An Introduction to **Sociolinguistics**

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7 Gender and age

Do women and men speak differently? Do children speak differently from adults? The answer to both these questions is almost certainly 'yes' for all speech communities, and the reasons in both cases are mainly social and cultural.

The linguistic forms used by women and men contrast – to different degrees – in all speech communities. There are other ways too in which the linguistic behaviour of women and men differs. It is claimed women are more linguistically polite than men, for instance, and that women and men emphasise different speech functions. These claims will be explored in later chapters. In the first section of this chapter, the focus will be on evidence that women and men from the same speech community may use different linguistic forms.

First a brief comment on the meaning of the terms *sex* and *gender* in sociolinguistics. I have used the term *gender* rather than *sex* because *sex* has come to refer to categories distinguished by biological characteristics, while *gender* is more appropriate for distinguishing people on the basis of their socio-cultural behaviour, including speech. The discussion of *gender* in this chapter focuses largely on contrasts between empirically observed features of women's and men's speech. The concept of gender allows, however, for describing masculine and feminine behaviours in terms of scales or continua rather than absolute categories. So we can also think of the features associated with women and men's speech as linguistic resources for constructing ourselves as relatively feminine or relatively masculine. This is something which is discussed further in chapter 12.

Gender-exclusive speech differences: highly structured communities

Example 1

Tayana is a young Amazonian Indian woman from the north-west Amazon Basin. She lives with her husband and children and a number of other families in a longhouse beside the river. The language of her longhouse is Tuyuka, which is the language of all the men in this tribe, and the language she uses to talk to her children. She comes from a different tribe and her first language is Desano. She uses Desano to her husband, and he replies in Tuyuka.

Map 7.1 Colombia and Brazil

Women and men do not speak in exactly the same way as each other in any community. The Amazon Indians provide an extreme example. As described in chapter 4, in any longhouse the language used by a child's mother is different from her father's language, because men must marry outside their own tribe, and each tribe is distinguished by a different language. In this community, women and men speak different languages.

Less dramatically, there are communities where the language is shared by women and men, but particular linguistic features occur only in the women's speech or only in the men's speech. These features are usually small differences in pronunciation or word-shape (morphology). In Montana, for instance, there are pronunciation differences in the Gros Ventre American Indian tribe. Where the women say [kjajtsa] for 'bread' the men say [dfajtsa]. In this community, if a person uses the 'wrong' form for their gender, the older members of the community may consider them bisexual. In Bengali, a language of India, the women use an initial [l] where the men use an initial [n] in some words.

Word-shapes in other languages contrast because women and men use different affixes. In Yana, a (now extinct) North American Indian language, and Chiquitano, a South American Indian language, some of the words used between men are longer than the equivalent words used by women and to women, because the men's forms sometimes add a suffix, as illustrated in example 2.

Example 2

Yana

Women's form	**Men's form**	
ba	ba-na	'deer'
yaa	yaa-na	'person'
t'et	t'en'-na	'grizzly bear'
cau	cau-na	'fire'
nisaaklu	nisaaklu-ci	'he might go away'

Just the reverse is true for Yanyuwa, an endangered Australian aboriginal language, where it is often the women's forms which are longer because men and women use different forms of the class-marking prefixes on noun classes, verbs and pronouns. In traditional and con-servative styles of Japanese, forms of nouns considered appropriate for women are frequently prefixed by *o-*, a marker of polite or formal style.

In some languages, there are also differences between the vocabulary items used by women and men, though these are never very extensive. Traditional standard Japanese provides some clear examples.

Example 3

Japanese

Women's form	**Men's form**	
otoosan	oyaji	'father'
taberu	kuu	'eat'
onaka	hara	'stomach'

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. Increasingly, too, as gender roles change, with more women in the workforce and more men prepared to assist in child-rearing, young Japanese women are challenging restrictive social norms, and using the 'men's' forms. While initially 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.

Some languages signal the gender of the speaker in the pronoun system. In Japanese, for instance, there are a number of words for 'I' varying primarily in formality (a point explored further in chapter 10), but women are traditionally restricted to the more formal variants. So *ore* is used only by men in casual contexts and *boku*, the next most casual form, is used mainly by men in semi-formal contexts, while women are conventionally expected to use only the semi-formal variant, *atashi*, the formal *watashi* and the most formal *watakushi* (forms also used by men in formal contexts). However, again modern young Japanese women are increasingly challenging such restrictions.

Map 7.2 Japan

Exercise 1

Do English pronouns encode the gender of the speaker?

Answer at end of chapter

Gender differences in language are often just one aspect of more pervasive linguistic differences in the society reflecting social status or power differences. 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. In Bengali society, for instance, a younger person should not address a superior by first name. Similarly, a wife, being subordinate to her husband, is not permitted to use his name. She addresses him with a term such as *suncho* 'do you hear?' When she refers to him, she uses a circumlocution. One nice example of this practice is provided by the Bengali wife whose husband's name was *tara*,

which also means 'star'. Since she could not call him *tara*, his wife used the term *nokkhotro* or 'heavenly body' to refer to him. This point – the interrelationship of gender with other social factors – is illustrated even more clearly in the next section.

The fact that there are clearly identifiable differences between women's and men's speech in the communities discussed in this section reflects the clearly demarcated gender roles in these communities. Gender-exclusive speech forms (i.e. some forms are used *only* by women and others are used *only* by men) reflect gender-exclusive social roles. The responsibilities of women and men are different in such communities, and everyone knows that, and knows what they are. There are no arguments over who prepares the dinner and who puts the children to bed.

Gender-preferential speech features: social dialect research

Example 4

Keith was a 7-year-old Canadian from Vancouver whose parents were working for six months in the city of Leeds in Yorkshire, England (see map page 154). He had been enrolled at the local school, and after his first day Keith came home very confused. 'What's your teacher's name?' asked his father. '*She* says she's Mrs Hall,' said Keith, 'but when the boys call her *Mizall* she still answers them. And the girls sometimes call her *Mrs Hall* and sometimes *Mizall*. It sounds very funny.'

Not surprisingly, 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. In all the English-speaking cities where speech data has been collected, for instance, women use more *-ing* [ih] pronunciations and fewer *-in'* [in] pronunciations than men in words like *swimming* and *typing*. In Montreal, the French used by women and men is distinguished by the frequencies with which they pronounce [l] in phrases such as *il y a* and *il fait*. Both women and men delete [l], but men do so more often than women. In Sydney, some women and men pronounce the initial sound in *thing* as [f], but the men use this pronunciation more than the women. Both the social and the linguistic patterns in these communities are gender-preferential (rather than gender-exclusive). 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. In Australia, interviews with people in Sydney revealed gender-differentiated patterns of [h]-dropping.

Exercise 2

What would you predict for [h]-dropping patterns? Is it more likely that women or men drop most [h]s?

Answer at end of chapter

Gender and social class

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.'

The linguistic features which differ in the speech of women and men in Western commun-ities are usually features which also distinguish the speech of people from different social classes. So how does gender interact with social class? Does the speech of women in one social class resemble that of women from different classes, or does it more closely resemble the speech of the men from their own social class? The answer to this question is quite complicated, and is different for different linguistic features. There are, however, some general patterns which can be identified.

In every social class where surveys have been undertaken, men use more vernacular forms than women. Figure 7.1 shows, for instance, that in social dialect interviews in Norwich, men used more of the vernacular [in] form at the end of words like *speaking* and *walking* than women. And this pattern was quite consistent across five distinct social groups. (Group 1 represents the highest social group.)

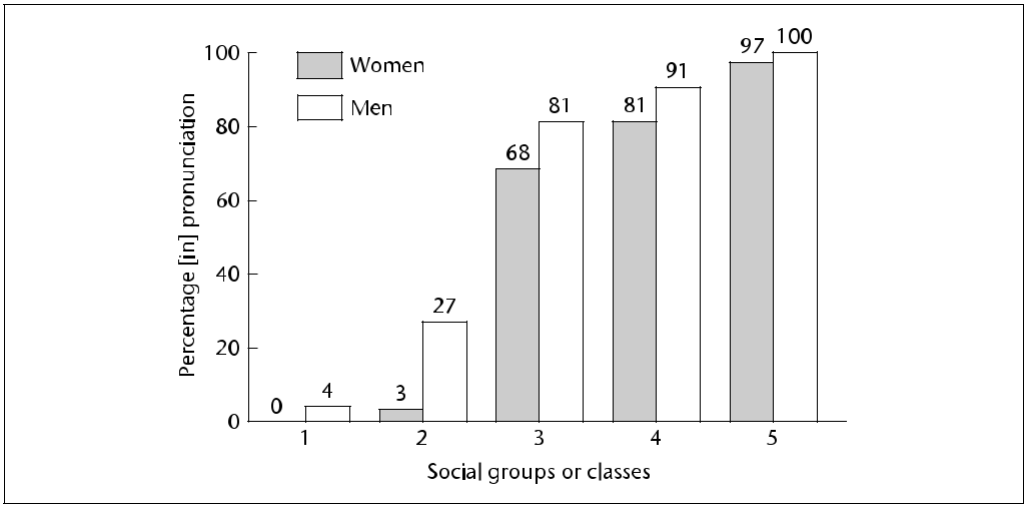


Figure 7.1 Vernacular [in] by sex and social group in Norwich

Source: This diagram was devised from data in Trudgill (1983).

Source: DENNIS THE MENACE ® used by permission of Hank Ketcham Enterprises and © North America Syndicate.

Notice, too, that in the lowest and the highest social groups the women's speech is closer to that of the men in the same group than to that of women in other groups. In these groups, class membership seems to be more important than gender identity. But this is not so true of women in group 2. Their score (of 3 per cent) for vernacular forms is closer to that of women in group 1 than it is to that of men from their own group. This may indicate they identify more strongly with women from the next social group than with men from their own social group. Possible reasons for this are discussed below.

Exercise 3

Recent research suggests that Japanese women and men may use grammatical patterns with different frequencies. Are you aware of any differences in the grammar of English-speaking women and men? What pattern of gender differences would you predict for grammatical variables such as multiple negation, which was discussed in chapter 6?

Answer at end of chapter

Across all social groups in Western societies, women generally use more standard grammat-ical forms than men and so, correspondingly, men use more vernacular forms than women. In Detroit, for instance, multiple negation (e.g. *I don't know nothing about it*), a vernacular feature of speech, is more frequent in men's speech than in women's. This is true in every social group, but the difference is most dramatic in the second highest (the lower middle class) where the men's multiple negation score is 32 per cent compared to only 1 per cent for women. Even in the lowest social group, however, men use a third more instances of multiple negation than women (90 vs 59 per cent).

This pattern is typical for many grammatical features. In many speech communities, when women use more of a linguistic form than men, it is generally the standard form – the overtly prestigious form – that women favour. When men use a form more often than women, it is usually a vernacular form, one which is not admired overtly by the society as a whole, and which is not cited as the 'correct' form. This pattern has been found in Western speech communities all over the world. It was described in 1983 by Peter Trudgill, the socio-linguist who collected the Norwich data, as 'the single most consistent finding to emerge from sociolinguistic studies over the past 20 years'.

This widespread pattern is also evident from a very young age. It was first identified over thirty years ago in a study of American children's speech in a semi-rural New England village, where it was found that the boys used more [in] and the girls more [ih] forms. Later studies in Boston and Detroit identified the same pattern. Boys used more vernacular forms such as consonant cluster simplification: e.g. *las'* [las] and *tol'* [toul], rather than standard *last* [last] and *told* [tould]. Boys pronounced *th* [e] in words like *the* and *then* as [d] more often than girls did. In Edinburgh, differences of this sort were observed in the pronunciation of girls and boys as young as 6 years old. The pattern is clear, consistent and widespread and it is evident from a very early age. What is the explanation for it? Why does female and male speech differ in this way?

Exercise 4

Before you read the next section, consider some possible explanations for the finding of urban social dialect surveys that women use more standard forms than men. Consider the possible influence of the dimensions discussed in chapter 1: social status, social distance or solidarity, the formality of the context and the functions of speech. How might these affect the speech used by an interviewee in a social dialect survey? Bear in mind that no single explanation is likely to fit all cases.

Explanations of women's linguistic behaviour

'Why can't a woman be more like a man?' (*My Fair Lady*)

When this pattern first emerged, social dialectologists asked: 'why do women use more standard forms than men?' At least four different (though not mutually exclusive) explana-tions were suggested. The first appeals to social class and its related status for an explanation, the second refers to women's role in society, the third to women's status as a subordinate group, and the fourth to the function of speech in expressing gender identity, and especially masculinity.

The social status explanation

Some linguists have suggested that women use more standard speech forms than men because they are more status-conscious than men. The claim is that women are more aware of the fact that the way they speak signals their social class background or social status in the community. Standard speech forms are generally associated with high social status, and so, according to this explanation, women use more standard speech forms as a way of claiming such status. It has been suggested that this is especially true for women who do not have paid employment, since they cannot use their occupations as a basis for signalling social status.

The fact that women interviewed in New York and in Norwich reported that they used more standard forms than they actually did has also been used to support this explanation. Women generally lack status in the society, and so, it is suggested, some try to acquire it by using standard speech forms, and by reporting that they use even more of these forms than they actually do.

Though it sounds superficially plausible, there is at least some indirect evidence which throws doubt on this as the main explanation for gender differences in social dialect data. It is suggested that women who are not in paid employment are most likely to claim high social status by using more standard forms. This implies that women in the paid workforce should use fewer standard forms than women working in the home. But the little evidence that we have in fact suggests that just the opposite may be true. An American study compared the speech of women in service occupations, working in garages and hotels, for instance, with the speech of women working in the home. Those in paid employment used more standard forms than those working in the home. In the course of their jobs, the first group of women were interacting with people who used more standard forms, and this interaction had its effect on their own usage. By contrast, the women who stayed home interacted mainly with each other, and this reinforced their preference for vernacular forms.

Exactly the same pattern was found in an Irish working-class community. The younger women in Ballymacarrett, a suburb of Belfast, found work outside the community, and used a much higher percentage of linguistic features associated with high status groups than the older women who were working at home. This evidence throws some doubt, then, on suggestions that women without paid employment are more likely to use standard forms than those with jobs, and so indirectly questions the social status explanation for women's speech patterns.

A variation on this explanation suggests that standard or prestige forms represent linguistic capital which people can use to increase their value or marketability in some contexts. This has the advantage of accounting for the higher proportion of such forms in the speech of those in the white collar professional workforce, especially when they are interacting with

people they want to impress. Where women have few other sources of prestige, language may become especially significant as a social resource for constructing a professional identity. But if you work in a soap factory or a shoe factory, or on a building site, the forms that your companions value are more likely to be vernacular forms, so your linguistic capital will take a different form.

Woman's role as guardian of society's values

'A woman's place is in the home.'

Example 6

Mrs Godley, an early New Zealand settler, believed in the civilising influence of women. When two young men she knew were about to begin work on a sheep station in the South Island province of Canterbury in 1852, she warned them that they would become 'semi-barbarous'. She begged them to have a 'lay figure of a lady, carefully draped, set up in their usual sitting-room, and always behave before it as if it was their mother'.

A second explanation for the fact that women use more standard forms than men points to the way society tends to expect 'better' behaviour from women than from men. Little boys are generally allowed more freedom than little girls. Misbehaviour from boys is tolerated where girls are more quickly corrected. Similarly, rule-breaking of any kind by women is frowned on more severely than rule-breaking by men. Women are designated the role of modelling correct behaviour in the community. Predictably then, following this argument, society expects women to speak more correctly and standardly than men, especially when they are serving as models for children's speech.

This explanation of why women use more standard forms than men may be relevant in some social groups, but it is certainly not true for all. Interactions between a mother and her child are likely to be very relaxed and informal, and it is in relaxed informal contexts that vernacular forms occur most often in everyone's speech. Standard forms are typically associated with more formal and less personal interactions. It seems odd to explain women's greater use of more standard speech forms (collected in formal tape-recorded interviews) by referring to a woman's role as a speech model in her very intimate and mainly unobserved interactions with her child.

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)

A third explanation which has been proposed for women's use of more standard forms is that people who are subordinate must be polite. Children are expected to be polite to adults.

Women as a subordinate group, it is argued, must avoid offending men – and so they must speak carefully and politely.

It is not immediately apparent why *polite* speech should be equated with *standard* speech. It is perfectly possible to express yourself politely using a vernacular Liverpool or Glaswegian accent, and it is equally possible to be very insulting using RP, as example 7 illustrates. A more sophisticated version of this explanation, however, which links it to the social status explanation, suggests that by using more standard speech forms women are looking after their own need to be valued by the society. By using standard forms a woman is protecting her 'face' (a technical term used by sociolinguists with approximately the same meaning as in the phrase *to lose face*). She is also avoiding offence to others.

Suggesting that a woman uses standard forms in order to protect her 'face' is not very different from saying she is claiming more status than she is entitled to, compared to men from the same social group. On the other hand, the suggestion that women's greater use of standard forms may relate not only to their own face-protection needs, but also to those of the people they are talking to, is more promising. It is consistent with other evidence of women's sensitivity to their addressees, which is discussed more fully in chapter 12.

Like most of the explanations presented, this explanation also begins from the assumption that it is women's behaviour which is aberrant and has to be explained. Men's usage is being taken as the norm against which women's is being measured. Yet this seems odd when we remember that what people are trying to explain is why women are using the standard forms or the norms. Why should standard or 'correct' behaviour need explaining? It is men's speech which uses fewer standard forms – not women's. Instead of asking 'why do women use more standard speech forms than men?', it makes more sense to ask 'why don't men use more standard forms?'

Exercise 5

Before you read the next section, can you think of possible reasons why men in social dialect studies might use more vernacular forms than women?

Vernacular forms express machismo

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')]

One answer which has been suggested to the question 'why don't men use more standard forms?' is that men prefer vernacular forms because they carry macho connotations of masculinity and toughness. If this is true, it would also explain why many women might *not* want to use such forms.

There is some evidence to support the suggestion. The speakers on a tape who were iden-tified as most likely to win in a street fight were those who used most vernacular forms. The fact that Norwich men tended to claim that they used more vernacular forms than they actually did, while the women didn't, supports this explanation too. The men apparently wanted to sound less standard than they actually were. This suggests these men regard vernacular forms positively and value them highly, even if they don't always openly admit to doing so. It has been suggested, then, that these forms have 'covert prestige' by contrast with the overt prestige of the standard forms which are cited as models of correctness. (See chapter 15 for a further discussion of covert and overt prestige.)

The converse of this claim is that standard forms tend to be associated with female values and femininity. Some linguists have pointed to the association of standard forms with female teachers and the norms they impose in the classroom, with the suggestion that boys may reject this female domination, and the speech forms associated with it, more vigorously than girls. More generally in the society, a preference for vernacular forms may be a reaction to what is perceived as overly influential female norms.

This explanation seems consistent with much of the sociolinguistic evidence which has accumulated. It is worth asking, however, what it implies about the values expressed by working-class women's speech. The taped voices that people were asked to assess in terms of their likely abilities in a street fight were men's voices. How do people respond to working-class women's speech? Would her listeners consider the high frequency of vernacular forms in the speech of the 70-year-old woman in example 9 as evidence that she was a tough and masculine old woman?

Example 9

C'mere an Ah'll tell ye a wee laugh – ma twin – ma brother an me's twins – he's ten i a family, Ah've nane, Mary – an ma other niece's daughter, she was up visitin er mother an oor Andy was in, as we just cawed im Aundra – Scoatch – but it's Andrew – [. . .] Ah think e'll maybe be aboot ten, Scott – e says, 'Uncle Andrew, are you French?' E says, 'Away, an don't be daft! A'm Brigton!' E says, 'Where's that? Is that abroad? Fae Brigton!'

Or would they consider her a promiscuous old tart? One New Zealand study suggested that women avoid vernacular forms because they are associated with promiscuous women, 'sluts' and 'loose morals'.

There are other problems too. If a higher frequency of vernacular forms conveys con-notations of masculinity (or promiscuity), then why do *all* speakers from *all* social classes use more vernacular forms in less formal contexts? (See chapter 10 for examples of this pattern.) Women use more vernacular forms in relaxed situations, as example 5 suggested. Why should forms most typically associated with informal relaxed contexts be identified as 'masculine'?

Some alternative explanations

'. . . women continue to be one of the mysteries of the universe.' (Shuy 1969: 14)

Example 10

It was widely considered that Rose had married beneath her. Her parents were both doctors, as she was herself. She had been educated at a private girls' school and had proceeded on the basis of an outstanding exam performance to Oxford University. She was earning a very respectable salary from her practice when she married Bruce. Bruce worked in his father's sports shop and, while it was clear he would eventually inherit the business, at the time of their marriage he seemed no match for Rose intellectually, financially or socially. Nevertheless the marriage seemed to work – despite these apparent disparities.

How are women categorised?

There are alternative ways of accounting for at least some of the social dialect evidence that women's and men's speech differs. Consider, for example, the data on which these general-isations have been made. In assigning women to a particular social class, researchers in early social dialect studies often used the woman's husband's occupation as their major criterion. Not all women marry men from the same social class, however. It is perfectly possible for a woman to be better educated than the man she marries, or even to have a more prestigious job than him, as illustrated in example 10 . In such cases, 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, miscategorisation is one plausible explanation of their speech behaviour.

