Angel M. Y. LIN

(2001)

Language and Gender

In: Paul Levine & Louise Aylward (Eds.)

Language and Society in Hong Kong (Unit 7).

Hong Kong: Open University of Hong Kong Press.

Contents

Introduction

This unit introduces you to the topic of language and gender. You may wonder why it is important to study the relationships between language and gender. Well, consider the following questions:

- Do you think many people in our society still hold, perhaps subconsciously, some gender stereotypes — e.g., the ideas that women tend to be better as secretaries and assistants, and men tend to be better as managers and leaders, or that women should be more polite and modest while men should be more aggressive and assertive?

- If people still hold some gender stereotypes, what does language have to do with it? Does language help to perpetuate or change such stereotypes? How can we have non-sexist and non-discriminatory language — e.g., language that does not perpetuate unfavorable attitudes towards women's abilities, roles and contributions in society?

The language we use in our daily life is often taken for granted and we seldom pause to critically think about it. In this unit you are encouraged to reflect on our language and our language practices to see if they reflect and perpetuate inequalities between the two sexes. We also discuss the question of whether men and women have different speech and communicative styles, and if yes, how and why. Finally we discuss sexist language and introduce the concept of 'symbolic violence', and discuss how we can heighten our awareness of it in the public media.

Throughout this unit you will find a series of bulleted questions designed to make you think about the concepts being discussed and apply them in the Hong Kong context. You might find it helpful to make notes of your ideas, as they will be useful for completing the final activity.

Objectives

By the end of *Unit 7*, you should be able to:

1 *Discuss* the importance of language and gender issues and have an overview of major areas of studies in the field of language and gender.

2 *Discuss* whether there exist distinctive differences in the speech and communicative styles of women and men in different societies, and if there are such differences, examine how and why.

3 *Critically reflect on* our language to see if it reflects and perpetuates inequalities between the two sexes.

4 *Compare* overseas research findings on language and gender with findings of research carried out in Hong Kong.

5 *Identify* possible areas of symbolic violence in the media and *discuss* how we can use language in non-sexist and non-discriminatory ways.

Speech and communicative styles of women and men

Have you ever observed how men and women speak? Do you think men and women, in general, have different speaking styles? One of the first linguists to claim that women tended to use language differently from men was Robin Lakoff. Lakoff's writings have now become classics in this area of research and it is worth taking a look at her pioneering work. In her 1975 book, *Language and Women's Place,* Lakoff claimed that women's speech forms tended to express uncertainty, politeness, respect, insecurity and emotionality. For example, women were said to prefer the use of empty adjectives like 'adorable' and 'divine', to avoid the swear words men typically used, replacing them with euphemisms like 'goodness' or 'oh dear', and to end statements with tag questions to play down the certainty of their opinions or observations.

Lakoff claimed that women, instead of making a direct statement like, 'The situation in the Lebanon is awful,' would prefer a question form like 'The situation in the Lebanon is awful, *isn't it?*'or 'The situation in the Lebanon is awful, *don't you think?*' Lakoff based her claims on her own intuition or her impressions of her friends' speech habits.

- Consider your own experience and intuition. Do you agree with Lakoff's claims? What is the situation in your community? Do your female friends tend to speak more tentatively and indirectly than your male friends? Remember that the findings of overseas studies might or might not be applicable to the Hong Kong context and it would be interesting to compare the situation overseas and the situation in Hong Kong. We can then find the differences and similarities.

Do men interrupt women more?

In a pioneering study of Zimmerman and West in 1975, which has since been widely quoted, the researchers found that men tended to frequently interrupt women in conversations. They quoted the following example of a conversation between a male and a female student as evidence. In the following transcription, = symbolizes latching (i.e., speaking right after another person), (#) means a silence of one second or less, and [indicates overlapping speech.

Female: How's your paper coming? =
Male: = Alright I guess.
        (#) I haven't done much in the past two weeks.
        (1.8 seconds).
Female: Yeah, know how that [can
Male: [hey, ya' got an extra cigarette?
        (#)
Female: Oh uh sure (hands him the pack) like my [pa
Male: [thanks
        (1.8 seconds)
Female: Sure (#) I was gonna tell you [my –

Male: [Hey I'd really like to talk but I
            gotta run (#) see ya.
Female: Yeah.

(*Source*: Zimmerman and West 1975)

Zimmermann and West compared the frequencies of interruptions in same-sex and mixed-sex conversation pairs. They found that the speakers interrupted each other more or less equally in same-sex pairs, but not in mixed-sex pairs. In conversations between eleven mixed-sex pairs, they found that men interrupted women forty-six times while women interrupted men only two times. Based on these findings Zimmermann and West claimed that men often did not respect women's speaking rights. Consider your own experience and intuition. Do you agree with their claim?

Activity 7.1

Let us do a small empirical study to find out more about how men and women talk.

1   Try to find a television talk show with one male host and one female host. If possible, videotape it.

2   Listen to and view the tape bit by bit three or four times. (If you can't do this you can still do the exercise but you won't be able to get as much information from one viewing.)

While you're listening to or viewing the tape, compare how the female and male hosts talk. Do you think the male host talks differently from the female host? Make a list of the lexical, phonological and syntactic differences (if any) as well as the similarities (if any) in their speech styles (e.g., does the female host use more polite words, more questions, or more indirect, tentative ways of expressing her opinions and observations?). Also count the number of interruptions made by each host and compare them. Pause the tape to take notes if necessary.

Now reconsider the claims of Lakoff and Zimmermann and West above. Do you agree with them? Apart from gender, what other factors do you think may also affect people's speech styles? Make a list of these different factors.

Having done Activity 7.1, you may notice that apart from gender, other factors such as age, institutional role (e.g., position in a company), purpose of interaction and kind of setting and topics may also affect people's speech styles. There are also other important factors such as social class, education level, and ethnic background.

Deborah Tannen, a famous American sociolinguist and discourse analyst, has compared in detail the communicative styles of white American middle class men and women in the workplace. In her best-selling 1994 book, *Talking from 9 to 5*, she said that although men could be indirect and women could be direct, there were different social norms or expectations about which style was more appropriate for each sex. For instance, Tannen quoted the research finding that female American doctors could not bark orders to

nurses and still be respected or obeyed, but male doctors could (Tannen 1994, 124). Tannen also claimed that the very notion of authority was associated with maleness (Tannen 1994, 167). For instance, she quoted the finding that in the Japanese language there are different particles used by women and men. ('Particles' are little words that have no meaning in themselves but are often added to sentences to give them the right emphasis. In Cantonese, words like 'laa', 'lo' and 'ne' are particles). The Japanese male boss can choose to use female particles sometimes to soften requests to subordinates and be appreciated. He can also choose to use male particles to sound authoritative. However, the Japanese woman who wants to sound authoritative must risk sounding male and being seen as speaking in socially inappropriate ways.

If Tannen is right, then it appears that men (at least in those social classes and societies that Tannen has studied) have a wider range of communicative styles to choose from while women are often restricted to the more polite, indirect and tentative communicative styles. Does this suggest some kind of social inequality between the two sexes? Does our society expect women to be polite and gentle and men to be assertive and aggressive? What is the situation in Hong Kong?

