PRAGMATICS OF GENDER DIFFERENCES IN COMMUNICATION

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Abstract: *Language is an important communication tool in everyday life, and an understanding of how language reflects and shapes gender roles can provide valuable insights into the social construction and perception of gender in society. Many psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, and other researchers into language and gender have shown a keener interest in the differences between men and women in the ways they communicate and interact than in the similarities between them, focusing on aspects such as style of language and speech. By highlighting some of the important aspects of cross-gender communication and language variation, the main objective of this paper is to suggest areas for more in-depth research in the future that could produce findings.*

Keywords: *gender, communication, context, settings*

Introduction: The idea that males and females speak differently has attracted the attention of researchers in psycholinguistics and linguists. Researchers have studied the ways in which men and women use different patterns of communication: for example, how males and females pronounce words, interrupt, pause, use vocabulary and ask questions. Many psychologists, sociolinguistics, anthropologists and other researchers into language and gender have been interested in the differences, rather than the similarities, between men and women. The term ‗gender' does not simply mean biological sex but refers to everyday work and social interaction (Paltridge, 2012). According to Cameron (2005), gender is ―not something a person has, but something that a person does. Gender awareness is an important aspect of people's understanding of each other.

Singh (2001) suggests various reasons why studies on this subject are important. The first reason is concerned with their significance to psycholinguistics: it has been established that, in some language tasks, different parts of the male and female brain are activated for the same tasks. The second reason is their value to linguists and psycholinguists in general. For instance, understanding how male and female speakers use language assists the study of sociolinguistics and the creation of language acquisition models. Singh adds that such studies can help us to understand how language-disordered subjects are reformed. In many conversations between males and females, miscommunication or misunderstanding occurs because men and women use different conversational rules and infer meanings differently. In other words, they employ different linguistic patterns in their conversation. This might be because men and women have different aims for starting a conversation with others. With this in mind, Tannen (1990) argues that sorting out the differences in a conversational style can help people confront real conflicts of interest and find a shared language in which to negotiate them. There is a large body of evidence that the language of women is not always the same as that of men. Crawford (1995) noted that every empirical study of sex difference in language use cites the work of Robin Lakoff who began the search for the main features of women‘s speech. She published several articles in 1973, in addition to her well-known book, Language and Women’s Place.

In the earliest decades, researchers examined features which could be interpreted as interactional dominance or power strategies, such as the distribution of turns of talk, the number of interruptions, and the amount of feedback contributed by women and men in different contexts, as well as features which expressed politeness, such as linguistic hedges and intensives. Speech acts also attracted a good deal of attention; researchers examined the gender distribution of directives, requests, compliments, apologies, requests, and complaints, for instance in English-speaking communities and later in the usage of women and men in other cultures (e.g., Bargiela-Chiappini &Kádár, 2011).

Using a more dynamic theoretical framework, researchers in Pavlenko,

Blackledge, Piller, and Teutsch-Dwyer's collection (2001) also address power issues, examining the position of women in a range of multilingual settings. The authors analyze some of the socio-pragmatic challenges faced by minority women, such as language choice in the workplace, and by second language learners, such as the effects of sexual harassment in L2 learning contexts, and the discomfort of modifying one's gender performance to conform to the target culture's norms. On the other hand, Pavlenko (2007) also demonstrates, through analyzing learners' autobiographies, that new gendered subject positions or identities offered by the target language discourse may be welcomed by immigrant women, a process labeled "self-reconstruction." Menard-Warwick (2009) develops this theme by examining the socio-pragmatic strategies adopted by Spanish-speaking immigrants in California. Analyzing personal narratives and classroom discourse behaviors, she identifies the women's discursive acts of resistance to and acceptance of, particular gender ideologies in their daily lives. Those who address the implications of such research for educators, including second language teachers, are explored by Shi (2006), who points out their responsibility to facilitate the renegotiation of identities and mitigate social factors that may inhibit learners' progress toward legitimate membership in a new community. Finally, applied research on socio-pragmatic features of workplace discourse has provided useful input for workplace communication skills programs (e.g., Holmes et al., 2011). But while gendered socio-pragmatic strategies, such as (normatively masculine) challenging and congestive humor, and (normatively feminine) relationally oriented small talk have been identified in workplace interaction, there is little research investigating the practical applications of this research in new contexts. Similarly while gendered aspects of interaction in job and promotion interviews have been identified, research exploring the implications for new immigrants has not yet been undertaken. There is clearly still a great deal of work to be done in terms of research into the gendered dynamics of second language learning and pragmatics.

