

## GENDER AND AGE

### A. GENDER

S. Romaine. 1994. *Language in society*: the word *sex* has biological implications. The word *gender* is more appropriate: it distinguishes people based on their social and/or linguistic behaviour.

Women and men from the same speech community may use different linguistic forms.

#### 1. Gender-exclusive speech differences: highly structured communities

- (i) Gros Ventre (Amerindian tribe in Montana)  
pronunciation differences, for example:  

[kja' tsa]	women's form
[dza' tsa]	men's form
	'bread'
- (ii) Bengali (in India)  
Women: initial [l]  
Men: initial [n]
- (iii) Yana (extinct Amerindian language)  
words used by men are longer than the same words used by women

Study the Example #2, p.161.

- (iv) Japanese  
Vocabulary differences, for example:

Women's form	Men's form	
ohiya	mizu	<i>water</i>
onaka	hara	<i>stomach</i>
oisii	umai	<i>delicious</i>
taberu	kuu	<i>eat</i>

Pronouns also reflect gender differences in Japanese:

Study the examples on p. 161

Changes in modern Japanese: vocabulary differences reflect degrees of formality as opposed to signaling gender!

## 2. Gender-preferential speech features: social dialect research

Speech styles of women and men vary in the frequencies with which they employ particular linguistic alternatives.

-ing [ɪŋ] vs. -in' [ɪn] more women use the *-ing* form

In Montreal French, men delete [l] more often than women in phrases such as *il y a* or *il fait*.

In Sidney (Australia) words like *thing* may be pronounced with initial [f] more frequently by men!

*Women tend to use more standard forms!*

## 3. Gender and social class

Study Figure 7.1 on p. 164

In the highest and the lowest social groups women score similarly to men: social status appears to be more important than gender identity.

Gender identity is more important in the other social groups!

Multiple negations (non-standard forms!) are used in the lower middle class group 32% by men vs. 1% by women.

Vernacular forms are used more frequently by men: a typical pattern in many speech communities. This pattern is apparent also for young children – for example, boys use more the *in'* form, than girls; their speech contains more frequent consonant cluster simplification in words such as [las] for *last*, [toul] for *told*, etc.

## 4. Explanations of women's linguistic behaviour

### 4.1 The social status explanation

Hypothesis: women are more status-conscious than men, thus they use the standard form. Standard forms are associated with higher social status -- women want to signal social status when using standard speech.

Counter argument: working women (having social status!) employ more standard forms than women staying home – Stay-home women reinforce the use of vernacular forms used by those they are in social contact.

#### 4.2 Woman's role as guardian of society's values

Study the Example #6 on p. 168

Society expects “better” behaviour from women – thus it is expected that women speak the standard variety. Comment!

In certain social context women use more standard forms than men; in other context they move away from the standard, for example, mother/child conversation, see p. 168. Implications?

#### 4.3 Subordinate groups must be polite

Women may employ rising pitch at the end of declarative sentences more frequently, whereas men use a steady or lowering pitch.

The rising pitch variant is interpreted as a questioning contour and, according to R. Lakoff (1975), this leads to women's self-presentation as hesitant, uncertain, and lacking in assertiveness.

“tag questions” (sentences in which the speaker makes a declarative statement and adds on a tag in the form of a question about their assertion).

Examples: Jane came home, *didn't she?*  
It is cold here, *isn't it?*

Lakoff states that women use tag questions as a signal of their reluctance to make direct assertions. They can “avoid committing themselves and thereby avoid conflict with the addressee”

Such a deferential style *may be* perceived as the speaker's uncertainty and lack of definite opinions.

	Number of Tag Questions	
	Women	Men
Facilitative	59%	25%
Softening	6%	5%

*Softening tags*: mitigating the force of command or criticism.

Examples:  
Open the oven door for me, *could you?*  
You're driving rather fast, *aren't you?*

*Facilitative tags*: they indicate the speaker's desire to engage the addressee in continuing conversation.

Examples:

Still working hard at your office, *are you?*

The hen's brown, *isn't it?*

Holmes (1984): There is a significant difference in the functional role of tags in women's and men's speech. Men more often use tags for "*speaker-oriented*" goals, to obtain or confirm information about themselves, whereas women more often use tags for "*addressee-oriented*" goals, particularly as strategies to engage addressees in talk.

#### 4.4 Vernacular forms express machismo

Study the example #8, p. 169.

Men may regard vernacular forms positively: *covert prestige!*

### 5. Some alternative explanations

The influence of the interviewer and the context

- women accommodate the interviewer more than men: they tend to use more standard forms;
- men use more vernacular forms when talking to a male interviewer;
- women use more standard forms than men in a formal interview.

In the interaction of gender with several social factors, there are speech communities where gender alone influences speech patterns:

Examples:

(i) Tyneside, England

(ii) Reading, England

Study Figure 7.2 on p. 174.

## B. AGE

### 1. Age-graded features of speech

- (i) Pitch differences: social implications!

- Lower pitch – socially expected from public figures; they are taken more seriously (Margaret Thatcher underwent training to lower her pitch);

Study the Example #11, p. 175

- Cultures differ with regard to expectations concerning pitch differences.

- (ii) vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar may reflect age difference: social implications!

Study the Example #12, p.176.

Middle-class Glaswegians (a Scottish dialect around Glasgow): pronunciation differences between 10-year olds and teenagers (p. 176)

Slang relating to age (p. 176)

## 2. Age and social dialect data

Research shows that in Britain and in the US there is not much gender-related difference in the speech of children; in Denmark, however, the difference may be there at the age of four (the role of daycare there): girls use fewer vernacular forms.

Vernacular use in English-speaking countries are fewer for middle-age speakers, but again, it increases for old-age speakers: decrease of social pressure!

Study Figure 7.3 on p. 178

Middle-aged speakers, in general, use more standard forms. Explain!

Study the usage of multiple negation in different age groups, Figure 7.4, p. 179

## 3. Age grading and language change

Increase or decrease of a linguistic form over time: *linguistic change*!

When a form is on the increase, we talk about *innovation*.



Higher use by younger speakers!

Study Table 7.1 on p. 180

### C. IS LANGUAGE SEXIST?

Language *reflects* sexism in society: language itself is *not* sexist.

	unmarked	marked
	<i>heir</i>	<i>heiress</i>
	<i>laundry worker</i>	<i>laundress</i>
	<i>poet</i>	<i>poetess</i>
	<i>actor</i>	<i>actress</i>
	but: <i>governor</i> (governs a state)	
	<i>governess</i> (takes care of children)	
French	<i>l'ami</i> <i>le chanteur</i>	<i>l'amie</i> <i>la chanteuse</i>

The male form is unmarked!

Male referential forms: *chairman, postman, Museum of Man*

But: *chairman* → *chairperson*  
*postman* → *letter carrier*  
etc.

Generic 'man' and 'he' :

*mankind*  
*the man in the street*  
*ape-man*  
*man-made*  
*Peking-man*  
*Neanderthal man*

*riddle: If a man can walk seven miles in seven minutes...*

Are these terms really generic?

??? *Man, being a mammal, breastfeeds his young.*

In attempting to eliminate the generic *he*, it is assumed that language affects thought; research shows that generic *he* tends to suggest that a male referent is in mind (to be discussed in detail later).

