

Language and Gender: English and English Speakers

What clues do the following sentences contain that tell us whether the speakers are men or women?

"You're driving rather fast, aren't you?"

"Well, I guess it's approximately four feet high."

Both sentences are more typical of the speech of women than of men. The most significant stylistic feature is their use of mitigation to blunt a direct statement. In the first sentence, the speaker employs two devices to minimize the force of her criticism of the addressee's behavior. She uses a *hedge word*, "rather," to qualify the following word "fast." And she uses a linguistic device called a *tag question* ("aren't you?") that has the effect of questioning the declaration "you're driving rather fast." By asking a question rather than making an assertion, the speaker asks the addressee to confirm or deny the proposition contained in the statement. That is, the speaker lets the addressee decide whether she or he is driving fast.

In the second sentence, the speaker employs a series of hedges: "Well, I guess it's *approximately* four feet high." These words have the effect of creating uncertainty about the speaker's claims, uncertainty that she herself expresses about her own knowledge. Use of such devices blunts the intended statement, undermines the speaker's competence, and anticipates the possibility that she may be contradicted by the addressee.

The styles of speech illustrated here are more typical of women than of men because women and men are socialized to express themselves in different ways in accordance with cultural norms that teach and reinforce differentiated gender roles. Gender itself is a social construct. It is through concepts of gender that society transforms female and male human beings into social women and men.

...giving them roles and giving them cultural value. Social norms construct and enforce attitudes about women's and men's proper work roles, their participation in family and community life, modes of dress and demeanor, and their appropriate styles of communicative behavior. In this chapter we review research concerning the ways that men and women speak and interact. We begin with data from English-speaking societies. In the following chapter we add to our understanding of language and gender by examining several studies that document gender differences in other societies.

The interrelationship of language and gender can be approached from several perspectives. Sociolinguistic analyses inform us about women's and men's styles of speaking, including differences in pronunciation, use of prosodic cues (intonation, pitch, volume), grammatical forms, and choices of vocabulary. Speech performance can also be examined in order to discover gender differences in conversational interaction such as modes of topic introduction, topic control, and supportive or non-supportive mechanisms used by speakers and listeners. Linguistic and semantic analyses inform us about categories in a language itself and the ways that cultural attitudes toward people are both expressed and reinforced in grammar and vocabulary.

It is probably a universal fact that in all cultures there are differences in how men and women communicate because in all cultures the genders are socially distinguished. As we have seen from studies of class and race, wherever societal distinctions are made among community members, linguistic and stylistic variations arise to reflect and reinforce existing segmentation. It is important to stress that although the obvious sexual female/male dichotomy is used in social differentiation of gender, it does not absolutely determine the roles and values given to women and men. If it did, behavior and evaluations of the two genders would be identical in all societies. This clearly is not the case. Cross-cultural differences in roles performed and rewards given to the genders are well documented. And social roles and attitudes are subject to change as part of social processes resulting from economic and ideological transformations.

In English, and in many other languages, speech styles of women and men vary in the frequencies with which they employ particular sounds, grammatical features, or words. No patterns are exclusive to either gender; rather, different styles are culturally associated with each. These associations have become stereotypes in many cases so that members of the culture believe that certain communicative behavior is typical of women and other behavior typical of men. Stereotypes are sometimes based on people's actual behavior, but stereotypes also serve to reinforce conformity with prescribed norms. And reactions to people's behavior based on stereotyped assumptions can be complex because overt approval or criticism may actually carry conflicting messages. We will see that this is often the case in evaluations of gender-linked speech.

Before examining data revealing gender-related tendencies in language use, it is critical to caution against overstating differences between women and men. Numerous reviews of studies of linguistic behavior conclude that men's and

Gender differences in Norwich were particularly significant for highest and lowest social groups. In the MMC, women used standard pronunciation all the time, whereas men used *-ɪn* in casual speech about one-third of time. In the next group, the LMC, women continued to use *-ɪn* in all contexts except casual speech. At the lower end of the class hierarchy, men used nonstandard *-ɪn* in all contexts except the most careful style ("word lists"), whereas women in the lowest group began to shift to standard *-ɪn* in "formal style."

These data agree with the results of other studies that show women's greater use of standard pronunciations and quicker and more marked style shifting to the standard in increasingly formal speech contexts. The phonological variable of postvocalic /-r/ (we saw in Chapter 6 that it is sensitive to class distinctions and stylistic variation) has been analyzed in several American dialects in relation to gender differences. For example, William Labov's study (1966) of New York City speech demonstrated women's greater use of prestige /-r/.

Gender is also related to the use of postvocalic /-r/ among white speakers in North Carolina (Levine and Crockett 1967). In their study, Levine and Crockett presented subjects with two kinds of lists to be read aloud. One list was made up of sentences containing words with the targeted /-r/ feature. The second was composed of words to be spoken in isolation. The following table compares "R scores" (use of /-r/) for different contexts and also shows net increases for the more careful context of word-list readings (ibid.:95). Men's and women's sentence readings do not differ, but it is the "net increase" to isolated words that is most significant, showing that women have greater sensitivity to prestige norms, as evidenced by their increased use of the prestige variable in a context where more attention is given to speech.

	Sentences	Words	Net Increase
Men	52.3	57.4	5.1
Women	52.9	61.1	8.2

Another study demonstrated that African-American speakers follow the same patterns as do whites. Investigations of AAVE in Detroit indicated that gender had an impact on pronunciations, again given class and contextual parameters (Wolfram 1969). In this speech community, women used more of the prestige postvocalic /-r/ than did men.

Percentage of Postvocalic /-r/

	UMC	LMC	UWC	LWC
Men	66.7	52.5	20.0	25.0
Women	90.0	70.0	44.2	31.7

Male and female speakers in Detroit varied their use of other sounds as well, including omission of standard labiodental /θ/at ends of words (e.g., tooth) or between vowels (e.g., nothing) or its replacement with either a bilabial fricative /f/

or an alveolar stop /t/. Frequencies of such patterns are exhibited in the following table (ibid.).

Percentage of /θ/ Deletion or Replacement

	UMC	LMC	UWC	LWC
Men	14.6	21.9	70.1	72.3
Women	9.6	12.3	47.5	70.2

All these studies support the contention that pronunciations act, in part, as sociolinguistic markers of gender. Whether the research has been conducted among children, among speakers of American or British regional dialects, or among African Americans or whites, the conclusions are identical: Females use standard and prestige pronunciations at higher rates than do males of similar age and social or racial groups. And in studies that take account of context, females demonstrate quicker and sharper stylistic shifting toward prestige norms in increasingly formal styles. Again, we need to think about why this is so. One explanation is that women are more conscious of prestige norms and strive to use them because they are judged by their social self-presentation and are socialized to behave in ways considered polite and refined. Aware of strong social sanction if they do not conform, women use linguistic style as one manifestation of their "proper" behavior. Labov's notion of "linguistic insecurity," characteristic of members of the lower middle class, can be applied to women as well. Just as LMC speakers' linguistic patterns reflect their position in a system of class hierarchy in which they are stigmatized, women's "linguistic insecurity," manifested by careful speech, reflects their "social insecurity" in a hierarchical system of gender in which they are culturally relegated to second place.

Trudgill developed another explanation of gender differences that is compatible with the one just offered. He introduced the concept of "covert prestige" to account for the fact that men use less standard pronunciations and less style shifting toward the standard than do women. Although standard language is given overt social prestige, shown by comments about one's own or another's speech, a competing norm gives "covert prestige" to male behavior that rejects the standard. In other words, men and women are acting in accordance with different norms. An important indication of this is found in self-reports about one's own speech. Trudgill's subjects were given self-evaluation tests, asking them to specify which of two sounds they used, each set paired for standard and nonstandard features. Women tended to claim greater use of standard pronunciations, whereas men tended to claim greater use of the nonstandard than actually occurred in their speech. These patterns recurred for a number of consonants and vowels.

The following tables display relevant data (Trudgill 1972). The first table presents data for the segment *-yu*, as in the word "tune" (tyun/tun); the second concerns *-er*, as in "ear" or "here"; and the third shows values for the vowel *-o-*, as in "road" or "nose." (Note that Trudgill's term *overreport* refers to claims of standard use; *underreport* refers to claims of nonstandard use.)

