Language and Gender Construction

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Introduction

The relationship between language and gender has been the interest of many sociolinguists. Over the past decades, many pieces of research regarding this issue have been done in many countries, especially in the English-speaking world such as the United States (e.g. Labov, 1966) and Britain (Trugill, 1972). In most of these studies, it has been found that men and women speak in different ways in both verbal and non-verbal behaviours such as eye contact, frequency of interruptions and turn-taking, the topics of conversation, pronunciation and vocabulary choice (Gramely and Pätzold, 1992). During 1970s, there are two classical pieces of research conducted in Britain and the United States. Peter Trugill (1972) found that women in Norwich, Britain, tended to use Standard English in pronouncing words more often than men did. In her research, Robin Lakoff (1975) discovered that women had a higher tendency to use polite and correct form of English in the United States.

This paper aims to argue that language is a form of gender representation. Men and women deploy the language patterns which have been assigned to them so that they can perform their own gender roles and meet the social expectation. In the first part of this paper, the differences between sex and gender from sociolinguistic and feminist points of view will be examined. Next, some background information about the relationship between language and gender in the sociolinguistic field will be given. Third, we are
going to discuss how the cultural element – language – helps to construct gender. And finally, I would like to focus on liberation from negative attitudes towards language.

**Differences between Sex and Gender**

Sex and gender are two different concepts in the sociolinguistic field. The former refers to biological category, and it is fixed before birth (Thomas et al., 2004). The latter is a socially constructed category which is based on sex (Coates, 1993), and gender is also considered as a social variable which can affect the language use (Gramley and Pätzold, 1992).

Feminists distinguish sex and gender on the basis of concept. The former refers to the biology sex while the latter is the cultural assumptions and practices governing the social construction of men, women and their social relations (Baker, 2000). The sex-gender system is constructed socially by different cultural systems such as language use (Chan, 2011, Lecture). As there are different expectations of language use on men and women, they use the same language in different ways so as to perform their social roles which have been assigned to them.

**Language and Gender in Sociolinguistics**

1. **Sexist Language in English**

Much research on how language and gender are related to each other has been conducted over the decades. These studies fall into two main categories. The first one aims to look
into how a language makes a reference to males and females, particularly in the areas of vocabulary items and pronouns. For example, the word “horse” is a generic term which can refer to both sexes of animals.

NCTE (1997), as cited in Gramley and Pätzold (1992), defines sexism “words or actions which arbitrarily assign roles or characteristics to people based on their sex” (p. 260). For some words in the English language, the generic, or unmarked, forms are considered sexist. The pronoun “his” which carries a male feature has been used to anaphorically refer to “everyone”, “human” or “one”, though “his/ her” which is gender neutral is becoming commoner. Thomas et al. (2004) also comments that sexist language represents stereotypes of women and men. The word “fireman” is an example of sexist words in English. The suffix “~ man” carries the sex preference to males. As there is no counterpart for “fireman”, another word “firefighter” has been coined to refer to both men and women. Some other English words such as “poets” and “poetess” are paired. However, the feminine ones often convey a different but negative meaning (Thorne and Henley, 1975). For instance, “poetess” means female writer of poems of poorer quality, and “courtesan” (male: courtier”) means a prostitute with wealthy or aristocratic clients (Gramley and Pätzold, 1992).

Some English terms such as “doctors” and “nurses”, in fact, can refer to both men and women. Yet, occupation stereotypes in many communities have associated the profession “doctor” with males and “nurse” with females. As a result, pronouns “he” and “she” are used to refer to a doctor and a nurse respectively (Gramley and Pätzold, 1992). If the
doctor is a female, and the nurse is a male, it is necessary to say “women/ lady doctor” and “male nurse” (Lakoff, 1975; Thomas, 2004) to indicate their sex.

2. Gender and Language Use

The second category has an aim to find out how men and women use a language in conversations, and look for explanations for the similarities and differences in their language patterns. Generally speaking, women prefer to use refined, euphemistic and hyperbolic expressions, and tend to avoid topics such as money and politics but more on people. Men, on the other hand, tend to use slangs, and like to discuss sports and business things. They also tend to use the non-standard form of English more often to show their power, masculinity, and competitiveness. For women, in order to show their femininity and cooperativeness, they have a higher tendency to use the standard form in speech (i.e. Received Pronunciation in Britain and General American in the United States) which is more prestigious and is regarded as the educated and accepted norms of a community (Gramley and Pätzold, 1992; Thomas et al., 2004; Thorne and Henley, 1975; Yule, 1996).

