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INTRODUCTION*

This special issue on Zabān va Zanān (Language and Women) is the first collection on *gender*-related scholarship presented to Persian speaking societies.[1] In the past, there has not been more than a couple of articles on the interaction of language and gender in Persian language. The aim of this issue is to introduce the scholarship in the area of language and gender to the readers of the journal *Nimeye Digar*.

In this issue, seven papers are presented discussing different aspects of the interaction of language and gender. The articles authored by Katayun Mazdapour and Zohreh Zarshenas in this volume have the unique flavor of bringing into account the ancient stories, the problems related to the interpretation of ancient words, and their relevance to gender studies. The three articles by Abolghasem Soheili, Hossein Bagherzadeh, and Afsaneh Najmabadi are specifically devoted to an analysis of Persian (although Bagherzadeh's article goes beyond this language, and discusses some general issues related to gender). These three papers offer interesting facts about the Persian language that have not been discussed before in the literature. Finally, the English articles by Niloofar Haeri and Anne Lobeck present the modern trends in gender studies in the States as well as in the Middle East.

In this introductory article, I will first review the literature on the interaction of language and gender. This discussion is followed by a critical analysis of the contemporary research on this issue. A summary of papers presented in this volume is included in the analysis.

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*I am grateful to Afsaneh Najmabadi and Shaun O'Conner who read the previous version of this introduction, pointed out some shortcomings, and provided me with helpful suggestions.

1. In the Persian version of this introduction, I am employing 'jins,' 'jinsīyat,' and 'jinsgarā'ī for 'gender', hoping that we will find an adequate Persian term for it in the futrue. Bagherzadeh, in this issue, has used 'jinsgarā'ī,' 'jinsālūdigī,' 'jinsī,' and 'jinsīyat'. The latter is also used by Soheili in this issue.

Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, European scholars produced descriptions of gender-marking languages. They also described and analyzed languages that exhibit differences based on the sex of the speaker (and the listener). However, what they found remarkable was not the former, but rather the latter: they found the differences in women's and men's speech intriguing, and treated them as entirely different phenomena from grammatical gender.

What is 'gender'? In other words, what does it mean for a language to have this phenomenon? The answer is that such a language usually makes a distinction between male and female in its lexical system, for example with respect to its pronouns. This usage is sometimes purely logical. That is, a gender marker indicates the natural sex of the entity it refers to as in der Vater 'the father' and die Frau 'the woman' in German that are marked by masculine and feminine articles, respectively. Sometimes the usage of gender is purely grammatical and independent of the natural sex. For example, das mädchen 'the maid' is neuter in German despite referring to a female human being. Grammatical gender also includes markers for sexless objects, such as German der Tisch 'the table'. The fact that the grammatical gender is arbitrary is evidenced by the opposite markers that different languages employ for the same entity: 'table,' for example, is masculine in German while it is feminine in French, and 'book' is neuter in German while masculine in French.[2]

The existence of gender differences does not reflect the cultural attitude of their speakers: Modern Persian does not have gender differences while German and French do exhibit a system of gender distinctions. This fact, however, does not make the speakers of Modern Persian 'less' sexist than the speakers of the last two languages. Hossein Bagherzadeh has a discussion on this subject in this issue.

The differences in male and female speech, the subject that intrigued scholars in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, are mostly of a phonological and morphological nature.[3] In Zuni, for example, women's *ty* and *ç* correspond to men's *ky* (Bunzel 1933, cited by Bodine (1975)). As for morphological differences, Japanese and Yana present interesting examples: in Japanese, longer suffixes are used in female to

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2. Soheili (in this issue) has a brief discussion of this subject.

3. That means these differences appear in the "sound system" and in the "structure of words".

female speech, whereas in Yana longer suffixes are used in male to male speech. Furthermore, the first person pronoun in Japanese differs depending on the sex of the speaker: *wtakushi* is used by everyone, *atashi* is used only by women, and *boku* only by men. Das (1968) reports that there is a variety of titles, terms of address, and terms of reference for men in Bengali, while such words are virtually nonexistent for women.

In a large number of distinct languages women and men use different kinship terminology. Early ethnographers considered these differences to indicate that women and men used languages of separate origins. Among those languages, Carib was considered THE language with the strongest separation between men's and women's speech.[4]

In the nineteenth century, investigators continued to concentrate on women's speech, especially in languages for which female-male speech differences had been reported earlier by ethnographers. Part of the goal of these investigations was to see how the female-male speech differences had survived colonization or other contacts with Western societies (Bodine, 1975).

Ironically, a diametrically opposite tendency served to inhibit the empirical investigation of sex differences in the speech of Europeans. The tendency of the scholars of the period was to serve the dominant opinion that everyone knew about the 'different' way European women spoke. At the same time, men's speech was automatically equated with *the language* (Bodine, 1975). This tendency received its highest development in Jesperson's 1922 book who devoted a great part of a chapter to all those 'differences' in the speech of women *that everyone was perfectly aware of, and therefore, did not deserve any attention and investigation*. In sum, the language of Western women did not capture the interest and attention of European scholars until very recent times.

Although Western and non-Western scholars continued to describe properties of women's speech in non-Western languages in the twentieth century, they followed the general tendency in considering men's language as the 'norm' and the 'unmarked' form from which women's language deviated. For example, Chatterji (1921) makes an

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[4]. This claim continued to hold and was cited as recent as in the sixties (Kroeber 1961, among others).

automatic equation of the Bengali language with men's speech: he reports that Bengali initial l- is often pronounced as n- by women, children, and the uneducated classes. Bodine (1975) states that with the exception of Sapir (1929), Haas (1944), and Flannery (1946), none of the investigators cited in her study even considered the basis of their choice in determining the 'basic' and 'derived' language. It is interesting to note that not only were the descriptions of sex related language differences anything but precise in all those centuries; the social significance of such differences was never explored.

