

**FACULTY OF EDUCATION
CHARLES UNIVERSITY, PRAGUE**

Department of English Language and Literature

**Gender-based linguistic differences in
the context of social variables**

Diploma Thesis

Prohlášení o původnosti práce
Prohlašuji, že jsem diplomovou práci vypracovala samostatně s
použitím uvedených pramenů a literatury.

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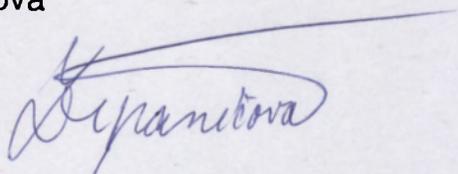
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V Praze dne 16. června 2009

Lenka Županičová

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Županičová', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

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KEYWORDS: gender, language, society, variable, linguistic phenomena, status, difference, dominance

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1 Introduction

The linguistic behaviours and the language currently spoken by the British society is a reflection of a centuries-long historical, social and political development.

Social status has had a major impact on the language of the two sexes. The language of the elites was strikingly different from that of the poor, whereas the middle class oscillated somewhere in between depending on the economic situation. Despite the fact that until mid. 1950s the majority of the British society was formed primarily by the lower class, the gender differences in language first appeared among the upper class. It was in the upper class where the differences between the lives led by men and women were the widest.

Even though the differences between the particular social classes in UK have, but for a few exceptions, now been almost obliterated and the basis of the society is formed by a vaguely defined "middle class", if we go back only as far as to the mid. 1950s, we would still be able to identify three main social classes that differed in every aspect of their life, language included. On the top was the social elite consisting of the peers and gentry, then there was the gradually strengthening middle class and at the very bottom was the working class of manual workers.

As the time went by clearly defining these three classes as strictly confined groups was proving ever harder. While it was almost impossible to move to a higher class in the middle of the 19th century, from the beginning of the 20th century onwards the situation became rather complex primarily due to the intricate stratification of the middle class.

Until the 1850s, the leadership and the government was exclusively in the hands of the higher class who controlled the House of Lords, held the majority of chairs in the House of Commons as well as all the important posts in the empire including the army. Out of all the classes it was the nobility that proved the most resistant to changes, both cultural and social, as well as linguistic. Gradually the nobility got under a strong pressure of the middle class, which resulted in The Great Reform Act of 1832, which brought about one of the most important changes in the history of British politics, conceding to radical demands to make amends in the electoral system.¹

Although the smallest in number, the nobility of England and Wales enjoyed the largest influence and fortune. The aristocracy kept on growing in number and in 1803 there were

¹ Morgan, Kenneth Owen & kol., *Dějiny Británie*, Praha, Lidové Noviny, 1999, p. 390-392.

over 27,000 noble families.² This was due to the increased birthrate as well as due to the ennoblement of some members of the middle class. Once the middle class acquired certain possessions they wanted to attain a title. In the late 19th century the higher and middle class comprised less than 21 per cent of the entire population of Great Britain.³

Nonetheless, the aristocracy was far from intact; in fact it was a group with an intricate hierarchy. The basis was formed by the nobility with its hereditary title. Then there were peers who enjoyed the right to a chair in the House of Lords. Given the principle of absolute primogeniture, this group was rather small in number. Only the eldest sons of lords and baronets inherited the title whereas the others were often demoted to the middle class, which, as a result, further stratified. The lowest standing group among the aristocracy were the knights who often represented the borderline between the aristocracy and the middle class.⁴

Since the beginning of the 19th century the importance of the middle class was growing, namely after the Great War.

² Black, Jeremy, - Macraill, Donald M., *Nineteenth-Century Britain*, London, Palgrave, 2003, p. 108.

³ Hoppen, K. Theodore, *The Mid-Victorian Generation, 1846-1886*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 34.

⁴ Black, Jeremy, - Macraill, Donald M., *Nineteenth-Century Britain*, London, Palgrave, 2003, p. 95.

Notwithstanding its indisputable political and social rise, the middle class did not deprecate the rule of aristocracy. Rather than that, the middle classes strived for having its share at the government. In other words, they respected the existing social hierarchy and tried to culturally and socially reflect and resemble the upper class.

The largest in number was without any doubt the working class. After 1800 the middle class grew in number as well. Their social stratification was widening. Unlike the aristocracy, they possessed no title and in most cases they had to work to make their living. And as opposed to the working class, they had fortune, education and expertise.⁵

In the 1850s the middle class was still rather scarce and could be easily identified. They were merchants, bankers, industrialists and the so called professional men (Anglican clergymen, doctors and lawyers).⁶ After 1850s the middle class experiences expansion through the so called white collars, who grew in number substantially in the 20th century. Both state and private clerks belonged to the middle class as well as professional managers (in small businesses) who replaced the untrained family members in the running of small business.

⁵ Perkin, Harold, *The Origins of Modern English Society 1780-1880*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1972, p. 25.

⁶ Hoppen, K. Theodore, *The Mid-Victorian Generation, 1846-1886*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 40.

linguistic levels. Until mid-1950s the rest of the working class often

The middle class's endeavour to approach the aristocracy was particularly eminent amongst the upper middle class in terms of their mansions, entertainment, lifestyle and language. In most cases, however, they lacked the refined taste of aristocracy.

The largest in number was without any doubt the working class. For the most of the 19th century, this group had practically no political or any other influence whatsoever and its position only begun to change after 1867 when many got their right to vote.⁷ The influence of working class, however, only became significant in the 20th century when the Labour Party rose on the British political scene.

Just like the nobility and the middle class, the working class also enjoyed its inner hierarchy. On the top were qualified and well-paid workers with certain political influence, who were often active in unions, the blue-collar aristocracy. They boasted better working and living conditions that often resembled those of the middle class. The upper class moreover viewed it as the basis of a reasonable and educated proletariat, which contributed to the gradual eradication of the differences between white collars, small businesses and blue-collar aristocracy throughout the 20th century. This process also had its impact on the cultural and

⁷ Morgan, Kenneth Owen & kol., *Dějiny Británie*, Praha, Lidové Noviny, 1999, p. 433-436.

linguistic levels. Until mid 1950s the rest of the working class often remained without any social security. The working and living conditions were not seldom beyond poor. These people often inhabited crowded dwellings and slums and lived in poor social and sanitary conditions.

The turning point in terms of the development of modern British society was the industrial revolution, where the idea of moral renewal was upheld and the woman was meant to take the initiative. Many Britons believed that the moral decline of the traditional family was a result of the living conditions in the turbulently developing cities, of the religious indifference and weakening of the traditional values. A woman should therefore become the pillar of the regenerated society and teach others the virtues and morals. This resulted in an interesting ambivalence – whereas a woman had to respect these moral principles, a man could and should adore the woman for her moral purity without being moral himself.⁸

Thus in the Victorian period, a strong diversification between the male and the female was accentuated. This was also reflected in the spoken language. Just as there were different sets of standards and rules in terms of behavior, the double-standards were also reflected in language. Consequently,

⁸ Burstyn, J. N., *Victorian Education and the Ideal of Womanhood*, London and Totowa, N. J., Croom Helm, 1980, p. 31.

women started using what Robin Tolmach Lakoff more than a century later labeled as women's language, which was soon paraphrased as the weak language. It is the language of frequent questions, evaluative adjectives, question tags, intensifiers, hyper-politeness and hyper-correctness, repetition and the like.

Since the 1850 the social dependence of women on men has been vindicated by the biological differences of both sexes. According to the Victorian values, a woman should have its natural role. A woman should not work; she should dedicate all her time entirely to the upbringing of children and keeping the household and she should not confer these tasks on others. The press gradually adopted this rhetoric that presented the ideal woman as a self-confident housekeeping mother who plans and works for the family as well as a woman that stands by her husband who earns money. More than 150 years later Jennifer Coates makes an interesting observation when examining the habits of contemporary female and male conversationalists. She notices that the prototypical venue of all-female conversation is home. Women today use their home or the homes of their friends as a haven where they can be themselves and entertain with their friends. Indeed many linguists (for example Tannen or Holmes) point out that whereas home is the feminine sphere, the outside (i.e. pub or sports club) is where men feel "at home".

