

GENDER AND ITS IMPACT ON LANGUAGE

Ioana Boștenaru

MA Student, "Babeș-Bolyai" University of Cluj-Napoca

Abstract : Language represents an essential aspect of our lives and we should all be aware of its complex features because we contribute to its shaping as members of the speech community, being shaped by it at the same time. However, different formulas of one and the same language emerge in the speech community, several aspects leading to these "language diversities": context, age, status on the social ladder, region, but also gender. This research paper approaches gender, focusing on its impact on language. Starting from the discourse in which men and women are engaged daily, the article will underline the main perspectives outlined by linguists concerning the different speech styles of men and women. Moreover, a questionnaire completed by students will point out the awareness of nowadays society with regard to the differences between the patterns of linguistic behaviour assigned to men and women, which often highlight a stereotypical approach, leading to the discrimination of women.

Keywords: gender, discourse, difference, stereotype, discrimination.

Introduction

People are engaged daily in discourses, interacting in different contexts and bringing with them distinct backgrounds and values, but also a particular speech style according to their age, position, geographical area or gender. This paper approaches the latter element, gender, focusing on the peculiar patterns of linguistic behaviour assigned to men and women.

Regarding the notion of "discourse" because it represents the point of departure of this inquiry, it has known various approaches, most scholars in the field of linguistics and sociolinguistics attempting to define it as properly as they considered. Therefore, it has been perceived as: "a dynamic process in which language was used as an instrument of communication in a context by a speaker/writer to express meanings and achieve intentions."¹ Hence, according to this perspective, we are engaged daily in a „dynamic process”, communicating with other individuals and conveying ideas and perceptions with regard to the world and to what happens around us. The complexity of discourse is depicted in a more playful approach belonging to James Paul Gee, who states that: "Discourses are out in the world and history as coordinations (a dance) of people, places, time, actions, interactions, verbal and non-verbal expressions, symbols, things, tools, and technologies that betoken certain identities and associated activities."² In this *dance of people*, gender distinctions are brought to the surface, determining different speech styles, different representations in the linguistic imaginary that individualize each sex. These dissimilarities are obvious in our society, being acknowledged not only through the manner of talking and relating therefore to the world, but by simply looking around and observing distinct ways of dressing, for

¹ Gillian Brown, George Yule, *Discourse Analysis*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1983, p. 26.

² James Paul Gee, *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method*, New York, Routledge, 2005, p. 32.

instance.

When it comes to defining gender, most researchers point out that it should be taken into consideration the fact that it is distinct from sex. In this respect, gender should not be confound with a biological distinction, because it points out the way in which society deals with sex categories, by assigning different attitudes to them. Thus, there is a role, a set of features assigned to us, according to our sex, feminine or masculine, since our birth. This dimension of gender is also pointed out by Peter Trudgill, who claims the existence of: “different social attitudes towards the behaviour of men and women”³, in other words, the existence of a well-established set of norms, which characterize each gender. West and Zimmerman’s perspective goes in the same direction, the expression that they promote, “doing gender”, being extremely suggestive. Hence, in their view, gender is perceived as “the activity of managing situated conduct in light of normative conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate for one’s sex category.”⁴ If a person is “doing gender”, it means that he/she has appeal to the appropriate attitudes, to the appropriate behaviour according to his/her gender when interacting with other people in society: “a person’s gender is not simply an aspect of what one is, but, more fundamentally, it is something that one does, and does recurrently, in interaction with others.”⁵ Therefore, in these particular interactions different attitudes emerge, a different behaviour assigned to men and women, which is also remarkable at the level of language. In this respect, this research paper will outline hereunder, in the first section, the main perspectives regarding the differences between men’s and women’s patterns of linguistic behaviour which were outlined in the specialized literature (the *difference, dominance and deficit* perspectives), highlighting as well if and how these differences are perceived nowadays in society, in the second section, through the interpretation of twenty questionnaires addressed to both male and female students.

Hereby, resting upon the theoretical framework and upon the analysis of the questionnaires, this paper attempts to draw attention to the implications of gender on discourse, pointing out that in most cases the discrimination of women occurs in society and it is encouraged through language.

