discrimination programs should not use language or images in a way which is likely to disparage or discriminate against any person or section of the community on account of race, ethnicity, nationality, sex, marital or parental status, age, disability or illness, social or occupational status, sexual preference or any religious, cultural or political belief or activity. The requirement is not intended to prevent the broadcast of material which is *factual, or the expression of genuinely-held opinion in a news or current affairs program, or in the legitimate context of a humorous, satirical or dramatic work*.

To make two, perhaps obvious, points: a linguistic item may be the topic of a news report or be relevant to a documentary, and including a fictional character who uses derogatory terms does not mean that these are being put forward in a positive light, often the reverse being the case (allowing the reader to negatively evaluate them). Similarly, satire that ironically employs sexist language can make valuable feminist points. There remains the question of how an utterance intended as ironic will be read, or (mis)understood. Nevertheless, since non-sexist language is limited in what it can achieve (see Unit A5.3 'Later Feminist Challenges'), the 'risk' of misunderstanding or irony has to be balanced against the fact that strategies other than non-sexist language items will always be needed here.

Task A5.2.2: Reflection task

➢ Do you think it is reasonable to have 'codes of practice' for language use in the workplace, particularly in relation to gender, at this point in the twenty-first century?

➢ If so, what would you include in terms of specific linguistic items? 36

➢ If not, how would you address the issue of sexist (and racist) language in the workplace? (Consider this in relation to a particular workplace.)

Task A5.2.3: Reflection task

➢ Which new and old lexical items, including phrases, would you expect to find in a 'non-sexist language' dictionary?

➢ What do you think might be some of the dilemmas facing a lexicographer with a non-sexist 'brief'?

➢ What are some different ways these dilemmas might be addressed? ➢ What would be your policy as regards these dilemmas?

➢ How would you deal with derogatory terms such as 'slag'?

A5.3 LATER FEMINIST CHALLENGES

Linguistic (word-level) sexism is the first topic addressed in the Unit B5 readings. Unit B5.1 concerns an early initiative, the *American Heritage School Dictionary* project. Its story is documented in Alma Graham's (1975) 'The making of a non sexist dictionary'. This project began in 1969, right at the start of the 'second wave' of the Women's (Liberation) Movement.

The questions and linguistic items of concern in Graham's dictionary now sound outdated in many ways, as words and meanings have continued to change since 1975. More recent feminism (sometimes described as 'third-wave feminism'), influenced strongly by post-structuralism, has challenged previous feminist posi tions. What might in 1975 (or even a decade ago) have appeared unquestionably and straightforwardly 'sexist', is less self-evidently so today.

First, a given linguistic item will have more than one possible meaning, related to those of other words (and statements, and indeed discourses) with which it is textually associated (for example, Black and Coward 1981), and depending on how it is used, pragmatically. In Cameron's words, meaning is '*radically* contextual' (1992b: 192, her italics). From a post-structuralist perspective, lexical (and other) meaning is never fixed but is rather 'endlessly deferred' (see for example, Baxter 2003). At a theoretical level, this rather pulls the rug from under lexicography altogether. However, few would argue that linguistic item 'X' can mean just anything. (From a different, commercial perspective, the dictionary industry is unlikely to disappear, and it is arguably better, given the reverence that exists in some CofPs for dictionaries, to have non-sexist language items encoded than not.)

Second, given that people interpret words in different ways, a ‘sexist’ meaning cannot automatically be imputed. ‘Reader response’ can extend to listening, and to inten tionally ‘reading [listening] against the grain’ (for example, Cosslett 1996), that is, making your own meaning for your own purposes, regardless of how you see the intentions of the speaker or writer. Relatedly, meanings can be ‘appropriated’ by individuals or groups, for their own, perhaps political, ends: for example the ‘reclamation’ of the insult ‘dyke’ by lesbian feminists (as well as of ‘gay’ and ‘queer’ by homosexual women and men).

Third, even ‘gender neutral’ words such as ‘people’ and ‘adult’ can be sexist. As an example of ‘slippage’, Cameron (1994) cites: ‘The lack of vitality is aggravated by the fact that there are so few able-bodied young adults about. They have all gone off to work or look for work, leaving behind the old, the disabled, the women and the children (*Sunday Times*)’ (1994: 30).‘Adults’ thus turns out (or comes) to mean ‘male adults’. This is an example of sexist use of ‘adult’, but we can imagine it happening in interpretation too. Such slippage happens not on an exceptional
but rather on a regular basis, and not only in English, of course. At the 2002 International Gender and Language Association Conference (IGALA2), Marlis Hellinger provided the following German example:

Vergeßliche Hotelgäste

Wir müssen immer mit dem klassischen Fall rechnen, daß die Ehefrau nichts vom Hotelaufenthalt ihres Mannes weiß. Deshalb schicken wir die gefundenen Gegenstände grundsätzlich nur zurück, wenn der Gast

darum bittet.

which translates as:

Forgetful hotel guests

We will always have to reckon with the classic case that a wife may not know about her husband's stay in the hotel. Therefore we return lost property only at the guest's request.