In the last two and a half decades, the term 'gender' has taken on a broader meaning: it also implies cultural beliefs and norms, as well as individual attributes associated to sex. It also covers 'sex' differences that seemed to intrigue European scholars throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth century. In other words, 'gender', in addition to its original meaning, also implies 'sexually' associated differentiations in language as well as in language use. Therefore, this term is not only about 'grammatical markers' in a given language, but it also refers to the way a language treats women as well as to linguistic properties that distinguish women's speech from that of men. In fact, the bulk of the literature associated with gender studies in the last twenty five years has focused on the following two issues:
--how women employ their language;
--how language treats women.

The modern concept of the term 'gender', which includes cultural differences associated with sex, has created controversial opinions with regard to the Persian translation of this word: some authors feel that the well-known and comfortable 'jins' and 'jinsīyat' should be used for the new concept of 'gender', while others express the need for the creation of a new term to represent this broader usage. This group of scholars argue that the familiar Persian term would be misleading since 'gender' is not a matter of individual characteristics, but rather interacts with social factors and relations, and so is different from *jins* or *jinsīyat* (sex).

Presenting new ideas, theories, and concepts in a language has always been one of the most difficult problems for writers who take on the task of transmitting the new ideas. The dilemma can be solved by (a) using an existing term in the language, (b) borrowing the original term, or (c) creating a new one. The first option can always be misleading since the old term has its own familiar denotation and connotation in the

language, and it would not be easy to suddenly change the scope of its meaning without an appropriate history of scholarship associated with it: 'gender', an already existing term in English, can be used for the broader meaning since there is a history of scholarship that has allowed this term to gradually take on the new meaning, while this is not true of 'jins' or 'jinsiyat' in Persian. The new concept of 'gender' has to be 'transmitted' to these words.

The second option is probably the easiest, but not necessarily the best one.[5] Creating a new word, the third option, is not an easy task, and requires the constructive guidance and cooperation of knowledgeable scholars rather than their destructive and sarcastic criticism. Related to this subject, see Afsaneh Najmabadi's brief essay "Dar dil-i dūst. . ." a response to Kho'i's poem on *zanvar* in this issue. Ala Khaki's response to Kho'i, as well as the original poem, appear in this volume as well.

Returning to the scholarship on *gender* in the last twenty five years, the major question in this era has been the following: how do language and gender (in its broader sense) interact? This time, the speech of American women has been the main subject of research. Not only linguists, but also psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, and feminist thinkers have explored different aspects of this question. The central aim of the recent literature has been interpreting and analyzing speech differences of men and women by resorting to the social status of women, among other cultural variables. In this respect, recent literature departs from the earlier tradition of simply *describing* linguistic systems.

Lakoff's 1975 book on *Language and Women's Place* was the first widely influential work on this issue. She uses linguistic structures such as interrogative intonation, tag questions,[6] and 'meaningless' adjectives such as cute', 'lovely', etc., to illustrate the differences between men's and women's speech. She arrives at the conclusion that women use these structures more than men do. Her interpretation is that these linguistic properties indicate lack of confidence, and hence represent 'powerless' language. Men s language, which does not exhibit

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5. See Bateni (1989) on "Fārsī zabānī 'aqīm?"

6. Tag questions are short questions that are 'taged' to the end of a statement:

you will be here tomorrow, won't you?
this theory wouldn't work, would it?

these properties to the extent the women's speech does, represents the 'powerful' language. She also points out that a woman using the same powerful strategies might well be evaluated as more aggressive than the man. Conversely, language strategies that are interpreted as powerful when used by a man (such as slow, measured delivery) may well not be heard as such when employed by a woman.

In spite of the pioneering status of Lakoff's work, she has been highly criticized for reasons that are discussed in Anne Lobeck's paper in this issue. The major criticisms include the following, stated by Eckert and McConnell-Ginet: Lakoff considers men's language as *norm*:

> ...she (Lakkof) followed a long tradition in characterizing 'women's language' as *different* from the '*standard*' set by men in being polite, tentative, indirect, imprecise, noncommittal, deferential, closer to norms of grammatical 'correctness' and less colloquial, emotionally expressive but euphemistic, and so on.
>
> (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 1992: 475)

A second highly influential book appeared fifteen years later: Tannen's 1990 *You Just Don't Understand* became a nationally celebrated and acclaimed piece of work. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet state that where much work on language and gender ignores male behavior by treating it as a neutral norm from which women s speech deviates, Tannen's work has the great merit of trying to account for men's behavior as well as women's. However, they criticize Tannen's focus on 'separation', and state that

> by taking separation as given, theorists ignore the place of this separation in the practice of the wider community. In fact, both real differences and the belief in differences serve as interactional resources in the reproduction of gender arrangements, and of oppression.
>
> (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 1992: 467)

While Lakoff's book represented the 'dominance' model, Tannen's became the representative of the 'difference' model. The former states that gender differences in the speech of women and men are based on power, and the latter argues that 'cultural' differences related to gender, independent of power, are responsible for these linguistic distinctions.

In addition to these books, there has been a wealth of scholarship on different aspects of women's speech. Although some of these works are on languages other than English, the bulk of the research concentrates on American Standard English.[7]

Scholarship on women's speech suffers a number of serious problems which make its results less than convincing. First, most of the gender experiments, and the generalizations drawn from them, are based on a restricted group of white, educated, middle class women in America. Consequently, the results of these studies can by no means be generalized to other subgroups in this society, let alone other cultures. For example, men in Western societies have been considered to be direct and open, while women are viewed as indirect in their interactions. However, research in Malagasy contradicts these results showing most women as direct and most men as indirect (Keenan, 1974). In general, most of these authors speak of 'women' and 'men' in ways that underplays not only cross-cultural differences but also the viability within each gender class.

Second, gender differences can only be correctly understood if they are discussed in RELATION to other social variables, rather than just ADDED ON to other factors. Eckert (1989) finds that gender does not have a uniform effect on linguistics behavior for the community as a whole, across variables, or for that matter for any individual. Gender, like ethnicity, class, and age is a social construction and may enter into any of a variety of interactions with other social phenomena.