Percentage of Informants Over- and Underreporting (yu)

	Total	Men	Women
Overreport	13	0	29
Underreport	7	6	7
Accurate	80	94	64

Percentage of Informants Over- and Underreporting (er)

	Total	Men	Women
Overreport	43	22	68
Underreport	33	50	14
Accurate	23	28	18

Percentage of Informants Over- and Underreporting (o)

	Total	Men	Women
Overreport	18	12	25
Underreport	36	54	18
Accurate	45	34	57

Trudgill's terms *overreport* and *underreport* are not semantically neutral and are actually somewhat misleading. Both women and men are overreporting or underreporting, depending on which norm is taken as the perspective. In fact, what is happening is that both are overreporting but they are overreporting use of different forms. In the case of women it is the standard, and for men the nonstandard. Whereas women claim to produce pronunciations having "overt prestige," men model their behavior purposely, although nonconsciously, toward nonstandard forms having "covert prestige."

Trudgill also noted an interesting link between masculinity and working-class behavior. In male self-reports, the nonstandard pronunciations that men often claim to use are stereotypical traits of working-class speech. In a significant finding, no differences were shown in men's self-reports when separated for class, so that middle-class men were just as likely to claim nonstandard speech as were working-class men (ibid.).

This observation raises additional questions about sociocultural models of gender. Perhaps an explanation lies in the complexities of gender dichotomization. Given that women are socialized to behave with propriety and politeness (reflected by "middle-class" speech), and given a system of gender stratification in which men are privileged and in which men who act like women are strongly criticized, men consciously or unconsciously strive toward speech norms that reject styles associated with women. Because women model their behavior on "middle-class" styles, men covertly prefer "working-class" speech.

Elizabeth Gordon approaches the question of women's use of standard speech from the opposite direction. Rather than explaining women's speech as reflecting a desire to model their behavior on middle-class norms for positive reasons, Gordon

suggests that they may do so in order to avoid inferences associated with lower class speakers. Whereas men may value stereotypical images of masculinity that are linked to the lower class, women avoid the stereotypical images of "immorality" or "sexual promiscuity" associated with members of the lower class (1997:48). Women are particularly vulnerable to condemnation for even the hint of sexual promiscuity because of the existing double standard that either overlooks or rewards men's sexual behavior but criticizes that of women. In this social context "style-shifting to a more prestigious speech variety conveys the information that the female speaker is not lower class, and is consequently a 'respectable' person" (ibid.:50).

Finally, Penelope Eckert (1998) notes that many of the jobs available to women require the use of standard language. Since white-collar workers, such as secretaries, receptionists, flight attendants, and other "front-end" workers, represent their organizations to the public, they must employ standard or prestigious speech in order to make a good impression. And women's work as elementary and high school teachers especially encourages knowledge and use of standard language. The relationship between language style and employment in white-collar and service occupations has also been demonstrated in Patricia Nichols's (1982) study of dialect and style shifting among African-American women in coastal Georgia (see Chapter 6).

Intonation

Intonation is a crucial feature influencing how people sound. *Intonation* is a complex combination of rhythm, volume, and pitch overlaying entire utterances. It is heard by listeners as relative changes in these prosodic features rather than as absolute qualities. Some intriguing research has investigated differences in female/male intonational patterns and has discovered cues people use in evaluating the speech of others. In general, women use more dynamic intonational contours than do men. They employ a wider range of pitches within their repertory and more rapid and marked shifts in volume and velocity. In studies of judgments by subjects asked to listen to tape-recorded speech and evaluate the "femininity" or "masculinity" of speakers, speech that varied more in overall rhythmic and pitch patterns was identified as "feminine," whereas speech within narrower limits was identified as "masculine" (Bennet and Weinberg 1979; Terango 1966).

In a review of research on gender differences in English intonation, Sal McConnell-Ginet noted that dynamic patterns are interpreted as indicating emotionality and natural impulses, whereas use of narrow intonational ranges is taken as evidence of control and restraint (1983:76-77). It is important to remember that this is primarily a cultural interpretation (although intonational changes may result from internal emotional states that have respiratory and muscular effects). In employing more monotonic styles, men are perceived as being in control of their emotions, as opposed to women, who are seen as more expressive. "Masculine speech melodies can be heard as metaphors for control and feminine speech melodies as uncontrolled" (ibid.:82). But women and men are not viewed simply as different

instead, women's behavior is negatively evaluated in relation to male (or "neutral") norms. "The problem is that the culture does not simply categorize [women] as emotionally expressive but also views [women] as unstable and unpredictable" (ibid.:77).

Intonational patterns may also serve social functions. McConnell-Ginet suggested that women's frequent changes in pitch and volume "may serve the important function of attracting and holding the listener's attention. Women may need this device more than men because of their relative powerlessness and their frequent contact with young children who are not yet socialized to attend reliably to verbal signals" (ibid.:83).

Studies of intonational patterns suggest that women and men employ sentence contours in distinctive ways in some linguistic or interactional contexts. For instance, women may raise pitch levels at the end of declarative sentences, whereas men use a steady or lowering pitch. Because rising pitch is a regular indicator of a question, some linguists, such as Robin Lakoff (1975:17), believe that when women use rising pitches, they are interpreted as hesitant, uncertain, and lacking assertiveness. Other linguists, including McConnell-Ginet (1983) and Pamela Fishman (1983), agree that rising pitch is heard as a question and suggest that women use this style in order to secure a response from hearers.

GRAMMATICAL VARIANTS

Although research on gender differences in pronunciation is consistent in demonstrating similar trends, studies of gender-related grammatical alternatives are often problematic. One reason is that many discussions of the subject are anecdotal or introspective. Also, results of experimental or observational studies sometimes present contradictory findings. Both of these issues deserve further clarification. Regarding the first problem, claims are made about characteristics of women's and men's speech without any testing or controlled observations. Examples to support hypotheses are constructed and presented not as data, but as illustrations. A major difficulty encountered in this technique is the perplexing question of whether the claimed gender-based styles are actual or stereotypical. That is, do they reflect how women and men actually speak, or do they reflect cultural stereotypes of how people are thought to speak? Because people's perceptions of men's and women's speech are influenced by underlying cultural models, we need to be wary of statements about differences without careful analyses of the data presented.

This leads to the second problem of inconsistent results. Some research demonstrates clear distinctions, whereas other work does not. Part of the problem may be the small samples selected in research projects. Another problem is more difficult to address: The speaker's gender is only one of many factors that influence choice of grammatical forms. Additional factors include addressee, context, and speaker's intentions and goals. It is difficult to tease out all the contributing influences on a speaker's use of language. With these cautions in mind, we now turn to an examination of some of the relevant research and debates dealing with gender and grammar.

Gender differences have been found in usage of nonstandard grammatical constructions by adolescent girls and boys in a working-class district of Reading,

England (Cheshire 1982:153-154). The following linguistic features were targeted:

1. Present-tense *-s* with nonsingular subjects:
"We *goes* shopping on Saturdays."
2. *Has* with first- and second-person subjects:
"We *has* a little fire keeps us warm."
3. *Was* with plural subjects and singular "you":
"You *was* outside."
4. Multiple negation:
"I'm *not* going *nowhere*."
5. Past-tense *never*, replacing standard "didn't":
"I *never* done it, it was him."
6. *What*, replacing "who, whom, which, that":
"Are you the boy *what's* just come?"
7. Auxiliary *do* with third-person singular subjects:
"How much *do* he want for it?"
8. Past-tense *come*:
"I *come* down here yesterday."
9. *Ain't* used for negative auxiliary "have":
"I *ain't* got any."
10. *Ain't* used for negative auxiliary "be":
"I *ain't* going to help."
11. *Ain't* used for negative copula:
"It's her proper name, *ain't* it?"

In the Reading community, boys consistently employed nonstandard grammatical constructions more often than did girls (only the feature *do* was an exception). This finding is not surprising but, rather, is consistent with other research showing that females use more standard and prestige features than males, who prefer nonstandard forms. The following table presents scores for use of nonstandard forms (ibid.:163). (Note that a score of 100.00 reflects consistent use of the nonstandard.)

Gender Differences in Nonstandard Features

	Frequency Scores	
	Boys	Girls
Nonstandard <i>-s</i>	53.16	52.04
Nonstandard <i>has</i>	54.76	51.61
Multiple negation	88.15	73.58
Nonstandard <i>never</i>	46.84	40.00
Nonstandard <i>what</i>	36.36	14.58
Nonstandard <i>do</i>	57.69	78.95
Nonstandard <i>come</i>	100.00	75.33
<i>Ain't</i> = aux. "have"	92.00	64.58
<i>Ain't</i> = aux. "be"	74.19	42.11
<i>Ain't</i> = copula	85.83	61.18

In an influential book on gender differences, Robin Lakoff (1975) pointed out, from anecdotal evidence, that a number of grammatical patterns appear in women's speech more frequently than in men's. Of the syntactic constructions she discussed, the one receiving the most subsequent attention is the tag question. *Tag questions* are sentences in which a speaker makes a declarative statement and adds on a "tag" in the form of a question about the assertion, as in

Jane came home, didn't she?

