register, and the relationship between spoken and written language varieties.

Ronald K. S. Macaulay's book *Locating Dialect in Discourse* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991) looks at a range of syntactic and discourse variables in Scottish English.

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Language and Gender

> The first non-sexist Bible to be published in Britain was launched yesterday. The revisers have systematically changed expressions such as 'any man' to 'anyone', but have kept the masculine, especially for God, on the grounds that this is faithful to the original.
>
> (*Guardian*, 4 Oct. 1985)

IN Chapter 3 we saw that one of the sociolinguistic patterns established by quantitative research on urban social dialects was that women, regardless of other social characteristics such as class, age, etc., use more standard forms of language than men. In fact, one sociolinguist has gone so far as to say that this pattern of sex differentiation is so ubiquitous in Western societies today that one could look at women's speech to determine which forms carry prestige in a community, and conversely, at men's to find out which are stigmatized. While many reasons, such as women's alleged greater status consciousness and concern for politeness, have been put forward to try to explain these results, they have never been satisfactorily accounted for.

For the most part, however, women's speech has just been ignored. Although one widely quoted linguist writing in the early part of this century actually devoted a chapter of his book on language to 'The Woman', in his view women had a debilitating effect on language and there was no corresponding chapter on 'The Man'. He believed there was a danger of language becoming languid and insipid if women's ways of speaking prevailed. While practically all linguists would regard these ideas as sexist, even some of the early work of the 1970s prompted by the women's movement proposing the existence of a 'women's language' has been recently criticized by feminists for its sexism. One particularly influential book tried to identify a number of characteristics of

women's speech which made women seem as if they were tentative, hesitant, lacking in authority, and trivial. Take, for example, the use of so-called tag questions such as, *It's a nice day isn't it?* When a tag question is added onto a sentence, it may have a number of meanings. A speaker can make an assertion without appearing to be dogmatic leaving open the possibility that others may not agree. It can also be used to check whether one's ideas are accepted, or to put forward a suggestion without making it sound like a command. Some of the early research claimed that women used more tag questions because they were characteristic of the greater hesitancy of women, who were afraid to assert things without qualification. Another feature which has been associated with women is the use of a high rising tone at the end of an utterance, especially when making statements, which make it sound as if a question is being asked. This too was seen as an indication of women's tentativeness and lack of confidence in putting forward their views.

Such arguments are, however, circular: women were labelled as lacking in confidence because they used more tag questions and tag questions were thought to indicate a lack of confidence because they were used by women. Unfortunately, a great deal of the research on language and sex has suffered from this kind of circularity or has been anecdotal or flawed in other respects. When empirical studies were actually conducted to test some of these claims, some found that men actually used more tag questions than women. Nevertheless, this discovery was not accompanied by any suggestion that men might be lacking in confidence.

This shows that the way in which research questions are formed has a bearing on the findings, as I pointed out in Chapter 2. If men's speech is taken to the yardstick for comparison, then women's speech becomes secondary or a deviation which has to be explained. Similarly, because monolingualism has been taken as a societal norm, bilingualism is seen as problematic and in need of explanation, if not remediation and intervention (see Chapter 7). Those in a position of authority define the world from their perspective and so it is not surprising that academic disciplines are not only male-centric but Eurocentric too, since European males have defined the world's civilization in their own terms. Because males have been in power, they have enforced the myth of male superiority. Women and their speech have been measured

against male standards and found to be deficient and deviant, just as not too long ago there was a widespread consensus that something was 'wrong' with working-class speech, Black speech, etc.

Women occupy what might be called a problematic or negative semantic space. They are seen as derivative of men, or inferior versions of men. In practically all fields of research, it is women's differences from men and masculine norms which are seen as standing in need of some explanation. Because women (and other minority groups in society) are devalued, so is their language. But how much of what is believed to be characteristic of women's speech actually is? Some of the features thought to be part of 'women's language' can be found in use by males when those males are in a subordinate position. Thus, maybe women's language is really the 'language of powerlessness'? Women typically use the speech style they do because they are in less powerful positions in relation to men. Nevertheless, many feminists now argue that languages such as English have been literally 'man made' and are still primarily under male control. In their view, only radical reforms can create a situation in which women are not obliged to use a language which forces them to express themselves only as deficient males rather than in their own terms. Thus, women's liberation requires a linguistic liberation. The question of language and gender seen from a feminist perspective must address two fundamental questions: how do women speak? and how are they spoken about? In this chapter I will look at some of the research findings related to these issues in more detail.

Sex and gender

I have called this chapter 'language and gender' rather than 'language and sex' to draw attention to the fact that what concerns me here is the socio-cultural dimension of the division of humans into male and female persons (i.e. gender), rather than its biological determinants (i.e. sex). While the distinction between sex and gender is well established in usage, it presupposes that we can distinguish between innate and environmental differences, and that is far from the case at present. Again, part of the problem is that, even in biology, society's views about the cultural position of women dictate that men should be regarded as genetically

superior to women. The innatist position was summed up very well by John Stuart Mill when he wrote:

> What it is to be a boy, to grow in the belief that without any merit or exertion of his own, by the mere fact of being born a male he is by right the superior of all of an entire half of the human race.

Much of the early research on female/male differences was undertaken primarily to try to validate this assumption. Women stood to lose much from such research because it tried to prove scientifically that certain characteristics, such as a societal division of labor which confined women to their roles as housewives, were 'natural', i.e. biologically based, and therefore inevitable and beyond questioning. For instance, the size and volume of women's brains were measured and when they were found to be smaller than men's, this was taken as a sign of genetic inferiority (see also Chapter 7). As late as 1873, it was argued that higher education for women would shrivel their reproductive organs and make them sterile. Even in the early part of this century it was suggested that allowing schoolgirls to play hockey would impair their ability to breastfeed in later life. Thus, men have used the observed differences between the sexes to justify their dominance and priority in the human scheme of things.

From a biological point of view, however, the development of the fertilized egg is basically female. For the first seven weeks of the life of a fetus internal and external genitalia look the same. Biological maleness is brought about when the embryonic gonads, glands which later become either male testes or female ovaries, start to produce the male hormone testosterone. This causes the genitals to assume male form and later is responsible for the appearance of secondary sexual characteristics. Whether the gonads become ovaries or testes is determined by the chromosomes received from the parents at the time of conception. All female eggs contain one of the sex chromosomes, X. Male sperm may be either X-chromosome (female) or Y-chromosome bearing (male). Some have, in fact, described the Y chromosome as an incomplete X. It is one of the smallest chromosomes and seems to carry no information other than maleness.

Many feminists have concluded from evidence such as this that the basic human form is female and that maleness represents an addition to this basically female ground-plan. Of course, all this

flies in the face of received wisdom handed down culturally, which suggests women are derivative of men, such as the Biblical account of God's creation of the two sexes, in which Adam is made first and Eve is formed later by God's taking of a rib from Adam. Interestingly, this idea that women are appendages to men finds a counterpart in many languages such as English, where many feminine occupational terms are formally derived from the male version, e.g. *manager/manageress*, and many women's names are diminutives of men's, e.g. *Henrietta*, *Georgette*, *Pauline*, but I have more to say about that later. The biological evidence for female basicness and superiority can also be strengthened by the fact that there are some species such as the whiptail lizard in the south-western United States which have only females. There are no all-male species. In a few species the males are eaten after they have fulfilled their role in reproduction. If we were to apply the logic often used by men that culture simply mirrors the natural state of affairs between the sexes, then really it is surprising that we refer to 'mankind' instead of 'womankind' and that it is women who are labelled as *manageresses*, *poetesses*, etc. But naming practices are social practices and symbolic of an order in which men come first, as can be seen in the conventions followed in expressions going back to *Adam and Eve*, such as *man and woman (wife)*, *husband and wife*, *boys and girls*, etc. (a notable exception being *ladies and gentlemen*). Women are the second sex.

