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THINK PRACTICALLY AND LOOK LOCALLY:
LANGUAGE AND GENDER AS COMMUNITY-BASED PRACTICE

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I. INTRODUCTION

How do gender and language interact? For the past twenty years or so, linguists, anthropologists, psychologists, sociologists, and feminist thinkers have explored many different aspects of this question. There are now dozens of books and hundreds of course offerings on gender and language (14,20,41,60,67,92,98,99), specialized articles are found in many journals and collections (15,21,59,78,87,90,109,110,115), and review articles continue to appear (8,32,47,74,76,89). Topics treated include sexist and heterosexist and racist language, interruptions, graffiti and street remarks, names and forms of address, politeness, tag questions, directives, motherese, children's talk during play, schoolroom discourse, bilingualism and language contact, metaphors, shifts in word meanings, the language of science and religion and war, silence and volubility, intonation, emotional expressiveness, religious and political rhetoric, sociolinguistic variation and language change. This list is far from comprehensive but its scatter suggests an absence of theoretical coherence in language and gender studies.

Partial integration of the range of linguistic phenomena that seem sensitive to gender is sometimes attempted by trying to explain them all in terms of a quite general feature of gender identities or relations. The most influential frameworks in which this has been attempted can be thought of as emphasizing either gender difference or (men's) dominance. Thorne and Henley (108) highlighted these two modes of explanation in their early anthology title, Language and Sex: Difference and Dominance, although they were ahead of their time in proposing that difference and dominance would probably both enter into explaining gender-language interactions. We have organized much of our discussion around difference on the one hand (especially as a component of gender identities), and power on the other (especially male dominance as a component of gender relations). However, we have tried to shift attention from the two as opposed, to the processes

through which each feeds the other to produce the concrete complexities of language as used by real people engaged in social practice. In Section II, we discuss ideas about separation of the sexes (producing distinctive female and male communicative cultures) and about sex as a determinant of social address and resulting orientation toward linguistic variation and change. In Section III, we look at accounts of male power in language and the subordination of women at personal and at institutional levels, we briefly consider other kinds of hierarchical relations such as those across class and racial boundaries, and we examine larger issues about language and power. But in both Sections II and III, we also try to point to some of the ways that gender difference helps create hierarchical and other kinds of gender relations, and that those power relations in turn help construct "women", "men", and their language. In other words, it is not only that difference and dominance are both involved in gender, but as they are jointly constructed, they also prove ultimately inseparable. These constructions are different at different times and places, and the constructors are people, not faceless 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 both gender and language.

Our major aim is to encourage a view of the interaction of gender and language that roots each in the everyday social practices of particular local communities and sees them as jointly constructed in those practices. Thus we will use our critical reviews of others' research primarily to hang flesh on the bones of a community-based practice orientation, within which we propose to think about language, about gender, and about their interaction as living social practices in local communities. To think practically and look locally is to abandon several assumptions common in gender and language studies: that gender can be isolated from other aspects of social identity and relations, that it "means" the same across communities, and that the linguistic manifestations of that meaning are also the same across communities.

Becoming language-users and becoming gendered members of local communities both involve participating with other members in a variety of practices that often constitute linguistic, gender, and other social identities at one and the same time: reciting jump rope rhymes, playing (or not playing) the question-answer game at school, volunteering advice to a troubled friend, telling dirty jokes as preadolescents, telling (or trying to tell) a trusted older man not to touch you "like that," giving and receiving compliments, consulting with siblings and doctors about an aged parent. It is in the course of engaging with others in such activity that people collaboratively construct a sense of themselves and of others as certain kinds of persons, as members of various communities with various forms of membership and privilege in those communities.

In all of these, language interacts with other symbolic systems - dress, body adornment, ways of moving, gaze, touch, handwriting style, locales for hanging out, and so on. And the selves constructed are not simply (or even primarily) gendered selves: they are unemployed, Asian-American, lesbian, college-educated, post-menopausal selves in a variety of relations to other people. Language is never encountered without other symbol systems, and gender is always joined with real people's complex forms of participation in the communities to which they belong (or have belonged or expect to join). Individuals may experience the language-gender interface differently in the different communities in which they participate at a given time or at different stages of their lives. Using "Mrs. Jones" may be important for avoiding the condescension of "Mary" when a professionally employed woman addresses the woman who cleans her house; for that professional woman, address as "Mrs. Smith" (particularly from her colleagues) may seem to emphasize her subordination to a husband and to deny her individual identity as Joan Doe, who simply happens to be married to John Smith. On the other hand, acquiring a new name of "Mrs. John Smith" upon marriage may have functioned thirty years ago for the young Joan Doe as a mark of her achieving fully adult status as a married woman. And the woman who receives "Mary" with a tolerant

smile from the six-year-old daughter of her employer may insist in her local residential community on "Mrs. Jones" from her own daughter's friends.

Precisely how language and gender interact with other symbolic and social phenomena and with one another depends on the particular configurations of practices and forms of membership that constitute a particular community at a particular time. The language-gender interaction depends as well on the practices and overlapping memberships from which relations among different communities are constructed. How the community is defined in any study of language and gender, therefore, is of prime importance. Sociolinguists have located linguistic systems, norms, and social identities within a loosely defined construct, the "speech community." Although in theory, sociolinguists embrace Gumperz' (42) definition of a speech community as a group of speakers who share rules and norms for the use of language, in practice community studies have defined their populations on the basis of location and/or population. Differences and relations among the speakers who people the sociolinguists' speech communities have been defined in terms of abstracted characteristics - sex, age, socioeconomic class, ethnicity. And differences in ways of speaking have been interpreted on the basis of speculative hypotheses about the relation between these characteristics and social practice. Sociolinguistic analysis, then, attempts to reconstruct the practice from which these characteristics - and the linguistic behavior in question - have been abstracted. While participation in community practice sometimes figures more directly into classification of speakers, sociolinguists still seldom recognize explicitly the crucial role of practice in delineating speech communities and more generally in mediating the relation between language and society.

To explore in some detail just how social practice and individual "place" in the community connect to one another, sociolinguists need some conception of a community that articulates place with practice. For this reason, we adopt Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger's notion of the

"community of practice" (69). A community of practice is an aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement in some common endeavor. Ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs, values, power relations - in short, practices - emerge in the course of their joint activity around that endeavor. A community of practice is different as a social construct from the traditional notion of community, primarily because it is defined simultaneously by its membership and by the practice in which that membership engages. (This does not mean that communities of practice are necessarily egalitarian or consensual - simply that their membership and practices grow out of mutual engagement.) A focus on language and gender as practice within such communities can help, we think, give deeper understanding of how gender and language might interact and how those interactions might matter.

A community of practice might be a nuclear family, people working together in a factory, a basketball team, a neighborhood play group. Communities may be large or small, intensive or diffuse; they are born and they die, they may persist through many changes of membership, and they may be closely articulated with other communities. Individual identity is based in a multiplicity of memberships in different communities of practice - in the range of endeavors and practices that emerge from them, in the range of forms of participation that the individual enjoys in each community, and in the ways in which the individual comes to articulate these multiple memberships. And while this identity is experienced as persistent, it changes constantly: we continue to adopt new ways of talking and discard some old ways, to adopt new ways of being women and men, gays and lesbians and heterosexuals, even changing our ways of being feminists or being lovers or being mothers or being sisters. And there are many more unnamed ways of thinking, being, relating, and doing that we adopt and adapt as we participate in the various communities of practice to which we belong.