The apparently gender-neutral 'guest' means 'male guest'. This phenomenon demonstrates clear limitations on the value of the non-sexist language item. Sexist language cannot be identified, 'pinned down', controlled, contained and replaced, but will continually emerge and re-emerge in a variety of guises and genres. (Sara Mills' paper in Unit B5.2 on 'Changes in sexist language use' explores precisely this.)

Such complexity can be handled by post-structuralism, which allows for, even encourages, a text to be read in more than one way, including by the same individual. An individual may recognise what Baxter calls 'the plurality, multivocality and non

fixity of all meaning' (2003: 6). She may also know that this is what she is recognising (without necessarily seeing it in those terms). And many of us are now sophisticated consumers of irony. But while ironic texts are both interesting and challenging for the contemporary feminist linguist, irony is also a gift for sexists (who can happily 'defend' accusations of sexism) and is widely drawn on and exploited, for example, in men's 'lifestyle' magazines such as *FHM* and *Loaded* (Benwell 2002, 2004).

The 'linguistic turn' refers to the theoretical shift in the Social Sciences and Humanities away from a focus on single linguistic items to discourse, which has been embraced by feminist linguistics (as well as Linguistics more widely). A classic example here is Black and Coward's (1981) early critique of Dale Spender's (1980) *Man Made Language*, which was important in its rejection of what might be seen as a socially 'reflective' or 'expressive' model of language, in favour of a constitutive one. They proposed a different theoretical imperative (see also Unit A2):

language, as a system of phonological, syntactic and logical structures and rules, is not inherently sexist or 'man-made' in Dale Spender's sense. Linguistic systems, however, serve as the basis for the production and interpretation of sets of related utterances – discourses – which effect and sustain the different categorizations and positions of women and men. It is on these discourses, and not on language in general or linguistic systems, that feminist analyses have to focus.

change in non-sexist language items. Quantitative analysis of change in discourses would be impossible, given that a discourse cannot be 'seen', only its 'traces' [for example, Talbot 1998]; see also Unit 7.) Use of 'gender-inclusive' language has been documented in speech and writing (for example, Bate 1978, Cooper 1984, Hellinger and Bußmann 2001–2, Pauwels 1998). Cooper and his seminar group, for example, conducted a 'manual' study of 'generic he' and 'generic man' in US newspapers between 1971 and 1980, and reported a decline.

(1981: 78)

Current CDA would, however, also argue that the study of discourses is greatly enriched by the detailed and systematic study of actual language use, including the use, distribution and frequency of certain linguistic items.

A5.4 ACTUAL LANGUAGE CHANGE

It is one thing to formally implement non-sexist language change, that is, to recommend, encode and document new or alternative linguistic items, for example in dictionaries or codes of practice. Questions of actual usage of non-sexist language and new progressive forms are something else again.

Evidence is sparse but not non-existent. (Note that this is quantitative evidence of

Spoken and written corpora have afforded particularly interesting research into non sexist language use. Janet Holmes and Robert Sigley (2002a, b) looked at 'girl' and 'girls', and found 'girl' to be used in the workplace of females of subordinate status regardless of age – but not 'boy' of equivalent males (see also Sigley and Holmes, 2002). Both 'girls' and 'boys' are, however, used of groups of adults in various professions, perhaps marking in-group solidarity (see also Unit B8.1).

'Success' of non-sexist language has been patchy, varying not only with item but also with users, contexts of use and the 'biography' of the items themselves. 'Ms' use, for example, appears to vary geographically, being more widely used and more acceptable in the USA than in the UK. MICASE, the Michigan corpus of academic spoken English (<http://www.hti.umich.edu/m/micase>; see Unit A4), illustrates this patchiness. Out of the 1,848,364 words of talk in academic settings, we find no occurrence of 'chairperson' but three of 'spokesperson', none of 'she or he' but nine of 'he or she'. 'Spokesperson' was used in different academic spoken genres, each time by a female speaker; 'he or she' most frequently in small lectures, seven of the nine occurrences being produced by female speakers (again see Holmes and Sigley 2002a, 2002b). None of the occurrences of 'spokesperson' or 'he or she' appeared to be facetious or ironic. But the story is not over yet . . .

A5.5 LANGUAGE USERS' UNDERSTANDINGS

Although the non-sexist language campaign may have been theoretically naïve, flawed and limited in its achievements, one of its achievements has been to prompt people to talk about non-sexist language. Even though many did (and still do) so dismissively, some finding the whole question a big joke, quaint, naïve or completely peripheral, huge numbers of English-language users in many countries cannot now claim that they are unaware of the issue. This has personal and political implications. As Deborah Cameron wrote in 1995: 'Choice has altered the value of the terms and removed the option of political neutrality' (1995a: 119, but see Schwarz [2006] for a modification of this claim).

