

LEADING TO LANGUAGE AND GENDER STUDY: WHY AND WHAT IS IT ALL ABOUT?

Willem Saragih

Fakultas Bahasa dan Seni
Universitas Negeri Medan

ABSTRACT

Language inquisitiveness seems to be unstoppable till today. Investigation into aspects keeps going around across time and space. In further development of language research after age-based language use studies, currently language enthusiasts', especially sociolinguists, are eager to find out language use according to gender such as how language is used by male and female. Whether or not men's language and women's language show broad differences in the way they do and say things has become another interesting thing to look into. More specifically, such research is aimed at finding whether there are certain features of female and male language expressions which show distinct characteristics due to the two kinds of gender. However, information about the framework as the basis for finding the language features of both genders is still inadequate to many. This paper will present information which is obtained from a number of sources to help language gender researchers carry out research on that current issue. Some pieces of information related to language gender discussion which covered are 1. A Brief Account of the Women's Liberation Movement and Its influence on Language and Gender study. 2 Language Use Equality . How Men and Women Use Language. What aspects of language use can be elaborated between Women and Men? Hopefully, these points will be of some help to anyone of us who is interested in the area of language study in the attempt to disclose distinctive features of language used by female and male.

Key words: *Language use, Language gender, distinctive features of language*

INTRODUCTION

As language is an integral part of human civilization without which societies cannot come into existence, a discussion about language is always interesting. There are always new things to talk about it. Not only are how to acquire or to teach a language and how to use it in an appropriate and accurate way for the ease and acceleration of acquisition that people are keen to know but also how language is used by its speakers based on age. For example, by children under five years of age, by people at puberty, by adult etc. In other words, language has been seen as something that must be connected to all life activities and environment of its users.

In its further development of investigation, currently even language enthusiasts', especially sociolinguists, are eager to find out language use according to gender such as how language is used by male and female. Such a study is aimed at finding whether there are certain features of female and male language expressions which show distinct characteristics due to the two kinds of gender. Do men and women show broad differences in the way they do and say things?

This article will discuss things that are related to the study of language and gender. Some factors – from women’s liberation movement due to injustice and unfairness of role in social, economical and political aspect of life in the United States many years ago, and the study of how women use language in comparison to men do today that make the issue interesting to disclose up to the exposure the typical features of women’s language based on experts’ work in the field will be the scope of discussion. What marks out women’s language, for example, will be presented. Hopefully, this article will contribute to those who are interested in language and gender study.

DISCUSSION

1. A Brief Account of the Women’s Liberation Movement and Its influence on Language and Gender study

The demand for equality of rights in all aspects of life regardless of gender by women seems to continue endlessly. In spite of the relatively successful movement and emancipation made by women in America many years ago, precisely started in 1792 and further, in 1966 they founded a group to support full equality for women in America in a truly equal partnership with men, (Women’s liberation Movement: <https://www.marxists.org/events/o.htm>) there is still a feeling of injustice among women. Obviously, the great strides in achieving political, social and economic rights have been fruitful not only to women in the United States but also to those in other parts of the world including in Indonesia today. As can be seen that women have been given good positions in many sectors of important executive, legislative as well as judicative institutions. To mention some, those who have ever held a top position in countries over the world are Megawaty Soekarno Putri (President of Indonesia, Benigno Aquino (President of The Philippines), Margareth Thatcher (Prime Minister of Great Britain), Indira Gandhi (Prime Minister of India). Recently, this female dominance is signaled by the appointment of Vassiliki Thanou as Prime Minister of Greece who is considered to have good capability to overcome the monetary crisis in the country. Indonesia also has elevated its reputation in the world wide due to the appointment of Sri Mulyani to hold a number one position in the World Bank. In private sectors also, women as leaders are not uncommon these days.

