

GENDER LINGUISTICS

A short introduction

Language and gender

Language and gender is an area of study within sociolinguistics, applied linguistics, and related fields that investigate varieties of speech associated with a particular gender, or social norms for such gendered language use.

Sociolinguistics

Sociolinguistics [ˌsəʊʃiəʊlɪŋ'ɡwɪstɪks] is the descriptive study of the effect of any and all aspects of society, including cultural norms expectations, and context, on the way language is used, and the effects of language use on society .

Applied Linguistics

Applied Linguistics is an interdisciplinary field of study that identifies, investigates, and offers solutions to language-related real-life problems.

Language and gender

There are numerous investigations in Gender studies and linguistics, held by Mary Haas, Deborah Cameron and Mary Bucholtz and many other researchers.

Language and gender

There are two different types of Language and Gender questions you could be asked about:

- ✓ representations of gender;
- ✓ gender in action

Language and gender

For instance, magazine articles, adverts and books all include *representations* of gender (usually stereotypes) and not what males and females are *really* like.

It's the *perception* of a gender difference, not a real gender difference.

Language and gender

And these are based on stereotypes. A stereotype ['steriətaɪp], ['stiə-] is a fixed general image or set of characteristics that a lot of people believe represent a particular type of person or thing. It is usually a widely held but fixed and oversimplified image.

The Difference Theory

The difference theory is based on the idea that males and females really do converse differently.

The Difference Theory

A big advocate of this approach is Deborah Tannen. She believes the difference starts in childhood, where parents use more **words about feelings** to girls and use more **verbs** to boys. Males and females belong to different **sub-cultures** and therefore speak differently.

The Difference Theory

Her book, *You Just Don't Understand*, claims that there are six main differences between the ways males and females use language:

The Difference Theory

- 1) **Status vs. support** - men see language as a means of asserting dominance; women see it as a way of confirming/supporting ideas.
- 2) **Independence vs. intimacy** - men "go it alone"; women seek support.
- 3) **Advice vs. understanding** - men see language as problem solving; women see it as a means of empathy.
- 4) **Information vs. feelings** - males are concerned with the facts; women with emotions.
- 5) **Orders vs. proposals** - men use imperatives; females use hidden directives.
- 6) **Conflict vs. compromise** - men will argue; women will try to find a middle ground.

Christine Howe claims that

- Men have strategies for gaining power.
- Men are much more likely to respond to what is being said, keen to put their views across. This makes it harder for the listener to participate in the conversation.
- Women are more **active listeners**. They use minor interjections, such as "uh huh" and "oh really" (back-channeling).

Christine Howe claims that

The differences between male and female conversation begins at socialization.

- *Women's talk is co-operative.*
- *Men's talk is competitive.*

Christine Howe claims that

The differences between male and female conversation begins at socialization.

- ✓ *Women are more likely to use hedging, "sort of" "kind of" ...*
- ✓ *Women speak for less time and are less likely to interrupt. (???)*

Christine Howe claims that

The differences between male and female conversation begins at socialization.

Females use more tag questions:

For example:

F: We're seeing Mum later, aren't we?

M: We're going to see Mum today.

William O'Barr and Bowman Atkins

After all those annoying linguists who say that there is a difference, William O'Barr and Bowman Atkins wrote a book called *Women's Language Or a Powerless Language?* (1980)

William O'Barr and Bowman Atkins

They studied the language of the courtroom and found female lawyers to be assertive, interrupt, everything that Pilkington argued for males.

William O'Barr and Bowman Atkins

They also found that witnesses of both sexes would use Robin Lakoff's *weak "female" language*.

Robin Tolmach Lakoff / 'leɪkɒf/

Lakoff, "Language and Woman's Place" (1973)

They concluded that these weak language traits are actually a "powerless language" rather than a *"female language"*.

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William O'Barr and Bowman Atkins

O'Barr and Atkin's research is interesting, and seems to suggest that it is not so much differences in the sexes' language, more the situations that they face which result in the difference.

The Dominance Theory

This theory is known as the dominance theory: if there is a difference in language, it is because males have always dominated in both the home and workplace, and females have had to play the domestic roles.

