Prestige, Cultural Models, and Other Ways of Talking About Underlying Norms and Gender

Speaker Norms

Have been conceived in language and gender studies and attempt to arrive at a synthesis that suggests how a speaker’s knowledge about language and social context contributes to the patterning of language by gender.

Important distinction:

-The social identity of a speaker (social norms)

-Norms about the social meaning of a linguistic item (social action norms)

Example:

“Low pitched voice”

-indicative of masculinity.

-can show that the same kind of voice has connotations of authority, even for women.

We are thus more accurate in describing the relationship between masculinity and voice pitch by saying there is an (arbitrary) linguistic norm that connects masculinity and authority.

Pitch and a further social norm – connects masculinity and authority.

Low pitch – came from its association with men and there is no linguistic feature connecting a social group norm with a linguistic form.

Authority and masculinity - is a social group norm.

Low pitch and authority – social action norm.

Social action norms – describe the indexing of stances, acts, and activities by linguistic forms.

Group norms –describe the connection between stances, acts, activities, and social identities of speakers.

^ the difference between the two is that different linguistic features carry different social meanings for men and women.

Descriptive norms –simply describe a group. Usually through some statistic average. E.g. the average height of men.

Prescriptive norms –such as, “women should be more polite”

Social significance – comes from the statistical connection between a group and linguistic features. So it’s a direct index.

Social meaning –derives from the function of the linguistic feature.

Gender Stereotypes: Reproduction and Challenge

Female stereotypes in Disney films

Disney Life Lessons

* Girls should never speak up
* Beauty is a girl’s number one priority

Cinderella:

* Only girls of high stature can be capable of finding love
* Young girls need to be domestic. They are supposed to do it not boys.

Snow White

* Mothers (and daughters) should clean the house.
* Stay at home.

Ariel

* Girls need to be pretty and be silenced
* Girls do not need intelligence. Beauty is all that matters
* Girls must change for a man’s love
* Everything about a girl is superficial.

Belle

* Romanticizes domestic abuse
* Girls need to accept that men are dominant in a relationship

What is Gender

Gender is often thought of in terms of bipolar categories, sometimes even as mutually exclusive opposites (opposite sex). On the basis of gender assignment, naturalized norms and expectations about verbal behavior (feminine, masculine, etc) are imposed upon people.

Stereotyping:

To stereotype someone is to interpret their behavior, personality and so on in terms of a set

of common-sense attributions which are applied to whole groups (Italians are excitable)