

MALE - FEMALE DIFFERENCES IN SPEECH

S. A. KHACHATRYAN

GSU Lecturer

A. A. SARIBEKYAN

First-year Student, Master's Degree

"Women like silent men. They think they're listening"

Marcel Achard

Language is human speech either spoken or written. It is one of the most powerful means of social behavior. We use language to send vital social messages about who we are, where we come from, and who we associate with. When two or more people communicate with each other they employ a code - a certain language. Language is a communal possession, individuals have access to it and they use it, of course, individually. Choice of language is part of a speaker's presentation of self.

People have known long ago that gender and language use are interconnected. The question to what degree gender determines the usage of language has attracted both the public and scientific circles.

Gender is a pervasive feature of our everyday life. Wherever we look, we see different displays of gender: in the way we dress, behave, talk, choose the words. It is impossible to escape it.

The issue of men and women's language has been a source of disagreement over the years for linguists. How do the genders talk? How does their language differ? What's the difference between men and women while speaking? These and many other questions in this field have attracted the linguists' attention for many years.

Gendered language was not taken as a serious topic for study until the 1960s, until the publication of Robin Lakoff's book *"Language and Woman's Place"* in 1975. In the late 1980s study of the relationship between language and gender became universally studied especially after the publication of Deborah Tannen's best - seller *"You just don't understand: women and men in conversation"*, in 1990.

There exist various factors which could influence people's speech act, among which sex and gender are no doubt two major factors interplaying at the forefront. Many people use the words "*gender*" and "*sex*" interchangeably, however these words do not mean the same thing. The word "*sex*" refers to the genetic and biological features and status of being male or female. Gender therefore focuses on the roles and responsibilities, expectations and aptitude of men and women. It refers to the meaning our society imposes on sex.

It is obvious that language is personal, since each person is unique biologically, individuals differ, and men and women differ. The different biological structures, to some extent, decide that men and women would talk differently. However no one could escape from being influenced by the social surroundings. Sex is far from a conclusive factor to shape one's speech, and the external factor Gender also plays a quite crucial role, and its influence can be quite considerable: a person's biological sex could not match his/her own speech, or he/she could maintain traits of more than one gender. Therefore, in this case, it is obvious our language style is formed through both Sex and Gender.

The influence of gender differences begins very early in childhood. Studies on children have shown that there are language differences between boys and girls as early as preschool (Eckes, 2012). Tannen highlights differences in the way young girls and boys use language in childhood, stating that girls make requests, use language to create harmony and use more words while boys make demands, create conflict and use more actions. The two anthropologists Maltz and Borker have studied the interactions between children when playing together (Malz and Borker, 1982). They have found that girls learn to create and maintain relationships of closeness and equality, to criticize others in acceptable ways, while boys learn to assert their position of dominance, to attract and maintain an audience, and to assert themselves.

What then is gender speech? Several have used the term to signify the differences in speech due to biology and others use it to represent differences resulting from social psychological and cultural interactions. As a matter of fact it is scientifically researched that there are certain important differences in the speech of men and women.

Most of the previous researchers on gender differences in same-gender conversation demonstrate an agreeable result: women are more polite, indirect

and collaborative in conversation, while men are more impolite, direct and competitive on the other hand, which reveals that men pursue a style interaction based on power, while women pursue a style based on solidarity and support. The reason for that lies in the social fact, according to some researchers, that men usually occupy the dominate position and women are considered as stooge and subordinate to men.

One of the earliest linguists to examine gendered ways of speaking was Dane Otto Jespersen, in his *article "The Woman"* (1990). According to him, women's speech is clearly deficient to men's. Gendered language, as it has already been mentioned, is studied by Robin Lakoff, and she claims that men and women's speech differs widely, that women use weaker and almost sweet-sounding swear words such as "*oh dear*" or "*goodness*", whereas men use stronger expressions such as "*Shit!*" or "*Damn*". Women are more refined in their speech, use less coarse and gross expressions, they are uninventive.

