

LINGUISTIC VARIATION: POWER AND GENDER

MASTER 1_LA

Dr ATCHE Djedou,

F. H-B University, 2020-21

❑ ***General Objective of the Course:***

- **Present and analyze the Gender issue in general and specifically as a Social Construct and a trigger of Linguistic Variation.**

❑ ***Expectations:***

- **Students must be able to identify instances of Gender-based Linguistic Variation;**
- **Students are able to identify cross-cultural aspects of gender differences**
- **Students are prepared to design a simple research work on the gender issue in language.**

INTRODUCTION (1)

- ❖ A permanent assumption in sociolinguistics is that language and society are tightly related and that this tight interrelation translates the fact that any social phenomenon of a certain significance will reverberate in human languages.
- ❖ For example, **age, education, social class or social difference awareness, cultural or regional environment,** are reflected in language in one way or the other. **Gender** which is a also cross-cultural social reality is understandably reflected in human languages.

INTRODUCTION (2)

- ❖ The gender issue has become of central interest in **the literature of development and human rights** and most current development projects ambition or claim to be gender-centered. In effect, for the advocators of sustainable development, gender must be taken into account in all development strategies.
- ❖ The widely shared opinion is that sustainable development will not be easily achieved as long as the gender issue is not addressed correctly and this because in many areas in the world, women outnumber men (**generally 51% of the population**).

INTRODUCTION (3)

❖ Understandably,

➤ if this important proportion of the population is ignored from decision making concerning development,

➤ if women are ignored from the empowerment programs such education and training in general and ignored as manpower (**intellectual and labor**),

➤ if they are denied access to resources (**land, bank credits, etc.**) and circles of decision (**MP and members of Government cabinets**),

❖ There will be something missing in the development endeavor...

INTRODUCTION (4)

- ❑ Those concerned are quite justified since in those nations that are seen to make significant progress in development the gender is significantly addressed.
- ❑ Today, in the discourse on development, the gender issues have implicitly expanded and go beyond the problems of women and girls.
- ❑ The term “Gender” is now extended to include “vulnerable” proportion of the population (economically weak individuals, minorities that are discriminated against (gays) or physically disable individuals, etc.

1. BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF GENDER

A complete overview of the gender as construct in society and in language will not overlook issues such as:

❖ **Gender in society :**

- Gender as a folk perception (in traditional beliefs)
- Gender and the feminist movement in the 1970s

❖ **Gender in language and language sciences**

- Gender marking in languages
- Gender as a grammatical category
- Gender in sociolinguistic and as a construct.

1.1 FOLKS PERCEPTIONS OF LANGUAGE & GENDER (1)

- ❑ Folk perceptions are **popular beliefs and/or stereotypes** on the difference between men and women over the use of language. Such beliefs can be recorded in all cultures in the world.

a) Verbosity

The belief goes that women speak a lot and are more talkative than men as evidenced by several cross-cultural sayings:

Some folk British wisdom:

- « *Foxes are all tails; women are all tongue* »
- « *A woman's tongue wags like a lamb's tail* » «
- « *Daddies on the bus read, read, read, Mummies on the bus chatter, chatter, chatter* » (English school song)
- « *The North-Sea will sooner be found wanting in water than a woman be at a loss for a word* »

1.1 FOLKS PERCEPTIONS OF LANGUAGE & GENDER (2)

In the African context, it is generally considered that women will not keep a secret because they are **talkative** and **like gossiping**. Some current stereotypes are that, compared to men, when women relate an even they insist on unnecessary details. Reportedly, men will stick on the essential...

❖ See also the anecdote by Deborah (1991):

A woman sues her husband for divorce. When the judge asks her why she wants a divorce, she explains that her husband hasn't talked to her in two years. The judge asks her husband: "Why haven't you spoken to your wife in two years?" He replies: "I didn't want to interrupt her."

b) Language change

- ❑ According to **Otto Jespersen**, (a Danish Grammarian), **men are more innovative** in their use of language, so they are those who positively take the lead in the language change process. By comparison, **women are more conservative** and use old-fashioned language.
- ❑ As regards style (language use), some linguists voice a different opinion! (**Jean.Pré**) made the point that **women are responsible for language corruption and non-stability** on the grounds that they are easy to influence by foreign speakers...

b) Language change (2)

- ❑ In his view, women allow themselves to be easily influenced by foreign speakers: they will adopt incoming forms and expressions from foreigners (who have a poor mastery of the language) and they do so **with a regretful permissivity!**
- ❑ Note here the contradiction in the two accounts (Jespersen's and Pré's): when language change due to men is perceived as a positive thing (innovation) (Jespersen's view) it is praised but when language change is perceived as a cause of linguistic corruption it is understandably bad and is blamed on women!

c) Linguistic competence

- ❑ O. Jespersen once considered that men use more elaborated structures and expressions in general and with the appropriate use of **logical connectors** ("since", "therefore", "as", "considering that", "given the fact that", "it follows", "by way of consequence", etc.).
- ❑ By contrast (according to Jespersen), women are seen to just line up half-finished sentences, juxtapose clauses without connectors: in short, women are poor on rhetorics since their speech is not poorly elaborated and structured.

d) Pronunciation

- Women are reported to **pronounce better** and are **more articulated**, compared to men who show a clear tendency to glide over words / sounds.
- This accounts for the fact **some occupations are better executed by women** and then trusted to them (*announcements in public places (e.g. TV programmers), information to passengers in the airport, telephone operators, etc.*)

e) Politeness

- ❑ All societies implicitly admit that women are less rude than men, that is, they are more concerned with politeness (in its negative dimension) ...
- ❑ While, in general, women would avoid as much as they can taboo-related words/expressions which involve a connotation to sex or defecation, men simply don't care using such taboo concepts with social impunity...