The influence of the interviewer and the context

In many social dialect studies, the interviewers are middle-class, well-educated academics. 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 (as illustrated more fully in chapter 10). At least in some contexts, such as formal interviews, women tend to be more cooperative conversationalists than men, as discussed in chapter 12 . Hence 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. There is clear evidence of speech accommodation, for instance, in Swahili data collected in Mombasa, a town in Kenya. The women interviewed shifted much more dramatically than the men did from more to less standard forms when they were speaking to a friend rather than a stranger.

By contrast, men in such formal contexts seem to be less responsive to the speech of others, and to their conversational needs. In fact, it seems perfectly possible that working-class men might react against the speech of a middle-class academic from the university, and so in their interviews they may have diverged in their speech forms, using more vernacular forms precisely to distinguish themselves from the interviewer. An Australian study demonstrated that this was exactly how adolescent boys reacted in an interview with a stranger. The differ-ences between women's and men's speech behaviour would then be explicable in terms of their different responses to the interviewer collecting the data.

Exercise 6

How do you think you would speak in a social dialect interview? What would be the effect of the context and the interviewer's status on your speech? With your friend's permission, tape yourself talking to a friend in a relaxed context. Then select three questions from those in the appendix to this chapter and interview your friend.

Can you hear any differences in your speech or that of your friend in the two contexts? If you are an English speaker, pay attention to [h]-dropping and [in] vs [iy] variation.

Would you respond differently to a female vs a male interviewer? Why might women respond differently from men in a formal interview situation with a male interviewer?

Answer at end of chapter

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 domin-ant 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.

In one of the earliest social dialect surveys, the male interviewers asked different questions of women and men in order to elicit a casual style of speech in which vernacular forms were more likely to occur. The women were asked about childhood games and skipping rhymes, while the men were asked about fights, terms for girls and, in some cases, terms for a girl's sexual organs. As one pair of commentators note, 'With the best will in the world, it seems unlikely that a discussion of skipping rhymes could induce the rapport of two men talking about smutty words.' The fact that men used more vernacular forms than women in these interviews does not then seem so surprising. It can be accounted for by the fact that the inter-view context was different for women and men.

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. When people do not know each other well, they tend to speak in ways that reflect their social roles (e.g. customer–shopkeeper, teacher–pupil, interviewer–interviewee) rather than relating as individuals. Standard speech forms are appropriate to such transactional roles. Where women use more standard speech forms than men in social dialect interviews, this may be due to the fact that they experienced the interview as a relatively formal inter-action with a stranger.

This explanation accounts for the difference in women's and men's speech forms by referring to the relationship between the people concerned in the context in which they are operating. It provides a thought-provoking alternative to explanations which characterise women as status-conscious individuals who use more standard speech forms to ensure they are perceived as socially statusful.

Exercise 7

Can you think of social factors which might change the pattern described above, i.e. that in many communities women tend to use more standard forms than men in more formal social contexts?

Answer at end of chapter

Exercise 8

My young German friend, Anke, thinks that the explanations suggested above for differences in women's and men's speech are biased against men. Do you agree?

What does this suggest about interpretations of social dialect data?

Discuss with your teacher how you might test alternative explanations for any gender differences in speech observed in your community.

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. A researcher who believes the status dimension is more influential in accounting for linguistic differences than the solidarity dimension, for instance, will provide a different explanation from one who sees a person's social contacts as more influential in accounting for their speech than their social class background. This point will be illustrated further in chapter 8.

In concluding this section, it is worth noting that although gender generally interacts with other social factors, such as status, class, the role of the speaker in an interaction, and the (in)formality of the context, there are cases where the gender of the speaker seems to be the most influential factor accounting for speech patterns. 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.

The social dialect survey of the Sydney community, mentioned above, provides some support for this view of gender as an important factor in its own right, as does data from a study in Tyneside, an area in the north east of England. Glottalisation of [p], [t] and [k], for instance, is characteristic of the Tyneside vernacular. (Glottalisation involves cutting off the air at the vocal cords while producing the sounds [p], [t], [k].) It is better described as a masculine norm than a working-class norm, since men use these glottalised sounds across all styles regardless of their social class, whereas glottalisation varies in the speech of women from different classes. Figure 7.2 makes the point graphically.

There is similar evidence from Reading where Jenny Cheshire, dressed in her motor-bike gear, recorded the speech of adolescent girls and boys in an adventure playground. She found the usual pattern of gender-differentiation in grammatical patterns such as multiple negation, and the use of forms such as *ain't*. Overall, boys used vernacular forms more frequently than

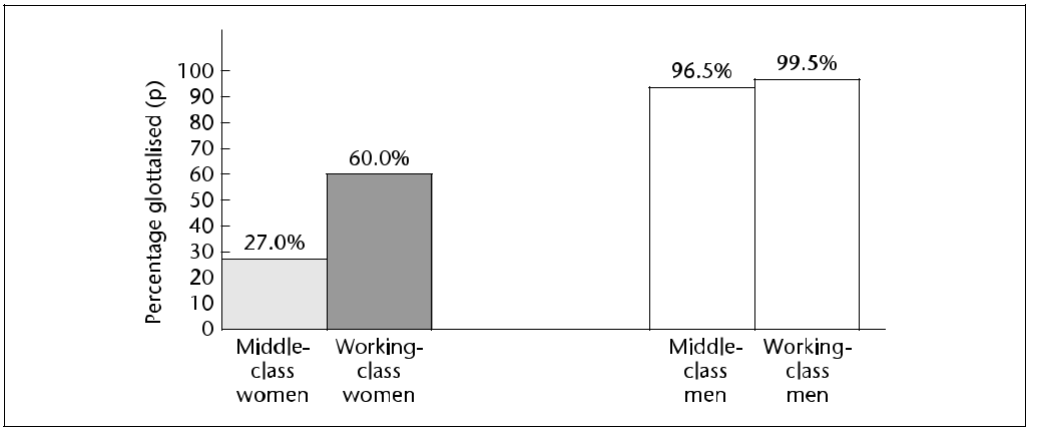


Figure 7.2 Glottalised [p] in speech of Tyneside women and men from two social classes
Source: Reproduced with permission from Fasold (1990: 101).

girls did. The boys who used most vernacular forms had the highest scores on a scale based on toughness (ability to fight and steal), peer group status and ambition to do a 'tough' job, such as slaughterer. But interestingly the speech of tough girls – those capable of swearing, stealing or setting fire to the adventure playground – was quite distinguishable from that of the boys on a number of grammatical features. So toughness was here not the distinguishing factor. Gender identity itself seemed to be an influential explanatory factor accounting for different speech patterns which were observed. 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 com-munities, 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.

Overall, then, the nature of the relationship between gender and speech is complex, and the way gender interacts with a range of other factors needs careful examination in each speech community. The social roles that women and men play, their different values and social net-works (who they talk to most), the social categories they identify with and the social identities they wish to construct, and their sensitivity to contextual factors, including characteristics of the person they are talking to, are relevant factors accounting for people's speech patterns which will be explored in more detail in the next few chapters. But signalling gender-affiliation or constructing gender identity cannot be ignored as factors in their own right.

This section has focused on the widespread evidence that men use more vernacular forms than women, but there are exceptions to this pattern. Figure 7.1 showed that women from the lower social groups in Norwich used almost as many vernacular forms as the men. And there are some communities, such as Pont-rhyd-y-fen, a small Welsh mining community, and Brazlândia, a satellite city of Brasília, where the women use more vernacular forms than the men. 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, as we shall see in the next few chapters. 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). In the next section, we will see examples of young people's use of vernacular forms expressing the latter.

Age-graded features of speech

Example 11

I was listening to New Zealand radio when they announced that they were going to be interviewing the Minister of Health after the news. I couldn't think who the Minister was. So I listened to the interview and I was very impressed with the policies he outlined, and particularly with his sensitive and sympathetic attitudes to the need for cervical screening for women. 'How sensible,' I thought, 'what an intelligent man!' I waited for the end of the interview to find out who he was. 'And that was an interview with the Minister of Health, Helen Clark,' announced the interviewer. Well at least that explained the sympathetic attitude to women's health issues!

One of the most obvious speech differences between women and men is in the pitch of their voices. Most people believe this difference develops at puberty. It is thought to be as difficult to guess the gender of a 5-year-old on the phone as it is to identify the gender of a swaddled infant from its wails and coos. It is certainly true that young boys' voices often 'break' at puberty and become noticeably lower in pitch. Their voice quality reflects their physical growth. Boys' vocal cords generally grow faster and bigger than girls' at puberty. Men's heads and lungs are also larger than women's, just as older people's are bigger than children's. As a result, 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.

This physical explanation is only part of the reason for gender differences in voice pitch, however. Social and cultural factors contribute too. Young boys' voices often become lower in pitch than girls' voices well before there is any physical basis for the change. It is more masculine to speak with a lower-pitched voice, and so young boys often develop this mascu-line feature, along with other more obviously sociolinguistic features of male speech such as the greater use of vernacular forms described above.

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. It is well-known that Margaret Thatcher underwent training to lower the pitch of her voice when she was Britain's Prime Minister, since she was persuaded that this would make people take her more seriously. These norms are culturally relative too. There are cultures where the average pitch of men's voices is considerably higher than that of the average American male, for instance, and the upper reaches of some Japanese women's pitch range are out of sight compared to those of English-speaking women. Only a young child could compete.

Example 12

G is a teenage Australian girl and I is a female interviewer.

G: We went – I've seen 'One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest' – can't even say 'cuckoo' properly. That was a good show. The only thing is they swear a lot in it.

And that really bothers you?

G: Mm. Sometimes, like, sometimes I'll be in the mood for it an other times I'll think, you, know 'I don't wanna say that.' Cause when you listen t'other people it sounds terrible, you know . . .

I: You don't think about that when you're 13 or 14 doing it yourself.

G: No, you don't. When you get older, you think, 'Oh Jesus, what did I ever say that for?'

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*. The extensive swear word vocabulary which some teenagers use is similarly likely to change over time, as example 12 suggests. The frequency with which they use such words tends to diminish, especially as they begin to have children and socialise with others with young families. It seems possible that adult men restrict swearing largely to all-male settings, whereas females reduce their swearing in all settings as they move into adulthood.

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. In New Zealand, young people currently use the terms *sweet*, *choice*, *awesome* and *cool* to describe something they approve of. Earlier generations of New Zealanders used *bosker* and *bonzer*. *Grouse* is another such word that reappeared briefly in the early twenty-first century after previously being fashionable in the 1970s. Rich Californian Valley girls use *mondo*. *Shubs* is British urban slang for a rave or a party and *mandem* for a group of men or boys (see example 13 below). Because slang is so ephemeral, vocabulary can be a real give-away if you are trying to guess a person's age on the telephone or radio. Out-of-date slang words like *spiffing*, *topping*, *super*, *groovy* and *fab* identify a British person as a member of the older generation as accurately as an old-fashioned RP pronunciation such as [o:fan] for *often*.

Exercise 9

Ask five people over 70 years old and five people aged between 15 and 25 from similar social backgrounds to tell you what words they would use in the following contexts:

I've just got a new car. It's _____

(Ask for two or three words meaning they like it and think it is good.)

The Australians were beaten by 6 wickets and I'm not surprised. Their playing was _____.

(Ask for two or three words meaning it was terrible.)

I heard a talk about personality types on the radio today. The speaker didn't know a thing about the subject. It was _____
(Ask for two or three words meaning it was wrong or misleading.)

You could add another couple of sentences if there are particular slang words you would like to check out in this way.

Is there any pattern in the forms you have collected?

Are some words used only by the older people and others used only by young people? Are there any words you had not heard before? Are there any words used by one group which you think members of the other group would not understand?

Age and social dialect data

Example 13

Brian, a teenager from Hackney in London, is talking about how security guards came to get people out of a room where a party was being held.

there was about forty mandem *like* boys inside so we went yeah they came and *like* there was *like* security at the door so *like* no one had invitation the people that we called so yeah so *like* they everyone ran in and so *like* the the security stopped the music and *like* turned on the lights said yeah everyone get out so they scattered the shubs

mandem = 'group of boys'; shubs [party/rave]

Social dialect research has provided a great deal of information about patterns of pro-nunciation and grammar, and more recently discourse particles, such as *like*, illustrated in example 13, for different age groups. The speech of young children, in Britain and the USA, for example, is not clearly differentiated by gender until they are approaching puberty, whereas in Denmark there is evidence of differences between boys' and girls' use of vernacular vs standard morphological variants from as young as four years old. One possible explanation is that Danish children are much more strongly influenced by their peers, since 90 per cent of those under four years of age spend forty or more hours per week in daycare.

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 [ih], in *walking*, or [d] for [e] 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.

In other words, the model suggests that as people get older their speech becomes gradually more standard, and then later it becomes less standard and is once again characterised by vernacular forms.

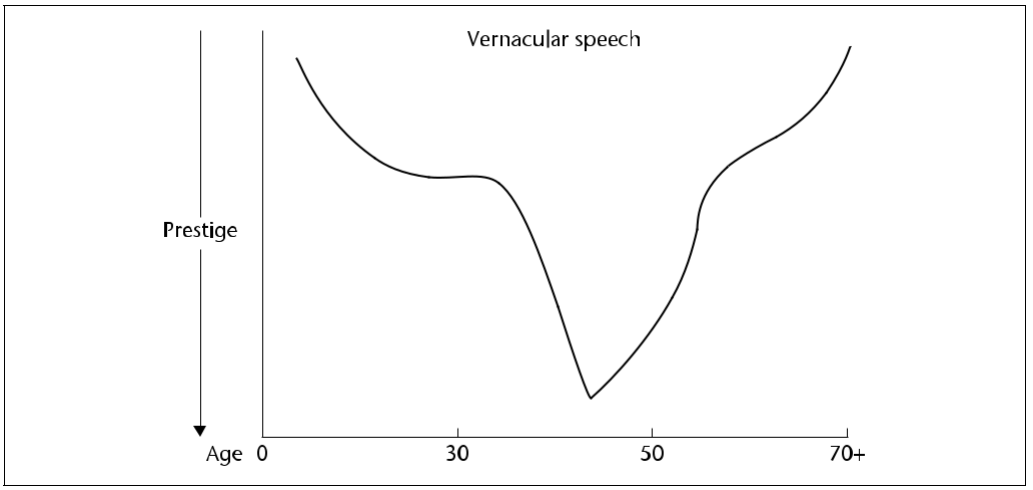


Figure 7.3 Relationship between use of vernacular forms and age

Source: Reproduced from Downes (1998: 191).

In a New Zealand survey, the pattern in figure 7.3 was particularly clear in men's use of the [in] vs [ih] variants at different ages. Those in their 40s used fewer instances of [in] than those in their 20s, or than those over 70. The first part of the pattern is illustrated in figure 7.4 in relation to the variable of multiple negation. Young children in both Detroit and the Appalachian region of the USA use multiple negation more frequently than adolescents, and adolescents use it more frequently than adults. Children gradually acquire standard forms in the same way as they gradually acquire new vocabulary and control of grammatical con-structions. 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.

Many social dialectologists have found that adolescents use particularly high frequencies of vernacular forms, especially if they are forms such as *ain't* and multiple negation which people clearly recognise and identify as non-standard. This provides empirical support for a proposed peak during adolescence when peer group pressure *not* to conform to society's norms is greatest. However, this pattern is not attributable to age alone. Like slang, vernacular forms act as solidarity markers; they can indicate membership of close-knit social groups, as illus-trated in the next chapter. New York gang members, for instance, delete the *-ed* which signals past tense at the ends of words much more often than adults from the same social group, but also more often than those labelled 'lames', young people who do not belong to gangs. Gang members more often say *miss* for *missed* (in utterances like *he miss the bus yesterday*) and *pass* for *passed* (*it pass me*) than 'lames' or adults. And they use more multiple negation than adults and 'lames' in the same social class. As discussed in chapter 8 , membership of a close-knit social group is more important than age alone in accounting for these patterns.

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. The

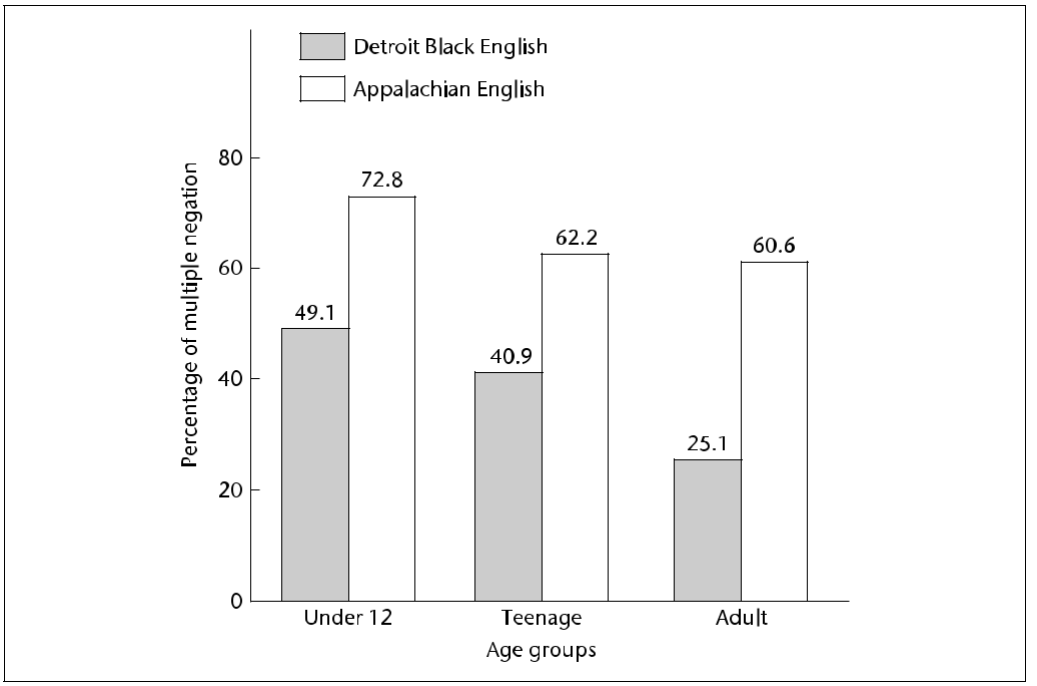


Figure 7.4 Multiple negation in different age groups in two communities

Source: This diagram was constructed from data in Romaine (1984: 108–9).

use of standard or prestige forms typically peaks between the ages of 30 and 55 when people experience maximum societal pressure to conform. So standard vowels and [ih] pronunci-ations of words like *working* are usually highest in this period of people's lives. 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. 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.

Exercise 10

Imagine you have been cast in a play as an elderly woman or man, although you are only a young person. How could you use linguistic features to construct an appropriate age identity for your character? Think about discourse particles, vocabulary choice, grammatical and phonological features, together with variations in pitch and speed which could be used to enact your role convincingly in your speech community.

Age grading and language change

Before leaving considerations of the relationship between age and speech patterns, it is important to notice how easy it is to confuse patterns of language change with speech patterns which vary with different age groups.

Exercise 11

There are at least two alternative explanations for the pattern shown in table 7.1. What are they?

Answer at end of chapter

Table 7.1 Vernacular pronunciation of standard [t] in medial and final position in New Zealand English

Linguistic form	*Age group*	
	20–30 years (%)	*40+ years (%)*
Glottal stop [c] for final [t] (e.g. [bac] *bat*)	82	33
Flap for medial [t] (e.g. [leder] for *letter*)	35	6

Source: from Hui 1989: 6.

When a linguistic change is spreading through a community, there will be a regular increase or decrease in the use of the linguistic form over time. For an innovation – a form on the increase – this will show up in a graph as a low use of the form by older people and a higher use among younger people. For a form which is disappearing, just the opposite will be true. Younger people will use less of the form and older people more.

Milton Keynes is Britain's fastest-growing new town. It was founded in 1967 and by 2005 its population had more than quadrupled. A social dialect study of teenage speech in the town indicated that [f] was rapidly replacing standard [k] in words like *thought* and *mouth*, and [v] was replacing standard [e] in words like *mother* and *brother*. This feature has been called (th)-fronting since the standard sound is pronounced a little further back against the teeth, while the lips are involved in [f] and [v]. Is this a feature of adolescent speech or is it a change in progress? The evidence suggests that this is a change which began in London as long ago as 1850, and though it took a while to get started it is now accelerating as it spreads northwards.

Exercise 12

Look at figure 7.5.

Are there any differences in the patterns of use of the three sounds in the three towns?
Does the figure support or challenge the claim that (th)-fronting is spreading north in England?