However, knowing about actual use tells us little about how items are concep tualised, why they are used, and what motivates a given usage at a particular moment in space and time. Is it a question of principle, politeness (for example, 'audience design'), perceived expediency, 'performing' a particular identity, or what? This is important: why something is said can tell us a lot about what really is happening. (Cameron et al. [1992] make a related point about watching a woman 'turning over the earth in a flower bed': is she gardening, or preparing to bury the budgie? If the former, is she relaxing or 'worshipping the Goddess Earth'?)

It is therefore always worth considering why people do what they do (or at least what they say about why they think they do what they do). In Unit B5.3, Juliane Schwarz asks focus group members about their 'Ms' usage, largely with the intention of ascertaining how this term is conceptualised by women of different ages. Her

work contributes to an understanding of why people (say they) say what they do, and not only to improved descriptions of language use.

Schwarz's study contain pointers for future language change, but her focus group members' accounts cannot, she acknowledges, straightforwardly provide 'infor mation' about future language use. This understanding of 'elicited' data is fully taken on board by – indeed, is the basis of – discursive psychology (for example, Wetherall 2002, Edley 2001, Wetherell, Stiven and Potter 1987). This sees accounts as co constructed (for example, by/with an interviewer). Speakers are also 'positioned' by a range of discourses, so the same speaker may produce different 'accounts' (see Baxter 2003, also Units B7.3 and B9). Speakers draw on 'interpretive repertoires', and the fact that accounts are often similar across speakers shows these interpretive repertoires to be socially available.

SECTION
A

Unit A6
Developing understandings of language: Context

A6.1 INTRODUCTION

The term ‘context’ is used in Applied Linguistics in wide-ranging ways, broad and specific. Thousands of currently available books have ‘context’ in their title, hundreds have both ‘language’ and ‘context’, several are actually called *Language and Context*. The relevance of context to linguistics was established by the anthropologist Malinowski (1923), who referred to the ‘context of situation’ in which ‘speech events’ took place. He wrote (1923: 307):

> utterance and situation are bound up inextricably with each other and the context of situation is indispensable for the understanding of the words. Exactly as in the reality of spoken or written languages, a word without linguistic context is a mere figment and stands for nothing by itself, so in the reality of a spoken living tongue, the utterance has no meaning except in the context of situation.

For Malinowski and other anthropologists, Graddol et al. write,‘utterances became comprehensible only in the context of the whole way of life of which they form part’ (1995: 15).

One of the most influential figures as regards context, language use, and inter pretation is Dell Hymes. Unlike Chomsky, who was interested in isolated sentences, Hymes was interested in the ‘rules of speaking’ within a community, and the associ ated ‘speech situations’,‘speech events’,‘speech acts’ and ‘communicative competence’ (see Jaworski and Coupland 1999). Hymes’s (1972) notion of the ‘ethnography of communication’ famously incorporates the following SPEAKING model:

Setting and scene
Participants (speaker and audience)
Ends (purposes, goals and outcomes)
Act sequence (order of components of the speech event)
Key (tone, manner and/or spirit)
Instrumentalities (forms and styles of speech)
Norms (social rules and expectations)
Genre (the kind/purpose of the event)

This model can of course also be applied to written communication.

Task A6.1.1: Follow-up task

➢ While retaining the SPEAKING acronym, adapt the descriptors (for each letter) for written communication.

➢ Then consider a particular 'literacy event' (a familiar activity in which reading and/or writing play a crucial role), which involves writing.

➢ Exemplify what is referred to by each descriptor.

In her own explanation of what is included in the 'context' of a conversation, Janet Maybin (1996) identifies the following:

- physical surroundings
- relationship between speakers
- speakers' past experiences
- current conversational goals, the social events of which the conversation is a part
- broader cultural values and expectations.

Maybin illustrates of the importance of several of these in the question of address. Focusing on 'Participants', she looks at how a young woman of twenty-one from Singapore (her full name is Lo Wing Yu) is variously addressed. These ways include:

- 'Ah Mui' (Cantonese for 'little sister') by her older sister, and by friends who find this term of address amusing;
- 'Xiao mei mei' (Mandarin for 'little girl/sister') by 'older guys who are trying to be funny, or older women who think that I am actually very, very young';
- 'Ma'am' by counter staff at fast-food restaurants;
- 'Miss Lo' by people in a more formal context, for example a job interview.

As Maybin notes (and as we can see), context-related terms of address will relate to gender, sometimes in an asymmetrical way ('older guys'). However, in a sense, such terms create as well as reflect context. Maybin comments: 'Note the way Lo Wing Yu feels positioned by certain people calling her *little sister*' (1996: 15, italics in original). This is to extend Hymes's notion of 'participants' to the (changing) relationships between them.