1. Accounts on gender differences in discourse

The idea of dissimilarities between men and women at the level of language has represented one of the main preoccupations of linguists and sociolinguists, who tackled the issue extensively, their opinions leading to the emergence of three main strands of interpretation: *difference, dominance and deficit*.

1.1. The difference perspective

According to this first strand of interpretation, the differences between women’s and men’s communicative behaviour have been linked to the fact that they represent *two distinct subcultures*. Within each subculture, there is a particular range of communicative patterns to whom men and women have recourse when interacting with other individuals. Hence, men and women speak differently because they have been raised in a different manner, they take part in different activities and therefore they are assigned a different role in interactions. This point of view is sustained by Tannen, who claims that: “Culture is simply a network of habits and patterns gleaned from past experiences, and women and men have different past experiences. From the time they were born, they were treated differently, talked to differently, and talk differently as a result.”⁶ Hence, from a tender age, we are assigned an appropriate behaviour, according to our sex, developing in separate

³ Peter Trudgill, *Sociolinguistics. An Introduction to Language and Society*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1974, p. 94.

⁴ C. West, Don H. Zimmermann, “Doing Gender” in *Gender and Society*, vol. 1, no. 2. Sage Publications, 1987, p. 127.

⁵ *Idem*, p. 140.

⁶ Deborah Tannen, *That’s not what I Meant! How Conversational Style Makes or Breaks Your Relations with Others*, New York, William Morrow & Co, 1986, p. 125.

dimensions of culture.

Maltz and Borker focused on this *difference perspective* too, underlining the norms which distinguish the linguistic behaviour of each subculture and which lead to miscommunication, an opinion shared also by Ann Weatherall, who affirms that the “miscommunication theory is based on the idea that women and men have to communicate across a cultural divide (...) the implication of the cultural approach and miscommunication theory is that women and men experience frustration and misunderstanding when they try to talk to one another.”⁷ In order to point out the belonging of men and women to different conversational styles, Maltz and Borker approached the minimal answers that men and women give in an interaction:

“Imagine a male speaker who is receiving repeated nods or “mm hmm”s from the woman he is speaking to. She is merely indicating that she is listening, but he thinks she is agreeing with everything he says. Now imagine a female speaker who is receiving only occasional nods and “mm hmm”s from the man she is speaking to. He is indicating that he doesn't always agree; she thinks he isn't always listening.”⁸

Hence, according to these scholars, if women choose minimal answers so as to illustrate that they are listening, men perceive them erroneously as agreement. Thus, minimal answers represent a suggestive example of how men and women behave according to different communicative norms in an interaction that they establish with other individuals. The gender subcultures are shaped since childhood and this is the main reason why they generate different patterns of linguistic behaviour for men and women. As Weatherall argues, “a female subculture creates and maintains relationships of closeness and equality (...) women develop a co-operative style of communication”⁹, while men are more interested in competition. Not only minimal answers reveal differences between the conversational styles assigned to men and women from a cultural point of view. Scholars in the field have also approached tag questions, claiming that they are representative for women's speech and although they are perceived as a negative feature, they point out the cooperation tendency: “Research, such as that done on tag questions, using a cultural, rather than a dominance framework, has suggested that women's speech is far from being referential, confused and uncertain, but can be confident, facilitating and supportive.”¹⁰ Thereby, cross-gender interactions generate miscommunication and misinterpretations of what is being said because two distinct types of communicative behaviour representative for the two subcultures come in touch:

“The worlds of the two sexes constitute something akin to separate subcultures. Each involves an elaborate assignment of roles to its members and the development of preferred personality types emphasizing various ones of the most significant role attributes. These two subcultures, though in general complementary and reciprocal, compete at certain points.”¹¹

There are many linguists who adhered to this *difference perspective* concerning the conversational styles of men and women, basing their arguments on other clues than minimal answers or tag questions. For instance, Deborah Tannen identified *six main dissimilarities*¹² between the speech of men and women. The first dichotomy that she pointed out was *status vs.*

⁷ Ann Weatherall, *Gender, Language and Discourse*, New York, Routledge, 2002, p. 70.

