

7 Language, gender and identity

7.1 INTRODUCTION

In obsolete usage, 'gender' could refer to types or sorts. 'Diseases of this gender are for the most part incurable,' wrote a seventeenth-century physician. As a verb, it once indicated copulation: 'elephants never gender but in private, out of sight', said Ambroise Paré in his *Chirurgie* (1564). A little later we find the related sense of the getting of offspring: William Wilkie thus wrote in his *Epigoniad* of 1757 that 'from tigers tigers spring; pards gender pards'. But, from at least the fourteenth century, 'gender' was essentially a grammatical term.

Words may refer to males or females, or to things that have become associated with these categories. In English, therefore, we find 'he' and 'she', 'actor' and 'actress', as well as some less obvious ascriptions – that designate ships as feminine, for instance. Other languages also have a 'neuter' gender (and, in English, 'it' is a neuter pronoun). It can be difficult to understand some gender allocations: in German, for instance, 'knife' (*messer*), 'fork' (*gabel*) and 'spoon' (*löffel*) are, respectively, neuter, feminine and masculine. In French, *pénis* is masculine – but so is *vagin*. Italian sopranos are masculine, but the sentries are feminine. In both French and Italian, the moon (*lune, luna*) is feminine, and the sun (*sole, soleil*) is masculine; in German, however, the moon (*mond*) is masculine and the sun (*sonne*) is feminine. *Und so weiter*. And so on. *Et ainsi de suite*. *E così via*.

There are some early usages of the noun 'gender' that approach contemporary non-grammatical ones, although they are generally of a facetious nature. Lady Montagu, the eighteenth-century feminist whose letters are her chief literary legacy, wrote to a woman friend:

of the fair sex . . . my only consolation for being of that gender has been the assurance it gave me of never being married to any one among them. (Montagu, 1709/1965: I: 135)

The current sense of ‘gender’ as an indication of the masculine or feminine behaviour of men and women dates only from about 1960. It is usually, and usefully, distinguished from ‘sex’: biological characteristics define the latter, while gender, although built upon biological categorisation, is a social construction. Here, maleness or femaleness is seen to exist along a continuum of elaborations, manipulations or, indeed, rejections of sexual inheritance. This seems a necessary refinement in a world in which traditional dichotomies are giving way to more nuanced appreciations, to ‘trans-gendered’ possibilities of various kinds. The idea of intermediate or ‘third’ sexes is not, of course, new. Eunuchs have been in existence, after all, for a very long time: the Greek origin of the word signifies ‘bed-keeper’, an apt designation for the role eunuchs were meant to play in the harem. Just like the ‘third’ sexes of India (the *hijara*) or of North America (the *berdache*, the ‘two-spirit people’ of the western prairies), eunuchs may or may not have undergone surgical alteration: the important and the obvious features are social and behavioural.

7.2 STEREOTYPING SEX AND GENDER

A good place to begin here is with the folk ‘wisdom’ reflected in proverbs, sayings and quotations: these bear some relationship to the laws and mores of a society, and they can tell us something of social attitudes. Many of them encapsulate views of men and women and, beyond the enlightened cloisters of academe – and often, it must be said, within them – the sentiments they convey are often remarkably constant. Consider these well-known observations:

Frailty, thy name is woman.
Varium et mutabile semper femina. (women are ever fickle)
 Do you not know I am a woman? When I think, I must speak.
 The female of the species is more deadly than the male.
 Your daughter and the Moor are making the beast with two backs.

or

Home is the hunter.
 Men were deceivers ever.
 The more I see of men, the more I like dogs.
 The silk stockings and white bosoms of your actresses excite my
 amorous propensities.
 In seduction, the rapist bothers to buy a bottle of wine.

The first set reveals the (stereotypic) eternal woman: weak, changeable and unreliable, endlessly talkative – but also dangerous, and

dangerously sexual. The second gives us the eternal male: the strong hunter who provides for the home, but a predatory and untrustworthy character, particularly in sexual matters. This is, of course, a very small sampling from a very wide field, but it is incomplete rather than unrepresentative. It is appropriate to point out here, and in any discussion of sex, gender and their differentiation, that most of our proverbial assessments of men and women have biological sexuality at their heart. This suggests, I think, that the modern scholarly distinctions between sex and gender, valuable as they are, have not moved very far beyond those scholarly cloisters. (Many academic insights, of course, never leave those limited intellectual grounds.) This in turn suggests why so much popular usage is quite rightly called 'sexist' and not 'genderist'.

Any consideration of apophthegmatic expressions relating to perceptions of biological sexuality very soon comes to Freud's famous observation that 'anatomy is destiny'. Much less well known – but much more pointed (and, no doubt, much more offensive in many quarters) – was the statement by Rudolf Virchow, an eminent nineteenth-century physician and pathologist: 'woman', he said, 'is a pair of ovaries with a human being attached; whereas man is a human being furnished with a pair of testes' (Dally, 1991:84). These sorts of statements suggest an interesting difference in perceptions of men and women beyond the immediate and obvious one. The character of woman has traditionally been seen as more superficial, and as possessing less moral depth, than that of man: *la donna è mobile*, after all. Women who seemed competent in matters of morals and intellect were generally regarded as anomalies, and their achievements were likely to be belittled. On 31 July 1763, Dr Johnson pointed out to Boswell (1791/1958) that 'a woman's preaching is like a dog's walking on his hinder legs. It is not done well; but you are surprised to find it done at all.' A century later, Francis Galton (1883: 39), that pioneer in the study of individual differences, was still clinging to the view that the intellectual capacity of women was limited, that their powers of discrimination were feeble, and that

coyness and caprice have in consequence become a heritage of the sex, together with a cohort of allied weaknesses and petty deceits, that men have come to think venial and even amiable in women, but which they would not tolerate among themselves.

Galton was ever the courteous Victorian gentleman, but, as Buss (1976) reports, he was puzzled at the entrance of women into the world of work. Indeed, several women working in his biometrics laboratory were dismayed to learn of his membership of an anti-suffrage society.

Women's lives have often been seen as grounded more deeply than those of men in the essentials of biological life; Sherry Ortner's (1996) interesting assertion that culture and construction are essentially male, while women are somehow more 'natural', is also relevant here. The intellectual superiority of men, and their greater capacity for practical application – largely views of men *by men*, of course¹ – pale somewhat at this level: unlike the biological comportment of his female counterpart, man is now seen as superficial, flighty and inconstant. Even if we were to believe, however, that there were some basic truths operating here, we could not logically assume that all individuals could be neatly categorised in these regards. Even accepting the strength of various biological imperatives, it is obvious that we can 'rise above' them in various ways. But it may be that, for most human beings, there exists a deeper and more stable intertwining of sex and gender than some modern (and post-modern) accounts would have us imagine. Relatedly, arguments that aim to refute assertions of the anatomy-is-destiny variety – typically replacing them with accounts of historically different patterns of socialisation for men and women – must surely come to grips with the obvious further question: what lies behind those very socialisation patterns?