1.2 GENDER AND THE FEMINIST MOVEMENT

- ❑ The **1970s** have witnessed the rise of feminist movement: these were not gender claims as they are nowadays, but rather militant attitude having emerged in the milieu of educated women (R. Lakoff 1975; Spender 1980; Mills 1995; Coates; 2004).
- ❑ These ladies raised issues that had been ignored so far by linguistic theories, presumably because research in linguistics was the business of male researchers.
- ❑ R.T. Lakoff and with D. Spender particularly have insisted that as things stand, it can be easily observed that the very nature of language (structure and it is naturally used by social members) seems to have instituted discrimination against women.

❑ Indeed, there are many terms in English and presumably in many other languages where the masculine variant stands for the generic term:

e.g. *Man is mortal* (Where “Man” alone stands for all mankind. Why not “womankind”?)

❑ Feminist activists complain that there are **too many terms in English** and presumably in many other languages where the masculine variant stands for the generic term.

❑ The thing is that in most European languages, “MAN” (the male-connotated term) stands for HUMANS including women; the discrimination lies in the fact that we cannot use «WOMAN» to refer to human beings.

❑ As a matter of fact, these European languages have dedicated the male reference to refer to humanity: MANKIND and not WOMANKIND, all things R. Lakoff and her fellow militants find discriminatory against women...

❖ And the discriminatory nature of language continues:

➤ ***"Man is mortal, Socrates is man, therefore Socrates is mortal"***

❖ While the following sophism proves unacceptable:

➤ ***"Man is mortal, Amelan/Fanta/Teneja/ Jennifer is man..."***

❑ Militant-researchers of the Feminist movement also complain that the masculine pronoun be used in the generic sense but not the feminine pronoun.

e.g. ***Il pleut but not Elle pleut***

- ❖ During a test, 20 subjects of both sexes were exposed to statement to follow:
 - **When a botanist is in the field, he is usually working.**
- ❖ They were then made to answer quickly whether the botanist referred to in the statement was a man or a lady and up to 90% times, interviewees (males and females) all answered the person referred to is a man!
- ❖ Gender-based discrimination in European languages could speak volumes and many so-called gender-based discriminations will even go unnoticed:
 - The business is manned by one gentleman and a lady

Why manned whilst the two genders all there?

- ***Marguerite and Ian are both chaimen of two separate businesses***

- ❖ **Why « chairman »? While the two genders are all there and why not chairwoman for both genders)?**

- In most European languages, a man feels no embarrassment in saying he is a bachelor (unmarried), while such an information would sound embarrassing when it is a woman (spinster)!

- **Mary hopes to meet an eligible bachelor.**

- **☺???? Bill hopes to meet an eligible spinster.**

- ❑ Quite fortunately after decades of feminist militancy there are some significant changes:
 - The UN now asks for the English expression “Human rights” to be translated in French as “Droits *humains*” rather than “Droits de *l’homme*” in which women are felt to be discriminated against.

- ❑ Similarly, today, not only there is no problem in saying «La Ministre» and even “La Maire” (Mayor), but will be strongly recommended to do so.

- ❑ In the academic context, it is recommended to avoid using the masculine form to express the generic reference to researchers of either gender; rather the conventional terms are “s/he” or her/his.

- ❑ But in the face this inherent gender discrimination in-built in language habits seem to die hard: some bad-tempered males would mock at women when feminize their function; such is the case of the use of the term “mistress” where an ambiguity is voluntarily maintained as to know whether we are talking of the female school teacher or the “lover” of a man...
- ❑ The struggle for redressing the wrong caused to women is still in progress and some African ladies like the former Head of Department in the 2000s, Dr Fatou KEITA, are in the vanguard of this struggle.
- ❑ Dr Fatou Keita used to sign the official papers with the title “la Cheffe”.

2. GENDER AS A LINGUISTIC & SOCIOLINGUISTIC CATEGORY

2.1 GENDER AS A GRAMMATICAL CATEGORY

- ❑ Stating that gender is a category or a construct amounts to saying that “gender” has little to do with reality.
- ❑ Some languages like French and German (English for a lesser extent) categorize some nouns as masculine or feminine.
- ❑ This remains a grammatical reality since it does not correspond to anything in real life. Rather it is a **metalinguistic abstraction** and must be taken as it stands.

- ❑ There is no rule to determine that a noun is feminine or masculine; this is an aspect of the **internal arbitrariness of languages**.
- ❑ The grammatical gender is a typological feature in that the gender allows a distinction among language that recognize this category beside languages which do not.
- ❑ In some African languages, the gender category refers to other realities like the distinction between 'animate/non-animate, 'human/non-human' – Lingala), small size things / large size things (Senufo), 'countable-non-countable), etc.

