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28 Discourse and Gender

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0 Introduction

The study of discourse and gender is an interdisciplinary endeavor shared by scholars in linguistics, anthropology, speech communication, social psychology, education, literature, and other disciplines. Many researchers have been concerned primarily with documenting gender-related patterns of language use, but the field has also included many for whom the study of language is a lens through which to view social and political aspects of gender relations. Tensions between these two perspectives arose in early research and continue today, as witness, for example, the interchange between Preisler (1998) and Cameron (1999). Regardless of the vantage point from which research emanates, the study of gender and discourse not only provides a descriptive account of male/female discourse but also reveals how language functions as a symbolic resource to create and manage personal, social, and cultural meanings and identities.

1 The Field Emerges

The year 1975 was key in launching the field of language and gender. That year saw the publication of three books that proved pivotal: Robin Lakoff's *Language and Woman's Place* (the first part appeared in *Language and Society* in 1973), Mary Ritchie Key's *Male/Female Language*, and Barrie Thorne and Nancy Henley's edited volume *Language and Sex: Difference and Dominance*. These pioneering works emerged during the feminist movement of the 1970s, as scholars began to question both the identification of male norms as human norms, and the biological determination of women's and men's behavior. A conceptual split was posited between biological "sex" and sociocultural constructs of "gender."[1] Early language and gender research tended to focus on (1) documenting empirical differences between women's and men's speech, especially in cross-sex interaction; (2) describing women's speech in particular; and, for many,

(3) identifying the role of language in creating and maintaining social inequality between women and men.

1.1 *Lakoff's* Language and Woman's Place

The third goal is evident in the field's foundational text, *Language and Woman's Place*. Lakoff describes her book as "an attempt to provide diagnostic evidence from language use for one type of inequity that has been claimed to exist in our society: that between the roles of men and women" (1975: 4). She posits a cycle that begins with the unequal role of women and men in society, resulting in differential gender socialization by which girls learn to use a "nonforceful style" because unassertiveness is a social norm of womanhood, given men's role in establishing norms. The use of "women's language," in turn, denies women access to power, and reinforces social inequality.

Lakoff identified the linguistic forms by which "women's language" weakens or mitigates the force of an utterance: "weaker" expletives (*oh, dear* versus *damn*); "trivializing" adjectives (*divine* versus *great*); tag questions used to express speakers' opinions (*The way prices are rising is horrendous, isn't it?*); rising intonation in declaratives (as seen in the second part of the sequence, *"What's for dinner?" "Roast beef?"*); and mitigated requests (*Would you please close the door?* versus *Close the door*) (1975: 10–18).

Lakoff's observations provided a starting point from which to explore the complexity of the relationship between gender and discourse. In one frequently cited followup study, O'Barr and Atkins (1980) examined features of "women's language" in courtroom discourse and found that the features Lakoff identified were related to the status (social class, occupation, and experience as a witness) rather than the sex of the speaker. They suggested that women use this style more than men in everyday interaction because they are more likely to be in lower-status positions. Later studies, however, showed that this is not necessarily the case. Cameron et al. (1989), finding that speakers who took up the role of conversational facilitator tended to use more tag questions, posited that women were more likely to do so because they were more likely to assume this role. Similarly, Preisler (1986) examined problem-solving situations in an industrial community, and found that managers who contributed most actively to the accomplishment of a task also used more linguistic "tentativeness features," and these managers were usually women. Tannen (1994a) also found women managers using strategies, including indirectness, to save face for subordinates when making requests and delivering criticism. Neither conversational facilitator nor manager is a low-status position.

1.2 *The personal as political*

In another influential early study, Zimmerman and West (1975) found that men interrupted women more than the reverse in thirty-one dyadic conversations tape-recorded in private residences as well as in "coffee shops, drug stores and other public places in a university community." The authors concluded that "just as male dominance is exhibited through male control of macro-institutions in society, it is also

exhibited through control of at least a part of one micro-institution" (1975: 125). Their conclusion confirms the 1970s feminist slogan, "the personal is political," by positing that asymmetries in everyday conversational practices reflect and reproduce asymmetries found in the wider social environment.

Though their methods were questioned by Murray (1985), Murray and Covelli (1988), and others, West and Zimmerman instigated numerous studies of interruption in language and gender research, continuing through the present (e.g. Ahrens 1997; Beattie 1981; Esposito 1979; Greenwood 1996; West 1984). Moreover, their framework of looking to language for reflections of unequal gender relations also influenced subsequent research. For example, Fishman (1983) examined naturally occurring conversations tape-recorded by three heterosexual couples in their homes, and found that the women performed more of the conversational "support work" required to sustain conversational interaction with their partners: they produced more listening cues (*mhm, uhuh*), asked more questions, used *you know* and attention-getting beginnings (*This is interesting*) more frequently (presumably to encourage a response), and actively pursued topics raised by the men. On the other hand, men were more likely to not respond to turns and topics initiated by the women, and to make more declarative statements. Fishman argues that women's supportive role in private conversations reflects and reproduces sex-based hierarchies of power within the public sphere. (Tannen 1990 suggests a concomitant explanation for the linguistic imbalance: the central role of conversation in establishing intimacy among women, in contrast with the primacy of copresence and shared activity in creating intimacy among men.)

1.3 *Lakoff in current research*

Innumerable studies inspired by Lakoff either confirmed her observations or found exceptions in particular contexts. Nonetheless, as Bucholtz and Hall (1995: 6) note, Lakoff's description of gender-related language "continues to be accepted by diverse groups of speakers as a valid representation of their own discursive experiences." Although her account of "women's language" does not represent the way each individual woman speaks, it nonetheless represents the norms by which women are expected to speak, or what Bucholtz and Hall call "the precise hegemonic notions of gender-appropriate language use," which represents "the idealized language of middle-class European American women." Thus Lakoff remains an invaluable tool for current studies of gender and discourse, as seen, for example, in Barrett (1999) and Hall (1995).

2 Cultural Influences on Gender, Language, and Society

The early focus on women's speech, sex discrimination through language, and asymmetrical power relations was maintained in two influential edited volumes: McConnell-Ginet et al.'s *Women and Language in Literature and Society* (1980) and Thorne et al.'s *Language, Gender and Society* (1983). However, several chapters in these volumes represent another major strand of research in discourse and gender, one that emphasizes the complexity of the relationship among gender, society, and language. This work is strongly influenced by the theoretical perspectives of Erving Goffman and John Gumperz.

2.1 *Gender differences as communicative strategies*

Ethnographic work influenced by Goffman explores gender and discourse as an organizing component of social interaction. Drawing on Goffman's (1967: 5) concept of face, Brown (1980) examined politeness phenomena in a Mayan community. She found that Tenejapan women used more speech particles to strengthen or weaken an utterance, as well as strategies that were qualitatively more polite than those used by men. For example, women tended to use irony and rhetorical questions in place of direct criticism (*Just why would you know how to sew?* implying *Of course you wouldn't*), which both de-emphasized negative messages and emphasized in-group solidarity. In addition (as Lakoff predicted), although both women and men used hedging particles in cases of genuine doubt, only women used them to hedge the expression of their own feelings (*I just really am sad then because of it, perhaps*) (Brown 1980: 126). In contrast, Brown claimed, the men's communicative style was characterized by a lack of attention to face, and the presence of such features as sex-related joking and a "preaching/declaiming style" (1980: 129).

McConnell-Ginet (1988: 85) observes that Brown's contribution was crucial because it shifted the framework "from a system one acquires . . . to a set of strategies one develops to manage social interactions." Brown explains that women's and men's linguistic choices are "communicative strategies"; that is, humans are "rational actors" who choose linguistic options to achieve certain socially motivated ends in particular circumstances (1980: 113).

Goffman's influence is also seen in the pioneering ethnographic work of Goodwin (1978, 1980a, 1990), based on fieldwork with African American children in an urban neighborhood. Goodwin found that girls and boys in same-sex play groups created different social organizations through the directive–response sequences they used while coordinating task activities: the boys created hierarchical structures, whereas the girls created more egalitarian structures. For example, the boys negotiated status by giving and resisting direct directives (*Gimme the pliers!*), whereas the girls constructed joint activities by phrasing directives as suggestions rather than commands (*Let's go around Subs and Suds*). Goodwin points out that the girls can and do use the forms found in boys' play in other contexts (for example, when taking the role of mother in playing "house"), emphasizing that gender-related variations in language use are context-sensitive.

2.2 *Male–female discourse as cross-cultural communication*

Maltz and Borker (1982) surveyed research on gendered patterns of language use and concluded that difficulties in cross-sex communication could be understood within the framework Gumperz (1982) developed for understanding cross-cultural

communication. In this framework, miscommunication stems from differences in women's and men's habits and assumptions about how to participate in conversation. For example, in considering the finding that women tend to use more minimal responses (*mhm, uhuh, yeah*) than men, Maltz and Borker suggest that women tend to use these responses to indicate "I'm listening," whereas men tend to use them to indicate "I agree." The reason, then, that women tend to use more of these utterances is that they are listening more often than men are agreeing. Based primarily on Goodwin (1978, 1980a, 1980b) and Lever (1976, 1978), Maltz and Borker suggest that women and men acquire such different conversational habits during childhood and adolescence as they play in same-sex groups.

Tannen (1989a) also brings a cross-cultural perspective to bear on cross-gender discourse. She uses "interruption" as a paradigm case of a discourse feature whose "meaning" might seem self-evident (a display of conversational dominance and usurpation of speaking rights), but which is in fact a complex phenomenon whose very identification is subject to culturally variable meanings and interpretations. In earlier work, Tannen (1984) showed that for many speakers, "overlapping" can be a show of enthusiastic participation rather than a hostile or dominating attempt to steal the floor. However, if one participant expects cooperative overlapping, but the other expects one person to speak at a time, the latter may perceive overlapping as interruption and stop speaking. Thus dominance created in interaction does not always result from an attempt to dominate, nor does it necessarily reflect the societal domination of one social group over another. This view of interruption is supported by a review of the literature on gender and interruption by James and Clarke (1993), who found that many of the studies following West and Zimmerman concluded that conversations among women exhibited more interruptions than conversations among men, but the purpose of the "interruptions" was to show rapport rather than to gain the floor.

3 The Field Develops

Throughout the next decade, scholars refined and advanced our understanding of the relationship between gender and discourse. Research focused on talk among women (e.g. Johnson and Aries 1983; Coates 1989); narrative (Johnstone 1990); language socialization (e.g. selections in Philips et al. 1987, and Schieffelin and Ochs 1986); language among children and adolescents (Eckert 1990; Goodwin 1990; Goodwin and Goodwin 1987; Sheldon 1990); and language and gender in particular contexts such as doctor–patient interaction (Ainsworth-Vaughn 1992; West 1990). Numerous journal articles were supplemented by edited collections (Todd and Fisher 1988; Cameron 1990; Coates and Cameron 1989; Philips et al. 1987); monographs (Cameron 1985; Preisler 1986); and introductory textbooks (Frank and Anshen 1983; Coates 1986; Graddol and Swann 1989).

3.1 *Tannen's* You Just Don't Understand

The publication of *You Just Don't Understand* in 1990 can be seen as ushering in the next phase of discourse and gender research, based on the attention this book received

both within and outside the field. During much of the 1990s, it served (as Lakoff had before) as the point of departure for numerous studies, both as a touchstone for developing further research and as a bête noir against which to define arguments. Written for a general rather than an academic audience, this book combined a range of scholarly work with everyday conversational examples to illustrate the hypothesis that conversations between women and men could be understood, metaphorically, as cross-cultural communication.

3.2 *Gender-related patterns of talk*

Combining the cross-cultural perspective of Gumperz, the interactional principles of Goffman, Lakoff's framework of gender-related communicative style, and her own work on conversational style, Tannen (1990) posited that gender-related patterns of discourse form a coherent web that is motivated by women's and men's understanding of social relationships. Building on Maltz and Borker's reinterpretation of the research on children's interaction, she concluded that patterns of interaction that had been found to characterize women's and men's speech could be understood as serving their different conversational goals: whereas all speakers must find a balance between seeking connection and negotiating relative status, conversational rituals learned by girls and maintained by women tend to focus more on the connection dimension, whereas rituals learned by boys and maintained by men tend to focus more on the status dimension. Put another way, conversational rituals common among women focus on intimacy (that is, avoiding the loss of connection which results in being "pushed away"), whereas conversational rituals common among men focus on independence (that is, avoiding the one-down position in a hierarchy, which results in being "pushed around").

Given these orientations, women tend to choose linguistic options based on symmetry. For example, Tannen describes a conversational ritual common among women, "displaying similarities and matching experiences" (1990: 77). Supporting this finding, Coates (1996: 61) notes that "reciprocal self-disclosure" characterizes talk between women friends. This mirroring is realized linguistically through the repetition of syntactic patterns and key words and phrases (1996: 79–81, 84). Furthermore, these conversations frequently involve matching troubles. Tannen notes that bonding through talk about troubles is a common activity for women throughout the world (1990: 100).

In contrast, Tannen (1990, 1994a, 1994c, 1998) finds, many conversational rituals common among men are based on ritual opposition or "agonism." This is seen, for example, in "teasing, playfully insulting each other, or playing 'devil's advocate'" to develop and strengthen ideas (through, for example, challenges, counter-challenges, and debate) (1998: 196). Just as troubles talk appears among women cross-culturally, men in disparate parts of the world engage in a "war of words," in which they "vie with one another to devise clever insults, topping each other both in the intensity of the insult and the skill of the insulter" (1998: 194). Tannen stresses that it is the use of *ritualized* opposition, or "agonism," that is associated with boys and men. Girls and women certainly fight in the *literal* sense (1998: 197). Thus, little boys frequently

play-fight as a favored game. Whereas little girls rarely fight for fun, they do fight when they mean it.

3.3 *The "difference" and "dominance" debates*

During the 1990s, scholars routinely classified research into two categories: the "power" or "dominance" approach focused on unequal roles as the source of differences (Fishman 1979, 1983; West and Zimmerman 1983; Zimmerman and West 1975) whereas the "cultural" or "difference" approach focused on sex-separate socialization as the source (Maltz and Borker 1982; Tannen 1990). This characterization of research, as initially proposed by Henley and Kramarae (1991), is clearly disciplinary: research labeled as "dominance" stemmed from communication and sociology, whereas research labeled as "difference" stemmed from anthropological linguistics.

The distinction has been used primarily to fault the "difference" approach for, purportedly, not incorporating power into the analysis of gender and discourse. Recent descriptions attribute the distinction to scholars' theoretical explanations: hierarchical power structures in a dominance approach, and divergent paths of language socialization in a difference approach. This characterization exposes the falseness of the dichotomy, because the first is an underlying cause of gender differences, whereas the latter is a sociolinguistic means through which gender differences may be negotiated and acquired. As such, the latter does not preclude unequal power relations as an underlying cause of socially learned patterns. Quite the contrary, as Tannen (1994b) notes in calling for researchers to abandon the dichotomy, a fundamental tenet of interactional sociolinguistics (see Gumperz, this volume), the theoretical framework for the cross-cultural approach, is that social relations such as dominance and subordination are constructed in interaction. Therefore, the cultural approach provides a way to understand how inequalities are created in face-to-face interaction.

A more viable basis for distinguishing between approaches is identified by Cameron (1995), who traces Tannen's non-judgmental evaluation of women's and men's discursive styles to the linguistic tradition of cultural relativity. Although she rejects cultural relativity as inappropriate in the language and gender domain, Cameron explains (1995: 35–6):

> for the linguist, inequality is conceived as resulting not from difference itself but from intolerance of difference. Thus linguists have insisted it is wrong to label languages "primitive" or dialects "substandard"; it is wrong to force people to abandon their ways of speaking, or to judge them by the yardstick of your own linguistic habits. Throughout this century, the norm in linguistics has been linguistic and cultural relativism – "all varieties are equal". It has always been an honorable position, and sometimes an outright radical one.

Thus researchers working in a linguistic tradition do not evaluate one style as superior to the other, but emphasize the underlying logic of both styles. Nonetheless they recognize – and demonstrate – that gender-related differences in styles may produce and reproduce asymmetries.

4 The Field Explodes

After 1990, the field grew exponentially with the publication of numerous edited collections (Bergvall et al. 1996; Bucholtz et al. 1999; Coates 1997b; Etter-Lewis and Foster 1996; Hall and Bucholtz 1995; Johnson and Meinhof 1997; Kotthoff and Wodak 1997a; Leap 1996a; Livia and Hall 1997b; Mills 1995; Tannen 1993; Wodak 1997); the proceedings from the influential Berkeley Women and Language Conference (Bucholtz et al. 1994; Hall et al. 1992; Warner et al. 1996; Wertheim et al. 1998); monographs (Coates 1996; Crawford 1995; Holmes 1995; Leap 1996b; Matoesian 1993; Talbot 1998; Tannen 1994a, 1994b); and second editions (Cameron [1985]1992, [1990]1998b; Coates [1986]1993).

4.1 *Heterogeneity in gender and discourse*

In the 1990s, research on gender and discourse expanded in many directions from its earlier focus on "women's language" to include the language of men and of other social groups who had not been widely included in earlier studies. In addition, researchers increasingly considered the interaction between gender and other social identities and categories, such as ethnicity (Mendoza-Denton 1999; Orellana 1999), social class (Bucholtz 1999a; Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1995; McElhinny 1997; Orellana 1999), and sexuality (Barrett 1999; Jacobs 1996; Leap 1996a, 1996b, 1999; Livia and Hall 1997a; Wood 1999). In this way, the field followed the perhaps inevitable progression from prototypical to less typical cases, including those which Bucholtz (1999b: 7) describes (positively) as "bad examples": people who assume social and sexual roles different from those their cultures legitimize.

4.2 *Language and masculinity*

The study of men's use of language reached a milestone in 1997 with the publication of Johnson and Meinhof's edited volume, *Language and Masculinity*. In these and other studies of men's discourse, a pattern identified by Tannen (1990) is found in a wide range of contexts: men tend to discursively take up roles of expertise or authority. Coates (1997a), for example, reports, based on an extensive corpus of women's and men's friendly talk, that men are more likely to take up the role of the expert, whereas women are more likely to avoid this role. In conversations between male friends, she finds, men take turns giving monologues – some quite extensive – about subjects in which they are expert (1997a: 120). For example, in one conversation, the men talk about "home-made beer-making; hi-fi equipment; film projectors and the logistics of switching from one to the other" (1997a: 120). Thus, each man gets a turn at being the expert.

Kotthoff (1997) finds that men are more likely to take up expert positions in the public sphere. She examines the discursive negotiation of expert status in television discussions on Austrian TV by comparing the actual expert status of the guests ("extrinsic rank") and the status they interactionally achieve ("intrinsic rank"). Crediting Tannen (1990) for identifying the centrality of lecturing in men's conversational

strategies, Kotthoff finds that high-ranking men always gained a high intrinsic status through the use of lecturing, characterized by suspension of turn-taking, assertions of debatable claims in a straightforward manner, and a lack of subjectivizers (e.g. *I think*) (1997: 165). (Significantly, even lower-ranking men sometimes gained a high intrinsic status, but lower-ranking women never did.)

4.3 *The language of African American and Latina women*

Recent research addresses the discourse of African American women (Bucholtz 1996; Etter-Lewis 1991; Etter-Lewis and Foster 1996; Foster 1989, 1995; Morgan 1991, 1999; Stanback 1985) as well as Latina women (Mendoza-Denton 1999; Orellana 1999). Morgan (1999: 29) describes three interactional events with which, barring a few exceptions, "women who have been socialized within African American culture are familiar": the first is girls' he-said-she-said disputes in which girls go to great lengths to determine who said what behind someone's back. She contrasts this speech event with "signifying," or ritual insulting, which is a game played mostly by boys. The second is teenagers' and young adults' instigating, in which older girls focus on who intended to start a confrontation. Finally, adult women participate in "conversational signifying," focusing on the speaker's right to be present to represent her own experience. (See also Goodwin 1978, 1990.)

Based on ethnographic fieldwork in a northern California urban public high school, Mendoza-Denton (1999) examines Latina girls' use of turn-initial *"No"* to manage interactional conflict. She finds a pattern of "collaborative opposition" or "conflictive corroboration" by which the girls manage shifting alignments, or stances. Goodwin (1999), based on ethnographic fieldwork among second-generation Mexican and Central American girls in an elementary school in Los Angeles, found that the Spanish–English bilingual girls engage in complex and elaborate negotiations about the rules of the game of hopscotch.

5 Analyzing Gender and Discourse

As our understanding of the relationship between language and gender has progressed, researchers have arrived at many similar conclusions, although these similarities frequently go unrecognized or unacknowledged. This section presents some of the most widely accepted tenets – and the most widely debated issues – that have emerged. Points of agreement include (1) the social construction of gender, (2) the indirect relationship between gender and discourse, (3) gendered discourse as a resource, and (4) gendered discourse as a constraint. The most widely debated issues are gender duality and performativity.

5.1 *The social construction of gender*

A social constructivist paradigm has prevailed in gender and discourse research. That is, scholars agree that the "meaning" of gender is culturally mediated, and gendered identities are interactionally achieved. In this sense, the field has come full circle from Goffman's pioneering work to the currently fashionable performative approach commonly credited to feminist theorist Judith Butler (1990, 1993). Goffman (1976) demonstrated, with illustrations from print advertisements, that the gendered self is accomplished through the display of postures that both ritualize subordination and are conventionally associated with gender, such as the "bashful knee bend," receiving help and instruction, and smiling more frequently and more expansively than men. Similarly, in Butler's (1993: 227) conception of performativity, local practices bring gender into being "through the repetition or citation of a prior, authoritative set of practices."

The distinctions and usefulness of Goffman's social constructivist approach and Butler's performative approach are currently being debated. See, for example, Livia and Hall (1997b), who discuss performativity in gender and language research; Kotthof and Wodak (1997b), who compare Butler and Goffman, and argue in favor of the latter; and discussions in Preisler (1998) and Meyerhoff (1996).

5.2 *The indirect relationship between gender and discourse*

Tannen (1994c) draws on Goffman (1977) to claim that discourse and gender are "sex-class linked" rather than sex linked. That is, ways of speaking are not identified with every individual man or woman but rather are associated with the class of women or the class of men (in Russell's sense of logical types) in a given society. By talking in ways that are associated with one or the other sex class, individuals signal their alignment with that sex class. A similar theoretical perspective is provided by Ochs (1992), who posits that ways of speaking are associated with stances that are in turn associated with women or men in a given culture. Thus, ways of speaking "index gender."

Because the relationship between gender and discourse is indirect, individuals may not be aware of the influence of gender on their speaking styles. For example, in interviews with four prominent Texan women, Johnstone (1995) found that the women proudly acknowledged the influence of being Texan but denied that their behavior was related to gender. Yet, in discussing her success as a litigator, one woman said (among other things): "I try to smile, and I try to just be myself." Tannen (1994c: 216) notes that, as Goffman (1976) demonstrated, this woman's way of being herself – smiling – is sex-class linked.

Based on an ethnographic study of police officers, McElhinny (1992: 399–400) notes that the indirect relationship between gender and discourse enables women to assume typically male verbal behavior in institutional settings: "female police officers can interpret behaviors that are normatively understood as masculine (like noninvolvement or emotional distance) as simply 'the way we need to act to do our job' in a professional way." Ironically, McElhinny's article is titled, "I Don't Smile Much Anymore."

5.3 *Gendered discourse as a resource*

The constructivist approach entails a distinction between expectations or ideologies and actual discursive practices. In other words, "gendered speaking styles exist

independently of the speaker" (Bucholtz and Hall 1995: 7), so gendered discourse provides a resource for women's and men's presentation of self. As Tannen (1989b: 80) explains, cultural influences do not determine the form that a speaker's discourse will take; instead, they "provide a range from which individuals choose strategies that they habitually use in expressing their individual styles."

Hall (1995) demonstrates that phone-sex workers draw on gendered discourse as a resource by using "women's language" to construct the gendered identity required for economic gain in their occupation. They use "feminine" words (*lacy*) and nonbasic color terms (*charcoal* rather than *black*) (as described in Lakoff 1975); they use "dynamic" intonation, characterized by a relatively wide pitch range and pronounced and rapid shifts in pitch (McConnell-Ginet 1978); and they actively maintain the interaction through supportive questions and comments (Fishman 1983).

5.4 *Gendered discourse as a constraint*

If gendered discourse strategies are a resource, they are simultaneously a constraint. Both views underlie Tannen's (1994c) framing approach by which a researcher asks, first, what alignments each speaker is establishing in relation to interlocutors and to the subject of talk or task at hand; second, how these alignments balance the needs for both status and connection; and, third, how linguistic strategies are functioning to create those alignments. Only then should one ask how these language patterns are linked to gender. Tannen analyzes workplace communication to show that language strategies used by those in positions of authority are not simply ways of exercising power but are ways of balancing the simultaneous but conflicting needs for status and connection – ways that are sex-class linked. She compares two instances of small talk between status unequals. In one interaction, two men who are discussing a computer glitch negotiate status and connection through challenges; bonding against women; and alternating displays of helping, expertise, and independence (needing no help). In the other example, four women negotiate status and connection through complimenting, a focus on clothing and shopping, the balancing of display and gaze, and expressive intonation.

In both interactions, participants' linguistic strategies, and the alignments they create, reflect both status and connection. The women's conversation occurred while the highest-status woman was telling a story to two lower-ranking colleagues. When a female mail clerk entered, the speaker stopped her story and complimented the mail clerk on her blouse, and the others joined in. The complimenting ritual served as a resource for including the clerk and attending to her as a person, thus creating connection; however, it also reflected and reproduced relative status because it was the highest-status person who controlled the framing of the interaction, and the lowest-status person who was the recipient of the compliment. But gendered discourse is also a constraint, in the sense that negotiating status and connection through challenges and mock insults was less available as a resource to the women, and doing so through the exchange of compliments on clothing and discussion of shopping and fashion was less available as a resource to the men. Finally, the relationship between gender and discourse is indirect insofar as, in each case, speakers chose linguistic options to accomplish pragmatic and interactional goals.

The notion of gendered discourse as a constraint also underlies Eckert and McConnell-Ginet's (1992: 473) influential exhortation that language and gender researchers examine women's and men's language use in "communities of practice": groups of people who "come together around mutual engagement in some common endeavor." They explain that "speakers develop linguistic patterns as they act in their various communities in which they participate." These sites of engagement are relevant to the relation between microactions and macrosocial structures, because "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." For example, in a study of the Kuna Indians of Panama, Sherzer (1987) found that language and gender were linked through gender-differentiated speaking roles that determined who had the opportunity to take up those roles in the first place. In a similar spirit, Lakoff (1995: 30) describes the increase in women's public access to "interpretive control, their ability to determine the meaning of events in which they are involved." She discusses five events that received "undue attention" in the media because they concerned the "identities and possibilities of women and men" (1995: 32).

Again, the notion of gendered discourse as a constraint is captured by a framing approach. Kendall (1999), examining family talk at dinnertime, shows that the parents create gendered identities through framing and through the alignments that constitute those frames. The mother accomplished multiple tasks by creating and maintaining several interactional frames, whereas the father participated minimally, and maintained only one frame at a time. For example, the mother served food (Hostess), taught her daughter dinnertime etiquette (Miss Manners), assisted her daughter (Caretaker), and managed her daughter's social life (Social Secretary). The father took up only one parental frame, Playmate, through which he created more symmetrical relations with his daughter, but sometimes undercut the mother's authority as well.

5.5 *Gender dualism*

Perhaps the most hotly debated issue in gender and discourse research is that of gender dualism. During the past decade, scholars have questioned "the division of speech on the basis of a binary division of gender or sex" (Bing and Bergvall 1996: 3). However, as a substantial number of studies find, theoretical frameworks of gender and discourse cannot summarily dismiss sex- or gender-based binary oppositions (Cameron 1998a; Johnson 1997; Preisler 1998). In a review of Bergvall et al. (1996), Cameron (1998a: 955) concludes that, although many researchers "approach the male–female binary critically, . . . in most cases their data oblige them to acknowledge its significance for the speakers they are studying."

Conceptualizing gendered discourse as a resource and a constraint within a framing approach may help resolve continuing tensions in the field concerning the role of sex/gender binarity in a theoretical model of gender and discourse. The conception of gendered discourse as a resource accounts for diversity in speaking styles: many women and men do not speak in ways associated with their sex; they use language patterns associated with the other sex; there is variation within as well as between sex groups; gender interacts with other socially constructed categories, such as race and

social class; individuals create multiple – and sometimes contradictory – versions of femininity and masculinity; and women and men may transgress, subvert, and challenge, as well as reproduce, societal norms.

The conception of gendered discourse as a constraint accounts for the stubborn reality that if women and men do not speak in ways associated with their sex, they are likely to be perceived as speaking and behaving like the other sex – and to be negatively evaluated. This is demonstrated at length by Tannen (1994a) for women and men in positions of authority in the workplace. Tannen found pervasive evidence for what Lakoff had earlier identified as a double bind: women who conformed to expectations of femininity were seen as lacking in competence or confidence, but women who conformed to expectations of people in authority were seen as lacking in femininity – as too aggressive.

Bergvall (1996) similarly demonstrates that, in a number of small group discussions at a technological university, a female student displays linguistic behaviors in some ways associated with stereotypically "masculine" speech ("assertively") and in other ways considered feminine ("cooperative, affiliative, instrumental"). However, her "assertive and active engagement" was negatively assessed by her peers in the class, "both orally and through written evaluations." Bergvall concludes that, when this woman "fails to enact the traditional supportive feminine role, she is negatively sanctioned and is silenced by the gender-normative activities of the class" (1996: 186).

Recent research has focused on linguistic behavior that "transgresses" and "contests" gender-linked expectations or ideologies, but it also concludes that such transgressions are typically perceived by speakers in terms of male/female duality. For example, Wood (1997), in examining lesbian "coming out stories," finds that the women refer to beliefs and practices that transgress gender ideologies, but do so by referring to cultural expectations of gender, attraction, and sexuality. Similarly, Hall and O'Donovan (1996: 229) find that hijras in India, who are often referred to as a "third gender" in gender theory (e.g. Lorber 1994), define themselves in their narratives in relation to a male–female dichotomy, characterizing themselves as "'deficiently' masculine and 'incompletely' feminine." Hall and O'Donovan conclude that "instead of occupying a position outside the female–male dichotomy, the hijras have created an existence within it."

As a result, scholars are increasingly wary of studies that view "discourse as an omnipotent force to create reality" (Kotthof and Wodak 1997b: xi). Walters (1999: 202) notes that, "In an effort to escape biological essentialism, sociolinguists have, I fear, preferred to act as if individuals do not have bodies." A framing approach incorporates the agency of performativity, but also relates – without attributing – individuals' agentive behavior to biological sex. Likewise, Kotthof and Wodak argue for a return to Goffman's social constructivist approach because it grounds the construction of gender within the social institutions that produce and perpetuate gender. As Goffman (1977: 324) put it, institutions "do not so much allow for the expression of natural differences between the sexes as for the production of that difference itself."

6 Conclusion

Research on language and gender has increasingly become research on gender and discourse (although variationist studies such as Eckert 1989, 1998 demonstrate a promising symbiotic relationship between quantitative and qualitative methods). A movement toward the study of language within specific situated activities reflects the importance of culturally defined meanings both of linguistic strategies and of gender. It acknowledges the agency of individuals in creating gendered identities, including the options of resisting and transgressing sociocultural norms for linguistic behavior. But it also acknowledges the sociocultural constraints within which women and men make their linguistic choices, and the impact of those constraints, whether they are adhered to or departed from. In a sense, the field of gender and discourse has come full circle, returning to its roots in a Goffman-influenced constructivist framework as seen in the groundbreaking work of Brown, Goodwin, Lakoff, and Goffman himself.

NOTE

1 As Maccoby (1988) observes, this distinction is illusory since it presupposes that we know a priori which aspects of behavior are culturally learned, and which are biologically given, when in fact we can not do so. Moreover, the distinction is increasingly muddied as the term "gender" is now used as a euphemism for "sex" in many contexts, such as forms that ask people to indicate their male or female "gender."

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