

Male and Female Spoken Language Differences: Stereotypes and Evidence

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Male speech and female speech have been observed to differ in their form, topic, content, and use. Early writers were largely introspective in their analyses; more recent work has begun to provide empirical evidence. Men may be more loquacious and directive; they use more nonstandard forms, talk more about sports, money, and business, and more frequently refer to time, space, quantity, destructive action, perceptual attributes, physical movements, and objects. Women are often more supportive, polite, and expressive, talk more about home and family, and use more words implying feeling, evaluation, interpretation, and psychological state. A comprehensive theory of "genderlect" must include information about linguistic features under a multiplicity of conditions.

Both casual and serious observers of the human condition have long recognized that communication between the sexes is often frustrating. A possible cause of the difficulty is that men and women may in fact not really be speaking the same language (Jong, 1977; Reik, 1954).

Aspects of form, topic, content, and use¹ of spoken language have been identified as sex associated. Either men or women are more likely to produce specific utterances. Informal observations, speculations, and stereotypes in each category are discussed first. This presentation is followed by a report of empirical findings² from a variety of communication situations. Although reports of stereotypes and evidence for male and female spoken language differences do not always coincide, they both contribute to one's understanding of sex roles and communication.

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Form

The form of utterances can be described in terms of their acoustic, phonetic shape . . . in terms of the units of sound, or *phonology*, the units of meaning that are words or inflections, or *morphology*, and the ways in which units of meaning are combined with one another, or *syntax*. (Bloom & Lahey, 1978, p. 15)

Perhaps the most widespread belief about men's speech as compared with women's is that it is coarser and more direct. An early observer of style in language, Jespersen (1922/1949), observed women's speech to be generally more conservative than men's in the following ways: Men are readier to coin and use new terms, pun, utter slang expressions, and employ profanity and obscenity. Women, on the other hand,

are shy of mentioning certain parts of the human body and certain natural functions by the direct and often rude denominations which men and especially young men prefer when among themselves. Women will therefore invent innocent and euphe-

¹The categories *form*, *topic*, *content*, and *use* were suggested by Lois Bloom of Teachers College, Columbia University and are described in Bloom and Lahey (1978).

²Mary Parlee of Barnard College, Columbia University suggested an evaluative review, separating stereotypes from empirical findings.

mistic words and paraphrases which sometimes may in the long run come to be looked upon as the plain or blunt names and therefore in their turn have to be avoided and replaced by more decent words. (p. 245)

Reik (1954) affirmed that "we all know that there is a 'man talk' and a 'woman talk'" (p. 14). He observed that "men . . . will not hesitate to say 'Hell' or 'Damned.' . . . Women will rarely say 'It stinks' preferring to state that it has a bad smell" (p. 14).

More recently, Kramer (1974b) quoted the following: "*The New Seventeen* on people who use 'those four letter words': Boys find it especially repugnant when girls use those words. One boy described girls who use profanity as having nothing better to say" (p. 22).

Lakoff (1973) observed that men use stronger expletives such as *shit* and *damn*, whereas women use weaker or softer profanity such as *oh dear*, *goodness*, or *judge*. Farb (1974) suggested that *dear me* and *gracious* are part of the female lexicon, and Ritti (1973) stated that most teachers of the sixth grade are well aware that young girls use far more "expressives" such as *oh* and *wow* than do the boys in their classes.

Farb wrote, "Nowadays young women use words that were formerly taboo for them with as much freedom as young men use them" (p. 50), but young men are not permitted the more euphemistic expressions. However, research on people's perceptions of language as either male or female suggests that the earlier stereotypes of coarse, free male language contrasted with euphemistic female forms still hold. Garcia-Zamor (Note 1) asked four boys and four girls in an upper-middle-class nursery school to indicate whether certain utterances were produced by a male or female doll; *shit* was seen by both boys and girls as male, and *drat* was seen by both as female. In a study of adults' stereotypes, Kramer (1974a) asked college students to determine whether various captions taken from *New Yorker* cartoons were uttered by males or females. Men in the cartoons were found to swear more than women and for more trivial reasons.

