LING 156
Language & Gender

Tuesday, April 21st

Midterm Exam Study

• All previous class lecture slides have now been posted at:
  http://www.stanford.edu/class/linguist156/slides.html

• Today’s slides will be posted today;
  Thursday’s on Thursday

Reminder

• If you get an A on the Midterm, you have the option of writing a final term paper instead of taking the final exam
Main Point Summary

• Indexical Meaning
• ‘Queer theory’ & Radical Feminism
• Heteronormativity & Patriarchy
• Explicit vs. Implicit Examples
• ‘Gender-Appropriate’ speech
• Intersubjectivity

Indexicality

• The relationship between language form and social meaning is usually indirect
• Most studies in language & gender rely on the concept of indirect indexicality
• Exception: when gender is embedded in the linguistic form, e.g., pronouns

Revisiting Intersubjectivity

• Asian American
• Biracial
• Hapa
• Mixed
• American
• Chinese
• German
• Dutch
• Multiracial
• “Other”
• “White and Asian”

• Each term has its own history, its own semantic field which has emerged from how it’s been used in discourse
• Each term therefore has a specifically different meaning depending on when and where and with whom I use it
• In other words, the meaning of each term is intersubjective
‘hook-up’

- the semantic field is changing!
- this change is happening through moment-to-moment use in discourse
- the change is negotiated intersubjectively
- remember that intersubjectivity doesn’t just happen face-to-face, but through any means of communication

agency

- *the capacity to make choices, particularly choices about actions taken in the world*
- although we have some agency in the words we use when we speak, our agency is also constrained by social systems (e.g. heteronormativity; the gender order)

Today

- Communicative Competence
- The Organization of Speech Activities
- Performativity & Legibility
- Power & Meaning-making rights
Communicative Competence

- Moving around in the world doesn't just come "naturally"
- How do you know how to walk down the street without bumping into people?
- How do you know when and how to greet someone?

Communicative Competence

- The acquisition of language involves the acquisition of *communicative competence*

The Organization of Speech Activities

- **Speech Situations** (cocktail parties, hanging out, in the store)
- **Speech Activities** (small talk, gossip, lecturing, complaining)
- **Speech Events** (lecture, discussion, gossip session, meeting)
- **Speech Acts** (insult, compliment, question, assertion, request)
Performativity


- Performative Speech Act
  - a speech act that enacts what it names
    (e.g., “I now pronounce you husband and wife.”)
    (e.g., “You can have a 24 extension on your homework.”)

Gender as Performativity


- Gender exists only in the reiterated doing
- Gender is constructed through repeated performances of e.g. “femininity” and “masculinity”
- In other words, if we didn’t do gender, it wouldn’t exist

Legibility & Iterability

- We engage repeatedly in these performances
- This could mean we always do what’s expected - that we reproduce the status quo
- It could also mean that we do something (even slightly) unexpected - that we push the envelope (even unintentionally)
- It’s legibility that makes change possible
Meaning-Making Rights

• The ability to get one's perspective embedded in the language

• The right to get one's perspective into the discourse:
  - access to situations, activities, speech acts, the floor, attention, repeatability

• The ability to use legitimated varieties, styles

• The ability to define the above

Meaning-Making Rights

• your communicative competence is constrained by your meaning-making rights in any given setting

Meaning-Making Rights

• What does it mean for one meaning to take over?

• Imagine you have two interlocutors with two different meanings:
  - What makes one person accommodate to the other?
  - Then what does it take for that meaning to travel beyond that particular situation?
  - How do meanings make it into the dominant discourse?
Small Group Discussion

- Your online prompts were to discuss (a) the semantic pejoration of the terms *hussy, mistress, wench, bitch, harlot* & *prude*, or (b) the meaning of *gossip* as a stigmatized and gendered speech activity
- **Form a group with someone who answered a different prompt than you:**

- Discuss: *how do particular meanings become part of the dominant discourse?*

Gossip

- The difference between *shop talk, chit-chat, and gossip* is not linguistic: it’s gendered
- *Gossip* has acquired stigma through men’s fears of women plotting or colluding to challenge male authority
- Some scholars have tried to reframe *gossip* more broadly as any informal, supportive talk between women

Other Speech Activities

- Arguing (*quarrel vs. bicker; reason vs. emotion*)
- Lecturing
- Complaining
- Preaching
- Advising
- ....
Speech Events

- Gossip Session
- Argument
- Lecture
- Sermon
- Advising section

Speech Events

- Speech events allow us to consider the ways in which speech activity is embedded in situations (how activity is initiated, structure, and ended)
- How do speech events differ between communities, and what does this tell us about gender and speech activities?

Conversation Analysis & Gender

- Research focus has been on difference & dominance -- those conversational strategies taken as dominance moves
  - amount of talk
  - interruptions
  - silence
**Conversation Analysis & Gender**

- But those same strategies might be taken as supportive
  - overlapping speech can be seen as collaborative
  - silence can be seen as considerate, relinquishing the floor

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**What Does Silence Mean?**

*Silence in social situations is never neutral. (p119)*

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**What Does Silence Mean?**

- Silence in the Clarence Thomas hearings
  - longer pauses after Thomas’ comments than after Hill’s comments
  - based on the comment that then followed each pause, what was her interpretation?
- As an extension of silence as power:
  - those with the sufficient power will have their own spokesperson
What Does Silence Mean?

• How do we end conversations without one interlocutor being guilty of leaving a silence?


Communicative Competence & Silence

Even in online chat! :-)

Mary: okay, g’night!

8:43 PM

me: likewise
well i should go
prep to meet the students
Lisa: ok Lauren
best!
me: xoxo
bye
Lisa: xoxo
me: thanks!
Lisa: bye!
Supportive Overlaps

- Backchannels:
  
  A: Okay, so you beat the eggs [until] they're stiff
  B: [uh huh]
  A: and then you fold in the [flour] very very gently
  B: [right]

Not-so Supportive Overlaps

- Backchannels, again...
  
  A: I'm really interested in organic [gardening].
  B: [right]
  A: not just be[cause] it's [healthy] but [because] it's
  B: [yeah] [uh huh] [uh huh]
  A: [good for the] en[vironment]
  B: [right right] [uh huh]
Supportive Overlaps

• Collaboration:
  A: So I was just sitting in the living room and the oven like blew [up, I couldn’t believe it]
  B: [ohmygod that’s really] scary, you must have had a heart attack
  A: Just about

Not-so Supportive Overlaps

• Compare to...
  A: So I was just sitting in the living room and the oven like blew [up, I couldn’t believe it]
  B: [oh, big deal] You’ve never had an oven blow up before?
  A: Not really...

• Is this “interruption”?

Supportive Overlaps

• A: So he just looks at her and says something really [nasty, like what did she do? She totally didn’t de-]
• B: [I tell you he’s such a jerk. You wouldn’t believe] what he did to me the other day…
Not-so Supportive Overlaps

• A: So he just looks at her and says something really [nasty, like what did she do? She totally didn’t de-]
• B: [So why’s she so thin-skinned?] I don’t think he’s that bad

Overlaps & Interruptions

• Not all overlaps are created equal

• So, research based on ‘the number/amount of interruptions’ must define interruption very carefully (or rephrase the question!), or risk ending up in the Hall of Mirrors

How does your conversational behavior depend on the gender of your conversational partner?

- 60 Columbia undergrads, 30 M / 30 F
- All participated in same- and cross-sex dyads
- Participants given, separately, a written description of a problem & several possible alternative solutions, then asked to rank solutions
- Pairs put together and asked to discuss and reach consensus
- All discussions lasted more than 10 minutes; the last 8 minutes of conversation was analyzed

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![Interruptions and total words](image1)

**Interruptions and total words**

![Mean utterance length](image2)

**Mean utterance length: a switch**

**Back-channels and laughter**

Fig. 4. Frequency of back-channels and laughter for males and females in same- and mixed-gender dyads.

**Intra-utterance pauses (short = < 1 sec)**

How does your conversational behavior depend on the gender of your conversational partner?

**One answer: completely!**
What do we learn?

- How meaning-making rights are acquired in conversational structure and discourse
- How power and dominance are realized in conversational structure and discourse
- How heteronormativity and the gender order are maintained in discourse

Main Point Summary

- Communicative Competence
- The Organization of Speech Activities
- Performativity & Legibility
- Power & Meaning-making rights
Next Time...

- **The Organization of Speech Activities, II**
- Read:
  - Ochs & Taylor 1995 (for section)
  - review Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, Chapter 3
  - review previous readings; bring questions with you to section to review for the midterm