Other evidence cited by feminists in support of female superiority includes the fact that the lack of a second X chromosome puts men at a biological disadvantage. Some sex-linked diseases are passed through the Y chromosome from fathers to sons. Still others are more likely to occur if there is no counterbalancing X chromosome. Haemophilia and disabilities such as red–green color-blindness are among the hundred or more known sex-linked disorders found mostly in males. Being male is also associated with higher mortality during gestation and afterwards throughout childhood and adulthood. Many childhood diseases affect males more than females, thus suggesting that males are biologically the more fragile members of the human species. This too is at odds with the cultural stereotype of women as fragile and passive. Very quickly, however, it becomes difficult to disentangle what is innate from what is cultural because one reason for men's greater mortality later in life maybe that men seek medical help less

readily than females. Greater strength, aggression, and physical activity are part of the male stereotype. Some diseases are more frequently found in men because they are associated with male lifestyles, e.g. lung cancer, heart attacks, cirrhosis of the liver. However, now that it is more socially acceptable for women to drink, smoke, and engage in high-stress executive positions which have been associated with these illnesses, the gap between death rates for men and women from these causes has lessened.

Some evidence of how much is learned through socialization as a male or female child rather than part of genetic inheritance can be obtained from cases such as the one in which one of a pair of identical male twins was raised as a female. At the age of 7 months the twins were circumcised by electrocautery and one of the boys' penis was burned off by an overly powerful current. A consultant plastic surgeon recommended raising 'him' as a girl. When the child was 17 months old they changed 'his' name, clothing, and hairstyle and four months later 'he' underwent surgery to reconstruct 'his' genitals as female. When the twins were 4 years old, the mother remarked of the girl that she was amazed by how feminine she was. She said, 'I've never see a little girl so neat and tidy as she can be . . . She is very proud of herself, when she puts on a new dress, or I set her hair. She just loves to have her hair set; she could sit under the drier all day long . . .'. Thus, in the words of one feminist, 'One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.' I will have more to say later about how girls learn to talk like ladies.

Another area where biology and culture interact can be seen in features of speech such as pitch. On average, men have lower-pitched speaking voices than women. This difference is at least partly anatomical. Men have larger larynxes and their longer and thicker vocal cords vibrate at lower fundamental frequencies. Fundamental frequency is the main (though not the only) determinant of perceived pitch. It has also been observed that women use a wider pitch range than men. This is what gives rise to the stereotype that women are more excitable and emotional than men. However, male/female differences in pitch cannot be fully accounted for without reference to social factors. Adult Polish men, for instance, have higher-pitched voices than American men. Speakers can also be taught to use pitch levels which are not appropriate to the size and shape of their larynx. A well known

case is Margaret Thatcher, whose female voice was considered a liability to the public image of her the media wanted to project. In fact, one source noted that 'the selling' of Margaret Thatcher as a politician had been set back years by the mass broadcasting of Prime Minister's question time since she had to be at her 'shrillest' to be heard over the din. She undertook training both to lower her average pitch and to reduce her pitch range and was advised to try to maintain a steady pitch to carry her voice through rather than over the noise.

All speakers raise their pitch somewhat in public speaking to make themselves heard, but because most women's voices are already higher-pitched than those of men, they have less leeway to raise their pitch before listeners start to perceive them as shrill and emotional. Women have been typically excluded from media positions as announcers and broadcasters because it was thought that their voices lacked authority. Women were therefore seen as unsuitable for conveying information about serious topics such as the news. Apparently, it is still difficult to persuade the BBC to let women produce commentaries or voice-overs.

Significant differences between male and female pitch do not appear to emerge until puberty, but it has also been shown that the voices of adult deaf males who have never heard speech do not 'break' at puberty. All these things indicate that pitch is at least partly a matter of cultural convention. There may be a biological element to it too. Over time, human as well as animal males have developed low-pitched voices to sound dominant and aggressive, probably in order to compete with one another for access to female mating partners. When animals fight, the larger and more aggressive one wins. It was thus advantageous from an evolutionary point of view for males to try to alter their pitch to signal large body size. Before we look at how children are socialized in male or female roles, we need to examine in more detail the claims made by feminists that language reflects the sexism in society.

Man-made language?

We saw in Chapter 1 that one of the crucial factors in our construction of the world is language, itself a human creation. But feminists argue that it is a language made *by* men *for* men in order

to represent their point of view and perpetuate it. In this world-view women are seen as deviant and deficient. Sexism in language can be demonstrated with many different kinds of evidence. Words for women have negative connotations, even where the corresponding male terms designate the same state or condition for men. Thus, *spinster* and *bachelor* both designate unmarried adults, but the female term has negative overtones to it. Such a distinction reflects the importance of society's expectations about marriage, and more importantly, about marriageable age. The Pope is also technically a bachelor, but by convention, he is not referred to as one since he is obliged not to marry. A spinster is also unmarried but she is more than that: she is beyond the expected marrying age and therefore seen as rejected and undesirable. These are cultural stereotypes.

The bias is far-reaching and applies even to our associations of *man* versus *woman*. No insult is implied if you call a woman an 'old man', but to call a man an 'old woman' is a decided insult. Where similar terms exist, such as *mother* or *father*, their meanings are different. To say that a woman *mothered* her children is to draw attention to her nurturing role, but to say that a man *fathered* a child is to refer only to his biological role in conception. The notion of mothering can be applied to other people and children other than one's own, whereas fathering cannot. More recently, the term *surrogate mother* has been used to refer to a woman in her biological role as mother. As I was writing this book, such a surrogate mother was the first woman to give birth to her own grandchildren. Now there are many kinds of mothers, e.g. *biological mother*, *surrogate mother*, *unwed mother*, *single mother*, *birth mother*, *working mother*, and even *natural mother*. The fact that these notions vary from our cultural stereotype of housewife-mother is signalled linguistically by the use of special terms to refer to them. We make inferences from such terms and use them in our thinking about men and women. There is no term *working father* because it is redundant. Likewise, we do not normally talk of *single* or *unwed fathers* because there is no stigma attached to this status for men.

Because the word *woman* does not share equal status with *man*, terms referring to women have undergone pejoration. If we examine pairs of gender-marked terms such as *lord/lady*, *baronet/dame*, *Sir/Madam*, *master/mistress*, *king/queen*, *wizard* (*warlock*)/*witch*, etc., we can see how the female terms may start out on an equal footing, but they become devalued over time. *Lord*, for instance, preserves its original meaning, while *lady* is no longer used exclusively for women of high rank. *Baronet* still retains its original meaning, but *dame* is used derogatorily, especially in American usage. *Sir* is still used as a title and a form of respect, while a *madam* is one who runs a brothel. Likewise, *master* has not lost its original meaning, but *mistress* has come to have sexual connotations and no longer refers to the woman who has control over a household. There is a considerable discrepancy between referring to someone as an *old master* as opposed to an *old mistress*. Both *hussy* and *housewife* have their origin in Old English *huswif*, but *hussy* has undergone semantic derogation. *King* has also kept its meaning, while *queen* has developed sexual connotations. *Wizard* has actually undergone semantic amelioration, or upgrading: to call a man a wizard is a compliment, but not so for the woman who is branded (or in medieval times burned) as a witch.