A careful review of the literature revealed no empirical studies of the comparative use of expletives. Profanity and obscenity do not readily submit to laboratory study. Documentation of this stereotype would require recording speech of female-only, male-only, and mixed-sex groups in various settings. The speakers should certainly not know they are being observed.

Reports by individual investigators writing about their own experiences (Key, 1975; Lakoff, 1975) strongly suggest that the form of expressives is sex associated. A possible explanation is that expressives "serve different functions for men and women. Males use them when they are angry or exasperated. . . . But women's exclamations are likely to convey enthusiasm" (Kramer, 1974a, p. 83).

The form of women's language is reputed to be more polite than the form of men's. Lakoff (1975) noted that "women are supposed to be particularly careful to say 'please' and 'thank you' . . . a woman who fails at these tasks is apt to be in more trouble than a man who does so" (p. 55). She speculated that "the more one compounds a request, the more characteristic it is of women's speech" (p. 19). An example of a doubly compound request is "Won't you please close the door?" (p. 18).

Only one very limited empirical study of politeness forms was found: 16 women born in Maine around 1900 used more politeness forms than 12 male counterparts when interviewed by college students (Hartman, 1976).

According to Austin (1965), high, oral sounds and giggling sounds are appropriate for females in courtship, whereas males produce low and nasal sounds. Coser (1960) recorded verbal interactions involving humor at 20 staff meetings of a mental hospital. She found that senior staff members (psychiatrists) made more jokes than junior staff members (paramedics) and that men made more witticisms than women (99 out of 103), but women often laughed harder. Coser suggested that this concurs with the sex roles of male authority and female receptivity. Haas (1978) similarly found that girls laughed more than boys in mixed-sex dyads.

Women are permitted to cry, as reflected in Key's (1975) observation that "if a female talks or cries into a pillow it's 'muffled sobbing'; if a male does the same, it's 'blubbering,' with negative connotations" (p. 109). Crying has been observed more frequently in girls than in boys. In an analysis of 200 quarrels of preschool children, Dawe (1934) found that 35.8% of the girls cried compared with only 20.2% of the boys.

Several writers (Labov, 1966; Levine & Crockett, 1966; Trudgill, 1972) have speculated that men use more slang expressions than women or even that slang is man's domain. Conklin (Note 2), however, observed that women's vernacular has not been studied and suggested a need to especially examine the dialect of all-female groups. Empirical phonological studies of -in versus -ing endings (Fischer, 1958), of -uh versus -er endings (Levine & Crockett, 1966; Wolfram, 1969), and of f, t, and th usage (Wolfram, 1969), show black females more likely to use standard forms than black men. Similar results were found in studies of pronominal apposition, as in "my brother he went to the park," and multiple negation (Shuy, Wolfram, & Riley, 1968). Garvey and Dickstein (1972) noted more nonstandard forms in the speech of six dyads of boys from four population groups (black, white, and low and middle socioeconomic status) than in matched girls.

Joffe (1948) noted sex differences in the vernacular of menstruation, including the greater use of color references by men and of personification by women. For example, men might say "she's waving the red flag," whereas women might refer to "having my friend." This finding was part of a larger study in New York City on attitudes and beliefs about menstruation.

Jespersen (1922/1949) believed women leave sentences unfinished or dangling more often than men. In an informal survey of television panel discussions, Bernard (1972) noted that women are more frequently interrupted than men. This may help explain the unfinished sentences. No empirical evidence for sex differences in sentence completeness has been noted. Zimmerman and West (1975), however, reported in a study

of 11 male-female dyads that "virtually all the interruptions and overlaps are by the male speakers (98% and 100% respectively)" (p. 115). They further noted that not one of the women who were interrupted protested. Similar results were reported by Eakins and Eakins (1976).

