FEMALE USAGE OF SPECIFIC LINGUISTIC FUNCTIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF CASUAL CONVERSATION IN ENGLISH AND IN ARMENIAN

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Abstract

Men and women differ in their linguistic behavior. The given article is on the use of the specific linguistic functions in casual conversation in English and Armenian. It particularly discusses the divergence of the male and female linguistic behavior in certain conversational contexts. Comparative parallels are drawn between analogous English and Armenian situational dialogues and in the result of their analysis a range of similar and special features are revealed. The article highlights the fact that gender consideration in interaction between males and females has linguistic and social effects on language use both in English and in Armenian.

Key words: *gender roles, sociological factors, comparative analysis, "genderless" language, communicative behavior, interruptions, linguistic devices, minimal responses, indirectness, facilitative effect.*

It is not difficult to state that men and women differ in their linguistic behavior. Assumed gender roles are contrastive, with men often thought as dominant speakers, while women are placed in a subordinate role during the conversation process. It is important to realize that there are different perspectives of the two sexes in casual speech. "If women speak and hear a language of connection and intimacy," a clash of conversation styles can occur, when confronted with a men's language concerned with status and independence [8]. Misinterpretation of the use of linguistic functions, thus, often arises.

In this article we shall concentrate on the use of key linguistic functions, and their use by women in creating or disturbing solidarity in a casual conversation context in English and in Armenian. Two approaches are first presented, that attempt to define the sex differences in communicative competence, specifically from females' position. With that theoretical research in mind, a sample of natural, casual speech will be examined and discussed in terms of its use of specific linguistic items.

Early attempts to distinguish speech norms of different communities focused on sociological factors such as economical status, ethnic minorities and age. Through this research, the belief that male and female speakers may somehow differ in their communicative behavior, and thus compose different speech communities, became the focus of researchers in the early 1970's. Although lacking in empirical research, and influenced by prejudice about gender roles [2], this article on women's language, specifically the usage of several linguistic features, proved influential toward becoming an important issue in the study of linguistics. Research since these early works has focused empirically on a variety of features, such as the use of tag questions, interruptions, questions, standard forms and minimal responses.

We consider it important to mention that the comparative analysis the article contains is rather limited as there are few researches on the notion of gender and linguistic divergence caused by gender in Armenian. The mentioned fact has a logical and reasonable explanation. Armenian is a grammatically "genderless" language and this might be the reason for our misconception of gender. [6] Gender is also a language-specific grammatical category. While English has this category only for the third-person pronoun (she/he), other Indo-European (IE) languages such as Russian or German, for example, also have nominal gender, nouns and adjectives that are arbitrarily masculine, feminine, or neuter while most IE languages distinguish

between two sexes with the third person pronoun, Eastern Armenian has one only *նա* (na), and Western Armenian has only *ան* (an), standing for both "she" and "he". The noun in Armenian is not marked by grammatical gender either. Armenian instead distinguishes between the two physiological sexes in the following three ways:

1. With the help of gender-binary vocabulary such as *աղջիկ-տղա* (girl-boy), *կով-ցուլ* (cow-bull), *մաքի-խոյ* (ewe-ram);

2. With the help of the feminizing postfix *-ուհի* (-ess in English as in prince-princess) e.g. *աշակերտ- աշակերտուհի* (pupil- female pupil), *մատուցող-մատուցողուհի* (waiter-waitress);

3. With the help of feminizing vocabulary, mostly *կին* (woman) placed in front of otherwise gender-neutral nouns as in *գրող- կին գրող* (writer- woman writer), *կին վարորդ* (woman driver).

One might think that being native in such a grammatically genderless language, speakers of Armenian would be predisposed to see gender beyond a binary categorization and accepting of gender as a variety. However, speakers of Armenian turn out to perceive gender the way that patriarchal culture has constructed it for them at a semantic level: binary physiological sex linked with a body of non-linguistic knowledge that ascribes roles to either of the sexes. Deciphering this principle of role distribution does not beg for a toilsome effort: solely biological conceptualization of gender should revolve around the core difference between women and men

While manhood and masculinity are characterized by high agency and ability, femaleness, on the contrary, is marked by inability and lack of agency [6].

It is now understood that men and women differ in terms of their communicative behavior [2]. In explaining these differences, however, Montgomery warns that there is a sense of variation in speech differences between men and women. One sociological point to be remembered, he states, is that "speech differences are not clear-cut" and a set of universal differences does not exist [5]. Gender, as a "dimension of difference" between people should always be thought of in relation to other dimensions of difference, such as those of age, class, and ethnic group. A second point he stresses is that linguistically one must be clear as to what is being identified as a difference between the sexes. Unless examining identifiable linguistic behavior, such as interruptions or tag questions, it is difficult to validate generalized claims of dominance, politeness or subordinance. Even then, "the formal construction of utterances is no consistent guide to what function they might be performing in a specific context".

Reinterpretations of gender-differentiated language fall into one of two approaches, which reflect contrasting views of women in society. The dominance approach considers language differences to be a reflection of traditional social roles, that of men's dominance and women's subordination. The difference approach, in contrast, focuses on sex speech differences as outcomes of two different subcultures. Women, it is claimed, come from a social world in terms of solidarity and intimacy, while men are more hierarchal and independent minded. Contrasting communicative styles are born out of these two subcultures.

The dominance approach to sex differences in speech is concerned with the imbalance of power between the sexes. Powerless speech features used by women help contribute to maintaining a subordinate position in society; while conversely, men's dominance is preserved through their linguistic behavior.

Early research that regards imbalance of power as a main factor toward gender speech differences can be attributed to Robin Lakoff, and her influential work "Language and Woman's Place". Although relying mostly on personal observation, and later criticized for its feminist bias and lack of empirical research, Lakoff's definition of "woman's language"-both language used to describe women and language typically used by woman created an initial theoretical framework which would be critiqued and expanded by future researchers. Lakoff provides a list of ten linguistic features which characterize women's speech, as follows:

1. Lexical hedges or fillers, e.g. *you know, sort of, well, you see.*
2. Tag questions, e.g. *she's very nice, isn't she?*
3. Rising intonation on declaratives, e.g. *it's really good?*
4. 'Empty' adjectives, e.g. *divine, charming, cute.*

5. Precise color terms, e.g. *magenta, aquamarine.*
6. Intensifiers such as *just* and *so*, e.g. *I like him so much.*
7. 'Hypercorrect' grammar, e.g. consistent use of standard verb forms.
8. 'Superpolite' forms, e.g. indirect requests, euphemisms.
9. Avoidance of strong swear words, e.g. *fudge, my goodness.*
10. Emphatic stress, e.g. *it was a BRILLIANT performance.*

[4]

Consistent in Lakoff's list of linguistic features is their function in expressing lack of confidence. Holmes divides this list into two groups [3]. Firstly, those "linguistic devices which may be used for hedging or reducing the force of an utterance," such as fillers, tag questions, and rising intonation on declaratives, and secondly, "features which may boost or intensify a proposition's force", such as emphatic stress and intensifiers. According to Lakoff, both hedging and boosting modifiers show a women's lack of power in a mixed-sex interaction. While the hedges' lack of assertiveness is apparent, boosters, she claims, intensify the force of a statement with the assumption that a women would not be taken seriously otherwise.

For Lakoff, there is a great concordance between femininity and unassertive speech she defines as "women's speech." According to her, in a male-dominated society women are pressured to show the feminine qualities of weakness and subordinance toward men.

Thus, "it is entirely predictable, and given the pressure towards social conformity, rational, that women should demonstrate these qualities in their speech as well as in other aspects of their behavior." [1].

Rather than assuming speech differences among men and women are related to power and status, the more recently emerging difference, or dual-culture, approach views sex differences as attributable to contrasting orientations toward relations [5]. For men the focus is on sharing information, while women value the interaction process. Men and women possess different interactive styles, as they typically acquired their communicative competence at an early age in same-sex groups.

Tannen provides much research on the concept of misunderstanding in the dual-culture approach. According to her, the language of women is primarily "rapport-talk", where establishing connections and promoting sameness is emphasized. Men, on the other hand, use language described as "report-talk," as a way of preserving independence while exhibiting knowledge and skill [8]. The contrasting views of relationships are apparent: negotiating with a desire for solidarity in women, maintaining status and hierarchical order in men. The frustration that occurs between women and men in conversation can be better understood 'by reference to systematic differences in how women and men tend to signal meaning in conversation [9]. When these meaning signals are misunderstood, communication breakdown occurs.

Firstly we are to examine a sample of natural, spoken conversation among three native speakers of English. Of special interest are several relevant linguistic features, many of which were first provided by Lakoff, and their use in controlling or facilitating the interaction of the speakers; the participants, two men and one woman, are co-workers of equal status in a casual conversation over lunch [11].

Indirectness: Female Use of Questions

The function of a command can be described as an utterance designed to get someone else to do something [5]. Several studies ([1], [8] [3]) have commented on the different ways men and women phrase commands. Men tend to use simple, direct statements, whereas women rely on "couching their commands as inclusive suggestions for action. [5]" Consider the following two examples:

Jody: Mmm…home phone.
Andy: What home?
Jody: My home. What's my phone number? Are you gonna plug it in?
Jody: Mmm…How many? Do you want it small?
Andy: Smallish.
    Ian: I like this stuff.
                Jody: Like that?
                Andy: Mmm…even smaller.

Jody: Smaller? Do you want to put it here? Why don't you just bite it?

Jody has chosen to couch her commands in the form of questions. Rather then stating the bald commands, "Here's my phone number. Plug it in," and "Put it here. Bite it," she opted for a more indirect approach. Lakoff describes two benefits of indirectness: defensiveness and rapport. Defensiveness "refers to the speaker's preference not to go on record with an idea in order to be able to disclaim, withdraw, or modify it if it does not meet with a positive response." Rapport refers to getting one's way not by demanding it, but because the listener is working toward the same end, indirectly encouraging the common goal [9].

It can be argued that defensiveness can be a feature of women's powerless language, and that women's tendency to be indirect is proof of an unauthorization for command usage, as set by society's standards. However a different and more valid interpretation is that Jody, however entitled, *chooses* not to make direct commands. Rather, the solidarity she creates with her command/question usage gives the benefit of rapport. This, according to Tannen, can be considered a sign of power rather than the lack of it. However, this ambiguity, often viewed with men's language as the norm, has a tendency to be labeled as powerless. As Tannen states, "Because they are not struggling to be one-up, women often find themselves framed as one-down [8]."

We have tried to present a similar dialogue in Armenian and observe whether an Armenian female speaker would also tend to use indirect commands or the so called question commands:

Աննա: …ունց որ թե տան հեռախոսն է:

Արամ: …ո՞ր տան.

Աննա: Իմ տան; Ինչպե՞ս էր իմ համարը: Չե՞ս ուզում այն միացնել:/Կմիացնե՞ս այն:/ Միա՛ցրու այն:

Աննա:…ասենք քանի՞սն ես ուզում: Փո՞քրն ես ուզում:

Արամ: Թող փոքրոտ լինի:

Նարեկ: Ինձ այս չափն է դուր գալիս:

94. Աննա: Էս մեկը ունցա՞:

95. Դրանից փոքր չկա՞:

96. Աննա :Է՞լ փոքր: Ուզում ես ի՞նչ անես: Կարողա՞ վերջապես կծես դրանից :

It's remarkable that in Armenian the female can equally use indirect command, a request like command or even a direct command in the place (line) where the English woman mostly uses indirect commands.

Tag questions

The tag question, similarly, can be interpreted as a hedging device which weakens women's speech. Of all the linguistic forms originally listed by Lakoff, the tag has come to hold the position of archetypal women's language feature [2]. However, researchers since Lakoff have included context as a deciding factor in determining a tag's usage, with an association toward conversational role rather than gender.

There are three instances in our sample which we consider function as tag questions, two by the woman and one by a man:

Andy: You don't have a phone right now…do you? (falling intonation)

Jody: Mmhm.

Jody: Looks good…huh? (falling intonation)

Andy: Mmm.

Jody: You didn't get scissors, ehh? (rising intonation)

Ian: It's like talking to a machine. She obviously had this spiel…

Holmes describes four different functions of tag questions, three of which do not follow Lakoff's original proposal of tags expressing tentativeness. They are expressing uncertainty, facilitative, softening, and confrontational [3].

The first example is labeled the tag as softening. Considering the falling intonation, its function is affective, or addressee-oriented. It is not seen as expressing uncertainty, but rather softening an informative out of concern for the addressee [3].

The second example, "Looks good…huh?" is decided to include as a tag form, taking in account the casual context of the recorded conversation. An equivalent tag would be, "Looks good…doesn't it?" It follows the classic facilitative strategy of providing a way into the discourse for the addressee, thus creating solidarity with the speaker. It is an expression of personal opinion, generally by someone in a leadership role, in which confirmation is not required, but is elicited. This can, however, be interpreted as a method of "fishing for approval or verification." [7]

Cameron, Mc Alinden and O'Leary, in their article "Lakoff in context: the social and linguistic functions of tag questions', state that although facilitative tags contain no informational function, their interactional function of including others is important. That the woman in our conversation sample provides the only facilitative tag device may support the claim that women are more attentive at keeping a conversation going, being "co-operative conversationalist who express frequent concern for other participants in talk." [1].

The third tag example is categorized as confrontational, although the function of this tag is not as clear-cut as the other two. According to Holmes, the function of a confrontational tag is not to hedge but rather to "strengthen the negative force" of an utterance. Unlike the other two examples, which are affective, this one is modal, in that it is requesting information or confirmation of information. With the rising intonation, the 'ehh?' can be translated into "did you?", as in "You didn't get scissors, did you?" If falling intonation had been used, the criticizing force would have been more powerfully signaled. However, with the rising intonation, it is difficult to determine, and she may simply be questioning whether the addressee is in possession of scissors. Holmes acknowledges this ambiguity, stating "a primary function is often identifiable, but not always. Different functions often overlap and classification into different types is not always straightforward. [3]"

It is interesting to note that in tag examples one and two, both of which are addressee-orientated and act as positive politeness devices, the addressee chooses to respond to the question, in these cases with the minimal response "mmm." In doing so, the interactional process is strengthened. The confrontational tag in example three, however, goes ignored, possibly because the addressee has noticed an accusatory tone in the remark and wants to avoid further criticism. The tag question, however, still lessens the accusation and allows the current speaker to hold his turn.

The following analogous Armenian dialogues would reveal the socio-linguistic function of the tag questions used by both sexes in Armenian:

Արամ: Դու հեռախոս չունես չէ՞

Աննա: Ընը:

Աննա: Լավն է չէ՞

Արամ: Ընը:

Աննա: Չգնեցիր մկրատ չէ՞

Նարեկ: Ոնց որ ռոբոտի հետ խոսելիս լինեմ: Նա էլ է միշտ նույն բանն ասում…

The analysis of the above-mentioned dialogues allows us to state that in Armenian the male and female (they mostly use low-rise for tags) use the tag questions just as an alternative for starting a conversation or attracting the listener's attention. As compared with the English dialogues where the tag questions play a multi-faceted role (softening facilitative, interactional), in Armenian the female and male equally use them to attain rather a facilitative effect. However it should be mentioned that sometimes the use of tag in Armenian

(for instance in the sentence "Չգնեցիր մկրատ, չէ՞") presupposes some tint of aggression or disappointment as speaker thinks that the listener hasn't done what she expected her to do.

The Minimal responses

Minimal responses (also known as back-channel speech, positive feedback and assent terms) can be defined as the brief, supportive comments provided by listeners during the conversation interaction. They are a feature of jointly produced text, and show the listener's active participation in the conversation [2]. Common examples include mmm, uh huh, yes, yea and right. Usage in the given data is abundant, with both the men and woman producing examples:

Ian: It's laying on my mind//

Jody:// Mmm.

Ian: So I think if I do it now and get it over and done with I can relax.

Jody: Yea…I have to //

Ian:// pay ever after the phone

Jody: Mmm.

Andy: High energy…You probably know him…Australian.

Ian: Mmm.

Andy: Is he a national hero or…does anyone really care?

Ian: Uhmm…He was for a while but…I dunno. I think he's more popular outside   Australia now.

Andy: Mmm…an export.

Ian: Yea.

Jody: How do you think about this now? Do you think it's ready?

Ian: It probably is ready and its beef so…

Jody: Yea.

Several researchers have found that, in casual conversation, it is women who take on the role as facilitator [10]. Men, it has been demonstrated, are less sensitive to the interactional process. One study which Holmes recounts found that women gave over four times as much of this kind of positive feedback as men [3]. For women, then, "talk is for interaction." [42].

One interpretation is that Ian goes against the norms of male speech strategies by being more supportive and less competitive in the discourse process.

A deeper analysis of this view, however, should consider the influence of context. Being a small group conversation in a casual context, the goals of this conversation sample are most likely focused on group solidarity (rather than control), which follows women's strategy of being cooperative conversationalists.

According to Holmes, "the norms for women's talk may be the norms for small group interaction in private contexts, where the goals of the interaction are solidarity stressing-maintaining good social relations. Agreement is sought and disagreement avoided." [3].

In their daily conversations the Armenian men and women also tend to use the so called minimal responses or short responses. The role of the Armenian words (short response words) ըհը, ահա, ապա, դե, հա, այո, յեսիմ, ապա-ապա in the conversation can't be underestimated. Being mostly used by the female they serve as verbal means for showing the listener that you are listening attentively or "you are *in* the conversation". As distinct from the English, in Armenian the male use the short responses quite scarcely.

However in the following dialogue we have also shown the use of the minimal response by the male:

41. Նարեկ: Ընց որ սրտիս վրա մի ծանր բեռ լինի:

42. Աննա: // Հա

43. Նարեկ: Դե մտածում եմ, եթե դա անեմ հիմա ու վերջացնեմ մի քիչ կթեթևանամ:

44. Աննա: Ըհը, ես էլ//

45.Նարեկ: // Պիտի գնեմ մի անգամ վճարես հեռախոսի համար:

129: Արամ: Շատ ակտիվ է….դե երևի ճանաչում ես նրան, Հայաստանից է:

130: Նարեկ: Chp

131: Արամ: Նա ազգային հերո՞ս է….թե դա կապ չունի:

132: Նարեկ: Դե….կար ժամանակ նրան հերոս էին կարծում…եսիմ: Բայց երևի նա հիմա Հայաստանից դուրս ավելի հայտնի է:

133: Արամ: Chp… արտահանում է:

134: Նարեկ : Ապա-ապա

135: Աննա: Մի տես պատրա՞ստ է հիմա:

136: Նարեկ: Եթե տավարի միս է, ուրեմն պատրաստ է:

137: Աննա: Chp:

Interruptions

West and Zimmerman provide a widely accepted definition of interruption as "a device for exercising power and control in conversation" and "violations of speakers" turns at talk [9]". Rather than mistaking the first speaker's intention to renounce a turn, for example, or enthusiastically overlapping in agreement with the first speaker, an interruption is an intended infringement on a person's right to speak. In mixed-sex pairs, West and Zimmerman found that interruptions were much more likely to come from men. In one study, 96 percent of interruptions were made by the man; in another, 75 percent [10].

In the given English conversation data, similar results were found. The woman was interrupted for many times, while a man was interrupted only once. Interestingly, it is the other that's for sure.

In the lengthy except below, several examples are shown in which the woman is interrupted. Double slash marks indicating the interruption, while brackets indicate overlaps:

Jody: Umm…cancel your phone?

Ian: Yea.

Jody: I have to give //

Ian:// It's laying on my mind

Jody: [umm]

Ian: [so] I just think if I do it now and get it over and done with I can relax.

Jody: Yea…I have to //

Ian:// pay ever after the phone.

Jody: Mmm. I have to do gas...electricity…water. What else is there? I don't know.

Ian: Cable TV. Do you [have cable TV?]

Jody [cable.] I've gotta get cable transferred //

Ian: // cause they've to come and pick up the box.

Jody: Mmm.

Despite being interrupted three times in this excerpt (following the 'interruption as violation' definition provided by West and Zimmerman), Jody provides three minimal responses to support Ian's speech turns. Thus, rather than fight to maintain her speaking turn, she relinquishes it when Ian cuts in and, in turn, supports his topic.

This, according to Tannen, should not be considered an issue of power control. For an interruption to occur, two speakers must act. One must start speaking, and the other must stop. If the first speaker does not stop, no interruption occurs.

