

GENDER, POLITENESS AND STEREOTYPES

How does society relate to the fact that women's speech is different? How does society relate to different linguistic choices used by men and women?

1. Women's language and confidence

Example #1, p. 301. Comment!

Lakoff (1975) stated that women's speech reflects their subordinate status.

1.1 Features in 'women's language

Study the list (a-j) on p. 302-303. Review Section 4 in Lecture #7.

All these features were unified by their function: expressing insecurity, lack of confidence.

Problems with subsequent research: ignoring "functional coherence, and simply listing any forms that produced a statistical difference between women and men, without providing any satisfactory explanation for why these differences might have arisen". (p. 303)

Further: inadequate methodology:

- Artificial recording environment;
- Artificial constraint (for example, a screen);
- Assigned topics;
- Lack of linguistic expertise;
- etc.

Lakoff's linguistic features relevant to the coherent function may be divided into two groups:

- i. reducing the strength of the utterance – hedging devices;
- ii. intensify the strength of the utterance – boosting devices.

Study the Exercise #2 (p. 304).

Lakoff: Women use more hedging and boosting devices than men. However, these devices do not always express uncertainty!

1.2 Lakoff's linguistic features as politeness devices

Tags may have several functions:

Expressing uncertainty: Example #5, p. 306.

Expressing politeness: Example #6, p. 306.

Facilitates conversation: Example #7, p. 306.

Expressing a directive or a criticism: Example #8, p. 307.

Confrontational device: Example #9, p. 307.

Study Table #12.1 on p. 307.

What about other cultures? Comment on the Mexican, Malagasy and Samoan practices (pp. 309-310)!

2. Interaction

2.1 Interruptions

Studies show that

- (i) in same gender interactions, interruptions are *evenly distributed between men and women*;
- (ii) in cross-gender interaction, *most interruptions were from men*.

Study the Table 12.2 on p. 312.

2.2 Conversational feedback

Women give more encouraging feedback than men!

Study the Example #13, p. 314.

2.3 Explanations

With regard to interruptions: the subordinate status of women may explain the pattern of *interruptions*. Study the two doctor/patient scenarios (p. 315) – comment!

Different norms for women and men conversations: the context for the former is small group and socialization patterns; for the latter, more public, overwhelmingly referential oriented.

These differences may explain the apparent differences in *feedback* patterns.

Study the Exercise #9 on p. 315.

2.4 Gossip

Relaxed atmosphere, often group talk.

Women: personal experiences, feelings, problems, etc.
Linguistic features include: propositions expressing feelings, tags facilitating conversations, etc.

Study the Examples #14 and #15, p. 316.

Men: often conflicting accounts of the same event, abrupt topic change, arguing, etc.
Linguistic features include: long pauses, responses challenged, discouraging feedback, etc.

Study the Examples #16 and #17, p. 317.

Do women and men represent *different cultural groups*? If so, it might explain miscommunications between men and women.

Study the Example #18, p. 318.

What is your opinion?

3. The linguistic construction of gender

Gender identity: *constructive* rather than fixed.

Constructing gender identities instead of considering it as a given category!

Examples: women in the police force – use features index masculinity;
men in hairdressing salons – use features index femininity.
These indexes include *linguistic features*!

Study the examples and comments on pp. 320-321.

Linguistic stereotypes: conscious characterization of a certain social group with regard to the speech expected from members of the group.