It's cold in here, isn't it?

Lakoff stated that women use tag questions because they are reluctant to make direct assertions. They "can avoid committing [themselves] and thereby avoid coming into conflict with the addressee" (ibid.:16-17). Although such deferential style can be favorably evaluated, it can also be perceived as indicating uncertainty and a lack of definite opinions. These contrasting evaluations are examples of the positive/negative judgments often given to women's behavior.

Some studies of actual behavior demonstrate no clear gender preferences for use of tag questions (e.g., Dubois and Crouch 1975). Others indicate the critical effect of context and goals on linguistic usage. Tag questions may serve a variety of social functions. For instance, *modal* tags (Holmes 1984:53) are used to request information from the addressee or request that the addressee confirm a statement about which the speaker is unsure. Janet Holmes calls these tags "speaker-oriented" because they function to supplement the speaker's knowledge, as in

She's coming around noon, isn't she?

A second type, called *affective* tags, are "addressee-oriented," indicating the speaker's interest in or concern for the addressee. One class of affective tags functions as "softeners" to mitigate the force of a command or criticism:

Open the oven door for me, could you?

You're driving rather fast, aren't you?

Another class of affective tags are "facilitative" and indicate the speaker's desire to engage the addressee in continuing conversation (ibid.:55):

Still working hard at your office, are you?

The hen's brown, isn't it?

These tags are essentially mechanisms to establish speaker turns. They "facilitate" conversation by inviting the addressee to build on a topic offered by the current speaker.

Holmes discovered a significant difference in the functional role of tags in women's and men's speech. Men more often use tags for speaker-oriented goals, to obtain or confirm information for themselves, whereas women more often

use tags for addressee-oriented goals, particularly as strategies to engage addressees in talk. (Recall a similar possible function of women's use of rising questioning intonational contours.) Note the following relevant statistical data (ibid.:54):

Type of Meaning	Number of Tag Questions	
	Women	Men
Modal	18 (35%)	24 (61%)
Affective		
Facilitative	30 (59%)	10 (25%)
Softening	3 (6%)	5 (13%)
Total	51	39

By taking account of interactional meaning, Holmes's research demonstrates inadequacy of simply tabulating occurrences of form without attending to function in discourse.

Another study of tags pointed out their use in asymmetric status interaction (Cameron, McAlinden, and O'Leary 1988). Deborah Cameron and coworkers recorded television and radio talk-show and classroom programs and noted differences between "powerful" (e.g., medical expert, teacher, program host) and "powerless" (e.g., client, student, program guest) roles. Sampling included a balance between women and men in each asymmetric role. Although they found that women used more tags than men did, the numbers were not significant (61% vs. 55%, respectively). However, role "power" seemed to influence the kind of tag employed. Using Holmes's terminology for classifying tags, Cameron and coworkers found that "powerful" participants employed "affective" tags, whereas "powerless" speakers preferred "modal" tags. The following table presents the results (ibid.:89).

Tag Questions in Unequal Encounters

Type of Tag	Women		Men	
	Powerful	Powerless	Powerful	Powerless
Modal	3 (5%)	9 (15%)	10 (18%)	16 (29%)
Affective				
Facilitative	43 (70%)	0	25 (45%)	0
Softeners	6 (10%)	0	4 (7%)	0
Total	Women: 61		Men: 55	

Although status asymmetry is an operative factor in the use of tags, gender is also significant. Cameron and her co-workers do not discuss gender difference in the asymmetric roles, but an examination of their data shows support for Holmes's findings that powerful men were more likely than powerful women to employ modal tags (18 percent versus 5 percent) and, contrastingly, powerful women were more likely than powerful men to use affective tags (80 percent versus 52 percent).

CHOICES OF VOCABULARY

Numerous researchers have discussed differences in choice of vocabulary used by women and men, observing that certain words or categories of words appear with greater frequency in the speech of one or the other. Some domains of vocabulary are more elaborated by each gender. For instance, women use and recognize more specific terms denoting colors such as "magenta" or "turquoise." For other categories, men and women are expected to know the meanings of words within domains reflecting culturally stereotyped areas of their assumed expertise, as, for example, cooking and other domestic skills for women, sports and machinery for men.

One well-studied category of words with relevance to gender differences is that of profanity. It has often been claimed that, given class and context, men use curse words with greater frequency and greater profane force than do women while women tend to employ milder expletives. Although both genders use less profanity in cross-sex interactions, many women refrain from its use even in casual conversations with other women who are not their familiars (Bailey and Timm 1976; Jay 1980). However, it is unclear whether these claims are actually substantiated or whether they reflect cultural stereotypes and assumptions. In a study of South African teenagers, Vivian DeKlerk (1992) found no significant differences in the number of or semantic force of the words used by boys and girls to describe males and females. Age was a more important indicator of knowledge and behavior than was gender. Susan Hughes (1997) also criticized the accepted notion of men's greater use of profanity. She contends that "vernacular" speech of lower-class women, including the use of profanity, functions as a linguistic mechanism that reflects and reinforces solidarity and "bonding" between women.

Another area of vocabulary differences is that of modifiers (adjectives and adverbs). Ever since the Danish linguist Otto Jespersen's chapter "The Woman" appeared in his *Language* (1922), observers have pointed to women's tendency to use intensifiers such as "very," "so," or "extremely" and what some have called "empty" adjectives, as "wonderful" or "lovely." Jespersen interpreted these usages as an example of women's tendency to exaggerate and as a sign of linguistic and cognitive superficiality (ibid.:347). This explanation clearly reveals underlying cultural biases that interpret women's behavior in negative terms. In fact, adjectives such as "lovely" are not empty or devoid of meaning. They express personal affective judgments. Women are free to use intensifiers and modifiers because society allows them to display emotion. Men are expected to control their feelings and, therefore, to refrain from using words that have marked emotional expressiveness.

One last area of vocabulary differences is the noted tendency for women to use more *hedge words* in discourse—that is, words or expressions that covertly comment on assertions in one's statements; for example,

Perhaps we could try fixing it.

I've been sort of wondering whether I should go.

Well, I guess it's approximately four feet high.

These constructions function to signal a speaker's uncertainty about the validity of her statement. In doing so, they create an impression of indecisiveness and lack of clarity. Use of hedge words reflects social inhibitions. Because females are socialized to defer to others and avoid conflict, they choose to state opinions interspersed with hedges to minimize confrontation with an addressee who may hold a different view. And making assertions in a tentative style allows speakers to modify or retract statements if they are challenged. But, once again, women who conform to sociolinguistic etiquette by avoiding a display of self-assertion are then often criticized for imprecision and uncertainty.

Hedges can also function to "express the speaker's attitude to the addressee, that is, to signal affective meaning" (Holmes 1984:48); for example,

Well, I think George is a bit, er, perhaps foolish.

This statement was made by a woman commenting on the behavior of her friend's husband. By hedging the assertion that "George is foolish," the speaker demonstrated concern for the addressee by not making a blunt criticism.

Using hedges as part of a politeness strategy is invoked not only by gender, but also by status and context. Note the following excerpt from an interviewer's questioning of the prime minister of New Zealand (quoted in Holmes 1984:49):

I had the feeling that with all the talk about the future that perhaps some of the Ministers were not talking quite so strongly in an election year context and I wondered whether perhaps you were surprised that. . . .

In order to test the relative weight of gender, status, and context on stylistic choice, Faye Crosby and Linda Nyquist (1977) examined speech produced in three different situations: laboratory experiments involving college students discussing a given topic, information-booth question/answer exchanges, and police-station interactions between personnel and clients. They measured usage of what they called the "female register" (ibid.:314), based on Lakoff's characterization of women's speech. As they point out, the female register can be used by either women or men. "The distinguishing feature of the female register is not that it is used exclusively by women but rather that it embodies the female role in our society. The female register is both expressive (e.g., polite rather than direct and informative) and nonassertive. Both of these attributes are central aspects of the stereotyped feminine role in our culture" (ibid.).