Apart from describing the differing language patterns used by men and women, sociolinguists are also interested in examining the reasons for the differences they have found in their studies. Gramley and Pätzold (1992) suggest that women favour the standard form of a language because they need to seek prestige through language. Since women are subordinate to men in society, and lack occupational status, the former tries to compensate for their subordination in status through linguistic behaviour (Trugill, 1972, as cited in Thorne and Henley, 1975). Also, women use language in order to establish a
group identity and solidarity in a social network. The more tied a social network, the more likely for people in that network to share their language. The differing use of language by men and women seems to imply that there is a gap of the social network between them. If men and women have the same social network, their language use should be more or less the same.

The gendered division of labour is another factor attributing to the language differences of men and women. In the past decades, in most countries, women have been excluded in paid employment, and they need to do domestic work. Men, on the other hand, had more opportunities to engage in production activities. This division of labour, as a result, has separated men and women in speech topics. Consequently, men tended to talk about cars, work and politics while women’s talk focused on family and personal lives (Thorne and Henley, 1975).

In addition, there are two more theories – dominance theory and difference theory – have been used by sociolinguists to explain the differences of linguistic behaviours between men and women. According to Coates (1993) and Thomas et al. (2004), dominance theory regards women as a suppressed group and subordination to men, and the difference in power between men and women have caused the linguistic differences. Men have more power than women in terms of physical strength, financial situation and in workplace. Also, they former can exert their power through linguistic behavior. Difference theory, which was developed by two anthropologists, Maltz and Borker, in the 1980s, has been deployed by sociolinguists to explain the linguistic differences between
men and women. Men and women have differing use of language because they belong to two different sociolinguistic subcultures. They talk in different ways as a result of social segregation at stages of their lives. They develop their own conversational patterns from interacting with their same-sex peers in their childhood and their own styles of speeches, carry these linguistic behaviours to their adulthood, and later have same-sex friendships when they have grown up. As a result, when a man and woman communicate with each other, they use their own linguistic styles developed from their childhood to adulthood, and this causes miscommunications and misunderstandings. Women, in this theory, can be seen as a resistance to being treated as a marginalised group (Coates, 1993; Thomas et al., 2004; Uchida, 1998).

**Feminism and Linguistics**

Feminist linguists are interested in studying linguistic differences based on sex as well. They agree that the linguistic differences are social instead of innate. Those feminist linguists study the linguistic differences of men and women for two main reasons. First of all, they search for authentic female language to see whether there is cognitive difference or existence of female subculture. The second reason is that feminist linguists need to identify the sexual power dynamic in language use, the conventions, and behaviours through which language reflects and perpetuates gender inequality (Cameron, 1992).

Deborah Cameron, a feminist linguist, has made criticisms on sociolinguistic studies regarding the relationship language and gender. Cameron (1992) comments that language is a tool of gender representation, and if a person is exposed to gender stereotypes and
distortions repeatedly, he/she will believe those stereotypes, internalise them, and take them for granted. She also thinks that women’s linguistic differences from men’s are the implicit and explicit bases on which sexism and inequality rests.

When studying the difference, sociolinguists are comparing two groups – men and women, and the former makes up the stereotypes, and invent stereotypes about the other group (Lakoff, 1975). Men’s linguistic pattern, which is the linguistic experiences of white males from the middle class, is set as the prototype, norm and unmarked form (Jenkins and Kramarae, as cited in Cameron, 1992), and it is which women’s language use deviates from the norm. This, namely Androcentric Rule (Coates, 1993), explains why women’s language must be explained, but usually on the basis of stereotypes. However, this category of male-as-norm and female-as-deviant is sexist and arbitrary (Spender, 1985).

