

The differences in language and gender english language essay

[Linguistics](#), [English](#)



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\n[/toc]\n \nLanguage in the oxford dictionary is defined as follow: " the means of human communication consisting of the use of spoken or written word in a structured way" . thus language is the means by which individual use to communicate with each other. However language we use are not cut off from society. It has a great impact on our societal environment that is they are interrelated basing itself on social distribution. Our focus is on language and gender. Going back to our historical study of language, numerous works have been focused on " sex differentiation" in term of language was carried out by many western scholars in a quest of understanding the differences in term of phonological and lexicon grammar ' exotica' (sounds, patterns word and structure). These study mainly deals with the pronouns and affixes to women and men. In short, it aims at studying the way both gender interact, their choice of words or even rules for social requirements affecting their speech. It is undeniable that society

plays a major role in the structuring of interaction of a man and a woman through the use of language.

1. 2 LINGUISTIC SEX DIFFERENTIATION

Through history, there has been controversy regarding gender in relation to language. Man was and is still perceived as being the superior figure therefore holds more power in terms of language. Nevertheless we can't deny the fact that language contributes to create gender differences in terms of pronouns and words, thus creating a barrier between men and women just like society does. First and foremost, our what is 'gender' and 'sex'. In the Zimmerman's view (1987): "gender is a social construction imposed on individuals of both sexes. Each sex has a distinctive role embedded thoroughly in our institutions and with time it has been naturalized and taken for granted" (West and Zimmerman 1987). Penelope Eckert and Sally McConnell Ginnet (2003) is defined 'sex' as biological categories based primarily on reproductive potential (Language and Gender 2003). In Germanic languages such as English, Danish sex is only distinguished in the third person singular reference he/him she/her or it. The pronoun system of Romance languages such as French, Italian and Spanish are similar except that they mark sex in the third plural ils/ells as well. This marking has been criticized especially by feminists where it is said that man holds more power than woman. For example, 20 girls and one boy in a classroom would be referred to as ils just because of the presence of a male. Thus it tends to be chauvinistic. In Arabic sex marking in the second person singular (you) so that in addressing a person by 'you' will depend whether the person is male (inta) or female (inti). In many languages the choice of pronoun does not

depend on the addressee but that of the speaker. Women use from 'female pronoun' while men use from 'male forms'. In Japanese society language tends to be sexist and there are terms typically restricted for male and female. Thus language creates inequality among sex differences in Japan. The Japanese girls in high school say that first person pronoun 'boku' (exclusively used by male) and 'atashi' (exclusively used by female), they won't be able to compete with men (Jugaku 1979 cited in Okamoto 1995: 314). Hence Japanese girls have to adopt male language in order to compete with boys and gradually attempts to erase the inferiority of woman through language in Japanese society. Biology and social practices are interplayed and can't be separated in societies: when gender is imposed on sex there is an unquestionable assumption that social differences have become naturalized and inevitable among men and women. Linguistic interaction is a behavior which has been learned. Gender performance imposed societal rules of language which influences language use, choice from among a range of lexicon grammatical options. Indeed speakers don't have choices since forms use by man and woman are enforced upon them and inappropriate forms are rejected and connected most of the time. Though gender is not biological, it is considered with the context of social relation between people. Gender is a psycho-social phenomenon which is challenged by feminists and queer theorists. Throughout history, women have suffered from neglect. Statistic has shown that women are more polite than men. Women in work setting use greater use of polite strategies than men. Two honorific title given to female (MISS OR MRS) contrast a single honorific for male irrespective of age. However, 'Mrs' reflects the importance society puts on

women's marital status. According to sociolinguistic survey, language is stereotyped based on gendered difference. Education and socio-economic plays important role affecting one's speech. For example, regardless of countries one's comes from, university student in Britain are likely to speak and write standard English rather than the vernacular language, meaning they ' talk posh'.

1. 2 WOMEN STRATIFICATION STUDIES

In almost all societies, women tend to use more features associated with the prestige standard variety of language than men. A famous study was conducted by the American linguist named William Labov, he examined language variation in new York city(Labov, 1996). Labov showed that individual speech pattern were part of a highly systematic structure of social and stylistic stratification. Harold Orthon claimed without offering any evidence that ' men speak vernacular more frequently, more consistently and more genuinely than women do' (Orthon 1962; 15). According to Trugill, women use the prestige variants more than men do because they are more class conscious. The reason behind it is that women are less secure socially and are being judged severely on their appearance. In order to break the chain of prejudiced inflicted on women, they have permanently adopted a ' proper language' making them appear posh and educated. It is through language that they can break the stereotyped image of woman being second class citizen without education. On the other hand, men are not under pressure to use prestige variants in contrast to women. Moreover, non standard forms found in the vernacular used predominantly by the working

class have masculine connotation which motivate men to use it than women. Hence vernacular variants is associated with masculinity and we can deduced that male language are coarse, rude and impolite. Not using masculine language for a male speaker rather the use of politeness and prestige variants for a male is seen as problematic in his social circle. He will be termed ' gay' or ' man of sodom' which is an insult and can suffers from oppression from heterosexist male friends. This type of language for male is an offence for masculinity and are marginalized for using it. On the other hand, women using vernacular language are in the marginalized groups because of female stereotyped of being soft, polite and gentle. This is a societal norms imposed on women. A woman using ' masculine language' are looked down upon and is assumed to be uneducated and below the expected social class. Negative female connotations are associated to her. Men link to think that they use vernacular more that they actually do. Standard form carries another hidden kind of status or covert prestige. To support this claim, British linguistic, have demonstrated that the work refer in order to substantiate the claim is shaky (D Euchar 1987: Graddol and Swann 1989 53-5). It is claimed that the working class women lack social status and try to acquire the prestige that they have been derived. Men also being ' status conscious' use vernacular variants. In more relaxed atmosphere, men and women switch from informal language. There is indeed evidence that people in some consider non standard speech more appropriate formers tending to associate it with masculinity (James 1996: 113-14).