Traits measured by Crosby and Nyquist included hedges ("kind of," "stuff like that," "I don't know"), expressive adjectives ("charming," "cute," "weird"), tag questions, intensifiers ("so"), and politeness formulas ("please," "thank you"). They discovered that in college experiments and police-station interactions, women more often produced speech conforming to the female register. In police-station observations, status also proved important, because clients of either gender used the female register more than police personnel did. Consistent results in information-booth exchanges were not found except that male-to-male speech

tended to show least use of the targeted traits (ibid.:316–319). This context is highly artificial. Interpersonal contact is extremely brief, routinized, and impersonal. It is, therefore, not unexpected that speakers do not use affective styles in such situations.

In sum, although both men and women sometimes employ linguistic styles characterized by indecisive, imprecise, or mitigated speech, these traits are perceived to be more typical of women. They are, in actuality, more likely to be used by women (given contextual similarities) and also by people of either gender in subordinate roles. Subordinates (and women in general) are expected to behave politely and show deference to higher-status people. Females learn deferential styles as part of their socialization and employ them in most interactions. Through these processes linking style, gender, and status, cultural models of personal and gender images are reinforced and justified. And men have greater control over the assignment of social value to gender-linked behavior. Men's stereotyped behavior is taken to be the norm or neutral form, whereas women's behavior is judged to be deviant or deficient.

GENDER-RELATED CONVERSATIONAL STYLES

Differences between the genders are demonstrated in conversational style as well as in linguistic structures. Much of the research investigating women's and men's conversation reveals alternatives in speaker turns, topic introduction and control, and mechanisms of signaling active listenership.

In the study of gender-related styles, two different explanatory perspectives have emerged. One contends that men's and women's behavior stems from their socialization into contrasting "cultures," beginning in childhood and continuing into adulthood. It is claimed that girls and boys tend to play and interact in same-sex groups and develop different communicative skills based on different individual and social goals. The other approach analyzes linguistic behavior within a social context of male power and dominance. Men use communicative strategies that assert their control and prerogatives, whereas women employ strategies that are deferential, conciliatory, and sensitive to the other's "face"—to use Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson's (1987) term.

Among the prominent proponents of the "cultural differences" theories are Daniel Maltz and Ruth Borker (1982) and Deborah Tannen (1986, 1990). Maltz and Borker place gender differences within the framework of research concerning "cross-ethnic miscommunication" (ibid.:196). To them, cross-sex conversation is sometimes problematic because of "cultural differences between men and women in their conceptions of friendly conversation, their rules for engaging in it, and their rules for interpreting it" (ibid.:200). Maltz and Borker note the major reported conversational tendencies of women and men: women's tendencies to ask questions, encourage responses from interlocutors, make "positive minimal responses," and allow interruptions into their speaking turns; and men's tendencies to interrupt, challenge, and/or ignore the speech of interlocutors, introduce and

control topics, and make direct assertions of fact and opinion. These modes of adult speech are the outcomes of childhood training in same-sex groups where girls learn "to create and maintain relationships of closeness and equality, to criticize others in acceptable ways, and interpret accurately the speech of others," and boys learn "to assert positions of dominance, to attract and maintain an audience, and to assert [themselves] when other speakers have the floor" (ibid.:205, 207). As a result, when women and men converse "as friends and equals" (ibid.:212), they misinterpret each other's cues.

Maltz and Borker criticize explanations based on gender-linked social power stating that such explanations "do not provide a means of explaining why these specific features appear as opposed to any number of others. . . . They do not really tell us why and how these specific interactional phenomena are linked to the general fact that men dominate within our social system" (ibid.:199). In fact, though, theories based on situating speech in the social context of gender hierarchy do indeed explain why "these specific features" appear and how they are linked to male dominance. Stylistic strategies associated with men are (as Maltz and Borker themselves note) those of asserting control and dominance (interrupting another's turn, insisting on introducing and developing topics while ignoring those introduced by others, failing to encourage another's talk), whereas women's strategies are indicative of relative powerlessness (encouraging another's talk through questions and positive responses, mitigating criticism, deferring to others' interruptions and attempts at control).

The "cultural differences" approach has also been championed in the academic and popular writings of Tannen (1986, 1990). Tannen states the claim even more strongly than do Maltz and Borker: "Boys and girls grow up in different worlds. . . . And as adults they travel in different worlds, reinforcing patterns established in childhood" (1986). Boys and girls "talk differently" because "[f]rom the time they're born, they're treated differently."

Although Tannen acknowledges that girls and boys are "treated differently," she never attempts to understand why. Instead, she focuses on the "misunderstandings" between men and women because of their "incongruent expectations" and differences in how they "view the role of talk in relationships." Going one step further than Maltz and Borker, Tannen states that male-female conversations are not similar *to* but actually *are* instances of "cross-cultural communication" (1990:47). Just as people from different cultural backgrounds misinterpret the stylistic intent and meanings of each other's speech, Tannen cautions her readers that "not seeing style differences for what they are, people draw conclusions about personality or intentions. . . . Understanding the other's ways of talking is a giant leap across the communication gap" (ibid.:298).

However, Tannen herself has been accused of "not seeing style differences for what they are." For example, by "regard[ing] socialization as the main influence shaping identified patterns of adult linguistic behaviour," Tannen fails to address "both what the triggers for such behaviour patterns in the first place are and what ensures [their] continuation from child to adulthood" (Davis 1996:75). And a

Uchida (1992) points out, "the sexual division of labor in conversation is not a mere result of cultural differences." Instead, it reflects "a hierarchy, a power structure in the society [that] affects our everyday interaction" (ibid.:559-560). In addition to the differences in communicative strategies that result in women working harder to maintain conversation than do men, the negative consequences of "miscommunication" are borne more by women. Men's behavior (being in control, assertive, rational) is given public approval, whereas women's behavior (being deferential, unassertive, emotional) is devalued or trivialized. Again quoting Uchida:

An analysis of miscommunication must take into consideration who gets what they want, who is punished, who is forgiven, and in what ways—both on the individual level and on the societal level—after the miscommunication. . . . The approach that dismisses this aspect has the danger of being used to legitimize blatantly misogynist behavior on the ground that it is a case of innocent miscommunication caused by cultural differences. (ibid.:562)

Finally, Senta Troemel-Ploetz discounts Tannen's premise that women and men do not understand each other:

On the contrary, they understand each other quite well. They know who is allowed to use dominant speech acts, like commands, orders, explanations, contradiction, criticism, evaluations, definitions, attacks, challenges, accusations, reproaches; and who has to apologize, defend, ask for favors, beg, request permission, justify herself, agree, support, adjust, accommodate, and accept someone else's definition of the situation. (1998:447)

In conversation, men and women reproduce their social rights by the way that they present themselves and interact. Men are typically able to get their interactional needs fulfilled more often than women do. Communication differences between men and women are, therefore, not simply differences of style that can be resolved by attempting to understand each other. By taking linguistic interaction out of the social context that produces it, the meaning of the interaction is lost. And any fundamental remedy is made impossible. As Troemel-Ploetz notes, by avoiding the social and political implications of conversation and by "selling the status-quo, [Tannen's] by-intention apolitical book becomes a highly political act" (ibid.:450).

Rather than explaining men's and women's behavior as derived from separate cultures, other researchers emphasize the context of power and dominance that permits men to assert control while it teaches women to support and defer to the goals of others. Henley and Kramarae draw similarities between the social relations of the genders and those of unequal ethnic, racial, and class groups and note similarities in conversation interaction and interpretation:

Hierarchies determine whose version will prevail; whose speech style will be seen as normal; who will be required to learn the communication style, and interpret the meaning, of the other; and who will be required to imitate the other's style in order to fit into the society. (1991:19-20)

It is typically men's speech style that is considered "normal" and that of women as deviant or in need of explanation. Women bear more of the burden of interpreting men's interactive style. And in order to be considered serious and competent, women must use speaking styles generally associated with men. As Henley and Kramarae point out, "Females, not males, [must] learn to read the silence, lack of emotional expression, or brutality of the other sex as not only other than, but more benign than, it appears (ibid.:23).

The facts of male control of conversation (through mechanisms that will be detailed in following sections) are best understood within the social context that produces them. But not only are the communicative strategies of men and women created by a system of hierarchy and inequality, the strategies themselves serve to maintain that very system: "One may in fact ask how well male dominance could be maintained if we had open and equally-valued communication between women and men. The construction of miscommunication between the sexes emerges as a powerful tool, maybe even a necessity, to maintain the structure of male supremacy" (ibid.:42).

Power is not abstract, however. It is embodied in people's identities. And those identities are based, in part, on the roles that people expect to have in the society. As Scott Kiesling observed, "When a man constructs a powerful identity, it is usually connected in some way to 'real' power. Thus, the expectation of a 'powerful' identity for men is not symmetrical to the expectation of a 'powerless' identity for women, since a man's powerful identity is *rewarded* (with power), whereas a woman's non-powerless identity may be *punished*" (italics in original; 1997:65-66).

