

Gender and Identity

(textbook chapter 7)

Overview

- Gender differences in interaction
- How languages encode gender
- Gender and language change
- Identity, performance, and practice

Gender vs. sex (simplified version)

- **Sex:** what you are (biologically)
- **Gender:** what you do (socially)
- ... even though many people nowadays just use the word *gender* for both meanings
 - For example, the “gender” of birds

Gender is what you do

- A widely understood idea outside linguistics
- There *are* biologically determined differences in the language of men and women
 - Men have longer thicker vocal cords
- ... but almost all language differences have nothing to do with that

Gender and interaction

- Pioneering researcher: Robin Lakoff
 - *Language and Woman's Place*
- **Major claims:**
 - Women's language exists
 - It includes an identifiable set of linguistic features
 - Women's language reflects subordinate status
 - Language *about* women also reflects status

Features of women's speech (according to Lakoff)

- (a) Hedges (*sort of*)
- (b) Fillers (*well, you know*)
- (c) Tag questions (It's nice, *isn't it?*)
- (d) Rising intonation even in non-question sentences (sometimes called “uptalk”)
- (e) “Empty” adjectives (*divine, cute*)
- (f) Precise color terms (*chartreuse*)

Color Terms

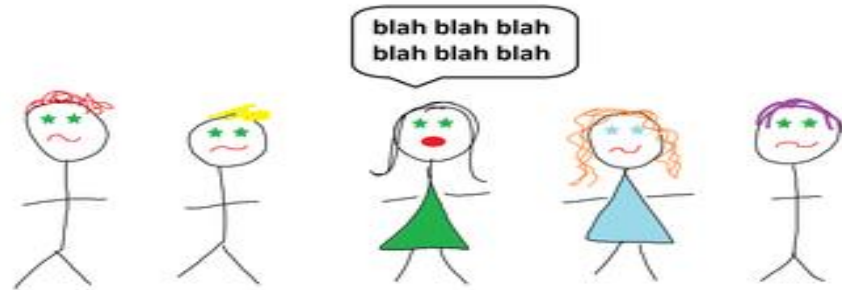
Color names if
you're a girl...

Maraschino		Red
Cayenne		Purple
Maroon		
Plum		
Eggplant		
Grape		
Orchid		Pink
Lavender		
Carnation		
Strawberry		
Bubblegum		
Magenta		Orange
Salmon		
Tangerine		
Cantaloupe		Yellow
Banana		
Lemon		
Honeydew		Green
Lime		
Spring		
Clover		
Fern		
Moss		
Flora		
Sea Foam		Blue
Spindrift		
Teal		
Sky		
Turquoise		

Color names if
you're a guy...

Features of women's speech (according to Lakoff)

- (g) Intensifiers like so (“It was *soooo* good!”)
- (h) Increased use of standard language forms
- (i) Super-polite forms (indirect requests, euphemisms)
- (j) Avoidance of strong swear words
- (k) Avoidance of interruptions



Research responses to Lakoff

- **Are the claims true?**
 - Many studies testing them
 - Often supported, although they're not all easy to measure
- **Do the features reflect subordination?**
 - Tag questions can reflect uncertainty, but also “antagonistic sparring”
 - Importance of researchers understanding *types* of features and how they're used

An example: interruption



- **Supportive interruption**
 - “Back channel” talk: *uh-huh... really? Wow!*
- **Deep interruption**
 - Non-supportive
 - Most common among men talking with women
- **Women deal with it by using other response-eliciting strategies**
 - Especially questions

TPS

- **Here's a list of English terms that highlight the female-ness of the things that they refer to:**
- Be sure you know what each term means. Then try to think of its male equivalent. Is there one?
- Does it refer to the exact same thing except male, or do the two words have different connotations?
- Does one of the two terms have a narrower reference than the other?
- What do your observations suggest to you about how people use gendered labels?

