

PROBLEMS OF GENDER ASPECT IN LINGUISTIC RESEARCH. THEORIES IN GENDER RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

This article addresses the multifaceted challenges associated with integrating gender aspects into linguistic research, examining various theoretical frameworks employed in gender studies. It explores the complex intersection between language and gender, analyzing how linguistic structures and practices reflect and perpetuate societal gender norms and stereotypes. Drawing from interdisciplinary perspectives, including sociolinguistics, feminist theory, and discourse analysis, the article evaluates different theoretical approaches to understanding gender in language. It discusses the contributions and limitations of essentialist, social constructionist, and intersectional theories in elucidating the intricacies of gendered language use.

Keywords: gender aspect, linguistic research, gender theories, language and gender, linguistic analysis, gender stereotypes, language use

The topic of gender differences is widespread worldwide, with many scholars investigating the reasons behind such differences in various disciplines [Maltz & Borker, 1982:64; Crawford 1995:277]. Some studies focus on the relationship between language and gender. Sociolinguists have studied various aspects of gender linguistics for many years, making efforts to provide reasonable explanations for observed differences in the behavior of men and women.

Numerous theories and concepts have been proposed in various articles regarding gender differences. For instance, one perspective suggests that these differences stem from male dominance, while another hypothesis posits that they are linked to cultural factors. Yet another concept focuses on social structure.

Scholars [Maltz & Borker, 1982:79; Crawford 1995:289] advocating for the concept of male dominance consider it as the cause for the formation of linguistic differences. Maltz and Borker [Maltz & Borker, 1982:90; Crawford 1995:270] adhere to the concept of cultural differences, viewing gender differences as a form of cultural differentiation, and communication

between men and women as a form of intercultural communication. These viewpoints have their drawbacks: the concept of male dominance only highlights the status and role of men, overlooking the fact that the social status of women also influences language usage, as well as the impact of cultural differences between men and women.

Since the 1970s, Western linguists and scholars have conducted numerous studies on utterances and speech acts, yielding a plethora of research findings published in articles, books, journals, and so forth [Pomerantz, 1978:149; Holmes, 1988:280; Herbert, 1990:89].

Various researchers [Mead, 1935:49; Rubin, 1984:119] concluded that men and women have different roles and that these roles are unequal. Accordingly, the concept of “gender” was necessary to describe how men and women interact, the socially constructed categories to determine what men and women should do, and how they should behave.

Language and gender are a relatively new area of sociolinguistics, marked by the publication of Lakoff's “Language and Woman's Place” in 1975. Since then, this field has garnered significant interest among linguists, both for ethnographic and ideological reasons. Ethnographic linguists have sought to gather reliable data to study and explain folk linguistic beliefs that men and women speak and act differently [Fishman 1978:39; Spender 1980:69]. “Gender” has now stabilized as a term, allowing for the differentiation of individuals in terms of their sociocultural behavior and denoting male and female behavior as scales rather than a dichotomy [Holmes 2001:90].

Research findings in this area [Labov, 1966:145; Trudgill, 1974:289] have shown that men and women indeed use different forms, particularly phonologically, and linguists have concluded that within each social class, women use more standard forms than men. For example, Trudgill [Trudgill, 1974:290] found that significantly more women than men in Norwich used standard forms rather than vernacular in written and spoken language. Various gender studies today can be more accurately characterized as “sociolinguistic.” It tends to move away from large-scale, quantitative, correlational methods toward more local, contextualized, and ethnographic approaches that investigate gender as intersecting with other social concepts such as class and sex within specific communities.

These studies focus on gendered differences in the ways people interact in various social and professional contexts. Three theories were proposed and examined in this study.

Lakoff's “deficit” theory [Lakoff 1975:120] asserted that from an early age, girls are taught to use a separate “female language”: they are socialized to speak “like a woman.” This language was deemed more cautious, tentative, indirect, and therefore a weaker version of the male language, trapping them in a perpetual double bind. It was also noted that this female

language mainly manifested in a series of modifiers (such as hedging responses and tag questions), which, according to the researcher, blurred the message and portrayed the speaker as insecure and powerless.

Lakoff's proposition that women construct their own subordination through language use was a precursor to the theory of "dominance." Speaking about language as a system, Spender [Spender 1980:76] argued that language had evolved over centuries to represent male interests and express the male experience. She noted three ways in which language maintains this androcentric perspective:

- Linguistic marking of terms to denote women (e.g., manageress, stewardess).
- Semantic derogation (how terms denoting women, such as housewife, over time became "downgraded" or demeaned; [Schulz 1990:58]).
- Lexical gaps (the absence of woman-oriented lexicon to positively describe certain female experiences, such as childlessness or a single woman).

Cultural Differences Theory

Boys learn to compete with others for access to the "platform," use referential, goal-directed language, and speak to make an impression. In contrast, girls, as an alternative, learn to build relationships of equality and trust, collaborate with others to achieve a goal, and express feelings and emotions. These conflicting conversational goals corresponded to different gendered speech "styles," whereby "women talk and hear language and its inner side, while men talk and hear language of status and independence."

Language and gender studies have firmly distanced themselves from theories of gender differences and, as Holmes [Holmes 2007:234] puts it, are "swept up in the wave of social constructionism," emphasizing diversity of genders rather than differences. Although social constructionism has now solidified as the dominant approach, it has not been universally embraced as the ideal theory for feminist linguistics.

Social Constructionism and the "Postmodern Turn" This postmodern perspective asserts that men and women do not possess individual essence, character, or "core" [Crawford 1995:90]; there are no inherent male or female characteristics, only those that are manifested through repeated bodily or linguistic actions. Any apparent characteristics are effects produced through specific actions we perform. Thus, from the standpoint of social constructionism, gender can be viewed as relational, a process, something that is done, and an important resource for constructing gender roles and identities. If gender is merely cultural constructs, they can be challenged and resisted. Gender can potentially be reconceived in terms of a multitude of roles

and positions for men and women. The social constructionist approach suggests that gender roles and identities resist generalization or simple categorization.

Similar to gender is perceived as a mutable, multifaceted form of identity constructed and realized through speech and behavior, rather than simply determined by a person's body at birth or early socialization.

The availability of a range of new interdisciplinary research methods has made such exploration more feasible [Simpson 2011:89].

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