

Gender from Sociocultural Perspective

Gohar Harutyunyan, Margarit Hovhannisyanyan
Yerevan State University

As a social factor having a great impact on the choice of linguistic items, gender has always been a subject of thought in the sociolinguistic tradition. A special area within sociolinguistics, called *language and gender* or *gender studies*, is devoted to the investigation of language varieties in relation to gender. The theory of gender has formed and developed as a separate field in sociolinguistics since 1970s, and Robin Lakoff's famous book "*Language and Woman's Place*", published in 1975, was a real turning point in the area of gender studies which gave rise to various works on the topic. Some of these works developed the ideas proposed by Lakoff; others challenged them, suggesting new explanations and approaches to gender differences. Lakoff's arguments on gender are known as "deficit approach", since she represents diversities of male and female speeches, portraying women as a subordinate, deficient group in society. According to this approach, male speech is the norm against which female speech can be viewed and judged. This kind of attitude towards gender differences could not be accepted implicitly by subsequent scholars. Starting from 1990s a new approach became dominant in sociolinguistic theory. Deborah Tannen was one of the major proponents of this new position, known as "difference approach". Tannen states that men and women, being brought up and socialized in different sub-cultures, differ also in their speeches. This assumption is explained in terms of cultural diversities, which in their turn give birth to male and female conversational styles. The belief that there is a fundamental difference between men and women in all the aspects of life goes still deeper in later years. In 1992 John Gray published his bestseller "*Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus*", where he states that males and females are so distinct as if they were from two different planets. He also expresses the idea that very often there occur grave problems in the relationships between men and women because of these differences. According to Gray deep misunderstandings occur between genders in various conditions of life. He acclaims that men and women behave differently when handling problems, responding to stressful situations and even counting the received amount of love. In this book linguistic diversities between genders are presented to be still greater. According to the claims proposed by Gray, women are more sensitive towards communication, they talk more and are verbally more skilled than men. In short, Gray was a great advocate of the proposition that there exist serious gaps between male and female speeches, which lead to misperception or misinterpretation and finally to "miscommunication".

The widely spread stereotype that men and women speak different languages is broken in 2007, when Deborah Cameron writes her book "*The Myth of Mars and Venus: Do men and women really speak different languages?*", which casts doubts on the claims stated by Gray and his precedents. She calls the theory of "Mars and Venus" a myth in the broadest sense of the word, assuming that male and female differences are biological rather than social. The fact that there are differences between men and women is as nat-

ural as communication itself. These diversities construct personal identities and give meaning to the communicative process. As it is noticeable, the notions about gender diversities greatly vary from each other, and they have been subject to cardinal changes in the course of time.

The aim of the present paper is to find out whether men and women speak identically in English and Armenian. As a basis for our investigation we have taken the following claims put forward by Robin Lakoff: **color terms, strong vs weak expletives, women's versus neutral adjectives, tag questions, question intonation with statement syntax and strength of directive speech acts.** The analyses of gender talk in English linguoculture are based on examples which are taken from fiction. The data that these examples provide us clearly show that the above mentioned points which Lakoff mentions as distinguishing features between male and female speech, mainly hold true for English.

Let us discuss the use of *strong expletives* by males first. The bulk of the material obtained from the examples clearly shows that in modern English men really use strong expletives when they are in extremely emotional situations. Males may use swear words when they are disappointed, nervous or angry. Sometimes swear words appear in male speech nearly automatically, along with word combinations which carry a positive meaning. This can be proved by the following example: *"It's all right. He says it's a **damned good part**, a boy's part, nineteen. Eight or ten weeks in New York and then on the road. It's a safe forty weeks with John Drew. Two hundred and fifty dollars a week"* (M.S. p.31). As we can see, the expression **damned you** is used alongside a word combination which does not possess any negative connotations. In the same way, once, when Michael is too touched by Julia's acting and his eyes are heavy with tears, Julia approaches him and asks what the matter is. Michael, who is clenching his jaw to prevent its trembling, answers: *"Don't talk to me. You **dirty little bitch**, you've made me cry"*. Then Julia asks if he liked the scenes. To this "naive" question Michael answers in the same style: *"The scenes **be damned**, it was you. You just wrung my heart. The critics are right, **damn it**, you're an actress and no mistake"* (M.S. p.24). In this example uttering swear words is a good means for Michael to express his deep emotions and also to show the extent he admires the actress and her acting.