Although the difference in language between men and women has been widely discussed, most of the literature on the subject concentrates on two main theories. The first is again the *dominance approach* (supported by Lakoff 1975, Fishman 1983), which claims that the difference in language between men and women is a consequence of male dominance and female subordination. According to this approach's supporters men use more directives. They behave more competitively in conversations, for example interrupting and talking more often than their female conversational partners. Men are expected to know how to swear and how to tell and appreciate the telling of dirty jokes (Lakoff 2004), they carelessly blurt out whatever they are thinking, while on the other hand women are expected to speak properly, and they usually use euphemism to replace of-color or indelicate expressions. The same things go for humor where Lakoff claims that women are claimed to have no sense of humor. Women lack something that men have. Women display a more cooperative style including minimal reaction to mark interest with such devices as "*yes*" or "*mhmm*". The *mhmma* woman uses quite frequently means *I am listening*, whereas the *mhmma* man uses, but much less frequently, tends to mean *I am agreeing*. Men's speech is less emotional and more factual, using a greater amount of locatives and terms relating to quantity. They are also more judgmental in their utterances and relate more consistently to themselves.

Supporters of the *difference approach* (Coates 1986, Tannen, 1990) on the other hand believe that men and women belong to different subcultures and that any linguistic differences can be attributed to cultural differences. Much sociolinguistic research holds that gender differences in language are simply a reflection of the way society works. Tannen has shown that the role of culture is critical to the understanding of speech skills of a person. Tone, aggressive speech, interruption of the speaker all depend on cultural background. (Tannen, 2001) In any case no one could define with certainty which approach is more widely accepted. The fact is differences between men's and women's speech are no longer thought to be characteristic only of "exotic" languages, it is found in every language community nowadays.

The speech differences observed between men and women range from *verbal* to *nonverbal*. Connected with verbal differences, the evidence shows that men are more talkative than women in mixed-sex groups (Eckes, 2012), though many linguists will have us believe that women are more talkative than men, they are the great talkers of the world. *Verbal* differences include the use of vulgar words, aggressiveness and a tendency to attack the speaker, dominate and interrupt the conversation by men. Men are reputed to possess larger lexicons in areas associated with traditional male activities (particular occupation, sports, etc.). Meanwhile, men are more reserved and careful in their speech. As for women, they tend to speak more grammatically correct, and use more well - formed sentences, speak more politely and have a tender to foster conversations. However, there is an opinion that men are now encouraged to open up and share their feelings and women are becoming more assertive and masculine in their way of speaking.

In *verbal* communication there are certain differences in the quality of speech used by men and women.

Men Women

- Talk loudly • Talk softly
- Deep pitch • High pitch
- Slow rate • Fast rate
- Downward inflection • Upward inflection
- Relaxed tone • Strident tone
- Powerful style • Powerless style

Nonverbal communication refers to those actions that are distinct from speech. Thus nonverbal communication includes body language: facial expression, hand and arm movement, posture, position and other movements of the body, legs or feet (Mehrabian, 2007). In this field women are considered to be nonverbally warmer than men with a tendency to smile and lean toward others during conversation. Men are observed to use straight and sharp movements, while women tend to have more fluid movement. In addition, men are considered to be more visually dominant than women. In communication men tend to sit either side - by - side next to each other or to stand at some distance. Women sit face - to - face with other woman or stand closer, indicating a more open and intimate position. For men a face - to - face position indicates challenge or confrontation.

Thus, there are differences in the quality of *nonverbal* communication used by men and women.

Men Women

- Use more physical space • Yield physical space
- Stare • Use moderate eye contact
- Use commanding gestures • Use acquiescent gestures
- Hold their head straight • Tilt their heads
- Keep a “poker face” • Use more facial expressions

Gender differences can also be accounted for by the difference in status, genetics, social, cultural factors as well as education. Society often expects that a woman should be polite and well behaved. This stems from childhood, when girls were told that it is better to be seen and not heard.