- ❑ If gender is important as a social feature, just like politeness, it seems normal that it be encoded in one way or another in languages.
- ❑ In this respect and as usual, the world languages will not grammaticalize the gender features the same way and not at the same level of the linguistic system.
- ❑ In some languages, there are specific morphologies to indicate whether the utterer of the sentence is male or female.
- ❑ Such is the case of the Koasati language (America), there is an "S" inflection on verbs when the speaker is a man:

Table 1 : The 'S' inflection on verbs when speaker is male

FEMALE TO MALE	MALE TO FEMALE	GLOSE
Lakaw	LakawS	« he is lifting (something)
Kaa	KaaS	« he is saying

In another language in India – the Kurux - it is the inter-subjective relationship marking which is gender-sensitive morphologically:

Table 2: Variation related to the gender of the speaker or the addressee

Any speaker to Male addressee	Female speaker to Female addressee	Male speaker to Female addressee	<i>Glose</i>
barday	Bardin	bardi	<i>you come</i>

- ❖ In such languages, grammatical inflections indicate the gender of speakers and it must be noted that these features are not stylistic – which would mean that they are optional.
- ❖ They are as grammatical as the gender of pronouns in French and English: you would not refer to a girl with « il »; this would be taken as a grammatical deviance.

- ❑ Closer to us the greeting features in the majority of (West) African languages the phatic function of language (greetings) observes the distinction based on gender:
 - In Baule, Jula or Senufo, male speakers are expected to greet and/or answer to greetings with dedicated forms that are function of their gender.
- ❑ In the right lines of the grammatical perspective and in the context of semantics, the “construct” dimension appears clearly when we oppose “sex” to gender”.
- ❑ **Semantically**, while “gender” is a **construct**, “sex” is a **biological reality**: in principle, an individual is either of the masculine sex or the feminine sex and that can be concretely verified!
- ❑ In short, **gender is just a representation (abstraction)** while **sex is an extra-linguistic reality**.

2.2 GENDER IN SOCIAL SCIENCES & SOCIOLINGUISTICS

- ❑ In **sociolinguistics**, gender will not be approached as form as such, but rather a social category, a sociolinguistic construct.
- ❑ This automatically amounts to saying that “gender” also stands for a representation **not a clear-cut reality!**
- ❑ Therefore, as a social variable (construct) gender stands for a series of social characteristics establishing a more or less reliable distinction between males and females.
- ❑ It also follows that, as social category, gender differences are not clear-cut as social features are sometimes pervasive.

- ❑ In stating and admitting that gender is a (social) construct, we mean that the tacit social consciousness construes and entertains what it expects a man to be and behave and what it expects a woman to be and behave.
- ❑ Being a woman or a man is to **talk, dress and react** in some specific ways even though all men and women will not behave exactly the same way. For these reasons, social sciences (sociology & psychology) suggest a methodological difference along with a terminological adjustment: the term “male” will be preferred over “man” while the term “female” will be used in lieu of “woman”.

□ **Gender** will then be treated as a **social reality** while **sex** would be the **extralinguistic reference**, say the **biological observable reality**.

□ In other words, it is implicitly admitted a man can “behave” like a woman by displaying some social characteristics specific to women; the same way, a girl or a woman can behave more like a man rather than like a woman as will be the case of girls having a clear preference to playing rugby.

□ And in some case, the girl/woman having a malish behavior might even want to be assimilated to “males” and adopt some external outlook accordingly...

3. GENDER-RELATED DIFFERENCES IN LANGUAGE

- Female speakers and male speakers appear to differ in language use and this in several aspects.

3.1 LEXICAL CHOICE

As already seen during the introductory session, females and males do not resort to the similar lexical choices:

e.g. The translation from English of "smart-looking house" by DEUG 2 students in 1998 with girls' preference for "chic" (63%) and boy students' opting for "belle" (56%), the difference between girls and boys over the selection of "magnifique" was not that significant!

- ❑ In the perception of **R. Lakoff**, male speakers would use emotively loaded words to express a strong emotion with a certain social impunity: **damn, shit "merde"**.
- ❑ Women do not and are not expected to use such words lest they will be judged as rude and indecent.
- ❑ Some other adjectives express strong positive emotion great, **"super"** and these are used both by genders.

- ❑ However, it would seem that the use of terms such as “adorable”, “charming”, “charmand”, “chic” are preferably used by women while men would make alternative lexical choices.
- ❑ In Lakoff’s opinion, the last category of adjectives bears a frivolous or trivial meaning whereby the idea being expressed is more important for the speaker rather than for the listener(s).
- ❑ She considers that females’ speech does not deliver “**serious information**” but rather sticks on things with a **relatively low importance**...

3.2 GENDER AND ATTITUDE TO THE LINGUISTIC NORM

- ❑ Language variation recognizes the existence of variables that generally have several variants; when a variable has two variants, very often, there is one deviant (disfavoured) variant and the “favorable” variant.
- ❑ With relatively few exceptions, female speakers reportedly use the favoured term more frequently than male speakers do.
- ❑ In the Ivorian context that would mean that if the use of the article were to be considered as a linguistic variable, the appropriate use of the article will be the favoured as evidenced by a study carried out in 1998 (Silué 2011):

Table 1: Article deletion in Ivorian French rate according to gender and instruction level

	Levels of instruction			
GENDERS	Higher Education	Students	Middle-Administration	Manual Workers
Males	2.60	3.00	6.20	17.20
Females	0.20	2.90	4.10	13.40

Source: Silué's "The article as a linguistic variable in Ivorian French" in LTML

THE COVERT PRESTIGE PHENOMENON (P. TRUDGILL)

- ❑ **Covert prestige** to the linguistic norm is the **unconscious reflex** that as speakers, we admit deviating more or less from the linguistic norm.
- ❑ Sociolinguistic research reveals that **females under-report** on their deviations rates while **male speaker over-report**.
- ❑ Underreporting is to claim deviating less than we really do (we deviate more): when interviewed and then submitted to a language test, females are seen to deviate more than they believe they while male speakers really deviate far less than they think do.

