

Repositing Gender in Discourse Differences between Male and Female Speeches

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Abstract

Positioning gender in discourse offers an interesting approach to the study of spoken discourse. A discourse analytic approach such as Feminist post-structuralist discourse analysis (FPDA) has provided relevance to analyzing the significance of gender in relation to addressing the complexity and differences in an interaction. This involves analyzing the way an interaction is constructed in male and female discourse. The study examined the peculiar differences in gender speech using recorded conversation of male and female youths. It was however discovered that men's way of using language is economical and competitive, thereby reflecting their general interest in acquiring and maintaining status; whereas women's use of language is uneconomical and cooperative, thereby reflecting their preference for equality, expression of feelings and harmony. The differences are based on the biophysical factors,

cultural presuppositions, and level of understanding and behaviour. The paper is divided into five sections, comprising; introduction, literature review, methodology, data presentation and analysis, as well as summary and conclusion.

Keywords: discourse, gender, speech

Introduction

Today, the study of real samples of speech and writing as evidence of the way in which people in the world use language in a range of social contexts is manifestly the business of linguistics. The study of talk (spoken discourse) and text (written discourse) is apparent in linguistic investigation.

Discourse analysis has been established in disciplines such as linguistics to provide an array of approaches to examine the use of language and its role in social life (Poter, 2008). The object of all discourse analysis is language and the form it takes (e.g. spoken or written speech). Taylor, (2001) maintains that discourse analysis views language as constitutive which can be analyzed at different levels such as words, sentences, conversation turns and/or patterns.

Many discourse analysis-based research approaches focus on language-in-use and social construction of meaning (Wetherell, 2001). Some approaches such as conversation analysis focus on talk and interaction as a social institution. They tend to focus on performance, descriptive aspect of discourse. Other approaches such as critical discourse analysis focus on how knowledge is produced through discourses in terms of legitimacy or challenge of power and dominance in society. Feminist post-structuralist discourse analysis focuses on the

issue of discourse and power. It places more emphasis upon the interplay of male and female voice within a discursive context (Baxter, 2003). The approach aids in gender differentiation. Heritage, (2001) noted that the difference between these approaches is how the concept of discourse is understood. For instance, approaches that focus on performance and descriptive nature of discourses, understand discourse to be a social action.

As soon as we hear a new voice, we do much more than just understanding the message it contains. We make judgments about how old somebody is or where he comes from. We also try to ascertain whether we are listening to a man or women. Often, we are only conscious that we are trying to make this judgment when we realize we have made an incorrect assignment or are confronted with an ambiguous voice. When asked why we think we are listening to a male or female voice, the first reason we give is the pitch of the voice - male voice being on average lower pitch. Others are: men tend to speak loudly, while women whisper; men talk over each other, while women conspire behind each other's backs; men hold back their feelings, while women lay them out to strangers (Rogers, 2011).

In this paper, concentration will be made on describing speech differences between male and female speeches. In other words, it will examine those differences that relate to the way in which Gender speech is produced and perceived. Examination of explanations that researchers have offered to account for these differences will equally be highlighted.

Literature review

In this section, definition of terms will be made in order to buttress the meaning of the basic concepts being treated. Gender theories and feminism as it regards speech were

discussed. Various previous studies conducted by scholars on the subject-matter will also be examined.

Definition of terms

Discourse

This is a Latin word, *discursus* which means '*running to and from*' and denotes '*written and spoken communications*'. The term '*discourse*' is itself a contested term, which has generated a lot of debate among scholars about what it means and how it should be used.

In semantics and discourse analysis, a discourse is a conceptual generalization of conversation within each modality and context of communication (Gee, 2005). The most straightforward definition used by linguistics textbooks is that of 'language above sentence' and is referred to a sequence of sentences or utterances that constitutes a speech (Cameron, 2001). This implies that discourse is not just about sentence but a full-fledged speech or text of interaction.

Fairclough, (1992) sees discourse as the situational context of language use, which involves the interaction between the reader or the writer and the text or the speech. Associated with discourse is the plural understanding (discourses) which Foucault, (1972) explained as being more than linguistics. To him, 'discourses' are social and ideological practices which can govern the ways in which people think, speak, interact, write and behave in a given context. This involves series of analysis and approaches which linguists use to give meaningfulness to a text and talk.

Discourse analysis is a broad term for the study of the ways in which language is used in texts and contexts (Baxter, 2003). It is usually referred to as discourse studies. It involves different

approaches to which meaningfulness of text and talk could be ascertained with a linguistic form. For current research in linguistics, Baxter, (2010) pointed out that there are four approaches one may follow. They include; conversation analysis (CA), discourse analysis (DA), critical discourse analysis (CDA), and feminist post-structuralist discourse analysis (FPDA). These are used differently in analyzing the speech of a speaker, the social influences such as age, sex, profession, social strata and so on.

Gender

This is the state of being male or female (typically used with reference to social and cultural differences rather than biological ones). Gender is derived from a Latin word, *genus* and French word *gendre*, which means 'kind', 'type', or 'sort'. Mikkola, (2008) defines gender as "the range of characteristics pertaining to, and differentiating between masculinity and femininity". Based on the context, these characteristics may include biological sex, sex-based social structures or gender identity.

According to World Health Organization, (2002), "gender refers to the socially constructed characteristics of women and men - such as norms, roles and relationships of and between groups of women and men". Gender role varies from society to society and can be changed. While most people are born either male or female, they are taught appropriate norms and behaviours through socialization - including how they should interact with others of the same or opposite sex within households, communities and work places. The way and manner of speech for male and female gender differs to some sort. This shall be discussed in subsequent section.

Speech

It is expression of or the ability to express thoughts and feelings by articulate sounds. Kennison, (2013) sees speech as the vocalized form of communication used by humans which is based upon the syntactic combination of items drawn from the lexicon. Each spoken word is created out of the phonetic combination of a limited set of vowel and consonant speech sound units known as phonemes. These vocabularies, the syntax that structures them and their sets of speech sound units differs, creating many thousands of different and mutually unintelligible human languages (Fromkin, 1973). According to the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, (1997), speech is the verbal means of communication. It consists of articulation, voice and fluency.

Alternatively, speech is a formal address or discourse delivered to an audience (Fromkin, 1973). Kennison, (2013) maintains that these are four basic types of speech including to inform , to instruct, to entertain and to persuade. These are not mutually exclusive of one another. One may have several purposes in mind when giving a speech. For example, one may try to inform in an entertaining style, another might inform the audience and try to persuade them to act on the information. Thus the principal purpose of a speech will generally fall into one of the four basic types of being informative, demonstrative, persuasive and/or entertaining.

Linguistic Competence and Communicative Competence

Noam Chomsky in 1965 argued that the goal of linguistics should be to study underlying linguistic competence. That is, the rule that inform the production of grammatical sentences. For him, the focus of study was the abstract system, the underlying structure of language, described as '*linguistic performance*' (i.e. speaker's actual utterances) which were regarded as being disorderly, chaotic and no value in offering

an understanding of language as a system. A significant challenge was made to Chomsky's view by Del Hymes, (1972) who offered the term '*communicative competence*'. He observed that a person who has only '*linguistic competence*' would be quite unable to communicate (a '*social monster*' producing grammatical sentences disconnected from the context in which they occurred). This notion of communicatively competent speaker and writer who knows the rules of how to communicate appropriately in different social settings has had a profound effect on discourse analysis.

