

A CULTURAL APPROACH TO MALE-FEMALE DIFFERENCES IN COMMUNICATION

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This work is an attempt to determine and analyse the differences in the speaking patterns of men and women in cross-sex and cross-ethnic communication. This topic is widely discussed nowadays as the women and men attempt to interact as equals in cross-sex conversations but they do not play the same roles in interaction. Historically men and women have different experiences and operate in different social contexts thus developing different genres of speech. At the same time women's speeches are considered to be more emotional while men's ones more rational.

This study has a challenging character as it not only implies cross-sex conversations but it also goes further to the level of cross-ethnic dialogue. The research data include friendly dialogues between Moldovans, Russians, English and Turkish people.

Keywords: *cross-sex communication, cross-ethnic communication, speaking patterns, differences, community of practice.*

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În prezenta lucrare sunt stabilite diferențele dintre modelele vorbirii utilizate de interlocutori în gen la nivel de comunicare interculturală. Tema în discuție e pe larg tratată recent, deoarece reprezentanții genului încearcă să interacționeze la egal într-o conversație, de fapt neavând aceleași roluri în interacțiune. Pe parcursul dezvoltării omenirii cei doi reprezentanți ai genului au fost supuși diferitelor experiențe și, ca rezultat, fiecare grupă a dezvoltat un limbaj tipic pentru comunitatea dată. Totodată, se consideră că discursurile feminine sunt mai emotive, pe când cele masculine dau dovadă de mai mult raționalism.

Pe de altă parte, actualmente vorbim despre comunicare interculturală ca fenomen social și lingvistic foarte răspândit, ceea ce presupune o comunicare dintre reprezentanții a cel puțin două culturi diferite. Astfel, comunicarea interculturală în gen presupune luarea în vedere a mai multor elemente în timpul conversației decât simpla comunicare în gen sau comunicarea interculturală între doi bărbați sau două femei. Termenul „cultură” are peste 500 de definiții propuse de lingviști, antropologi și alți specialiști. Considerăm cultură unitatea de reguli, norme și tradiții respectate de o comunitate sau de un popor. O altă semnificație a acestui termen e comunicarea/comportamentul corectă a unui individ dintr-o comunitate. În această lucrare vom utiliza termenul „comunicare interculturală” cu sensul de comunicare interetnică.

Acest studiu are un caracter provocator, deoarece implică nu doar conversații în gen, dar și conversații interculturale. Materialul factologic include dialoguri prietenoase dintre locutori moldoveni, ruși, englezi și turci.

Cuvinte-cheie: *comunicare în gen, comunicare interculturală, domeniu de activitate.*

Gender communication is a topic that linguists have been paying special attention since the 70s of the previous century. There have been established a set of rules according to which men and women behave in the course of a communication act. They are all very well enumerated and explained in D. Tannen's works [7, p.503-517], Daniel N. Maltz and Ruth A. Broker's writings [5, p.487-501], Gerald L. Wilson, Alan M. Hantz, Michael S. Hanna's book [8, p.273], while other works on language and gender focus on the correctness of data research on this topic and the complex issues that should be taken into consideration while investigating the language of males and females.

The general picture that emerged from the reviews of works that deal with gender communication was one of general tendencies that admitted of some variability: female speakers tended to use language in one way while male interlocutors used it in another one. Beyond that, however, representations of gendered linguistic behavior are extremely variable historically and culturally. It would be easy to get the impression that women have always and everywhere seen measured against a similar linguistic idea constituted by such qualities as reticence, modesty, deference, politeness, empathy, supportiveness and cooperation. On inspection, however, the picture is more complicated [2, p.585]. The modesty of woman is very often dictated by the norms of the society or culture, thus her behavior being not natural.

Otto Jespersen thought women more refined than men, and claimed that this way reflected in women's instinctive avoidance of coarse, vulgar and abusive language [quoted from 2, p.586].

