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Language and Gender

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Varieties of Language

- The varieties of language used in different places may be quite different
 - English, Hungarian, Arabic
- Or more similar
 - French, Italian
- Or even the “same” language
 - US English, British English, Australian English



Varieties of “Same” Language

- Variation may be found in any linguistic level
 - Semantics, syntax, morphology, phonology, etc.
 - Vocabulary
 - truck/lorry
 - elevator/lift
 - sidewalk/pavement
 - Pronunciation



Variables that Affect Variation

- Geography
 - US/England
 - Different locations within the same country
- Pronunciation
 - East
 - West



Variables that Affect Variation

- Socioeconomic factors
 - Labov (1972)
 - socioeconomic group in NYC
- Ethnicity
 - African-American English
 - Indian English



Affecting variation: gender

- Does this mean there is a distinct variety of English/ French/ Ukrainian spoken by women?
- Women' s English/ French/ Ukrainian?
- Lakoff (1972) suggests this is true
 - Focuses on vocabulary, syntactic constructions and intonation



Lakoff's Women's Language

- Vocabulary for fine color distinctions
 - mauve, beige, ecru, lavender
- Use of “meaningless” particles
 - “oh dear”, “oh fudge”
- Use of certain adjectives
 - adorable, charming, sweet, lovely, divine
- Use of tag questions
 - John is here, isn't he?
- Rising intonation for declarative sentences
 - Q: When will dinner be ready? A: Oh, around 6?
- Greater variability in intonational contour



Lakoff's Women's Language

- Some important points
 - Lakoff's work was impressionistic
 - Later work has suggested that power, not gender, is the variable more relevant for linguistic features Lakoff identifies;
- Another point/observation/hypothesis of Lakoff's

Women have access to both “women's language” and “neutral language” (spoken by both men and women)

- If a man uses these features he may be perceived as homosexual
- This hypothesis has triggered research on language and sexuality (Gaudio 1994)



Language is sexist

- Language was a particular feature and target of Women's feminist movements in the '60s and '70s.
- “The very semantics of the language reflects [women's] condition. We do not even have our own names, but bear that of the father until we exchange it for that of a husband” (Robin Morgan (1977: 106), *Going Too Far*).
- Claim: Language is sexist!



Examples:

- Mr. Smith vs. Mrs. Smith (EN)
- Popov vs. Popov-a; Onegin vs. Onegin-a (RU)
- Mažeik-is vs. Mažeik-ytė vs. Mažeik-ienė
- Dabašinsk-as vs. Dabašinsk-aitė vs. Dabašinsk-ienė (LT)

Suffixes: -ytė/ -aitė, -utė (unmarried)
-ienė (married);
-ė (neutral?) Mažeik-ė



Womens' talk is a cultural product

Deborah Tannen, 1990. *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation*

- Women speak a language of connection and intimacy;
- Men speak a language of status and independence;
- Power vs. solidarity; dominance vs. cooperation;
- Thus:
their communication can be like cross-cultural communication.



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Do gender differences affect the way people engage in conversation?

The answer to this question is positive! It has to do with the way we use language in communication.

- Men interrupt women more than vice versa.
- Women are more communicative.
- Men do not give verbal recognition of the contributions in the conversation made by women.
- Men curse more than women.
- Women gossip more than men.
- Women talk more with one another than men do.
- Men speak more comfortably in public than women.

Social aims

- Within the social sciences the findings suggest that men tend to use language more for the *instrumental purpose* of conveying information;
- Women are more likely to use verbal interaction for *social purposes* with verbal communication serving as an end in itself (Brownlow, Rosamon, & Parker, 2003; Colley et al., 2004).



Notion of “women”

The notions of "women" and "men" are typically just taken for granted in sociolinguistics.

- Women's language has been said to reflect their *conservatism, prestige, upward mobility, insecurity, deference, emotional expressivity, connectedness, sensitivity to others, solidarity.*



Notion of “men”

- Men's language is related to *toughness, lack of affect, competitiveness, independence, competence, hierarchy, control.*
- Linguists are not inventing such accounts of gender identities and gender relations; also social scientific studies offer support for the kinds of characterizations linguists offer in explanation of language use.



Contradictory findings

- Thomson and Murachver's (2001) study of e-mail communication found that men and women were equally likely to ask questions; offer compliments, apologies, and opinions;
- In a comparison of 36 female and 50 male managers giving professional criticism in a role play, it was the *men* who used significantly more negations and asked more questions, and the women who used more directives (Mulac, Seibold, & Farris, 2000).



Contradictory findings

- The study did confirm that men used more words overall, whereas women used longer sentences.
- One possible explanation for these contradictory reports is that the different contexts in which the language samples were generated influenced the size and direction of the gender differences.



