Language and Society – Team 1

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Introduction

The topic of our project was Varieties in Language. For this, we have decided to work on Language differences and variations based on Gender from a sociolinguistic point of view and how they are represented in Bollywood. My part in this project works in 3 major phases:

1. **Analysing Bollywood scripts:** For this, four movies were chosen, where the lead was female. My goal was to analyse the difference in language used by male and female characters in the movie Queen. This analysis was done manually since I needed to analyse the context of every occurrence of linguistic disparity.

2. **Reading Literature:** Here, I read published and known literature based on themes of women's language and language disparity based on gender. I try to formulate hypotheses based on ideas presented in the paper in an Indian context. Then I try relating it to Queen and see if it holds. These also give an extra depth in analysis of the movies and each character.

3. **Survey:** The final phase involved a survey. This was based on hypotheses which were formed due to different pieces of literature read, which could be applied to the movies. This was done to figure out whether Bollywood was an apt representation of the current demographic and whether these ideas themselves could be applied to the current demographic.

This four-phase approach not only helped us to correctly analyse the linguistic representation of women in Bollywood compared to men, but it also allowed us to expand our topic to explore the linguistic difference in language used based on societal norms in the real world.

Procedure

Phase 1: Queen

The movie Queen has Rani as the protagonist. Rani is a middle-class Indian woman, who broke up with her long-term boyfriend, and fiance, Vijay. In a vast frenzy of emotions, she takes a trip to Paris and Amsterdam all alone, and this is her journey through confidence level. The reason this movie was chosen was due to societal issues influencing the language of Rani, and how confidence affects her language. We observe four significant factors affecting the language used by Rani in this movie, namely: Upbringing, Relation, Confidence and Power.

I try to draw a character-sketch of Rani, and based on it, re-read the whole script classifying particular use of language into possible reasons. This gives me an in-depth perspective into Rani, and representation of women in this movie in general. I analyse each character from the viewpoint of Rani, and how they interact with each other. Once that is done, I back some of my claims from the data in form of charts. Using this gives me a better idea, and a more correct idea, about how linguistic features (apology words, for example) occur and are influenced by Rani's character.

Phase 2: Relavant Literature

- **Robing Lakoff:** Her paper 'Language and Woman's place' describes the difference between a man's and a woman's language based on power relations. It claims that due to the existing societal power difference between a man and a woman, men use a more powerful variety of language, hence dominating women's language.

- **Deborah Tannen:** Her book 'You just don't understand' enumerates the 'Difference Theory' or 'Dual-Culture Approach' to the linguistic differences between a man's and a woman's language. She mentions that it is due to different preferences, not different societal power relation, that the linguistic differences occur.

These theories were then applied to Queen, and other chosen movies, to see its relevance with respect to Bollywood.

Phase 3: Survey Analysis

A survey was conducted, which explored the two mentioned theory, and their applications. We had surveyed an almost equal number of girls and boys on whether or not, and if yes, how often, did they use certain linguistic features in their language. They were then statistically represented, such that observations could be made. I ended up justifying the measured observations based on the two theories mentioned above.

Observations

Phase 1: Queen

We firstly observe how upbringing and personality affect the usage of language. Rani, as mentioned, is brought up in a typical middle-class household in Delhi. She is extremely sheltered since she was not allowed to go out on her own at all. She also had never gone outside India. Her education was moderate, but her hold on English was not. Due to this, we observe a lot of instances within the movie, where her choice of words could be attributed to her upbringing. Often when discussing sexual talks with her friend Sonal, we could see her disdain for such talks. Due to her upbringing, sex and topics related to it were considered as a taboo, and as a disgusting cheap topic. Another issue she would divert to while these conversations were marriage. This is directly related to her upbringing since her parents told her to become an ideal wife. Hence, sex became a taboo, where wedding became a goal.

Secondly, we go through the differences her relation with the listener was. As a traditional Indian woman, it is natural that she refers to her elders in the family by 'aap'. Similarly, it can be seen that she refers to her younger brother Chintu as 'tu', instead of 'tum', to signify the closeness. An interesting point of conflict here is Rani referring to Vijay as 'tum'. It can be said she does not refer to him as 'aap' to signify they are close, but it could be said that the reason she does not use 'tu', as she does with Sonal, is due to the power relation existing, which makes her use a more respectful pronoun.

Next, we observe how confidence plays a role. When Rani first went to Paris, she was very uncomfortable speaking in English. It could be attributed to the sudden change in surroundings since this was the first time she has gone outside India. Her education would suggest she should still be able to speak functional English,

but we can attribute her nervousness to lack of confidence. This is then focussed more by the usage of the native tongue, as even in France, she talks to Vijaylaxmi in Hindi, Usage of native tongue is specified in other places as well, where the four friends in Amsterdam always used their native tongue, even if none of the other understood it, to signify comfort. Rani spoke in Hindi to the prostitute in Amsterdam, and she spoke in Urdu. Regularly it is emphasised that native tongue represents that people are more confident in it, and it signifies emotional closeness. It is also observed that Rani's confidence increased in Amsterdam, compared to Paris, and this was reflected in her usage of language. She did not mind using Hindi to people who did not understand it, and she was very comfortable using English when required in Amsterdam.

Lastly, we could look at how power relations play a role. This is done by considering the dynamic between Vijay and Rani. It is often seen that when they were younger, Vijay would use highly code-mixed English, knowing that Rani was not comfortable in it, to woo her. His usage of English as a more powerful language is often seen, whenever he is talking to her. Contrastingly, it is observed that Rani did not use English much at all in India. Other aspects of Power relation represent how Rani would often talk to Vijay, when Vijay was asking her to not to dance or sing, for example. An interesting observation is the usage of the word 'Queen', to refer to Rani. Vijay would often use it as a literal translation of Rani's name, where it would represent the usage of a more powerful language, representing their power relation. On the other hand, her friends in Amsterdam would use 'Queen' to refer to her in a friendly way, where the power relation was of equals.

We can hypothesize that they have accurately represented the average middle-class north-Indian women. Though above-mentioned factors represent a certain demographic, we can see that this can easily be extended to women in general, where these societal factors do affect the language used by women.

Phase 2: Relevant Literature

- **Robin Lakoff:** We could make some observations reading her paper. First being a feedback loop of power relation. Men having more powerful variety of language, give negative feedback to boys if they were to use less powerful version to it, and to girls who use more powerful version. Similarly, women

reinforce the power dynamic based on language used by children. These positive and negative feedback create a loop, essentially trapping women to use less dominant version of the language.

A real-life example of this is the previous US election between Trump and Hilary Clinton. Here, a lot of the general public were unsure about Hilary, not due to her abilities, but her language. Due to her being a woman, she would use a less dominant variety of English, and a more subservient one is used instead of that. Public feared that during national dialogues, this would be disadvantageous, and men's language, which has more features making it direct and assertive would be better. In this way, women are systematically denied powerful positions, hence the power relation between men and women are maintained, resulting in a loop.

This difference between the power of language representing power relation between characters could be observed in Queen, between Vijay and Rani. In lots of places, you could see Rani apologizing in a childish manner ('Sorryyyyyy'), which signifies that Vijay is the more powerful in the relationship. This is later seen with how Vijay uses a code-mixed version of Hindi with English, knowing Rani is not very comfortable in it. This is done since English is deemed to be more powerful, based on where and how Rani and Vijay were brought up, and it would again represent more dominating language.

- **Deborah Tannen:** Her paper claims that the difference in languages observed is due to the two separate culture the genders have created. In the 'male' culture, certain features are more prominent, whereas, in the 'female' culture, those features are more used. This shifts the focus from it being a power relation to one of choice made. This choice is influenced by upbringing and experiences, but it accounts for the exceptions which are caused by Dominance approach.

In current world, where the boundaries between genders are slowly melting away, and becoming more intertangled than ever, this makes a lot of sense. We are seeing men using linguistic features which would be placed as women's feature by the dominance approach. Similarly we are seeing women becoming more dominant and powerful as and when the get more powerful positions in the society.

This theory was applicable to Laxmi and Sonal in Queen, where you could see them using dominant speech in Paris, compared to subservient speech of Rani.

Phase 3: Survey Analysis

Our survey report and observations were very different from what we expected. In almost all the features we had asked for, there was no significant difference based on gender which could be seen. We had tested to see the relevance of Lakoff's dominance theory.

This insignificant difference could not be explained by the dominance theory, hence here is where dual-culture approach came in. Dual-Culture approach, when extended to today's scenario of gender classes becoming more and more blended, refer to a choice a person takes, based on societal reasons, of which attribute of language is prefered, and when. Here, since our demographic was mainly young adults of the urban educated class, we could claim that they have not experienced much power difference, thus it has not affected their language in that manner. Thus it has become a matter of choice, and it was observed that the majority of people have chosen to use the more 'polite' version of the language, rather than a direct and crude variety of it. This could be only explained by Tannen's approach and the recent change in power dynamics between genders in this world.

Conclusion and Future Work

I was in charge of one of the movies chosen, Queen. This movie was a journey through confidence, and from a linguistic standpoint, an eye-opening perspective. It lets me gauge how confidence and gender truly affect one's language. These observations were discussed with my teammates, and we deliberated different features we could extract and take note of, comparing different genders using it. It also made me see a language in use with respect to context, something which is difficult to do in real life.

I was also in charge of justifying the survey observations, which directed me to read Lakoff's and Tannen's work. This was again a good perspective to consider since language difference exists and are very influential in real life. It was

surprising, and refreshing, to see that the current demographic which we surveyed use linguistic features as a choice based on society and how they are brought up, instead of the skewed power balance.

Future work would definitely involve surveying a wider demographic, in terms of education, financial status, region and age. This would let me dissect the usage of language based on gender properly, and see which sub-groups follow which theory.

All in all, this project gave us, as a team, a great insight into language differences due to gender, and how they are represented in Bollywood.