Words like *biddy* and *tart* have changed dramatically since they were first used as terms of endearment. *Tart* meant a small pie or pastry and was later extended to express affection. Then it was used to refer to a woman who was sexually desirable and to a woman of the street. In general, it seems that English has many more terms to refer to a sexually promiscuous female than to a sexually promiscuous male. According to one count, there are 220 words for such women, while only twenty for men. Some of the more common derogatory terms applied to men, such as *bastard* and *son of a bitch*, actually degrade women in their role as mothers. Because it is men who make the dictionaries and define meanings, they persistently reserve the positive semantic space for themselves and relegate women to a negative one.

The prevailing world-view that everyone is male unless otherwise designated is manifested in various ways in language as well as in models of linguistic analysis. Some analyses assume maleness is the more basic semantic category and that females are therefore to be described as [− male]. (It is conventional in linguistics to enclose features which have plus or minus values within square brackets.) Thus, if we were to break down nouns such as *man* and *woman*, *boy* and *girl* into their semantic primitives (see Table 4.1), we would analyze them as follows. All the terms share the feature

of [animacy], which distinguishes them from inanimate objects such as tables and chairs, and the words *boy* and *girl* are distinguished from *man* and *woman* in terms of both sex as well as age. We also need the feature [human] to distinguish between human beings and other animate beings such as cats and dogs, which would be marked for [−human]. Again, we see a bias expressed in the distinction [−human] and [−adult], which suggests that the adult human life form or state is more basic, and that children are in a sense regarded as deficient adults, while animals are not on a par with humans. One could of course argue precisely the opposite from a biological point of view since all adults were once children, and pushing the argument further, humans are evolutionarily later life forms than animals. While such a feature analysis may seem elegant since it captures a number of semantic contrasts with a minimum of binary features, it is sexist and one can easily see that the cards are stacked against women, who have one negative feature, and little girls, who have two strikes against them. Is it surprising that grown women have objected to being called 'girls'?

It is not hard to see why women have been especially sensitive to gender differences in naming practices and forms of address since these are a particularly telling indicator of one's social status. To answer Shakespeare's question of 'what's in a name?', we could reply, a person's social place. To be referred to as 'the Mrs' or 'the little woman' indicates the inferior status to which men have allocated women. For many men in particular, feminism has been equated with what is perceived as a pointless and at times amusing or irksome insistence on the replacement of titles such as *Mrs* and *Miss* with *Ms* and other gender-marked terms such as *busboy* with *busperson*. Many articles and cartoons such as the one in Fig. 4.1 appear in the press about this, and most have a jocular tone to them, suggesting that somehow the proposed

TABLE 4.1. *Semantic-feature analysis of* man, woman, boy, *and* girl

man	woman	boy	girl
[+animate]	[+animate]	[+animate]	[+animate]
[+human]	[+human]	[+human]	[+human]
[+adult]	[+adult]	[−adult]	[−adult]
[+male]	[−male]	[+male]	[−male]

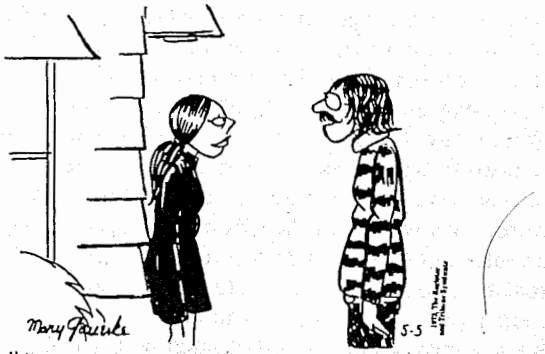

FIG. 4.1. House persons and cleaning persons

gender-neutral terms are ridiculous and preposterous. One press item, for instance, had the title 'Death of a salesperson', another from New Zealand 'Gone like the melting snowperson', and still others created terms such as *one upspersonship*. One male humorist suggested *Mush* (abbreviated *Mh*) as a title for unmarried men.

When I first began teaching in Britain, I was puzzled by the fact that males and females were indicated on student lists by using the initials and last names for the men, while women had the title *Miss* (or *Mrs*) added to their names. When I asked a colleague why this was the case, he replied that it was done so that we would know which students were male and female. He had no answer to my next questions, which were why on a class list it was even necessary to know, or why the women were singled out to have titles indicating their marital status. That was simply the way it had always been done, and it had never occurred to him that we should abandon this as a sexist practice.

This system of marking the females is still used at all levels of society. At the time I was appointed to my chair at Oxford, there were only three women holding the rank of full professor out of a total of more than 200 professors. (There are not many more women in such positions now!) In the diaries printed for academic staff, and in various other official lists of the university and the

different colleges, the names of men are still given in this way or with a title, followed by a list of degrees and where they were obtained, so that, for instance, a man named John Smith who is professor of modern history would be listed as J. Smith, MA, Ph.D. (Edinburgh), Professor of Modern History. I and my women colleagues are given a title, either *Miss* or *Mrs*, rather than simply 'Professor' before our names. The term *Ms* is still not as widely used in Britain as it is in the United States (where since 1973 it has been sanctioned as an optional title), as can be seen in sporting events such as the Wimbledon tennis matches, where women players such as Chris Evert and Billy Jean King are referred to as *Miss Evert* (or more recently *Mrs Lloyd*) and *Mrs King*, but men are referred to with last name only.

Many feminists have pointed out that it is difficult even to trace the history of women because the history of most countries, as Virginia Woolf said in talking about England, is 'the history of the male line'. Fathers pass their names on to both male and female children, and when women marry they have traditionally taken the names of their husbands. Only men have a right to the permanency of their names. Traditional Scandinavian naming practices call attention to the importance of the male heir line since both the female and male children in a family would carry names such as *Johansson*, literally 'Johann's son', and even in Iceland, where names such as *Johansdottir* 'Johann's daughter' were used, the female child is still seen as a possession of the father. A common practice among some feminists has been to replace the father's last name with the name of a female friend or relative, or to drop the father's name. In this way, Julia Stanley has become Julia Penelope. Similar motivations are behind the change in designations witnessed among newly independent countries such as Vanuatu (formerly the New Hebrides) and Zimbabwe (formerly Rhodesia), and the practice among certain Black Muslims to take new names. In his autobiography Malcolm X makes the point that the names of Blacks were appropriated by their White masters. In changing their names, women and other minorities are asserting their right to be called by a name of their own choosing rather than one given by an oppressor. Names are a fundamental part of our identity.

Non-reciprocity of address to women is a feature of many societies. Javanese women use more deferential speech levels to

their husbands than they receive in return. I mentioned in Chapter 1 that there were four different Japanese pronouns for 'I'. When used by women, the terms represent a lesser degree of deference than when used by men. Traditionally, only men used the terms *boku* and *ore* to refer to themselves, although now some feminists have begun to use *boke*. To take some examples from Western societies, women teachers in some schools in Italy tended to be addressed as *signora* 'Mrs' or *signorina* 'Miss', but men received a title plus their last name. Some women did not regard this as unfair since they thought of *signora* as a term of respect and valued their role as women more than the role of professional. In one school, the headmaster announced a policy specifying that he would address the women by *signora* or *signorina* plus last name and the men by their first name. The male teachers could also address him by first name, but women were expected to call him *headmaster* or *Mr Headmaster*. Women in many non-English-speaking countries have proposed titles similar to *Ms*, such as the Danish *Fr.* to replace *Fru* 'Mrs' and *fröken* 'Miss', and the French *Mad.* to replace *Madame* 'Mrs' and *Mademoiselle* 'Miss'.

