Announcements

- Homework #3 (the last one) is posted and is due on Monday April 22 by 12pm.
- How are the research papers going?

Language and gender

- It has been noted that men and women do not speak in the same way.
- In extreme cases, they don’t even speak the same language (some Amazon communities).
- In less extreme cases, they have different pronunciations, e.g., in Montana, in the Gros Ventre Native American tribe, women and men have pronunciation differences: women say [kjatsa] for ‘bread’, and men say [djatsa].

- In Yana and Chiquita, two Native American languages from North and South America respectively, some of the words used among men are longer than the equivalent words used by women and to women.
  - ‘deer’ → [ba] vs. [ba-na]
  - ‘person’ → [yaa] vs. [yaa-na]
  - ‘fire’ → [ʔau] vs. [ʔau-na]
  - ‘he might go away’ → [nisaaklu] vs. [nisaaklu-ʔi]

- In Montreal, many more men than women drop the [l] in the pronouns il and elle.
- Schoolgirls in Scotland pronounce the [t] more often than boys in words such as water and got.
Language and gender

• In some languages, the distinctions between women’s and men’s language are more a matter of degree of formality or politeness than gender.
  – The ‘men’s forms’ are restricted to casual contexts and considered macho or coarse.
  – The ‘women’s forms’ are used by everyone in public contexts.
  – Women are usually more restricted to the more formal variants.

Language and gender


• Modern young Japanese women are increasingly challenging such restrictions.

Sexism in Language?

• Language use may reflect certain attitudes or expectations about sexes in society. Compare:
  
  My cousin is a professor.
  My cousin is a nurse.

• Language use can also reflect sexism in society, e.g., compare the connotation of spinster/old maid with that of bachelor.

• ‘He/She is a professional.’

Sexism in Language?

• Dictionaries often give us clues to social attitudes. Entries in the 1969 edition of the American Heritage Dictionary include examples such as “manly courage” and “masculine charm” but “womanish tears” and “feminine wiles”

• In Webster’s New World Dictionary of the American Language, “honorarium” is defined as “a payment to a professional man for services on which no fee is set or legally obtainable.”

Sexism in Language?

• Perhaps “man” has two meanings: “male” and “human”.

• But:
  “If a woman is swept off a ship into the water, the cry is Man overboard. If she is killed by a hit-and-run driver, the charge is manslaughter. If she is injured on the job, the coverage is workmen’s compensation. But if she arrives at the threshold marked Men only, she knows the admonition is not intended to bar animals or plants or inanimate objects. It is meant for her.”

  A. Graham: “How to make troubles”

Sexism in Language?

• In many languages, terms referring to males are also used generically to refer to “mankind” or to everyone in a group:
  All men are created equal.
  Every student should do his best.

• A. A. Milne wonders;
  “If the English language has been properly organized ... then there would be a word which meant both ’he’ and ’she’, and I could write, ’If John or Mary comes, heesh will want to play tennis,’ which would save a lot of trouble.”

  (The Christopher Robin Birthday Book)
Avoiding sexist language

• Some of the gender-biased aspects of language are changing, however, under the influence of the feminist movement and a common desire to avoid bias and stereotypes, and more general terms are used:

  Every student should do their best.
  chair (not chairman)
  police officer (not policeman)
  firefighter (not fireman)

• Guidelines by some publishers.

Change
early man
Man and His World
mailmen
the common man
the motorist...he
the farmer and his wife
Mary Smith is a highly successful woman executive
the fair sex
The captain is John Smith. His beautiful first officer is Joan Porter.

To
early humans
World History
mail carriers
ordinary people
the motorist...he or she
a farm couple
Mary Smith is a highly successful executive woman
The captain is John Smith and the first officer is Joan Porter.

Avoiding sexist language

• “Our heroes and sheroes”
• ‘history’ to ‘herstory’?

Sexism in Arabic?

• femininity
  • manhood
  • ‘A girl worth 100 men’
  • ‘crying like girls’
  • بِيعَيَّتُ البنات

French
• ولد
  • ولد
  • ولد

• رجل
  • رجل
  • رجل

• أرملة
  • أرملة

• a girl worth 100 men
  • a girl worth 100 men

• She is Fred’s widow. vs. *He is Sally’s widower.

Sexism in Arabic?

• Grammatical gender in Classical Arabic.
  • ولد طويل
  • ولد طويل
  • ولد طويل
  • ولد طويل

  • النابل
  • النابل
  • النابل

Female speech vs. male speech

• It has been also frequently noted that women speak differently from men.

• Any examples?
Lakoff (1973) on ‘women’s speech’

- Lexical hedges or filler; e.g., you know, sort of, well, you see.
- Tag questions; e.g., she’s very nice, isn’t she?
- Rising intonation on declaratives; e.g., it’s really good.
- ‘Empty’ adjectives; e.g., divine, charming, cute.
- Precise color terms; e.g., magenta, aquamarine.
- Intensifiers such as just and so; e.g., I like him so much.
- ‘Hypercorrect’ grammar – consistent use of standard form.
- ‘Superpolite’ forms, such as indirect requests and euphemisms.
- Avoidance of strong swear words; e.g., fudge, my goodness.
- Emphatic stress; e.g., it was a BRILLIANT performance.

Women’s speech

- Lakoff’s list can be categorized into two types of linguistic devices, both of which signal an unconfident speaker.
  - Hedging devices
  - Boosting devices

Women’s speech and power

- The researchers who worked on the speech of witnesses in a law court found that male witnesses used more ‘women’s language’ features than female witnesses with more expertise in court or higher occupational status.
- It seems, then, that what is called ‘women’s language’ is the language of the powerless in society, regardless of gender.

Politeness

- Research seems to suggest that women tend to be more polite than men.
- Politeness is about preserving face.
- It has to do with power and solidarity relations.
- Sensitivity to power relations gives rise to negative politeness. Sensitivity to solidarity gives rise to positive politeness.
- If women are less powerful, then it makes sense that their speech would be more polite than that of men.
Politeness

- Women interrupt less than men do, regardless of their respective status (doctor, patient, etc.).

Question #3

- Do the Arabic examples in Section 4.4 provide empirical support to the view held by sociolinguists regarding the impact of politeness on the relation between language and gender? Explain.


Bargaining in Morocco

- More on language and gender. Use of standard/prestigious forms in women's speech.

Next class agenda

- Continue reading chapter 4, pp. 162-197.