Gender studies and Feminism theory

In "Duels and Duets", John Locke, a professor of linguistics at Lehman College and author of "Eavesdropping: An Intimate History", argues that men and women have radically different ways of speaking not because of their upbringing, but because they have radically different evolutionary needs. Men, he argues use antagonistic speech, or 'Duels' to show off their strength and prove themselves to women. Women, meanwhile, use quieter speech pattern to bond with each other and help protect themselves against aggressive men. And, according to Locke, this is a pattern that has been going on for thousands and thousands of years.

In gender studies, the term gender refers to proposed social and cultural constructions of masculinities and feminities. In this context, gender explicitly excludes reference to biological differences to focus on cultural differences. This emerged from a number of differences. In sociology, during 1950s from the theories of psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan; and in the work of French psychoanalysts like Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray and American feminist such as Judith Butler (1990) and Judith Baxter (1999) came to regard gender roles as a practice, sometimes referred to as performance.

Charles E. Hurst comments that in a society where we present our genders so distinctly there can often be severe consequences for breaking norms. Many of these consequences are rooted in discrimination and dominance based on sexual orientation. Based on this, Andrea Dworkin stated her commitment to destroying male dominance and genders itself, stating her belief in radical feminism.

Empirical review

Tracy, (2010) in his study on "differences in male and female speech" observed that male use fewer qualifiers than females. He however pointed out that men's way of using language is competitive; reflecting their general interest in acquiring and maintaining status, women's use of language is cooperative, reflecting their preference for equality and harmony.

Cameron, (2001) maintain that men's goals in using language tend to be about getting things done, whereas women tend to be about making corrections to other people. To her, men talk more about things and facts, whereas, women talk more about people, relationships and feelings.

On the other hand, Rogers, (2010) in his study "why do men and women talk differently? ", he observed that some critics maintain that these differences are merely a reflection of our cultural presuppositions about gender. He posits that there is a far simpler reason for these linguistic differences, which he pointed out as being biological and genetic.

Similarly, Simpson (2012) in his study "phonetic differences between male and female speech" noted that there is significant anatomical differences prior to the onset of puberty. He pointed out that such differences exist in the phonation and pitch.

Simpson attributed the differences to biophysical consequences of differences in anatomy and physiology and others to differences in learned behaviour.

Eckert, (1989) in his study on "male and female English speakers" discovered two main differences in the use of voice quality: (a) Male speakers use creakier voice than females; (b) Female speakers have brighter voice quality than males. Judith Baxter developed an approach to discourse analyst termed Feminist post-Structuralist Discourse Analysis (FPDA). In 2003, she used it to study gender in social category in terms of ways in which power relations are constructed through spoken interactions. She maintains that females are constituted as less powerful than male in many educational contexts, thereby working as reactionary ways to produce girls as more subservient and boys as more dominant. She used FPDA to challenge any view that girls should always be perceived as helpless victims in the classroom or any form of interaction.

Methodology

The writers use both interviews and interactions between males and females in gathering data that were used for the study. The interview is made up of spoken discourse between male and female youths, while the interaction is a friendly chat between two lovers who are male and female. By so doing, they were able to extract male and female differences in speech.

Data presentation and analysis

This section presents and analyzes data on the gender speech interactions, which made it possible for the researchers to establish the real differences between male and female speeches. Various data were presented, followed by the analysis.

Data showing gender speech differences in youth's spoken discourse

Data 1

Lizzy: "that test really, really sucked."

Dan: "that test sucked."

The above data (conversation) shows that female use more qualifiers than male.

Data 2

Lizzy: "Urn, well... hmm, I think I failed it."

Dan: He paused. "I failed it."

Based on the above conversation, it is clear that females use more filler (they slur) than males when they are searching for their words, whereas the males might either be silent or pause.

Data 3

Dan: "I took the sandwich."

Lizzy: "Mm, hrnmm..."

Dan: "Then I added all the hot sauce packets from the cafeteria's condiment bucket."

Lizzy: Continued filling her nails, "Oh?"

Dan: "I squeezed them all in Chris's soup when he went to take a piss."