- ❑ It is as if **Ivorian female speakers** were asked: "*How often do you think you delete the article*" and she answers **15%** when her actual deletion rate is **20 to 25%**.
- ❑ As for **Ivorian male speakers**, it is as if they are asked the same question, and they claim to delete the article as frequently as **55%**, when their actual deletion rate is just **30%**.
- ❑ This way, female speakers really under-report on their deviation habits while male speakers deviate less than they think they do.

Which interpretation can we give to the fact that female speakers under-report their linguistic deviation while male over-report on the same habit?

- ❑ It simply means that female speakers are more concerned about the linguistic norm than male speakers do.
- ❑ When a male speaker makes a mistake, he thinks this is not that serious an offense, while the female speaker will feel more uneasy.
- ❑ For men mistakes can be made with impunity but for women making mistakes matters a lot for they positive face needs.

- ❑ In general, when female speakers deviate, they tend to inch close to the norm when they are not being hyper-correct;
- ❑ On the contrary, when male speakers deviate, they generally deviate away from the norm:



3.3 GENDER-RELATED DIFFERENCES WITH SOME LANGUAGE FUNCTIONS

- ❑ Linguistic variation around gender appears at various level of language use and this variation is more manifested in in some specific language functions.
- ❑ R. Fremann & B. McElhinny (1996: 232) have identified no less than 10 (ten) instances where females are seen to single out themselves in language use:

1. *More use of expletives items and especially weaker ones*
2. *Women's speech is more polite than men's*
3. *Trivial, unimportant topics (fashion in hairdressing or cloth)*
4. *More use of "empty" adjectives*
5. *More resort to question tags*
6. *Expressing uncertainty with use question intonation pattern*
7. *More resort to intensifiers*
8. *More frequent resort to hedges/mitigators*
9. *Open preference to n hypercorrectness*
10. *Less resort to jokes during conversations*

- It should be insisted upon that **R. Freeman and B. McElhinny's** research concern a western society (American) society.
- There is a need to investigate other cultures, (Asian, African). IN any case, whilst

❑ We need to see whether these language variation features are cross-cultural, there are reasons to believe that most of them apply in many societies.

❑ In this lecture Here, the gender-based differentiation in language use will be examined through universal features of language use, namely basic language functions exploited during verbal interactions):

➤ *Question asking*

➤ *Paying compliments*

➤ *Expressing apologies*

➤ *Discourse content or topic preferences*

a) Question asking

- ❑ Asking questions can take the two orientations embodied in politeness: asking questions can be taken as a FTA for the private life of the addressee (he wants to be left alone) or FFA if the asking is an invitation for interaction; in that case the positive face is flattered.
- ❑ It all also depends on the nature of the questions and the object of question (what is being asked about) and the formality of the context.

- ❑ In non-formal contexts (home contexts) there is no significant difference between females and males.
- ❑ However, in formal contexts where distance-taking is the norm, asking question is FTA and if question asking turns out to be a FTA, then men ask more questions in public settings and are even keen on asking challenging questions.
- ❑ In the same contexts, females will ask questions but non-challenging question; instead, they generally ask supportive questions (conference), class or amphitheater).

- ❑ In short, female will avoid embarrassing questions and go for supportive questions, while males will prefer confrontational questions.
- ❑ This so because, as already stated, females are “other-oriented”, which is not the case of males.
- ❑ However, recent sociolinguistic research reveals that this difference (**Power dominated for males vs solidarity-oriented form females**) is significantly on the decrease.
- ❑ If such observations are accurate, they do confirm the universal social change translating into a shift from Power to solidarity (**see Modals and F. Coulmas 2013**).

b) Giving Instructions or Requests

- Jennifer Coats (1995) reports that in some professional contexts involving verbal exchanges, males' speech is power-marked while females' is comparatively less, say more comforting (see preference for either gender for positive face or and negative face):
 - Male doctor: ***Take these tablets and don't take some of those any more; and if you don't feel better come back to see me"***
 - Female doctor: ***I think you should take these tablets and leave those for a while; if you don't feel OK come here, please"***
- Understandably, females are better in some professions than males (cf the health sector in former Soviet Union).

c) Paying compliments

- ❑ **A compliment** is a speech act that implicitly or explicitly attributes credit to someone other than the speaker and which is positively valued.
- ❑ In general, compliments are paid between equal status individuals; otherwise, they are paid by higher status people down to lower status ones (not the reverse).
- ❑ Due to their power-oriented attitudes, males seem to consider compliments paid to them as potentially face-threatening especially when paid by an interlocutor which they perceive as inferior (*see the appreciation of student to the President of the University on her hair-dressing!*).
- ❑ In such circumstances, the higher status speaker appreciates the compliments as a form of intrusion in their life.

- ❑ Comparing female speakers to males, males are seen to pay compliments to females and are not necessarily prepared to receive them: they pay more compliment than they receive.
- ❑ Females appear to pay less compliments to men than they receive from them (males); **however**, females are seen to pay more compliments among themselves, a proof of solidarity and mutual appreciation.
- ❑ Note that females' paying compliments among themselves might have but a phatic function just to show warmth (**see Robin T. Lakoff about adjectives**): the compliments might not necessarily be "sincere" but just a matter of maintaining and warming up civilities.