The majority of scholars overlook the significance and force of these interactions. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet notice and criticize this shortcoming. They suggest that researchers should think 'practically' and look 'locally':

> to think practically and look locally is to abandon several assumptions common in gender and language studies: that gender can be isolated from other aspects of social identity and

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7. Studies on non-English languages include: Jabbra (1980) (Lebanese Arabic), Kojak (1983) (Syrian Arabic), Royal (1985) and Rakir (1986) (Standard Arabic), Harding (1975) (Spanish), Hill (1987) (Spanish in Modern Mexico), Jahangiri and Hudson (1982) (Tehrani Persian), Keeler (1990) (the language in Java), Shibamoto (1987) (Japanese), and Weil (1983) (Hebrew).

> relations, that gender has the same meaning across communities, and that the linguistic manifestations of the meaning are also the same across communities.
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> (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 1992: 462)

Third, most authors undermine the historical processes of constructing gender categories, power relations, and linguistic behavior. In research concerning language and gender, it is important to put the issue in a historical perspective in order to correctly analyze and understand it. One of the topics widely discussed in the literature, for example, concerns 'politeness'. Most authors have assumed that women are more polite than men are, and have tried to explain this assumption by resorting to psychological and social factors. Brown (1980) suggests that speakers' politeness as well as their usage of impersonal constructions such as passives correlates with their (inferior) social position rather than with gender. According to her, we are more polite (a) to a superior, (b) to people we don't know, and (c) in a face threatening situation. She concludes that women are more polite than men since they feel 'inferior' and 'distant' in the society, and find themselves in a face threatening act. She presents examples from her experiments with Mayan community to support her claims. The result of this assumption is that 'lady' like speech is a sign of 'weakness' and 'inferiority'.

The same phenomenon, however, has a completely different meaning in other societies when it is placed in a historical context. Afsaneh Najmabadi (1993, and in this issue), for example, shows that the language of Iranian women, in the process of moving from a 'unified' all-female atmosphere to a 'mixed' male-female atmosphere, has changed from a careless form full of curses and shameful expressions to a polite, thoughtful, and refined speech. Her analysis clearly indicates that the change in women language is the result of the change in her status, function, and role in the society. The woman who has entered the society is a person who thinks and is logical: her language has to represent her new status. This means that for the Iranian society, women's 'politeness' is the indication of education and hence higher status, as opposed to the generalized assumption proposed by western scholars.

Many of the educated feminists in the west freely use taboo words in their speech, including the so called 'f' words, as an indication of 'equality' and 'liberation', rejecting the concept of 'politeness' that has been classified as a property of the 'weak' language. Ironically, the

older, uneducated generation of the Iranian women comfortably uses the same expressions while the younger, educated generation intentionally avoids them.[8] The point is that the liberated western woman and her educated Iranian counterpart *want* to be different from their grandmothers. The result is manifested in a contradictory linguistic behavior that cannot be understood if it is not looked at from a historical perspective. Therefore, purely synchronic generalizations, such as the one made by Brown, can easily be misleading.

A similar misunderstanding in gender studies concerns the notion 'conservative', and its relationship with 'standard' language. This confusion is due to the lack of appropriate cultural-historical analysis. As mentioned before, the property 'conservative' is considered to be a specific characteristic of the 'weak' language, the language of women. Niloofar Haeri, in an article concerning women's speech in Egyptian Arabic (this issue), challenges previous assumptions regarding the speech patterns of women in the Near East with respect to the notions 'conservative' and 'standard'. She cites Labov (1982), who, on the basis of gender studies in Europe, Canada, United States, and Latin America, suggests that women are more 'conservative' than men in that they prefer to use the 'standard' language rather than the 'colloquial' variants. He goes on stating that this generalization is reversed in the Near East and South Asia: in these areas, men seem to be more conservative in that they use the 'standard' language more than women.

Regarding the same issue, Haeri states that studies in Cairo, Amman, Basra, Damascus, and other places found that men use lexical items containing 'classical' sounds such as 'qāf' more than women. These observations seemed to support the conclusion that men use the 'standard' form, while women employ the 'non-standard' variety, indicating that women in Middle East are less 'conservative' than men. Considering the general understanding of the social position of women in the Middle East as being less equal to that of men, this conclusion is rather surprising.

Haeri further states that "given a stereotype of women s speech as more polite, refined, and conservative," the speech of women in Arabic speaking communities with its LESS conservative characteristics has been interpreted as a matter of lack of 'access' to Classical Arabic. The argument is based on the fact that Classical Arabic is the medium of

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8. See Afsaneh Najmabadi (1993).

education, and since women are less educated than men, they don't have enough 'access' to the 'standard' norms. She cites Labov who states

> for women to use standard norms that differ from everyday speech, they must have access to those norms. . . . It stands to reason that the conservative tendency of women applies only when the opportunity for it to apply is present.
>
> (Labov, 1990: 213)

Haeri rejects this assumption on the basis of her interviews with Egyptian men and women at the college level, where women still use classical forms less than men although they enjoy the same educational background. She argues that explanations on the basis of 'access' cannot account for the interaction of language and gender in Arab countries. Her criticism basically concerns the theoretical assumptions of Arabic sociolinguistics that treats non-classical Arabic as 'colloquial' varieties rather than 'standard' languages. She argues that these varieties are 'languages' whose stylistic resources do not depend on their contact with Classical Arabic, but rather on their own sociolinguistic dynamics and their contact with other languages. She raises the question as to whether the 'standard' varieties are the socio-historical forms associated with the speech of a group of powerful speakers within the speech community, as suggested by Bourdieu (1977, 1982, 1991), or the "desired norms that are privileged largely through *textual authority*," not reflecting the habitual and daily speech of any particular group? The first choice would be the spoken languages employed by local communities, and the latter the Classical language associated with religious or literary texts.