It is now commonplace to say that meaning is 'contextual' – even '*radically* con textual' (Cameron 1992b: 192, her italics). Sociolinguistics requires the notion of context, in the study of speech communities, social networks (for example, Cheshire 1982, Gal 1978, Labov 1966, Trudgill 1972a, 1972b), and CofPs (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1992a, 1992b; see also Unit B6.2). Consider a group of people

who meet weekly for salsa dancing. Here, context is both social and geographical. Speech communities, networks and CofPs, however, are not restricted to geo graphical boundaries. The Internet has enabled these to exist independently of spatial considerations, so that, for example, academics can communicate perfectly satisfactorily on a topic with no idea of where on the globe their correspondent is writing from, and people forge genuine friendships and alliances in chat-rooms with people they have never met.

A6.2 CONTEXT, LANGUAGE AND GENDER

In 1970s gender and language study, an acknowledgement of the importance of context came with the recognition that if and when men tended to dominate women linguistically in certain ways, this had to be related, *inter alia*, to what Hymes might see as 'participants' and 'genre'. So, for example, Candace West's (1984) work on doctor–patient talk, and that of William O'Barr and Bowman Atkins (1980) on courtroom discourse, showed how professional status intersected with gender in terms of what was said. O'Barr and Atkins showed that what had been seen as 'women's language' was in large part 'powerless language': it was evident in the talk of those on trial, but not in that of the members of the legal profession involved in the trial, female or male.

Context may also extend to participants' interpretations. Mary Talbot (1992) pointed out that whether a given case of overlapping speech could be seen as an 'interruption' – unwanted and 'hostile' – could really only be

established with recourse to speakers' understandings. This was important for early gender and language study since 'interruptions' – of women, by men – played an important role in findings of the '(male) dominance' tradition of investigation (for example, Zimmerman and West 1975, West and Zimmerman 1983).

Following '(male) dominance', social context was also important in gender and language study in the '(cultural) difference' approach – not only for understanding the meaning of a given utterance, but also its origin. Maltz and Borker (1982, see also Unit B3), and later Deborah Tannen (1991), claimed that girls and boys grow up largely in single-sex groups, and that these apparently very different, formative contexts entail different linguistic practices to which different tendencies in adult male/female language use can be attributed (see also Unit A3). In Unit B6, the notion of context is exemplified from three perspectives.

First, in Unit B6.1, context extends to the wider social practices surrounding the use (or 'consumption') of a written text, with an extract from a study of actual (and in many ways unpredictable) uses of a language textbook, instantiated in teacher talk. This draws on the notion of 'talk around the text', borrowed from literacy studies (for example, Jaffe 2003). The epistemological point here is that analysis of a written text alone cannot do more than suggest how it may be interpreted or responded to – which may depend in part on what is said while it is being read. Understanding that meaning is co-constructed by a text (and that text's producer) and its reader (or listener) entails that a study of meaning in the written text alone must always be inadequate.

In Unit B6.2, the second perspective on context derives from the important notion of CofP. Originating in education (Lave and Wenger 1991), with a focus on 'situated learning', this was taken up by language and gender study first by Penelope Eckert and Sally McConnell-Ginet in 1992 (1992a and 1992b), and, several years later, was the topic of a special issue of *Language and Society* (1999). Here we look at an extract from Eckert and McConnell-Ginet's influential 1992 paper: 'Communities of practice: where language, gender and power all live'.

A CofP entails shared practices (linguistic and otherwise), and thus extends the notion of 'speech community' (Graddol et al. 1995). Practices have implications for identity, which may be achieved and/or ascribed through taking part in certain social and linguistic practices. Joining an adult education class in creative writing, for example, may change that person's sense of who she is through the practices she engages in, with others; at the same time, friends, relatives and associates may 'ascribe' a certain identity to her because of her membership of the class. CofP also entails the notion of 'legitimate peripheral participation' (the subtitle of Lave and Wenger's [1991] book), meaning that whereas some members may be 'core', and relatively powerful, others are not, but are accepted as part of the CofP, and may go through a process of learning and become increasingly less peripheral. What exactly counts as a CofP (and, for example, how 'permanent' it has to be) is a matter of debate, but relatively clear examples would be a family, a football team, and the above-mentioned creative-writing class.

The CofP notion has made an important and useful contribution to gender and language study. This does not mean that as a notion it was absent before Lave and Wenger's, and Eckert and

McConnell-Ginet's work. It is possible, for example, to retrospectively see Lesley Milroy's young Clonard women (Unit B1.2) as part of several CofPs: they had families, and worked and socialised outside the home. Since they both worked and socialised together, in sharing a multiplex social network, these women also shared a set of linguistic practices, and it was the linguistic details of this network that provides Milroy's explanatory power. Gender (as a variable) was thus not abstracted from practices or from the communities in which these women lived and worked.