The relation between abstract linguistic systems and language as a social institution and arena of concrete human activity is extraordinarily complex, and relatively unexamined by either linguists or anthropologists. Many linguists simply ignore language as social practice, sometimes seeming to assume that it is really just a matter of a social contract in a community to "use" some particular system or family of systems. The systems themselves are seen as "belonging to" individuals, as cognitive constructs whose social (and instrumental) character is somewhat accidental. On the other hand, the linguists who do take function as central often treat formal matters quite superficially. And although anthropologists and social theorists recognize the social character of language and its general importance in thought and action, they tend to ignore questions about the detailed mechanisms through which language works and, in particular, the possible connections between various features of linguistic systems and the social and cultural significance of language. Our larger goal, which can only be hinted at in this paper, is to promote more productive interaction between linguistic and anthropological and sociological theorizing and research.

II. DIFFERENCE: GENDER IDENTITIES

In thinking about gender, many start by looking at sex differences. We will discuss two strands of sociolinguistic research that have emphasized differences among speakers. One strand starts with a view of gender differences as arising in female and male subcultures, each of which is characterized by genderized values and modes of interaction. These studies focus on an array of discourse phenomena as implementations of those values and interactional modes, analyzing cross-sex communicative problems as stemming from gender/cultural differences in norms of appropriate discourse. Language is of interest simply as part of communicative interaction: the larger inquiry is sociocultural and so language is considered together with such nonverbal phenomena as gaze direction, posture, and the like.

The other strand offers more extensive research from a wider range of research projects. It offers, however, no fully articulated conception of gender and focuses on linguistic phenomena at a more structural level: sex is seen as just one of several attributes determining social address or "place" in a community (theoretically on a par with class, race, age) and a distinctive relation to linguistic variation (e.g., pronunciation patterns or orientation toward standard grammar). Gender is of interest just because sex seems in many instances to correlate significantly with linguistic variation, often interacting with class and other components of social address: the starting point is linguistic variation within a population, and its relation to social address and to structural linguistic change.

A. Sex as the Basis of Separate (but Equal) Subcultures

As we shall see in section III, many have argued that differences in women's and men's relation to language, both in systemic matters such as how vowels are pronounced and in the dynamics of conversational interaction, are produced by and themselves help reproduce male power. But at least some analysts have thought of individual cross-sex interactions as plagued by misunderstandings that could not be adequately explained in terms of the man's control or the woman's submission, but seemed rather to reflect prevalent gender differences in preferred communicative styles and interactional strategies.

Gumperz and colleagues (43) have explained certain problematic interactions and social tension in encounters between members of different social groups as arising from unrecognized differences in the communication patterns that those social groups favor. Originally applied to different ethnic, national and regional groups, this model was extended to tensions between women and men by Maltz and Borker (70), who proposed that norms of friendly peer conversation are learned mainly in single-sex preadolescent peer groups, and that these norms are radically different for females and males, yet essentially the same for each sex across many different local communities. Adult

women and men, then, may unwittingly bring different norms to their interactions, each assuming that the other is flouting established norms rather than adhering to a different but equally valid set. Or to put it differently: she assumes he means what she would mean by making (or not making) a particular conversational move, whereas his intended import is often rather different. Similarly, he too misjudges her contributions to their exchange. The intended analogue is the young American woman responding with indignation to the British hotel clerk's "shall I knock you up in the morning," hearing a sexual proposition where wake-up service is being offered. Although this model does not account for why boys and girls develop different cultures along the same lines in distinct local communities, there is an implication that gender practices in the wider society (e.g., the U.S.) are the key.

Tannen (105) elaborates the Maltz-Borker picture, expanding considerably on the cultural models of male and female conversational practice. Although the general two-culture model does not in itself dictate a particular "essentialist" conception of how female interactional norms might differ from males, the model has in fact been coupled with a specific view of "women's" and "men's" ways of thinking and behaving now enjoying considerable popularity (5,35). The claim is that women emphasize connection with others, avoiding overt confrontations and direct disagreement, seeking empathy and understanding rather than guidance from their conversational partners, offering intimacy, suggesting or asking rather than directing or telling, preferring the tête-à-tête to talk in larger groups. In the same way, boys continue boyish patterns of self-assertion into manhood, competing with one another to establish their individual claims to hierarchical status, preferring instruction rather than tea or sympathy, displaying their own ideas and claims for others to confirm but also engaging with relish in defending them against expected attacks of the sort they themselves frequently launch, seeking large audiences and avoiding showing themselves as vulnerable. Neither male nor female is culpable for misunderstandings and disappointments in cross-sex

interaction, since each is simply continuing in tracks established in the innocence of childhood. Where much work on language and gender ignores male behavior by treating it as a neutral norm from which women deviate, this work has the great merit of trying to account for men's behavior as well as for women's. It also has the merit of recognizing that women are not defined simply in terms of their relation to men and that women may actively espouse values and pursue goals not set for them by men. The stereotypes are familiar but they paint a much more positive view of the "female" subculture and sometimes a less flattering view of the "male" than may have been traditional.

What has seemed to many the most interesting consequence of the dual culture model - namely, that cross-sex communicative problems derive from inadequate knowledge of interactional norms in the "other" culture - seems difficult to maintain if we reject the view of people as simply passive sponges soaking up the gender identities with which they come in contact in their own subcultures. We do not want to deny the possibility that sex-separation in childhood may sometimes, perhaps often, contribute to genderizing adult interests, strategies, and social values. And this genderization may sometimes go unnoticed and ignorance of it may indeed cause some misunderstandings. But the emphasis on separation and resulting ignorance misses people's active engagement in the reproduction of and resistance to gender arrangements in their communities. For example, indirect requests are a familiar interactional resource in many communities of practice. Every English speaker knows that interrogatives such as "do you think you can finish this by tomorrow?" can function as polite requests or sugar-coated commands, as well as genuine information-seeking questions. The apparent misinterpretation of requests masquerading as questions is also available as a strategy of resistance - the child's "not really, mom" in response to "would you like to set the table?" tries to read mom's directive literally, thus forcing her to display openly her actual coercive authority. Or a man can impute an indirect meaning to a woman through actively exploiting his "understanding" of the female

style as different from his in its indirectness. When he reads her "no" as "yes," it is not because he learned in his subculture to encourage and welcome sexual advances by feigning rejection of the advancer - and thus assumes she is doing the same. Rather, he tells himself that such coyness is part of "femininity," a mode of being he views as very different from his own. The dual culture approach posits the speakers' mistaken belief in shared norms and symbols: gender relations in many actual communities of practice familiar to us, however, often are founded on (possibly mistaken) presuppositions not of sameness but of difference ("woman - the eternal mystery"). By taking separation as given, the place of this separation in the practice of the wider community gets ignored. In fact, both real differences and the belief in differences serve as interactional resources in the reproduction of gender arrangements, of oppression and of more positive liaisons.

The most common criticism of the dual culture model is that it ignores power (41,48,97). Where interpretations are disputed, whose cultural norms prevail? Dominance relations between cultures have indeed received little attention in Gumperz-style analyses of communicative conflict. But the dual culture theory can certainly accommodate power asymmetries - the theory might well predict that those in the subordinated culture would be more likely to "understand" the interactive dialect of their oppressors than vice versa, on the direct analogy to the position of those who speak stigmatized vernaculars or minority languages (Black English Vernacular or Spanish in New York City, for example). But the appeal of the theory is that it minimizes blame for cross-cultural tensions for both the dominating and the oppressed group: there is no more agency (and hence no more responsibility) in becoming an interrupter rather than a "good listener" than in becoming a speaker of Quechua rather than of English. But how then can people use differences and beliefs about them strategically in constructing their social relations? That they do so in constructing gender relations seems apparent from even casual observation of social practice: careful examination of unsatisfactory

social relations in cases where cultural separation is more pervasive (e.g., different racial groups) may well also show uses of difference (or beliefs about it) in constructing dominance and other relations. The dual culture theorists are right in insisting on the importance of interactional devices in gender relations, but their "no-fault" analysis makes it virtually impossible to see how gender differences in interactional strategies are constructed and how interactional strategies (more precisely, strategists) construct gender relations from a repertoire of similarities and differences and ideas about them.

