Chapter 7   **Gender and discourse analysis**

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Language and gender – the turn to discourse

One of the most striking phenomena in language study in the 1970s and 1980s was the development of the field of research known as 'language and gender'. This area of research continues to grow: the International Gender and Language Association was founded in 1999 and holds biennial conferences, and a new journal – *Gender and Language* – was launched in 2007, dedicated to the publication of research in this area.

The language and gender field consists of two main strands. The first developed as part of quantitative sociolinguistics: sociolinguists analysing the co-variation of language and variables such as social class began to notice that their data also revealed gender differences. Peter Trudgill (1974, 1983), for example, examining the pronunciation of a wide range of speakers living in Norwich, UK, realized that women and men of the same social class patterned differently. Women on average used forms closer to Standard English, while male speakers used a higher proportion of vernacular forms. Trudgill's analysis demonstrates that use of non-standard forms of language seems to be associated not only with working-class speakers, but also with *male* speakers, and thus with masculinity. This strand continues to flourish, with more recent research taking a communities of practice approach, employing ethnographic methods to explore the local meanings of language variation – frequently also linked to an analysis of style and indexicality (see for example Eckert, 1998, 2012; Mallinson and Childs, 2007; Moore and Podesva 2009; Lawson 2013; Zimman 2017).

The second strand of language and gender research, which will be the subject of this chapter, focuses not on phonological, morphological, or lexical features of language but on language as a 'concrete living totality' (Bakhtin, 1981) – in other words, on *discourse*. The move in linguistics from the micro-analysis of phonemes and syntactic structure to a more macro-analytic approach, looking at language in a more holistic way, was undoubtedly a paradigm shift with significant consequences. The freedom to think about talk in general and to analyse whole conversations has led to new understanding of the relationship between discourse and social life. Huge emphasis was placed on using authentic language data and on analysing these data in their social context.

At the same time as attention was shifting from isolated grammatical sentences to discourse, the old term 'sex' was replaced by 'gender'. In the early 1970s, 'gender' was a linguistic category referring to a morphological characteristic of nouns, and sociolinguists referred to *sex differences*. So linguistic analysis was oriented to the binary male/female, a binary based on biology. But by the late 1980s linguists and discourse analysts had adopted the new term 'gender' from the social sciences, and with it a new understanding that gender was not a given, but was culturally constructed and malleable.

The turn to discourse in sociolinguistics and in social psychology, combined with growing synergies with anthropological research, led to a huge creative burst in research and writing on language and gender. Researchers studied a wide variety of conversational data, encompassing talk in both mixed and single-sex groups and in both public and private contexts. Family talk, friendship talk, and workplace talk were all interrogated in the quest to understand how gender is constructed and maintained in everyday life.

Over the last thirty odd years, there have been three main approaches to language and gender research: the *dominance* approach, the *difference* approach, and the *social constructionist* approach. These developed in a historical sequence, but the emergence of a new

approach did not mean that an earlier approach was superseded. It is probably true to say, though, that most researchers now adopt a social constructionist approach. Research that takes a dominance perspective interprets the differences between women's and men's linguistic usage as reflexes of the dominant–subordinate relationship holding between women and men. Research that takes a difference perspective, by contrast, sees the differences between women's linguistic usage and men's linguistic usage as arising from the different subcultures in which, it claims, women and men are socialized (this approach is sometimes called the subcultural or two-cultures approach). Research taking a social constructionist perspective sees language use as constitutive of social reality and gender not as a given but as accomplished through talk. In the rest of this section I will give a brief sketch of work done using the first two of these approaches. The social constructionist approach, which has dominated the study of language and gender for the last three decades or more and has led researchers to consider the plurality and fluidity of gender performances, and, increasingly, their intersections, will be the focus of the following section.

