

Gender: social construct giving insights into the structure and organisation of social life; linked to biology (sex) but incorporates cognitive, societal, cultural and psychological qualities that varies from society to society

Changes in language to be more progressive:

(Cameron, 1995) "Subversive innovation may take various forms, but the most popular is probably verbal hygiene" – an attempt to cleanse the language and divest it of its salient negative connotations

- May it hinder effective communication instead?

In 2021, Australia National University (ANU) urged staff to use "parent-inclusive language" in accordance with ANU's Gender Inclusive Handbook that offers recommendations to uplift female and gender minority students. The recommendations include, using the term "chestfeeding" instead of "breastfeeding", "gestational/birthing parent" instead of "mother", and likewise "non-gestational/non-birthing parent" instead of "father". This decision by ANU was met with contention when the senate voted to ban the "distorted" gender-neutral language, they argue that while the government "supports the right of individuals to make use of any pronouns or descriptors they prefer... the government will use language in communications that is appropriate for the purpose of those communications and is respectful of its audiences". Additionally, it was implied that this particular variation of gender-neutral language "dehumanises the human race and undermines gender" with reference to reported incidences of young children feeling stressed and panicked about whether it is okay to use the words boy and girl. The motion has since been passed, resulting in an uproar of anger and disappointment from some citizens who felt that the Senate motion denied the identity of transgender and non-binary people.

Gender stereotypes – they reduce and simplify, tend to be directed at subordinate groups (ethnic minorities, women), and tend to be negative

- Gender-specific linguistic stereotypes are deeply entrenched and help to establish and maintain rules of feminine and masculine behaviour even if those generalisations fail to reflect social or linguistic reality
 - Changes in social attitudes towards gender equality and gender roles will be reflected in how language represents gender
- English has a huge variety of words for vocal, particularly verbally aggressive women which reflects the social convention that women are supposed to be modest in conduct and language
"Karen",
- Women are characterised as emotional, sentimental, dependent, weak, passive, alluring, mysterious, fickle, inferior, neurotic, gentle, muddled, vain, intuitive

Vain – “Bimbo”, “Whore”

- Men are viewed as the opposite: dominant, strong, aggressive, sensible, superior, randy, decisive, courageous, ambitious, objective, independent, ruthless

Theories of language use based on gender:

1) Deficit theory (Lakoff, 1947) Women play more of a supporting role

- Argues that women’s speaking style has denied them access to power
 - Women’s speech is inadequate, showing uncertainty and hesitancy because of social inequalities between men and women

Uptalk: the utterance of declaratives with rising intonation at the end, as if a question was being asked

Tag questions: express uncertainty of the declarative it is tagging

Avoidance of expletives, the use of hedges and fillers, empty adjectives, high levels of politeness

- May not reflect the way women actually use language but it is a representation of how society expects women to speak
- Women are socialised into behaving more femininely in a sexist society which systematically strove to keep women subordinated (passing on of subordination from mothers to daughters)
- LFs: avoidance of expletives, the use of hedges and fillers,

2) Dominance theory (Fishman, 1983)

- Cause being how the hierarchical relations between women and men are constructed and maintained (especially in traditionally patriarchal societies)
 - Women’s conventional supportiveness is an expected characteristic i.e. women are expected to play the supporting role
 - Topics raised by men are more likely to be pursued than topics raised by a woman

3) Difference theory (Tannen, 1990)

- Views gender as a cultural difference
- Argues that women speak and hear a language of connection and intimacy while men speak and hear a language of status and independence

4) Acknowledging diversity

- Recognising the importance of difference between men and women, that men and women use language to interact with one another for the purpose of a shared activity
- Milroy and Milroy’s network theory, Cameron’s verbal hygiene

Theories were crafted against the social and political history of feminism, and attitudes towards women in the 20th century, 3 waves of feminism (Titjen, 2018)

- 1) 1st wave of feminism: focused on getting the rights for women to vote, have property rights and the right to education
- 2) 2nd wave: focused on women's roles and rights in the workplace and in reproductive, sexual and family issues
- 3) Post-modern feminism: covers different views and beliefs about women's rights and sees women as individuals as well as part of a group

Representation of gender in language:

- Symmetry and asymmetry in lexis
 - Social norm / preference (until recently) to use male generic terms to refer to humanity ("Mankind", "He") – increasingly changed to gender-neutral terms in some societies
 - Semantic change altered some of these terms