B. Sex as Social Address

Sociolinguists working in the quantitative paradigm pioneered by Labov have found significant correlations within geographic communities between linguistic variables and speakers' demographic characteristics - socioeconomic class, race, age, and sex (65,114). The most striking findings have been for phonological variation. Variationists have been able to give quite detailed empirical content to a picture of sound change that accounts for the spread of patterned sound shifts through and between communities. Quantitative methods show clearly that prestige variants and "standard" dialects associated with those at the top of the socioeconomic hierarchy in a community are normative targets at which speakers from all groups aim in their more formal speech. At the same time, however, regular, systematic change typically moves up the socioeconomic hierarchy. As we noted earlier, people to a considerable extent acquire and regulate their linguistic repertoire through contact with language used by those with whom they speak regularly. Thus the partial separation between classes, racial groups, and generations - the relatively low contact across these social boundaries - seems to provide much the same kind of explanation of the fortunes of linguistic change as more purely physical divisions like rivers or political divisions like national borders. Social addresses are not, however, all equal. In a sense, gender becomes an issue for variationists precisely because sex differences in variation emerge even in communities for which it seems obvious that people of

different sexes are not systematically separated in the ways that people from different socioeconomic or racial backgrounds might be. Some such differences can be explained as a matter of different kinds of contact outside the home community that might significantly affect exposure to standard dialects or to vernacular varieties not heard in the home. (9,62). But most gender differences in variation can not be explained in this way. This has led sociolinguists to think about gender identity: if it isn't separation that differentiates the sexes in their linguistic behavior, then it must be some aspect of the distinctive content of their gendered personalities or social positions. And the differences in gender identity that have been posited matter for variation because of how that variation enters into social practice in the community.

Variation studies have used correlations as the primary method for determining the role of linguistic variables in social practice. Sociolinguistic variables are seen first and foremost as passive "markers" of the speaker's place in the social grid (particularly in the socioeconomic hierarchy). Correlation of a linguistic variable (or a certain level of frequency of its use) with a demographic category gives a rudimentary social meaning to that variable within the community - what the variable "means" is membership in the demographic group with which its use is correlated. Speakers are seen as making strategic use of sociolinguistic markers in order to affirm membership in their own social group, or to claim membership in other groups to which they aspire. Working class speakers are said to use local vernacular variables to lay claim to the local goods and services that are the purview of authentically local people (64), and the hypercorrect patterns in the formal speech of the lower middle class are interpreted as their laying claim to membership in the middle class (66). Variables that women use more than men throughout different strata of a community have been interpreted as signalling female identity in that community (49), and men whose use of those variables is noticeably low have been interpreted as signalling their male identity by avoiding female markers (45,62). In all these cases, identity, interpreted in

terms of place in the social grid, is seen as given, and manipulation of the linguistic repertoire is seen as making claims about these given identities.

Explanation in variation, however, is not entirely dependent on the notion of markers. The fact that the middle class is more resistant to phonological change than the working class has been attributed to the nature of class-based participation in the marketplace (93), and class differences in variation have been attributed to class-based differences in social network structure (80). A variety of patterns of variation have been associated with social network and local orientation (63,66,106), and Nichols (81) found linguistic behavior among women differentiated by whether or not they had access to the marketplace; the different forms of women's and men's participation in the marketplace accounted for differences across gender boundaries (teaching school requires more standard language use than construction work, for example). And Milroy (80) has found complex relations between linguistic differences among women and market-related differences in their social network structure (whether, for example, co-workers are also neighbors or kin).

But although explanation is becoming more sophisticated in the study of variation as ethnographic studies provide more richly textured data and analyses, explanation of sex patterns in variation still needs much more detailed articulation of the relation between variation and social practice in general and a much subtler and more nuanced picture of gender in particular. Variationists are clearly looking for practice-based explanations of sex correlations, but finding them will require a significant leap from the correlational and class-based mode of explanation that has been used so far. Explanations that appeal to practice have typically tried to infer psychological dynamics from correlations rather than from observations of actual gender dynamics in the communities from which the correlations have been extracted. Speakers who use patterns of language that are the normal markers of (i.e., statistically associated with) those in the next higher social

stratum are characterized as upwardly mobile, prestige oriented, and/or insecure. These characterizations have been regularly attributed to women, even when their linguistic behavior is not uniformly more conservative than that of men. There is a certain circularity in the correlational interpretation of linguistic variables - a number of correlations have emerged in which women make greater use than men of historically conservative variants. These variants have been interpreted as prestige markers, and women's greater use of them has been said to reflect status consciousness or prestige orientation. But no independent evidence is offered that the patterns in question have (only) the social meaning analysts have assigned on a correlational basis. There is no detailed examination of just how they figure in the social practice of the women and men using them. When other correlations have emerged in which women have made greater use of historically innovative variants than men, then these innovative variants have been interpreted as prestige markers, maintaining the characterization of women as prestige oriented (62,113). What is at issue is not whether women in a particular community are or are not upwardly mobile or status-conscious. Our methodological point is rather that social meanings of linguistic variables cannot be ascertained just on the basis of the social address of those who use them most frequently. Nor is there any reason to think that linguistic variables are unambiguous in their meaning (13). A variable acquires meaning and often multiple meanings through the uses made of it in communities of practice. In this respect it is like other informationally richer symbols (cp. the discussion of indirect requests above, p. 00, and of tag questions and rising intonations on declaratives below, p. 00).

C. A community-based practice view of difference

Many of the studies cited above have found some tendencies toward gender-differentiated practice with implications for language. Statements like "women emphasize connection in their talk whereas men seek status" may have some statistical support within a particular

community. But such generalizations are seldom read as simple reports of statistics. "Most" American women are under 5 feet 9 inches tall and "most" American men are over 5 feet 6 inches tall, but it would sound odd indeed to report these statistical facts by saying "women are under 5 feet 9 inches tall" or "men are over 5 feet 6 inches tall" without some explicit indicator of generalization like "most" or "in general". Although unmodified claims about "women" and "men" do allow for exceptions, such claims often seem to imply that individuals who don't satisfy the generalization are indeed exceptional "as women" or "as men", deviants from some "normative" model (perhaps deviants to admire but nonetheless outsiders in some sense). This is especially true when women and men are being characterized as "different" from one another on some particular dimension. But if gender resides in difference, what is the status of the tremendous variability we see in actual behavior within sex categories? Is this variability just noise in a basically dichotomous gender system? Or are differences among men and among women also important aspects of gender? Tomboys and goody-goodies, homemakers and career women, body builders and fashion models, secretaries and executives, basketball coaches and French teachers, professors and students, mothers and daughters - these are all categories of girls and women whose mutual differences are part of their construction of themselves and each other as gendered beings. When femaleness and maleness are differentiated from one another in terms of such attributes as power, ambition, physical coordination, rebelliousness, caring, or docility, the role of these attributes in creating and texturing important differences among very female identities and very male identities becomes invisible.

