

“SEX AS AN INDEPENDENT VARIABLE RELATED TO LINGUISTICS VARIABLES”

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Abstract. This paper attempts to investigate sex as an independent variable related to linguistic variables. Although sex is not considered as a direct element in linguistic behavior, however, the effects of gender on linguistic behavior show up the differences between male and female speakers. In fact, Sex has become one of the important factors in the field of linguistics in general and in the study of the phonological variation in particular. The writers of this paper would try to shed some lights on how the language use relates to the everyday practice that constitutes speaker’s class-based social participation and identity in the community. However, the main focus of the discussion would be the correlation of sex with linguistic behavior.

Keywords: Language, Sex, Gender, Variables, Linguistics.

1. Introduction

One of the major issues in the sociolinguistic of speech is the relationship between sex and language. Since the mid 1970’s research on language and sex has concentrated on the role language plays in the location and maintenance of women in disadvantage position in society. It also seeks to elucidate the role of language in defining, constructing and reproducing gendered identities, as well as the role of gender in the perception and production of language. The early studies have shown that linguistics had taken an interest in sex and language in two other respects the earlier of these were the presences of lexical, phonological and morphological forms that are used by speakers of one sex or the other. More recent researches on sociolinguistic variation have revealed that sex was investigated as an independent variables, along with social status, style, age and ethnicity. For example, women’s language has been said to reflect their conservatism, prestige consciousness, upward mobility, insecurity, deference, nurture, emotional expressivity, and sensitivity to others, solidarity while men’s language is heard as evincing their toughness, lack of effect, competitiveness, independence, competence, hierarchy and control.

2. Difference between Men’s and Women’s Language Form:

After the study of forms in certain languages, it is found that several systematic differences between men’s and women’s version of the indicative and imperative verbal paradigms. In ‘Kurux’ a small group of Dravidian language spoken in India, there are several morphological forms used by women only when addressing other women, they are not used by men or by women to address men. Ekka speculates that in ‘Kurux’, forms that are fundamentally for use between men are accepted by women for use in cross Sex dyads. He suggested that the spread of the masculine form is consequence of the ‘patriarchal’ Kurux society. It seemed to him that the Kurux would think it ‘rather indecent’ if men were to talk about women or address a plurality of women using feminine forms and that it would be ‘very improper’ for women to refer to themselves or other women as being of the feminine gender. The field of language and gender as a whole has primarily employed two methodology of linguistics inquiry-

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- Investigation of phonetic and morpho syntactic variation.
- Discourse/ conversation analysis.

The Norwich, England, the study by Tudgill showed that the members of the middle class women were more likely to use standard verb forms like 'running' (with word-final [ɪŋ]), as opposed to the non-standard forms like 'runniŋ' (with word final [ɔŋ]). The standard form [ɪŋ] was more frequently used by Norwich women irrespective of the class. So this difference in usage of [ɪŋ] verses [ɔŋ] reveals the gendered pattern of phonetic realizations of the same phoneme. A similar pattern occurred in the speech of working class adolescent in Sydney, Australia. Boys were more likely than girls to use non-standard syntactic features such as multiple negation, like –'they don't say nothing' and non standard past tense forms like 'he woke up and seen something' by seeing these examples, the generalization would appear to be that women are more likely to use standard, prestigious linguistics forms than are men of the same social class.

Even if one speculated that women were more sensitive to prestige forms, why would they act on this in the first place? Three kinds of explanations have been offered to account for this phenomenon.

The first one was linguistics insecurity which claimed that women imitate the prestigious and more standard language of social class immediately above their own to become more prestigious and powerful. This reveals the fact that women want to use standard forms while men do not. Men was more inclined towards local affinity to show vernacular solidarity and pressure to sound like 'one of the guys' for example we can say that standard enjoys 'overt prestige' and non-standard forms enjoys 'covert prestige'. Women are attracted by the norm of Standard English while men respond to the covert prestige of the vernacular. It suggested that women use favored linguistic forms as a way of achieving status through the use of linguistics which is denied to them in other aspects of life.

The second explanation emphasized women's role in child rearing. Since in most societies women are responsible for taking care of children, researchers theorized that women would try to improve their children's prospects by exposing them to the most prestigious language possible.

The third point deals with the Labor Market Dynamics- in a South Carolina Community P. Nichols describe the language shared by this community as a speech continuum which ranges from an English Creole known as Gullah or Geechee on the one end to a variety of Black English in the center to a regionally standard variety of English at the other end. Gullah, which is being used less as speakers favor the other two. She discovered that it was used only by older women and men but among the younger one there was a sharp difference. The analysis of the social networks of the island residents helps to explain their linguistics behavior. The men both young and old generally take construction job which require little education. So, on job their co workers are generally friends, family and neighbors and this reinforces both Gullah language norms and their group identity as Gullah speakers. The younger women on the other hand are taking up less lucrative, service related jobs associated with the tourist industry; elementary school teacher etc. and they have a great deal of interaction with speakers of standard English. So there are sharply different network pattern for males and females. Males have high network strength and women have low.