This ideology of the division of the social spheres according to gender stood in the way of gender equality. It is

commonsense that a woman from higher or middle class could enjoy more freedom and fortune than a worker's wife. All the women, however, were denied the right to vote and the right for remunerative work.

Notwithstanding some first voices calling for the suffrage for women at the end of 18th century, the modern feminist movement striving not only for political rights, but also for true equality only emerged in 1830s in connection with the charismatic movement. Female revival was, however, very gradual and was initiated by upper and middle class women like nurse Florence Nightingale (1820-1910)⁹ or writer and philosopher Harriet Martineau (1802-1876)¹⁰. These women and their public activities became an inspiration for their followers. In 1858 Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon (1827-1891) started English Women Journal and a year later Jessie Boucherett (1825-1905) initiated The Society for Promoting the Employment of Women.¹¹

Despite the resistance of certain parts of the society, first victories gradually saw the light of this world. In 1882 the

⁹ Davey, Cyril J., *Lady with a Lamp: The Story of Florence Nightingale*, Cambridge, The Lutterworth Press, 1958.

¹⁰ Riedesel, Paul L., *Who Was Harriet Martineau?*, in *Journal of the History of Sociology*, vol. 3, 1981. pp. 63-80.

¹¹ Robson, A. P. W., *The founding of the National Society for Women's Suffrage*, in *Canadian Journal of History*, 8 (1973), pp. 1-22.

Parliament passed the Married Women Property Act, which granted married women the same rights that single women enjoyed. A hold-over of the past that “a woman is the property of her husband” was abolished. Until then when entering into a marriage a woman lost a title to her fortune.¹²

Another important area where improvements were slowly emerging was female education. In 1848 Queen's College was founded in London under the supervision of the Anglican Church followed by a non-conformist Ladies (Bedford) College.¹³ Slowly, the number of female colleges grew, but none of them was a part of a University. The breaking point came in 1860 when young girls got a chance to pass their examination at the University of Cambridge. It was, however, the University of London that first witnessed a woman graduate in late 1870s.

Since the 1870s the number of female students has been slowly rising, but they were mostly enrolled in classes that were considered “feminine” like biology, physiology and botanics. Due to a public resistance women were long banned from studying medicine. It would seem that women were granted access to the world of academia. They, however, again did not enjoy the same

¹² Erickson, Amy Louise, *Women and Property in Early Modern England* London, Routledge, 1993.

¹³ Purvis, June (ed.), *Women's History: Britain 1850-1945. An Introduction*, London, Routledge, 1995, p. 109-111.

status as men and again they were banned from certain fields of study and consequently from related linguistic realities. Since access to education and subsequent division of labour serve to allocate meaning-making opportunities, women were still lacking many opportunities that man enjoyed in terms of having the right to be in certain situations and to build their social networks.

During and after the Great War many traditional concepts of division of labour changed. At a time when millions of British men enlisted, women had to take over their jobs. Thousands worked right at the battlefield in lazarettos and in logistics. The faith of Edith Cavell (1865-1915), a nurse that despite the dangers helped both the allied and German forces and who was decapitated in 1915 on the order of a German officer, heightened the prestige of women.¹⁴ Many opportunities opened for women to do office and administrative work, to work in ammunition and mechanical plants as well as to perform many tasks so far reserved to men.

Banishing the norms and rules as a result of the war strengthened the pressures exerted earlier by suffragettes and feminists on traditional barriers between the sexes. Given the situation, it was no longer possible to claim that women were

¹⁴ Hughes, Anne-Marie Claire Hughes, *War, Gender and National Mourning: The Significance of the Death and Commemoration of Edith Cavell in Britain*, in *European Review of History: Revue europeenne d'histoire*, vol.12, Issue 3, Nov. 2005, s. 425-444.

incapable of fully exploiting their civil rights. The Representation of the People Act of 1918 gave all women at or above the age of 30 the right the vote. And in 1925 women were granted universal suffrage.¹⁵

The Great War was also a milestone in that that the until then in many respects segregated life of the social classes started merging. The language of the upper and middle classes that was so different from that of the lower class, remained the ideal, but the language of the higher class was enriched with many expressions that the Victorians condemned as low.

After 1918 women could finally enjoy full liberty. Apart from smoking, which became very classy in the female society, they also enjoyed freer sex life and liberation of formal legal right that for centuries tied them to their fathers and husbands.

The influence of the church was weakening and the younger generation inclined to decadence and nihilism. Even though the two thirds of the national wealth were still in the hands of one percentage of the population, the changes that Britain encountered since the beginning of the century were absolutely crucial in terms of gender.

¹⁵ Morgan, Kenneth Owen & kol., *Dějiny Británie*, Praha, Lidové Noviny, 1999, p. 462-470.

The Second World War had similar influence on the position of women as the events of the years of 1914-1918. From then on nothing could stop the factual equality of the two sexes. The fall of the empire and the reforms that followed were connected with strengthening of the role of women. Women held more and more important positions in all areas of public and social life. And in 1979 Margaret Thatcher, born Robertson (*1925), became the first female prime minister.

Even though the factual equality of both sexes has been achieved in terms of voting rights, access to education and job market, the equal opportunities will only become truly equal when double-standards and different expectations in terms of social and linguistic behaviour will cease to exist.

2 Language and Gender from a Historical Perspective

As the British society evolved and changed so did the class arrangement. Clear distinctions and boundaries gradually gave way and a massive, vaguely defined middle class saw the light of this world. The language naturally did not fall behind and evolved accordingly. The abysmal differences between the classes were bridged and the language adapted to the new reality. The media, mainly the television, have played its indisputable role in this process. An exposure to the language of the aristocracy as well as to various jargons of the working class through one medium has had a wide reaching impact. All of a sudden, just about any form of language became accessible to anyone.

This virtual contact with just about any vernacular spoken by the English also brings new light to the linguistic disciplines. New areas of language and communication are being examined. The female vs. male becomes the focus of attention in terms of social status, equality or inequality, as the case may be, and language.

In this work I will focus on how are the different roles of women and men in the society reflected in the way the two sexes speak and express themselves. It is not my intention to approach this topic from a feminist perspective, neither do I wish to in any respect make any judgments as to the division of roles that have been for centuries ascribed to men and women. Rather than that

I will to examine how and to what extent does gender difference projected into language difference.

2.1 *The Beginnings*

Since early 1950s there have been many linguists venturing in the area of gender and language examining gender specific and prototypical linguistic behaviour, but it was not until Lakoff first published her article titled "Language and woman's place" (1972) that the debate evolved into a complex issue. This article was soon after expanded into a classic monograph, *Language and Woman's Place* (1975).¹⁶ Robin Tolmach Lakoff's pioneering work is unique in it that she argues that language is fundamental to gender inequality, both in terms of language used about women (i.e. the asymmetry of master and mistress) and the language used by women. Lakoff was the first one to enumerate a set of linguistic features and phenomena and label them as typical of female vernacular.

In Eckert's and McConnell-Ginet's words, *Language and Woman's Place* created a huge fuss. There were those who found the entire topic trivial – yet another ridiculous manifestation of feminist paranoia. And there were those – mostly women – who jumped in to engage with the arguments and issues that

¹⁶ Eckert, Penelope – McConnell-Ginet, Sally, *Language and Gender*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004 p. 1

Lakoff had put forth.¹⁷ Thus was launched the study of language and gender.