Women, on the other hand, are more careful about words. They may use strong expletives only in the case they are alone, or if they are addressing someone lower in status and age. Lots of examples taken from fiction show that women use strong and offensive words mostly in their inner speech. In the following speech situation Julia expresses her disappointment, anger and depression: *"He doesn't love me. He doesn't care **a damn** about me. I hate him. I'd like to kill him. **Blast** the American manager!"* (M.S. p.32).

In another example Julia is having tea with Charles Tamerley, who is the oldest and the most constant of Julia's admirers. Actually, Julia is not in love with him, she just uses her artistic skills to pretend so and to make an impression on Charles. When Charles goes away under the influence of Julia's bitter cry, she gets up and looks in the glass: *"You **rotten bitch**," she said to herself* (M.S. p.64). In the light of these data we can assume that women in English linguoculture are more *status-conscious* than men, since they avoid using expletives in the presence of others.

The next point we focus on is the frequent use of *tag questions* by women. As the analyses show, this is the dimension which mostly corresponds to the results of our data in English. In modern English women tend to use questions with tags more frequently. The abundance of the examples provides us with a firm basis to say that females sometimes apply tag questions in cases when their occurrence is not logical, such as when women express their own emotions, feelings or other personal matters. For example, in the following example the use of a tag question reaches extremes. Julia meets a young actress Avice Crichton. When they are about to part, Avice asks her: “*You won’t forget me, Miss Lambert?*” (M.S. p.133). To this Julia answers: “*No, dear, I promise you I won’t. It’s been so nice to see you. You have a very sweet personality. You’ll find your way out, **won’t you?** Good-bye.*” (M.S. p.133). It is obvious that Julia does not intend to find out Avice’s opinion, otherwise she could have asked: “*Do you think you will find your way out?*” Julia’s words express her own viewpoint and prevision. It sounds like an encouragement or good wish, formed like a question.

Another point mentioned by Lakoff is the *strength of directive speech acts*. Directive speech acts sound really strong and rude when used by males. In some cases they may sound even too offensive. Females, on the contrary, tend to accompany their orders with phrases which make orders sound like request. For example, each time Eloise gives instructions to her own daughter, she says: “*Close the front door after you, **please,***” *Eloise called* (S.J. p.42), “*Stand up, **please**....Tell Mary Jane how Jimmy looks*” (S.J. p.44) or “*May I have this. Yes. Stay out of the street, **please***” (S.J. p.45). Women often form their requests indirectly. When Susan wants to tell Bo to stop smoking, she expresses her request in the following way: “*I don’t think you’re allowed to smoke in here*” (S.J. p.87). It is important to mention that Susan and Bo are quite on good terms. They are close friends. However, Susan prefers to use an indirect way of making Bo understand that his smoking is not pleasant for her. This feature does not occur so often in male speech.

Question intonation with statement syntax is another distinguishing feature between male and female speech mentioned by Lakoff. Based on the data of the analyses, it is possible to state that at present this point is rarely found in male speech, at least in the works we have analyzed. Certain examples are present in female talk; however their occurrence is not so often. When Dougald tells Susan that their friends are going to build a dam on Ranna Creek, Susan says: “*And I suppose he expects me to drop everything and survey Ranna?*” (M.A. p.67). On another occasion Annabelle tells Bo that she was too much afraid to ever go back to Suttor country. When Bo asks her what she is afraid of, Annabelle answers: “*I’m not a very bold person,*” *she said and laughed. “Just imagine, supposing I found the Suttor country meant so much to me that I decided my life for the past twenty years had all been a dreadful mistake?”* (M.A. p.78). Annabelle goes on with another statement again with question intonation: “*Supposing I found it meant nothing all to me? They say you should never go back*” (M.A. p.78). The assumption that the above mentioned sentences are not mere questions but statement syntaxes with question intonation is proved by the fact that they are not perceived as questions both by Dougald and Bo, and do not elicit answer. We can easily see that these statements of question are

not directed to Susan's or Annabelle's addressees, but to themselves. It is evident that they do not need an affirmation from their interlocutors. They merely express their opinions formed like a question.