Limitations of Previous Research

- To draw broad conclusions about how men and women differ in their language use across settings, nontraditional methods with large samples are often required.
- Most studies based on observations or small samples.
- Larger samples are often difficult to collect when each sample must be hand coded.
- Thus, a strategy that allowed for the efficient analysis of large samples of text could help to create a more complete picture of gender differences in language use.
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Theoretical issues

- Absence of a coherent theoretical framework within which to refine and further explore an ongoing research.
- Theoretical insight into how language and gender interact requires a close look at *social practices* in which they are jointly produced.



Do men and women use language differently?

- To answer this question, a large corpus of text samples was subjected to analysis, and these linguistic data were analyzed for main effects of gender.
- Results were expected to be consistent with the overall picture from previous research—that is, men’s language should focus relatively more on conveying information, and women’s language should focus relatively more on social connections (Newman et. al 2008).



Function words

- Which dimensions of language should be examined to capture differences in how men and women approach the world?
- Research suggests that by counting and categorizing the words used to communicate we learn about thoughts, emotions, and motives.
- This approach has proved particularly fruitful with respect to “function words,” which include pronouns, articles, prepositions, conjunctions, and auxiliary verbs.
- These words are distinct from content words (nouns, verbs, and adjectives), and are used to “glue” other words together.



Personal pronouns

- Differences in the use of function words reflect differences in the ways that individuals think about and relate to the world.
- For example, using “you and I” instead of “we” reflects a different perspective on the relationship between the speaker and the referent.
- Empirically, the use of first-person singular has been associated with age; depression; illness; and, more broadly, self-focus (Pennebaker et al., 2003).
- First-person plural can be a marker of group identity and, on occasion, a sign of emotional distancing (Pennebaker & Lay, 2002).



- Empirically, those words that best discriminated between men and women were function words.
- Biber et al. (1998) used parts of speech to create an index of whether a text sample was “involved” (e.g., more pronouns, present-tense verbs) or “informative” (e.g., more nouns, long words).
- Consistent with prior research, females’ language was more involved than males’ language.



Conclusions

- The question of whether men and women as groups have differences must be considered in the context of cross-cultural communication.
- There are always exceptions!
- It is clear that perceptions of how we speak and how much we do speak are very different.



GENDER DIFFERENCE IN LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

- A lot of studies emphasize an early female advantage in language acquisition, but differ in their claims about why those differences appear (Bornstein *et al.* 2004; Ladegaard & Bleses 2003);
- One of the convincing arguments concerning gender differences in language acquisition is the bias towards advance character in language acquisition of the girls over boys.



Boys and girls: toys

- Bornstein et al. (2004) demonstrate that boys are more often offered to play with trucks and cars and not with dolls.
- Trucks are associated with low levels of teaching; playing with them does not foster proximity with the parents but elicit animated sounds such as engine noises rather than a conversation or questions.
- Dolls evoke physical proximity with the parent and elicit more verbal interactions, such as starting a conversation.
- Differences in language acquisition can arise from society's imposition of gender role stereotypes on the child which, in turn, brings differences in verbal behavior (Bornstein *et al.* 2004).



Boys and girls: verbal interaction

- Frequency hypothesis argues that, depending of the child gender, parents speak to him/her differently.
- It is claimed that already from a young age boys and girls hear a different 'kind' of language.
- It is claimed that caregivers address boys in direct imperatives more often than girls and such differences in received speech can cause gender differences in language use later on (Ladegaard & Bleses 2003).



Mothers' Child Directed Speech (CDS)

- CDS is characterized by shorter utterances, longer pauses, a slower speech rate, higher pitch, and hyperarticulated vowels, all of which have been proven to facilitate language acquisition (Fernald *et al.* 1989; Kempe *et al.* 2003; Kempe *et al.* 2007).
- While speaking to girls mothers use CDS more often than they do this with boys; it is also observed that mothers adapt their speech according to a child's developmental needs intuitively.



Mothers' CDS

- Mothers of girls talk more, ask more questions, repeat their children's utterances more frequent, and use longer stretches of language compared to mothers of boys;
- Mothers of boys use directives, clarification requests, and confirmation more often (Cherry & Lewis 1976; Stoneman & Brody 1981; Kilani-Schoch *et al.* 2009).
- These results suggest that depending on the gender of their children mothers may transmit to them different messages, both through language and non-verbal interaction which may contribute to child's gender role development.



Micro-level: linguistics

- Not only features of the macro-level, *amount of speech, frequency of questions, repetition of children's utterances*, but also
- the elements of the micro-level, such as *derivational and inflectional morphemes* also crucially influence child language acquisition.
- For example, **diminutives** in child directed speech may not only facilitate the acquisition of nominal inflection (Dabašinskienė & Dressler 2007), but also be an indicators for gender difference in language use.



