COVER SHEET

Gender and Spoken Interaction: A Survey of Feminist Theories and Sociolinguistic Research in the United States and Britain

by

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Comments welcome.

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Introduction

It is no coincidence that the interdisciplinary fields of Sociolinguistics and of Women's Studies have done some growing up together over the last thirty or more years. Social forces in the USA and the UK (eg. the second wave of the women's movement, civil rights movements) have pushed a new paradigm competing with the traditional ways of studying language, and of determining who and what is worthy of any kind of study. With a shifting focus have come challenges to method and theory that can be seen in the making as one examines the nexus between these two fields: the study of language and gender.

Debates around issues of language and gender over the last twenty years reflect not only the sociolinguistic challenge to 'normal' linguistics (Figueroa 1994), but also the challenge which Women's Studies poses to conventional ways of knowing about women (and men). Scholars in both fields have increasingly argued the importance of context, of situated interactions over abstractions; they have demonstrated the need for multidimensional and dynamic instead of unidimensional and unidirectional analyses. Both have called for a shortening of the distance between researcher and those being studied, underscoring the importance to any scholarly interpretation of participants' understandings of events surrounding them. At the same time, all scholars are called on by feminist and sociolinguistic critics to disclose their own values, even as they attempt objective research, in recognition of the bearing such values may have on their science. Each field challenges any uncritical acceptance of what is 'normal', or 'standard' and focuses instead on the options available in situated events to achieve desired outcomes.

Present questions in language and gender research reveal how far we have come in our understanding of the linguistic mechanisms involved in constructing gender, and of the relations between 'femininities' and 'masculinities'[1] within a complex web of ethnicity, age, occupation, and class. Applications abound, for the very findings suggest the importance of our own agency in gendering our world, just as we furnish it simultaneously and interactively with ideas about other social categories such as race, class, age, and sexual orientation, through our language practices. Findings in this area of research provide us with possibilities for challenging the social constraints which serve again and again to reproduce stories which order our world in a way that systematically privileges some while disadvantaging others. Applied linguistics therefore is one

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[1] Each set of variable attributes, *feminine* and *masculine*, forms a stereotype and these are often polarized along an axis; for example, in one working class community of a certain ethnic group, the idea of femininity may comprise particular behaviors, including endurance, reliability, and resilience while masculinity may be seen as including dramatic risk-taking and volatile behaviors; another social class or ethnic group may reconfigure the traits of femininity to include innocence, weakness, dependency while masculinity is defined by worldliness, responsibility, and authority. These ideals are variable because they are socially constructed.

forum in which language and gender studies will ultimately yield fruit. For as physicist and feminist theorist Evelyn Fox Keller has said, we are purposeful creatures; it is naive to think that we are in any scientific endeavor "just for the understanding" (1990). For many scholars in Sociolinguistics and in Women's Studies, a purpose of their work, inspired by the social movements that gave rise to the fields, is to educate for a more just and humane world.

In this chapter, we will survey the sociolinguistic research that has opened up the area of language and gender studies, restricting our attention to spoken language and social interaction. We will also trace possible linkages between various feminist theories and these Anglo-American studies of language and gender, while recognizing that this way of organizing such work may not be that chosen by the researchers cited. Feminist theories have porous boundaries; indeed they overlap in many ways (Tong 1989), and yet they offer a useful framework for organizing the abundance of work done in recent years on language and gender. The relevance of the theories and findings to applied linguistics will be considered in each thematic section. However, we are not suggesting that one simply *apply* these diverse findings (uncritically) to practical situations without accounting for the premises and caveats of the original study or those understandings that have changed with increasingly sophisticated analyses. We prefer to outline the fundamental principles, methods and arguments (with examples) of a range of feminist theories and feminist linguistic projects so that applied linguists may absorb them and thus better formulate their own feminist-informed models of language study (Recent attempts to survey sociolinguistic studies of gender can be found in Cameron 1995, Freed 1995, and McElhinny 1993).

Liberal Feminism: Deficit and Compensation

Liberal feminism might be described as a first consciousness of past discrimination, a desire for women to gain equal access to opportunities traditionally reserved for elite, propertied men (education, voting, owning property, engaging in business, politics, etc) with no special accommodations which might draw attention to their 'femaleness'. It rests on the belief in Platonic rationality, hence the autonomy of the individual, bolstered by competitiveness within a hierarchical model (see Friedman 1974, 1981, Mill 1970, [Taylor} Mill 1970, Tong 1989: 13-38, Wollstonecraft 1975). Citing ways in which women have been socialized into difference that diminishes them, liberal feminists emphasize gender-neutral solutions, and women's moving into the public sphere — that half of an allegedly dualistic world traditionally forbidden to women, their designated sphere being private and domestic.

Some of the early work on language and gender was patterned on a liberal feminist model, and it investigated the linguistic obstacles to women's fullest participation in the public realm. Miller and Swift (1980) focused on inequities in grammatical prescription and use (a generic masculine

pronoun, lack of parallelism in reference to gender, and commonly used language that trivializes or deprecates women) and instructed on ways to correct them (gender-neutral referents, singular-they, parallelism, and the avoidance of derogatory or belittling references to women). Theorists described the ways dominant groups silence subordinate groups through disinterest in what they have to say, the muted group theory (Ardener 1975, Kramarae 1981). In short, studies exposed the sexism that was built into common language practices.

But in much of the early work, the focus fell on women's forms of speech and the disadvantages of using them. Lakoff, whose exploratory essay *Language and Woman's Place* (1975) marked the beginning of real interest in women's talk, singled out abundant use of modals, hedging strategies, and certain kinds of tag questions — indicators of insecurity — as typical of 'woman's language.' While Lakoff deplored women's subordinated status and posed questions that would open up fruitful lines of research, she offered no empirical evidence to support her observations (see Dubois & Crouch 1976). In their studies focused on isolated phonetic variables, sociolinguists were beginning to include gender as a factor with somewhat persistent findings (Thorne *et al.* 1983) of a tendency of women to use — more than men — phonetic variables closer to the prestige norm (socially 'correct' standard). Other studies focused on what appeared to be women's greater variability in stress, pitch, and intonation (Coleman 1971, Sachs 1975, McConnell-Ginet 1978), sometimes emphasizing dominance and power differentials[2]. As a result of this first consciousness-raising, some believed that if women were not taken seriously, they might remedy the ineffectiveness of their communication in mixed groups by individually working on their style through 'assertiveness training' (for a critical view see Crawford 1995).