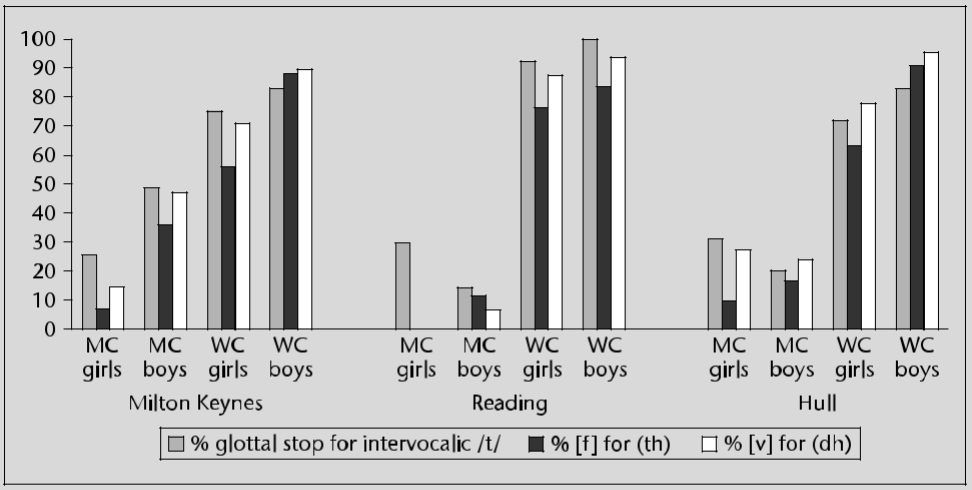


Figure 7.5 Three vernacular features in girls' and boys' speech in 3 English towns

Note: Milton Keynes, Reading and Hull are British towns. Milton Keynes is a relatively new town 80 kilometres north of London. Reading is 60 kilometres west of London and Hull is the furthest north and over 200 kilometres from London.

Source: Cheshire, Kerswill and Williams (2005: 146).

Answer at end of chapter

Exercise 13

Sociolinguists have recently begun to pay attention to the frequency of *like* in the speech of young people. See example 13. There is disagreement about whether this is an age-graded feature or a change in progress. What does figure 7.6 suggest? Does the distribution of *like* support the argument that *like* is an age-graded feature or does it suggest that it is an incoming grammatical change in progress?

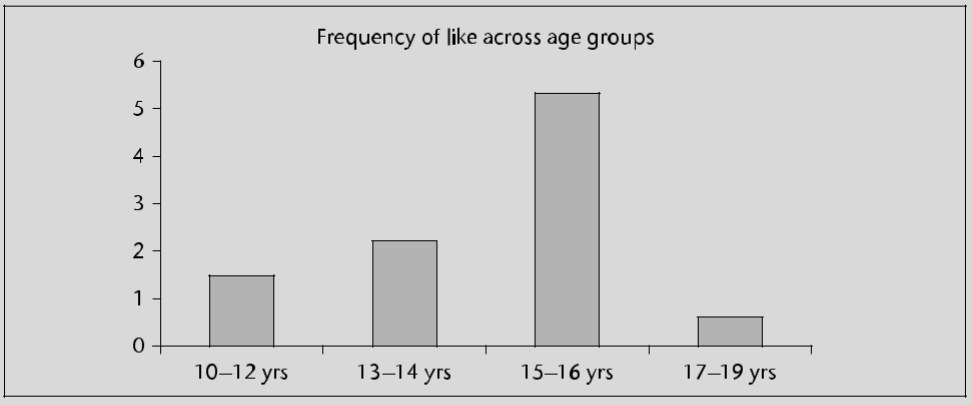


Figure 7.6 Frequency of *like* across four age groups in Toronto

Answer at end of chapter

We will look at patterns of linguistic change in chapter 9 and consider how information about what different age groups are saying can provide clues to changes in progress. The discussion in this section shows that before studying patterns of change it is important to know the normal distribution of stable forms through a community. Without this it would be easy to make a wrong deduction. It would be possible, for instance, to interpret the pattern of language use reported in Montreal as evidence of linguistic change in progress. We would project forward the monolingualism of the young and treat it as the in-coming pattern. We would then see the bilingualism of the middle-aged group as likely to be displaced over time and predict a language shift to French, with loss of English. All this would be totally misleading in terms of what was really happening. In fact, the pattern of shift from monolingualism to bilingualism and back is one which is stable, and it simply repeats itself for different individuals over time.

This example also highlights the relationship between language and ethnicity which is so apparent in a community where a particular language is associated with a particular ethnic group. In the next chapter we will see that even in monolingual communities, ethnicity is often signalled by the way people speak.

Answers to exercises in chapter 7

Answer to exercise 1

No. English pronouns do not reflect the gender of the speaker. The third person singular pronouns encode the gender of the referent, i.e. *she* vs *he*, but all other pronouns can be used to refer to either gender. You might like to consider whether, and if so how, the pronouns used in other languages with which you are familiar encode gender.

Answer to exercise 2

In Sydney, as in all other English-speaking communities where a social dialect survey has studied this feature, men drop more [h]s than women. The differences were not very great in Sydney, however. Men dropped 16 per cent in the interview context, compared to women's 5 per cent. In the North of England [h]-dropping is much more frequent. Hence Keith's con-fusion in example 4. When asked to say her name on its own, Mrs Hall carefully pronounced the [h] at the beginning of *Hall*, though in other contexts she would omit it, as the boys in her class always did, and the girls usually did when addressing her.

Answer to exercise 3

There is evidence that women use fewer instances than men of all the vernacular grammatical features discussed in the previous chapter. The pattern for multiple negation in Detroit is dis-cussed in the next section. Similar patterns have been observed in other English-speaking communities all over the world. The forms of present and past tense verbs, the use of past participles such as *seen* and *done* as past tense forms, and the use of *ain't* are further grammat-ical variables which illustrate the same patterns. Further grammatical variables which are used differently by women and men are discussed in chapter 12.

Answer to exercise 6

As we will see in chapter 10 , most people use more vernacular forms in more relaxed contexts. So it is likely that you used more [in] forms and dropped more [h]s in casual speech than in the interview situation.

Some possible answers to the other questions are discussed in the following section.

Answer to exercise 7

In societies where women do not have access to education and thus have restricted oppor-tunities to acquire the standard variety, they do not use more standard forms than men. Similarly, in societies such as Saudi Arabia where women are confined to specific social contexts, they do not have the same opportunities or motivation as men do to use standard forms.

Answer to exercise 11

Two possible interpretations of the data in table 7.1.

The pronunciation of standard [t] in medial and final position may be an age-graded feature. As people approach middle age, their pronunciation of this sound may become more standard and less vernacular. This is a common pattern for a vernacular feature. If this were an accurate interpretation of the data, one would predict that the percentage of vernacular forms would increase again in old age, so the incidence of vernacular forms for people of retirement age would be higher than for the 40–60 age group.

Alternatively, the pronunciation of standard [t] may be changing in New Zealand speech. If this is the case then the data suggests that the vernacular pronunciations (medial flap and glottal stop) are gradually displacing standard [t] in the speech of younger people. One would then predict that scores for those above 60 years of age would show a lower incidence of vernacular forms than those for the 40–60 age group.

Answer to exercise 12

The pattern of use for all three vernacular variants is similar in that they are most frequent in the usage of working-class boys in all three towns. The pattern for middle-class boys and girls is less clear-cut, but middle-class boys in Milton Keynes use more vernacular forms than middle-class girls, which is not the case in the other towns.

If (th)-fronting is spreading north, we would expect it to be most frequent in Reading and Milton Keynes and least frequent in Hull, the northern-most town. Though it is more frequent in middle-class boys' speech in Milton Keynes, overall, this is not clearly the case. There are a number of possible explanations for this, one of which is that the change is too well-established in working-class speech for this data to show its progress northwards. Since vernacular changes tend to be established in working-class speech before middle-class speech, the fact that it is more evident in middle-class boys' speech in Milton Keynes than in middle-class Hull speech supports the claim, but the Reading data does not. See map (page 154) in chapter 6.

Answer to exercise 13

The figure is taken from Tagliamonte (2005). The sudden increase in the use of *like* by 15–16 year-olds and its dramatic reduction in the speech of 17–19 year-olds supports the claim that *like* is an age-graded feature (at least in Toronto English); i.e. a change that occurs at a particular point in a person's life and then largely disappears. If instead *like* is a change in progress, we would expect it to continue to increase in frequency in the speech of young people as they grow older. It has been suggested that this is what is happening in other varieties of English such as London English, but there is no published research on this yet. The relationship between age-grading and change in progress is discussed further in chapter 9.

Concepts introduced

Gender-exclusive features
Gender-preferential features
Gender and social class
Age grading

References

The following sources provided material for this chapter:

Bodine (1975) on Chiquita(no). See also www.ethnologue.com Bortoni-Ricardo (1985) on Brasília Bradley (2011) on Yanyuwa

Cheshire (1982a, b) on Reading speech
Cheshire, Kerswill and Williams (2005) on (th)-fronting in Milton Keynes Coates and Cameron (1988) on explanation in social dialectology Downes (1998) on age-grading
Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003) Ch. 8 on Detroit adolescents' speech
Eisikovits (1989b) on divergence from standard Australian English in adolescent boys' speech
Gordon (1997) on New Zealand vernacular forms and 'loose morals'
Graddol and Swann (1989) on pitch ranges
Holmes, Bell and Boyce *et al.* (1991) for New Zealand data on vernacular [in] usage
Horvath (1985) for Sydney data
Hui (1989) on New Zealand English
Labov (1972b: 264–9) on the linguistic consequences of being a 'lame'
Ladegaard and Bleses (2003) on gender differences in Danish children's speech
Macauley (1977) on Glasgow speech
Milroy (1982) for Belfast data
Milroy (1989) for Newcastle data
Nichols (1983) on service occupations and speech
Romaine (1984) on Edinburgh children's speech
Russell (1982) for Mombasa Swahili data
Shibamoto (1987) for Japanese data, up-dated by Kaya Oriyama and Andrew Barke (personal communication)

Shuy, Wolfram and Riley (1967) for Detroit data
Sorensen (1972) on Amazon Indians
Tagliamonte (2005) on *like* in Toronto and data in Figure 7.6 Thomas (1988) on Pont-rhyd-y-fen speech Trudgill (1992, 2000) especially data on Norwich

Quotations

Example 6 is adapted from Bassett, Sinclair and Stenson *et al.* (1985: 67).
Example 8 is an edited excerpt from Cheshire (1989: 61).
Example 9 is from Macafee (1989: 194).
Example 12 is from Eisikovits (1989b: 43).
Example 13 was supplied by Paul Kerswill and Sue Fox from an interview in their social dialect data collected in London.
Graddol and Swann (1989: 57) on the topics used with women and men in social dialect surveys.
Trudgill (1983: 162): 'the single most consistent finding to emerge from sociolinguistic studies over the past 20 years'.

Useful additional reading

Coates (2004)
Coates and Pichler (2011), Part 1
Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003)
Fasold (1990), Ch. 4
Meyerhoff (2011), Ch. 10
Romaine (2000), Ch. 4
Wardhaugh (2010), Ch. 13

Appendix

Here are some questions which you could use to collect data in an informal interview.

What do you like doing best in your spare time?
What did you do last weekend?
Do you play any sport or get any regular exercise?
Have you ever seen a fight around here? What happened?
Do you remember your first day at school? How did you get there? What was it like?
What's the worst experience you've ever had at school – a really awful day or a day when some-thing really horrible happened?
What do you think of the standard of driving round here?
Do you think old/young people are better drivers? Why?
Have you ever seen a bad accident around here? What happened?
What does your family do at Christmas?
What did you do on Christmas Day last year?

8 Ethnicity and social networks

When people belong to the same group, they often speak similarly. But there are many different groups in a community, and so any individual may share linguistic features with a range of other speakers. Some features index a person's social status, as we saw in chapter 6; others may vary in frequency in the speech of women and men or identify a person as a teenager rather than a middle-aged citizen, as illustrated in chapter 7 . There are also linguistic clues to a person's ethnicity, and closely related to all these are linguistic features which are responsive to social pressure from those we interact with most frequently, our social networks. Individuals draw on all these resources when they construct their social identities. This chapter illustrates the relevance of ethnicity and social networks in accounting for people's speech patterns, as well as briefly introducing a related concept, the community of practice.

Ethnicity

Example 1

When I was in Montreal I found a small restaurant in the old French quarter where the menu looked affordable and attractive. I was greeted in French by the waiter and I responded in French, though my accent clearly signalled that I was a native English speaker. At this point, the waiter, who was undoubtedly bilingual, had a choice. He chose to continue in French and, though I cannot be sure of his reasons, I interpreted this choice as expressing his wish to be identified as a French Canadian. In any case, I was very happy that my French had not been so awful that he felt he *had* to switch to English.

Many ethnic groups use a distinctive language associated with their ethnic identity, as demon-strated in the examples discussed in the first section of this book, as well as in example 1 above. Where a choice of language is available for communication, it is often possible for an individual to signal their ethnicity by the language they choose to use. Even when a complete conversation in an ethnic language is not possible, people may use short phrases, verbal fillers or linguistic tags, which signal ethnicity. So interactions which appear to be in English, for example, may incorporate linguistic signals of the speakers' ethnic identity, as illustrated in example 2.

Example 2

Lee: *Kia ora* June. Where you been? Not seen you round for a while.
June: *Kia ora* . I've just come back from my Nanny's *tangi* [FUNERAL]. Been up in Rotorua for a week.
Lee: *E kï* [IS THAT SO!] a sad time for you, *e hoa* [MY FRIEND] and for all your family, *ne* [ISN'T IT].
June: *Ae* [YES]. We'll all miss Nanny. She was a wonderful woman.

In New Zealand many Maori people routinely use Maori greetings such as *kia ora*, and a con-versation between two Maori people may include emphatic phrases, such as *e kï*, softening tags such as *ne*, and responses such as *ae*, even when neither speaks the Maori language fluently. Bargaining with Chinese retailers in the shopping centres, Chinese Singaporeans similarly often signal their ethnic background with linguistic tags, such as the untranslatable but expressive *la*, and phrases or words from their ethnic language. Emphasising common ethnicity may mean they get a better bargain!

Exercise 1

Consider the following utterances. Can you identify any of the linguistic clues to the speaker's ethnicity?

Yo mama so bowlegged, she looks like the bite out of a donut.
I cannae mind the place where those bairns are from.
Dem want me fi go up dere go tell dem.
Kia ora Hemi. Time to broom the floor eh.
Already you're discouraged! Goyim like bagels so why not this.
My brother really hungry la. Let's go for makan.

Answers at end of chapter

As we saw in chapter 3 , when a group adopts, willingly or perforce, the dominant language of the society, an important symbol of their distinct ethnicity – their language – often disappears. Italians in Sydney and New York, African Americans and Hispanics in Chicago, Indians, Pakistanis and Jamaicans in London are in this situation. For different reasons, so are most Scots, Irish and Welsh people in Britain, Aboriginal people in Australia and Maori people in New Zealand. Ethnic groups often respond to this situation by using the majority language in a way which signals and actively constructs their ethnic identity. For groups where there are no identifying physical features to distinguish them from others in the society, these distinctive linguistic features may be an important remaining symbol of ethnicity once their ethnic language has disappeared. Food, religion, dress and a distinctive speech style are all ways that ethnic minorities may use to distinguish themselves from the majority group.

Italians in Boston use a particularly high percentage of vernacular pronunciations of certain vowels, such as the vowel in words like *short* and *horse*. Similarly, both first and second generation Italians in Sydney are distinguishable in different ways by their pronunciation of Australian English vowels. In New Zealand, as elsewhere in the world, Scots people tend to

retain features of their Scottish English. The pronunciation of [r] in words like *part* and *star* is widely noted as a marker of Scottish ethnicity. American Jewish people often signal their ethnicity with a distinctive accent of English within any city in which they have settled. Studies of Jewish people in Boston and New York have identified distinctive pronunciations of some vowels. Jewish Americans also use ethnically marked linguistic tags such as *oy vay*, and occasional Yiddish vocabulary items, many of which, such as *schmaltz*, *bagel*, *glitch* and *shlemiel*, have passed into general US English.

African American Vernacular English

Example 3

Jo : This ain' that ba', bu' look at your hands. It ain't get on you either. Asle, look at mine. This all my clay . . . In your ear wi' Rosie Greer . . . I ain' gone do that one . . . Did you hear about the fire at the shoe store? It wan't a *soul* lef'.

In the USA, though their distinct languages disappeared centuries ago, African Americans do not need a distinct variety or code as a symbolic way of differentiating themselves from the majority group. They are visibly different. Nevertheless, this group has developed a distinct variety of English known as African American Vernacular English (I will use the abbreviation AAVE). This dialect has a number of features which do not occur in standard mainstream US English, and others which occur very much less frequently in the standard variety. These linguistic differences act as symbols of ethnicity. They express the sense of cultural distinc-tiveness of many African Americans.

AAVE is heard especially in the northern cities of the USA. One of its most distinctive fea-tures is the complete absence of the copula verb *be* in some social and linguistic contexts. In most speech contexts, speakers of standard English use shortened or reduced forms of the verb *be*. In other words, people do not usually say *She is very nice* but rather *She's very nice.* They reduce or contract the *is* to *s*. In the same kinds of context, speakers of AAVE omit the verb *be*, as illustrated in example 4.

Example 4

African American Vernacular English	**US Standard English**
She very nice	She's very nice
He a teacher	He's a teacher
That my book	That's my book
The beer warm	The beer's warm

In recordings of Detroit speech, for instance, white Americans never omitted the copula verb *be*, whereas African Americans – especially those from the lower socio-economic groups – regularly did.

Another distinctive grammatical feature of AAVE is the use of invariant *be* to signal recurring or repeated actions, as in example 5.

Example 5

African American Vernacular English	**US Standard English**
She be at school on weekdays	She's always at school on weekdays
The children do be messin' around a lot I run when I bees on my way to school	The children do mess around a lot I always run when I'm on my way to school
The beer be warm at that place	The beer's always warm at that place

Clearly the grammar of AAVE has some features which simply do not occur in the grammar of white Americans. However, there are many features of the English used by lower socio-economic groups in the USA which also occur in AAVE. Most AAVE speakers simply use these features more frequently than most white Americans. Multiple negation was identified in chapter 6 , for instance, as a feature of the English of many lower socio-economic groups. It is also a feature of AAVE, as figure 8.1 illustrates. In every social group interviewed in Detroit, African Americans used more multiple negation than white Americans did.

Consonant cluster simplification is another feature which distinguishes the speech of white and African Americans. All English speakers simplify consonant clusters in some contexts. It would sound very formal, for instance, in a phrase such as *last time* to pronounce both [t]s distinctly. Most people drop the first [t] so the consonant cluster [st] at the end of *last* becomes simply [s]. AAVE speakers also simplify the consonant clusters at the ends of words, but they do so much more frequently and extensively than speakers of standard and regional dialects of English.

AAVE is different from the English of white Americans, then, in a number of ways. There are features which clearly distinguish the two dialects, such as the omission of the verb *be* and distinct meanings of *be*, as illustrated in example 5. And there are other features, such as multiple negation and consonant cluster simplification, where AAVE uses higher frequencies than are found in the English of most white Americans.

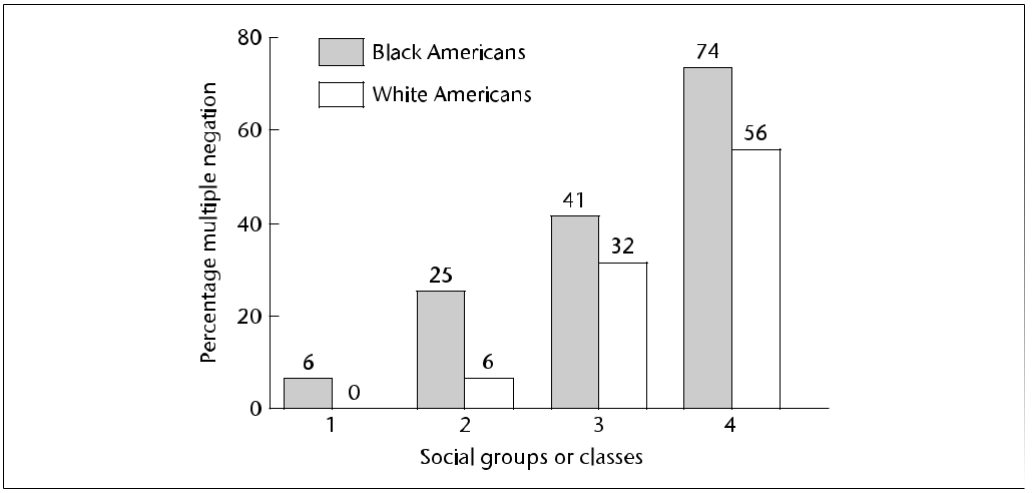


Figure 8.1 Multiple negation in black and white Detroit speech

Source: This diagram was constructed from data in Shuy, Wolfram and Riley (1967).

Exercise 2

Using figure 8.1 as data, what is the relationship between ethnicity and social class in relation to the vernacular features of speech?

Identify the features of the following passage which distinguish it from standard English. These are all features of AAVE, though some also occur in other vernacular varieties.

It's a girl name Shirley Jones live in Washington. 'Most everybody on her street like her, 'cause she a nice girl. Shirley like a boy name Charles. But she keep away from him and Charles don't hardly say nothing to her neither.'

Look at sentences 1–8. * = ungrammatical utterance

What is the rule for the occurrence of *be*?

1. They usually be tired when they come home.
2. *They be tired right now.
3. James always be coming to school.
4. *James be coming to school right now.
5. Sometimes my ears be itching.
6. *My ankle be broken from the fall.