TPS

(a) chick flick

(b) chick lit

(c) women's
magazine

(d) drag queen

(e) diva

(f) girl band

(g) party girl

(h) girlfriend

(i) girly girl

(j) girl

Conversational purpose

- Sometimes, all-male conversations are more competitive and all-female conversations are more supportive...
- ... but they can both be used for solidarity building
- What happens when the two styles collide?
 - We see the strongest results from cross-sex conversational pairs

Difference and dominance

- If men and women have different conversational styles in same-sex groups, what does that reflect?
- **Different status of the sexes**
 - Dominance
- **Different “cultures” of speech**
 - Difference

Dominance model

- Lakoff and onward
- Gender differences reflect differences in access to power



Difference model

- Often associated with Deborah Tannen
- Single-sex interactions develop different cultures of communication
- **Males:** *report style*, convey information
- **Females:** *rapport style*, build relationships
- **In mixed-sex interactions**, men are less likely to switch styles
 - So there is a power component...

Power and language style

- **Is it the same everywhere?**
 - Most research on middle-class speech in industrialized societies...

Malagasy research (Keenan/Ochs)

- In the village studied, it was *men* who used indirect speech
- ... but women were still politically subordinate
- ... and it was *indirect* speech that the community prized
- As we remember from discussions of status, it's the higher status group whose speech features are considered prestigious

Gender *in* languages (1)

- Many languages divide **nouns into feminine and masculine genders**, e.g., French
- **Often corresponds to biological sex**
 - *Chat* = male cat, *chatte* = female cat
- **But for most words, no relation to real world**
 - Nothing inherently “masculine” about *le beignet* (‘the doughnut’)
 - It’s the *word* that’s feminine/masculine, not the *referent*

Gender *in* languages (2)

- When both genders are present, the masculine gender “wins”
- 10 boys = *ils* (‘he-plural’)
- 10 girls = *elles* (‘she-plural’)
- 1 boy, 9 girls = *ils* (‘he-plural’)

Discussion

- The word bitch differs in social meaning across generations, depending on who uses it and who they're referring to (the referent). For you, which combination of user and referent (female, male, gay, straight) makes bitch the most confrontational?
- Are there any combinations where bitch has positive social meaning?
- (If you discuss this in a very diverse group, you may be surprised by how different you all feel about the social meanings of the word)

TPS: language-gender and society-gender

- **Does having to indicate gender (including your own) in a language all the time mean speakers are constantly reminded of gender?**
- **Would that imply that non-gender-marking languages reduce social-gender differences?**

Leveling traditional male/female descriptors

- **Male default, female socially marked**
 - *Fireman* (now often *firefighter*)
- **Male default, female linguistically marked**
 - *Actor, actress* (now often *actor* for both)
 - *Doctor, lady doctor* (now *doctor* for both)
- **Male word survives, female word gets negative connotations**
 - *Bachelor/spinster* (now... *bachelorette*?)

Direct vs. indirect indexing

- *He* directly means “male”
- In Japanese, *ze* particle associated with men, *wa* with women
- But *ze* actually directly means “*assertive*” and *wa* means “*hesitant*”
 - Because those traits are traditionally associated with men and women, the particles become seen as male and female
 - They indirectly index gender

Discussion

- Google the words woman, man, boy, and girl, and the phrases (in quotation marks) he or she and she or he
- How many hits for each word or phrase?
- How do the top 10 hits for each word or phrase differ?
- Discuss

“Men’s and women’s language”

- In some languages, there are sound rules that apply differently for men and women
- More like men’s and women’s *accents*

Language change (1)

- **Why do women lead change from above and below?**
 - Maybe women's changes are more likely to be adopted, because they do more child rearing
 - Maybe women notice/adopt change faster, then men retreat from "women's" forms
 - Maybe "all men" or "all women" is too general a classification, and we need to look at finer details

Language change (2)

- **Why do women use more standard language?**
 - Perhaps other ways of accessing power are not available to them
 - Perhaps there are no advantages to sounding local or non-standard
- **Do *standard* and *female* and *educated* overlap (socio)linguistically?**
 - To some extent – often shared features

Language change (3)

- Does *female = standard* work in all societies?
- Not in Arabic, where women are less likely to use standard (Classical) Arabic
- But it probably makes more sense to look at use of the local standard, not Classical
- When women get access to education, their language becomes more standard, matching the pattern found elsewhere

Discussion

- If you read Kiesling's "Dude" article, go online and find and watch the Bud Light "Dude" commercials
- Describe how they illustrate Kiesling's points (or not)