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THINK PRACTICALLY AND LOOK LOCALLY: Language and Gender as Community-Based Practice

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INTRODUCTION

How do gender and language interact? For the past 20 years or so, linguists, anthropologists, psychologists, sociologists, and feminist thinkers have explored many aspects of this question. There are now dozens of books and hundreds of course offerings on gender and language (14, 20, 41, 60, 67, 92, 98, 99), specialized articles are found in many journals and collections (15, 21, 59, 78, 87, 90, 109, 110, 115), and review articles continue to appear (8, 32, 47, 74, 76, 89). Topics treated include sexist, heterosexist, and racist language; interruptions; graffiti and street remarks; names and forms of address; politeness; tag questions; directives; motherese; children's talk during play; schoolroom discourse; bilingualism and language contact; metaphors; shifts in word meanings; the language of science, religion, and war; silence and volubility; intonation; emotional expressiveness; religious and political rhetoric; sociolinguistic variation; and language change. This list is far from comprehensive but its scatter suggests an absence of theoretical coherence in language and gender studies.

Partial integration of the range of linguistic phenomena that seem sensitive to gender is sometimes attempted by trying to explain them all in terms of a

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general feature of gender identities or relations. The most influential frame-works in which this has been attempted can be thought of as emphasizing either gender difference or (men's) dominance. Thorne & Henley (108) high-lighted these two modes of explanation in their early anthology, *Language and Sex: Difference and Dominance,* although they were ahead of their time in proposing that difference and dominance would probably both enter into ex-plaining gender-language interactions.

We have organized much of our discussion around difference on the one hand (especially as a component of gender identities) and power on the other (especially male dominance as a component of gender relations). However, we have tried to shift attention away from an opposition of the two and toward the processes through which each feeds the other to produce the concrete com-plexities of language as used by real people engaged in social practice. In our second section, we discuss the separation between the sexes (allegedly produc-ing distinctive female and male communicative cultures); there we also criti-cally discuss sex as a determinant of social address and the resulting orientation toward linguistic variation and change. In our third section, we look at accounts of male power in language and the subordination of women at personal and at institutional levels; we briefly consider other kinds of hierar-chical relations, such as those across class and racial boundaries; and we examine larger issues about language and power. But in both the second and third sections we note some of the ways that gender difference helps create hierarchical and other kinds of gender relations; and we indicate how those power relations in turn help construct "women", "men", and their language. Not only are difference and dominance both involved in gender, but they are also jointly constructed and prove ultimately inseparable. These constructions are different at different times and places, and the constructors are people, not faceless abstractions like "society." It is the mutual engagement of human agents in a wide range of activities that creates, sustains, challenges, and sometimes changes society and its institutions, including gender and language.

We aim here to encourage a view of the interaction of gender and language that roots each in the everyday social practices of particular local communities and sees them as jointly constructed in those practices. Thus we use our critical reviews of others' research primarily to hang flesh on the bones of a commu-nity-based practice orientation, within which we propose to think about lan-guage, about gender, and about their interaction as living social practices in local communities. To think practically and look locally is to abandon several assumptions common in gender and language studies: that gender can be isolated from other aspects of social identity and relations, that gender has the same meaning across communities, and that the linguistic manifestations of that meaning are also the same across communities.

To think practically about gender is to focus on the historical processes of constructing gender categories and power relations: "Gender" becomes a dy-namic verb. We speak of practices (and traits and activities and values) as

"gendered" where they enter in some important way into "gendering" people and their relations. That is, gendered practices construct members of a community "as" women or "as" men (or members of other gender categories), and this construction crucially also involves constructing relations between and within each sex. Looking locally, we see that the same community practices that help constitute a particular person as a woman may, for example, also help constitute her as "African-American" and "middle-class" and "a mother" and "a sister" and "a neighbor" and so on. We often speak of "women" and of "men" (or sometimes of "female" and "male"), referring to those so constituted in their own communities. But in talking globally, we do not want to suggest that gendered identities and relations have any common core "fixed" by their (initial classificatory) link to reproductive biology. Dichotomous sex-based categories often (not always!) provide an easily applicable way to sort an entire community into two non-overlapping groups. But the content of those categories (including the social relations within and between the groups) is constantly being constituted and in various ways transformed as the members of that community engage with one another in various practices. There is no guarantee that "women" (or "men") in a particular community will in fact constitute themselves as a coherent social group with distinctive common interests. Even practices closely tied to reproductive biology (e.g. those revolving around menstruation and the "disease" of PMS) are connected in complex ways to other social practices (e.g. class-related employment possibilities; see 71), thus making it problematic to speak of "women's" position or interest without reference to other factors.

It used to be fashionable to draw a sharp distinction between sex (biology and what it supposedly "determines"—i.e. femaleness or maleness) and gender (cultural beliefs and norms linked to sex, often more specifically a normative conception of individual attributes associated with sex—i.e. femininity or masculinity). Practice-theoretic approaches to gender make it clear, however, that this dichotomy cannot be maintained (e.g. 22). What looks like laudable terminological clarity in the service of workable analytical distinctions turns out to mask intellectual confusion. Bodies and biological processes are inextricably part of cultural histories, affected by human inventions ranging from the purely symbolic to the technological. It isn't that cultures simply "interpret" or assign "significance" as a cultural overlay to basically biological distinctions connected to sex; rather, social practices constitute in historically specific and changing ways not only gender (and sexual) relations but also such basic gender (and sexual) categories as "woman" and "man" and related categories such as "girl" or "lesbian" or "transsexual" or "lady" or "bitch." "Female" and "male" label distinctions in potential sexual reproductive roles: All cultures known to us sort people at birth into two groups on the basis of anatomical distinctions potentially relevant to those roles. Crucially, however, what is made of those categories and how they link to other sex-related categories and relations emerges only in the historical play of social practices, including their

link to such phenomena as medical and technological changes in reproductive possibilities. "Defining" these various terms is not preliminary to but an ongoing component of developing a scholarly practice centered on questions of gender.

Language enters into the social practices that gender people and their activities and ideas in many different ways, developing and using category labels like "woman" and "man" being only a small part of the story. To understand precisely how language interacts with gender (and with other symbolic and social phenomena) requires that we look locally, closely observing linguistic and gender practices in the context of a particular community's social practices. Gumperz (42) defines a speech community as a group of speakers who share rules and norms for the use of a language. This definition suggests the importance of practice in delineating sociolinguistically significant groupings, but it does not directly address social relations and differentiation among members of a single community (though implicitly treating differentiation as revealing "sub-" communities). Nor does it make fully explicit the role of practice in mediating the relation between language and society.

To explore in detail how social practice and individual "place" in the community interconnect, sociolinguists need a conception of a community that articulates place with practice. We therefore adopt Lave & Wenger's notion of the "community of practice" (69, 116). A community of practice is an aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement in an endeavor. Ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs, values, power relations—in short, practices—emerge in the course of this mutual endeavor. As a social construct, a community of practice is different from the traditional community, primarily because it is defined simultaneously by its membership and by the practice in which that membership engages. (This does not mean that communities of practice are necessarily egalitarian or consensual—simply that their membership and practices grow out of mutual engagement.) In addition, relations between and among communities of practice, and relations between communities of practice and institutions, are important: Individuals typically negotiate multiple memberships (in families, on teams, in workplaces, etc), many of them important for understanding the gender-language interaction. A focus on language and gender as practice within communities of practice can, we think, provide a deeper understanding of how gender and language may interact and how those interactions may matter.