Women have long had the reputation for being more loquacious than men: "*Où femme il y a, silence il n'y a*" (Where there's woman, there's no silence.) "The tongue is the sword of a woman, and she never lets it become rusty" (China). "The North Sea will sooner be found wanting in water than a woman at a loss for a word" (Jutland; cited in Jespersen, 1922/1949, p. 253). Jespersen believed that

the superior readiness of speech of women is a concomitant of the fact that their vocabulary is smaller than that of men. But this again is connected with another indubitable fact, that women do not reach the same extreme points as men, but are nearer the average in most respects. (p. 253)

He gave many examples of how women are supposed to talk ahead of thinking, to talk more than men.

Lakoff (1975) informally observed longer sentence forms in women than in men, possibly resulting in the impression of more speech. For example, women are more likely to compound a request: "Will you help me with these groceries, please?" is more characteristic of women than "Help me" or even "Please help me with these groceries." Empirical evidence, however, suggests that at least under certain conditions women's sentences are shorter than men's. For example, at professional conferences, the mean time used by women asking a question was reported to be less than half that used by men (Swacker, 1975).

Studies of sex differences in length of utterance in children indicate that girls are significantly superior to boys at various matched age levels in mean length of utterance (Winitz, 1959). Maccoby (1966, p. 335) reported similar results in her summary of 19 studies. Garvey and Ben Debba (1974), however, found no sex differences in words per utterance among same-sex or mixed-sex dyads ranging in age from 3½ to 5½ years

and participating in free-play testing situations. In considering mean length of utterance of children, language maturation must be considered a factor, since utterances normally become longer as skill in language increases and most studies show that girls develop language facility earlier than boys. Limited evidence, then, suggests that although in early childhood female sentences are longer than those of males, by adulthood the reverse may be true.

Mixed results have been reported in studies of verbosity (Maccoby, 1966, p. 335). In a task involving adults' responses to picture stimuli, Wood (1966) concluded that men tend to use more words than women in responding to a given stimulus. Like results in similar situations were found by Argyle, Lalljee, and Cook (1968) and Swacker (1975). Cherry's (Note 3) review of 11 studies dealing with children's quantity of speech reported that girls tended to exceed boys in this dimension in 6 of the studies. No differences were noted in 4 studies.

The participants in a communication influence quantity of verbalization. In mixed-sex groups, men tend to talk more than women (Argyle et al., 1968; Bernard, 1972).

Among children the composition of the communication group also seems to affect verbosity. Mueller (1972), in a study of "the maintenance of verbal exchanges between young children" (ages 3½-5 years) found that "boys talked significantly more than girls" (p. 933) in a free-play situation to same-sex peers. Brownell and Smith (1973), however, reported more verbal productivity among 4-year-old girls in comparison with same-age boys in mixed-sex dyads, triads, and small groups. In preschool children, then, boys have been found to talk more to boys and girls to talk more in mixed-sex groups—the reverse of the adult pattern.

Entwisle and Garvey (1972) reported sex differences in verbal productivity among Baltimore children, with girls more productive than boys; note that this finding is most marked among those of lower social class. Possibly no real difference exists in the quantity of talk that is produced by men and

women, but "girls are not *supposed* to talk as much as a man" (Kramer, 1974b, p. 17).

In sum, the stereotype clearly shows women to be more verbose than men. Empirical evidence is mixed. Girls seem to talk somewhat more than boys, but adult women, especially in the company of men, have been found to talk less than their male companions.

Topic

Topic refers to the subject matter of the spoken utterance, to what the conversation is about.

Kramer (1974b) captured much of the folklore related to topics of male and female conversations through her study based on *New Yorker* cartoons:

Men hold forth with authority on business, politics, legal matters, taxes, age, household expenses, electronic bugging, church collections, kissing, baseball, human relations, health and—women's speech. Women discuss social life, books, food and drink, pornography, life's troubles, caring for a husband, social work, age, and life-style. Several of the students who rated the cartoon captions said they considered all statements about economics, business or jobs to be male. (p. 83)

The interviews by Komarovsky (1967) suggest similar stereotypes in blue-collar families. One 28-year-old wife commented that "[men] think we [women] are silly and talk too much. They think that women gossip a lot and they are against it" (p. 150). A 36-year-old husband noted that women want "to talk about kidstuff and trivia like Mrs. X had her tooth pulled out" (p. 150). Women reported that they enjoyed talking about the family and social problems. Both sexes acknowledged that men prefer to talk about cars, sports, work, motorcycles, and local politics.

Klein's (1971) observations of the working class in England are similar:

Just as men in the clubs talk mainly about their work and secondly about sport and *never* about their homes and families, so do their wives talk first of all about *their* work, i.e.: their homes and families, and secondly within the range of things with which they are all immediately familiar. (p. 73)

In mixed-sex conversations the impression is that women initiate topics that are rarely followed through by men (Bernard, 1972; Chesler, 1972).

Three studies in the 1920s of conversational topics using tape-recorded fragments of conversations on city streets are of interest. Moore (1922) recorded 174 conversations in New York City and reported that man-to-man topics included money and business (48%), amusements or sports (14%), and other men (13%). Woman-to-woman topics were men (44%), clothing or decoration (23%), and other women (16%). Male-to-female topics were amusements or sports (25%) and money and business (22%). Women talked to men about other men (22%) and other women (13%).

M. H. Landis and Burt (1924) conducted a similar study in Columbus, Ohio and recorded 481 conversations. Their findings concur with Moore's. Men talked to men about business and money 49% of the time, sports or amusements 15% of the time, and other men 13% of the time. Women talked to women about men (22%), clothing or decoration (19%), and other women (15%). Women talked about people in 37% of the conversations. Man-to-woman topics included amusement and sports (25%), money and business (19%), and themselves (23%). Women talked to men about amusements or sports (24%), clothing or decoration (17%), and themselves (17%).

In 1927, C. Landis analyzed 200 London conversations. The all-male topics were similar to those in New York City and Columbus, but the women talked about a wider variety of topics among themselves. Landis suggested that in mixed-sex conversations, "the Englishman when talking to a feminine companion adapts his conversation to her interests while American women adapt their conversations to the interests of their masculine companions" (p. 357).

In a study of "the women of the telephone company," Langer (1970a, 1970b) reported that men discussed politics among themselves, whereas women avoided religion and politics in their conversations.

Mulcahy (1973), using a self-disclosure questionnaire with 97 adolescents, reported that female same-sex disclosure was greater than male same-sex disclosure. Major topics for girls were "tastes, interests, and personality" (p. 343); for boys high disclosure clustered about "tastes, and interests, work (studies), and attitudes and opinions" (p. 343). "The lowest disclosure area for males was Body, whereas it was Money for females" (p. 354).

Sause (1976) reported that kindergarten girls made more reference to the female role than did kindergarten boys, and this was the only category that girls referred to more than boys in this study of 144 subjects. Boys talked more about family and home environment, recreation, other people, and animals, but the differences were not significant. Utterances were all to a male examiner who encouraged the children to talk about two stimulus objects—an irregularly shaped block and a toy fire engine.

Knowledge of conversational topics is limited. Although the evidence supports the stereotype that women talk more about people and men more about money, business, and politics, the studies date back to the 1920s. Times have been changing!

Content

Content refers to the "categorization of the topics that are encoded in messages," such as "object in general," "actions in general," and the "possession relation in general" (Bloom & Lahey, 1978, p. 11). Content differs from topic, since topic refers to particular objects, events, and ideas, whereas content refers to the more general concept of how the topic is referenced.

Women's language is more emotional and evaluative than men's according to the stereotype (Jespersen, 1922/1949; Kramer, 1974a; Lakoff, 1975; Pei, 1969; Reik, 1954). Jespersen wrote of women's fondness for hyperbole and their greater use of adverbs of intensity such as *awful*, *pretty*, *terribly nice*, *quite*, and *so*. These all suggest value judgments. Reik believed terms such as *darling*, *divine*, *sweet*, *adorable*, *I could just scream*,

I nearly fainted, and *I died laughing* are female associated. Pei observed "extravagant adjectives" such as *wonderful*, *heavenly*, *divine*, and *dreamy* in women's speech. Again the focus is on emotional value judgment.