Sociolinguist Lakoff's work led her to conclude that women's language- by which she meant both language used to describe women and language typically used by women-had overall effect of sub merging a women's personal identity. They are denied the means of expressing themselves strongly, encouraged to use forms that express uncertainty concerning what they are talking about. She described six categories of language use that are sharply differentiated by the sex of the speakers. Lexical distinctions such as color terms, strong versus weak expletives, like they are supposed to avoid the use of strong expletives such as 'damn' or 'shit' and encouraged to substitute weaker ones like 'oh dear' or 'fudge' etc. it is followed by difference between women's adjectives and neutral adjectives. Like 'great', 'terrific' are neutral ones that can be used either by men or women. But 'adorable', 'divine' are expected in women's speech.

A syntactic feature, the tag question form are more freely used by women than men. Greater uses of this form by women are presenting themselves as unsure of their options that count very much. It is followed by the degree of strength of directive speech acts. Women seem to be taught to use the more polite, weaker, more self effacing forms of directives. In contrast to this male speech was characterized as direct, forceful, authoritative and confident. But simply identifying these features and saying that women use certain forms in

their speech is not enough. The question must be dealt with carefully that what differences in interactional strategy between women and men are there, and how do they reveal the structure of society with regard to the sexes.

Labov was the first to notice the important role of sex/gender as sociolinguistic variable. Labov emphasized two features of human language behavior—first the women of all classes and ages use more standard variants than their equivalent men. Secondly the lower middle class ‘hyper corrects’ its language, it copies features of upper middle class, whose language behavior is more standard, in order to gain social prestige. Labov tried to reconcile two slightly inconsistent questions that why it is that men use more non-standard varieties and why do women lead language change. So once again it is seen that the role of gender is an important factor in sociolinguistics variation. But he was not able to explain why it is that women use more standard form.

Tudgil (1972) has a stronger emphasis on sociolinguistics reasons to account for the observed gender specific difference in language variation. The question is why working class men stick to their low prestige non-standard variety. To explain this Tudgill has adopted Labov’s notion of ‘covert prestige’: for men, non-standard variants fulfill the function of solidarity markers, which highlights certain group values like masculinity. So the notion of ‘covert prestige’ captures the hidden sociological function of vernaculars. He also explained, why women in general use more standard forms than men, and said the social position of women in our society is less secure and signals their social status “Linguistically”. Furthermore men are judged according to their work and women are assessed according to their appearance which also included language. Women tend to exaggerate their actual use of standard form which is called the ‘overt prestige’ and men tend to under report their standard usage in the name of ‘covert prestige.’ The explanation put forth so far can be divided into three groups according to the concept of sex/gender.

Biological Approach: covers the explanation of which covers the explanations of difference in sound frequency using the difference in psychology of male and female.

The Two Cultural Approaches: says that language is used as signifying code to maintain group identity. Male peer group exert strong pressure on their members to use the vernacular. Their use of vernaculars is due to the tendency to delimit themselves from women. Women have the responsibility of child rearing. So they are more conscious of their language behavior. The status of man is derived their occupation. Language can also be talked as a medium to maintain cultural differences; it also acts as a major vehicle for the transmission of cultural beliefs and values.

The third most important approach is the **power and the dominance approach:** female usage of the standard language is intended as a means of improving their own inferior position in a patriarchal society. The weaker a women’s position, the more she is forced to be polite. Standard language is only one of the many ways to show the difference. So the male language is regarded as the ‘language form’ and female language is treated as a ‘deviation’. By assigning the weaker linguistic features like ‘politeness’ use of tag questions, in the women’s use of language. the society reflects that their position is secondary. It is men who are supposed to be in dominant position and this domination can be observed in every aspect of life. So men can dominate over women with the help of language also.

Language helps in uncovering the social structure that who is dominating? It is women who are supported to be at the inferior position and their sense of inferiority and insecurity in the society is reflected in the use of their language. Therefore men tend to be more likely to give direct commands. Women are more polite, these behaviors appear to place men in the position of controlling conversation. Women’s language is equated with relative powerlessness, and shows the difference in power between men and women. The terms related to sex in language also shows the dominance of male in the society.

