

GENDER DIFFERENCES IN LANGUAGE USE

Sayed Naqibullah ORFAN (University of Taqhar, Afghanistan)

E-mail: [sayeed.naqibullah@fulbrightmail.org](mailto:sayed.naqibullah@fulbrightmail.org)

Abstract

The purpose of the study is to explore the differences between men and women's speech. It particularly examines gender differences in phonology, morphology, syntax, use of taboos and conversation. The author reviewed the literature on gender differences in language and summarized several research papers in different countries. The review shows that women and men are different in the way they use language. Numerous factors including social organization and culture can account for gender differences in language. The researcher suggests more research on gender differences in language considering speech communities in underdeveloped countries like Afghanistan.

Keywords: *language, gender, differences, culture, speech community*

Introduction

Language is used in all human activities. It plays a vital role in society because of its communicative functions (Janfaza et al., 2012; Kuhl, 2004). It also reflects a number of characteristics of its users in a speech community, e.g., someone who cannot speak standard variety of a language is believed to have a low socioeconomic status, and someone who can speak standard variety of a language is considered to be educated and a member of higher social class (Heller, 2011; Agha, 2006; Milroy & Milroy, 2012; Kacewicz et al., 2014). Men and women have different social roles in different cultures around the world. Society has various expectations from these genders. Different social roles and expectations from men and women naturally affect their way of communica-

tion (Olah et al., 2018; Fodor, 2006; Bosak et al., 2018). Language is also considered a differentiating point between women and men, meaning that men and women speak differently and employ different linguistic items in certain occasions. Some language patterns of women and men are the same while others are different. In this paper, the author explores gender differences in phonology, morphology, syntax, taboo words and conversation.

Phonology

There are phonological differences between women and men's speech. In a split of second, an individual with a normal hearing ability can distinguish whether a man or a woman is speaking when she/he hears her/him. One difference is pitch of the voice. The men's voice is on average lower in pitch while the women's voice is higher in pitch (Xia, 2013; Dumanig, 2004). Another difference is that women produce certain phonemes differently from males. For example, in Chukchi, a Siberian language, men drop /n/ and /t/ when they take place between vowels, but women pronounce them, e.g., Chukchi female speakers pronounce nitvaqenant while males pronounce nitvaqaant (Lakoff, 1975).

According to Lakoff (1975), generally speaking, women answer questions with rising intonation in English. It shows women's gentleness, and sometimes it might demonstrate a lack of confidence. On the other hand, men answer questions with falling intonation, which shows they are confident of what they say, and sometimes it demonstrates that men are powerful. Simpson and Adrian (2009) argue that these differences come from a number of biological differences between men and women particularly muscles of speech, e.g., dimension of the mouth, throat and vocal cords.

Jiang (2011) studied gender difference in intonation patterns of English. The main goal of the paper was to explore the reasons for gender difference in use of intonation and its implication for nonnative speakers of English. The researcher used sound samples of native speakers of English from IViE - a corpus that contains 36 hours of speech data. The speech data came from records of 6 girls and six boys who were all 16 years old. The girls and boys all came from several cities in the UK. The researcher analyzed the nuclear pitch accent models and F0 contours of sound samples of girls and boys. The study found that male speakers used falling tones in statement while female speakers

used rising tones. Tench (2015) believes that the intonational function of falling tones with imperatives, wh-questions and statements is that a speaker is authoritative. However, according to Lakoff (1975), the intonational function of rising tone is to show a speaker's respect to the hearer's authority and knowledge. The intonation pattern of women (rises) is considered to be polite and it shows non-assertiveness (McConnell-Ginet, 1978).

Morphology

There are some morphological differences between the speech of women and men. Women use color words more than men do. In general, women tend to know and use almost all types of colors including tertiary ones (e.g., blue green and yellow green). For example, women use color words such as mauve, beige, and aquamarine more than men do. On the other hand, men do not know all the color words and most men do not use the color words women do (Fider et al., 2019; Mostovaia, 2009; Simpson & Tarrant, 1991).

Moreover, Women use many adjectives such as adorable, lovely, fantastic, charming, sweet, and lovely, but very few men use such adjectives. Women also use certain words and phrases such as so exquisite, so good, and such fun to emphasize how certain things affect them (Salami, 2004). For example, a woman's response to a waiter's question (how is the meal?) in a restaurant might be "gorgeous" while a man's response might be "good." According to Xia (2013), women use more adjectives to describe their feelings about things and people because they are more sensitive to the environment, and they do not want to make others feel uncomfortable. In addition, swearing and cursing are much more common among men than among women. Therefore, men use swearwords and curse words more frequently than women do (Jespersen, 1922).