Lakoff's (1975) list of female adjectives includes *adorable*, *charming*, *lovely*, and *divine*. Male adjectives are *great*, *terrific* and *neat*. Kramer (1974a) suggested that "words of approval" (p. 22) such as *nice*, *pretty*, *darling*, *charming*, *sweet*, *lovely*, *cute*, and *precious* are used more frequently by women.

Hartman (1976) tested and supported Lakoff's hypothesis that women use evaluative adjectives more than men. In her study of 70-year-old native Maine men and women, she found that women compared with men used many more words such as *lovely*, *delightful*, *wonderful*, *nice*, *pretty*, *pathetic*, *pretty little*, *smartly uniformed*, *cute*, *dearest*, *gentle*, *gaily*, *beautifully*, *lovelies*, *very very*, *devoted*, *meeek*, *perfectly wonderful*, and *stylish*. Most women used *awful* and *pretty* to mean *very* and *so*.

Wood (1966) analyzed the speech of 36 college students (18 men and 18 women) as they described photographs of a man's face. She found that males referred more directly to what was actually in the picture. Females were more interpretative and tended to be more subjective in their descriptions. Barron's (1971) study of speech by teachers and pupils during regular classroom activities showed patterns similar to those reported by Wood. Through an analysis of the grammatical cases of speaker's utterances, Barron found that women used more participative and purposive cases and men used more instrumental and objective cases. Specifically, women talked more about how people felt and why they behaved in certain ways. Men's speech focused more on objects and actions related to these objects.

Gleser, Gottschalk, and Watkins (1959) studied the speech of 90 white adult men and women who were asked by a male examiner to tell about "any interesting or dramatic life experiences you have had" (p. 183). As did the other studies, this investigation revealed that women used significantly more words implying feeling, emotion, or motiva-

tion (whether positive, negative, or neutral); they made more self-references and used more auxiliary words and negations. Male subjects referred more to time, space, quantity, and destructive action. This can be viewed as supporting Eble's (Note 4) suggestion that terms of hostility are more associated with men.

Physical movement was more frequently referenced by kindergarten boys than by girls (Sause, 1976). Boys also used significantly more words classified as self, space, quantity, good, bad, and negative words. Garcia and Frosch (1976) also found that males talked more about spatial relations than females. Their subjects were 40 black, Anglo, and Spanish-speaking adults, ranging in age from 18 to 65 years, who were asked to respond to two pictures (one "female room" and one "male outdoors scene") from current magazines. Females described items in terms of patterns and colors more than did males. Also of interest was the observation that "each [sex] group went into immediate detail when describing the visual which was stereotyped to their sex group, but paused to 'orient themselves' to the environment when approaching the other visual" (p. 68).

Comparative use of adjectives was studied by Kramer (1974b), Brandis and Henderson (1970), and Entwisle and Garvey (1972). College students writing descriptions of black and white photographs did not differ in the type or number of prenominal adjectives used or in the number or variety of -ly adverbs (Kramer, 1974b). However, according to the studies by Brandis and Henderson and Entwisle and Garvey, girls use more adjectives than boys. The Brandis and Henderson study was on spoken language by 5-year-old working-class British children; the Entwisle and Garvey study was based on the written language of ninth graders when asked to write imaginative stories after viewing four stimulus pictures.

Garvey and Dickstein (1972) found that fifth-grade black and white boys of low and middle socioeconomic status used the possessive construction more frequently than females of the same age, race, and socioeco-

onomic status during oral communication involving problem-solving tasks.

The stereotype of the content of spoken language, then, points to positive value judgments as female marked and hostile judgments as male marked. The empirical evidence suggests that the content of adult female speech includes more words implying feeling, auxiliary words, negations, evaluative adjectives, interpretations, psychological state verbs, and purposive cases. Adult males use more terms referring to time, space, quantity, destructive action, and perceptual attributes and more objective cases. Boys have been reported to use more words related to self, space, quantity, good, bad, negation, and possession. It is likely that girls use more adjectives. Studies of adult use of adjectives show mixed results.

Use

"Language use consists of the socially and cognitively determined selection of behaviors according to the goals of the speaker and the context of the situation" (Bloom & Lahey, 1978, p. 20).