The third perspective, in Unit B6.3, exemplifies the broad and popularly understood notion of 'culture'. While different 'cultures' are of course marked by diversity, nuancing and a myriad of CofPs, certain practices may be specific to certain cultures. One such linguistic practice is *hlonipha* (Hanong Thetela 2002, Swann 2000, Finlayson 1995), a morphological and lexical part of the language of some groups in South Africa and neighbouring countries. On the surface, *hlonipha* is about respect for women, but it also about women showing respect for others (particularly older male relatives), entailing language women are not expected to use. This largely

concerns syllables in the names of in-laws, but it extends to use of euphemistic words related to the act of sex and to sexual body parts. The implications of this are the focus of Hanong Thetela's text in Unit B6.3.

Task A6.2.1: Reflection task

➢ Have you had direct experience of 'cultures' in different parts of the world in which women's and men's linguistic practices (or expectations of practices) vary, either 'sex-exclusively' or 'sex-preferentially' (see Units A1, A2 and A3)?

➢ Were these evident in single-sex or mixed-sex groupings?

Unit A7
Developing understandings of language: Discourse and discourses

A7.1 INTRODUCTION

Task A7.1.1: Reflection task

➢ Spend a few minutes making notes about some different possible meanings of *discourse*.

➢ List some collocates and closely related terms.

➢ Which writers do you associate with the notion of *discourse*?

Discourse is omnipresent. This is especially true as modes of communications increase, exponentially more texts are published year on year, and more information of different sorts becomes available. Much of this is relevant to gender and language study: as Cameron notes, 'Men and women . . . are members of cultures in which a large amount of discourse about gender is constantly circulating' (1997a: 60). The number and diversity of what might be called 'discursively gendered' sites and topics is vast, and there is no shortage of discourse to analyse.

Discourse has a variety of meanings, varying with discipline and intellectual persuasion. 'Linguistic' meanings include the broad 'stretch of written or spoken language', and the more specific 'linguistic, and accompanying paralinguistic, interaction between people in a specific context' (Talbot 1995a: 45), for example, 'Classroom discourse'. Such names can be seen as 'descriptive':'Classroom discourse' is the language associated with the classroom.

Discourse can also refer to a 'broad system of meaning', and to 'knowledge and practices generally associated with a particular institution or group of institutions' (Talbot 1995a: 43). Given this sense of discourse, we can also talk about discourses, which have been characterised as ways of seeing the world (Sunderland 2004), and as 'ways of representing the world: the processes, relations and structures of the material world, the "mental" world of thoughts, feelings, beliefs and so on, and the social world' (Fairclough 2003: 124).

Fairclough's use of 'representing' goes beyond 'seeing' to suggest agency and intention. Indeed, speakers and writers *use* discourses – 'drawing on', 'invoking', 'producing', 'reproducing' and even 'inserting themselves' within (Foucault 1981) discourses. The different verbs imply different forms of agency. Agency does not however mean that discourses are produced ahistorically, from nothing. Rather, we can see discourses as having been around as long as there have been human, social practices, and speakers, through their language and social actions, constantly re produce these. A given discourse may be relatively continuous and durable, over time undergoing local (and visible) transformations in written and spoken texts (Fairclough 2001), that is, manifesting changing linguistic 'traces' (see below).

Discourses themselves are neither visible nor bounded. A discourse has no objective beginning and no clearly defined end (Wodak 1997: 6). However, a given discourse may be recognisable to analysts and other language users through its manifestation in characteristic linguistic 'traces'. These 'traces' then provide 'cues' for how a text can be understood (Talbot 1998: 154). Particular discourses can be analytically 'co-constructed' from these traces with the aid of co-textual and contextual features.

Let us take as an example a 'pro-environmental discourse'. Rather than being 'descriptive', this discourse, and its name, are better referred to as 'interpretive': what for some might be a clear a 'pro-environmental discourse', for others might be a 'left-wing discourse' or discourse of 'state interference in the rights of the individual'. But, regardless of perspective, the idea of protecting the environment, for our own good and that of our descendents, is by now a familiar, recognisable one – even to those who neither positively espouse a pro-environmental discourse nor allow it to shape their practices. Characteristic lexis are words and phrases such as 'earth', 'planet', 'low impact', 'sustainability', 'biodiversity' and 'environmental footprint'. Characteristic syntax when the discourse is used with persuasive intent (for example by pressure groups) might include 'first conditional' constructions, often negative ones:'If we do not . . . then . . .'. Such linguistic 'traces' of an environmental discourse enable us to co-construct it: what the text producers want, of course.

Task A7.1.2: Reflection task

➢ Think of another, familiar discourse. What might some characteristic lexical and syntactic traces of this discourse be?

➢ Can you think of a familiar gendered discourse?