7.2.1 The early appearance of stereotypes

It is certain, of course, that the force of socialisation patterns typically begins very early in life, has a great deal of strength across many domains, and receives more or less constant reinforcement from many quarters. From a large literature, a few examples will make the point. Best *et al.* (1977) found that, among 5- and 8-year-old children in the United States, Ireland and England, knowledge of traditional sex-trait stereotypes was already well developed. The children were presented with a number of 'pictures', in each of which were two black silhouette figures; no features were shown, but male and female were identified in a manner similar to that used on the doors of public toilets. The experimenters read a short descriptive vignette to the child, one accompanying each pair of silhouettes. Each of these little 'stories' encapsulated one aspect of male–female stereotypes, and the child was simply asked to point to the silhouette he or she thought the vignette applied to. Thus: 'one of these people is always pushing other people around and getting into fights. Which person gets into fights?'; or, 'one of these people cries when something good happens, as well as when everything goes wrong. Which one cries a lot?' In all, 32 pictures-plus-vignettes were presented. While many interesting nuances appeared when the results were analysed, the general patterns were quite clear: children in each country

knew, from the earliest age, that women were gentle, affectionate and emotional, and that men were strong, aggressive and dominant. Not all the familiar stereotypes were in place among the 5-year-olds – many more had been learned by the older children – but the broad strokes were evident (see also Williams *et al.*, 1977). Indeed, other work (by Williams *et al.*, 1975; Widen and Russell, 2002) suggests that children as young as 3 years have some non-trivial degree of awareness of adult-defined sex stereotypes.

Edwards and Williams (1980) extended the generality of these results when they demonstrated that Canadian children were very much like their American and European counterparts. Their conclusions summarise this whole line of research:

The implications of the present findings revolve around the continued existence of perceptions that are increasingly being challenged in western society. At a time when discriminatory treatment of men and women is seen, more and more, as unacceptable and, indeed, without justification, these data suggest that the more traditional views still permeate society. The distortions and exaggerations inherent in any stereotype tend to obscure the variability found among individuals. To the extent that they accurately reflect one set of stereotypes, these findings indicate a continuing problem in the psychological definition of male and female characteristics and roles, and a disinclination to view individuals in terms of their unique patterns of abilities and interests. (pp. 218–9)

Since I was the one who conducted the Irish and Canadian segments of these studies, I had ample opportunity to talk to teachers and others about the findings, and to assess their reactions. This proved very easy to do: virtually everyone was dismayed to find that the pervasive nature of sex-trait stereotypes had shown itself among young children, even before they first went to school. Female teachers, in particular, were upset and annoyed to think that – by the time they first received children into their classrooms – blunt and often prejudicial attitudes had already appeared among their charges. In general terms, of course, the findings here are not to be wondered at. They reflect continuing trends in the larger society. In advertisements – merely to take one very obvious example – gender-role allocations have remained quite constant, reinforcing the insights of Goffman's (1976) investigation in which, in hundreds of illustrations, he found overwhelming evidence of the depiction of 'conventional' roles for men, women and children.

If these sorts of investigations show just how early sex stereotypes appear, another Irish study of about the same vintage reveals something of their influence upon children's speech. More specifically, I tested some

of the implications of language perceptions and prestige in a group of prepubertal children (Edwards, 1979a). Physiological sex differences relating to speech production are of course not very marked in such children, but earlier work had confirmed what common sense knows: judges can guess the sex of young children (on the basis of speech samples) with a high degree of accuracy (typically on the order of 75–80%). It is children's early adherence to social norms concerning male and female speech that allows such accuracy in sex-identification. In this study, voice samples of 20 working-class and 20 middle-class 10-year-olds were presented to 14 adult judges (Irish trainee teachers) whose task was, simply, to identify the sex of each speaker. As well, five other judges were asked to rate all the voices on four dimensions related to masculinity/femininity.

Among both girls and boys, the voices of working-class children were perceived as rougher and more masculine than those of their middle-class counterparts. The major finding, however, was that – although the high overall degree of accuracy in sex-identification found in earlier work was confirmed (it was about 84%, in fact) – the errors made were not randomly distributed. First, female judges were more accurate than the male assessors in identifying children's sex. This accords with observations, both within and without the literature, of females' greater sensitivity in interpersonal relationships in general, and in verbal interactions in particular. Second, beyond the differential accuracy of male and female judges, a significant interaction was found, in terms of errors made, between social class and the sex of the child. That is, among the working-class children, few boys were mistaken as girls, but errors made about girls were considerably greater; for the middle-class children, the pattern was reversed, and more errors were made with the boys than with the girls.

It appears as if the general masculinity of working-class speech caused girls to be mis-identified as boys by the middle-class judges. Middle-class speech, relatively more feminine, allowed the operation of what we might term the 'boys sound like girls' principle, one that reflects the fact that, at puberty, it is boys' speech that changes most markedly in assuming adult characteristics. So: different social conventions operate for working-class and middle-class speech, young children are aware of these, and this awareness is exemplified, in their own speech patterns, by adherence to the appropriate norms. Differential accuracy in the identification of children's sex can then be seen as a reflection of these social processes.

This Irish study supports the earlier ones on sex-trait stereotypes in its suggestion of their pervasiveness, their strength and their early

appearance. The last piece of evidence I shall touch upon here is provided by the classic study of Condry and Condry (1976). About 200 male and female subjects were shown a film of an infant confronting various stimulus objects; half were told that the baby was a boy, the others that it was a girl. Allowing for some variation attributable to judges' experience with infants, the results showed that different emotions, and different *levels* of emotion, were reported, and that these differences rested upon the sex of the judge and, more importantly, on the sex attributed to the baby. For example, when the child was described to them as being a boy, judges were more likely to see its reaction to a jack-in-the-box as being more angry and less fearful. Condry and Condry termed this the 'eye of the beholder' effect. A little later (1983), working with Pogatshnik, they demonstrated a (roughly) analogous 'ear of the beholder' one. Here, judges heard a baby waking up and, again, some were told it was a boy, others that it was a girl. While men responded quite slowly, regardless of the alleged sex of the infant, women responded more quickly to 'girls' than to 'boys'. The fact that questionnaire data showed that neither male nor female judges agreed with the opinion that girls are frailer creatures than are boys makes the results here less crystal-clear; nonetheless, it was again demonstrated that considerations of sex are likely to affect our perceptions, our assessments and our responses.

