Group Project - Team 1

Language And Society

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Introduction

The topic that we chose for our project was **Varieties in Language**. To work on this, we chose the subtopic *Language Differences and Variations based on Gender*. We planned to cover this project from a sociolinguistic point of view. I mainly worked on the sociolinguistic aspects and most of my analysis was based on previous work done in sociolinguistics. My contribution to this project was mainly divided into three phases:

▼ *Analysing Bollywood Scripts*

In this part of the analysis, four movies were chosen that satisfied the **Bechdel Test**. Furthermore, the movies had a female lead(s). The goal was to analyse the difference in language used by the male and female characters in the movie **Pink**. This analysis was manual, and it required me to peruse the script and watch the movie multiple times. This was done so that I could extract as much linguistic information from the movie as possible.

▼ *Reading Literature*

In this part of the analysis, I read multiple papers and books on themes like feminism, women's language, and societal disparity. A lot of work went into understanding the texts and re-reading them. Special emphasis was put on trying to find Indian texts so that it would be easy to draw parallels. Some authors that I read were *Lakoff*, *Tannen*, *de Lauretis*, etc. This stage helped me prepare for the analysis I would do based on the data we collected.

▼ *Data Analysis*

The last stage of my work required me to analyse the data that we had collected via various methods. Here, I took the hypotheses that we made and related them to the data we collected. The data collected was from the scripts and the survey. Here, other members of the team made a CLI interface from which I could extract the data I required from the scripts. Similarly, the survey also gave us real-life data to test our hypotheses. The hypotheses were made after I understood the basic concepts of feminism and females in society from the literature I read.

This approach helped us to analyse the linguistic differences between the genders in society and help us generate a deeper understanding of women in Bollywood. The multiple stages ensured that the quality of work was high and that there was no tiring. The conclusions that we drew, in the end, were of extremely high quality because we went through multiple stages of testing for each hypothesis.

Procedure

I have elaborated upon each of the above-mentioned steps in this section of the report. All of the mentioned papers, scripts, and survey data can be found in the GitHub repository.

Analysing Bollywood Scripts

The movie that I chose was **<u>Pink</u>.** This movie follows the story of three young, working women, *Minal* (Tapasee Pannu), *Falak* (Kirti Kulhari) and *Andrea* (Andrea Tairang) who are flatmates in Delhi and good friends. An untoward incident one night at a resort in Surajkund, involving some boys, among whom is *Rajveer* (Angad Bedi), who comes from a politically well-connected family, proves to be life-changing for the trio. What follows is an intriguing courtroom drama where ace lawyer *Deepak Sehgal* (Amitabh Bachchan) represents them in a bid to get them justice. Replete with contemporary instances and issues, centring around women and their safety, the film, through its potent dialogues, takes a dig at society and its stereotypical norms and prejudices towards women, as in **"The Rule Book of the Girls' Safety Manual"**, enumerated by lawyer Deepak Sehgal.

Using this movie, I try to understand the psyche behind how society functions and why our country is termed as a misogynistic one. I try to understand what society expects an ideal woman to look like, how she should behave, and how she should talk. I try to contrast this with how the men in the movie behave. After this, I read papers to

understand society, language, and women better. This helped me form hypotheses that I later verified using data that we collected from the survey and the movie scripts.

Reading Literature

For this project, I had to read a lot of papers and books to understand society, language, and women better. In fact, I had to read papers to understand how these three were linked and why the link is essential. However, most of my work is based on two papers.

Gender, Language, Conversation analysis and Feminism - Elizabeth Stokoe and Ann Wetherall

This book was mainly used to understand the major cause for the prevalent misogyny in language. There were multiple insights which were gained from this book. The most important of those was the fact that the book tried to define what a **gendered speech style** is. The definition is simple in the fact that unlike early attempts to define gendered speech styles it draws upon constructionist and performative treatments of gender (*cf. Bucholtz et all. 1999; Weatherall, 2002*) to define the term. Relating this to society gave us a very basic idea of the underlying misogyny in society and how language plays a part in that.

Aesthetic and Feminist Theory: Rethinking Women's Cinema - Teresa de Lauretis

The previous book talks about how language is gendered and how the basic differences initiate the misogyny prevalent in society. This paper, on the other hand, is a reflection on how Bollywood and any movie industry can do better to better represent women in cinema. The most important thing to fix with any portrayal of women, be it in art or movies, is ensuring the removal of the female aesthetic. Bollywood in the 90s was straight-up sexist. There were very few movies where the lead character was a woman, where women were not sexualised, and not a property of their man. However, with the struggle for equality for women taking shape and increasing in power, Bollywood now seems to be filled with "*feminist*" movies. The movies chosen in this project are examples of movies where the lead protagonist is a woman. Women are still considered as aesthetic objects. For example, a modern 21st-century woman is one who is working and is dressed in Western clothes. Yet, they are usually still bound by the same societal

constraints like the pressure to get married or to have kids as seen in the chosen movies.

