

particle acceleration. In that same column, I wrote that boys are stupid in English, yet I didn't get a single letter of protest from boys. Obviously, they couldn't read the column.

3 Anyway . . . here we go again.

4 My daughter recently came home from sleep-away camp, where she'd spent five weeks. She looked great. And I was so proud of her, going away by herself.

5 The first question I asked her was "How was camp?"

6 She began by saying, "Well, the day I left, I got on the bus, and I sat next to Ashley, and she brought Goldfish, which was good because I forgot my Now and Laters, and then Shannon came over, and she's from Baltimore, and she gets her clothes at the Gap, and she had a Game Boy, but all she had was Tetris, which I have, so we asked Jenny, who was the counselor, if anybody had Sonic the Hedgehog, but . . ."

7 She went on like this for a few minutes, still talking about the bus ride up to camp five weeks ago, and I came to the horrifying realization that she was actually going to tell me how camp was, minute by minute. Because this is what girls do (and when they grow up and become women, they do it, too, as any man can vouch for). They gather information and dispense it without discrimination. Everything counts the same! It is not that women lack the ability to prioritize information, it is that they don't think life is as simple as men do, and so they are fascinated by the multiplicity of choices that they see.

8 This is why you have to be very specific with what you ask women. If, for example, you missed a Rams game, and you know a woman who saw it, never, ever ask, "What happened?" Unless you have nowhere to go until Thursday.

9 Ask:

1. Who won?
2. What was the score?
3. Was anyone carried out on a stretcher?

10 You must get them to fast-forward.

11 Left to their own devices, girls go through life volubly answering essay questions. And boys? Multiple choice is way too complicated. Boys restrict themselves to true/false.

12 Boys do not gather and retain information, they focus on results.

13 My son went to camp for six weeks—one week longer than my daughter. As I had with my daughter, I asked him, "How was camp?"

14 He said, "Good. I busted Jason's nose." Short and to the point.

15 This was followed by, "Can we go to McDonald's?"

16 Did I mention the cheers? My daughter came back with cheers. About 187,640 musical cheers, all of which are accompanied by an intricate series of hand, feet and hip movements. She went to camp a 10-year-old, she came back a Vandella.

17 It's amazing, the affinity of girls and cheers. If you've ever been to camp, you know that girls have a special gene for cheers and that even girls who have never been to camp before—or, for that matter, been to America or spoken English before—automatically know all the cheers the moment they step off the bus. As a

boy at camp, I used to look at girls in amazement, wondering why they would waste their time like that, when they could be doing useful things like me—memorizing Willie Mays' doubles and sacrifice flies during an entire decade.

18 Boys don't do musical cheers.

19 Even during "color war," that traditional camp competition when cheering is supposed to result in points, here's how boys cheer on the way to the dining hall: They look at the other team and say, "Yo, Green Team, drop dead."

THINKING CRITICALLY

1. Kornheiser, in the context of his daughter's communication style, states that women "gather information and dispense it without discrimination." Respond to Kornheiser's assertion. Is there truth to his stereotypical description of the way men and women relay information? Explain.
2. In his introduction, Kornheiser relates how his joking about girls and math resulted in angry letters from many women, yet his comments about boys and English received no such response. What accounts for this difference? Is it more important to dispel one stereotype than it is the other? Why or why not?
3. Based on his essay, can you determine which communication style Kornheiser prefers? As a writer and columnist, is Kornheiser more "male" or "female" in his communication style? Explain.
4. How would you characterize Kornheiser's tone and style? What assumptions does he make about his audience? Does his article appeal to both sexes? Why or why not?

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

1. Many of the authors in this section seem to defend their own gender's communication style. Write an essay in which you support your gender's communication style, or defend or analyze the style of the opposite sex. Is one better than the other? Why or why not? Remember to support your perspective with examples.
2. In his essay, Tony Kornheiser describes the differences between the way his children, one boy and one girl, communicate. How do his observations connect to stereotypes about how men and women communicate? Are these communication styles simply a fact of gender? Explain, using examples from Kornheiser's essay and from other authors in this section, such as Deborah Tannen and Janet Holmes.

Sex Differences

Ronald Macaulay

Contrary to popular belief, men and women do not speak different forms of English. Nor are there innate or genetic differences in the way males and females acquire or use language. So argues Ronald Macaulay, a professor of linguistics and an expert on language acquisition. Although social background can generate some differences in the way the sexes speak, it is pure myth and

stereotyping that sex differences show up in language patterns. Males do not, for instance, instinctively gravitate to coarse language, and females are not preternaturally drawn to the language of nurturing.