Bernard (1972) suggested that "instrumental" talk is male associated. Men are stereotyped as the conveyors of information and fact. Women "tend to be handicapped in fact-anchored talk. . . . They are . . . less likely to have a hard, factual background, less in contact with the world of knowledge" (p. 153). The male instrumental style includes lecturing, argument, and debate. This has not been empirically documented to date.

Assertiveness was observed as part of the male stereotype by Kramer (1974b) in her study of cartoon captions. Lakoff (1975) suggested that women's speech is nonassertive. This concept has been developed by other writers. Kuykendall (Note 5) wrote that "clean, effective vigorous speech and writing is just what women, *qua* women, learn not to produce so as not to appear too assertive and so to offend" (p. 4). Furthermore, "Assertion of competence and power by a female is regarded as deviant behavior so that she becomes the recipient of social sanctions" (Unger, Note 6, p. 43). Wolman

and Frank (1975) observed that in a professional peer group a woman was labeled *bitchy* or *manipulative* when her behavior was assertive and directive. Nursery school children also believe that competitive and aggressive language is appropriate for males only, as demonstrated by a study in which boys and girls were asked to ascribe various uttered sentences to a girl or boy doll (Garcia-Zamor, Note 1). Dawe (1934) found that when nursery school children quarreled, boys were assertive by threatening and forbidding more often than girls.

Tentativeness has been stereotyped as female. Lakoff (1975) suggested that tag questions (e.g., "It's cold, isn't it?") are used far more often by women than by men. This form of question avoids assertion and gives the addressee the option of agreeing or disagreeing. Women's speech is said to be "hedge marked."

Empirical evidence is mixed. Hartman (1976) reported that tentativeness was clearly female associated among the 70-year-old Maine natives whose speech she studied. This was revealed in the women's greater production of qualifiers such as *perhaps*, *I suppose*, *I just feel*, *probably*, and *as I interpret it* and tag questions such as "Well, most people would say marriage, wouldn't they?" and "It was grandmother, wasn't it?" Swacker (1975) found that female college students indicated approximation when using numbers ("about six books"), whereas only one male used the tentative form in a task requiring the description of three pictures by Albrecht Dürer. However, in dyadic conversations of college students, Hirschman (Note 7) found no difference between the sexes in the overall proportion of qualifiers such as *maybe*, *probably*, *I think*, and *I guess*. In a somewhat larger study, Hirschman (Note 8) found that males uttered *I think* twice as much as females. (*I think* is usually considered a qualifier, but Hirschman suggested that it served primarily as a way for more assertive speakers to present their opinions.) Loban (Note 9) reported that expressions of tentativeness including supposition, hypothesis, and conditionality are associated with effective users of language from

kindergarten through sixth grade. Hass and Wepman (1973) similarly found that uncertainty increased as a function of age in children 5 to 13 years old and noted that "there are many fine points about the uncertainty scores [with regard to the Age \times Sex interaction] that demand further investigation" (p. 305). Baumann (1976) analyzed 7½ hours of tape of adults in various settings for confirmatory tag questions and qualifying prefatory statements. She found only 20 examples altogether and no sex-associated use.

Men and women may make requests in different ways. Lakoff (1975) observed that women state requests and men issue commands. Hennessee and Nicholson (1972) reported that in over 1,000 television commercials, men gave almost 90% of the directives, that is, the advice or commands to buy a particular product. In a naturalistic study of the conversations of a single married couple, Soskin and John (1963) reported that the husband gave far more directives than the wife. In one critical situation when they were rowing and the boat capsized, mainly the husband gave regulative statements such as demands, suggestions, and prohibitions.

Hirschman (Note 8) tested the hypothesis that women are more supportive than men. No overall differences were found between the college men and college women studied, although females used 'mm hmm' significantly more than males and most of these utterances occurred in female-to-female conversations. In mock jury deliberations, Strodbeck and Mann (1956) reported that women agreed, concurred, complied, accepted, and supported other speakers almost twice as much as men did. Similarly, women were antagonistic or offensive half as often as men. Conversely, men were more assertive. Supportive behavior can be inferred from the emotional sensitivity Alvy (1973) reported to be more characteristic of grade-school girls than of boys of lower, middle and upper socioeconomic status in an experiment of listener-adapted communication.