Diminutives

- Hypothesis: whether diminutives in CDS are used differently when talking to boys and girls and whether they use diminutives differently as well.
- Cross-linguistic analyses of the distribution of diminutives in CDS have shown that the diminutive usage reaches its peak around a child's second birthday, and that it starts decreasing between the age of three and five which should coincide with a child's full mastery of grammatical categories (Kempe *et al.* 2001; Melzi & King 2003, 2004).



Diminutives

- As regards English, Gleason *et al.* (1994) report that parents of two-year old girls tended to use more diminutives in contrast to parents of boys.
- Besides the fact that individual differences exist, most of the Russian data show that girls use more diminutives than boys and that the input for girls is marked by a high percentage of diminutives (Protassova & Voeikova 2007).
- The use of diminutives mainly depends on individuals or family strategies; therefore, the amount of diminutives in CDS will be reflected in child speech.
- One of the reasons for using high number of diminutives in Russian/ Lithuanian/ Spanish CDS the various pragmatic functions that they exhibit.



Pragmatic development

- Studies of pragmatic development are concerned with how children acquire the knowledge necessary for the appropriate, effective interpersonal communication.
- Children have to learn language in order to make sentences, to ask questions, to request, to greet, to refuse etc.; these are so-called illocutionary speech acts.
- The child has to learn to interpret both the form and function of the speaker's utterance, and to maintain the conversation by initiating further responses and creating links between utterances (Karmiloff, Karmiloff-Smith 2002).



Direct vs. indirect requests

- Men and women may differ in the way they request other people to do things;
- Men use the imperatives, while women tend to opt for forms which are indirect.
- There are also stereotypical hypothesis that women's speech is less assertive and more polite than men's.



Acquisition of requests: different perspectives

- **Input-output relationship.** According to Aikhenvald (2010: 235), “the high frequency of imperatives and explicit directives of other kinds in child language reflects the high frequency of such expressions in the way adults address children.”
- **Gender differences.** The evidence suggests that children share these perceptions, and from a rather early age they associate a more direct way of requesting actions with males and a more indirect ways with females (Bellinger, Gleason 1982: 1124).



Input-output Hypothesis (1)

- Children are very efficient pattern recognizers, sensitive to the lexical and grammatical structures and their distribution, so they induce linguistic structures based on the language they hear (e.g., Bates, MacWhinney 1987; MacWhinney 1999; Tomasello 2003).
- We expect that stable distribution of linguistic structures in the input might help children to discover these structures. If the use of linguistic structures is highly variable, it will provide less reliable cues to language structure.



Gender differences/impact Hypothesis (2)

- How children acquire gender stereotypes is an important developmental question.
- *Hypothesis (2) is that parents use different forms addressing boys and girls, who, in turn, learn to speak as they have been spoken to.*
- We expect that boys are exposed to more directives in the form of imperatives than girls, and girls are exposed to more indirect forms than boys.



Study

- The main aim of the current study is to investigate the acquisition of requests in Lithuanian and contribute to cross-linguistic research on directive speech acts analysis in general.

More specifically, the study aims:

- 1) to describe, analyze, and compare the abilities to produce early directive speech acts by two Lithuanian children. We are going to find out what type of requests and in which order they emerge first;
- 2) to determine the following: what are the types and frequencies of requests in child speech and in CDS, and how does CDS affect the acquisition of requests? We will also try to explore the relationship between CDS and CS using correlational analysis.



Data and methodology

- Two Lithuanian children:
- **Elvijus** (boy) recorded at the age of 1;6–2;6 (MLU range 1.2-3.2); 20 hours of recordings; No. of words – 71,728.
- **Monika** (girl) recorded at the age of 1;8–2;7 (MLU range 1.3-2.2); 27 hours of recordings; No. of words – 122,114.
- 7 periods for each child were selected.
- Corpora analysis using CHILDES, manual coding of different request types, statistical analysis (Paired-Sample T-test Chi square (p), Kendall's tau-b (τ) (correlational analysis).



Requests

- Requests usually take a central position in both speech act and politeness theories.
- Depending on the level of their indirectness, i.e. how much the linguistic form of a request coincides with its communicative function, three main levels of directness in requests were distinguished (Bellinger, Gleason 1982; Blum-Kulka et al. 1989; Blum-Kulka, Olshtain 1984; Hilbig 2010):
 - *Direct Requests (DR)*,
 - *Conventionally Indirect Requests (CIR) and*
 - *Non-Conventionally Indirect Requests (NCIR).*



Requests in Lithuanian

- The most recent contrastive analysis of Lithuanian and English requests by Hilbig (2010) has revealed very clear patterns in request strategies and their usage in both languages.
- Lithuanian direct requests out-numbered English requests nearly three times. Direct requests were mostly addressed to intimates (small social distance).
- The Lithuanian norms of politeness appear to allow a wider usage of direct requests in a larger variety of contexts.



