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## Study on Gender Differences in Language Under the Sociolinguistics

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### Abstract

Human beings not only created language, but also become the users; therefore, the study on linguistics should not only be made from the perspective of symbol, but more should be people-oriented. But the most significant difference between human beings is the gender difference, so people of different genders from either physiology or psychology in the use of language will have their own gender characteristics, which leads to the gender differences in language. By analyzing and studying on the connotation of gender differences in language and the social sources of it, we can conclude the significance of gender differences in language.

**Key words:** Sociolinguistics; Language; Gender differences

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### INTRODUCTION

Social linguistics can be defined by two angles of simplicity and complexity. Simply speaking, the main content of sociolinguistics is the study of the relationship between language and society. Specifically, the main content of sociolinguistics is the study of language structure and social context. Through the study of the interaction and influence between them, sociolinguists try to analyze from the various social cultural phenomena

and explore different discourse behaviors. The scope of sociolinguistics studies, in general, is defined according to the relationship between language and society. From the perspective of the study, it can be roughly divided into two levels: the microcosmic social linguistics and macroscopic sociolinguistics, this is a classification based on the interdisciplinary nature: macro refers to the sociology focus on the society; and micro is from the perspective of linguistics, focuses on linguistic phenomenon, social factors are its derivative contents. Sociolinguistics has used a new perspective and analysis method for the language and its interdisciplinary study, and has greatly enriched the study of sociolinguistic, which helps us to understand the nature of language better, changes the pure symbolic study of the ivory tower to the language, expands the understanding of the sociolinguistic phenomenon, and help anatomy of the social problems, so it has important research significance.

### 1. LANGUAGE AND GENDER

Language exists as a system of symbols, in terms of abstract thinking and senses, it reveals a method and pattern to describe the objective world. From another perspective, language system and language structure's difference reflected our different recognitions of the world in some degree. In addition, as a kind of historical and cultural heritage, during the process of using it, the language in a certain sense, reflects the formation of cultural traditions, evolution of civilization, national spirit creation, social life improvement. If we could stand on the panoramic view when we observed the specific using conditions during the mutation and change process in concrete social context, the research of sociolinguistics can open up more growth point in exploring the process of linguistic theory.

In the study of language and gender differences, many linguists such as Leonard Bloomfield, McConnell-Ginet,

Haas, Zhao Yuanren and so on have dabbled in them. In the process of the study they concluded that: in different contexts, men and women have differences to a degree in phonology, vocabulary and grammar, syntax options. Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (2003) pointed out that, because of the traditional social factors, men have higher social status, thus leading to their privileges in speech. At the same time, he carried on the explanation to the interaction effect of gender and language. Combining with the factors of age, Chinese linguist Chen Songcen pointed out the gender and age variations that caused when using languages. Their appearance is not because of human socialization distance or communication difficulties, but because of the social psychological factors of speakers with different genders and different ages, According to a survey, there are sexual salutation differences for strangers having the same occupation in Beijing. The survey results also show that the young and the old are quite different in diction and discourse habits. Different gender and age will cause the diversity of languages, there are two aspects of reasons: first, when the traditional social status is different, their mental state will be different; second, men and women play different roles in society, their participation in social activities and the scope of their activities in society also have great differences, and all these factors resulted in the variation of their language.

Language gender difference has always been complex. Gender differences in language are not only regarded as a linguistic phenomenon but also as a social phenomenon, and become the popular subject of linguistics and sociolinguistics. The linguists from all countries have made a lot of profound significant exploration according to the gender differences of language use phenomenon to explain the cause of gender difference. The gender difference referred in language, is a kind of language phenomenon in the display of society, culture, customs and other considerations of language users. It has a rich cultural background, historical connotation and profound social reality, reflecting the social psychology, folk psychology and the social and cultural value orientation. Gender differences have important academic significance and application value in the sociolinguistics. It widens our research horizon, deepens our cognition of the universal law of language; at the same time, it helps us to better explain the factors in the internal change of language development. In terms of language structure, gender difference reveals the relationship between gender and language. The interaction between language and gender and the objective existence of gender difference make the difference of gender language users, meanwhile the phenomenon of gender differences in language promote and enhance the different gender language users' new requirements and provisions for language in the social cultural life in turn. Gender differences in language can be divided into absolute and relative gender differences,

sociolinguistics mostly focus on relative gender language differences. In general, the relative gender differences mean men and women show significant differences in the characteristics when using the same language or dialect, and they usually form variations of gender.