Data Analysis

The final step that I had to do was to make hypotheses based on the literature I read and the initial observations I made after the movie. The hypotheses made were then verified based on the data we collected. Since the data we collected was for the scope of this project, it would be unwise to claim these hypotheses as *hard* rules. However, I believe that these hypotheses are an excellent starting point for making more concrete observations on society, language, and feminism. The hypotheses made are as follows.

Societal Observations

▼ *Inequality*

There was a clear theme of inequality in the movie. There were separate expectations for men and women. Men were allowed to come late to their homes; they were allowed to swear and take control of their own lives while women were not. In fact, at one point in the movie, the female protagonist was questioned for living alone while the males in the movie all lived alone, and there were no problems with that. Throughout the movie, the actions of the women are monitored by the people living in their society. The other members in the society spend a lot of time talking ill about the activities of the women while turning a complete blind eye to the acts of the men. The antagonists in the movie get away with threatening the landlord of the girls, actually assaulting him and there are no consequences. Yet, for the women, every action is looked at with a fine-tooth comb.

▼ *Immorality*

What was immoral for women was not immoral for men. Women in the movie were ostracised for having sex(even if it was consensual) and for drinking. For men, the sex was something that made them look *cool,* and the alcohol was merely a health concern as stated in a counter by the Amitabh Bacchan, the defence attorney. Throughout the movie, the lead villain kept saying how these women were immoral for accepting to have drinks with them. While, on the other hand, he said his sister would never do such a thing. This double standard is a common theme throughout the movie and a sad take on society.

▼ *Exclusion*

A common theme in the movie was the clear bias against people from the North-Eastern states in the movie. A female protagonist was clearly abused because she looked different from how the others in the movie looked like. They also refused to accept the fact that there were multiple states in North East India even after repeatedly being told so.

▼ *Power*

As with most movies we analysed, people in the higher strata of the society had certain privileges that made their lives easier. In the movie, an inspector asks the lead protagonist to think twice before filing an FIR against an influential man because it might end up ruining her career.

Linguistic Observations

▼ *English*

In the movie, men speaking English was considered a sign of progress and a testament to their excellent education. On the other hand, women speaking English was considered to be rude. This is clearly shown when a constable tells off a protagonist to stop speaking in English and to converse in Hindi.

▼ *Pronouns*

Another common theme present in the movie was the fact that women used more respectful pronouns like "*aap*". On the other hand, the males used pronouns like "*tu*" which adds to the whole females are treated differently theory.

▼ *Slangs*

Most slangs in the movie were used by males and directed towards the females. Most of the slangs used in the movie were abusing women members of the family like mothers or sisters. Women rarely abused but were abused a lot because of their so-called "loose" morals.

▼ *Power*

As with most movies we analysed, people in the higher strata of the society had certain privileges that made their lives easier. In the movie, people in power were referred to by respectful pronouns and they used pronouns that made the other person look derogatory.

Conclusion and Future Work

Working with the movie Pink was an extremely catatonic journey. I learnt a lot about consent, about how society and language are intertwined and that it is very hard to pinpoint a societal constraint that has no linguistic implications and vice-versa. Similarly, it taught me a lot about the struggles of women that go unnoticed. It taught me to appreciate cinema but at the same time how crucial it is for certain things to change for the betterment of society. The work I did in this project cemented my belief that Society and Language are not two indistinguishable things, rather they are two things that depend on each other for survival.

Reading the multiple texts over the course of this project has helped me understand the role of cinema in society. Similarly, I now have a deeper understanding of how gender is an important factor in how a language develops. The fact that there is still a lot of scope for improvement in society to ensure the removal of misogyny was illuminating sadly.

The conclusions that we managed to draw from the movies were fascinating, and we feel that this is something that can be worked upon in the future. There is a lot of scopes in exploring Bollywood through the eyes of a sociolinguist. Similarly, the survey that we conducted should be expanded and should include a wider demographic so that we can understand the thought process of not just our peers but the rest of the country as well. The wider demography should include people from different financial statuses, religions, genders, and age to get a better result. Similarly, more movies should be taken, and maybe movies which do not pass the Bechdel Test should also be taken into consideration.

Challenges Faced

There were many challenges that I faced while analysing the movie. At a personal level, watching the movie multiple times was a painful experience because it kept reminding me of how terrible the world can be for women. There were challenges to relate fundamental human aspects to linguistic theories like those of Lakoff's, etc. There were also very few dialogues between a man and a woman, so I had to go through all those dialogues with a fine-tooth comb to find any possible ideas and come up with

solutions. There were also cases where my hypothesis had failed, and I had to understand why it had happened.