

Gender-Related  
Variation in the Speech  
of English and  
Romanian Adolescents



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By

Costin-Valentin Oancea

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# INTRODUCTION

This study represents a synchronic sociolinguistic analysis of gender-related variation in the speech of English and Romanian adolescents. This research is motivated by the belief that variation is a characteristic of natural language, and a comprehensive understanding of language must include a grasp of the nature and function of variation. The aim is to analyse some sociolinguistic features of adolescent speech that occur in natural, spontaneous, everyday speech. This implies that the chief contribution is to the study of language in its social context. The core of this research centres on chapters 3, 4 and 5. The last section of Chapter 1 also introduces a few key ideas regarding gender stereotypes in Romanian. The issues addressed in these chapters can be roughly divided into two major groups. Chapters 3 and 4 offer a quantitative analysis of phonological variation in English and Romanian respectively. The main objective of Chapter 5 is to provide a qualitative analysis of foul language and slang in English and Romanian, which makes it a contrastive chapter.

Chapter 1, “Language and gender: past and present”, offers a review of the relevant literature on language and gender research carried out in English-speaking communities, which does not claim to be exhaustive. The chapter starts by discussing the difference between sex and gender, the former being biological and the latter social. The next part of the chapter examines the idea that women are more polite than men, an idea which led Robin Lakoff (1975) to introduce the term “women’s language”. A distinction is drawn between gender-exclusive differences (see Borgoras 1922, Ekka 1972, Fasold 1990, Trudgill 2000, Bradley 2006, Meyerhoff 2006, Talbot 2010), which index gender directly, and gender-preferential differences which index gender indirectly.

Section 1.2.2 sketches the most relevant theories of sex and gender developed over the years. The first one – the deficit approach – is the theory proposed by Lakoff (1975) who, albeit based on no empirical research, discusses some of the linguistic features of “women’s language”. The discussion moves to the second theory – the dominance model – associated with Zimmerman and West’s (1975, 1983) and Tannen’s (1994) analyses. Men are seen as dominant, whereas women are insubordinate and seen as an oppressed group. The overview moves swiftly to the third model – the difference approach – which is based on the work of Gumperz

(1982) who stresses the idea that men and women should be seen as belonging to different subcultures. The last theory – the dynamic approach – argues for a social constructionist perspective as far as gender identity is concerned. These theories are not mutually exclusive and they can all be used to create a more unified and cohesive approach to the study of gender variation in language use.

The third part of this chapter looks at gender-related stereotypes in English (Coates 1993, Crawford 1995, Holmes 1995, Fleischman 1998). Some of the gender stereotypes tackled here have been confirmed by quantitative sociolinguistic studies (e.g. Cheshire 1982, Newbrook 1982, Trudgill 1983, Romaine 1984, Eisikovits 1988, Cheshire 1997) supporting the idea that women tend to use more standard features of language than men irrespective of speech style. Starting from this hypothesis, I set out to identify gender-related stereotypes in Romanian, which constitutes the last part of this chapter. The analysis reports on the findings of two surveys which were conducted in Constanța and Bucharest. The first survey focuses on M.A. students studying at Ovidius University of Constanța and at the University of Bucharest. The second survey covers three age groups, carried out at one school and high school in Constanța. The aim of these surveys is to understand the Romanian teenagers' beliefs about the language they use and identify some of their linguistic choices.

Chapter 2, “Language variation and change: the theoretical framework”, discusses the key concepts underlying this study and proposes a theoretical background in accordance with the chosen topic. The chapter opens with a discussion of variationist sociolinguistics (Labov 1966, Trudgill 1974, Cheshire 1982, Tagliamonte 2006, Kiesling 2011, Tagliamonte 2011), stressing the importance played by variation in the analysis of gender-related differences in language use. The sociolinguistic interview (Labov 1966, 1972, Trudgill 1974, Shilling 2013) is discussed at length and included in this discussion are also the steps that must be followed or avoided in order to conduct a first-hand sociolinguistic research in a community.

Central to this chapter is the discussion regarding the linguistic variable, which is the source of linguistic variation. I give a broad-brush picture of some of the main studies that focused on linguistic variables to analyse gender variation, and phonological variables are discussed first as variationist sociolinguistics was built on the study of phonological variation. The discussion then moves to morphological and syntactic variables which have been analysed quantitatively and presents studies focusing on the language spoken by adolescents. The concept “communities of practice”, coined by Lave and Wenger (1991), as well as

politeness (Brown and Levinson 1987) are highlighted in relation to their relevance to the study of gender variation.

The chapter aims at offering a unifying approach for the study of gender-related linguistic variation, by integrating a discussion of variationist sociolinguistics, which is the theoretical framework for Chapters 3 and 4, with a discussion of (im)politeness theory (Brown and Levinson 1987, Culpeper 1996) and of swearing and taboo language (Andersson and Trudgill 1990, Allan and Burridge 2006) for Chapter 5.