Haeri's answer regarding the Standard Arabic is the following: Cairene Arabic is the Standard variety for Egypt, and Classical Arabic is the Supra-Standard variety. She makes a distinction between the Classical and the Spoken variety, similar to the distinction made by Ibrahim (1986) and Abu-Haidar (1989) in terms of 'Standard' and 'Prestige' languages:[9] Haeri's 'Standard' versus her 'Supra-Standard' correspond to

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[9]. Regarding the notion of 'standard' language, Ibraham (1986) finds that investigators have been misled into equating standard with prestige. He further states that there is evidence from varies sources in Arab countries indicating that spoken Arabic has its own local prestigious varieties that are not necessarily in the direction of Standard (or Literary) Arabic. Abu-

Ibrahim's and Abu-Haidar's 'Prestigious' versus 'Standard' terms, respectively.

Haeri argues that "women use the 'standard' variety while men tend to use the 'supra-standard'. Hence women in the Middle East, similar to their counterparts in Western countries, use the more 'standard' variety, but in the case of the former, "this does not also entail conservative behavior." She states, therefore, that "the controversial conclusion made by Labov and others about a reversal of the gender patterns in the Middle East is inaccurate."

Haeri's critique concerns lack of social analysis and historical contextualization of previous studies. Regarding the role of Classical Arabic, the Supra-Standard variety in her term, Haeri states that most men and women interviewed by her emphasized the crucial role of this variety "in resisting Western cultural and political imperialism and in providing cohesion for a unified 'Arab' identity." For many women, she argues, this issue is far more complex since Classical Arabic has historically represented "an ideology that is against their full participation in social, cultural, and political life." In other words, Classical Arabic "undermines" women's position, while it strengthens the place of men. Haeri concludes that

> as such, Classical Arabic is rarely as unproblematic and transparent an anti-Western 'weapon' for women as it is for men. . . .And while women may not deny that it has helped forge an "Arab" identity and has served nationalist aims, that identity has hardly been constructed by challenging the patriarchal structure, and the male-dominated values that women have been struggling against.

Haeri's analysis clearly shows that notions such as conservative' and 'standard' cannot be understood and generalized without taking into

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Haidar makes similar distinction between standard' and prestige' languages:

> More recent studies have challenged the assumption that prestige and standard spoken Arabic are one and the same. These studies have found that there are, in some Arab communities, prestige varieties of spoken Arabic which are not in the direction of standard Arabic, and that, contrary to what had been previously concluded, it is mostly women who speak the prestigious dialects. (Abu-Haidar, 1989:471)

account the social and historical complexity of different speech communities.

Returning to the basic problems of gender studies, a final important drawback of the scholarship concerns the 'one dimensional' aspect of these studies: they analyze the speech differences either from a 'power' oriented point of view proposed by Lakoff, or in the framework of a 'dual-culture' model highlighted by Tannen. Thorne and Henley (1975) discuss these two approaches, suggesting that both of them are needed in order to explain gender-language interactions. Anne Lobeck, in this issue, presents an interesting discussion of both of these trends, highlighting their theoretical as well as their empirical problems.

Lobeck criticizes the traditional trends in gender studies by stating that gender differences are not totally sex related differences, but have to do with age, education, occupation, social status, and interpersonal relationships. She goes on summarizing Lakoff's Dominance model as well as Tannen's Difference model:

Lakoff proposes that women use certain unassertive conversational features which brand them as 'weak' and socially subordinate to men. Men's language presumably consists of 'strong' conversational features commensurate with higher social status. Tannen's central thesis, on the other hand, is that miscommunication between men and women can be attributed to the division of these two genders into different social 'subcultures'. According to Tannen, men's conversational strategy concerns the search for 'status', while women's revolves around the search for 'connection'. Hence for Tannen, dominance is explained away as part of a 'cultural style' rather than an exertion of power.

Lobeck criticizes both models for the following reasons: As for Lakoff, a range of studies have shown that not only do many of the characteristics of women language discussed in her work lack empirical support, but that those which can be supported can also be analyzed not as markers of weakness or unassertiveness, but rather as cooperative and facilitative, and therefore in some cases powerful, conversational strategies. Considering Tannen, although she acknowledges that both difference and dominance exist, she fails to integrate these two models, ignoring the 'power' and social 'status' in her analysis. She does not pay attention to the fact that research since 1970's has shown that neither the difference nor the dominance model is entirely adequate in explaining language use by men and women, and that an integrated

approach to gender roles in conversation has proven more adequate than adopting a strong version of either difference or dominance.[10]

Lobeck further argues that both of these models depend on anecdotal rather than empirical evidence, and discuss primarily white, middle class subjects. She then poses the question as to why these two books (Lakoff's and Tannen's) are so immensely popular, when they are based largely on unsupported generalizations. Following Freed (1992), she suggests that readers are inclined to embrace comfortable stereotypes presented as facts. She further states that

> we thus see a dangerous, repeated trend in language and gender research, one in which non-scientific generalization is presented to public as reality, and is adopted by those eager to rationalize behavior which perpetuates the status quo of women as subordinate to men.

In Faludi's (1991) terms, she suggests that both of these works represent a kind of 'backlash' to the women's movement: Lakoff's book supports many of the highly criticized claims made by Jesperson in his 1922 book (Coates 1986), and Tannen's work excuses men's "oppressive linguistic behavior," by justifying their insensitivity and their outright rudeness as just being part of their need for independence (Freed 1992).

So far we have discussed some properties of women's speech and the problems with the related scholarship. A second aspect of gender studies in the last two and a half decades concerns the way women are spoken of: the way language treats women. In this respect, language does not seem to treat women very kindly, a property which is widespread among different languages. Alma Graham states that

> from Eve and Pandora on, the female has been held responsible for evil and assigned a semantic house of ill fame. Titles of honor illustrate the point particularly well. *Queen, madam, mistress, and dame* have all acquired degraded meanings, whereas *Prince, king, lord, and father* are exalted and applied to God-for even God is thought of as a male and is called *him*.
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> (Graham, 1975: 61)

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10. See Lobeck (this issue) for references.

