

HOW LANGUAGE DEFINES GENDER

Introduction

Language is a method of communication used by humans to communicate. It consists of structured words conveyed by speech, writing, or gesture. People around the world use diverse language in terms of structure and vocabulary to articulate their ideas and communicate them to others. Different languages use different words to describe the same concept, but they also organize the relationships between concepts in different ways. Consequently, the languages are so diverse and many have argued that the language we speak may limit the scope of our thinking and understanding. The use of gendered language can often lead to gender inequality, which creates an unfair bias towards a certain gender that may result in harmful stereotypes, which cause discrimination and portray a negative view of a certain gender. For many years, women did not have the same rights and opportunities as men, such as not being able to vote or access certain public places like clubs or joints. The use of gendered language has the power to reinforce and maintain male supremacy in society.

According to Benjamin Lee Worf, the theory of linguistics argued that it was difficult for humans to think about ideas since there was no words in their language.

In this case, there is a link between language and gender. Languages treat gender differently across the world. The nouns are not categorized as either masculine or feminine. Many languages distinguish between human males and females by using different pronouns: for example, “he” and “she” in English respectively.

Case study: “Research into the many possible relationships, intersections and tensions between **language and gender** is diverse. It crosses disciplinary boundaries, and, as a bare minimum, could be said to encompass work notionally housed within applied linguistics, linguistic anthropology, conversation analysis, cultural studies, feminist media studies, feminist psychology, gender studies, interactional sociolinguistics, linguistics, mediated stylistics, sociolinguistics, and feminist language reform and media studies.

In methodological terms, there is no single approach that could be said to 'hold the field'. Discursive, post-structural, ethnomethodologically, ethnographic, phenomenological, positivist, and experimental approaches can all be seen in action during the study of language and gender, producing and reproducing what Susan Speer has described as 'different, and often competing, theoretical and political assumptions about the way discourse, ideology and gender identity should be conceived and understood'.”

Examples of gendered language

“**Mr.**” can be used to refer to any man regardless of their marital status. However, there are different terms used by women depending on her marital status. “**Miss**” is used for unmarried while “**Mrs.**” is used if she is married. “**Ms.**” is amore neutral term for women who do not wish to disclose their marital status. The use of different terms for women and not men could be

seen as problematic as it portrays the idea that their lives are defined only by the relationships they have with men. A woman's role in society has been closely associated with her marital status which is why women use different titles. This highlights the privilege of men and the status they already have in society without being expected to marry someone.

Gender-biased job titles

In the past, gender roles were followed more strictly and there was a clearer divide between the expected roles for men and women. Men were seen as the main earners whereas women looked after the children and carried out unpaid household chores like cooking and washing. Some of these jobs include the following:

- Postman
- Chairman
- Policeman
- Fireman
- Cameraman

It is noticed that they all end in **man**. The use of these job titles is problematic as it excludes the word women, implying that only men are fit for these jobs. Nevertheless, women are able to do the above jobs. However, the language we use when describing these jobs continues to cement the idea that they are typically done by men. This portrays men as strong and smart, and women are forgotten or abandoned.

Gendered greetings

Words like "ladies and gentlemen" or "sir/madam" have been used severally. Although they are used to address both genders and are not biased towards specific gender at a time these greetings are still gendered. However, they are not inclusive to people who do not associate with those binary terms.

Gender-neutral job titles

More job titles either have a female equivalent or are gender-neutral. These jobs can be seen as better as they do not carry a bias towards any sex or gender. Using these titles help to limit negative stereotypes surrounding certain jobs and reduces inequality faced by women, as anyone is able to use them not just men. Examples of these gender-neutral jobs include:

- Police officer instead of policeman
- Fire fighter instead of fireman
- Postal worker instead of postman
- Chairperson instead of chairman
- Camera operator instead of cameraman

Gender-neutral greetings

Instead of using greetings such as “ladies and gentlemen” or “sir/madam” , it is becoming more common to use neutral greetings such as everyone or folks to be more inclusive towards non-binary people.

Areas of study

There is a distinct difference in speech with a particular gender preferably known as gendered language whereby the language humans use differentiate male from female.

There are studies that focus on ways language can produce and maintain sexism and gender bias, and studies that focus on the contextually specific and locally situated ways in which gender is constructed and operationalized. Linguists have tried to understand how language affects gender in the current world. They have studied the behavioral change associated with language. The communities have also explained how gestured or spoken language have distinguished males and females.

Language history and development

The language and gender are categorized into the fields of linguistics, feminist theory and political practices that are witnessed in the current society. The history of language depicts the relationship between language and gender that tries to explain the linkage between language usage and gender asymmetries. This was a liberation by women to understand and explain the said linkage in discrimination and place of women in the society. According to them, they argued the feminists that they is patriarchy and sexism in the current society.

How language is associated with gender.

The following areas of study explain the gendered language associated to both male and female groups in our society. The language association has been use to distinguish between males from females.