In use, then, men's speech reputedly serves to lecture, argue, debate, assert, and command. Women's speech is stereotyped as non-

assertive, tentative, and supportive. Limited evidence confirms that males are more assertive and issue more directives; females are often more tentative and supportive.

Conclusions and Implications

Do male and female spoken language differences exist? The stereotypes abound, and evidence has been accumulating, especially since the beginning of this decade.

Women's speech is said to contain more euphemisms, politeness forms, apology, laughter, crying, and unfinished sentences. They are reputed to talk more about home and family and to be more emotional and positively evaluative. Further, women's speech is stereotyped as nonassertive, tentative, and supportive. Women are also said to talk more than men.

Men, on the other hand, are reputed to use more slang, profanity, and obscenity and to talk more about sports, money, and business. They are reputed to make more hostile judgments and to use language to lecture, argue, debate, assert, and command.

Empirical evidence is less clear, partly because studies can only sample limited populations in specific situations. Further, sex differences in American English are only statistical differences. No feature of spoken American English is used exclusively by one sex or the other. In general, however, empirical studies of form confirm that males use more nonstandard forms than females and that females laugh and cry more. Older Maine women, at least, are more polite, and sixth-grade girls claim they use more expressives. Contrary to the stereotype, adult men have been found to be more loquacious, but it is unclear whether boys or girls are more verbose. Studies from the 1920s support the stereotype that men talk more about money, business, and politics and that women talk more about home and family. The empirical evidence supports the stereotype of content differences in men's and women's speech. Various studies found that women use more emotional language and men focus more on perceptual attributes and destructive action. The males studied were generally

more assertive and directive than the women. One study found that women are more supportive than men, and the results of research on tentativeness are mixed.

Are these isolated, unrelated variations in speech, or is there a logical clustering that points to "systems of co-occurring, sex-linked signals," or "genderlects," as Kramer (1974b, p. 14) proposed?

If, in fact, one can say that there is a male speech style and a female speech style, then rules and restrictions can be written for each much in the way that grammatical structures are described. This task is complicated by two major observations: (a) Sex differences in spoken language that have been identified in English are sex preferential as opposed to sex exclusive (Bodine, 1975); that is, there is no evidence that any linguistic feature is used exclusively by one sex in our society; variations have been found only in frequency of production. (b) Sex is not the only variable to influence speech style. There is a complex interaction of personal characteristics such as sex, age, education, occupation, geographical region, ethnic background, and socioeconomic status and contextual factors such as communication, situation, environment, and participants.

Despite these complications, a start has been made at constructing a grammar of style for men's and women's language (Lakoff, Note 10). Lakoff focused on women's style and suggested that it is basically one of deference. She suggested that the various phonological and lexical forms and the syntactic-pragmatic features identified as occurring more often in women's speech add up to a pattern of deference. However, deference alone does not make a woman's style. Other characteristics of the individual and the context combine to form the complete style. Lakoff pointed to a need to learn which styles can coexist and which cannot. Even more important is the need to know which sex-associated spoken language features are real and to document conditions under which they occur.

Communication can be viewed as a microcosm of social behavior. Much of human in-

teraction occurs at the linguistic level. As Gumperz and Hymes (1972) pointed out,

If sociolinguistic research often begins as an extension of linguistics, it must end as an intension of the social sciences—but in the idiom of disciplines that is only to say that it changes from a way of studying language to a way of studying man as a social being. (p. 466)

The stereotypes and evidence discussed in this article have significant implications for the power structure between the sexes and indeed the psyche of both men and women. Future researchers need to be sensitive to situations in which they observe sex-associated speech and to be cautious of making premature judgments. In any event, there is little doubt that recent interest in gender and language will continue to generate worthwhile exploration into this topic. Clinicians and theoreticians alike will thereby increase their understanding of this important dimension of human communication.

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