## 2. SOCIAL ROOT OF LANGUAGE GENDER DIFFERENCES

Gender differences in language phenomenon are not accidental; they have the profound social root. Gender differences are the fundamental facts of social life and human differences. It reflects that there is a long historical origin in language difference phenomenon. Men and women have different status and play different roles, thus they have different duties and different rights.

Researchers engaged in sociolinguistics explain different phenomenon of language gender difference from the perspective of social structure, consistency and rights. They think the formation of language difference is due to the unequal status of males and females. For one thousand years, the traditional concept of "men outside, women inside" has dominated people, and men are seen as the dominators of the status and power. They govern the external world and go out to earn money for the family, women were considered to be weak and only do activities in the family. The "three obediences and four virtues" of ancient China more exactly reflects their humble social status. Their duty is to serve husband, children, take care of her parents-in-law, do housework, and are almost unable to take part in social activities. Therefore, Zimmerman thought that men have absolute authority in the society; therefore, their control is in compliance with their positions in society. Always interrupting other's conversations is an obvious sign to reflect their social power and controlling force. Similarly, women's subordination and dependence on social status result in the ruled position in conversations. There is a direct relationship between women's phonetic standard and the status of women. Trudgill holds the same view, he believes that women pay more attention to social status than men because women are economically dependent on them in the past. They were slaved in a subordinate position and only played a decorative role in the society. Even in contemporary society, more and more women cut a striking figure in economy, politics, and own the same occupation in many fields as the man. But the primitive social psychology still exists, men still discriminate against women. And the traditional ideas which holds that women are inferior to men are still bound them and remain in people's minds. Social status and women's higher requirements are not consistent, once if they do not pay attention to their words even slightly, they may be criticized or ridiculed; in addition, females are mainly engaged in domestic work in the past life, thus their social

status are not recognized. Therefore, they are forced to use other methods to get a higher position and using the appropriate language is a kind of good way.

Sociocultural factors have inestimable influence on a person's mentality, behaviors, ideological actions, religious beliefs and values. From the cultural concepts of any region or country, people have different recognition and expect for different gender roles and behaviors. Thus, in traditional concepts, women's language is kind and polite while men's is relatively simple, arrogant and firm. Inherent social expect will automatically become a powerful social stress and drive people to restrain their behaviors according to their gender mode. When a child is born, society will make different effect on boys and girls. First, they will be given a gender-specific name so that they will develop in the expected direction to satisfy their physiological factors and social roles. Society expects the boy to become a true man, who can overcome dependence, fear and passivity and build a more positive, independent and adventurous character. Speeches show manhood, so boys' speaking rudely or speaking with rude keynotes are accepted and acquiesced by the society even their talking is incoherent and clueless. On the contrary, girls usually keep clean, tidy, and quiet to become gentle, virtuous, and kind-hearted ones. So they talk like elegant ladies with standard pronunciation and correct grammar. There cannot be taboos and spells in their words. From this, we can see there are high requirements for girls' discourses and they should pay attention to every aspect of their manners especially their speech. During this process, different gender roles will get different social and gender approval. Gender role identity and culture circle have positive correlation.

We can learn from this that during the socialization process, proper manners will influence gender roles recognition. During the recognition process, boys and girls gradually learn to develop according to their genders. Different cultural behaviors and communication methods will naturally become a part of features and eventually form different ideological men and women. At the same time, girls' and boys' expressions are becoming different and the same mentality and action will cause different language effect. Besides, males' and females' accepting and adopting social interaction in their childhood will obviously affect their communication methods. Even when they grow up, the existing mode is hard to reject.

### **3. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF LANGUAGE GENDER DIFFERENCE STUDIES CONNOTATION OF LANGUAGE GENDER DIFFERENCE**

As a method of communication between people, language is sure to reflect all kinds of social relationships during

communication. In terms of sociolinguistics studies, most scholars' main research contents are not just about gender grammar neither of specified language system nor about physiological gender study. There are gender differences in sociolinguistic phenomena mainly because of social structure types, culture backgrounds and pragmatic mentality like phenomena of social gender. Gender language difference is objective, and even in society using the same nation language or region dialect, it is common to see different languages because sexual, physiological and social factors. They mainly exist in construction change features of language use like pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar and communication mode.