2.2 Lakoff's Paper

In her paper, Lakoff suggests that there are several features that differentiate women's speech from men's speech. Lakoff is the first one to give them a name and she first uses women's language as the umbrella term for all these phenomena. They are hedges and hedging (*sort of, kind of, I guess, it seems* etc.), hyper-politeness (*I would really appreciate, if.... Would you please open the window, if you don't mind* etc.), tag questions (*"Lucy is happy, isn't she?"* instead of *"Is Lucy happy?"*), empathic language (characterized namely by intonation and the emphatic *so* and *very*), empty adjectives (*divine, charming, cute, sweet, adorable, lovely* and the like), hypercorrect grammar and pronunciation, lack of sense of humour (women are said to be poor joke tellers and frequently "miss the point" in jokes), direct quotations (use of direct quotations rather than paraphrases), special lexicon (in domains like colours where words like

¹⁷ Eckert, Penelope – McConnell-Ginet, Sally, *Language and Gender*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004 p. 1

magenta, chartreuse are typically used only by women) and last but not least question intonation in declarative contexts.¹⁸

In summary, Lakoff claims that these phenomena make women's speech sound weaker and less powerful. Hedges and hedging or hyper politeness, Lakoff says, reflect the fact that women are very much aware of their inferior position in the society and in order to speak their minds and express their views they need to "hedge" what they are saying.

2.3 Present Views

The significance of Lakoff's article lay not only in its pioneering nature, but also in the fact that this watershed study was as unprecedented, controversial, and as influential as its basic thesis: that gender influenced vocabulary and usage and that both in turn reflected oppressive social structures.

Many argued, however, that her findings are taken out of context, often misinterpreted (Aries, Coates) and generally that they label women's language as the powerless language (O'Barr, William M. and Atkins, Bowman K.:1998). O'Barr and Atkins, among many others, suggest that the weak language features

¹⁸ Lakoff, Robin, *Extract from Language and Woman's Place in Cameron, Deborah, The Feminist Critique of Language. A Reader*, London – New York, Routledge, 1999. p. 242-245

may be related more to social powerlessness than to sex.¹⁹ Rather than being primarily sex-linked, a high incidence of some or all of these features appears to be more closely related to social position in the society, they claim. But it was indisputably the society that created this massive discrepancy between the feminine and the masculine, both in terms of family roles and in terms of social positions and expectations.

Indeed more and more linguists specializing in the area of gender and language come to agree that the issue is much more complex and that there are more variables that play a significant, if not crucial, role in the way women and men of various communities of practice speak. Variables like social class, education, region, race and gender have a significant impact on the way we speak. The latest research, however, suggests that gender plays a minor rather than a major role in the complex system of social and other variables and factors.

¹⁹ William M. O'Barr and Bowman K. Atkins, *Women's Language or Powerless Language* in Coates, Jennifer, *Language and Gender. A Reader*, Maiden, MA – Oxford – Carlton, Victoria, Blackwell Publishing, 1998. p. 385

3 Frameworks in the Study of Gender and Language

For over forty years now linguists have been thoroughly examining and scrutinizing the area of spoken communication and the varying tendencies in female and male speech. Despite differing convictions when it comes to the origin of these differences, most of them, nonetheless, come to an agreement with regard to the elemental question. That there are differences that are not attributable to any other variable but gender. Currently, we can distinguish between three various approaches or frameworks; each viewing the issue from a slightly different perspective. They are deficit framework, dominance framework and difference framework.²⁰

3.1 Deficit Framework

Deficit framework suggests that women's way of speaking is, whether by nature or nurture, deficient in comparison to men's. In its nurture variant this is the idea that often underpins, for example, the provision of assertiveness trainings for women where assertiveness is seen as something that women lack and

²⁰ Cameron, Deborah, *The Feminist Critique of Language. A Reader*, London – New York, Routledge, 1999., p. 14-15

the lack is conceived as disadvantageous to them, suggested Crawford.²¹

3.2 Dominance Framework

Dominance framework, on the other hand, suggests that women's ways of speaking are less the result of their gender as such than of their subordinate position in the society. The key variable in this instance is power. Fishman claims that if a little girl "talks rough" like a boy, she will normally be ostracized, scolded or made fun of. This socializing process raises serious problems since the acquisition of this special style of speech will later be an excuse to keep her in a demeaning position, to refuse to take her seriously. Because of the way she speaks, the little girl – now a grown-up woman – will be accused of being unable to speak precisely or to express herself forcefully. If a girl or a woman refuses to talk like a lady, Fishman claims, she is ridiculed and subjected to criticism as unfeminine. If she adheres to what is expected of her, she is ridiculed as unable to think clearly, unable to take part in a serious discussion. These two

Feminist Critique of Language. A Reader, London – New York, Routledge, 1999, p. 253-254.

²¹ *Talking, Deborah, You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation*, New York, Morrow, 1990, p. 207.

21 Crawford, M., *Talking Difference*, London: Sage, 1995 in Cameron, Deborah, *The Feminist Critique of Language. A Reader*, London – New York, Routledge, 1999., p. 14-15

choices that a woman has – to be less than a woman or less than a person – are highly painful.²²

3.3 Difference Framework

Finally, difference framework suggests that women's ways of speaking reflect the social and linguistic norms of the specifically female subcultures in which most of us spend our formative years. The difference between women and men, Tannen suggests, is like the difference between speakers from two cultures who are not well acquainted with one another's customs and may often, therefore, misunderstand one another.²³

3.4 Current Endorsements Across the Linguistic World

While fewer linguists now endorse the deficit framework, there has been considerable debate on the competing claims of the dominance and difference frameworks.²⁴ Dominance

²² Fishman, Pamela, *Conversational Insecurity* in Cameron, Deborah, *The Feminist Critique of Language. A Reader*, London – New York, Routledge, 1999., p. 253-254

²³ Tannen, Deborah, *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in conversation*, New York, Morrow, 1990, p. 297.

²⁴ Cameron, Deborah, *The Feminist Critique of Language. A Reader*, London – New York, Routledge, 1999., p. 14-15

researchers have been criticized for making simplistic assumptions both about men's intention to dominate women in conversation and about the relationship of linguistic strategies to power or powerlessness. Difference researchers on the other hand have been criticized for failing to distinguish questions about the intentions of individual men to dominate individual women from questions about the social structure, in which men as a gender occupy the dominant position, and also for giving too little weight to the ways in which difference is dominance.

41. Chapter 4: Difference and Power

A community is a group of people who come together to work together to some common endeavor. It is a group of people who share values, power relations, and a common history in the course of a joint activity. The community of practice is different in a subtle way from the traditional notion of community, primarily in that it is not defined by its membership, but by the activity that its membership engages in. A community of practice is people working together in a shared activity. It is a community of practice, not a group of people who share a common activity. This individual

²⁴ Cohen, *Communities of Practice: Learning and Gender*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

4 Community of Practice

The notion of gender and language and gender-related linguistic differences is very complex. Coates as well as Eckert and McConnell-Ginet or Tannen speak of community and consider it one of the defining factors in terms of the language we speak in various situations and linguistic realities, i.e. the language from the pragmatic point of view.

4.1 *What is a Community of Practice*

A community of practice is an aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement in some common endeavour. Ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs, values, power relations – in short, practices – emerge in the course of a joint activity around that endeavour. A community of practice is different as a social construct from the traditional notion of community, primarily because it is defined simultaneously by its membership and by the practice in which that membership engages.²⁵ A community of practice might be people working together in a factory, regulars in a bar, a neighbourhood cricket group or users exploiting certain web sites. Thus individuals

²⁵ Eckert, Penelope – McConnell-Ginet, Sally, *Language and Gender*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004.

participate in multiple communities of practice and individual identity is based in the multiplicity of this participation, Coates claims.²⁶

4.2 *Production and Reproduction*

Gender is produced (and often reproduced) in differential membership in communities of practice. According to Eckert and McConnell-Ginet gender is not something we possess. Rather than that it is something that we constantly create and recreate through our exposure to various situations, relationships and societal expectations.²⁷

People's access and exposure to different communities of practice are related to such things as their class, age, and ethnicity, as well as their sex. Working-class people are more likely on the whole than middle-class people to be members of unions whereas young people are more likely to participate in various internet mediated discussions and chats.

