Language & Gender

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A Presentation by –

Sahil Singh	14581
Ashu Prakash	14146
Mayank Singour	14378
Abhishek Anand	12018
Bhukya Charan Naik	14185

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Introduction

- Observations of the differences between the way males and females speak were long restricted to grammatical features, such as the differences between masculine and feminine in morphology in many languages.

- However, in the 1970s women researchers started looking at how a linguistic code transmitted sexist values and bias.

- Do women have a more restricted vocabulary than men? Do they use more adjectives? Are their sentences incomplete? Do they use more 'superficial' words?

Introduction

- Over the past thirty years, issues related to the study of language and gender have been examined, described, interpreted, explained, revised, and revisited by linguists, sociologists, psychologists, educators, feminist scholars, and others.

- A major criticism of the work done in this area has been that language and gender scholarship has taken positions that are fundamentally ideological and political, forcing scholars to take a stand on one side of an issue or the other.

- The focus has shifted from viewing gender as an unchanging natural fact to investigating the unfolding of gender in the "local" contexts and examining women as active members of their particular speech communities.

- First-world gender politics of "global, generic, and feminist" has heard the words of third-world gender politics: "practical, local, and particularistic."
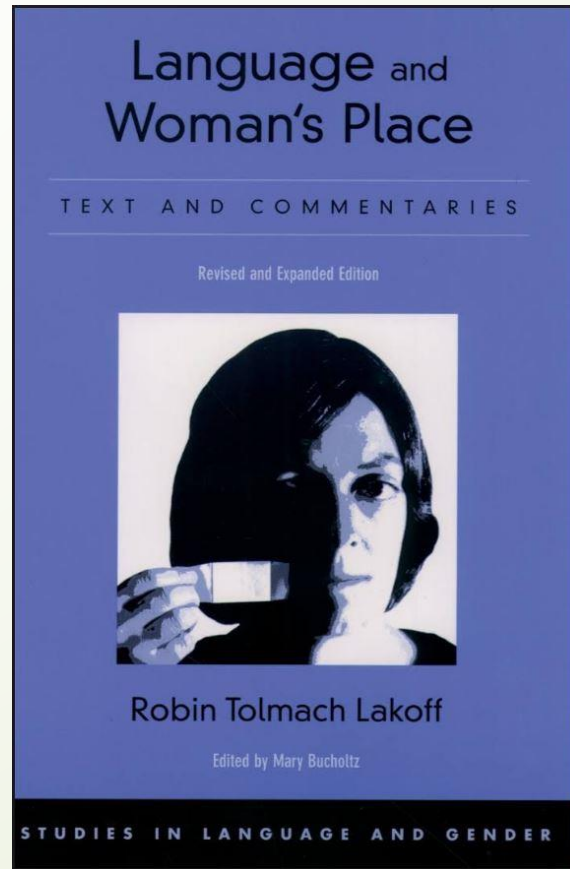
Rethinking the ideology of biological sex

- **Gender** is a term that refers to social or cultural distinctions associated with being male or female. Gender identity is the extent to which one identifies as being either masculine or feminine

- Early researchers assumed that the language differences found between women and men reflect underlying biological differences. Sex is natural, biological, and fixed;

- Gender is sociocultural and variable assuming that women across the world share a collective identity.

- It is evident from the fact that Most South Asian languages have one word for both sex and gender.

- To distinguish biological from social sex, descriptors are used: Praakritik Linga for "natural sex" and Saamaajik Linga for ''cultural/social gender.

- Feminists strongly criticized the essentialist definition on the grounds that sex is associated with characteristics that are narrowly defined and strictly grounded in biology, disregarding social and cultural factors that may shape an individual's sense of reality and identity.

History

- Language was a particular feature and target of Women's feminist movements in the '60s and '70s.

- "The very semantics of the language reflects [women's] condition. We do not even have our own names, but bear that of the father until we change it for that of a husband."

- Robin Morgan, a famous poet claimed that "Language is Sexist".

- There are words like Chairman, Spokesman, barman, etc.

- But words like Chairwoman and Spokeswoman were build up later.

Language & Gender: In World History

Language and Woman's Place

TEXT AND COMMENTARIES

Revised and Expanded Edition

Robin Tolmach Lakoff

Edited by Mary Bucholtz

STUDIES IN LANGUAGE AND GENDER

Robin Lakeoff in her book "Language and Woman's Place" (1975) wrote,

"Our use of language embodies attitudes as well as referential meanings. Woman's language has its foundation, the attitude that women are marginal to the serious concerns of life, which are pre-empted by men."