Often cited problems with some of this research (Cameron 1985, Coates 1986, Henley & Kramarae 1991) are that any *deficit* model that required compensatory behavior by women, had the effect of locating both the blame and the potential solution in the woman (Henley & Kramarae 1991:22), requiring her assimilation to what was in effect a male norm, with no guarantee that it would have the desired effect. Researchers often failed to challenge the normative power of rhetorical practice developed almost exclusively by men (in a public sector for so long open only to men), or men's evaluations of women's practices. Critics, including Bodine 1975, Brown & Fraser 1979, Smith 1979, Nichols 1983, Thorne *et al* 1983, and West & Zimmerman 1985, would charge that the many isolated variables assessed as 'woman's language' represent sex-stereotyped speech, and reflect the association of speech with activities that tend to be segregated by sex. Thorne *et al.* (1983:11) conclude that "the most fruitful research on gender and speech has conceptualized

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[2] See Henley & Kramarae (1991) for later caveats and reanalysis.

language not in terms of isolated variables nor as an abstracted code, but within contexts of actual use."

The problems of the earliest efforts notwithstanding, the research generated by the liberal feminist consciousness caused some women to give themselves permission to use a wider range of options than those restricted by norms of femininity. This research also effectively challenged the grammatical masculine generic, outdated and sexist naming practices, and problems of exclusive language, to the extent that many professional organizations in the USA (Modern Language Association, The National Council of Teachers of English, The Linguistic Society of America, the Associated Press, The American Psychological Association, etc) and the UK (the British Psychological Society, Cambridge University, the General Synod of the Church of England, etc) adopted policies of inclusive (non-sexist) language, and some workplaces began slowly but surely to change towards intolerance of sexist speech. As women moved in increasing numbers from historically female work into historically male work in the public sector, this growing research provided support for a less chilly climate.

Radical Feminism: Dominance/Conflict models

Radical feminism rejects any construction of knowledge that does not put women at the center. Women's oppression, to the thinking of radical feminists, is a result of male control of their sexuality and procreative capacities. Radical feminists usually agree on some or all of the following tenets (Jaggar & Rothenberg in Tong 1989: 71): women were the first oppressed group; their oppression is the most widespread; their oppression is the deepest and most difficult to eradicate; their oppression causes the most suffering to its victims; and women's oppression provides a conceptual model for understanding all other forms of oppression as various groups (even Nature[3]) are feminized in order to be brought under control.

A radical feminist approach to language involves a transvaluation of meanings so that what is good in patriarchy is actually bad for women, and what is bad in patriarchy is actually healthy for women (cf. Daly 1987, Kramarae, Treichler & Russo 1985). There is a conscious reappropriation of language previously avoided (starting with naming oneself 'woman', despite the degraded connotation given the term until recent decades). Radical feminists reject "ladyhood", those male-approved behaviors which are rewarded with the social benefits of marriage into the highest order, as in 'lords and ladies.' Radical feminists eschew feminine norms developed to win male approval,

[3] In English, Nature has been described metaphorically as a female entity, 'Mother Nature', sometimes beneficent, sometimes unruly, unpredictable and destructive. Francis Bacon, who helped found the Royal Society of London at the onset of the scientific revolution, put it this way: Nature is a bride who must be brought to her knees in a chaste and lawful marriage with science, the "masculine philosophy" (Keller 1985).

and a high-ranking husband, and instead define themselves solely in their own terms, at whatever risk to their social standing. With its woman-centered approach, radical feminism might reconceptualize language used to describe heterosexual intercourse, for example, as a woman engulfing a man, rather than a man penetrating a woman (eg. Thorne & Henley 1975; Thorne, Kramarae & Henley 1983). However, within radical feminism there is a strong current of lesbian separatism whose proponents criticize the oppressive nature of heterosexism (see the later section on queer feminism), and thus might not consider the last example.

Compared to other approaches, radical feminism posits a different view of how knowledge can be constructed. Daly's (1987) *Wickedary*, for example, starts with conventionally negative words for women (crone, witch, shrill, cackling) and spins positive meanings, new applications, reclaiming ownership of language about women. Consciousness-raising by women, using non-hierarchical groups to explore their personal experience is the preferred method for testing the validity of claims made about women (MacKinnon 1987). It is preferred over supposedly objective, empirical scientific methods which have, after all, made some outrageous claims in the past about females (hysteria was supposedly female-specific, caused by a wandering womb; the female brain supposedly supported lower intelligence; the study of higher math and science supposedly could lead to insanity in the female, etc). Radical feminists are suspect of all supposedly ‘neutral’ pronouncements regarding women, and subject them to their own tests and interpretation.

Radical feminism thus has significance for revaluing notions about all-female communication, transvaluing gossip, for example, from a disparaging description of how women communicate to a positive form of building relationships and negotiating disputes. Among radical feminist linguistic researchers, one might include Spender (1980:2), who contends that language, as we know it, is actually *man-made*, since until recently in human history, men have controlled public discourse and the dissemination of writing (see also Coates 1986). Penelope (1990) describes how we depend on a cultural model of reality to decide how to act and what to say in specific contexts, and in our culture, language has crystallized as it was set forth in a Patriarchal Universe of Discourse, PUD, a model elevating manhood above all other experience. This PUD, a male idealized conceptual framework, defines the boundaries of ‘sense’ and ‘non-sense’ for us (65).

In a radical feminist approach, the problem that is named and documented is male dominance and exploitation of women. In this line of thinking, Zimmerman & West (1975) found in their studies of adults that interruptions were infrequent and equally distributed in same-sex conversations; in cross-sex exchanges, however, males initiated 96% of the total interruptions observed, effectively cutting off both the females' turns at talk and the topics they were attempting to develop. In West's (1990) study of doctor-patient interaction, she found that doctors out-

interrupted male and female patients two to one except when the doctor was a woman. Then the situation was reversed.

In some 52 hours of transcribed cross-sex exchanges, Fishman (1977, 1978) found that women asked more than 70% of the questions (*D'ya know what?* being frequent among them). Fishman then analyzed attempts to start and maintain conversation and found that the men's topic-raising led to discussion 28 out of 29 times, while 30 out of 47 attempts by women to raise a topic were *ignored* by their male partners. Interestingly, these men were all acknowledged sympathizers with the women's movement. Fishman could now explain women's use of questions as openers: like children *vis-à-vis* adults, they had very low odds of gaining the floor in interaction with men who were, consciously or unconsciously, controlling the conversation.

