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Gender Difference in Language Use: A Review of Phonetic, Lexical, and Discourse Features

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Abstract: Gender represents one of the main branches that sociolinguists focus on. Investigating gender in the current study manifests the number of factors that play a crucial role in using language. The current review inspects gender differences and language use from sociolinguistic perspective. The main focus is on the phonetic, lexical, and discourse differences. The study investigates how gender impacts linguistic behaviour and how it affects communities. Some modern studies are displayed to show how men and women behave and talk and how they use language.

Keywords: Gender, Language Use, Linguistic Features, Phonetic, Lexical, Discourse

1. Introduction

In sociolinguistics, gender is recognized as a significant factor affecting language use through speech communities. Gender is treated in early research as a binary demographic variable, while in modern, contemporary methods, it is identified as socially formed and interactionally fulfilled [1]-[3]. Previous studies investigate phonetic, lexical, and discourse levels to reveal differences that show the way speakers use language, as well as highlights the role of context, identity, and social meaning [4]-[7]. Gender becomes one of the main topics to variationist sociolinguistics, forming patterns of language utilisation through lexical, phonetic, and discourse levels [1], [2], [8]. This review shows the display of gender in different studies and how some linguistic fields play a role in the identification of men and women in using language and the effect of gender on linguistic features.

2. Theoretical background

Labov builds the quantitative study of linguistic variation and recognised gender as “a key social variable” [1]. Labov notices that the prestige form is preferred by women more than men in many communities [1]. He identifies the “systematic gender differences in linguistic variation”. Eckert classifies gender as a social practice, in which linguistic variation represents interaction and participation in societies more that to a stable list [2]. She states that gender must not be regarded as fixed category but as part of wider system related to social status [2]. Tannen, at the same time, stresses that the difference of gendered language reflect variant communicative style rather than deficits [7]. These opinions show a transformation from gender as a variation to gender as an act.

3. Phonetic Variation

Biological and social factors play a crucial role in phonetic differences. There are differences between male and female regarding the biological and acoustic differences. These differences are rooted physiologically. Keith Johnson attributes these differences to the size of vocal tract that leads to systematic variation in resonance and pitch [9]. Pronunciation choices are influenced by gender. Women occasionally lead in sound change from innovative forms, while men use vernacular or non—standard variants more than women. Labov maintains this pattern through multiple communities [1]. Eckert introduces ethnographic study related to adolescents [8]. She illustrates the way phonetic variation listed social identities, like burnouts and jocks with gender communicating with social class. Gareth Walker argues that phonetic variation relies on real-time interactional dynamics, which contains conversational alignment, pitch, and timing [10].

4. Lexical Variation: Vocabulary Use

Lakoff argues that women's use linguistic features, like evaluative adjectives, hedges, and intensifiers [6]. Some other studies refine this claim. Affective and evaluative language are utilised by women more than men, while men use directive and taboo language. Koeser et al argue that the exposure with gender comprehensive language broaden women's use more than men's [11]. This shows that lexical variation is constructed from exposure, ideology, and discourse context, as well as gender. There is a difference between "rapport talk", which refers to connection oriented and related to women, and "report talk", which refers to information oriented and related to men, Tannen [7]. Corpus-based studies displays that topic, context, and audience are the basic factors that lexical variation relies on.

5. Discourse and Pragmatic Variation

Discourse studies highlight gender differences in backchannelling, interruption patterns, and turn-taking. Jennifer Coates explains that women's conversations stress support and collaboration, whereas men's conversations focus on involving competitive turn-taking, Coates [4]. Nowadays researchers join phonetic, discourse, and lexical features instead of examining them individually. This method displays that linguistic features combine together to register social meaning. Community norms, social class, and ethnicity interacts with gender. According to Labov and Eckert there is no single linguistic feature indicates gender in isolation [1], [8]. Janet Holmes states that women prefer using facilitative interactional devices and politeness strategies. Men prefer using assertive and direct style despite the fact that this differs broadly by culture and context [5]. Contemporary discourse analysis focuses on the construction of speakers for gender identities via language. Eckert and Sally McConnell-Ginet discuss that the emergence of gender comes from recurrent interactional practices [3]. In recent studies, the emphasis is on the contextual and interactional discourse. Shalini Yadav says that context and power is the foundation of gendered interaction patterns. Sharma and Rampton present methods for interpreting how speakers change their style during interactions, joining discourse variation to identity structure.

6. Critiques and Contemporary Directions

Modern sociolinguistic studies focus on class, gender, and ethnicity. This is called intersectionality. The speaker agency, context-sensitive variation, and non-binary identities are emphasized. According to Eckert, gender is "not a property of individuals but an emergent feature of social situation" [8]. In 2015, Nguyen et al. highlights in their research entitled "Computational Sociolinguistics: A Survey" the way the large-scale datasets work to analyse gender-linked variation through multilingual contexts and social media [12]-[15]. Besides, in 2019, Hoyle et al. postulate their work entitled "Unsupervised Discovery of Gendered Language", which focuses on the gendered lexical patterns that

work with social stereotypes in large corpora. These studies register a shift in sociolinguistics.

7. Conclusions

Gender can be classified as a powerful and essential factor in linguistic variations. Variationist studies illustrate that gender affects language at many levels. Lexically, semantic bias, emotional and informational language, gender-fair language, and vocabulary choice. Phonetically, pronunciation, interactional phonetics, pitch, and sound change. Discoursal, conversational structure, turn-taking, interactional style, identity construction, and politeness. The prominent modern view says that gender is not a permanent factor of linguistic behaviour. It is actively structures, discussed, and expressed via language utilisation.

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