Activity 7.2

Let us do a small questionnaire survey to find out whether your friends perceive some qualities to be more characteristic of men than women or vice versa. Ask twenty of your friends (ten male and ten female) to fill in the following questionnaire. Analyse the findings of your survey by doing a simple counting of the number of people who have circled each different numeral. Are there qualities chosen more frequently as masculine or somewhat masculine? What are they? Make a list of them. Are there some other qualities chosen more frequently as feminine or somewhat feminine? What are they? Compare the two lists. Do you notice any major differences between the two lists of qualities?

Questionnaire

In the table below, there is a list of qualities. Please indicate the degree to which each quality is characteristic of a man (i.e., a masculine quality) or a woman (i.e., a feminine quality) on a scale of 1 (masculine) to 5 (feminine). '2' represents 'somewhat masculine' and '4' represents 'somewhat feminine'. For example, if I think 'willing to take risks' is a quality typical of men, I circle '1'.

Qualities	Masculine	Somewhat masculine	Neutral	Somewhat feminine	Feminine
willing to take risks	1	2	3	4	5
loves children	1	2	3	4	5
has leadership abilities	1	2	3	4	5
shy	1	2	3	4	5
strong personality	1	2	3	4	5
sensitive to the needs of others	1	2	3	4	5
defends own beliefs	1	2	3	4	5
gentle	1	2	3	4	5
independent	1	2	3	4	5
compassionate	1	2	3	4	5
willing to improvise	1	2	3	4	5
affectionate	1	2	3	4	5
aggressive	1	2	3	4	5
sympathetic	1	2	3	4	5
assertive	1	2	3	4	5
understanding	1	2	3	4	5
conscientious	1	2	3	4	5

Please circle the appropriate options below:

Your age: under 13   13-19   20-29   30-39   over 40
Your gender: Male   Female
Your education level: below primary   primary   junior secondary
                                        senior secondary   post-secondary/university or above

(*Source*: Adapted from Fung and Ma 2000)

The questionnaire you did in Activity 7.2 was adapted from one developed by Anthony Fung and Eric Ma (2000). Using a similar questionnaire, they conducted a large-scale survey in Hong Kong and found that Hong Kong people are still very stereotypic in their thinking regarding gender relationships. Below is an excerpt from their report (p. 67):

In general, people tended to believe that males are 'independent', 'aggressive', 'assertive', 'willing to improvise', and are always defending their own beliefs. 'Strong personality', 'leadership abilities' and 'willingness to take risks' were all perceived to be masculine characteristics ... Hong Kong Chinese are stereotypic on feminine

character ... in general, characteristics such as 'shy', 'gentle', 'compassionate', 'affectionate', 'sympathetic', and 'understanding' were all perceived to be attributes of females. Females were also perceived to be 'children-loving' and 'sensitive to the needs of others'.

Now if both Hong Kong males and females still cling to these stereotypic notions (e.g., women are largely perceived as less independent, less willing to improvise, less likely to have leadership abilities, etc.), what is the reason? Does language play a role in perpetuating and reinforcing these gender stereotypes?

- Can you identify any characteristics that you would consider 'typical' in female speakers of Cantonese?

Deborah Tannen argued that language socialization during childhood played an important role in the formation of both these different stereotypic social norms (i.e., different social expectations about what is appropriate language for girls and for boys respectively) and the distinctive speech and communicative styles of men and women. This is discussed in the next section.

Gender socialization through language

Language is a part of culture and very often a tool for passing on implicit cultural beliefs about gender roles and relationships (e.g., about what counts as 'good' and 'bad' manners and speech behaviour for girls and boys respectively; what topics are seen by adults as appropriate for girls and boys to talk about respectively, etc.). The process by which children learn to use language in ways that fit a culture's norms (i.e., expectations) of appropriate feminine and masculine behaviour is called *language socialization* (Schieffelin and Ochs 1986). Interaction with adults is one way that children are socialized through language. Adults influence children by providing models of women and men talking to each other (Fishman 1983), as well as to children (Freedle and Lewis 1977). Have you ever noticed how men talk to women in front of children, or how adults talk to girls and boys? Do you think adults implicitly pass on their norms about gender roles to children?

Children also spend much time with their peers. So, in addition to language socialization by adults, we can expect language socialization by peers. Child language researcher Amy Sheldon (1993) found that in same-sex peer conflicts, girls tended to focus on relationship while boys tended to focus on self. To see an example of how girls quarrel with one another and how boys quarrel with one another respectively, in Activity 7.3 below we look at two conversations, one of a group of girls, another of a group of boys, when they were playing with a plastic pickle. The conversations were recorded in Amy Sheldon's study.

Activity 7.3

Look at the girls's pickle fight and the boys' pickle fight in Reading 7.1. Compare the ways the boys and the girls argue among themselves. What strategies were used by each group? What are the similarities and differences in the two groups' strategies?

Reading 7.1

Sheldon, A (1993) 'Pickle fights: gendered talk in preschool disputes' in Tannen, D (ed.) *Gender and conversational interaction*, New York: Oxford University Press, 94–97 and 99–104.

Having done Activity 7.3, you have probably noticed that the boys used language to assert a dominant position while the girls used language to create and maintain relationships. In the boys' pickle fight, the boys focused on the self: they insisted on getting their way, appealing to self-serving rules and threats of separation, and there was a lack of joint negotiation. In contrast, in the girls' pickle fight, the girls focused on relationships: their negotiations served to enhance communication and respond to the needs of

others. The girls' real interest seemed to be in jointly constructing and maintaining their pretend play (Sheldon 1993).

Linguist Penelope Eckert (1989, 1993, 2000) also hypothesized that boys gained status by asserting their accomplishments while girls gained status by asserting their social network — whom they were friends with. Deborah Tannen (1994) further argued that men and women, because of their different childhood socialization processes, were like people coming from different cultures and their communication problems were *cross-cultural communication* problems. According to Tannen, by understanding each gender group's distinctive cultural and communicative styles, both men and women can understand and communicate with each other better.

Tannen's approach has been called the 'dual cultures approach' or the 'difference approach'. Under this approach, gender differences in communicative and speech styles are seen as mainly cultural differences due to different childhood socialization processes. According to this approach, girls learn to create and maintain relationships, criticize others in ways which are acceptable (i.e., be indirect), and interpret the speech of their female playmates accurately and sensitively. Boys, on the other hand, learn to assert a dominant position in the group, draw the attention of the other boys and keep an audience, and assert themselves when another has the group's attention (Gibbon 1999).

The difference approach has, however, been critiqued for neglecting issues of gender inequality embedded in the culture, society and language socialization processes. Our cultural and social norms (or expectations) about what is appropriate for girls/women and boys/men to say and how to say it are not harmlessly neutral, but a reflection of the culture and society's hierarchical structure (e.g., girls and women are usually in subordinate positions and need to be polite/indirect). Margaret Gibbon (1999) pointed out that just like ethnic minorities faced with dominant majority bureaucrats (e.g., an African-American talking to a white American police officer), the effects of miscommunication are not the same for men and women, powerful and powerless participants (e.g., the African-American will suffer more than the white officer). Style differences cannot be simply labeled as 'neutral'. In contrast to the difference approach, language researchers working in the perspective of the 'dominance approach' argue that language both reflects and reinforces/perpetuates a society and culture's gender inequalities. Their studies and arguments are discussed in the next section.