Focusing to applied linguistic research into the gendered dynamics of pragmatics more generally. In this section discussed how people pragmatically

perform many
different gender identities in interaction. Work on gender and pragmatics in social interaction (in workplaces and beyond) has been very much influenced in recent years by a postmodern turn in which the gendering of on going performances has become the focus, and gender has at the same time become pluralized into masculinities and femininities (see Cameron, 2005, for a thorough summary). In other words, attention has turned to how gender manifests itself in relation to other social constructs such as class, race, and sexual identity, focusing on the differences within masculinity and within femininity. This pluralization of gender has influenced the study of gender and pragmatics by encouraging a focus on how different versions of gender might be influencing our interpretations in conversation (e.g., Bucholtz, 2004; Hall, 2005, 2009). How do masculinities, femininities, and sexualities become involved with sense-making? Along with this postmodern turn has come a focus on queer linguistics, an approach which aims to query heteronormativity (i.e., the implicit assumption that everyone is heterosexual and
that it is normal) and its role in conversational inference.

A fruitful avenue of research has been the examination of gender and leadership, particularly how power and politeness are related to gendered inference. Power in this setting is treated as a force which is dynamic and constantly constructed/negotiated during social interaction. Research demonstrates that in order to be an effective leader, both men and women need to deploy a diversity of socio-pragmatic strategies, including both normatively masculine and normatively feminine ones (see Holmes & King, in press). Examples of normatively masculine strategies highlighted by this research include giving unmitigated directives, asking controlling questions, and challenging the statements of others. Normatively feminine examples include offsetting disagreement, hedging criticism, and lightening certain speech acts with humor. In actual fact, effective leaders are habitually flexible in the use of both normatively masculine and normatively feminine socio-pragmatic strategies, but interactional

norms may indeed be gendered. Some settings are “masculinist” in leaning, such as the police force, the army, or construction sites, and research in these workplaces has demonstrated, for example, a tendency for less mitigation of directives, thus confirming societal understandings of the way women and men are generally expected to behave (Holmes & King, in press). However much more subtle discursive processes take place when roles are more equal and speakers enact power to control discourse and access authority. Women and men alike have been observed using normatively masculine strategies effectively in spite of their normative status.

Gender and discourse is very much influenced by the pragmatics of politeness, which tends to be normatively feminized in many communities because of its relational qualities. However, once again, its normative status does not fully determine its accessibility by speakers during interaction. The use of relational humor in the workplace provides an interesting example of how stereotypes about humor fail to obtain in research findings. Jocular abuse and teasing (perhaps less polite) have been framed in research as examples of masculine, power-oriented humor whereas feminine humor is seen as more empathetic and collective. Although there is some evidence for this difference (Coates, 1996, 2003), other research findings demonstrate that it is indeed more normative than it is normal. That is, both types of humor are accessible by men and women in workplace settings depending on the desired effect (e.g., opposition vs. collegiality) (see Holmes, 2006).

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the study of language and gender provides valuable insights into the ways communication reflects and reinforces societal gender roles. Research has demonstrated that men and women exhibit different linguistic patterns, influenced by social, cultural, and contextual factors. While traditional studies focused on gender differences in language use, contemporary research acknowledges the complexity of gender as a dynamic and performative construct. The intersection of gender with class, race, and sexuality further highlights the

fluidity of communication styles. Additionally, workplace interactions and leadership dynamics illustrate the strategic use of both masculine and feminine discourse strategies, challenging rigid stereotypes. Despite progress in understanding gendered communication, there remains a need for further research into its implications in evolving social and professional contexts. Future studies should continue to explore how language shapes and is shaped by gender identity across diverse settings.

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