



## **LANGUAGE USE BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN**

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***Abstract:** Sex differences bring a consequence of difference in language use between men and women. From the long process of socio-cultural legitimization in gender, the difference is assumed predestine that gives consequence of inequality of sex treatment in language. In short, sex and gender differences pervade all aspects of language. English use between men and women manifests in phonology, morphology and vocabulary, intonation patterns, and conversational styles.*

***Key words:** gender, language, men, women*

### **INTRODUCTION**

As a branch of linguistics that studies language dealing with society, sociolinguistics has some social variables in its research such as social class, age, sex, etc. In the research those variables are correlated to understand language basically. Besides, the research has often taken sex differences as independent variable, for instance in a research that correlate language and sex differences (gender).

Before going further, it is essential to explain about the concept of sex and gender. Sex is the characterization or dividing of two sexes of human beings determined biologically which attach to certain sex (for example, certain biological characteristics), whereas gender is characteristics attached to both men and women constructed socially and culturally (such as women are known delicate and pretty) (Fakih, 1996:8). Sex differences, automatically, bring a consequence of difference in language use between men and women. Then, gender differences (also in language) are formed, socialized,

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strengthened, even legitimized socially and culturally. From the long process, the difference is assumed predestine that gives consequence of inequality of sex treatment in language (Budiwati, 2000:183).

Language, of course, is not sexist. But as we know that men and women often play distinctly different roles in society, so they differ in the kinds of language they use and how they use it. No wonder if the more distinct the roles, the greater the differences. How and what the differences of English language use between men and women? This article will describe some studies or research by some linguists that show the differences. These studies are mainly taken from some sources such as Deborah Tannen's *Seni Komunikasi Efektif* (trans.), Ralph Fasold's *Sociolinguistics of Language*, and Ronald Wardhaugh's *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*.

## LANGUAGE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN

Recently, one topic that has come to the fore in sociolinguistics is the connection between the structures, vocabularies, and ways of using particular languages and the social roles of the men and women who speak these languages.<sup>2</sup> In this case, English has received more discussion than any other language, largely because of the impact of early American feminism (Crystal, 1987: 46). Some differences in language between men and women are given in this paper, i.e.:

### A. Phonological Differences

A variety studies on phonological differences between the speech of men and women have been done by many linguists. For example, Fischer's study (1958) of the (*ng*) variable, i.e. pronunciations like *singing* /h/ versus *singin'* /n/.<sup>3</sup> The research shows boys used more *in'* forms than girls in the most formal situation. Then Cheshire has also done research on (*s*) variable in the speech of boys and girls in Reading, England (ex. "I knows to stick in the boot" or "I just lets her beat me"). In this research she devises an index based on ambition, degree of 'toughness', and peer group status. Her research shows that girls uses the s ending as much as boys, but do not exhibit the same correlation between frequency of use and index scores. In short, from many studies it seems that women use more favored or correct forms than men do.

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2 Wardhaugh, 1986, P. 302.

3 Ibid. P. 155-156.

### B. Morphology and Vocabulary Differences

In grammar (morphology), the issue that has attracted most attention is the lack of sex-neutral, third person singular pronoun in English, especially in its use of after indefinite pronouns, e.g. *If anyone wants a copy, he can have one* (Crystal, 1987: 46). In the plural, there is no problem, for *they* is available. In lexicon, *man* is used to refer to generic phrases as in *salesman, policeman, chairman*, etc. The consequence of the distinctions is that recently a frequent insistence that neutral words are often used as much as possible, as in describing occupation e.g., *chairperson* (not *chairman*), *letter carrier* (not *postman*), *salesclerk* (not *salesman*), *police officer* (not *policeman*), etc.

Lakoff (in Wardhaugh, p. 304-5) claims that women use color words like *mauve, aquamarine, lavender, and magenta* but most men do not. She also shows that adjectives such as *adorable, charming, divine, lovely, and sweet* are also commonly used by women but only very rarely by men. English, as a language, is said to make certain distinctions of sex-based kind, e.g., *actor-actress, waiter-waitress, bachelor-spinster, governor-governess, witch-warlock, and master-mistress*. Some of the distinctions have pejorative meaning, for instance a 'spinster' image an old and unappealing woman in a consequence of her failure to marry, while a 'bachelor' is seen as being unmarried by choice and living in a happy life; a 'governess' cares for small children and is employed by their wealthy parents, while a 'governor' has considerable power as the executive of a political administrative unit; both a 'witch' and a 'warlock' posses evil supernatural power, but no one would think of indicating that man who is ugly and ill-tempered by calling him a 'warlock'. In Indonesian, 'nenek sihir' is used to refer an ugly, ill-tempered and wicked woman, whereas the word 'kakek sihir' is not never used (Budiwati, 2003: 56).

### DIFFERENCE IN INTONATION AND PATTERNS

Women use certain patterns associated with surprise and politeness more often than men. Lakoff says that women may answer a question with a statement that employs the rising intonation pattern associated with making a firm statement. This is because they are less sure about themselves and their opinions than men. In this case, women often add tag questions to statements, e.g., 'They caught the robber last week, *didn't they?*' (Compare with Ulfa in 'Ngerumpi di Mall' who often says 'Ya nggak, ya nggak, ya

*nggak?*). Dealing with this, in answer to the question, 'When will dinner be ready?', women will tend to answer '*Around six o'clock?*'. They will feel inclined to adjust dinner time to suit the convenience of the other members of the family. On the other hand, men will reply '*At six o'clock, and everybody better be here*'.

## **DIFFERENCES IN CONVERSATIONAL STYLE**

Men-women communication is cross-cultural one. This different culture includes different hopes of conversation role in a relationship and how the relationship conditions the conversation (Tannen, 1996: 126).

### **A. Conversational Style between Men and Women**

Most women need more involvement in conversation than men do. Women feel understandable without saying anything explicitly what they mean. To get the understanding, women express it by meta-meaning or meta-message (one form of insincerity/"frame of conversation"). Women tend not to say straightforwardly, and try to deal by negotiation in which they express their solidarity. In this case, women prefer to show solidarity than power, although the goal is the same; that is to get what they want. But, the different conversational styles between men and women often cause misunderstanding among them.

### **B. Understanding Meta-language**

Men often focus on message, whereas women think about meta-message. Women understand and appreciate meta-message because they focus more on involvement, that is the relationship between each other, and through the meta-message the relationship between someone and others is built and maintained.<sup>4</sup> To catch meta-message, sensitivity is needed, and women are more sensitive in this case.

### **C. Different Focus in Conversation**

The different perspective on meta-message between men and women make different focus of conversation when they talk about some problems in their communication. When women pay more attention to meta-message (feeling), men more focus on message (action). For example, a woman can

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4 Tannen, 1996.

catch different message from a man when he stares at her instantly. She may feel that he assumes her as a bad woman. In fact, he does not think that at all. He may think different thing.

#### D. Conversational Theme and Form

Women and men have different interest in conversational theme. Women pay more attention in conversational details (*not important things*), not because the details are important but because telling details action show involvement (care each other). It is normal for women to tell and listen what happen today, who's called, and what she/he has told. Meanwhile, men usually do not use such conversation and think it not important. To men, essential things to talk are the fact or topic like politic, sports, history, etc.

### CONCLUSION

The sex differences make language use different between men and women. The differences are the result of biological, psychological, and social factors. The language differences manifest in phonology, morphology and vocabulary, intonation patterns, and conversational styles. Discussion on different language use between men and women are not the effort to make a gap between them, but try to understand language dealing with their differences, not the discrimination.

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