Ronald Macaulay is professor of linguistics at Pitzer College in Claremont, CA. He is the author of *Generally Speaking: How Children Learn Language* (1980), *Locating Dialect in Discourse: The Language of Honest Men and Bonnie Lassies in Ayr* (1991), and *The Social Art: Language and Its Uses* (1996), from which this essay is taken.

I think the English women speak awfy nice. The little girls are very feminine just because they've a nice voice. But the same voice in an Englishman—nae really. I think the voice lets the men down but it flatters the girls.
—Aberdeen housewife

1 More nonsense has been produced on the subject of sex differences than on any linguistic topic, with the possible exception of spelling. Perhaps this is appropriate. The relations between the sexes have generally been considered a fit topic for comedy. In his book *Language: Its Nature, Development and Origin*, Otto Jespersen has a chapter entitled "The Woman" in which he manages to include every stereotype about women that was current at the time. It is almost unfair to quote directly but even in the 1920s Jespersen should have known better, particularly since he lived in Denmark where women have traditionally shown an independent spirit. Here are a few examples:

There can be no doubt that women exercise a great and universal influence on linguistic development through their instinctive shrinking from coarse and gross expressions and their preference for refined and (in certain spheres) veiled and indirect expressions.

Men will certainly with great justice object that there is a danger of the language becoming languid and insipid if we are always to content ourselves with women's expressions.

Women move preferably in the central field of language, avoiding everything that is out of the way or bizarre, while men will often either coin new words or expressions or take up old-fashioned ones, if by that means they are enabled, or think they are enabled, to find a more adequate or precise expression for their thoughts. Woman as a rule follows the main road of language, where man is often inclined to turn aside into a narrow footpath or even to strike out a new path for himself. . . .

Those who want to learn a foreign language will therefore always do well at the first stage to read many ladies' novels, because they will there continually meet with just those everyday words and combinations which the foreigner is above all in need of, what may be termed the indispensable small-change of a language.

Woman is linguistically quicker than man: quicker to learn, quicker to hear, and quicker to answer. A man is slower: he hesitates, he chews the cud to make sure of the taste of words, and thereby comes to discover similarities with and differences from other words, both in sound and in sense, thus preparing himself for the appropriate use of the fittest noun or adjective.

The superior readiness of speech of women is a concomitant of the fact that their vocabulary is smaller and more central than that of men.

2 Such stereotypes are often reinforced by works of fiction. Since little information about prosodic features or paralinguistic features is contained in the normal writing system, novelists frequently try to indicate the tone of voice by descriptive verbs and adjectives to introduce dialogue. An examination of several novels revealed an interesting difference between the expression used to introduce men's or women's speech:

MEN	WOMEN
said firmly	said quietly
said bluntly	asked innocently
said coldly	echoed obediently
said smugly	said loyally
urged	offered humbly
burst forth	whispered
demanding aggressively	asked mildly
said challengingly	agreed placidly
cried furiously	smiled complacently
exclaimed contemptuously	fumbled on
cried portentously	implored
grumbled	pleaded

The surprising part is that the two lists are totally distinct. No doubt the novelists intended to be realistic in describing two very different styles of speech but, in doing so, they also reinforce the stereotypes of men and women.

3 In the past twenty years the question of sex differences in language has been a growth industry as scholars have attempted to claim and to counter claims that there are or are not important differences in the ways in which males and females use language. It would, of course, be surprising if there were not. Both men and women will use the forms of language, registers, and styles appropriate to the activities in which they are engaged. To the extent that these activities differ between males and females, it is to be expected that their language will differ. This much is obvious. There is no need to look for a genetic basis for such differences. It is also obvious that those in a position of power often expect to be treated with deference by those over whom they have power. To the extent that in Western industrialized societies men have more often been in positions of power over women rather than the reverse, it is hardly surprising if women are sometimes found to have used deferential language. There have also been certain violent activities, such as fighting or contact sports, that until recently have been exclusively a male province, and there are forms of language appropriate to them that may have been less common among women.

4 Even in making such banal statements, one must qualify them by reference to "Western industrialized societies" or by limiting them to a single section of the community. For example, it is probably true that in Britain until World War I middle-class women were less likely to swear in public than middle-class men, but working-class women were less inhibited. (G. K. Chesterton reported that in an

argument with a fishwife he could not compete in obscenities with her but triumphed in the end by calling her "An advert! A preposition! A pronoun!"