Gender differences are reflected in many areas of linguistics such as *phonology, morphology, vocabulary, etc.*

Phonological differences between the speech of men and women have been noted in a variety of languages. In Montreal many more women than men do not pronounce the “/r/” in the pronouns and articles “/I/”, “/ell/”, “/a/” and “/es/”. Schoolgirls in Scotland apparently pronounce the “/t/” in words like *water*, and *get* more often than schoolboys, who prefer to substitute a glottal stop. Women were found to be more careful in pronunciation, to realize constant clusters like

"*sks*", or "*sts*", or the postvocalic "*r*" more frequently, to use correct speech forms like "*ing*" instead of "*in*" more often (Labov, 1972).

Male and female differences are reflected in the area of *articulation* as well. As a matter of fact, both sexes articulate words differently. Female vowel articulations tend to be fuller and more properly pronounced than those of males. Females will complete all the proper mouth and tongue movements more often than men, who tend to take shortcuts. There are also differences in specific letter articulations, for example, females pronounce the vowels *u* and *o* similarly. Men will pronounce *u* and *o* significantly differently. Besides, one study has examined 29 male and 25 female speakers, and found differences in the duration of male and female vowels when speaking. Females' vowels last, on average, 11 percent longer than those of their male counterparts. Scientists concluded that males reduce the length of a vowel sound more often than females do. That is, men shorten the sound of the vowel to be and sound more formal and dominant.

The *intonation patterns* of men and women vary somewhat, too. The average woman's voice is higher in pitch than the average male's voice since males have longer, thicker vocal folds. However, some vocal differences are socially determined. Women adjust their voices to sound the way they perceive women should sound and men adjust to sound like men should sound. Women use a wider range of pitches than men in all speaking situations, while men tend to keep their voices subdued and monotonous when talking to adults, but use more vocal variation when talking to young children. Despite the ability of both genders to use vocal variation, men are much more selective about when they vary their voices and female language contains greater imagery. Women use intensifiers (e.g., so, such, quite, very, etc.), modifiers, tag questions (eg., isn't it?), and mild expletives. There is a general notion of uncertainty or hesitancy in female speech. Male language is more absolute; female language is more abstract. Women use certain patterns associated with surprise and politeness more often than men. Lakoff says that 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 do this because they are less sure about themselves and their opinions than are men. For the same reason, she says that women often add tag questions to statements, e.g. *They*

visited their parents last week, didn't they? According to Lakoff women do so because they are less sure about themselves and what they say.

In the area of *morphology* and *vocabulary*, many of the studies have focused on English. Lakoff, for example, claims that women use color words like *beige*, *lavender*, *magenta* but most men do not. She also maintains that adjectives such as *adorable*, *charming*, *divine*, *lovely* are commonly used by women but only very rarely by men. Women are also said to have their own vocabulary for emphasizing certain effects on them, words and expressions such as *so good*, *such fun*, *lovely*, *divine*, *fantastic* and so on.

Women and men have different paralinguistic systems. Women are more likely than men to be addressed by their first names when everything else is equal, or, if not by first names, by such terms as *lady*, *miss*, or *dear* and even *baby* or *babe*. Women are also sometimes required to be silent in situations in which men may speak. Men tend to speak loudly, while women whisper, men talk over each other, while women conspire behind each other's backs, men hold back their feelings, while women lay them out to strangers they meet on the subway. One of the first things one might notice when comparing male and female speeches, is that fewer qualifiers are used by men.

For example: **Lucy:** *"Oh, My God, that test really, really killed"* versus **Alex:** *"That test killed."*

Similarly, you might notice that your female characters use more fillers when they're searching for their words, whereas the male characters might be silent in that pause.

For example: **Lucy:** *"Um, well.... I think I failed it."* Versus **Dan:** **He paused.** *"I failed it."*

