

Jasna Mikić

A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH INTO GENDER AND LANGUAGE: FROM THE DEFICIT MODEL TO THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVIST MODEL

ABSTRACT

This paper presents an overview of early research into gender and language conducted in various developed Western countries and their languages. Different models were proposed to establish the properties of the language used by men and women. A major concept in early research was the 'woman's language', regarded as inferior, and subject to pejorative connotations. The presented models represent an important beginning of research on gender and language, although they are largely no longer considered current due to the many shortcomings of their theory and weak empirical support. The paper also reviews contemporary critical frameworks and offers suggestions for further research.

KEY WORDS: *gender, language, woman's language, historical overview, research models*

Zgodovinski pregled raziskovanja spola in jezika: od modela primanjkljaja do družbenokonstruktivističnega modela

IZVLEČEK

Prispevek prinaša pregled prvih raziskav spola in jezika, ki so bile opravljene v razvitih zahodnih državah in na jezikih teh držav. Avtorice in avtorji so skozi različne modele ugotavljali značilnosti jezika, ki so ga uporabljali moški in ženske. V ospredje raziskovanja so postavljali predvsem t. i. ženski jezik, ki je bil viden kot manjvreden in na katerega so se vezale slabšalne konotacije. Predstavljeni

modeli so bili pomemben začetek preiskovanja teme spola in jezika v svetovnem merilu, kljub temu pa danes zaradi številnih pomanjkljivosti v njihovi teoretizaciji in empiričnem preverjanju v večini niso več aktualni. V prispevku predstavimo tudi sodobne kritične pristope in nakažemo poti nadaljnjega raziskovanja.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: spol, jezik, ženski jezik, zgodovinski pregled, modeli raziskovanja

1 Introduction

Literature in the field of gender equality is highly extensive and mainly focused on the relations between men and women in the context of socially constructed practices, which help shape unequal opportunities and expectations for a particular gender, mostly women (e.g., Walby 1997; de Beauvoir 1999; Connell 2002, etc.). These types of (mainly sociological) studies were far more concerned with women (issues related to femininity) than men (issues related to masculinity) (Wharton 2012: 20). They were based on the notion of the weaker and subordinate social position of women that was found as a (historically) recurring pattern by most researchers of gender throughout their investigations of various systems of power. Language and discourse, which serve as instruments for the reproduction of society and gender (in)equality (e.g., Lakoff 1975; Spender 1980; Irigaray 2002; Holmes 2006; Litosseliti 2006; Mills 2008, etc.), became the subject of (scientific) discussions about discrimination only in the 1960s and '70s. They first appeared generally among Western authors and in the analysis of languages spoken in developed capitalist economies (e.g., Great Britain, USA)¹ (Plemenitaš 2014: 18–19). The earliest linguistic research of this type was largely concerned with the examination of the so-called woman's language, a characterisation of the language used by women, and used to describe women. It was perceived as pejoratively marked, since it had in all aspects been interpreted as inferior to the language being used by (and for) men. Frequently, woman's language was thus conceptualised as a deviation from the (masculine) linguistic norm (Ščuka 2014: 80).

To understand the field of gender and language today, it is necessary to understand how interest in the relations between the two concepts first emerged. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to present a historical overview of significant research, subjects, models, and discussions, which established a variety of focuses on the interpretation of gender and language. Older analyses will be critically

1. Most of the available literature is in English language, though other languages also appear in the frame of gender and language analysis.

assessed, since their historical placement (the 1960s and '70s) results in empirically questionable and in many aspects oversimplified perspectives on gender and language. These are problematic especially since they form the basis on which arguments against changing sexist language are (still) often rooted.

2 “Male” examination of “woman’s language”

The first outlines of (non-systematic) exploration of gender and language date back to the 5th century, when earliest attempts to identify connections between grammatical and biological gender (then conceived as “natural gender”) were recorded (Ščuka 2014: 80). Few developments followed until the 16th century, when in 1553 Thomas Wilson, a British writer and grammarian, advanced his proposal – based on the “known fact” that men were “in the natural order more important than women” – that masculine terms be set before feminine terms in writing as well² (Bodine 1998: 128). Wilson was the first to officially advocate for “natural order” in language. More interest on the study of the male generic form arose in the Indo-European languages throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, notably with the authors Joshua Poole (in 1646) and John Kirkby (in 1746) (Sunderland 2006: 33). The latter, who authored 88 grammatical rules (for the English language) in rule 21,³ specified the masculine grammatical gender as “comprehensive”.⁴ This is the earliest documented case of the explicit advocacy of a “generic” or “neutral” *he*, which the grammarians even managed to confirm legally (through an Act of Parliament) in 1850. With that act, the use of the *he* or *she* or *they* was officially replaced with the generic *he* in English language (Bodine 1998: 129–130).

Particular investigations of woman’s language as deficient began with the Scandinavian linguist Otto Jespersen (1922), who described some of its features in the chapter *The Woman*, which was a part of his famous work *Language: Its Nature, Development and Origin*. In the chapter, he portrayed women as having a limited vocabulary (which is supposedly smaller and more central than that of the men), weaker interest in the words/language (men supposedly

-
2. Wilson wrote for educated upper-class men, whereas women – as they did not have access to education – were not allowed to object (and were not included in the process of grammatical rule formulation) (Bodine 1998: 128). He proposed masculine terms (as “the worthier”) be set before feminine in all cases, e.g., brother and sister.
 3. Rule 21 states: “The masculine Person answers to the general Name, which comprehends both Male and Female; as Any Person, who knows what he says.” (Kirkby 1974: 117)
 4. Kirkby’s argumentation of the rule was based on the belief that man was “more than woman” – and hence that it was legitimate for the masculine form to encompass more meanings than the feminine form.

showed more interest for words and their acoustic properties; they also used different words and pronounced them differently), and are also creating and using less complex sentences/terms (supposedly created by men, and adopted by women) (Sunderland 2006; Tolmach Lakoff 2010; Jespersen 1998). An important assumption he made was that women were linguistically quicker than men – claiming they learn faster, hear and also respond faster (answering as soon as they think of something)⁵; whereas men appear to be more reasoned in their use of language, weighing, hesitating, choosing their words (in sound and in sense) and thus forming the most appropriate responses (Jespersen 1998: 236–239)⁶. Though Jespersen made specific descriptions of perceived female deficiencies in language use in this chapter,⁷ he also saw women's preference for refined and indirect expressions as something that universally influenced linguistic development (Jespersen 1922: 246). His work was well known and frequently quoted and is still considered ground-breaking research in linguistics (Vandeputte 2015–2016: 6).

