21   Gender and Identity: Representation and Social Action

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1   Gender Identity: A Pervasive Social Categorization

Gender identity has long been understood as one's social identification as a boy or a girl, a man or a woman. For the vast majority of people, a clear gender classification is given at (or with ultrasound technology, well before) birth. Thereafter, all social interactions are influenced by gender assignment (see, for example, Condry and Condry 1976). Identification with a gender group is considered by many developmental psychologists as a fundamental social categorization in the life of a child (Yelland 1998). Indeed, there is general agreement among psychologists that gender is the single most important social category in people's lives (Bem 1993). Despite this agreement there is little consensus about how best to conceptualize gender identity and its relationship to language. In this chapter, we discuss two major psychological approaches to gender and language. The first takes a social-cognitive perspective, where gender identity is considered to be the internalization of social norms about gender that predispose individuals to act, talk, and think largely in accordance with them. The second perspective comes from discursive psychology, where the emphasis is on language rather than cognition as the prime site for understanding social conduct.

The social-cognitive perspective generally assumes that behavior, including language and communication, is mainly driven by and is a reflection of underlying cognitive characteristics and processes. For example, a study showing differential treatment by teachers in response to the same behavior displayed by either boys or girls was interpreted as demonstrating that teachers' gender preconceptions influenced their responses to children (Fagot et al. 1985). Such preconceptions are thought to derive from a proclivity of the human cognitive

system to categorize information, in order to make sense of the huge amount of sensory information with which people are confronted in daily life. Cognitive shortcuts tend to assimilate items into culturally available categories (cf. Tajfel 1981). Thus, social beliefs about gender function as a guide in the perception of others and in interactions with them. In addition, a psychological need for a positive personal and social identity may, in some situations, influence the kinds of judgments made about other people, depending on whether they belong to the same or a different gender category to you.

The social-cognitive perspective involves an assumption that gender identity develops as a relatively stable, pre-discursive trait, which resides in individuals and which is more or less salient, depending on its relevance to a particular social context. For this perspective, although identity both drives and reflects the language around it, cognition is conceptually prior to its expression in language and communication. In contrast, the discursive psychology perspective considers gender to be the accomplishment and product of social interaction. Discursive psychology emphasizes the study of language over minds as the best way for understanding the significance of social categories in human conduct. In this approach, social categories are also verbal categories whose use provides insights into the structure and organization of social life. For example, generalizations about gender may be used to support differential treatment of women and men, and the specific characteristics of individual women or men may be mobilized in arguments to contradict the validity of gender generalizations (Billig et al. 1988).

The development of discursive psychology has been influenced by ethnomethodological approaches to the study of social life. This influence is particularly relevant to the topic of gender identity and language, because one of the earliest non-essentialist approaches to gender in psychology developed from ethnomethodology. This approach considers how the taken-for-grantedness and ordinariness of belonging to one and only one of two gender groups is achieved in everyday life (Kessler and McKenna 1978). Garfinkel's (1967) study of a transsexual, Agnes, provided compelling evidence that gender identity is more than a reflection of biology or an internalization of social norms. Agnes, unlike most people, had to consciously work at achieving and securing her gender identity status. Thus, she made "observable *that* and *how* normal sexuality is accomplished" (Garfinkel 1967: 80). Garfinkel noted that among Agnes's "passing" devices were the use of pitch control, a lisp, and stereotypical features of women's speech such as euphemism.

The differing theoretical assumptions of the discursive and social-cognitive approaches about the nature of gender identity and its relationship to language have profoundly influenced the research agendas of psychologists studying gender and language. Sections 2 and 3 describe the kinds of questions asked about gender and language, and the insights achieved, from each approach. Section 4 highlights similarities and differences between them. Finally we consider what the two psychological approaches can contribute to and take from other gender and language research traditions.

2   Language and Social Cognition: Representations of Gender in Language and Interaction

A fundamental assumption made by psychologists taking a social-cognitive approach to gender identity is that language is both a medium for expressing gender identity and a reflection of it. The idea that language holds a representation of social identity motivated much early social-cognitive research on gender. An early question was: if speech is a reflection of gender identity, then to what extent can a speaker's gender identity be accurately assessed by listeners? A related concern has been with how much real gender differences in speech, and how much beliefs about gender differences, influence evaluations of speakers. In research since the early 1970s, definitive answers to these questions have not been found. From a social-cognitive perspective, a possible explanation for the lack of resolution has been that the salience of gender identity in speech and communication fluctuates as a function of the specific conversational context. Social identity theory and communication accommodation theory, discussed later in this section, offer two key frameworks for explicating the subtleties of context for the expression of gender identity in language and speech.

Giles, Smith, Ford, Condor, and Thakerar (1980) were among the first to report a high degree of consistency in ratings of speakers on masculinity and femininity. This finding prompted speculation about the degree of correspondence between people's self-reported gender identity and others' perceptions of them as masculine or feminine. Smith (1985) tested whether speech-based attributions of masculinity and femininity bore any resemblance to speakers' self-assessed masculinity and femininity. In this study, speakers' gender identities were measured by their degree of endorsement of sex-role stereotypes as characterizing themselves. The results showed a high level of correspondence between listeners' perceptions of the speakers' gender identity and speakers' self-ratings of masculinity and femininity. In an additional experimental twist, Smith examined whether listeners' gender identities would affect their ratings. The results suggested that the stronger the gender identity of the listeners, the more likely they were to polarize the differences between female and male speakers, and to exaggerate the similarities among same-gender speakers.

The idea that factors other than the gender identity of the speaker may influence the perception and evaluation of speech has continued as an important theme in social-cognitive research on gender and language. A variable that has received considerable attention is gender stereotypes about speech. Early work established a high degree of consensus about the speech traits associated with women and men (Kramer 1978). Aries (1996) confirmed that there is broad agreement in Anglo-American culture on beliefs about how men and

women talk, and that stereotypes about gender and language have changed little since the 1970s (see also Mulac et al. 1998).

Cutler and Scott (1990) investigated the influence of speaker gender (i.e. gendered speech stereotypes) on listeners' judgments of speaker verbosity. They recorded two-person dialogues taken from plays, where each person contributed equal amounts of speech to the conversation. The gender of the speaker taking each role in the conversation was systematically varied. In this work, the general social categories of "women" and "men" were being used as a proxy for gender identity. When the dialogues were between a man and a woman, the woman was judged to be talking more than her conversational partner. When members of the same gender performed the dialogues, however, each speaker was judged as contributing to the conversation equally. Thus, gender as a social category appeared to trigger psychological processes that resulted in a halo effect, where a gendered speech style was somewhat in the ear of the beholder.

Given that speakers' gender identity and gender stereotypes about speech influence how other speakers are perceived and evaluated, an obvious question is how much we evaluate women's and men's speech based on actual differences in language style, as opposed to stereotyped beliefs about the way men and women talk. A supposition here, of course, is that there are real and stable gender differences in speech (e.g. Mulac et al. 1998). Lawrence, Stucky, and Hopper (1990) tested what they called the sex-stereotype and the sex-dialect hypotheses. The sex-stereotype hypothesis asserts that speaker gender alone triggers differential evaluative responses in listeners. In contrast, the sex-dialect hypothesis is that different evaluations of men and women are due to real differences in their speech patterns. The conversations used in the study were based on short segments of a previously recorded naturally occurring conversation between a woman and a man. The conversational segments were transcribed and re-recorded. In one condition, actors of the same gender as the original speaker reproduced the language and paralanguage. In the other condition, each actor took the other gender role.

The sex-dialect hypothesis would predict that listeners' ratings would be influenced by the original speaker gender, whereas the stereotype hypothesis would predict that listeners would be influenced by the gender of the actor. The results of the study did not straightforwardly support either hypothesis. Rather, listeners were influenced by both original and attributed speaker gender. In addition, the influence varied depending on the particular conversational segment. Lawrence et al. concluded that the impact on listeners of speech style and stereotypes may be fluctuating and transitory, and that there was a need for descriptive research on how speakers produce and orient to social identities such as age, gender, and social class in interactions. Other possible explanations are, among others, that stereotypes may differ in strength and that stereotypes may have different functions.

2.1   Gender and social identity theory

One of the most influential contemporary theories to consider the importance of social identities and their impact on language use and interaction is social identity theory (SIT: Tajfel 1981). According to SIT, people's sense of who they are comprises aspects deriving both from them as individuals and from their membership of social groups (see Augoustinos and Walker 1995 for a comprehensive overview of this theory). SIT emphasizes that the ways people think and behave depend strongly on the social groups they belong to, particularly in contexts where group membership is salient for some reason. Characteristics of group behavior associated with social identity include stereotyping and in-group favoritism. An important aspect of the theory is that it recognizes that different social groups vary in terms of the power and status that they have in society, a recognition that is essential to a comprehensive understanding of women and men as social groups.

SIT is based on the assumption that people are generally motivated to view themselves in a favorable way. Achieving a positive self-concept requires making social comparisons in order to evaluate the opinions and abilities of people who share or do not share a social group membership. If a group to which a person belongs has a low social status, the person may try to overcome any sense of inferiority stemming from that group membership through a number of identity maintenance mechanisms. One possible strategy, social mobility, is to leave the low-status group and join the higher-status group (i.e. to "pass"): this is an individual strategy. Where passing is not possible and group membership is stable (as is generally the case with gender), other strategies may be employed to achieve more positive self-esteem. These include social creativity, or finding new dimensions of comparison where one's own group comes out better (e.g. using nurturance or people-centeredness as a key dimension, rather than leadership), and social competition, or entering into social or political conflict to gain more status for the group (e.g. joining the feminist movement).

Social identity theory was conceived to explain the ways that oppressed groups challenge their social disadvantage, but the methodology originally developed to test it involved experiments on the behavioral patterns of reward allocation by individuals assigned randomly to minimally different groups (Tajfel 1970). Much of the research on SIT has diverged from the original purpose and is more relevant to contexts of social rivalry (such as opposing sports teams) than to social inequality. Nevertheless, the theory was soon applied as a framework for understanding the influence of important social group memberships (e.g. ethnicity, religious affiliation) on cognition and behavior. For example, Williams and Giles (1978) argued that this theory could be used to demonstrate that the diverse actions and perspectives of women in a feminist era, far from being trivial and irrational, were coherent strategies for promoting social change. The identity maintenance strategies they described frequently involved language.

Williams and Giles (1978) suggested that prior to the women's liberation movement of the 1960s–1970s, women had largely accepted their secondary status in society. Thus, before the second wave of feminism, many women achieved a positive social identity by individual means. For example, individual women could achieve a positive self-concept by comparing themselves with other women on dimensions such as performance of domestic duties, or by comparing the social status of their husbands to other women with husbands of lower social standing. The feminism of the 1960s and 1970s led to a raised consciousness of the illegitimacy of women's secondary social status, however, and the American Civil Rights movement meant that the possibility of social change was salient. Williams and Giles argued that it was precisely under such social conditions that SIT would predict a mobilization of women in a political movement. They interpreted attempts to gain equality with men in employment, legal, and political contexts as consistent with the social mobility strategy outlined in SIT (cf. Augoustinos and Walker 1995).

More recently, feminist psychologists have criticized social identity theory for treating women as a single, coherent social group. The limitations of SIT for understanding the multifaceted nature of womanhood in contemporary society have been well documented (see Skevington and Baker 1989). Despite these problems, however, this theory has been useful for interpreting aspects of women and language use. For example, Coates (1986) used SIT in a discussion of the impact of feminism on women's language. Coates suggested that, in terms of language, a social mobility strategy was a widespread identity maintenance tactic used by women to enhance their social identity. The linguistic evidence she cited of women trying to be like men included the use of deeper voices, increased swearing, adoption of falling rather than rising intonation patterns, and increasing use of non-standard accents. Women also redefined the language characteristics of women positively, for example by emphasizing the relative merits of cooperative as opposed to competitive strategies in conversation. There have also been moves, particularly in feminist academic circles, to redefine positively features of women's language such as gossip.

2.2   *Communication accommodation theory*

The psychological concept of social identity in general, and gender identity in particular, appears in a different guise in another influential theory called communication accommodation theory (CAT: Giles, Coupland, and Coupland, 1991; see also Gallois and Giles 1998). CAT and its precursor, speech accommodation theory (SAT), have been widely used as frameworks for understanding social identity, language variation, and their consequences during intergroup interactions**.**

If a fundamental psychological process is the categorization of people into different groups, then speech is likely to be a key basis for social categorization

and a consequential marker of social identities. In considering the processes influencing language use in any interaction, speech accommodation theory (see Giles and Powesland 1975; Giles and Smith 1979) applied four social psychological theories to language use. First, influenced by similarity-attraction theory, SAT proposed that speech convergence (adjusting the way we speak to be more like the person we are speaking to) is used to indicate that we like or want to be liked by the interlocutor or to identify with the interlocutor's group. For example, a young man wanting to signal his liking of a young woman may reduce his use of swearing and taboo language (i.e. converge to what he believes is her more polite speech). A corollary of this pattern is that we may judge the speech of a person we like to be more similar to our own speech than that of a person we do not like or who is a member of a group we disparage.

Similarity-attraction theory emphasizes the benefits of speech convergence: an increase in attraction or approval. Such convergence also has costs; for example, the young man using more polite speech, while he shows his identification with his love, may be losing language markers identifying him as masculine. Social exchange theory predicts that convergent speech acts occur only when the advantages of the exchange outweigh the disadvantages. Carli (1990) highlighted the potential dilemmas for women in using a particular language style. Carli found that women who used a more tentative speech style were more persuasive when talking to a man than when talking to a woman. People with more tentative speech styles were rated by both women and men as less competent, however. These results indicate that the cost of using assertive language for women may be not being influential, particularly to men, but the benefit of using such language is that they are perceived as more competent.

Third, causal attribution theory suggests that the way speech shifts are evaluated depends on the motives and intentions that are attributed to them. For example, if the young man in the example above reduces his swearing only when the young woman's mother is around, the young woman may be less likely to attribute that change to the young man's attraction to her (even though his intention may actually be to signal his attraction).

The final theoretical influence on SAT was social identity theory. Giles and Smith (1979) argued that in situations where group membership is salient, speech divergence (shifting language style to make it more dissimilar to the interlocutor's) reflects a group identity maintenance process; that is, a strategy to mark oneself as distinct from another social group. For example, a woman wanting to emphasize her femininity may exaggerate the features associated with women's language in a mixed-sex interaction.

The paragraphs above show that SAT is a well-developed example of the social-cognitive approach. As such, this theory was, at its conception, distinct from sociolinguistic approaches to language variation. At the time, Giles and Powesland (1975) argued that the latter constructed people as (in their words) "sociolinguistic automata," whose social identifications were expressed by

particular features of language in deterministic ways. In contrast, SAT proposed that motivation, in context, to identify with or show liking for another person (or the reverse) is what determines the use of language markers, rather than a stable trait of group identity. Indeed, they argued that Labov's (1966) findings of style change might best be explained as a motivation to converge with the interviewer, rather than an indication of social group or social identity *per se*.

From the beginning, research using SAT found complexities that the theory was not well equipped to handle. For example, Thakerar, Giles, and Cheshire (1982) found that nurses converged to stereotypes of a higher-status group's speech style, rather than to the actual speech characteristics of members of that group. In a similar vein, Bilous and Krauss (1988) found that men and women in friendly interactions (where a motivation to converge could be expected) converged to each other's style on some variables (even crossing over in some cases), but diverged on others; this appeared to involve behavioral divergence driven by convergent motivation. Complexities like these led to the transformation of SAT into communication accommodation theory (CAT: see Giles et al. 1991).

CAT, compared to SAT, has significantly broadened and extended the variables seen to influence sociolinguistic choices and responses to them. The theory now links the larger sociohistorical context to the orientations and goals of individual speakers, who use a large array of strategies (including convergence/divergence, management of the discourse, emotional and relational expression, role-related language, and face-maintenance, among others) to direct their communication. Accordingly, listeners respond, attribute, and evaluate the interaction, and make judgments about future interactions. Identity, along with intergroup and interpersonal orientation, are negotiated during the course of interactions, in a continual interplay between communication and social-psychological variables. Thus, CAT is less clearly a social-cognitive approach, and shows some similarity to the discursive approach described below. Nevertheless, for CAT, identity and motivation are still conceptually prior to language and communication.

To date, few studies have invoked the full complexity of CAT in the area of gender and language. Instead, research has often continued to rely on stereotypes about gender differences in speech. For example, Hannah and Murachver (1999) operationalized a (feminine) facilitative speech style as the higher use of minimal responses, fewer interruptions, and not looking away during an interaction. They then looked for divergence or convergence to the facilitative or non-facilitative style across two conversations in same- and mixed-sex dyads. Their results showed no compelling patterns of change related to gender identity, perhaps because the salience of gender identity was marked in a way other than what they measured (e.g. intonation, phonology).

One exception to this trend is research by Boggs and Giles (1999), who studied patterns of accommodation and non-accommodation in workplaces where women were coming into previously male-dominated jobs. They argued

that communication breakdown in such workplaces reflects socio-structural factors built into the organization that normalize male domination of the jobs and encourage miscommunication when women take the jobs. Using CAT along with closely related theory, they modeled a non-accommodation cycle, beginning with threats to the men's identity, progressing through non-accommodation by men as a consequence, and leading to tit-for-tat responses by women. They concluded that this cycle reflects and maintains the organizational structure, and that in particular it undermines attempts at affirmative action. In their view, the usual construction of communication breakdown between men and women in these workplaces as interpersonal (and therefore the "fault" of either the men or the women involved), or at best as arising from cultural differences in men's and women's language, is unhelpful. Instead, they advocate considering these situations in terms of the language that reflects the social structure.

Social identity theory (SIT) and communication accommodation theory (CAT) have been influential in interpreting language behaviors that seem to be motivated by the desire to achieve a positive social identity as a woman or a man. For example, SIT has been used to explain the use of lower pitch by women in politics, feminist challenges to sexist language, and the promotion of a co-operative communication style in business. SIT and CAT provide a framework for understanding why communication style changes during the course of an interaction, depending on the relative salience of interpersonal and inter-group dimensions. Indeed, the work of Boggs and Giles (1999) and that of other recent researchers (see Gallois and Giles 1998) shows how CAT gives priority to both communication and social-cognitive factors, and it represents a significant move in the direction of constructionist theory. Both SIT and CAT, however, are open to the charge that they treat "women" (and "men") as a homogeneous group, when in fact there are few or perhaps no experiences that all women (or men) share. Discursive psychology aims to avoid this problem by avoiding essentialist and realist assumptions about identity altogether.

3 Discursive Psychology: Gender as Action in Talk

A discursive psychological (DP) perspective to identity rejects the essentialist assumptions of social cognition, where gender identity is expressed through language. This approach treats identity as primarily a verbal categorization that occurs in the process of interaction *in order to do things*. Thus, identity is not viewed in essentialist terms as something that people *are*. Rather, identity is something that people *do* during the business of everyday interaction. Furthermore, the kinds of identifications or categorizations that are resources for social action are available, and have their nature defined, through systems of meaning which have cultural and ideological histories (Wetherell and Edley

1998). In discursive psychology the emphasis is on talk, not cognition, as the most important site for studying identity (e.g. see Edwards 1997).

There are different styles of discourse analysis within DP. At a general level, however, discursive psychological approaches have been more or less influenced by conversation analysis, ethnomethodology, post-structuralism, and speech act theory. For example, Foucault's ideas about subjectivity being the product of discursive practices or epistemic regimes have influenced the theoretical stance of DP on identity. According to this approach, a sense of self emerges not from an inner core but out of a complex of historical, cultural, and political processes and practices. Individuals are located in and opt for a variety of different positions, depending on the social, historical, political, and economic aspects of their situations. The influence of ethnomethodology and conversation analysis is evident in discursive studies where the focus is on the everyday linguistic practices that function to organize and structure interaction and social action.

Following Potter and Wetherell (1987) the concepts of action, construction, and variation are often used as analytic tools in discursive psychology. In this work, an important focus is what is being achieved (i.e. social action or function) in an interaction. Often, an analysis concentrates on the management of an *issue* or *dilemma*, for example presenting something as factual (e.g. sex differences) when there is a personal stake involved (e.g. a need to justify discriminatory practices). The term *ideological dilemma* has been coined to refer to the contradictory beliefs and ideas that constitute our common-sense understanding of the world (Billig et al. 1988). For example, when referring to many people working together on a talk we may say "many hands make light work" or "too many cooks spoil the broth." This reflects an underlying dilemma, whose resolution depends on what we are doing with the idea – recruiting or discouraging volunteers.

A further characteristic of Potter and Wetherell's (1987) discourse analytic approach is that it aims to identify the linguistic and rhetorical resources used by a speaker to construct behavior or social action as reasonable and rational. The identification of broader patterns of language use, sometimes referred to as *interpretative repertoires, practical ideologies*, or *discourses*, is often an aim of the research. These patterns involve the "often contradictory and fragmentary notions, norms and models which guide conduct and allow for its justification and rationalisation" (Wetherell, Stiven, and Potter 1987: 60). The use of the term "ideology" in ideological dilemmas and practical ideologies suggests the critical nature of many discursive studies. Ideology refers to the systems of beliefs or thoughts that contribute to the maintenance of asymmetrical power relations and social inequalities between groups. For example, the belief that women are "naturally" more nurturing than men contributes to women having to shoulder the major burden for child-care and elder-care.

An early example of a discourse-analytic study in psychology that utilized the concepts of interpretative repertoires and practical ideologies was Wetherell et al.'s (1987) investigation into the accounts that university students gave of

employment opportunities for women. The interpretative repertoires that emerged from the analysis were called "individualism" and "practical consideration" talk. These two repertoires functioned in the students' accounts to naturalize and justify sexual inequality in employment. On the one hand, students argued, using an individualism interpretative repertoire, that it was up to individuals to show they had the knowledge, experience, and skills worthy of employment. On the other hand, the participants noted that there were practical considerations (e.g. lack of adequate child-care) making the employment of women a problem (also see Gough 1998). Wetherell et al. suggested that the repertoires of individualism and practical considerations allowed speakers to endorse the concept of equal opportunity, thus presenting themselves as liberal and open-minded. At the same time, however, they also denied the possibility that bias against women in employment existed. The simultaneous endorsement of equity and denial of bias constructs a discursive context that discourages actions that would encourage women into employment.

3.1 Gender differences as interactional resource

The issue of gender differences in speech has been a key theme in gender and language research (Cameron 1998). Instead of trying to establish what the "real" differences are, a discursive approach examines how ideas of gender are used for argumentative purposes. Billig et al. (1988) noted that there is a fundamental dilemma associated with discussions about men and women. The dilemma is associated with the contradictory common-sense ideas that all human beings are essentially "the same" and also that all individuals are essentially "different." The availability of these contradictory notions means that making generalizations about people can always be countered by particular exceptions. An important point is that generalizations and particularizations have a moral status. There are tensions between beliefs and values of human equality and those of human variety. As a result, the extent of similarity or difference between people is always an ideological dilemma. Billig et al. illustrated the articulation of the dilemma of gender versus individual difference in student discussions about the statement "there are some jobs men can do better than women." Discussions of this question followed what Billig et al. referred to as a "generalization–particularization chain," with each categorical statement about women or men sparking a reference to individual differences or exceptions.

   The "fact" of being a man or a woman and what that means, at least in discussions about gender, is not fixed but a process of stabilizing and destabilizing notions that generalize about gender and that highlight the uniqueness of individual women and men. The contradictory purposes to which gender can be put were noted by Ehrlich (1999), when a tribunal member's identity as a woman was used to justify claims that she was both biased and

not biased. Similarly, Marshall and Wetherell (1989) found variability and inconsistency in how gender identity was used in discussion of men's and women's suitability as lawyers. The similarity between women and men was used to support the argument that both make good lawyers, but the differences between them were also used to argue that both women and men make good lawyers. Of course, the notion of gender differences was also used when claims were made that men were more suited to careers as lawyers than women.

Gill's (1993) study of how radio station personnel explained the lack of female disc jockeys (DJs) also shows how the notion of gender differences becomes implicated in the discursive patterning of sexism. The first and most prevalent explanation given by the radio station workers was that women just did not apply for jobs when vacancies were advertised. A typical reason given for women's non-application was that women are not interested in doing that kind of work. Gill suggested that a function of this kind of explanation is that it deflects possible charges of sexism away from the radio station. Women's non-application is a compelling explanation for the lack of female DJs. However, a characteristic of discourse analytic studies is not to endorse the "truth" of any one explanation, but rather to identify the different accounts given (sometimes by the same person) and to consider any inherent contradictions. The contradictions are key to the analytic approach because they highlight the discursive nature of the problem, reveal the ideological dimensions of common-sense ideas, and suggest why social problems (such as gender segregation in the labor market) are so resistant to change.

A contradiction in the accounts collected by Gill (1993) was highlighted by the second type of explanation given for the lack of female DJs. This reason (and sometimes both explanations were used within the same interview) focused on audiences' alleged negative reactions to female presenters and their preference for men's voices. The interesting thing to note here is the inherent inconsistency between the two explanations, of women's non-application and of audiences' preference for men. In the light of the latter explanation, the lack of women in broadcasting looks less like the result of non-application and more like a deliberate policy not to employ women because of audience preference for men's voices. Despite the inconsistency, a common feature is that both explanations deflect the attribution of blame away from the radio station (Gill 1993). These two seemingly common-sense explanations function discursively to excuse the radio station from any responsibility to increase the number of women DJs.

The third type of explanation given invoked the notion of gender differences. Women supposedly lacked the qualities and skills necessary to be radio presenters. In this case, Gill (1993) paid close attention to the exact nature of the skills that the men interviewed listed as being necessary for the job. Interestingly, the interviewees tended to avoid being explicit about the skills required, but when they were, the skills mentioned (e.g. being dextrous and having a personality) did not seem to fit more readily with masculine than feminine stereotypes. Thus, the *notion* rather than the reality of difference was

sufficient to justify sexual inequality. A final type of explanation in the broadcasters' explanations revolved around the supposed unsuitability of women's voices. As might be expected, women's voices were not described in positive terms; rather, adjectives like "shrill" or "grating" were used.

A further interesting aspect of Gill's (1993) analysis was the identification of a "Catch–22" situation with the way women's voices were described. On the one hand, if women sounded grating and shrill they turned listeners off, justifying not employing women as presenters. On the other hand, the duskiness and sexiness of some women's voices could switch audiences on, thus justifying limiting female DJs to unpopular night shifts. Every description of women's voices supported discriminating against them in broadcasting jobs. Furthermore, despite the contradictions and inconsistencies among the four types of explanations, they formed a compelling set of discourses that could be used to undermine accusations of sexism and weaken the justification for affirmative action campaigns. Thus, the sexual inequality evident in broadcasting may be seen, in part, as an effect of the discourses about the lack of female DJs.

3.2   *Identity work in talk*

The discourse analytic studies discussed so far have approached gender as a social category that is produced and reproduced through interpretative repertoires, or common-sense meaning systems. The systems of meaning are ideological because they are implicated in maintaining the gendered structure of society. A different thread of discursive psychology focuses less on broad patterns of meaning and more on the production of social identities as verbal categories mobilized during interaction in order to do things. Both types are constructionist in so far as gender is viewed as a discursive and/or interactional product. In contrast, a cognitive approach generally construes gender in more essentialist terms as an internal characteristic of individuals that sometimes causes, or at least influences, behavior.

The influence of conversation analysis (CA), with its focus on the joint accomplishment of social action, is important to this second thread of discursive psychology, as is the CA perspective of context. Historically, gender and language research has treated the sex of participants as one of the features of the interactional context that may influence language use (see Aries 1996); thus, whether a conversation is held in a mixed-sex group or a same-sex group is an important influence on language use. The CA perspective on context is markedly different. Context is not seen as a combination of independent variables that define the nature of the interaction in advance; rather, context is viewed as being constituted by the interaction itself.

The conversation analytic approach to context and its influence on discursive psychology is evident in Antaki and Widdicombe's (1998) approach to the study of identity. According to this perspective, the important question is:

> . . . not therefore whether someone can be described in a particular way, but to show *that* and *how* this identity is made relevant or ascribed to self or others . . . If there is one defining principle displayed in this kind of analytic approach, it is the ethnomethodological one that identity is to be treated as a resource for the participant rather than the analyst.   (Widdicombe 1998: 191)

Many gender and language studies assume that participants have an internalized gender identity and that people's speech is somehow causally related to that identity. Speakers' identities as "men" or "women" are often invoked in analyses to explain speech, without any evidence that these identities are salient to the participants. This practice has been criticized by conversation analysts as an act of intellectual hegemony, where the researcher's concerns about what is relevant to the participants is imposed onto the analysis (Schegloff 1997). One way of avoiding the imposition of a researcher's concerns is to take the approach that Widdicombe (1998) alludes to above. Taking a more conversation analytic approach means not treating identities as a kind of demographic or psychological fact whose relevance to behavior can simply be assumed. Instead of asking about the strength of gender identity or the kind of contexts where that identity is salient, the focus is on whether, when, and how identities are used. Thus, the existence and relevance of any feature of the interactions is introduced into an analysis only when the participants have demonstrated their orientation to that feature as relevant.

Edwards (1998) is one of the rare examples of discursive psychology's conversation analytic approach being applied to the study of gender identity (but also see Stokoe 1998, 2000). The data for the study were transcripts of family counselling sessions. The analysis focuses on one session with a couple, Connie and Jimmy. Early in the first session, the counsellor asked a series of questions in order to "make some sense" of the couple's "rich and complicated lives" (Edwards 1998: 20–1). Those inquiries offered up various kinds of identity categories (e.g. age, marital status, parenthood) that presumably had some relevance to understanding Connie and Jimmy's relationship problems. One of the more general theoretical points made by Edwards was that it is possible to speculate on how the details requested by the counsellor can be used to make sense of the couple's lives. Following a CA approach, however, the task is to examine what, if anything, the participants in the sessions *do* when they invoke these social categorizations in their talk.

In his analysis Edwards (1998) focused on the terms "girl" and "woman" to investigate the rhetorical subtleties of gender as it was mobilized as a relevant category in the counselling session. Edwards was interested in how these words, with their different connotations of age, marital status, and potential sexual availability, were applied to highlight the relevant aspect of the person being referred to. One instance was when the topic of their relationship difficulties arose: the issue was how Jimmy had left Connie with the children. Connie attributed Jimmy's walking out to an extra-marital relationship, whereas Jimmy blamed his leaving on various aspects of Connie's social activities.

During the discussion of Jimmy's walking out, Edwards (1998) noted that the terms "girl" and "woman" were used variably for the same referent. For example, Connie referred to the other person in the extra-marital affair as "this girl," which seemed to downgrade her status as someone worth bothering about. In contrast, Jimmy denied leaving Connie for another "woman" and reformulated what Connie referred to as "an affair" as a "fling" with a "girl." Edwards argued that Jimmy's use of the term "girl" functioned to downgrade the status of the relationship and helped to counter Connie's claim that it was a serious and long-term threat to their relationship.

Edwards (1998) found a similar kind of rhetorical variation in the use of gender identity terms in descriptions of Connie's social activities. Jimmy's objection to Connie's going out was her flirtatiousness. However, Connie claimed she wanted the freedom to go out with her "friends" for a "girls' night out." Edwards argued that the categories of "friends" and "girls" worked together to define going out as unthreatening and harmless. Jimmy maintained his objection to the way Connie behaved "out with company." A bit later Connie reformulated the relevant identities of her friends from "girls" to "married women." This reformulation attended to Jimmy's complaint about her going out as being an opportunity for unfaithfulness.

In this brief description, we have only been able to give a flavour of Edwards's (1998) analysis, but his substantive point is important. Identity categories such as "girls," "married women," and "the other woman" are not used merely because that is what the people being referred to *are*, or even because that is how those people *think* of themselves. Instead, the categories of girls and women are used to attend to the local, rhetorically important business of the interaction at hand.

3.3   Gender relevance

A definitive aspect of the conversation analytic thread in discursive psychology is an insistence on focusing on features that are demonstrably relevant to the participants in the interaction. Thus, analysts avoid seeking the influence of predetermined categories on interactions (such as "gender" or "sexist language"), but instead only analyze what the speakers or members explicitly orient to as relevant. The feminist psychologist Elizabeth Stokoe (1998) suggested that the analytic approach of CA may provide a way of escaping the historical tendency of research in the gender and language field to perpetuate and endorse stereotyped beliefs about the ways women and men speak. A conversation analytic approach to gender, following the CA view of context, supports a grounded, empirical approach for documenting the theoretical notion of "doing gender." Thus, CA provides a method of analysis that is consistent with the social constructionist perspective currently advocated by many gender and language researchers (e.g. Bergvall, Bing, and Freed 1996; Crawford 1995).

Influenced by a CA approach, Stokoe (1998) restricted her analysis of gender and language to those moments during an interaction when gender as a topic was raised in interactions. The data she examined were recordings of groups of young adults discussing the future, employment, and family orientations. She found that participants' orientations to gender tended to be occasioned when the topics of employment and family were discussed. Thus, utterances where women and men were contrasted followed people's orientation to gender and recognition of gender as a societal division. Statements about the nature of women and men often occasioned extended discussions of gender. In these discussions gender stereotypes were invoked to support or contest arguments. Stokoe (1998) noted that sequential structures of conversations about gender included generalization–particularization chains (see Billig et al. 1988) and assessment–agreement/disagreement adjacency pairs.

Stokoe (1998) used discussions about child-care facilities to illustrate the kinds of interactional sequences that organized talk about gender. In such discussions it was commonly assumed that the facilities were largely for the benefit of women. This assumption of a "generic mother" invoked extended discussion about gender. Other participants called attention to (i.e. "noticed") the implicit assumption of women as caregivers. Stokoe found that these noticings occasioned extended discussions about the relative roles of women and men in child-care. Furthermore, disclaimers of the kind "I'm not sexist but . . ." or "I'm not chauvinistic but . . ." were used to occasion a non-sexist identity for a speaker precisely at the moment when he or she was invoking sex stereotypes (e.g. associating wives with washing and ironing). Stokoe's analysis is an initial step toward understanding the kinds of norms and structures that organize talk about gender maintain the gendered status quo.

The extent to which it is justifiable or even desirable to invoke gender as an analytic category when it is not transparently relevant to participants engaging in an interaction has been a matter of heated debate (see Billig 1999; Schegloff 1997; Weatherall 2000; Wetherell 1998). Arguing against using a conversation analytic mentality, Wetherell suggested that for a complete rather than just a technical analysis of texts it is necessary to consider the "argumentative texture of social life" upon which everyday sense-making practice depends. Compelling evidence that gender constitutes part of the "argumentative texture" for meaning-making is found in Cameron's (1998) analysis of the vignette "Is there any ketchup, Vera?" In this example, Vera understands that her husband is not inquiring as to the presence of ketchup in the house, but is requesting that she fetch it for him. The relevance of gender here is marked not by "gender noticing" but through a consideration of the pragmatics of the exchange (i.e. a similar request from a daughter may have received a different response). Arguably, gender is "omni-relevant" to all social interaction. However, an ongoing challenge for feminist gender and language researchers is to analyze its significance for language and talk without endorsing the gender binaries and sex stereotypes that we are seeking to challenge.

4   Parallels and Disjunctures in Approaches to Gender Identities in Language

Discursive psychology developed in part as a reaction against an overly cognitive focus in psychology, where individual mental processes were emphasized as primary in human behavior and everyday talk as a central activity of social life was largely ignored. Social-cognitive approaches tend to be interested in language only in so far as it provides a way of understanding cognitive structures and mental processes. In contrast, discursive psychology takes language, in its own right, as the object of study, examining how talk and social interaction construct the social world and make things happen. DP also endorsed established critiques of psychology's conventional research practices and its dominant epistemological assumptions of realism and positivism (see Potter and Wetherell 1987; Edwards 1997). Thus, it is quite common for DP to be set up in opposition to approaches that have a more cognitive and experimental flavor. A fundamental difference between the two approaches that cannot be ignored is that social cognition conceptualizes gender identity as existing prior to language in the minds of individuals, whereas discursive psychology views gender identity as indexical and occasioned, discursively constituted in the ongoing business of interaction.

Despite the considerable differences, we would like to suggest some similarities between the two approaches, and to highlight what each contributes to the strengths and limitations of feminist work on gender identity and its relationship to language. When compared to studies of gender and language from other fields, both social-cognitive and discursive psychological approaches put more emphasis on the relation between language and larger social variables, constructed either as pre-existing intergroup relations (SIT), verbal categories occasioned in talk (DP), or a combination of the two (CAT). Both approaches, thus, aim to link language and communication in interaction to larger issues about gender.

In addition, a theme common to social-cognitive and discursive psychology is that of variability. For the former, language variation in accent, speech rate, lexis, and the like may indicate the influence of social identity on the interaction. DP has focused less on variation in paralanguage and non-verbal behavior and more on how common-sense beliefs and verbal categories are used to conduct the business of the interaction. Historically, social psychologists have endeavored to introduce psychological explanations of patterns of linguistic variation reported in sociolinguistic surveys, arguing that concepts such as motivations, identities, and intentions were required to increase explanatory power (Giles 1979). Twenty years later, Holmes and Meyerhoff (1999) noted that SIT and CAT were regularly used in the interpretation of linguistic variation. In contrast, there is little evidence that the theoretical ideas and analytic concepts from discursive psychology are being mobilized in sociolinguistic

work on gender (but see Ehrlich 1999), though there is considerable scope to do so.

There are some strong similarities in the conceptualization of gender identity in the two approaches we have described, especially when CAT is considered. Both approaches allow for variation in the salience and relevance of gender identity. CAT proposes that in contexts where particular social identities are relevant, predictable changes in communication strategies and behavior should be evident. For DP the relevance of gender identities to interaction is also variable. In styles of DP that are more heavily influenced by conversation analysis, psychological concepts such as identities (e.g. gender identity) are only relevant to an analysis when the participants explicitly attend to them.

A relatively recent development in sociolinguistics has been a "community of practice" approach to gender and language (see McConnell-Ginet, this volume). The two psychological approaches described in this chapter can gain from and also contribute to this perspective, where shared social practices are viewed as mediating the relationship between social identity and language variation (see Eckert 2000; McConnell-Ginet, this volume). The community of practice approach also acknowledges that the relationship between gender identity and language is dynamic and situated in the ebb and flow of social interactions. What differentiates discursive psychology in particular from both social-cognitive psychology and the community of practice approach is its reluctance to invoke (gender) identity as relevant to interaction, unless that relevance is interactionally displayed.

Treating identity as a concern of participants avoids the difficulties of specifying exactly what gender identity is (e.g. a pattern of responses to sex-stereotypical traits or to an assigned gender category), as well as the problems associated with the ontological status of gender categories (deciding in advance the defining characteristics of a woman or a man). Furthermore, it avoids reproducing gender stereotypes by assuming, for example, that when women talk about "female" things and men talk about "male" things, the participants are "doing" gender. Thus, an important advantage of DP is that it avoids making the assumption that identity always guides behavior. Instead, the relevance of gender identity is grounded in the interaction itself, rather than relying on the researcher's assumptions. In recent years, CAT has moved in this direction by invoking the notion that identities are continually negotiated in interaction (e.g. Boggs and Giles 1999; Gallois and Giles 1998). The cost of this move is a loss of parsimony, as is also the case for DP, but the gain in explanatory power makes this cost bearable.

What advantages does a community of practice framework bring to the social psychology of gender and language? Supporting a social constructionist perspective, the community of practice framework has moved attention away from a simple notion of gender differences in speech to an investigation of the role of linguistic variation in constructing social identities. Linguistic practices are understood to form part of a more general pool of resources for constructing identity. Some versions of DP have tended to focus on labeling practices or

verbal categories to study identities in talk. The study of linguistic variation within a community of practice framework shows that verbal categories (e.g. lexical items such as "girl," "woman," and so on) are not the only linguistic resources available for doing identity work; variation in phonology, prosody, and so forth (and by extension, non-verbal behavior) may also be used to make identities relevant to an interaction. A challenge for discursive psychologists and some other social psychologists of language is to broaden the range of linguistic resources they consider in studies of identity in talk and social interaction.

Furthermore, the community of practice framework encourages researchers to focus attention on the local linguistic accomplishment of identity, and to focus on how gendered social identities are accomplished through the activities and practices of specific speech communities. The advantage of attending to the local and practical accomplishment of identity is that it avoids treating gender as a monolithic category and making universal claims about gender.

What focusing on the particular misses, however, is the power of broader meaning systems to shape local practices. An important element of discursive psychology and of CAT is that issues of similarities and differences among and between women and men do not simply emerge out of local practice but also have an ideological dimension. Gender identities are not just social categories to which people belong, but are also verbal categories that can be invoked in order to do things that are consequential for social action. The link between larger social issues and local practices, *as they are engaged in and responded to by individual men and women in interaction*, will remain the focus of psychological research on gender and language into the future.

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