Graham reports that in 1972 a new dictionary for children was published by the name of *The American Heritage School Dictionary* which contains 35 thousand entries, selected "after an unprecedented analysis of 5 million words encountered by American children in their schoolbooks." This non-sexist dictionary was the first to define *sexism*, and to include the phrase *liberated woman*. In the process of compiling this dictionary, the authors had discovered many clear indications of sexism in the usage of the English language. For example, even though there are 100 women for every 95 men in the real world, there were over seven times as many men as women and over twice as many boys as girls in the books read by children. Two out of three mothers were mentioned in relation to male children, and four out of five fathers were fathers of male. There were twice as many uncles as aunts, and sons outnumbered daughters by more than two to one, and every firstborn child was a son.

Another interesting discovery was that boys and girls were taught two sets of values: boys in these schoolbooks "ran races, rode bicycles, drove fast cars, and took off in spaceships for Mars. Girls, however, "were less concerned with *doing* than *being*. . . : *he was the manliest of his sex and she was the loveliest of hers.*" As Graham noticed, "a child would say that the word comparable to *manly* was *lovely*, not *womanly*.[11]

Along the same lines, Paula Treichler states that

> dictionaries have generally excluded any sense of women as speakers, as linguistic innovators, or as definers of words. Whatever the editor's aims, dictionaries *have* perpetuated *the* stereotypes and prejudices of writers, editors, and language commentators, who are almost exclusively *male*.
>
> (Treichler, 1989: 60)

She gives examples such as "she made his life a *hell* on earth, chosen by *Random House Dictionary* to illustrate usage of *the word hell.*" The entry for *overdone* is something like 'she gave us *overdone* steak," always using the feminine pronoun to illustrate negative

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[11] Graham, 1975: 59.

actions.[12] Treichler's point is that she does not mean simply that dictionaries selectively 'authorize' language usage that exist in a culture, but they also "construct and create usage", like other kinds of scholarship.[13] Recall that one of the criticisms regarding Tannen's Difference model was that the belief in differences serves "in the reproduction of gender arrangement and oppression" (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1992). Along the same lines, Bagherzadeh (this issue) states, that "although a sexist language is itself the reflection of a sexist culture, it mutually *recreates* the latter."

Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that language reflects the cultural and traditional beliefs of its speakers. Although Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, in its strong version, claims that "language shapes our world view," it is the culture that imposes its values and stereotypes on language.[14] The latter is evidenced by the fact that when certain values change in a society, the reflection of that phenomenon in language changes accordingly: when the *liberated* woman arrives in the society, the language changes, and we see examples such as *she was a woman of dedicated political principles* or *she made a name for herself*. As Curtis James, one of my undergraduate students in the fall of 1994, states in a paper on Language and Gender "language is not sexist. The portion of society which has historically contributed gender injustices to the language is the guilty party." Once more, the reflection of sexism in language has to be placed in a historical perspective if we want to do language, and our understanding of it, justice.

In a language that has grammatical gender differences, male dominant values are reflected in the usage of a masculine pronoun such as 'he', instead of 'she', in all contexts where the third person is not known. This trend is easily generalized by using masculine nouns as 'generic' terms: *lehrer* (teacher) is used to include not only male, but also female teachers in German. Similarly, *actor* will be used in a generic form for everyone who *acts*: male or female. How can a genderless language like Persian, then, be a *male dominant* language? This question is raised by Afsaneh Najmabadi (this issue) who answers it by analyzing the reflection of *zan* (woman) and *mard* (man) in the Persian language from

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12. Treichler, 1989: 57

13. Treichler, 1989: 58.

14. A 'weaker' version of this hypothesis states that language influences' our 'Weltanschauung'. Even this version is a controversial subject.

a historical point of view. Najmabadi provides fascinating examples to exhibit *sexism* in this 'genderless' language. She cites Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī (*Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī*), for example, who uses the generic word *farzand* (child) as 'sons', while *dukhtarān* (daughters) is used by him only when he specifically refers to 'daughters'.

Najmabadi shows how linguistic expressions are used in a male dominated society to leave women out of the context: in the application of *'umūm-i ahālī va aṭfāl va niswān* (all citizens, and children, and women), as well as in *millat* (nation) and *irānīān* (Iranian), 'women' are not considered to be part of the group of 'citizens', the 'nation', or 'Iranians'. Similarly, the plural pronouns *mā* (we) and *shumā* (you) refer only to men, excluding women altogether.

Najmabadi proposes that with the change in the social structure and cultural values there will be a change in language as well. Her analysis demonstrates that when Iranian women started to write during the *Mashrūṭah* (Constitutional) era, the male dominated language started to shift to include women. The semantic change of *mā īrānīān* (we Iranians), from exclusively referring to men, to including women, clearly reflects the close interaction of language and culture. She notices that in this era, there is evidence indicating that authors had started putting women in the same position as men, at least in certain contexts: *mard u zan rūznāmah mī'khānand/ kārhā rā tamām mī'dānand* (men and women read newspapers and know everything).

Najmabadi arrives at the conclusion that the fact that pronouns and generic nouns in contemporary Persian have a more general connotation including both men and women is due to the writings of women in the last one hundred years. She states, however, that our language today is by no means a 'neutral' one with respect to gender issues and the way it treats men and women. She is absolutely right. However, this fact is not surprising if we consider the differences between the social/political status of men and women in Iran, the distribution of power, and the cultural beliefs that portray the image of women in that society.

Although Persian is a 'genderless' language, its lexicon is full of entries that reveal typical characteristics of a male dominated society. This subject is examined by Hossein Bagherzadeh in this issue. Bagherzadeh discusses the lack of grammatical gender as well as the reflection of cultural sexism in *zabān-i jāmi'ah-'i mardsālārī* (the language of a male dominant society). He starts out by stating that grammatical

gender differences are not the same as the reflection of cultural sexism in a language: gender differences are of 'structural' nature while sexism reveals cultural values of the society.