Acquisition of requests in Lithuanian

- DIRECT REQUESTS

1. Commands [Imperatives]: *Paimk!* 'Take it!'
2. Hortatives: *Einame/ eikime.* 'Let's go'
3. Wishes [want and obligation statements]: *Arbatos noriu!* 'I want some tea!'; *Reikia cukraus* 'I need sugar!'
4. Prohibitions (negative constructions): *Nedaryk to dabar!* 'Don't do it now!'

- INDIRECT REQUESTS

1. Statement of addressee's desired action: *Gal galėtum paduoti?* 'Could you pass it?'
2. Suggestions: *Gal einam į muziejų?* 'Could we go to the museum?'

- NON-CONVENTIONAL INDIRECT REQUESTS

1. Hints: *Aš pasisiojau* 'I peed'.
2. Warnings: *Jeigu verksi, eisime namo.* 'If you cry, we will go home.'



The distribution of request types according to the level of indirectness in Elvijus's and his Mother's speech

| Level of Indirectness | Elvijus (boy) | | | | | | | Mother | | | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|---------------|-----|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-------------|-----|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| | 1;6 | 1;8 | 1;10 | 2;0 | 2;2 | 2;4 | 2;7 | 1;6 | 1;8 | 1;10 | 2;0 | 2;2 | 2;4 | 2;7 |
| Direct R. (DR) | 101 | 109 | 125 | 122 | 101 | 90 | 69 | 234 | 206 | 178 | 157 | 96 | 95 | 37 |
| Conventionally Indirect R. (CIR) | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 10 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 3 | 0 |
| Non-conventionally Indirect R. (NCIR) | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Sub-Total | 101 | 109 | 125 | 126 | 102 | 100 | 72 | 235 | 209 | 179 | 157 | 98 | 98 | 37 |
| Total | 735 | | | | | | | 1013 | | | | | | |



The distribution of request types according to the level of indirectness in Monika's and her Mother's speech

| Level of Indirectness | Monika (girl) | | | | | | | Mother | | | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|---------------|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-------------|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| | 1;8 | 1;10 | 2;0 | 2;2 | 2;4 | 2;6 | 2;8 | 1;8 | 1;10 | 2;0 | 2;2 | 2;4 | 2;6 | 2;8 |
| Direct R. (DR) | 69 | 108 | 65 | 104 | 114 | 81 | 105 | 368 | 316 | 209 | 87 | 139 | 152 | 115 |
| Conventionally Indirect R. (CIR) | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 4 | 9 | 9 | 12 | 0 | 11 | 5 | 4 |
| Non-conventionally Indirect R. (NCIR) | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 5 | 0 |
| Sub-Total | 69 | 109 | 67 | 105 | 114 | 82 | 109 | 378 | 325 | 222 | 88 | 152 | 162 | 119 |
| Total | 655 | | | | | | | 1446 | | | | | | |



Results

- Both children demonstrate a rather similar pattern of using requests, although Elvijus uses a little bit more requests (735) than Monika (655).
- In contrast, the CDSs show different strategies: Monika's mother uses many more requests (1446 vs. 1013).
- CDS to both children demonstrates correlation with age. It is an established strong negative correlation (CDS and Elvijus, $r=-0.986$; CDS and Monika, $r=-0.836$), which shows that at younger age mothers use significantly more requests than later.
- The data show that the vast majority of all the requests consists of direct requests (DR) and only very few occurrences of indirect requests (CIR and NCIR) appear in both children's speech.
- The very similar tendency is documented for CDS, as both mothers use very few indirect requests (more occurrences are noticed for CIR then for NCIR).



Results (gender effect)

- Our study revealed some unexpected results, as the girl's mother used significantly more direct requests than the boy's mother ($p=0.052$).
- However, the girl's mother also used significantly more indirect requests (both CIR and NCIR) than the boy's mother ($p=0.003$).



Conclusions

- The general hypothesis for input-output relationship is only partially confirmed (children learn to speak as they have been spoken to) as there were no close match determined between the child and the mother of those two dyads for a general developmental path of requests.
- An age factor seems to be important for this study. The study showed that when children are younger, mothers use significantly more requests than later, therefore commands in imperative forms are becoming less frequent.
- There were no significant cross-gender effects. We assume that parental modeling, rather than differential socialization of boys and girls, appears to be the mechanism by which children learn to request action.