DIFFERENCE: GENDER IDENTITIES

In thinking about gender, many start by looking at sex differences. We discuss two strands of sociolinguistic research that have emphasized differences among speakers. One strand starts with a view of gender differences as arising in female and male subcultures, each of which is characterized by gendered values and modes of interaction. These studies focus on an array of discourse

phenomena as implementations of those values and interactional modes, analyzing cross-sex communicative problems as stemming from gender/cultural differences in norms of appropriate discourse. Language is of interest simply as part of communicative interaction: The larger inquiry is sociocultural, and so language is considered together with such nonverbal phenomena as gaze direction and posture.

The other strand comprises more extensive research from a wider range of research projects. It offers, however, no fully articulated conception of gender and focuses on linguistic phenomena at a structural level: Sex is seen as one of several attributes determining social address or "place" in a community (theoretically on a par with class, race, age) and also determining a distinctive relation to linguistic variation (e.g. pronunciation patterns or orientation toward standard grammar). Gender is of interest just because sex seems in many instances to correlate significantly with linguistic variation, often interacting with class and other components of social address: The starting point is linguistic variation within a population and its relation to social address and to structural linguistic change.

Sex as the Basis of Separate (but Equal) Subcultures

As we shall see in the section on power, below, many have argued that differences in women's and men's relations to language—both in systemic matters, such as how vowels are pronounced, and in the dynamics of conversational interaction—are produced by, and themselves help reproduce, male power. At least some analysts, however, have thought of individual cross-sex interactions as plagued by misunderstandings that cannot be explained adequately in terms of the man's control or the woman's submission. According to these researchers, such misunderstandings seem rather to reflect prevalent gender differences in preferred communicative styles and interactional strategies.

Gumperz and colleagues (43) have explained certain problematic interactions and social tension in encounters between members of different social groups as arising from unrecognized differences in the communication patterns those social groups favor. Originally applied to different ethnic, national, and regional groups, this model was extended to tensions between women and men by Maltz & Borker (70), who proposed that norms of friendly peer conversation are learned mainly in single-sex preadolescent peer groups, and that these norms are radically different for females and males, yet essentially the same within each sex across many different local communities. Adult women and men, then, may unwittingly bring different norms to their interactions, each assuming that the other is flouting established norms rather than adhering to a different but equally valid set: She assumes he means what she would mean by making (or not making) a particular conversational move, whereas his intended import is different; and he likewise misjudges her contributions to their exchange. The intended analogue is the young American

woman responding with indignation to the British hotel clerk's "shall I knock you up in the morning," hearing a sexual proposition where wake-up service is being offered. Although this model does not account for why boys and girls develop different cultures along the same lines in distinct local communities, it implies that gender practices in the wider society (e.g. the United States) are the key.

Tannen (105) elaborates the Maltz-Borker picture, expanding considerably on the cultural models of male and female conversational practice. Although the general two-culture model does not in itself dictate a particular "essential-ist" conception of how female interactional norms might differ from male, the model has in fact been coupled with a currently popular view of "women's" and "men's" ways of thinking and behaving (5, 35). The claim is that women emphasize connection with others, avoiding overt confrontations and direct disagreement, seeking empathy and understanding rather than guidance from their conversational partners, offering intimacy, suggesting or asking rather than directing or telling, preferring the tête-à-tête to talk in larger groups; boys continue boyish patterns of self-assertion into manhood, competing with one another to establish their individual claims to hierarchical status, proferring instruction rather than tea or sympathy, displaying their own ideas and claims for others to confirm but also engaging with relish in defending them against expected attacks of the sort they themselves frequently launch, seeking large audiences and avoiding showing themselves as vulnerable. Neither male nor female is culpable for misunderstandings and disappointments in cross-sex interaction, since each is simply continuing in the track established in the innocence of childhood. Where much work on language and gender ignores male behavior by treating it as a neutral norm from which women deviate, this work has the great merit of trying to account for men's behavior as well as women's. It also has the merit of recognizing that women are not defined simply in terms of their relation to men and that women may actively espouse values and pursue goals not set for them by men. The stereotypes are familiar, but they paint a much more positive view of the "female" subculture and sometimes a less flattering view of the "male" than may have been traditional.

What has seemed to many the most interesting consequence of the dual-cul-ture model—namely, that cross-sex communicative problems derive from in-adequate knowledge of interactional norms in the "other" culture—seems to suppose that people ignore all but the interactional possibilities predominant in their own gender-specific subcultures and make no real interactional choices, simply acting as passive sponges who soak up gendered identities. We do not deny that sex separation in childhood may result in gendering some adult interests, strategies, and social values, that such gender differentiation may go unnoticed, or that ignorance of it may cause misunderstandings. But the em-phasis on separation and resulting ignorance misses people's active engage-ment in the reproduction of or resistance to gender arrangements in their communities. For example, indirect requests are a familiar interactional re-

source in many communities of practice. Every English speaker knows that an interrogative such as "do you think you can finish this by tomorrow?" can function as a polite request or a sugar-coated command, as well as a genuine information-seeking question. The misinterpretation of requests-masquerading-as-questions is likewise available to all speakers as a strategy of resistance: The child's "Not really, mom" in response to her "Would you like to set the table?" tries to read mom's directive literally, thus forcing her to display openly her actual coercive authority. When a man reads a woman's "no" as "yes" he actively exploits his "understanding" of the female style as different from his own—as being indirect rather than straightforward. His reading is possible not because his subculture taught *him* to encourage and welcome sexual advances by feigning their rejection; rather, he tells himself that such coyness is part of "femininity," a mode of being he views as significantly different from his own. The dual-culture approach posits the speakers' mistaken belief in shared norms and symbols. Gender relations in many actual communities of practice familiar to us, however, are often founded on (possibly mistaken) presuppositions not of sameness but of difference ("woman—the eternal mystery"). By taking separation as given, theorists ignore the place of this separation in the practice of the wider community. In fact, both real differences and the belief in differences serve as interactional resources in the reproduction of gender arrangements, of oppression, and of more positive liaisons.

The commonest criticism of the dual-culture model is that it ignores power (41, 48, 97). Where interpretations are disputed, whose cultural norms prevail? Dominance relations between cultures have indeed received little attention in Gumperz-style analyses of communicative conflict. But the dual-culture theory can certainly accommodate power asymmetries. The theory might well predict that those in the subordinated culture would be more likely to "understand" the interactive dialect of their oppressors than vice versa, on the direct analogy to the position of those who speak stigmatized vernaculars or minority languages (Black English Vernacular or Spanish in New York City, for example). But the appeal of the theory is that it minimizes blame for cross-cultural tensions for both the dominating and the dominated group: There is no more agency (and hence no more responsibility) in becoming an interrupter rather than a "good listener" than there is in becoming a speaker of Quechua rather than English. To deny agency and assume interactional difficulties arise simply from insufficient knowledge of differences is to preclude the possibility that people sometimes use differences (and beliefs about differences) strategically in constructing their social relations. In other words, dual-culture theory cannot recognize, let alone explain, strategic appeals to (real or perceived) differences. Yet strategic appeals to difference in constructing gender relations are apparent from even casual observation of social practice: Careful examination of unsatisfactory social relations in cases where cultural separation is more pervasive (e.g. different racial groups) may well also show uses of

difference (or beliefs about it) in constructing dominance and other relations. The dual-culture theorists are right in insisting on the importance of interactional devices in gender relations, but their "no-fault" analysis makes it virtually impossible to see how gender differences in interactional strategies are constructed and how interactional strategies (more precisely, strategists) construct gender relations from a repertoire of similarities and differences and ideas about them.