Which of these is grammatical in this dialect?

7. Linguists always be asking silly questions about language.
8. The students don't be talking right now.

Answers at end of chapter

British Black English

In Britain, the way different ethnic minorities speak English is often equally distinctive. The English of those who speak minority languages such as Gujerati, Panjabi and Turkish generally signals their ethnic background. And people of West Indian or African Caribbean origin use a range of varieties, depending on where they live in England, and how long their families have lived in Britain. Those born in Britain are usually described as members of the British Black community and some speak a variety of Jamaican Creole as well as a variety of English. Others speak a range of varieties of English with different frequencies of creole features depending on the social context and who they are talking to.

The variety of Jamaican Creole still used by some British Blacks is known as Patois or British Jamaican Creole. London Jamaican, for instance, is the London variety of Patois. It derives from Jamaican Creole, but it has a number of features which distinguish it from the Jamaican variety.

Example 6

Polly is a young British Black teenager who lives in the West Midlands. Her parents came to Britain from Jamaica in 1963 looking for jobs. Though Polly's mother had a good education in Jamaica, the only work she was able to find in Dudley was cleaning offices at night. Polly's father used to work in a factory, but he was laid off and has been unemployed for nearly two years now. They live in a predominantly Black neighbourhood and almost all Polly's friends are young Black people. She and her parents attend the local Pentecostal church. Her older brother used to attend too, but he has stopped since he left school.

Map 8.1 The Greater London Boroughs

Polly's verbal repertoire includes standard English spoken with a West Midlands accent, an informal variety of English with some Patois features, which could be described as Midlands Black English, and Patois, the variety of Jamaican Creole used by Black people in Dudley in the 1980s, which was described in chapter 2.

Polly's patterns of language use are not simple. While her parents use Patois or British Jamaican Creole to her and her brother, she is expected to use English in response. At home she uses Midlands Black English, but she uses a more standard variety to her teachers at the college where she is doing a hairdressing course. With some friends she uses a variety called 'chatting Patois' which has a small number of creole features. With other friends who like her can speak Patois, she uses full-blown Patois. In most shops, she uses standard English with the local accent, unless she knows the young Black person behind the counter, in which case she might use Midlands Black English.

Polly's ethnicity is signalled not so much by her knowledge of any particular variety, but by the way she uses the varieties in her linguistic repertoire. Some young British Blacks use Patois for in-group talk as a symbol of their ethnicity, but not all are proficient users. In

contexts where Patois is appropriate, those who do not know much Patois use a variety of English which is clearly marked as Black by the fact that it incorporates some Patois or creole features. The use of Patois, as well as the use of Patois features in informal varieties of English, obviously has an important symbolic function. These varieties signal a person's ethnicity as British Black. Between Polly and her Black friends, Patois signals friendship or solidarity. It indicates that they belong together as a group of young Black British people. Someone who used standard English in this group when they were talking in the cafeteria between lessons, for example, would be labelled 'prissy' or 'snobby'.

There are a number of linguistic features which characterise Patois. It is a creole and as such it is quite distinct from standard English. There are lexical items such as *lick* meaning 'hit' and *kenge* meaning 'weak, puny'. There are many features of pronunciation, including stress and intonation patterns, which differ from those of standard English. The vowel sound in a word like *home* is sometimes pronounced as in Jamaican Creole, rather than as in the local variety of English. Words like *then* and *thin* are pronounced [den] and [tin]. Plural forms don't have *s* on the end. Tenses aren't marked by suffixes on verbs, so forms like *walk* and *jump* are used rather than *walked*, *walks*, *jumped* and *jumps*. The form *mi* is used for *I*, *me* and *my* (e.g. *mi niem* for 'my name') and the form *dem* is used for *they*, *them* and *their* (e.g. *dem niem*). Not surprisingly, given the patterns we have found elsewhere, some speakers use more of these features than others. Midlands Black English uses some of these features too, together with a distinctively Midlands accent of English.

There are a number of regional varieties of British Black English, such as Polly's Midlands' variety and a London variety, as well as regional varieties of Patois, though many of them have not yet been described. The function of these varieties as symbols of ethnicity among Black British people is quite clear, however. They could even be regarded as examples of 'anti-language', a term which has been used to signal their function of expressing opposition to the mainstream values of white British society which exclude Black people and their culture.

Exercise 3

Teachers have reported that some children who show no sign of Patois features in their speech during their early years at school, start using noticeably Black speech during adolescence. Why do you think this might happen?

Answer at end of chapter

Social dialect researchers in Hackney, an inner city area of London, and an ethnically very diverse area, have identified a new ethnic speech variety used by local teenagers. It has been labelled Multicultural London English because it is used by adolescents from a range of ethnic backgrounds, including Jamaican, African and Asian backgrounds. As well as using monophthongs where other varieties use diphthongs (e.g. [fe:s] for *face* and [go:] for *go*), these teenagers have developed a distinctive vocabulary. They call their friends [blud] *blood* rather than *mate*, *nang* is their word for *good*, *buff* means *attractive*, while *butters* means *ugly*. In Multicultural London English, a *house* is referred to as a *yard*, *nuff* means *very* and *trainers* are *creps*. *People* are referred to as *mandem* (as in chapter 7, example 13). The researchers believe that the new variety has developed as a result of high levels of immigration in the inner city area along with the typical desire of young people to distinguish themselves from other

groups, and develop a distinctive identity. Though it is strongly associated with Black British teenagers, it is in fact used much more widely and it is rapidly spreading.

Maori English

Example 7

An' den an old ant came – there was a old kuia. She went and walk to de ant's house. An' den she went and knock at the window. An' den de ant started to open his window. An' den he's told the old kuia to go back. An' den de old kuia was talking. An' den de old kuia went and walk back.

In New Zealand there has been considerable discussion about whether a Maori dialect of English exists. Many people assert firmly that there is such a variety, but there is little evidence so far of linguistic features which occur *only* in the speech of Maori people. The alternation between

and [e] at the beginning of words like *the* and *then*, which is indicated in example 7, for instance, is by no means confined to the speech of Maori people. Greetings like *kia ora* and vocabulary items like *tangi* ('funeral'), illustrated in example 2 above, are used by Pakeha (New Zealanders of European origin) as well as Maori in New Zealand. However, in general, Maori people use Maori words more frequently in their speech than Pakeha people do. The word *kuia* in example 7 illustrates this. *Kuia* is a Maori word meaning 'old woman', which is widely known in New Zealand. Nevertheless, its occurrence in the child's story suggests the speaker is more likely to be Maori than Pakeha.

There are also grammatical features which occur more frequently in Maori people's speech. In a study of 8-year-old children's speech, vernacular verb forms (such as *walk* for *walked*) occurred more often in the speech of the Maori children than the Pakeha. There were also some distinctive uses of verbs, such as *went and*, which seemed to be used as a narrative past tense marker by the Maori children, as illustrated in example 7.

A comparison of the speech of a small group of New Zealand women also found that the Maori women were more likely to use vernacular past tense forms of some verbs, as illustrated in sentences (a) and (b) in example 8 . Moreover, Maori women were more likely than Pakeha to use present tense forms with *s* as in (c) and (d), and much more likely to omit *have*, as in (e) and (f).

Example 8

She *seen* it happen and she stopped and picked Jo up off the bloody road.
Well next I *rung* up the police.
I *says* you wanna bet.
So I *gets* home and I waited a couple of weeks.
Yeah well you * seen him dancing eh so you understand.
See I * been through all that rigmarole before.

* indicates where *have*/*had* has been omitted.

Exercise 4

Identify the clues in the following excerpt of transcribed speech which suggest that the speaker is Maori.

He's a hell of a good teacher and everything eh. And um I sit in with him sometimes, and 'cause all of a sudden he'll come out speaking Pakeha you know, just it was only, it was only a sentence that he'll speak, you know, one line of it, and the rest is just Maori eh.

Answer at end of chapter

New Englishes

It would be possible to consider African American English, Black English and Maori English as examples of 'new' varieties of English, compared to older, well-established varieties such as British standard English and US standard English. However, the term 'new Englishes' is most often used to describe varieties which have developed in post-colonial societies where the colonial powers have been displaced, but the legacy of English remains. Some examples were discussed in chapter 4 under the heading 'world Englishes'. Fiji English, Hong Kong English, Singapore English, Indian English and the English used in the Philippines are typical examples of 'new Englishes'.

It has been suggested that these varieties represent different stages along a trajectory towards the development of a distinct local variety which symbolises the identity of each particular group of speakers. In other words, English undergoes re-colonisation in order to express the identities of the local peoples in different communities. Using this framework, New Zealand English, Australian English and South African English are well-developed examples, with distinctive lexis, grammatical patterns and phonological features, as well as established literatures in each of these varieties. Young people who use New Zealand English no longer think of their language as a variety of British English.

Another view makes a sharp distinction between 'settlement' colonies like Australia and New Zealand, where English has always been the first language of the majority group, and 'exploitation' colonies such as Hong Kong and Singapore, India, Kenya and Tanzania, where multilingualism is the norm, and English has been adopted primarily for adminis-trative convenience. In these countries, English was not initially taught by native speaker 'settlers' to new generations, and the varieties of English which have developed are typically influenced by local languages spoken in the region, e.g. Hokkien Chinese, Malay and Tamil in Singapore.

As English continues to grow in terms of its utility as a lingua franca in multilingual countries and at the international level, it is increasingly being adopted as a medium of education in many countries, especially at secondary and tertiary level. As a result, some varieties of the New Englishes, such as Singapore English, are now used in the home, and these are steadily moving into the position of native-speaker varieties of English with quite distinctive local features, as illustrated in the discussion of Singlish in chapter 4.

Overall, however, the value of the term 'new Englishes' is still being debated, and it will be some time before any agreement is reached about whether it is useful, and if so which varieties should be included as examples.

Exercise 5

Discuss with your fellow students where you think US English fits into an analysis which distinguishes settler colonies from exploitation colonies.

In this section I have focused on features of people's language which may signal and con-tribute to the dynamic construction of ethnic identity. People from different ethnic groups often *use* language differently too. Particular groups develop ways of speaking which are dis-tinctive to their culture. The fast repartee known as *soundin'*, for example, is a distinctive use of language by African American gang members, as is the ritual insult illustrated above by utterance (a) in exercise 1. In New Zealand, the greeting routines exchanged between Maori people, even in informal contexts, are similarly distinctive. And in more formal Maori contexts, the rules for greeting people are very different from those used in Pakeha formal meetings, as we will see in chapter 11. Even patterns of pausing, silence and conversational feedback may differ between ethnic groups, and this can sometimes result in misunderstandings. If you expect your interlocutor to give frequent signals that they are listening and interested (e.g. *mm, yea*), then the absence of feedback can be disconcerting.

In everyday interaction, speech differences may also be an indication of people's social networks, a concept which has proved extremely valuable in accounting for some speech

"No, Timmy, not 'I sawed
the chair'. 'I saw the chair'
or 'I have seen the chair'."

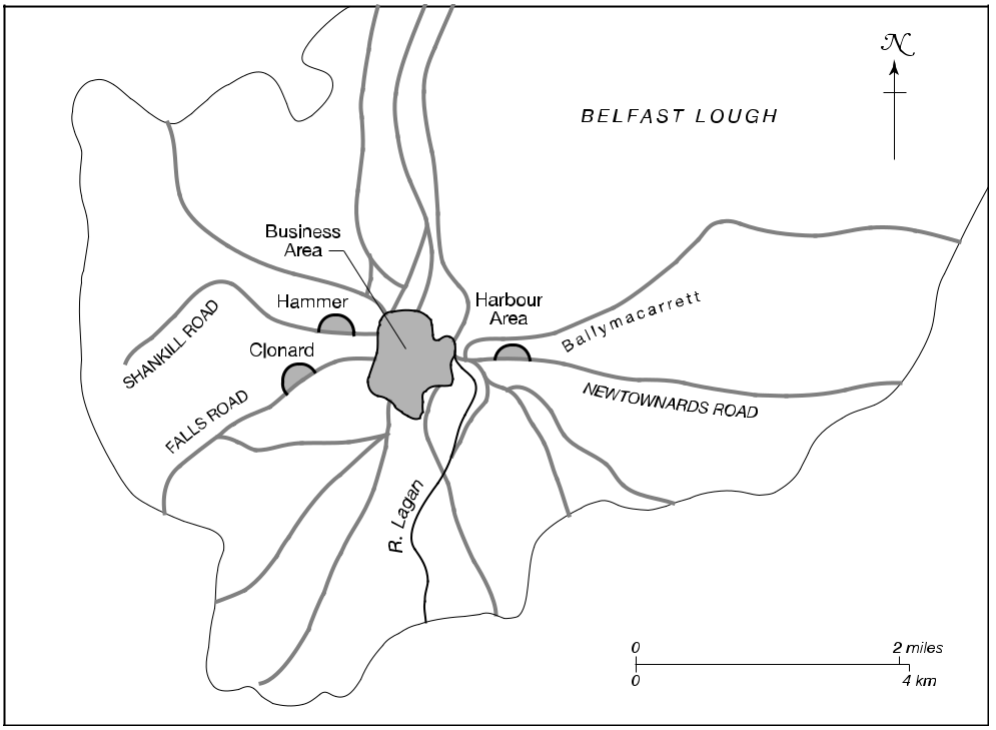
patterns. Social networks move the focus from social features of the speaker alone, such as status, gender, age and ethnicity, to characteristics of the interaction between people.

Social networks

Example 9

Tom lives in Ballymacarrett, a Protestant area east of the River Lagan in Belfast. He is 18 years old and works as an apprentice in the shipyard. He got the job through his uncle Bob who works at the shipyard, and he has a cousin Mike, who works there too. He and Mike live in the same street and most nights they have a beer together after work. They also run a disco with two friends, Jo and Gerry, and that means that several nights a week they travel across town to perform at different venues.

The way Tom and his cousin speak indicates that they belong to a small closely knit working-class community. The men they work with and mix with outside work are also their relations and neighbours, and they all speak alike. The patterns noted in the previous sections suggest that, as members of the working class, they are likely to use more vernacular forms than other social groups. And they do. Tom and his mates use a high number of vernacular speech forms.



Map 8.2 Belfast

They frequently delete the *th* [e] in *mother* and *brother*, for example, and pronounce *man* as [mo:n], and *map* as [ma:p]. By contrast, people in Tom's community who are not so much a part of the kinship, neighbourhood and work networks – who are more marginal – tend to speak less 'broadly' (i.e. with less distinctively Belfast pronunciations). Sandy, for instance, a man who lives on the edge of Ballymacarrett, works for the civil service. He comes from Southern Ireland and doesn't have any family in Belfast. He sees people like Tom only occa-sionally in the pub. He is not really a part of the close-knit Ballymacarrett male network, and his speech reflects this. He uses far fewer vernacular forms than Tom and Mike.

Figure 8.2 provides a visual representation of Tom's social network. Networks in socio-linguistics refer to the pattern of informal relationships people are involved in on a regular basis. There are two technical terms which have proved very useful for describing different types of networks – *density* and *plexity*. Density refers to whether members of a person's net-work are in touch with each other. Do your friends know each other independently of you? If so, your network is a dense one. Tom's friends and relations know and interact regularly with each other, as well as with him. He clearly belongs to a dense network. This is indicated by the various connections between Mike and Tom and Uncle Bob in figure 8.2.

Plexity is a measure of the range of different types of transaction people are involved in with different individuals. A *uniplex* relationship is one where the link with the other person is in only one area. You could be linked to someone else only because you work together, for example, or you might only play badminton or football together, and never meet in any other context. If most transactions in a community are of this type, the network would be characterised as uniplex. *Multiplex* relationships, by contrast, involve interactions with others along several dimensions. A workmate might also be someone you play tennis with and meet at church regularly. If most transactions in a community are of this type, the network would be considered multiplex. Tom's network is multiplex since the people he works with are also his pub-mates, his relations and his neighbours.

It is not surprising that people's speech should indicate the types of networks they belong to. The people we interact with are one important influence on our speech. When the people we mix with regularly belong to a homogeneous group, we tend to speak the way the rest of the group does, provided we want to belong to the group and like the people in it. (This point is developed further in chapter 10 in the section on accommodation theory.) Parents

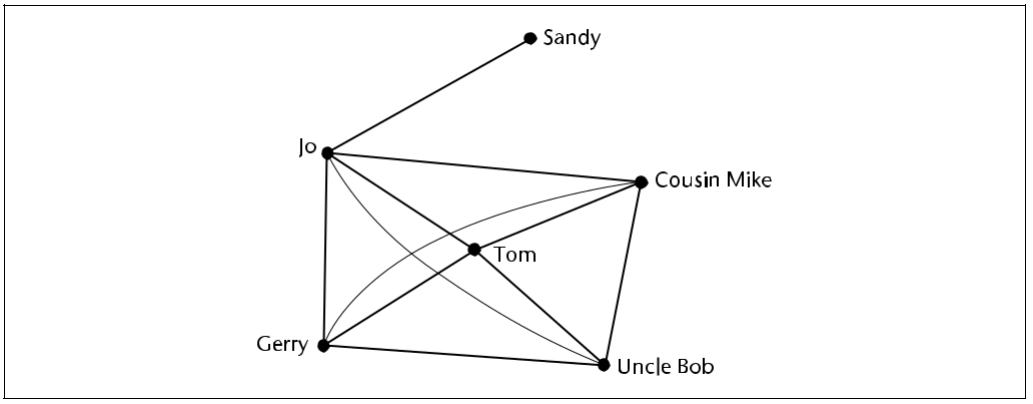


Figure 8.2 An example of a social network

Source: This diagram was constructed from data based on a similar one in Milroy (1980: 48).

notice this when their children's speech begins to resemble the speech of the other kids at kindergarten and school rather than that of the family. Those children in the new town of Milton Keynes in England who had the strongest school-based networks were using the most innovative features of the new variety (or koine) that was developing in the town. Their pronunciations of some sounds were quite different from their parents. Adolescent gangs typically have quite distinctive ways of talking which signal their gang membership. In New York, for instance, a study of the speech of African American male gang members showed that the more involved a boy was with the gang, the more vernacular speech forms he used. Boys on the periphery of the gangs used more standard forms than those who were more central or core members. In Britain, too, the speech of young Black people indicates the extent to which they mix with other Black people or with white people in their work and play.

When adults belong to more than one network, they may signal this by unconsciously altering their speech forms as they move from one context to another. A student, for example, may find she uses more standard forms with her friends at university, and more local, verna-cular forms when she goes home to the small town or village where her family lives.

Exercise 6

Using figure 8.2 as a model, draw a network for yourself based on your interactions on an average weekday or a weekend. Identify the three people you talk to most. Link them to yourself by lines on the diagram. Then if those people know each other join up the lines as appropriate. Then think who are the three people each of them talk to most. Do *they* know each other? If so link them up – and so on.

Do you think your social network would provide any clues to the way you speak?
Would it identify the people whose speech your speech most resembles?
If not, what would provide a more accurate indication of the influences on your speech?

A study which examined language shift in Oberwart, an Austrian town on the Austrian– Hungarian border, made good use of the concept of social networks. Susan Gal noted who talked to whom over a set period of time. The patterns of social interaction which emerged accounted for people's language preferences. Some people in the Oberwart area worked in the fields and kept farm animals as their parents had before them – they continued to cling to a peasant way of life. Others worked in the industries which had become established in the town. Those people who interacted more with peasants were more likely to prefer Hungarian as their primary language, while those who had more contacts with people involved in industrial jobs tended to prefer German.

In Brazil, a similar pattern was found in the speech of rural Brazilian people who had moved to the city of Brasilia. People who adapted to the city, and took advantage of what it offered, developed a wide range of relationships and tended to use more standard forms of Portuguese, while those who kept themselves to themselves, interacting mainly with kinfolk and friends from the country, tended to retain their vernacular rural accents.

In Ballymacarrett, the working-class area of Belfast referred to in example 9, the women's networks are more open than the men's. The men, like Tom, work in the local shipyard with their relations, their neighbours and their mates. Their networks are dense. Young Ballymacarrett women work on the far side of the city where they have found better-paid jobs. The people they work with are not their neighbours or relations, and so they are mixing

with a more diverse group of people than their menfolk are. These women's networks are therefore less dense and less closed than the men's, and correspondingly their speech has fewer vernacular forms.

By contrast, in the Clonard, another area of Belfast, the men's traditional source of employment – the linen industry – has disappeared, but the women have sought and found work together. Their networks therefore resemble those of the men in Ballymacarrett – they are dense and multiplex or closely-knit, and this too is indicated by the women's high use of vernacular speech forms. In Belfast, then, male and female speech differences are best explained in terms of the type of networks women and men belong to.

Example 10

Mary is a teenage girl who lives in a working-class African American community on an island in the Waccamaw river in South Carolina. Most of the men work at construction jobs on the mainland to which they commute daily across the river. The women work in the seasonal tourist industry on the mainland as servants or clerks. No one in Mary's community is very well off. She has seven brothers and sisters. Like everyone else on the island, Mary's family own a small motor boat which her mother and father use to travel to the mainland for work each day. She goes to school on the schoolboat, and, like almost all her island friends, she qualifies for a free lunch.

