GENDER AND LINGUISTIC VARIETIES

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Abstract: *At the present stage, the study of gender and linguistic varieties are becoming more and more relevant. The investigation of gender linguistics will surely explain many reasons for the usage of language means by men and women and will predict the further development of the language, its varieties, dialects, etc. This paper examines gender and gender-related issues, especially, linguistic varieties. A lot of problems dealing with gender linguistics were discussed and investigated in the article. Different means of language, gender peculiarities of the use of language, and language varieties were deeply studied.*

Keywords*: gender, linguistic varieties, language, dialects, varieties, male and female.*

In every culture, learning to talk -- like learning to walk -- is a part of growing up. In both cases, the learning seems to happen whether or not there is explicit instruction. And in both cases, the end product is a kind of knowledge and facility that operates more or less automat¬ically. Walking styles are heavily influenced by anatomy, although there are small cultural distinctions. For example, in certain cultures, shuffling is considered normal, whereas in others it is frowned upon. In many countries, the norms for women's and men's walks are vastly different. However, it is considered that while talking children create various activities and actions. The child learns a particular language - or maybe more than one language. A child uses one variety of English. And within New York and London there are significant differences in the variety one will learn depending on the specific community within each city. A child growing up in an African American community in New York will most likely learn the New York African American variety, and a working-class Italian American child will most likely develop a more distinctively New York dialect than an upper-middle-class Italian American child. And within each of those languages that the child learns, he or she learns a specific dialect (or possibly more than one).

Languages, dialects, varieties

The differences between two dialects of the same language can be relatively subtle. For instance, many people are not aware that in much of the eastern and midwestern US, speakers make regular use of a construction known as positive anymore. In most dialects of English, anymore occurs only with negation:

I don't get in a lot of trouble anymore

In positive anymore dialects, however, it can be used in positive sen¬tences, to mean 'nowadays':

I get in a lot of trouble anymore or even

Anymore, I get in a lot of trouble

In each of these cases, the sentence means 'I get in a lot of trouble nowadays,' and speakers of positive anymore dialects are relatively unaware of the fact that this construction does not exist in all dialects of English.

In African American Vernacular English, the verb he occurs in invari¬ant form to signal a continuative aspect [69, p.79]:

He's working hard meaning 'he's working hard right now.'

He be working hard meaning 'he's always working hard'.

More common than grammatical differences, though, are the phono¬logical differences by which we distinguish regional dialects. These differences can be quite subtle, or not so subtle. In the New York area and in Chicago, for example, the vowel /ж/ can be pronounced as a diphthong [eЗ] - and the nucleus of that diphthong can be pronounced even higher in the mouth [iЗ]. But this does not occur in the same words in the two dialects. In New York, people "raise" /ж/ when it pre¬cedes certain consonants – nasals, voiced stops, and voiceless fricatives as in ham, had, and hash – but not before voiceless stops as in hat. Learning to speak like a New Yorker, then, involves - among other things – knowing which words one can raise /ж/ in, and which words one cannot. In the northern cities dialect area around Buffalo, Cleveland, Detroit, and Chicago, on the other hand, all occurrences of /ж/ have this pronunciation - people in these cities can raise /ж/ in hat as well as had, ham, and hash [30, p. 45].

In some cases, one dialect may have a phonemic distinction - a con¬trast in pronunciation that separates distinct words – that another does not. For example in most dialects of English, speakers distinguish between the phonemes /a/ as in hock, cot, Don and /o/ as in hawk, caught, and dawn. In a number of North American dialects (e.g. much of the west¬ern US and Canada), however, these two phonemes have merged so that the vowels in hock and hawk, cot and caught, Don and dawn, are all pro¬nounced the same. In order for speakers of one of these dialects to ac¬quire a dialect in which the phonemic distinction remains, they would have to learn basically from scratch which words contain /a/ and which contain /o/ - and they'd have to learn it well enough to produce the distinction automatically as they speak.

Compare the chore of learning when to raise /ж/ or learning which words contain /a/ and which contain /o/ with the chore of trying to learn an entirely new language with native-like pronunciation. As we get older, it becomes increasingly difficult to modify our dialect (s) significantly or to acquire native-like abilities in a new language. Jack Chambers, studying Canadian children moving to England, found that those over the age of eight did not learn the distinction well, while their younger siblings did. Many linguists believe that there is a critical period beyond which a person can no longer acquire native competence in a new language. This is, however, a matter of some debate. We know that indeed it is difficult to develop such competence, but is it a consequence of biology? Or is it a consequence of the social affordances of different age groups? [20, p. 14]

Because of the relative permanence of one's language, and even one's dialect of that language, and the relative difficulty of learning "someone else's" language or dialect, we tend to

think of our linguistic variety or varieties as fundamental to who we are. And as a result, dialect differences (to say nothing of differences between languages) carry a good deal of social baggage. Speakers of New York and Chicago dialects can be quite sensitive to the patterns of occurrence of [eЗ] or [iЗ] as opposed to [ж], and they are likely to have an attitude about people who use raised /ж/ in the "wrong" words. New Yorkers and midwest- erners have stereotypes written indelibly on each other's dialects. The pronunciation of /ж/ is socially significant on the local scene as well, as regional stereotypes give way to local ones. As we will describe later in this chapter, very subtle patterns of variation can relate ways of speaking to the class, ethnicity, age, gender, and a range of local groups and types.