The role women play in this system is, of course, complex. They may at times contribute to maintaining their own subordination by acquiescing to men's control; they may collude with male power by interpreting men's speech as more worthy than their own; and they may counter male prerogatives either through overt objections or covert resistance. Resistance may be demonstrated informally through comment and gossip, or it may be formalized through special speech genres such as women's poetry and songs (see, for example, Lila Abu-Lughod's studies of Bedouin women's genres).

A number of studies have investigated whether cultural stereotypes concerning men's and women's speaking styles have any basis in practice. One such stereotype is that women are more talkative than men. However, an experiment aimed at measuring verbosity (amount of talk) demonstrated the opposite pattern. Male and female college students were presented with three pictures drawn by Albrecht Dürer, a fifteenth-century Flemish artist, and were asked to describe the drawings as thoroughly as possible, taking as much time as they liked (Swacker 1975). Results showed striking gender differences. The mean time for all three pictures was 13.0 minutes for males and only 3.17 for females (ibid.:80). Choosing only the second description, men's speaking length averaged 333.41 seconds, and women's 96.0 seconds. Verbosity differed significantly, but rather than confirming the stereotype of talkative women, the study showed that male speakers talked

more. Persistence of the erroneous stereotype has been explained by Cheris Kramer, who suggested that because females are socialized to defer to their coconversationalists, "perhaps a 'talkative' woman is one who does talk as much as a man" (1975:47). Because men have more rights to talk, they are not considered talkative when they exercise those rights. In contrast, women who speak in moderation are judged to be talkative.

In actual (rather than experimental) settings, men also tend to be more talkative than women. Observation of conversation in university faculty meetings revealed that speaking turns of male teachers were from one and one-quarter to nearly four times longer than those of females (Edelsky 1981:415). When topics and context of meetings were more formal, men's contributions to discussions lengthened and those of women were shortened. In more relaxed, give-and-take exchanges, women's and men's turns were equal.

Extending the meaning of these findings, Jack Sattel (1983) found that although men may be more talkative than women in some settings, they are more silent in regard to discussion of emotions. Sattel contended that men's tendency for emotional inexpressiveness or unwillingness to talk about affect either with women or with other men stems from their desire to maintain and assert power. "What better way is there to exercise power than to *make it appear* that *all* one's behavior seems to be the result of unemotional rationality. . . . Keeping cool, keeping distant as others challenge you or make demands upon you, is a strategy for keeping the upper hand" (italics in original; 1983:120). Silence functions as part of competitive displays of dominance since "to not say anything is to say something very important indeed: that the battle is to be fought by [his] rules and when [he] chooses to fight" (ibid.:122). This tactic is particularly effective when used in interactions with women because of women's tendencies for emotional self-disclosure. Furthermore, Sattel notes that it is women rather than men who have to interpret the other's speech and adjust to it (ibid.:123). Sattel urges that these interactions be understood in the context of male dominance and female subordination:

Male dominance takes shape in the positions of formal and informal *power* men hold in the social division of labor; greater male prestige includes, and is evidenced by, the greater *reward* which attaches to male than to female activities. What our culture embodies is not simply two stereotypes—one masculine, one feminine—but a set of power and prestige arrangements attached to gender. (ibid.:119–120)

This system, which rests on social power, cannot be changed by "simply changing men's capacity to feel or express themselves" because "men are not oppressed *as men*, and hence are not in a position to be liberated *as men*" (ibid.:123).

In a study of interactions between spouses that substantiated Sattel's insights, Victoria DeFrancisco reported that men's silence had the effect of silencing women. Although men directed topics and their development through interruption and minimal responses, they most often exerted their control by silence, especially in the form of "no response" to their wives' prior statement (1998:179).

While women sometimes employed this strategy as well, they did so much less often (68 percent of "no response" were done by men, 32 percent by women). Men's "no response" turns were followed either by their wives' silence (giving up) or attempts to introduce an alternative topic.

Two important studies of gender, by Candace West and Don Zimmerman (1975, 1983), investigated dyadic (two-person) interactions, focusing on instances of one speaker's turn limited or interrupted by a co-participant. West and Zimmerman recorded casual conversations in public places (coffee shops, stores, university buildings) between people who knew each other and later conducted experiments involving college students who were unacquainted. In both studies, they noted violations of speakers' turns in the form of interruptions defined technically as an intrusion into current speaker's talk "prior to the last lexical constituent [word] that could define a possible terminal boundary" (Zimmerman and West 1975:114). An "interruption" contrasts significantly with an "overlap," which is "simultaneous speech where a speaker other than the current speaker begins to speak at or very close to a possible transition place in a current speaker's utterance (i.e., within the boundaries of the last word)" (ibid.). Overlaps, therefore, are errors of judgment in transitions and timing to the next turn, whereas interruptions are violations of a current speaker's rights.

Although Zimmerman and West's samples were small, their findings are quite striking and consistent with other research concerning men's and women's status in our society. First, they found a marked difference in patterns of overlap and interruption in same-sex and cross-sex conversations. In the former, overlaps and interruptions were evenly distributed, each speaker contributing approximately the same number. But in cross-sex conversations, almost all errors and intrusions were initiated by men. The following tables present data obtained in the 1975 study (ibid.:115, 116).

Interruptions/Overlaps in 20 Same-Sex Conversations

	First Speaker	Second Speaker	Total
Interruptions	43% (3)	57% (4)	100% (7)
Overlaps	55 (12)	45 (10)	100 (22)

Interruptions/Overlaps in 11 Cross-Sex Conversations

	Males	Females	Total
Interruptions	96% (46)	4% (2)	100% (48)
Overlaps	100 (9)	—	100 (9)

In addition to marked gender differences in cross-sex conversations, another significant fact displayed in these tables is that in same-sex interactions, most conversational errors are overlaps (minor mistakes of timing), whereas in interactions between men and women, most intrusions are interruptions (violations of current speaker's turns). Exercise of power by male participants seems to be an operative principle in many cross-sex encounters.

The following table presents findings from West and Zimmerman's 1983 experimental study of unacquainted students (1983:107).

Interruptions in 5 Cross-Sex Conversations

Conversation	Amount of Interruption		Total
	Male-initiated	Female-initiated	
Dyad 1	75%	25%	100% (4)
Dyad 2	100	0	100 (4)
Dyad 3	67	33	100 (6)
Dyad 4	83	17	100 (6)
Dyad 5	63	37	100 (8)

Zimmerman and West's research demonstrates a clear inequality in the rights of women and men engaged in conversation. Men use mechanisms of power and control in interactions with women, whether previously acquainted or not. Interruptions are strategies that disregard the current speaker's talk and attempt to disallow that person an opportunity to express herself fully as she had intended. In so doing, interruptions also function as tactics to exert control over topics of conversation because they frequently lead to changes in topics, establishing the interests of the interrupter. West and Zimmerman concluded:

When viewed from a perspective encompassing the fate of women in the various institutional domains of society, the many small insults women suffer in face-to-face interaction do perhaps seem trivial. Yet, . . . the gestures of power are an integral part of women's placement in the social scheme of things. These daily gestures are constant "reminders" which help constitute women's subordinate status. (1983:110)

In research designed to test hypotheses concerning relative influences of gender and occupational status on frequency of interruption, Nicola Woods (1988) tape-recorded triadic (three-party) interactions in work settings. Subjects included both male and female supervisors and subordinates. Woods discovered that the two factors of status and gender significantly affected several conversational strategies, but that gender was the most important influence on behavior. "Essentially, while the power base of occupational status did influence the way that both men and women organised conversation, nevertheless even when women held high-status occupational positions male subordinates still organised the interaction in a way that allowed them to dominate the floor" (ibid.:149).

Woods found that powerful people (high-status and male) were more likely to interrupt co-participants successfully and were least likely to be interrupted in their turns. And when men intruded on other speakers, they were usually successful in gaining the floor (data indicate 17 out of 20 attempts), whereas women interrupters were not as likely to succeed (only 11 of 21 attempts; ibid.:151).

The following two tables present Woods's findings on interruptions. The first table displays numbers of interruptions initiated by each speaker; the second presents numbers of times each speaker was interrupted. In both cases, success or lack of success is additionally enumerated. "Occupational status" is rated as 1, 2, or 3 from highest to lowest. In the first set of scores (encounter A), the highest status person was a woman, with a second-ranked man and a third-ranked woman; in the second (encounter B), the superior was a man, conversing with female and male subordinates (ibid.:151, 152).