Bagherzadeh makes a three way distinction with respect to *jinsgarā'ī dar zabān* (gender in language). First, he presents a discussion of structural (grammatical) gender, and compares Persian, a genderless language, with languages such as Arabic and English that exhibit gender distinctions in the form of pronouns, inflections, and so on. Next, he examines sexist values in language in the form of male oriented lexicon, and discusses the existence of lexical entries such as *mardum* (people) in Persian or *human* in English which are based on 'man', but nevertheless include women as well. In the same section, Bagherzadeh also discusses words that clearly reveal the social status and cultural functions of men and women: the owner of a house is typically a *landlord* while the person who cleans homes is a *housemaid*. Finally, he examines positive cultural values that are manifested in words that correspond to males, such as *mardānigi* (manliness, courage), and *javānmardī* (manliness, generosity), and compares them with negative values manifested in words corresponding to women (or female's sexual organs).

Selecting the words *khānum* (lady, wife) and *zan* (woman, wife), Abolghasem Soheili presents a sociolinguistic analysis of their application in Modern Persian (this issue). Leaving the direct denotation of these words aside, he goes on to examine their connotation and social values within the complex system of sociolinguistic interactions. Soheili also considers the historical development of the semantic scope of these lexical items: while *khānum* has lost its 'royal' connotation and is applied with respect to all social classes, *zan*, as a generic noun, has also received more elaborated interpretation: it is used at the level of the generic noun *mard* in phrases such as *naqsh-i zan* (the role of women), *jāmi'ah-i zanān* (women organization). This fact indicates, once more, that with social change, we can expect linguistic change: women have entered the society, and hence the meaning of the word *zan* has taken on a new, and in some cases more positive, interpretation.

Language not only indicates the cultural attitudes of its speakers in a current era, but it also reflects the attitudes of our ancestors with respect to the status of women. In this regard, ancient texts and stories are important and interesting sources for analyzing women's status and

sexist attitudes of our ancestors. This aspect of language and gender is discussed by Katayun Mazdapour and Zohre Zarshenas in this issue.

By analyzing some lexical items from the Pahlavi language, Mazdapour shows the semantic change of these entries as an indication of the change of the status of women over a long period of time. She compares the status of women in the Sassanid era with that of modern times, and discusses the reflection of this change by resorting to the semantic development of relevant vocabulary items. She states that texts that belong to different eras of human history reflect changes in social, political, and economic status of women throughout the centuries. In the history of the Iranian culture, she argues, women have gradually and constantly lost their honor and credibility, a fact that is reflected in the Persian language. Mazdapour's analysis is based on *Mādiān-i hazār dādstān*, a legal text from the Sassanid era, and *Ravāyāt-i Dārāb Hurmuzyār*, a text that was written much later.

One of the important points in Mazdapour's analysis is that the interpretation of old materials and lexical items depends on the social and cultural beliefs of the *interpreters*. She states that we can see this semantic reconstruction in the different interpretations of Pahlavi words such as *stūr* and *khusarāy zan*: the new interpretation is based on cultural beliefs specific to our times, rather than on their original meanings. Along the same lines, Treichler states that 'historical reconstruction of form and meaning may also display the bias of etymologists and lexicographers."[15] She cites Emile Benveniste who explains that "there is no term for *marriage* in Proto-Indo-European, because the situation of the man and that of the woman have nothing in common."[16] Treichler expresses her suspicion about Benveniste's explanation by stating that his "interpretation may derive as much from his own cultural and professional conditioning as from the 'facts' of the Indo-European lexicon."[17]

Zohreh Zarshenas (this issue) discusses an ancient story entitled *Dāstān-i Sughdī-yi bāzargān va rūḥ-i daryā* (the Soghdian Story of the Merchant and the Spirit of the Sea). She states that the language of this tale indicates the negative bias and humiliating attitudes of a

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15. Treichler, 1989: 56.
16. Treichler, 1989: 56
17. Treichler, 1989: 57

male/father oriented society towards women. She further indicates that women in this and similar stories are the symbols of sacrifice, not necessarily by choice, but rather by the responsibility that was imposed on them by their cultural beliefs.

We use our language on a daily basis without paying attention to any of the sexist values that pollute it. Although we cannot change the language and its sexist connotations without changing our cultural attitudes, the awareness of the existence of sexism in language will be enlightening, and could help us to recognize the degree, and the ugliness, of sexism in our culture. Therefore, it is a pleasure for me to have been given the opportunity to edit this volume which should be considered as an introduction to language and gender scholarship in Persian speaking societies. I would also like to express my gratitude to my colleagues who contributed to this issue, without whom the present work would not have come to be a reality. I will join them in hoping that the present work will stimulate further discussions and research related to sociolinguistic aspects of the interaction of Persian language and gender.

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Niloofar Haeri

Language and Gender in the Arab World: Analysis, Explanation, and Ideology

> I saw the Almighty in a dream and asked, 'O lord, what is the best way to manage to be near you.' He replied, '*My Word*. O Ahmad.' I inquired 'With understanding or without understanding?' He said, 'With or without understanding'.
>
> Ahmad Ibn Hanbal[1]

The linguistic repertoire of virtually all societies encompass different languages, varieties of the same language, a national "standard" along with social and regional dialects, and of course a multiplicity of styles of speaking. In all Arab countries, the official state language is Classical Arabic which coexists with each country's own variety of Arabic, e.g. Egyptian, Syrian, Iraqi and so on.[2] Though Classical Arabic as the highly codified language of the Quran has a "modern" version insofar as changes in its vocabulary and minor changes in its more obscure syntactic constructions have been effected, it differs on every linguistic level from the present-day national languages. Without schooling it remains for the most part unintelligible. The duality of the linguistic setting, referred to as "diglossia" (Ferguson 1959, 1991), and the religio-cultural credentials of the classical language have produced and reproduced a strong ideology which exalts the latter, and devalues what Hourani calls the "living spoken languages" (Hourani 1991a: 68).

Classical Arabic is held to be of divine origin, incomparable in beauty

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1 Ninth century jurisconsult, quoted in Chejne 1969: 12, emphasis added.