Jespersen was not the only linguist dealing with gender and language, but he was one of the few who had written in English, which made him more widely read compared to authors in other languages. Some of his Swedish colleagues also covered the topic, in particular Johan Gustaf Christoffer Cederschiöld, who in his work *Om svenskan som skriftspråk* (*About Swedish as a Written Language*) (1897) addressed the difference between spoken and written language, also touching briefly upon perceived differences between men's and women's speech. In the 1900, he also published an article *Om kvinnospråk och andra ämnen* (*About Female Speech and Other Topics*). Differentiation between woman's and man's language eventually also became a subject of interest outside of linguistics.⁸ The topic was treated by Swiss sociolinguists, most visible among them Louis Gauchat (1905), who differed from his colleagues in his introduction

-
5. Which he based on women supposedly changing their mind mid-sentence, or frequently failing to finish their sentences.
 6. He partly connected his views of woman's language with the lower average education of women at the time (Jespersen 1998: 235–240).
 7. Which is also a reflection of the time in which he wrote (1922) and the fact that not much was known about gender and language at that time (his work is considered as one of the first scholarly texts on gender in the history of linguistics) (Vandeputte 2015–2016: 6–7).
 8. At that time, questions on the role of gender in the use of language expanded to the field of literature. In 1929, Virginia Woolf wrote *Women and Fiction*, in which she stressed the material and social limitations women experienced in times preceding her own had they wished to write – lack of education, household obligations, social disapproval, mockery of “unfeminine” activities and ambitions, etc. (Cameron 1998b: 28).

of empirical sociolinguistic research (in contrast to the other works, which generally lacked empirical evidence). The subject of gender and language was also researched by Canadian anthropologist Alexander Francis Chamberlain, who published his work *Women's Languages* in 1912, and the American sociologist Paul Hanly Furfey, who published the article *Men's and Women's Languages* in 1944 (Vandeputte 2015–2016: 7).

Until the second wave of the feminist movement, the subject of gender and language was thus explored largely by non-feminist⁹ (and mostly male) researchers who, consequently, conceptualised language with a focus on (or through the perspective of) men. With second-wave feminism (starting in the 1960s), interest arose in a more systematic scientific examination of reasons behind gender inequalities, for which most authors were rooted in the feminist perspective (Kambič 2008: 5). The central motive of research became the aim (and at the same time political decision) to explore language for the benefit of women, a discourse that notably understands “patriarchal” language to be an instrument of women’s subordination (Spender 1980: 8).

3 Deficit model, dominance model, and difference model

In the 1970s, extensive academic examination of the connection between language and gender began. At the forefront was the analysis of linguistic gender inequality, which became a core subject of sociolinguistic¹⁰ and feminist studies (Plemenitaš 2014: 22). Similarly to centuries prior, attention was directed at the so-called man’s and woman’s language(s), the investigation of linguistic styles and use of prestigious or stigmatised forms, and similar (Sunderland 2006: 7). Given certain preceding attempts to connect the concepts of gender and language, Robin Lakoff earned her place as a pioneer in this field. In her work *Language and Woman's Place* in 1975, she approached the point of view referred to by later scholars as the deficit model.

9. The aforementioned Jespersen, and similar studies, focused on descriptive gender-linguistic characteristics, often connected with processes of linguistic change or language variations (e.g., Labov 1966, 1972; Milroy 1987), or descriptions of the use of language in different circumstances and time points (Trudgill 1974).

10. Sociolinguists established many factors that influence a person’s mode of speech: for example, social class, education, childhood environment, age, occupation, among others. Language is shaped by all these circumstances, consequently resulting in a large variation in language use and communication between individuals (Vandeputte 2015–2016: 15).

Lakoff (1975) claimed that man's and woman's speech and language display many differences, whereby she assumed that certain lexical aspects of language, for example (super)polite forms ("would you mind"), apologetics, a less frequent initiative to speak, euphemisms, tag questions¹¹ ("you're going to dinner, aren't you?"), hedges ("sort of"), "empty" adjectives (e.g., "charming", "lovely"), intensifiers ("so") etc., were more related to women than men. She listed expressions that were (in her observation) being used by women exclusively (naming these "women-specific", whilst naming others "neutral")¹², e.g., "adorable", "sweet", "lovely", "charming", while establishing that in men, the use of these terms might result in reputation loss (ridicule). Among the forms of deficient language, she also classified "ladylike speech", claiming it was a mannerism developed during childhood or youth when girls were being encouraged to act ladylike (which transferred to the field of speech). In this, the author states two vectors of negativity affecting women: when they did not speak in "ladylike" terms, they were considered unfeminine and rude (by both women and men); but when they did, they were accused of frivolous language and an inability to discuss serious matters, in some way characterised as being less than a real, full person ("She's a bit of fluff") (Lakoff 1975: 61). Lakoff thus identified the dilemma faced by women as follows: either being "less than a woman", or "being less than a person".