Sex as Social Address

Sociolinguists working in the quantitative paradigm pioneered by Labov have found significant correlations within geographic communities between linguistic variables and speakers' demographic characteristics—socioeconomic class, race, age, and sex (65, 114). The most striking findings concern phonological variation. Variationists have garnered empirical data that describe the spread of patterned sound shifts through and between communities. Regular, systematic sound change appears to enter communities through the speech of the locally oriented working- and lower-middle-class population, and then to move upwards through the socioeconomic hierarchy. People tend to develop and regulate their linguistic repertoire through contact with language used by those they speak with regularly. Thus the partial separation between classes, racial groups, and generations—the relatively infrequent contact across these social boundaries—seems to affect linguistic change much as physical and political divisions do. Social addresses, however, are not all equal. In a sense, variationists consider gender precisely because sex differences in variation emerge even in communities where the sexes are not systematically separated the way socioeconomic or racial groups are. Some such differences may result from different kinds of contact outside the home community—contacts that might significantly affect exposure to standard dialects or to vernacular varieties not heard at home (9, 62). Because most gender differences in variation cannot be explained in this way, however, sociolinguists have reasoned thus about gender identity: If it isn't separation that differentiates the sexes in their linguistic behavior then it must be some aspect of the distinctive content of their gendered personalities or social positions. Differences in the use of linguistic variables, then, reflect sex-based differences in social practice.

Variation studies have used correlations to determine the role of linguistic variables in social practice. Sociolinguistic variables are seen as passive "markers" of the speaker's place in the social grid (particularly in the socioeconomic hierarchy). Correlation of a linguistic variable (or a certain frequency of its use) with a demographic category gives a rudimentary social meaning to that variable within the community: The variable "means" membership in the demographic group correlated with its use. Speakers are seen as making strategic use of sociolinguistic markers in order to affirm membership in their own social group, or to claim membership in other groups to which

they aspire. According to this idea working-class speakers use local vernacular variables to claim the local goods and services due authentically local people (64); the hypercorrect patterns in the formal speech of the lower middle class assert membership in the middle class (66). Variables that women use more than men throughout different strata of a community signal female identity in that community (49), and men who rarely use those variables thereby signal their male identity (45, 62). In all these cases, identity, interpreted in terms of place in the social grid, is seen as given, and manipulation of the linguistic repertoire is seen as making claims about these given identities.

Analysts have, however, recognized linguistic variation as doing more than just marking group membership. The fact that the middle class is more resistant to phonological change than the working class has been attributed to the nature of class-based participation in the marketplace (93), and class differences in variation have been attributed to class-based differences in social network structure (80). A variety of patterns of variation have been associated with social network and local orientation (63, 66, 106). Nichols (83) found linguistic behavior among women differentiated by whether or not they had access to the marketplace (in the sense of opportunities for paid work); the different forms of women's and men's participation in the marketplace accounted for language differences across gender boundaries (teaching school requires greater adherence to standard language norms than construction work, for example). Milroy (80) has found complex relations between linguistic differences among women and market-related differences in their social network structure (whether, for example, coworkers are also neighbors or kin).

Although explanations of language variation are becoming more sophisticated as ethnographic studies provide more richly textured data and analyses, the relations between variation and social practice, and between variation and gender, require further elucidation. Finding practice-based explanations of sex correlations will require a significant leap beyond the correlational and class-based modes of explanation used so far. Explanations that do recognize the contributions of practice to variation have typically tried to infer psychological dynamics from correlations rather than from observations of gender dynamics in the communities from which the correlations have been extracted. Speakers who use language patterns that mark (i.e. that are statistically associated with) the social stratum above their own are characterized as upwardly mobile, prestige oriented, and/or insecure. Such correlational interpretation of linguistic variables involves a certain circularity. For example, a number of studies find that women make greater use than men of historically conservative variants. These variants have been interpreted as prestige markers, and women's greater use of them has been said to reflect status consciousness or prestige orientation. But no independent evidence is offered that the patterns in question have (only) the social meaning analysts have assigned on a correlational basis. How they figure in the social practice of the women and men using them has not been examined in detail. When other correlations have emerged in

which women have made greater use of historically innovative variants than men, these innovative variants have also been interpreted as prestige markers, maintaining the characterization of women as prestige oriented (62, 113). What is at issue is not whether women in a particular community are or are not upwardly mobile or status conscious. Our methodological point is rather that the social meanings of linguistic variables cannot be ascertained merely on the basis of the social address of those who use them most frequently. Nor are linguistic variables unambiguous (13, 16). A variable acquires multiple meanings through the uses made of it in communities of practice. In this respect it is like other informationally rich symbols (cf the discussion of indirect requests above, p. 467, and of tag questions and rising intonations on declaratives below, p. 478).

A Community-Based-Practice View of Difference

What many of the studies cited above have found are *tendencies* toward gender-differentiated practice that have implications for language. It is important to remember that statements like "women emphasize connection in their talk whereas men seek status" are statistical generalizations. We must take care not to infer from such unmodified claims about "women" and "men" that individuals who don't fit the generalization are deviants from some "normative" gender model. This is especially true when women and men are characterized as "different" from one another on a particular dimension. If gender resides in difference, what explains the tremendous variability we see in actual behavior *within* sex categories? Is this variability statistical noise in a basically dichotomous gender system? Or are differences among men and among women also important aspects of gender? Tomboys and goody-goodies, homemakers and career women, body builders and fashion models, secretaries and executives, basketball coaches and French teachers, professors and students, mothers and daughters—these are all categories of girls and women whose mutual differences are part of their construction of themselves and each other as gendered beings. When femaleness and maleness are differentiated in terms of such attributes as power, ambition, physical coordination, rebelliousness, caring, or docility, the role of these attributes in creating and texturing important differences among very female identities and very male identities tends to become invisible. Analysts all too often slide from statistical generalizations to quasi-definitional or prototypical characterizations of "women" and of "men," thus inaccurately homogenizing both categories and marginalizing those who do not match the prototypes.

The point here is not that statistical generalizations about the females and the males in a particular community are automatically suspect. But to stop with such generalizations or to see finding such "differences" as the major goal of investigations of gender and language is problematic. Correlations simply indicate areas where further investigation might shed light on the linguistic and other practices that enter into gender dynamics in a community. An

emphasis on difference as constitutive of gender draws attention away from a more serious investigation of the relations among language, gender, and other components of social identity. Gender can be thought of as a sex-based way of experiencing other social attributes such as class, ethnicity, or age (and also less obviously social qualities like ambition, athleticism, musicality, and the like). To examine gender independently as if it were just "added on" to such other aspects of identity is to miss its significance and force. Certainly to interpret broad sex patterns in language use without considering other aspects of social identity and relations is to paint with one eye closed. Speakers are not assembled out of independent modules: part European American, part female, part middle-aged, part feminist, part intellectual.

