LING 156
Language & Gender

Thursday, April 23rd

No Make-up Exams

• Final Grade: Midterm = 30%, Final = 40%
• If you miss the Midterm on Tuesday (without prior arrangements), you cannot make up the exam.
• If you miss the Midterm on Tuesday, your Final exam will count for 70% of your final grade.

• NB: The Final Exam is Tues., June 9th, 3:30-6:30pm

Last Time:

• Communicative Competence
• The Organization of Speech Activities
• Performativity & Legibility
• Power & Meaning-making rights
Today’s Goals

• How to interpret previous conversation analysis on gender and sexuality
  – to know what’s useful form a research study
  – to conduct a focused critique of a research study
  – to debate the benefit of using older studies to understand language and gender in our current (upper-middle class, academic, etc...) context
  – to learn about some brand-new studies

Revisiting Back-channels

• Short overlaps of speech
  * Supportive (encouraging conversation forward)

• Distinct from interruptions, specifically in conversation analysis research

(Quick!)

Small Group Discussion

• We keep talking about how context matters, and how everything is situated
  – What exactly do we mean by that?
  – What is context?
  – What are some factors to look for when reading about language & gender research?
1.

How do gender and expertise interact in conversation?


• The goal:
  - To design an experiment where expertise and gender are independent variables


• U.S. college students
• 70 stranger dyads (mixed and same-sex)
• Dyads divided according to Same vs. Different expertise (expert given special knowledge)
• Measurements:
  - amount of speech
  - number of backchannels
  - openings & closings
• External judgments of control and dominance
Gender and Expertise interact:
- On average, all experts talked more than their non-expert partner
- Male experts talked more than their non-expert female partners
- Female experts did not talk more than their non-expert male partners; external observers rated the male non-expert as more dominant than the female expert

Openings & Closings
- Male experts controlled openings with male partners, but only sometimes the closings
- Male experts controlled both openings and closing with female partners

Use of back-channels
- Females used more than males
- Females used more with male than with female partners
- Non-experts supported male experts, not female experts

How do we interpret these results?
- The question was: How do gender and expertise interact in conversation?
- What did the study tell us to answer that question?
2.

How do gender and power interact in conversation?

"The literature suggests that men talk more, interrupt more, and use minimal responses as a lazy way of filling a turn and showing a lack of interest. Women seem to talk less, interrupt less, ask a greater number of questions and tag questions, and use back channels as a way of supporting the other speaker."

"We see a division of labor in which women nurture the conversation by working to keep it going and by obeying the rules of polite interaction to make the transition of turns go smoothly, while men freely violate these rules without repercussions and further dominate the conversation by using a disproportionate amount of the time."
The goal:
- To design an experiment where power and gender are independent variables
- To collect data in a naturalistic environment, rather than a psych lab

Same-sex (98 gay, 93 lesbian) and cross-sex couples (129) were interviewed in their homes
Relative power in the relationship was determined on the basis of a 8 questions about who had more influence in a range of decisions
Each partner read a slanted version of a story, separately, and then was asked to discuss the story as a couple (recorded without the interviewer present)

Measured:
- Mean total time of talk, in seconds
- Mean number of interruptions per 15 minutes
- Mean number of back-channels per 15 minutes
Cross-sex couples:
Mean talking time in seconds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Balanced couples</td>
<td>292</td>
<td>286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male more powerful</td>
<td>385</td>
<td>330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female more powerful</td>
<td>465</td>
<td>373</td>
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Same-sex couples:
Mean talking time in seconds

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>More powerful partner</th>
<th>Less powerful partner</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male couples</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female couples</td>
<td>333</td>
<td>267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross-Sex couples</td>
<td>381</td>
<td>330</td>
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</tbody>
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Cross-sex couples:
Mean # of interruptions per 15 min

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Balanced couples</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male more powerful</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female more powerful</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>24.7</td>
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Same-sex couples:
Mean # of successful interruptions per 15 min

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<th>More powerful partner</th>
<th>Less powerful partner</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male couples</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female couples</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross-Sex couples</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>4.5</td>
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Cross-sex couples:
Mean # of back-channels per 15 min

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<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Balanced couples</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male more powerful</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female more powerful</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>2.0</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Same-sex couples:
Mean # of backchannels per 15 min

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</table>
• Summary:
  - “Our findings show that power dynamics by themselves can create a conversational division of labor parallel to the one ordinarily associated with sexual differentiation.”

• How do we interpret these results?
  - The question was: How do gender and power interact in conversation?
  - What did the study tell us to answer that question?

• Consider:
  - How 'power' was measured (decision-making)
  - What the actual speech task was
  - What it means to test gender vs. power in the context of romantic relationships
  - Who the speakers were

• How was this study an improvement on earlier studies?
3.

How do (dis)agreement, gender, & familiarity interact in conversation?


- Participants: Students in Scotland, age 18-21
  - 6 pairs of male friends, 5 pairs of female friends
  - 6 pairs of female strangers, 5 pairs of male strangers
- Dyads were given social dilemmas to discuss
- Measured:
  - Interaction time (entire interaction in seconds)
  - Words per turn
  - Interaction rate (words/minute)
  - Turns, overlaps, back channels, & false starts per minute


- Defining “Overlapping Speech”
  - basically equivalent to “Successful Interruptions”
  - not Back-channels
  - not Unsuccessful Interruptions
Summary of findings:

- Gender differences are greater than familiarity differences
- Gender and (Dis)Agreement interact
- Familiarity and (Dis)Agreement interact to a lesser extent

- How do we interpret these results?
  - The question was: *How do agreement/disagreement, gender, & familiarity interact in conversation?*
  - What did the study tell us to answer that question?


- *Who* were the people in this study?
- *When* was this study done?
- *Where* was this study done?
  - *When* & *Where* might these results be different, and why?
- How was this study an improvement on earlier studies?

*one current study*
Differences in the ways that men and women use language have long been of interest in the study of discourse. Despite extensive theorizing, actual empirical investigations have yet to converge on a coherent picture of gender differences in language. A significant reason is the lack of agreement over the best way to analyze language.

In this research, gender differences in language use were examined using standardized categories to analyze a database of over 14,000 text files from 70 separate studies. Women used more words related to psychological and social processes. Men referred more to object properties and impersonal topics.

- The idea (just slightly paraphrased...)
  - Now that we have really fast computers and fancy computer programs, let's look at a whole ton of data and see what we can see!
• The data consist of transcriptions from previous language & gender studies, plus samples of books, poems, song lyrics, etc.

• 11,609 participants/authors

• 45,700,000 total words

• 70 previous studies
  – Mostly US, but also UK & NZ
  – spanning 1980-2002
  – 2/3 based on college-aged participants
  – “a good mix” of both spoken & written

• Fiction from 17th-21st century, but mostly top-selling fiction from 1996

• Use of automatic text-analysis program that samples texts word-by-word and puts each into one of 74 categories, based on a 2,000 word dictionary

• Output is a simple word count for each category, yielding the percentage of a given text characterized by each category
Main effects of gender on language use:

- Some highly significant differences between men's and women's speech emerged.

- Specifically:
  - Females' language was more likely than men's to include pronouns and social words, a wide variety of other psychological process references, and verbs. Negations and references to the home were also features of the female profile.
  - Men exceeded women on word length, numbers, articles, and prepositions. Men also discussed various current concerns more frequently, and swore more often.

However:

- Contrary to popular stereotypes, men and women were indistinguishable in their references to sexuality, anger, time, their use of first-person plural, the number of words and question marks employed, and the insertion of qualifiers in the form of exclusion words (e.g., but, although).
• Other results:
  - Taking speaker age into account didn’t switch the direction of any of the main findings
  - CONTEXT also mattered:
    • “In conversations, for example, men used many more negations, negative emotion words, present-tense verbs, and references to leisure activities, whereas women predominated in their references to numbers.”
    • Overall findings (psych/social vs. current) were also amplified in the fiction context

• Overall:
  - “Female language emphasized psychological processes, social processes, and verbs. Male language emphasized current concerns. Thus, the results are consistent with the idea that men and women employ language for different reasons.”
  - “The overall picture is of a multitude of differences combined with a good deal of overlap between the language of men and women.”

“The fact that we are confronted with these differences every day yet fail to notice them highlights the degree to which they are a part of everyday life. At the same time, it is important to keep in mind that these differences are averages at the population level. The implication of this fact is that predictions about language use by individuals should be made cautiously, if at all.”

"It is important to note that our analyses merely identify how men and women communicate differently, without addressing the issue of why these differences exist. Rather, our goal was to provide a clear map of the differences in men’s and women’s language, and to offer a starting point for future research into the nature and origin of gender differences."


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Next Week...

• TUESDAY: In-Class Midterm Exam
• THURSDAY: Performativity

Readings:
  – for Lecture: C&K Chapter 4
  – for Section: Barrett 1999; Keisling 2004