□ At home, casual or intimate contexts, males are perceived as miser over paying compliments as illustrated below: female speakers are begging for compliments but males will downplay the request!

❖ e.g. ➤ Female: *Why don't you say anything if you think that the dish is good?*

➤ Male: *If it were not good, I would have told you so ! If I don't say anything it is because it is good...*

d) The Object of Compliments

- ❑ Even if we admit that often times females and males are paid compliment the same way, the kind of compliments either gender appreciate differ in the motives or objects of the compliment being paid...
- ❑ Females welcome those compliments that are in connection with their **external appearance** (dressing, outlook, etc.) while males are prepared to receive compliments about their **possessions**!
- ❑ Note that the rule is that your compliments to a woman are better welcome not when you speak of her car or her house (they might have been offered), but rather about her **hair-dressing, shoes, or dress, etc.!**

e) Expressing Apologies

- ❑ **Apologies** are used either *to negotiate positive politeness and emphasize friendship or resettle negative politeness or maintain distance and mutual respects.*
- ❑ As apologizing is meant to repair a damaged situation, males perceive them as face threatening for their positive face needs: **showing that we are wrong and having to say it overtly is assimilated to losing the face!**
- ❑ Accordingly, male speakers will express apologies if and only if they cannot do otherwise, if they think it necessary.
- ❑ But in general, they will refrain from apologizing if they appreciate that the offense is not that serious! All on the contrary, females will apologize even for minor offenses (if any) and this because they are more other-oriented...

f) Interruptions and Turn-taking

- ❑ **Face to face interactions**, especially when causal, necessarily call for turn-taking with the implicit rule that speakers take the floor alternatively.
- ❑ In practice however, the rule is often broken with more or less conscious interruptions.
- ❑ In Western societies where interrupting the co-speaker is perceived as rude, reportedly, male speakers afford more interruptions than females do.
- ❑ This seems to be in keeping with males' power-oriented attitude: *interrupting the co-speaker is a strategy to impose one's point of view or, at least, giving oneself the control of the conversation.*

g) Expressing Disagreements

- ❑ Remember that a disagreement is a potentially FTA since we challenge other people's opinion or point of view. It follows that the way we express disagreement can take either a power orientation or a solidarity orientation.
- ❑ Concerning the expressions of disagreement, males will be confrontational and more than challenging: disagreements are "cast at" naked co-speakers.
- ❑ Quite on the contrary, females who show more concern about other people's face needs will resort to mitigators so as to be less confrontational:
 - Male speaker: *I must say I completely disagree with the way you come to that conclusion!*
 - Female speaker: *I don't think I understand how the process can come about with this result!*

h) Discourse Content or Topic Preferences

- ❑ Males and females also oppose over the content of speech: since their speech is less other-oriented, males' speech content is likely to be either neutral or more referential. By contrast, female's being other-people's oriented, it will understandably be more affection-marked.
- ❑ In short, while males' speech is more referential than subjective while female's speech is more subjective as accounted for by Lakoff (1975). This difference, if confirmed would accounts for gender differentiation in lexical choice (see R. Lakoff) and each gender, will concentrate on a particular aspect of an even or happening:

e.g. Following a car-crash, males are likely to concentrate on the material casualties (how important was the accident, how violent was the shock) while females will concentrate on how wounded feel and if fatal casualties, they will worry about the children left orphans, etc.

□ Gender differentiation can be traced out in varied other domains such as preference for academic subjects where the society expects and even encourages girls towards “soft subjects” like arts, literature and language, while pushing boys toward “hard sciences”.

4. HYPOTHESES ON GENDER DIFFERENTIATION IN LANGUAGE

- ❑ Different scholarly approaches or hypotheses have suggested as possible explanations for female and male differences in language use.
- ❑ Unfortunately, these approaches appear to be more descriptive than explanatory.
- ❑ These approaches are the Deficit Model, the Dominance Model and the Difference Approach.

4.1 THE DEFICIT MODEL/APPROACH

- ❑ The Deficit Model is the earliest approach within language and gender research.
- ❑ It argues that women's language is deficient in comparison with men's language.
- ❑ Men's language has long been thought to constitute the social linguistic norm, a point of view which would be sanctioned as highly sexist today.
- ❑ The early work of R. Lakoff (*Language and Women's Place*) is typically associated with the deficit approach: she had complained that women's language is devalued, weak, unassertive, and therefore powerless in character.
- ❑ Women's frequent use of questions and tag questions, hedges and empty adjectives (nice, divine...) in conversation are interpreted by Lakoff as a linguistic expression of this unassertiveness and admitted inferiority.
- ❑ The Feminist movement and the establishment of feminism in society has contributed to change this perception.

4.2 The Dominance Approach

- ❑ Dominance Approach argues ***that women have an inferior social position in society and that men dominate women.***
- ❑ These social conditions are reflected in male and female language use: Men dominate women linguistically and women are linguistically powerless.
- ❑ Language is the linguistic expression of their social powerlessness.
- ❑ Lakoff (1975) argues that women's manner of speaking, which is different to men, reflects their subordinate status in society.