Critical analysis of language used to refer to men and women

To understand how language, cultural beliefs, thought and behaviour are related, we have to look at the works of two influential anthropological linguists (i.e., researchers who study the languages and cultures of native peoples). Edward Sapir (1884–1939) and Benjamin Whorf (1897–1941) are famous for their Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. There have been different understandings of this hypothesis: the weak version and the strong version.

According to the weak version of this hypothesis, some elements of language (e.g., words and grammar structures) influence speakers' perceptions and can affect their attitudes, beliefs and behaviour. On the other hand, according the strong version of the hypothesis, a community is very much 'at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society' (Sapir 1949, 162). Today, most scholars believe that although language does not determine thought (i.e., the strong version of the hypothesis is not true), it does both reflect and to a certain extent constrain or reinforce our beliefs and worldviews. For instance, in traditional Chinese societies, there was a strong cultural need to differentiate between relatives on the mother side and relatives on the father side. The complex system of Chinese kinship terms (e.g., different names for cousins on the mother side and father side respectively) both reflects this cultural tradition and reinforces this tradition. Similarly, we can expect different cultures' and societies' beliefs about gender roles and relationships to be reflected in their respective languages. However, since language is often learnt as a 'cultural given' (i.e., we take it for granted), we seldom critically reflect on its implicit assumptions, even when some of them might be cultural biases. Recently, feminist linguists (i.e., linguists who are concerned with gender equalities) have succeeded in getting more and more people to notice some of the gender biases encoded in language. Their findings and arguments are discussed below.

Naming practices

Seen in the perspective of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, names are not just neutral or random products. Names both reflect and shape our understanding of the world. They also carry a culture's norms and beliefs. For instance, the Chinese name for China is 'Jung-gwo', literally meaning 'Middle Kingdom'. This reflects the traditional Chinese's thinking about their position and importance in the world: their kingdom, they believed, was located at the center of the world. This Sinocentric (i.e., China-centred) view can be problematic in the eyes of people in the modern world. However, the name does seem to carry the culture's deep-rooted values, attitudes and beliefs about its position in the world. Similarly, the colonizing Europeans called the American continents 'the new world', showing a Euro-centric worldview (i.e., the old world is their own world). However, seen from the perspective of native Americans (i.e., the native peoples living on the American continents), their homeland is the 'ancient land' of their gods and ancestors. New or ancient? It depends on your cultural beliefs, but the language one uses does seem to predispose one towards seeing things in some ways and not others.

Similarly, names traditionally used in a society and culture can carry some deep-rooted, taken-for-granted biases regarding the relative roles and positions of women and men. To heighten our awareness of these biases which are encoded in language, we need to critically reflect on our naming practices.

Can 'he' mean both 'he' and 'she'?

Have you ever wondered why 'he' is traditionally used to refer to both sexes and 'man' and 'mankind' to refer to human beings and human kind? There are also other male-privileged words like 'chairman' and 'congressman', and only recently, with feminist advocacy, have there appeared more gender-neutral words like 'chairperson' and 's/he'.

Some people might argue that words like 'he' or 'man' are simply used as generic terms to refer to all members of a class. The central feminist argument against using masculine words as generic terms is that they make invisible women's presence and contributions to our society and civilization. In the following example taken from Margaret Gibbon (1999, 41–42), can you see some of the problems of using 'man' as a generic term for the human species?

How well does 'man' compare with other generic terms?

Look at the generic terms 'furniture', 'animals' and 'cars', in the following sentences.

Furniture: chair, bed, table, desk

- A chair is a piece of furniture.

- I'd like some new furniture, especially a desk.

- I'd like a new bed. Let's go furniture shopping.

Animals: fish, mammals, birds

- Humans are often carnivores; they eat all kinds of animals, including fish and birds.

- Of all the animals, I like cute little mammals best.

Cars: Jaguar, Ford, Toyota, Volvo

- I have a Ford but if I could afford it, I'd buy a more expensive car like a Jaguar.

- Japanese cars like Toyotas are very popular second-hand cars to buy in Ireland and Britain.

All these generic terms work well, since each one can stand for any one of the sub-group. Look at the following sentences in which the word 'man' is used as a generic term.

Man: woman, man, girl, boy

- A man is a man.
- Girls and boys are men.
- Half of all men are women.

And what about these odd sentences?

- Every man experiences his menstruation differently.
- Man, being a mammal, breastfeeds his young.
- Man, when pregnant, experiences good cravings.
- Man, unlike lower mammals, has trouble giving birth.

Clearly, the problem which arises in terms of our mental imagery is that the one word, 'man', has a specific meaning which is activated in our memory before, simultaneously, or just after the generic meaning arises. This causes the 'generic' term to call up male imagery, and therefore to fail as a generic term.

Miss, Mrs and Ms

Have you ever wondered why traditionally we have address terms for women that specify their marital status (i.e., Miss and Mrs) while the address term for men (i.e., Mr) does not encode any marital information? If our language reflects our cultural and social norms (i.e., beliefs and expectations), does that mean that our society/culture makes it a requirement to announce a woman's marital status whenever she is formally addressed? Women cannot choose to reserve information on their marital status even when filling in a simple form. Does this suggest that in our culture, a woman's identity has to be defined, at least in part, by her marital status while the same is not true for men? If a woman does not want to reveal her marital status, what can she do?

Recently, feminists have advocated the use of the marital-status-neutral address term, 'Ms', for women. However, the term has also been used by some traditionalists to refer to divorced women or feminists with some negative connotations. It seems that traditional cultural beliefs change only slowly and changing our naming practices is only the first step. What do you think is the situation in Hong Kong? In your experience, when is 'Ms' usually used? Is there a Chinese equivalent of 'Ms'? If yes, does this marital-status-neutral address term carry any negative connotations?

Names of professions and occupations

Since women have traditionally been in household or subordinate positions, when the names of high level occupations and professions are mentioned, usually male imagery arises. For example, consider the following riddle taken from Margaret Gibbon (1999, 78).

A man and his son were involved in a serious road accident, the father being killed outright. The boy, with serious head injuries, was taken by ambulance to the nearest hospital and prepared for brain surgery. The neuro-surgeon entered the operation theatre, looked at the child and exclaimed, 'I can't operate on him. This is my son.' How can this be?

Are you able to solve this riddle? The surgeon is the boy's mother. Margaret Gibbon (1999) points out that when we hear 'brain-surgeon' or 'neuro-surgeon', we often have a mental image of a man in a white/green medical coat, a surgeon's mask and latex gloves. Similarly, male images are usually conjured up by words like 'engineer', 'nuclear physicist', 'architect' and 'professor', although theoretically such words are *epicenes* (i.e., they can apply to women or men). About how women are usually seen in subordinate, non-professional roles, linguist and professor Deborah Tannen tells the following personal story of hers (1994, 115).