Women are also more likely than men to be addressed by their first names. Women often protest that male doctors call them by their first names even on the first consultation. Men, however, are more likely to be addressed by a title plus last name. It would, however, break the rules of address if women were to call their doctors by their first names. Patients are subordinate to doctors, but it seems that female patients are even more so. Doctors interrupt female patients and female doctors are interrupted more by male patients than male doctors, which suggests that to be a woman is to be a subordinate, no matter what professional level she attains. Some feminists recommend that women should begin using their male doctors' first names to draw attention to sexist practices. I recall being somewhat surprised to be addressed by first name in a letter written to me by the senior partner in an accounting firm, whom I had never met or spoken to before, even though I was a client of one of the junior female partners. So I wrote back to him and addressed him by his first name. The use of reciprocal first names in English-speaking countries and many other places too is indicative of intimacy and familiarity, while non-reciprocal use is indicative of unequal power.

Another example of the marking of women can be seen in the

use of titles such as *lady/woman/female doctor*. It is assumed that a doctor is a man, so a woman who is a doctor must somehow be marked as such, which conveys the idea that she is not the 'real' thing. Conversely, we have terms such as *male nurse*, where the male has to be marked because the norm is assumed to be female (compare also *widow* and *widower*). Similarly, the expectation is that men have careers, so that women who do so must be marked as the deviant *career woman*. In my college at Oxford, which was formerly all-male, I am often referred to as the college's 'lady professor'. Even after I became the college's first woman fellow, it was and still is common for speakers at college meetings to begin their remarks by saying, 'Gentlemen'. I routinely received announcements about events such as the annual fellows' wives' dinner asking me to indicate if I would be bringing my wife. I cannot count how many times when I was present among the still primarily male gatherings at my college that it was assumed I was either someone's wife or a junior research fellow. Not surprisingly, a lady fellow who is also a professor is marked by her presence in a context where all fellows are assumed literally to be fellows.

Other examples which show the markedness of females in relation to males can be found in the many cases where female terms are formed from the male terms by adding endings such as *—ess*, e.g. *actor/actress*, *major/majorette*. We can compare other terms such as *salesman/saleswomen/saleslady* and *salesgirl* (though not *salesboy*). This is found in other languages too, such as German, where *der Student* 'the student' is male and *die Studentin* 'the student' is female. We can see in this example a significant difference between English and many other languages. English does not require the use of gender-differentiated forms of the definite article and other similar words. Other European languages have two or three so-called 'genders', masculine, feminine, and neuter. All nouns, not just those referring to males and females, must be either masculine or feminine and the articles, adjectives, or other modifiers that go with them must be marked accordingly, as in French *la semaine dernière* 'the past week' (feminine) versus *le bureau nouveau* 'the new office' (masculine). Women use forms such as *je suis contente* 'I am happy' and *je suis allée* 'I went', while men say *je suis content* and *je suis allé*.

In these languages, however, gender is a grammatical category

similar to the four-way classification system for Dyirbal nouns which I discussed in Chapter 1. The fact that a noun is feminine, for instance, is no guarantee that the entity it refers to is feminine. A noun that is classified as feminine in one language might be masculine in another. For instance, French *la voiture* 'car' is feminine while German *der Wagen* is masculine. English, on the other hand, is a language which is said to have 'natural' gender; items which are referred to as 'she' are in fact (with a few exceptions to be noted below) feminine in the real world.

The contrast is humorously illustrated in this extract from one of Mark Twain's stories, where he confuses natural and grammatical gender in his suggestion that 'a young lady has no sex, while a turnip has' because the word for young woman is *das Mädchen*, neuter in gender.

Gretchen. Wilhelm, where is the turnip? [German *die Rübe*]
Wilhelm. She has gone to the kitchen.
Gretchen. Where is the accomplished and beautiful English maiden? [German *das Mädchen*]
Wilhelm. It has gone to the opera.

The traditional distinction between 'natural' and 'grammatical' gender, however, is fraught with problems since there is 'leakage' from society even into languages with so-called grammatical gender. This has some consequences for the kinds of language reform which can be undertaken in particular languages, as I will show later. While German speakers do not, of course, conceive of trees as male, their leaves as sexless, and their buds as female simply because the corresponding words belong to the masculine, neuter, and feminine gender categories respectively (cf. *der Baum* 'the tree', *das Blatt* 'the leaf', *die Blume* 'the flower'), nevertheless, insulting terms for males often take the feminine article, e.g. *die Memme* 'male coward', *die Tunte* 'gay male' (but *der Zahn* 'sexually desirable young girl'). In English, which is supposed to be a language with 'natural' gender, ships, boats, cars, and, until recently, hurricanes were referred to as 'she'. Such usages reflect the male point of view which dictates that effeminate men are not masculine and that cars and boats, like women, are generally owned and controlled by men, while hurricanes are destructive and irrational forces, akin to Dyirbal's fire and dangerous things.

As I pointed out in Chapter 1, we must be careful not to make

simplistic equations between categories of the mind and categories of grammar. I showed how the Dyirbal classification drew on perceived as well as culturally derived similarities and associations which resulted in a grouping of women, fire, and dangerous things into one category. Fire belongs to this category since it is associated with the sun, and recall that sun is a member by virtue of a Dyirbal myth in which the sun is the wife of the moon. But can we conclude that Dyirbal speakers are induced by this linguistic schema to see a motivation behind these associations? Actually, there is some evidence to support this because one male speaker consciously linked fire and danger to women in saying 'buni [fire] is a lady. Ban buni [class II fire]. You never say bayi buni [class I fire]. It's a lady. Woman is a destroyer. 'e destroys anything. A woman is a fire.' However, this requires further systematic testing, which is problematic since Dyirbal is a dying language and the classification system has been dramatically simplified or is no longer used by younger speakers.

Now we can ask what some of the consequences are of the linguistic fact that certain male terms include females. Where gender-differentiated pairs of words exist, such as *dog* and *bitch*, the male term can be taken to include the female. This has been applied to pronouns too. Grammarians tell us that the male pronouns and certain other terms such as *mankind*, *manpower*, *man-made*, and, of course, even *man*, as in *prehistoric man*, encompass women. Feminists argue that if such terms were truly generic, we would not find sentences such as this one odd: *Man, being a mammal, breastfeeds his young*. French feminists have seized upon the shock value associated with such unexpected usages in their slogan *un homme sur deux est une femme* 'one man out of two is a woman'. Male terms used to include females are called 'androcentric generics'. Grammarians also tell us that *everyone should get his hat* is supposed to refer to both men and women, despite the use of the masculine pronoun *his*. In informal English, of course, the alternative, *everybody should get their hat*, exists even though it has been condemned as non-standard. However, many people have seen it as a more elegant replacement for masculine pronouns than using both *he* and *she*, i.e. *everyone should get his or her hat*. Some feminists have suggested new gender-neutral singular pronouns such as *tey* to replace *she* and *he*, or combining them as *s/he*. But do androcentric

generics actually influence the way we conceive of the entities they refer to?