However wide the range of speech styles exhibited by both girls and boys (Goodwin 1990), by adulthood, these modes appear to be tolerated differently along gender lines in certain groups. Psychoanalytic theory suggests how the stage is set for adolescent and adult males to establish themselves as, above all, *not* female, and to compete for the privilege, authority, and power reserved for non-female adults in patriarchal culture. This assumption of power requires an attitude and behavior of *dominance* which is illustrated in discourse and criticized by radical feminists. Recent studies focus on complaints by women of aggressive, dominating behavior by men even across the Internet (cf. both Hall and Herring in Bucholtz *et al.* 1996; Herring, Johnson, and DiBenedetto in Hall & Bucholtz 1995). The women's response is to polarize in opposition to such behavior by forming women-only electronic lists with explicitly co-operative behavior and no tolerance for 'flaming' (verbal attacks over the Internet).

A radical critical theory owes its inception to the ideology it challenges, and remains in dialectical tension with that ideology. Thus a radical feminist theory depends on patriarchy to establish its meanings. The fixed focus on the oppressor allows for a conscientious revaluing of women and their authentic woman-to-woman communication, but it operates within the dualistic oppositions created and maintained by patriarchal consciousness, choosing a completely different alternative to what is offered by patriarchy. In responding to patriarchal concepts of woman, radical feminists theorize a different woman, and in so doing tend to ignore the many differences among women and the possibilities of a positive redefining of heterosexuality without patriarchal exploitation.

An additional caveat is raised by James & Clark (in Tannen 1993) who argue that overall research on gender difference in interruptions does *not* support the conclusion that there *is* any difference in frequency of use, which they find not surprising given the multiple ways in which interruptions (overlap) or any other linguistic tool can be used, for instance, to dominate or to

collaborate. They criticize a lack of attention to situations, semantics, and methods in earlier studies.

These problems notwithstanding, radical feminism has raised the consciousness of many researchers to the destructive power of patriarchy, and in turn brought us documentation concerning the mechanisms of domination and the ways in which women and things deemed ‘feminine’ have been disparaged through language. Research has involved measuring and evaluating both speech and silence, turns and interruption, directives and co-operation, topic management and control (Zimmerman & West 1975, West & Zimmerman 1983, 1985). Creative language use by radical feminist writers has also shown us the possibilities that await us when women are celebrated as everything patriarchy says they cannot be, and words come to describe powerfully their lives.

Dual Cultures Alternative to Radical Feminism: Difference

More popularised than radical feminist theory and its approach to language is a theory that attempts to explain differences between men’s and women’s conversational styles in terms of the two segregated subcultures that girls and boys inhabit and in which they formulate their rules for interaction. Its proponents often explicitly reject patriarchal values that discount the female sphere. In focusing on observed behavioral differences, these researchers often look admiringly at the behavioral forms exhibited by women. Contrasts are made between women’s relational behavior that stresses connectedness, care and responsibility, and men’s competitive behavior that stresses individual competence to insure justice and rights. Among other works, Gilligan’s (1982) psychological research on women’s moral decision-making, and Chodorow’s (1974) and Dinnerstein’s (1977) focus on the effect of female-exclusive infant care on an individual’s psycho-sexual development, provide a psychoanalytic framework for explaining women’s “different voice” and the resulting two cultures that must strive to understand each other.

The distinctive competitive and co-operative models which may arise out of children's differing relationships with (almost) exclusively female caregivers, can be observed in the speech of adults. In her study of groups of men, Aries (1976) found that a single speaker would address the whole group for as much as one-third of the time, as opposed to engaging in one-on-one conversation. Certain men thus dominated the conversation in all-men groups. This occurred five times more often than for women interacting in all-women groups. Aries and others found that typically, in women's groups, leaders tend to keep a low profile and encourage others to speak. Some studies found that, in all-women task groups, the various modes of interaction, dominant and passive, were shared randomly among the leaders and subordinates. In measuring such things as interruptions,

hedging, assertions, yielding, and topic raising it was shown that women knew how to use either mode but that they rotated them, diffusing the power throughout the group.

Language studies in this stream of work include Maltz & Borker (1982) and Deborah Tannen (1990). Maltz & Borker's *A Cultural Approach to Male-Female Miscommunication* compares cross-sex communication with cross-cultural communication, focusing on systems of talk (whole conversations in specific contexts, with specific strategies and outcomes) rather than individual speech variables. Men and women, they argue, come from different sociolinguistic subcultures with different rules for friendly conversation, and miscommunication results from failing to understand the others' rules. They prefer the comparison with interethnic miscommunication because it explains wrongly interpreted cues without assigning 'bad faith'. These quite different subcultures develop, they argue, in the single sex peer groups of middle childhood, with girls investing in pair friendships which they must learn to read with great sensitivity, while boys organize hierarchically and compete for dominance and self assertion. They list the sites in which miscommunication between the two resulting conversational styles can occur: the use and meanings of minimal responses, questions, linking utterances to previous utterances, verbal aggressiveness, topic flow and shift, and problem sharing/advice giving.

Tannen (1990) reinforces this *dual cultures* view, focusing on the different strategies that some of the same variables can serve, causing frustration between heterosexual partners. Tannen (1993) argues, however, that such research should *not* be construed as oppositional to work done to expose *dominance*. She sees it rather as complementary to it, since few if any researchers with this approach deny the negative consequences of dominance relations in interactions. She was no doubt responding to the severe feminist criticism (eg. Cameron 1995) brought on by her popular book, *You Just Don't Understand.*

Goodwin's study (1980, 1990) of Black working-class boys and girls (in Philadelphia, USA) and their use of directives with each other is one of the pioneering studies revealing distinctive gender modes of social organization that depends on the type of activity being undertaken. ”The boys characteristically use a hierarchical social organization to coordinate their activities within a task” (1990:109). The boys engaged in making sling shots competed verbally to gain control over the process, negotiating where, who, and how at every turn. Certain boys established their positions *vis-à-vis* others in their group by issuing explicit commands in aggravated form.