	Encounter A			Encounter B		
	1	2	3	1	2	3
Occupational status	1	2	3	1	2	3
Gender	F	M	F	M	F	M
Successful interruption	6	9	4	4	1	4
Unsuccessful interruption	3	1	3	0	4	2

	Encounter A			Encounter B		
	1	2	3	1	2	3
Occupational status	1	2	3	1	2	3
Gender	F	M	F	M	F	M
Interrupted successfully	2	6	11	1	7	3
Interrupted unsuccessfully	1	4	1	5	1	0

These data show that men are usually successful in interrupting current speakers. They violate other speakers' turns, even when the men are subordinates and particularly when subordinate to a higher-status woman. And women are the most likely targets of successful interruptions even when they are in higher-status positions. When the double factors of low status and female gender co-occur, women are especially vulnerable, as shown in the second table. The lowest-status woman was interrupted successfully 11 times (encounter A) and the second-ranked woman 7 times (encounter B).

In a study of dyadic conversations between physicians and their patients, West found that both status and gender were significant factors in the frequency of interruption but, like Woods's findings, gender outweighed status. In interactions between male physicians and their patients, the doctors initiated 67 percent (126) of the interruptions, whereas patients were responsible for only 33 percent (62); but in encounters between female physicians and their patients, the doctors initiated 32 percent (19) of the interruptions, and patients were responsible for 68 percent (40) (1998:399-400). An additional significant finding is that in all dyads involving a male physician, the doctor always interrupted the patient more often than the patient interrupted the doctor, whereas there was variation in dyads involving female physicians. When both doctor and patient were women, both interrupted the other with about equal frequency, whereas male patients interrupted the doctor much more often than the doctor interrupted the patient (ibid.:404-405).

Women and men employ different strategies for conversational interaction in casual and familiar settings as well as in structured contexts. In studies of talk between couples, Pamela Fishman (1983) collected 52 hours of tape recordings

made in the homes of three white, middle-class couples (with their approval and ability to censure material if they wished). In her research and analysis, Fishman developed the notion of the "work of conversation":

Interaction requires at least two people. Conversation is produced not simply by their presence, but also by the display of their continuing agreement to pay attention to one another. That is, all interactions are potentially problematic and occur only through the continual, turn-by-turn, efforts of the participants. . . . In a sense, every remark or turn at speaking should be seen as an attempt to interact. Some attempts succeed; others fail. For an attempt to succeed, the other party must be willing to do further interactional work. That other person has the power to turn an attempt into a conversation or to stop it dead. (ibid.:90-91)

Fishman's data revealed a "variety of strategies to insure, encourage and subvert conversation" (ibid.:93). On the whole, women do more of the interactional work, attempting to gain their partner's attention and responding to their partner's talk. The following devices were used to initiate conversation or to introduce topics (ibid.:94-95):

1. *Attention beginnings* (e.g., "this is interesting"). These expressions function to establish the interest or legitimacy of statements or topics to follow. "Attention beginnings" were used twice as often by women as by men.
2. *Asking questions*. Questions help guarantee subsequent talk because they are bound in a paired sequence with answers. Addressees are usually obliged to give at least some response. In Fishman's transcripts, women asked questions two and a half times more often than did men.
3. *Asking "D'ya know what?"* These ritualized questions trigger a three-part exchange of the form; question-question-answer. The initiator asks, "D'ya know what?" addressee asks "What?" and initiator returns with the intended topic. This tactic was used by women twice as much as by men.

A significant ingredient in the work of conversation is the response one gives to co-participants. Responses can encourage speakers to continue or discourage and block interaction. One type of reaction is the "minimal response," often in the form of "umm," "oh," or "yeah," uttered by the listener during or following the current speaker's turn. According to Fishman, men and women used these mechanisms for different purposes. Men's responses tended to occur at the ends of women's turns, taking the place of their own turn. This actually discourages the current speaker because it displays no interest in the speaker's topic, requests no elaboration, and contributes no informational comment that the previous speaker can build on. In contrast, women as listeners tended to place responses within the current speaker's turns, signaling ongoing listener interest and encouraging the speaker to continue (ibid.:95-96).

Finally, Fishman discovered that whereas women suggested nearly twice as many topics as men, they were successful in establishing only about one-third of the accepted topics. Men's topics were almost always accepted, whereas women had a failure rate of nearly 2 to 1. The following table presents relevant data (ibid.:97).

Topic Success and Failure

	Success	Failure	Uncertain	Total
Men	28	0	1	29
Women	17	28	2	47
Total	45	28	3	76

After analyzing the evidence contained in the recordings, Fishman concluded:

As with work in its usual sense, there appears to be a division of labor in conversation. The people who do the routine maintenance work, the women, are not the same people who either control or benefit from the process. Women are the "shitworkers" of routine interaction, and the "goods" being made are not only interactions, but, through them, realities. . . . But the idea that it is work is obscured. The work is not seen as what women do, but as part of what they are. Because this work is obscured, because it is seen as an aspect of gender identity rather than of gender activity, the maintenance and expression of male-female power relations in our everyday conversations are hidden as well. When we orient instead to the activities involved in maintaining gender, we are able to discern the reality of hierarchy in our daily lives. (ibid.: 99-100)

Research in conversational strategies indicates that people transmit complex messages about their gender identities through the topics they choose and the linguistic devices they employ. These studies make it clear that gender is continually enacted and performed as a dynamic part of a person's identity rather than as a static attribute. An analysis of an interaction involving four male college roommates uncovers some of the strategies these young men use to affirm their masculinity while at the same time employing characteristics often thought to be typical of the behavior of women (Cameron 1999). In the conversation analyzed, two topics dominated: basketball (the men were engaged in watching a basketball game on television) and the negative attributes of supposedly gay classmates. The latter topic clearly was an example of "gossip," a stereotypically female pastime. In Cameron's analysis, the men identified several of their classmates as "gay" because of these classmates' choice of attire and personal grooming habits, not because of specific knowledge about their sexual activities. But in so doing, the four friends revealed through their speech that they paid close attention to the bodies and clothing of other men, a supposedly tabooed behavior. For example, note the following exchange:

- BRYAN:** you know that really gay guy in our Age of Revolution class who sits in front of us? He wore shorts again, by the way, it's like 42° out, he wore shorts again. It's like a speedo, he wears a speedo to class. He's got incredibly skinny legs.
- ED:** it's worse, you know, like those shorts women volleyball players wear? It's like those. French cut spandex.
- BRYAN:** he's either got some condition that he's got to like have his legs exposed at all times or else he's got really good legs.

- ED: he's probably, he's like at home combing his leg hairs.
 BRYAN: he doesn't have any leg hair though.
 AL: very long very white and very skinny
 BRYAN: those ridiculous Reeboks that are always. . . . and goofy white socks always striped, tube socks
 ED: he's the antithesis of man

In analyzing this conversation segment as part of the young men's overall display of their heterosexual gender identity, Cameron points out the contradiction in which they find themselves: "They are impelled, paradoxically, to talk about men's bodies as a way of demonstrating their own total lack of sexual interest in those bodies" (ibid.: 449). In gossiping about the "gay" classmates, the men were revealing their keen observation and attention to their target's body and style of dress. But in this conversation, as always, context and participants are critical components in the negotiation and display of meaning. As Cameron notes, "performing masculinity or femininity 'appropriately' cannot mean giving exactly the same performance regardless of the circumstances" (ibid.: 454). Furthermore, as she observes, it is safer for heterosexual men to comment on the appearance and clothing of "gay men" than it would be for them to talk so intimately about other heterosexual men.

GENDER BIAS IN ENGLISH

Language is a vehicle for expressing cultural models, in part through the way people, activities, and ideas are named. In societies with entrenched gender hierarchy, where women and their behavior are disvalued, inequalities in linguistic images are one sign of the denigration of women. By continual usage of words and expressions that demean females, speakers unconsciously (or consciously) reproduce and reinforce negative stereotypes. These stereotypes become internalized symbols for both genders, resulting in male attitudes toward females as deviant and female acceptance of negative self-assessments. In this section we review some of the literature and findings related to gender bias in linguistic form.

Classes of Vocabulary

The English language expresses gender distinctions in many classes of vocabulary, including the labeling of people (nouns), their qualities (adjectives), and actions (verbs). But English does not simply record differences; it covertly (and overtly) demeans or trivializes females, presenting males as normative and females as deviant or secondary.