Language & Gender: In World History

- According to Lakeoff, women's talk has the following properties
- A large set of words specific to their interests: e.g. colour words like magenta, shirr, dart (in sewing), etc.
- "Empty" adjectives such as divine, precious, lovely, cute, etc.
- Tag questions and rising intonation in statement contexts: What's your name dear? Mary Smith?
- Use of hedges
- Use of intensive "so"
- Hypercorrect grammar: women are not supposed to talk rough
- Super-politeness
- Ask more questions

- Goal of politeness: oppression!

Early language and gender accounts

- The body of ethnographic literature on culture identified "male" and "female" variation in language as gender exclusive and gender preferential.

- In languages with gender-exclusive differences, women and men used different words for the same thing, different grammatical or lexical morphologies, or different pronunciations.

- In languages with gender-preferential differences, women and men used the same linguistic forms but in different frequencies.

- Certain forms of "proper" linguistic behaviour were prescribed for each sex, emphasized more often for women than for men.

- Numerous sociolinguistic studies on Indian languages have described the forms of address and reference, pronominal usage, modes of greeting, and the naming practices of speakers in the family, social, and professional contexts of South Asia.

Early language and gender accounts

- Example from Indian perspective: To show respect and deference a wife avoids uttering the name of her husband or the names of her husband's father, husband's brothers, and other male family members.

- For example, a wife avoids the Hindi word dhaniya "coriander" or any word phonetically similar to it because her husband's elder brother is named Dhani Ram.

- Instead of dhaniya the wife substitutes the common phrase "hari botal waalaa masala" to erase any sound association between the brother's name Dhani Ram and the spice dhaniya.

Early language and gender accounts

- To attract the attention of her husband a wife replaces his personal name with evocative like

- _Are, ae ji, O ji_ in Hindi,

- _aaho_ in Marathi,

- _ajii_ in Bangla,

- with respect forms such as _saahab_ ("master"), _suno ji_ ("please listen"), and _pati dev_ ("honorific husband")

- Third person plural pronominal forms to address or refer to the husband – forms not reciprocally returned.

- In Tamil for example, husbands may address their wives as kalutai ("donkey")

Dominance & difference

- Women and men behave differently in a speech situation.

- This difference is interpreted by two hypotheses, however, have been suggested in the literature: the dominance and the difference approach.

- **Dominance**: The participants in a conversation use a number of strategies to achieve their conversational goals. One of these goals may be to dominate other participants of the speech situation. The question whether gender or status and power is the motivating force for conversational behaviour has been resolved in favour of status and power in the literature. Most studies find that in mixed talks men tend to be more dominating than women.

Dominance & difference

- The dominance approach, as it became known, proposed that the cluster of linguistic and pragmatic features that typified women's language was a function of the existing power relationship between women and men.

- Men's dominance in conversation paralleled men's dominance in society.

- Men's speech is a vehicle for male displays of power male speaker dominated talk in cross-sex conversation by using the noncooperative strategies of interruptions, silence, delayed responses, topic control, and selective verbosity, among other conversational infringements

Dominance & difference

- Interruptions are generally considered to be violations of the rules of conversation.

- One of the obvious strategies for achieving this goal, as we have seen, is the use of interruptions. Their use is generally explained by the relative power of the participants which derives from their social status.

- Interruptions is a major component in the explanation of male-female differences.

Dominance & difference

Studies on interruptions and related phenomena seem to indicate a larger tendency on the part of men to interrupt in cross-sex conversations while in same-sex conversations no significant differences were found.

Same-sex conversations	1st Speaker	2nd Speaker	Total
Interruptions	3	4	7

Cross-sex conversations	Male	Female	Total
Overlaps	9	0	9
Interruptions	46	2	48

Dominance & difference

- The following English exchange between two Indian friends, a female and a male, illustrates the controlling tactics of interruptions, overlaps, disagreements, and changing topic by the male speaker.

- It supports the dominance view that like most female speakers of the world, Indian women too, are not equal partners in conversations nor are they granted equal speaking rights in mixed sex discourse.

Dominance & difference

- Example:

- **F**: They [Indian women] like these things because from a very young age the condition is such a way that they have to like it. It's not something they do actively something that grows in them this fondness for housework and

- **M**: I mean I think it can be explained from a very simple analogy. For example you have South Indian pundits who don't who vomit at the sight of seeing pig and I love to eat pig. So it's social conditioning. I think everything is social condition. Now if I say that I am forced to like pig I mean it would be hypocritical because I love it.