⁸ Daniel Maltz, Ruth Borker, "A Cultural Approach to Male-Female Miscommunication" in Coates, Jennifer (ed.) *Language and Gender: A Reader*, Oxford, 1998, p. 422.

⁹ Ann Weatherall, *Gender, Language and Discourse*, New York, Routledge, 2002, p. 71.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹¹ Robert Lynd, Hellen Lynd, *Middletown in Transition. A Study in Cultural Conflicts*, New York, Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1937, p. 176.

¹² Deborah Tannen, *You just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation*. New York, Ballantine Books, 1990.

support. While men are interested in competing with the others and in enhancing their position in society or in a group, women tend to establish connections with other people, to reach consensus. Another difference that Tannen identifies is *independence vs. intimacy*. While men are more independent in their attempt to assert themselves, women seek to maintain intimacy and to establish good relationships with the others. Moreover, the author detects a contrast between *advice* and *understanding*. Men have a great tendency to find an immediate solution rather than empathizing with the others and this is what differentiates them from women. In addition, men seek more the *transmission of information*, in contrast with women, who are more keen on *expressing their feelings*. The fifth difference that Tannen identifies regards the dissimilarity between *orders* – male-specific and *proposals* – female-specific. Last but not least, if men tend to be *resistant* when it comes to a conflict, women are more likely to make *compromises*, in the pursuit of problem solving. Hence, cultural differences are prominent, shaping distinct speech styles for men and women.

1.2. The dominance perspective

Regarding the second disseminated perspective, it had many proponents among scholars in the field of linguistics and sociolinguistics, the most representative being Don Zimmerman and Candace West, William O’Barr and Bowman Atkins, Dale Spender or Pamela Fisherman. According to this theory, the differences between women’s and men’s speech are associated with men’s superiority in society, as individuals who possess a powerful language, as Coates points out: “the dominance approach sees women as an oppressed group and interprets linguistic differences in women’s and men’s speech in terms of men’s dominance and women’s subordination.”¹³ Thus, the dominance of men in society is also reflected through their linguistic behaviour, a *powerful* one, set in contrast with that of women.

To begin with, Zimmerman and West adhered to this approach of dominance, analyzing conversations in terms of silence and interruptions. They drew the conclusion that men are responsible for interruptions in conversations, using them as a weapon in order to enhance their position. Moreover, men’s language has been perceived as a powerful one due to the fact that they are prominent figures in society, with high authority positions. Thus, the different patterns of linguistic behaviour arise because men and women are not perceived as equal in society, they do not have similar social statuses.

Pamela Fishman is another advocate of the dominance theory, claiming that women are responsible for keeping the flow of a conversation: they ask, they bring to discussion certain issues, making sure that their interlocutors are active listeners. According to her, men speakers adopt reverse strategies, which highlight the mechanisms of power during interactions.

Furthermore, Dale Spender is another representative of the dominance theory, claiming that: “in a society where women are devalued, it is not surprising that their language should be devalued.”¹⁴ She initiates the idea of a men-dominating linguistic order: “men have formulated a semantic rule which posits them as central and positive as the norm, and they have classified the world from that standpoint, constructing a symbolic system which represents patriarchal order.”¹⁵

1.3. The deficit perspective

The most prominent figure of the third perspective, the deficient one, is Robin Lackoff, who pointed a series of features of the powerless language specific to women, which deviates from

¹³ Jennifer Coates, *Women, Men and Language.: A sociolinguistic account of gender differences in language*, Longman, London and New York, 1993, p. 12.

¹⁴ Dale Spender, *Man Made Language*, London, Harper Collins Publishers, 1980, p. 10.