The discursive construction of dominance

Early work on language and gender was inspired by the feminist movement of the 1970s and 1980s. In the book widely acknowledged as marking the beginnings of the new field, *Language and Woman's Place* (1975), Robin Lakoff was concerned to make people aware of the ways in which language use helped to keep women in their (subordinate) place. The feminist concern to expose discrimination against women meant that much early language and gender work analysed everyday interaction to reveal the ways in which male speakers dominated female

speakers through talk. The classic example is the study carried out by Don Zimmerman and Candace West (1975) on the campus of the University of California, examining the use of interruptions. [1] They observed two-party interactions and demonstrated that interrupting – that is, starting to talk before another speaker finishes their turn – was rare in conversation involving two women or two men, but more common in talk involving a woman and a man. In mixed dyads, interruptions were nearly all made by the male speaker (46 out of a total of 48 interruptions). The following is a typical example:

(1) [*Two university students*]

FEMALE: so you really can't bitch when you've got all those on the same day (4.2) but
            I uh *asked* my physics professor if I couldn't chan[ge that]
MALE: [don't touch that
            (1.2)
FEMALE: what?
MALE: I've got everything just how I want it in that notebook (#) You'll screw it up
            leafin' *through* it like that

(from West and Zimmerman, 1977)

The female speaker is prevented from continuing her turn by the male speaker's interruption. (Also note the 4.2 second pause, where the female student waits for a response from the other speaker – pauses of this length are a sign of a malfunctioning conversation.) As this example makes clear, '[g]ender relations are power relations' (Osmond and Thorne, 1993: 593).

Interruptions are not the only linguistic form involved in conversational dominance. Speakers may also dominate by holding the floor for lengthy periods or taking many turns. Joan Swann's (1989) research on classroom talk, in which she analysed videotapes of sessions in two different English primary schools, revealed that boys dominated discussion with the support of teachers: on average, boys contributed more to the sessions, both in terms of the number of turns taken and in terms of the number of words uttered.

In computer-mediated communication (CMC) early studies (e.g. Herring 1992; Herring et al 1992) confirmed a similarly gendered pattern of conversational dominance. As Herring (2014: 570) sums up:

> In asynchronous CMC in discussion lists and newsgroups, researchers found that males were more likely to post longer messages, begin and close discussions in mixed-sex groups, assert opinions strongly as 'facts,' challenge others, use crude language (including insults and profanity), and in general, adopt an adversarial stance toward their interlocutors.

By comparison, women's messages were more supportive and apologetic, making greater use of emoticons and other representations of smiling/laughter, a finding which was also confirmed for synchronous/real time CMC. Women also posted shorter and fewer messages, particularly in mixed-sex public forums, and were less in control of the topic development (Herring 2014: 570-571). In the last 20 years women's participation in CMC has grown to match that of men, but this has not necessarily gone hand in hand with a dissolving of patterns of gendered dominance and difference (e.g. see Kapidzic and Herring 2011), and women clearly suffer more online sexual harassment than men (Citron 2016; Vogels 2021).

A very different dominance strategy can be non-response or silence. Victoria DeFrancisco's (1991) study of seven married couples in the USA focused on non-cooperation in interaction. DeFrancisco asked the couples to record themselves at home for a week or more, using the method developed by Pamela Fishman (1980). She found that, although the women talked more than the men and introduced more topics, this was not associated with dominance. In fact the women were less successful than the men in getting their topics accepted. The men used various non-cooperative strategies to control conversation: no response, interruption, inadequate or delayed response, and silence. DeFrancisco concludes that men have the power to establish the norms of everyday conversation in the home, and that women have to adapt to these norms. More recently, the dominance approach has fallen out of favour: there has been less research in this area – particularly on talk in the private sphere – as a result of the tension between the postmodern idea that 'woman' cannot be treated as a uniform social category and the awareness that there continues to be systematic discrimination against women. However, interest in discourse patterns in the workplace has grown dramatically (e.g. see Baxter 2006,