In other words, the American women’s emancipation movement, has also brought a positive impact on Indonesia. It is a fact that attention has been more greatly paid to gender matters from time to time. For example, since the era of Soeharto, up to this presently governing regime under the leadership of President Joko Widodo, Ministry of Women’s Empowerment has always been in the cabinet. More surprisingly, another expansive effect of the emancipation is the term ‘housewife’ which was the only one known in the past has already been emancipated with the presence of ‘househusband’ too, which implies that it is not only women who are supposed to be at home taking care of the families but also that responsibility can also go to men. The husband is to look after the children or family and the wife to become the breadwinner for the family. This is a very progressive emancipation and liberation for women, isn’t it? It is a true equality of status and role between men and women. If this condition is compared with the era of Siti Nurbaya or Raden Adjeng Kartini, all of us, especially female people should be unable to deny that the liberation of women today has been so fantastic or perhaps we can say excessive – overpowering men. It is undeniably a tremendous emancipation.

2. Language Use Equality

The fast and vast shift of women's role - from the era of colonization or feudalism to today's the era of democracy, has, in fact, resulted in more things to deal with in the world of women one of which is that dealing with language use. One main reason, most probably, is due to the reality that language plays such a big role in human's life. In spite of the successful demand for equality of rights as mentioned above, since the last few decades, the movement has also been going to language use in which women also claim to have been placed in inferiority level. That there are differences in language use between women and men is also unacceptable to the extreme women. To them it is a sort of inferiority. Interestingly, this idea has urged people, not only women but men as well, to do or to investigate language in relation to gender, especially in view of politeness domain.

In Japan, for instance, according a research finding as reported by Ide (2004: 180), women did use more polite honorific forms than men. Meanwhile, according to Longman dictionary of Applied Linguistics, honorifics is politeness formulas in a particular language which may be specific affixes, words, or sentence structures. Some languages which have a complex system of honorifics are Japanese, Maduranese and Hindi. Although English has no complex system of honorifics, expressions such as "Would you.... May I and polite address forms fulfill similar functions. (Neustupny, 1978). This statement, however, is still a controversy in the sense that it is not a matter of inferiority or superiority but just a matter of sexism. It is assumed that the tendency of using such honorific language by women is not due to gender difference per se but to the different roles in which women and men engage in their everyday lives. More likely, it is just a fact that women have their own way of using the language which is different from the way men use it.

Another gender- based issue that is raised is about the right to speak. In fact in some tribal groups like Bataknese, one of over 600 tribes in Indonesia, the role of speaking between male and female in formal situations such as cultural and ritual events of birth, wedding and death ceremonies is still dominated by male. In Bataknese traditions, spokespersons of both the groom and the bride sides, are never female. This speaking - role tradition was once affirmed by Professor Lince Sihombing, a Bataknese woman lecturer in Language and Gender while lecturing in her class. But her stance was not explicit enough - whether to support or to oppose that tradition. Furthermore, to spot more differences of role in that domain of life event, even the seats for men and women at the party site are never in the same row but the women are always seated behind the men's row. This cultural aspect of life may also be considered unfair by the extreme group of women. Therefore, more things about language are worth investigating further by linguists, sociolinguists in particular.

Nevertheless, to Bataknese group, this condition is normal because it has been practiced that way ever since. Probably, since this tribe came into existence. Consequently, when it is done otherwise, even women would make a protest. For example, if a woman became a spokesperson at a wedding event, everyone present would make a serious protest. An absolute rejection, not only by men, but by women present at that ceremony. It is a tradition that must not be broken but followed.

3. How Men and Women Use Language

In the context of language and gender study, one topic of interest to investigate is the features of language that are used as well as the levels of formality, the so called politeness levels. Are there any differences about these two aspects in use between women and men? For our information about the issue, some pieces of research-based information are forwarded in the part that follows.

To mention one who has reported information on that issue is a sociolinguist Japanese lady, named Sachiko Ide, who was educated in America where she had experienced a totally different role of women compared with that in her own country – Japan. In the urge for her to carry out her research, Ide (2004) was also inspired by Lakoff's work in *Language and Woman's Place [LWP]* which was first published in 1973 to think about language in relation to social reality. It was when she was there in the United States and she had read that book that she realized that the world was governed by men who were in the mainstream and that women were usually pushed into a marginal position (Ide, 2004 : 179). In other words, both the women's movement during her academic year of 1974 - 1975 in United States and the book had made her fully aware of the marginal position of women and had wanted to make Japanese women aware of that condition too with arguments. For that purpose, Ide (2004) wrote several articles such as "Women's liberation and the Study of Women's Language" (1975) and "Language and women's Consciousness in the Contemporary States (1976). Upon her return to Japan, she tried to liberate her female students but she failed to do so. Ide added that her students in Japan did not feel that they were oppressed or marginalized; instead, they were content as they were. Also she asserted that even if they did elevate men and chose to put themselves in subordinate positions, they enjoyed relationships in which women and men took different roles. In an outright way they refused to buy Ide's newly imported ideas on language and women's place.