Chapter 3, “*Talkin’ or talking?* Phonological variation in the speech of London teenagers”, is concerned with the quantitative analysis, in the variationist sociolinguistics framework. The analysis starts with a critical overview of the research on the (ing) variable in different English-speaking communities (Fisher 1958, Labov 1966, Shuy et al. 1967, Anshen 1969, Cofer 1972, Reid 1978, Woods 1979, Wald and Shopen 1985, Schlee et al. 2011). The reason I chose to study the (ing) is that it is a stable sociolinguistic variable, it can be analysed auditorily, and it is salient among native English speakers.

The novelty of the approach consists in the fact that there are no studies, at least to my knowledge, which analyse the (ing) variable from a sociophonetic perspective. The majority of studies focusing on (ing) use programs like Goldvarb (Sankoff 1985, 1988, Paolillo 2001, Tagliamonte 2006) or the more recent Rbrul (Johnson 2009). Instead, I use PRAAT<sup>1</sup> (Boersma 2001) for an acoustic analysis. The analysis is based on data collected at Queen Mary’s College, University of London in October 2012, as part of a research project carried out at this university under the guidance of Professor Jenny Cheshire. Eight undergraduate students (four males and four females) were interviewed, resulting in a corpus of 14,000 words.

This chapter focuses on the English used by London teenagers and seeks to identify patterns of phonological variation regarding the use of (ing). In the literature there are two phonetic realisations of (ing), either as a velar nasal [ŋ] or as an alveolar nasal [n]. The former is associated with prestige while the latter with the vernacular (Trudgill 1974). The use of the velar nasal form is associated with the speech of women, as it is considered the prestigious variant whereas the alveolar nasal form is associated with the speech of men as it is deemed the vernacular variant.

After reviewing the literature on (ing) the issue of data collection and methodology is addressed. This part is based on three important points:

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<sup>1</sup> I used version 5.3.84 of PRAAT. The soft program can be downloaded here <<http://www.fon.hum.uva.nl/praat/>> (last accessed 07.07.2014).

speech style, recording procedures and the subjects. In the speech style section I discuss the format of the sociolinguistic interview which contains three parts: a semi-structured questionnaire with 23 questions (casual speech style), three texts (reading style) and a list of words (word list style). The sociolinguistic interview is built in the Labovian style. The second section, recording procedures, discusses the technical equipment used to record the teenagers and the technique(s) used to interview students. The last section provides information about the subjects that took part in the research project and the fieldwork procedures.

The last part of this chapter presents the results and is divided into two important parts: casual speech style and reading style. I show that the alveolar nasal variant is preferred by both sexes, which is contrary to the results obtained so far. This subsection also includes spectrograms to offer a better understanding and show the realisation of the velar and alveolar variants. Another aspect presented is the distribution of alveolar and velar forms according to word class. It is shown that the [n] variant is preferred with common nouns, progressive verb forms and gerunds, while the [ŋ] form is used in adjectives, discourse markers and pronouns. In the reading style I show that irrespective of speech style, the results do not change, and the alveolar nasal variant is the one preferred.

Given the lack of sociolinguistic studies focusing on phonological variables in Romanian, chapter 4, “*Pe vs Pă*: Phonological variation in the speech of adolescents living in Constanța”, offers a fresh and innovative perspective in this area. The chapter begins by presenting the evolution of the (pe) variable throughout centuries, starting from the form (pre) and evolving to the modern (pe). This variable is studied in the variationist sociolinguistics framework with the purpose of identifying and analysing sociolinguistic patterns.

As already mentioned, the first part of the chapter tackles the (pe) variable in early modern Romanian, and provides relevant examples from 16<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> century textual evidence with the aim of buttressing the arguments advanced. The transition from *pre* to *pe* takes place somewhere in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, but the form *pre* appears in a text from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which is peculiar. The variation between (pe) and (pă) is encountered in texts from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, thus showing that (pe) can be considered nowadays a stable sociolinguistic variable, just like (ing).

The discussion continues with a review of the methodology and the methods which have been used to collect data. The research project was carried out at the Educational Center Theoretical High School in Constanța. Two methods were used to collect data: the sociolinguistic interview and long-term participant observation. As far as the sociolinguistic

interview is concerned, the analysis relies on a corpus of 15,000 words. Twelve students were interviewed using a semi-structured questionnaire which was followed by a reading task. The subjects who took part in this research are both secondary school and high school students, thus another social factor was taken into account besides gender, i.e. age.

Section 4.4. is the core of this chapter as the results are presented here. There are three lines of discussion, depending on the speech style: casual speech style, reading style and the results obtained via participant-observation. The results that fall in this category were labelled “playground results”. Regarding casual speech style I show that the prestigious form [pe] is favoured in most of the cases, unlike English where the vernacular form was used more frequently. There are also age-related differences, with high school boys using the non-standard form [pã] more often than secondary school students. It is also argued that [pã] is a marker of masculinity which shows group membership.

I contend that in the playground, students are more relaxed and more prone to use non-standard features of language. The results obtained indicate that two communities of practice are formed: *pops* and *geeks*. The former are interested in showing their social and financial security through clothing (a powerful social marker), behaviour and interactions with their peers. The latter are preoccupied with school activities, gaining the respect of their teachers and parents and focusing on their career prospects.