The same discourse may be reproduced widely, in different linguistic guises and manifestations. First, traces of the discourse can appear in both written and spoken texts. It is not hard to envisage this: there is no mode or genre restriction on either a discourse of feminism or a discourse of sexism, for example. Both can be encountered in print media, in political speeches (spoken but often scripted) and in naturally occurring talk. The same discourse can also be produced by men and

by women: Wetherell et al. (1987) demonstrated that women and men both drew on a discourse of 'equal opportunities' in interviews about employment and gender and a limiting 'practical considerations' discourse. Women can also produce sexist (anti-women) discourses, and men feminist discourses. For some people this is counter-intuitive: I have several times encountered assumptions that women textbook writers will represent women in their books better than will their male colleagues, and that female researchers of Gender and Language will ask questions and/or represent their findings in ways that cast men and boys in a poor light. I do not think either is true. Women cannot be assumed to support women or to be critical of existing gendered social arrangements. Walsh, for example, has documented how in the UK complaints by New Labour women MPs of sexual harassment by their male colleagues were simply dismissed by Tory women MPs (2001: 99). That discourses are not sex-exclusive is a reason to look at what is said (and written), as well as how and by whom (the focus of earlier 'gender differences' studies).

A7.2 THE CONSTITUTIVE NATURE OF DISCOURSE

An important distinction is between what discourse is (described above), and what it does. Recognition and production of familiar (or less familiar) discourses may help the language user maintain a sense of control and make sense of the world. As regards what discourses themselves do, for both critical social theory and post structuralism, discourses are potentially constitutive systems of meaning: 'different ways of structuring areas of knowledge and social practice' (Fairclough 1992a: 3) (from critical social theory and CDA), or, in the famous post-structuralist Foucault definition, 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak' (Foucault 1972: 49). Both Foucault and Fairclough (1992a, 1992b, 2003) have been influential in shaping understandings of the potential constitutiveness of discourse (see also Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999).

certain way?

Discourses are constitutively potentially powerful, both in large-scale political processes and small everyday exchanges (Jaworski and Coupland 1999), and powerful in the senses of constraining and enabling (Mills 1997). The feminist

Task A7.2.1: Reflection task

➢ What is your experience of language as constitutive?

➢ Can you recall occasions in which something you read, or heard, made you see things in a different way?

➢ Other than the obvious (for example, you read on a board that the last train has been cancelled, so you get a taxi home), can you recall occasions in which an encounter with language has prompted you to act in a

discourse which names, identifies and condemns sexual harassment of women by men can be seen as empowering to women, compared with a traditional discourse in which male harassment of women was something 'natural', and therefore something women had to put up with.

Constitution can be symbolic, semiotic and/or discoursal, but is also potentially material and social, i.e. constituting effects beyond discourse. Fairclough makes a useful and important distinction between 'constructions' and 'construals': 'we may textually construe (represent, imagine, etc.) the social world in particular ways, but whether our representations or construals have the effect of changing its con struction depends upon various contextual factors – including the way social reality already is, who is construing it, and so forth' (2003: 8).

As regards 'construction', J. Camille Cammack and Donna Kalmbach Phillips refer to the possibility of discourses 'binding' people 'so that they cannot see connec tions or construct meaning outside the set of definitions given them' (2002: 126). Claims of construction (in this sense) are, however, often theoretical and rhetorical, rather than drawing on empirical support. Accepting that a given discourse constructs language users in themselves and their practices (as opposed to in a text about them), often requires an intellectual act of faith. While accepting in principle rhetorical claims about what a discourse does (or can do), we can then also interrogate such claims. For example, 'constitute' in what sense? as evidenced in or by what? (Sunderland 2004).

Given different theoretical approaches to discourse and its workings, approaches to

discourse analysis vary accordingly. Discourse analysis encompasses, *inter alia*, conversation analysis (CA), classroom discourse analysis, critical discourse analysis (CDA), critical classroom discourse analysis (Kumaravadivelu 1999), discursive psychology, and feminist post-structuralist discourse analysis (FPDA) (Baxter 2003). In FPDA, Judith Baxter stresses the possibility of different forms of power for an individual at different times (or even at the same time). Drawing on Foucauldian (rather than CDA) understandings of social 'realities' as always discursively produced, Baxter claims that our identities and subject positions as speakers are continually being reconstructed and thus open to redefinition through discourse. Unit B7.3 is an extract from Baxter's book *Positioning Gender in Discourse* (2003). Units 8 and 9 look at CA and discursive psychology, respectively. Below we look more closely at CDA.

A7.3 CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

CDA 'aims to show non-obvious ways in which language is involved in social relations of power and domination' (Fairclough 2001: 229). Discourses, for example, are 'non-obvious' because they cannot be 'seen', but must be inferred from linguistic cues. Fairclough goes on:

> The starting point for CDA is social issues and problems . . . it does not begin with texts and interactions. . . . The dramatic problems in economy and society . . . lie, I would argue, at the root of the problems, insecurities and struggles of contemporary social life. If CDA wants to address the latter, it has to have a picture of how language and semiosis figure in the former. (2001: 229, 232)

The social issue and 'dramatic problem' here is gender – an issue and often a problem for women and girls, in different ways, for men and boys, and accordingly for gender relations. CDA would thus seem to be theoretically well placed to seek and identify gendered discourses of a 'damaging' kind (Sunderland 2004). Yet, oddly, given its concern with power relations (see also Cameron 1998a), CDA remains relatively marginal in gender and language research. Michelle Lazar's (2005) edited collection *Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis* is the first book to explicitly bring together achievements of this theoretical approach (but see also Walsh 2001).