However, she did not give up. On the contrary, she tried to explore the reasons behind her failure from 1980s to 1990s. She conducted a research on the use of women's language in Japan which focused on the use of honorifics, linguistic devices that mark varying levels of politeness. The research question posed in the project was *how and why women speak more politely than men*.

Then, In her further investigation she found that gender was not the only factor that causes people to use more polite language but also the common type of interaction of the female speakers, be it a social interaction for the women who are just housewives whose roles primarily involved in social interaction and workplace interaction for those who work. Also, it was discovered that the use of more polite honorifics was not due to subordinate position in the society. Based on those findings it was then predicted that women's language would change as women began to work outside the home. Another interesting finding was the fact that even in the workplace women still use more polite forms as an index of femaleness in social interaction. This could be the reason why Ide failed to liberate the female people as she wished in Japan at that time.

It is generally believed that women of lower status use more polite forms to superiors in order to acknowledge the difference in status. Yet, it was found that women with higher positions in the workplace use more polite expressions than those with lower positions. These executives use more polite expressions as a tool or even a weapon to express a dignified demeanor in keeping with their status, not to show deference or respect to those they address. This implies that linguistic forms can function to signify elegance or dignity.

Meanwhile, upon seeing language use in relation to gender, George Keith and John Shuttleworth cited in their book "The Living Language" p.222

(www.universalteacher.org.uk/lang/get) stated that women talk more than men, talk too much, are more polite, are indecisive, complain and nag, ask more questions, support each other, are more cooperative, whereas, men swear more, don't talk about emotions, talk about sport more, talk about women and machines in the same way, insult each other frequently, are competitive in conversation, dominate conversation, speak with more authority, give more comments, interrupt more.

In line with Keith and Shuttleworth, Cameron (2007) affirms that what differs fundamentally between women and men in the way they use language to communicate is simply the proposition (expression) that they use. She added that all versions that have been forwarded by researchers and enthusiasts in the topic share this premise. The following are some claims of language features used by men and women according to Cameron:

1. Language and communication matter more to women than to men; women talk more than men.
2. Women are more verbally skilled than men.
3. Men's goals in using language tend to be about getting things done, whereas women's tend to be about making connections to other people. Men talk more about things and facts, whereas women talk more about people, relationships and feelings.
4. Men's way of using language is competitive, reflecting their general interest in acquiring and maintaining status; women's use of language is cooperative, reflecting their preference for equality and harmony.
5. These differences routinely lead to "miscommunication" between the sexes, with each sex misinterpreting the other's intentions. This causes problems in contexts where men and women regularly interact, and especially in heterosexual relationships.

4. What aspects of language use can be elaborated between Women and Men?

In order to come to the right track of looking into language and gender study, a well-known reference should go to Lakoff (1973)'s work on the issue. Robin Tolmach Lakoff has been a great reference to many researchers when dealing with language and gender issues. Some of those are Catherine Evans Davies (2004) in her work "Women's Language", Sachiko Ide (2004) in her work "Exploring Women's Language in Japanese", and Deborah Cameron (2004) in her work "What Language barrier?". Lakoff asserted that language can be insightfully analyzed in relation to social reality. Lakoff (1973) as cited in Ide (2004: 185) argues that there are linguistic imbalances between women and men. In fact, Lakoff's finding has been used as the basis for language analysis based on gender that there are ten characteristics of women's language, (specified to upper class women), namely:

1. **Hedges:** Phrases like "sort of", "kind of", "it seems like"
2. **Empty adjectives:** "divine", "adorable", "gorgeous"
3. **Super-polite forms:** "Would you mind..." "...if it's not too much to ask" "Is it o.k if...?"
4. **Apologize more:** "I'm sorry, but I think that..."
5. **Speak less frequently**
6. **Avoid coarse language or expletives**
7. **Tag questions:** "You don't mind eating this, do you?"
8. **Hyper-correct grammar and pronunciation:** Use of prestige grammar and clear articulation (consistent grammar, for example, the use the subject- verb agreement for present tense, plural markers, etc).
9. **Indirect requests:** "Wow, I'm so thirsty." – really asking for a drink
10. **Speak in italics:** Use tone to emphasize certain words, e.g., "so", "very", "quite"

One of those who have applied the Lakoff's theory in their analysis was Davies (2004). She applied the theory of upper social class women's language characteristics in analyzing a female TV presenter, that was Martha Stewart's linguistic presentation of SELF on her television show (Selling Kitchen Tool). According to Davies (2004) women's language characteristics as featured by Lakoff are exactly found in her subject's language presentation as partly elaborated in the following:

1. Women have a large stock of words related to their specific interests;
2. The use of hedges (evasive or not direct) of various kinds;
 e.g, You could add a little bit of fresh lemon if you like but I would prefer just letting it cook like this and then add the lemon juice if you like the taste of lemon right before you are gonna drink it. This shows that women are not allowed to express power directly through language. The hedges are here in the form of conditional clauses and are oriented to politeness considerations as part of deferential involvement. Such usage can be seen as clever marketing that avoids the potentially overbearing imperative mood.
3. Hypercorrect grammar (Similar to that categorized by Lakoff);
4. Superpolite forms;
 E.g:
 Martha Stewart: Sebastian, thank you very much for the perfect cup of perfect green tea.
 Sebastian : You 're welcome. Thank you.
 Martha Stewart: Thank you very much.
5. Women don't tell jokes;
 In the data Davies has collected, she has found only one instance of joking that she initiated as shown in the dialogue between Martha and her employee below:
 MS : Now if you like to make French fries, this is the tool to have too because
 SS : yeah
 MS : You can make shoestring French fries you can make waffle French fries, you can do everything.
 SS : Ok.
 MS : with a mandolin; *we sound like an advertisement on television.*
 SS : Ah . hahahahaha. We do. It slices, it dices
 MS : huhuhuh. And it does all tha. It's true but it really is a great helper in the kitchen.
6. Women speak in italics (Similar to that categorized by Lakoff),.'
7. The use of intensive "so"
8. "Empty" adjectives like *divine, charming, cute*;
9. Women have at their disposal a wider range of intonation patterns than do men.
10. Question intonation where we might expect declaratives.
 E.g. So Ralph's been going around my property and feeding the trees with this fabulous food and it is all organic, right?

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

1. Conclusion

The study of language seems to be unstoppable and never ending. It will continue to be objects of investigation as long as life exists in the world. As a central and integral part of human's survival there are always new things to discover about language in its relation to human. One basic reason to be so is the fact language has been seen as something that must be connected to all life activities and environment of its users.

How language is used by women and men, for example, still remains an unfinished and challenging aspect to scrutinize for language enthusiasts and linguists, particularly sociolinguists so as to make language describable based on gender. This is necessarily done in response to language and gender elaboration.

2. Suggestion

A lot of researches dealing with language and gender conducted, some of which are those by Catherine Evans Davies (2004) in her work "Women's Language", Sachiko Ide (2004) in her work "Exploring Women's Language in Japanese", and Deborah Cameron (2004) in her work "What Language barrier?" as mentioned in the above passage. Since they also applied Lakoff's theory or procedure of analysis in their researches, and their findings sound to have confirmed the validity and the power of the theory, and they have not introduced any new one, it is properly suggested that Lakoff's theory be also applied in further analysis of language in the attempt to uncover language characteristics of men and women. More emphatically, Cameron (2007) even asserts that Lakoff's work *Language and Woman's Place* introduces to the field of sociolinguistics many ideas about women's language that are now often commonplace. It has inspired many different strategies for studying language and gender, across national borders as well as across class and race lines. This implies that the theory also applies to language and gender study in Indonesia. Also, her work is noted for its attention to class, power, and social justice in addition to gender. One thing that is important to note down in conducting a similar research is that the people chosen as the subjects of the research to carry out need to be considered in terms of their socio-economic class. It is said so because the women that were used by Lakoff in her research were from the upper – class group.

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