²⁶ Coates, Jennifer, *Men Talk. Stories in the Making of Masculinities*, Malden, MA – Oxford – Carlton, Victoria, Blackwell Publishing, 2003., p. 145

²⁷ Eckert, Penelope – McConnel-Ginet, Sally, *Language and Gender*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004., p. 59

4.3 *Continuous Construction and Reconstruction*

It is important to point out, however, that in actual practice social meaning, social identity, community membership and forms of participation are being constantly and mutually constructed and re-constructed. The identities of both the individual and the individual community of practice are not stable; they in fact both change constantly. We continue to adopt new ways of talking and discard some old ways and in the likewise manner we adopt new ways of being women and men.²⁸

²⁸ Eckert, Penelope – McConnell-Ginet, Sally, *Language and Gender*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004., p. 60

5 Female vs. Male Discourse

In this chapter I will focus on the factual linguistic differences between the speech of men and women as they were described in research findings of prominent English and American linguists. I will intentionally concentrate only on the Anglo-American world, its language and way of expressing various realities verbally. I will disregard other cultures and their languages merely for the purpose of eliminating cultural differences that are always reflected in the society, its behaviour and language.

Many linguists claim that there are clearly distinctive patterns and features that can be typically detected in all-female and all-male conversations. Jennifer Coates, for example, draws the attention to the fact that those two variants differ significantly not only in terms of vocabulary, but more importantly when it comes to floor-sharing, overlapping and participation in construction of talk.²⁹

5.1 Female Discourse

Coates claims that the primary goal of women friend's conversation is the maintenance and development of friendship,

²⁹ Coates, Jennifer, *Men Talk. Stories in the Making of Masculinities*, Maiden, MA – Oxford – Carlton, Victoria, Blackwell Publishing, 2003.

whereas information-exchange, for example, is secondary.³⁰ Prototypically, collaborative or shared floor prevails, which would support Tannen's claim that women are oriented on sharing, be it feelings, experiences or even information, whereas men have the urge to display knowledge and thus show-off rather than co-narrate or share the floor.³¹

Another distinctive feature of woman talk according to Coates is frequent overlapping strikingly resembling a jam session that is rich in minimal responses.³² Women further enjoy participation in construction of talk; their talk adopts the form of "talk-as-play" focused on construction and maintenance of good social relations and on enjoyment rather than "talk-as-business" form focused on information.³³ Hedges and hedging are frequent and serve as a protection of positive face and sometimes even to avoid "playing the expert".³⁴ Another striking feature of female-

³⁰ Coates, Jennifer, *Women Talk. Conversation between Women Friends*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, 1996., p. 44

³¹ Coates, Jennifer, *Men Talk. Stories in the Making of Masculinities*, Maiden, MA – Oxford – Carlton, Victoria, Blackwell Publishing, 2003., p. 15

³² Coates, Jennifer, *Women Talk. Conversation between Women Friends*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, 1996., p. 117

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 61

³⁴ Coates, Jennifer, *Women Talk. Conversation between Women Friends*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, 1996., p. 152

only friendly discussions is self-disclosure followed by matching self-disclosure; something that is only very rarely represented in all-male conversations of similar, i.e. friendly, nature.³⁵ Furthermore, women take relish in mirroring, they use questions as an encouragement to join the conversation as well as question tags with rising intonation, which serve as an invitation for another speaker to participate in the conversation and join the floor.³⁶ Other oriented questions and repetition aimed at organizing thoughts and expanding on them characterize intimacy and are also quite frequent.

Prototypical venue of all female conversations is home. This suggests that private lives and home are a feminine space, while public sphere is masculine. That is coherent with the division of family and social roles where women take care of the household and the family while their men focus on their career and work. Thus men's sense of who they are has strong links with the public sphere whereas home as a venue of female gathering supports the claim that the private sphere is a feminine domain.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 264

³⁶ Ibid., p. 155

5.2 Male Discourse

On the other hand in all-male conversations information exchange is primary. It serves the goal to achieve and maintain status.³⁷ Focus on demonstrating masculinity prevails and is achieved through linguistic devices such as taboos and vulgarisms that well serve the purpose of displaying toughness and invulnerability.³⁸ Surprisingly, not just male dominated, but also exclusively male world is accentuated.³⁹ It is achieved through stories of achievement displaying main characters that are always men. Unlike in all-female conversations, questions are understood as an encouragement or a token for the other participant to take the floor.⁴⁰ Questions are prototypically speaker oriented and serve the purpose of seeking additional or unknown information rather than as survey into the other person's emotional state or an encouragement to join the floor in co-narration.

Male conversations are characterized by sociability rather than intimacy and male talk serves the purpose to achieve, assert

³⁷ Coates, Jennifer, *Men Talk. Stories in the Making of Masculinities*, Malden, MA – Oxford – Carlton, Victoria, Blackwell Publishing, 2003., p. 15

³⁸ Ibid., p. 33

³⁹ Ibid., p. 69

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 24-27

and recognize masculinity.⁴¹ Accordingly, the prototypical venue is outside home, usually in a pub or at a sporting event.⁴²

5.3 Narrative

Narrative as such has a key role in construction of both female and male friendships. In male conversations it is prototypically single floor narrative where *behaving badly* and *getting away with* are almost omnipresent themes.⁴³ From the lexical and linguistic point of view male story-telling is, unlike female story-telling, rich in taboo words. There is a striking absence of hedging and thinness of characterization.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Coates, Jennifer, *Men Talk. Stories in the Making of Masculinities*, Maiden, MA – Oxford – Carlton, Victoria, Blackwell Publishing, 2003., p. 144

⁴² Ibid., p. 8

⁴³ Ibid., p. 40

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 75

6 Prominent Features of Male and Female Talk in Comparison

6.1 Focus

Male stories typically focus on action, whereas female stories focus on people. Men present themselves as winners, those who managed to get away with something. They like to portray themselves as lone heroes. Events take place in the workplace, at pub, etc. and the storyworld they create is populated entirely by men. Self-presentation in female narrative is much more subtle, stories are set in private world of home and storyworlds include both men and women. Unlike women men do not exploit narratives to reflect on their feelings and relationships.⁴⁵

6.2 Sequencing

All-female talk features a strong propensity to tell stories in sequence, which can not be said about all all-male talk.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Aries, Elizabeth, *Men and Women in Interaction. Reconsidering the Differences*, New York – Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 148 – 150, 156, 159.

⁴⁶ Coates, Jennifer, *Men Talk. Stories in the Making of Masculinities*, Maiden, MA – Oxford – Carlton, Victoria, Blackwell Publishing, 2003, p. 198

Sequences of stories are in general characteristic of relaxed talk between friends, which signals mutual understanding and that the participants are in tune with each other. When telling stories in sequence, it is more frequent in all-male talk that the same narrator tells a sequence story.⁴⁷ That fits the general observation that men are happy to hold the floor for extended turns. By contrast, women in friendly conversation tend to take shorter turns and share the floor. Story sequences in women's talk are never competitive.

6.3 Settings

Male narrators' preference for settings outside home suggests that men's sense of who they are has strong links with the public sphere.⁴⁸ The domestic setting of many women's stories supports the claim that the private sphere is a feminine space, while the public sphere is masculine.⁴⁹ Women tell stories

⁴⁷ Coates, Jennifer, *Men Talk. Stories in the Making of Masculinities*, Maiden, MA – Oxford – Carlton, Victoria, Blackwell Publishing, 2003, p. 92.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁴⁹ Tannen, Deborah, *Women and Men Talking: An International Sociolinguistic Approach* in Walsh, Mary Roth (ed.), *Women, Men, & Gender. Ongoing Debates*, New Haven – London, Yale University Press, 1997, p. 88-89.

as a way of keeping in touch with each other's lives and they usually do so in the solace of their homes.⁵⁰

6.4 Temporal Framing

Quite a surprising dimension of difference can also be found in temporal framing. Narrative analysts distinguish between three time-frames: today stories, stories of the recent past (last week, the other day, yesterday) and stories of the distant past. While the majority of women's stories are set in the recent past, the majority of men's stories are set in the distant past.

This corresponds to the different functions of story-telling in men's and women's friendships. Women are concerned to keep in touch with each other's daily lives, men are more concerned to present themselves as certain sorts of persons, who engage in contest and win and with this objective, any relevant story can be told whatever its time-frame.⁵¹ It is also true that where conversational participants choose temporal framing closer to the now of speaking, they achieve emotional closeness of a kind not

⁵⁰ Coates, Jennifer, *Women Talk. Conversation between Women Friends*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, 1996, p. 52

⁵¹ Tannen, Deborah, *Women and Men Talking: An International Sociolinguistic Approach* in Walsh, Mary Roth (ed.), *Women, Men, & Gender. Ongoing Debates*, New Haven – London, Yale University Press, 1997, p. 85.

achieved where temporal framing is more remote from the now of speaking. This phenomenon is directly correlated with the relative intimacy of the relationships between women.

6.5 Self-disclosure and Vulnerability

One of the rewards speakers get from self-disclosing is that fellow-speakers are likely to self-disclose in return.⁵² Reciprocal self-disclosure makes speakers feel supported by others since mirroring behaviour involved in reciprocal self-disclosure communicates understanding and empathy. A common pattern in women's conversation is that one self-disclosing story is matched by a second told by another woman. Sequences of self-disclosing stories play an important role in constructing and maintaining solidarity in all female friendship groups.⁵³ Men, on the other hand, try to avoid self-disclosure and vulnerable topics on all accounts.

6.6 Collaborative Narrative in Single-sex Groups

Women often collaborate in telling of stories, while men's stories are much more likely to be solo narratives with one well-

⁵² Coates, Jennifer, *Men Talk. Stories in the Making of Masculinities*, Maiden, MA – Oxford – Carlton, Victoria, Blackwell Publishing, 2003, p. 116.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 118-125.

defined narrator.⁵⁴ Male stories recipients also tend to give less feedback. This is a gender difference that women are painfully aware of. Mobile text messages are a case in point. Many women get frustrated with their partners when they receive one-word messages in reply that are strictly to the point.

6.7 Recipient Design and Accommodation Theory

Recipient design and accommodation theory are very interesting features employed when we strive to design our talk not according to our nature but to suit the intended recipient and when our objective is to accommodate the form and partly also the content of what we say to who we are talking to.

Taboos in mixed talk are a prime example of recipient design and accommodation theory in practice. Men use less taboos in mixed-gender conversation than in all-male talk⁵⁵ and similarly women use more taboos in mixed gender conversation than in all-female talk.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Coates, Jennifer, *Women Talk. Conversation between Women Friends*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, 1996, p. 111-115.

⁵⁵ Coates, Jennifer, *Men Talk. Stories in the Making of Masculinities*, Maiden, MA – Oxford – Carlton, Victoria, Blackwell Publishing, 2003, p. 148.

⁵⁶ Coates, Jennifer, *Women Talk. Conversation between Women Friends*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, 1996, p. 163

6.8 Different Gender Norms

In everyday conversations female interactants give far more feedback – including laughter – than male interactants⁵⁷ and both men and women hold slightly different views and perceptions as to what is worth sharing and talking about.

Mixed gender conversations therefore call for an accommodation to more feminine or masculine, as the case may be, norms of what constitutes a material for a story.⁵⁸

6.9 Collaborative Narrative In Mixed Gender Group

Collaborative narrative is a powerful display of togetherness in a couple. Two speakers making contributions to the story which join together seamlessly form a linguistic and verbal reflection of the non-verbal reality of sharing their lives and experiences. Frequent repetition, rephrasing each other's ideas, shared construction of utterances, frequent use of back-channel support to signal acceptance of the other speaker's contributions

⁵⁷ Coates, Jennifer, *Men Talk. Stories in the Making of Masculinities*, Maiden, MA – Oxford – Carlton, Victoria, Blackwell Publishing, 2003, p. 150.

⁵⁸ Aries, Elizabeth, *Men and Women in Interaction. Reconsidering the Differences*, New York – Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 19.

and overlapping also serve this purpose. The ability of speakers to share the narrative floor is symbolic of intimacy.⁵⁹

Collaborative narration requires very careful syntactic, semantic and prosodic monitoring on the part of both speakers and is characteristic of people who know each other well. The joint telling of a story is sometimes described as a “duet” – where the two co-narrators function as a single speaker.⁶⁰ The co-construction of stories is now recognized as a key way for couples to “do” their relationship in public.

⁵⁹ Coates, Jennifer, *Women Talk. Conversation between Women Friends*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, 1996, p. 113.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

7 Two parallel worlds in the society

In her immensely popular work titled "You Just Don't Understand" Deborah Tannen describes two different worlds that the two genders reside in. Tannen clearly endorses the difference framework in it that she examines the area of linguistic practice and its relationship to the society that men and women grow up in and learn to communicate in. Tannen claims that male versus female verbal interaction can be understood as cross-cultural communication and that the sexes speak different codes or, as she calls them, genderlects.⁶¹

7.1 Hierarchy and Involvement

Tannen claims that men prefer hierarchy, which reflects their concern with status, whereas women seek connections and involvement, which accords with their need to avoid social isolation. Accordingly, women revel in intimacy whereas men strive for independence. Women seek and enjoy symmetry and symmetric relationships while the world of men is ruled by asymmetry or status. Thus women and men frame the same messages differently. For example, when using a *protective*

⁶¹ Tannen, Deborah, *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in conversation*, New York, Morrow, 1990, p. 297.

frame, the protector is automatically framed as dominant and the protected is framed as subordinate.⁶²

7.2 Childhood and Growing-up

To understand the differing communication strategies of grown-up men and women we have to look back and focus our attention on their childhood, a period where communication strategies and behaviour are formed and created.⁶³ Whereas boys usually play outside in large, diverse, hierarchically structured groups, which implies lots of competition and results in boasting of skills, girls tend to play in smaller groups or pairs, they usually have a best friend and intimacy is key to their relationships.⁶⁴

7.3 Symmetry vs. Asymmetry

⁶² Tannen, Deborah, *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in conversation*, New York, Morrow, 1990, p. 25.

⁶³ Aries, Elizabeth, *Men and Women in Interaction. Reconsidering the Differences*, New York – Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 197

⁶⁴ Tannen, Deborah, *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in conversation*, New York, Morrow, 1990, p. 26.

Mixed gender communication therefore features considerable asymmetries when it comes to expectations and implicature. Tannen points out that women and men often talk at cross-purposes. In situations where a woman might expect the gift of understanding, i.e. when she confides in her partner and expects compassion, the man offers her his advice. Accordingly, when being complained to, men offer resolutions whereas women confirm sympathy and empathy.⁶⁵ Thus, when men and women talk to each other, the problem is that each expects a different kind of response.⁶⁶

When asking for information, women usually do that quite easily, while men feel that it may automatically put them in the one-down position. Symmetrically speaking, giving information reinforces bonds between people. From the asymmetrical point of view, however, it creates hierarchy and the information-giver is automatically put in the position of authority. Tannen calls women the givers of praise and men the givers of information.

7.4 Amount of Talk

⁶⁵ Tannen, Deborah, *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in conversation*, New York, Morrow, 1990, p. 28-29.

⁶⁶ Aries, Elizabeth, *Men and Women in Interaction. Reconsidering the Differences*, New York – Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 39

7.5 Many contemporary linguists disprove the stereotype of tattling woman and the quiet man. It still may surprise many, but research findings suggest that contrary to popular belief, men talk more than women. There is, however, a significant difference between public and private talk.

Women's language of conversation is the language of rapport.⁶⁷ They are establishing connections, displaying similarities and matching experiences. Men's language serves as primary means of preserving independence and negotiating and maintaining status in a hierarchical social order. This is done by exhibiting knowledge and skills. From childhood men learn to use talking as a way to get and keep attention. Private sector, however, could not be more different. It gives us a prototypical picture of the wordy woman and the mute man.⁶⁸ It shall not be all too surprising when viewing the situation from the perspective of the function and purposes the conversation shall serve where for men talk is for information, while for women it is for interaction.