We refer to features of language that vary in this way - that essentially offer more than one way of saying "the same thing" -- as variables. And the study of patterns of use of such variables is referred to as the study of sociolinguistic variation. Whether we say ^g] or [biЗg], our hearer knows that we mean the same word - bag. But in addition to knowing the general kind of object we're talking about, our hearer can gather some social information from our pronunciation of the vari¬able /ж/ or /o/, or our use of invariant be or positive anymore.

If our use of variables offers information about who we are, it should also be clear to the reader by now that who we are is never static -- and speakers are not likely to simply be defined by the linguistic varieties they learn at home. Access is key to developing competence in a variety, and our greatest access is through our family and friends in our early years. But as we get older, we may move in new circles, gain exposure to new varieties - and we may well find the motivation to learn to use those new varieties, or to tone down what makes our old variety distinctive. A New Yorker or a Chicagoan can exaggerate the raising of /ж/ or play it down, for instance, and many people do both -- depending on the situation.

Gender and linguistic varieties

Any variety's use necessitates, first and foremost, access to participation in the communities of practice where the variety is utilized, as well as the right to employ it in situations. Use necessitates desire as well. Speakers will not accept linguistic influence from persons they dislike; their linguistic variants show progression toward desired identities and communities of practice in which they want to engage. Our language practice is heterogeneous in part because we participate in numerous communities of practice throughout our lives. We may use one language in one setting and a different language in another; we may employ a greater local accent in one scenario and a lesser accent in another. We rely on resources to tailor our variety to our immediate demands, depending on where we are, what we're doing, who's in our audience, what we're talking about, how we're feeling about the circumstance - and any other number of things.

Jobs often require particular kinds of language skills -¬whether it's simply because of the community in which they are located, or because of the actual kind of work. And the jobs themselves may differentially attract women or men because the work is gender-specific or because there are local or temporary reasons for women or men to be attracted to them.

On the one hand, the actual work may not require specific language skills, but being in the workplace may provide greater access to certain varieties. On the other hand, the differential linguistic requirements of jobs at¬tracting (or specifying) male or female

employees may motivate men and women to develop different linguistic skills. To have a chance of marrying a prince, a young girl had better be able to talk like a princess.

The gender pattern of this shift depends on the local details of social change, but a common development is for women to leave the farm fastest, and hence to lead in the shift from the vernacular. Susan Gal's ethnographic study of a Hungarian-speaking village in Austria documents a case of this sort in detail. In this community, Hungarian was the language of a peasant life that did not offer the same advantages to women that it did to men. Men had the inborn ability to control households and land, while women had the inherited ability to do household on their husbands' property. Modernization tended to affect farm work before it affected housework, tying women in farm households to long hours of hard physical labor while their husbands' burden in the field was lightened by modern farm equipment [36, p. 968].

In these two cases, one would not say that the jobs that were drawing women into the standard language market were themselves particularly gendered. Many of the cases in which we see gendered shifts in language use, though, do involve the gendering of work. For example, in a study of a Gullah-speaking African American island community in South Carolina, Patricia Nichols found that in general, the variety spoken by women was closer to standard English than that spoken by men. The men were able to make good money as laborers on the mainland - jobs that required physical skill, but that did not depend on the way they spoke. However, the women were able to find the best jobs as teachers or as maids in wealthy homes or hotels. They were required to use the standard language. In this case, it was the place of gendered jobs in the language market that led to gender differences in speech [63, p. 56].

David Sankoff et al. has argued that gendered roles in the workplaces of western society tend to engage women more than men in the standard language market. Women in their traditional work roles are often what Sankoff et al. have called "technicians of language." [70, p. 244] Employment as governesses and private tutors was an early extension of middle-class women's domestic role into the workplace, allowing educated women to make a living while keeping them out of the public sphere. Some governesses taught academic subject matter, but all of them taught manners and refinement, of which linguistic propriety was an important component. More women have tried to move into the workplace, and they have chosen to work as front women. They tried to give voice to corporate stan¬dards to outsiders: receptionists, hostesses, phone operators, flight attendants, and secretaries. In her study of the language of corporate managers in Beijing, Qing Zhang examined a prime example of women providing cultural capital for their company, as different work trajectories shaped women's and men's use of Mandarin [80, p. 51].

Conclusion

We learn from the beginning to vary our linguistic variety strategically to place ourselves, to align ourselves with respect to others, and to express particular attitudes. We use linguistic variability to move around our initial home communities of practice. At the same time, we can also adapt linguistically to new communities and situations, or we can use language to help us gain access to new communities and situations. Linguistic variability is key to social mobility and the presentation of self, hence to the construction of gender. The story of gender and the

use of linguistic varieties is to be found in the relation between gender and participation in the many communities of practice that make up the diverse social and linguistic landscape.

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