¹⁵ *Idem*, p. 58.

the male norm, an opinion also shared by Weatherall, who perceives women's language as: "deviation from what is desirable."¹⁶ According to Lackoff, the communicative behaviour assigned to women: "submerges a women's personal identity, by denying her the means to express herself strongly and encouraging expressions that suggest triviality in subject matter and uncertainty about it."¹⁷ Moreover, as Lackoff claims, an imbalance concerning the access to power of men and women emerges, because the latter ones have developed powerless linguistic features, which comprise all layers of a language: phonetics, stylistics, morphology, syntax or lexicology. Therefore, in her point of view, women's linguistic behaviour is characterized by the following characteristics:

- "the use of a cautious language, where hedging is prominent: structures like "sort of kind of", verbs like "seem" etc.
- the use of polite forms: "Would you mind ...", "I'd appreciate it if ...", "if you don't mind ...".
- the use of tag-questions: "You are visiting your grandparents, aren't you?"
- the use of words related to their fields of interest.
- the tendency to apologize more frequently: "I'm sorry ..."
- the use of empty/ subjective adjectives such as wonderful, great, amazing etc.
- the tendency towards hyper-correct pronunciation and grammar.
- the use of intensifiers such as "so" or "very" and of emphasis – tendency "to speak in *italics*" – It's sooooo beautiful!
- the use of euphemism and diminutives.
- the use of "wh-" imperatives: "Why don't you turn of the light?"
- the use of modals: should, could, can, would – "Should we buy the tickets?/Would you like to come and pick me from the airport around 6 pm?"
- the avoidance of taboo language, of threatening, swearing or insulting.
- the use of minimal answers to questions.
- the tendency to speak more quietly.
- the tendency to use the higher pitch and thus to transform assertions in questions.
- the absence of a well-developed sense of humour which prevents them from telling jokes."¹⁸

However, the opinions of linguists and sociolinguists regarding language as shaped by gender are very numerous, some of them sharing the same points of view, others disputing them. The presence of gender and its implications on language amid the topics of research led by scholars highlights the fact that this issue is still prominent in society, generating flourishing debates. To conclude, what is essential is the fact that despite the apparently contradictory arguments that they invoke, these perspectives have a great contribution to the disentanglement of the issue, clarifying to a certain extent (not entirely, the debate is still in progress) some of the aspects which lead to distinct patterns of linguistic behaviour of men and women.

2. Questionnaire – men's & women's speech styles

In order to discover if individuals are aware of the dissimilarities that were approached in the previous section between the conversational styles of men and women, we decided to distribute a questionnaire among students so as to be filled in. Hence, we attempted to collect their pieces of

¹⁶ Ann Weatherall, *Gender, Language and Discourse*, New York, Routledge, 2002, p. 69.

¹⁷ Robin Lackoff, *Language and Woman's Place*, New York, Harper and Row, 1975, p. 7.

¹⁸ Robin Lackoff, *Language and Woman's Place*, New York, Harper and Row, 1975, pp. 53-57.

information and to formulate an opinion with regard to what is known about these differences and about the discriminatory tendencies of language.

The questionnaire addressed 20 students from Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, who accepted to complete it on a volunteer basis. This research conducted is extremely suggestive because within the university, there are students of different sexes (depending on the profile) who interact bringing in this interaction different backgrounds, different manners to relate to the world, besides the different gender norms that society imposed since their birth.

Procedure

Each participant had to complete a questionnaire which encompassed different types of questions: T/F questions, open questions, fill in questions, as it follows:

Female Male Age

I. Look at the following statements and then mark an X in the box that reflects your own beliefs (T or F).

a. Men focus more on conveying information, rather than feelings and emotions. T F

b. Women tend to be more intuitive than men, who are more practical.

c. Men tend to be more assertive in conversations.

d. Women are more likely than men to speak about intimate issues.

e. Men tend to interrupt more in a conversation.

f. Women tend to make eye-contact more than men.

g. Men's speech style is not as vivid as women's one (gestures, facial expressions)

h. Women are more likely to smile when interacting.

II. Answer the following questions, taking into account your own experience.

1. As a child, which were the reasons that influenced your friendship with other children?

2. As a child, did you use to play within groups or to be more independent and to compete with other children ?

3. Imagine that you had an accident last week. You decide to write an e-mail to one of your friends. On what are you focusing, on what happened or on how you felt?

4. It's Friday night. You meet with your mixed group of friends in a pub. Who tends to monopolize the discussion, men or women?

5. You are spending the evening with a mixed group of friends. Who tends to tell more jokes, men or women?

6. What do you think of swearing and taboo language? Do you use them often? If yes, what terms do you usually use?

7. Who uses these structures more, men or women?

“You are coming to the party, aren't you?”

“Would you mind closing the window?”