Abstracting gender from other aspects of social identity also leads to premature generalization even about "normative" conceptions of femaleness and maleness. While neither of the two strands of research discussed above is theoretically committed to a "universalizing" conception of women or of men, research in both has tended to take gender identity as given, at least in broad strokes at a global level. Although many of the most audible voices in both the dual-culture and the social-address traditions have indicated clearly that the particular content of gender identities is variable cross-culturally, they have nonetheless spoken of "women" and of "men" in ways that underplay not only cross-cultural differences but also the variability within each gender class for a given culture, much of which is highly structured socially. The strong temptation (one we have sometimes succumbed to ourselves) is to apply theoretical accounts of gender difference globally to women and men.

The portrayal of women as self-effacing, indirect, and particularly concerned with connection derives from research on the American white middle class. Drawing on contrasts with Samoa, Ochs (85) suggests that this "mainstream" American stereotype of women's speech owes much to child-centered mothering practices. Tannen's research on interactions between ethnicity and preference for directness (102) casts doubt on a simple relation between gender and indirection, and African American women have also protested unwarranted assumptions that directness contradicts universal norms of womanhood (81). One might still maintain that most women are less direct than most men in each of these local communities, but research in Madagascar showing most women as direct and most men as indirect (56) contradicts even this weak version of the generalization. Lakoff (68) proposes that women's linguistic patterns, whatever they may be, will be seen as somehow improper; but this is a generalization about evaluation, not linguistic behavior. Once we raise the question of just who might "see" women's language as deficient, a question that Lakoff ignores by using agentless passives and faceless abstractions like "the culture," it becomes apparent that in few communities will evaluations of women's (or of men's) speech be completely uniform. Not only may people recognize diversity among women and among men in their ways of speaking; one person may celebrate the very same gendered stereotype another depre-

cates. There may be statistically significant correlations between sex and pre-
ferred interactional styles and norms that hold across different communities of
practice, related to one another via their orientation to common structures and
institutions (e.g. to a national state, mass media, educational systems). Some
correlations may even hold globally (though only a wide range of detailed
local studies could establish these). But such observations would not demon-
strate that gender can be isolated from other dimensions of social life, as
having some "essence" to be abstracted from the varied sociohistorical circum-
stances in which people become "women" and "men."

Rather than try to abstract gender from social practice, we need to focus on
gender in its full complexity: how gender is constructed in social practice, and
how this construction intertwines with that of other components of identity and
difference, and of language. This requires studying how people negotiate
meanings in and among the specific communities of practice to which they
belong.

What, then, is the relation between gender differences and communities of
practice? People's access and exposure to, need for, and interest in different
communities of practice are related to such things as their class, age, and
ethnicity, as well as to their sex. Working-class people are more likely than
middle-class people to be members of unions, bowling teams, and close-knit
neighborhoods. Upper-middle-class people are more likely than working-class
people to be members of tennis clubs, orchestras, and professional organiza-
tions. Men are more likely than women to be members of football teams,
armies, and boards of directors. Women are more likely to be members of
secretarial pools, aerobics classes, and consciousness raising groups. These
aspects of membership combine in complex ways. For example, associated
with differences in age, class, and ethnicity are differences in the extent to
which the sexes belong to different communities of practice. And different
people—for a variety of reasons—will articulate their multiple memberships
differently. A female executive living in a male-dominated household will
have difficulty articulating her membership in her domestic and professional
communities of practice; a male executive "head of household" will likely
have no such trouble. A lesbian lawyer "closeted" within the legal community
may also belong to a "women's" community whose membership defines itself
in opposition to the larger heterosexual world. The woman who scrubs toilets
in the households of these two women may be a respected lay leader in her
local church, facing still another set of tensions in negotiating multiple mem-
berships. Gender is also reproduced in differential forms of participation in
particular communities of practice. Women tend to be subordinate to men in
the workplace; women in the military do not engage in combat; and in the
academy, most theoretical disciplines are overwhelmingly male, with women
concentrated in descriptive and applied work that "supports" theorizing.
Women and men may also participate differently in single-sex communities of
practice. For example, if all-women's groups do in fact tend to be more

egalitarian than all-men's groups, as some current literature claims, then women's and men's forms of participation in such groups will differ. Relations within same-sex groups will, of course, be related in turn to the place of such groups in the larger society. Only recently, for example, have women's sports begun to receive significant recognition, and men's sports continue to involve far greater visibility, power, and authority. This articulation with power outside the team in turn translates into different possibilities for relations within. Further, the relations among communities of practice when they come together in overarching communities of practice also reproduce gender arrangements. For example, the relation between male varsity sports teams and cheerleading squads illustrates a more general pattern of men's organizations and women's auxiliaries. Umbrella communities of this kind do not offer all members the same status. When several families get together for a meal and the women team up to do the serving and cleaning up while the men watch football, gender differentiation (including differentiation in language use) is being reproduced within the family on an institutional level.

The individual's development of gender identity within a community of practice [e.g. the Philadelphia neighborhood of working class African American families Goodwin (38, 39, 40) describes] is inseparable from the continual construction of gender within that community of practice, and from the ongoing construction of class, race, and local identities. Nor can it be isolated from that same individual's participation and construction of gender identity in other communities of practice (e.g. her "scholastic-track" class in an integrated school outside the neighborhood). Speakers develop linguistic patterns as they act in their various communities. Sociolinguists have tended to see this process as one of acquisition of something relatively "fixed." Like social identity, the symbolic value of a linguistic form is taken as given, and the speaker simply learns it and uses it either mechanically or strategically. But in practice, social meaning, social identity, community membership, and the symbolic value of linguistic form are constantly and mutually constructed. (Indeed the variationists' circular construction of the social meaning of variables can be seen as part of this process.) And the relation between gender and language resides in the modes of participation available to various individuals within various communities of practice as a direct or indirect function of gender. These modes of participation determine not only the development of particular strategies of performance and interpretation, but more generally access to meaning and to meaning-making rights.

People use the attribution of difference to construct social hierarchies. In hierarchies, dominant community members attribute deviance only to subordinates; their own distinctive properties they consider unremarkable—the norm. Even if subordinate members are not seen explicitly as deficient, they are disadvantaged by this process of nonreciprocal difference attribution because social practices and institutions favor the interests of "normal" participants (6). Many of the studies reviewed here offer evidence elucidating the power dy-

namics of gender differences in language use. Not all of the authors cited note this aspect of the phenomena they discuss, but recasting their work within such a framework gives us a rich picture of the dynamics of linguistic power.

POWER: GENDER RELATIONS

Power is not all that connects gender identities to gender relations (consider, for example, intimacy and desire). Differences between and within gender groups can support collaborative efforts in community endeavors, dividing labor and drawing on multiple talents (72), and can function in structuring desire (and not only heterosexual desire; see 61). But interest in power has been the engine driving most research on language and gender, motivated partly by the desire to understand male dominance and partly by the desire to dismantle it (sometimes along with other social inequalities).

Janus-like, power in language wears two faces. First, it is situated in and fed by individual agency; situated power resides primarily in face-to-face interactions but also in other concrete activities like reading or going to the movies. Second, it is historically constituted and responsive to the community's coordinated endeavors; social historical power resides in the relation of situated interaction to other situations, social activities, and institutionalized social and linguistic practices. This duality of power in language derives directly from the duality of social practice: Individual agents plan and interpret situated actions and activities, but their planning and interpretation rely on a social history of negotiating coordinated interpretations and normative expectations (and in turn feed into that history). And the duality of social practice is directly linked to the duality of meaning. What speakers "mean" in their situated utterances and how their interlocutors interpret them is the situated face of meaning; its historical community face involves the linguistic system(s) with conventionalized meanings and usage norms to which utterance meanings are oriented. The real power of language, its social and intellectual value, is found in the interplay between these two aspects of meaning and in the room for development afforded by the adaptability of conventions (e.g. indirection, irony, metaphor, pervasive vagueness, and ambiguity).