Experiments have shown that women feel excluded when they read texts with generic *he*. When people are asked to make drawings to go with such texts, they tend to draw men. Results such as these show that the structure of language can affect thought processes. They point to the psychological cost many women experience at being non-persons in their own language. Women are at the margins of the category of 'human beings'. Just as when we think of a prototypical bird, the chicken does not readily come to mind. It is somehow less of a bird than a robin or sparrow. Still, we must exercise caution because there are some Aboriginal Australian languages in which the unmarked gender is female. Unfortunately, we do not have adequate information about the social groups in which these languages are spoken. There are also some languages where a mixed group of people is referred to with a feminine plural pronoun, but in at least one of them, the feminine form is used because the presence of even one woman in a male group is enough to contaminate it, and therefore a marked pronoun must be used. From all these examples we can conclude that grammatical categories may lead us to perceive things in certain ways, so that women are in effect contaminated by their association with fire and dangerous things in Dyirbal, as well as in English, where terms marked as female may be used to express or create negative views of women. My quotation at the beginning of this chapter drew attention to the way in which our mental imagery associated with God is masculine. After all, God made man in *his* own image!

If the perception of women is culturally derived, then we might expect anthropological research to reveal some interesting cross-cultural differences in the position of men and women. While this is true, it must also be pointed out that, for the most part, women were ignored by anthropologists. Men were seen as a more legitimate object of study if one wanted to understand a culture. One of the earliest studies which set the tone for much of the discipline and established a working method which is still widely practiced today by anthropologists was devoted to an explication of the kula, a trading system organized across great distances in the south-western Pacific whereby bracelets went in one direction, and necklaces in the other. The kula network, a male activity, was

seen as fundamental to all aspects of the culture, while women's gathering and trading of brown leaves was not noticed until recently. Now, however, the women's exchange has been seen to play a crucial role in the community's life-stage rituals, which were run by women.

Nevertheless, there were some intriguing mentions in some of the early anthropological literature of cultures with male and female languages. In Yana, an American Indian language, most words have distinct male and female forms. The male forms are used exclusively by males speaking to other males, but the female forms are used not only by females speaking to other females, but also by females speaking to males and males speaking to females.

Learning to talk like a lady

Recently, much less attention has been focused on individual words used by men and women, and more on their conversational styles. We are all familiar with the stereotype that women 'gossip' and 'chatter' while men 'talk shop', but actual research reveals that men talk much more than women across a wide range of contexts, e.g. in husband–wife interaction, TV discussions, meetings, etc. Women are expected to remain silent, so when they do talk, it is noticed and commented upon negatively. The topics that women discuss are different from those of men, and typical female topics such as child-rearing and personal relationships are seen as trivial when compared with male topics such as sports, politics, etc. However, these judgements reflect the differing social values we have of men and women which define what men do as more important. A British newspaper carried the headline 'girl talk' to describe a meeting between Margaret Thatcher and Indira Gandhi when the two were Prime Ministers in their respective countries. One study showed that women did not in fact talk more about topics which were independently rated as trivial by both men and women. Actually, nearly half of all the discussions undertaken by all-male, all-female, and mixed-sex groups were on topics that had been independently judged as trivial.

Studies have revealed quite different patterns of verbal interaction in all-male and all-female groups, which begin in early years when children play in same-sex peer groups. Boys tend to have a larger network than girls, who usually have one or two girlfriends

with whom they play regularly. To some extent the size of these groups may be determined by the different types of activities they engage in. It takes only three girls to skip rope or two to play house, while more boys are needed for team sports such as football. Extensive interaction in single-sex peer groups is probably a crucial source of the gender differentiation patterns found by sociolinguists.

Although much less attention has been paid to girls' networks than those of boys, there are observable differences in the way in which language is used in boys' versus girls' play. Girls use language to create and maintain cohesiveness, and their activities are generally cooperative and non-competitive. Differentiation between girls is not made in terms of power. When conflicts arise, the group breaks up. Bossiness tends not to be tolerated, and girls use forms such as 'let's', 'we're gonna', 'we could' to get others to do things, instead of appealing to their personal power. When they argue, girls tend to phrase their arguments in terms of group needs rather than in personal terms.

Boys, on the other hand, tend to have more hierarchically organized groups than girls, and status in the hierarchy is paramount. In boys' groups speech is used to assert dominance, to attract and maintain an audience when others have the floor. They issue commands to other boys rather than suggest what should be done. Certain kinds of stylized speech events, such as joking and storytelling, are valued in boys' groups. A boy has to learn how to get the floor to perform so that he can acquire prestige. Some of the most extensive sociolinguistic work on the verbal skills of male peer groups has been done in Black communities in the United States, where there are a number of competitive speech events such as sounding or playing the dozens in which insults (usually about mothers) are exchanged. Some of these are in the form of rhymed couplets and some are more like taunts or challenges, e.g. 'Your mother wears high-heeled sneakers to church'. The winner in these contests is the boy with the largest store of sounds and the best delivery. High value is placed on obscene language and swearing.

Some of these differences can be found in the following examples of talk in single-sex peer groups among Black working-class children between the ages of 8 and 13. In the first extract the boys are making slingshots from coat-hangers, and in the second the girls are making rings from old bottle-tops:

Michael. Gimme the pliers.
All right. Give me your hanger Tokay.
Huey. Get off my steps.
Get away from here Gitty.
Michael. Get out of here Huey.
Huey. I'm not gettin out of nowhere.

Sharon. Let's go around Subs and Suds.
Pam. We could go around looking for more bottles.
Terry. Maybe we can slice them like that.
Pam. We gotta find some more bottles.

Evidence such as this does not support one of the explanations sometimes given by sociolinguists for gender differentiation, namely, that both boys and girls first learn 'women's language' at home and school since their primary caretakers are mothers and female teachers. Later, usually during adolescence under the influence of peer pressure, the boys shift towards more non-standard speech, while the girls retain their more standard speech. Certainly, there is a lot of evidence that boys talk more in classroom interaction and get more attention from teachers than girls, but this pattern can be found in the home too. Moreover, we have already seen from Chapter 3 that patterns of gender differentiation in language are already present in the early school years. This suggests children receive some exposure to different gender-appropriate norms even before they come to school. Mothers pay more attention to their male infants. Books for both pre-school and school-age children typically depict boys and men in more active roles and a greater variety of them. Children's cartoons are also very much male-dominated.

Even 6-year-olds I worked with in Edinburgh were aware of differences between girls' and boys' speech. They said that girls spoke more politely and boys roughly, and that boys used more slang and swear words. There is also some explicit coaching by mothers and schoolteachers (and even neighbors!), who tell children what is polite speech. A case is reported where a woman vividly recalls being corrected as a child for using a local dialect word, *ken*, meaning 'you know': her mother slapped her in the face so hard that she lost a tooth as a result. This is perhaps an extreme example of the pressure young children can be put under to conform to adult ways of speaking. One 10-year-old told me in answer to the question of whether her mother ever told her to speak politely:

Girl. If there's somebody polite in. Like see, some people come in. There's new people in the stair we've moved up to and they come in and I'm always saying 'doon' [the local way of pronouncing *down*] Shep, cause it's my wee dog, so I say 'doon'. My mum says, 'That's not what you say'. She says, 'It's sit down'. Ken, cause she doesn't like me speaking rough.
SR. Why do you think she doesn't like it?
Girl. Well, if I speak rough, she doesn't like it when other people are in because they think that we're rough tatties in the stair.
SR. Does your Mum ever speak polite?
Girl. She doesnae really speak polite, but she corrects all her words.
SR. How about your teachers, do they ever say anything to you about the way you speak?
Girl. I've never actually said 'doon' to the teacher.