Task A7.3.1: Reflection task

➢ As you read the next section, consider for yourself whether you think CDA might be an appropriate approach for gender and language study – theoretically, epistemologically and/or methodologically.

Crucial to CDA are notions of power and dialectical relations, in particular between discourse and other social practices,

including institutional dominance and economic production. In addition to being constitutive, discourse is thus itself shaped by the material and by social structures. Accordingly, analysis must consider the extra-discursive, including the material. CDA in fact entails the extra-discursive: there is a 'real world' where reality does not depend on discoursal constitution. For CDA, as Chouliaraki and Fairclough claim, 'the question of power in social class, gender and race relations is *partly* a question of discourse' (1999: vii, my italics). Discourse is thus significant in its constitutive potential but not omnipotent, and the potential of discourse to improve women's lives is, for CDA, seriously and materially circumscribed.

A7.4 INTERTEXTUALITY AND INTERDISCURSIVITY

For both post-structuralism and CDA, the analysis of discourses is never straight forward in that it cannot, in contrast to the analysis of more formal or more purely linguistic features, deal with 'bounded' units. The issue is not however the demarcation of a unit of analysis in talk or written text, but that of intertextuality. A given discourse is always related to others, both synchronically and diachronically. Diachronically,'With each word spoken, the meanings within particular discourses are carried through time' (Peterson 2002: 352). Synchronically, similar and different discourses exist in contemporary relation to each other. There is, for example,

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a diversity of discourses of sexism (from misogyny to 'Vive la différence!'). Intertextuality may refer to 'manifest intertextuality' – for example, the use of extracts from *Taming of the Shrew* in Cole Porter's musical *Kiss Me Kate*, and the direct (if tidied up) reported speech of media reports. Alternatively, it may refer to 'interdiscursivity', the 'mixing together of different discourses and genres' (Fairclough 1992a). Discourses thus continually take on characteristics of each other, endlessly combining and recombining.

Task A7.4.1: Reflection task

➢ Have you had the experience of becoming aware of a new discourse (articulated by a friend or relation, or in the media, perhaps through new words or phrases or combinations), becoming aware of others taking it up, and then perhaps taking it up yourself?

As an example of interdiscursivity, the following text type will be familiar to many. With the overall title of 'Project Planet', and featuring a picture of three horses on a hill in the mist or at dawn, a card with this wording was found in a city hotel bathroom:

PLEASE REUSE THE TOWELS

We invite you to join with us to conserve water by using your towels more than once. In addition to decreasing water and energy consumption, you help us reduce the amount of detergent waste water that must be recycled within our community.

Please hang towels up if you wish to participate in this program – if not, simply leave them on the floor.

The card is 'Printed on recycled paper' and is 'Laminated to reduce waste'. A 'pro environmental discourse' can be seen here, in terms of the advocacy of the preservation of water and energy and the limitation of (presumably) polluting detergent, and the phrase 'our community'. But the 'invitation' to 'participate in this program' has been issued by a major hotel chain, whose bottom line is to succeed financially in a competitive leisure industry. It is very hard to read this text and not see the main intention of its writers to promote savings on laundry costs, and as textually 'appropriating' a familiar environmental discourse to do so. (Note that there are no linguistic traces like the serious and contingent 'If we do not . . . then . . .', suggested in the earlier discussion of pro-environmental discourse.) Behind the traces of this ostensibly 'pro-environmental discourse', and with the help of those traces, we can 'co-construct' a hard-headed commercial discourse.

When several discourses are produced in the same text, including in the same utterance (by one individual) or conversation, as they often are, these discourses can be seen not just as 'jostling' together, but also as competing, or contradictory. Contradictions are of interest to CDA (Hegel wrote on them at length), post structuralism (including FPDA) and discursive psychology, in the shape of 'ideological dilemmas' (Billig et al. 1988). An example of a contradiction can be seen in two documented parenthood discourses in comparable texts,'Father as line manager of the mother' and 'Mother as manager of the father's role in child care' (Sunderland 2002). Contradictions may signal discoursal and social instability and hence act as pointers to struggle and avenues of change (Pecheux 1982), perhaps playing a 'disturbing' role themselves. They also create room for contestation in the form of, for example, explicit challenge to the speaker who contradicts him or herself, or commentary on the contradictions in one's own talk. Alternatively, they may act as a conservative force (Wetherell et al. 1987), in that articulation of a given progressive discourse invites the co-construction of a conservative or traditional one.