The overwhelming tendency in language and gender research has been to emphasize either speakers and their social relations (e.g. women's disadvantages in conversation) or the meanings and norms encoded in the linguistic systems and practices historically available to them (such sexist patterns as conflating generic human with masculine in forms like "he" or "man"). But linguistic forms have no power except as given in people's mouths and ears (or via other media); talk about meaning that leaves out the people who mean is at best limited. We begin by looking at power in situated interactions, then expand the discussion to include more explicit considerations of the community's attempted coordination of symbolic practices (and control of their potential power). We emphasize the existence of alternatives to androcentric

world views and practices, moving finally to consideration of power and gender dynamics and change in communities of practice.

Interactional Reproduction of Gender and Male Power

Lakoff blazed new ground some 20 years ago by hypothesizing that gender difference in the use of English among mainstream white middle-class Americans helped maintain male dominance (67). She followed a long tradition in characterizing "women's language" as different from the standard set by men in being polite, tentative, indirect, imprecise, noncommital, deferential, closer to norms of grammatical "correctness" and less colloquial, emotionally expressive but euphemistic, and so on. However, she departed radically from the misogynistic tradition that gave rise to such stereotypes by arguing that this sort of speech was forced on girls and women as the price of social approval for being appropriately "feminine." At the same time, she saw women's language as keeping them from becoming effective communicators in positions where they might act as independent and nonsubordinate agents. Although challenges have been mounted to many of Lakoff's proposed formal characterizations of "women's language" and to the functions (and hence "meanings") she assigns to those forms, her ideas have been important in suggesting that genderized language use might figure in reproducing men's advantage over women at both personal and institutional levels.

Lakoff's early work prompted analysts to consider how language might connect to men's dominance in the professions and public life. She argued that norms of conversational interaction operative in mainstream American middle-class communities put a woman speaker in a double bind. Behavior that satisfies what is expected of her as a woman disqualifies her in the marketplace: To speak "as a woman" is to speak "as an underling"; and authoritative speech is, according to Lakoff, incompatible with cultural norms of femininity. Lakoff also proposed that linguistic conventions put women at an expressive disadvantage by encoding an androcentric (more specifically a misogynistic) perspective on women themselves. Lakoff not only noted explicitly insulting terms for referring to and addressing women, but also used linguistic techniques to highlight the problematic assumptions that underlie the widespread use of such apparently innocent words as "lady" and "girl."

Impressed by the suggestion that institutionalized male power might be instantiated in everyday linguistic exchanges, investigators began in the mid-1970s to look at such exchanges as potential arenas of sexual politics. A variety of approaches were taken to investigating institutionalized male power in interactions. One was to test gender stereotypes—particularly to assess the empirical evidence on the portrayals of gendered speech in the scholarly literature on language and gender (23, 25). Another kind of study granted (provisionally) the accuracy of stereotypical characterizations of the form of gendered speech but then reanalyzed the functions of those forms, seeing "women's" interactional moves in cross-sex contexts as resisting or coping

with the dominance embodied in "men's" moves and as sometimes having other functions as well (29, 73). These studies, too, sought to efface the misogynist underpinnings of many prevalent beliefs about gender differences in language. A different but related strategy has been to examine interaction in single-sex groups, often in order to explore the possible dimensions of gender-specific verbal cultures [55; a study by Goodwin (38) has been widely cited as evidence for separate cultures but is not understood as such by its author]. The emphasis of all these efforts has been on women's language, since an important motivation of the work was to attack casual (and often demeaning) female stereotypes. Of course, these scholars also wanted to compensate for the fact that much sociolinguistic investigation had ignored women's language use.

One stereotype to come under empirical scrutiny early was that of the talkative woman. Swacker (100) showed that, given the task of describing a picture, the college men in her study talked far longer than the women and tended also to make more positive (if incorrect) statements; women were more tentative in the face of insufficient information. These intriguing results raise questions about how the men and women interpreted their obligations and rights in the context of the task. There are clearly situations in which men are expected and licensed to talk more, and others in which women are; and men and women have differential rights and obligations to talk about particular topics. There is not likely to be a simple relation between amount of talk and gender, or for that matter between amount of talk and power. There are enormous cultural differences in the relationship between power/authority and verbosity (1, 8, 95).

Swacker's speakers were performing solo, doing what was asked of them without threat of competition or benefit of cooperation. Conversational interactions offer other complications, interruptions being one important focus for exploring gender and power in language use. Early studies found that men interrupt more than women (in same-sex and in cross-sex interactions) and that women get interrupted more than men (36, 117, 118, 120); similar patterns of dominant interrupters seemed to emerge in asymmetries of parent-child and doctor-patient interaction. Recent reviews of research on sex differences in amount of speech and on interruptions and overlapping speech show, however, that matters are considerably more complicated (53, 54, 101, 104) than such observations might suggest. First of all, identification of interruptions that usurp others' speaking rights creates serious analytical problems; overlaps and speaker changes interpreted as disruptive interruptions are formally no different from those that function as supportive devices in conversation. Furthermore, conversational turn-taking norms and behavior are not the same in all regional or ethnic groups or situations, and investigation in a variety of settings does not give a clear picture of connections between gender and interruptions even for middle-class whites. Edelsky (28) and Coates (19) found women in certain informal situations regularly overlapping their speech, and

Kalčik's study of women's rap groups (55) notes continual collaboration in topic development as supported by overlaps and mutual sentence completion.

In addition, control is not always a matter of monopolizing "air-time" or of other forms of overt bullying. Control can be exercised through refusing to talk (29, 51, 58) or through making someone else talk (17). An individual's conversational contribution is evaluted in retrospect, and inasmuch as silence can signal the inappropriateness or unsatisfactoriness of the preceding turn, it can be a powerful tool for devaluing contributions. In the same way, an individual may continue to provide talk in order to fill in the threatening silence offered by the interlocutor. Such talk may then be evaluated—by both parties—as idle chatter. The potential for devaluation of women's contributions (by both men and women) under these circumstances is tremendous. This interactional construction of the worth of what is said, of the weightiness of different speakers' words for ongoing community-wide purposes, contributes to the development and maintenance of a community history. Such a history tends to reproduce androcentric values in its ongoing conventions and norms—in familiar messages and in the unexamined assumptions that hide in the historically constituted backgrounds against which discourses unfold within the community. A contributor not accorded attention and respect will find her capacity reduced for full participation in the social elaboration of thought, meaning, and community values. The cycle may be vicious in even subtler ways. Strategies undertaken in recognition of situational disadvantage often additionally convey recognition (and at least apparent acceptance) of subordination. Faced with less than energetic participation from the interlocutor, for example, a person may well employ compensatory linguistic strategies to establish the right to talk. Fishman's (29) study of several graduate student couples showed women having considerable difficulty introducing topics and starting conversations with their male partners. They fell back on such strategies as the opening questions that children use to get the floor—"Do you know what?" Announcing perceived lack of entitlement in this way ultimately confirms both partners in their views of the locus of control. As O'Barr & Atkins (84) noted, powerless strategies reproduce powerlessness, signaling the lack of authority (and presumptive value in the community) of their users.