It is clear from this passage that this girl knows a lot about the social significance of the options open to her, i.e. using the local Scots form of speech, as opposed to speaking in a more standard-like English. She evaluates these ways of speaking in the same terms that local adults use, namely, speaking local Edinburgh Scots is 'rough', whereas more standard speech is 'polite'. Moreover, she is aware that the way one speaks is an important part of the impression one conveys to others and that others make judgements about social character on the basis of speech. She has also learned that there are at least two contexts for polite speech, i.e. in front of strangers and the teacher in the classroom. She can also identify the local pronunciation 'doon' as an inappropriate one for contexts requiring polite speech. This is the form she would most likely use consistently at home among family members and, as she says, when addressing her dog. When used in the home and with in-group members, speaking this way is the normal unmarked way of talking, but outside this domain it becomes 'speaking rough'.

Boys are corrected too, however, as was evident from this story told to me by a boy whose neighbors corrected him:

My next-door neighbors [correct me—SR], cause see they've got a boy four called Andrew and they don't want him to learn the bad habits and they're always checking me for saying it ['done' instead of 'did'—SR] cause I usually go there for my dinner in the holidays and they're always correcting me for that sort of thing. When I say—I don't know if it's right or wrong—I say like, if 'I done something today', they go, 'you DID', and they do like that all the time.

While many pre-school children have consistent notions of what is 'correct' and 'incorrect', it is not clear how early they associate 'correctness' specifically with female speech. One study tried to investigate at what age children learn gender-appropriate speech by showing children pictures together with sentences such as 'Damn, the TV's broken' and were asked whether they thought a man or a woman would be more likely to say such a thing. Adults were also shown the pictures and their responses were compared with those of the children, who were between the ages of 6 and 11. However, the results are difficult to interpret because children and adults were being asked to perform different tasks. While the adults were offering their own intuitions about adult speech, children were being asked to make inferences about adults' speech behavior. The responses given by the younger children appeared to indicate that they linked sex with topic. Thus, they seemed to think that a man was more likely to say 'Damn, the TV's broken' because it was Daddy who watches TV or Daddy who fixes the TV, etc. The oldest children's judgements, however, matched those of adults.

There are competing pressures on children from their peers. Boys, in particular, feel they have to talk rough with other boys in order not to be ridiculed. While girls are under the same pressure to fit in with a group, they have to be careful not to go too far or people will judge them negatively. These conflicting patterns were expressed by one girl in a study of peer influence on girls in Birmingham, who said 'You always try to be the same as everyone else. You don't sort of want to be made fun of . . . sort of posher than everybody else. Then you get sort of picked on. But then if you use a lot of slang and that, people don't think very much of you.'

In a French study, girls put pressure on each other to use standard speech, as can be seen in this extract:

Girl 1. Moi, j'ai un oncle qui s'appelle Gérard [I've got an uncle called Gerard].
Girl 2. Ah, bon (Oh, really?].
Girl 1. Ouais [Yes (with non-standard pronunciation)].
Girl 3. On dit pas 'ouais'. On dit 'oui' [One doesn't say 'ouais'. One says 'oui' (with standard pronunciation)].
Girl 1. Mois, j'sais dire les deux [But I know how to say both].
Girl 3. Ici, on dit 'oui' [Here we say 'oui'].

Some of these peer groups, however, exert powerful pressure on their members to conform to norms which are at odds with those approved by the family and school. The groups' influence can even extend to levels of acceptable academic achievement and reading ability. In one school in Edinburgh, where I interviewed some children, a group of boys operated a system of fines which they levied against those who were seen to cooperate too much with the teachers. What makes a boy successful in school is irrelevant to prestige in the peer group. Some boys are less well integrated into the group's activities than others and are 'lames' because they do not know the rules for these events. It is these boys who use more standard-like forms of speech. Those who are most integrated reject the ethic of the school and speak more non-standardly. This is of course what some of the network studies described in the last chapter have found, namely, that certain types of group structure may have an effect on linguistic behavior.

Among the explanations put forward for the finding that women use more prestige forms and are more concerned with politeness than men is that women use linguistic means as a way to achieve status which is denied to them through other outlets such as occupation, which is the chief determinant of men's social status, and the related variable of education. Since women have long been denied equality with men as far as educational and employment opportunities are concerned, these are not reliable indicators of a woman's status or the status she aspires to. There is also the related hypothesis that using non-standard forms of speech carries connotations of masculinity. One piece of evidence taken to support this hypothesis is that, when asked to say which forms they use themselves, women tend to 'over-report' their usage and claim they use more standard forms than they actually do. Men, however, are likely to under-report their use of standard forms. From these findings it has been suggested that, for men, speaking non-standardly has 'covert' prestige, while the 'overt prestige' associated with speaking the standard variety is more important to women. While there may be some truth in this, this explanation still makes the assumption that some qualities are inherent to one sex or the other, in this case, the preoccupation of women with status.

Most of the early sociolinguistic studies were in fact done by men and many of the questions asked of both men and women

reflected a masculine bias. For example, in the New York City study, both men and women were asked by a male investigator to read a passage which ended with a very unflattering comparison between dogs and a boy's first girlfriend, i.e. 'I suppose it's the same thing with most of us: your first dog is like your first girl. She's more trouble than she's worth, but you can't seem to forget her.' In other parts of the interview men and women are asked about their words for different things. Women are asked about childhood games, while men, among other things, were asked about terms for girls and even, on occasion, terms for female sex organs. Naturally, researchers have since questioned the nature of the relationship established between male sociolinguists and the female informants they have interviewed. It is not likely that a discussion of hopscotch would establish the same kind of rapport between the male interviewer and a female interviewee as talk about obscene language would between two men.

The relationship between female speech and social dialects also needs re-examination from a new non-class-based standpoint since men's and women's relations to the class structure are unequal. From a Marxist perspective, it is obvious that women do not have the same relationship to the means of production that men have. Women are concentrated in specific occupations, particularly in poorly paid white-collar work, and of course in housework, which is generally unpaid and unrecognized as related to the prevailing economic structure. In fact, the existence of the word *housework* as a marked category by comparison with 'work' is another instance of the marking of women and their activities as deviant. The working world is defined as a male world, so what women do in the home is not real work, but goes by another name. Hence the notion that a woman at home doesn't work, despite the fact that many housewives with children work ninety-hour weeks. Similarly, a 'working mother' does her 'work' outside the home. Here we see a double bias against women: a woman who works is deviant, as is a mother who works. However, as feminists have pointed out, it is precisely housework which makes the modern capitalist economy feasible since it frees the man to work in the public sector by relieving him of domestic work which has to be done and which would otherwise have to be paid for. According to the United Nations, women perform nearly two-thirds of the world's work, for which they receive one-tenth of its income and own one-hundredth of its property.

It is only within the last few decades, since the modern feminist movement, that government departments and academic disciplines such as sociology have come to see women's relationship to social classes as a political issue and a technical problem for official statistics. Censuses and other surveys rely on a patriarchal concept of social class, where the family is the basic unit of analysis, the man is regarded as the head of a household, and his occupation determines the family's social class. Women disappear in the analysis since their own achievements are not taken into account and their status is defined by their husband's job. The sociolinguistic surveys of urban dialects which I discussed in the previous chapter have simply adopted these notions of social status uncritically. Based on the 1971 British census, however, it is actually the case that more than half of all couples have discrepant social classes. The concept of the traditional nuclear family of man, woman, and children is also outdated. Studies in both the United Kingdom and the United States have shown that already by the late 1960s the majority of families were not of this type in both countries, and over the past few years government inquiries have been mounted expressing concern that the break-up of this family structure has serious consequences for society.