“I'm sorry for what I said.”

“What a lovely day!”

“It's soooooo beautiful!”

8. How many pejorative words regarding men and women come to your mind? Write them down.

9. Is the following sentence encompassing both sexes: ‘Man is rational, this quality being the pattern that distinguishes him from animals.’? If not, how would you correct it?

10. Do you believe that the following words have the same value as their pair: *governor/governess, master/mistress*. If yes, why? If no, why not?

- III. Complete the following sentences, by using the pronoun that you consider appropriate.
- The judge entered the room. sat down and then began the trial.
 - The nurse gave him the medicine. Then left the room.
 - The secretary entered the password. printed the documents for the meeting.
 - The surgeon asked the family to have faith. began the operation.

Measures

The first phase of the questionnaire was to fill in through an “x” the sex, masculine or feminine of the persons who took part in the research: 10 men and 10 women, an equal amount of members of the same sex.

Moreover, the people who took part in the questionnaire had to complete their age. This question pointed out that we appealed to male and female students from the same age group - 23-25 years old – as the chart below points out (fig. 1). Thus, we managed to find out if students perceive the gender differences between them and if they possess a stereotypical approach, enforcing the discriminatory tendencies of society, which are recognizable at a linguistic level as well.

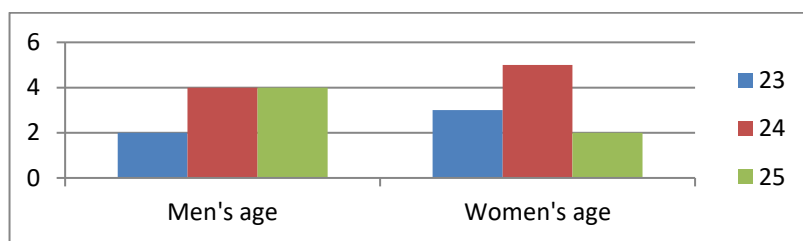


fig. 1

The first section of the questionnaire included a series of eight affirmations concerning several aspects related to the communicative behaviour of men and women. The persons who were asked to fill in agreed that: men focus on conveying information, women tend to be intuitive, likely to speak about intimate issues and that men’s speech is not as vivid as women’s one. However, there were some questions that brought to the surface differences of perception. For instance, there were four affirmations with variable answers (T/F), as the chart depicts (fig. 2): “Men tend to be more assertive in conversations.” (c)/ “Men tend to interrupt more in a conversation.” (e)/ “Women tend to make eye-contact more than men.” (f)/ “Women are more likely to smile when interacting.” (h)

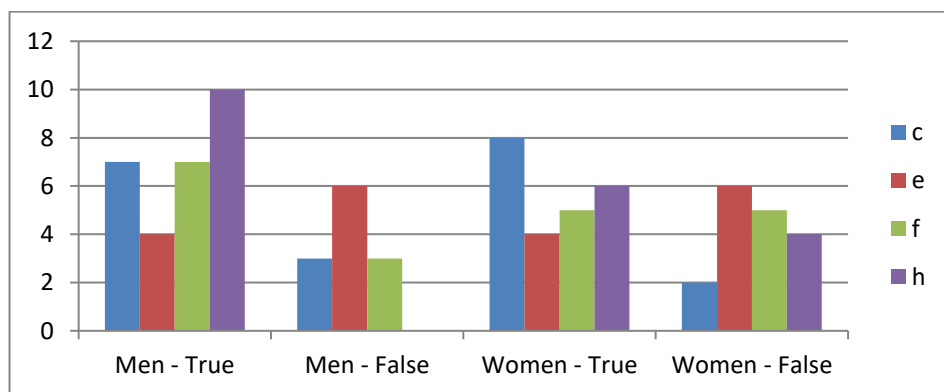


fig.2

Concerning men’s tendency to be more assertive in a conversation, 7 men and 8 women agreed on this aspect, the other 3 men and 2 women considering this affirmation false. Hence, the majority of people consider assertiveness a feature of men’s linguistic behaviour. Moreover, when