Syntax

Syntactic differences exist between the speech of women and men, but there are not particular grammatical structures used only by either men or women. Women and men are different in the way they use grammar structures to achieve what they want. For example, women use more hedging phrases and expressions (e.g., kind of, sort of, I mean, you know, and maybe) than men do, simply because they try to be more unassertive and more careful when they express their views. They also attempt to avoid any imposition on the audience (Coates, 2015;

Another difference is the use of interrogative sentences. According to Lakoff and Bucholtz (2004) women use more interrogative sentences than men do because women consider interrogative sentences as a strategy to continue a good conversation with an interlocutor. They also use tag questions more than men since tag questions can ease the tenseness of tone, e.g., the president addressed the nation last week, didn't he? Moreover, men tend to use imperative sentences more than women do because men are more assertive and insensitive than women are. Women prefer to use more polite sentences instead of imperative sentences. Additionally, women use euphemism more frequently (Al-Shamali (1997; Olimat, 2020) According to Jespersen (1922), women are more euphemistic, meaning that they use implicit and indirect words and phrases to talk about tabooed subjects and objects or unpleasant things. For example, they use "I fell off the roof" to express menstruation, and "the small of one's back" to talk about buttocks.

Taboo Language

Taboo is topics forbidden to talk about in a community. It also refers to words connected to taboo topics. In other words, taboos are topics or words that considered improper and inappropriate in a community (Radcliffe-Brown, 2014; Jay et al., 2008; Colbeck & Bowers, 2012). For example, it is forbidden to talk about sex in Afghanistan. It is tabooed to ask a man's wife's name. In addition, it is inappropriate to use sex-related words in Afghanistan. Taboos have existed in almost all cultures in the world and they change over time. Taboos differ from culture to culture. For example, it is tabooed to ask about a person's salary in American culture while it is not in Afghanistan culture (Spears, 1992).

Women and men use taboo words differently. Extensive research has been done on gender difference in taboo use. The literature suggests that men use swear words more often than women do. Furthermore, women use less offensive curse words than men. Gender differences are found in the use of fighting words, sexual terms, insult words and harassing speech (Ueno, 2004).

Zhou (2010) studied gender differences in use of taboo language on the Internet. She collected data from conversations from three chat rooms in Palace - a chat box website. The conversations came from mixed gender chat-rooms, female-only chat-rooms and male-only chat-rooms. She read all the conversations closely and analyzed the number

and frequency of occurrence of taboo words used by female and male participants. The research found that men used more taboo words than women did. It also revealed that men knew a larger number of taboo words than women and they used them frequently. Further, it concluded that women used more words that are taboo in the same-sex conversations while men used less taboo words in single-sex talks.

In another study, Gati (2015) studied use of swear words by female native speakers of American English in single-sex and mix-sex conversations and one of the purposes of the research was to find out in what gender constellation women use curse words more. The researcher listened to both recorded conversations of single-sex and mix-sex talks. The recordings were gathered through the Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken American English - a corpus which includes 249,000 words recorded all over the United States of America. The corpus focuses only on conversations that take place naturally and face to face. He analyzed the curse words in the recordings quantitatively to find out the frequency of use of swear words by different sexes, and qualitatively to discover the context of the use of swear words. The researcher concluded that women used more swear words in the presence of their gender while they use less swear words in mix-sex conversations.

Conversation

In daily interaction, men and women are different in topics they choose to talk about, and it varies from culture to culture. In general, women are more likely to talk about family, children, clothes, cooking, lifestyle, and fashion. On the contrary, men are interested in talking about sports, politics, business, and cars. Moreover, when men talk to men, the content of their talks generally focuses on competition, aggression and getting things done while the content of women's talks focuses on feelings, relationship with others, and family when they talk to each other (Tannen, 1999; Clark, 1998; Nordenstam, 1992) Furthermore, women tend to use more polite words and phrases and more compliments than men do so that they can keep their social relationships with others. In contrast, men are assumed to use words and phrases by which they get things done, and they are more likely to disagree with others more bluntly than women do (Moore, 1922).

Ueno (2004) studied gender differences in interaction styles of Japanese men and women. She targeted three interactional patterns in her study: interruptions, reactions to in-

terruptions and backchannels. The data of the study came from excerpts of a Japanese talk show. She selected ten settings in which 38 women and men between ages of 20 to 50 were actively engaged in conversations. The men and women were Japanese celebrities including actors, singers and comedians. She analyzed the data quantitatively; she identified interruptions, reactions to interruptions and backchannels. She also analyzed the data qualitatively; she examined the context of different interruptions. The findings showed that both Japanese women and men were willing to give up the floor when interrupted, and both gender provided supportive interruptions more frequently. It also revealed that women interrupted the conversation more often than men did, and women provided more backchannels than men did.