On the other hand, the girls who were engaged in making rings from bottle rims organized themselves by suggesting or proposing joint actions, “with a minimal negotiation of status.” A common vehicle for the girls' 'egalitarian' social organization was the structure *Let's* ..., which ”shows neither special deference toward the other party (as a request does) nor claims about special

rights over the other (as a command does)" (Goodwin 1980:166). Whereas attempts by boys to issue directives would be refuted by the ones acting as leaders, in the girls' group, proposals could be made by many different participants and the girls generally agreed to the suggestions of others. Girls distinguished themselves from each other in the course of their play by stating personal preferences that contrasted with others. Goodwin concluded (1980:173):

> Different approaches of girls and boys to talk in similar activities are not only indicative but also constitutive of characteristically different social organizations.

Importantly, however, Goodwin went on to demonstrate that the co-operative organization of the girls' play was not a function of girls' differential abilities. They were quite able to boss younger siblings or argue with boys using considerable skill at explicit commands. And when playing house, they created hierarchies similar to those of the boys.

In *He-Said-She-Said* (1990), Goodwin points out that following the children from one activity to another, in a year and a half-long study, allowed her to refute Gilligan's notion of females' speaking "in a different voice" (usually understood to be powerless). Goodwin's data shows that sometimes "justice and rights" are more important to girls than "care and responsibility" (Gilligan 1982). Cooperation and competition, Goodwin argues (1990:284), are not mutually exclusive agendas and often coexist within the same speech activity.

Although proponents of a dual cultures approach often refute essentialist (biological) causes for their findings, the popularity of their work is often due to its tendency to feed laypeople's essentialist theories for gender differences. Such work stressing the style differences without sufficiently acknowledging the power differences in mixed-gender interaction is also unsatisfactory to many feminist scholars, because the effect of such studies is that women are usually still expected to adapt to men's linguistic styles, to excuse men's lack of responsiveness or their aggressive behavior, and the focus remains on heterosexual partners. Henley & Kramarae (1991) conclude that the construction of 'miscommunication' between the sexes emerges as an imperious tool, maybe even a necessity, to maintain the structure of male supremacy. Further, critics point out that cross-sex interaction is not like intercultural interaction, and that style differences are not categorical (Uchida 1992, Cameron 1995). Goodwin, whose work is often cited as an exemplar of this approach, insists that deeper analysis of her findings disturbs the notion of simply two separate styles, as the girls in her study demonstrate great competency in multiple styles, including that preferred by the boys. Her study, rather, points most emphatically to "the situated presentations of self, sensitive to the contexts in which they occur" (Goodwin in Tannen 1993: 129) and the ways in which the participation frameworks that stories provide, allow children "to construct and

reconstruct their social organization on an ongoing basis"(110). Her focus is on how the children accomplish and restructure social identities within encounters.

The findings in dual cultures research have fueled an industry of self-help and therapy guides, usually bought and used by women, to improve male-female interaction. They have heightened general awareness of talk styles and speech genres and provided favorable analyses of styles usually attributed to women. They have also demonstrated how linguistic forms should not be confused with functions, which can vary considerably, depending on strategies and contexts.

Marxist and Socialist Feminism: Work Assignments

While Marxism fails entirely to address women as a class, Marxist feminism attributes the common disadvantage of women to the creation of a capitalist class structure which, coupled with patriarchy, systematically oppresses them. Thus, in contrast to liberal feminism, Marxist feminism rejects individualism in favor of socially constructed knowledge through human involvement in production. In Marxist feminist thought, it is the division between spheres of production which keeps women engaged in unpaid or low-paid labor for others, prostituting themselves for subsistence. Because of inequalities of wealth, even their sexuality becomes a commodity – work they do for another.

Marxist methodology is appealing to feminism on the grounds that it is based on *dialectical materialism*, abandoning the idea of essential nature and prompting the argument that women are what they are because of the work to which they are consigned. Through Marxist feminist analysis of labor, production, value, and class, we more clearly see the systematic undervaluing of women's work, and the dismissal of women's domestic work.

Socialist feminism takes a similar approach to Marxist feminism but adds the notion that capitalism, the material structure of production, is tied to patriarchy, the material structure of reproduction (Tong 1989). Some socialist feminists argue for a concept of dual systems (patriarchy-capitalism) where one system feeds the other, citing concrete forms of male control over females through the institutions of monogamous heterosexual marriage, female childrearing, female domestic work and economic dependency, the state, and male bonding. The material base they allude to is male control over women's labor power, restricting women's access to important economic resources, and disallowing women control over their sexuality and reproduction (Hartmann 1976, 1981a, 1981b, Tong 1989: 179-183).

Other socialist feminists argue for a unified systems theory where patriarchy and capitalism are both the same. Young, for example, argues that patriarchy and capitalism are unified (or conflated) by the concept of the *sexual division of labor* (see Tong 1989). One has only to determine who gives orders and who takes them, who does stimulating work and who does the

drudge work, to see that women form a marginal, secondary work force essential to capitalism/patriarchy. Jaggar (1983) argues that patriarchy and capitalism are unified by their practice of *alienation* (Tong 1989: 186-189). She explains that through male objectification of female sexuality, women are alienated from their own bodies. Through medical intervention, child-rearing experts, and control of female reproduction, women are alienated from motherhood; and through the rejection of their language and ideas, women are made to feel impostors and thus alienated from their intelligence.

A dialectical materialist approach, exemplified by both Marxist and socialist feminist theories, provides a tool for analyzing the work of conversation in male-female interaction, which involves the oldest class division, the sexual division of labor. The work by Fishman (1977, 1978) illustrates this concept here, as it also illustrates other feminist theories elsewhere in this paper: by studying casual conversation she contends that interaction not only *takes* work (in order to be successful) but *is* work in and of itself (West & Zimmerman 1985). Fishman's study of conversation between female-male couples suggests that women do far more work than their male partners to maintain a flow of conversational topics. Perhaps to improve the odds that men would respond to their topics, women used far more attention-getting beginnings (*D'ya know what?*) and questions, to little avail. Fishman found that the majority of the men's rejoinders consisted of single turns and delayed minimal responses (*uhuh*) before they would switch topics. In contrast, the women provided much active 'support work' to sustain men's conversational topics. By precisely timing their comments (*Yeah?*) and displays of appreciation (*You're kidding!*), women's work carried men's topical development through much longer streams of discourse. Fishman concluded that women had developed strategies adapted to the lesser likelihood that they would secure men's attention when they spoke. Men, by contrast, opened topics with statements because of the greater likelihood of their being listened to. Fishman (1978: 405) concluded:

> Since interactional work is related to what constitutes being a woman, with what a woman is, the idea that it is work is obscured. The work is not seen as what women do, but as part of what they are.