In order to fathom the variation between [pe] and [pã] the language of adults has also come under scrutiny. The analysis draws on eight hours of conversation gathered from TV talk-shows in 2013–2014. Five men and five women were recorded and 256 tokens of (pe) are interpreted. I build on the idea that [pã] is manly, tough, powerful, whereas [pe] is softer and more delicate thus paving the way to the construction of feminine identity. Moreover, (pe) could be construed as a gender marker. I also compare the results obtained with the realisation of (pe) in Hornoiu’s (2007) corpus.

The last part of this chapter is a comparative overview of the use of (pe) by adolescents and adults. In the case of adolescents, the fact that they use the [pã] variant more on the playground engenders an awareness of social pressure. Adults on the other hand, especially male speakers, have a proclivity for the nonstandard form [pã]. Therefore, I stress that with age, there appears to be a rise in the use of [pã], since the willingness to be conform to societal rules decreases.

Chapter 5, “Adolescents as language innovators: Swearing, taboo language and slang in English and Romanian”, analyses the use of foul language by adolescents and compares the use of such language in two different cultures: English and Romanian. The discussion starts by tackling

the concept of “taboo language” and what should be deemed taboo. The subsequent section is an inquiry into bad language and sweet words, stressing the importance of euphemisms in contemporary speech. The examination continues with a scrutiny of “slanguage” as used by Stenström et al. (2002). This is an umbrella-term and includes: *proper slang*, *dirty words*, *vogue words*, *vague words*, *proxy words* and *smallwords*. *Proper slang*, *dirty words* and *vogue words* are discussed at length and relevant examples are provided.

Section 5.3. looks at swearing and slang in the speech of London adolescents. The discussion is based on data from The Bergen Corpus of Teenage Language (COLT) and Stenström et al.’s (2002) book which is based on COLT. Included here is an analysis of gender-related differences in conversations about sex. I argue that boys and girls swear alike, the main difference lies in the fact that girls use female genitalia to refer to boys. Regarding the use of slang in COLT, many interesting facts are revealed. First, I show that proper slang and dirty words are used more frequently by boys than girls. I introduce another sociolinguistic variable, i.e. age and show that there are also age-related differences. Older girls (17–19 years old) use proper slang and dirty words more often than boys. From this finding girls’ use of foul language makes them appear more secure and powerful, thus dominating the scene. Boys’ use of dirty words can be related to the concept of toughness, usually associated with lower classes.

The last part of this chapter dwells on the idea of teenagers as language innovators and focuses on their use of swearing and slang in Romanian. The study is based on a corpus of 6500 words collected in 2011–2012. The corpus consists of a three hour video recording of a group of teenagers spending New Year’s Eve in Bușteni. They are all born and raised in Constanța and currently studying in this city. To this recording, several conversations in the form of commentaries from Facebook have been added, in order to obtain a more unified account of swearing and slang in both spoken and written Romanian. A significant number of slang words are discussed and several explanations accounting for their use are also provided.

As far as gender-related differences are concerned, I show that boys use more slang and swear words than girls. Another interesting finding lies in the girls’ use of male genitalia when they swear, just like in English. I also argue that there are much more dirty words to refer to girls than to boys.



# CHAPTER ONE

## LANGUAGE AND GENDER: PAST AND PRESENT

### Introduction

This chapter represents the starting point in my analysis of gender-related variation in the speech of English and Romanian adolescents. First I will discuss some slippery concepts, i.e. **sex** and **gender**, and another new concept derived from these two, i.e. **sexuality**. It is important to draw a distinction between these concepts as they are vital to this research. Next, I will present some features associated with “women’s language” and “men’s language” throughout the centuries. In the literature gender-related differences in speech are of two types: **gender-exclusive** and **gender-preferential** differences. The former are found in traditional societies whilst the latter in modern ones. In language and gender research there are four frameworks, some of them dating as far back as the early seventies. The first one, the deficit framework, states that women are weak and unassertive as language users, this framework being associated with the work of Lakoff (1975). The second one is the dominance framework according to which the language uses of men and women are viewed as enactments of male privilege or superiority, developed by Spender (1980). The difference framework is associated with the work of Gumperz (1982) and focuses on cross-cultural miscommunication. The last framework, the dynamic one, as the name suggests, looks at the dynamic aspects of conversation. The last part of this chapter is dedicated to gender-related stereotypes in the British and Romanian society.

### 1.1. From sex differences to gender variation in language use

The study of language and gender has bloomed over the past several decades and sociolinguists have come to realize that male-female differences in language use are “by no means clear-cut and we find

similarities in speech across gender groups, as well as much diversity within groups” (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2008: 234). Because of the complexity of gender-based patterns of language, researchers have realized that we cannot see gender as a “given”, as a synonym for biological sex. The earliest studies which focused on men, women and language were carried out by Western Europeans and their interest was anthropological rather than linguistic. Such studies analysed phonological and lexical differences in exotic languages and noted the existence of different pronouns, affixes, nouns, used exclusively by men or by women, or to refer exclusively to a man or a woman. However, such sex-related differences are absent from European languages. In Romance languages the pronoun system is similar, and they mark sex in the third person singular and plural. On the other hand, English (a Germanic language) marks sex only in the third person singular.