All of this should be seen as the general field of which more specific *language* issues are but one aspect. If we turn now to some of these specifics, we will have an opportunity to compare stereotypes and assumptions, on the one hand, and actual behaviour, on the other.

7.3 GENDER VARIATIONS IN SPEECH

7.3.1 Some general observations

The greatest variation, of course, would be found in a speech community in which men and women spoke different languages. This may seem unlikely, to say the least, but a famous instance was reported three hundred years ago by Europeans in contact with the Carib Indians of the new world. How could this come about? The Indians themselves provided this explanation (Trudgill, 2000: 66):

When the Caribs came to occupy the islands these were inhabited by an Arawak tribe which they exterminated completely, with the exception of the women, whom they married in order to populate the country. . . [thus] there is some similarity between the speech of the continental Arawaks and that of the Carib women.

A more considered analysis, however, indicated that:

The men have a great many expressions peculiar to them, which the women understand but never pronounce themselves. On the other hand the women have words and phrases which the men never use, or they would be laughed to scorn. Thus it happens that in their conversations it often *seems* as if the women had another language than the men. [my italics]

It would indeed be odd to find men and women unable to understand each other's language, but there are situations in which women customarily speak language A and men language B, and where the two sexes are bilingual. One such is found among Amazonian Indians living along the Vaupés river (Holmes, 1992). The language of the longhouse is Tuyuka, which is used by all the men, and between women and children. However, since men must marry outside their tribe, the first language of the wives is not Tuyuka; thus, a woman might be a native speaker of Desano and continue to use it with her husband – who answers her in Tuyuka. More common is the Carib scenario, in which certain features of men's and women's speech differ. Typical here are variations in pronunciation or morphology. Among the Gros Ventre of Montana, for example, the women say *kyatsa* for 'bread', while the men's form is *jatsa*. In Yana, another North American variety, the words of men and women differ because the former typically add a suffix: the word for 'deer' is *ba* (for women) and *ba-na* (for men), and 'person' is *yaa* or *yaa-na* (Holmes, 1992).

Beyond this, there are many examples of vocabulary differences between the sexes, although these seem never to be very extensive. In the 1930s a classic study was undertaken of Koasati, a language of Louisiana, which revealed sex differences with verb forms (Haas, 1944; see also Trudgill, 2000). In the phrase 'You are building a fire', men used the term *osch* while women said *ost*; in 'I am saying', the male variant was *kahal*, the female *kahas*; and so on. Vocabulary differences are seen in Japanese too, where women say *ohiya*, *onaka* and *taberu* for 'water', 'stomach' and 'eat', while men say *mizu*, *hara* and *kuu* (Holmes, 1992). Or consider Chiquito, a Bolivian language: here a woman says *ichibausi* to mean 'my brother' where a man would say *tsaruki*; 'my father' is *ishupu* for females, but *ijai* for males. Many of these variations say more, of course, about an elaborate system of kinship designation than about sex differences *per se*. After all, the relationship of a sister to her brother is not the same as that of brother to brother, and there is no reason why sisters and brothers should refer to other brothers with the same word.

There are languages in which the sex of the *listener* rather than that of the speaker determines the variant used, and there are others in which

the sex of *both* speaker and listener is influential. In Kūrux, a Dravidian language of India, a man speaking to either a man or a woman, and a woman speaking to a man, would say *bardan* ('I come'); a woman speaking to another woman, however, says *barʔen* (i.e. with a glottal stop). Speaking to a man, either sex says *barday* ('you come'), but speaking to a woman, a man would say *bardi* and another woman would use the form *bardin* (Ekka, 1972).

Why do such differences exist? In some cases, social and religious taboos can have linguistic consequences. In others, women's forms appear to be older than the men's: changes have occurred in men's speech which the women have yet to adopt. It is a common observation that women's linguistic patterns tend, overall, to be more conservative than those of men. Related to this, and supporting the maintenance of distinctions, is the view – expressed more in some cultures than in others – that the older forms are *better*.

The variations just considered are of the 'sex (or gender)-exclusive' variety (Bodine, 1975). But 'gender-preferential' features will be more recognizable to most readers of this book: linguistic practices and markers which are more *common* to one sex than to the other. The most general observation is the one I have just mentioned: women's speech tends to be more conservative, more 'standard' and more 'polite' than men's speech. In a much-quoted study, Fischer (1958) found, among young children in New England, that girls were much more likely than boys to use *-ing* rather than *-in'* for the ending of the present participle. Although the degree of differentiation varies, this has proved a robust finding in other contexts. While American research has predictably shown that the use of multiple negation ('I don't want none') is much more common among working-class speakers than among upper-class ones, it also reveals that women use it (and other similar grammatical variants) much less frequently than do men.

Findings within a speech community reveal that women's speech tends to be more standard than that of their male colleagues. An apparently contradictory finding is that, where a more prestigious variety is threatening a 'smaller' one, and where language shift to the former is underway, women tend to be early 'shifters' (see Scherer and Giles, 1979). But this seeming contradiction is resolved when we consider just why women's speech should be more standard than men's. Most explanations centre upon women's allegedly greater status-consciousness (Trudgill, 1983). If women are less socially secure than men, for example, they may wish to gain status through the use of more standard forms. It has also been suggested that, with women traditionally less likely to be defined by markers of occupation and income, they may make their speech a

sort of surrogate status marker; see also Trudgill (1972; 2000). They may also, in their maternal role, be more conscious of the importance of their children's acquisition of prestigious speech variants and thus, consciously or otherwise, see part of this role as linguistic model. Beyond this, there is also the already noted association between working-class speech and masculinity which, for males of *all* classes, can constitute so-called 'covert prestige' (see below). Research here has shown that males often *claim* to use more nonstandard forms than they actually do while females are more likely to over-report *standard* usage.

If women's and men's speech differs because the status (and hence, status-consciousness) of the genders differs, then it is clear that large social issues of power and subordination are involved. If women are expected to use 'better' forms than men, if they are supposed to be more 'polite', if their use of profanity and obscenity is more severely sanctioned, then we might conclude that they are a subordinate group whose linguistic (and other) behaviour has limits placed upon it. It is an irony, of course, that the forms this limiting takes are often velvet-lined: isn't it good to be polite and to avoid swearing? The fact remains, however, that if women are on some sort of linguistic pedestal in these regards, they have been *placed* there – and pedestals offer little room for movement.