> One evening after hours, I was working in my office at Georgetown University. Faculty offices in my building are lined up on both sides of a corridor, with cubicles in the corridor for secretaries and graduate-student assistants. Outside each office is a nameplate with the professor's title and last name. The quiet of the after-hours corridor was interrupted when a woman came to my door and asked if she could use my phone. I was surprised but glad to oblige, and explained that she had to dial '9'. She made the call, thanked me, and left. A few minutes later, she reappeared and asked if I had any correction fluid. Again surprised, but still happy to be of help, I looked in my desk drawer but had to disappoint her: Since my typewriter was self-correcting, I had none. My patience began to waver, but my puzzlement was banished when the woman bounded into my office for the third and final time to ask if I was Dr Murphy's secretary, in which case she would like to leave with me the paper she was turning in to him.

Commenting on this experience, Tannen pointed out that her being female has overridden all the other clues pointing to her position as professor (e.g., her title and name plate was on her office door). However, Tannen called this more a case of *realism* (i.e., reflection of reality) than *sexism* (i.e., prejudice or discrimination against women): in reality, there are more male professors than female professors and this has predisposed people to think of 'professors' as male and 'secretaries' as female. 'So long as women are a minority of professional ranks, we cannot be surprised if people assume the world is as it is,' said Tannen (1994, 117).

• Now do you agree with Tannen? What is the situation in Hong Kong? Do you think language to a certain extent also plays a role in reinforcing and perpetuating cultural beliefs about the expected roles of women, and thus perpetuating reality as it is? For instance, in Hong Kong, women in professional and high executive ranks are usually called 'neuih keuhng-yahn' ('female strong-person'), often with some negative connotations (e.g., usually poor-tempered, aggressive, not womanly, having difficulties finding a spouse, etc.). Is there any Chinese idiom which says women should not be too knowledgeable or capable? For instance, there is the Chinese traditional idiom: 'Neuih-ji mouh choih bihn-sih dak' ('The virtue of a woman lies in her lack of talent.'). Are women in professional and executive ranks under some social pressure

(e.g., they are violating the society/culture's expectations about their roles or they are seen as not feminine enough and somehow not normal)? Does that contribute to the small number of women in those ranks?

Activity 7.4

Linguist Muriel Schulz (1975) took one of the first steps in studying the relationship between language and sexism. To Schulz, it is not mere coincidence that there are more positive words for males in the language, nor is it an accident that there were so many negative words for females with no semantic equivalent for males. Schulz refers to this phenomenon as 'the systematic, semantic derogation of women'. For instance, consider the words 'spinster' and 'bachelor'. The word for unmarried women ('spinster' or 'old maid') carries negative connotations but not the word for unmarried men ('bachelor'). Many swear words have meanings associated with sexual assaults on women. Schultz argues that it is men who have 'created English' and especially slang. Many complimentary words have also degenerated as they have become associated with women. For instance, 'tart' now applies to a woman and is a demeaning term whereas it once referred to either sex and meant a sweet pie, just as children may be called 'sugar dumpling' and the like (Gibbon 1999).

Consider the Chinese language. Do the comments of Schulz apply to our language as well? Let's do the following analysis with the Chinese language.

- Make a list of words with negative connotations that refer to women.

- Then try to find words that denote their male counterparts and determine whether they carry negative connotations too.

- Also make a list of Chinese idioms that refer to women negatively.

- Again, try to find parallel idioms referring to males and determine whether they carry negative meanings.

What do you find? Is there also some degree of semantic derogation of women in the Chinese language?

Media representation of women and men

How are women and men represented in the media? Kate Clark did an interesting study on the reporting of crimes of sexual violence by the *Sun* newspaper (a tabloid daily with the largest circulation of all the British dailies). To Clark, analysing media language is a useful method of examining a society's *ideology* (i.e., beliefs, norms and attitudes which are often unspoken and taken for granted by most people). Clark conducted *naming analysis* and *transitivity analysis* on the media texts. Below, Clark's analyses and findings are excerpted and summarized from her longer report (Clark 1992).

Naming analysis

Naming is a powerful tool to represent people in different lights and to influence the reader's perception of them. For instance, how does a news report name a person who seeks political aims using aggression? Is s/he a terrorist, guerrilla, freedom fighter, rebel or resistance fighter? These different names carry positive or negative connotations. The naming of the participants in a case of sexual assault works in a similar way.

The attacker

The *Sun* has two naming choices for an attacker: whether to regard him as sub-human or not. It may name him as a 'fiend', 'beast', 'monster', 'maniac' or 'ripper', using verbs which further suggest his non-humanness, for example 'monster caged'. Or it may treat him in socially normal terms, i.e., name, address, age or occupation. Emotional terms like 'fiend' indicate how utterly alien, terrible and scandalous the newspaper finds the attacker and his/her actions. An absence of these names implies that the *Sun* does not find an attacker or his/her actions particularly shocking. A last naming option, occasionally used, is to name an attacker sympathetically. This is done by building apparent excuses into an attacker's name.

The victim

Almost always victims are just portrayed as roles (e.g., wife, bride, housewife, mother or daughter) rather than individuals, and this makes it difficult to imagine and sympathize with their experiences. Victims of 'non-fiend' attackers (i.e., attackers named sympathetically by the newspaper) are given names such as:

- blonde
- unmarried mum
- Lolita (in *Sun* language, a sexually active under-aged girl)
- blonde divorcee/mum
- woman/victim (no role)

Transitivity analysis

Blame or lack of responsibility, absence or emphasis of a participant can all be encoded into a news report by its choice of transitivity linguistic devices. Transitivity is concerned with language at the level of clauses. For instance, in news reports, usually material processes are described. Material processes involve 'doing'. There are two possible roles for participants: the 'Agent' who 'does' the process and the 'Goal' who is affected by the process. The Agent role is obligatory (i.e., always inherent in the process), but the Goal is optional. For instance, examine the following *Sun* headings:

1   Hubby (Agent) kicked (process) no-sex wife (Goal) out

2   Raped girl (Agent) weeps (process) (no Goal)

In sentences where there are both Agent and Goal, the Agent may be emphasized by the use of active voice or the Goal may be put into focus as the grammatical subject by use of passive voice, with optional agent deletion. For example, consider the following sentences and see if they convey different emphases and connotations:

1   a   Hubby kicked no-sex wife out of bed (active voice)

   b   No-sex wife kicked out of bed by hubby (passive, with agent)

   c   No-sex wife kicked out of bed (passive, agent deleted)

Contrast sentence (1a) and sentence (1c) in particular. Do you feel that sentence (1c) conveys a somewhat different perspective from sentence (1a)? The attacker has been made invisible in sentence (1c) by using passive voice and agent deletion. However, even in sentence (1a) the attacker is named as 'hubby', an intimate word usually used in the positive sense. The reason for his attack is also implied by the way the victim is named: 'no-sex wife'. In this way, the attacker is named sympathetically by building in an excuse for his attack: the wife refused to have sex with the husband and in the ideology (i.e., belief system) assumed and asserted by the *Sun*, this act is seen as a fault of the wife. The husband's violence is thus represented as excusable or understandable, which lessens the responsibility of the attacker by presenting/naming the victim in a negative light.

In the violent acts reported by the *Sun*, the attacker affects the victim. In transitivity terms, he acts as Agent in a material process on the victim as Goal. If an attack is reported in this way, the attacker is shown acting intentionally upon the victim and the responsibility for the attack is usually seen to be his. Apart from the strategy of building in excuses for the attacker, there are several other linguistic strategies used by the *Sun* to ensure that the attacker is not shown in his role as Agent attacking the victim as Goal. In these ways, blame for the attack can be withheld from the attacker and transferred to the victim or someone else. This can be seen in the following analysis of news reports.

Analysis of news reports

Clark found that the *Sun* has several strategies for taking away the blame of an attacker. One of the common strategies used is to lessen the awareness of a man's guilt by making him invisible. Sometimes this non-blaming will be masked by blaming someone else. Both these strategies are used in the following headline and opening sentence of one news report (*Sun* December 20 1986, 7):

> GIRL 7 MURDERED WHILE MUM DRANK AT THE PUB
>
> Little Nicola Spencer was strangled in her bedsit home — while her mum was out drinking and playing pool in local pubs.

Both sentences have two clauses. One clause details the murder ('Girl 7 murdered' and 'Little Nicola Spencer was strangled in her bedsit home'), and the other clause describes what the victim's mother, Christine Spencer, was doing at the time of the murder ('while mum drank at pub' and 'while her mum was out drinking and playing pool in local pubs'). The 'murder' clauses are passive and the murderer is made invisible by deletion. This minimizes the reader's awareness of his guilt. Compare the following two headlines:

3   a   MAN MURDERED GIRL, 7

     b   GIRL 7 MURDERED

Which heading has taken the emphasis away from the murderer? Yes, it is heading (3b). By using passive voice and agent deletion, heading (3b) has made the murderer invisible and minimizes the reader's awareness his guilt. Let us look back at the headline and opening sentence of the *Sun* above. Do you notice the following sentence structure?

> a 'murderer-less murder' clause + a 'drinking mother' clause

This structure links the child's death to the mother's absence so directly and so forcibly that a causal relationship is formed. The implication is that Nicola Spencer died because Christine Spencer was out. The naming of Nicola and her mother underscores the mother's supposed responsibility. Nicola's names in the news report all refer to her small size and age, which is usual for child victims. In all other similar reports the connotations of innocence and vulnerability given by this naming emphasize the cruelty of a 'fiend' attacker. However, here, with the murderer made invisible (by passive voice and agent deletion), the naming of the child implies that the mother is heartless and responsible for the death of the child. In another part of the news report, the mother is named as a 'blond divorcee'. In the *Sun's* language, a 'blonde divorcee' usually implies an 'unrespectable woman'.

Blaming the mother of the victim is a judgement passed by the newspaper. A totally different perception of the crime could have been given by choosing other sentence structures within the newspaper's normal linguistic range. Can you rewrite the headline and opening sentence of the *Sun's* report above to make the murderer visible and his responsibility for the crime obvious? (Hint: use active voice and have the murderer present in the subject position.)

You have probably figured out the answer now. Does it look somewhat like the following rewritten headline and sub-headline?

FIEND STRANGLES ONLY CHILD, 7 [headline]

Divorced Mum Grieves Alone [sub-headline]

Compare the rewritten headlines with the original ones. Can you notice the differences in connotations?

Activity 7.5

You have just looked at Kate Clark's analysis of violence reports in a British tabloid daily and seen how language can be manipulated to cast women and men in differential lights. In Hong Kong, the most widely read tabloids are *Apply Daily* and *Oriental Daily*. Have you read different sections of these two tabloids? What is your impression of them? How do they represent or describe women and men respectively? What do they highlight or focus on? Leaf through some issues of *Apple Daily* and *Oriental Daily* in a library and write down your impression of them. For example, do they frequently highlight and focus on the body parts of women? What are the adjectives and metaphors used to name and describe women and their bodies? Make of list of these adjectives, names and metaphors (e.g., 'sing-neui', literally 'sex girl'). Do the newspapers do the same with men? What do you think are the motivations behind such language use patterns? Are women (and their bodies) cast as sex objects or commodities? Is a woman's status/value described and implied by these newspapers as depending on her body and appearance, seen through the male's eyes?

Symbolic violence: discourse practices of beauty contests in Hong Kong

Beauty contests have in recent years become increasingly publicized and sensationalized media and social events in Hong Kong. Each year, two highly publicized major beauty contests, Miss Hong Kong and Miss Asia, are staged by the two competing television companies TVB and ATV in May/June and August/September respectively.[1] They compete with each other in making their own beauty contest more sensational and attention getting. Having evolved with this competition in sensationalism is a set of distinct discourse practices (i.e., language use patterns) in both televised and print media. In the televised media, beauty contest events can be seen to be organized via recognizable, specific, recurring discourse and activity structures. In the print media, beauty contests have served as topical anchors on which the info-tainment (i.e., information and entertainment combined) type of newspapers and magazines churn out pages and pages of sensationalized stories and pictures of the contestants. To understand the beauty contest event, let us look at an example of a recurrent discourse genre found to be playing a central mediating role in beauty contests in Hong Kong.

An example: the 1992 Miss Hong Kong beauty contest

The 1992 Miss Hong Kong Beauty Contest was the 20th anniversary of the Miss Hong Kong Beauty Contest. TVB gave a lot of publicity to it and especially designed a glamorous slogan for that year's contest: 'Faat-fong yaah joi gwong-mohng, yihn-dim syun-meih mahn-faa' ('Shining through two decades, kindling the beauty contest culture'). The slogan seems to conjure up associations of the beauty contest spirit with the Olympic Games spirit.

The 1992 Miss Hong Kong beauty contest began with a glamorous, magnificent Egyptian palace stage set-up. Jang Ji-Waih (Eric Tsang), a short, chubby, familiar TV and movie star, who has a well-established sleazy-guy screen image and has been the principal host in every Miss Hong Kong beauty contest in recent years, was costumed as the Egyptian Pharaoh and leisurely seated on the throne. Standing beside him and conversing with him was another male host, Jehng Daan-Seuih, a popular radio and TV talk show star, costumed as an Egyptian palace attendant. Excerpt 1 below was taken from the beginning of their conversations. They had been talking about the third host, Philip Chan, whom they referred to as 'Chahn sìng-syun' (Chief-Secretary Chan):

---

[1] Apart from the two major beauty contests, there are also a few other smaller-scale beauty contests (in terms of the amount of publicity given to them by the media). These include Miss Air Hostess, Miss International Chinese, Miss Fitness, and recently and sensationally, Mr Hong Kong.