### 1.1.1. Sex, gender, language

Talbot (2010: 15) notes that one view of the relationship between language and gender – which might be called the **weak** one – is that language mirrors society, and the social divisions on gender grounds are mirrored in patterns of language use. A good example is that women in work settings are usually subordinate in status to men, and this fact is reflected in their greater use of politeness strategies. Another example is the existence of two traditional honorific titles for women (*Miss* and *Mrs*), in contrast with *Mr* for men, thus reflecting the importance society puts on women’s marital status.

The **stronger** view suggests that language does not reflect gender division, it creates them. For example, things such as the difference in the use of politeness strategies, the asymmetry of the titles *Miss* and *Mrs* in relation to *Mr* and asymmetrical usage of terms of address for women and men do not just simply reflect society, but they also create and sustain inequality. The two extremes are **language-as-mirror** and **language-as-reproductive** (Talbot 2010: 15).

Sex, together with age, social class and ethnicity, is one of the most widely used social categories and also one of the most analysed. Holmes (1997: 195-196) states that research on language and gender has tended to follow the general development of feminist thought, moving from an essentialist paradigm where speakers were divided in terms of their biological sex through a period where the significance of the cultural concept of gender was recognized. Bucholtz (2002: 37) provides three

definitions of sex<sup>2</sup>: (i) a social variable with two values: male and female; (ii) the biological differentiation of individuals into a dichotomy between female and male (in contrast to gender); (iii) the negotiable and contestable social classification of individuals into three categories of female and male based on cultural understandings of the body, especially with respect to sexuality, with attendant normative local ideologies about social, physical, cognitive, and affective practices, attributes, and capabilities.

Wodak (1997:13) highlights the fact that gender is “not [...] a pool of attributes “possessed” by a person, but [...] something a person “does””. She further notes that “what it means to be a woman or to be a woman or a man also changes from one generation to the next and [...] varies between different racialized, ethnic, and religious groups, as well as for members of different social classes”. In such a view, gender must be learned anew in each generation. On the other hand, Cameron (1998: 280-281) puts it slightly differently:

Men and women...are members of cultures in which a large amount of discourse about gender is constantly circulating. They do not only learn, and then mechanically reproduce, ways of speaking “appropriate” to their own sex; they learn a much broader set of gendered meanings that attach in rather complex ways to different ways of speaking, and they produce their own behavior in the light of these meanings. Performing masculinity or femininity “appropriately” cannot mean giving exactly the same performance regardless of the circumstances. It may involve different strategies in mixed and single-sexed company, in private and public settings, in the various social positions (parent, lover, professional, friend) that someone might regularly occupy in the course of everyday life.

We cannot avoid gender because it is a part of the way in which societies are ordered around us. Gender<sup>3</sup> is a part of our identity.

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<sup>2</sup> Butler (1990, 1993) argues that the definition of sex, like gender, is a social construct, that is, it is assigned social meanings by social beings, and the body thus semiotically indexes a host of ideologies about social and other practices and abilities.

<sup>3</sup> In the 1970s writers and researchers did not distinguish between biological and cultural influences on the speaker. Trudgill (2000, originally published in 1974) included a chapter entitled “Language and Sex”, in which he discussed gender-based differences in language use. However, things changed towards the end of the twentieth century when more and more scholars became dissatisfied with the linking of biological sex and social behavior, and the term “gender” replaced the term “sex”. Researchers became aware that men did not prefer certain linguistic patterns or forms because they were male, from a biological point of view, but

**Sex** is used to refer to the physiological distinction between females and males, while **gender** refers to the social and cultural elaboration of the sex differences, as Cheshire (2002: 423) eloquently puts it. This process begins at birth that is why gender is the more appropriate term to use for the category than sex. In the literature both terms have been treated as binary categories:

Gender differences need not map directly onto physiological sex differences, but in practice our social lives are organized around the physiological dichotomy to such an extent that a cultural connection has been forged between sex and virtually every other aspect of human experience.

West and Zimmerman (1987), on the other hand, say that gender is not something we are born with or something we have, but something we do. Is this really true? There is no clear-cut distinction between sex and gender. We do not know where sex leaves off and gender begins. Although sociolinguists have tried to separate these two terms, they are intertwined. Another distinction between sex and gender is given by Eckert and McConnel-Ginet (2003: 10) who note that “sex is a biological categorization based primarily on reproductive potential, whereas gender is the social elaboration of biological sex”. In another paper, Eckert (1989a: 246) defines sex as being a biological category that serves as a fundamental basis for the differentiation of roles, norms and expectations in all societies. These norms, roles and expectations constitute gender, which is the social construction of sex.

To sum up the discussion about sex and gender, I quote Fausto-Sterling (2000: 3) who concludes that:

Labeling someone a man or a woman is a social decision. We may use scientific knowledge to help us make the decision, but only our beliefs about gender – not science – can define our sex. Furthermore, our beliefs about gender affect what kinds of knowledge scientists produce about sex in the first place.