The point here is not that statistical generalizations about the females and the males in a particular community are automatically suspect. But to stop with such generalizations or to see finding such "differences" as the major goal of investigations of gender and language is problematic. Correlations simply point us toward areas where further investigation might shed light on the linguistic and other practices that enter into gender dynamics in a community. An emphasis on difference

as constitutive of gender draws attention away from a more serious investigation of the relations among language, gender, and other components of social identity. Gender can be thought of as a sex-based way of experiencing other social attributes like class, ethnicity, or age (and also less obviously social qualities like ambition, athleticism, musicality, and the like). To examine gender independently as if it were just "added on" to such other aspects of identity is to miss its significance and force. Certainly to interpret broad sex patterns in language use without considering other aspects of social identity and relations is to paint with one eye closed. Speakers are not assembled out of separate independent modules: part European American, part female, part middle-aged, part feminist, part intellectual.

Abstracting gender away from other aspects of social identity also leads to premature generalization even about "normative" conceptions of femaleness and maleness. While neither of the two strands of research discussed above is theoretically committed to a "universalizing" conception of women or of men, research in both has tended to take gender identity as given at least in broad strokes at a relatively global level. Although many of the most audible voices in both the dual-culture and the social address traditions have indicated clearly that the particular content of gender identities is variable cross-culturally, they have nonetheless spoken of "women" and of "men" in ways that underplay not only cross-cultural differences but also the variability within each gender class for a given culture, much of which is highly structured socially. The strong temptation (one we have sometimes succumbed to ourselves) is to see theorizing as yielding accounts of gender difference that apply globally to women and men.

The portrayal of women as self-effacing, indirect, and particularly concerned with connection is based on beliefs about the American white middle class in which the research has been located. Drawing on contrasts with Samoa, Ochs (85) suggests that this "mainstream" American stereotype of women's speech owes much to child-centered mothering practices. Tannen's own research on a direct New York

Jewish woman and an indirect Greek-American man (102) seems at odds with a simple relation between gender and indirection, and African American women have also protested the unwarranted implication that directness is at odds with universal norms of womanhood (81). One could still maintain that women are less direct than men in each of these more local communities, but research in Madagascar on women as direct and men as indirect (56) seems blatantly at odds with even that more cautious claim. Lakoff (68) proposes that the real generalization is that women's patterns, whatever they may be, will be denigrated. However, this is not a generalization about linguistic behavior but about evaluation. And even evaluation is undoubtedly far less homogeneous than Lakoff seems to think: e.g., women themselves may well reject attempts to denigrate their speech. There may be statistically significant correlations between sex and preferred interactional styles and norms that hold across different communities of practice, related to one another via their orientation to common structures and institutions (e.g., to a national state, mass media, educational systems). There may even be some that would hold globally, though only a wide range of detailed local studies could establish them. But such facts would not show gender isolable from other dimensions of social life, as having some "essence" to be abstracted from the varied sociohistorical circumstances in which people become "women" and "men".

Rather than try to abstract gender from social practice, we need to focus on gender in its full complexity: how gender is constructed in social practice, and how this construction intertwines with that of other components of identity and difference, and of language. This requires studying how people negotiate meanings in specific communities of practice and in the articulations they make among the different communities of practice to which they belong.

What, then, is the relation between gender differences and communities of practice? People's access and exposure to, need for, and interest in, different communities of practice are related to such

things as their class, age, ethnicity as well as sex. Working class people are more likely on the whole than middle class people to be members of unions, bowling teams, close-knit neighborhoods. Upper middle class people, on the other hand, are more likely than working class people to be members of tennis clubs, orchestras, professional organizations. Men are more likely than women to be members of football teams, armies and boards of directors. Women, on the other hand, are more likely to be members of secretarial pools, aerobics classes, and consciousness raising groups. These aspects of membership combine in complex ways. For example, associated with differences in age, class and ethnicity are differences in the extent to which the sexes belong to different communities of practice. And different people - for a variety of reasons - will articulate their multiple memberships differently. A female executive living in a male dominated household will have difficulty articulating her membership in her domestic and professional communities of practice, unlike a male executive "head of household." A lesbian lawyer "closeted" within the legal community may also belong to a "women's" community whose membership defines itself in opposition to the larger heterosexual world. And the woman who scrubs toilets in the household "managed" for a husband by the female executive and also in that of the lesbian lawyer and her artist lover may be a respected lay leader in her local church, facing a different set of tensions than either of her employers does in negotiating multiple memberships.

Gender is also reproduced in differential forms of participation in particular communities of practice. Women tend to be subordinate to men in the workplace, women in the military do not engage in combat, and in the academy, most theoretical disciplines are overwhelmingly male with women concentrated in descriptive and applied work that "supports" theorizing. Women and men may also have very different forms of participation available to them in single-sex communities of practice. For example, if all-women's groups do in fact tend to be more egalitarian than all-men's groups, as some current literature claims, then women's and men's forms of participation will be quite different.

Such relations within same-sex groups will, of course, be related in turn to the place of such groups in the larger society. Only recently, for example, have female competitive sports begun to receive significant recognition, and male sports continue to bring far greater visibility, power and authority both to the teams and to the individual participants in those teams. This articulation with power outside the team in turn translates into different possibilities for relations within. Further, the relations among communities of practice when they come together in overarching communities of practice also reproduce gender arrangements: for example, the relation between male varsity sports teams and cheerleading squads illustrates a more general pattern of men's organizations and women's auxiliaries. Umbrella communities of this kind do not offer neutral membership status. And when several families get together for a meal and the women team up to do the serving and cleaning up while the men watch football, gender differentiation (including differentiation in language use) is being reproduced on an institutional level.

The individual's development of gender identity within a community of practice (e.g., the Philadelphia neighborhood of working class African American families Goodwin (38,39) describes) is inseparable from the continual construction of gender within that community of practice, and from the ongoing construction of class, race, and local identities. And it cannot be isolated from that same individual's participation and construction of gender identity in other communities of practice (e.g., her "scholastic-track" class in an integrated school outside the neighborhood). Speakers develop linguistic patterns as they engage in activity in the various communities in which they participate. Sociolinguists have tended to see this process as one of acquisition of something relatively "fixed" - like social identity, the symbolic value of a linguistic form is taken as given, and the speaker simply learns it and uses it either mechanically or strategically. But in actual practice, social meaning, social identity, community membership, and the symbolic value of linguistic form are being constantly and mutually constructed. (Indeed the variationists' circular construction of the

social meaning of variables can be seen as part of this process.) And the relation between gender and language resides in the modes of participation available to various individuals within various communities of practice as a direct or indirect function of gender. These modes of participation determine not only the development of particular strategies of performance and interpretation, but more generally access to meaning and to meaning making rights.

Differences are not only a positive social resource but available for constructing social hierarchies in which difference is located only in subordinates who are seen as different from normative (dominant) community members (whose particular distinctive properties are seen as unremarkable). Even if not explicitly seen as deficiency, such non-reciprocal difference is easily translated into disadvantage given that social practices and institutions develop with disproportionate attention to the perspective and interests of "normal" or privileged participants (6). Many of the studies reported on in this section offer important evidence for the analysis of power dynamics in the genderization of language. Not all of the authors discuss this aspect of the phenomena they demonstrate, but recasting their work within such a framework gives us a rich picture of the dynamics of linguistic power. We will turn to this in the following section.

III. POWER: GENDER RELATIONS

Power is not all that connects gender identities to gender relations (consider, e.g., intimacy and desire). Difference between and within gender groups can support collaborative efforts in community endeavors, dividing labor and drawing on multiple talents (72), and can function in structuring desire (and not only heterosexual desire; see 61). But interest in power has been the engine driving most research on language and gender, motivated partly by the desire to understand male dominance and partly by the desire to dismantle it (and, sometimes, other social inequalities).