2. In Arabic, the terms for Classical Arabic are: al-lugha al-'Arabiyya, 'the Arabic language'; or al-lugha al-fuṣḥā, lit. 'the eloquent language'. Non-classical Arabic is frequently referred to as al-lugha il-'Āmmiyya 'the common' and in Egypt, the terms maṣri 'Egyptian' or baladi 'belonging to the balad (country)'.

and strength to other languages, and as the embodiment of Islamic civilization. The present-day Arabic "dialects"--the national languages of Arab countries which have undergone fundamental changes throughout the centuries--are considered "vulgar" and "unworthy" in particular as vehicles of writing, and of cultural production and transmission more generally. Classical Arabic is the language of the vast body of highly revered religious and literary texts produced since the beginning of Islam. It is viewed as the single most important vehicle of Islamic civilization and culture. Endowed with these associations, it is a language that embodies and bestows authority on those who know it. It is primarily a written medium and has ceased to function as a language passed on from one generation to the next through the medium of a spoken, home language. At present, Classical Arabic is the official state language and the medium of print, education, and bureaucracy in all Arab countries.

In contrast, non-classical national languages such as Egyptian, Syrian, etc. are the mother tongue of elite and non-elite Arabs.[3] They have been the vehicle of epic poems, folklore, plays, proverbs, and songs. Increasingly, books of poems, plays, and satirical journals are also published in these languages, though there has always been resistance against printing non-classical Arabic. The dialects of capital cities such as Cairo have much national and regional prestige. Sedentary (as opposed to Bedouin) dialects of Arabic differ in phonology, morphology, and syntax from the classical language. Grave literacy problems attributed to the distance between the classical and the non-classical varieties have appeared in the literature at least since the 1930s, and continue to be mentioned in various formulations (Heyworth-Dunn 1939; Matthews & Akrawi 1949; Altoma 1969; Seckinger 1988). The diglossic situation which holds true for the entire Arab world is said to be unified through the classical language. Local languages are thought of as divisive because they differ from country to country (Chejne 1969). The historical stance against the latter is also echoed in social scientific writings by Arab and non-Arab authors alike in the label given to all non-classical varieties: "*colloquial* Arabic"

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[3]. The term "Arabs" is at times problematic. Egyptians, for example, do not refer to themselves as "Arabs." In Egyptian Arabic, the term il-'Arab is used to refer to people from the Gulf countries. Still, in political rhetoric the term is used inclusively even by Egyptians; and it is useful in order to avoid repetitive enumeration of different nationalities.

(Haeri 1991, 1992). Rarely are they referred to by modifiers such as "Egyptian," "Syrian," and so on. The deep antipathy toward the "colloquials," is exemplified by Nobel laureate Naguib Mahfouz:

> The colloquial is one of the diseases from which the people are suffering, and of which they are bound to rid themselves as they progress. I consider the colloquial one of the failings of our society, exactly like ignorance, poverty and disease. (in Cachia 1967: 20)

The pervasiveness of such an ideology of linguistic correctness and purity may be further illustrated by noting that on the one hand, it would also be shared by the militants who attempted to assassinate Mahfouz recently; and on the other by the fact that Mahfouz himself is faulted for making "too many grammatical errors" by professors at Dār al-'Ulūm (Parkinson 1991: 36).

If we consider that between the 8th century A.D. to the mid-1800's, that there was no non-religious schooling, and that Egyptian, Syrian, Iraqi, and other sedentary dialects of Arabic diverged in fundamental ways from Classical Arabic (if they ever were wholly similar to it), then we must ask how the classical language managed to survive? For religious and non-religious scholars it served as a lingua franca, a language in which they wrote, and we surmise, in some situations spoke—a language that connected them to other Muslim scholars around the world. We may also infer that the classical language survived for the majority outside of the reading-writing elites in their recitations of daily prayers, readings of the Quran (whether by themselves or by others); and in sermons or political speeches to which they listened. The gradual development of mass education brought Classical Arabic more forcefully to the domain of public education (Heyworth-Dunn 1939; Hourani 1991b; Vatikiotis 1991). Since it was chosen as the official state language, educational materials developed for public schools aimed at teaching how to read and write in the classical language. In time, an increasing number of lexical and other borrowings from Classical Arabic entered the daily language of many people also outside the traditional reading-writing elites. It may help to draw a useful though imperfect analogy by likening this situation to a hypothetical one in Italy, for example, had Classical Latin continued to serve educational purposes.

Situating Studies of Gender Differences in Arabic

Although there are two vast bodies of literature on Arabic, one dealing with purely linguistic matters, and another with literary works, research that locates language within the broader cultural and social contexts is very scant. Rarely can one find genre, narrative, and conversational analysis studies with anthropological or sociolinguistic concerns. A few recent ethnographies have begun to fill this gap (Abu-Lughod 1988, Caton 1991, Messick 1993, Early 1993), but only Caton carries out an integrated analysis of linguistic forms that reflect and reproduce the social world. Early is concerned with the content of the English translations of baladi women's narratives of illness. Abu-Lughod (1988: xv) in her ethnography of Awlad Ali Bedouin poetry states that her "focus [is] on the social use of poetry rather than on linguistics or even poetics" and hence does not pay close attention to the forms of the poetry.[4] But even aside from linguistic ethnographies per se, the dearth of research on the social aspects of language use is rather astonishing, given the relevance of language ideology and its implications to many of the central concerns of social scientists working on the Arab and Islamic world as they grapple with questions of "modernity" vs. "tradition," nationalism, civil society, identity, and others.

The handful of studies on gender differences in Arabic that are available have been carried out within the sociolinguistic paradigm. Sociolinguistics became an established subdiscipline when it successfully challenged the long-standing Saussurian dichotomy between synchrony and diachrony (Saussure 1966 [1916]). In a seminal article that could be characterized as the "sociolinguists' manifesto," Weinreich, Labov, and Herzog (1966) argued that keeping synchrony and diachrony apart eliminates any chance of understanding why languages change. If language is such a tightly organized and closed system, as orthodox structuralists following Saussure have stated, then how can it change? The answer was not to give up on the systematicity of language, but on the equation of systematicity with homogeneity.

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4. She uses this focus to explain why her system of transcription of the poems that does not fully represent the dialect of the people she studied, but one that is accessible to those familiar with Classical Arabic. In light of our brief discussion on language ideology in the Arab world, such a decision is more than a choice among systems of phonetic transcription.