In her book *Feminism and linguistic theory*, Cameron (1992) has introduced feminists’ views on (socio)linguistics in Chapter 7 and 8. She details linguistic determinism, which means an idea that language determines humans’ perception of the world. This idea is important in radical feminist linguistic theory. To radical feminists, language constructs a certain reality, men do the construction, and women are excluded in the construction process. Language, from radical feminists’ point of view, is a thing which forces “women’s experiences into categories that do not fit” (p.132). From their viewpoint, language not only helps to filter the reality, but also distort the reality (Cameron, 1992).
Cameron mentions other feminist linguists such as Dale Spender in her book. Spender was influenced by “the dominant and muted” theory of two British anthropologists, Edwin and Shirley Ardener. In 1980, Dale published her book named *Man Made Language*, and it caught attention. Spender (1985) suggests that men have the power to order the structure of language, thought and reality, and they are the central figures. Men control language and create a language with classification schema – plus male and minus male, good and bad (Cameron, 1992). For instance, the word “bachelor” can be defined as [+male], [+animate], [-married], and the word “woman” can be seen as [-male], [+animate], [+adult]. From these two examples, we can see that male is the basic element in the classification system, and “woman” is defined from men’s point of view. Women are excluded, exploited, and relegated to the category of “Other”, and they are either internalised in male reality or find themselves unable to say anything as they are peripheral (Cameron, 1992; Spender, 1985).

The release of *Man Made Language* has aroused heated discussions. Black and Coward (1981), as cited in Cameron (1992), think Spender’s view of power is too simple. Apart from gender, there are more dimensions of power including ethnicity and class; however, all these dimensions are neglected by Spender. Moreover, Black and Coward (1981) stress that the working of power is more sophisticated than Spender thinks. In a society with unequal divisions, a number of groups have power in relation to other groups. The forms of domination and subordination are not always identical (p.103). So, it is quite misleading to say that men have all power over women (Cameron, 1992). Language should neither be reduced to a tool or effect of sex position, or be expressive of division.
of gender, but it is necessary for people to understand how language is in relation to power which is exercised through discourses and ideologies (Black and Coward, 1981).

To summarise, there is no direct or simple relationship between language and gender. On the one hand, the linguistic differences of men and women reflect the social inequality in society. On the other hand, social roles and stereotypes have imposed social expectations on both men and women, and they perform their gender roles through their linguistic behaviours given to them.

In the following section, we are going to look at the two sociolinguistic studies conducted by Peter Trugill and Robin Lakoff in Britain and the United States respectively. Their studies will serve the basis for us to discuss the notions of “standard” and “norms” of a language, and how language is a means for men and women to perform their gender roles in the late parts of the paper.

**Sociolinguistic Studies 1: Peter Trugill’s Sex, Covert Prestige and Linguistic Change in the Urban British English of Norwich**

Peter Trugill conducted his research in the city of Norwich, Britain, in summer 1968. This study was developed based on Labov’s research which was conducted in the United States in 1966. Trugill’s research aimed to investigate whether women consistently or more frequently produced linguistic forms which were closer to the standard language or had a higher prestige than those produced by men. His study also concerned correlating
phonetic and phonological variables with social class, age and stylistic contexts including Word list Style, Reading Passage Style, Formal Speech and Casual Speech.

In this research, sixty people were selected randomly. Those participants came from five social classes developed based on their income, education, dwelling type, location of dwelling, occupation, and occupations of their father. The five classes in this study were labelled as Middle Middle Class, Lower Middle Class, Upper Working Class, Middle Working Class and Lower Working Class. However, the information including the number of participants in each class, and the number of male and female informants were not provided¹.

According to Trugill (1972), it was found that male informants tended to use Working Class speech, which is a non-standard dialect carrying connotations such as “bad speech”, “masculine”, and “roughness”, while women participants had a higher frequency to use the form associated with Standard English (i.e. Received Pronunciation in Britain) when compared with the male participants. Trugill (1972) has speculated the following three reasons for his findings:

1. **Women in Britain are more status-conscious than men are. Therefore, the former is more aware of social significance of linguistic variables. The social position of women is less secure and subordinate to men. As a result, women need to secure themselves, and signal their social status in a**

¹ The details of the research can be found in Trugill’s own unpublished Ph.D. thesis (1971).
linguistic way. In addition, being not rated socially by their own occupation, earning power and other capabilities, British women have to be rated on their appearance. Speech, then, has become basis for being rated.