For example ‘Bachelor’ and ‘Spinster’ is both unmarried. But the bachelor however is seen as probably being unmarried by choice and living happily, while a ‘spinster’ conveys the image of an old and unappealing women living unfulfilled life in consequence of her failure to marry. A ‘governor’ wields considerable power and executive of a political administrative unit, a ‘governess’ cares for small children while she is employed by their wealthy parents. Both a ‘witch’ and ‘warlock’ possess evil supernatural power but no one would think of indicating that some men they know is ugly and ill tempered by calling him

a 'warlock'. A madam might be the manager of a brothel, but we would never call a 'pimp' a 'sir'. A master is an individual with great ability but 'mistress' is used for female involved in adultery. Men are always considered as species and females are called as subspecies.

These sex paired words are supposedly semantically equivalent, except that one refers to men and other to women. But by their use the attitude of dominance is very clear in the society. Gender explains that what it means to be a woman or to be a man. That's why gender must not be misunderstood as sex. Sex is something which represents the biological differences where as gender is a set of norms which are fixed for male and female. So we can say that gender categories are social constructs, they institutionalize cultural and social status and they have served to make dominance over female appear natural. Gender inequality in class society results from a historically specific tendency to ideologically 'naturalize' prevailing socio-economic inequalities.

3. Sex and Gender:

Gender is not something we are born with and not something we have, but something- we do- something we perform. A girl child will imitate her mother's activities very well and a boy child will follow his father since his childhood. In other words gendered performances are available to everyone, but with them come constraints on who can perform which persona with impurity and this is where gender and sex come together as society tries to match up ways of behaving with biological sex assignments. Sex is biological categorization based primarily on reproductive potential, where as gender is the social elaboration of biological sex.

In the famous word of Simone de Beauvoir, 'women are not born, they are made'. The same is true of man. The making of a man or a woman is a never ending process that begins before birth-then after birth the child is transformed into 'he' and 'she', then assigning it to a lifetime as 'male' or 'female'. This attribution is further made public and lasting through the linguistic event to naming. From infancy, male and female children are interpreted differently and interacted with differently. While it takes a community to develop gender, not all participants in the community are equally involved in enforcing difference. Gender continues to be transformed as we move into professional like as doctors, managers etc. it continues to be transformed as our family status changes as we learn to be wives and husbands, mothers and fathers, aunts and uncles, sisters and brothers, grandmothers and grand fathers.

Therefore the crucial question for us is what is it that gives rise to difference in language use and its answer is very clear, it is power which is maintained in all linguistic (inter)action. So the structure of society must be observed critically and we must talk about the possibilities of real action by an individual acting in social environment. The three approaches correlations, choice and critique can help us in further understanding. We can correlate the forms of linguistic behavior with certain social organization. For example we can correlate the prescribed forms assigned for female section with the intention of suppressing them by male section. They can dominate easily because there is a set of prescribed rules for women's linguistic behavior and if any woman want to break that rule, her action would be considered improper and inappropriate. This means that the rules are not natural; they are defined by the dominating section of society i.e. men and they keep on varying from society to society. But the controlling group of men appears to be naturalizing these rules, so that they can be accepted by weaker section i.e. females without any question.

The second approach, the notion of choice can also be seen in the same light, that 'who will speak what' the choice is not free, it carries the notion of power with it. The powerful will decide who is supposed to speak what. For example females are not allowed to interrupt in between the conversation, they are expected to maintain politeness and softness in their conversation, silence is observed by men, because they will always have the last word in any discussion with women. Therefore it is indicated that the features which are associated with gender distinction are created in society, maintained in society, sustained in society and reduplicated in society. And of course the power of control is with male group because they are at the dominating position. So there must be a critical approach to look at the complex relationship between these gender patterns in society, because they not only suggest the types of language used by two genders but also the structure of society.

So, critical sociolinguistics tries to find out the explanation for this kind of variation. By merely saying that men speak like this and women speak like that we merely described the construction of the society. But this is not enough; there is a need for elaboration and explanation of these factors. For critical sociolinguistics the society is a field of power-when we are talking in terms of gender. The linguistic action of socially formed and positioned individual is seen as shaped first and foremost by differences in power. Sociolinguistic tries to answer that what gives rise to difference in language use, what are the possibilities of choice and how does power enter into the possibilities of choosing.

4. Resistance to the Powerful Language:

It refers these kinds of questions and attracts the attention of people who are in favor of human equality. Many people, as a result, have started questioning about the existing inequality and trying to correct these inequality. The political correctness therefore, is one of the results of increased level of consciousness among the people in society, those who are again the dominance of male over female. Words like ‘chairperson’ instead of ‘chairman’; workforce instead of ‘man power’; ‘work hour’ in place of ‘man hour’; ‘artificial, synthetic’ instead of ‘man made’; ‘person-to-person’ for ‘man-to-man; ‘prehistoric people’ for ‘prehistoric man’ have emerged out of this political correctness. Now women are also interrupting in between the conversation. They too are using ‘silence’ as a tool to dominate over the opposite sex. These behaviors are indicative of the resistance to the powerful language.

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