Pointing to the fact that devaluation and limited authority tend to reproduce themselves must not be seen as "blaming the victim" for interactional failures but as showing how dominance can be exercised in the absence of overt coercion. The cycle for a woman may start with social devaluation of her speech, and that devaluation may handicap her capacity for effective speech even where interlocutors might be disposed to treat her as a valued colleague in common enterprises. (Such dispositions are hardly commonplace.) Women and men may utter the same linguistic form but not be able to accomplish the same things by doing so because both men and women presume the lesser value of women's contributions to community endeavors. The power lies not in the forms themselves but in the complex web that connects those forms to

those who utter and interpret them and their kinds of membership in the community of practice in which the utterance occurs. Two linguistic forms have been highlighted as evidence of women's interactive insecurity—tag questions ("We should leave, shouldn't we?") and rising "question" intonation in declarative sentences ("My name is Lee?"). It was early recognized that the tag form could carry an intonation that seemed more nearly coercive than insecure or deferential; early quantitative studies of tag questions (23, 25) did not directly examine whether the forms they counted encoded tentativeness and insecurity, however, but concentrated on whether or not they characterized women's speech "in general," finding different sex correlations in quite different situations. However, it has been pointed out (17) that, even keeping intonation constant, tag questions can be heard in exactly the same conversational setting as either deferential or threatening, depending on relations among the participants and the activities in which they are engaged. Similar comments have been made about interpretation of rising intonations in contexts of assertion. Guy et al (45) provide quantitative evidence that Australian women use more rising intonations than men do overall, and suggest that this is a result of women's tentativeness. In an ethnographic study, McLemore (79) showed that rising intonation could be a powerful strategy within a Texas sorority; one speaker reported, however, that she would never use such an intonation in a male-dominated situation, because there it would sound "weak." Even within the sorority, the power of the rise correlated with its user's social position (pledges, for example, sounded "weak" when using repeated rises). This leads us to the more general observation that speech strategies are evaluated in the context of the identities of the participants and their status in specific interactions. The same language may be interpreted differently, for example, depending on whether it is used by a man or a woman. As Lakoff has pointed out, a woman using the same powerful language strategies as a man might well be evaluated as more aggressive than the man. Conversely, language strategies that are heard as powerful when used by a man (e.g. slow, measured delivery) may well not be heard as such when employed by a woman.

Alternative and Changing Norms and Conventions

It can be discouraging to survey the ways women's linguistic "differences" from men can disadvantage women as agents reshaping the linguistic norms of their communities. However, we have many indications that this situation can be challenged successfully. Male "control" in situated interactions and in the course of shaping evolving community norms is at best partial and certainly not monolithic. Both women and men have complex arrays of "interests" to further through their actions and have ambivalent connections to community endeavors.

Some of the studies cited above emphasize women's agency, their active participation in interactions. In addition, a number of researchers (re)examining women's participation in linguistic practices find this active agency impor-

tant not just for the individual agents but for developing socially viable countercurrents and giving alternative meanings to linguistic strategies and forms. Although some "coping" practices ultimately help maintain existing inequities (simply making them more "bearable" for the oppressed), other countercurrents have more potential for transforming communities.

Politeness, for example, is often associated with women's language use. Researchers have tended to see politeness as either passive enforced deference (e.g. 67) or willful "prissy" avoidance of real social engagement (for an early critique of this view see 2). As noted above in the discussion of variation and adherence to "standard language" norms, women's alleged "correctness" can also be viewed as evidence that they are repressed prigs (the "schoolmarm" image) or timid and unimaginative shrinking violets. Alternative functional characterizations may be somewhat more positive, linking women's politeness and correctness to their nurturing roles and to the educative and "civilizing" functions they often serve.

Quite different interpretations have seen these same "women's" linguistic features arising as (partial) strategic solutions to the problems posed for women by their social oppression. Trudgill (113) proposed that women's relative phonological conservatism in Norwich England reflects a symbolic compensation for a lack of access to the marketplace. Eckert (26, 27) has expanded on this view, arguing that women are constrained in a variety of ways to accumulate symbolic capital more generally. Deuchar (24) has argued, furthermore, that where women's language is more standard than men's it may serve to defend them against accusations of stupidity or ignorance, thus increasing the likelihood that they will be recognized as agents capable not only of communicating but also of creating meanings, as not only consumers but also producers of symbols. Speculations like these gain support from observations of such "women's language" features as politeness and "correctness" in the context of community practice.

Community-based studies show clearly, for example, that politeness is not simply a matter of arbitrary conventional norms constraining individuals ("Ask Kim nicely!") but of intricate and connected strategies to foster social connections and potential alliances and to subvert institutionalized status advantages (see 12 for a general account). Brown (11) examines language use in a Mayan community where in-marrying women are structurally subordinated in many ways, including being subjected to physical violence from husbands and mothers-in-law. Although they do defer to men, they accord respect to other women and foster positive affiliative ties both with other women and with men. In general, they fine-tune their politeness strategies to enhance their individual positions, even using the forms of respect ironically as weapons in such rare (and socially problematic) activities as direct confrontation in the courtroom (10). Lack of other resources having forced these women to develop such nuanced linguistic skills, they actively use them to lessen their

social disadvantage and increase their social power (albeit only in limited ways).

A number of community studies detail other concrete ways women refuse to accept passively certain problematic features of their participation in community practices, often reevaluating those practices from alternative perspectives. Radway (92), for example, found that a number of women who were avid readers of "bodice-ripping" romances exercised considerable selectivity in their reading and were not, as some critics argued, simply feeding a perverse masochism produced by a misogynistic culture. They actively sought visions of capable women and (at least eventually) admiring and respecting men; they saw their own reading activities as having educational value and as asserting their own self-worth and entitlement to pleasure. They recognized, however, that others did not share their assessment. Furthermore, as Radway points out, reading romances may have prevented their issuing more fundamental challenges to the unsatisfactory state of gender relations in their communities of practice, including in their marriages.

Studies that emphasize access as a determining factor in the "acquisition" of language varieties have an underlying functionalist flavor. Specific language varieties are associated with specific situations; speakers are then cast both as passive users of whatever language varieties they happen to come into contact with and as passive participants in whatever situations they happen to find themselves in. But language choice can be an important strategy for gaining control over one's exposure to people, situations, and opportunities. Gal's study (33) of language shift in a Hungarian-speaking agricultural community in Austria shows young women emerging as leaders in social change and language shift as part of a move to gain greater control over their own lives—and young men holding back in order to maintain control over theirs. In this male-dominated peasant community, women see their interests as conflicting with those of local men. By rejecting Hungarian for German, they reject the roles and identity of a peasant wife in a male-dominated agricultural community, in favor of greater access to jobs and marriage partners in the emerging local industrial economy. Their local male peers' retention of Hungarian, on the other hand, is consonant with the greater attractiveness for men of the traditional agricultural life.

Harding's (46) description of women's verbal behavior in a Spanish village might seem to support either Tannen's generalized claim that women seek connection or less flattering views of women as "gossips." But Harding's rich ethnographic observations show that this behavior plays a different role in overall practice. Though formal authority and political power in the village are vested in men, the men depend on their wives for information (obtained through talk with other women); this information is offered to husbands in forms designed to influence their evaluation of affairs and their subsequent decisions. Thus the women gain considerable influence over many important matters in the community, though that influence is exercised only with the

cooperation of men and only within the general parameters of existing practices and relations.