⁶⁷ Tannen, Deborah, *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in conversation*, New York, Morrow, 1990, p. 74.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

7.5 Instrumentality of Talk and Action for Access to Gender Group

7.5.1 Public vs. Private Speaking

As mentioned earlier, we can track the roots of the communication traits described above to the childhood of adult men and women and the prototypical social interaction of girls and boys. While for girls talk gets and holds relationships together, for boys relationships are held together primarily by activities, by doing things together. The comfort of home thus offers men the freedom from having to prove themselves. For women, however, it symbolizes the place where they are free to talk.⁶⁹

Public speaking is a different picture. It shows the ever opinionated and talkative man and the silent woman. Interestingly or maybe not surprisingly, mixed gender talk usually reflects more the talk of men than the talk of women.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Swann, Joan, *Talk Control: An Illustration from the Classroom of Problems in Analysing Male Dominance of Conversation* in Coates, Jennifer, *Language and Gender. A Reader*, Maiden, MA – Oxford – Carlton, Victoria, Blackwell Publishing, 1998, p. 192

⁷⁰ Coates Jennifer, *Thank God I'm a Woman: The Construction of Differing Femininities* in Cameron, Deborah, *The Feminist Critique of Language. A Reader*, London – New York, Routledge, 1999, p. 299

7.5.2 Society and Expectations

Contemporary society, however progressive and open compared to centuries ago, still has different sets of expectations and demands when it comes to the behaviour, both verbal and non-verbal, of men and women. Thus women and men are often judged differently even if they talk the same. Such expectations and behaviour is reflected in the higher tendency of women to apologize more than men and to not flout authority as much as men do.

In their extensive work titled "Language and Gender", Penelope Eckert and Sally McConnell-Ginnet strive at making connections rather than pointing out differences between the obvious, i.e. our verbal behaviour, and the hidden, i.e. the underlying social prerequisites. According to Eckert and McConnell-Ginnet we are learning to be gendered and accordingly, gender differences are part of a social construct.²¹

8.2 The Marked and Unmarked

In our culture, female vs. male is always reinforced as oppositions and while the male is usually unmarked, the female is predominantly marked. Be it in lexicology where unmarked term predominantly labels the masculine, whereas the feminine is

²¹ Eckert, Penelope – McConnell-Ginnet, Sally, *Language and Gender*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 258

8 Society as an Umbrella for Variables Like Gender, Ethnicity or Class

Every single aspect about our lives is influenced by the society we live in and interpreted through the norms and the set of rules set by the society. And gender is no exception.

8.1 Gendered Personae and Social Construct

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⁷¹ Eckert, Penelope – McConnell-Ginnet, Sally, *Language and Gender*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 238

always marked and derived from the masculine, or in other areas of linguistic and non-linguistic reality. Despite massive, mostly feminist, actions against this lexicological imbalance the disproportion still prevails.

Our current social construct further endorses this concept that the masculine is not only the unmarked, but often also the desirable. Men deemed feminine are seen as inferior men, whereas women deemed masculine may sometimes be seen as inferior women, but they are also seen as striving for what is in fact a valued persona. This is one of the reasons that masculine behaviour in women is often less stigmatized than feminine behaviour in men.

8.3 Division of Labour

Another important gendered component of our lives is the division of labour. Male jobs are characteristically assigned higher prestige than typical female jobs.⁷² Technical skills and expertise (i.e. pilot, rocket scientists) are regarded very highly whereas compassion, care and understanding (which can be found in and is expected of nurses or kindergarten teachers) are considered

⁷² Aries, Elizabeth, *Men and Women in Interaction. Reconsidering the Differences*, New York – Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 64.

as inherent to all women, thus not requiring any special skills and therefore less important.⁷³

8.4 Linking “It” Together

It is, however, very important not to isolate separate tendencies but to link the linguistic to the social⁷⁴ and follow current linguistic practice to the society which has been the source and ground for naming things and for linguistic realities around us.

A very good example is the usage of Mr. to indicate a person who is male by sex on one hand and Miss or Mrs. to label a single or a married woman, respectively. Numerous feminists have been calling for equality in both linguistic and non-linguistic areas. Thus Ms was introduced as an attempt to erase the differences in designation between Mr. and Miss or Mrs., which is indicative of family status. It is certainly a step forward, but the full equality of these designations can only be reached, if Miss and Mrs. cease to be used.⁷⁵

⁷³ Eckert, Penelope – McConnel-Ginet, Sally, *Language and Gender*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 38.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 53.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 54.

8.5 The Hall of Mirrors

At this point, it is also necessary to mention that certain linguistic stereotypes are compelling to the person looking for gender differences, principally because they offer themselves up for ready-made gender-based explanations. Even when each individual researcher has made only modest claims on the basis of individual studies, the combination of the sheer volume of studies and the belief that the results should be positive, have led to a general impression of robust findings. In the end these stereotypes are accepted as scientific fact and become part of the background of general truth about language and gender. Shan Wareing (1996) used the term “hall of mirrors” to describe this phenomenon.⁷⁶

8.6 Organizing Talk

Women used to be and in some parts of the world still are banned from certain social and professional events and occasions. Such access to events of daily life is reflected in speech and linguistic practice. The right to speak depends on the right to be in the situation and the right to engage in particular kinds of speech activities in that situation. In most parts of the world this public vs. private dichotomy still exists. Gender

⁷⁶ Eckert, Penelope – McConnel-Ginet, Sally, *Language and Gender*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 30.

balance, or imbalance, in formal institutions has a profound effect on who constructs official discourse and who designs the world.

8.7 Networks

The division of labour serves to allocate meaning-making opportunities not simply in the formal sphere, but in the informal sphere as well. Race, ethnicity and gender all work to limit people's sources of information gained in formal situations.⁷⁷

The individual's network is a set of overlapping institutional, professional and personal networks and the way in which the individual combines these networks is extremely important for success.⁷⁸ It is apparent that the combination of personal and institutional networks maximizes the flow of career resources, it is also apparent that this combination puts women at a disadvantage for a number of reasons.

Interference of individual's personal situation or activities is often seen as incompatible with professionalism. This is again more true for women than men. Simply appearing in the role of

⁷⁷ West, Candance and Fenstermaker, Sarah, *Doing Difference* in Walsh, Mary Roth (ed.), *Women, Men, & Gender. Ongoing Debates*, New Haven – London, Yale University Press, 1997, p. 63.

⁷⁸ Eckert, Penelope – McConnel-Ginet, Sally, *Language and Gender*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 96-97.

homemaker or mother has often been damaging professionally for women. Appearing as the more powerless member of a couple is, needless to say, damaging. Appearing as a sexual being is more damaging to a woman's professional image than to that of a man and certainly traditional norms for women make them far more vulnerable to the leakage of "negative" personal information.⁷⁹

A final difficulty for many women in the combination of personal and professional networks is that domestic responsibilities still frequently constrain women's social activities, preventing them from servicing their ties in the way that single people and most married men can. A woman with children, particularly if she is single, is prevented from building networks on a variety of counts.

8.8 *Speech Situations and Events*

As indicated above, it is sometimes difficult for women to even get access to certain speech situations and events. The dichotomy, however, does not end there.

The same event can be construed as being about many things. Conversational frames are not gender-neutral as people's

⁷⁹ Eckert, Penelope – McConnel-Ginet, Sally, *Language and Gender*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 287

assessments of situations are often transformed when the gender participation changes. Ervig Goffman (1974) characterizes frames as the interpretive schemes that people apply to interactions. Certain frames exist in western culture as rules for public interactions. To pick a gender-neutral example, in Anglo-American culture one is not supposed to introduce themselves when asking for directions.⁸⁰

8.9 Conversational Analysis

Conversational conventions have been the subject of the study of conversational analysis (sequencing of turns, alternating among speakers with a minimum of silence between adjacent turns – Sacks et al. 1974). Conversational conventions provide routines for such things as initiating and ending conversations and for signaling that one is coming to the end of one's turn, in other words that one is at a transition-relevant place.