"Lady" used to mean the mistress of a household or a married woman. Marital status was viewed as a huge part of a woman's identity and continued to be viewed as such in some places of the world today – Even in the English language, women were required to declare their marital status through their use of honorifics – "Miss" for unmarried women, "Mrs" for married women. It was only recently that a neutral term "Ms" was introduced, restoring the power of women as they are no longer forced to reveal their marital status while men used the neutral term "Mr" all along. Additionally, common collocations for "bachelor" (an unmarried man) are "eligible bachelor" or "bachelor pad" that reflects a positive view of single life for men, that they and their lifestyle is desirable. On the other hand, the label "spinster" is negatively connotated with ideas of loneliness and unwantedness.
- Use of gender-marked terms
 - Marked terms: unusual form of a word or phrase that is usually seen as less powerful
 - Unmarked terms: regular form of a word or phrase that is usually seen as powerful

(Motschenbacher, 2013) Syntactic order when both men and women are in a noun phrase, it is far more common for a man to be mentioned first as in "man and wife" – implying that the man is of greater importance or is the more dominant figure in the relationship described. Although in some semantic fields such as parenting, where "mommy and daddy" is more common than the inverse. This shows that there are some fields which 'belong' to women.

Marked terms (namely professions): the collocation “female doctor” or “lady doctor” is as uncommon as “male nurse”, suggesting that the default perception of a doctor (a job viewed with high prestige) is a male.

- Tendency to demean women through the noun used for reference and verb choices

- Labels / mode of address
- Some verbs are usually used to describe women, influenced by the stereotypical characteristics of women

“Gushed” to describe women’s speech, implying that what was said was driven by emotion and should not be taken seriously. “Gossip” to describe women’s discussion about each other’s affairs, implying that women are judgemental, vain and materialistic. This is increasingly changing. The words were once used in a derogatory way to describe people who identified as gay men, referencing the way they were viewed as “sissy” men or men who behaved like women.

- Semantic derogation: a process by which the meaning of a word becomes more negatively connotated – this process is often seen in words referring to females

“Mistress” used to refer to the female counterpart of a man (master) but now it has acquired a demeaning sexual connotation meaning a woman other than the man’s wife who has a sexual relationship with a married man, the lack of term used to describe a man in this situation greatly decreases the power of the woman by shaming the woman only.

“Bitch”, “Whore”, “Harlot”, “Shrew”
- Labelling based on gender
 - Category labels can be derived from proper names, where the content of the noun usually derived from some unique characteristics of a particular person bearing the name; can be gendered too

“She’s no Mother Teresa”

“He’s a regular Einstein”
 - Colloquial phrases, especially profanity and expletives used to express anger, frustration or surprise, shows society’s difference in attitude towards men and women

“You’re the man.” “That’s ballsy.” refers to males and the male anatomy in a way that uplifts and inspires.

“Don’t be a sissy.” “You’re a bitch.” “Cunt.” refers to women, the roles they hold and parts of women's bodies as insults.

Additionally, female-descriptive derogatory terms are significantly more obscene since they often also relate to sexuality and promiscuity such as “whore” and “slut” while male-descriptive derogatory terms, such as “dick” and “douche” often refer to character. This implies that female promiscuity is considered obscene by society.
- Pronouns in English reinforce gender
 - Reinforces a gender distinction in third person singular pronouns (he/she); carries a presumption of sex attribution
 - These conventions have been challenged as binary gender norms in some societies

American Dialect Society word of the year 2020 was “they”, taking reference from “the trend of people presenting their preferred pronouns in email signatures and on social media accounts...People started doing this to help destigmatize a non-binary person’s declaration of their pronouns”.

For titles such as Ms and Mr, new gender-neutral alternatives have been proposed. The most successful of them being Mx advocated by the LGBTQ community as a term of address for transgender and non-binary individuals.