2. The Working Class speech appears to have the connotations with masculinity as this type of speech is probably linked with toughness and roughness which are also the characteristics of Working Class life. These attributes are not desirable for women as they are expected to be more refined and sophisticated.

3. The phenomenon may also be the result of differential responses to school situation in Britain. Female domination would appear to be the norm in primary schools\(^2\). As female values such as quietness at school predominate in teaching situation, boys may react to the female domination negatively, and reject the Standard English and other value systems which are taught in schools through linguistic behaviour.

**Sociolinguistic Studies 2: Robin Lakoff’s Language and Woman’s Place**

Robin Lakoff, an American linguist, published her book named *Language and Women’s Place* in 1975, the aim of which was to make an attempt to give diagnostic evidence from language use for inequality between the roles of men and women in the United States. Lakoff (1975) thinks that women are experiencing linguistic discrimination in the way

\(^2\) Trudgill did not explain the term “female domination”. From my point of view, this may mean that the teaching posts at primary level were mostly occupied by women.
that they are taught to use language, and that language treats them. Women, then, are put in a subservient position as a sex object or servant.

Lakoff collected her data mainly through introspection of her own speech and the speech of her acquaintances. She also used the speeches in the mass media including commercials and situation comedies on television as they mirrored the speech of the audience. Lakoff, then, used her intuitions in analysing the data she had collected.

In the first part of the book, Lakoff expresses her opinion that women have been put in a difficult situation. When they are small, females are taught to speak ladylike; otherwise, they will be scrutinised, scolded and criticised. Having grown up, women are ridiculed because of their way of speaking—they are unable to speak precisely and express her self in a forceful manner. Lakoff (1975) has also made a summary of the following eight characteristics of “women’s language” in the second part of her book:

1. **Women have the words related to their specific interests, and these words are generally relegated to women as “women’s work”**
2. **Women use empty adjectives such as “charming”, “cute” etc. more often**
3. **Women tend to use rising intonation for statements and tag questions (e.g. The weather is good, isn’t it?)**
4. **Women use hedges (e.g. you know, well etc.) more frequently, and hedges suggest uncertainty**
5. **Women use intensive “so” more often**
6. **Women tend to use hypercorrect grammar as non-standard forms of a language mean “rough” which girls are not supposed to be**

7. **Women use super-polite forms more frequently as they are supposed to do so**

8. **Women do not tell jokes**

9. **Women speak in italics, a way to express uncertainty with one’s own self-expression**

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**Critiques on the Two Studies**

Cameron (1992) criticises that there is a theoretical assumption behind Trugill’s studies – family is the unit of social stratification. Women are categorised with their fathers or husbands. The social class of a woman is either determined by her husband’s if she is married, or her father’s if she is unmarried. In the United States, for example, a woman achieves status only through her father’s husband’s or lover’s position (Lakoff, 1975). However, from feminist’s point of view, if men and women are from the same social class and enjoy the same social status, they should be equal. However, it is not the case as women are still dependent on their husband financially.

Besides, people have a tendency to dichotomise men’s and women’s language use which are considered mutually exclusive (Thorne and Henley, 1975). Traditionally, men’s behaviour is associated with assertiveness whereas women’s is more supportive. However, as what Thorne and Henley (1975) state, “assertiveness” and “supportiveness”
is not opposite to each other. When men and woman have different linguistic patterns, we have a high tendency to use this binary concept to explain the differences so that the findings make sense to people.