- **F**: This totally different between eating pork and

- **M**: No, I am saying social conditioning is there ...

Dominance & difference

- **Difference**:

- The difference approach attempts to explain the differential communicative behaviour of men and women by assuming two subcultures in the speech community: men and women. In these different subcultures separate linguistic strategies for interactional behaviour are acquired.

- The two cultures in terms of different and equally valid styles of talk: "women speak and hear a language of connection and intimacy, while men speak and hear a language of status and independence".

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Dominance & difference

- The stylistic dichotomy between adult women and men inevitably leads to miscommunication, and each gender wrongly interprets the other's cues based on each gender's own set of rules and linguistic norms acquired in play activities when young girls and boys.

- Misunderstandings can arise, for example, from the differential use of minimal responses.

- Imagine a male speaker who is receiving repeated nods or "mm hmm"s from the woman he is speaking to. She is merely indicating that she is listening, but he thinks she is agreeing with everything he says. Now imagine a female speaker who is receiving only occasional nods and "mm hmm"s from the man she is speaking to. He is indicating that he doesn't always agree; she thinks he isn't always listening.

Dominance & difference

- Example of two female Hindi speakers conversation.

- *F1: mãɪ̃ bhii shaayad na jaau~u~ kyõki mujhe uskaa point of view maaluum hai [hm hm] uh mujhe . . . mãɪ̃ usko jaantii hu~u~ ki [hm hm] vo kyaa kahegii [hm hm] kyõki ek baar pahale bhii mãɪ̃ uskii sun cukii hu~u~ .*

   I too may not go because I know her point of view. I know what she will say because I have heard her once before

- *F2: mãɪ̃ bhii ek baar pahale sun cukii hu~u~ [hãã] jab tum sab saath the na. (both laugh) vaise mãɪ̃ pataa nahɪ~ɪ~, mujhe lagaa ki zyaadaa extreme feminism [hm] ho rahii thii wahãã [hãã]*

   It doesn't agree with what I feel like. I too have heard her once before, when you were all together remember? (laugh) and you know I don't know I felt that there was too much extreme feminism going on there. It doesn't agree with what I feel.

- F1: wahãã tum ne dekhaa thaa, mãɪ̃ jo thii, sab se maailD thii mãɪ̃?

   Did you see that I was milder than all the rest?

Dominance & difference

- **F2**: *hãã mujhe bhii wahii lagaa.*

  Yes I felt that way too

- **F1**: *mere baat . . . vo phir vo . . . kyõki mãı̃ vo . . . bilkul radical feminism me˜ believe nahı̃ı̃ kartii . . .*

  I do not believe in absolute radical feminism.

- **F2**: *mãı̃ bhii*

  Me too

- The style of the two female Hindi speakers signals gender solidarity and establishes community.

- Their talk shows a liberal exchange of cooperative discourse strategies, which convey a woman's style of mutual understanding, involvement, and agreement.

Difference in aggressiveness

- Aggressiveness is more in male. This is because of the higher testosterone level in blood in males than in females.

- In terms of language, males give impulsive reactions.

- In psychological terms, women are far more evolved than men, they do not respond quickly.

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Direct and Indirect aggression in speech

- **Indirect Aggression**: Telling stories about target of aggression in their absence.

- Such narration could have element of lie or exaggeration in order to put the target in trouble.

- Mostly seen in women.

- **Direct Aggression**: When aggression is manifested in the presence of the target.

- Mostly seen in men.

Direct and Indirect aggression in speech

- In Direct Aggression, men respond in a very dramatic manner.

- Angriness is shown in language by abuses and slang words.

- The abusive words are female-centric.

- People swear, curse, cuss and insult in most of the South Asian languages using female directed contexts.

General Perception

- Women are more communicative than men.

- Men do not give verbal recognition of the contributions in the conversation made by women.

- Men curse more than women.

- Women gossip more than men.

- Women talk more with one another than men do.

- Men speak more comfortably in public than women.

General Perception

- Women break the rules of "turn taking" less than men.

- In general, women often think in terms of closeness and support but struggle to preserve intimacy. Men concerned with status tend to focus more on independence.

- Women use more standard forms than men.

- Women's speech is less direct/assertive than men's.

Gender Fluidity

- Tracing the history of the study of language and gender, we see that for the most part the research community assumed the position of gender as a unitary, fundamental fact, as meaning the same across communities, and as context free.

- In order to understand women and men as language users in their speech communities, focus has been diverted from examining gender as located within the individual to examining gender as an ongoing, changing process constructed in communities of practice.