- ❑ Thus, women's language is marked by powerlessness and tentativeness, expressed through the use of mitigators and inessential qualifiers, which effectively disqualifies women from positions of power and authority... (Lakoff)
- ❑ The fact that the language of women be full of hedges (comparatively to men's speech) and seek for supportive reactions when they speak to men is the signal that they concede being socially inferior and accept men's domination.
- ❑ Today with the raise of gender awareness and all other human rights movements, the dominance approach would face severe attacks, not only by feminists but also by linguistic scholars in general.

4.3 The Difference Approach/Model

- ❑ The more modern difference approach argues against the assumption that women are socially inferior to men.
- ❑ The genders are **different** (biologically and socially) **but equal** in status.
- ❑ The Difference Model states that the difference in conversational styles of women and men are the result of socialization processes during which girls and boys learn to use language in different ways.
- ❑ There is no cause of surprise if males and females use language differently: it could be otherwise!
- ❑ Thus, one of its basic ideas is that women and men belong to different **subcultures** with different norms of language use.

- ❑ As a consequence, miscommunication may occur in female-male conversation which Deborah Tannen describes in her popular book *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation* (1990).

There is a difference between females and males over language use, as shown earlier?

Is that difference nature-given ?

Does the difference stem from the Social Dynamics?

How has it come about?

- ❑ The folk review on **gender differentiation** does not provide **explanation** why should men and women speak differently: folk perceptions are nothings but stereotypes !
- ❑ The analyses suggested by **feminist militants** have rather concentrated on the gender discrimination as a motive of social struggle so that their lines of argument fall under Human Rights concerns...
- ❑ The focus is on the prejudice caused to women and feminists' research analyses show little interest for the possible reasons why things are the way they stand...

4.4 ALTERNATIVE HYPOTHESES ON GENDER DIFFERENTIATION: THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL & CONSTRUCTIONIST ACCOUNTS

- Before gender difference is appreciated in language use, it should have been examined in general out of the realm of language.
- Two hypotheses are in order: the anthropological account and the social constructionist hypothesis.

a) **The Anthropological & Prehistoric Account**

- ❑ This account remains hypothetical and it suggests that differences between men and women in many respects (such as language use), derive from the progressive sophistication of human societies over time.
- ❑ There are hypotheses by anthropologists and palaeontologists that the difference between men and women has started over the division of labor.
- ❑ The term labor must be taken in its broadest sense, namely survival or the continuity of the human species such as (food provision, security, reproduction of species, etc.).

- ❑ The difference between men and women has presumably derived from the biological difference around sex;
- ❑ The difference between men and women has presumably started when human societies of the Neolithic period have progressively abandoned nomadic life to adopt sedentary lifestyle, that is social life as we know it nowadays.
- ❑ The most straightforward manifestation of sedentarisation is the advent of villages and cities.
- ❑ In most societies, based on the biological difference women and men have been assigned different tasks and responsibilities and this seems to be a universal practice.

- ❑ In most human societies, while child rearing, fire making, cooking, clothes repair, taking care of the living place (home), are generally recognized as tasks under the responsibility of women, **hunting, fishing** in potentially deep streams, fighting to ensure security, etc. all the tasks that require physical force have been tasks reserved for men.
- ❑ In the subsequence and still under social constructionism, physical strength has come to be assimilated with ***power*** while less physical investment associated with absence of power (*see the expressions strong sex, weak sex*).
- ❑ First, early agricultural activities have required physical strength and endurance which has progressively translated into social power, so drawing a difference between men and women.

- ❑ Next, the accumulation of wealth through various means including agriculture and cattle rearing have been a reinforcing factor for the psychological construction of power.
- ❑ True, the accumulation of wealth or its mere presence is synonym of (economic) power, a power phenomenon which consolidates into a psychological ascendance of rich people over the least well-off.
- ❑ Since the social awareness of power is now a social reality, it is not surprising that this transpires in language as manifested by the gendered based linguistic variation.

b) Social constructivism & gender-based differences

- ❑ To say of something that it is **socially construed** is to focus on its dependence on **contingent aspects of our social selves**. It is as if we are saying: *"this thing could not have existed had we not built it; and we need not have built it at all"* (P. A. Boghossian 2006).
- ❑ Social constructionism or Constructivism is the fact that our realities are shaped and formed through our experience which, itself, is formed through interactions with others social members.
- For instance, if there were no social life, we would not know things like *marriages, education, wealth, economic growth, funerals, etc.*

- ❑ A less obvious illustration would be the case where we know or believe that lions are frightening or dangerous animals; this might turn out to derive from social constructionism/constructivism.
- ❑ A European kid might want to play with the tail of the lion while the African child who knows lions through traditional stories will run away...
- ❑ By contrast we do not have to develop an awareness or a perception/representation of what **trees, mountains, a mountain, monkeys or the sky**, etc.
- ❑ The feeling of hunger, for example, is not shaped by the society; it is natural. **Social constructionism or constructivism** is the assumption we apprehend and give sense to some phenomena just under the effect of we being social entities.

- ❑ Some sociolinguists (**among which Peter Trudgill 1974**) made the point that the differences between females and males in language use might originate of the perception females and males have on their own gender..
- ❑ While **males** are concerned with their **deeds and possessions** (to a lesser extent), **females** are more concerned with **what people might think of their external appearance** (e.g. dressing).
- ❑ **P. Trudgill** is of the opinion that the first element of external appearance when we meet someone for the first time is precisely language (how we speak).

- ❑ All this accounts for the fact that female speakers are more concerned than males about “good” language or about observing the linguistic norm.
- ❑ While the **sex-based difference** (women and men) hardly ever suffers any contest, (left alone the rare biological abnormalities with aphrodisiacs), gender difference which is a construct, remains rather pervasive.
- ❑ As regard **biological differences**, before puberty, there is no difference between boys and girls as for language use.
- ❑ However, after puberty, the difference starts looming up but it remains of a biological nature due to anatomic differences: while the male’s vocal track is grown in length and with the development of the Adam’s apple, female adult’s vocal track does not change significantly;

i) From nature (**biology**) to culture (**social determinism**): socialization

- ❑ While the sex-based difference (women and men) hardly ever suffers any contest, (left alone the rare biological abnormalities with aphrodisiacs), gender difference which is a construct, remains rather pervasive.
- ❑ As regard biological differences, before puberty, there is no difference between boys and girls as for language use.
- ❑ However, after puberty, the difference starts looming up but it remains of a biological nature due to anatomic differences.

- ❑ While the male's vocal track is grown in length and with the development of the **Adam's apple**, female adult's vocal track does not change significantly.
- ❑ Note that the increase of the Adam's apple is biologically triggered by the gene of masculinity present in the testicles, and which is also responsible for the appearance of the beard and all other hairy features much of which women generally lack!
- ❑ With the length of the vocal track and appearance Adam's apple, the pitch of the voice differs according to the sex: **between 80 and 200 hertz** (cycle per second) for **males** and between **120 to 400 hertz** (cycle per second) for **females**.

- ❑ **Socialization** acts as reinforcing factor of gender differentiation in language.
- ❑ Informal education (the one implemented in the family or social context (traditional rituals like initiation systems) have the effect of reinforcing the gender differentiation.
- ❑ The historical labor division whereby females are in charge of procreating and then of taking charge of early education is the first factor (**Silué 2007**).

- ❑ There is research evidence that little girls acquire language earlier than little boys and one of the convincing explanations is that mothers seem to interact more frequently with their babies when the latter are baby girls and interact relatively less when the child is a baby-boy.
- ❑ Based on such a difference in early interactions from mothers to baby-girls, some language researchers conclude that in the early acquisition of language (before teen-age), the amount of vocabulary among female kids is higher than that of their male counterparts ...
- ❑ And the **gender differentiation** is so perpetuated over ages!

CONCLUSION: Culture is overriding nature!

- ❑ With relatively fast on-goings social changes, gender difference today must be reconsidered or, at least, analyzed with caution!
- ❑ Human beings are keen on exploiting **biological differences** – actually natural differences - to serve sociolinguistic purposes and so comply to the social dynamics as (Karpf 2006) remarked.
- ❑ In all societies, the lowering of the voice pitch is perceived as more male-oriented while its height of the voice pitch signals femininity, sweetness.
- ❑ **Recent sociolinguistic research** on gender differentiation in European and Asian (Japanese specifically) societies helps uncover a shift in the exploitation of the pitch of the voice.

- ❑ As revealed by the general social change translating in linguistic variables such as the English modals (Silué 2017), English and Japanese males are taking to raising the pitch of the voice (like women) in order to sound more sympathetic or gentle. Karpf (2006: 175) reports that from 1945 to 1993, the average pitch of English female adults (18-25 years) has lowered and got deeper!
- ❑ Put in a nutshell, while men tend to inch close to females by moving away from power-marked attitudes through the pitch of the voice, females are on their way to inch close to males' way of using language!
- ❑ In other words, there is a general leveling of the social gap as for the difference between females and males over some aspects of language use... and understandably, this shift in societies is reverberated in languages.

- Note that whatever the model we use to account for gender differences, be it in absolute terms or in connection to the use of language, power remains an underlying factor behind this difference, be it power deriving from physical strength (**diachronic account**) or power deriving from other socially construed attributes.
- Thus, if male speakers over-report on deviating rates away from the linguistic norm, it is because, as **“powerful social actors”**, they think they can afford deviating from the norm without any consequence.

- ❑ True, in real life, powerful people are those who often afford to break the law with impunity!
- ❑ If labor division has been the basis of the difference between women and men, a difference that was to progressively invade language us, we should expect such differences to decrease when current fundamental modifications in labor division reduce differences in labor.
- ❑ The fact is that, due to technological progress, labor has changed and the activities requiring direct physical strength are decreasing for task calling for less physical investment.
- ❑ New production systems and the increasing proportion of "service job" (*far from those activities requiring physical strength*) are taking the lead.

- ❑ In most modern societies today, on hearing "***University teacher***" or "***President***", and even "***driver***", we do not automatically conclude that the person being referred to is a necessarily a man. If there is a general levelling in labor division – that was the basis of gender division – we should also expect a certain levelling in gender difference.
- ❑ Correlatively, if the difference between males and females is on the decrease, the sociolinguistic consequence might well be that the difference between males and females over language use, will also progressively decrease.
- ❑ If this phenomenon were confirmed, it would be in keeping with the finding that there is decrease in social distance and the correlative increase of social proximity over time (**Silué 2017**).
- ❑ Thus, change in gender-based relations might reverberate in gender-based language use.

TRIAL EXAMS - Discussions

1. Considering the attitude of each gender toward the linguistic norm, from males and females which category of gender is likely to be more conservative?

2. The folk perception of gender-based difference over the use of language is that “women speak more than men”.

Can we reconcile this intuitive remark with recent sociolinguistic explanations on the difference between females and males on language use ?