Despite the criticisms, the two studies are still useful to our discussions on representation of gender roles through language in the following section. To summarise, the findings of differing language patterns of men and women from the two studies reflect the following four things in common:

1. *Gender inequality existed in both Britain and the United States during 1970s*
2. *Women had a higher frequency to use standard form of a language in both societies*
3. *Language is not neutral but gendered. A form of a language can be either masculine or feminine – the non-standard form is seen as masculine whereas the standard one feminine. Men choose a language pattern to show their masculinity whereas women opt to use another one which is associated with femininity.*
4. *Gendered stereotypes have been imposed on both men and women.*

In the following section, we are going to investigate how gender has been stereotyped through language.
Gender Construction through Language

In previous parts, it was mentioned that women had a higher tendency to use the Standard English and conform to norms of a language. Kate Millet, a radical-libertarian feminist, thinks that with the powerful patriarchal ideology, men can secure the apparent consent of women they oppress through institutions, for example, the academy and family, and these institutions reinforce the idea that women are subordinate to men, causing the internalisation of women’s feelings of inferiority (Tong, 1989). The standard form of a language which is taught in schools and standardised by linguists and grammarians justifies women’s subordination to men in a patriarchal society.

Before examining the relationship between language use and the construction of gender, we may need to understand the meanings of “standard” and “norms”.

1. Definitions of Standard and Norms

According to Gavin (1964), as cited in Gramley and Pätzold (1992), a standard language means “a codified form of a language, accepted by, and serving as a model to, a larger speech community” (p.2). Locher and Strassler (2008) further elaborate the term, stating that Standard English is regarded as the commonly-used variety in the media and education for native English speakers and English learners. In Britain, the standard form in speech is called Received Pronunciation whereas in the United States, the widely accepted form is called General American (Gramley and Pätzold, 1992). Standard English, which is the also national standard, enjoys prestige from the social importance (Greenbaum and Quirk, 1990). Also, it is also often associated with the notions of
“educated”, “correct”, “pure”, “good” and “acceptable”. In contrast, any deviations from the standard and norm are stigmatized, and regarded as “bad”, “poor” and “unacceptable”. Unlike some countries such as France, there is no institution to codify the rules of the English language in Britain. Linguists look at dictionaries, grammars and handbooks as authorities, and the public, as a result, indirectly accept those linguists as their authorities since the linguists are considered well-educated and prestigious (Locher and Strassler, 2008). Quirk (1972), as cited in Locher and Strassler (2008), states:

_Educated speech – by definition the language of education – naturally tends to be given the additional prestige of government agencies, the learner profession, the political parties, the press, the law court and the pulpit – any institution which must attempt to address itself to a public beyond the smallest dialectal community ... By reason of the fact that educated English is thus accorded implicit social and political sanctions, it comes to be referred to as Standard English._ (p. 6)

The standard form of the English language is a non-regional variety which is used in politics, the mass media, law courts and other professions. During 1970s, men and women in Britain did not enjoy occupational equality. The latter had a lower social status, and most professions were occupied by men at that time. Therefore, the standard form of English, in this sense, should be a variety used by men instead of women. In addition, men had the right to judge what was good and what was bad, and what was acceptable and what was unacceptable in a community. Contradictorily, Trugill (1972) and Lakoff
found that women tended to use the standard form of the English language more often when compared with men. How can this be explained? One of the possible explanations for the phenomenon is that women and men perform their gender roles through language.

2. Performativity of sex

Gender can be performed through a number of ways, One of which for men and women to perform their own genders is language (West and Zimmerman, 1983, as cited in Coates, 1993). Butler (1990), as cited in Silverstone (1999), speaks gender as an act of “doing” which can be “achieved through reiteration of the norms” (Baker, 2000, p.245). Therefore, to be a qualified “woman”, a woman needs to repeatedly conform to norms of a language which is using Standard English and speak politely.

West and Zimmerman (1987), as cited in Uchida (1998), comment that we learn how to be a male/ female since we are socially labelled as male/ female through being categorised as men/ women biologically. Learning appropriate linguistic rules is one of the ways to become a male/ female in our own communities. Therefore, we are performing gender through gendered activities which include how language should be used. In the United States, one of the ways to be a woman is being dominated and weak. The differences of language use between men and women are constructed to reinforce the construction of gender (Uchida, 1998). Therefore, if women are expected to use Standard English, they learn the rules, and do their gender through using the standard form of the language.
Women, especially the Working Class women, perform Middle Class women through various forms of performance, one of which is using the standard form of the English language. Beverley Skegg, a sociologist, regards this as “passing”. Skegg (1997), as cited in Couldry (2002), elaborates that Working Class women in Britain do not have means for them to speak positively about themselves as the Working Class women; consequently, they need to perform another class position – Middle Class women. However, it does not mean that the Working Class women want to become a part in the Middle Class, but they have a desire not to be regarded as “merely” Working Class women (p.55). This concept of passing may be useful in explaining the linguistic behaviour of women in Norwich. In Britain, Received Pronunciation and Standard English is mainly used by the Upper Class and Middle Class. Women in Norwich, in particular the Working Class women, may use this linguistic form in order to pass or perform as Middle Class women so as to express, or even transgress, their identity. The performance of another social class by Working Class women may reflect the unequal distribution of resources and inequalities of class and gender (Couldry, 2002).