it comes to men's greater appeal to interruptions, an equal amount of men and women - 6 - consider this affirmation false, the others claiming that it is true. The third affirmation which raised different answers regards women's predisposition to make more eye-contact when interacting with other individuals. Seven men and 5 women believe that this is indeed a feature of women, while 3 men and 5 women do not assign this feature only to women, interpreting the affirmation as false. Subsequently, the last affirmation related to another pattern of linguistic behaviour assigned to women, that of smiling more, is rated as true by 10 men and 6 women, while 4 women do not believe that smiling is an attribute possessed only by them. Nevertheless, all in all, these affirmations and the answers given by the questioned persons highlight the fact that they are aware of the differences between men's and women's speech styles, enforcing the existent stereotypes, which present women as emotional, cooperative and supporting, in opposition to men.

In addition, the second section of the questionnaire, consisted of 10 open questions, some of them related to the questioned people's personal experiences whereas others to their perception of language and of its discriminatory tendencies. On the one hand, the men who took part in the questionnaire claimed to have been competitive during childhood, choosing their friends according to common interests. What is more, they answered that if an accident happened to them, they would focus on the facts rather than on the feelings. According to them, men monopolize discussions, tend to tell more jokes and use taboo words and swearing. The most common terms that they pointed out were: *fuck, fuck it, dammit, shit, suck it, fuck off*. However, three of the interviewed men claimed that they do not swear or use taboo words. On the other hand, the women who participated in the questionnaire asserted that in their childhood they used to play in groups, choosing their friends according to friendly attitudes and following the recommendations of their parents. In terms of the hypothetical situation regarding the accident, women pointed out that they would focus more on their feelings and on emotions when relating. As well as their male correspondents, women consider that men tend to monopolize the discussion and to tell more jokes in a mixed group, the context being very important. Swearing and taboo words are not part of the speech style of most women, as they pointed out. Nevertheless, there were 4 cases when they claimed that they use this type of terms, the most common being: *fuck, dickhead, idiot, cunt, shit, balls, bitch, moron, whore, fat-ass, hell no, wtf*.

Regarding the 7th question, most men and women agreed that women are the ones who use the structures more than men. There was one man and 3 women who claimed that men also use tag-questions as in the following structure: "You are coming to the party, aren't you?" and one woman who asserted that men would apologize, by using the structure "I'm sorry for what I said." Thus, both sexes agree that women use more frequently tag questions, polite requests, apologies, exclamations and emphasis.

Moreover, the 8th question aimed to bring to the surface the pejorative terms which are used most frequently and to see if the masculine ones are more numerous than the feminine ones or vice versa. Thus, the ones that both men and women use and remember mostly are: for women - *blonde, battleaxe, witch, bitch, bimbo, slut, stupid, arrogant, hysterical- bitch, wench, frump, virago, tramp, sucker, chippy, jade, bossy, hoe, side chick, cunt, skank, bitchass, cuntface, insecure, superficial, hysterical, irrational, angry, nonsensical, weak, pussy, chick, doll, diva, useless, hypocrite*; for men - *dickhead, crackhead, asshole, jerk, prick, idiot, faggot, wanker, douchebag, son of a bitch, bastard, selfish, instable, pig, inconsiderate, womanizer, perv, douch, motherfucker, manwhore, rude, fool*.

The amount of pejorative words for women is definitely higher – 36 vs. 22 – (see fig. 3) than in the case of men, discrimination intervening,

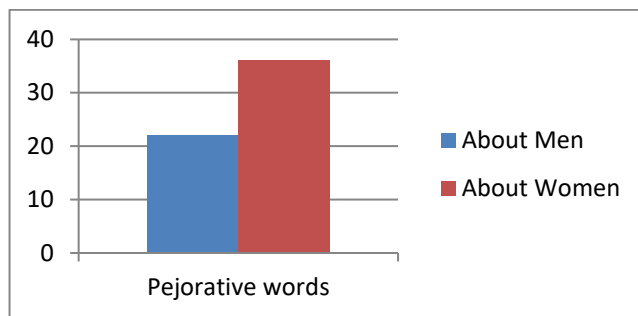


fig.3

Concerning the 9th question, the interviewed people argued that it is incorrect and that it could encompass both sexes by replacing “Man” with “People”/”Human”/”Human beings” and the third person singular pronoun “him” with the third person plural pronoun “them.” Once again, they noticed that language discriminates women. Although “man” in that particular structure may refer also to women, being used as a generic term for “human”, at a first sight it seems to exclude women. There was only one woman who did not consider that women are excluded. The discrimination of women within the language was acknowledged by the questioned men and women in the last question of the second section. They identified the lower, negative value of the feminine correspondents for *governor* and *master*. According to them, while *governor* and *master* refer to higher positions, *governess* is defined by some of them as the person in charge with the education of children, whereas *mistress* is perceived as the woman who breaks a marriage.