Misogyny in evaluating women's speech (e.g. trivializing it as "gossip") has certainly been prevalent, and sexist patterns of language use are now well documented. Baron (3) provides a useful historical perspective, and Frank & Treichler (31) offer a superb summary of the field accompanied by excellent annotated bibliographies. Much of this work has focused on American English [and on heterosexual white middle-class speakers thereof; but see (47, 119)]; but the project of documenting male dominance in speech evaluation, and that of documenting misogyny and heterosexism in widespread usage patterns and rhetorical practices, have recently become international (50, 52, 86, 112). Scholars have also begun to study linguistic androcentrism in such enterprises as science and philosophy (30, 82).

Women do not always accept views excluding them from active participation in shaping the community's endeavors and practices. Visible and effective resistance has characterized the (mainly white and middle-class) feminist movement, ranging from new publications like *Ms.*, to consciousness-raising groups, to assertiveness training, to nonsexist language guidelines (see 31; for Canada's bilingual situation, see 57). Just as striking though less visible in the mainstream are the many refusals to accept wholeheartedly women's relegation to inferior status. Martin's (71) compelling ethnographic study of ways of talking about women's reproductive experiences shows that although authoritative (mainly male) voices in the community (e.g. the medical establishment) do sometimes enforce views of women, as under these authorities' control ("managing childbirth"), women can see themselves as active agents. Class privilege may make resistance to predominant views of gender less likely. For example, middle-class women tend to accept the medical model of menstruation, childbirth, and menopause far more readily than do working-class women. Why? Perhaps because the middle-class women far more often depend directly for their personal and economic well-being on men much like those in the medical establishment: Doctors' wives or daughters or sisters have a general interest in doctors' continued authority, and some middle-class women (indeed increasingly many these days) aspire to be accepted as members of that medical establishment themselves.

Some feminists have spoken of men's "control" of language: Men set norms that limit and devalue "women's language" and they appropriate meaning-making for themselves. Male-controlled meaning leads not only to what is called sexist language but also to exclusion of women's contributions from the wide range of cultural values and from what counts as knowledge. Language has been described as "man made" (99) and, more recently, as shaped in and serving the interests of a "patriarchal universe of discourse" (87). The claim is that men (sometimes "modified": e.g. elite white heterosexual men) derogate women and their language and impose on women definitions of reality that serve men's interests at the expense of women's, suppressing or at least

ignoring women's meanings. There are subtle as well as simplistic versions of the view that men have shaped language as an instrument for their own sexual, social, political, and intellectual ends. Even the subtlest versions fail to show how norms and conventions might confer or sustain privilege without overt coercion or conscious direction. Nor have their proponents investigated the complex ways linguistic power relates to gendered individuals, including resistant practices like those mentioned above.

Ultimately the view that males have made language an instrument of their own purposes also misses the real potency of language by assuming its meanings float in the ether, unattached to social and linguistic practices. McConnell-Ginet (75, 77) explains semantic change as possible precisely because linguistic forms do not come permanently glued to meanings but are endowed with meanings in the course of social practice. The history of linguistic and social practice constrains but does not determine what a speaker can mean. Male domination in conversation, then—be it subtle or overt—can impose male-oriented meanings on linguistic forms and reinforce them; but meanings are never uniform, nor can they be completely controlled. There is always room for resistance, challenge, and alternatives. Male-centered perspectives can seem to infect "the language" itself, but protection afforded them by existing linguistic conventions of meaning is never complete: Such conventions (and thus "the language") must be continuously sustained in ongoing interactions. Thus we cannot separate so-called "semantic" issues from the kinds of interactive dynamics we have discussed above; on the contrary, it is through these dynamics (including the ways individual interactions connect to wider community practices and institutions) that "the language" and conventions for using it are constituted.

The fact that in most societies familiar to us there are more stereotypes of female language than of male indicates the pervasiveness of the view that women and their relation to language are deviant or "other." Ironically, however, the cumulative effect of a new research focus on women has been to perpetuate this view of men as "normal" and women as needing to be studied. For example, many still refer to the study of language and gender as the study of "women's language." Just as racial privilege maintains the illusion that racial difference resides in people of color, and as heterosexual privilege sustains the illusion that differences in sexuality reside in lesbians and gay males, male privilege sustains the myth that male talk and male meaning-making are not gendered. Such privilege affects the interpretation of speech differences; it also affects how people use language to represent and direct their own and others' thought and action. "Women's words" have too often been interpreted by analysts from male-centered perspectives that ignore multiple possibilities of meaning: To mount any real challenge to women's linguistic disadvantage, we must shift scholarly attention to "men's words" and to language more generally. Black & Coward suggest (7) that men's linguistic advantage over women, in our own and other Western cultures, may derive

primarily from the fact that in many communities of practice there exist familiar ways of talking and thinking—roughly what they and other theorists call "discourses"—that constitute men as ungendered autonomous beings and women as gendered and dependent on men. Such discourses involve more than use of such so-called masculine generic forms as "he" or "man," extending to a more general presumption that maleness is a norm while femaleness is a special condition—a presumption that supports a wide range of linguistic and other social practices. One need not believe the presumption to fall into its trap. Even someone attacking the privilege of "white, male heterosexuals" can slip and imply that "most Americans" are in that category, and feminists can eloquently defend the rights of "women and other (!) minorities." The "majority" here is quite clearly not a literal one, yet we have almost certainly ourselves lapsed into such profoundly problematic misstatements (though not, we hope, in this review).

Community Practices and Linguistic Power

As we have seen, sexual asymmetries in culturally sanctioned power can be both deeper and more subtly connected to language than is suggested by accounts of enforced female deference or male tyranny in local speech activities. Language is a key symbolic and communicative resource, central to developing the ways of thinking and doing that give communities of practice their character. As the preceding sections show, dominance relations among individuals or groups cannot be assessed simply by surveying who says what to whom. Relations of equality or dominance are partly produced in and through what is said (and through histories of similar utterances and their interpretations), as are the speaker and the auditor. The utterance "How about some more coffee, hon?" must be understood in light of two quite different practices when spoken, on the one hand, by a wife holding her empty cup up to her husband and, on the other, by a young male airline passenger to the middle-aged woman pushing the refreshment cart. A marriage creates a persistent community of practice typically involving a rich array of couple-specific practices. The airplane is a very short-lived community involving limited and routine practices common to many similar communities. In both cases power relations derive in part from such conversational exchanges and their place in community practice.

Dominance is sustained by privileging in community practice a particular perspective on language, obscuring its status as one among many perspectives, and naturalizing it as neutral or "unmarked." The privileged can assume their own positions to be norms toward which everyone else orients; they can judge other positions while supposing their own to be invulnerable to less privileged assessment. This privileged relation to a symbolic system, which we shall call symbolic privilege, carries with it interpretive and evaluative authority that requires no explanation or justification.