3. Psycholinguistic research reveals that in the process of language acquisition, at the age of 5 to 7, little girls are faster in language mastery compared to their male counterparts. How can the effect of socialization influence this difference in language acquisition?

4. It has been observed that University teachers readily address girl students with the address form "**VOUS**" while using the address form "**TU**" when talking to boy-students.

How would you show that this difference derives from constraints relating to **negative politeness**?

5. The difference in the pitch of voice differs from women to men due to anatomical differences in the vocal tracks of women and men.

Can this sex-driven difference be exploited to produce variation in language?

6. In their prayers Catholics would address the Holy Mary (*In the Catholic dogma, Mary is the mother to Jesus Christ*) as "Je **VOUS** salue Marie... **VOUS** êtes bénie..." and paradoxically they address God himself as "Notre Père qui es cieux... que **TON** nom soit sanctifié, que **TON** règne vienne..."

Are there sociolinguistic explanations in the fact of using **VOUS** to address Mary and use **TU** to address the Almighty God?

References

BOGHOSSIAN Paul A, 2006, *Fear of Knowledge: Against Relativism and Constructivism*, Oxford: OUP

CAMERON, D. (2007). *The myth of Mars and Venus*. Oxford University Press. ISBN 0-19-921447-6.

CHESHIRE, J. and Trudgill, P. (Eds.), (1998). *The sociolinguistics reader, vol. 2: Gender and discourse*. London: Arnold.

COATES, J. (1986). *Women, men and language: A sociolinguistic account of gender differences in language*. London: Longman.

COATES, J. (1996). *Women Talk: Conversation between women friends*. Oxford: Blackwell.

CRAWFORD, M. (1995). *Talking Differences: On Gender and Language*. London: Sage.

DeFrancisco, V. (1997). Gender, power and practice: Or, Putting your money (and your research) where your mouth is. In Wardhaugh (2010).

ECKERT, P. (1989). The whole woman: Sex and gender differences in variation. *Language Variation and Change 1*: 245-67.

ECKERT, P. & McConnell-Ginet, S. (2003). *Language and gender*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

GOODWIN, Marjorie Harness. 2003. The Relevance of Ethnicity, Class, and Gender in Children's Peer Negotiations. *The Handbook of Language and Gender*. Janet Holmes and Miriam Meyerhoff (Eds). Pp 229-251

HOLMES, Janet & Miriam MEYERHOFF (Eds). 2003. *The Handbook of Language and Gender*. London. Blackwell Publishing Ltd

HOLMES, J. (1998). Women's talk: The question of sociolinguistic universals. In Wardhaugh, (2010).

HOLMES, J. and Meyerhoff, M. (1999). The Community of practice: Theories and methodologies in language and gender research. *Language in Society*, 28 (2). 173-183. doi: 10.1017/S004740459900202X

LAKOFF, Robin. 2000. *The Language War*. University of California Press. ISBN 0-520-22296-2

LAKOFF, Robin. 2006. Identity à la carte: you are what you eat. *Discourse and Identity*, ed. Anna DeFina, Deborah Schiffrin and Michael Bamberg. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.

Md, Sohel. Ranai. & Osama, Khalifa. Moh. (2011). Sex as an independent variable related to linguistics variables. Jazan University, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

LAKOFF, Robin. 1975. *Language and Woman's Place*. ISBN 0-19-516757-0 Maltz,

Lakoff, Robin. 1990. *Talking Power*. Basic Books. ISBN 0-465-08358-7

LAKOFF, Robin. 1993. *Father knows best: the use and abuse of therapy in Freud's case of Dora*. With J. Coyne. Teachers College Press. ISBN 0-8077-6266-0

O'BARR, W. & Bowman, A. (1980). Women's language' or 'powerless language'. In McConnell-Ginet et al. (Eds.) *Women and languages in Literature and Society*. pp. 93-110. New York: Praeger.

SILUE, S. Jacques (2017). The Decrease of Social Distance and Social Distance Markers, *MBONGUI*, n° 17, Décembre 2018 pp 5-25.

SPENDER, D. (1985). *Man made language*. 2nd edn. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

TALBOT, M. M. (1998). *Language and Gender: an introduction*. Cambridge: Polity.

TANNEN, D. (1990). *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation*. New York: William Morrow.

TANNEN, D. (1993). *Gender and conversational interaction*. New York: Oxford University Press.

TRUDGILL, P. (1972). Sex, covert prestige and linguistic change in the urban British English of Norwich. *Language in Society*, 1: 179-95.

ZIMMERMAN, D. and West, C. (1975). Sex roles, interruptions, and silences in conversation. In Barrie Thorne and Nancy Henley. (Eds.) *Language and Sex: Difference and Dominance*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House, pp. 105-29.

GENDER in Language.
<http://semantics.uchicago.edu/kennedy/classes/sum07/myths/myths4-gender.pdf> (see Powerpoint hand-out)

From a cross-cultural perspective on contemporary societies, there is great variation around labor division (G. P. Murdock 1935, David-Barnett 2010) and it should be heavily insisted upon that the gender role is not innate. According to Mark Dyble (2013), although activities requiring physical endurance have generally been entrusted to men, in early agrarian societies (*before sedentarisation*) there was a far less rigid division of labor.

Labor division based on sex has been reinforced indirectly with sedentarisation and directly with the development of agriculture and subsequent practice of the accumulation of wealth (economic enrichment).