8.9.1 Turn-taking

Video research (Duncan 1972, 1974) has shown that speakers use a complex and almost imperceptible set of cues to show that they are coming to the end of their turn, and people

⁸⁰ Eckert, Penelope – McConnel-Ginet, Sally, *Language and Gender*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 105.

waiting their turn have a similarly subtle set of cues that show that they wish to take the floor. Interactants, however, expect certain amount of backchanneling that is by no means considered as an interruption, nor does it function as such.⁸¹

8.9.2 Back-channeling

The amount and kind of backchanneling expected varies considerably. Several American studies have found women providing more backchanneling than men (Biliouss and Karuss 1988, Roger and Nesshoever 1987, Edelsky and Adams 1990). It has been claimed (Maltz and Borker 1982) that women and men use backchanneling differently – specifically that women use the minimal responses *yeah* and *uh-huh* to signal attentiveness, whereas men use them to signal agreement.⁸² It is further claimed that in male-female conversations, therefore, men tend to mistake women's attentiveness for agreement.⁸³

⁸¹ Eckert, Penelope – McConnel-Ginet, Sally, *Language and Gender*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 111.

⁸² Ibid., p. 111.

⁸³ Coates, Jennifer, *Men Talk. Stories in the Making of Masculinities*, Maiden, MA – Oxford – Carlton, Victoria, Blackwell Publishing, 2003, p. 176.

Turn-taking conversations are particularly ripe for the study of gender differentiation because they are at the more conscious end of linguistic practice. Turn-taking is regulated from the time one is small – being told not to interrupt, being interrupted, having difficulty getting the floor are all foregrounded for children.⁸⁴

Inasmuch as getting the floor is fundamental to having a say in the world, conversational strategies are a fundamental locus of the exercise of power in language.

8.9.3 Interruptions

It is common belief that men interrupt more than women and that women get interrupted more than men. Being interrupted or being the interrupter certainly does not depend entirely on gender, but also to a great extent on class, profession, education, etc.

8.9.4 Interruption vs. Overlap

In their early study of gender patterns in interruption, Don Zimmerman and Candance West (1975) distinguished between

⁸⁴ West, Candance and Zimmerman, Don H., *Women's Place in Everyday Talk: Reflections on Parent-Child Interaction* in Coates, Jennifer, *Language and Gender. A Reader*, Malden, MA – Oxford – Carlton, Victoria, Blackwell Publishing, 1998, p. 166.

an interruption and an overlap. An overlap occurs when a second speaker begins speaking before the first finishes, but at a point that might be mistaken for a transition-relevant place – for example during the final syllable of what could be a complete sentence. In other words, the overlap anticipates a new turn. An interruption, on the other hand, violates turn-taking conventions, specifically by taking place at other than these transition-relevant places.⁸⁵

8.9.5 Interruption and Overlap as Social Moves

Deborah Tannen points out that such definition of interruption tends to put a variety of distinct social moves into one category. More particularly, Tannen argues that overlap is often a supportive conversational strategy, enhancing rather than violating a speaker's right to the floor. In her study of ethnic styles in conversation, Tannen has coined the term high-involvement style to describe a style in which simultaneous talk is the norm and high-considerateness style where respect for the other person's right to hold the floor is more desirable than simultaneous co-construction of the talk.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Aries, Elizabeth, *Men and Women in Interaction. Reconsidering the Differences*, New York – Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 82-83.

⁸⁶ Tannen, Deborah, *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in conversation*, New York, Morrow, 1990, p. 188.

Thus interruption and overlap can be strategies for supporting the contributions of others, and studies of women's conversational style (e.g. Coates 1996) have shown that women make considerable use of this strategy in informal conversation.⁸⁷ They use mirroring, repetition, shared construction of utterances, collaborative narrative and overlap as a communication strategy aimed at keeping and fostering narratives.

While overlap can clearly be supportive, it is also true that one person might interrupt another solely for the purpose of showing dominance. Models of dominance tend to focus on the dominator, so the actual overlap is seen as a dominating move. But as Tannen emphasizes, an interruption takes more than one participant. An interruption is not complete until the first speaker ceases talking.⁸⁸

8.9.6 Interruption and Silence as Conversational Power

There are relationships in which the exercise of conversational power is striking. Pamela Fishman's study (1983)

⁸⁷ Coates, Jennifer, *Women Talk. Conversation between Women Friends*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, 1996, p. 220.

⁸⁸ Tannen, Deborah, *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in conversation*, New York, Morrow, 1990, p. 201 – 209.

of the private conversations of several graduate student heterosexual couples serves as a landmark in the study of male conversational dominance. This study depicted men dominating their partners through the strategic use of both silence and interruption. These men not only interrupted their partners during conversation, they also did not take up their partners' topics in conversation. The result was that women often failed in trying to start a conversation on a topic of their choosing.⁸⁹

8.10 Who Does All the Talking

Quantity of speech is a dimension of verbal behaviour that appears to be socially salient across cultures. We are all familiar with stereotypes about gender differences in speech quantity in western societies, where women are commonly portrayed as talking excessively and trivially.⁹⁰

Research on amount of speech shows that not only do men talk more overall than women, but that women and men tend to talk more in different kinds of situations. For example Deborah James and Janice Drakish (1993) found that out of 56 studies of adult mixed-gender interactions, 34 (61 percent) showed males

⁸⁹ Eckert, Penelope – McConnel-Ginet, Sally, *Language and Gender*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 112.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

talking more than females overall, while only 2 studies showed females talking more overall. The remaining 20 studies showed either no gender difference (16) or sometimes males and sometimes females talking more (4). More importantly male domination of talk was concentrated in the two formal types of situation (75 percent), but only in 38 percent of the studies of informal conversation.⁹¹

James and Drakich account for men's dominance of the formal situation in terms of social psychological status characteristic theory (Berger et al. 1977), which offers an account of interaction in terms of the participants' perceptions of their relative social status, be it race, gender or expertness. Those with perceived higher status seem to speak more.⁹²

In institutional settings in which official knowledge and decisions are being made it is men who talk significantly more than women and their talk is more likely to be taken up. But how about informal situations? Do women make up for their relative silence in less official conversations? Apparently not. James and Drakich found that in five out of sixteen studies of conversation in

⁹¹ Eckert, Penelope – McConnel-Ginet, Sally, *Language and Gender*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 116.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 116.

informal settings, men were found to speak more than women, while women spoke more than men in only one of these studies.

8.10.1 Speech and Silence

It is often said that women are silenced. But silence is not only an absence of expression. Silence in social situations is in large amount of cases not neutral. We talk about awkward silences, ominous silences, stunned, strained, awed, reverent, and respectful silences.⁹³

Silences take on meaning because in Anglo-American culture, we expect social exchange to involve fairly continuous talk. Scandinavians, on the other hand, can feel comfortable with extended periods of silence and often find the constant talk expected by American friends rather wearing. A protracted silence between turns at talk, therefore, signals something unusual. But what it means exactly depends on its discursive history. It is not only the right or obligation to speak that is significant for the making of meaning, but also participation as an addressee, or even overhearer. An addressee can be cast simply as a receiver of knowledge and information, or the addressee can be cast as an adjudicator.

⁹³ Eckert, Penelope – McConnel-Ginet, Sally, *Language and Gender*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 119.

As noted earlier, it has often been said that women in traditional cultures get their ideas into public discourse through the men in their families.⁹⁴ Even today many women in the professions and business report that their contributions in meetings are often ignored until some man repeats them as his own. And many women continue to exercise their influence mainly out of public view, allowing others to think that they have few ideas of their own. One reason for this may be that these women recognize that ideas seen as originating with some authoritative man often have more impact than those from a source less fully respected.⁹⁵

De Francisco endorses this concept and in her research she focuses on the every-day conversational difficulties that many women in Anglo-American culture still encounter on every-day basis. She claims that the following conversational components were identified as problematic: talk time, question-asking, topic initiations, topic success vs. topic failure, turn-taking violations and minimal, delayed or complete failure to respond.

