

Examine good or
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reflect



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Examine the language in relation to gender, and observe its changing role in society. A businessman is aggressive; a businesswoman is pushy. A businessman is good on details; she is picky.

... He follows through; she doesn't know when to quit. He stands firm; she is hard.

... His judgements are her prejudices. He is a man of the world; she's been around. He isn't afraid to say what is on his mind; she is mouthy.

He exercises authority diligently; she's power mad. He's closemouthed; she's secretive. He climbed the ladder of success; she slept her way to the top.

From How to Tell a Businessman from a Businesswoman, Graduate School of management UCLA. From the first moment a child begins to understand the spoken word, they begin to receive messages about society's view of the different sexes. Language itself can not be deemed good or bad, but it does reflect individual or societal values. The above example displays the way in which language can be used to stereotype gender.

Both sexes in the example are behaving in the same way but the language used has separated them, praising the male whilst disparaging the female. In order to explore the differences between males and females regarding language we must look at whether or not language is sexist, whether it is used differently by different genders and how language has changed, if at all, in relation to these points. Women's roles in society have changed considerably over time, and they are now valued more than ever in society. Chafetz (1990) has claimed that this has largely arisen due to the media. She

says that newspapers and magazines now largely avoid sexist language, and even advertisers have changed their depiction of both genders to some degree.

Universities have expanded their curricula to include courses for women, even hospitals have changed their policies pertaining to childbirth in directions originally propounded by womens movement activities; i. e. developing birthing centres etc.

These examples are merely a few of the multitudes of changes that have occurred. Trask (1995) has pointed out that the utilisation of language differs with gender. For instance, women have more of a tendency to use finer discriminations than men do in some areas such as colour terms. Women would be more at ease using the labels crimson, ecru, or beige, than men and men would be found to use the simpler version: Its blue, not cornflower; what the hell is cornflower (my dad when looking at paint.) Trask also noted that men have a tendency to drop more expletives into a conversation than women, although some women do swear, especially younger females (just sit in a student common lounge for a while to back this up); which is becoming worryingly commonplace. Jeperson, an early linguist, included a chapter on The woman in his book Language: Its Nature, Development and Origin (1922).

He claims that the womens contribution to the language is to maintain its purity, caused by the way they shrink from coarseness and vulgarity. (A totally outmoded theory.): There can be no doubt that women excersise a great and universalinfluence on linguistic development through their

instinctively shrinking from coarse and vulgar expressions and their preference for refined, and (in certain spheres) veiled and indirect expression.

Jespersen 1922. He does maintain, however, that it is men's language which is endowed with vigour, imagination and creativity. Without it, he states, there is a danger of the language becoming languid and insipid. He goes on to claim that women have a smaller vocabulary than men and that which they do have they tend to misuse. As examples he quotes that women use intensifying adverbs with disregard of their proper meaning, as in the German *riesig klein* (gigantically small), the English *awfully pretty*, and *terribly nice*...

.. Danish *raedsimt morosom* (awfully funny). (1922) He claims that women also suffer from an inability to finish sentences and while there is more talk from women there is less substance. Talbot assures us that none of these claims were based on evidence but were mere conjecture on Jespersen's part. She goes on to add that the women that he encountered may well have had smaller vocabulary than the men, but that women then were often denied the education permitted to most men.