1. Responses and replies

The communicative behavior of men differ from women since men use paralinguistic features such as “mm” and “yeah”. These are collective language used mostly by men than women. However, this may be true, men are known for less replies to questions or any conversation rather than argument compared to women that may expound and elaborate the replies. In any conversations, men are known to respond less compared to women by using the sated paralinguistic above such as “mm” or “yeah”. Men use genders to demonstrate their understanding, agreement, attitude or surprise. In this case, both males and females in a

conversation may employ minimal responses for interactive sessions apart from gender based functions.

2. Openness and disclosure.

Self-disclosure varies from males to females in adult life. According to research conducted, sixty seven women and fifty three men were asked about their intimate and non-intimate on self-disclosure to their closest same gender friends. Self-disclosure among spouses were also conducted. Married group assessed showed less disclosure than unmarried group in the society. Married men disclosure to their friends was low compared to married women disclosure to their friends were probably high. Consequently, married men disclosure to their fellow married men was generally high unlike married women to their married friends was generally low. It was however, concluded that disclosure on gender has neglected an important value on marital status between men and women.

Marital status has important role on openness and disclosure in friendship for men but not for women. However, this is not the only factor to determine the gender difference.

Heterosexual couples-disclosure is the key factor to facilitating intimacy majorly among those who have stayed for long rather than those who separated. Their self-disclosure on their first date was higher compared to those who had separated and this facilitated strong relationship.

3. Aggressiveness

Aggression can be indirect, relational and social

Indirect aggression happens when the person is attacked through covert and concealed attempts to cause social suffering. Indirect aggression include gossiping, exclusion or ignoring of the person. **Relational aggression** is more resolute and may cause more harm and intend to end friendship or spread false rumors. The third type of aggression, **social aggression** is character assassination and may take direct forms such as verbal rejection, negative facial expressions or body movements, or more indirect forms such as slanderous rumors or social exclusion. This third type has become more common in adolescence stage in both male and female character.

4. Attentiveness

It is noted that women are more attentive compared to men in importance of listening in a conversation since they relay lower rate of interruption. Women are more attentive when listening to unrelated conversation that is different from the previous one. Women tend to listen and agree when men speak indicating the reflection of power and status. Men are notorious in interruption with non-related topics compared to women who interrupt less frequently. However, men misinterpret this attentiveness from women in the sense that women are indecisive or insecure towards their relationship. When women listen to men, it shows that they are thinking in terms of connection and support.

5. Relationship stereotypes

It is stereotyped that men are more public speakers than women; while women are known to talk more in private among their friends and family members. Society view men communications as expression of power and negotiation of status among others individuals. But women communicate to express feelings and emotions. The women language becomes more active and passive for men when communicating within heterosexual marriage or relationship. In this case, the traditional norms are changed. Men's stereotypical silence is often disappointing to women while women's emotional communication is seen as aggravating for a man. This however creates an assumption that men and women have opposing communication styles and hence do not understand themselves.

6. Dominance and subjection

According to Tannen's research, men tend to tell stories as another way to maintain their status. Primarily, men tell jokes or stories that focus on themselves. Women on the other hand, are less concerned with their own power, and therefore their stories revolve not around themselves, but around others. By putting themselves on the same level as those around them, women attempt to downplay their part in their own stories, which strengthens their connections to those around them. Men and boys tend to dominate every conversation as an expression of status and power. They express their role in society as superior and are protecting their territory. However, women and girls are subjective to their male counterparts. Their communication expresses feelings, love and care among themselves. They want to understand the role and place in their society. They express their grievances through emotional speeches and facial expressions

7. Honest and politeness

It is believed that women are honest and polite in their communication, unlike men who are rough and rude. Even though there is no evidence to conclude this, statistics show that women use standard language such as "I didn't do anything" vs. "I didn't do nothing". Men tend to be more secretive and honest if the situation is favoring them but women are honest in any situation so that they cannot be victims of circumstances. In terms of relationships, women are always open and polite while expressing their affection while men's honesty is compromised so as to a woman's heart however polite he may be. Men are secretive and cannot share their problems amongst themselves; they are not honest about their status and situation. Unlike men, women are free and honest to the problems affecting them.

8. Gender politics

Men in society are assumed to be political genius and deserve to rule over women. They use their masculinity deter power for themselves and leave women for family chores. However, women tend to express their views in politics by mobilizing their fellow women. They are advocating for their rights and place in the society. They use politics to express their grievances that are overlooked by their male counterparts. Women use honest language to woe for votes

unlike men who are coaxing voters using rhetoric's. Women expresses their political ambitions through facial expressions and body language; men are known for their jokes to influence voters to elect them to various positions. They use masculinity to express their society from humiliation in terms of distribution of resources. Women employ a balance of masculine and feminine behaviors to appear both competent and likable to an audience of male peers during political scenarios . Gender differences in political communication also appear in political arenas whereby women are seen incompetent to rule. Women in politics use facts to express their political grievances unlike their male counterparts.

Summary:

Gender concerns are found in the use of many languages across the world. The gender based language which seem express the differences in language of men and women can be found not only in common expressions, but also in famous proverbs and fictions. In many case women's languages are described as inferior to men's age because it consists of disfluency, unfinished sentence and approval seekers and does not have logical speech order. The separation between masculine and feminine roles in language may be affected by the different social status and power distance between men and women where men is often considered to have higher position than women in the current political world.

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