A subordinate social role implies less freedom of movement, greater insecurity, uncertainty and lack of confidence. It is exactly these features that were elucidated by Robin Lakoff (1973, 1975, 1990) in her much-cited studies of women's language. These include:

- (a) lexical 'hedgies' or 'fillers' (*you know, sort of, you see*);
- (b) tag questions (*she's very nice, isn't she*);
- (c) emotional, expressive but often 'empty' adjectives (*divine, charming*);
- (d) precise colour terms (*magenta, taupe, mauve*);
- (e) intensifiers (*I like him so much*);
- (f) excessive politeness, avoidance of commitment and indirect requests;
- (g) euphemisms and avoidance of swearing;
- (h) emphatic stress (*it was a brilliant performance*);
- (i) use of diminutive forms;
- (j) collaborative rather than competitive conversational style;
- (k) greater use of gesture and intonation (i.e. nonverbal or paralinguistic accompaniments);
- (l) 'breathier' voice quality;
- (m) imprecision in diction.

There were several difficulties with Lakoff's work. Her methodology was questionable and her analysis was imprecise; her lists of features were hardly comprehensive; and she implicitly adopted a 'male-as-norm' perspective. Nonetheless, her attempts to at least begin a classification of recurring gender differences in speech have been widely recognised and applauded (see the appreciation by Crawford, 1995; Colley, 2005). The most interesting features are those involving either overstatement or understatement, because either of these can suggest nervousness, insecurity, desire to mollify, and avoidance of unpleasantness. And these, in turn, are related to gender differences in communication: men dominate conversations, men interrupt women more than women do men, women provide more conversational feedback than men – that is, they make more encouraging and facilitating remarks during exchanges – and so on. This, at least, has been the received wisdom.

It would be easy to see all of this as evidence of clear-cut differences in which comparisons are not generally favourable to women. These speech variants fit very nicely into the broader gender-trait stereotypes that I have already touched upon: in language as in social behaviour generally, women are timid, dainty, 'nice' and eager to please. The areas in which they are acknowledged to be more accomplished than men – presumably *because* they are 'women's work' – are themselves less 'serious', and certainly less rewarding in terms of the usual coins of society. Could there be, after all, any possible doubt about the relative importance of an extensive and fine-grained colour vocabulary, or an expanded capacity to endlessly discuss and dissect 'relationships', when compared to the discourse of engineers, surgeons, philosophers and other traditionally male groupings?

But what is easy is not always what is correct, and one or two points should be made. The speech characteristics traditionally associated with women are not, after all, exclusively theirs. The features do not always signify the same thing. And a dominant-subordinate dichotomy is clearly an inadequate explanation for gender variations. As an example, consider 'tag questions', one of the most widely discussed features of women's speech. Must they *always* imply uncertainty, do they *always* invite the listener to make a correction or at least expand upon a dubious utterance? Some clearly do ('*It's a wonderful painting, isn't it?*') but others are better understood as 'facilitative', giving the listener a comfortable conversational entry ('*You've just changed jobs, haven't you?*'), and others still may work to soften a criticism ('*That was a bit silly, wasn't it?*'). Readers will immediately see that these usages are frequently employed by both men and women. Tags can also be confrontational ('*You see what I'm telling you*

here, don't you?"); in this sort of case, readers may be right to believe that men are the more frequent users. In fact, Holmes (1992) analysed these and other features, plotting their gender distribution in a large corpus of speech. She found that most women's tag-question use (about 60%) was facilitative, another third expressed uncertainty, and only about 6% had a mollifying function. Men's use was clearly less facilitative (about 25%) – but about *twice as likely* to be used to 'soften' or to express uncertainty. These findings seem to turn stereotypes on their heads. Can men's language really involve more mollification of other speakers and listeners? Can men really be more uncertain in their opinions than women? And if they are more apt to 'soften' their views, why are they not more 'facilitative': wouldn't these tend to go together? Well, yes and no. As with the data concerning confidence and certainty of judgement (see chapter 5), it may be that men are more linguistically aggressive than are women, and hence feel a more frequent need to moderate their expressions; similarly, they may forge ahead with ill-informed points of view, only to have to back-pedal somewhat later. None of this need touch upon the 'facilitation' function that, indeed, seems to be taken more seriously by women.

Very recently, Cameron (2006, 2007) has shown, too, that women can be as conversationally aggressive as men in terms of turn-taking and interruption. Many of the 'classic' features identified by Lakoff do not, after all, discriminate particularly well between men and women. And it is noteworthy that some of the commentaries in the revised edition of Lakoff's classic work (2004) are now suggesting that it was always more about ideology and power than about this or that specific linguistic feature.

More fine-grained analyses of gender differences in speech reveal that 'women's' features, greater female politeness, increased use of standard variants and so on may all imply more about genuine facilitative and supportive desires than they do about insecurity and lack of confidence. The broader point, of course, is that men and women may use language for different social purposes, having been socialised in different ways from earliest childhood. Alleged differences in men's and women's 'gossip' are instructive here. The latter is traditionally seen to focus on personal relationships, experiences and problems, in a generally supportive atmosphere in which 'networking' is key. The former is more concerned with factual information, often in a competitive or combative format; of course, the tradition for men avoids the word 'gossip' altogether. Leet-Pellegrini (1980) succinctly remarked that men typically ask themselves if they have won in conversational exchanges, while women ponder whether or not they have been sufficiently helpful.

7.3.2 Verbosity and silence

If we return for a moment to proverbial aphorism, the most general proposition is that speech may be silver, but silence is golden. It is better to remain silent and be thought a fool, said Abraham Lincoln, than to open one's mouth and remove all doubt. The picture here contrasts the garrulous ass with the strong, silent type, and there is the further suggestion that, with wisdom, one expects taciturnity. The German proverbial assertion about silver and gold (*Reden ist Silber, Schweigen ist Gold*) is amplified by the further note that talking is natural (and common), while silence is wise (and rarer): thus, *Reden kommt von Natur, Schweigen vom Verstande*. No prizes are awarded for deducing the gender linkages that have suggested themselves here. Woman, the more 'natural' of the sexes or genders (see above) is inevitably also more 'common'; wisdom thus comes less frequently to her than it does to man. Besides, lacking the physicality of men, women find that *la langue est leur épée*, and it is a sword that they will not let rust. This, despite the fact that they are so often reminded about that golden silence that not only reflects sagacity but also – and even more importantly – obedience and submission. Silence may be the best ornament of a woman, but it is one she all too seldom wears.