Robin Lakoff



Robin Lakoff (1975) was a believer in this to some extent. She combined elements of dominance and deficiency (another theory that claims women's language is weaker because it's EXPECTED to be weaker... "*women don't swear*" being a common assumption) and created a set of female characteristics:

- .

Robin Lakoff

1. Women use super polite forms: "Would you please...?"
"I'd really appreciate it if..."
2. Women speak in italics (use more prosodic features):
It's soooo nice...
3. They use **empty adjectives**: *divine, lovely, adorable...*
4. They use modal verbs: *should, would...*
5. Overuse qualifiers. "I think that..."
6. They use mitigated responses and **hidden directives**.
7. They have special lexis for things like **colours and cloth**.
8. They avoid coarse language and expletives.
9. Women **can't tell jokes. (!!!)**

Robin Lakoff

Many of these, like **hedging**, **hidden directives**, **overuse of qualifiers**, she claimed were because of the patriarchal society - historically, women had never had any **power**, and when faced with opportunities to place their opinion, they grow nervous... (???)

Robin Lakoff: Ladies' politeness

“The more particles in a sentence that reinforce the notion that it is a request, rather than an order, the politer the result. The following sentences illustrate these points:

(a) is a direct order; (b) and (c) simple requests, and (d) and (e) compound requests.

(a) Close the door.

(b) Please close the door.

(c) Will you close the door?

(d) Will you please close the door?

(e) Won't you close the door? “

Robin Lakoff

neutral	women only
great	adorable
terrific	charming
cool	sweet
neat	lovely
???	divine

Robin Lakoff

““Women don't tell jokes”? I'm sure there's at least a little humour sprinkled throughout these pages... and what did one snowman say to another? can you smell carrots! And guess what, Lakoff, I'm female...” She wrote...

The feminist Dale Spender

The feminist Dale Spender also believed the dominance approach. She once said:

"The crux of our difficulties lies in being able to identify and transform the rules which govern our behavior and which bring patriarchal order into existence. (See next page...)"

The feminist Dale Spender

... Yet the tools we have for doing this are part of that patriarchal order. While we can modify, we must none the less use the only language, the only classification scheme which is at our disposal. We must use it in a way that is acceptable and meaningful. But that very language and the conditions for its use in turn structure a patriarchal order."

A brief Conclusion

Under *the dominance theory*, in a gender-neutral area, males and females should use language in the same way.

Language and gender

Language and gender

❖ **differences between forms of language used by women and those used by men.**

Women – higher involvement

closer together
more eye contact
more understanding checks
more attention signals
shorter gaps
more overlap
shorter turns
more frequent speaker change
less appeal to expert knowledge

Men – lower involvement

farther apart
less eye contact
fewer understanding checks
fewer attention signals
longer gaps
less overlap
longer turns
less frequent speaker change
more appeal to expert knowledge

Gender-Inclusive English

TAKE A LOOK!



Gender-Inclusive English

Check yourself!

What word can we replace mankind with?

- a) Womankind
- b) Peoplekind
- c) Humanity
- d) Mail Person
- e) Kinda

Gender-Inclusive English

Check yourself!

Which word is a good replacement for fireman?

- a) Fireperson
- b) Firefighter
- c) Fire Worker
- d) Arsonist
- e) Human Torch

Gender-Inclusive English

Check yourself!

Choose the best sentence.

- a) If a teacher likes her students, she will find work more enjoyable.
- b) If a teacher likes his or her students, he or she will find work more enjoyable.
- c) If a teacher likes their students, they will find work more enjoyable.
- d) If teachers like their students, they will find work more enjoyable.

Gender-Inclusive English

Check yourself!

Choose the best sentence.

- a) Man must protect the environment for future generations.
- b) People must protect the environment for future generations.
- c) Woman must protect the environment for future generations.
- d) Mankind must protect the environment for future generations.

Gender-Inclusive English

Check yourself!

What is a better way to say mailman?

- a) mail human
- b) letter carrier
- c) mail carrier
- d) Both letter carrier and mail carrier are good alternatives for mailman.

Gender-Inclusive English

Check yourself!

Nurses are always women. They are never men, so we should always refer to them as she and her.

True - We don't need to use gender-inclusive language here because nurses are always women.

False - There are nurses who are men as well. We should use gender-inclusive language when we talk about nurses.