Nowadays the norms of behavior and the language differ. Tatiana Larina [10, p.387] comes with interesting examples that illustrate the usage of rude words by both men and women that belong to the intellectual layer of the English society. A young man of about 20 whose father is a respectable English Philology professor uses swear words like *fuck* and its derivatives in the presence of his father without any embarrassment, or an adult gentlemen addressing his wife in the presence of Professor Tatiana Larina also uses dirty words: *I can't park here because of that fucker*, or a talk between friends: *What the fuck is wrong with you?* Women don't stay back in using the same vocabulary: *What the bloody hell are you talking about?* (Addressing a woman friend), *You look shit, my friend. You should have a rest* (A young woman to her friend).

In the times of J.B. Shaw well-educated people would use swear words as well but these were just *devil* or *damn it*, no more (see the speech of Professor Higgins in “Pygmalion”). So the stereotype of a polite and modest woman from an upper class society goes back in old times.

In the course of history the woman has had the stereotype of a ‘silent’ one and the sense of masculinity in conversation was superior towards women. The mentioned above stereotype of a woman appeared among the European bourgeoisie, so the conventional behavior between a husband and wife should have been the following:

<i>Husband</i>	<i>Wife</i>
Deal with many men;	Talk with few;
Be “entertaining”;	Be solitary and withdrawn;
Be skillful in talk;	Boast of silence [2, p.586].

In many families this sense of superior masculinity in dialogue and the silent femininity predominates. Let us consider the story of a couple from America. The incident that happened resulted in unnecessary misunderstanding and hurt for eight years. While on honeymoon in the restaurant where they took their first meal, she started up a conversation with a strange couple. He refused to participate in this conversation. Both became quite angry and a fight ensued... For his wife to seek out strangers was perceived by him as an insult to his masculinity and to his role on the honeymoon. She saw her husband's refusal to join the conversation as an insult and rejection of her. She began the conversation with the strange couple because “she never had a conversation as a wife” and wanted to try out this new role. The honeymoon seemed to her the ideal time to try this aspect of her new role [1, p.175].

We experience different roles in the society or in a certain community; it means one and the same person can use different language patterns in various situations. Gender is not only a biological and linguistic category but it is also a social one. A linguist cannot analyse the speech of a certain representative without taking into account his/her occupation, background, experience, social status.

Varied studies are able to identify systematic differences between social groups in terms of their language use. Having compared the speeches of women and men from the same social class the more important finding was that women tend to use more standard or ‘prestige’ features of language and men more nonstandard or vernacular features.

Joan Swann explains that the use of certain linguistic features may be associated with some other factor (e.g. employment) rather than, directly, with gender. Many of the carried out investigations confront socio-linguistics and psycholinguistics more generally: too much abstraction. Abstracting gender and language from the social practices that produce their particular forms in given communities often obscures and sometimes distorts the ways they connect and how these connections are implicated in power relations, in social conflict, in the production and reproduction of values and plans. Gender is abstracted whole from other aspects of social identity, the linguistic system is abstracted from linguistic practice, language is abstracted from social action, interactions and events are abstracted from community and personal history, difference and dominance are each abstracted from wider social practice and both linguistic and social behavior are abstracted from the communities in which they occur .

In the course of engaging with others in a conversation people collaboratively construct a sense of themselves and of others as certain kinds of persons, as members of various communities with various forms of membership, authority and privilege in those communities. In all of these, language interacts with other symbolic systems – dress, body adornment, ways of moving, gaze, touch, handwriting style, locales of hanging out and so on [3, p.573-575].

The term *community of practice* was introduced by Jane Lave and Etienne Wenger. This community takes us away from the community defined by a location or by a population. Instead, it focuses on a community defined by social engagement that language serves, not the place and not the people as a collection of individuals... A *community of practice* might be people working together in a factory, regulars in a bar, a neighbourhood play group, a nuclear family, police partners and their ethnographer, the Supreme Court [3, p.578].

Gender is produced in differential membership in *communities of practice*. One and the same person performs different functions in various *communities of practice*: at the office s/he is the head, at home s/he is the husband/wife, mother/father, in the sports club s/he may be a quiet member. In all these various roles s/he would use a different language that is a norm for such a community. Speakers develop linguistic patterns as they engage in activity in various communities in which they participate.