Her analysis, when considered for our purposes from a Marxist feminist perspective, captures the dilemma of wage labor: the laborer (woman) is obliged to take what work (conversation) she can get; the capitalist (the self-absorbed man) enjoys economic (conversational) freedom. His style of speech is supported by the uncompensated work of his conversational partner. The woman's work goes largely to the benefit of the man.

MacKinnon's (1983) discussion of a Marxist framework cites control as its issue. The power to interrupt, to raise topics, and to enjoy holding the floor provides men with control in the production of speech. The power to name, to organize the world around one's own perceptions, is

the power of being subject, creator, God. For men this power is captured through language. In the face of such male-centeredness, held in place by language, women's work in interaction is invisible and women must constantly struggle against alienation from their own ideas, their own identities, which would be the product of their work through speech, if not appropriated by men.

Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (1992), *Think Practically and Look Locally: Language and Gender as Community-Based Practice*, adds to our understanding within this dialectical materialist framework. They change the focus from the opposition between difference and power (especially male dominance in gender relations), to “the processes through which each feeds the other to produce the complexities of language as used by real people engaged in social practice” (462). Difference and dominance, they argue, are not only both involved in gender, but are jointly constructed by real people, not by abstractions like ‘society’.

> It is mutual engagement of human agents in a wide range of activities that creates, sustains, challenges, and sometimes changes society and its institutions, including gender and language (462).

Gendered practices construct community members *as* women or men, and these practices constitute the relations between the sexes. Communities of practice (families, teams, workplaces) provide varying sites for varying ways to practice gender, ethnicity, class, etc simultaneously. It is the ongoing dialectical tension that creates the particular gender relations and the language to express them. Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (469) cite Nichols (1983), who argues that (in her study) women’s linguistic behavior was differentiated by whether or not they had access to the marketplace (opportunities for paid work): teaching school required different language norms than construction work, for example. They also cite (480) a study by Gal (1978) where language shift in an Austrian agricultural community shows young women leading language change from Hungarian to German in order to gain greater control over their own lives...as young men hold on to Hungarian in order to maintain control over theirs. The women, through their language practice, reject a laborious future as peasant wives in favor of greater access to jobs and marriage partners in the local growing industrial economy.

While a Marxist-socialist framework offers insights to the economics involved in constructing language and gender, it conflates class oppression with other forms of oppression which can mask their separate problems (McElhinny 1993). It also provides no explanation for the tensions between difference and dominance and resulting patriarchal gender relations that have been equally present in non-capitalist settings.

Applied linguists would do well to consider, however, the dynamics of language practice in terms of economic constraints and opportunities, particularly as they are affected by a sexual

division of labor. McElhinny (1993:36) suggests studying mother-child and caretaker-child spoken interactions in light of economic factors; considering the ways that the use of deference/neutral markers, standard language, and positive/negative affect is shaped by the kind of wage and non-wage labor available to or required of women or men; examining possible linguistic change in industrial sectors where women come to form a cheaper, majority workforce; and questioning automatic associations of the capitalist public/private split with masculine and feminine discourse by focusing on the economic role such a division plays.

Standpoint/Multicultural Feminism: An Example in African-American Feminism

Standpoint, multicultural feminist theories contribute the unique angles of vision from outside the dominant culture, thus forcing recognition of the operation of dominance through constructions of race and class which can skew even feminist theorizing. Multicultural feminism begins with critical theory arising from Hispanic, Asian-American, Native American, African-American and Black British feminists, as well as others who might be categorized outside the mainstream — lesbians, non-academics, the disabled — and ultimately tells us something about how white, heterosexual culture becomes constructed as “the culture”. Such theories are based in the epistemologies of material lives, insisting on the complexities present when two or more disfavored social categories coincide. Because multicultural feminism captures best the paradoxes of women’s lives, it has perhaps the most explanatory power of the many approaches discussed in this paper. For this reason, we give it special attention.

African-American feminism, characterised by Patricia Hill Collins (1991) as *Black Feminist Thought*, presents us with the clear dialectic of oppression and activism in Black women’s lives. Its formulation eventually maps out many of the issues raised by an increasingly coherent sociolinguistic challenge to linguistics (Figueroa 1994), and by a feminist challenge to hidden assumptions in scientific epistemology (Keller 1985).

Economic, political and ideological suppression of Black women has created an effective system of control. Even feminist theory has suppressed Black women’s ideas, just as Black male-run organizations have pushed women leaders to the rear. And yet the knowledge gained at the intersection of race, class, and gender oppression provides the stimulus for crafting and passing on the subjugated knowledge of Black women’s culture of resistance. Segregation in the US, after all, meant a separate space in which to articulate an Afrocentric world view. Black women fashioned an independent *standpoint*: *the outsider within.* Domestic work has allowed Black women to see white elites in their private sphere with the result of demystifying white power. While experiencing racism, they have also seen their own work for the race or the family discounted in order to have Black men elevated. They *know* the contradictions in the dominant ideology (Collins 1991).

bell hooks (1984) confronted middle-class white feminists with their own unexamined racism and classism. Many African-American women, she says, do not see the problems as being male oppressors, but rather as being group oppression. Feminist criticism of male privilege rings hollow to Black women who know that while Black men and poor men may oppress women, they themselves clearly do not enjoy privilege in American society. Likewise, Black women know that there is no solidarity among women against oppression, for some educated white feminists focus on gaining equal access to the class interests enjoyed by educated white men, and will prioritize the privileges of class over the plight of their Black sisters.

In *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*, Smith (1982) underscores the significance of learning Black feminism from other women in the home — mothers, grandmothers, aunts, neighbors — through the pragmatics of survival. She and others emphasize that while one can point to what they have endured, one must also recognize and educate others about the successes, the resistance, the survival by strong women, exploiting what options are available to them. Whereas some white feminists have identified motherhood and homemaking as the site of oppression, hooks (1984:133) argues that historically, Black women have experienced work in the context of family as "humanizing labor, work that affirms their identity as women, as human beings showing love and care, the very gestures of humanity white supremacist ideology claimed black people were incapable of expressing. In contrast to labor done in a caring environment inside the home, labor outside the home was most often seen as stressful, degrading, and dehumanizing" (see also, Walker 1984).