- Abusive language
 - The jocular use of abusive language in address is more age-sensitive, with peak use among young men (maybe the rugged use of the language contributes to their masculinity)

“It’s good to see you, you old sonofabitch!” “Motherf*cker” used as a term of admiration, where mother is used as a reference point. Many of these terms reference women in a very disrespectful way although the vulgarisms are used on and among men.
 - Terms of address that are oversexual and classified as obscene are frequently used by men talking among themselves about women, they may serve to display a kind of superiority over women allowing them to bond over a shared “othering” and denigration of women

On all-male sports teams, and maybe the music industry, references to women such as “bitch”, “cunt”, “pussy” are extremely common
 - Kinship terms in English are mostly very gendered

Familial terms “husband” and “wife” used more than spouse, “brother” and “sister” used more than sibling, “uncle” “aunt” “niece” “nephew” have no gender-neutral alternative.

Language reclamation: the cultural process of removing negative associations with a particular term that has been used by a dominant group against a specific less powerful group

Jocular uses of what was seen to be abusive or vulgar language are becoming more commonly used by young women to their close friends and siblings, and even in public. “Slut” and “bitch” are used as a term of sisterhood in female rap music or between girls who are friends.

Differences in language use between men and women: there is still remarkable discrepancy between public perceptions of how women and men speak and the actual character of the language that people use

- Politeness (Brown and Levinson, 1980): showing concern for people’s face (Holmes, 1995) Women are more positively polite than men

Women use affective tags (59%) to invite the addressee to contribute to the conversation “You’ve got a new job Sam, haven’t you?”

Affective tags: signals the speaker’s attitude to the addressee or the topic discussed

Men use modal tags (61%) to express uncertainty about information being conveyed “I did my exam, did I?”

Modal tags: amount of certainty speaker is expressing

 - Positive politeness: expression of warmth or friendliness towards others
 - Negative politeness: not imposing on others or threatening their face

- Interactional styles in gender talk at the workplace
 - Female: indirect, conciliatory, facilitative, collaborative, supportive feedback, person/process oriented, affectively oriented
 - Male: direct, confrontational, competitive, autonomous, aggressive interruptions, task-outcome oriented, referentially oriented

Link to mansplaining:
 “Mansplaining” a blend of the words “man” and “explaining” that describes when a person, usually a man, condescendingly provides an explanation to someone who already understands the topic. (Briggs, 2023) Research showed that mansplaining had a larger effect on women than on men, especially when done by a man. Video footage showed that women spoke less after being spoken to condescendingly by a man, but men’s dialogue was unaffected even if the “mansplaining” was done by a woman. It was concluded that the women tended to register that their competence was being questioned more than men did, and tended to attribute this to a gender bias; reinforcing gender stereotypes where men is superior in terms of knowledge while women are expected to accept it
- Online gender identities (Herring and Zelenkauskaitė, 2009)
 - Women wrote longer-winded SMSes, used more non-standard spelling (clipping, phonetic spelling, omission of punctuation) and typography (GIFs, emojis)
 - This indexed “emotional expression and creativity” typically “feminine qualities of sociability”
 - (Page, 2012) Study of gender differences in Facebook updates: Proportion of Facebook updates containing an emotional display increases from 7% in 2008 to 20% in 2010
 - Women use more emotional displays than men and the proportions between genders remain the same (76% women and 24% men in 2008 and in 2010)
 - Emotional displays include emoticons, emojis, laughter (“HAHAHA”, “lol”), affection (kisses, hugs, hearts, love)
- Gender stereotypes in speech
 - Gender is linked to social stratification
 Trudgill (1974) found that women tend to use more prestige / high status language features whereas men used more vernacular language features; suggests that it is because women are more status conscious while men associate masculinity with working class speech
 - However, current research (Milroy’s Belfast, 1980) showed social class and speech community more important than gender innovation and change so it

is inferred that there is no direct link between gender and the tendency to use vernacular and standard forms

Age and gender: ageing is perceived to be worse for women than it is for men in terms of outward appearance and societal status

- As seen in phrases such as:

There's an old saying "it is often said that women age like milk and men age like fine wine" that compares women to milk that has an expiry date and goes sour and spoils as they age, while men become more valuable as they age. This is reflected in the labels of older men or women used in the media. "Silver fox" – a term usually used to describe an attractive middle-aged man with grey or white hair; silver is a precious metal meaning that the person is desirable, while the label fox is associated with cleverness and attractiveness. A popular example is the star actor George Clooney, at 53 years old he was known as "Hollywood's most sought-after bachelor" and "the ultimate silver fox" whereas there are notably lesser of such terms complimenting older women.