Excerpt²

1 Jang: Hàih Laa, góng hòi Chàhn sìng-syun, aah, yíh-chìhn keúih hái
ngóh-deih go chāan-gún douh si choi gaa jaa!
<Yeah, talking about Chief-Secretary Chan, oh, he used to taste
food for me in the restaurant!>

2 Jehng: Haih aa! Haih aa!
<Yeah! Yeah!>

3 Jang: Yìh-gà dím wúi jouh-jó sìng-syun gum bà-bai gé?
<Now how come he has become Chief-Secretary, with such a
high rank?>

4 Jehng: O! Néih m̀h-gei-dāk aah? Yàn-wàih keúih tùhng néih si choi si
dāk hóu, yeuhng yeuhng choi tùhng néih si saai ne, yihn-jì-hauh
sìn béi néih sihk, néih gok-dāk hóu-hóu sihk, yù-sih néih maih
sing-jó keúih jouh sìng-syun lo!
<Oh! You've forgotten? Because he did such a good job sampling
food for you, tasting every dish for you before you ate, and you
found the food so delicious, so you have promoted him to Chief-
Secretary!>

5 Jang: Haih aa haih aa haih aa! Jeui-gahn keúih gáau-gán māt-yéh?
<Oh yeah, yeah, yeah! What's he up to these days?

6 Jehng: O! Keúih gáau-gan go hóu wuhn-yi aa! Haih syún sahp-yih
sàhn-sing neúih aa!
<Oh! He's organizing a fun game! He's selecting twelve sacred
girls!>

7 Jang: Syún sing-neúih? Hei-hei! {chuckling sleazily}
<Selecting sacred girls? Hei-hei!>

8 Jehng: Haih aa!
<Yeh!>

9 Jang: BAAIH! Yíh-chìhn keúih bòng ngóh si sung go wo! {in a worried
tone}
<OH DEAR! In the past he tasted food for me!>

10 Jehng: Haih aa! GO-GO si wahn gaa!
<Yeh! EACH ONE he tasted first!>

11 Jang: Ngóh sihk di yéh keúih bòng ngóh sihk sìn go wo,=
<Those things I ate he tasted first.>

12 Jehng: Mh! Móuh-cho aa!
<Mh! That's right!>

---

² See Appendix 7.1 for notes on transcription.

13 Jang: Gam yìh gà bòng ngóh syún sing-neúih maih... ai-yaah, mh-hóu laa, faai-di giu saai di sing-neúih chēut-lèih béi ngóh tái-hah sìn! {in an anxious tone}
<But now he's selecting sacred girls for me ... oh dear, oh no, hurry, go call all the sacred girls out for me to see first!>

14 Jehng: Oh, Wohng-Seuhng chíng fong-sàm, di sing-neúih yíh-gìng yuh-beih saai hái-douh gaa laa!
<Oh, Your Majesty need not worry, all the sacred girls have been prepared[3] here already!>

15 Jang: Haih me?
<Really?>

16 Jehng: Juhng-yìu heung néih hin bóu tìm aa!
<Not only that, they're offering treasures to you!>

17 Jang: Aa? Hin-bóu? Hei-hei! {chuckling sleazily}
<Yes? Offering treasures? Hei-hei!>

18 Jehng: Ngóh-deih yáuh chíng keúih-deih chēut-lèih sìn laa hóuh-mh-hóuh aa?
<Shall we invite them out first?>

19 Jang: Gam tái-hah hin mè-yéh bóu béi ngóh laa, faai-di faai-di!
<Okay, see what treasures they're offering to me, quick quick!>

20 Jehng: Yáuh chíng.. sahp-yih sing-neúih!
<Would the twelve sacred girls come out to the stage!>
{In the background Egyptian music started; three contestants in Egyptian costumes, each sitting on a bed-like carrier which was carried by four men in Egyptian soldier costumes, were carried out from the back stage to the left side of the front stage and placed in a line there. Then the music stopped. The first contestant stepped down from the first carrier, took her translucent silky scarf up to cover half of her face, smiling, walking towards the stage center where the Pharaoh-host was seated. As the contestant was walking towards the Pharaoh, she kept her front largely facing the audience. While she was walking, Jehng said the following:}

21 Jehng: Yāt-hòuh, Jeùng Yuhk-Wàh síu-jé, fòng-lìhng yih-sahp-yih seui.
<Number one, Miss Jeung Yuhk-Waah. Her age is twenty-two.>
{The contestant stopped in front of the standing microphone which was placed slightly to the right and a few steps in front of the throne. The Pharaoh-host leaned on the left side of his throne to get a better view of the contestant, who was basically facing the audience, but with her left side slightly slanting towards the

---

[3] The Cantonese utterance 'yih-ging yyuh-beih saai hai-douh gaa laa!' is equivocal; it is capable of either the active human or passive object interpretation, i.e., can be interpreted as either 'have prepared themselves here' or 'have been prepared (as dishes by the cook) here'.

direction of the Pharaoh. In this way, all of them were frontal to the audience.[4]}

22 Jang: Aa! Jàn-haih leng neúih aa-haa!
<Ah! Indeed a beautiful girl!>
{The contestant then spoke into the standing microphone and started greeting the Pharaoh-host by saying, 'Wòhng-Seuhng, néih-hóu' (meaning 'Your Majesty, how do you do?'). Then an Egyptian soldier carried some odd object (e.g., a green hat[5]) on a tray to the front stage and stood slightly to the left and behind the contestant. The Pharaoh asked what treasure she had to offer. Then the contestant said something auspicious about the object to the Pharaoh-host. The Pharaoh-host teased her a bit, usually challenging the logic of her words, but Jehng, the second male host usually rounded up the conversation by answering some of the harsh questions for her, and then thanking her and hurrying her to recede to the backstage. Then the second contestant stepped down from her carrier and walked to the microphone and carried out another similar conversation with the two male hosts. After the first three had finished, the music started again, and another three contestants were carried to the side stage, and there was the same sequence of events until all twelve contestants had made their appearance. Then one more woman with her face all covered under a scarf was carried to the front stage. The Pharaoh queried whether there was one more sacred girl, but then he immediately remarked that he recognized the 'cylindrical body shape of this woman'. The woman (a short, slightly chubby, comedy TV star) stepped down from the carrier and scolded the Pharaoh for selecting sacred girls behind her — the Queen. There was immediate laughter from the live audience.}

Activity 7.6

You have just read a description of the 1992 Miss Hong Kong beauty contest. Consider the following questions:

1 What is happening here? What kind of stage setup is constructed? What kind of setting and situation is suggested?

2 What are the relationships among the players on stage? Who are represented as powerful figures (e.g., the Pharaoh and the Chief-Secretary)? What are the beauty contest candidates represented as (e.g.,

---

[4] 'The audience' refers to both the audience in front of the stage and in front of the television screen. The live audience was most of the time not shown on the screen. It was included by the camera occasionally, e.g., when the contestants were being carried out from the back stage.

[5] 'The green hat' is a familiar Chinese symbol for 'horns' in the Western sense. For example, when a wife is said to give a green hat to her husband to wear, it meant that she had an affair with somebody else and had cheated on her husband.

'sing-neui', apparently meant as 'sacred girls', which, however, shares the same sound as the Cantonese name for 'sex girls')? What do these metaphors of the male hosts and the female candidates represent respectively?