1. 3 SEX, GENDER AND VOICE INEQUALITY

In assigning women to class category, it is assumed that the father is the bread winner of the conventional family. Wives are assessed on their husbands' positions, occupations and earnings. As a consequent, women have been wrongly classified." her voice was ever soft, gentle and low, An excellent thing in a woman" (William Shakespeare in king Lear) this quotation by William Shakespeare reinforces the idea of sex, gender and voice quality. When you answer the phone, the speaker immediately identify you as either male or female and you are rarely mistaken. There is a clear difference in women's voice and men's voice. These differences are they biological or culturally acquired. The hero in Mills and Boon novel sounds deep and husky in this quotation : " as always that deep slightly husky voice made Annie's spine tingle" (Hamilton, passionate Awakening) . we can hear the epitome of masculinity in the hard, gravely and resonant voice. A woman is supposed to have low, soft and gentle voice compared to the grave and loud voice of male. These stereotyped are culturally viable within and across language. However this is also biological, since the voice quality of men and women have anatomical determinants, the length and thickness of their vocal cords, frequently of vibration and their reasoning capacity chambers.

2. 1 LANGUAGE AND SOCIAL CLASS

Linguistic have known for some time the difference in languages are heed up to social class. Ross (1954) suggested that certain lexical phonological differences in English could be classified as U (upper class) and non U lower class. In the nineteenth century, studies on language were mainly concerned

with regional variation or dialectology. The studies dealt mainly with rural dialect which was disappearing. However with globalization, sociolinguists have feel the need to turn their attention from rural language to cities language where a great number of people live and socialize. The rise in urbanization is connected with an increase in social stratification reflects in linguistic variations. Social dialects are the main subject of study for many linguist which is also known as " social dialectology" and occupies central place for researches. This research beginning with the famous American sociolinguist William Labov (1996) work in New York city. He was the first to introduce a systematic methodology for investing social dialect and the first large scale sociolinguistic survey of urban communities. Through investigation, we can conclude that speech of new Yorkers appeared to vary in random and fickle way. Sometimes they pronounce the name ' Ian' and ' Anne' and sometimes they pronounce post vocalic /r (i. e. r following a vowel) in words such as car while at other times they did not. Labov's study one model after it, pronunciation of postvocalic/r/ in New York city with that of reading of England. The outcome of the study demonstrates the New York lower class as evaluated on factors like age, occupation, education and income and have fewer postvocalic/r / s/ one uses. The postvocalic r/ is widely use geographically and have acquired social compelling distribution. However, just as dissemination of linguistic feature can be ceased by natural geographical barriers, it may also be hindered by social class stratification. Formal speech style- the variation concerns the use of non standard third person singular present tense without s Ex he go, another example is ' the way I are'. This similar behavior can be taken as an suggestion of

membership in a speech community sharing norms for social evaluation of the relative prestige of variable. Working class men speech and middle class women speech are practically the same since they are more close to standard. Social hierarchal among men and women are not equal.

3. 1 GENDER, LANGUAGE AND DISCOURSE

The new wave of feminism has shed the light on the topic language and the sexes which has been brushed aside. They wrote : " there has been a burst of interest and research" (Kamer, Thore & Henley 1978, 683). Feminists scholars meditate on current tendencies and new standpoints in the study of gender, language and discourse. Do women and men use the same language in different ways? In what ways does language - in structure, content and daily usage reflect and help widen the gap of sexual inequality? How can sexist language be changed? However, there is an assumption in westernized societies that women and men can be treated as internally homogeneous group. The core of this discourse is on ' specificity' (looking at men and women in particular setting) and ' complexity'(looking at the interaction of gender with other kind of identity category and power relation) (Deborah Cameron 1998: 947) .

3. 2 DOMINANCE AND DIFFERENCE.

The core of the debate on language on gender is : ' Do women and men use language differently?'. However researchers have agreed with the following that gender plays major role affecting our language and can be proved by observing female and male pattern of speech in our society. As a result, feminist linguistics have come into existence because of that difference.

They aim at understanding the issue of its nature, origins and its significance. Debora Tannen's book 'you just don't understand (1990)' her work has been successfully recognized by sociolinguistic because of her exemplification on language and gender. However she has been harshly criticized by feminists for getting the wrong idea for her 'difference' and 'sub cultural' approach to the conversational troubles for men and women. Her topic "the relativity of linguistic strategies" she conceptualizes gender as a form of dominance and difference but also the reviewing of their relationship in linguistic study. According to her, interruption can be either a status linked denial of someone's speaking rights or a mark of high involvement that signals affiliation rather than power. Talk difference has invariably political agenda. Feminists have locate gender in individual subject rather than in social relations and processes(Crawford ; 950). Women have been blamed for their linguistic deficiencies which is called 'communication problem' in women.

4. 1 SEXISM IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE

The English language for centuries has praised men historically in all areas. Most successful hero, writer, philosopher, singer were male. Social power is reflected through language by treating words to refer to women as marked and men unmarked. For example, poet for male, and poetess for female. Language pinpoints this gender differentiation. This kind of sexist language has been criticized and it paves the way for woman to be categorized as lower class citizen in some societies. Language adjectives, pronoun

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