In fact, however, there is abundant evidence that men talk more than women. The most recent demonstration of this is revealed in a meta-analysis of 150 studies involving thousands of informants conducted by Leaper and Ayres (2007). While the overall differences were slight (but significant), the authors found that nuances of speech *context* and *type* were more indicative of gender variations: women's speech, for instance, was more 'affiliative', men's more 'assertive'. These and other effects, however, can be substantially moderated or mitigated by specific setting variables (the gender of conversational participants, the topics being discussed, status and age variations, and so on). A recent book by Cameron (2007) criticises the received wisdom that there are, in fact, substantial differences between men's and women's language, paying particular attention to the 'verbosity' myth; see also below.² In the same way, there is abundant evidence that silence can be used in different ways. In one interpretation, silence can be an 'affiliative' device (hence, a 'feminine' one) that allows another participant an entry into the conversation. There is, of course, only a short interpretative step here between perceptions of polite consideration and of subordinate status (inferiors speak only when spoken to, otherwise remaining silent). In another interpretation, silence can be a reflection of male power. Sattel (1983) provides an excerpt from Erica Jong's *Fear of Flying*, in which the

man's lack of response to the woman is an exercise in dominance. In his commentary on this, Kiesling (2007) also makes the important point that social views and, more importantly, preconceptions are operative here: if a man is silent, this may well be seen to confirm his authority and potency; if a woman is silent, this may be taken as a confirmation of her weakness or timidity; see also Mills (2006) for a recent discussion of women as a silenced or 'muted' group.

7.3.3 Miscommunication between women and men

Coates (2004) provides some very useful general commentary here, much of which builds upon the familiar belief that while women's questions are used for conversational facilitation and maintenance or, more importantly, to invite discussion, men typically interpret them as they would their own – as requests for information *tout court*. This then leads to cross-purposes across the breakfast table. Cameron (1995, 2006, 2007) reminds us again, however, of the large overlap in the way men and women speak, and she is particularly critical of some of the 'popular' literature that has reinforced our sense of gender miscommunication. Commenting on the well-known work of Deborah Tannen (1986 and 1990, for instance), Cameron notes that problems arise, not because of linguistic gender differences, but because of variations in power. When the man says to his wife, 'Is there any ketchup?', the message is really 'Bring it to me.' If the daughter asks the same question, it is much more likely that the mother will respond by telling her that it is in the cupboard. Cameron (1995) is particularly insightful when she writes that the underlying theme in 'popular' books is that there are both real differences between men's and women's language, and useful ways of dealing with them. The 'strategies' here are essentially directed to women. These are self-help books, part of what Cameron (1995) styles the 'you and your relationship' genre, obviously meant for women. The problem, then, is that they really only deal with adaptation and tolerance; they do not come to grips with the reasons for either the behaviour or the stereotypes, and no contribution is thus made to any possible change.

Other 'advice' has suggested that women should speak more like men if they want to be taken seriously, to do well in the corporate world, and so on. Perhaps, on the other hand, women ought to be reassured that it is all right to be 'different'. But the first tack has sometimes contributed to the stereotype of the business woman who has surrendered her femininity, while the second may simply perpetuate older stereotypes; see Romaine (1997). It is instructive to learn that advocacy organisations for women in business, like *Catalyst* in the United States and Canada's

Women's Executive Network, continue to point to some very familiar problems. Pamela Jeffery, the current president of the Canadian body, has (Immen, 2008a) noted that – besides male prejudice and continuing difficulties in reconciling work and family life – women remain hampered by certain perceptions of language and style. There is the ‘femininity’ issue: successful women are seen to be abrasive and domineering, traits that attract much less negative comment in men. As well, Jeffery notes that female executives continue to find that assertiveness and social control, typically seen to be necessary for effective management, are hard to reconcile with other qualities – she mentions compassion and empathy – traditionally more evident among women. Immen (2008b) has recently reported that when *Vogue* offered her a place in the magazine, accompanied by photographs to be taken by Annie Liebowitz, Hillary Clinton declined on the grounds that appearing in that context would make her appear ‘too feminine’. For further documentation of the most recent trends here, see Immen (2008a) and Rosenzweig (2008). Finally here, Immen (2008b) cites recent survey work suggesting that, in fact, some combination of ‘male’ and ‘female’ characteristics may be the most effective for women in executive positions:

female managers who blend the traditional direct and authoritative style of leadership with a more nurturing and inclusive feminine style consistently achieve greater success than women who act strictly like men.³

7.3.4 Names and words

Coates (2004) refers to some of my own work on disadvantage (see Edwards, 1989), correctly pointing out that my treatment does not make clear that women constitute a disadvantaged social group in their own right. My discussion involved immigrants, ethnic-minority groups and working-class populations, and my particular focus was upon the social and linguistic difficulties encountered by children at school. But, as this chapter has already demonstrated, the traditional subordinate status of women is clearly marked in terms of language usage, attitudes and stereotypes. Some of these earlier and more egregious examples (cited by Smith, 1985) are no longer so apparent, perhaps:

Barrister and woman found dead. (newspaper headline)

QE-II ‘wife free’ fares across the Atlantic.

They add to the pleasure but not the price. (Cunard advertisement)

Drivers: belt the wife and kids – and keep them safe. (Road-safety poster)

If it were a lady, it would get its bottom pinched. (Fiat advertisement)

However, as Hellinger and Pauwels (2007) have recently demonstrated, the days of sexist language – usage that is insulting or trivialising to women – are far from over. References like ‘mankind’, ‘lady philosopher’ and ‘delegates and their wives’ still slip under the radar, despite current attention, omnipresent writers’ guidelines, and so on. (Romaine [1999] writes of being the only ‘lady professor’ at Merton College.) The most interesting questions, which go well beyond my purposes here, have to do with the appropriate response to sexist, inaccurate and unfair language.

Romaine (1999:291) summarises things: language both reflects and constructs woman’s status; it often casts her in an inferior or unfavourable light. So what to do? Ought we try and change society, secure in the knowledge that language change will follow? Should we make attempts at language reform, as a way of speeding the happy day? Is it language as symptom, or is it language as cause? Cameron (1992b) deals with this point, too. Her view is that suggesting changes to sexist language pays attention to words rather than to the meanings that underlie them (see also Spender, 1980). On the other hand, it is surely possible that attempts to change language, to change symptoms, could be useful. I am reminded here of anti-segregation moves in the American south. For instance, legislation banning the practice of consigning blacks to the back of the bus was considered by some to be dangerously ahead of prevailing (white) attitudes – pushing the envelope, to use a phrase not then in use. But the counter-argument was that action taken a little in advance, as it were, of attitudes could actually expedite changes in them. And so it proved in this case. The distance between attitude and action in these matters is crucial, of course.

Many would point to the apparently rapid adoption of the title ‘Ms’, although Romaine suggests that our applause should be a bit restrained. ‘Ms’ was meant, of course, to replace both ‘Mrs’ and ‘Miss’, to be analogous to the use of ‘Mr’, regardless of a man’s marital status. As Romaine suggests, however, it is often now a third option alongside the two terms it was to replace, or else is used as a replacement for ‘Miss’ alone. A Canadian study found that ‘Mrs’ was retained for married women, ‘Miss’ for unmarried ones, and ‘Ms’ for those who had divorced. For some, ‘Ms’ apparently suggests a woman who is trying to hide her marital status. Romaine provides an interesting note from a study by Ehrlich and King (1994): state authorities in Pennsylvania told their information officers that, if they recorded ‘Ms’ for a female, they should then put either ‘Miss’ or ‘Mrs’ in brackets immediately afterwards.

In a discussion less dated than his presentation of headlines and advertisements, Smith (1985) referred to the fact that words associated with

masculinity are more likely to be associated with prestige; conversely, 'feminine' words with negative connotations are more frequent than 'negative' men's words. Some caution is needed here, however, since prestige was defined as involving either skill or power over others. More elaborate investigations by Williams and Best (1982, 1990), however, involving adults and children in thirty countries, have shown that the affective components of trait descriptions can indeed vary significantly along evaluative dimensions. Adjectives seen to be associated with men score higher in terms of perceived strength and activity, for example, although no marked differences between the sexes/genders were found in terms of 'favourability'.

Personal names and their implications have been usefully discussed by Gibbon (1999) and Cameron (1990, 1992b); the latter has particularly relevant treatments of 'naming and representation', and within the 1990 collection there is a valuable study by Schulz on the 'semantic derogation of woman'. Spender (1980) also remains instructive reading here. Much of the discussion has become quite familiar now. Thus, sexual terms associated with males ('macho', 'stud' – even 'ladies' man') are often positive or, at least, reflect a sly admiration, while those for women tend to be demeaning or pejorative ('slut', 'tart'). Animal names applied to men and women ('dogs' and 'bitches') also differ in their force and direction. 'Bulls' are not merely male 'cows', and 'bachelor' is not merely a male equivalent of 'spinster'. Beyond these rather shop-worn illustrations are some less familiar onomastic notes. We know that names that can apply to either gender are sometimes spelled differently (Lesley/Leslie), but it is apparently the case that, once a name is used for girls, it loses its popularity for boys (Beverley, Evelyn). Boys' names are often shorter, and end with a firm, consonantal stop. Girls' names are longer, often derivative of boys' names (Roberta, Patricia), and often end in a 'softer' vowel. Many female names mean something nice: virtues (Patience or Faith) or precious stones (Ruby, Emerald) or flowers (Violet).

7.3.5 Swearing, politeness and standard usage

As I have already noted, standard middle-class usage has typically been more attractive as a status marker to women than to men. This is related to the common perception that women's speech is 'politer' and more 'correct', and that they are less prone to profane and obscene language. A greater linguistic insecurity among women has been seen as important here, an insecurity that may rest upon a more pronounced status-consciousness, coupled with a traditional lack of social, occupational and other markers of place – markers that operate for men, beyond the front gate, but that have been less available for those whose role keeps

them nearer home and hearth. These are the familiar explanations that will be found in sociolinguistics texts. They are undoubtedly valid, but they hardly do justice to the great historical sweep that has created gender roles and stereotypes in all societies. Women in western society, for example, may use fewer 'four-letter words' than do men, and this may indeed reflect a less solid social footing, real or perceived. But it is surely also the residue of a very long period during which linguistic sanctions of all sorts have become so thoroughly ingrained in the essence of 'femaleness' that they can be expected to retain something of their force long after status differentials have begun to shrink. Many attributes and practices survive the passing of the conditions which initially gave rise to them.

I chose this example on purpose, however, because – as most readers can readily attest – women do seem to swear more often nowadays. (Also noteworthy is the increased likelihood of *men* swearing when women are present.) It is also the case that shifts in usage here are more marked in some contexts than in others. I have been in factories, for example, in which powerfully obscene language was the norm for both men and women. Montagu (1967: 87) cited a war-time aircraft factory setting in America in which signs directed at the (female) workers read 'No swearing. There may be gentlemen about.' Hughes (2002) reports on the extensive use of expletives among working-class women in Salford. These are perhaps the contemporary descendants of the Billingsgate fishmongers, particularly fishwives (see Hughes, 2006). Occupational and educational levels, then, are important variables here – as is age: the four-letter words I regularly hear used by female undergraduates in the corridors are not nearly so frequent in the mouths of their women instructors, even when the latter are relaxing after work, even when (so I am reliably informed) they are in same-sex venues.⁴ Finally here, studies have shown that, even in this linguistically permissive age, there are still some words (fewer than once was the case, of course) that women tend not to use. There is swearing and swearing. Among others, Coates (2004), Jay (1992) and Hughes (2006: 195) note, for example, that, while women may actually swear *more* than men in some contexts, they still 'lag significantly behind men in using terms for the genitalia' (it is debatable, of course, whether 'lagging behind' is entirely apt here). My point in all this is that any argument that holds men to be less polite and more profane than women is entirely too simplistic. Hughes's (2006) long essay on women's swearing, in his wonderful encyclopaedia, provides an excellent brief overview, all the way from the earliest European written records to the language of female characters in *The Sopranos*.

The better analyses have always recognised the nuances here, going back at least to the work of Brown and Levinson (1987), and most recent overviews have appropriately expanded the arena of enquiry, first by embedding the discussion in broader perspectives on gender variations in language and, second, by treating both genders under the one roof. Coates thus accompanied her initial book on women's language with one on men's talk (1996, 2003) and her most recent discussion brings them together (2004). Crawford (1995), Holmes (1995) and Mills (2003) provide valuable discussions of 'politeness' and 'nonstandardness' in the dynamic context of power and its negotiation. Salkie pointed out (2004: 29) that 'politeness is what in the language field we call a Whelk (What every linguist knows)'. Perhaps swearing is another. It is certainly the case that studies in politeness and swearing – and, more broadly, in the whole standard–nonstandard continuum – have increased dramatically in the last two decades.

There are many interesting modern works dealing with obscenity and profanity. A useful place to begin is McArthur's (1996) brief discussion of offensive words; it concludes with a six-page chronology (from 1300 to 1900) that outlines swearing in print. All the important milestones are here: Chaucer, Shakespeare, Grose's famous dictionary of 'the vulgar tongue', the activities of Thomas Bowdler, the *Lady Chatterley's Lover* case, and so on. McArthur also draws our attention to the periodic attempts to ban or regulate offensive usage; she mentions the nineteenth-century American Comstock Law and the twentieth-century attempts to give some legal definition to 'obscenity'. Interesting here is the *Act for the More Effectual Suppressing [of] Profane Cursing and Swearing*. McArthur records a date here of 1694, and implies an English origin, although Benjamin Franklin printed off copies of this title in 1746. There were probably many such acts, on both sides of the Atlantic, with the same or similar title. Trevelyan (1949–1952) notes the various moves against swearing, drunkenness, indecency and Sunday trading in early eighteenth-century England. A tract entitled *Kind Cautions Against Swearing* was distributed among the coachmen of London; another was *Kind Cautions to Watermen*. Trevelyan also reproduces (III: 36), in its entirety, a broadsheet headed *A Short Warning, or Reproof, to all Desperate and Prophane Swearers, Coursers, Damners, etc.*, distributed for one 'Philearetus' (the name means 'lover of virtue').

There are many accounts of swearing, from many theoretical perspectives; the psychoanalytic literature is particularly rich. On a more eclectic note, Jay (1992, 2000) provides comprehensive overviews of 'cursing' in many settings. His work is notable for its combination of experimental findings (on usage and attitude) and theoretical underpinnings: what

is swearing, why and when does it occur and so on. Most relevant for our purposes here are his relatively brief remarks on gender. The most general observations are that, over time, the 'swearing gap' between men and women has narrowed, but that men still swear more frequently than do women, and that they remain more likely to use what are broadly judged to be the most offensive words of all. Long ago, Robert Graves, in his *Lars Porsena* (1927/1972), advanced the theory that swearing increases at times of stress. He began with the observation:

Of recent years in England there has been a noticeable decline of swearing and foul language, and this, except at centres of industrial depression, shows every sign of continuing until a new shock to our national nervous system, a European war on a large scale or widespread revolutionary disturbances at home, may (or may not) revive the habit of swearing, simultaneously with that of praying. (p. 1)

Of course, Graves's little book is essentially a literary excursion, not a sociological one, but this does not make it without interest – even today – nor should the reader be put off by the rather weaselly 'may or may not' phrase. This interest need not extend to acceptance of the author's thesis; his sense that offensive language was in decline in the late 1920s probably reflects the restricted circles in which he moved, and the great alterations in his life since his years of familiarity with army profanity during the First World War (see Graves, 1929/1960). In his foreword to the later edition of *Lars Porsena* (1972), Graves slips again:

Swearing has now virtually ended in Britain, except for words like 'bloody' and 'fucking', still commonly used as intensives. This is because the age of sexual permissiveness initiated by the Pill makes pornography no longer either legally punishable or morally shocking; because the almost total decay of religious faith has taken all the punch out of mere blasphemy.

There is an interesting theory lurking in this, but it is of course an incorrect one. What would Graves have made of modern politicians who wear their religion on their sleeves, of the rise of the evangelical right in America, of Islamic fundamentalism, of the many shades of political correctness?

Montagu's (1967/2001) classic study gave only two pages (out of almost 400) to what he styled 'the sexual factor in swearing', and these were largely devoted to the idea that while swearing is generally a way of 'letting off steam' for men, the women's traditional equivalent has been weeping. This remains, he argued, a 'dependable outlet' for frustration and anger, and one to which a woman can resort without social penalty. Montagu reinforced his point by noting that those women (he mentions

prostitutes) who *do* swear rarely cry; his point of reference here is Hamlet's reference to whores, drabs and scullions. A corollary is that 'if women wept less they would swear more' (p. 87) and that the modern woman has indeed made a transition here.

Holmes (1995) reminds us that politeness is a good thing, a social lubricant that can make people feel safer and more comfortable; it is an obviously central aspect in any form of 'facilitative' speech. As with swearing, Mills (2003) and others remind us that the frequency, form and function of polite usage are important matters. As with swearing, it would be incorrect to simply say that women are more polite than men. As with swearing, social-class variables may be more generally predictive of politeness than those of gender. In some ways, politeness is to swearing as the masculine directness attributed to working-class speech is to the more 'feminised' middle-class usage (recall here my 1979 study, described above). Politeness that is seen as excessive or insincere is often associated with subordination and deference – which can, in turn, reinforce its 'feminine' connotations. On the other hand, when we consider the regularity with which we hear empty suggestions ('Have a nice day'), or have someone tell us who they are, for obviously venal reasons ('Hi! I'm Chuck, and I'll be your waiter this evening') or are inappropriately reassured ('Hey! No problem'), and when all such noxious utterances blithely cross every conceivable divide of age and sex, it is possible to imagine that the entire currency has become so incredibly cheapened that it would be stupid to try and attach any gender nuances to its use.

7.4 CONCLUDING REMARKS

Although the chapter title here singled out neither men nor women, I seem to have written mostly about the latter. There are good reasons for doing so, and they have been implicit throughout the discussion. It can be more instructive, in linguistic terms, to study Spanish rather than English language policies in the United States; it may be more revealing, in racial terms, to consider the social situation of blacks rather than whites there, too. Likewise, it may be more appropriate to focus upon women than upon men. The general point here has to do with Dostoevski's argument that understanding the treatment of subaltern populations provides the single best perspective on a society.

Kiesling (2007) notes that women are more attended to than men in this literature, because the latter have been, and continue to be, the benchmark; they are the 'unmarked variant', dominant and taken for

granted. This is why, when men *have* been the object of linguistic study, it is gay men, or black men, or male members of some other 'marked' community who have attracted attention. Kiesling (p. 654) also points to what he calls the two main 'schools' in the area of language and gender: dominance and difference. He notes:

the dominance view supposedly saw the root of (almost) all gender differences in language as being related to male dominance and female subordination, while the difference perspective viewed these differences as arising from the different 'cultures' that girls and boys inhabit when they are young.

At first blush, these seem analogous to the more familiar dichotomies of nature and nurture, or heredity and environment. It is apparent, however, that both dominance and difference could be ascribed to environmental influences; just as easily, however, both could be laid at the feet of hereditary ones. Consequently, they are unsatisfactory and essentially false theoretical positions. From a feminist point of view – or, indeed, from any other that would like to see some alteration in male–female interactions, linguistic or otherwise – aetiologies are less important than some might wish to claim. If, on the one hand, environmental or cultural variation contributes the most to differences between men and women, then there is always the possibility of change: man (woman) is both proposer and disposer. If biological imperatives form the foundation of behaviour, on the other hand – well, there is no reason that we cannot rise above them: God's (nature's) ability to dispose can be trumped by our own.

Since the work of Kramarae (1981), at least, the best treatments have attended to both men and women (e.g. Coates, 2003, 2004; Cameron, 2007; Holmes, 1995; Johnson and Meinhof, 1997). These all make the point, for example, that assessments of women's politeness, or swearing, or use of tag-questions, are often built upon unexamined assumptions about the men's speech from which women's is seen to depart. Most of them are well aware, too, that any bald comparison between men and women *tout court* is likely to be of extremely limited interest; in fact, such comparisons are usually only possible within sterile experimental settings. Almost everything here depends upon context and circumstance: the assertive father can be a timid office worker; the polite little woman can prove to be as forceful and profane as the burly soldier; David Hockney probably knows more colour terms than does Nigella Lawson; female roller-derby skaters are more personally competitive than are male baseball players; men gossip more about the trivialities of sport than women do about shopping; Joan Rivers interrupts people more often than her husband does – but only in public; and so on.

Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003) provide an excellent discussion of the vagaries and vicissitudes of 'networking' and its organisation, in which it appears that much of women's activity is driven by practical necessity, and much of men's gossip is intensely personal. Folk-wisdom is turned on its head. If one were to put together a corpus of women's exchanges about child-rearing, and compare it to a similar assemblage of men's talk about work or sports – just to remain in traditional arenas here – the inconsequentiality of the latter would likely be in stark contrast to the practicality and applied value of the former. Here, women discuss tangible matters of immediate and obvious relevance, while men natter on about who said what, who cheated, who was strong and who was weak. Any thoroughgoing and fair-minded investigation must always take on board various social divisions, all of which interact in important ways. Central here, of course, are the many possible interactions involving gender variables themselves: all women, all men, men and women together, younger men and older women, young women among older men, low-status workers with bosses, and so on.

Hannah and Murachver (2007) have demonstrated – or re-demonstrated, to be more accurate – the presence of some of the 'classic' gender differences; they have done so, however, in a way that illustrates the interactive nuances just mentioned. Both men and women, in conversation with more or less 'facilitative' partners, for instance, showed systematic adaptations to them. Over time, though, they tended to shift towards more 'gendered patterns': men began to talk more than women, to make longer utterances, to become less facilitative; women began to speak less, and to ask more questions. The authors note that while these differences seem robust enough, the fact that they emerge most markedly *after* an initial period in which the speech style of one participant has had time to affect that of another suggests the importance of considering the 'interrelatedness' of conversational exchanges. Gender variations do not occur independently of contextual constraints (see also Crawford, 1995; Tannen, 1994), and it is thus an error to consider them in some disembodied manner. Kramarae (1981) was one of the earliest writers to attend to gender-in-interaction, and subsequent authors have emphasised it more and more; other early studies of note include Tannen's more 'popular' treatments (1986, 1990); see also her edited collection (1993) and the recent Tannen *et al.* (2007), in which discourse among parents and children is examined. Finally here, the rise of the internet has led to some interesting work on gender differences in a context devoid of the usual conversational cues. Fox *et al.* (2007) have shown that while 'instant messaging' practices are broadly similar across male and female users, the latter are more expressive in their use of emphasis,

adjectives and number of topics. They also used more 'emoticons' (the use of characters or symbols, like ☺, to insert emotion into a message); see also Provine *et al.* (2007).

Throughout, however, the point that men and women use language, at least some of the time, for different purposes is surely reasonable; and there is ample evidence that this is generalisable across cultures (Bull and Swan, 1992). Despite considerable recent advances in both information and sensitivity, we must continue to be alert to the danger of seeing the speech of one gender (need I say which?) as the norm from which that of the other differs or deviates. Why say women are more polite than men, or swear less, or are more conversationally facilitative, or hedge their linguistic bets? Why not ask, rather, why men are ruder, more confrontational and more unreasonably assertive? An answer is provided by Frank and Anshen (1983: 46):

If it were shown that men speak more surely than women, hesitating less, this would certainly be greeted as another sign of masculine superiority. The halting speech of women would be seen as evidence of their tentative, feminine nature. Yet, when Jespersen found just the opposite phenomenon, that men hesitate more than women when speaking, he naturally attributed this fact to a greater desire for accuracy and clarity among male speakers, which leads them to search for just the right word.

This is a variant of the familiar 'heads I win tails you lose' perspective, the same sort of agreement that Freud made with himself, but only with himself: if some symbolic entity resists all attempts to fit it into an emerging psychoanalytic picture, then it can be assigned an altogether new value. And this is the same Jespersen who, standing at the head of a long line of later authors, both male and female, felt obliged to include in his *Language* (1922) a chapter on women but none on men. An analysis of tag-questions that built upon Holmes's insights had as its title 'Not gender difference, but the difference gender makes' (Cameron, 1992a) – and this apt phrase is relevant to all investigations in the area.⁵

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. On what (linguistic) grounds might miscommunication between women and men be expected?
2. Why should the language of men and women continue to show – if, in some circumstances, in somewhat attenuated form – differences in both politeness and profanity?

3. Studies suggest that children learn and reproduce gender-trait stereotypes at a very early age. Is this worrisome? What, if anything, might be done to intervene here?
4. How might society better combat sexist language?

Further reading

Deborah Cameron's (2007) *The Myth of Mars and Venus: Do Men and Women Really Speak Different Languages?* is a very insightful commentary on the topic, one that pays particular attention to different practices that may not, in fact, be as different as both popular perceptions and academic insights have made them out to be.

Marlis Hellinger and Anne Pauwels (2007), in their chapter 'Language and sexism', give a good overview of the area.

Scott Kiesling's article (2007) 'Men, masculinities and language' is useful. Common-sense suggests that men's language may require some attention too, as several recent authors have argued; Kiesling's brief overview brings the most important findings up to date here.

Robin Lakoff's (2004) *Language and Woman's Place: Text and Commentaries* is a revised and updated presentation of her classic 1975 monograph, here supplemented by a number of scholarly commentaries on her work.