3   Who controls the conversation between the host and the contestants?

The limited space of this unit does not permit further documentation and analysis of more examples from the 1992 Miss Hong Kong contest and from other beauty contests in recent years. However, the visual and discursive texts offered to the TV audience by these beauty contest events seem to be variations on similar themes (Ho 1998). Similar discourse practices are also seen in these beauty contests as well as the recent Mr Hong Kong contests hosted by ATV. Invariably, the contestants have to go through the ordeal of being cast in subordinate roles without much dignity and are subjected to verbal teasing and insults by the hosts. They are also increasingly asked to insult one another as a test of their skills to handle tricky situations (e.g., the host asks the contestants to state the shortcomings of other contestants). It seems that in the community of practice to which the hosts, producers and script-writers belong, there is the well-established social practice of putting contestants through severe tests and trials in which the contestants are stripped of their basic human dignity.

Discourse practices and symbolic violence

The discourse practices that mediated the beauty contest spectacle seem to reflect the social practices not only of the television entertainers' community but, potentially, also of society at large. In the beauty contest spectacle, a viewer can experience as natural, acceptable and legitimate the acts of teasing, insulting and denigrating contestants. It does not matter whether the candidate is male or female, although female aspirants are frequently positioned as passive sex objects to be consumed by powerful males (e.g., as fresh dishes to be tasted by the emperor and his entourage).

When such practices are offered as legitimate, acceptable and natural experiences, the practices are themselves acts of *symbolic violence* (Bourdieu 1991). These practices reinforce and perpetuate the unequal relationships among people (e.g., between women and men) in this world. They present such inequalities not only as natural and acceptable, but also as harmlessly funny and entertaining. These beauty contest discourse practices thus seem to be a symptomatic reflection of similar practices in certain sectors of our society. They are also powerful symbolic tools capable of shaping the ethos of our society (i.e., language and symbols are powerful but subtle tools to affect people's thinking, attitudes and beliefs).

Language reform: towards non-sexist and non-discriminatory language

In the above sections, we have looked at the relationship between patterning in language and patterning in the wider society (e.g., how some language use patterns reflect and reinforce some unequal relationships in society). As Margaret Gibbon pointed out, we need to change society towards more gender equality and merely changing the language is 'useful but woefully inadequate'. However, language is central to all areas of human activities, and language tends to reflect and reinforce social relations. Thus, a study of language can contribute to our understanding of mechanisms of power and violence — physical and symbolic — and structures of social inequality (Gibbon 1999, 154).

There has also been a recent movement in Western countries towards non-sexist and non-discriminatory language. Government departments and agencies as well as universities and institutions in these countries have started to provide the public with definitions of sexism and sexist language as well as guidelines on how to use language in non-sexist and non-discriminatory ways. For example, in the Australian *Style manual for authors, editors and printers* (1988), the following definition of sexist language is provided:

> Sexist language is language that expresses bias in favour of one sex and thus treats the other sex in a discriminatory manner. In most instances the bias is in favour of men and against women.

Other guidelines provide a more comprehensive description of common forms of sexism in language. Below is a summary of the major areas covered in many guidelines.

Sexist language involves the following issues and practices

1 Making women invisible in language by taking men as the norm or standard for the human species: men's characteristics, thoughts, beliefs and actions are seen as fully or adequately representing those of all humans, including male and female.

2 Portraying women's status with reference to that of men: women's linguistic status is considered dependent on, deriving from or submissive to that of men, which is represented as autonomous. By relegating women to a dependent, subordinate position, sexist language prevents the portrayal of women and men as different but equal human beings. This also results in a lack of symmetry in the linguistic portrayal of women and men.

3 The stereotyped portrayal of both sexes which leads to a very restrictive portrayal, particularly of women.

4 The portrayal of women as inferior to men.

Consequently, the majority of guidelines cover the following areas of sexism:

1 Generic reference to people by means of nouns, pronouns, idioms and expressions.

2 Names for men and women in relation to occupations, professions and offices.

3 Stereotyped portrayal of the sexes.

4 Asymmetrical practices in the use of titles, terms of address, human agent nouns for women and men as well as descriptions of women and men.

(*Source*: Abridged and excerpted from Pauwels 1998, 157–60)

More recently, guidelines have also started to include a section in which common worries and questions about the use of non-sexist language are discussed and answered. For example, in 1992 a language committee was set up within the Queensland Department of Education in Australia to draft guidelines on non-discriminatory language. It included in the guidelines a large section covering not only possible objections to the use of non-discriminatory language but also some counter-arguments. See the following excerpts from the *Guidelines on Non-discriminatory Language* of the Queensland Department of Education.

- Will I be able to say or write what I want to?

- You will be able to say and write what you want, except perhaps for making discriminatory statements or comments. Using non-discriminatory language does not inhibit your potential to write or say what you want. Each language is so rich and flexible that each thought or idea can be expressed in a variety of ways. Language constantly changes to accommodate language users' needs to express themselves in different ways.

- It's too trivial to worry about!

- This argument is like a double-edged sword: it is usually raised by people who strongly oppose change in language, yet they use the triviality argument to express their opposition. The previous sections in this guide have clearly shown that people can be hurt by discriminatory language. Being on the receiving end of discriminatory language can have devastating effects on a person's self-image. This should be avoided at all costs, especially in the context of education in a multicultural society like that in Australia.

- It curbs my freedom of expression!

- The use of non-discriminatory language in no way impinges on your freedom of expression except when your expressions impinge on someone else's freedom and rights.

- What's the problem? Language is natural!

- The problem is that many speakers feel that they are misrepresented in current language use: they are invisible, mainly described in a stereotypical way or only in relation to another group of people.

- This argument often results from the erroneous belief that language changes all by itself without the assistance of or interference from language users. The expressions we have in language result from the uses speakers make of it. Speakers and writers constantly change language to suit their needs: that is how language is natural!

- You are interfering with proper language!

- Non-discriminatory language does not interfere with proper or correct language use. It does not lead to incorrect language use. As a matter of fact, it amends language use to reflect better and more equitably the great diversity of its users.

- What if everyone invents their own language?

- Non-discriminatory language is not a new language. In most instances, non-discriminatory language is about using the present resources of language in such a way that they represent and treat different people and their characteristics in an equitable way. There is no ground whatsoever to believe that the use of non-discriminatory language will lead to incomprehensibility. On the contrary, non-discriminatory language is often more accurate than discriminatory language and therefore aids rather than diminishes people's understanding.

(Source: Guidelines on Non-discriminatory Language of the Queensland Department of Education.)

Usually the main body of the guidelines consists of a list of sexist language forms and their non-sexist alternatives, placed side by side, as in the following example.

Avoid	Use instead
• man	• human being, person, people, man or woman
• chairman	• chair, chairperson, head, president
• policeman	• police officer, policeman/policewoman

Activity 7.7

You have just looked at some examples of guidelines on non-sexist and non-discriminatory language use. Now can you add to *the main body* of the guidelines listed above? Glance through newspapers, magazines, textbooks, announcements, advertisements, government documents, forms or other English public media texts available in Hong Kong. Try to identify sexist language patterns (e.g., words, phrases, sentences, or names, metaphors, etc.) and suggest alternatives. Then add them to the main body of the guidelines given in the example above. Add at least ten rows to the example.

