

Preface: seeking other parameters

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This special issue was compiled in the hope of broadening the perspectives from which the issue of gender and language is approached. More than two decades have passed since the surge of research interest in this topic began. However, the state of the art on this topic is that "We still have little idea of what general principles may be at play in the joint construction of gender differences and gender relations" (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1992: 486).

Moreover, "We have nothing so grandiose in mind as a detailed theory of the general principles and parameters of gender and language interactions" (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1992: 486). Indeed, we all would like to attain the stage of such a theory. What is needed in its pursuit are the spectacles that will allow us to look, without distortion, at the phenomena of gender and language that obtain in each culture. Studies to date have fit more or less into the assumptions of main research trends: the parameter of "power" (cf. Lakoff's hypothesis: Lakoff 1975), the "dual-culture theory" (cf. Tannen's interactional approach: Tannen 1990, 1993), "social address" (cf. Labovian variation approach: Labov 1972; Trudgill 1975) and the "practice-theoretic approach" (cf. Eckert's construction of women and men in everyday practice: Eckert 1989). These assumptions provide eyeglasses for looking at phenomena of gender and language in various cultures in coherent ways. However, there are gender and language phenomena that cannot be adequately perceived and interpreted using those assumptions or frames. This issue of *IJSL* is an attempt to fill this gap; that is, to bring some of these neglected approaches and cases to the stage of international scholarship. One example of such neglected phenomena is the study of Japanese women's language. In Japan, women's language was studied by Japanese philologists long before the surge of research on this topic began in the 1970s. Women's languages in Japan used to be special languages used by court ladies, nuns, and courtesans in their secluded worlds and were studied in these contexts through historical written documents such as diaries.

Contemporary Japanese women's language, which has borrowed a large amount of vocabulary from these earlier special languages, continues the image of high culture carried by educated women in traditional worlds. Thus, the studies of gender and language of contemporary Japanese that focus only on present-day usage fail to do justice to the issue as it is generally understood in Japanese society. As long as women's language in Japan is observed and analyzed according to Western academic assumptions, the results of such studies sound like artifacts foreign to native speakers' intuitions. This can be seen in some works written in English that do not refer to Japanese scholarship and therefore have no impact on scholarship in Japan (e.g. Shibamoto 1985). Similarly, some reviewers tend to confine their evaluations to frameworks familiar in the West, thus missing the broader perspective that might allow them to productively evaluate works that have been created using a framework constructed within the language and culture under study (e.g. Kramarae 1991; Coates this issue). What we need are additional lenses for looking at phenomena in different cultures, since what it means to have gender-related differences in language is to some extent different from culture to culture. In other words, the lenses established by the Western academic tradition based on the phenomena in speech communities familiar to it do not necessarily work for language and gender phenomena in unfamiliar cultures, in such areas as Japan and many other parts of the world, where the origin, development, and present function of such phenomena in societies are different.

One common feature of all academic work is the use of some sort of theory or theories to look at an issue. This academic inclination is useful in making the issue focused and in producing coherent and integrated results. However, we should not forget what is left behind unnoticed. There is an enormous number of phenomena related to gender and language that have not yet been integrated into the current approaches, and still more that have not even been described. We can begin to address issues of language and gender from an international perspective only when we have become more accustomed to viewing these phenomena from perspectives as yet unfamiliar. Before we go further along the lines that have been established so far, it would be useful to observe other cultures humbly and to try to understand what is going on in the everyday lives of ordinary people in various parts of the world. What must concern us today is attaining a true understanding of people's cultures as they really are. Equally, we must be concerned about the demise of economically and politically weaker cultures under the influence of stronger cultures. The extinction of varieties of languages and cultures on this globe is a loss not only of historical material but also of our resources

for global survival, which depends on maintaining variety as the source of the dynamics of creation.

What we have assembled here is a mosaic of different approaches to the study of language use from various parts of the world: Europe, Africa, the Middle East, the Far East, and Micronesia. In each of these, the approach to the phenomena depend on the author's perspective on what is most prominent in the topic. Certainly approaches familiar to international scholarship can be found here. However, perspectives and approaches quite independent of Western traditions of scholarship are also present, especially in Part III. In these papers, what is important and how that is interpreted are expressed through the author's cultural and linguistic lenses.

These, then, are examples of what we need in the search for a more comprehensive understanding of language and gender: the accounts of the gender and language phenomena that might not be encompassed by frameworks with which we have, up to now, been familiar. These accounts may need further analysis in terms of parameters as yet unknown to us. Our understanding may also benefit from subjecting them to established Western principles of analysis. But it is only after we know more realities of gender and language use that we can step forward to find general principles and parameters.

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