In sociolinguistic studies of complex communities such as Glasgow, New York, and Norwich, it has been shown that women in the lower middle class are likely to be closer in their speech to the women in the class immediately above them than are the men, who are likely to be closer to the men in the class immediately below them. It has been suggested that this is because lower-class speech is associated with toughness and virility and the men in the lower middle class choose to identify with this image rather than with the less "masculine" speech of the upper-class men. It may not be unimportant that in these studies the interviewers were all men.

There seems, however, to be a deep-seated desire to find essential differences between the speech of men and women that can either be attributed to some discriminatory kind of socialization or, even better, to genetic disposition. This can be seen in many references to sex differences in language development. Popular belief and scholarly opinion has generally maintained that girls are more advanced in language development than boys at the same age. Jespersen, for example, claimed that girls learned to talk earlier and more quickly than boys, and that the speech of girls is more correct than that of boys.

For about fifty years after Jespersen this view was maintained in the scholarly literature on children's development. In 1954 Professor Dorothea McCarthy published an article summarizing what was known about children's language development at that time. Her conclusion about sex differences is:

One of the most consistent findings to emerge from the mass of data accumulated on language development in American white children seems to be a slight difference in favor of girls in nearly all aspects of language that have been studied.

What McCarthy actually found, however, was that the differences were not large enough to be statistically significant. Although psychologists are normally very careful not to make claims about differences that could be the result of chance (that is, are not statistically significant), McCarthy was so convinced that girls were more advanced in their speech that she chose to interpret the evidence the way she did. In a survey of the literature up till 1975, I found that none of the studies provided convincing evidence of consistent sex differences in language development. I concluded that the burden of proof remained with those who wished to claim otherwise. To the best of my knowledge, the situation has not changed since then.

What I did find were many examples of preconceived notions of sex differences from the assertion that girls have an innate tendency toward sedentary pursuits to claims that it is easier and more satisfying for the girl baby to imitate the mother's speech than it is for the boy baby to imitate the father's. One example will illustrate the kind of attitude:

The little girl, showing in her domestic play the over-riding absorption in personal relationships through which she will later fulfill her role of wife, mother and "expressive" leader of the family . . . learns language early in order to communicate. The kind of communication in which she is chiefly interested at this

stage concerns the nurturant routines which are the stuff of family life. Sharing and talking about them as she copies and "helps" her mother about the house must enhance the mutual identification of mother and child, which in turn . . . will reinforce imitation of the mother's speech and promote further acquisition of language, at first oriented toward domestic and interpersonal affairs but later adapted to other uses as well. Her intellectual performance is relatively predictable because it is rooted in this early communication, which enables her (environment permitting) to display her inherited potential at an early age.

This is contrasted with the interests of boys:

Their preoccupation with the working of mechanical things is less interesting to most mothers and fathers are much less available.

As a result the boy's language development is slower:

His language, less fluent and personal and later to appear than the girl's, develops along more analytic lines and may, in favourable circumstances, provide the groundwork for later intellectual achievement which could not have been foreseen in his first few years.

Girls, of course, are more predictable:

The girl, meanwhile, is acquiring the intimate knowledge of human reactions which we call feminine intuition. Perhaps because human reactions are less regular than those of inanimate objects, however, she is less likely to develop the strictly logical habits of thought that intelligent boys acquire, and if gifted may well come to prefer the subtler disciplines of the humanities to the intellectual rigor of science.

I am not sure whether the writer considered himself a scientist, but if his writing is an example of intellectual rigor, then give me the subtlety of the humanities any day. What makes his statement all the more incredible is that it comes after describing a longitudinal study of children that showed no important sex differences in language development.

One of the problems with attempting to demonstrate differences in language development is that measures of linguistic proficiency, particularly for young children, are extremely crude instruments. Thus it is not surprising that samples of linguistic behavior will reveal occasional differences between subgroups of the sample. Such sex differences that have shown up on tests are much smaller than those that have been shown to relate to social background. The fact that most studies show no sex differences and that many of the findings of small differences have been contradicted in other studies should be sufficient warning against drawing conclusions about the linguistic superiority of either sex.