Symbolic privilege is not, of course, absolute; it is a matter of degree. Nor is a person's rank in symbolic privilege fixed. A woman might have considerable symbolic privilege in her neighborhood but rank low in her office; she might exercise considerable authority in talk about nutrition but not in discussion of finance. Symbolic privilege in some communities of practice may extend far beyond local settings, perhaps through institutions and practices associated with them. Treichler (111) recounts the lovely story of a woman collecting citations for the *Oxford English Dictionary* who used in, and then collected from, her own published writings words and meanings she wanted "authorized" by dictionary inclusion. Symbolic privilege is seldom so obvious or so self-consciously wielded.

Symbolic resources do, of course, mediate access to material resources, but they are ultimately more difficult to monopolize and control. The function and meaning of linguistic forms must be created by situated use if language is to serve the changing needs of communities. A language that cannot grow or change is a defective social and cognitive instrument. Growth and change may threaten established linguistic privilege.

EPILOG

Despite the studies of language and gender discussed above we do not yet have a coherent view of the interaction of gender and language. Existing theories have tended to draw on popular conceptions of gender—e.g. as a set of sex-determined attributes of individuals (a kind of "femininity" or "masculinity," often associated with a particular division of social activities such as childcare or making war), or as a relation of oppression of females by males. As we have emphasized, gender cannot be understood simply as a matter of individual attributes: Femininity connects to masculinity, femininities and masculinities connect to one another, and all connect to other dimensions of social categorization. Nor is gender reducible to a relation between "women" and "men" as undifferentiated groups. Rather, gender is constructed in a complex array of social practices within communities, practices that in many cases connect to personal attributes and to power relations but that do so in varied, subtle, and changing ways.

Although a number of scholars have attempted to understand language as rooted in social practice, relatively little progress has been made in explaining how social practices relate to linguistic structures and systems. With only a few exceptions (e.g. 7, 32), linguists have ignored recent work in social theory that might eventually deepen our understanding of the social dimensions of cognition (and of the cognitive dimensions of social practice). Even less attention has been paid to the social (including the linguistic) construction of gender categories: The notions of "women" and "men" are typically taken for granted in sociolinguistics. Nor has much attention been given to the variety of ways gender relations and privilege are constructed. Dominance is often seen

as either a matter of deference and/or coercion; other aspects of gender relations—e.g. sexual attraction—are typically ignored. Theoretical work in gender studies (e.g. 6, 22, 96, 107) is still not well known among theorists of society and culture (but see 37 as an interesting contribution), and sociolinguistic studies have only rarely taken advantage of recent developments in understanding gender (but see e.g. 39).

Sociolinguists working on questions of language and gender need to build bridges to other communities of scholarly practice whose endeavors focus more centrally on gender. Many linguists talk about gender only because sex has seemed to emerge as a significant variable in their study of phenomena like variation, intonation, or the use of indirection in discourse. They try to elucidate particular aspects of language use or linguistic structure; they seldom hold themselves accountable to gender theory, or even to linguistic theory beyond their own area of specialization. Others who talk about language do so from an interest not in language itself but in gender (not always an analytical or intellectual interest); such scholars may miss insights into the detailed workings of language that linguistics can provide. No community of intellectual practice yet centers on the interactions of gender and language. It is therefore impossible at this point to share approaches to the important questions or evaluations of interim answers.

Investigators have not neglected to look at others' observations before proposing accounts of gender and language interactions. Citations abound in support of claims that women's language reflects conservatism, prestige consciousness, upward mobility, insecurity, deference, nurturance, emotivity, connectedness, sensitivity to others, and solidarity; and that men's language reflects toughness, lack of affect, competitiveness, and independence. But the observations on which such claims are based have all been made at different times and in different circumstances with different populations. One seldom finds good evidence from social practice for the gender characterizations made (evidence of the kind provided by Brown for her claim (11) that the Mayan women in the Mexican village of Tenejapa are politer than their male peers), and it is rarer still to find evidence from social practice of the comparability of observations made in distinct local communities.

It seems clear that the content of gender categories and their connections to linguistic behavior can only be determined by ethnographic study. Such study will likely demonstrate that gender categories intertwine with other social classifications (e.g. class, age, race) within communities of practice; the categories' content and their connections with linguistic behavior will likely work differently in distinct communities of practice. But, as we have noted, there are also deeper difficulties than those posed by premature generalization across communities about gender-language correlations. First, such generalizations tend to forestall close examination of how features like vernacular use (variously interpreted as discussed above, pp. 469, 479) might enter into the social practices of the community. Which activities and situations promote use of the

vernacular by those who "tend" to avoid it and for those who "tend" to favor it?

Second, to ask how "women" (or "men") behave "as a group" is to focus on gender conformity and ignore intragender differences (especially challenges to gender hegemony). Suppose in a particular community a given woman uses more (or a given man less) vernacular than other female and male community members, respectively. Are there patterns of exception to community-wide generalizations that can be explained by a deeper understanding of the community's social practices? Can looking at these patterned exceptions yield insight into mechanisms of social and linguistic change?

Third, focus on gender content diverts attention from what may ultimately prove the far more interesting question: How does social practice "use" gender differences (seen as central to gender "content") in constructing gender relations and other social relations (and vice versa). What role does language play in this reciprocal construction of gender difference and gender relations? The diversity of gender differences and relations across and within communities should help us better understand the possible parameters of interaction between language and gender (and, more generally, among language, thought, and society).

Every informed and detailed study of a single language contributes to our understanding of linguistic universals, and every informed and detailed study of a social group contributes to our understanding of social and cultural universals. Both linguists (e.g. 18) and anthropologists (e.g. 34) have argued, however, that such universals are more formal than substantive. Linguists and anthropologists generally agree that comparative studies are essential to getting a grip on the ranges of human language, thought, and social life. We have nothing so grandiose in mind as a detailed theory of the general principles and parameters of gender and language interactions. We certainly are not recommending linguistic theory as a model for thinking about those interactions. What we do want to stress, however, is the great variability both in the factors that constitute gender—the character of gender differences and beliefs about them—and in relations between genders. The latter include not only sex-linked power asymmetries but also other aspects of social ties and social relations [including connections to other social hierarchies and to what Connell (22) dubs the "cathexis" complex of desire, liking, and aversion]. We still have little idea of what general principles may be at play in the joint construction of gender differences and gender relations.

Significant further advances in the study of language and gender must involve unprecedented integration. Such integration can come only through the intensive collaboration of people working in a variety of fields and a variety of communities. Language and gender studies, in fact, require an interdisciplinary community of scholarly practice. Isolated individuals who try to straddle two fields can often offer insights, but progress depends on getting people from a variety of fields to collaborate closely in building a common and

broad-based understanding. Collaboration is needed among people in different fields and among people doing similar work in more than one community. A collaborative effort among ethnographers in many different communities might arrive at a view of gender dynamics across communities rich enough to begin to permit generalizations about the relation to language of those dynamics. These would not simply be studies of women or of men. These studies would explore how "women" and "men" are constructed as social categories. They would also explore how these constructions link to relations among those constructed as "women" and among those constructed as "men" (including those constructed as atypical or deviant members of their categories) as well as to relations between those assigned to different categories. These studies would be studies not of language in isolation from other social practices but of the linguistic dimensions of social practice [and, more generally, the complex social and cognitive character of so-called "(socio)linguistic competence"]. By approaching both gender and language as constructed in communities of practice, we may be able to strengthen claims about the social and cognitive importance of their interaction. We may likewise succeed in enriching our view of social conflict and change, thus deepening our understanding of the profoundly historical character of gender, of language, and of their connections.

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