2010; Mullany 2007, 2020) and, although these studies draw explicitly on a social constructionist framework, many also implicitly draw on ideas of conversational dominance. Large studies, such as the Wellington Language in the Workplace Project (see Holmes, 2000, 2020; Holmes and Stubbe, 2003), have revealed how complex power relations can be in the workplace, with women as well as men in powerful positions. However, overall the picture is not encouraging. Sylvia Shaw (2006) carried out research which looked at the experience of women MPs (members of parliament in the UK). Parliament has been, until very recently, an arena reserved for the male voice. An important way to 'do' power in parliamentary debate is to hold the floor. Shaw found that whist there was gender parity with respect to MPs' participation in the "legal" debate floor, men vastly outdid women with respect to their "illegal" debate floor in the UK House of Commons. Women MPs had trouble holding the floor, even when it was legally theirs, because male MPs frequently break the rules, making illegal comments (such as 'Rubbish') without being censored by the Speaker (who moderates parliamentary behaviour). In five debates, male participants made 90 per cent of all individual illegal utterances, which suggests that this kind of rule breaking is seen as normal by male MPs, while women MPs are disadvantaged because they are reluctant to break the rules. More than a decade after Shaw's first study, similar gender patterns persist in the UK House of Commons. Interestingly, however, men do not appear to outdo women with respect to their illegal interventions in the newer devolved institutions such as the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh and the Northern Irish Assembly (Shaw 2020).

As Judith Baxter comments: 'Women still struggle for acceptance within institutional settings such as government, politics, law, education, the church, the media and the business world' (Baxter, 2006: xiv). Women are expected to adapt to androcentric norms, for example to use the more adversarial, information-focused style characteristic of all-male talk, and typical of talk in the public domain. But women who successfully adapt to characteristically

male linguistic norms run the risk of being perceived as aggressive and confrontational, as un-feminine, while those who choose to use a more affiliative, cooperative style risk being marginalized. This double bind for women persists to the present day (e.g. Holmes 2020).

Discourse patterns in same-sex talk

While the dominance approach proved helpful in analysing mixed talk, some researchers began to question the wisdom of focusing exclusively on talk involving both women and men. In the '80s and '90s, these researchers increasingly turned their attention to same-sex interaction and to the conversational strategies adopted in everyday talk. They adopted a theoretical framework known as the *difference* or *two cultures* approach. The idea of linguistic differences arising simply from boys and girls growing up in different subcultures (see Maltz and Borker, 1982) may seem simplistic now, but the difference approach was a breakthrough: it allowed researchers to show the strengths of linguistic strategies characteristic of same-sex talk and, in particular, celebrate women's ways of talking.

Coates' work on the talk of women friends (1989, 1996) focused on groups of close women friends in a single context: informal gatherings where the main aim is 'to talk'. Talk is revealed as highly cooperative, with hedges, questions, and turn-taking strategies all used to promote symmetry and cohesion in the group. Topics tended to be personal, and topic shift was gradual. In the case of turn-taking, Coates argues that women prefer to establish a collaborative, or all-in-together floor, rather than the more conventional single, or one-at-a-time floor (the terms 'collaborative floor' and 'single floor' come from Edelsky, 1993). This means that women's friendly talk is characterized by repetition, overlap, and the joint construction of utterances, as well as by frequent laughter, as illustrated in the following examples:

(2) *[Pat tells Karen about her neighbour's attack of acute indigestion]*

P: he and his wife obviously thought he'd had a [heart attack]
K: [heart attack]

(3) *[Amanda, Jody and Clare talk about a friend's mother's dubious boyfriend]*

A: I mean <u>the man has a mobile phone</u>*{laughing}*
C: *{laughs}*-------->
A: so [one thing leads to another […]
J: [he's an architect [….]   would you want to marry this man?=
A: *{low laugh}*
C: =no
J: would you want to be in the same room as this man?=
C: =[no
A: =would you want to bloody (.) [USE THIS MAN'S MOBILE PHONE? {laughs}
J: [*{laughs}*---------------------------->
C: [yeah {laughs)----------------------->

These characteristics have also been found in subsequent research looking at a range of all-female groups, for example, teenage school students in the north of England (Davies, 2003); deaf friends at university in Bristol using British Sign Language (Coates and Sutton–Spence, 2001); elderly Austrian Jewish refugees living in London, code-switching between German and English (Eppler, 2009).