Janus-like, power in language wears two faces. First, it is situated and fed by individual agency; situated power resides primarily in face-to-

face interactions but also in other concrete activities like reading or going to the movies. Second, it is historically constituted and responsive to the community's coordinated endeavors; social historical power resides in the relationship of situated interaction to other situations, social activities, and institutionalized social and linguistic practices. This duality of power in language derives directly from the duality of social practice: individual agents plan and interpret situated actions and activities, but their planning and interpretation rely on a social history of negotiating coordinated interpretations and normative expectations (and in turn feed into that history). And the duality of social practice is directly linked to the duality of meaning. What speakers "mean" in their situated utterances and how their interlocutors interpret them is the situated face of meaning; its historical community face involves the linguistic system(s) with conventionalized meanings and usage norms to which utterance meanings are oriented. The real power of language, its social and intellectual value, is found in the interplay between these two faces of meaning and in the room for development and for change afforded by the exploitability and adaptability of conventions and norms (e.g., indirection, irony, metaphor, pervasive vagueness and ambiguity).

The overwhelming tendency in language and gender research has been to emphasize either speakers and their social relations (e.g., women's disadvantages in conversation) or the meanings and norms encoded in the linguistic systems and practices historically available to them (such sexist patterns as conflating generic human with masculine in forms like "he" or "man"). But linguistic forms have no power except as given in people's mouths and ears (or via other media); talk about meaning that leaves out the people who mean is at best limited. We begin by looking at power in situated interactions, then expand the discussion to include more explicit considerations of the community's attempted coordination of symbolic practices (and control of their potential power). We emphasize the existence of alternatives to androcentric world views and practices, moving finally to consideration of power and gender dynamics and change in communities of practice.

A. Interactional Reproduction of Gender and Male Power

Lakoff blazed new ground some twenty years ago by hypothesizing that gender difference in the use of English among mainstream white middle-class Americans entered into maintaining male dominance (67). She followed a long tradition in characterizing "women's language" as different from the standard set by men in being polite, tentative, indirect, imprecise, noncommittal, deferential, closer to norms of grammatical "correctness" and less colloquial, emotionally expressive but euphemistic, and so on. However, she departed radically from the misogynistic tradition that gave rise to such stereotypes by arguing that this sort of speech was forced on girls and women as the price of social approval for being appropriately "feminine". At the same time, she saw women's language as keeping them from becoming effective communicators in positions where they might act as independent and nonsubordinate agents. Although challenges have been mounted to many of Lakoff's proposed formal characterizations of "women's language" as well as to the functions (and hence "meanings") she assigns to those forms, her ideas have been important in suggesting that genderized language use might figure in reproducing men's advantage over women at both personal and institutional levels.

Lakoff's early work prompted analysts to consider how language might connect to men's dominance in the professions and public life. She argued that norms of conversational interaction operative in mainstream US middle-class communities put a woman speaker in a double bind. Behavior that satisfies what is expected of her as a woman disqualifies her in the marketplace: to speak "as a woman" is to speak "as an underling" and authoritative speech is, according to Lakoff, incompatible with cultural norms of femininity. Lakoff also proposed that linguistic conventions put women at an expressive disadvantage by overwhelmingly encoding an androcentric and more specifically a misogynistic perspective on women themselves: she not only pointed to the explicitly insulting terms for referring to and addressing women but also used linguistic techniques to highlight the

problematic assumptions that underlie the widespread use of such apparently innocent words as "lady" and "girl".

Impressed by the suggestion that institutionalized male power might be instantiated in everyday linguistic exchanges, investigators began in the mid-1970s to look at such exchanges as potential arenas of sexual politics. A variety of approaches were taken to investigating institutionalized male power in interactions. One was to test gender stereotypes - particularly to look at empirical evidence about the validity of the portrayals of gendered speech that had found their way into the scholarly literature on language and gender (23,25). Another kind of study (provisionally) granted the accuracy of stereotypical characterizations of the form of gendered speech but then reanalyzed the functions of those forms, seeing "women's" interactional moves in cross-sex contexts as resisting or coping with the dominance embodied in "men's" moves and sometimes as having other functions as well (29,73). These studies too sought to efface the misogynist underpinnings of many prevalent beliefs about gender differences in language. A different but related strategy has been to examine interaction in single-sex groups, often in order to explore the possible dimensions of gender-specific verbal cultures (55; Goodwin (38) has been widely cited as evidence for separate cultures, but is not understood as such by its author). The overwhelming emphasis of all these kinds of work has been women's language, since an important motivation was to attack casual (and often demeaning) female stereotypes. And of course there was also a compensatory motive: much sociolinguistic investigation had ignored women's language use.

One stereotype to come under early empirical scrutiny was that of the talkative woman. Swacker (100) showed that, given a task of describing a picture, the college men in her study talked far longer than the women, and tended also to make more positive if incorrect statements; whereas women were more tentative in the face of insufficient information. Interpreted within the context of the task itself, these results are intriguing - they raise questions about how the men and

women interpreted their obligations and rights within that task. There are clearly situations in which men are expected and licensed to talk more, and others in which women are; and men and women have differential rights and obligations to talk about particular topics. Certainly there is no simple relation between amount of talk and gender, or for that matter between amount of talk and power. There are enormous cultural differences in the relation between power and authority on the one hand, and verbosity on the other (1,8,95). Swacker's speakers were performing solo, doing what was asked of them without threat of competition or benefit of cooperation. Conversational interactions offer other complications, interruptions being one important focus for exploring gender and power in language use. Early studies found that men interrupt more than women (in same-sex and in cross-sex interactions) and that women get interrupted more than men (36,116,117,119); similar patterns of dominant interrupters seemed to emerge in asymmetries of parent-child and doctor-patient interaction. Recent reviews of research on sex differences in amount of speech and on interruptions and overlapping speech show, however, that matters are considerably more complicated (53,54,101,104). First of all, identification of interruptions that usurp others' speaking rights creates serious analytical problems; overlaps and speaker changes interpreted as disruptive interruptions are formally no different from those that function as supportive devices in conversation. Furthermore, conversational turn taking norms and behavior are clearly not the same in all regional or ethnic groups or situations, and investigation in a variety of settings does not give a clear picture of connections between gender and interruptions even for middle-class whites. Edelsky (28) and Coates (19) found women in certain informal situations regularly overlapping their speech, and Kalcik's study of women's rap groups (55) notes continual collaboration in topic development as supported by overlaps and mutual sentence completion.

But in addition, control is not always a matter of monopolizing "air-time" or of other forms of overt bullying. Control can be exercised

through refusing to talk (29,51,58) or through making someone else talk (17). An individual's conversational contribution is evaluated in retrospect, and inasmuch as silence can signal the inappropriateness or unsatisfactoriness of the preceding turn, it can be a powerful tool for devaluing contributions. In the same way, an individual may continue to provide talk in order to fill in the threatening silence offered by the interlocutor. Such talk may then be evaluated - by both parties - as idle chatter. The potential for devaluation of women's contributions (by men and by women themselves) under these circumstances is tremendous. This interactional construction of relative worth and importance of what is said, its weightiness for ongoing community-wide purposes, is part of what contributes to the development and maintenance of a community history that tends to reproduce androcentric values in its ongoing conventions and norms -in familiar messages and in the unexamined assumptions that hide in the historically constituted backgrounds against which discourses unfold within the community. In other words, a contributor not accorded attention and respect may find her capacity for full participation in the social elaboration of thought and meaning and community values thereby reduced. The cycle may be vicious in even subtler ways. Strategies undertaken in recognition of situational disadvantage often also convey recognition (and at least apparent acceptance) of subordination. Faced with less than energetic participation from the interlocutor, e.g., a person may well turn to compensatory linguistic strategies to establish the right to talk. Fishman's (29) study of several graduate student couples showed women having considerable difficulty introducing topics and starting conversations with their male partners. They fell back on such strategies as the opening questions that children use to get the floor - "do you know what?" Of course announcing lack of entitlement in this way ultimately confirms both the subordinated and the dominant partner in their views of who does have ultimate control. As O'Barr and Atkins (84) noted, powerless strategies reproduce powerlessness, signalling the lesser authority (and presumptive value in the community) of their users.

