

The Different Using of Language Between Sexes

DE L'UTILISATION DIFFÉRENTE DE LA LANGUE ENTRE LES DEUX SEXES

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Abstract: Sex differences are a topic of perennial interest in our society. But it is not generally understood that most sex differences are the result of social, not biological. In the present article, the differences between women and men are presented from the angle of sociolinguistics. During the analysis, the writer emphasize on the three following aspects: 1) Different diction; 2) Different syntactic approach; 3) Different communicative strategies. We hope that through the study a better understanding of the differences between the genders can be achieved. Linguistic differences are merely a reflection of social differences, and as long as society views women and men as different—and unequal—then differences in the language of women and men will persist.

Key words: gender, sociolinguistics, communicative strategies, syntactic approach

Résumé: La différence de sexe entre les êtres est un sujet de conversation éternel de notre société. Mais le commun des mortels ne comprennent pas le fait que les origines de cette différence sont d'ordre plutôt social que physiologique. Dans l'article présent, l'auteur met l'accent sur trois points : premièrement, la différence de choix du terme ; deuxièmement, celle de syntaxe, troisièmement, celle de technique de communication. Nous espérons que nos recherches peuvent contribuer à une meilleure connaissance de la différence de sexes. La différence langagière n'est qu'un miroir de la différence sociale. Tant que nous voyons les femmes et les hommes d'un oeil différent ou inégal, cette différence de langue subsistera pour toujours.

Mots-Clés: sexe, linguistique sociale, moyen de communication, syntaxe

1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, the society is paying more attention to the differentiation between male and female. And as language is a mirror of culture, the differences concerning about the gender of the language also occupied the researchers' attention. This article will focus on the different using of language between men and women as well as the causes of it from the angle of sociolinguistics. In order to make the point clear three aspects will be analyzed. 1) Different diction; 2) Different syntactic approach; 3) Different communicative strategies. From these facts we can find the differences between the different characteristics and we can also learn that the traditional unequal social status effect on women's psychology and their language.

2. THE ANALYSIS OF THE DIFFERENCE

Given that you have one dialogue with female and male equals, I presume you can pick out which lines are made by men and which by women without any difficulty. Of course you do not judge them by the distinguishing qualities of voices. But you may not be able to figure out the reasons why you can do such a wonderful job. Here we will focus on the differences by the following three ways.

2.1 Differences in Diction

In the area of vocabulary, many of the studies have focused on English. "Lackoff, for example, claims that women use color words like *mauve*, *beige*, *aquamarine*, *lavender*, and *magenta* but men do not. (Ronald, 304). " These colors are very bright which reflect women are more emotional and sentimental than men. While men seldom use colors except *black*, *grey* and something like that. And from this angle, we may say men are

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comparatively more rational. Lackoff also maintains “adjectives such as *adorable, charming, divene, lovely, and sweet* are also commonly used by women but only very rarely by men (Ronald, 304).”

Women do not usually employ the profanities and obscenities as men do, or, if they do, use them indifferent circumstances or are judged differently for using them. But the case on man is different. Without these words, the fluency of their speech seems to be destroyed. Women often using praising words, such as good, excellent, wonderful, but men seldom do so. However, no rule exempt exception. Men often admiringly call out “beautiful” when they see a pretty girl. We can learn from this that women more care about the others’ feelings. When they are talking with other ones, they try to respect and admire their partners. They want to make the others feel happy. On the other hand, men do not bothered with this. They just want to show that they are wonderful and want the admiring eyes are fixed on themselves.

2.2 Syntactic Differentiations Between Male and Female

Here is an extract of a conversation:

(Meg gives Petey a bowl of cornflakes. He sits at the table props up his paper and starts to eat)

Meg: Are they nice?

Petey: Very nice.

Meg: I thought they’d be nice. You got your paper?

petey: yes.

Meg: What does it say?

petey: Nothing much. (Jennifer: 106)

This extract is a microcosm of daily talk between women and men. It reviews that women use interrogative forms more than men and that this may reflect women’s relative weakness in interactive situations: they exploit questions and tag questions in order to keep conversation going.

Directive is a speech act, which tries to get someone to do something. A group play of girls and boys had been observed when the play was going on. It is noticed that the boys used different sorts of directives from the girls. The boys used explicit commands: “Give me the pliers.” “Get off my steps.” “Give me the wire...Look man, I want the wire cutters right now.”

The girls, by contrast, typically used directives such as the following: “Hey, you all let’s use these first and then...” “Let’s go around...” “Let’s ask her” Do you have any bottles?” The form *let’s* is hardly ever used by the boys: it explicitly includes the speaker in the proposed action. The modal auxiliaries *can* and *could* are also used by the girls to suggest rather than demand action. For example, “We could go around looking for more bottles.” “Hey maybe tomorrow we can come up here and see if they got some more.”