In order to reclaim the Black feminist intellectual tradition, Alice Walker, African-American author of the best-selling novel, *The Color Purple* (1982*),*and *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (1983*)*, among other works, states, "I write all the things I should have been able to read." Black feminists work to deconstruct the concept of the intellectual, just as Sojourner Truth, a 19th century African-American crusader for the abolition of slavery and for women's suffrage deconstructed womanhood, comparing herself, uneducated and a former slave to the delicate white ladies whose protection was at stake if women's suffrage were enacted, and asking "Ain't I a woman?" (Collins 1991). Black feminist thought attempts to clarify Black women's standpoint, yielding an interpretation of Black women's experiences and ideas by those who participate in them, and attacking the false dichotomy between scholarship and activism.

It provides a method, Collins argues, which rallies against a Eurocentric, masculinist knowledge validation process that stresses positivism, objective generalizations, decontextualized data, an absence of emotion, and a unidirectional stance. Black feminist thought graphically expands the criteria. It calls for *both/and* premises instead of *either/or*; for concrete experience as a

criterion of meaning; for the use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims (with two subjects); and for the ethic of caring and the ethic of personal accountability. It argues for situated knowledge, subjugated knowledge, and partial perspectives. One needs to pivot the center in order to create dialogues on domination. Power dynamics are fluid; everyone has a voice, but everyone must listen and respond to other voices in the Black call and response tradition. There is always a choice and the power to act. A recurring theme in Black women's lives is to "*make a way out of no way.*"

How does African-American feminism inform our insights into the workings of language? It brings into relief the unquestioned assumptions of those viewing the multiply oppressed — assumptions of there being an absence of linguistic choice among those speakers of non-standard varieties, and of there being a monolithic desire by such speakers to speak the language of the dominant culture. This extends to canceling out the content of their speech because, as with that of women, its form is the focus. These assumptions can bias linguistic studies of African-American English Vernacular, or Gullah Creole (Gullah is an African-English creole spoken on the sea-islands and adjacent mainland of South Carolina and Georgia by descendants of enslaved Africans) as surely as they can bias expectations of women's competencies. Here educated elites join with early male grammarians in excluding 'undesirables' from the privileges of class. By describing speech by women or minorities in binary opposition to that of men or whites, with an implied unidirectionality between the two poles, some researchers have ignored the preponderance of overlapping features of speech, and ignored the exercise of linguistic choice by speakers engaging in different kinds of interactions, needing differing strategies to achieve particular outcomes, one of which might be to assert identity within a particular group and *not* in relation to the dominant one(s).

This recalls Nichols (1983), and her study of Gullah speakers along the coast of South Carolina. While a group of young women used more English grammar features than creole grammar features, placing them closest to the prestige norm, it was women also who were the heaviest users of creole forms in their communities. Nichols explains that older women, traditionally relegated to domestic and agricultural jobs, have little need for local English in the networks of their Gullah community where they enjoy elder status, while the young women's work opportunities bring them into more contact with speakers of the local standard. Some sociolinguistic studies at the time assumed "women to behave as some sort of universal speech group rather than as members of specific speech communities who make choices in terms of the linguistic options available to them in within those communities" (Nichols 1983:64). Nichols showed counter evidence to the claim of women's being drawn to the prestige norm, as Gullah-speaking women in her studies produced the greatest number of variants both closest to and farthest

from the prestige norm, depending on their occupations and the networks formed in their workplaces and communities. Her study also refutes the often-made assumption that wives are automatically members of the same social class as their husbands. Rather, she argues, Gullah women, like people everywhere, make active use of the options available within the networks that involve them daily. They are *not* always situated in direct relation to a dominant group, *nor* do they have but one identity – that assigned them by whites, or by men.

In Mille's study (1990) of Gullah Creole and variation present in its tense-mood-aspect system over 130 years, these issues provided some explanatory power to her findings. The prevailing model in creole studies prepares one to expect unidirectional change along a continuum so that over time, a creole basilect, the grammar of the creole most unlike the local standard, moves toward and is, eventually, replaced by the local standard. Grammatical variation which includes some rules from the standard is called the mesolect, a middle ground, in the language's move toward its target. In the case of Gullah, the target is supposed to be standard English, and people from a Gullah community who speak the local standard are considered acrolectal, having reached the supposed developmental heights

Mille's finding of relatively stable variation in Gullah over time is contrary to conventional predictions of decreolization. Instead of finding a much 'purer', invariant creole grammar in the last century, she found the same kind of variation as is present today. Speakers could conceivably die out thus diminishing the numbers, yet the language, when it is spoken, appears to be the same as that used in the past. Gullah speakers, like American Southern English speakers who also hear mainstream television English every day, can still maintain their own speech variety which has, through centuries of oppression, connected them with family and neighbors. Mille proposes a model of overlapping grammar systems (spheres), instead of the hierarchical basilect-mesolect-acrolect, such that those features that have always been shared by Gullah and English speakers can be represented. The speaker's choice of orientation toward either the English or Gullah center in a given interaction would affect which linguistic variables are selected. Speakers able to move comfortably in either sphere as bilinguals would be able through linguistic virtuosity to choose whichever forms they wish for a particular exchange.

This brings us back to Goodwin's (1980, 1990) assertions based on the competencies she observed in Black girls and boys. While the girls exhibited different concerns than the boys in the manner in which they organized, they also demonstrated a competency in a variety of forms, including the aggravated form preferred by the boys. Their choice of communication mode depended on the function of their activity and the desired outcome. Also, in cross-sex interaction, the girls were equally able to argue and to defend themselves as the boys.

As all languages serve to negotiate their speakers' identities, Gullah and African-American English Vernacular may meet an important need in the face of oppressive systems that remind Black speakers that no matter how they speak, they are still Black and subject to racism: language separate from the oppressor's can reinforce the community in which one is a full-fledged member. The issues of multicultural difference, standpoints, and agency have become critical issues in feminist sociolinguistic debates. They have been applied in many instances where language policies are being determined, and have even been invoked in court cases dealing with language-dialect and class-race issues (eg. Smitherman 1984 and Morgan 1994 on the 1977 Ann Arbor, Michigan court case regarding a school's responsibilities to economically deprived students whose "Black English" speech was different from the standard being assumed; the children had been assigned to learning disability classes where they had failed to learn to read; dialect had been equated with intellect). Applied linguists may put an understanding of standpoint, identity, and communities of practice to good use in evaluating their own research methods and assumptions, particularly in relation to language policy and planning, and language pedagogy.