There are some differences between males and females that do not depend upon unreliable tests of language development. Boys are much more likely to suffer from speech disorders, such as stuttering, than girls. Adult males on average have deeper voices than adult females because the vibrating part of the vocal cords is about a third longer in men. However, there may be social influences on this

physiological difference. It has been claimed that in the United States women may speak as if they were smaller than they are (that is, with higher-pitched voices) and men as if they were bigger than they are (that is, with lower-pitched voices). The "Oxford voice" common among Oxford fellows (all male) at one time was remarkably high pitched, and other social groups have adopted characteristic pitch levels that are not totally "natural."

¹² It was reported that once during a debate in the French parliament when a delegate pointed out that there were differences between men and women, another delegate shouted out *Vive la difference!* It is not necessary to believe that men and women are the same to be skeptical about claims as to the differences in the way men and women speak. The desire to emphasize the differences seems to be widespread. Jespersen's chapter remains as a warning signal to all who venture into this murky area that one's prejudices may show through. Jespersen obviously believed (and no doubt so did many of his readers) that what he was saying was self-evident. However, he ends the chapter by observing that "great social changes are going on in our times which may eventually modify even the linguistic relations of the two sexes." Eventually, even scholars following in Jespersen's footsteps may come to see that men and women are simply people and that what they have in common is more important than *la difference*, at least as far as their use of language is concerned.

¹³ It is, however, disturbing to find in a work published in 1991 the following passage by a distinguished and respected scholar:

[I]t is clear why, as sociolinguists have often observed, women are more disposed to adopt the legitimate language (or the legitimate pronunciation): since they are both inclined towards docility with regard to the dominant usages both by the sexual division of labor, which makes them specialize in the sphere of consumption, and by the logic of marriage, which is their main if not their only avenue of social advancement and through which they circulate upwards, women are predisposed to accept, from school onwards, the new demands of the market in symbolic goods.

¹⁴ It is a salutary reminder that progress is often an illusion.

THINKING CRITICALLY

1. Why does Macaulay refer to much of the work done on sex differences as "nonsense"?
2. Macaulay charges that fiction often reinforces sexual stereotypes, as novelists attempt to introduce men's or women's speech. Are there any problems with the examples he cites? Support your answer.
3. What examples does Macaulay give to indicate how society influences male or female speech patterns?
4. Because Macaulay sees so many flaws in Jespersen's findings, why does he devote such a large portion of his article to discussing and even quoting Jespersen?
5. Does Macaulay feel that a lessening of sexist language indicates that society has made significant progress in the way it views the sexes?

6. Macaulay wrote his essay for a scholarly audience. In your opinion, is the language used in the essay more like that of a class lecture, a textbook, a radio talkshow, a professional journal, or a conference presentation? Why?

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

1. Keep a journal of the expressions writers you encounter use to introduce male and female characters' speech. What conclusions can you draw?
2. Watch a television program with a story line (e.g., a situation comedy, a drama, or a full-length movie). Write a brief critique of the program, based on its presentation of linguistic sex differences.

He and She: What's the Real Difference?

Clive Thompson

According to a team of computer scientists, writing style can reveal gender. A computer program developed by a team at an Israeli university can identify the gender of an author with an accuracy of almost 80 percent. The program tracks different key words that each gender uses more frequently than the other. For example, women are more likely to use the words *not*, *wouldn't*, *couldn't*, and *shouldn't*, and men are more likely to use *the* and *and* more often. While the results are interesting—do they actually mean anything?

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1. Imagine, for a second, that no byline is attached to this article. Judging by the words alone, can you figure out if I am a man or a woman?
2. Moshe Koppel can. This summer, a group of computer scientists—including Koppel, a professor at Israel's Bar-Ilan University—are publishing two papers in which they describe the successful results of a gender-detection experiment. The scholars have developed a computer algorithm that can examine an anonymous text and determine, with accuracy rates of better than 80 percent, whether the author is male or female. For centuries, linguists and cultural pundits have argued heatedly about whether men and women communicate differently. But Koppel's group is the first to create an actual prediction machine.
3. A rather controversial one, too. When the group submitted its first paper to the prestigious journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, the referees rejected it "on ideological grounds," Koppel maintains. "They said, 'Hey, what do you mean? You're trying to make some claim about men and women being different, and we don't know if that's true. That's just the kind of thing that people are saying in order to oppress women!'" And I said "Hey—I'm just reporting the numbers."
4. When they submitted their papers to other journals, the group made a significant tweak. One of the coauthors, Anat Shimoni, added her middle name "Rachel" to her byline, to make sure reviewers knew one member of the group was female.