Another method to study the gender language is to analyse it as form/function problem. Joan Swann claims that not the use of linguistic form is important but the functions that could be 'read off' from these (findings that male speakers interrupt female speakers more than were based on linguistic forms) [6, p.552].

There have been carried out many researches in this direction, for example Janet Holmes who studied tag questions used by males and females and identified the different functions of tag questions used by representatives of the two genders. Later Deborah Cameron found it was not always possible to assign tag questions unambiguously to one category or another. These were often ambiguous and could have more than one function simultaneously [quoted from 6, p.553].

In what follows we intend to analyse not only in intra- but also in inter-cultural variation in cross-sex communication. Let us take the example of the East European women who are trying to handle many occupations and activities and do the traditional job of a man. They lose from their femininity not only in dress but also in the language patterns. Asian women are said to be "super-feminine", but their "super-femininity" is also dictated by the norm of the society. The Turkish women that act as business ladies or professors at the universities are not included in this group as they are more like Europeans in behavior and speech than like Asians.

If in the course of history women were not admitted to public speaking now, many of them developed this skill even better than many men. Women and not men are more tolerant towards others, that is why they work in social service sphere. Besides linguistic features associated with 'women talk' were noted in interactions between men in some contexts and researchers documented contexts in which women used the discourse of power and authority, or adopted the emotionally inexpressive interactional style widely associated with masculinity [4, p.600].

The male interlocutor was offended by a female in the following situation. These people belong to the same *community of practice* but represent different ethnic groups. Three years ago we had a guest teacher from one of the Istanbul Universities to work for Moldova State University, to teach Turkish Language. The first day he came to the Dean's office to find out the timetable he spoke to the Deputy Dean. At first sight all seemed to be polite and under control but later on he complained to the Dean (in my presence) that our colleague showed disrespect when she spoke to him and did not look into his eyes, so he considered her to be impolite. In this case non-verbal communication means (no eye contact) was the cause of misunderstanding.

Another example to show the difference in behavior and communication in cross-sex conversation is a dialogue between an Englishman and an American lady: The lady travelling in England got into a compartment in a smoking carriage where an Englishman was smoking a pipe. For a short time she sat quietly expecting that the Englishman would stop smoking. But when the train was under way for half an hour, she began to cough and sneeze trying in this way to show him that she objected to the smoke. At last seeing that all her effort to attract his attention failed, she addressed him impatiently: "*If you were a gentleman, you would stop smoking when a lady gets into the carriage*". "*If you were a lady*", replied the Englishman, "*you would not get into a smoking carriage*". [9, p.318-319]. Both the interlocutors used subjunctive mood to show their objections to each other.

We notice that even if they speak the same language (English (British and American)) the two people belong to different cultures: the English one that is more conservative and the American culture that supposes more tolerance and more democracy. There is, however, another factor that influences the behavior and speech of the participant in cross-sex communication. By the time we have become adults we know a wide variety of rules for interacting in different situations. In different cultures they differ if not totally then partially.

Other reasons why difficulties in communication occur it is because women like to complain about different things while men like to help with solutions. The women in their turn are looking for consolation and empathy, while the men complain about women's refusal to take action to solve the problems they complain about [7, p.504].

My father always wanted to show his superiority in the house, then, it was my husband and my uncle. It means they feel more comfortable when having the upper hand. Their attunement to the fact that having more information, knowledge, or skill puts them in a one-up position comes through in their way of talking. And if sometimes men seem intentionally to explain something in a way that makes what they are explaining difficult to understand, it may be because their pleasant feeling of knowing more is reinforced when their interlocutor does not understand [7, p.504].

To draw the conclusion we must say that this was only an attempt to clarify how to analyse gender language and which the main difficulties in cross sex and cross-ethnic communication are. For a deeper analysis empirical data should be collected taking into account the communities of practices of different speakers from various cultures.

At present the recommendations would be to develop the speaking skills and to study the culture of the country you intend to visit so as to try to avoid difficulties in communication. This also refers to translators and interpreters whose job is not easy at all and they can sometimes avoid cross-sex and cross ethnic miscommunications while being delicate in translating.

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