A number of assertions have been made about female and male speech styles. It was claimed by Jespersen (1922) that women have an instinctive shrinking from coarse and gross expressions and a preference for refined and (in certain spheres) veiled and indirect expressions. Research tells us that communication styles of men and women differ dramatically. Women's language tends to be more indirect and subtle than men's language. Pitch and intonation differences often reveal the sex of the speaker. Culture, as well as biology, is an important factor in determining voice use. Women tend to tag declarative answers by adding yes/no rising intonations that make statements sound like questions. Women use hyper - polite forms that may involve more

word usage. Women include modifiers and query tags, often avoiding definitive statements. Metaphor and superlatives, such as *"Nothing is working"* characterize women's language, and men mistakenly take these expressions literally since male language is more absolute and female language more abstract. Also Lakoff (1975) claimed that while men use stronger expletives, women use politer versions such as *'damn'* and *'oh dear'* (Coates, 1986). Male use of language is said to express authority and power whereas women, who deviate from the male norm, show their weakness through their choice of linguistic devices. Women say *"I don't know"* or *"I'm not sure"* more easily than men do. Sometimes evaluators interpret these expressions of uncertainty as lack of knowledge base when, in fact, they are frequently utterances that indicate knowledge that is partial or incomplete. In addition, women take time to think over a problem and may respond to a query more slowly and less automatically. Women do not want to give answers unless they are absolutely sure.

All these facts and examples come to prove that women and men follow basically different communicative principles. Females do three things with speech. Basically:

- Create and maintain relationships of closeness and equality,
- Criticize others in acceptable ways,
- Interpret accurately the speech of other girls.

Whereas men use their speech in three major ways:

- To assert one's position of dominance,
- To attract and maintain an audience,
- To assert oneself, when other speakers have the floor.

This conception is suggested by MaHz / Borker (1982).

Men and women differ *psychologically* in the way they act, from the style in which they communicate to the way in which they attempt to influence others. The biggest difference between men and women and their style of communication boils down to the fact that men and women view the purpose of conversations differently. Academic research on psychological gender differences has shown that while women use speech as a tool to enhance social connections and create relationships, men use language to exert dominance and achieve tangible outcomes (Maltz & Borker, 1982). Women are, overall, more expressive, tentative, and polite in conversation, while men are

more assertive, and power-hungry. Men and women also differ in their relations towards others in society: while women strive to be more social in their interactions with others, men value their independence.

As it has been mentioned above gender differences can be accounted for by the difference in status, genetics, psychological, social, cultural factors as well as education. There are some views on biology and *brain structure* of these two genders, which brings forth certain speech differences between them. That there exist differences in the male and female brain structure has been the topic of academic research. Recent studies on structural differences in the brain of men and women account for the greater verbal fluency by showing that the corpus callosum, a large tract of neural fibers which connect both brain hemispheres, is enlarged in women, which permits better communication between hemispheres. Campbell concluded that the female brain is therefore better organized for communication. This, she states, explains the reason why women use words more expressively than men. Thus, it is scientifically researched that based on brain differences women are better communicators than men, a difference that probably existed at birth.

The question '*Do women talk more than men?*' can't be answered with a straight '*yes*' or '*no*'. Here it's worth quoting Marcel Achard's words: "*Women like silent men. They think they're listening*". The above mentioned question has been a long-standing area of discussion. Tannen (1990) examined conversations between married couples and discussed at length the stereotypes of the wife who '*never stops talking*' and the husband who comes home from work and barely utters a word about his day to his wife. Phrases such as '*She never stops talking*' and '*He never talks to me about work*' being typical of responses. In conversations involving both genders most researchers agree that men speak more than women do. Tannen (1990) also commented on this talkativeness of men when she heard comments by wives who expressed their disappointment when their husbands told interesting stories about their day at work to friends, after remarking on their arrival home that '*nothing special there is at home*'. Tannen's extensive work on gender and communication suggests that men use speech to establish status and a hierarchy of superiority. They are more comfortable giving information and advice than accepting advice or information. Women are equally comfortable accepting information as they are giving it. Women are less comfortable in the

role of information conveyer. Men talk to inform; women talk to connect. Case suggests that male communication tends to be more assertive and direct, making the speaker sound self-confident. Since men and women don't have the same reaction or rules for talk, they can misread each other's motives and meanings.

Women are more inclined to negotiate in their communication style in contrast to men's tendency to be matter - of - fact. Men speak to both exchange information and establish status in a group, and women talk to exchange information and establish cohesion.