#### **3.1 Gender Difference in Utterance-Choosing**

Normally, men usually talk eloquently in all kinds of competitive topics like sports while women's topics are usually about family life, individuals and emotions. So the dialogues showing directly one's inner lives are more from women, on the contrary, men are inclined to hide their feelings.

Klein once made a research in an ordinary worker's family. He found what men mainly talk about are working conditions, sports news and other related topics, while women mainly talk about family and family members. It's mainly related to males' and females' mentalities: women prefer to harmonize and soften interpersonal relationship while men just think about showing their leading roles and assert their dignities.

##### **3.1.1 Pronunciation and Intonation Difference**

For pronunciation, we set English pronunciation as an example because lots of research achievements are made in English backgrounds. After making researches, lots of linguists have found women's pronunciations are more close to British pronunciation standards.

For /t/ and /r/, women pronounce more easily. Thus we can see, women's pronunciations are more correct and concise. Usually, the upper class and the educated do better to pronounce correctly. Trevor once said, because of the lower social position and high expectation, females have to pay attention to their methods and make sure they can make pure pronunciation while males relatively undisciplined and free pronunciation further reflect their prestige. Perhaps men are not eager to show their high position in this aspect.

For intonation: Chinese Academy of Sciences once conducted an experiment to test the intonation values of men and women. They chose eight men and eight women to let them read ten of Mandarin vowels and find that women's intonation values are obviously higher than men's. Usually, intonation changes mean rich expressions, so women prefer to use several intonations in one sentence. On the contrary, men prefer falling tones rather than modified tones.

In reality, we can see many examples. First, women use more modified tones than men. For example: M:

When will our lunch be ready? W: Oh....around 12 o'clock? W means if there isn't any problem, it must be 12 o'clock. She is the only responder who knows the answer, but she uses the lifting tone. This reflects her euphemistic, modest character and soft introverted temper. Then, women are inclined to use inverted sequence stress. For the sentence "How would you do it", men will stress on do while women will use inverted sequence stress, intending to omit this important verb by using the lowest tone. Females' uncertain and undetermined attitudes make them use euphemistic methods during the intonation process. Also, their relatively low social position and less discourse determine their speaking methods.

### 3.1.2 Vocabulary Difference

Some extreme and commendatory adjectives are more used by women like great, lucky, happiest, excellent and etc. They also use some positive degree adverbs to emphasize in good aspects like really, largely and so much.

It proves that women are inclined to use euphemistic expressions and cautious words like "ai", "a", "taoyan" in Chinese and "My dear", "Oh god" in English which men will not care about. Women usually avoid using slang and dirty words even they are really angry beyond endurance. But those words will be used by men like "tamade", "goudongxi" in Chinese and "Shit", "Damn" in English. Besides, there are greeting differences for males and females. Males will not add more emotional colors to salutations while females add more individual inclination and preference. The most obvious one is that females prefer to add- i.e. to some nouns, like bookie, luckier and etc.

### 3.1.3 Syntactic Differences

Distinguished linguist Lakoff did some researches and pointed that women are more likely to use tag questions which can be regarded as an obvious feature that cannot be neglected. For example, "She is a very nice girl, isn't she?" They are not common in men's daily expression. And if men want to express the same views, they will choose the direct way "The girl is very nice". Tag question will make the speaker's tone more euphemistic and modest. It also can avoid the speakers' making mistakes and offer approaches to avoid the conflicts between speakers. Tag questions usually reflect the speakers' uncertain views and wishes to get others' affirmation. So women will choose general question and special question to express their uncertain views and ask for others' opinions. However, men are inclined to speak bluntly and will not give much speaking right to others.

Thus, males' discourse certainty is stronger than females'. Besides, there are similarities between grammar and pronunciation feature differences. Females are inclined to use more standard and exact syntactic structures. There is an example: M: "He walks too quick" or "I known that"; F: "He walks too quickly" or "I have known that". There are lots of cases like that because

women want to show their good education and status in speech and pronunciation.

## 3.2 The Development Trend of Language Gender Difference Studies

Gender language studies are divided into several fields. It can be divided into dispersion, concentration, systematic and thorough stages. Some scholars think it's a process to research inwardly and extend outwardly. These processes have great influence on the common linguistics and create a new world for linguistics study field.