For Jody, therefore, the goal of group cohesiveness takes precedence over the desire to share her individual information and opinions, and her choice of relinquishing the floor shows sensitivity for this. For men, conversely, conversation can be likened to a contest, "in which everyone competes for the floor…expecting women to compete for the floor like everyone else [8]." The misunderstanding of these two

different conversational styles has often been misinterpreted as supporting men's speech dominance over women.

   Even a brisk overview of the Armenian dialogue makes it clear that the Armenian men are less patient in a conversation than women. They are more likely to interrupt the conversation than the female. Thus we can state that the sociolinguistic feature of interruption is peculiar both for Armenian and English conversation:

Աննա: Դե.. ի՞նչ անենք էդ հեռախոսի պահով, հետաձգենք

Նարեկ: Չիր

Աննա: Պետք է տամ…//

Նարեկ: // Ընց որ սրտիս վրա մի ծանր բեռ լինի:

   Աննա: [հրմ]

Նարեկ: [դե] մտածում եմ, եթե դա անեմ հիմա ու վերջացնեմ մի քիչ   կթեթևանամ:

Աննա: Չիր…ես պիտի//

 Նարեկ: գոնե մի անգամ վճարես հեռախոսի համար:

Աննա: Դե ես ստիպված եմ վճարել գազի, լույսի, ջրի համար: Ընց որ էլի կա վճարելիք:

 Նարեկ: Հեռուստացույցի կաբելային ալիքնե՞րը բա: Դրանց համար չե՞ք վճարում:

Աննա: [հա կաբելայինը] Իմ կաբելայինը տեղափոխել են//

Նարեկ: // որովհետև նրանք եկել են ու վերցրել տուփը:

Աննա: Չիր

   Analyzing many dialogues with the above mentioned socio-linguistic features (indirectness, tag questions, minimal responses, interruptions) we have come to the conclusion that the social and psychological characteristics of male and female are reflected in their language often irrespective of the country they live. Gender consideration in interaction between males and females has linguistic and social effects on language use both in English and in Armenian. One of the linguistic consequences of gender differentiation in language is linguistic change. Certainly, differences in women's and men's language are regularly associated with changes in language as gender in speech plays an important role on the mechanism of linguistic change.

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ԱՄՓՈՓՈՒՄ
Անգլերեն և հայերեն լեզուներում հատուկ լեզվական գործառույթների կիրառումը կանանց կողմից ամենօրյա զրույցների համատեքստում
Գայանե Գևորգյան

Բանալի բառեր՝ գենդերային դերեր, սոցիոլոգիական գործոններ, համեմատական վերլուծություն, ընդհատումներ, լեզվական միջոցներ, կարճ պատասխան, անուղղակիություն, օժանդակող ազդեցություն:

Հոդվածը քննարկում է ամենօրյա շփման մեջ առանձին լեզվական գործառույթների օգտագործումը տղամարդու և կնոջ կողմից անգլերեն և հայերեն լեզուներում: Այն մասնավորապես շոշափում է կոնկրետ հաղորդակցման համատեքստում տղամարդու և կնոջ բառապաշարի միջև առկա տարբերությունը: Համեմատական զուգահեռներ են անցկացվում նմանատիպ անգլերեն և հայերեն երկխոսությունների միջև: Շեշտվում է նաև այն փաստը, որ տղամարդու և կնոջ շփման մեջ առկա գենդերային գործոնը իր լեզվական և սոցիալական ազդեցությունն է թողնում լեզվի կիրառման վրա թե՛ անգլերենում, թե՛ հայերենում:

РЕЗЮМЕ
Использование женским полом специфических языковых функций в контексте непринужденной беседы на английском и армянском языках
Гаяне Геворкян

Ключевые слова: гендерные роли, социологические факторы, сравнительный анализ, коммуникативное поведение, прерывание, языковые средства, короткий ответ, косвенность, способствующее влияние.

В статье рассматривается использование конкретных лингвистических функций мужчиной и женщиной в повседневном общении в английском и армянском, в частности, разницу между мужским и женским словарным запасом в конкретных контекстах. В статье проводятся сравнительные параллели между аналогичными английскими и армянскими ситуационными диалогами. Также подчеркивается тот факт, что гендерный фактор, присутствующий в общении мужчины и женщины, имеет социальное и лингвистическое воздействие на использование языка как в английском, так и в армянском языках.