Yet the perception of the chatty woman persists due to our socialization, which distorts our views of how much a certain person speaks. Men tend to take the initiative in conversation and explain things to women and in doing so to patronize them, whereas women tend to apologize to men. Men interrupt more, challenge, dispute, and ignore more, try to control what topics are discussed, and are inclined to make categorical statements. Men often believe that women are always agreeing with the man then conclude that it is impossible to tell what a woman really thinks.

Anyway, the answer is rather, *'It all depends'*. It depends on many different factors, including the social context in which the talk is taking place, the kind of talk involved and the relative social confidence of the speakers, which is affected by such things as their social roles (e.g. teacher, host, interviewee, wife) and their familiarity with the topic.

Thus, the issue of gender's speech differences is not black - and - white. We aren't destined for greatness or doomed to fail because we are women or men. For men and women: recognizing our differences, embracing our similarities, and making a commitment to bridge the gaps are all important steps forward in the march toward gender equality. Speech differences are obvious enough, but in any case, only a certain situation could define the way a person behaves both physically and mentally.

Key words: *language, speech, Gender, Sex, male, female, man, woman, speak, voice, difference, conversation, psychology, science, Sociolinguistics, social, behaviour, speaker, listener*

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ՏՐԱՄԱՐԴ - ԿԻՆ ՏԱՐԲԵՐՈՒԹՅՈՒՆՆԵՐԸ ԽՈՍՔՈՒՄ

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Գղձ դասախոս

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Մագիստրատուրայի առաջին կուրսի ուսանողուհի

Հոգվածում քննարկվում են սեռային տարբերություններից բխող լեզվական առանձնահատկությունները խոսքում: Այն, որ լեզուն երկու սեռերի ներկայացուցիչների կողմից կիրառվում է բավականաչափ տարբեր կերպ, նկատելի է ամենուր:

Տղամարդիկ իրենց խոսքում առավել զերիշխող են, հաստատական, նրանք սիրում են ընդհատել և ստիպել, որ կանայք լսեն և ընդունեն այն, ինչ

իրենք են ասում: Տղամարդկանց խոսքը զուրկ է հուզական արտահայտչական միջոցներից ու այնպիսի բառերից ու ձայնարկություններից, որոնք հատուկ են միայն կանանց խոսքին:

Կանանց խոսքը աչքի է ընկնում առավել ճիշտ արտահայտությամբ: Նրանք տղամարդկանց հետ զրույցում հնազանդ են և ավելի շատ համղես են գալիս որպես ունկնդիր: Կանանց խոսքին հատուկ են երանգավորող բառերն ու արտահայտությունները: Որոշ գիտնականներ այս երկու սեռերի միջև առկա խոսքային տարբերությունները կապում են ոչ թե անձի սեռի, այլ՝ նրա հոգեբանության, ծագման, սոցիալական կարգավիճակի և նույնիսկ ուղեղի կառուցվածքի հետ: Այդուհանդերձ, կին-տղամարդ խոսքային տարբերությունների դրսևորման դրդապատճառի բացահայտումը եղել և մնում է գիտության կարևորագույն խնդիրներից մեկը:

РАЗЛИЧИЯ В ЯЗЫКЕ МУЖЧИН И ЖЕНЩИН

С. А. ХАЧАТРЯН

Преподаватель ГГУ

А. А. САРИБЕКЯН

Студентка 1-ого курса магистратуры

В статье рассматриваются языковые особенности речи, вытекающие из половых различий. То, что представители обоих полов используют язык по-разному, общеизвестно. Мужчины привыкли доминировать в речевом процессе, они напористо прерывают собеседника и заставляют женщин слушать себя и принимать то, что они говорят как данность. Мужчины не владеют эмоциональными способами выражения мыслей и не употребляют слова, которые являются характерными для женщин.

Женщины отличаются способностью более точного выражения мыслей. В процессе общения они выступают в роли слушателя. Речи женщин свойственны специальные эмоциональные слова и выражения.

Некоторые ученые связывают различия речи представителей двух полов не с половой принадлежностью человека, а с его психологией, происхождением, социальным положением и даже структурой мозга. Проблема мужских и женских речевых различий была и остается одной из наиболее важных в науке.