This is in contrast with what Coates (2003) found in the talk of a range of white, heterosexual British working and middle-class all-male groups. These different groups of men talked about topics such as sport, politics, cars, and avoided introspective topics. Their talk was characterized by fewer hedges than were found in women's talk (a direct consequence of topic choice), questions tended to be information-focused, and turn-taking followed a one-at-a-time pattern. Coates (2003, 2004) showed that male speakers like to play the expert and take it in turn to hold the floor, which leads to a pattern of serial monologues. At other times, and in other groups, men enjoy the cut and thrust of more adversarial, bantering talk, as illustrated in the following example:

(4) [*Men working in a bakery in New Zealand*]

Ray: CRATE
Sam: CASE
Ray: what?
Sam: they come in cases Ray not crates

Ray: oh same thing if you must be picky over every one thing
Sam: JUST SHUT YOUR FUCKING HEAD RAY
Ray: don't tell me to fuck off fuck (…)
Sam: I'll come over and shut yo-
Jim: yeah I'll have a crate of apples thanks {*laughingly using a thick sounding voice*}
Ray: no fuck off Jim
Jim: a dozen…
Dan: SHITPICKER{*amused*}

(From Pilkington, 1998: 265)

Deborah Cameron (1997) analysed the conversation of a group of male students, recorded while they watched sport on television. One of the ways that these men perform gender in their talk is through their comments on the basketball game they are watching. Cameron suggests that 'sportstalk' is a typically masculine conversational genre. Besides sport, these friends talk about women and about alcohol, topics stereotypically associated with all-male conversation. But they also gossip about non-present others: they discuss in great detail certain males of their acquaintance, accusing them of being gay. Overall, the talk displays solidarity: the five friends are bonded through their shared denigration of the supposedly gay outsiders. Interestingly, Cameron shows how the talk of these men involves several features normally associated with 'cooperative' women's talk – hedges, overlapping speech, latching. But it also displays more competitive features – two speakers dominate the talk, and speakers vie for the floor. She argues that cooperation and competition as styles of talking cannot be simplistically attributed to one gender or the other. Cameron also points out that language and gender analyses should not restrict themselves to a consideration of conversational style, but instead consider the substance of what is said, that is, the (gender) discourses/ideologies that speakers draw on in their positioning.

While the cooperative/competitive divide is not neatly isomorphic with femininity and masculinity, there are still arenas where discourse styles are strikingly gendered. One of these arenas is the classroom. Julia Davies (2003) worked in three different secondary schools in the north of England, focusing on small discussion groups involving 14-year-old pupils dealing

with specific tasks, such as answering questions about a poem or carrying out a role play of teachers dealing with bullying. In this paper Davies focuses on all-boy and all-girl discussion groups. She describes the girls' ways of talking as being characterized by 'polyphony' (borrowing the metaphor from Coates, 1996) and the boys' ways by 'cacophony'. Girls' discourse styles in the discussion groups involved both personal narrative and collaborative, jointly constructed text. Talk was highly cohesive, with lexical and grammatical repetition and the use of similar pitch levels and intonation patterns. By contrast, the boys' talk was full of interruptions, joking asides, insults, and was frequently off-topic. The chief goal of boys in classroom discussion was to demonstrate that they were 'real boys'. Classroom goals of cooperation and focus on the task in hand were seen as non-macho or 'gay', which made it very difficult for boys who wanted to engage with academic work. This is an important study, in that it not only demonstrates significant differences in discourse style between male and female speakers, but also draws attention to the conflict between the discourse of learning and expressions of heterosexual masculinity.

The discussion about male–female differences was popularized by Deborah Tannen's (1990) book *You Just Don't Understand*, which (following Maltz and Borker, 1982) linked gender differences to cross-gender miscommunication. This has led to the difference approach falling out of favour, because it became associated with a political stance which ignores male dominance. However, interesting work on same-sex talk continues to be carried out which implicitly draws on a difference or subcultural approach. But in many areas researchers have moved on, assimilating ideas from European social theory. Not only does more recent work view gender as fluid and malleable, but masculinity and femininity are no longer viewed as singular: analysts explore a range of femininities and masculinities.