The linguistic forms used by the boys and girls reflect the social organization of the group: the boys’ group is hierarchically organized, with leaders using very strong directive forms to demonstrate control, while the girls’ group is non-hierarchical with all girls participating in decision-making on an equal basis.

Another point that I want to point out is that the differences exist in the language used by fathers and mothers when they play with their children. Fathers tend to give directions like this: “Why don’t you make a chimney?” “Off! Take it off!” Mothers, on the other hand, are more likely to consult the child’s wishes. They just raise questions like this: “Do you want to look at any of the other toys over there?” “What else shall we put on the truck?” Not only were the fathers more directive than the mothers, they were more directive with their sons than with their daughters. These linguistic differences again reflect a difference in organization: mothers view interaction as an occasion to help children learn how to choose; fathers were less concerned with the children’s desires and introduced new ideas. (Jennifer: 108)

Just now we have examined the different language using in giving directions. Next, I want to talk about the differences in requirement. In effect, in this situation a female again uses questions much more often than male. When they making a request, female often employ questions for politeness reason. For example, “pass a pen when you are about to write”. There are at least three versions to express the same request: 1) pass me a pen. 2) Please pass me a pen. 3) Would you please pass me a pen? According to an investigation, most of the male will choose the first one while female generally selects the question styles. (何兆熊 梅德明:189) The intonation patterns of men and women also vary somewhat, women using certain patterns associated with surprise and politeness more often than men. Women may answer a question with a statement that employs the rising intonation pattern usually associated with a question rather than the falling intonation pattern associated with making a firm statement. According to Lakoff, women often apply tag questions at the end of the sentence to statements (Jennifer, 306-307). Such as “Isn’t it?” “Don’t you think?” “Wouldn’t it?” For example, “They caught the robber last week, didn’t they?”

Women ‘s speeches are more graceful because they are taught so, and they are forced to do so. When they are young, their mothers taught them how to grow up as a graceful lady. When they grow up, men love and want to marry those kinds of ladies.

By using tag questions, which are “midway between an outright statement and a yes-no question, less assertive than the former, but more confident than the latter”(Jessie 1982:57) women’s speeches are softened and less forceful. We can also conclude that women are less sure about themselves and their opinions than men. Further more, we can say, if not safely, women are still

depend on men to make the final statements. May be not intentionally, but subconsciously.

2.3 Different communicative strategies

Women are genius for conversation. They know how to participate a conversation. They act actively but thoughtfully during the process of the conversation.

2.3.1 Frequent Using of Questions

Asking questions is their habitual manner in a conversation and also a very good method to facilitate the flow of the conversation. We have mention this above. Besides, women take questions as a means of obtain useful advices and so after put forward the question, they will fix their attention on the response, then the conversation goes on. Things are different in the man's world. During a conversation, men always compete to express out their own ideas and eager to dominate the conversation. They seem to be happier to be an advisor than to be a pupil. Therefore the atmosphere of the man's is always aggressive tense.

2.3.2 Respecting the Correspondents' Turn in Speech

Some researchers describe the conversation typical of all-women's groups as "cooperative" and that typical of all-men's groups as "competitive". (Jennifer: VI) It's quite true. In a conversation, the style used primarily by women is facilitative, while the style used primarily by men is assertive, authoritative. Men tend to use more strategies of display such as joking, swearing, using slang and talking about competition and aggression, as well as more of the strategies that appeal to authority and maintain status distinctions, such as appealing to objectivity instead of personal experience and giving direct commands. (Case:104) While the women tend to use more strategies that engaged others and minimized status differences, such as back channeling, adding to others' comments to shift topics, using frequent and

well-placed minimal responses (張維友: 41) and using modal constructions rather than imperatives. Women use this to show they are interest in the speaker's speech and respect the right of their turns. And it reflects that women are care about the speaker's feelings and are politer than men who often are ready to seize the chance to express their own opinion. Men were more likely to speak in ways that claimed attention and got credit for their contributions, whereas women were more likely to preface statements with a disclaimer, speaker at a lower volume, and try to be succinct so as not to take up more speaking time than necessary, especially at meetings. (Schiffrin: 56) Therefore, when women and men interact in groups, a mismatch in the styles that they typically use is likely to produce unbalanced participation, so that those who end up having proportionately more influence in groups and appearing more competent and capable and hence wielding more authority are more likely to be men.

3. CONCLUSION

To sum up, in terms of linguistics, women's discourse seems softer, politer and typically feminine. And during a process of conversation, women seem more thoughtful and put more effort than men into maintaining and facilitating conversation. But men's speeches are more forceful and convincing. Two reasons attribute to this phenomenon: on one hand, women are generally emotional while men are mostly more rational in characteristics; on the other hand, women are subordinate to men in social position. Men take the most important occupations and always gain much more money than women, so in psychology women are inferior to men. Therefore the discourse differences between them reflect men's dominance and women's subordination.

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