Lizzy: "Hmmm."

Dan: Shook his head. "And then he took a big gulp and his face exploded. Lizzy, you are not listening."

Lizzy: "Dan, are you listening?"

The above conversation reveals that female asks more questions than male. They also tend to make more encouraging

gestures and speeches (such as "Mm, Hmmm, and Oh") than males to keep the conversation going.

Data 4

Nkechi: "I was beaten by rain, I mean heavy rain o yesterday."

Jude: "I didn't encounter it."

Nkechi: "Jude, hmm, if you see me eh."

Jude: "I will be in Awka tonight."

From the above conversation, it is deduced that males tend to initiate new topics or otherwise try to steer the conversation. Males are more likely to interrupt the speech of their female partners, make statements of fact and respond less enthusiastically about the comments of others (or not to respond at all).

Data 5

Jude: "I want you to come with me to the market."

Nkechi: Smiles. "Wow, are you serious?"

Jude: "I can see you don't want to go."

Nkechi: "Lolz, I will go o! I will be very glad to go with you to the market whenever."

The above conversation shows that females use indication of excitement (interjection; wow, lolz) often more than their male counterparts.

Data 6

Jane: "Chy, if you see what Ada wore to school yesterday, you will be amazed."

Chy: "Are you serious? Ada of all people.
Upon all her big girl stuff?"

Jane: "Hmm, urn... you never see something."

Chy: "Hmm, even you, you do fuckup
sometimes."

Jane: What? Eh e! Don't start before I will fire
back at you now now now."

Chy: Oh! You want me to open up about you
and what you do?"

Ken: "Please Jane and Chy, that's enough.
Stop all these gossip and quarrel."

From the above conversation, it is seen that females gossip and
quarrel more than males.

Summary and conclusion

Summary

So far in this study, various gender speech differences have
been ascertained using spoken conversation of male and female
youths. They include:

- Males use fewer qualifiers than females.
- Females use more filler (i.e. they slur) when searching
for their words, whereas the male characters might just
silent or pause.
- Women tend to ask men more questions in a
conversation, make more encouraging gestures and
speech (such as 'mm-hmm') to keep the conversation
going.
- Men are more likely to interrupt the speech of their
(female) partners, and are more likely to make
statements of fact and to respond less enthusiastically
about the comments of others (or not respond at all).
- Men are more likely to introduce new topics or
otherwise try to steer the conversation.

- Male's way of using language is competitive; reflecting their general interest in acquiring and maintaining status: women's use of language is cooperative; reflecting their preference for equality and harmony.
- Female's voice (pitch) is more realized than the male's voice. They have higher pitch than their male counterparts.
- Females gossip and quarrel more than males.
- Females produce overlapping remarks in conversations than males.

Conclusion

Conclusively, positioning gender discourse offers a newly approach to the study of spoken discourse. Feminist post-structuralist discourse analysis was particularly used to analyze the significance of gender in relation to the competing ways in which speaker's construct their identities and relationships through talk. This paper has discussed and pointed out the gender differences in male and female speech using male and female interactions. It was discovered that men's goal in using language tends to be about getting things done, straight to point; whereas women's tend to be about making connections to other people. Men talk more about things and facts, more economical in use of words; whereas women talk more about people, relationships and feelings, and are more inquisitive.

Although, it is relatively easy to deduce these differences, it is a much harder task to explain exactly why the differences are the way they are. Some differences are attributed to biophysical factors, others to the reflection of our cultural presuppositions about gender, and others to differences in the level of understanding and behaviour. However, there is less

clear distinction between the three phenomena that accounts for these differences.

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Definition of terms

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Dan: "that test sucked."

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Lizzy: "Urn, well... hmm, I think I failed it."

Dan: He paused. "I failed it."

Based on the above conversation, it is clear that females use more filler (they slur) than males when they are searching for their words, whereas the males might either be silent or pause.