Pointing to the self-reproductive nature of devaluation and limited authority must not be seen as "blaming the victim" for interactional failures but as showing how dominance can be exercised in the absence of overt coercion. The cycle for a woman may start with social devaluation of her speech and that devaluation may handicap her capacity for effective speech even where interlocutors might be disposed to treat her as a valued colleague in common enterprises. But such dispositions are hardly commonplace. Women and men may utter the same form but not be able to accomplish the same things by doing so because both men and women presume the lesser value of women's contributions to community endeavors. The power lies not in the forms themselves but in the complex web that connects those forms to those who utter and interpret them and their forms of membership in the community of practice in which the utterance occurs. Two linguistic forms have been highlighted as evidence of women's interactive insecurity - tag questions ("We should leave, shouldn't we?") and rising "question" intonation in declarative sentences ("My name is Lee?"). It was early recognized that the tag form could carry an intonation that seemed more nearly coercive than insecure or deferential; early quantitative studies of tag questions (23,25) did not directly examine whether the forms they counted encoded tentativeness and insecurity, however, but concentrated on the question of whether or not they characterized women's speech "in general," finding different sex correlations in quite different situations. However, it has been pointed out (17) that, even keeping intonation constant, tag questions can be heard in exactly the same conversational setting as either deferential or threatening, depending on relations among the participants and the activities in which they are engaged. Similar comments have been made about interpretation of rising intonations in contexts of assertion. Guy et al (45) provide quantitative evidence that Australian women use more rising intonations than men over all, and suggest that this is a result of women's tentativeness. McLemore (79), however, in an ethnographic study in a Texas sorority, showed that rising intonation could be a powerful strategy within the sorority; nonetheless a speaker reported that she would never use such an intonation in a male-dominated situation, because there it would sound "weak"-- even within the sorority, the power of the rise was connected to its user's social position (pledges, e.g., sounded "weak" when using

repeated rises). This leads us to the more general observation that speech strategies are evaluated in the context of the identities of the participants and their status in specific interactions, and that the same language in the mouth of a man and of a woman may very well be interpreted differently. As Lakoff has pointed out, a woman using the same powerful language strategies as a man might well be evaluated as being more aggressive than the man. But conversely, language strategies that are heard as powerful in the mouth of a man may well not be heard as such when coming from a woman (e.g., slow, measured delivery).

B. Alternative and changing norms and conventions

It can be discouraging indeed to survey ways in which women's "difference" from men can interactionally derive from and contribute to their institutionalized disadvantaged position as "mean-ers", as language-using agents active in shaping and reshaping the histories of their communities and the linguistic norms operative in them. At the same time, however, there are many signs of rupture and many indications that challenge and change are possible. Male "control" in situated interactions and in the course of shaping evolving community norms is at best partial and certainly not monolithic. And, of course, both women and men have complex arrays of "interests" to further through their actions and ambivalent connections to community endeavors.

Some of the studies cited above do emphasize women's agency, their active participation in interactions. In addition, a number of researchers (re)examining women's participation in linguistic practices find this active agency important not just for the individual agents but for developing socially viable countercurrents and giving alternative meanings to linguistic strategies and forms. Although some "coping" practices ultimately help maintain existing inequities (simply making them more "bearable" for the oppressed), other countercurrents have more potential for transforming communities.

Politeness, for example, is often associated with women's language use and seen either as passive enforced deference, on the one hand (e.g., 67), or as willful "prissy" avoidance of real social engagement (for an early critique of this view see 2), on the other. In a similar vein, we saw in the discussion of variation and adherence to "standard language" norms that women's alleged "correctness" like their "politeness" can be viewed as evidence of their status as repressed prigs (the "schoolmarm" image) or as timid and unimaginative shrinking violets. Alternative functional characterizations may be somewhat more positive, linking women's politeness and orientation to standards to the demands of their nurturing mothering roles and to the educative and "civilizing" functions women often serve. Such characterizations still do not address issues of men's privilege and women's power, however, assuming traditional gender arrangements.

Other quite different interpretations have seen these same "women's" linguistic features arising as (partial) strategic solutions to the problems posed for women by their social oppression. Trudgill (113) proposed that women's relative phonological conservatism in Norwich England reflects a use of symbolic means to make up for a lack of access to social mobility through action in the marketplace. Eckert (26,27) has expanded on this view, arguing that women are constrained in a variety of ways to accumulate symbolic capital more generally. And Deuchar (24) has argued, furthermore, that where women's language is more standard than men's, it may serve to defend them against accusations of stupidity or ignorance, thus improving their status as "mean-ers". Speculations like these find support from observations of such "women's language" features in the richness of the community practice in which they play a role.

Community-based studies show clearly, e.g., that politeness is not simply a matter of arbitrary conventional norms constraining individuals ("ask Kim nicely!") but of intricate and connected strategies to foster social connections and potential alliances and to subvert institutionalized status advantages (see 12 for a general account).

Brown (11) examines language use in a Mayan community where in-marrying women are structurally subordinated in many ways, including being subjected to physical violence from husbands and mothers-in-law. Although they do defer to men, they accord respect to other women as well as fostering positive affiliative ties with both other women and with men. In general, they fine-tune their politeness strategies to enhance their individual positions, even using the forms of respect ironically as weapons in such rare (and socially problematic) activities as direct confrontation in the courtroom (10). Certainly it is lack of other resources that forces these women to develop such nuanced linguistic skills, but they actively use these skills to lessen their social disadvantage and to increase their social power (albeit only in limited ways).

And a number of other community studies detail other concrete ways women refuse to accept passively certain problematic features of their forms of participation in community practices, often reevaluating those practices from alternative perspectives. So, for example, Radway (92) talked with a number of women who were avid readers of "bodice-ripping" romances and found that these women exercised considerable selectivity in their reading and were not, as some critics argued, simply feeding a perverse masochism produced by a misogynistic culture. Rather, she argues, they actively sought visions of capable women and (at least eventually) admiring and respecting men, and they saw their own reading activities as having some general social value (educational) and as constituting an assertion of their own self-worth and entitlement to pleasure. At the same time, however, they recognized that others did not share their assessment. Furthermore, as Radway points out, reading romances ultimately may have prevented their issuing more fundamental challenges to the unsatisfactory state of gender relations in their communities of practice, including in their marriages.

Studies that emphasize access as a determining factor in the "acquisition" of language varieties have an underlying functionalist

flavor: specific language varieties are associated with specific situations, and speakers are then cast as passive users of whatever language varieties they happen to come into contact with - and indeed as passive participants in whatever situations they happen to find themselves in. Language choice, however, can be an important strategy for gaining control over one's exposure to people, situations, and opportunities. Gal's study (33) of language shift in a Hungarian speaking agricultural community in Austria shows young women emerging as leaders in social change and language shift as part of a move to gain greater control over their own lives - and young men holding back in order to maintain control over theirs. In this male-dominated peasant community, women see their interests as conflicting with those of local men. By rejecting Hungarian for German, they are rejecting the roles and identity of a peasant wife in a male dominated agricultural community, in favor of greater access to jobs and marriage partners in the emerging local industrial economy. Their local male peers' retention of Hungarian, on the other hand, is consonant with the greater attractiveness for men of the traditional agricultural life.