Postmodern/Poststructuralist Feminism: Deconstructing Difference versus Dominance

With the emergence in the 1980s of a strong critique of the biases of Enlightenment thought, in tandem with the ‘linguistic turn’ in the social sciences and humanities, feminism began to engage with the predominantly male critics in order to bring *postructuralist* and *postmodernist* thinking into dialogue with feminist principles; the complex and difficult debate still continues (Flax 1990, Weedon 1987, Butler & Scott 1992). Following hard on the heels of French poststructuralist feminism (Kristeva, Irigarary), Anglo-American postmodern feminist theorists have continued the inquiry into the category of ‘women’, but with a healthier scepticism towards ‘totalising fictions’ of feminism that necessarily exclude and marginalise ‘different’ women. For example, the search for an authentic women’s language overlooks the instability of gender divisions and the many differences between women. Postmodernists emphasise the heterogeneity within given categories that are obscured by dualistic norms about social and cultural identity (see Elam 1994 for a discussion of feminism and deconstruction). Michel Foucault’s seminal work on discourse and sexuality (1976) has provided important tools for feminists to examine the political stakes in defining ‘women’ as an originating identity. Building on his genealogical approach, as well as speech act theory, Judith Butler (1990) introduces an influential ‘performative turn’ into feminist theorising so as to rethink gender not as what we are, nor a set of traits we have, but an effect we produce by what we do. Consequently, one becomes gendered by doing and talking gender; gender has to be continually reaffirmed and displayed in spoken interaction, and through this contingently

repeated citation, gender differentiation and gendered speech become naturalised yet inherently unstable.

Following Foucault, Cameron (1995: 43) argues that feminist linguistics has produced a 'regime of truth', a normative discourse or dominant version of what it means to be a gendered speaker, that normalises women's exclusion from important communicative practices. From her perspective, the *difference* theorists in sociolinguistics, as well as the *deficit* and most *dominance* theorists, fail to address the question of where 'men' and 'women' come from. Gender is a problem to be explained, not a solution. She proposes, instead, that we focus on how subjects constantly negotiate the norms, behaviours, and discourses, that define masculinity and femininity for a particular community, so as to produce themselves as gendered subjects. Hence, the essentialist notions of 'men's style' or 'women's language' need to be reformulated to allow for the possibility that men may use women's language on particular occasions, and that some women and men do end up outside the gender *norms* identified by feminist linguistics.

Explicitly postmodern or poststructuralist approaches to gender and spoken interaction are not yet common nor clearly articulated. Rather, the critical attention to categories of gender and to fundamental oppressive polarities currently unsettles prior studies. McElhinny (1993) suggests that an ethnomethodologically-informed approach to conversation, similar to Goodwin's (1990), may enable us to show how the fluidity of gender identities and identifications in social interaction is managed (see Woodward 1997 for a generous discussion of the nature of identity and difference). Indeed, such studies are necessary in order to pose difficult questions to postmodern theories of language such as those mentioned above, which often gloss over or forget the complexities and subtleties of social practice, the crucible in which structures of language are interactively performed and forged.

Critical discourse analysis (CDA), which draws on a richer conception of discourse as social practice following Foucault (Fairclough 1995), has had little engagement specifically with gender issues until recently. Bergvall & Remlinger (1996) direct attention to the reproduction of, and resistance to, traditional gendered social roles that men and women take on in the important arena of university classroom interaction. They argue that CDA has a pivotal role as an educational tool to reveal how conversations evolve and how they might be improved by attending to the positive aspects of gendered behaviours in the classroom, without supposing a *deficit* or *difference* model (see earlier sections).

Feminist Discursive Social Psychology

One particular encounter between feminism and poststructuralism that needs more than a passing mention is the British feminist approach to social psychology, which draws heavily on a

Foucaultian conception of discourse, while attending to the feminist project of intellectual, social and political change. In this approach, emotions, beliefs and opinions are *not* private things hiding inside the person: they are created by the language used to describe or account for them. Language is organised into discourses, and the discursive location of the individual frames one's 'personal' experience of self and subjectivity, yet language is an interactive activity which mediates sociocultural knowledge and is the medium in which identities and subjectivities are contested. From a feminist perspective, much of the social sense-making we are subjected to is the working through of ideological struggle between the discourses of legitimated, naturalised patriarchy and emergent, marginalised feminism. Hence, language is a key site for, and often the stake in, feminist resistance. The strength of this approach for studying gender and spoken interaction is that a diverse range of shifting and contentious discourses of masculinity and femininity can be demonstrated to be locally operative in situated performances of talk, with the result that particular ways of talking and being gendered are repressed or excluded. However, not all feminist social psychologists agree on the benefits to feminism of a poststructuralist discourse analytic approach; for example, some scholars argue that it is relativist and value-free, and so it is not suited to a feminism that requires broad generalisations and political commitment (see Gill 1995).

Studies have concerned adolescent talk about menstruation, the differences between male and female adult talk about sexual harassment (in Wilkinson & Kitzinger 1995), and the oppressive discourses of sexuality manifested in men's talk (Hollway 1984). What these studies point to is the clash of discursive means and choices that women and men draw upon and make when engaging in the telling of opinions and experiences in spoken interaction. The focus on personal experience and collective identification is of relevance to a feminist understanding of how women's knowledge and activism, as well as male sexist beliefs and opinions, are engendered. Applied linguists with an interest in interview, therapy and counselling discourse practices in various settings would benefit from the findings, methods and critical self-reflexivity of this anti-positivist approach (see also Jokinen *et al*. 1993).

Critical Studies of Masculinity: Problematising Men

It has often been pointed out that traditional linguistics has usually been conducted by men, for men, and about men, with men's language practices as the invisible norm by which we measure language use. Feminist linguistic research has corrected this bias, but what could further (visible) studies of men add to the invaluable feminist insights into gender oppression? Although the emerging field of 'men's studies' is often anti-feminist, or lamely searches for the 'new man', there is some critical *pro-feminist* attention to the nature of *masculinity* that is consequential for contemporary feminist linguistics and the study of language.

Feminist theories of language have most often maintained a critical stance on the language use of men, but few studies have explicitly problematised the normativity of *deficit* and *difference* models which imply that women, not men, should change their speech behaviour. In addition, studies of the diversity of men's language practices are few and far between. The focus on women's spoken interaction by feminist linguists is understandable, but with a relational approach to gender we need an understanding of hegemonic masculinity in language better than the abstract notion of a 'male oppressor' (or a male 'victim' in backlash men's studies). Some theorists (Connell 1995) argue that there has been a fragmentation of masculinity; indeed, there are complex power relations between men, in addition to those between men and women. We desperately need an understanding of how men hold on to and consolidate power over women and other men through spoken discourse, and of the ways in which they resist change. Methods vary but a focus, for example, on all-male contexts as crucial locales for the construction of the gender order has the result of exposing and delegitimising the language of powerful men.