The gender differences between males and females have got great attention. Professors and scholars in different fields have made researches in different degrees about it. But at the same time, the similarities have been neglected. Because the matter of gender difference and language aroused great attention, many professors and scholars think there should be a new subject: gender linguistics. But still there are lots of disagreements, which hold that gender language studies belong to sociological linguistics and should not be listed exclusively or it will confuse the linguistic field. Though having disagreements, professors and scholars have coincident views:

a. Enrich the research methods and patterns of gender language studies. Combine the research and demonstration from contradiction perspective and analyze from multilevel and multi-dimension.

b. Establish a relatively perfect theory frame, research all kinds of difference phenomena comprehensively and research through categorization. We should plan the whole research direction from an overall point of view.

c. Revise related language policies after sufficiently considering social effects. Every language has its established features and we should devote to eliminating negative language gender discrimination.

Rationally estimate girth and degree of language gender discrimination and difference avoiding overhastiness. Gender discrimination does exist, but it is not completely unforgivable. Much too racial pattern will cause an exactly opposite effect. Generally speaking, gender discrimination has regional and timeliness features. Discourse gender difference is comparative and different multitudes, time and regions are all influential factors.

## 3.3 The Research Meaning of Language Gender Difference

Language gender difference studies have been the focus of sociolinguistics. Language is the main method of human thinking and self-expression. Thus, linguistics has close relationship with other subjects. The gender language phenomenon is not only a linguistic matter, it also involves in lots of other fields like psychology, philosophy, social science, education and media. In terms of sociolinguistics, language gender difference studies have at least three contributions: first, it builds a gender pattern research paradigm based on linguistics analysis;

then, it indicates successfully correlative relationship between sex-based versus class-based differences and enrich the variation theory connotation; finally, using quantitative method to study gender language contributes to find its origin according to complicated linguistic phenomenon and improve the credibility and scientificity of linguistic studies. So, the gender language studies have great significance:

Firstly, the field of gender language studies expands linguistic studies which mean the connotation of language studies. People increasing realize that traditional language studies do not meet the social development. Different sexual discourse styles based on gender difference studies inject new strength and vitality to linguistic researches. Because of this, the research methods need involvements in many different fields.

Secondly, gender language studies keep pace with the direction of language research development and are also the objective requirement of the new century's Chinese rhetoric development. The rhetoric since 1990s not only has paid attention to the dynamic development but also combined static studies and made breakthroughs in colloquial and acceptance rhetoric. According to different purpose, sexual factors will directly affect the rhetoric methods and patterns. Based on this, studies of language and gender can go farther.

Thirdly, the development of western rhetoric enlightened and guided the development of Chinese rhetorics. At that time, feminism rhetoric comments make us understand more about the close relationship between the speaking right and patriarchal culture. French feminists believe that language can reflect the functionality of social power and it shows more in communication. So for improving speaking right, the most important is to change patriarchy. This is a new start and a challengeable task for gender language studies.

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## CONCLUSION

As is mentioned above, language is the product of objective world and in return to influence the inner world of people. Lots of social factors can be reflected from language and at the same time specify and limit

the contents of the language. They both make effect with each other. The gender difference phenomena in language reflect that the cultural psychology and social value orientation of language users are affected not only by social and environmental stress but also family culture and experience. The gender differences in language are not invariable. They are influenced by the age, education degree, occupation and status and change according to social development. So this study has crucial theoretical and practical significance. Also, it benefits not only the further comprehension of linguistic systematical rules but also the concrete linguistic studies.

With the development of education levels and the increase of social communication activities, language differences based on gender will decrease and the language similarities between males and females will increase. It will help to comprehend the similarities and differences of language use between males and females. It also contributes to communication and comprehension and makes people use it exactly in social life. At the same time, it will benefit the social culture studies and promote to predict the development trend of language and make policies. Besides, it has positive effect on the social spiritual civilization development.

Great philosopher and thinker Marx once said the society's civilization degrees are closely related to the degree of female liberation. In contemporary society, the attention of gender matters directly suggests the degree of social civilization and advancement. As an independent, brand-new and fringe subject, femaleology is built by mainly using humanistic view and tries to review human culture by writing female culture. And it offers an extensive field for studies of relationship between gender and language in linguistics. Concerning the relationship between language and gender coincide with the social development and pace of the time.

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