In her class at school she meets Tracy, who comes from the mainland white com-munity up the river. Tracy has three younger brothers and her mother doesn't have a paid job. She stays home and looks after the boys and the house. Tracy's grandad was a cotton farmer and her dad had expected to carry on working the farm, but the cotton farming business went bust and they had to sell the farm, like most others in the area. So her father works as a supervisor at one of the hotels in the tourist area. They aren't rich, but they're a bit better off than Mary's family. They have a reliable car and they can afford regular holidays.

If we examine the speech of Mary's parents and Tracy's parents in an interview with a white teacher visiting the community, we find some interesting patterns. There are differences between the women's and the men's speech. There are also differences between the speech of the African American parents and the white parents. But not the differences you might predict without thinking a little about their social networks. Tracy's father's speech is much closer to Mary's mother's speech than it is to Tracy's mother's speech. Both Tracy's dad and Mary's mum use more standard forms than their spouses. Mary's dad uses a great many creole forms, while Tracy's mother uses local vernacular dialect forms.

The patterns in these communities are best explained not by gender or by ethnicity, but by the interactive networks the two sets of parents are involved in. African American women interact in their daily work with tourists and middle-class Americans who use high frequencies of standard English forms. White men and young white women similarly work in service industries, interacting not with members of their own community but with strangers and outsiders. Their networks are neither dense nor multiplex. The people they work with are different from the people they live with and 'play' with. Their speech is correspondingly more standard, and they use fewer vernacular or creole forms than the white middle-aged women and the African American men.

Many white middle-aged women, on the other hand, work as housewives in their own communities, and they interact with each other regularly at the shops, for coffee, on the phone and in shared community and child-caring activities. African American men also interact with each other in their work on construction sites. Both these groups have much denser and more multiplex networks than the white men, the young white women, and the African American women. Like the Ballymacarrett men and Clonard women, they use more vernacular and fewer standard forms.

This example draws together a range of the social factors covered in this section of the book. The social class background, gender, age and ethnicity of the speakers are all relevant, but the example also illustrates clearly the overriding influence which social interaction plays in accounting for patterns of speech. Who we talk and listen to regularly is a very important influence on the way we speak, a point which will be pursued further in chapter 10. It is also illustrated in the final social concept to be considered in this chapter, the community of practice.

Communities of practice and the construction of social identity

Example 11

OK, us, you know, like the burnout . . . the burnout chicks, they sit over here, you know, and like jocky chicks stand right here . . . And then there's like um the guys, you know, you know, like weirdos that think they're cool. They just stand like on the steps, and hang out at that little heater . . . And then the poins are inside in the cafeteria, because they're probably afraid to come out into the courtyard.

(Hall, K. and Bucholtz, M. 1995)

Jo, an American high school girl, is describing the social organisation of space in the school courtyard. In the process, she positions her own group, the female *burnouts*, in relation to other groups in the school. Penelope Eckert, a sociolinguist who spent many months at this US high school, uses the term *community of practice* to capture the complexities of what it means to belong to a social group like the burnouts. The burnouts are mainly, but not exclusively, from low-income families. They socialise in the local urban neighbourhood and their friendships extend beyond the school. They reject school values and they are aiming to join the workforce immediately on leaving school. Their behaviour, both linguistic and non-linguistic, distinguishes them clearly from the *jocks* , a much more conformist group who largely accept school values and are heading for college. Groups like these exist in every school community, though the names are different – *nerds*, *bums*, *greasers*, *hoods*, *cholos*, *gangsters*, *drop-outs* and so on.

The concept 'community of practice' has been adopted by some sociolinguists to permit a focus on social categories like these which make more sense to participants than abstract categories such as class and gender. Communities of practice develop around the activities which group members engage in together, and their shared goals and attitudes. We all belong to many communities of practice which share particular goals and ways of interacting – family, sports team, work group, hiking group, drama club, church choir and so on. Some may be relatively long-term; others, such as a group organising a party, a dance, a school fair or a conference, will be more temporary.

This approach highlights the extent to which we use language to construct different identities in different social interactions. At school, Jo constructs her *burnout* identity, using particular vocabulary (e.g. *poins*) and innovative variants of vowels in the pronunciation of words like *fun* and *line*. At home with her family or in her after-school job, she may emphasise different aspects of her social identity, again using linguistic choices to indicate her affiliations and values. Using this more ethnographic approach, the researcher focuses on the ways in which individuals 'perform' particular aspects of their social identity in specific situations.

Different aspects of an individual's social identity will be more or less relevant in specific social contexts, and even at different points within the same interaction. So for instance, a young African American male talking to an African American female is likely to highlight his masculinity at certain points in the conversation, but their shared ethnicity at others. Similarly, Jo constructs her identity as a super-cool, non-conformist burnout when she interacts with jock guys but, at certain points in the interaction, her linguistic choices may emphasise her gender identity, or her low income background. In example 12, the speaker performs a rather tough 'masculine' identity.

Example 12

I says you better put those fuckin' arms down because that's fightin' material for me . . . she says you can't fuckin' do nothin' to me and I says you wanna bet?

The speaker in example 12 is Geraldine, a young working-class Maori woman, describing a fight in which she was involved. In this brief snippet, talking to a much better educated and very feminine-looking Maori woman, she selects consistently vernacular variants of the *-ing* variable, and vernacular present tense forms of the verb *say*, as well as using swear words. While [in] variants indicate her working-class background, the consistency and concentra-tion of vernacular linguistic features also make Geraldine sound tough and masculine. High frequencies of the [in] variant are associated not only with working-class speech but also with male speech, as described in chapter 7. Hence, Geraldine seems to be constructing a tough, masculine gender identity to contrast with the educated feminine identity of her addressee. This is a nice example of how social meaning is a dynamic mutual linguistic construction between different participants in an interaction.

Exercise 7

In example 12, Geraldine's frequent use of [in] variants is discussed using a number of terms: working-class, tough, masculine.

Do you think it makes sense to separate out non-linguistic variables in this way?

An answer is suggested in the next paragraph.

Sociolinguists need to describe the linguistic patterns that correlate with the macro-level abstract categories of class, age, ethnicity and gender, but for describing the detail and complexity of what goes on in day-to-day interactions between individuals, the concepts of

social network and community of practice are particularly useful. They allow us to examine the ways in which individuals use linguistic resources in dynamic and constructive ways to express various social identities – identities which draw on macro-level social categories, such as class and gender, as well as micro-level categories, such as new gang member, or feisty friend or youngest child in the family. Indeed, it is these moment-to-moment linguistic choices which ultimately create the larger-scale patterns, a point which will become evident in the next chapter.

Conclusion

'When it comes to linguistic form, Plato walks with the Macedonian swineherd, Confucius with the head-hunting savage of Assam.'

This famous quotation from Edward Sapir expresses a very fundamental belief held by linguists. All language varieties are equal: there is no significant difference in the complexity of their linguistic structure; they all have resources for creating new vocabulary as it is needed, and for developing the grammatical constructions their speakers require. Any variety can be developed for use in any situation. A language used by a tribe buried in the mountains of Papua New Guinea or the depths of the Amazonian rain forests has the potential for use at the nuclear physics conferences of the Western world, or in the most sensitive diplomatic negotiations between warring nations. There are no differences of linguistic form between varieties which would prevent them developing the language required for such purposes. The barriers are social and cultural.

Though linguists present this ideal of equality between the languages and dialects used by different ethnic and social groups, it has no social reality. Varieties acquire the social status of their users, and the divisions of dialects along racial, ethnic and social lines have been only too apparent in many countries, including the USA and Britain. I have used the terms standard and vernacular in describing features which characterise the speech of different social and ethnic groups. Some people have used the term sub-standard for vernacular features, with all the implications of deviance and inadequacy which that term carries, and this has often influenced people's views of the linguistic features involved.

It should be clear from the description of linguistic features provided in chapters 6, 7 and 8 that the difference between those features which happen to characterise the standard dialect and those which occur in vernacular dialects is entirely arbitrary. Indeed, the evidence reviewed demonstrates that the difference between the two is most often simply a matter of the frequency of different forms in the speech of different groups. In chapter 10 , it will become clear that no one – not even the Queen of England or the President of the United States of America – uses standard forms all the time.

Before looking at the way people use language in different situations, however, it will be useful to explore a little further the relationship between some of the social factors considered in these three chapters and the process of language change. Since the 1960s, when sociolin-guists began to contribute to studies of language change, explanations of the process have been increasingly illuminated by an understanding of the contribution of social factors. In the next chapter, the relationship between age-grading and linguistic change will be explored further, and the influence of speakers' social class and gender on the process of language change will be discussed.

Answers to exercises in chapter 8

Answer to exercise 1

Some of these examples will be discussed further in the next section.

This is an example of a young African American male 'playing the dozens', a competitive style of speech which consists of ritual insults usually referring to the opponent's mother. The use of *mama* is typical of African American dialect, and the pronunciation suggested by *yo* provides another ethnic clue. A grammatical clue is the omission of the verb form *is* after the word *mama* , another feature frequently found in the English of Black Americans.

This is Scottish speech. There are lexical clues – *bairns* for standard *children* and *mind* for *remember*, and a grammatical clue – the use of *cannae* for standard *can't* or *cannot.*

This is an example of the Patois used by British Blacks with Jamaican origins. The crucial clue is the use of *fi* where standard English uses *to*. The use of *d* [d] where standard English uses *th* [e] is another clue, but this is also found in many other dialects of English.

Two lexical features suggest the speaker is Maori: the greeting *kia ora* and the name *Hemi* (the English equivalent is *Jim*). The use of the word *broom* as a verb and the final tag *eh* are additional features which have been noted particularly in the speech of Maori people.

This speaker is a Jewish American as indicated by the words *goyim* to refer to non-Jewish people or Gentiles, and *bagels*, a Jewish doughnut-shaped bread roll. The syntactic pattern of the exclamation is also heard more frequently in Jewish discourse.

The speaker is either from Singapore or Malaysia, and probably Chinese or Malay in ethnicity. The omission of *is* provides a clue since this verb is variably present in Singapore and Malaysian English, but this is a feature of many dialects of English. The speaker is identifiable as Singaporean or Malaysian by the use of the particle *la* and the Malay word *makan* for 'meal'.

Answer to exercise 2 (a)

Each social group uses more multiple negation than the group above it, and within social groups African Americans from Detroit consistently use more multiple negation than do white Detroiters. The amount of multiple negation used by African Americans from the highest social group is the same as that used by white speakers from the next social group down, for instance, showing clearly that social and ethnic features interact with linguistic features in a complex way in signalling information about speakers.

Answer to exercise 2 (b)

Features of AAVE:

the use of *it's* for standard *there was* to introduce the story
name for standard *named*, *live* for *lived*, *like* for *liked*, etc.
deletion of *who* in the clause *live in Washington*
'most for standard *almost*
multiple negation *don't . . . nothing . . . neither*.

Answer to exercise 2 (c)

The form *be* has a habitual meaning in these sentences so it cannot occur in constructions which indicate the action took place at a particular point in time.

Hence sentence 8 is ungrammatical and should be marked with *.

Answer to exercise 3

As mentioned in the previous chapter, young people's awareness of society's attitudes, includ-ing attitudes to speech, becomes particularly acute during adolescence. So it is usually in their early teenage years that a person's stylistic repertoire expands. Majority group children often learn more standard speech forms for use in more formal situations at this stage, as men-tioned in the discussion of age-graded features in chapter 7. For minority group adolescents, however, the pattern is likely to be just the opposite. They become aware at this stage of the wider society's valuation and prejudice against their group, and this often leads to a rejection of the standard speech forms associated with the majority group. It seems likely that for those who used relatively few Patois features as children (at least in school), a greater use of Patois features in adolescence may serve the function of expressing negative attitudes towards the majority culture, while positively asserting their Black British identity.

Answer to exercise 4

There are a number of different types of clue. The expression 'speaking Pakeha' for 'speaking English' is more frequently used by Maori than Pakeha people. The pragmatic particle *eh* is another feature which tends to be more frequent in the speech of Maori people. The other interesting feature is the tense switching which has also been noted more frequently in Maori narratives. Note that the features discussed are matters of frequencies. They do not occur exclusively in the speech of Maori speakers.

Concepts introduced

Ethnicity
African American Vernacular English (AAVE)
British Black English
Maori English
New Englishes
Social network
Network density
Uniplex and multiplex networks
Community of practice
Constructions of social identity

References

The following sources provided material for this chapter:

Bell (2000), Holmes (1997a), McCallum (1978), Jacob (1990) for data on Maori English Bortoni-Ricardo (1985) data on Brasilia
Downes (1998) on ethnic differences in language use Dray and Sebba (2011) on Patois or Jamaican Creole
Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992, 1995) on jocks and burn-outs Edwards (1986) data on Patois in Britain Gal (1979) data on Oberwart

Gesslbauer (2003) on Patois or British Jamaican Creole
Kerswill and Williams (2000) on Milton Keynes
Kerswill, Torgersen and Fox (2006) on Multicultural London English Labov (1972a, 1972b, 1972c) data on American Black English

Milroy (1980), Milroy and Gordon (2003) on Belfast and networks
Nichols (1984) data on South Carolina communities
Schilling-Estes (2004) on constructionist approaches to ethnic identity
Schneider (2003), http://courses.nus.edu.sg/course/elltankw/history/NE.htm on New Englishes Shuy,
Wolfram and Riley (1967) data on Detroit Wenger (1998) on community of practice

Wolfram (1998) data for exercise 2(c)

Quotations

Exercise (1) sentence (a) from Kochman (1972: 261); sentence (c) from Edwards (1986: 144).
Example 3 is from Bryen, Hartman and Tait (1978: 2).
Example 7 is from data collected for McCallum's (1978) research.
Example 8 and quotation in exercise 4 from Jacob (1990).
Example 11 is from Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1995: 495).
Example 12 uses material collected by Jacob (1990).
Sapir quotation from Sapir (1921: 219).

Useful additional reading

Chambers (2003), Ch. 2
Crystal (2003)
Labov (1972b) and (1972c)
Meyerhoff (2011) Ch. 9
Milroy (1980), Ch. 3
Milroy and Gordon (2002), Ch. 5
Paris (2011)
Trudgill (2000) Ch. 3
Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (2006)

12 Gender, politeness and stereotypes

In this section of the book where we are examining styles and registers, the way language is used, the relationship between language, thought and culture, and linguistic attitudes, the topic of 'women's language' is one which illustrates all these concepts. Is 'women's language' a distinct style or register of a language? Are women more polite than men? Are there any differ-ences in the way women and men interact? How do we signal our gender and our sexuality through our linguistic choices? How is language used to refer to women and men? What message does the language used about women convey about their status in the community? These are the questions addressed in this chapter. Chapter 7 reviewed some of the evidence that women speak differently from men. In this chapter, I examine claims that women and men use language differently, and I also look at what language reveals about the way society categorises women.

Women's language and confidence

Example 1

'. . . a girl is damned if she does, damned if she doesn't. If she refuses to talk like a lady, she is ridiculed and subjected to criticism as unfeminine; if she does learn, she is ridiculed as unable to think clearly, unable to take part in a serious discussion: in some sense, as less than fully human. These two choices which a woman has – to be less than a woman or less than a person – are highly painful.'

While some social dialectologists suggested that women were status conscious, and that this explained their use of standard speech forms (see chapter 7), Robin Lakoff, an American linguist, suggested almost the opposite. She argued that women were using language which reinforced their subordinate status; they were 'colluding in their own subordination' by the way they spoke.

Social dialect research focuses on differences between women's and men's speech in the areas of pronunciation (such as [in] vs [ih]) and morphology (such as past tense forms), with some attention to syntactic constructions (such as multiple negation). Robin Lakoff shifted the focus of research on gender differences to syntax, semantics and style. She suggested that women's subordinate social status in US society is indicated by the language women use, as well as in the language used about them. She identified a number of linguistic features which she claimed were used more often by women than by men, and which in her opinion expressed uncertainty and lack of confidence.

Example 2

1. Lawyer: What was the nature of your acquaintance with the late Mrs E. D.?

Witness A: Well, we were, uh, very close friends. Uh she was even sort of like a mother to me.

Lawyer: And had the heart not been functioning, in other words, had the heart been stopped, there would have been no blood to have come from that region?

Witness B: It may leak down depending on the position of the body after death. But the presence of blood in the alveoli indicates that some active respiratory action had to take place.

The speech of the two female witnesses in example 2 contrasts in that witness A uses features of what Lakoff labelled 'women's language', while witness B does not. Before I describe these features, you might like to see if your intuitions about what constitutes 'women's language' agree with Lakoff's.

Exercise 1

Consider the following sentences. Put F beside those you think were said by a woman, M beside those you think were said by a man and F/M beside those you think could have been said by either.

Close the door.
That's an adorable dog.
Oh dear, the TV set's broken.
I'll be damned there's a friend of mine!
I was very tired.
Won't you please get me that pencil?
They did the right thing didn't they?
You're damn right!
I was just exhausted.
My goodness, there's the Prime Minister!
I was so mad.
Damn it, I've lost my keys!

Answers at end of chapter

Features of 'women's language'

Lakoff suggested that women's speech was characterised by linguistic features such as the following.[1] [> indicates rising intonation].

Lexical hedges or fillers, e.g. *you know, sort of, well, you see.*
Tag questions, e.g. *she's very nice, isn't she?*
Rising intonation on declaratives, e.g. *it's really g*Pod.
'Empty' adjectives, e.g. *divine, charming, cute.*

Precise colour terms, e.g. *magenta, aquamarine*.
Intensifiers such as *just* and *so*, e.g. *I like him so much*.
'Hypercorrect' grammar, e.g. consistent use of standard verb forms.
'Superpolite' forms, e.g. indirect requests, euphemisms.
Avoidance of strong swear words, e.g. *fudge, my goodness.*
Emphatic stress, e.g. *it was a BRILLIANT performance.*

Many of these features are illustrated in the list of sentences in exercise 1. Lakoff's claims were based on her own intuitions and observations, but they sparked off a spate of research because they appeared to be so specific and easy to investigate.

Much of this initial research was methodologically unsatisfactory. Speech was recorded in laboratory conditions with assigned topics, and sometimes rather artificial constraints (such as a screen between the speakers). Most of the subjects were university students. Consequently, it was difficult to generalise from the results to natural informal speech in the community as a whole. In addition, the linguistic analysis of the data was often rather unsophisticated.

Example 3

'The final syntactic category is imperative constructions in question form, which are defined as alternatives to simple and direct ways of ordering action. They are questions which are substituted for commands. "Will you please close the door?" instead of "Close the door" is an example of an imperative in question form.'

This quotation illustrates the kind of statement which betrayed lack of linguistic expertise among these early investigators of Lakoff's claims about women's speech. No linguist would describe 'will you please close the door?' as an imperative construction, and the expression 'imperative construction in question form' confuses form and function. (It is an interrogative construction expressing directive function.) Yet this was not untypical. Many of the categor-isation systems devised by non-linguists to measure features of 'women's language' seem rather odd or arbitrary to linguists. Another study, for instance, made a distinction between 'fillers' and 'hedges', with *sort of* classified as a hedge, while *well* and *you see* were described as 'meaningless particles' and assigned to the same category as 'pause fillers' such as *uh*, *um* and *ah*. But this is a complicated area where form alone is never an adequate guide for classification, and function and meaning need careful analysis.

As well as lacking linguistic expertise, many researchers also missed Lakoff's fundamental point. She had identified a number of linguistic features which were unified by their *function* of expressing lack of confidence. Her list was not an arbitrary conglomeration of forms. It was unified by the fact that the forms identified were means of expressing uncertainty or tentativeness. Other researchers, however, ignored this functional coherence, and simply listed any forms that produced a statistical difference between women and men, without providing any satisfactory explanation for why these differences might have arisen. One study, for example, analysed short sections from formal speeches by American female and male college students and found they differed on a range of features including the number of prepositional phrases, such as *at the back* (women used more) and progressive verb forms, such as *was walking* (men used more). Without a theoretical framework, it is difficult to know how to interpret such apparently arbitrary differences.

Nor did Lakoff claim her list was comprehensive. But because they ignored the underlying functional coherence which unified Lakoff's list of features, many researchers treated it as definitive. The internal coherence of the features Lakoff identified can be illustrated by dividing them into two groups. Firstly, there are linguistic devices which may be used for hedging or reducing the force of an utterance. Secondly, there are features which may boost or intensify a proposition's force. Researchers who recognised this functional unifying factor included in their analysis any form which had a hedging or boosting effect on an assertion. Those who didn't tended to stick to Lakoff's list as if it had been handed down like Moses' tablets.

Exercise 2

Allocate as many as possible of the features in the list provided by Lakoff to one of the following columns.

Features which may serve as:

Hedging devices	**Boosting devices**

Answer at end of chapter

Lakoff argued that both kinds of modifiers were evidence of an unconfident speaker. Hedging devices explicitly signal lack of confidence, while boosting devices express the speaker's anti-cipation that the addressee may remain unconvinced and therefore supply extra reassurance. So, she suggested, women use hedging devices to express uncertainty, and they use intensify-ing devices to persuade their addressee to take them seriously. Women boost the force of their utterances because they think that otherwise they will not be heard or paid attention to. Thus, according to Lakoff, both hedges and boosters express women's lack of confidence.