Harding (46) describes women's verbal behavior in a Spanish village that could easily be seen as lending credence to Tannen's generalizations about women seeking connection (and perhaps also less flattering views of women as "gossips"). However, rich ethnographic observation shows that this behavior has a part in overall practice that one would not be able to predict. Though formal authority and political power is vested in men, the men themselves depend on their wives for information (obtained through talk with other women), which is offered to husbands in forms designed to influence their evaluation of affairs and their subsequent decisions. Thus the women gain considerable influence over many important matters in the community, though that influence is exercised only with the cooperation of men and only within the general parameters of existing practices and relations.

Misogyny in evaluating women's speech (e.g., trivialized as "gossip") has certainly been prevalent, and sexist patterns of language use are now well documented. Baron (3) provides a useful historical perspective, and Frank and Treichler (31) offer a superb summary of the field accompanied by excellent annotated bibliographies. Much of this work has focused on American English (and on heterosexual white middle-class speakers thereof but see (47,118)); the project of documenting male dominance in evaluating speech and misogyny and heterosexism in widespread usage patterns and rhetorical practices has, however, recently become an international one (50,52,86,112). And there is also work on the androcentrism of linguistic practices in such enterprises as science and philosophy (30,82).

But women do not always just accept views excluding them from active participation in shaping the community's endeavors and practices. There has been the visible and effective resistance of the (mainly white and middle-class) feminist movement, ranging from new titles like "Ms." to consciousness-raising groups to assertiveness training to nonsexist language guidelines (see 31 and, for Canada's bilingual situation, see 57). But just as striking though less visible in the mainstream are the many refusals to accept whole-heartedly models of women's relegation to inferior status. Martin's (71) compelling ethnographic study of ways of talking about women's reproductive experiences shows clearly that although authoritative (mainly male) voices in the community (e.g., the medical establishment) do achieve some success in enforcing views of women as under their control ("managing childbirth"), women themselves offer alternative models of themselves as active agents. But class privilege may make resistance to predominant views of gender less likely, middle-class women buying into the medical model of menstruation, childbirth, and menopause far more than working-class women.

Some feminists have spoken of men's "control" of language: men set norms that limit and devalue "women's language" and they appropriate meaning-making for themselves. Male-controlled meaning leads not

only to what is called sexist language but also to exclusion of women's contributions from the wide range of cultural values and of what counts as knowledge. Language has been described as "man made" (99) and, more recently, as shaped in and serving the interests of a "patriarchal universe of discourse" (87). The claim is that men (sometimes "modified": e.g., elite white heterosexual men) derogate women and their language and impose on women definitions of reality that serve men's interests at the expense of women's, suppressing or at least ignoring women's meanings. There are subtle as well as simplistic versions of the view that men have shaped language as an instrument for their own sexual, social, political, and intellectual ends. But even the subtlest versions fail to show how norms and conventions might confer or sustain privilege without overt coercion or conscious direction. Nor can they investigate the complex ways in which linguistic power relates to gendered individuals, including resistant practices like those mentioned above.

And ultimately the male instrument view also misses the real potency of language by assuming its meanings float in the ether, unattached to social and linguistic practices. McConnell-Ginet (75,77) explains semantic change as possible precisely because linguistic forms do not come permanently glued to meanings but are endowed with meanings in the course of social practice. The history of linguistic and social practice constrains but does not determine what a speaker can mean. Male domination in conversation, then - be it subtle or overt - can impose and reinforce male-oriented meanings on linguistic forms. Yet at the same time, meanings are never completely uniform nor can they be completely controlled: there is always room for resistance, challenge, alternatives. The male centered nature of language itself, then, is not separate from the kinds of interactive dynamics we have discussed above ; on the contrary, it is through these dynamics (including the ways individual interactions connect to wider community practices and institutions) that language is so constructed.

The fact that there are more female stereotypes around than male is an indication of the pervasive view of women and their relation to language as deviant or "other" in familiar androcentric societies. Ironically, however, the cumulative effect of a new research focus on women has been to perpetuate this view of men as "normal" and women as needing to be studied. One legacy: many people still refer to the study of language and gender as the study of "women's language". Just like the illusion that racial difference resides in people of color and that differences in sexuality reside in lesbians and gay males, male privilege sustains the myth that men and their talk and their meaning-making are not gendered. Such privilege has consequences for how differences in ways of speaking are interpreted; it also has consequences for how people use language to represent and direct their own and others' thought and action. A fundamental challenge to the monolithic and male-centered ascription of meanings to "women's words" requires shifting attention to "men's words" and to language more generally. Men's linguistic advantage over women in our own and other western cultures, Black and Coward suggest (7), may lie primarily in the availability in many communities of practice of ways of talking and thinking that constitute men as ungendered autonomous beings and that constitute women as marked by gender and by their relations to others (especially men). This is not just a matter of so-called masculine generic forms like "he" or "man" but a more general presumption that femaleness is a special condition whereas maleness is the norm, a presumption that supports a wide range of linguistic and other social practices. One need not believe the presumption to fall into its trap: a striking example is the claim in a book directly attacking male privilege that a "majority of the [US] population" is working to retain "their white, male heterosexual power" over others.

C. Community Practices and Linguistic Power

As we have seen, sexual asymmetries in culturally sanctioned power can be both deeper and subtler in their connections to language than is suggested by accounts of enforced female deference or of male

domineeringness in local speech activities. Language is a key symbolic and communicative resource, central for developing the interests and values and ways of thinking and of doing that give communities of practice their distinctive character. As the preceding sections show, dominance relations among individuals or among groups cannot be assessed simply by surveying who says what to whom. Relations of equality and of dominance are partly produced in and through "sayings" (and histories of similar sayings and their interpretations), as are the who, the what, and the whom. "How about some more coffee, hon?" from a wife holding up her empty cup in front of her husband must be understood in light of quite different practices than the same words and gesture from a young man on an airplane to the middle-aged woman pushing the refreshment cart. A marriage creates a community of practice persisting for some time and one typically involving a rich array of practices, at least some of which are distinctive to the particular couple. (In some marriages, the suggested breakfast scenario might be quite startling, the presumption being that the wife will serve the husband. Even in a marriage where the husband's serving breakfast coffee is unremarkable, there might be quite different practices in play when guests come for dinner.) The airplane is a very short-lived community of practice with limited and mostly routinized practices encountered in many similar communities. In both cases power relations derive in part from such conversational exchanges and their place in community practice.

Dominance is sustained by privileging in community practice a particular perspective on language, by obscuring its status as one among many perspectives, naturalizing it as neutral or "unmarked." The privileged can assume their own positions as norms toward which everyone orients, as taken for granted or universal in some sense, and they assume the authority to judge other positions without supposing their own vulnerable to assessment from less privileged viewpoints. To put it slightly differently, what we might call symbolic privilege entitles its holder to interpretive and evaluative authority without need for explanation or justification.