Activity 7.8

The following questions relate to issues I have been asking you to think about throughout the unit. If you've already made notes to the bulleted questions, review them now. Try to come up with some answers to these questions before going on to the next stage.

Now jot down your ideas about each one.

1   In the context of Robin Lakoff's theories of female discourse, do you think Hong Kong women tend to speak more tentatively and indirectly than Hong Kong men?

2   Can you identify any characteristics that you would consider 'typical' of female speakers of Cantonese?

3   Are there any naming practices in Chinese that perpetuate stereotypes of women?

Once you've written your own ideas down, read Readings 7.2 and 7.3, below. Do they provide any answers to these questions? Are they different from your own? Do you agree with what the writers say? Did they highlight any features of female and male discourse in Chinese that you hadn't thought about before?

Reading 7.2

Tan, D (1990) 'Sexism in the Chinese language', *International Women's Studies Association Journal*, 2(4): 635–39.

Reading 7.3

Light, T (1982) 'On being *dǎing*: How women's language is perceived in China', *Computational Analyses of African & Asian Languages*, 19.

Summary

In this unit, you are introduced to the major areas of studies on language and gender. First we look at studies that compare the speech styles of women and men and find that the different speech styles can be due to different childhood socialization processes. Then we critically reflect on our languages (both English and Chinese) to see if there are any gender biases implicitly encoded in them. We also see how newspaper reports can make use of different linguistic devices (e.g., choice of names, passive voice, deletion of agent) to cast men and women in different lights. You are then introduced to the concept of 'symbolic violence' and see how symbolic violence is played out in the discourse practices of beauty contests in Hong Kong. Finally, we look at possible directions for language reform and explore how we can use language in non-sexist and non-discriminatory ways.

References

Bourdieu, P (1991) *Language and symbolic power*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Clark, K (1992) 'The linguistics of blame: representations of women in The Sun's reporting of crimes of sexual violence', in Toolan, M (ed.) *Language, text and context: essays in stylistics*, London: Routledge, 208–26.

Eckert, P (1989) *Jocks and burnouts: social categories and identity in the high school*, New York: Teachers College Press.

Eckert, P (1993) 'Cooperative competition in adolescent "girl talk"', in Tannen, D (ed.) *Gender and conversational interaction*, New York: Oxford University Press, 32–61.

Eckert, P (2000) *Linguistic variation as social practice*, Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Fishman, P M (1983) 'Interaction: the work women do', in Thorne, B, Kramarae, C and Henley, N (eds) *Language, gender and society*, Rowley, MA: Newbury House, 89–101.

Freedle, R and Lewis, M (1977) 'Prelinguistic conversations', in Lewis, M and Rosenblum, L A (eds) *Interaction, conversation and the development of language*. New York: John Wiley and Sons, 157–85.

Fung, A and Ma, E (2000) 'Formal vs. informal use of television and sex-role stereotyping in Hong Kong', *Sex Roles*, 42(1/2): 57–81.

Gibbon, M (1999) *Feminist perspectives on language*, London: Longman.

Ho, G W M (1998) *The projection of women's image in the 'Miss Hong Kong Pageant' 1988-1997*, MA dissertation, School of Communication, Hong Kong Baptist University.

Lakoff, R (1975) *Language and woman's place*, New York: Harper and Row.

Light, T (1982) 'On being *déing*: How women's language is perceived in China', *Computational Analyses of African & Asian Languages*, 19.

Lin, A M Y (2000) 'Genres of symbolic violence: beauty contest discourse practices in Hong Kong', in Li, D C S (ed.) *Discourses in search of members*, New York: Ablex.

Ming Pao (1994) 'Beauty contests instantiate patriarchy' (in Chinese). June 1.

New Women's Association (1993) 'Survey report on sexism in television commercials' (in Chinese). Hong Kong: New Women's Association.

Pauwels, A (1998) *Women changing language*, London: Longman.

Sapir, E (1949) (originally written in 1912) 'Language and environment' in Mandelbaum, D (ed.) *Selected writings of Edward Sapir*, Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 89–103.

Schieffelin, B and Ochs, E (1986) 'Language socialization', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 15:163–246.

Schulz, M R (1975) 'The semantic derogation of women', in Thorne, B and Henley, N (eds) *Language and sex*, Rowley, MA: Newbury House, 134–47.

Sheldon, A (1993) 'Pickle fights: gendered talk in preschool disputes' in Tannen, D (ed.) *Gender and conversational interaction*, New York: Oxford University Press, 83–109.

South China Morning Post (1996) 'Beauty pageant tops ratings', February 4, 3.

Tan, D (1990) 'Sexism in the Chinese language', *International Women's Studies Association Journal*, 2(4): 635–39.

Tannen, D (1994) *Talking from 9 to 5: how women's and men's conversational styles affect who gets heard, who gets credit, and what gets done at work*, New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc.

van Zoonen, L (1994) *Feminist media studies*, London: Sage.

Zimmermann, D H and West, C (1975) 'Sex roles, interruptions and silences in conversation', in Thorne, B and Henley, N (eds) *Language and sex*, Rowley, MA: Newbury House, 105–29.

Feedback on activities

Most of the answers to the activities are suggested in the section immediately following the activity (e.g., Activities 7.1 and 7.3). Some activities require you to collect data from your friends (e.g., Activity 7.2) or from the mass media (e.g., Activities 7.4, 7.5 and 7.7). The answers to these activities are not fixed and they depend on and come from your data. For answers to Activity 7.8 you have been referred to Reading 7.2 and Reading 7.3. Answers to Activity 7.6 can be found in Reading 7.4, below, by Lin.

Reading 7.4

Lin, A M Y (2000) 'Genres of symbolic violence: beauty contest discourse practices in Hong Kong' in Li, D C S (ed.) *Discourses in search of members*, New York: Ablex.

Appendix 7.1

Notes on transcription

1 Cantonese is transcribed using the Yale system. English translations of Cantonese utterances are bolded and placed in pointed brackets < > beneath the Cantonese utterances.

2 The numeral preceding each turn is the speaking turn number.

3 Pauses and gaps: A short pause is indicated by '..' and a longer one by '...'.

4 '....' appears at boundaries of the excerpt, indicating the untranscribed utterances.

5 The latching of a second speaking turn to a preceding one is indicated by an equal sign '=', e.g.:

> Jang: Ngoh sihk di yeh heuih bong ngoh sihk sin go wo,=
>   <Those things I ate he tasted first,>
>   =Jehng: Mh! Mouh-cho aa!
>   <Mh! That's right!>

6 Contextual information: Significant contextual information is given in curly brackets, e.g.:

> Jang: Syun sing-neui? Hei-hei! {chuckling sleazily}
>   <Selecting sacred girls? Hei-hei!>

7 Accentuation: Accentuated syllables are marked by capitalization, e.g.:

> Jehng: Haih aa! GO-GO si wahn gaa!
>   <Yeh! EACH ONE he tasted first!>