It is not surprising, given the range of methods used to collect and analyse the data, that the research results were often contradictory. In some studies, women were reported as using more tag questions than men, for instance, while in others men used more than women. Some researchers reported that women used up to three times as many hedges as men, while others noted no gender differences. Most, but not all, claimed women used more boosters or intensifiers than men.

One pair of researchers recorded the speech of witnesses in a law court and found that male witnesses used more 'women's language' features than women witnesses with more expertise in court or higher occupational status. Example 4 illustrates this.

Example 4

Lawyer: And you saw, you observed what?

Witness C: Well, after I heard – I can't really, I can't definitely state whether the brakes or the lights came first, but I rotated my head slightly to the right, and looked directly behind Mr Z, and I saw reflections of lights, and uh, very very instantaneously after that I heard a very, very loud explosion – from my standpoint of view it would have been an implosion because everything was forced outward like this, like a grenade thrown into the room. And, uh, it was, it was terrifically loud.

Witness C is a male witness who uses a relatively high number of hedges and boosters. These researchers suggested the forms be relabelled ‘powerless forms’ to emphasise a point made by Lakoff herself, that the patterns she had noted were characteristic of the speech of the powerless in society rather than of women exclusively. (It is also worth noting that one could argue the witness was simply being cautious about his claims.)

Overall, however, Lakoff’s claim that women used more hedging and boosting devices than men was borne out in a number of studies in English-speaking Western societies. But a more detailed analysis sometimes showed that these forms were not always expressing uncertainty.

Lakoff's linguistic features as politeness devices

Example 5

[> indicates rising intonation]

Susan is a university student. She is telling her friend and flatmate about her experiences at school.

I did my exams in sixty-three wls it.

The tag question is a syntactic device listed by Lakoff which may express uncertainty as example 5 illustrates. Susan is uncertain about the date, and she indicates this with a tag which signals doubt about what she is asserting. This tag focuses on the referential meaning of Susan's assertion – the accuracy of the information she is giving. But tags may also express affective meaning. They may function as facilitative or positive politeness devices, providing an addressee with an easy entrée into a conversation, as illustrated in example 6.

Example 6

[< indicates falling intonation]

Margaret is holding a small party to introduce a new neighbour, Frank, to other people in the street. She introduces Frank to an old friend, Andrew.

Margaret: Andrew this is our new neighbour, Frank. Andrew has just changed jobs, havmn't you.

Andrew: Yes I am now a well-paid computer programmer instead of a poorly paid administrative assistant.

Teachers, interviewers, hosts at parties and, in general, those in leadership roles who are responsible for the success of an interaction tend to use tags in this facilitative way. The host provides the guests with a topic of conversation. In example 7, the teacher makes it easy for the child to participate.

Example 7

Mrs Short is a primary school teacher working with a group of 5-year-olds. They are preparing for a nature walk by looking at pictures of birds, flowers and leaves that they hope to see on their walk.

Mrs Short: Here's a pretty one what's this one called Simon?

Simon: Mm, erm [pause]

Mrs Short: See its tail, look at its tail. It's a fantail, isn't it?

Simon: Mm a fantail. I seen one of them.

A tag may also soften a directive or a criticism as in example 8.

Example 8

Zoe and her mother Claire have just come home from the supermarket. Zoe empties the shopping basket all over the kitchen floor.

Claire: That was a bit of a daft thing to do, wasn't it?

Here the tag's function is not to express uncertainty, but rather affectively to soften the critical comment, indicating concern for Zoe's feelings.

Tags may also be used as confrontational and coercive devices. Example 9 is an example of a tag used to force feedback from an uncooperative addressee.

Example 9

A police superintendent is interviewing a detective constable and is criticising the constable's performance:

. . . you'll probably find yourself um before the Chief Constable, okay?

Yes, Sir, yes, understood.

A: Now you er fully understand that, don't you?

Yes, Sir, indeed, yeah.

The tag in this exchange functions not to hedge but rather to strengthen the negative force of the utterance in which it occurs. So here we have a tag which could be classified as a boosting device. Treating all tags as signals of uncertainty is clearly misleading.

Table 12.1 summarises the patterns found in a 60,000-word corpus containing equal amounts of female and male speech collected in a range of matched contexts. It is clear that in this corpus the women used more tags than the men, as Lakoff predicted. But more interesting is the fact that women and men used them more often for different functions. Women put more emphasis than men on the polite or affective functions of tags, using them as facilitative positive politeness devices. Men, on the other hand, used more tags for the expression of uncertainty.

Table 12.1 Distribution of tag questions by function and sex of speaker

Function of tag	*Women* %	*Men* %
Expressing uncertainty	35	61
Facilitative	59	26
Softening	6	13
Confrontational	–	–
Total	100	100
N	51	39

Source: Based on Holmes 1984a: 54.

Exercise 3

Using the contextual information together with the information provided on intonation, how would you characterise the functions of the tags in the following examples?

The teacher is talking to Sam, a pupil who is looking at a picture of a butterfly in a cocoon in a book:
Teacher: What's this called Sam?
Sam:*No answer.*
Teacher: It's a cocoon isv't it?

Conversation in kitchen between flatmates: Thomas:
This isn't Bridget's egg beater ts it? Michael: No, it's ours. We still haven't found hers.

Older child 'tutor' to younger child who is reading to her:
Fran:That's not right is ut? Try again sh.

To visitor who has called in for a chat with a group of neighbours:
Sally:Ray had some bad luck at the races yesterday didv't you Ray?

One friend to another in a relaxed conversation at her home:
Fiona:But then it would pass on to the rest of your family woãldn't it?
Jim:No, not necessarily.

Answers at end of chapter

What has emerged from this discussion of tag questions is not peculiar to tags. Many lin-guistic forms have complex functions. Similar results have been found when other so-called 'hedges' such as *you know* and *I think* have been analysed. They are used differently in different contexts. They mean different things according to their pronunciation, their position in the utterance, what kind of speech act they are modifying and who is using them to whom in what context. Like tags, they are often used as politeness devices rather than as expressions of uncertainty.

Analyses which take account of the function of features of women's speech often suggest that women are facilitative and supportive conversationalists, rather than unconfident, tentative talkers. What is more, this image is consistent with the explanation suggested in chapter 7 for the use of more standard speech forms by many women. In using standard forms, these women could be seen as responding positively to their addressees by accommodating to their speech. When women use more politeness devices, this could be regarded as another way in which they show consideration for the addressee.

This also suggests that explanations of differences between women's and men's speech behaviour which refer only to the status or power dimension are likely to be unsatisfactory. The social distance (or solidarity dimension) is at least as influential. Many of the features which have been identified as characteristic of women's language are positive politeness devices expressing solidarity. And as will be illustrated in the discussion below, there are many other factors which are also relevant when comparing women's and men's use of language, including culture, social role and the formality of the context.

Exercise 4

A study of the language used by prospective jurors in law courts in Tucson, Arizona, identified interesting grammatical differences between women's and men's utterances. It was found that men deleted what were described as 'non-essential' words more often than women – especially in monologues. (i) is an utterance with an example of what was regarded as 'non-essential' elements deleted.

I'm employed with the city of Tucson. Aah been there over nine months. In this utterance *I have* has been deleted before *been*.

My name is Sophia K. Jacobs. I'm employed by Krable, Parsons and Dooley. I've been employed there for ten years as a bookkeeper an' junior accountant. My husband is employed by (Amphitheater) school district. He's a teacher. And he's worked there for ten years. I have never been on a trial jury before. I don't have any formal legal training.

Herb R. Beasley, senior. President of Beasley Refrigeration Incorporated. Do commercial refrigeration. And my wife's name is Lillian an' she works in the office. I've never been on a trial jury and no legal training.

Utterance (ii) illustrates the kind of utterances that women jurors produced. Utterance (iii) illustrates the kind that male jurors typically produced. Overall in this study men deleted 'non-essential' words more often than women.

Compare utterances (ii) and (iii). Identify places where so-called 'non-essential' elements may have been deleted.

How would you interpret the significance of this data?

What extra information would you need in order to support your preferred interpretation?

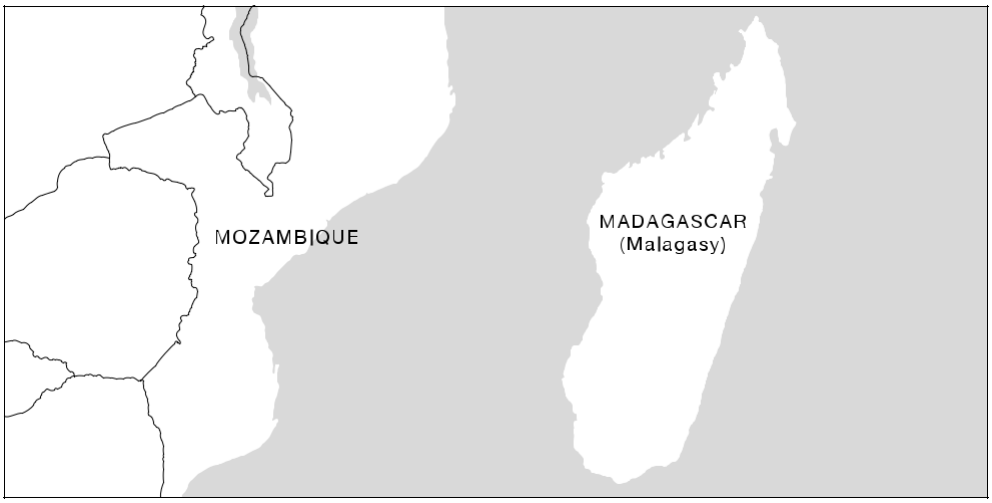
Answers at end of chapter

Exercise 5

An article in *New Scientist* (25 June 2011) claims that new online gender-checking software can identify the gender of a writer on the basis of a programme which identifies 157 gender-significant features. These include differences in punctuation as well as pronouns and lexical items. The software has been used to analyse the language of bloggers, and the next version will analyse tweets and Facebook updates. What sort of question might a sociolinguist ask about such analysis?

Answer at end of chapter

The data reviewed in this section has been collected in English-speaking Western communities. To what extent can the patterns described be generalised to different cultures? This is an interesting question which is gradually being addressed by a number of researchers. There are some indications, however, that we should be cautious in interpreting patterns observed in other cultures through Western spectacles. In a study of a Mayan community in Mexico, for instance, overall the women used more politeness devices than the men, so the pattern seemed to resemble the Western pattern. But, interestingly, the men used far fewer politeness



Map 12.1 Madagascar

forms to each other than to women, so male talk to males was relatively plain and unmodified. In all other contexts, everyone used more politeness devices. In this community, 'men's talk' could be seen as the unusual variety. So-called 'women's talk' was the norm, used by everyone in most contexts.

In Malagasy, by contrast, it is the men rather than the women who qualify and modify their utterances, and who generally use less direct language. Since indirectness is equated with politeness, Malagasy men are correspondingly considered the more polite speakers, another clear contrast with Western norms, but one which is accounted for by the specific social roles of women and men in that community. In other communities, too, factors such as social role or status are relevant to the different patterns of language use by women and men. Indeed, a study of Samoan personal narratives found that status was more important than gender in accounting for the use of certain positive politeness devices. Statusful women with a Samoan title, for instance, used fewer such devices than young untitled men. On the other hand, titled Samoan men used the highest frequency of negative politeness devices, expressing social distance. In order to interpret such patterns, researchers must look carefully not only at the relationships between women and men in different cultures, but also at the contribution of factors such as status, role, interaction patterns and the meanings conveyed by particular patterns of linguistic behaviour in particular social contexts and cultures.

Interaction

Example 10

'A good guiding dinner party principle is given by Mrs Ian Fleming. She says that guests can be roughly divided into "shouters" and "listeners", and the best assortment is three shouters to five listeners.'

If you had to put money on the likely gender of the 'shouters' vs the 'listeners' what would you venture? Despite the widespread stereotype of women as the talkative sex, and proverbs which characterise women as garrulous ('Women's tongues are like lambs' tails; they are never still'), most of the research evidence points the other way. In a wide range of contexts, particularly non-private ones such as television interviews, staff meetings and conference discussions, where talking may increase your status, men dominate the talking time.

There are many features of interaction which have been shown to differentiate the talk of women and men in particular contexts. Mrs Fleming's distinction identifies one of them. In this section, I will discuss two others: interrupting behaviour and conversational feedback.

Interruptions

Example 11

Wanda: Did you see here that two sociologists have just proved that men interrupt women all the time? They –

Ralph: Who says?

Wanda: Candace West of Florida State and Don Zimmerman of the University of California at Santa Barbara. They taped a bunch of private conversations, and guess what they found. When two or three women are talking, interruptions are about equal. But when a man talks to a woman, he makes 96 per cent of the interruptions. They think it's a dominance trick men aren't even aware of. But –

Ralph: These people have nothing better to do than eavesdrop on interruptions?

Wanda: – but women make 'retrievals' about one third of the time. You know, they pick up where they were left off after the man –

Ralph: Surely not all men are like that Wanda?

Wanda: – cuts in on what they were saying. Doesn't that –

Ralph: Speaking as a staunch supporter of feminism, I deplore it Wanda.

Wanda: (*sigh*) I know, dear.

Ralph here illustrates a pattern for which there is a great deal of research evidence. The most widely quoted study, and the one referred to by Wanda in example 11, collected examples of students' exchanges in coffee bars, shops and other public places on a tape-recorder carried by one of the researchers. The results were dramatic, as table 12.2 illustrates. In same-gender interactions, interruptions were pretty evenly distributed between speakers. In cross-gender interactions, almost all the interruptions were from males.

These researchers followed up this study with one which recorded interactions in sound-proof booths in a laboratory. The percentage of male interruptions decreased to 75 per cent in this less natural setting, but there was no doubt that men were still doing most of the interrupting. In other contexts, too, it has been found that men interrupt others more than women do. In departmental meetings and doctor–patient interactions, for instance, the pattern holds. Women got interrupted more than men, regardless of whether they were the doctors or the patients. In exchanges between parents and children, fathers did most of the interrupting, and daughters were interrupted most – both by their mothers and their

Table 12.2 Average number of interruptions per interaction

	Interruptions %
Same-sex interaction	
Speaker 1	43
Speaker 2	57
Cross-sex interaction	
Woman	4
Man	96

Source: From Zimmerman and West 1975: 116.

fathers. And a study of pre-schoolers found that some boys start practising this strategy for dominating the talk at a very early age. Women are evidently socialised from early childhood to expect to be interrupted. Consequently, they generally give up the floor with little or no protest, as example 12 illustrates.

Example 12

A conversational interaction between a man and a woman.

Woman: How's your paper coming?
Man: Alright I guess. I haven't done much in the past two weeks.
Woman: Yeah. Know how that G can J
Man: IHeyL ya' got an extra cigarette?
Woman: Oh uh sure (*hands him the pack*)
like my G pa- J
Man: IHowL 'bout a match
Woman: 'Ere ya go uh like my G pa- J
Man: IThanksL
Woman: Sure. I was gonna tell you Gmy-J
Man: IHeyL I'd really like ta' talk but
I gotta run – see ya
Woman: Yeah.

(The words within the square brackets were uttered simultaneously.)

(West C. and Zimmerman D. 1977)

Exercise 6

Does the data in table 12.3 support the claims made above concerning women's and men's interaction patterns? Who talks most, men or women? Do the men interrupt more than the women?

What questions or qualifications would you want to raise in order to be sure you were interpreting the data accurately?

Answer at end of chapter

Table 12.3 Turns speaking time, and interruptions in seven staff meetings

Speaker	*Average turns per meeting*	*Average no. of seconds per turn*	*Average 'did interrupt' per meeting*	*Average 'was interrupted' per meeting*
Woman A	5.5	7.8	0.5	3.0
Woman B	5.8	10.0	0.0	3.0
Woman C	8.0	3.0	1.0	3.2
Woman D	20.5	8.5	2.0	7.5
Man E	11.3	16.5	2.0	2.6
Man F	32.3	17.1	8.0	6.7
Man G	32.6	13.2	6.6	6.3
Man H	30.2	10.7	4.3	5.0
Man I	17.0	15.8	4.5	2.5

Source: Modified from Eakins and Eakins (1979: 58).

Exercise 7

With their permission, record a relaxed conversation between a small group of your friends. Include both males and females if possible. Listen to the tape and count the interruptions. Do the men interrupt more than the women? What kinds of problems arise in attempting this exercise? Discuss your findings with your friends.

Answer at end of chapter

Feedback

Example 13

Mary: I worked in that hotel for – ah eleven years and I found the patrons were really really you know good
Jill: Mm.
Mary: You had the odd one or two ruffian'd come in and cause a fight but they were soon dealt with.
Jill: Right, really just takes one eh? To start trouble.
Mary: Yeah, and and it was mostly the younger ones
Jill: Mm.
Mary: that would start you know.
Jill: Yeah.
Mary: The younger – younger ones couldn't handle their booze.
Jill: Mm.

Another aspect of the picture of women as cooperative conversationalists is the evidence that women provide more encouraging feedback to their conversational partners than men do.

One New Zealand study which examined the distribution of positive feedback (noises such as *mm* and *mhm*) in casual relaxed interaction between young people found that women gave over four times as much of this type of supportive feedback as men. American studies of informal speech as well as talk in classrooms and under laboratory conditions have also demonstrated that women typically provide significantly more encouraging and positive feedback to their addressees than men do. One researcher noted that women students were also more likely than men to enlarge on and develop the ideas of a previous speaker rather than challenge them.

In general, then, research on conversational interaction reveals women as cooperative conversationalists, whereas men tend to be more competitive and less supportive of others. Why are women's patterns of interaction different from men's? Is it because they are sub-ordinate in status to men in most communities so that they must strive to please? Or are there other explanations?

Exercise 8

Compare the transcript provided in example 12 with the one provided in example 13. Identify specific examples in these transcripts of the patterns of interaction discussed in the preceding section.

Answer at end of chapter

Explanations

In an interesting range of this research, it seems to be gender rather than occupational status, social class or some other social factor which most adequately accounts for the inter-actional patterns described. Women doctors were consistently interrupted by their patients, while male doctors did most of the interrupting in their consultations. A study of women in business organisations showed that women bosses did not dominate the interactions. Males dominated regardless of whether they were boss or subordinate. The societally sub-ordinate position of women indicated by these patterns has more to do with gender than role or occupation. For this data at least, women's subordinate position in a male-dominated society seems the most obvious explanatory factor.

Women's cooperative conversational strategies, however, may be explained better by looking at the influence of context and patterns of socialisation. The norms for women's talk may be the norms for small group interaction in private contexts, where the goals of the inter-action are solidarity stressing – maintaining good social relations. Agreement is sought and disagreement avoided. By contrast, the norms for male interaction seem to be those of public referentially-oriented interaction. The public model is an adversarial one, where contradiction and disagreement is more likely than agreement and confirmation of the statements of others. Speakers compete for the floor and for attention; and wittiness, even at others' expense, is highly valued. These patterns seem to characterise men's talk even in private contexts, as will be illustrated below.

Exercise 9

If one accepts the generalisation that the goals of women's talk are often aimed at maintaining good social relations and emphasising solidarity, while men's talk is more often referentially oriented and competitive, whose norms prevail in mixed-gender informal interaction in your experience?

Answer at end of chapter

The differences between women and men in ways of interacting may be the result of different socialisation and acculturation patterns. If we learn ways of talking mainly in single-gender peer groups, then the patterns we learn are likely to be gender-specific. And the kind of miscom-munication which undoubtedly occurs between women and men may well be attributable to the different expectations each gender has of the function of the interaction, and the ways it is appropriately conducted. Some of these differences will be illustrated in the next section.

Gossip

Example 14

Three women chatting as they work.

Maryanne: Well I don't know how she puts up with him.
Chris: God he's awful – a real dickhead I'm not kidding.
Maryanne : And he's so rude. He interrupts her all the time and he puts her down – even in front of her friends.
Fran: She must be nuts.
Maryanne: Exactly – but he's rolling of course. He gets two thousand dollars a shot as an after-dinner speaker.
Fran: Yeah?
Chris: (*singing*) Can't buy me love, can't buy me love!

Gossip describes the kind of relaxed in-group talk that goes on between people in informal contexts. In Western society, gossip is defined as 'idle talk' and considered particularly char-acteristic of women's interaction. Its overall function for women is to affirm solidarity and maintain the social relationships between the women involved.

Women's gossip focuses predominantly on personal experiences and personal relation-ships, on personal problems and feelings. It may include criticism of the behaviour of others, but women tend to avoid criticising people directly because this would cause discomfort. A common male reaction to this behaviour is to label it two-faced, but this is to mistake its purpose which is often to relieve feelings and reinforce shared values, rather than simply to communicate referential information. In gossip sessions, women provide a sympathetic response to any experience recounted, focusing almost exclusively on the affective message – what it says about the speaker's feelings and relationships – rather than its referential content. Recordings of a women's group over a nine-month period, for instance, showed how women built on and developed each other's topics, told anecdotes in support of each other's points, and generally confirmed the attitudes and reactions of other participants.