As to the third set of questions, those in which men and women had to complete four sentences with the pronoun that they considered appropriate, almost all persons chose the masculine third person pronoun “he” for “judge” and “surgeon”, nouns which denote higher and powerful positions, and the feminine third person pronoun “she” for “nurse” and “secretary”. There was a questionnaire completed by a 25 year-old woman, who chose the third person plural pronoun “they” for the “judge”, assuming the idea of collectivity and the feminine third person pronoun “she” for “surgeon”. However, the fact that almost all of them assumed that a higher position is assigned to a man and that a lower one is assigned to a woman points out the fact that nowadays students do possess a stereotypical thinking, according to whom women are supposed to occupy subordinate positions, lower positions which presuppose the stereotypical attitudes assigned to them: cooperation, empathy, support etc.

The questionnaire brought to the surface the fact that nowadays men and women are aware of their distinct speech styles and of language’s discriminatory tendencies, their answers sustaining the theoretical framework outlined in the previous chapter. Although there were cases when women recognized that they swear, that they tell jokes or cases when both sexes did not assign smiling or eye-contact only to women and interruption or assertion only to men, the great majority proved the attachment to the stereotypical thinking promoted in society, which enhances the dichotomy between the sexes at a linguistic level, promoting women as emotional, cooperative and empathetic and men as competitive, practical and more likely to monopolize discussions with female interlocutors.

Conclusions

Nowadays society is organized according to different variables and this variety is eloquent at the linguistic level too. People talk in a different manner due to the context, to their age, to their status, but also due to their gender. As this inquiry pointed out, gender is an important aspect in our lives, influencing the way in which we talk and relate thus to the world.

Distinct from *sex*, which represents the biological distinction between *masculine* and

feminine, gender is related to the set of norms that society assigns to each sex. Thus, men and women are *doing gender*, they are performing a preset behaviour, which imposes the existence of different attitudes and of a different use of language. The approaches regarding the linguistic dissimilarities between men and women brought to the surface arguments related to all linguistic layers (*lexic, syntax, semantics, pragmatics*) in linguists' attempt to correlate the differences with the attachment of men and women to two different subcultures (*the difference theory*), with power relations (*the dominance theory*) or with the deviation of women's speech from the androcentric linguistic norm (*the deficit theory*). Although none of them offered a clear explanation regarding the dichotomy between the speech of men and women, they are suggestive attempts which complete each other and which contribute to the improvement of acknowledging the differences between the sexes' speech.

In addition, the questionnaire carried out among 20 students of both sexes pointed out that nowadays, men and women are acquainted with their different patterns of communicative behaviour. Even though the questionnaire highlighted cases when women admitted that they swear or cases when both sexes did not consider smiling or eye-contact specific only to women and interruption or assertion only to men, most questioned people demonstrated that they do possess the stereotypical manner of approaching men's and women's behaviour promoted in society, perceiving women as emotional and supportive and men as competitive, independent and unlikely to militate for cooperation.

Thus, gender definitely influences the linguistic behaviour of men and women. As the theoretical framework and the results of the questionnaire pointed out, we enforce the idea of a dichotomy between the speech styles of men and women and of the discrimination of the latter ones within language. However, this discrimination will persist because it is deeply rooted in the society's way of thinking. There are indeed differences regarding the way in which they talk and relate to what is happening around them, but this happens due to their distinct nature and to due to the context in which they find themselves at a particular moment. Dissimilarities do exist, but discrimination should be avoided, humans being guided towards a world in which differences are recognized and celebrated, in which individuals are treated equally and treat each other equally, discrimination being abolished.

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