Gender-Inclusive English

Check yourself!

Choose the best sentence.

- a) A good manager knows his staff well.
- b) A good manager knows his or her staff well.
- c) A good manager knows their staff well.
- d) Good managers know their staff well.

Gender-Inclusive English

Check yourself!

1. What word can we replace mankind with?

womankind

peoplekind

humanity

mail person

kinda

2. Which word is a good replacement for fireman?

fireperson

firefighter

fire worker

arsonist

WHAT IS GENDER NEUTRALITY IN LANGUAGE?

Gender-neutral or gender-inclusive language is more than a matter of political correctness. Language powerfully reflects and influences attitudes, behavior and perceptions.



WHAT IS GENDER NEUTRALITY IN LANGUAGE?

Gender-neutral language is a generic term covering the use of non-sexist language, **inclusive language** or gender-fair language. The purpose of gender-neutral language is to avoid word choices which may be interpreted as biased, discriminatory or demeaning by implying that one sex or social gender is the norm. Using gender-fair and inclusive language also helps reduce gender stereotyping, promotes social change and contributes to achieving **gender equality**.

WHAT IS GENDER NEUTRALITY IN LANGUAGE?

In the multilingual environment of the European Parliament, the principles of **gender neutrality in language** and **gender-inclusive language** require the use of different strategies in the various official languages, depending on the grammatical typology of each language.

Gender-Inclusive English

5 pieces of advice

1. **GENERIC USE OF 'MAN'** Avoid the generic use of 'man' and its derivatives Alternatives: humanity (for mankind), staff (for manpower), a French person (for Frenchman)/ the French or French people (for Frenchmen), synthetic or artificial (for man-made), advisory panel (for committee of wise men), political leaders (for statesmen).

Gender-Inclusive English

5 pieces of advice

2. GENERIC USE OF 'HE', 'HIS', ETC. Complete rephrasing may sometimes be necessary. Instead of, for example, 'the official shall carry out his duties': Use plural forms ('officials shall carry out their duties ...') Use the imperative ('please send your CV to ...') Omit the pronoun altogether ('an official's salary is dependent on his length of service') Use the passive ('the relevant documents should be sent to ...') If none of the above strategies work, use 'he or she', but do so sparingly and avoid repeating it more than once in the same sentence.

Gender-Inclusive English

5 pieces of advice

3. GENERIC USE OF 'THEY' There is an increasing tendency to use 'they' and its derivatives in certain contexts for a singular subject, thus not specifying the person's gender, as in: 'Someone may not know their tax number'. This may be considered acceptable, though caution should be exercised when it comes to the reflexive/emphatic form: should one accept 'Someone may unintentionally cause harm to themselves'? In such cases 'themselves' is a possible neologism, but does not appear to be established as yet, although this may evolve. For the moment and if there is no alternative, use 'themselves'.

Gender-Inclusive English

5 pieces of advice

4. TITLES Use 'Mr' for a man; 'Ms' for a woman, avoiding 'Miss' and 'Mrs', unless it is known that the person referred to specifically wants to be referred to by one of those titles; use 'Dr' for both genders (in the sense both of 'medical doctor' and 'Ph.D.');

use 'Professor' (abbreviation: 'Prof.') for both genders.

Gender-Inclusive English

5 pieces of advice

5. NAMES OF PROFESSIONS AND FUNCTIONS Use gender-neutral job titles Generally in English, it is by now long-established that words like 'doctor' or 'lawyer' refer to a professional of either sex (without 'woman', 'lady' or 'female' tacked on the front). In some cases a substitute is available ('firefighters', 'flight attendants', 'athletes'), but it is still normal to use 'fisherman', 'midwife', and some other gender-specific terms. A list of recommendations is set out in the Appendix.

Gender-Inclusive English

5 pieces of advice

Use 'Chair' instead of 'Chairman' 'Chairperson' should be avoided, as the tendency has been to use it only when referring to women. 'Chair' should be used consistently for both sexes (for example, the Conference of Committee Chairs). Use 'press officer' or paraphrase: 'a representative for ...' or 'speaking for ...' or (sparingly) use 'spokesman' or 'spokeswoman', depending on the actual sex of the specific person concerned.