This means that not only do sociolinguistic patterns between language and gender need to be re-examined, but also the explanations that have been put forward for them. If men and woman of the so-called working class do not really have equal status, then comparisons drawn between the classes do not have equal validity for men and women. The network approach I discussed in Chapter 3 shows that some patterns of social class stratification are actually better accounted for as gender differences. In the Belfast study there was in fact one group of working-class women who had tighter and denser networks than all the other men, and women also used more non-standard forms than men.

Gossip versus shop talk

Looking at adults, we can see some continuity between adolescent ways of speaking and the management of social interaction later in life. There are common elements in the speech styles of boys and men, such as story-telling, verbal posturing, and arguing. Men

tend to challenge one another. Women, on the other hand, do not value aggressiveness and their conversations tend to be more interactional and aim at seeking cooperation. They send out and look for signs of agreement and link what they say to the speech of others. In all female groups women often discuss one topic for more than a half-hour. They share feelings about themselves and talk about relationships. Men, however, jump from topic to topic, vying to tell anecdotes about their achievements. They rarely talk about their feelings or their personal problems.

There are also differences in how conversations are managed. Women are careful to respect each other's turns and tend to apologize for talking too much. They dislike anyone dominating the conversation. Men compete for dominance, with some men talking a lot more than others. They don't feel a need to link their own contributions to others. Instead, they are more likely to ignore what has been said before and to stress their own point of view.

What happens in talk between men and women? The existence of these different discourse patterns indicates a potential for miscommunication. A recent best-selling book on this subject claims that communication between men and women is similar to cross-cultural communication. In fact, lack of communication is one of the most frequently given reasons for breakdown of marital relations leading to divorce in the United States. Wives commonly complain to their husbands, 'Why don't you ask me how my day was?' or 'Why don't you listen to me?' We are all familiar with cartoons which depict the silent husband behind his newspaper at the breakfast table. Women want their partners to be like their best friend from schooldays—someone to whom they can tell secrets. Women value details in conversation because they represent a sign of involvement with others, but men are not socialized to be concerned with taking care of others, and don't use talk in this way. Women do what has been called the 'shitwork' of conversation. The responsibility of initiating conversations on topics likely to be of interest to men and keeping them going has been traditionally seen as women's work. But all the work that women do towards maintaining conversation still leaves them at a disadvantage because men end up dominating conversations.

In mixed-sex conversations men interrupt women more, with the result that women are less able to complete their turns at talk and tend to talk less. Not surprisingly, this means that men can dominate the topics of conversation. In fact, we can even go so far as to say that, for men, the point of conversation is to be the speaker. Women value listening much more than men. It is a common experience of many women to have their own contributions ignored, but once a man makes the same point, it is seen to be important and worth further consideration by the group.

Language reform: a misguided attempt to change herstory?

We have seen how language reflects women's status, but does this mean that society has to change before the language can? Or, can linguistic change bring about a social reform? Language is clearly part of the problem, but how can we make it part of the solution? As one feminist says, male superiority should not be confused with male power. Male superiority is a myth which can be exposed by education and a change in consciousness, but male power has to be challenged in a more radical way in order to effect change. Some feminists maintain that as long as women must use a language which is not of their own making, change is impossible. That is why some of them not only want to rid language of its male bias, but also want to use terms such as *spinster*, *hag*, etc. positively. To insist on being called *Ms* is to undermine men's power in a visible way. Many women authors deliberately use *she* as the generic pronoun to shock their readers. One feminist writes that if there are men who feel uncomfortable about being excluded, they should think of how women feel within minutes of opening most books. A reform in usage is required to promote a positive self-image. One can compare the case of women to that of other minorities such as Blacks, who have pointed out how the term 'black' has negative connotations, as can be seen in terms such as 'black market', 'black sheep', 'blackball', etc. By adopting the name 'Black' to refer to themselves (in place of 'Negro' or 'colored') and asserting that Black is beautiful, they attempt to create a positive image for blackness.

Women have complained that there are systematic gaps in the lexicon of English to refer to female experience. For instance, English has no expression corresponding to *virility* to refer to female potency, and likewise no counterpart to *emasculate*. The

term *gynergy* has been proposed as the opposite of *virility*. Other terms such as *phallustine* and *testeria* have also been created and used by feminists. As indicated in my heading for this section of the chapter, some men have regarded some of these changes as ridiculous.

Probably all deliberately proposed innovations are laughed at initially. When, for instance, *Frau* was proposed to replace *Madame* in German many years ago, one historian actually rashly predicted that *Frau* would never be accepted, but in fact it has been. Indeed, as a German male colleague confided to me in an amused manner, his young female research assistants were nowadays quite adamant they should be called *Frau*. Of course, traditionally, as young unmarried women, they would have been called *Fräulein*, where the ending *-lein* is diminutive. There is, however, not surprisingly, no corresponding male term of address, *Herrlein*, for young unmarried men. A German woman who is now a full professor told me that her doctoral supervisor was reluctant to address her as *Frau Professor Doktor* rather than as *Fräulein Professor Doktor*. Women's battle for the right to be addressed as *Frau* continues today. The reason for the replacement of *Madame* with *Frau* had nothing to do with feminism, but was part of a purification effort to rid German of foreign, especially French, borrowings. Now some German feminists are suggesting that *frau* should replace the indefinite *man*, which is an androcentric generic when used in contexts such as *man soll das nicht machen* 'one shouldn't do that'.

I noted some resistance, particularly in Britain, to accept the title *Ms*. I had quite an argument with my bank before they allowed my full name to be printed on my checks without any title. Of course, some professional women have the option of using their titles to avoid being addressed as *Miss* or *Mrs*. I once had the experience of giving my title as *Dr*, to which I got an aggressive reply, 'but is it *Miss* or *Mrs*?' An argument resulted because I refused to give it, since I took the question to be aimed at putting me in my place. The use of *boy* to refer to adult Black men, particularly in colonial contexts, is obviously insulting in a similar way, as can be seen in Dr Poussaint's account of being stopped by a White policeman in a southern United States town. The policeman puts him in a subordinate place by refusing to address him by his proper title:

'What's your name, boy?', the policeman asked.
'Dr. Poussaint. I'm a physician.'
'What's your first name, boy?'
'Alvin.'

Many arguments have been put forward against some of the changes proposed by feminists. For example, some object to *Ms* because its pronunciation cannot be determined from the spelling. But then this is true for *Mrs* and *Mr* too, and for a great many other English words. The reasoning put forward by some men against changing such male-dominated naming practices often amounts to no more than resentment at a change in the status quo. As one man said, it makes it 'jolly difficult to work out whether women are married these days because of the ridiculous practice of not taking their husbands' names'. This is, of course, precisely the point! A woman's marital status is irrelevant and is marked only for men's convenience. Practices such as taking a man's family name or using titles such as *Mrs* or *Miss* are symbolic of women's position as men's property and represent their status as sex objects, whose availability or non-availability due to ownership by another male has to be marked in a conspicuous way.

While many women have argued that all sexist words in the English language should be eliminated, this is clearly not feasible. It would be necessary to eliminate not only almost all words referring to women, but also most referring to men too, since the enhanced positive image of men in relation to women would also have to be ousted from the language in order for linguistic parity to be achieved. It is also not clear how to deal with seemingly gender-neutral words such as *aggressive* and *professional*, which have different connotations when applied to men as opposed to women. To call a man a professional is a compliment. To be an aggressive male is acceptable and expected in society, but to be a woman and a professional is perhaps to be a prostitute. To be an aggressive female is undesirable because such a woman would pose a threat to men. Should these terms be eliminated too? This makes it obvious that society's perceptions of men and women must change in order for linguistic reform to be successful. But language is not simply a passive reflector of culture, it also creates it. There is a constant interaction between society and language. Otherwise, new terms which are introduced will become

incorporated into the existing semantic bias in favor of males. We can see this happening already with some of the supposed sex-neutral terms.

The United States Department of Labor and other government bureaucracies have made some attempts to eliminate sexist language in their documents. The Department of Labor, for instance, revised the titles of almost 3,500 jobs so that they are sex-neutral. Thus, *steward* and *stewardess* are 'out' and *flight attendant* is in. (Again, it can be noted that British usage is more conservative, with British Airways retaining, for instance, the titles of *steward* and *stewardess*.) The Australian government even has a linguist who acts as an adviser on sexism in its publications. However, studies have shown that there is a bias in the usage of these supposedly sex-neutral terms and that they are used in such a way as to perpetuate the inequalities expressed by the old gender-marked terms they are supposed to replace. Thus, for example, it has been shown that women are much more likely than men to be referred to as a *chairperson* or *salesperson* (note, however, *Madam Chairperson*!). This raises the question of how successful such reforms are likely to be. At the moment, sex-neutrality is not a recognized category.

As I noted earlier in my discussion of languages with grammatical gender, such as German, nouns referring to persons have feminine as well as masculine forms, e.g. *der Kollege/die Kollegin* 'male/female colleague'. Notice that the corresponding English term is already neutral. While the feminine forms exist, German feminists have had to fight for their use, since the assumption until recently has been that the masculine term was generic. German feminists have also suggested some new neutral terms such as *der/die Studierende* 'one who studies' to replace the marked *der Student/die Studentin*. However, these few examples indicate that both the extent and type of reform necessary to rid a language of sexist distinctions will vary depending on the type of language concerned.

Some evidence on the effect of another type of language reform comes from experiments examining whether those who have reformed their use of male androcentric generics have also changed their mental imagery. Are those who appear more egalitarian in their language actually more so in their thoughts too? Groups of undergraduate students at Harvard University who

either had or had not reformed their usage in their written work were asked to draw pictures to go with sentences such as *an unhappy person could still have a smile on his/her (or her/their) face*. The findings showed that there were still more male images than female ones, regardless of the pronoun used, and regardless of whether the subject had reformed his/her written usage. However, only women who had reformed their usage produced more female images, and they did so for all three pronouns. Thus, even the men who had ostensibly reformed their usage had done so only superficially and were still androcentric in their thought patterns. In some respects, this shows that language reforms have had only limited success. Proposed for the most part by women, not surprisingly, it is women for whom they seem to have the greatest effect. Men take more convincing, but then they stand to lose more, and women to gain more from such reform.

In another sense, however, the change is significant if seen from the perspective of earlier experiments in the 1970s in which people were given journal articles to evaluate. Some received articles which had the name of a woman author, while others received exactly the same articles but men's names were given as authors. Both men and women judged the same articles as better and more scientific when they thought they had been written by a man than by a woman. Women did not of course need experiments to tell them of this bias. It was partly for this reason that Emily Brontë published *Wuthering Heights* under the male pseudonym of Ellis Bell. Studies have since shown how differently the novel was interpreted when it became known that a woman was the author.

Men have interpreted experimental results such as these as an indication that women shared the negative image assigned to them by men and even went so far as to express surprise that 'women were prejudiced against women'. This is part of the process of being in a subordinate position. It is because the superordinate are more powerful that they impose their own way of thinking (and their language) as the only valid one. The behavior of these women was reminiscent of that of Black children who in experiments conducted in the late 1940s expressed preferences for white over black dolls, and non-RP speakers who rate RP speakers as more intelligent, successful, etc. Such studies are often used to support the status quo, as, for instance, the producers of children's cartoons who claim that both boys and girls prefer to see male

characters in more prominent roles. Later attitudinal studies on accent preference have, however, indicated a reversal of some of these negative attitudes. As far as television is concerned, once females are depicted in more positive roles, it is likely that a better image for women will be created.

Women who work in professional positions often have a hard time competing on an equal basis with men. They are at a disadvantage if they do not adopt some features of male interactional style, but when they do they are seen as less feminine and criticized by both men and women. This is of course the double standard. It has been applied to women such as Margaret Thatcher, and probably most women who have to speak in public, though interestingly, experiments have shown that British women who speak RP are perceived as more androgynous. Until recently, women have been denied access to the registers needed for success in society. Similar phenomena can be observed in other cultures, where it is men who control the high ritualistic language, and written language. In most developing countries men have much higher literacy rates than women because fewer women get to go to school. Requiring a woman to be 'one of the boys' in order to succeed treats symptoms of women's inequality rather than its causes. Many would argue that some aspects of women's conversational style, with its emphasis on cooperation and solidarity rather than competitiveness, are more desirable for everyone. In fact, this style has been adopted by feminists for their meetings. In principle, there is no reason why the negative connotations and stereotypes associated with women could not be changed by language planning. After all, drinking lager was once regarded as effeminate in England, but the advertising industry has transformed it into a macho enterprise.

There are some signs that change has taken place to rectify some of the linguistic imbalances in English and other languages. Many government agencies, newspapers, and publishing houses have style manuals prohibiting the use of sexist terminology. An examination of newspaper articles will reveal that women used to be more often referred to as 'girls', where in a similar context males would be referred to as 'men'. The tendency to comment on women's appearance, but not men's, was something I experienced personally when an article appeared about me in the British national press not too long after my appointment in 1984 to my

position at Oxford. A male reporter wrote that a 'fussy silk blouse pokes from under a casual striped sweater'. It also described my hair as being center-parted and as 'neat as a doll's house curtains'. I was annoyed at these references not just because I thought them irrelevant to the point of the article, but also because they were inaccurate. I have never parted my hair in the center, and I don't own any silk blouses, 'fussy' or otherwise. The only shirts I own and wear are completely plain, all without ruffles or frills of any kind—in fact, I would have thought they were totally indistinguishable from men's shirts. But very seldom would a man's way of dressing be commented on as routinely as a woman's would, or in such detail.

There is evidence that public norms for language use are changing. The *Washington Post*'s *Deskbook on Style*, for instance, says that last names alone are to be used on second reference to both men and women in newspaper articles and that expressions such as 'the comely brunette' and 'weaker sex' are to be avoided. Androcentric generics have declined dramatically over the past decade in the *Washington Post* and the use of women's middle initials on first reference has become more frequent since the style manual was introduced. Limits on change will be posed by differences which are not entirely arbitrary and conventional such as average pitch. Although it is possible to imagine that our association between high pitch and lack of authority will be reversed over time, it is unlikely.

Many feminists are not content to wait for society to change, but see linguistic reforms as a way of helping to engineer social change. The process is a two-way street: there seems little point in arguing about whether the chicken or the egg should come first. Human knowledge in general has been constructed by men, while women have been until recently silent partners. While the study of language and gender has experienced a huge growth over the past few decades, it is still seen at best as a subject for women, and few men engage in it since it is regarded as a trivial area of research.

In conclusion, we can say that the study of men's versus women's speech is much more complicated than it at first appears. The influence of gender will differ from culture to culture and it may interact with many other social characteristics of speakers such as social class, age, context, etc. to varying extents. The

existence of sexist language is not simply a linguistic but a social problem. As such, any remedy will require change in both society and language.

Annotated bibliography

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