Symbolic privilege is not, of course, all or nothing but a matter of degree. Nor is a person's ranking in symbolic privilege fixed: a particular woman might have considerable symbolic privilege in her household and local neighborhood but rank low in her office of better-educated coworkers, and she might exercise considerable authority in talk about nutrition but not in discussion of finance. And symbolic privilege in some communities of practice may extend far beyond local settings, perhaps through institutions and practices associated with them. Treichler (111) recounts the lovely story of a woman collecting citations for the OED who used in her own published writings words and meanings she wanted to get "authorized" by dictionary inclusion, then citing the relevant publication. Symbolic privilege is seldom so obvious or so self-consciously wielded.

Symbolic resources do, of course, mediate access to material resources, but they are ultimately more difficult to monopolize and control. In particular, the function and meaning of linguistic forms need to be responsive to situational features if language is adequately to serve changing needs arising in communities: a language that cannot grow or change is a defective social and cognitive instrument, but growth and change cannot be guaranteed to preserve all existing privilege and may sometimes threaten that privilege.

IV. EPILOGUE

The studies of language and gender discussed above have looked at many different dimensions of language use and have offered a rich variety of hypotheses about the interaction between gender and language. But, as we have noted, they have not invoked a coherent view of gender or its interaction with language. So far as they have been offered, theories have tended to draw on various elements of popular conceptions of gender: e.g., as a set of sex-determined attributes of individuals (a kind of "femininity" or "masculinity", often associated with a particular division of social activities such as childcare or making war) or as a relation of oppression of females by males. Gender as a matter of individual attributes is then understood

quite variously, often in an "essentializing" way that assumes femininity and masculinity exist independently of their connection to each other and to other dimensions of social categorization.

Although there are a number of attempts to understand the relation of people to language as rooted in social practice, there has been relatively little progress in articulating explicitly the connections of social practices to linguistic structures and systems. With only a few exceptions (e.g., 7,32), linguists have ignored recent work in social theory that might eventually deepen our understanding of the social dimensions of cognition (and of the cognitive dimensions of social practice). There is even less attention to understanding how the relation of people to gender categories is socially (including linguistically) constructed, the notions of "women" and "men" typically being taken for granted in sociolinguistics. Nor is there much attention to the variable construction of gender relations and privilege, dominance often being seen as either a matter of deference or coercion and other aspects of gender relations - e.g., sexual attraction - typically ignored. Theoretical work in gender studies (e.g., 6,22,96,107) is still not well known among theorists of society and culture (but see 37 as an interesting contribution), and sociolinguistic studies have only rarely taken advantage of recent developments in understanding gender (but see, e.g., 39).

Sociolinguists working on questions of language and gender need to build bridges to other communities of scholarly practice whose endeavors focus more centrally on gender. Many linguists talk about gender only because sex has seemed to emerge as a significant variable in their study of some phenomenon like variation or intonation or the use of indirection in discourse. The endeavor they take themselves to be concerned with is elucidating some particular aspect of language use or linguistic structure: not only do they not hold themselves accountable to gender theory, they seldom even hold themselves accountable to linguistic theory beyond the area of their own specialization. And others who talk about language do so from an

interest in gender (not always an analytical or intellectual interest) and not in language itself, thus not attending to the insights into the detailed workings of language that linguistics can provide. Though inquiry into the interactions of gender and language is the sort of endeavor around which a community of intellectual practice might center, no such community yet exists because those engaged in such inquiry do not adequately orient themselves to others' related activities, making it impossible to develop shared ways of asking questions and of exploring and evaluating possible answers.

This does not mean that investigators look only to their own observations in proposing accounts of gender and language interactions. Far from it: e.g., citations abound in support of claims that women's language reflects conservatism, prestige consciousness, upward mobility, insecurity, deference, nurturance, emotivity, connectedness, sensitivity to others, solidarity or that men's language reflects toughness, lack of affect, competitiveness, independence. But the observations on which such claims are based have been made at different times and in different circumstances with different populations. It is also relatively rare to find real evidence in social practice for the gender characterizations made (evidence of the kind provided by Brown for her claim that the Mayan women in the Mexican village of Tenejapa are politer than their male peers) and rarer still to find evidence from social practice of the comparability of observations made in distinct local communities.

It seems clear that the content of gender categories and their connections to linguistic behavior can only emerge from ethnographic study. Corollaries are that gender categories will intertwine with other social classifications (e.g. class, age, race) within communities of practice and that even within what is at some global level a single society and culture the content and connections may work rather differently in distinct communities of practice. But, as we have noted, there are also deeper difficulties than those posed by premature generalization across communities about substantive content of

gender-language correlations. First, such generalizations tend to forestall close examination of how features like vernacular use (variously interpreted as discussed above, pp. 00) might enter into the social practices of the community. What can we say about which activities and situations promote use of the vernacular for those who "tend" to avoid it? For those who "tend" to favor it? Second, to pose the question as one of how "women" (or "men") behave "as a group" is to focus on gender conformity and to ignore differences among women and especially challenges to gender hegemony. Suppose in a particular community a given woman uses relatively more (or a given man relatively less) vernacular than other community members. Are there patterns in "exceptions" to community-wide generalizations that can be explained by a deeper understanding of the community's social practices? And can looking at these patterned exceptions yield insight into mechanisms of social and linguistic change? Third, focus on gender content diverts attention from what may ultimately prove the far more interesting question: how does social practice "use" gender differences (seen as central to gender "content") in constructing gender relations and other social relations (and vice versa). What role does language play in this reciprocal construction of gender difference and gender relations? Here again, the diversity of gender differences and relations across and within communities should help us better understand the possible parameters of interaction between language and gender (and more generally, between language, thought, and society).

Every informed and detailed study of a single language contributes to our understanding of linguistic universals, and every informed and detailed study of a social group contributes to our understanding of social and cultural universals. Both linguists (e.g., 18) and anthropologists (e.g., 34) have argued, however, that universals which emerge are more formal in character than substantive. But linguists and anthropologists generally agree that comparative studies are also essential in getting some grip on the possible ranges of human language, thought, and social life. We have nothing so grandiose as a

detailed theory of the general principles and parameters of gender and language interactions, and we certainly are not recommending linguistic theory as a model for thinking about those interactions. What we do want to stress, however, is the great variability of actual gender content--the character of gender differences and beliefs about them--and of gender relations--including not only sex-linked power asymmetries but also other aspects of social ties and social relations (including connections to other social hierarchies and to what Connell (22) dubs the "cathexis" complex of desire, liking, and aversion). And we still have little idea of what general principles may be at play in the joint construction of gender differences and gender relations.

Significant advances in the study of language and gender from now on are going to have to involve integration on a level that has not been reached so far. The integration can come only through the intensive collaboration of people in a variety of fields, and working in a variety of communities. Language and gender studies, in fact, require an interdisciplinary community of scholarly practice. Isolated individuals who try to straddle two fields can often offer insights, but real progress depends on getting people from a variety of fields to collaborate closely in building a common and broad-based understanding. Collaboration must be not only among people from different fields, but among people doing similar work in more than one community. A collaborative effort on the part of ethnographers in many different communities might arrive at a rich enough view of gender dynamics across communities to begin to determine what sorts of generalizations there are to be had about the relation to language of those dynamics. These would not be studies of women or of men. These studies would explore how "women" and "men" are constructed as social categories and how the relations between them (and among them) link to those constructions. These studies would also not be studies of language in isolation from other social practices but of the linguistic dimensions of social practice (and, more generally, the complex social and cognitive character of so-called "(socio)linguistic competence"). By approaching both gender and language as constructed in communities of practice, there is the

possibility of putting some real bite into claims about the social and cognitive importance of their interaction. There is also some possibility of enriching our view of social conflict and change, of deepening our understanding of the profoundly historical character of gender, of language, and of their connections.

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