First of all, English creates a context for the interaction of genders with the term "opposite sex." Certainly the sexes are different, but in what sense are they "opposite"? The word itself connotes a polarity, denying possibilities of overlap or congruence. It also implies conflict and antagonism, as in "they have opposing views" or "the Mayor opposes the new legislation."

Words referring to human beings are often paired for female and male exemplars, but in ordinary usage, males precede and females appear in linguistic "second place." Some instances of this common ordering are male and female, man and woman, he or she, husband and wife. Such pairing denotes primary status of male in two ways. First, order of linguistic components is generally of cognitive importance; that is, more important elements usually occur earlier in sentences. For example, many languages make use of a procedure known as "focus-fronting" through which words and clauses are manipulated to place important or emphasized segments earlier than they would appear in unmarked sentences. English employs passive constructions to accomplish this goal (compare: the child caught the ball/the ball was caught by the child). Therefore, arguing that the first member of a pair carries greater importance is consistent with widespread linguistic processes.

The second kind of evidence supporting the contention of covert inequality in male/female pairs is provided by comparing similar constructions denoting age and status hierarchies. Older or higher-status individuals precede younger or lower-status people: older and younger, parent and child, dominant and subordinate. Other sets of paired words reflect positive connotations given to the first member and negative connotations to the second: good and bad, happy and sad, rich and poor. Gender, then, merges with these constellations of social and semantic categories.

Two counterexamples to the "male + female" ordering are "ladies and gentlemen" and "bride and groom." The first is typically used in public formal situations where polite speech is preferred. Perhaps its use is akin to chivalrous behavior that often masks underlying power. The second, "bride and groom," is also a conventionalized expression relevant in a formal ceremonial context. Note, however, that after the wedding, the couple is transformed from "bride and groom" to "husband and wife." Variation in the usual ordering occurs in kin-term pairs; for example "mother and father" is as likely as "father and mother." Perhaps this flexibility reflects individual choice based on attitudes toward relatives and may also indicate our society's stereotypes of closer emotional bonds between children and their mothers.

The English language provides evidence of gender hierarchy in marital relationships, first in the traditional, although disappearing, formula "I now pronounce you man and wife" in which the male is labeled by his humanness, but the female is defined in relation to her husband. Second, our culture decrees that women give up their maiden names at marriage and assume their husband's last name. A wife can be referred to by her husband's full name (first + last) with the preposed address term Mrs., as in Mrs. John Smith. The couple can then be called "the Smiths" or even "the John Smiths," depriving the wife of her own identity. Finally, couples are frequently described by the use of the husband's name + "his wife," as in "John Smith and his wife." In such usages, the wife appears almost as a possession or appendage without an autonomous existence. A contrasting construction, "Jane Jones and her husband," has marked meaning and would

typically occur only if special attention is given to "Jane Jones" for particular contextual or emotional purposes.

Another symbolic reflection of females' subsidiary status is the possibility of deriving girls' names from male sources. Feminine endings *-a*, *-ette*, *-ine*, *-y* (or *-ie*) are thus added to male names: Roberta, Bernadette, Geraldine, Stephanie. Any male name can idiosyncratically be converted into a girl's name by this procedure. The only boy's name obtained from a female source is Marion, which occurs rarely in contemporary American society but in any case has a special derivation, originating from the religious symbol of Mary.

In a further reflection of the semantics of gender, feminine suffixes *-ette* (or *-et*) and *-y* (or *-ie*) can function as diminutives, that is, as markers of smallness, for example, booklet, itty-bitsy. Diminutives also carry meanings of endearment, reflected in nicknames and affectionate or youthful versions of personal names: Cathy, Tommy. Although both girls and boys are addressed with these forms as children, males tend to outgrow their diminutive names (except among kin), whereas females often retain them throughout life.

The interaction of age and gender is also differentially marked for males and females in the terms "boy, girl, man, woman." Boys typically become men at roughly the age of adulthood, although exact demarcation of the change is often vague. But girls can remain girls long after they become adults. It is true that this usage is unacceptable today among many people, but it is still frequently employed. Comparable use of the word "boy" to refer to an adult man is restricted to certain regional varieties, as in the American South. These examples demonstrate that although the words "girl" and "boy" have definitions that might appear to be distinguished solely on the basis of gender, they actually have uses and implications that are quite different in recognizing or denying adult status.

Some sets of words for males and females illustrate another process of inequality in images of gender. Consider the following pairs: lord/lady, sir/dame, master/mistress, king/queen, bachelor/spinster, governor/governess. In each of these, there is one level of meaning equating the paired individuals. But a critical process has affected females in a consistent manner. That process is often referred to as semantic derogation, changes in meaning by which negative attributes become attached to senses of words. Semantic derogation of words for women has historically resulted in secondary meanings that demean or trivialize women and their activities or that emphasize their sexuality. The words "mistress" and "dame" are examples of words taking on sexual connotations, whereas "governess" is a trivialization. "Queen" also has a sexual meaning, although it is applied to men, rather than women, in a derogatory fashion. "Spinster" implies negation of sexuality, so that a spinster is not an "unmarried woman" in the same way that a "bachelor" is an "unmarried man." A "bachelor" is a man who is desirable as a potential husband, whereas a "spinster" is an undesirable mate. Because of this negative implication, the expression "bachelor girl" (or even "bachelorette") has evolved.

The word "lady" has special complexities. In one of its uses, it retains polite, respectful implications of its origin. However, it also occurs in casual contexts as a

label for a woman whose name is unknown to a speaker: "Hey, lady, move your car!" Perhaps its most interesting function is as a euphemism for "woman." The word "woman" needs a euphemistic replacement because it too has acquired sexual connotations. Compare the following (adapted from Lakoff 1975:26):

She's only 12, but she already acts like a woman.

She's only 12, but she already acts like a lady.

These sentences highlight two cultural images of females that our society promulgates. The first suggests her sexuality; the second notes the polite and "proper" behavior expected of her.

The pair woman/man also deserves attention. "Woman" refers specifically and only to females, whereas "man" is used not only for males but for "people" in general, as in "mankind." In addition, "man" appears as a verb meaning "operate" or "control": "We need someone to man the elevator."

In addition, many English words are based on roots or compounds with "man," "master," or other male-oriented sources: bachelor's degree, bedfellow, brotherhood, forefather, fraternize, freshman, manpower, masterful, mastermind, patronize, statesmanship (Nilsen 1977:36).

As Muriel Schulz pointed out, many words associated with females that began with innocuous or even positive connotations have undergone processes of derogation, most often with sexual implications. For example, "hussy" is derived from Old English *huswife* (housewife), originally meaning "female head of household." It gradually came to mean "a rustic or rude woman" and finally "a lewd, brazen woman or a prostitute." The words "nymph" and "nymphet" were first endearments referring to "beautiful young girls or women" and then became euphemisms for prostitutes, finally meaning "a sexually precocious girl; a loose young woman." Semantic narrowing and derogation also affected the word "whore," which originally was a polite term for "a lover of either sex." It then narrowed its meaning only to women and degenerated as a label for prostitutes (1975:66-69).

A more recent expression, "sex object," is a further instance of defining females by their sexuality. The term removes not only females' full personalities and activities, but also their very personhood and metaphorically transforms them into inanimates. Similar semantic processes have not affected words for males. In fact, although words referring to male sexuality, such as "stud," are not used in polite speech, they have positive rather than negative connotations.

Terms in AAVE similarly express derogatory or trivialized meanings for females. In AAVE slang, most words for women emphasize physical characteristics, including variations in skin color—"redbone," "spotlight," "high yaller," "pinky"—or apply animal terms to females—"fox," "filly," "butterfly" (Scott 1974:220).

Female/male differences are also found in adjectives describing people's attributes and in verbs denoting their activities. Most verbs can be used for male

or female activities, but others are restricted to refer to actions of females. For example, men/women "yell," but only women "screech" or "shriek"; men/women "talk" and women "chat" or "gossip"; men/women may "laugh," but women "giggle." Notice that all of the specialized "female" verbs have derogatory or trivialized nuances. Adjectives or adverbs derived from these verbs are employed for women with negative meaning: chatty, screechy, talkative, giggly.

Adjectives referring to physical characteristics of females are often used in contexts where comparable modifiers for males would not likely occur. Even public figures and political leaders who are women typically have their appearance or clothing commented upon by the media. This practice reminds women that they are never free from scrutiny and that their physical image is a crucial part of their being.