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Competing and intersecting discourses: multiple femininities, multiple masculinities

Social constructionism is now the prevailing paradigm in discourse analysis and sociolinguistics. Gender is understood as a social construct rather than a 'given' social category, and speakers are seen as 'doing' gender – doing femininity or doing masculinity – in everyday interaction. Besides challenging the idea of a singular femininity or masculinity, current research takes the view that speakers have available to them a whole range of (often conflicting) discourses (see Weedon, 1987; Fairclough, 1992; Lee, 1992; Coates 1997). This use of the term 'discourse' is derived from the work of Michel Foucault. Discourse, in this sense is linked to ideology, and can be conceptualized as a 'system of statements which cohere around common meanings and values' (Hollway, 1983: 131). So, for example, in contemporary Britain there are discourses that can be labelled 'conservative' – that is, discourses that emphasize values and meanings where the status quo is cherished – and there are discourses that could be labelled 'patriarchal' – that is, discourses that emphasize meanings and values that assume the superiority of males. Dominant discourses such as these appear 'natural': they are powerful precisely because they are able to make invisible the fact that they are just one among many different discourses.

Thus at any one time there is a wide range of femininities and masculinities available to speakers. The next two examples, which both come from conversations about mothers, demonstrate how these discourses can conflict:

(5) [*talking about the function of funerals*]
MEG: I would see it [*mother's funeral*] as honouring her memory in some way

(6) [*Sue is complaining that she phones her mother but her mother never phones her*]

SUE: [(xx) I'm not very close to my mother really]
LIZ: [cos most mothers are a pain in the bum]

In the first example Meg positions herself as a loving and dutiful daughter. She and her friends discuss whether it would be taboo to miss your mother's funeral. They draw on a dominant discourse where the family is revered and parents are to be honoured, a discourse that upholds the taboo against missing your mother's funeral. The second example represents mothers in a very different way. Here Sue and Liz resist dominant discourses of the family and express feelings that reveal a different picture of mother–daughter relations. This discourse challenges the hegemonic idea that all families are happy and all parents benevolent. Most people have probably experienced both positions, and may even hold both views simultaneously. This is possible because of the existence of alternative discourses, alternative ways of thinking about the world.

The heterogeneity of gender identities has also been foregrounded in research which considers the way that gender intersects with social class, ethnicity, race and even religious norms (Keim 2007; Mendoza-Denton 2008; Hall 2009; Pichler 2009, 2011, 2019, 2021). In the following extract a group of 14-16-year-old British Bangladeshi girls switch in between a range of different discourses which at times align them with and other times reject the position of the 'good girl' who abhors public displays of affection.

(7) [*London Bangladeshi girls talking about kissing in the street*]

Rahima	*{amused}*<u>do you find that weird</u> *{laughs}* <u>kissing someone in the street</u>*{laughing}*
Ardiana	I don't
Dilshana	[yeah::]
Hennah	[oh my] God it is weird
Dilshana	(no I find- when) everybody is staring at you that that is (.) that is horrible yeah but th- I don't want anybody to [stare] at me when I'[m kiss]ing my **ma[n]**
Rahima	[(**see**)] [yeah]
Hennah	[(y]eah)
Ardiana	this is them (xxxx) they stare with their big eyes like [[and it's like]]
Dilshana	[**innit**]
Ardiana	they haven't seen this n:: (in the whole) **world**]
Dilshana	innit they're watching] <u>free cinema you /</u>**know***{mock Bangladeshi adult accent}*

[…]

Ardiana   I was saying to Shashima (.) tell her sister to come on **that** day to see **me** kissing him **again** (.) that's free I've g- I make everybody come and kiss (-) *{laughs}*]

?Dilshana   *{faint laugh}*]

Ardiana   <u>yeah as though she would</u>*{laughing}* (.)

Rahima   (but-) oh Go:d <u>I just get so</u> **embarrassed***{embarrassed/amused}*

Ardiana   =**that** is fu[nny   though kissing somebody on the street everyone [watching] you

Rahima?   [(I really-)]

Rahima   *{disgusted}*<u>ugh</u> that is so (-) %stupid I find it% (-)

Ardiana   (-) it's ALRIGHT if you're kissing someone in front of a **white** person right

(adapted from Pichler 2009, 2011)

In this extract the girls link the discourse which positions public kissing as 'embarrassing' and 'free cinema' to the Bangladeshi community. This is evident in the content of the story, as well as by Dilshana's adoption of a mock Asian accent to subvert the voice of the community elders. The clearest opposition to this 'good girl' femininity comes from Ardiana, who challenges this discourse of the "good Asian girl". However, once Ardiana steps out of the boasting frame she acknowledges not only the power but also the intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991; Levon 2015) of this particular good girl discourse which she associates with her local (East London Muslim Bangladeshi) community, concluding that public kissing is only OK in front of 'white people'.

Just as there is a range of discourses encoding femininity today, so there is a range of discourses encoding masculinity. Research on language and masculinities has been prolific in the last couple of decades. There is continuing evidence of hegemonic masculinity, which frequently draws on discourses of 'red-blooded heterosexuality' (Cameron 1997: 62, see also Kiesling 2002; Coates 2007; Bodó et al 2019). At the same time, this body of work has highlighted the fluidity and plurality of (hegemonic and alternative) masculinities, performed in specific contexts, communities of practice and intersected with age, social class, ethnicity, race, nationality and sexuality (Eckert 1998; Coates 2001; Hall 2009; Preece 2009; Levon 2012; Lawson 2013; Pichler and Williams 2016; King 2017; Pichler 2019, 2021).

Moreover, recent work on hegemonic masculinities argues that these are also multiple and shifting, dependent on historical and cultural context (Milani 2015). For example, it has been

suggested that the discourse of involved and intimate fatherhood has become hegemonic, at least in Scandinavian countries (Johansson & Klinth 2008). This discourse is also prominent in the following extract of spontaneous, self-recorded talk in a group of four young men from ethnically and racially mixed working-class backgrounds (see also Pichler and Williams 2016; Pichler 2019, 2021). At the core of the extract is Joe's self-disclosure about what he perceives as a lack of closeness between himself and his four-year-old daughter. His friends offer reassurance and advice, the latter in the form of a discourse of involved fatherhood.

(8) [*young southeast London men talking about their children*]

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Les:   you see if you're making a beat yeah do you get her involved though [….]
Tim    I didn't want my mom I wanted my [dad bruv]
Les                                    [that's what] it is and you gotta realise that
       anything-
Joe    but with a daughter might be [different it might] be the mom
Les                                 [anything you do]
Tim    na it's still still always daddy it's always daddy
Les    [anything you do they look up to it bruv (.) if I sit there and play guitar]
Joe    [na she doesn't like coming to me blood (.) she starts crying bruv=]
Tim    [=na she does she does]
Les    [my son's gonna ask] questions like even today I was sitting in the room and I woke
       up this morning and I was playing the guitar just strumming and he's at the cot
       like this (.) dancing do you get what I'm saying so if he's dancing he knows
Les    that the guitar makes music
Tim    =yeah
Joe    and that's what we do (.) we dance
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Joe appears to position the mother-daughter bond as 'natural', thereby also suggesting that his daughter's crying for her mum has nothing to do with his own personal shortcomings. Les persists with his argument about the love and admiration children feel for their dads, producing a brief narrative to capture the important role of music in creating involved fatherhood. His strumming of the guitar, and the baby's rocking along, is summed up by Les in a perfect coda (Labov 1972) 'and that's what we do (.) we dance'. Thus, differently from the discourse of 'deadbeat' or absent fatherhood, which continues to be associated with lower income and even more so Black fathers (Gillies 2009; Maxwell 2019; Wilson 2019), Les is

positioning himself and his friend very much as involved and close fathers. This captures the complex and dynamic nature of hegemonic masculinity/ies, whose 'internal hierarchy' (Christensen and Qvotrup Jensen 2008: 63) on one hand positions the young men in the group as disempowered in many respects, but, on the other hand, also shows their enthusiastic alignment with more recently hegemonized norms around caring/involved fatherhood (Pichler 2021).

Ideologies of gender and discourse

The last thirty years in language and gender research have been marked by battles over essentialism. Early researchers relied on a biologically based binary – male/female – and used the term 'sex' rather than gender. The realization that gender was culturally constructed meant that the original biologically based binary was replaced by a new cultural binary: masculine/feminine. But in the 1990s binaries of all kinds came under fierce attack. The argument was that binaries relied on an essentialist view of gender, reducing the complexities of gender to a homogeneous duality. The terms 'woman' and 'man' were seen as intrinsically flawed, since they appealed to an essentialist and binary notion of gender. The notion of gender as fluid and multiple is intrinsic to queer linguistics (see Leap, Chapter 14), since this field 'has the sexual and gender deviance of previous generations at its centre' (Hall, 2003: 354). Language in queer linguistics is studied from the twin perspectives of gender and sexuality, so research focusing on the language of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender communities is at its heart (e.g. Barrett 1999; Cameron and Kulick 2003: 141; Zimman 2017; Borba 2019). Queer linguistics has provided one of the key stimuli to fresh thinking about gender and nonbinary.

At the same time, with the turn of the century came a new awareness of the role played by *ideology* in structuring society. When speakers perform gender, they are inevitably influenced

by prevailing ideologies of gender (see Cameron, 2003; Talbot, 2003). Ideologies of gender and language have varied over the last 200 years, but even though researchers talk in terms of the fluidity and plurality of gender, it is important to acknowledge the power of the social ideology of gender as dichotomous (Cameron, 2003: 452). This ideology is still dominant/hegemonic for many people in many cultural contexts. Gender is seen as a simple mapping onto sex, and sex is construed as binary (male/female). These ideologies of gender and language maintain gender distinctions and help to naturalize the idea that there are two 'opposite' sexes. Media analyses also capture many of these binary and frequently discriminatory discourses, as for example Ju Yating (2019) on the media constructions of single women over 27 as 'leftover women' in China, or Clare Anderson (2019) on representations of the ageing female body in British lifestyle media and advertising. Both scholars highlight important ideologies around the intersection of aging and gender for women,

Recent work in the language and gender field is increasingly paying attention to the ideologies of gender and language underpinning everyday interaction. For example, Susan Ehrlich (2006) looks at the language used in Canadian and US court rooms, in trials about sexual assault, and shows how dominant ideologies of gender and of sexual behaviour make it very difficult for the women complainants to be heard and for their "silence" to be interpreted as anything other than consent. Jie Yang's (2007) research looks at the impact sexist ideology can have on women's everyday lives. Yang identifies a meta-pragmatic discourse on domestic violence in China around the term *zuiqian*, meaning 'deficient mouth'. This discourse includes a series of terms such as *zuisui* 'broken mouth' (talking about trivial things in great detail) or *chang shetou* 'long tongue' (being too inquisitive and nosey). In effect this discourse blames women's 'deviant' speaking styles for the serious social problem of domestic violence. The Chinese terms for women imply there are lots of different sorts of women with different

(deviant) ways of speaking. But a feminist analysis makes clear that the true basis of violence against women is simply the fact that they are women.

Cameron (2003: 448) argues that we need to understand the way ideologies work if we are to understand the way ideological representations of language and gender 'inform everyday linguistic and social practice among real women and men'. She looks at how language and gender ideologies vary through time and in different cultures. She argues that the role of ideologies is to make the (unequal) relationship between women and men in any society appear natural, rather than unjust. She also charts what she calls 'the fall and rise of women's language', arguing that women's language skills are not always seen as deficient any longer, in fact at times they are positioned as superior to men's. However, this new ideology of women as great communicators has not resulted in better pay or higher-status jobs for women, who are simply seen as doing what they are 'naturally' good at. Interestingly, Cameron shows how, while working class males are disadvantaged by these new ideologies, powerful men combine the new 'feminine' communicative skills (emotional expressiveness, good listening, rapport) with traditionally masculine ones (authority, enterprise and leadership). Good examples of such men are Bill Clinton, ex-president of the USA, and Tony Blair, ex-prime minister of the UK. Cameron points out that, while men who combine the masculine and the feminine like this are widely admired, women in senior positions are not rewarded for developing masculine characteristics: 'Nobody ever said approvingly of Margaret Thatcher that she was "in touch with her masculine side" ' (Cameron, 2003: 463).

To sum up, during these last forty years, ideas about language and gender have changed considerably. What used to be called 'language' is now seen instead as a heterogeneous collection of competing discourses. Gender is no longer viewed as monolithic or static but as multiple and fluid. Researchers have moved on to observing the discursive production of a wide range of femininities and masculinities, and have broadened the range of communities

investigated, both geographically and in terms of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender speakers.

However, in the twenty-first century there has been a re-appraisal of the roots of language and gender research, and some researchers have begun to argue explicitly for a revival of feminist awareness in language and gender research (see Baxter, 2003; McElhinny, 2003; Swann, 2003; Ehrlich 2006; Holmes, 2007; Lumala and Mullany 2020; Mills and Mullany 2011; Mullany 2007; Mullany and Trickett 2020). While it is not true to say that there is now consensus, there is a sense that a more pragmatic approach needs to prevail. Some are arguing for 'strategic essentialism', a phrase coined by the post-colonial theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1987) to refer to the careful and temporary use of essentialism when the main goal is to expose discrimination against subaltern (subordinate) groups. As Holmes (2007) argues, the category of 'women' as a group (and some level of generalization about this category) is still 'strategically indispensable' if the aim of the scholar is to explore the 'gender order', that is, the 'ways in which women are the victims of repressive ideologies and discriminatory behaviour' (p. 56). This has been highlighted in the recent #MeToo movement, and is reflected in the stark statistics offered by UN Women, the UN organization dedicated to gender equality and women's empowerment. Thus globally almost one in three women have experienced (sexual and non-sexual) physical violence, most frequently from current or former husband or partner. One hundred thirty-seven women are killed by a member of their family every day (see UN Women, 2021 for many further examples).

What this means for research in the area of discourse and gender is that there is currently a sense that researchers are now free to analyse talk in whatever way seems to make sense of the data. Post-structuralist ideas have led to a loosening of ideas about gender, while at the same time a new understanding of the role of ideology has led to the re-emergence of binaries when

used strategically. The discursive reproduction of gender is being explored all over the world and in a wide range of contexts, from the family dinner table to the twenty-first century global workplace. It seems likely that research in this area will continue to flourish and that our interest in the relationship between gender and discourse will continue unabated.

Further reading

Cameron, Deborah (2015-2021) Language: a Feminist Guide. [https://debuk.wordpress.com/[accessed 22/08/2021]

This is Deborah Cameron's treasure trove blog which will delight lay readers and students/scholars of language, gender and sexuality alike. Topics include gender norms, connotations and stereotypes, sexist language use, pronoun choices, misrepresentation of sexual violence, #MeToo, constraints and successes of (authoritative) women speakers in public.

Coates, Jennifer (2013) *Women, Men and Everyday Talk*. Houndsmill: Palgrave Macmillan.

This book contains a collection of the author's key papers which explore a rich body of spontaneous conversational data spanning more than 30 years.

Hall, Kira (2009) 'Boys Talk: Hindi, Moustaches and Masculinity' in Pichler, Pia and Eppler, Eva (eds.) *Gender & Spoken Interaction*, pp 139-162. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan.

This article presents an ethnographic investigation of the interplay between local identity constructions and larger-scale ideologies of language, gender and social class in a bilingual support group for male-identified women (or 'boys') in a New Delhi NGO.

Pichler, Pia (2021) I've got a daughter now man it's clean man": heteroglossic and intersectional constructions of fatherhood in the spontaneous talk of a group of young southeast London men. Forthcoming. *Language in Society.*

This article provides an insight into the heteroglossic and intersectional construction of fatherhood and (hegemonic) masculinity in the self-recorded, spontaneous talk of a group of young men from ethnically and racially mixed working-class backgrounds in southeast London.

Shaw, Sylvia (2020) *Women, Language and Politics.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

In this book Shaw presents an in-depth overview of women's (under)representation in in a range of political contexts over a 20-year time span, contemplating the effects of sexism, gender stereotypes and ideologies and providing examples of resistance.

Transcription conventions

{laughter}	nonverbal or paralinguistics information
[ ]	beginning/end of simultaneous speech
bold print	speaker emphasis
CAPITALS	raised volume
yeah:::::	lengthened sound
% %	reduced volume

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| = | latching on (no gap between speakers' utterances) |
| (.); (-); (1) | micropause; pause shorter than one second; pauses longer than one second |

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[1]   Some commentators are less convinced about the role of interruption in conversational dominance; see for example James and Clarke (1993). Analysis of so-called 'interruptions' has not always distinguished clearly between supportive overlap, typical of collaborative talk, and simultaneous speech resulting from one speaker taking an illegitimate – and often adversarial – turn while another speaking is still talking. It is only the latter that is involved in conversational dominance.