Gender is the social construct of sex and a key component of identity. Gender is something we perform every day without even knowing it. Sex is binary, gender is not. A person can be either male or female. Gender, on the other hand is socially constructed. We acquire characteristics which

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“because of their alignment with the norms of the culture they lived in” (Coates 2007: 66). To put it differently, people are born male or female, but their way of speaking is determined by the social and cultural influences which surround them.

are considered masculine or feminine. It is possible to talk about a feminine man or a masculine woman, a woman being more feminine than another or a man more masculine than another<sup>4</sup>. Cameron (1998: 258) supports the idea of gender performance when she claims “I suspect that in conversations with their superior men use what has been regarded as women’s conversational style. The underlying issue here is likely to be hierarchy, not simply gender.” If we take her idea for granted, then this means that men are able to perform the female gender. Schilling (2011: 218) notes that gender has to do with matters like social and economic roles and relations (power relations included), conceptualizations of femininity and masculinity and with sexual orientation or sexual identity. Many textbooks have started to include chapters entitled “language and sexuality”<sup>5</sup>, as it has become a field of study in its own right. However, there has been much debate over what a study of “sexuality” should include.

Bucholtz (2002: 36) argues that gendered linguistic variables have sexual associations for men though of a different kind, while Milroy (1992) notes that the language ideology that links men’s use of prestige forms to what she calls effeminacy, a term which carries ideological information not only about gender but also about sexuality. Bucholtz (2002: 37) defines sexuality as: (i) sexual orientation, based on the gender of one’s erotic attachments; (ii) one’s orientation to sexuality: sexual(ized) practices and ideologies that shape daily life, including gender. She also notes that there are two ways in which the subfield of language and gender can assist variationist sociolinguistics: it can offer a new perspective and it can help retheorize the conflicting definitions of sex and gender discussed above; and it can also demonstrate the importance of the term sexuality to variationist research.

Regarding gender differences in language use, a distinction has been drawn between gender-exclusive and gender-preferential differences. In what follows I discuss them, focusing more on gender preferential differences, as they are essential to this research.

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<sup>4</sup> From a grammatical point of view, the word “masculine” has degrees of comparison: *more masculine*, *most masculine*. The word “male” does not. Forms such as *\*maler* or *\*malest* are incorrect.

<sup>5</sup> There is also a book entitled “*Language and Sexuality*” by Deborah Cameron and Don Kulick published in 2003, as well as a “*Journal of Language and Sexuality*”, proving that this has become an important area of research.

## 1.2. Men's language *versus* women's language

So far we have seen what the terms *sex* and *gender* refer to. I will now focus on the differences between the speech of men and women. According to Hornoiu (2002: 116), in the sixteenth century, English writers wrote about differences between men and women in terms of pronunciation and favoured the masculine form. In 1568, Sir Thomas Smith talks about the affected speech of women and Richard Mulcaster in his *Elementarie* identifies a pair of gender-linked diphthongs, implying the superiority of the masculine form, although it is the pronunciation attributed to women that has become standard in modern English:

Ai [pronounced /ai/ as in *fine*], in the mans diphthong, and soundeth full: ei [pronounced /ei/, as in *faint*], the womans, and the soundeth finish in the same both sense, and use, a woman is deintie, and feinteh soon, the man feinteh not because he is nothing daintie (quoted in Hornoiu 2002: 115).

This is a good example of the **androcentric view of linguistic usage** that presents women's speech as deviating from the (male) norms. Elyon in *The Governer* (1531) highlights that gentlemen, as the educated literate group in society, differed in their use of language from women, the former's English being "sillable, as folisshe cleane, polite, perfectly and articulately pronounced, omittinge no letter as women often times do" (Elyon, quoted in Hornoiu 2002: 116).

In 1665 the French writer Rochefort described the language of the Carib Indians, who lived in the Lesser Antilles in the West Indies. He notes:

The men have a great many expressions peculiar to them, which the women understand but never pronounce for 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 (quoted in Graddol and Swann 1989: 41).

Rochefort provides the following explanation for these differences:

When the Caribs came to occupy the islands, these were occupied by an Arawak tribe which they exterminated completely, with the exception of the women, whom they married in order to populate the country. Now, these women kept their own language and taught it to their daughters... But though the boys understand the speech of their mothers and sisters, they nevertheless follow their fathers and brothers and conform to their speech from the age of five or six (quoted in Jespersen 1922: 237).

Graddol and Swann (1989: 41-42) say that we shall never know if an invasion and subsequent slaughter of half of the population is the correct or true explanation for the linguistic differences discovered by Rochefort and other Europeans who mixed with the Carib community, but the idea that women and men might actually use different languages provoked quite a stir, and thus the Carib Indians have become a classic case in accounts of gender differences in language use.

Despite this interest, it does not seem as if the Carib male and female speech varieties were actually distinct enough to count as two separate languages. Jespersen (1922) re-examined Rochefort's data and found that distinct male and female forms accounted for only about one tenth of the vocabulary items he had recorded.