3. Gender Roles and Stereotypes

A stereotype reduces persons to a set of exaggerated but usually negative characteristics, and marks the boundary between the “normal” and “the abjected”, “us” and “them” through the operation of power (Baker, 2000). In this part, we will examine how women are represented, in particular in the popular culture, so that we can understand better why women are expected to use Standard English.
Gender roles and the concept of “nature” and “culture” may help us to understand men’s and women’s differences in linguistic behaviours. Ortner (1974), as cited in Peach (1998) and Tong (1989), asset that women are found to be subordinated to men in every known society, and virtually, all cultures think that women are closer to nature, and men are closer to culture. From the perspective of social gender roles, men are supposed to actively engage in the production system which is closer to the cultural process. In the United States, men are the ones who make money (Uchida, 1998). Women, on the other hand, are seen as being close to reproduction which is much closer to the nature.

From linguistic point of view, language can be regarded as a relatively closed system. Though new vocabulary items can be coined, sounds of words can be shifted, and grammar rules can be altered, codification or standardisation of all these changes takes a very long period of time. So, the standard form of a language is relatively stable. Men, as they are seen as close to culture, can create new things including rules, pronunciations, and vocabulary items. As the new forms of language are not codified and well-acceptable in society, these changes are usually considered as “non-standard” form of the language.

Women opt to use a certain kind of language because of the gender roles imposed on them. As the major role of women is considered reproduction of life and preserve the cultural system in which language is one of the components, women may also need to take the responsibility for the transmission of the standard form of a language from one generation to next generations. Language is an important element of shared cultural resources (Couldry, 2002), and Lakoff (1975) has also made a comment that generally
Speaking, women in the United States (in particular in the middle region) are viewed as the preservers of literacy and culture, and they are supposed to uphold social conventions. At home, mothers need to shoulder the responsibility for teaching their children and speaking the “correct” form of language to them (Cameron, 1992). At school, school teachers, who are usually females as suggested in Trugill’s studies (1972), are the transmitters of Standard English to their students. The gender roles to which women have been assigned may help us understand why women have a higher tendency to use standard form and conform to norms of a language.

There are gender stereotypes on both men and women. In English-speaking communities, women are expected to be supportive, cooperative, sharing, relationship-oriented and expressive which are typical feminine characteristics, whereas men are seen more aggressive, dominant, challenging and competitive which are considered masculine traits (Uchida, 1998). As a result, men and women may need to choose the most appropriate linguistic forms in order to meet these social expectations. So, one of the reasons why women tend to use more tag questions and rising tone, which are associated with seeking confirmation of a person’s opinion and showing reservation respectively (Gramley and Pätzold, 1992), is that they want to maintain a good relationship with their audience instead of being more assertive. Cameron (1992) also thinks that women in Trugill’s studies may be aware of the gender stereotypes, and they talk closer to the standard form in order to fulfill the social expectations imposed on them.
Lakoff’s findings have re-affirmed the stereotypical traits which have been given to both men and women. Lakoff (1975) explains that the women speak more politely and hyper-correctly since in the middle-class society, it is more mannerly for people to speak in that way. Also, women “are the repositories of tact and know the right things to say to other people” (p.55). Men, on the contrary, “carelessly blurt out whatever they are thinking” (p.55). These gender stereotypes may help explain why the former to speak more politely than men in the United States.

