

Language and Society Team -1

Individual Analysis of Course Project

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1 Movie Analysis : Dangal

1.1 Introduction

The film Dangal(2016) is a movie set in the highly patriarchal society of rural India. It is based on the real-life story of Geeta and Babita Phogat, who won India it's first Gold and Silver medal in Wrestling.

1.2 observations

I analysed language change, keeping gender as the primary focus. Throughout the movie, I observed the changes in the language people use based on the speaker and the listener's genders. I also explored the power relation between them and how it affected the language used. The connection between the listener and the speaker also influenced the terminology used. Lastly, cultural influence on language was also discussed.

- First, we see that the relationship that the speaker and listener have has a large effect on the language used. It was found that people used less formal language, the closer you are to someone. e.g. Geeta uses 'tu' while talking to her mother, as she is very close to her. But when talking to her father, she always uses 'aap', which is a respect marker. While the type of relation plays an important role, here the patriarchal nature of society may also be the partial cause of respect markers being reserved for the males of the house. We can also see that Geeta and Babita use 'tu' for their cousin, even though he is a male AND older than them, which implies a very close relation between them.
- Second, cultural impact on language was also analyzed. We notice that all the jibes and jokes aimed at the girls when they begin wrestling, a sport that is considered to be men's monopoly, are enforcing the cultural view that men are superior to women and women should not step out of the house. E.g. "choriyan chullah chokah karte hue achhi lagti hain, pehelwani karte hue nahi."

- After being exposed to the more urban culture at the NSA, Geeta's language underwent noticeable changes. The instances of english being code-mixed increased significantly. Being from a rural, male dominant society, Geeta had been very subservient to the dominant male figure in her life, i.e. her father. It also reflected in her language. But after the NSA, she used more casual language with her father and even became a little more disobedient.
- Lastly, we also observe the role Power plays in the language. The most easily measured and observed is the usage of pronouns. We found data that showed females used 'aap' a lot more than males, signifying that females are in general at a lower power level.(In this limited database at least.) We also saw that people used language to accentuate power difference. (e.g. in the interaction between the coach and Mahavir Singh, Mahavir Singh used all the respect markers expecting to receive some respect markers in return, but the coach spoke to him quite rudely, to highlight the fact that Mahavir Singh had no power here.)

2 Related Work

To gain valuable insights, I read Robin Lakoff's 'Language and Woman's place'. It details the difference between a man's and a woman's language based on power relations. It says that men use a more powerful variety of language, hence dominating women's language. Examples taken from the movie support this hypothesis. E.g. Geeta's mother falls silent at a single gesture from their father in multiple instances, indicating that he is more powerful in the relation. Also, the Coach uses a lot of technical jargon with Geeta, which she might not understand, in their first interaction, establishing his Dominance.

3 Relevant Literature : Interpreting Interruptions

3.1 Introduction

The text opens with a joke :

A woman sues her husband for divorce. When asked the reason, she says that her husband has not spoken to her in 2 years. When the judge demands an explanation from the husband, he replies " I did not want to interrupt her". This Joke reflects the commonly held stereotype that women talk too much and are always interrupting men. But Tannen's research on the contrary revealed that it is men who interrupt women more often, contrary to the misogynistic prejudice that holds true in everyone's minds.

This finding collaborates with the complaints that many women have of having trouble getting their voices heard when talking to men. And if we consider

interruption to be an hostile act, it also strengthens the fact that men are social aggressors and use it as social control.

3.2 Previous Research

There have been many researches that prove the claim that men interrupt women more often (Zimmerman and West 1975, 1983, 1985), Eakins (1976). Zimmerman and West recorded naturally occurring conversations on campus locations. They reported that 96% of interruptions were instances of men interrupting women. Further studies by Esposito (1979) found that even parents interrupted female children more compared to male children, and fathers interrupted more than mothers on a whole. A similar pattern was also found among children i.e. boys interrupted girls more often.

3.3 Is interruption dominance?

The researchers mentioned above, like Zimmerman and West have called the act of interruption “a device for exercising power and control in conversation”. But whether that is true can be refuted. There are a lot of researches (Komarovsky, 1962) that say that the ‘dominant’ party in a marriage is more silent. They speak what they mean and that is what is followed.

If both silence and interruption are seen as dominating strategy, the interesting question that arises is whether power and domination resides in linguistic strategy at all or some other level.

3.3.1 Assumptions

Listed below are the wrong assumptions people make that lead to them thinking interruptions are a form of dominance.

- Interpreting interruption as evidence of power or dominance assumes that interruption is a single-handed speech act, something that one speaker does to another. But conversation is a joint production. Everything that happens is doing of all participants. If the second speaker tries to interrupt, but the speaker does not stop, then there is no interruption. So if someone was to speak up now, and I don’t stop then there is no domination. So interruption only has as much power as you give it
- Interruption as dominance also assumes that a conversation is a fight for the floor, where people are competing to speak. But many overlaps (possible interruptions) are often collaborative. The claim also assumes that conversations are arrangements where only one speaker speaks at a time, which is almost never the case. Tannen analyzed many conversations where the second speaker starts speaking and the first one does

not stop. Even when the transcript was played back to the speakers themselves they did not see simultaneous speaking as interruption but saw it as positive.

3.3.2 Ethical Dilemma

There are some stereotypes against speakers of some minority regarding their conversational styles. e.g. Jews are seen as pushy, erratic speakers. Or for an example closer to home, punjabis are seen as being loud and very jolly speakers. There may be some minority in these groups that conform to these stereotypes but labeling everyone in these minorities as the same is wrongheaded. If it is wrong to claim that people of a certain ethnicity are pushy and loud because they interrupt people more often, then how can we accept research that ‘proves’ that men dominate women because they appear to interrupt them in conversations.

3.4 Conclusion

The reality is that men do dominate women in most if not all cultures in the world. But to claim that they dominate because of language difference is putting a cloth over the real reason, whatever that may be.

4 Conclusions and future work

This project allowed me to analyze the movie Dangal quite deeply. This movie exposes the language difference among the genders. It also enabled me to see how culture, circumstances and other features influence the language that one uses.

I gained some insights by reading Lakoff and Tannen’s works.

For future work, It would be great to record and analyze actual conversations across wider demographic, instead of fabricated conversations, as I feel it would result in a more accurate picture of today’s society.