Graddol and Swann (1989) further note that while the Caribs have often been seen as one of the most extreme examples of women and men using different language varieties, it is likely that some form of gender difference will be found in any language. Those differences that have been recorded, occur at all linguistic levels: for example, they include use of different words, grammatical differences and pronunciation differences. In some cases these differences are categorical – men use one form while women another. In other instances they are a matter of degree – women use some features more than men, or the other way round.

According to Coates (2004: 10) commentary on gender differences in vocabulary is quite widespread in eighteenth-century writings, as demonstrated below. The following excerpt written by Richard Cambridge for *The World* of 12 December 1754 provides some insight into how women's language was perceived in those times:

I must beg leave...to doubt the property of joining to the fixed and permanent standard of language a vocabulary of words which perish and are forgot within the compass of a year. That we are obliged to the ladies for most of these ornaments to our language, I readily acknowledge (quoted in Coates 2004: 10).

What Richard Cambridge is actually implying is that women's vocabulary is ephemeral and what they say is not important.

Lord Chesterfield, writing in *The World* of 5 December 1754, makes an observation regarding women's excessive use of certain adverbial forms:

No content with enriching our language with words absolutely my fair countrywomen have gone still farther, and improved it by the application and extension of old ones to various and very different significations. They

take a word and change it, like a guinea, into shillings for pocket money, to be employed in the several occasional purposes of the day. For instance, the adjective *vast* and it's [*sic*] adverb *vastly*, mean anything and are the fashionable words of the most fashionable people. A fine woman...is *vastly* obliged, or *vastly* offended, *vastly* glad or *vastly* sorry. Large objects are *vastly* great, small ones are *vastly* little; and I had lately the pleasure to hear a fine woman produce, by a happy metonymy, a very small gold snuff-box that was produced in company to be *vastly* pretty, because it was *vastly* little (quoted in Coates 2004: 11).

Language commentators have little trouble in identifying what they think to be women's words, though their lists are usually impressionistic and have little validity. An anonymous contributor to *The World* (6 May 1756) complains of women's excessive use of certain adverbial forms:

Such is the pomp of utterance of our present women of fashion; which, though it may tend to spoil many a pretty mouth, can never recommend an indifferent one. And hence it is that there is so great a scarcity of originals, and that the ear is such a daily sufferer from an identity of phrase, whether it be *vastly*, *horridly*, *abominably*, *immensely*, or *excessively*, which, with three or four more calculated for the same Swiss-like service, make up the whole scale or gamut of modern female conversation (quoted in Coates 2004: 11).

This characteristic of women's excessive use of adverbial forms is also found in 19<sup>th</sup> century literature. Jane Austen mocks it in her novel *Northanger Abbey* (1813), in the speech of Isabella Thorpe:

'My attachments are always excessively strong.'

'I must confess there is something amazingly insipid about her.'

(Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, Ch. 6)

The use of adverbial forms of this type was very fashionable in those times, and was evidently associated with women's speech.

Furfey (1944: 222), in an early review of women's and men's language, argues that the very existence of sex-differentiated forms implies:

some consciousness of men and women as different categories of human beings. Furthermore, at least at some period in the history of language, this distinction must have been regarded as being of a certain consequence; for it would seem to be a general truth that the great categories of grammar are not based on distinctions regarded by the speakers as trivial.



Furfey (1944: 223) further notes that “language sometimes serves as a tool of sex dominance”. Beyond this very general level, few satisfactory explanations were offered for sex differentiated forms in language.

The view that women have their own vocabulary has been held over more than three centuries. The following list provides a sample of words that have been ascribed to women (Hornoiu 2002: 117):

- 18<sup>th</sup> century** – *ah!, oh!, such, so, somehow, fine, pronominal one, ruck, flirtation, vast, vastly, frightful.*
- 19<sup>th</sup> century** – *implicit, splendid, pretty, horrible, unpleasant, thousands, ‘any number greater than two’.*
- 20<sup>th</sup> century** – *person, ‘woman’, nice, perfectly, lovely, darling, sweet, horrid, mean, dear, just-too-sweet, poor thing, minx, cat, just, so, too, adorable, precious, cunning, cute, stunning, itsy bitsy, terribly, awfully frightfully, sweetie, honey, doll, all rightie, beige, mauve.*

### 1.2.1. Gender-exclusive differences

Meyerhoff (2006: 202) points out that the so-called exclusive features are those used only by (or to) speakers of a particular sex. She further notes that in Māori (the Polynesian language spoken in New Zealand), the words for siblings provide information about both the referent and the speaker. For example, the word *teina* tells us that the speaker is referring to a younger sibling that is the same sex as the speaker is (younger brother for a male speaker, younger sister for a female speaker). If a man wants to refer to his sister, he would use a completely different word, *tuahine*, and this could refer to a younger or older sister.