Who Talks More, Men or Women

As to whether either women or men talk more, it depends on the context. Generally, in a formal setting (e.g., a business meeting), men speak more than women do because they are more powerful and authoritative. In an informal setting, women generally speak more than men, and it varies from culture to culture. In addition, it depends on the relationship between two or more women who participate in a conversation. Additionally, men and women differ in using body language, and they use them for different purposes. For instance, a man nods to show agreement with an individual while a woman nods to demonstrate that she is listening and wants the speaker to keep talking (Kaplan, 2016; Mulac, 1989).

Gender discrimination is reflected in so many languages (Lan and Jingxia, 2019). That is, some languages have pronoun system that differentiates men from women. They also have gender morphology, meaning that verbs are inflected based on the gender of nouns. For example, Arabic has different pronouns for women and men. There are fourteen pronouns in Arabic out of which six refer to females; six refer to males and two are neutral. It also has many gender-based morphemes. In Arabic, there are both grammatical and biological genders. In other words, there are words in Arabic, which are female grammatically, but neutral biologically, and there are words, which are both grammatically and biologically female. In addition, there is a morpheme that changes masculine gender into feminine gender (Teh et al., 2009; Alkohlani, 2016; Kheiry, 2020).

Ex (1): Telmizun (male student) kharaja (exited) menal (from) fasl (classroom) – a male student left the class.

Ex (2): *Telmizatun* (female student) *kharajat* (exited) *menal* (from) *fasl* (classroom) – a female student left the class.

In (1) and (2), a male student (*telmiz*) is differentiated from a female student (*telmizat*) by the suffix “*t*” and the verb is inflected based on the gender.

Some languages have a particular morpheme for a particular gender. For example, Spanish has a masculine gender morpheme (*o*), and a feminine gender morpheme (*a*), and they generally refer to men and women, respectively. Spanish is considered to be a sexiest language because of its extensive grammatical gender (Lomotey Legon, 2015). On the other hand, there are languages that do not have any gender systems. For example, Persian has neither a pronoun that refers to a particular gender nor it has a particular morpheme that represents a particular gender. Ex (3): (*?o*) *englisi khand* – s/he English studied – s/he studied English. In (3), the pronoun (*?o*) refers to either a woman or a man (Mace, 2015).

Why gender differences in language

There are three claims as to why there are differences between the speech of men and women. Women and men are not the same physiologically and psychologically, and this fact leads to speech differences between men and women. That is, men are rather pre-disposed to be more independent, and they are more interested in vertical relationships, meaning that they want hierarchy, and they want to be more powerful than others. On the contrary, women prefer to get involved with others, and they tend to be supportive with one another. They usually do not compete with one another, and they are more interested in horizontal relationships - they do not want hierarchical structure in society, and they want everyone to be equal with one another (Holmes, 2013), Lakoff, 2003).

Secondly, social organization, which is based on power and wealth in many societies, affect language use not only between the upper class and the lower class, but also between men and women. Language reflects social structure. In other words, it reflects whether an individual is powerful in a community, and what role s/he plays in the community. Generally, women are more powerless than men are in society. Like the lower social class, however, women have to use more prestigious and polite forms of language to maintain the relationship with and protect themselves from the powerful men.

Another claim is that females and males are social individuals and they learn to use language differently because speech behavior, like any other behavior, is learned. Men and women are exposed to different experiences in society, and they are also expected to act in certain different ways in society. Therefore, men learn to speak masculine language, and women learn to speak feminine language (Thomas, 2004).

Culture also plays a great role on the extent of speech differences between men and women (Kramsch, 2014). In a democratic culture, there might not be so many differences between the speech of men and women because they are equal in many ways. For instance, American women and men may not differ a lot in their speech compared to other cultures. There have been feminists attempting to minimize the speech differences between men and women in the USA. On the other hand, in a nondemocratic culture, there are many differences between the speech of men and women simply because the culture is socially hierarchical and mostly patriarchal, and it promotes gender inequality and discrimination. For instance, the culture of Afghanistan, which is substantially influenced by strict interpretation of Islamic rulings and tribal values and traditions, is more biased towards women and it strips girls and women of their rights, e.g., social and political activities (Orfan et al., 2021; Noori & Orfan, 2021). The traditional practices consider calling a woman by her first name in public a taboo in Afghanistan (Orfan & Rahimi, 2022). Such cultural and traditional practices lead to marginalization of women and their poor participation in their communities, which may result in developing certain linguistic behaviors.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the speech of women and men differ in certain ways. There are phonological, morphological, and syntactic differences between the speech of men and women, and they are highly influenced by cultures. Women and men tend to choose different topics when they interact to one another, and the topics vary from culture to culture. The idea of whether a man or a woman talks more depends on the setting of the talk. Normally, in a formal setting, men talk more than women do since they are powerful; however, in an informal setting, women might talk more than men do. Biological differences between men and women, hierarchy of social organization, and different expectations of society from both genders, may account for gender differences in language. The

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author suggests further studies on gender differences in language use particularly in underdeveloped countries like Afghanistan where gender inequality is pervasive and social roles are substantially gendered.

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