⁹⁴ De Francisco, Victoria Leto, *The Sounds of Silence: How Men Silence Women in Marital Relations* in Coates, Jennifer, *Language and Gender. A Reader*, Malden, MA – Oxford – Carlton, Victoria, Blackwell Publishing, 1998, p.

⁹⁵ Eckert, Penelope – McConnel-Ginet, Sally, *Language and Gender*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 120.

8.11 Conversational Styles and Conversationalist's Character.

Research on gender and conversation among English speakers has tended to emphasize women's strategies for cooperative, supportive talk. Women pick up and build on each other's themes (Kalcik 1975, Coates 1996), they engage in supportive overlap (Eckert 1990, Coates 1993), they provide plentiful backchanneling (Biliou and Krauss 1988, Roger and Nesshoever 1987, Edelsky and Adams 1990), etc. This style has been contrasted with a male style that is said to be competitive rather than cooperative. Men's conversation has been found to involve competitive banter and to foster hierarchy (Kiesling 1997).⁹⁶

8.11.1 Difference vs. Similarity

From the looks of it, the differences between men's and women's conversations are overwhelming. But focusing on differences can also have the effect of overlooking similarities. Aries and Johnson (1983) emphasize this in their study of adult friendships. They found that male and female close friend pairs in general discussed the same topics (religion and morals, personal finances, friendship, secrets about the past, community, work

⁹⁶ Eckert, Penelope – McConnel-Ginet, Sally, *Language and Gender*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 122.

etc.). The differences came in the stereotypically gendered topics. Women reported discussing personal problems, doubts and fears, family problems and intimate relationships more than men, while men reported discussing sports more than women. Women also reported discussing personal problems in depth more than men.⁹⁷

	Discussed frequently		Discussed infrequently	
	Women (%)	Men (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)
Personal problems	45	14	50	73
Doubts and fears	46	16	49	60
Family problems	47	26	51	56
Intimate relations	26	8	45	44
Sports	18	45	42	40

Language and Gender, Eckert and McConnell-Ginnet (2003:123)

As the table shows, the difference is not in what men and women talk about, but in how much time they devote to these topic. It appears that women in general do spend more time than

⁹⁷ Eckert, Penelope – McConnel-Ginet, Sally, *Language and Gender*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 123.

men talking with their friends, while men in general spend more time engaging in other activities with their friends. The observation that men tend to spend more time with each other engaged in activities other than conversation should not be surprising, given gender norms in our society. Inasmuch as men are rewarded for accomplishments, while women are rewarded for aspects of their "personhood" – their looks, personality, moral qualities – it stands to reason that women will be compelled to talk about and work on their personhood while men will be compelled to talk about and work on their accomplishments.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Tannen, Deborah, *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in conversation*, New York, Morrow, 1990, p. 25

9 Person's Worth and Language

As discussed earlier, a man's personal worth is primarily based on the accumulation of goods, status and power in the marketplace. A woman's worth, on the other hand, has traditionally been constructed in the domestic realm and has rested on her ability to maintain order in, and control over, her house, and to develop personal influence. Deprived of public power, women have had to develop personal influence through the construction of moral authority. Thus women's influence has often depended primarily on the accumulation of symbolic capital. While the marketplace establishes the value of men's capital, women's symbolic capital must be evaluated in relation to community norms for women's behaviour.

9.1 *Affective vs. Instrumental talk*

Janet Holmes, who has conducted numerous empirical studies of gendered ways of talking among English speakers, associates women's putatively greater attention to (politeness-oriented) facework with a greater interest in the affective function of the talk.⁹⁹ The affective function of talk covers both the overt

⁹⁹ Eckert, Penelope – McConnel-Ginet, Sally, *Language and Gender*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 139.

expression of emotion (“How sad”, “Damn it”, etc.) and everything that has to do with the maintenance of social relations. The affective function is usually contrasted with the referential or instrumental function, i.e. conveying information or trying to establish “facts” or getting things accomplished. As Holmes recognizes, virtually all utterances serve both affective and instrumental functions. Not surprisingly, (male) instrumentality is associated with reason and (female) affect with emotion.¹⁰⁰

9.2 Entitlement

It is obvious that the relation between gender and the use of varieties depends not only on social status but also on a wide range of local practices and ultimately will come down to the nature of the claims that different categories of people are entitled to make through the use of language. The issue of entitlement is quite central to the gender issue. In the halls of academe or government, one is more likely to find men projecting a folksy demeanour than women. This is no doubt because women are more easily disqualified in the professional marketplace and cannot afford to muddy the waters by talking about hunting and fishing or heaven forbid sewing.¹⁰¹ Women in institutional

¹⁰⁰ Eckert, Penelope – McConnell-Ginet, Sally, *Language and Gender*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 139.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

positions of authority generally enhance their images by appearing more educated or meticulous, more ethical and more serious.

9.3 Language as a Set of Practices

People use language to construct their whole personae – to make social meaning of themselves. They struggle to bring together – or to keep apart – the personae that they can construct in their different communities of practice. And these personae embody gender, along with class, race and every other thing that is significant to selves in a particular time and place. This work of construction requires all of the linguistic resources that we have.

It is important to emphasize that gender is not part of one's essence, what one is, but an achievement, what one does.¹⁰² Gender is a set of practices through which people construct and claim identities, not simply a system for categorizing people. Transsexuals may be categorized as either men or women by their sex, but their true gender identity could be and indeed is different. This difference is achieved through their practices and performance. And gender practices are not only about establishing identities but also about managing social relations.

¹⁰² Eckert, Penelope – McConnel-Ginet, Sally, *Language and Gender*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 308.

9.4 *Performing Gender*

The popular notion of performance commonly suggests a conflict with the “real” self. Many of our stylistic acts are aimed more at what we hope to become than at what we think we are. But it is through these stylistic acts that we have a chance of becoming what we hope to be. By the same token, we may present a persona we at some level dislike but that nonetheless on some occasions we want to display to others.¹⁰³

In this case repeated stylistic practice can transform us into someone we might have said we hoped not to be. Most people have at least somewhat different multiple personae, different ways of acting in the world that they draw on. Often it is absurd to say that one of these selves is the “true” one, while all the others are false. Saying that gender is performance does not mean that it is not real. It means that this personal reality does not come merely from within, but from our participation in the global performance that is the social order.

¹⁰³ Eckert, Penelope – McConnell-Ginet, Sally, *Language and Gender*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 316.

10 Conclusion

It was my goal to examine gender-based linguistic differences in conversational interaction of contemporary Anglo-American men and women. My aim was not only to focus on isolated phenomena and analyse them, but more importantly I wanted to scrutinize gender-based linguistic differences and conversational practice in the context of the society and its implications.

Firstly, I wished to demonstrate that there are differences between the way men and women typically express themselves that are not attributable to any other variable, but gender. To this end I introduced the three frameworks, the deficit, dominance and difference framework, that each explains the existence of gender-based linguistic differences from a different perspective. Regardless of the aspect that is accentuated, all the three frameworks find the reasons explaining these differences in the society.

Next, I intended to bring to the attention the fact that gender itself is not a constant; it is not what one is, but what one does. Gender identity is not the sex itself. Instead, it is something that is constantly constructed and reconstructed from the perspective of our position in the society and based on our sets of social networks.

Finally, I wanted to show that the many ways women and men speak in various situations, the many different personae each of them embodies and the many ways in which they are being men and women is the result of them being integrated into a society facing its impacts. It is a mutual leveraging where the society and the individual constantly influence and form one another, a never-ending circle with intricate networks where every single aspect, be it age, ethnicity, education or class, has its meaning.

I believe that the issues raised throughout this paper reach far beyond the area of linguistics; they are pertinent to gender differences in many other domains of behaviour and life. As it has been pointed out on a number of occasions, even the non-verbal behaviour of adult women – that is, their tendency to smile more, gaze more, show more facial expressiveness – has been interpreted to reflect weakness and subordination just as women's language (hedges and hedging, question tags, intensifiers, evaluative adjectives and the like) has been interpreted to reflect hesitancy and subordination. These linguistic differences mirror status differences where men and individuals with high status show similar behavioural and verbal patterns.

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