Ochs (quoted in Meyerhoff 2006: 203) has described words like those above as a **direct index** of gender. Direct index means that a word has a semantic feature [+female] or [+male] as part of its basic meaning. Personal pronouns like *he* or *she* directly index gender. Meyerhoff (2006: 204-205) writes that there is one region where it seems that in a community women and men do use different languages, and this is the Vaupés<sup>6</sup>, an area between Colombia, Peru and Brazil. The Vaupés is an

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<sup>6</sup> Sorensen (1967: 671) first introduced the anthropological and linguistic communities to the fascinating sociolinguistic situation encountered in the Vaupés river basin of Brazil and Columbia, which he described as “a large, culturally homogenous area where multilingualism – and polylingualism in the individual – is the cultural norm”. Stenzel (2005: 3) notes that multilingualism as it is encountered in the Vaupés system is the result of several complementary factors. A person’s social identity is established by patrilineal descent and has language

area of great linguistic diversity, and according to the tradition one must marry outside the father's home language group.

### 1.2.1.1. Phonological differences

Phonological differences between the speech of men and women have been noted in a variety of languages.

According to Coates (2004: 29), the Chukchee language, spoken in Eastern Siberia, varies phonologically depending on the gender of the speaker. Women use /ʃ/ where men use /tʃ/ or /r/. For example, the word 'people' is pronounced by women [ʃamkɪʃɪn] while men pronounce it [ramkɪtʃɪn]. In his analysis of Chukchee, Borgoras (1922: 665) notes that women generally substitute /ʃ/ for /tʃ/ and /r/, particularly after weak vowels. They also substitute /ʃ/ for /rk/ and /tʃ/. The sounds /tʃ/ and /r/ are quite frequent so that the speech of women, with its ever-recurring /ʃ/ sounds quite peculiar, and is not easily understood by an inexperienced ear. Women can pronounce /tʃ/ and /r/ and when quoting the words of a man – for example in tales – they use these sounds. In ordinary conversation, however, the pronunciation of men is considered as unbecoming a woman.

Men's pronunciation	Women's pronunciation	Gloss
ra'mkitʃhin	ʃa'mkiʃʃin	'people'
tʃũmña'ta	ʃũmña'ta	'by a buck'
Pa'rkala	Pa'ʃʃala	'by a Parkal'
Tʃaivu'urgin	ʃaivu'uʃʃin	(a name)

**Table 1.1. Phonological differences between the speech of men and women in Chukchee (Source: Borgoras 1922)**

Borgoras further adds that men, particularly in the Kolyma district, drop intervocalic consonants, especially /n/ and /t/. In this case the two

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group affiliation as its primary marker. Sorenson (1967: 677) explains "A woman invariably uses the language of the longhouse – her husband's language – when talking directly with her children. But she is usually not the only woman from her tribe in a longhouse. In a longhouse of any size there are usually several women from other tribes; and during the course of a day, these several groups of women usually find occasion to converse with each other in their own original languages."

adjoining vowels are assimilated. Women say [nitvaqenat] while men pronounce it [nitvaqaat]. It would seem that this process of elimination of intervocalic consonants has been very important in the development of the present form of Chukchee.

Wardhaugh (2009: 318) notes that in Bengali, an Indo-European language spoken in India, men often substitute /l/ for initial /n/; women, children, and the uneducated do not do this. He further adds that in Yukaghir, a northeast Asian language, both women and children have /ts/ and /dz/ where men have /tʰ/ and /dʰ/. Old people of both genders have a corresponding /tʃ/ and /jʃ/. This proves that the difference is not only gender-related, but also age-graded, meaning that it is specific to a certain age. These differences are set out in the table below:

MALE			FEMALE		
CHILD	ADULT	OLD	CHILD	ADULT	OLD
/ts/	/tʰ/	/tʃ/	/ts/	/ts/	/tʃ/
/dz/	/dʰ/	/dʒ/	/dz/	/dz/	/dʒ/

**Table 1.2. Phonological differences between the speech of men and women in Yukaghir (Source: Wardhaugh 2009)**

Another example of phonological differences<sup>7</sup> is highlighted by Trudgill (2000: 68) in Darkhat Mongolian, a language spoken in Asia. The back rounded vowels /u/ and /o/ in men's speech correspond to the mid vowels /ʉ/ and /ø/ in women's speech, whereas male /ʉ/ and /ø/ correspond to female /y/ and /ø/ - front rounded vowels. Although female speakers do not use /ʉ/ and /ø/ where male speakers use them, there is no taboo prohibition to prevent them from using these sounds in other cases.

Talbot (2010:5-6) notes that in Brazil there is a tribe called Karajá, whose language has more differences between male and female speech than any other language. In Karajá, the gender of the speaker is marked phonologically. There are systematic sound differences between male and female forms of words, even occurring in loan words from Portuguese. Some examples are provided in Table 1.3 below:

<sup>7</sup> There are also some extremely important phonological and morphological differences between the speech of men and women in American Indian languages, such as Koasati, Gros Ventre, Yana. For more details see Campbell (1997), Haas (1944), Mithun (2006), Taylor (1982), among others.