Through numerous (above listed) examples, the author attempted to portray the use of woman's language, which she perceived as a language expressing weakness, subordination, the powerlessness of the women, as well as a language representing a deviation from the standard or desired, prestigious and powerful language of men. Lakoff (1975) saw language as the reflection of a (non-linguistic) reality, in which the position of men and women was unequal, since both society as well as language grant men "more powerful" instruments of communication compared to women – which reaffirms and perpetuates the social superiority of men. As she states, the goal of the use of woman's language was to "submerge" woman's personal identity, through the process of encouraging expressions (or offering access to only a limited spectrum of "appropriate" terms) that suggest triviality in a given subject or express insecurity. She saw these aspects as being related to the fact the woman is, in speech, frequently treated as an object – be it sexual or some other, yet never as a serious subject with important individual views. Lakoff pointed out the irony of such treatment,

11. Lakoff (1975) believed that speakers construct statements when they are confident in their speech – sure of their knowledge – whereas questions are, according to her, connected with lack of knowledge. She assumed tag questions were used when speakers made claims but were not confident in their truthfulness or accuracy.

12. E.g., "great", "cool".

which made women internalise/accustom to believing their position was justified (due to purported deficiencies in their intelligence and/or education). Based on this, she was convinced that language was an effective instrument of “keeping women in their place” (Lakoff 1975).

Lakoff’s work was criticised for its lack of empirical evidence (her conclusions were deduced from (self)observation), especially since some authors (already at that time) empirically disproved some of her claims¹³. She was also accused of leaning too heavily on the interpretation of culturally specific gender stereotypes, and especially of disregarding the background of the position of women in a patriarchal society (Cameron 1996; Spender 1980; Litosseliti 2013). Her thinking was characterised as male-biased, as her ideas were strongly based on the works of Jespersen, most significant among them that woman’s language was a deviation from the male norm (Cameron 1998b: 216).

Based on strong feminist assumptions about the relationship between genders at the time and as a reflection of the political climate (emphasis on the initiatives for public exposure and deconstruction of patriarchy), the position that man’s speech was dominating woman’s speech was set at the centre of discussion (Litosseliti 2013: 32). These theories were grounded in the interpretation of the power asymmetry between men and women. Men were perceived as utilising the patriarchy to keep women subordinate, with language as one of the instruments of power reproducing their dominant status (Van Han 2014: 96). This was the so-called dominance model, influential in the late 1970s to the ‘90s. In contrast to the deficit model, which rested on the idea that the characteristics of woman’s speech were connected to woman’s inferiority in society, the dominance model was based on a belief that language patterns were an expression of the patriarchal social order, and therefore that asymmetries in the status of men and women were a consequence of self-reproducing male privilege (Talbot 2010). Nevertheless, the two models share common ground since the subordinate status of women is by both understood as the central determinant of women’s behaviour (Cameron 1998b: 216).

With her radical feminist work *Man Made Language*, Dale Spender (1980) is considered among the most important authors of the dominance model. She based her work on the presumption that sexist language was a result and reflection of the patriarchal social order. The author claimed that language was the product of men (i.e., that men create and define it) and was, therefore, primarily under the control of men. In her opinion, this monopoly over language was one

13. Dubois and Crouch (1975), for example, proved that men used tag questions more frequently than women.

of the key factors allowing men to secure their social dominance, and at the same time perpetuate the invisibility of women and their language (Spender 1980: 12). As the author stressed, it was not a situation and/or in relation to language determinism and economic determinism. Both language and material resources have been instrumentalised by the dominant group in order to construct female inferiority (and they are interconnected) (Spender 1980: 6). Spender was critical towards analyses implying the inferiorities of woman's language, since they were inherently attempting to define something woman's language was lacking (through research that had been male-biased on many occasions), and with this merely reinforcing their starting position that woman's language was essentially inferior¹⁴ (Spender 1980: 7). On these grounds, she strongly criticised the work of Lakoff (1975). Spender claimed it was not woman's language that was deficient, but rather the social order instead. She was also critical to the Lakoff's unreflected assertion that man's language was superior/normative due to its linguistic performance, and not due to (male) gender (Spender 1980: 8). Pamela Fishman (1978, 1980, 1983) likewise rejected the conceptualisation of woman's language as deficient and disagreed with Lakoff's claim that woman's language was a symptom of insecurity. In the analysis of domestic relations between men and women, Fishman established the contrary: that woman's language was effective and a significant conversation facilitator. She believed that women were conducting "support" in the process of communication, which men were not expected to do, and did consequently not contributed equally to the conversation process. The author focused on the aspect characterised as "women's conversation styles": namely the tag questions, and the use of the figurative phrase "you know", interpreted as a marker of insecurity. She agreed with Lakoff in that women used more tag questions, and that women tended to ask more questions in general, but did not connect this to any perceived deficiency in women's character, but rather the conversational effectiveness of questions (assuming women had certain barriers in establishing conversation with men, thus opening with questions was intended to create a context for conversation). Don Zimmerman and Candace West (1975) were also important dominance model authors who researched conversation interruptions (in gender-mixed groups) as a

14. Spender (1980: 10) also discusses how (negative) representations of woman's language do not change even when research disproves the premises of female inferiority (e.g., establishing that men frequently use tag questions etc.). Rather than researchers rejecting the assumption of the inferiority of woman's language, she claims excuses are made to rationalise it based on details (e.g., that some other factor of language analysis might confirm their framework). She believed the conceptualisations of woman's language as non-normative persisted systemically, regardless of counter-evidence.

means of establishing the dominant social position. They observed that as many as 98 % of all conversation interruptions were initiated by men. Zimmerman and West (1975) interpreted this as a result of the inequality between the status of female and male speakers, in which men tend to suppress women's initiative to develop subjects of conversation.

Only a decade later, it was determined that many of the hitherto presented theories addressing gender and language were either too rigid or too simplistic. The works of that time (for the most part) did not meet the scientific criteria, as opposed to the examination of gender and language pursued in the 1980s and '90s (Tolmach Lakoff 2010: 161) that helped shape and reflect the difference model. In contrast to viewing women as "weak" (the deficit model) or "victims" (the dominance model), the goal of the difference model was to empirically reassess woman's language (and distance itself from any intrinsic negative conceptualisations of that language). Jennifer Coates and Janet Holmes, as representatives of the difference model, in their works focused especially on the positive interpretation and evaluation of woman's talk (Sunderland 2006: 20). In contrast to the dominance model, the difference model was not concerned with the perceived dominance of male verbal power but looked for reasons behind female "invisibility" in differences between the genders. These gender differences were based on a set of conclusions about socio-biological characteristics (e.g., women being less competitive than men, men being less emotional than women), different cultural and social backgrounds, and different (communicational) socialisation. Daniel N. Maltz and Ruth A. Borker (1982), for example, saw the origin of linguistic differences between the genders in the (differing) ways girls and boys were being raised (Tolmach Lakoff 2010: 162). Due to stressing the importance of (communicational) socialisation on the different use of language between men and women, the difference model at first glance appears similar to the deficit model. Nevertheless, a closer examination shows that the difference model does not conceptualise woman's language as inferior or "non-standard" as the deficit model does, but emphasises different styles and ways of using language according to gender.

The most visible author of the difference model is undoubtedly Deborah Tannen (1990a; 1990b). She believed that the main issue encountered by men and women in conversation was not necessarily a disparity in social hierarchy or inequality between them, but rather female/male differences as cultural differences¹⁵. Tannen was convinced that different modes of speech utilised by men

15. Claiming that the presumption men consciously dominate women during conversation was misleading and unfair.

and women affect certain misunderstandings between the genders, and saw the solution to this problem in a greater awareness and mutual tolerance in the communication process (Cameron 1998b: 217–218).

It should be mentioned that during the 1970s, certain works published outside of the feminist paradigm also significantly contributed to the pursuit of feminist goals. An example of this is the analysis of authors studying the field of language variations and gender, Susan Gal (1978) and Ann Bodine (1975), and those who focused on empirical studies concerning language variations in connection to social class, age, and stylistic context, such as William Labov (1966, 1972) and Peter Trudgill (1972) (Sunderland 2006: 7). The 1970s (and '80s) were also characterised by numerous critiques of the generic use of the masculine grammatical form¹⁶ (Moulton, Robinson and Elias 1978; MacKay 1980; Spender 1980), which generated research investigating the sociolinguistic effect of generic pronouns (*he* and *his*). Their findings showed that the use of masculine grammatical forms as generic reproduces mental representations centred mostly on male individuals, and promotes male-favouring bias (e.g., Bodine 1975). As a reaction to research into language sexism, a number of guidelines were being written and gradually implemented to address sexist practices in language in the late 20th century. These were formed within publishing houses and non-governmental organisations (Blaubeurgs 1980: 135) and the academic environment. For example, Casey Miller and Kate Swift¹⁷ prepared *The Handbook of Nonsexist Writing*¹⁸ (1989), and Bobbye Sorrels published *The Non-sexist Communicator* (1978). These were the first two systematic works pointing out the detrimental nature of sexist expression and offering non-sexist alternatives (Hellinger and Pauwels 2007: 653–654; Sunderland 2006: 11).

At the same time, dictionaries and grammar books were also identified as problematic by certain authors, understanding them as “sites of codification and normative language” (Hellinger and Pauwels 2007: 667) and “gatekeepers” of language (enabling and specifying its use). Hellinger in Pauwels (2007: 667) believed that dictionaries have at an early point “institutionalised sexist

16. A subject already treated by the dominance model (e.g., Spender 1980).

17. In 1976, Miller and Swift also published the book *Words and Women*.

18. Cameron criticised their work, as it supposedly represented only a single view of the English language, meaning American English (and related specifically to the American target audience) and was not applied to all (including British) English variants (Cameron 1998a: 157). She saw guidelines for non-sexist language as a “necessary evil”, and believed they were not focused on the important aspect of sexist language (changing terms from sexist to non-sexist, rather than focusing on underlying semantics) (Cameron 1998a: 162–163).

language in their choice of definitions and examples (use of androcentric generics, asymmetrical gender-marking, the communication of stereotypical gender roles)". As a response to this institutionalisation of sexist terms, several feminists created their own dictionaries in their critique of the conventional dictionary practice, by subverting prescribed meanings, introducing feminist knowledge and neologisms, e.g., Graham 1975; Mills 1989 (*Womanwords: a dictionary of words about women*); Kramarae and Treichler 1985 (*Feminist dictionary*); Doyle 1995 (*The A-Z of Non-Sexist Language*) (Mills 2008).

4 New poststructuralist dimensions of exploring gender and language

Developing understanding of the concept of gender had a profound influence on the emergence of various models and approaches to the theorisation of gender and language. The research of the 1970s was still strongly based on the strict dichotomising of women and men (Tolmach Lakoff 2010: 163), which was supported by the so-called traditional feminists who understood gender as a universal, natural, ahistorical, stable, and fixed (e.g., Lakoff and Tannen). Although their research on gender and language introduced new insights into the context of relations between men and women (Lakoff's through the deficit model and Tannen's with the difference model), their overall view of gender implied that "what is done, can't be undone" and that women ought to simply embrace their socially predestined role (e.g., of being physically and intellectually inferior to men, less important than men, dependent on men, invisible in the company of men, the property of men) (Marković 2003: 403). This heavily marked the development of their theories which were (just as the dominance model theories) eventually strongly criticised by a number of authors (e.g., Fishman 1980; O'Barr and Atkins 1998; Cameron et al. 1988; Uchida 1992; Troemel-Ploetz 1991).

Towards the late 1980s and in the '90s, feminist linguistics began developing new dimensions of discursive and poststructuralist perspectives with the intention of pursuing more critical and specific questions. New conceptualisations were influenced by the developments and findings within other academic disciplines dealing with the theorisation of gender. One of the key questions the academics were trying to answer was: in what ways is gender an effect of the language used, rather than a determinant of different uses of language? (Litosseliti 2013: 44).

A work that rose to particular prominence at the turn of the century was *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) by Judith Butler, in which she rejected the binary division of genders and advocated the recogni-

tion of several forms of masculinity and femininity¹⁹ (Coates 2015: 215–217). The work of Judith Butler represented a breakthrough moment in the paradigm of gender studies. Rather than understanding gender as “being” or “having” (as the traditional feminists understood it), Butler defined it as doing/performing. She adopted and expanded the concept of “performativity”²⁰ (devised by John Langshaw Austin (1962) in language philosophy) from speech actions to the entire frame of communication performed by men and women. According to Butler, gender can be recreated repeatedly, at different time points and in different situations through the activity of the subject – but never by itself (Marković 2003: 404). With the theory of performativity, she managed to transpose anti-essentialism into language. Unlike the initial sociolinguistic assertions that had been based on the assumption that genders showed different use of language because the language itself was “gendered” (i.e., someone who is a woman, therefore, speaks as a woman), the perspective of performativity introduced new means of reasoning – understanding that men and women are using language in specific ways in order for themselves to become and be accepted by others, as “gendered” (Cameron 1998b: 17). This is one of the newer approaches to the study of language and gender, called the dynamic or social constructivist model, which conceptually departs considerably from preceding theories.

A broader context for this standpoint is represented by the third wave of feminism, whose main characteristic was the opposition to the essentialist view on gender as a fixed and stable characteristic of every person (Cameron 1998b: 218). In third-wave feminism, meanings were no longer understood as forced upon women, since the production of meaning was conceptualised as a

19. Butler (1999) rejects the differentiation between the biological sex (as a natural category) and the social gender (as an acquired cultural-social category). She claims that sex is likewise a socially constructed category, originating from social-cultural practices and in the context of discourse with a specific history and socio-political dynamic. She believes gender is not contingent as a stable identity or source of agency that guides actions, but is an identity recreated across time by society, institutionalised in the external space through the stylised repetition of actions themselves. As she states, gender is created socially-temporally; while simultaneously being a norm that can never be fully internalised. Performing gender in undesired ways thus has clear punitive consequences, in that society disapproves of those who do not perform their gender “correctly/appropriately” (Butler 1999: 178–179).

20. The theory of performativity assumes that gender identity is not a manifestation of an internal essence/being, but rather a product of actions (i.e., performativity). Mundane actions, speech statements, gestures and theatrics, dress codes and prescribed mannerisms as well as certain prohibitions and taboos operate in a way to create the characteristics considered essential for (the male or female) identity (Butler 1999).

process of rejecting and confirming certain types of (discursive) practices and interpretations between men and women (Mills 2008: 26). The goal of feminist linguistics, at that time, was to stress the analysis of ways in which the interpretation of statements concerning women might differ between contexts²¹ and was no longer concerned with creating global statements on woman's language or language used to address women (Mills 2008: 24; Cameron 1998a).

One of the most important authors of the early 21st century is certainly Sara Mills (1995, 1997, 2003, 2012), who addressed the interconnections between gender, feminism and linguistics, looking at the themes of politeness, sexism, feminism, discursive practices, inter-cultural interactions, and similar. Mills²², as a proponent of third-wave feminist thinking, in her book *Language and Sexism* (2008) re-examined the (past) definitions of language sexism as they were utilised by most of the second-wave feminist authors. Language sexism, which in theory describes linguistic discrimination that might affect both genders, was frequently used among second-wave theorists to define prejudice (only) against women, and therefore understood as language that discriminates against women in particular (Vetterling-Braggin 1981). Mills (2008) rejected these views and also believed that previous definitions had been based on an overly liberal-feminist presumptions that sexism is grounded in the error of the speaker ("as a mistake"), which can be corrected immediately, if the speaker is warned/notified. Such views of sexism in language are founded on the assertion that one is able to objectively judge the sexist or non-sexist nature of particular statements. This was also something Mills rejected, conceptualising sexism (as other forms of discrimination in language) as a result of broader social forces, institutional relations of asymmetry and power, and conflicts arising from access to resources and social status. To Mills, language represents the "(battle)field" in which the struggle for semantic meaning is taking place, and which is often also the struggle for the right to be, to exist in certain contexts, speak in certain ways, occupy certain (social or occupational) positions. She advocated a more social and institutional perspective on sexism, centred not only on the linguistic elements of sexism but

21. The aim is to search for the deeper meaning and factors that lead to perception when a person is deciding whether a certain word or term is derogatory to women in general (to someone as a woman), or individually derogatory (Mills 2008: 22).

22. The author differentiates between two kinds of feminist analysis: second-wave feminist analysis and third-wave feminist analysis. In the broader sense, second-wave feminism treats woman's language as that of a subordinate group, while third-wave feminism challenges the homogeneity of women as a monolithic group essentially, focusing rather on localised studies. The author does not view them chronologically but as an upgrade of one model with another (Mills 2008: 22).

also on the conceptual frame of discourses or beliefs about women and men expressed and represented within language. In her opinion, discriminatory relations can be found within institutionalised contexts, where conflicts for power and access are constantly present, constructing a more localised model of sexism, according to which whether a word will be interpreted as sexist or not depends on the context (Mills 2008: 1–4). The local orientation of third-wave feminism is one of its advantages, though it also departs from the concept of society as a comprehensive whole, since it is difficult to discuss the influence of values and pressures of society on the linguistic choices of women and men if one is too narrowly focused on individual experience. Third-wave feminist linguistics thus attempted to preserve a balance between focus on the local and maintaining, “an awareness of the negotiations at the local level with structures which are largely imposed” (Mills 2008: 29).

In recent decades, a great deal of feminist research began to delve into poststructuralist approaches to discourse, including critical discourse analysis. These approaches presuppose a dialectical connection between any text (spoken or written), the discursive practices associated with it and the wider social and institutional context in which it is embedded. New poststructuralist conceptualisations led to the question how gender intersects with other aspects of identity (e.g., race, nationality, age, religion, class, status, sexual orientation), and to interest concerning men and women in specific circumstances, communities, institutions and cultures (Litosseliti 2013: 55, 63–65). Due to this expansion of the field of interest, and based on extensive criticism of preceding disciplinary concepts (over the prevailing one-dimensional treatment of “woman” as a white middle-class individual) (Tolmach Lakoff 2010: 164–165), some authors broadened their research horizon by intersecting the subjects of gender and language with other social categories as well, for example, social class (Labov 1990), and other concepts, such as power (Hall et al. 1992), masculinity (Johnson and Meinhof 1997) and similar. Feminist sociolinguists attempted to establish an understanding of fundamental analytical concepts of sociolinguistics by introducing definitions of standard and non-standard language (Morgan 1994), using concepts of the “speech community”²³ and “community of practice” (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1992, 1999; Eckert 2000; Holmes 1992, 1999), the cultural differences approach (Holmes 1995; Coates 1996) among others. (McElhinny 2003: 21).

23. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992) were the first authors to develop the approach “community of practice” within the framework of gender studies, enabling researchers to focus on the local production of identity and no longer operate with broad (questionable) generalisations found in the research of the speech community. The community of practice has proven itself an effective study approach, as it combines various disci

At the same time, the poststructuralist researchers of that period began to strictly reject traditional linguistics, asserting that it reproduced the ideology of heterosexual society (Marković 2003: 411).

5 Critical evaluation of presented theories and final remarks

This paper presents a historical overview of research into gender and language, which introduces the exploration of woman's language initially as deficient (the deficit model), as subordinate (the dominance model) and as different from the language of men (the difference model). In the recent decades, developments have been shifting towards a conceptualisation, stating that it is not, in fact, language that is gendered but rather the use of language in specific ways that (re)creates the gendering of its users (the social constructivist model).

The presented models had an important influence on the historical development of the analysis of gender and language, though some (deficit, dominance, and difference) no longer carry particular weight in contemporary feminist linguistics. There are several reasons for that, among them most significantly a lack of empirical evidence in support of the proposed theories and claims, and their respective (somewhat exaggerated) focus on a single dimension of theorising (power asymmetry, differences, deficiency) that fails to take into account a multitude of other vectors that might affect a perceived subordinate position of woman's language. Based on that, a critical assessment of the presented theories and positions appears to be necessary.

Both the dominance model and the deficit model were subject to criticism, especially on the account of the over-pronounced stressing of power as the single determinant shaping all relations between the genders. In this context, interruptions (as the most obvious expression of power) were seen as a deliberate action of men expressing their superiority. However, as some later authors pointed out, it was not the goal of all men to dominate all women, meaning that interruptions could be caused by several reasons (and many of them are unintentional) (Litosseliti 2013: 37). Regarding the difference model, whose principal interest was to describe (rather than critique) woman's language, the criticism is most often aimed at the frequently exaggerated stressing of gender dichotomy. The theoreticians of the difference model also failed to include similarities between

plines and allows for complex interdisciplinary views on the subject of gender. At the same time, this approach recognises the diversity within the male and female gender expressions, and facilitates the exploration of gender and language within the social structure (Marković 2003: 408–410).

masculine and feminine speech in their analyses, or the diversity of speech styles that exist among various groups of women, and among various groups of men. Additionally, they were critiqued for having entirely disregarded the aspects or dimensions of power on the formation of social relations (e.g., Tannen), due to which the difference model generally operates with an oversimplified concept of gender as an "innocent cultural difference" (Litosseliti 2013: 40).

As demonstrated, most ideas presented in the past models, are in certain aspects no longer valid, also due to the numerous changes in (social) circumstances in the decades since. Nevertheless, they represent valuable cultural/linguistic heritage, bringing important understanding and reflections of the narratives and social realities of a certain time (and place).

However, it also becomes evident that certain views on the subject conceptualised decades ago are still present in current perceptions of gender and language. This includes extensive and widely read popular literature, which thematises typical and frequently stereotypical gender communication styles, both in the workplace and in private relationships (e.g., *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus* (Gray 1992); *They Don't Get It Do They* (Reardon 1995); *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation* (Tannen 1990c); *Talking from 9 to 5: Women and Men in the Workplace* (Tannen 1994) etc.). This literature is usually dedicated to a general reader and based on presenting gender differences as inevitable, culturally conditioned or even innate (e.g., Cameron 1992; Crawford 1995; Freed 1992; Troemel-Ploetz 1991).

Contemporary research of gender and language reveals that many questions arising throughout the previous century connected with this subject have yet to be fully explored. An evident lack of empirical knowledge appears in connection to sexism in language and gender differences in the use of language. Likewise, existing studies have yet to develop the expected social critique to stop sexism and other forms of similar (linguistic) discrimination (Weatherall 2000: 39), which calls for continued efforts and reflection in this academic field of practice.

Literature

- Austin, John Langshaw (1962): *How to do things with words*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Blaubergs, Maija S. (1980): An analysis of classic arguments against changing sexist language. *Women's Studies International Quarterly*, 3 (2-3): 135-147.
- Bodine, Ann (1975): Sex Differentiation in Language. In B. Thorne and N. Henley (eds.): *Language and Sex: Difference and Dominance*: 130-151. Rowley: Newbury House.
- Bodine, Ann (1998): Androcentrism in prescriptive grammar: singular 'they', sex-indefinite 'he', and 'he or she'. In D. Cameron (ed.): *The Feminist Critique of Language: A Reader*: 123-138. London: Routledge.

- Butler, Judith (1999): *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Cameron, Deborah (1992): Not gender differences but the difference gender makes: Explanation in research on sex and language. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 94: 13–26.
- Cameron, Deborah (1996): The language-gender interface: Challenging co-optation. In V. Bergvall, J. Bing and A. Freed (eds.): *Rethinking Language and Gender Research: Theory and Practice*: 31–53. London: Longman.
- Cameron, Deborah (1998a): Lost in translation: non-sexist language. In D. Cameron (ed.): *The Feminist Critique of Language: A Reader*: 155–163. London: Routledge.
- Cameron, Deborah (1998b): *The Feminist Critique of Language: A Reader*. London: Routledge.
- Cameron, Deborah et al. (1988): Lakoff in context: the social and linguistic functions of tag questions. In J. Coates and D. Cameron (eds.): *Women in their speech Communities: New perspectives on language and sex*: 74–93. London: Longman.
- Cederschiöld, Gustaf (1897): *Om svenskan som skriftspråk*. Lund: CWK Gleerup.
- Chamberlain, Alexander F. (1912): Women's languages. *American Anthropologist*, 14 (3): 579–581.
- Coates, Jennifer (1996): *Women talk: Conversation between women friends*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Coates, Jennifer (2015): *Women, men and language: A sociolinguistic account of gender differences in language*. 3rd edition. London, New York: Routledge.
- Crawford, Mary (1995): *Talking difference: on gender and language*. London, Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Connell, Raewyn W. (2002): *Gender*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- De Beauvoir, Simone (1999): *Drugi spol*. Ljubljana: Delta.
- Doyle, Margaret (1995): *The A-Z of Non-sexist Language*. Toronto: Women's Press.
- Dubois, Betty Lou, and Crouch, Isobel M. (1975): The Question of Tag Questions in Women's Speech: They Really Don't Use More of Them. *Language in Society*, 4 (3): 289–294.
- Eckert, Penelope, and McConnell-Ginet, Sally (1992): Communities of Practice: Where Language, Gender, and Power All Live. In K. Hall, M. Bucholtz and B. Moonwomon (eds.): *Locating Power: Proceedings of the Second Berkeley Women and Language Conference*: 89–99. Berkeley: Berkeley Women and Language Group.
- Eckert, Penelope, and McConnell-Ginet, Sally (1999): New generalisations and explanations in language and gender research. *Language in Society*, 28 (2): 185–201.
- Fishman, Pamela (1978): What do Couples Talk About When They're Alone? In D. Butturff in E. L. Epstein (eds.): *Women's Language and Style*: 11–22. Akron: L & S Books.
- Fishman, Pamela (1980): Conversational Insecurity. In H. Giles, P. W. Robinson in P. M. Smith (eds.): *Language: Social Psychological Perspectives*: 127–132. Oxford: Pergamon Press.

- Fishman, Pamela (1983): *Interaction: The Work Women Do*. In B. Thorne (ed.): *Language, Gender and Society*: 89–101. Rowley: Newbury House.
- Freed, Alice A. (1992): *We Understand Perfectly: A Critique of Tannen's View of Cross-sex Communication*. In K. Hall, M. Bucholtz and B. Moonwomon (eds.): *Locating Power: Proceedings of the Second Berkeley Women and Language Conference*: 144–152. Berkeley: Berkeley Women and Language Group.
- Furfey, Paul Hanly (1944): *Men's and women's languages*. *The American Catholic Sociological Review*, 5 (4): 218–223.
- Gal, Susan (1978): *Peasant Men Can't Get Wives: Language Change and Sex Roles in a Bilingual Community*. *Language in Society*, 7 (1): 1–16.
- Gauchat, Louis (1905): *L'unité phonétique dans le patois d'une commune*. Halle: Niemeyer.
- Graham, Alma (1975): *The Making of a Non-Sexist Dictionary*. In B. Thorne and N. Henley (eds.): *Language and Sex: Difference and Dominance*: 57–63. Rowley: Newbury House.
- Gray, John (1992): *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*. New York: Harper-Collins.
- Hall, Kira, Bucholtz, Mary, and Moonwomon, Birch (eds.) (1992): *Locating Power: Proceedings of the Second Berkeley Women and Language Conference*. Berkeley: Berkeley Women and Language Group.
- Hellinger, Marlis, and Pauwels, Anne (2007): *Language and sexism*. In M. Hellinger and A. Pauwels (eds.): *Handbook of Language and Communication: Diversity and Change*: 651–684. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton.
- Holmes, Janet (1992): *Women's Talk in Public Contexts*. *Discourse & Society*, 3 (2): 131–150.
- Holmes, Janet (1995): *Women, Men and Politeness*. London: Longman.
- Holmes, Janet (1999): *Communities of Practice in Language and Gender Research*. *Language in Society*, 28 (2): 173–183.
- Holmes, Janet (2006): *Gendered Talk at Work: Constructing Gender Identity Through Workplace Discourse*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Irigaray, Luce (2002): *To Speak is Never Neutral*. London, New York: Continuum.
- Jespersen, Otto (1922): *Language: its nature, development and origin*. London: Allen & Unwin.
- Jespersen, Otto (1998): *The Woman*. In D. Cameron (ed.): *The Feminist Critique of Language: A Reader*: 225–241. London: Routledge.
- Johnson, Sally, and Meinhof, Ulrike Hanna (eds.) (1997): *Language and Masculinity*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Kambič, Mojca (2008): *Vloga jezika pri konstituciji družbene neenakosti med spoloma (diplomska naloga) [The Role of Language in the Constitution of Social Inequality between the Genders]*. Available from: <http://dk.fdv.uni-lj.si/diplomska/pdfs/Kambic-Mojca.PDF> (Accessed: 20. 04. 2020).

- Kirkby, John (1974): *A New English Grammar* (reprint of the 1746 edition). London: Alston.
- Kramarae, Cheri, and Treichler, Paula (1985): *A Feminist Dictionary*. London: Pandora.
- Labov, William (1966): The Linguistic Variable as a Structural Unit. *Washington Linguistics Review*, 3: 4–22.
- Labov, William (1972): *Sociolinguistic Patterns*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Labov, William (1990): The intersection of sex and social class in the course of linguistic change. *Language Variation and Change*, 2 (2): 205–251.
- Lakoff, Robin (1975): *Language and Woman's Place*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Litosseliti, Lia (2006): *Gender and Language Theory and Practice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mackay, Donald G. (1980): Psychology, prescriptive grammar and the pronoun problem. *American Psychologist*, 35 (5): 444–449.
- Maltz, Daniel N., and Borker, Ruth A. (1982): A Cultural Approach to Male–Female Miscommunication. In J. Gumperz (ed.): *Language and Social Identity*: 195–216. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Marković, Ljiljana (2003): Beyond binary opposition: de-gendering and redefining gender. *Linguistics and Literature*, 2 (10): 403–414.
- McElhinny, Bonnie (2003): Theorizing Gender in Sociolinguistics and Linguistic Anthropology. In J. Holmes and M. Meyerhoff (eds.): *The Handbook of language and gender*: 21–43. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Miller, Casey, and Swift, Kate (1976): *Words and Women*. New York: Anchor Press.
- Miller, Casey, and Swift, Kate (1989): *The Handbook of Non-Sexist Writing*. London: The Women's Press.
- Mills, Jane (1989): *Womanwords*. Harlow: Longman.
- Mills, Sara (1995): *Feminist Stylistics*. London: Routledge.
- Mills, Sara (1997): *Discourse*. London: Routledge.
- Mills, Sara (2003): *Gender and Politeness*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mills, Sara (2008): *Language and sexism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mills, Sara (2012): *Gender Matters: Feminist Linguistic Analysis*. Sheffield: Equinox.
- Milroy, Lesley (1987): *Observing and Analysing Natural Language*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Morgan, Marcyliena (1994): No Woman, No Cry: The Linguistic Representation of African American Women. In M. Bucholtz, A. C. Liang, L. Sutton, and C. Hines (eds.): *Cultural Performances: Proceedings of the Third Berkeley Women and Language Conference*: 525–541. Berkeley: University of California, Berkeley Women and Language Group.
- Moulton, Janice et al. (1978): Sex Bias in Language Use: Neutral Pronouns That Aren't. *American Psychologist*, 33: 1032–1036.

- O'Barr, William, and Atkins, Bowman K. (1998): Women's language or Powerless Language? In J. Coates (ed.): *Language and Gender: A Reader*: 377–387. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Plemenitaš, Katja (2014): Gender ideologies in English and Slovene. *ELOPE (Ljubljana)* 11: 17–29. Available from: <https://dk.um.si/lzpisGradiva.php?lang=slv&id=65697> (Accessed: 20. 04. 2020).
- Poole, Joshua (1967): *The English Accidence* (reprint of the 1646 edition). Menston, Yorks: Scholar Press.
- Reardon, Kathleen Kelley (1995): *They Don't Get It Do They*. Boston: Little, Brown.
- Spender, Dale (1980): *Man Made Language*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Sorrels, Bobbye M. (1978): *The Non-sexist Communicator*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall.
- Sunderland, Jane (2006): *Language and Gender: An Advanced Resource Book*. London: Routledge.
- Ščuka, Nuša (2014): Jezik in spol: ženska poimenovanja v slovenščini [Gender and Language: feminine terms in Slovene]. *Jezikoslovni zapiski*, 20 (2): 79–88.
- Talbot, Mary (2010): *Language and Gender*. Second edition. UK: Polity Press.
- Tannen, Deborah (1990a): Gender Differences in Conversational Coherence: Physical Alignment and Topical Cohesion. In B. Dorval (ed.): *Conversational Organization and its Development*: 167–206. NJ: Ablex, Norwood.
- Tannen, Deborah (1990b): Gender Differences in Topical Coherence: Creating Involvement in Best Friends' Talk. *Discourse Processes* 13 (1): 73–90.
- Tannen, Deborah (1990c): *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation*. New York: William Morrow.
- Tannen, Deborah (1994): *Talking from 9 to 5: Women and Men in the Workplace*. London: Virago Press.
- Tolmach Lakoff, Robin (2010): Gender. In J. Jaspers, J.-O. Östman and J. Verschueren (eds.): *Society and language use. Handbook of Pragmatics Highlights*. Vol. 7: 152–169. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Troemel-Ploetz, Senta (1991): Selling the Apolitical. In J. Coates (ed.): *Language and Gender: A Reader*: 446–458. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Trudgill, Peter (1972): Sex, Covert Prestige and Linguistic Change in the Urban British English of East Anglia. *Language in Society*, 1: 179–195.
- Trudgill, Peter (1974): *The Social Differentiation of English in Norwich*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Uchida, Aki (1992): 'When "Difference" is "Dominance": A Critique of the "Anti-Power-Based" Cultural Approach to Sex Differences'. *Language in Society*, 21 (4): 547–568.
- Van Han, Nguyen (2014): The Relationship Between Language and Gender: A Case Study in Vietnamese. *Global Journal of Interdisciplinary Social Sciences*, 3 (3): 96–99.

- Vandeputte, Daryen (2015–2016): *Language variation and gender throughout the 20th century. A historiographical study*. Ghent: Ghent University, Faculty of Art and Philosophy.
- Vetterling-Braggin, Mary (ed.) (1981): *Sexist Language: A Modern Philosophical Analysis*. Totowa: Littlefield, Adams.
- Walby, Sylvia (1997): *Gender Transformations*. London: Routledge.
- Weatherall, Ann (2000): *Re-vision of gender and language research for the 21st century*. In M. Holmes (ed.): *Gendered Speech in Social Context: Perspectives from Gown and Town*: 39–52. Auckland: Victoria University Press.
- Wharton, Amy S. (2012): *The sociology of gender: an introduction to theory and research*. London: John Wiley & Sons.
- Zimmerman, Don H., and West, Candace (1975): *Sex Roles, Interruptions and Silences in Conversation Language and Sex: Difference and Dominance*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Podatki o avtorici

asist. dr. **Jasna Mikić**
Asistentka z doktoratom,
Fakulteta za družbene vede, Univerza v Ljubljani
Kardeljeva ploščad 5, 1000 Ljubljana,
E-mail: jasna.mikic@fdv.uni-lj.si