The next point that Lakoff mentions is the use of *women's* adjectives by females and the use of *neutral* adjectives by males in similar situations. It's typical of female speech to use a great number of intensifying adverbs next to the adjectives to emphasize the meaning of the sentence and the frankness of their utterance. Thus, whenever Julia wants to tell Michael how handsome he is, she says something like this: "*It would be so silly to pretend you weren't **divinely handsome***" (M.S. p.30). When speaking about herself, Julia also uses this kind of '*colorful*' adverbs: "*With a son of sixteen it's no good pretending I'm so **terribly young** any more. I'm forty and I don't care who knows it*" (M.S. p.70). Similar adverbs occur in Julia's speech, when she talks to others, or when she thinks about them. For example: "*I couldn't bear to think of your having to throw away your good money on tips. I know that you're not **terribly rich** and I knew you'd spent a lot on green fees*" (M.S. p.106). On another occasion Julia is telling Langton about her admiration for Michael: "*Oh, you don't understand. He's so **frightfully handsome**, they'll fall for him like a row of ninepins, and **poor lamb**, he's so susceptible to flattery. Anything can happen in two years*" (M.S. p.34).

As the analyses prove, women tend to use rich and colorful adjectives in their speech, but they do not overuse them. Meanwhile in male speech rich and colorful adjectives are missing.

The last feature Lakoff focuses on is the use of *specific color terms*. It seems impossible to present a full picture in this connection, as the factual materials provide us with no typical examples concerning color terms. For the lack of data it is difficult to prove that women often tend to use precise color terms. The total absence of typical examples in the works that we have analyzed allows us to conclude that specific color terms are not common in women's talk.

As for Armenian linguoculture, we have the opportunity to conduct a more practical survey of men's and women's speech differences. To do this, we have compiled a special list consisting of 10 questions, each of which relates to the dimensions suggested by Robin Lakoff, and carried out a survey among 200 Armenians (100 males and 100 females). The responses given by all the respondents are really interesting. These answers prove the fact that the 6 dimensions proposed by Lakoff do not hold true for Armenian linguoculture altogether.

The data obtained from the analyses in Armenian are completely different from those in English. The first point to be discussed is the use of *strong expletives* by men. Two of the situations described in the questionnaire demand an expression of strong emotions. As the answers show, the majority of female respondents prefer to keep silent or ignore the situation and thus, they do not express their emotions. Even if they do, they do it either in their minds or among their friends. Only a very small number of women, nearly 12% use expletives. However, if they apply them, they use even stronger ones than the expletives mentioned by male respondents. The words that basically appear in females' answers are the following: «հիմար», «չորան», «ոչխար», «անդաստիիս-

բաւի», «սնչնորիք». The majority of men, 55% mention they would definitely react to the situation; they either would say something very rude or would even apply physical strength, like: «Ես էլ իրան կբռնեմ», «Կխիտեմ», «Ուրեքը կջարդեմ». However, even if males write that under certain circumstances they would react very rudely, in most of their answers strong expletives are missing. In order to present a more evident picture, we shall note that among men only 9% apply expletives in one of the situations given above, while among 100 women nearly 12% mention they would use rather offensive words. So, as we can see, the data received from the analyses in Armenian present a great deviation from the above mentioned dimension.

If we come to the use of *tag questions* by women, we can see that among females only 40% use a tag question when the situation demands. Others form their questions differently. More than half of the respondents avoid using a question with a tag. Among males the number of the respondents who apply tag questions is even smaller, only 25%. So, we can assume that tag questions are an inseparable part of female speech in English, while their occurrence is not common by Armenian women.

Among Armenian men only 42% of the respondents apply *direct orders* when addressing a stranger. Others use polite and in some cases even indirect requests. In the same situation the majority of females, 72% use polite requests. Thus, in Armenian the majority of men and women tend to use polite requests rather than directive speech acts when they address a stranger. The picture changes tremendously when the addressee of the request or the order is not a stranger but someone very close to the speaker. Here, as we can see, the social dimension of *solidarity* comes to the fore. In similar cases the number of polite requests greatly reduces, especially among the answers by women.

Among 100 female Armenian respondents 74% use *question intonation* when suggesting going to the cinema. Others apply affirmative sentences. Of 100 male respondents only 46% use sentences with question intonation. Of course it is obvious that the majority of women's answers are formed in question intonation, however, in men's answers too, this feature is present to a great extent. Nearly half of the male respondents form their suggestions using interrogative patterns. Thus, it would be wrong to state that only Armenian women use question intonation with statement syntax.