Not surprisingly, women's gossip is characterised by a number of the linguistic features of women's language described above. Propositions which express feelings are often attenuated and qualified, or alternatively intensified. Facilitative tags are frequent, encouraging others to comment and contribute. Women complete each other's utterances, agree frequently and provide supportive feedback. The following example of shared turns from a gossip session between women who worked together at a bakery illustrates the cooperative and positive nature of their talk.

Example 15

Jill: Perhaps next time I see Brian I'll *pump* him for information. Brian tells me all
Fran: the gossip.
Jill: I know it's about 6 years old but
Fran: [laugh] it doesn't matter.
Jill: It doesn't matter at all.
Fran: True, true, it's the thought that counts.

The male equivalent of women's gossip is difficult to identify. In parallel situations, the topics men discuss tend to focus on things and activities, rather than personal experiences and feelings. Topics like sport, cars and possessions turn up regularly. The focus is on information and facts rather than on feelings and reactions.

In a study of a parallel group of men working at the bakery, the linguistic features of the interaction were also quite different. Long pauses were tolerated and were apparently not inter-preted as discouraging following a contribution, even one which seemed to invite a response. Responses frequently disagreed with or challenged the previous speaker's statements in any case, as example 16 illustrates.

Example 16

Bernard: And er they're very smart.
Con: Well, then, how come they keep getting caught all the time.
Judd: Maybe that's why they
Bernard: (*interrupts*) They don't. You've got to be really clever to pull one you know.

The men provided conflicting accounts of the same event, argued about a range of topics such as whether apples were kept in cases or crates, criticised each other constantly for apparently minor differences of approach to things, and changed topic abruptly. Their strategies for amusing each other were often to top or out-do the previous speaker's utterance or to put them down. In other words, their talk contrasted completely with the cooperative, agreeing, supportive, topically coherent talk of the women in exactly the same context – working in the bakery – on a different night.

The following excerpt illustrates the competitive verbal abuse which was typical of the male interaction in the bakery.

Example 17

Greg: Crate!
Jim: Case!
Greg: What?
Jim: They come in cases Greg not crates.
Greg: Oh same thing if you must be picky over every one thing.
Jim: Just shut your fucking head Greg!
Greg: Don't tell me to fuck off fuck (. . .)
Jim: I'll come over and shut yo
Allan: (*Laughingly using a thick-sounding voice*) Yeah I'll have a crate of apples thanks
Greg: No fuck off Allan.
Allan: A dozen.
Con: (*Amused tone*) Shitpicker!

It seems possible that for men mock-insults and abuse serve the same function – expressing solidarity and maintaining social relationships – as compliments and agreeing comments do for women. This verbal sparring is reported by others who have examined all-male interaction and in some groups verbal insult is an established and ritual speech activity.

Evidence of this kind makes it easier to understand why some researchers have suggested that women and men belong to different cultural groups. It also helps explain why women and men sometimes miscommunicate.

Exercise 10

What do you think is the woman's primary aim in the conversation below? Is her focus mainly referential or social? How do you know?

Does the man interpret her intention accurately do you think? What is his primary concern?

The exchange took place at a camping ground. The man was fiddling with his radio attempting to tune in to a station; the woman was passing by and stopped to talk to him.

Example 18

Woman: You've got a radio there then.
Man: Yes (pause) I'm trying to get the weather.
Woman: I've been trying on mine but I can't get a thing.
Man: Mm.
Woman: We really need to know before we leave (pause) we're on bikes you see.
Man: Mm.
Woman: I've got a handicapped kiddie too (*pause*) we're from Hamilton and we're cycling to Taupo. (*pause*) Where are you going then?
Man: Taupo.

Answer at end of chapter

You should note once again, that most of the research referred to describes women's and men's interaction patterns in Western English-speaking communities, and most of the data comes from white middle-class adult speakers. While there is some evidence that women tend to be more supportive and men more competitive conversationalists in other cultures too, there is an increasing amount of research describing alternative patterns of interaction. In the rural Malagasy community mentioned above, women take more confrontational roles and their speech is more direct than men's. It is women who handle the bargaining necessary in the market-place, for instance, and it is the women who deal with family arguments and disagreements. Men's speech in this community is indirect and circumlocutionary. Not surprisingly, given that men hold the positions of power in the community, it is indirect allusive speech which is most highly valued in the Malagasy community. The direct information-oriented style so highly prized in Western society would be regarded as unspeakably rude – and feminine! Thus a com-munity's attitudes towards different speech styles may provide social information about the status of those who use them, a topic which will be pursued further in chapter 15. Incidentally, what assumptions did you make about the gender of the hedgehogs on page 319?

The Malagasy example leads to a consideration of the fact that there is variation within Western communities too. Generalisations are useful in the search for patterns and explanations, but it is important to remember that not all men behave like those in examples 12 and 17, and even Greg and Jim no doubt interact differently in different contexts. The next section outlines an approach which is much more dynamic in considering gendered language behaviour.

The linguistic construction of gender

Example 19

Ed: he's I mean he's like a real artsy fartsy fag he's like [*indecipherable*] he's so gay he's got this like really high voice and wire rim glasses

The final section of chapter 8 considered ways in which individuals draw from a range of linguistic resources to construct particular social identities, including gender identity. We generally treat gender as 'given' and unalterable, automatically classifying every person we encounter as female or male without a moment's reflection. Sometimes, however, our assump-tions are challenged and we have to re-think. In example 19, Ed criticises a man who fails to fit the established masculine norms, but, ironically, Ed's criticism uses features associated with, or 'indexing', a more feminine speech style, such as frequent use of the particle *like*, hedges, such as *I mean*, and intensifiers, such as *real*, *so* and *really*. Yet Ed is talking in a male-only context. This example clearly challenges some of the generalisations in earlier sections, and encourages a more dynamic and subtle analysis of the interaction between gender and talk.

Approaching gender identity as a construction, rather than as a fixed category, is also use-ful in accounting for examples where women adapt to masculine contexts, and men adapt to feminine contexts by using features which indirectly index or are associated with masculinity and femininity. Women in the police force, for instance, are sometimes advised to portray a masculine image – to wear bulky sweaters suggesting upper-body strength, and well-worn boots to suggest they are used to hard work. They also adopt a cool distant style; they don't smile much, and they talk 'tough'. Men who work in clothing shops and hairdressing salons, on the other hand, often construct a more feminine identity in these contexts than when they are in the pub or the sports club changing room. They use features which index femininity, such as affectionate terms of address and other characteristics of the cooperative discourse style associated with 'gossip'; they avoid strong swear words, and they act as responsive and facilitative conversationalists, encouraging their addressee to talk.

Example 20

Helen describes her daughter's attempt to learn to swim.

Helen: she looked like a goldfish you (*laughs*) know there's a little head a – a rolling in the water (*laughs*) and legs sort of sagging in the water and breaststroking away you know

One of the more obvious ways in which people construct particular kinds of social identity is through their narratives of personal experience. In answer to a question about her father's health, one woman, Helen, gave her friend an account of what she had been doing all day, including the information that she had visited her father. Helen's long story constructs a very conservative gender identity for herself. She recounts that she had taken her children swimming, encouraged her younger daughter's attempts to swim (example 20 is a snippet

from the story), persuaded her oldest daughter to cook her grandfather's lunch, and put her own needs consistently last. The identity constructed is 'good mother' and 'dutiful daughter'. The discourse style is characterised by interactive pragmatic particles such as *you know* and *you see*, appealing to shared experience, hedges like *sort of* and even rather 'feminine' adjectives such as *cute*, *little* and *sweet* to describe her daughters. In other contexts, however, Helen con-structs a more contestive and less conformist gender identity. At work, for instance, where she is a senior manager, she often challenges ideas she disagrees with, using a very assertive discourse style characterised by very few hedges and unmitigated direct questions.

In recounting her story, Helen constructs not only her own gender identity, but she also presents very 'gendered' identities for her daughters. example 20 presents Helen's youngest daughter, Andrea, as a sweet little girl, gamely swimming along with her admiring mother alongside. Andrea wasn't present when the story was told, but 4-year-old Ian was part of the audience in the next example.

Example 21

June and Mike are Ian's parents. Mary is his auntie who is visiting them after work.

Mary: Hi Ian what have you been up to today?

June: Oh he's been just terrible (*laugh*). Unbelievable. First he emptied all the kitchen cupboards before we were even out of bed – absolute chaos with everyone rushing round trying to get ready for work – pans and soap powder all over the floor. (*General laughter*) Then he got himself into the bathroom and what does he do? He empties all my expensive bubble bath into the bath with the water running. So we've got bubbles everywhere – the bathroom was just full of soap (*laugh*). Mike nearly broke his neck just trying to switch off the tap. He's just too much – a real monkey (*laugh*).

Mike: (*Laugh*) Yes he's a real little rascal – a real bad lad – eh Ian!

Exercise 11

What messages is Ian getting about his behaviour?
How are these signalled in the excerpt?

Answer at end of chapter

Narratives are just one means of constructing particular gender identities. Approaching the construction of gender as a process, rather than regarding gender as a given category, leads to a view of individuals as constantly 'doing' gender. As illustrated in earlier chapters, every phonological, lexical and syntactic selection conveys social information. Ways of expressing solidarity or informality may also be gendered as well as expressed differently among different social and ethnic groups. The form that teasing or 'joshing' takes, for instance, is often quite distinctive for particular communities of practice. This approach encourages us to view every linguistic (and non-linguistic) choice as meaningful. Every time we speak, we are either rein-forcing existing norms or we are challenging them. People who do not neatly fit into standard gender categories are particularly aware of this process.

The linguistic construction of sexuality

Example 22

When did you first realise you were heterosexual?

Example 22 will be considered a strange utterance in communities where heterosexuality is considered 'normal' and unmarked. In many societies, the discourse of gender conveys a message that heterosexuality is normal, and that people who desire same sex partners are in some ways odd or deviant. The English word 'queer' when used to refer to such people used to convey this derogatory assumption of deviancy. It was reclaimed in the late twentieth century by the groups that it was used to describe, so that it is now generally not regarded as insulting, at least in the USA and New Zealand, and it has developed new meanings. For some, the term 'queer' now includes all those who reject orthodox assumptions about what is con-sidered 'normal' in the area of sexuality and desire: e.g. gay men, lesbian women, transvestites, transgendered and inter-sex people. For others, it has simply become an alternative to 'gay', though perhaps with less unambiguously positive connotations. It will no doubt continue to develop new meanings as new labels develop to describe non-normative sexuality and desire.

Examining the relationship between language and sexuality involves considering how people construct their sexual identity – as gay, heterosexual, lesbian or bisexual, for instance. But it also involves considering how people use language to learn about sex, talk about sex and desire, and engage in sexual activities. How do young women indicate to young men that they are interested in them as potential sexual partners? What are the features of the courtship rituals in different societies? What are the discourse features of 'coming out' stories? Who tells 'dirty' jokes to whom, why and how? How is the discourse of sex education managed in schools? These are the kinds of topics that researchers in the area of language and sexuality consider interesting.

The earlier sections of this chapter described some of the linguistic features used to index gender in English. As example 19 suggested, these features are available as resources for expressing sexual identity. Heterosexual people typically make normative choices in most contexts, constructing themselves as 'feminine' or 'masculine', and thereby signalling their sexuality. Homosexual people may use the same linguistic features to convey the same meanings in many contexts, but there is a good deal of research, especially on features of the speech of homosexual men, which indicates that they may draw on additional linguistic resources for indicating their sexual orientation through their speech.

Researchers have identified a number of features associated with English 'gay' speech, including the use of stereotypically feminine vocabulary items, such as *divine*, features of pronunciation, such as affrication so that /t/ sounds like [ts], 'wavy' intonation and dramatic variations in pitch. But, of course, it is not the case that all and only gay people use such features. Moreover, many of these features prove to be ephemeral, since they are based on the speech of people from particular social, regional and ethnic backgrounds at a particular point in time. Variation in the sexualities constructed by lesbians in Japanese bars and by Hindi-speaking lesbians in New Delhi further emphasises the fact that there is no such phenomenon as a universal 'gay' variety, even when researchers focus on just one language.

More interesting is the suggestion that certain rhetorical strategies can index sexuality. 'Camp talk', for example, is widely regarded as indexing homosexuality through features such as exaggeration, parody, paradox, inversion of expected relationships and linguistic playful-ness. So, for example, camp talk may deliberately mix registers, or refer to males as 'she', or challenge well-established cultural values, as in the quotations in example 23 , or make use of clever double meanings in amusing insults, as in example 23.

Example 23

'The one charm of marriage is that it makes a life of deception absolutely necessary for both parties' (Oscar Wilde)

'If love is the answer, could you please rephrase the question?' (Lily Tomlin)

Example 24

'My dear, your hair looks as if you've dyed' (Bruce Rodgers)

This kind of talk is often amusing but also deliberately disrespectful and disturbing; it chal-lenges hegemonic heterosexual culture and constructs those who use it as non-conformist. Intimate talk is another area which often breaks taboos in expressing sexuality and sexual desire. Couples may address and refer to each other as animals, or use baby-talk to express intimacy and desire. At the other extreme, telephone sex operators serving heterosexual clients typically construct sexual identities which are completely conformist and predictable. They make extensive use of the features identified by Lakoff as 'women's language' (described above) to convey a powerless, vulnerable and thus, in the context of the transaction, erotic femininity. Personal ads aimed at attracting a heterosexual partner are similarly very conven-tional in what they focus on in the few words available.

Example 25

GORGEOUS, BLONDE, FEMALE **22**, SEEKS SMART, RICH, GENEROUS MALE FOR FUN AND FRIENDSHIP.

MALE IT PROGRAMMER, **26**, HONEST AND CARING, SEEKS CURVY BLONDE FEMALE **23–28**, FUN TO BE WITH, FOR LASTING RELATIONSHIP.

As these two ads illustrate, heterosexual women tend to describe themselves in terms of their looks, and they desire men who are well-heeled, while heterosexual men inform their readers about their occupations and desire women who are attractive. In other words, these ads draw on well-established, familiar indices of cultural value such as physical attractiveness for women and economic security for men.

Exercise 12

Collect ten examples of personal ads from a magazine or newspaper published in your speech community. Identify any linguistic features which signal the sexuality of the advertiser. Do these conform to the norms of your community or do they contest them in some way?

Example from *The London Review of Books*

I am Mr Right! You are Miss Distinct Possibility. Your parents are Mr and Mrs Obscenely Rich. Your Uncle is Mr Expert Tax Lawyer. Your cousin is Ms Spare Apartment on a Caribbean Hideaway that She Rarely Uses. Your brother is Mr Can Fix You Up A Fake Passport for a Small Fee. Man, 51.

Exercise 13

'When I am good I am very good. But when I am bad I am better' (Mae West)

This quotation has been described as an example of 'camp talk'. In what ways does this quotation conform to the description above and in what ways does it challenge it.

Answer in next paragraph

The quotation is clever and funny and involves a 'double entendre' with a sexual innuendo. It also involves a subversion of the predictable pattern in the unexpected choice of last word. These are typical features of camp talk. However, camp talk has generally been associated with homosexual men's talk while Mae West is a very feminine sexual icon. Including Mae West's comedy style as an example of 'camp talk' recognises that we are discussing a style of talk, not a dialect restricted to a particular social group with a particular sexual orientation. Linguistic resources are available to everyone to use for a range of social effects.

This approach encourages us to view every linguistic (and non-linguistic) choice as meaningful. As noted above, every time we speak, we either reinforce existing norms or we contest them. This belief explains why feminists object to sexist language.

More Mae West quotes

A dame that knows the ropes isn't likely to get tied up.
Anything worth doing is worth doing slowly.
Between two evils, I always pick the one I never tried before.
Don't keep a man guessing too long – he's sure to find the answer somewhere else.

Sexist language

In 1980, an American linguist, Dwight Bolinger, published a book called *Language: the Loaded Weapon*. In it he explored the wide variety of ways in which the English language provides

categories and ways of encoding experience which could be regarded as 'loaded' – in other words, carrying an implicit value judgement or manipulating responses. Alongside discussions of the language used in advertising and politics, he also considered the area of sexist language. Sexist language is one example of the way a culture or society conveys its values from one group to another and from one generation to the next.

Language conveys attitudes. Sexist attitudes stereotype a person according to gender rather than judging on individual merits. Sexist language encodes stereotyped attitudes to women and men. In principle, then, the study of sexist language is concerned with the way language expresses both negative and positive stereotypes of both women and men. In practice, research in this area has concentrated on the ways in which language conveys negative attitudes to women.

Can a language be sexist?

Feminists have claimed that English is a sexist language. At first sight, it may seem odd to suggest that a language rather than its speakers are sexist. Sexism involves behaviour which maintains social inequalities between women and men. Can a language contribute to the maintenance of social inequalities between women and men?

There are a number of ways in which it has been suggested that the English language discriminates against women. Most obviously, perhaps, in the semantic area the English metaphors available to describe women include an extraordinarily high number of derogatory images compared to those used to describe men.

Example 26

The chicken metaphor tells the whole story of a girl's life. In her youth she is a *chick*, then she marries and begins feeling *cooped up*, so she goes to *hen parties* where she *cackles* with her friends. Then she has her *brood* and begins to *hen-peck* her husband. Finally, she turns into an *old biddy*.

Animal imagery is one example of an area where the images of women seem considerably less positive than those for men. Consider the negativity of *bitch*, *old biddy* and *cow*, compared to *stud* and *wolf*. Animal imagery which refers to men often has at least some positive com-ponent (such as wiliness or sexual prowess). *Birds* are widely regarded as feather-brained and flighty! Even the more positive *chick* and *kitten* are sweet but helpless pets.

Women may also be described or referred to in terms of food imagery, which is equally insulting. Saccharine terms, such as *sugar*, *sweetie*, *honey*, are mainly, though not exclusively, used for addressing women. Less complimentary terms such as *crumpet* and *tart*, however, are restricted to female referents. They illustrate a common evolutionary pattern in the meaning of words referring to women. Terms which were originally neutral or affectionate eventually acquire negative connotations as they increasingly refer only to women and as their meanings focus on women as sexual objects. By contrast, there appears to be less food imagery which is appropriate for referring only to men, though there are insulting terms such as *veg* and *cabbage*, and, according to one 11-year-old, *parsnip*, which may be used to abuse girls or boys!

Exercise 14

If you are familiar with a language other than English, do some research to see whether there is any evidence of sexism expressed through the vocabulary and imagery of that language.

Many words reinforce a view of women as a deviant, abnormal or subordinate group. For example, English morphology – its word-structure – generally takes the male form as the base form and adds a suffix to signal 'female': e.g. *lion/lioness*, *count/countess*, *actor/actress*; *usher/usherette*; *hero/heroine*; *aviator/aviatrix*. This is true for a number of other European lan-guages, such as French and German, too. The male form is the unmarked form, and therefore, it is argued, implicitly the norm. The use of an additional suffix to signal 'femaleness' is seen as conveying the message that women are deviant or abnormal.

It has also been suggested that suffixes like *-ess* and *-ette* trivialise and diminish women, and, when they refer to occupations such as *authoress* and *poetess*, carry connotations of lack of seriousness. This attitude doubtless derives from the meaning of the associated diminutive suffixes in terms such as *laundrette* ('a little laundry') and *maisonette*.

'Generic' structures provide further evidence to support the claim that the English language marginalises women and treats them as abnormal. In fact, words like 'generic' *he* and *man* can be said to render women invisible.

Example 27

Mountainland ecosystems are fragile, and particularly vulnerable to the influence of man and his introduced animals . . . Life in the mountains is harsh. Storms are common, and temperatures are low . . . Into this scene comes *man*, with his great boots, ready to love the mountains to death.

Man loves to hunt. He sees it as a tradition and a right. He believes that deer herds should be managed so he, and his son after him, can hunt them. He cannot understand his brother's claim that deer diminish the range of plants. After all, his brother couldn't name a single plant that deer had made extinct.

The basis for claims that English renders women invisible is the use of forms such as *he* and *man* as generic forms, as illustrated in example 26. Since these forms are also used with the specific meanings of 'third person singular male subject pronoun' and 'male human being', the satisfactoriness of their use to convey the meanings 'third person human subject pronoun', and simply 'human being' or 'humanity' has increasingly been challenged. One can see why. Reading example 26, with its references to *man*, *his great boots*, *his son* and *his brother* , it is difficult to believe that the writer had ever conceived of the possibility that women too might venture into the mountains.

The use of *man* as a generic form has a long history. But its generic use is no longer acceptable to many English speakers because this meaning has become overshadowed by its masculine meaning. Others avoid it as clumsy or misleading for the same reason: *man* has become increasingly ambiguous between the generic and the masculine meaning. In a sentence such as *Man loves to hunt*, for instance, readers may be genuinely unsure whether women are meant to be included or not.

It is also clear that the word *man* is associated with male images, even when it is used generically. The best-known experiment asked college students to select pictures to illustrate the chapters of a sociology textbook. Chapter titles such as Social Man, Industrial Man and Political Man evoked male images to a much greater extent than headings like Society, Industrial Life and Political Behaviour. Those who claim *man* can still be used generically are ignoring the fact that for many readers the term *man* is firmly established as meaning 'male'.