- Only in the last decade has language and gender study applied an inter-disciplinary perspective, drawing methods and approaches from a variety of disciplines: sociolinguistics, ethnography, social theory, discourse analysis, and feminist studies.

- Focus has moved from thinking of things in twos to examining the fluidity of social identity.

Gender Fluidity

- Rather than viewing gender as something fixed, given, and readymade, gender is viewed as a unified collection of social identities existing in individuals; language is action oriented, jointly producing the many identities that speakers possess.

- Gender identity is no longer viewed as static or unidimensional but as a process, created and recreated as the cues change, the situation arises, and the relationships are negotiated in the social activities of the speech community.

- To further illustrate the range of ways that language use constructs gender in everyday talk, other cross-cultural studies provide a glimpse into how women act as agents of language change, influencing the linguistic landscape of their local communities in South Asia.

- Stella Mascarenhas-Keyes(1994) finds that Catholic Goan women play a major role in the marginalization and displacement of the mother tongue Konkani and in promoting the dominant Western languages of Portuguese and English.

Gender Fluidity

- As mothers and as advocates for education, these women are reshaping the linguistic face of their Goan families and community by furthering the spread of non-Indian languages at the possible loss of the minority regional Indian languages.

- Although the women consider themselves ''linguistically limited,'' they understand the economic and social advantage of being multilingual in English, Hindi, or Kannada.

- By promoting multilingualism, these women offer greater opportunities to their children as well as enhance their own self-image and strengthen their social standing in the community.

Myth: Women talk more than men

- Some folk "wisdom":

- Foxes are all tail, and women are all tongue.

- A woman's tongue wags like a lamb's tail.

- The North sea will sooner be found wanting in water than a woman be at a loss for a word.

- However research found that men talk more often (Eakins and Eakins):

- Men's turns 10.66 secs, women's 3-10 secs at faculty meetings.

- At academic conferences (Swacker): women 40.7% of the presentations, 40% of audience. But only 27.2%

- There seems to be an asymmetry between private and public speaking—Tannen's rapport versus report talk

Myth: Women talk more than men

- **Claims:**

- For women, the language of conversation is for rapport: a way to establish connections and negotiate relationships.

- For men, it is a way to negotiate and maintain status in a hierarchical order.

Gender in South Asian Languages

- In India (specially), few languages seem to be gender specific in common terms.

- People consider North-eastern Indian language to be sweet and that's why a feminine touch.

- Telugu is also considered one of the sweetest language of South Asia.

- One can feel the femininity in the tone of this language.

- *Telugu is called as "Italian of the east".*

Gender in South Asian Languages

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Gender viewed locally

- Put forward by Pat Nichols in 1980s.

- Focus has been diverted from examining gender as located within the individual to examining gender as an ongoing, changing process constructed in communities of practice.

- Language and gender study applied approaches from disciplines like: sociolinguistics, ethnography, social theory, discourse analysis, and feminist studies.

- Work done by Eckert and McConnell-Ginet.

- Gender identity is no longer viewed as static or unidimensional but as a process, created and recreated as the cues change, the situation arises, and the relationships are negotiated in the social activities of the speech community.

Gender viewed locally

- Rather than talking globally, this approach thinks practically and looks locally . It constructs a speaker's identity within a community of practice, the collection of activities speakers engage in to construct identities of themselves.
- Carrying out fieldwork in the natural local contexts, they help to illustrate how gender identity is constructed through language in the particular social activities that women regularly engage in.
- For example, In India, women shape their lives and their communities' practices by performing several of the linguistic traditions such as ritualized storytelling, devotional singing, and chanting (Wadley 1986); tuneful weeping (Tiwary 1978) and nonprofessional tale-telling (Ramanujan 1990, 1999).
- Gloria Goodwin Raheja (1994), shows that the community of women in rural north India constructs their gender when they chant ritual songs and proverbs.

Gender viewed locally

- Viv Edwards and Savita Katbamna's (1988) investigation of the community of Hindu Gujarati women in Great Britain illustrates the construction of Gujarati womanhood through the social practices of singing wedding songs.
- The use of language as ritual provides an outlet for Gujarati women to validate their native identity in the non-Indian setting of Britain but perpetuates the dominant ideology of the traditional family and social roles and expectations embedded in these songs and rituals.
- Stella Mascarenhas-Keyes (1994) finds that Catholic Goan women play a major role in the marginalization and displacement of the mother tongue Konkani and in promoting the dominant Western languages of Portuguese and English.

Citations

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THANK YOU