Analysis of classes of vocabulary, that is, nouns, verbs, and adjectives, uncovers a consistent pattern of segregating males and females and of demeaning or trivializing the latter. Women are restricted, through language, to their roles in relation to men, either as wives or as sexual beings. And their behavior in other spheres of life is disvalued through negative connotations associated with their activities. The English language, then, creates and reinforces cultural models of gender that help maintain social privilege for males and undermine the status and self-worth of females.

Generic "He" and "Man"

One of the most frequently debated examples of linguistic favoritism toward males is the use of the so-called generic "he" and "man" to refer to people without regard to gender. In some contexts, the prescribed pronoun "he" has a singular referent—"A child learns his reading skills in the first grade"—but in others, it has underlying nonsingular semantic referents, as in "Everyone should take his coat." Here, "everyone" may be morphologically singular (lacking the plural suffix -s), but it obviously refers to more than one individual. Insistence by grammarians that "he" is the "proper" pronoun for an indefinite person or people in general dates to the eighteenth century (Bodine 1975). Prior to that time, the pronoun "they" was used for singular or plural indefinites and generics, as shown in writing and presumably in speaking. In a discussion of English pronouns, George McKnight (1928) collected quotations from no less than William Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*: "God send every one their heart's desire" and "Each leaning on their elbows and their hips." Later authors continued to use "they," as, for example, Jane Austen in *Mansfield Park*: "Nobody put themselves out of the way" and "Each had their favorite." Although people are taught in school to use "he" in formal speech and especially in writing, even casual observation shows that speakers employ "they" in ordinary conversation. And while prescriptivists argue about the confusion of number and person in the use of "they" to refer to one individual, they ignore the

fact that the second person pronoun "you" is employed for both singular and plurals (McWhorter 1998:122). Finally, in addition to overlooking semantics and failing to hear actual speech, the grammarian approach ignores the existence of a linguistic context in which only the pronoun "they" can occur. In tag questions, when the subject of a statement is a generic or indefinite person, the underlying pronoun replacement surfacing in the tag is clearly "they":

Everyone left the room, didn't they?

Even when an indefinite noun refers to a single individual, its pronoun is "they":

Somebody left the room, didn't they?

Experimental tests of people's reactions to sentences with "generic he or his" consistently support the contention that "he or his" is never gender-neutral. Rather, it always contains some of its basic masculine sense. This is not surprising; it is even expected in terms of semantic theory in linguistics. That is, every word has a central or focal meaning that is carried with it in all contexts of its extended use. Underlying notions of gender associated with generic pronouns were studied in several experiments conducted by Donald MacKay (1983). One study presented male and female students at UCLA with sentences containing pronouns, such as "When a botanist is in the field, he is usually working." Test sentences were mixed, so that some referred to stereotypically "male-related" antecedents (engineer, doctor), others to "female-related" antecedents (model, secretary), and still others to "neutral" referents (student, musician). Subjects were asked to decide quickly whether or not sentences could refer to females. Results revealed that 95 percent of respondents (10 women and 10 men) judged that the sentences could not refer to females. Male and female subjects had similar reactions. And subjects excluded females at constant rates regardless of whether sentences had gender-stereotyped or neutral antecedents (ibid.:41).

In a related experiment, MacKay presented subjects with sentences identical to those in the first test except that pronouns were omitted, for example, "A botanist who is in the field is usually working." Results were strikingly different: 43 percent of the subjects (as compared to 95 percent in the prior study) responded that the sentences could not refer to females. Moreover, identity of antecedents became significant. Subjects thought that 68 percent of sentences with male antecedents could not refer to females, 42 percent with neutral antecedents, and 19 percent with female antecedents. Finally, sex of subject also affected judgments. Men were more likely than women to restrict sentences to male referents. MacKay concluded, "These findings suggest that adding prescriptive he dramatically increases the exclusion of females and washes out effects of subject sex and nature of the antecedent" (ibid.:42).

In another type of experiment, college students (226 male, 264 female) were presented with the task of composing stories based on two themes: "In a large coeducational institution the average student will feel isolated in

____ introductory courses" and "Most people are concerned with appearance. Each person knows when ____ appearance is unattractive" (Moulton, Robinson, and Elias 1978). The subject pool was divided into six groups, given alternative versions of the two themes expressed with pronouns "his," "their," or "his or her." Analyses of stories focused on the sex of the main character developed in respondents' compositions. Over all conditions, female characters appeared in 56 percent of stories with "his or her" as the pronoun in the theme statement, 46 percent were female with "their" pronouns, and only 35 percent were female when the pronoun "his" was used (ibid.:1034). Moulton and her co-workers asserted that "our results indicate that using male terms in their 'gender-neutral' sense induces people to think of males even in contexts that are explicitly gender-neutral" (ibid.).

Supposedly neutral interpretations of "man" face similar problems. This word has an interesting history, beginning in Old English to mean "a human being" with no gender association. Separate unambiguous words existed to denote females, *wif*, and males, *wer* or *carl*. "Man" could combine with these to refer specifically to adults of their respective genders: *wifman* and *werman* or *carlman*. *Wifman* eventually became "woman," and male designators were replaced by semantic narrowing of man to refer to males (Miller and Smith 1977:25). Experimental studies have revealed that even when "man" is used in generic contexts, male images surface.

In one experiment, college students were asked to select and submit illustrations for an introductory sociology textbook (Schneider and Hacker 1973). Each of two groups was presented with alternative titles for chapters, one phrased as "Urban Man," "Political Man," or "Social Man" and the second as "Urban Life," "Political Behavior," or "Society." In the first group, 64 percent of respondents chose photographs of males only, whereas half of those in the second group chose male-only illustrations (ibid.:14). The likelihood of including women in photographs varied for different titles. The only one in which women appeared in a majority of illustrations was "Social Man" in which case a male was typically shown surrounded by females in contexts of social or leisure activities. The title "Urban Man" elicited nearly equal representation, "males only" in 55 percent of illustrations. For the "Political Man," "Industrial Man," and "Economic Man" chapters, women appeared in a small minority of photographs (ibid.:16). On the basis of their study, Schneider and Hacker asserted that uses of "-man" as a label "may serve to 'filter-out' women, largely by suggesting imagery appropriate only or primarily to men" (ibid.:12).

In response to concerns over the symbolic preference for males expressed covertly and overtly by words such as "man," "he," and "his," advocates of gender equality in language have suggested replacing these words with genuinely neutral forms such as "person," "people," and "she or he" and "his or her." However, a curious development has occurred in the case of "-person" when used in compounds such as "spokesperson" or "chairperson." In common usage, there is currently a tendency to restrict "-person" nouns to females, retaining "-man" for

males. "Spokesperson," therefore, has replaced "spokeswoman" but not "spokesman."

A similar failure to get the point of an advocated change concerns address designations of Ms./Miss/Mrs. The title "Ms." was introduced in order to eliminate labeling women according to their marital status. Although intended as replacement for both "Miss" and "Mrs.," it has come to be employed (if at all) to refer solely to unmarried women. The only context in which it is generally used for all women is in business and official letters to address unfamiliar women, thus providing senders with the ability to avoid offending receivers by mistaking the marital status.

All the data uncovered in analyses of English linguistic forms indicate pervasive, covert ascription of positive and normative qualities to males and negative or secondary ones to females. Continual repetition of English words and expressions, both as speakers and hearers, reinforces cultural evaluations that enhance males' status and disvalue females'. These judgments do not originate in the language but arise linguistically to express, supplement, and justify entrenched cultural models.

SUMMARY

In all societies, gender distinctions are expressed through language. They may occur as differences in linguistic form: Women and men use alternatives in pronunciation, word selection, and grammatical construction. Gender-appropriate styles of communicative interaction further mark the separation of women and men. Finally, words and expressions in a language itself may reflect gender differences in how they symbolize males and females.

In the United States and other English-speaking societies, women and men behave differently in several communicative domains. Women tend to use speech that is marked as standard, correct, and/or prestigious. Their choice of words and grammatical constructions can be characterized as polite or deferential. And women's interactional moves tend to respect rights of interlocutors. In contrast, men are more likely, given similarities of class, race, and context, to use less formal, less prestigious, and less polite forms of speech. And through their conversational styles, men more often exert control and dominance.

Explanations for these behaviors should be sought in social systems that not only distinguish between the genders but structure men's and women's relationships in a hierarchical order, endowing men with more valued status and rights and restricting or subordinating women. The English language contributes to gender inequality by the ways that women and men are labeled and their actions are described. Recurrent messages convey derogatory, subsidiary, or disvaluing images of women. Through communicative processes, cultural models of gender are both portrayed and reinforced, contributing to the socialization of females and males into their expected roles and also creating their ideas about themselves and each other.

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