Generic *he* raises exactly the same issues, with even more challenging problems when writers want to avoid it. Attempts to solve the problem by introducing a new epicene (gender-neutral) pronoun can be traced back to the eighteenth century when grammarians were concerned not with the invisibility of women caused by generic *he*, but by the grammatical inefficiencies and confusions of gender and number it caused. More than eighty bisexual pronouns have been proposed since the eighteenth century, including *tey*, *thon*, *et*, *ip*, *ou*, *co*, *per*, *ne* and *hiser*.

Though generics survive in some outer-circle Englishes, there is evidence that newspapers, magazines, journals and books in countries such as the USA, Britain and New Zealand are increasingly aware of attitudes to the use of (so-called) generic *he* and *man* , and writers use a variety of strategies to avoid these terms. The magazine, *The New Zealand Women's Weekly*, for example, used only a quarter as many of these forms in 1984 as it did in 1964. An American study of a wide range of magazines and newspapers found a dramatic drop in the use of generic forms from twelve to four per 5000 words between 1971 and 1979. A study of generics in formal New Zealand Department of Labour documents revealed a drop from 98 per cent use of generic *he* in the 1960s to 7 per cent in the 1990s, with a complementary rise from 0 to 81 per cent for generic *they*.

Some writers adopt the strategy of using *he* and *she* in alternate chapters or even in alternate paragraphs. Others use *she* consistently as a generic 'to even things up' or draw attention to the sexist implications of using *he*. (Note this is interesting evidence that people are not just passive language users; some demonstrate 'agency' or active engagement with language for social and political reasons.) Generic *they* is by far the most widespread solution, and it has been used by well-established authors including Shakespeare, Chesterfield, George Bernard Shaw and Doris Lessing. It was opposed virulently by some nineteenth-century grammarians who were delighted when an Act of Parliament in 1850 legislated that in all acts 'the masculine gender shall be deemed and taken to include females'. Nevertheless, *they* is nowadays the most frequently heard generic pronoun in informal speech, and it is spreading to more formal contexts too, as indicated above. Its use is not always problem-free, however, as the following example illustrates.

Example 28

Someone who, like me, is trying to eliminate gender-laden pronouns from their speech altogether can try to rely on the word 'they', but they will find themself in quite a pickle as soon as they try to use any reflexive verbal phrase such as 'paint themselves into a corner', and what is worse is that no matter how that person tries they will find that they can not extricate themself gracefully, and consequently he or she will just flail around, making his or her sentence so awkward that s/he wis/hes s/he had never become con-scious of these issues of sexism. Obviously using 'they' just takes you out of the frying pan into the fire, since you have merely exchanged a male–female ambiguity for a singular– plural ambiguity. The only advantage to this ploy, I suppose, is that there is/are to my knowledge, no group(s) actively struggling for equality between singular and plural.

Exercise 15

The following examples are based on material from textbooks and a newspaper. What is your reaction to them?

Alone among the animals man uses language to communicate.

'Speech' wrote Benjamin Lee Whorf 'is the best show man puts on' . . . Language helps man in his thinking. The average student might hear 100,000 words a day. If he has a modest reading speed he would cover 90,000 words a day. He could easily be exposed to three quarters of a billion words a year. And anyone could easily increase that if he wanted.

Man has been civilized for centuries. He no longer needs to hunt for food for his women and children.

The two Oxford Union debaters most ably supported by a woman debater from Victoria made entertaining contributions.

The pioneers who established the farms of this country, who toiled together with their wives and children to break in the land, knew little of what was happening in the towns.

Can you translate the sentences above into non-sexist terms?
What strategies did you use?

Answers at end of chapter

Politicians and official agencies often get involved in arguments around sexist language. The Spanish Language Academy, *la Real Academia Espa*Kola, opposes the government's recom-mendations for non-sexist usages. In France, there was a furore among conservative groups, including the French Academy, when the French Ministry of Education ordered schools to use the term *la professeur* rather than the grammatically correct *le professeur*. The Ministry was responding to a directive from the Prime Minister to feminise labels for posts in the French civil service. The reform was a response to criticism that grammatically masculine forms discriminated against women by reducing their chances of being perceived as appropriate appointees to positions such as school principal and computer programmer which were grammatically masculine in gender.

Exercise 16

Job adverts in New Zealand may not specify the gender of the required employee unless aspects of the job require the attributes of a particular gender: e.g. *wet-nurse*, *sperm-donor*. Do you think that the suffix *-man* could be regarded as generic in such adverts, or is it an example of sexist language? Consider *postman*, *milkman*, *fireman*, *salesman*, *foreman*, *warehouseman*, *storeman*. What alternatives would you suggest?

Do you consider phrases like *master plan*, *master key, to man the desk* and *a princely sum* to be sexist? Why (not)?

Can a woman be addressed as *dude? mate? bro?* If not, could these be considered examples of sexist address terms or are they simply sex-specific like *girl* and *sheila*?

Answers at end of chapter

Exercise 17

Do you consider the term *guys* to be sexist in utterances like (a) and (b) if the groups addressed and referred to include women? Why/why not?

Hey you guys, it's time we got started.
I saw those guys in the library last week.

Answers at end of chapter

Exercise 18

Why do you think some women adopt the title *Ms* rather than *Mrs* or *Miss*?
Is *Ms* used by women in your speech community? What do you think of this usage?

Answers at end of chapter

Linguistic categories are one source of evidence on a culture's values. The categories discussed in this section indicate the society's view of women in many English-speaking communities. Once those views are encoded, it takes considerable time and effort to alter the language, even when social attitudes are changing. Guidelines and even legislation requiring people to use non-sexist language certainly help, but most changes take a considerable time to become established as the new norm.

The examples discussed in this chapter illustrate some of the ways in which language can provide insights about a community's perceptions and stereotypes, and aspects of its culture. Relative status may be indicated not only in the ways in which women and men use language, but also in the language used about women and men. What is more, the linguistic data supports the view that women are often assigned subordinate status by virtue of their gender alone, and treated linguistically as subordinate, regardless of their actual power or social status in a particular context. English, at least, appears to collude in the subordination of women. But can a language contribute to social repression? Can we escape the view of reality presented by the categories of our language? These are questions addressed in the next chapter.

Answers to exercises in chapter 12

Answers to exercise 1

These sentences were devised to incorporate features which Lakoff suggested distinguished women's and men's speech. The precise claims were not always supported by research, as will become clear in the next section. They do indicate people's stereotypes of women's usage, however. The stereotype suggests sentences (b), (c), (f), (g), (i), (j) and (k) were produced by women while (a), (d), (e), (h) and (l) were men's utterances. The reasons for this particular division of the sentences will become apparent in the next section where the features identified by Lakoff as features of 'women's language' are listed.

Answer to exercise 2

Features which may serve as

Hedging devices	**Boosting devices**
lexical hedges	intensifiers
tag questions	emphatic stress
question intonation	
superpolite forms	
euphemisms	

The hedging devices can be used to weaken the strength of an assertion while the boosting devices can be used to strengthen it. For example, *it's a good film* can be strengthened by adding the intensifier *really* (*it's a really good film*) or weakened by adding the lexical hedge *sort of* (*it's sort of a good film*). However, some of these devices serve other functions too, as we will see below.

Answers to exercise 3

The tags in (a) and (d) are most obviously facilitative in function, offering the addressee an opportunity to contribute. The tag in (b) seems to be an uncertainty tag, asking for confirma-tion of an assertion. It could also be a way of encouraging talk, but this seems unlikely given the context. There are two tags in (c) and both serve a softening function. The first softens a criticism, the second softens a directive. Finally, in (e) the function of the tag is much less clear-cut. Is Fiona asking for confirmation of her claim, or is she simply facilitating more talk? One cannot be sure. More contextual information and more extensive surrounding text would probably help, but finally one might need to recognise that her tag is achieving both functions at once. A primary function is often identifiable, but not always. Different functions often overlap and classification into different types is not always straightforward.

Answers to exercise 4

(iii) provides more possible places for the insertion of 'non-essential' elements than (ii).

(I am) Herb R. Beasley, senior. (I am) President of Beasley Refrigeration Incorporated. (I or we) do commercial refrigeration. And my wife's name is Lillian an' she works in the office. I've never been on a trial jury and (I have) no legal training.

This example illustrates an important point relevant to any research – the importance in the research process of the stage of interpretation of the data. Whatever the patterns identified, they can often be interpreted in different ways. The interpretation can be influenced by the assumptions, preconceptions and attitudes of the interpreters. In this case, for instance, there are at least two possible interpretations:

> The women juror's speech contains more redundancy than the men's. It contains more non-essential elements.
>
> Women jurors make less demand on the addressee by making things more explicit.

Information on whether deleted constructions were appropriate in the particular context would be helpful, as well as information on how much processing such deletions involved for the listener, and how much effort that processing involved. For instance, deletion tends to occur in more informal speech. In informal contexts where people know each other well, it would often be considered inappropriate and unnecessary, and possibly even insulting to close friends, to spell everything out and make it explicit. One could suggest that the men, by reducing redundancy, were trying to reduce the formality of the

interaction, then. Alternatively one could argue that the women were responding more appropriately in a context that was unalterably formal.

This example illustrates nicely that *identifying* gender differences in language use is just one step in the research process. Interpreting their significance is equally important, and requires a theoretical framework which will make sense of the findings. In the preceding section Lakoff's framework, which used women's subordinate social status and relative 'powerlessness' to explain 'women's language', was contrasted with a framework which focused on women as solidarity-oriented participants in interaction.

Answer to exercise 5

A sociolinguist would ask questions such as the following:

What kind of sample has the software programme used to identify the so-called gender-significant features?
What was the range of social backgrounds of the contributers? Does the programme pro-vide accurate results for people from different regional backgrounds?
Can an intelligent person fool the programme by using stereotypically gendered features?

These questions suggest that simple correlations between linguistic features and gender are based on assumptions of linguistic homogeneity which are very contestable. See Cameron (2007) for further discussion of such issues.

Answer to exercise 6

Overall the data supports the claims made. Most of the men spoke more often and for longer than most of the women. Most of the men interrupted more than the women, with only one man interrupting as little as the woman who did most interrupting. Note, however, that men also tended to be interrupted more than women – possibly a function of the fact that they were more often talking.

The data raises a number of questions. Man E interrupts much less than other men, for example. What differentiates him from his male colleagues? Why is woman D so much more talkative than her female colleagues? Information on relative status and interactional role might be helpful in interpreting the data further. Do high status women talk and inter-rupt less than low status men? Does the role of group leader or chair lead to a reduction or an increase in talk? The answers to these questions might assist considerably in interpreting the data more fully and satisfactorily.

Answer to exercise 7

The issue of what counts as an interruption is the first and most difficult problem. How long does overlapping speech need to be before it counts as an interruption?

It is also possible to distinguish between 'disruptive' interruptions and 'supportive' overlaps. Both overlap the current speaker's turn, but 'disruptive' interruptions throw the first speaker off course and often take over the floor, while 'supportive' overlaps generally do not. People often do not consider supportive overlaps as interruptions at all.

Another issue is the difference between what the speaker intends and what the others per-ceive and experience. Different participants often interpret the 'same' behaviour differently.

All these problems have obvious implications for claims about whether women or men interrupt most.

Answer to exercise 8

In example 12, there are four instances where the man interrupts the woman, and no examples where he provides encouragement to her to develop her topic. He does not give her an opportunity to talk about her paper. He answers her question and then, as she responds sympathetically, he interrupts with a request for a cigarette. When she begins to tell him about her paper he interrupts again with a request for a match. He interrupts her third attempt to tell him about her paper with an excuse and leaves. In example 13, on the other hand, there are five instances of encouraging feedback from Jill to Mary, as well as the confirming com-ment, *really just takes one eh?*

Answer to exercise 9

Your answer will no doubt be very context-dependent, and may differ for different social groups. On the evidence collected so far among middle-class white speakers, it seems that male rules often predominate in a variety of mixed-gender informal interactions. However, there is also some evidence of a hybrid style – jointly constructed collaborative talk which combines some features of both male and female interaction. This style involves several speakers contributing to and developing a topic in a supportive rather than a competitive way. Interruptions and overlaps occur, but are not disruptive, and the amount of talk contributed by each gender is much more equal.

There is also some evidence that conflict between women's and men's use of language in informal contexts can result in miscommunication, as illustrated in example 18.

Answer to exercise 10

There is some evidence that the woman's conversational aims are primarily social or affective. Her opening gambit is quite obviously phatic in function. The answer is self-evident and her utterance simply indicates that she wants to talk. Despite lack of encouragement from the man she persists, and she volunteers a number of pieces of information which, though related, are not essential to her declared aim of finding out the weather forecast.

It is possible that the man simply does not want to chat. He may be feeling unsociable. Alternatively, he may not recognise the 'real' function of the interaction from the woman's point of view. This conversation which the woman regards as primarily social or affective in function may be perceived by the man as essentially referential. He may genuinely assume that she only wants a weather report. This would explain his infrequent and monosyllabic responses. He may be ignoring the repeated attempts by the woman to draw him into a con-versation because he is concentrating on what he thinks she is concerned about – getting the radio to work.

Answer to exercise 11

Ian is being given double messages. His behaviour is described as *terrible*, *bad* and as a cause of *chaos.* But there is extensive mitigation at all levels of the discourse. The word *bad* is collocated with the friendly word *lad*, for instance. Phrases like *real monkey* and *little rascal* suggest that Ian is regarded affectionately and tolerantly, and his 'bad' behaviour is perhaps regarded as typical of a 'real lad'. It is also clearly a source of amusement, as the laughter throughout indicates. Whatever the reaction at the time he caused the chaos, Ian's exploits are here presented as mock-heroic. Note also that Ian's mother answers his auntie's question on his behalf, modelling for him one way to present his day's activities, and his father invites

him to agree he is *a real bad lad*, using a softening laugh and a friendly tag *eh*. So although Ian is being constructed here as a 'naughty boy', he is also presented as the hero of an amusing narrative. He is learning how boys are expected to behave.

Answers to exercise 15

The first two sentences use generic *man*. Alternative expressions that would avoid suggesting that these characteristics do not include women are perfectly possible. For example

Alone among the animals human beings use language to communicate.

'Speech,' wrote Benjamin Lee Whorf, 'is the best show humankind puts on.' Language helps people think. The average student might hear 100,000 words a day. With a modest reading speed a student would cover 90,000 words a day. Students could easily be exposed to three quarters of a billion words a year. And anyone could easily increase that if they wanted.

Sentences (c), (d) and (e) are more subtly discriminatory. They begin using apparently non-sexist and generic terms but the maleness of the writer's image of the supposedly gender-neutral protagonist is later betrayed. This has been called 'slippage'. The solution may be to make the male image explicit or to eliminate all references to gender.

Human beings have been civilised for centuries. Men no longer need to hunt for food for their women and children.

or

Human beings have been civilised for centuries. They no longer need to hunt for food.

The two Oxford Union male debaters most ably supported by a woman debater from Victoria made entertaining contributions.

or

The two Oxford Union debaters most ably supported by a debater from Victoria made entertaining contributions.

The men who established the farms of this country, who toiled together with their wives and children to break in the land, knew little of what was happening in the towns.

or

The pioneers who established the farms of this country, who toiled to break in the land, knew little of what was happening in the towns.

Which alternative do you prefer and why?

Answers to exercise 16

There are many who consider the suffix *-man* to be as sexist as generic *man* and *he*. They would advocate forms like *postie* (a well-established term in Australasia), *milk vendor*, *firefighter* and *sales assistant*. Alternatives for the last three terms are more difficult to find. Some people use *-person* as an alternative to *-man*, but this is not always considered a happy solution.

Some argue that these phrases express a 'male as superior' or 'male as best' ideology which underlies many so-called neutral usages. It should be recognised, however, that for many people they do not have such connotations. There is some evidence that men are less likely than women to consider such phrases as sexist. It is also worth noting that when men dominated these occupations, the use of *-man* reflected reality. This argument is clearly no longer valid, however. Alternatives such as *main plan*, *pass key*, *to staff the desk* and *a handsome sum* are preferred by many women.

Currently, it would be unusual to hear a woman addressed as *dude* or *bro*. Indeed, if used to include women *bro* could be considered another example of a male term being used to include females. There is some evidence that *mate* is expanding in Australasia to include women, while *sheila*, by contrast, is a term used only for women.

Answers to exercise 17

It can be argued that the term 'guys' is sexist when it is used to address or refer to women. The same semantic mechanism is at work as in the case of generic 'man' and 'he': the extension of meaning of a word originally denoting only men to refer to women as well. While most people recognise the sexism involved in the use of 'man' and 'he' to refer to women, they resist the label of sexism when 'guys' is used in this way. One possible reason for this resistance is that this process is relatively recent, and so people have not reflected much on it yet. Another is that 'guys' is a term that tends to characterise informal interaction, so it is considered friendly rather than sexist. But consider that if the term 'guys' may refer to women, then why isn't it acceptable for 'gals' to include men?

Answers to exercise 18

Ms was introduced by feminists as a genuine parallel to *Mr*. Like *Mr*, the term *Ms* does not signal the marital status of the person referred to, and hence does not define a woman in terms of her relationship with a man. However, despite some success, it has not achieved its intended aim. Rather than replacing *Mrs* and *Miss*, *Ms* has typically become a third term in the system of titles for women and it has developed a wide range of different meanings.

Tina Chiles undertook a survey in the New Zealand cities of Wellington and Christchurch and found *Ms* was used more often in Wellington than in more conservative Christchurch. Women tended to avoid using titles if they could, but, if pushed, unmarried women pre-ferred *Miss*. She also found a tendency for *Ms* to be more popular once women married. Her findings also confirmed earlier research indicating that *Ms* is frequently interpreted as a title for a divorced, separated or widowed woman, or a woman in a *de facto* relation-ship, and that for some people it signals 'feminist' or 'lesbian'.

Concepts introduced

Women's language
Gossip
Construction of gender identity
Narratives
Constructing sexuality
Sexist language
Generic forms

References

The following sources provided material for this chapter:

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Bengoechea (2011) on non-sexist language policy in Spain
Bodine (1975) on sexist language
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Cameron and Kulick (2003), Cameron (2006: 170) on language and sexuality
Cameron, McAlinden and O'Leary (1988) on tag questions
Chiles (2003) and Pauwels (1998) on *Ms*-usage
Coates (2004) on gender and language
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Crosby and Nyquist (1977) investigating Lakoff's hypotheses Dubois
and Crouch (1975) on tag questions
Eakins and Eakins (1979) on interruptions in meetings Hall
(1995) on telephone sex workers Hall (2011) on lesbian talk
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Holmes (1984a) on tag questions
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McConnell-Ginet (2011: 242), Cameron and Kulick (2003) on the meaning of 'queer'
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McElhinny (1995) on women in the police force
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West (1984) and Woods (1988) on interaction of status and gender
West and Zimmerman (1983) on interruptions
Zimmerman and West (1975) on interruptions

Quotations

Example 1 is from Lakoff (1975: 6).
Example 2 is from O'Barr and Atkins (1980: 98–9).
Example 3 is from McMillan, Clifton, McGrath and Gale (1977: 548).
Example 4 is from O'Barr and Atkins (1980: 99).
Example 9 is from Thomas (1989: 152).
Example 10 is Edwards and Beyfus (1969: 4).
Example 11 is from *TIME*, 25 September 1978.
Example 12 is from West and Zimmerman (1977: 527–8). It has been slightly edited for ease of reading.

Example 13 is from data collected for a New Zealand social dialect project. It has been edited for ease of reading.
Examples 14, 15, 16 and 17 are based on Pilkington (1989).

Example 18 is from Holmes (1985: 28).
Example 19 is from Cameron (1997: 56).
Example 20 is from Holmes (1997b).
Example 23 is from Oscar Wilde's play, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.
Example 24 is from Rodgers (n.d. [1972]: 207), cited in Cameron and Kulick (2003: 100).
Example 25 uses ideas from Coupland (1996).
Example 26 is from Nilsen (1972: 102).
Example 27 is from *Mountain Management*, a publication of the New Zealand Department of the Environment, 1986. It is perhaps only fair to note that deer-hunting is a predominantly male activity in New Zealand.

Example 28 is from Hofstadter (1982: 18).
Exercise 1 uses sentences from Edelsky (1977).
Exercise 4 is based on Philips and Reynolds (1987).
Exercise 13 draws on Cameron and Kulick (2003: 100–5).
Paragraph (b) in exercise 15 is edited from Carroll (1965: 1–2).

Useful additional reading

Cameron (2007)
Cameron and Kulick (2003)
Coates (1996, 2003, 2004)
Coates and Pichler (2011)
Current Issues in Language Planning 12:1 (2011)
Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003)
Gibbon (1999)
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Meyerhoff (2011), Ch. 10
Miller and Swift (1991)
Morrish and Saunston (2007)
Pauwels (1998)
Romaine (1999)
Sunderland (2006)
Talbot (2010)
Tannen (1990)

Note

1. These are all Lakoff's terms and it should be noted that many linguists would not endorse her use of terms such as 'empty', 'hypercorrect', and 'superpolite', since they consider them misleading.