A7.5 GENDER AND DISCOURSE/GENDERED DISCOURSE/GENDERING DISCOURSE

'Gender' and 'discourse' appear together in the titles of several monographs and edited collections (for example, Litosseliti and Sunderland 2002, Tannen 1994, Todd and Fisher 1998, Walsh 2001, Weatherall 2002, Wodak 1997), and are both central in Wilkinson and Kitzinger's *Feminism and Discourse: psychological perspectives* (1995) and Mills's *Discourse* (1997). Discourse analyses have shown the extent to which discourse is gendered, and indeed the proliferation of work here may be precisely because of the ability of discourse analysis to challenge traditional essentialist and reductionist understandings of gender (Edley 2001).

What about the phrase ‘gendered discourse’? Gender and Language theorists of the 1970s and 1980s who were adherents of the ‘(male) dominance’ (retrospectively labelled) approach would probably see gendered discourse as referring to the nature of the interactional dominance which they found in mixed-sex conversations: Fishman (1983), West and Zimmerman (1983) and Edelsky (1977) showed men on the whole talking more than women, interrupting more, providing fewer minimal responses, asking fewer questions, and having their topics taken up more regularly (see Unit A2). This could be said to be discourse of a very gendered kind indeed. A more contemporary understanding (for post-structuralism and CDA alike) would however refer to the discoursal representation or construction of women and men, boys and girls in particular gendered ways in written text or talk – ways that may be idiosyncratic or normative, conservative or progressive.

When women and men, boys and girls are represented and/or expected to behave in particular gendered ways, post-structuralism and CDA see gendered discourses as ‘subject positioning’ those individuals or groups concerned.‘Subject’ is used here in the double active/passive sense of ‘subject’ (as opposed to ‘object’) and ‘being subject to’. Actual behaviour may or may not correspond to those representations

and expectations, but people can be seen as 'taking up' (or not) particular gendered 'subject positions' (see Wetherell 1998, Weatherall 2002).

Rather than focusing on (and 'ferreting out') any 'gender differences' (or tendencies), a discourse approach would see gendered subject positions which are taken up not as an end (or the end of the investigation) in themselves, but as legitimating the 'male/female binary', and as potentially constitutive of gender more widely. Something which is gendered can thus also be gendering.

Gendered discourse may subject position women unfavourably – as in Walsh's (2001) example of the discourse of Tory (British right-wing) women concerning Labour Party (more left-wing) women (see A7.1). It does not have to do so, however. Further, to suggest that gendered discourse always constructs (as opposed to construes) gender (or that a particular stretch of discourse does so) would be to adopt a highly determinist stance which most analysts now distance themselves from. This stance was evident in some non-sexist language campaigns of the 1970s, in which one argument for 'inclusive' language was that linguistic items such as the so-called 'generic he' (a 'trace' of sexist discourse) caused people to 'think male' (see Unit A.2). While there was some evidence that thinking could be influenced by sexist language (for example, Schneider and Hacker 1973), this was by no means auto matic, universal or long term (its duration was never, to my knowledge, explored). Both individual agency and the possibility of resistance need to be considered – this last might include the recognition, and rejection, of sexist discourse. To borrow from CA, an

individual's orientation to a particular discourse needs to be considered before any discussion of construction in relation to that individual can take place.

In Unit B7 we look in more detail at discourses, discourse identification and discourse naming. Two extracts (B7.1 and B7.2) come from my own book *Gendered Discourses* (2004), the third (B7.3) from Judith Baxter's *Positioning Gender in Discourse* (2003).

Unit A8
Approaches to gender and language research

A8.1 INTRODUCTION

Task A8.1.1: Reflection task

➢ With what academic disciplines, in addition to linguistics, do you associate gender and language study?

➢ Is gender and language study characterised by particular sorts of data and data collection?

➢ What do you see as the role of feminism in gender and language study?

'Gender and Language' is not an approach. Rather, it can best be described as a topic, or, more broadly,'field' of study. Within Linguistics, gender and language study has links not only with sociolinguistics, discourse analysis and language change, as we have seen, but also with stylistics, pragmatics, literacy, the history of language and even historical and descriptive linguistics (for example, Corbett 2004).

As a field, Gender and Language is highly diverse, as recent work illustrates. The programme of the IGALA3 (International Gender and Language Association) Conference of 2004 included presentations on:

- discursive creation of gendered bodies in Internet chats;
- institutionalising norms and roles of gender and sexuality in a call-in radio programme;
- positioning a mature and normative heterosexual self in 'attraction talk' in ten year-old boys;
- 'half-Japanese' adolescent girls' display of multi-ethnic and feminine cultural capital;
- language, gender and world view: oral narrative in a Berber village;
- are psychotherapy texts gendered?
- the portrayal of women in selected Polish print advertisements.

As these titles suggest, current gender and language study is interdisciplinary. It crosses the boundaries of Linguistics into, *inter alia*, Women's Studies, Queer