Gender stereotypes are also commonly found in the popular culture including writings and the mass media. Very often, women are stereotyped into the bearers of the purity, reproduction of nation and the binary images of “good” and “bad” (Baker, 2000). In the article, “From The queen’s looking glass: Female creativity, male images of women, and metaphor of literary paternity”, Gilbert and Gubar (1984) discuss how women are represented in male’s writings. It has been mentioned that women are usually depicted either as “an angel” or “a monster’. The angel is the one possesses the feminine virtues such as modesty, politeness, domesticity, purity, gracefulness and delicacy. Also, all these virtues can make her man great (p.22).

Meehan (1983), as cited in Baker (2000), analysed the stereotypes of women on television in the United States. She has found that the representation of “good” women are submissive, sensitive and domesticated, and the “bad” women are rebellious, independent and selfish (p.249). As mentioned earlier, Standard English is regarded as “pure”, “correct” and “good” which are the feminine traits with which women should be
equipped. Women are also expected to be obedient to men. Obeying linguistic rules of Standard English which is set by men can be considered as one of the ways to be a good, obedient woman. In addition, preservation of culture is a virtue, and women have the responsibility for keeping the standard form of a language so that women can demonstrate their virtue in their own societies.

The above discussions reveal that a person can use a particular variety of language to represent himself/herself so that the social expectations on him/her can be achieved. Moreover, women are often viewed as oppressed and subordinate which is deep-rooted in a patriarchal society (Millett, 1970, as cited in Tong, 1989) as they are supposed to possess “feminine” characteristics such as obedience and purity. These stereotypes are reinforced through using language in social practices.

**Liberation from Prescriptive Approach to Language**

People make sense of their own experiences through using cultural resources. Language, one of the cultural resources, is not sexist inherently (Cameron, 1992), and it is neither masculine nor feminine. Yet, it becomes sexist when it is organised into discourse (Cameron, 1992). Differing language patterns of men and women reflects that gender inequality exists, and women are subordinate to men through power relations in discourse.

Indeed, it is possible to avoid sexism in language through the creation of new vocabulary items by changing “chairman” to “chairperson”. Yet, language is not neutral as it carries moral judgment – good/bad, right/wrong etc. It is far more important, in my opinion, for
people to liberate themselves from all these attitudes to language. Women have the power to decide what language to be used and how to use it so as to express themselves, not language controls women.

Women and nations are closely related symbolically (Chan, 2011, Lecture). In the English language, we have the word “motherland”, and we use the pronoun “she” to refer to the name of a country. According to Anderson (1983), as cited in Baker (2000), the condition for the creation of a nation is the standardisation of a vernacular language through printed books and newspapers. To think more positively, women using the standard language can be seen as a way to protect a nation, and symbolically means to protect women’s own body by themselves.

**Conclusion**

To conclude, we looked at the relationship between language and gender from sociolinguistic perspective in this paper. We also examined the two classical studies conducted by Peter Trugill and Robin Lakoff in Britain and the United States respectively. In many sociolinguistic studies, it was found that men and women had different language patterns, and men’s linguistic pattern was viewed as “unmarked form”, and any deviation is regarded as “marked form”. In addition, women tended to use the standard form of a language more often than men did. Sociolinguists used several theories to explain the different linguistic behaviours including dominance approach and difference theory. Based on Trugill’s and Lakoff’s studies, we further investigated the issue that men and women used language to perform their own genders, and meet the social expectations and
gender roles imposed on them. The standard form and norms of a language can be considered “pure” and “good” which are associated with feminine characteristics that women are supposed to possess.

Men and women have been being judged by what and how they speak for a long period of time. They are represented through language which is gendered and has moral judgment: what is good and bad, and what is acceptable and unacceptable. In the sociolinguistic field, gender stereotypes have been used to explain the differing linguistic patterns of men and women. However, the differences, in fact, have further re-confirmed the stereotypes existing in most societies. The linguistic cultural system as a whole has also manifested gender-based power inequality in both Britain and the United States, as well as in other parts of the world such as Japan. Very often, in sociolinguistics, quantitative data collected are analysed from men’s perspective, and this may explain why the language of women is worth discussing as it deviates from the unmarked form of men’s language pattern. In fact, liberation from prescriptive approach to language is important, and when studies regarding language gender are investigated, it is also worthwhile for students studying sociolinguistics to examine how power, gender roles and stereotypes work in a society.
References