Male speech	Female speech	Portuguese	Gloss
<i>heto</i>	<i>hetoku</i>		‘house’
<i>out</i>	<i>kotu</i>		‘turtle’
<i>bisileta</i>	<i>bisikreta</i>	<i>bicicleta</i>	‘bicycle’
<i>nobiotxu</i>	<i>nobikutxu</i>	<i>domingo</i>	‘Sunday’

**Table 1.3. Phonological differences in male and female speech in Karajá (Source: Fortune and Fortune 1987, quoted in Talbot 2010)**

### 1.2.1.2. Morphological differences

Fasold (1990: 89-90) states that there are languages where the sex of both the speaker and the hearer is important. A woman might use a different form when she is talking to another woman compared with when she is talking to a man, while a man might use a third form, with the exact meaning as the first two, irrespective of to whom he is addressing.

Such a language is Kūru<sup>8</sup>, a small-group Dravidian language spoken in India. In Kūru, there are several morphological forms used by women only when addressing another woman; they are not used by men or by women to address men. Some representative forms are given below in table 1.4.

TWO-WAY CONTRASTING FORMS BY GENDER IN KŪRUX		
Man speaking, any addressee; or woman speaking, man addressee	Woman speaking Woman addressee	Gloss
<i>bardan</i>	<i>bar'en</i>	‘I come’
<i>bardam</i>	<i>bar'em</i>	‘We (my associates and I, but not you) come’
<i>barckan</i>	<i>barc'an</i>	‘I came’
<i>barckam</i>	<i>barc'am</i>	‘We (my associates and I, but not you) came’
<i>xaddar</i>	<i>xadday</i>	‘children’

**Table 1.4. Morphological differences between the speech of men and women in Kūru (Source: Ekka 1972)**

<sup>8</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the differences in the speech of men and women in Kūru, see Ekka (1972).

These forms are the first-person singular and first-person plural exclusive verb paradigms, and the noun “children” in the plural.

Fasold further notes that “verb morphology in the second-person singular is even more sensitive to sex”. There is one form used by either men or by women when they are talking to men. When women are addressed there are two separate forms depending on the sex of the speaker. A man would use a different form to woman from what a woman would use to another woman, as illustrated below in table 1.5:

Man or woman speaker, man addressee	Woman speaker, woman addressee	Man speaker, woman addressee	Gloss
<i>barday</i>	<i>bardin</i>	<i>bardi</i>	‘you come’
<i>barckay</i>	<i>barckin</i>	<i>barcki</i>	‘you came’

**Table 1.5. Morphological differences between the speech of men and women in KūruX (Source: Ekka 1972 and Meyerhoff 2006)**

Taylor (1951, quoted in Fasold 1990) illustrates another example, from Island Carib from the Caribbean nation, Dominica. In this language, there is a tendency for men to use the names of qualities, states, and actions as if they carried **feminine** gender while women treat them like **masculine** gender nouns. The expression “the other day” is *ligira buga* if a woman says it, but *tugura buga* if uttered by a man. Interestingly, Taylor reports that “perhaps a minority of men” regularly use feminine forms for non-concrete nouns but that “all women resort to this trick” when they are quoting conversations between men.

Another language in which there are morphological differences between the speech of men and women is Yanyuwa, an aboriginal language spoken in Australia. Here men and women really speak two different dialects. In his analysis of Yanyuwa, Bradley (2006: 14) says that the most common statement given by the Yanyuwa people in relation to their language is that “Men speak one way, women speak another, that’s just the way it is!” Other people believe that they speak two different languages to show respect for the opposite sex. One individual claims that:

I don’t really know, but I was thinking that men and women have to respect each other, so we talk different ways and so we show respect for each other, just like ceremony; you know men have their ceremony and

their language well same way women have their own ceremony and their own language (Bradley 2006: 14).

Bradley further notes that the younger generations no longer speak the language so it is almost impossible to find out the way in which Yanyuwa language was acquired by children. However, it seems that in very early childhood children spoke a form of neutral Yanyuwa, meaning that the dialectal markers were deleted from words, so that ‘at or with the fire’ became  $\emptyset$  *buyuka-la* rather than the correct *ji-buyuka-la* for women and *ki-buyuka-la* for men. In adolescence around the age of 12 boys are initiated through a series of rituals which include circumcision, after which they are considered men and from that moment on they are supposed to speak the men’s dialect (Bradley 2006: 15).

When a young male uses Yanyuwa he often speaks the women’s dialect, for which he is severely criticised. The following excerpt is part of a conversation between mother and son:

(1)

*Son:* Mum, did you buy *ni-warnnyi* [meat]?

*Mother:* Hey! Are you a man or a woman? Man got to talk *na-warnnyi* not *ni-warnnyi* that’s women’s talk, you got to talk properly, you not little kid now.

*Son:* Hey look you complain because young people don’t talk language and when we do you got to laugh at us, man may as well not even bother.

*Mother:* Well, you just got to learn to talk proper way just like we did.

(Source: Bradley 2006: 16)

It is difficult for boys to start using the men’s dialect because when they were born they acquired the women’s dialect and after their initiation they have to forget that dialect and start speaking a completely different one.

In Yanyuwa, differences go beyond sounds and words and include pronouns, grammatical affixes (as illustrated above) and other parts of speech. Bradley (2006: 17) provides further evidence from songs cycles, where there are also female dialectal markers on common nouns and a number of verb stems from the female dialect. Consider the following examples: