Gender in non-English languages

- Women and men pronounce words differently
- Certain words and phrases are associated only with women or men
- Women and men have separate dialects
- Biological gender paralleled in grammatical gender
Markedness in American English

- Unmarked
  - Normal, default, can apply to all
  - Masculine forms
  - Hey guys
  - Mankind
  - Chairman

- Marked
  - Reserved for subset of the population
  - Feminine forms
  - Hey girls
  - Womankind
  - Chairwoman
Really?
American English

- Do women and men in the modern-day United States speak differently?
- If so, how and why?
- Biological or social causes?
- Speech communities
- Gender as performance
- Tendencies, not categorical distinctions
- Does language make society, or does society make language?
Gendered language

- Feminine speech is “rapport talk”
  - Maintains relationships
  - Establishes equality
  - Expresses support
  - Is responsive, personal, concrete
  - Is tentative with hedges, qualifying statements, tag questions
  - Interruptions are to offer support and demonstrate listening
  - Nonverbal features include eye contact, smiling, touch is for nurturing

- Masculine speech is “report talk”
  - Establishes status and control
  - Offers solutions
  - Is instrumental, abstract, less emotionally responsive
  - Is direct, assertive, authoritative
  - Interruptions are to establish control over topic of conversation
  - Nonverbal features include taking up space, less eye contact, less smiling, touch is for control
Making gender over a lifetime: Infancy and childhood

- Adult interpretations of babies’ crying
- Words used with baby girls and boys
- Speech acts that get adult responses
- Segregation and establishing speech community norms
- Girls create and maintain egalitarian relationships
- Boys assert ideas, attract and compete for attention
Making gender over a lifetime: Heterosexual partnering and marriage

- Asymmetry of gender
  - Man as active agent
  - Woman passive and acted upon
- “He made love to her”, “John married Mary”
- “My father and mother” better than “My mother and father” (16th century English grammar text)
- “Mr. and Mrs. Jones” vs. “Husband and wife”
- “Man and wife”
- “The bride is keeping her name” vs. “The groom is keeping his name”
Making gender over a lifetime: The working world

- What communication style dominates? Why? How?
- Metaphors relating to sports, the military, male sexuality
- Desired speech is assertive, dominant, confident
  - How are women in business and politics expected to speak?
- Who talks more?
- Assumptions of appropriate topics of conversation with women and men
- Women in science, math and engineering
- Women in philosophy
- Evaluations of women
- Invisible hand discrimination
- “We need to focus on emotional intelligence”
Intersectionality

- Gender does not exist in a vacuum
- Intersects with race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender identity, class, age
- In childhood and adolescence
- In romantic pairings
- In the working world
“Much is said about the value of bringing some of [women’s] “nurturing” and “cooperative” ways into corporate culture ... While it may be true that women are bringing new skills to the workplace that should be highly valued, the focus on “women’s special abilities” genders certain skills and reinforces the gendering of women’s place in organizations. Linking women’s value to the workplace to the new skills they bring effectively erases women’s ability to do what men have been doing all along.” (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003, p. 45)

“Elementary schools not long ago were known for keeping girls and boys separate ... More recently, schools have begun to enforce gender equity, often forbidding single-sex games ... Trying to downplay gender difference in the classroom ... This conscious attempt to foster gender equity is as gendered, of course, as earlier practices that fostered gender difference.” (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003, p. 45)

“So what can you do when everything is wrong??” (my notes)
So what can you do?

- Recognize that gender permeates everything
- Analyze how you act, speak, present yourself
- Examine your biases
- Recognize that you may have benefitted
  - How can you confer such benefits on others?
- Listen to people of different gender identities
- When gender assumptions are made, question them
- Give issues names to better recognize them
Gender-neutral language

- English
  - Generic third-person singular
  - Professions
  - Gender-inclusive pronouns (ze, hir, ne)
- Spanish
  - Avoid gendered endings on words referencing people
  - Latin@s, Latinxs, Latines, Latin*s
  - “La presidenta” or “La presidente”
- Other examples?
- Why bother?
In one day, Trump got more fat women out walking than Michelle Obama did in 8 years.
“You have choices in who you are, how you act, what you buy, what and whom you support, what and whom you get involved with ... You choose how to define and perform your personal sex and gender identities ... You also choose how and how much to engage in the ongoing cultural conversation about gender. You entered this conversation at a particular moment - one long after people fought for women's rights to vote and own property ... The moment at which you entered this conversation is also before the playing field - whether in sports, politics, or salaries - is truly even.” (Wood, 2015, p. 277)

“You cannot escape participating in the ongoing conversation about gender. Just as speaking out is a choice, so, too, is silence. You can’t avoid having influence ... It’s important to realize that voice and resistance are processes. We notice outcomes such as a protest, rally, or strike. But those visible results grow out of prolonged processes of listening, reading, reflecting, and talking with others.” (Wood, 2015, p. 280)


Thank you! ¡Gracias!

- Questions, comments, complaints, discussion?