Data 3

Dan: "I took the sandwich."

Lizzy: "Mm, hrnmm..."

Dan: "Then I added all the hot sauce packets from the cafeteria's condiment bucket."

Lizzy: Continued filling her nails, "Oh?"

Dan: "I squeezed them all in Chris's soup when he went to take a piss."

Lizzy: "Hmmm."

Dan: Shook his head. "And then he took a big gulp and his face exploded. Lizzy, you are not listening."

Lizzy: "Dan, are you listening?"

The above conversation reveals that female asks more questions than male. They also tend to make more encouraging

gestures and speeches (such as "Mm, Hmmm, and Oh") than males to keep the conversation going.

Data 4

Nkechi: "I was beaten by rain, I mean heavy rain o yesterday."

Jude: "I didn't encounter it."

Nkechi: "Jude, hmm, if you see me eh."

Jude: "I will be in Awka tonight."

From the above conversation, it is deduced that males tend to initiate new topics or otherwise try to steer the conversation. Males are more likely to interrupt the speech of their female partners, make statements of fact and respond less enthusiastically about the comments of others (or not to respond at all).

Data 5

Jude: "I want you to come with me to the market."

Nkechi: Smiles. "Wow, are you serious?"

Jude: "I can see you don't want to go."

Nkechi: "Lolz, I will go o! I will be very glad to go with you to the market whenever."

The above conversation shows that females use indication of excitement (interjection; wow, lolz) often more than their male counterparts.

Data 6

Jane: "Chy, if you see what Ada wore to school yesterday, you will be amazed."

Chy: "Are you serious? Ada of all people.
Upon all her big girl stuff?"

Jane: "Hmm, urn... you never see something."

Chy: "Hmm, even you, you do fuckup
sometimes."

Jane: What? Eh e! Don't start before I will fire
back at you now now now."

Chy: Oh! You want me to open up about you
and what you do?"

Ken: "Please Jane and Chy, that's enough.
Stop all these gossip and quarrel."

From the above conversation, it is seen that females gossip and
quarrel more than males.

Summary and conclusion

Summary

So far in this study, various gender speech differences have
been ascertained using spoken conversation of male and female
youths. They include:

- Males use fewer qualifiers than females.
- Females use more filler (i.e. they slur) when searching
for their words, whereas the male characters might just
silent or pause.
- Women tend to ask men more questions in a
conversation, make more encouraging gestures and
speech (such as 'mm-hmm') to keep the conversation
going.
- Men are more likely to interrupt the speech of their
(female) partners, and are more likely to make
statements of fact and to respond less enthusiastically
about the comments of others (or not respond at all).
- Men are more likely to introduce new topics or
otherwise try to steer the conversation.

- Male's way of using language is competitive; reflecting their general interest in acquiring and maintaining status: women's use of language is cooperative; reflecting their preference for equality and harmony.
- Female's voice (pitch) is more realized than the male's voice. They have higher pitch than their male counterparts.
- Females gossip and quarrel more than males.
- Females produce overlapping remarks in conversations than males.

Conclusion

Conclusively, positioning gender discourse offers a newly approach to the study of spoken discourse. Feminist post-structuralist discourse analysis was particularly used to analyze the significance of gender in relation to the competing ways in which speaker's construct their identities and relationships through talk. This paper has discussed and pointed out the gender differences in male and female speech using male and female interactions. It was discovered that men's goal in using language tends to be about getting things done, straight to point; whereas women's tend to be about making connections to other people. Men talk more about things and facts, more economical in use of words; whereas women talk more about people, relationships and feelings, and are more inquisitive.

Although, it is relatively easy to deduce these differences, it is a much harder task to explain exactly why the differences are the way they are. Some differences are attributed to biophysical factors, others to the reflection of our cultural presuppositions about gender, and others to differences in the level of understanding and behaviour. However, there is less

clear distinction between the three phenomena that accounts for these differences.

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