In Armenian the difference between men's and women's talks concerning the use of rich adjectives, which Lakoff characterizes as *women's*, is not considerable. Male respondents, like the female ones, use such colorful adjectives, which do not frequently occur in everyday speech. The number of adjectives used by both men and women is nearly equal. 83% of male respondents and 88% of female respondents present different types of adjectives, both colorful ones and slang terms. So, these data enable us to conclude that the distinction of adjectives between neutral and women's does not hold true in case of modern Armenian. We can say that this feature cannot be characterized as a main distinguishing feature between male and female speech in modern English, however, taken generally it is not completely wrong for the English linguoculture.

The results of the questionnaire show that, the dimension concerning the use of *specific color terms* by women is a bit exaggerated for modern Armenian as well. It should be emphasized once again that it is only female respondents who create new and precise

color terms like *դեղնակարմրավուն*, *դեղնանարնջագույն*, *դեղնակարմիր*, *կարմրանարնջագույն* and *կարմրադեղին* to describe the color which according to them is neither orange nor red, or neither yellow nor orange. However, these answers make up only a small number of all the answers, besides, among the color terms mentioned by males, there are again such specific names which do not provide us with sufficient ground to assume that the use of specific color terms is a feature typical only of female speech. Thus, the use of specific color terms is the only feature mentioned by Lakoff which is not in accordance with our analyses in English and Armenian linguocultures.

Our analyses enable us to draw certain culturally-oriented conclusions. Thus, as we can see all the points mentioned by Lakoff hold true for English, of course to different extents. Only one of the dimensions does not fit the analyses carried out in English. This means women in English are more indirect in making orders and more self-assertive in expressing strong emotions. They often seek confirmation from their interlocutors and also express uncertainty when uttering statements. As far as the vocabulary is concerned, it also varies greatly between men and women. The frequent use of *women's* adjectives by females and their absence in male speech proves that the word-stock used by men and women is too distinct. So, we can come to the final conclusion that in English linguoculture *directness* and *self-assertion* are actual and applicable in female talk. Hence, English males and females follow different speech patterns and thus, different value systems work well for each of the parties. If men in English are more direct in making orders, women tend to apply more indirect and polite utterances in the same situation. Males may express strong emotion when females try to avoid the use of expletives. Different reasons may account for the intention to sound less stiff and rude in speech. We can assume that women in English linguoculture prefer to use milder elements in their speech since they try not to offend their interlocutors, or intend to protect their face. So, it is clear that females pay more attention to interpersonal relationships and the maintenance of their own status and reputation in the society. This means that components of non-verbal communication are of more significance for women than the direct expression of their emotions, feelings or ideas through speech. It is believed that the tendency to attach more importance to non-verbal components than to the verbal message is typical of high-context cultures. As it is visible, English women's sub-culture is clearly high-context. Males, in contrast, follow patterns of low-context communication. When analyzing the use of adjectives, it became obvious that male and female vocabulary is also different. So we can say that in English men and women can be characterized as two distinct sub-cultures that are socially expected to have different speech habits and preferences.

As distinct from preconceived ideas and expectation, the above-discussed dimensions proposed by Lakoff mostly do not hold true in Armenian linguoculture. This means that male and female speeches in Armenian do not vary from each other to the extent they do in English. As it is perceived, male and female vocabulary, syntax and choice of linguistic elements differ in those cultures where the structure of the society is clearly hierarchical and there are clear-cut boundaries between different sub-cultures, in this particular case, between males and females. Thus, we have every reason to conclude that modern Armenian society, in contrast to modern English society, provides equal opportunities to

apply identical speech patterns for both men and women. This may sound interesting, and even unusual. However, as we see, globalization leaves its effects on modern societies, making them more westernized. Furthermore, our own analyses show that the English society is even more hierarchical than the Armenian one.

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Գեղերի հանրամշակութային հայեցակերպը

Սույն հոդվածում փորձ է արվում պարզելու դեռևս 1975 թ.-ին Ռ. Լեյկոֆի կողմից առաջ քաշված կանանց և տղամարդկանց խոսքի տարբերակիչ դրույթների արդիականությունը ժամանակակից անգլերենում և հայերենում: Անգլերենի համար որպես ուսումնասիրության նյութ են ծառայել գեղարվեստական գրականությունից վերցված համապատասխան օրինակները: Ի տարբերություն անգլերենի, հայերենում հեղինակները հնարավորություն են ունեցել կատարելու գործնական ուսումնասիրություն՝ հիմնված իրենց կողմից նախապես մշակված հարցաշարի պատասխանների վերլուծության վրա: