Seminar in Sociolinguistics

1302749

Lecture (7)

Gender and age
Part 1

Gender and Variation
Sex vs. Gender

- Sex is what you’re born with. Gender is what you’re given.

- **Sex**: one’s biological property, a matter of physiology (categories)

- **Gender**: one’s social property, learned behavior (continua)
Gender-exclusive speech differences: highly structured communities

Gender Differences in Language Use (from Tannen video)

1. Physical Orientation
   - Male: Avoid eye contact
   - Female: Use eye contact

2. Status & Connection
   - Male: Talk for status
   - Female: Talk for solidarity

3. Directness & Indirectness
   - Male: From decision to discussion
   - Female: From discussion to decision

4. Public & Private Talk
   - Male: Talkative in public, quiet in private
   - Female: Quiet in public, talkative in private

5. Ritual Opposition
   - Male: Fight for fun
   - Female: May fight, but not for fun

6. Conversational Style
   - Male: "Trouble talk" avoided; would put status at risk
   - Female: "Trouble talk" used to create rapport
Gender-exclusive speech differences: highly structured communities

Women and men do not speak in exactly the same way as each other in any community.

- **Amazonian Indians**: men must marry outside their own tribe so the men and women in the community speak different languages.
- **Gros Ventre North American Indian tribe**: ‘bread’ is [kja'tsa] for women and [dʒa'tsa] for men.
- **Traditional / conservative styles of Japanese**: where women have to prefix nouns with o-, a marker of polite or formal style.
- **Modern Japanese**: where such distinctions more related to formality than to gender; ‘men’s’ forms casual, coarse, macho …
**Gender-exclusive speech differences: highly structured communities**

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**Example 3**

*Japanese*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Women’s form</th>
<th>Men’s form</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>otoosan</td>
<td>oyaji</td>
<td>‘father’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>taberu</td>
<td>kuu</td>
<td>‘eat’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>onaka</td>
<td>hara</td>
<td>‘stomach’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Gender-exclusive speech differences: highly structured communities

➢ … ‘women’s’ forms used by everyone in public contexts.

➢ Some languages signal the gender of the speaker in the pronoun system.
➢ In modern standard Japanese, these distinctions are more a matter of degrees of *formality* or *politeness* than gender; so the ‘men’s’ forms are largely restricted to casual contexts and are considered rather vulgar, while the ‘women’s’ forms are used by everyone in public contexts.
➢ Again, in Japanese: *ore* (‘I’) used only by men, *boku* used mainly by men; women traditionally expected to use more formal *atashi*, *watashi* and *watakushi*
While initially Japanese women who used these forms were regarded as rather ‘macho’, the social meaning of these forms is changing. They are no longer so much signals of masculinity as of informality and modernity.
Gender-exclusive speech differences: highly structured communities

- If a community is very hierarchical, for instance, and within each level of the hierarchy men are more powerful than women, then linguistic differences between the speech of women and men may be just one dimension of more extensive differences reflecting the social hierarchy as a whole.

  e.g. in Bengali societies (apparently) wives are not permitted to use their husbands’ names as they (the wives) are supposed to be subordinate
Gender-exclusive speech differences: highly structured communities

- Gender-exclusive speech forms reflect gender-exclusive social roles; i.e. women and men have different responsibilities, and everyone in the community knows what they are
Gender-preferential speech features: social dialect research

- In Western urban communities where women’s and men’s social roles overlap, the speech forms they use also overlap. In other words, women and men do not use completely different forms.
- They use different quantities or frequencies of the same forms.
Different quantities or frequencies of the same forms

Collected data (for English) shows that women use more –*ing* [ɪŋ] and fewer *-in’*[ɪn] pronunciations

In Canada, the pronunciation of [l] in phrases such as *il y a* and *il fait* differs between women and men

In Australia, some men and women pronounce the initial sound in *thing* as [f], but men do it more than women
Though both women and men use particular forms, one gender shows a greater preference for them than the other. In all these examples, women tend to use more of the standard forms than men do, while men use more of the vernacular forms than women do.
Example 5

Linda lives in the south of England and her dad is a lawyer. When she was 10 years old, she went to stay for a whole school term with her uncle Tom and auntie Bet in Wigan, a Lancashire town, while her mother was recovering from a car accident. She was made to feel very welcome both in her auntie’s house and at the local school. When she went home, she tried to describe to her teacher what she had noticed about the way her uncle and auntie talked. ‘Uncle Tom is a plumber,’ she told Mrs Button ‘and he talks just like the other men on the building site where he works – a bit broad. He says ’ouse and ’ome and [kup] and [bus]. When she’s at home auntie Bet talks a bit like uncle Tom. She says “Me feet are killin’ me [luv]. I’ve ’ad enough standin’ [up] for today.” But she works in a shop and when she’s talking to customers she talks more like you do Mrs Button. She says house and home and she talks real nice – just like a lady.’
Gender and social class

In every social class where surveys have been undertaken, men use more vernacular forms than women.

Figure 7.1 Vernacular [in] by sex and social group in Norwich
Gender and social class

Lowest and highest social groups → women’s speech closer to that of the men in the same group;

class membership more important than gender identity?

Social group 2 → women’s score of 3% for vernacular forms is closer to that of men in group 1

Figure 7.1 Vernacular [in] by sex and social group in Norwich
Gender and social class

- Across all social groups women generally use more standard forms than men.
- Standard forms are overtly prestigious
- Vernacular forms are preferred by men, not admired overtly by the society as a whole, and not cited as the ‘correct’ forms

- Pattern found in all Western speech communities
- Described by Trudgill (1983) as ‘the single most consistent finding to emerge from sociolinguistic studies over the past 20 years’
- Also evident from a very young age – young boys use more [m], more consonant cluster simplification [læs] for last, [təʊl] for told, and are more likely to pronounce th [ð] as [d] in this, the and then
Explanations of women’s linguistic behaviour

Four explanations of women’s linguistic behaviour

1. Social class and related status?

2. Women’s role in society?

3. Women’s status as a subordinate group?

4. Function of speech in expressing gender identity (esp. masculinity)?
Explanations of women’s linguistic behaviour

1) The social status explanation

- Some linguistics experts have suggested that women are more status-conscious than men.
- More aware of speech signaling social class background?
- Standard speech forms → associated with higher social status
- Perhaps linked to paid employment? Occupation can signal social status
- Further support for this explanation in the fact that women in NY (Labov) and Norwich (Trudgill) reported that they used more standard forms than they actually did.
2) The social status explanation

- Women not in paid employment are more likely to rely on the use of standard forms to claim higher social status?
- No – the opposite seems to be true. (Think about their interactions.)
- Studies in NY and Belfast reflect this.
Explanations of women’s linguistic behaviour

2) The social status explanation

- Women’s role as guardian of society’s values
- Society tends to expect ‘better’ behaviour from women than from men.
- Boys generally allowed more freedom than girls, misbehaviour from girls more quickly corrected.
- Women designated the role of modelling correct behaviour in the community → think about primary school teachers.
- This explanation may be relevant in some social groups but what about interactions between mothers and children? Relaxed? Informal? This is when we expect to encounter more vernacular forms.
Explanations of women’s linguistic behaviour

3) Subordinate groups must be polite

Example 7

‘You are an intolerable bore Mr Brown. Why don’t you simply shut up and let someone speak who has more interesting ideas to contribute,’ said Lord Huntly in the well-educated and cultured accent of the over-privileged.

(Bassett, J. et al. 1985)
Explanations of women’s linguistic behaviour

3) Subordinate groups must be polite

- Not immediately apparent why polite speech should be equated with standard speech. Perfectly possible to be polite using Liverpudlian vernacular, as it is to be rude and insulting using RP.
- Unsophisticated version → women are subordinate and therefore should be polite.

- More sophisticated version → women are protecting ‘face’ (their own and others); this is when we start considering the more subtle functions of speech.
Explanations of women’s linguistic behaviour

- But whose speech is the norm – women’s or men’s?

- All the explanations so far seem to be based on the underlying assumption that women’s behaviour is aberrant and has to be explained – yet they are the ones who use more standard forms!
- Why should standard or ‘correct’ behaviour need explaining?!?
- What if we asked ‘why don’t men use more standard forms’?
Explanations of women’s linguistic behaviour

➢ 4) Function of speech in expressing gender identity (esp. masculinity)?

Example 8

Knocker: Comin’ down the club Jim?
Jim: Not friggin’ likely. It’s rubbish that club.
Knocker: It ain’t that bad. Music’s cool. I seen a couple of sharp judies there too. If we plays our cards right . . . Anyways you was keen enough las’ week.
Jim: The music’s last Knocker. I’m off down the Pier ’ead if there ain’t nothin’ better on offer.
Knocker: Bleedin’ rozzers crawlin’ round down there. Come down ours instead.

[Vernacular lexical items in the Liverpool dialect Scouse: judies (‘girls’), last (‘hopeless’, ‘terrible’), rozzers (‘police’)]
Explanations of women’s linguistic behaviour

4) Function of speech in expressing gender identity (esp. masculinity)?
- Vernacular forms express machismo(?)
- Do vernacular forms carry connotations of masculinity and toughness?
- Evidence / data → subjects listen to recordings of men speaking and then say who they think would be more likely to win a street fight.
- Norwich men tended to claim they used more vernacular forms than they actually did.
- Vernacular forms then may have covert prestige
- So, conversely, are standard forms to be associated with feminine values and femininity?
- Think about school teachers again … female domination?
Some alternative explanations

- women’s categorization by their husbands’
  - women’s use of more standard forms would require no explanation at all.
  - They would simply be using appropriate forms which accurately reflected their social background.
  - When women are classified by their husband’s social group, mis-categorisation is one plausible explanation of their speech behaviour.
Some alternative explanations

➢ The influence of the interviewer and the context

▪ When people wish to be cooperative they tend to accommodate to the speech of the person they are talking to. In other words, their speech becomes more like that of their addressee.
▪ One factor accounting for women’s use of more standard forms in social dialect interviews may be their greater accommodation to the middle-class speech of their interviewers.
▪ The differences between women’s and men’s speech behavior would then be explicable in terms of their different responses to the interviewer collecting the data.
Some alternative explanations

➢ The influence of the interviewer and the context

- Many of the interviewers who collected the social dialect data discussed in the previous sections were male. The interview context was therefore different for men and women.
- Women were being interviewed by a male stranger, a highly educated member of the dominant group in the society.
- Men were being interviewed by a member of their own gender.
- In such circumstances, it is likely that the interview context would be considerably more comfortable for men than for women, especially for middle-class men.
- Male solidarity would reduce the formality of the context. This too might account for men’s greater use of vernacular forms.
Some alternative explanations

- The influence of the interviewer and the context

- Women’s greater use of standard speech forms may then be an indication of their sensitivity to **contextual factors**.
- Standard speech forms are used in more formal contexts. They reflect **social distance**. They are used in contexts where people operate primarily in terms of social status and role.
Some alternative explanations

- The influence of the interviewer and the context

- This discussion of alternative explanations of women’s linguistic behaviour also illustrates another important point.
- The ‘same’ behaviour may be interpreted quite differently by different researchers.
- Identifying linguistic differences between groups is just the first step. Interpreting their significance is another, and any interpretation will be influenced by a researcher’s theoretical framework and beliefs about the relationship between language and social factors.
Some alternative explanations

- The influence of the interviewer and the context

- In some communities, a woman’s social status and her gender interact to reinforce differential speech patterns between women and men.
- In others, different factors modify one another to produce more complex patterns. But in a number of communities, for some linguistic forms, gender identity seems to be a primary factor accounting for speech variation.
- The gender of the speaker can override social class differences, for instance, in accounting for speech patterns.
- In these communities, expressing masculine or feminine identity seems to be very important.
Some alternative explanations

Figure 7.2 Glottalised [p] in speech of Tyneside women and men from two social classes
Some alternative explanations

➤ The influence of the interviewer and the context

▪ Penny Eckert’s research with adolescents in playgrounds in Detroit suggests that, while social group is a fundamental dimension, the symbolic value of speech is often more important for the girls than the boys.

▪ In these communities, specific linguistic forms may signal membership of the group ‘male’ or ‘female’ in particular, as well as indicating the different social aspirations of different groups.
Some alternative explanations

- The influence of the interviewer and the context but there are exceptions….

- A high frequency of vernacular forms may have a much wider range of associations than the explanation which identifies them with masculinity and toughness suggests.
- To give just two contrasting examples, vernacular forms may express conservative, non-urban values (where the standard is the urban norm), or alternatively vernacular forms may reflect anti-establishment attitudes (where the standard is the middle-class adult norm).
Part 2

Age and variation
Age-graded features of speech

- Male voices generally sound lower in pitch than women’s, just as adult voices sound deeper than children’s.
- Differences are relative, however, and the pitch ranges of women and men overlap to a considerable extent. In any community, there will always be some women whose natural speaking pitch is deeper than that of some men.
- Influence in public domains has been a male prerogative until relatively recently. The fact that women politicians (like Helen Clark in example 11) often have deeper voices than average may reflect the public’s preference for voices with masculine associations in politics; or perhaps women politicians are using male models in order to gain acceptance in spheres previously dominated by males.

**Pitch:** the quality of a sound governed by the rate of vibrations producing it; the degree of highness or lowness of a tone.
Age-graded features of speech

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peterson &amp; Barney 1952</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>130 Hz</td>
<td>220 Hz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Künzel 1989</td>
<td>German</td>
<td>116 Hz</td>
<td>211 Hz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eklund &amp; Traunmüller 1996</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>109 Hz</td>
<td>206 Hz</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Age-graded features of speech

- There are other features of people’s speech which vary at different ages too.
- Not only pitch, but vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar can differentiate age groups.
- There are patterns which are appropriate for 10-year-olds or teenagers which disappear as they grow older.
- These are age-graded patterns.
- Between the ages of 10 and 15, and typically with encouragement from their teachers and parents, middle-class Glaswegians learn to substitute [t] for the vernacular glottal stop variant in words like *water* and *matter*. 
Age-graded features of speech

- **Slang** is another area of vocabulary which reflects a person’s age.

- Current slang is the linguistic prerogative of young people and generally sounds odd in the mouth of an older person. It signals membership of a particular group – the young.
Age-graded features of speech

## SLANG WORDS

Slang, or informal words often belonging to a specific region or dialect, are highly creative phrases that demonstrate the evolution of language over time. Slang words spotlight the cultural experience of a generation, allowing like-minded people to forge unique ties of communication and understanding.

### American Slang
- Break a Leg = Good luck
- Hot = Attractive
- Cheesy = Cheap or tacky
- Dead = Bars and clubs as empty, quiet or sad
- Hold your horses = Hold up! Wait just a moment.
- Hooked = Be addicted to something

### British Slang
- Chuffed = Pleased, happy
- Mate = A friend
- Tosh = Nonsense
- Gander = Take a look
- Gutted = Sad, disappointed
- Cheeky = Do something disrespectful

### Australian Slang
- Bonzer = Great, awesome
- Do the harry = Getting the hell out
- Gone walkabout = A foot journey
- Thongs = Sandals
- Go troppo = Go crazy
- G'day = Good day

### Canadian Slang
- Dart = Asking for a cigarette
- Loonie = A $1 coin
- Toque = Winter hats
- Chesterfield = Couch or sofa
- Pop = A carbonated beverage
- Mickey = A 375ml bottle of alcohol

### Internet Slang
- 2day = Today
- 2moro = Tomorrow
- 2nite = Tonight
- 4EAE = For Ever And Ever
- ABT = About
- ADN = Any Day Now
- LOL = Laughing out loud
- BRB = Be right back
- BTW = By the way
- LMK = Let me know
- G2G = Got to go
- AFAIR = As Far As I Remember
- AKA = Also Known As
- AMA = Ask Me Anything
- ASAP = As Soon As Possible
Age and social dialect data

- By their teenage years, most young people in English-speaking communities have developed an awareness of the significance of standard English variants, though they may not choose to use them.
- A common age-related pattern for stable vernacular forms, such as the use of [in] for standard [in], in walking, or [d] for [ð] in then, or multiple negation, is represented by the curve in figure 7.3.
- The graph suggests the relative frequency of vernacular forms in different age groups. It indicates that they are high in childhood and adolescence, and then steadily reduce as people approach middle age when societal pressures to conform are greatest.
- Vernacular usage gradually increases again in old age as social pressures reduce, with people moving out of the workforce and into a more relaxed phase of their lives.
Age and social dialect data

Figure 7.3  Relationship between use of vernacular forms and age
Age and social dialect data

- Children gradually acquire standard forms in the same way as they gradually acquire new vocabulary and control of grammatical constructions.
- It is likely that this process reflects an expansion of the child’s *stylistic range*. In other words, the child gradually acquires standard forms alongside vernacular forms.
- The data probably also reflects the fact that, once acquired, the standard forms are likely to be used more often in an interview with a sociolinguist.
Age and social dialect data

- Patterns for particular linguistic features may vary between communities, but there is general agreement that, all other things being equal, in their middle years people are most likely to respond to the wider society’s speech norms by using fewer vernacular forms.
- Conversely, it is in middle age that they are most likely to use more standard forms.
Age and social dialect data

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- Conversely, it is in middle age that they are most likely to use more standard forms.
Age and social dialect data

Figure 7.4 Multiple negation in different age groups in two communities
Age and social dialect data

- An interesting parallel in the multilingual context of Montreal is the level of bilingualism reported by French Canadians at different ages.
- Young people begin life monolingual in French. Then as they grow older, through school and work they become increasingly bilingual.
- Bilingualism is clearly an asset during their working lives so the level of reported bilingualism rises to a peak between the ages of 30 and 50 while people are in the workforce. After retirement, many revert to French monolingualism with their family and close friends.
Age and social dialect data

- Bilingualism clearly functions as the equivalent of a linguistic prestige form in a monolingual community, while the reversion to French monolingualism parallels the greater use of vernacular forms among older people illustrated in Figure 7.3 above.
End of class 07