A recent collection (Johnson & Meinhof 1997) explicitly addresses these issues. Papers by Cameron (1997), Johnson & Finlay (1997) and Coates (1997) analyse informal men's talk and come to the conclusion that men and women do share linguistic and interactional resources — for example, turn organisation and gossip — but they draw upon them differentially; as a consequence, gossip as a spoken speech genre is untied from its association with the 'feminine', while at the same time its specific use by men to construct hegemonic masculinity is documented. These studies are important, but applied linguists should remain aware that there is the ever present danger of reinforcing men's view of their language practices as superior or the norm, and of diverting funds from feminist linguistic research.

Queer Feminism

The most recent feminist challenge to our conceptions of language and gender has been a queer one. At the same time as Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990, 1993) was serving as an important bridge for many scholars to a deconstructionist critique of the sex/gender system, a number of American scholars, for example Teresa de Lauretis (1991), were formulating a theoretical stance which has come to be known as *queer theory* or *queer studies*, a new anti-essentialist, anti-assimilationist paradigm for gay/lesbian studies (see Jagose 1996, Kulick 1996 and Seidman 1996 for more details). Butler (1994) has also edited a recent issue of the journal *differences* that explicitly addresses the consequences of feminism *meeting* queer theory, particularly the charge that queer theory is requisitioning the study of sexuality for its own, and thus is cleaving a divide between itself and feminist analysis.

But does queer feminism *meet* linguistics, specifically the study of spoken interaction? Lesbian feminism since the 1970s has already mapped out some of the issues. Lesbian separatism, one form of *radical feminism*, challenges conventional thinking with the view that compulsory heterosexuality is in place because, left to their own preferences, unless they were brainwashed and coerced to do otherwise, women might generally prefer to be with women and have no need of men. Thus patriarchal definitions of female sexuality are enforced to ensure that men will have access to women on demand, from a position of dominance. Lesbianism, in the view of many radical feminists, is an outward, political sign of a personal rejection of patriarchal sexuality (Tong 1989: 123) and a refusal to participate in the subordination of women. This particular separatist approach has its impact on language. Not only are words perpetuating a male-centred world replaced, but even reminders of the oppressor are supplanted with words such as *wimmin*, ”now, ironically, legitimated by the OED [Oxford English Dictionary] itself” (Penelope 1990: 27).

Rich (1980) points to the many structures in place to enforce heterosexuality and asserts that any resistance to patriarchy whatsoever places a woman somewhere in the lesbian continuum. The methodology Rich uses to expose her ideas, when applied to language, is useful in understanding the power of intimidation and coercion. A compulsory silence of women has been effected for centuries, and women's speech ridiculed (as lesbian women have been ridiculed) to the extent that both women and men believe that women have talked a lot (too much) when they manage to occupy no more than one third of the conversational space (Spender 1989). A true and good woman, under patriarchy, is supposed to be heterosexual and to embrace the public virtue of silence. To reject heterosexuality, or to break the taboo on public voice, is to invite scorn.

In a recent collection, Leap (1995: vii) argues that the study of the construction of “lesbian and gay genders” in everyday language use in particular cultural and social domains is an important new linguistic enterprise. Issues of authenticity, passing and eroticised language play, as well as the salience of silence, non-verbal behaviour and gaze, are characteristic of a developing ‘queer’ or ‘lavender’ linguistics. The trickle of articles on queer language use is likely to surge in the coming years, much as the feminist linguistic research reviewed earlier in this article can be traced back in dialectic relation to Lakoff’s seminal work (1975) on language and woman’s place. However, we might need to alter her original emphasis to include sexuality because studies of the language use of particular sexual minorities (eg. transgender or ‘gender outlaws’) can establish a profound challenge to notions of traditional gender roles. As a consequence, we need to reconceive of the relations of talking and being a gendered *and* sexual subject.

For example, by examining the spoken interaction and style choices of African American drag queens, Barrett (1996) disputes the common assumption that language choice is necessarily a

marker of 'desired' gender (or ethnic) identity. African American gay male drag linguistic performances which draw on a 'white-woman' linguistic style are not misogynist parodies of women, as radical feminists may have it, nor are they indicative of wanting to be white, but they may be used to criticise white homophobic society.

The scholarly, yet subversive, queer(y)ing of linguistics promises both to transform the debate once again and to put on the agenda a new set of issues centring around marginal genders and language use (see Livia & Hall 1997 for contemporary research). Applied linguists will be rewarded by paying attention to the study of the negotiation and contestation of a masculine 'heterosexual' language — a different engagement for a lesbian woman than for a gay man — and of the maintenance of minority identities by acquiring and appropriating language practices in situations in which secrecy, the discovery of non-heterosexual locales and a same-sex cultural collectivity are defining features.

Conclusion

There are potentially many more correlations between these (and yet unmentioned) feminist methodologies and the study of language. Those considered here underscore the damaging effects of patriarchy, and challenge the ability of linguists to be neutral observers of language, and of applied linguists to be neutral practitioners and shapers of language use. These feminist methodologies enable linguistics to document through experience and practice the persistence of dominance over women and other groups, held in place by language. But they also call our attention to individuals' agency and strategic use of language options to achieve desired outcomes within particular constraints, either to encourage further social interaction or to symbolize their personal identity or group membership.

They also raise a cautionary note: an applied linguist needs to combine recognition of *social context* with careful *empirical* research. So much of our traditional knowledge of spoken language use in mixed-gender, mixed-race, or mixed-class contexts turns out to have been grounded in impressions filtered through the prevailing ideologies and discourses of the time. Most present-day feminist methodologies strive to account for both empirical fact and social context, with careful attention to race, class and sexuality bias, in studying spoken language in social interaction. As Nichols (1984) argues, the study of language's role in creating and maintaining social categories, furthers our understanding of the choices we can make, and the power of language not only to transmit but also to transform culture. Recognizing the arbitrariness of power relations, we can withhold consent to those language practices that diminish us and others; we can seek to participate on terms of greater equality and mutual respect. An important task of applied linguists along with

feminist and sociolinguistic researchers is to document and study the interactional mechanisms through which this kind of transformation can and does occur.

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