Thus "systematic" does not necessarily entail homogeneity--and it is the heterogeneity of a synchronic state of a language that can explain how and why it changes. This heterogeneity which has come to be called "linguistic variation" or just "variation" (i.e. different ways of saying the 'same' thing) can be understood by stepping outside language and acknowledging its complex interaction with social structure. There is variation because there are different social classes and ethnicities, and women and men; different ideologies and interests, different political structures and so on. Eventually certain variations on the phonetic, lexical, syntactic, and prosodic levels become permanent changes that are characterized as "diachronic" changes.

In sociolinguistics when a social group is found to use a particular linguistic form (a certain pronunciation, a word, a phrase, or a syntactic structure) significantly more frequently than another group, that form and all its competing variants may be characterized in a number of ways. Non-linguists often use characterizations such as "cool," "pompous," "polite," "bookish," "slang," and so on to describe the way particular people talk. Since for sociolinguists the ultimate interest lies in locating language *change*, they identify which variant(s) of a variable (i.e. which of several competing forms) is the older, "standard," and more "conservative," form; and which is new, less "conservative," "innovative" and "non-standard."[5] In this way, the linguistic behavior of groups of speakers are compared to each other to locate the "innovators" of sound changes, to find "conservative" speakers who continue to the use the older and "standard" forms and so on. It should be explained that "conservative" is used in two senses: an older form is conservative; and the form that belongs to the standard language is also conservative. Beginning with Fischer's 1958 study of boys' and girls' use of (-ing); and Labov's 1966 study of New York City, to similar studies of other speech communities within and outside of the United States, a general pattern of gender differences emerged. Women were found to use "standard" and therefore "conservative" variants more frequently than men where linguistic variation was not leading to permanent change.

One of the most pervasive influences of Classical Arabic on some non

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5. Examples in English on the pronunciation level would be 'going' vs. 'goin', 'New York' with and without the /r/; on the syntactic level: 'I do not have any money' vs. 'I ain't got no money'.

classical, urban varieties, has been the re-introduction of sounds that had heretofore disappeared from the latter in the course of time. Levantine varieties of Arabic, for example, do not have the classical sounds [q] (qāf), the interdental series [th, ẓ], the diphthongs [aw] and [ay], and others. Instead, they have the glottal stop ['] for the qāf; [t, s, z]; and [oo], [ee], respectively.[6] When classical words that have these sounds are borrowed, in some cases, they are used with the original sound. This practice is often followed for stylistic purposes--it marks the utterance as "formal" and "learned." Sociolinguistic studies of Arabic set about identifying forms that have competing variants--variants that belong to the "standard" language, i.e Classical Arabic, and those that can be characterized as "non-standard." Obvious candidates for such "variables" were alternations between classical and non-classical sounds. The use of the qāf and the glottal stop (or other local reflexes) as alternative ways of realizing lexical items and as a resource for style-shifting par excellence has been investigated in Cairo (Schmidt 1974; Haeri 1991), Amman (Abdel-Jawad 1981), Basra (Bakir 1986), Bahrain (Holes 1987), Damascus (Kojak 1983) and among Palestinians living in the United States (Shorrab 1981). Other studies with a focus on similar forms were carried out but data were only gathered on men's usage exclusively (Schultz 1981 on Cairo; Al-Jehani 1985 on Mekka), or on women's (Al-Muhannadi 1991 on Qatar).

With the exception of Holes (1987) who did not find significant gender differences among Bahraini speakers, all others found that men use the Classical Arabic forms more frequently than women, regardless of age or level of education.[7] The qāf in particular has received the most attention because of all classical sounds, its occurrence is the most frequent; and because it is a prime marker of stylistic elevation. With respect to qāf usage, findings have been remarkably consistent: Studies in Cairo, Amman, Basra, Damascus, as well as others found that men use lexical items containing the qāf far more frequently than women. Such a result prompted the characterization that men employ older and

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6. Hence /'ahwa/ instead of /qahwa/ for 'coffee'; or /'alb/ for /qalb/ 'heart'; /tilt/ instead of /thulth/ 'third' /soora/ instead of /thawra/ 'revolution' and so on.

7. Most do not analyze the crucial role of social class, with the exception of Haeri 1991, 1995; Abdel Jawad (1981) looks at a variety of occupations.

more "standard" forms, while women use the local, urban, "non-standard" forms.

This pattern which showed women to be less "conservative" linguistically than men in the Middle East prompted a long-standing controversy in sociolinguistics. The opposite pattern had become an established fact for "Western" speech communities where women had turned out to use "standard" forms consistently more frequently than men. Labov (1982: 78) summarized the results in this way:

> The general principle that emerged from studies in Europe, Canada, the United States, and Latin America is that women are more conservative in their reaction where stable and socially recognized variation is concerned.

He went on to note that this generalization which holds for so many different speech communities "has been reversed for a number of studies in the Near East and South Asia" (Ibid: 78). That is, in the latter communities, it is the men who turned out to employ standard variants significantly more than women. Given the general understanding of the social position of women in the Middle East as being less equal to that of men, the expectation was that their linguistic behavior would reflect more conservative uses. Instead, even in studies carried out since 1982, the same findings were replicated. Women consistently turned out to be the speakers who use the urban, non-classical, and therefore less "conservative" variants more than men. What explains such patterns and "preferences"?

Explanations: The "Public" Language and the "Private" Woman

Given a stereotype of women's speech as more polite, refined, and conservative predating sociolinguistics, explanations of how women in Arabic speaking speech communities could be *less* conservative than men sought to establish that women's linguistic choices are a matter of "access." It has been argued that Classical Arabic is the medium of eduction and since women acquire formal schooling less than men, they do not learn the "standard" norms. However, the data on usage from several studies do not support this explanation. When women and men with the same level of education are compared, for example, at college

level, women still use classical forms less than men (Haeri 1987, 1991, 1994). The more general explanation which encompasses the first is based on the reasoning that Classical Arabic is the language of the "public" domain and since women in Arab societies operate in the "private" domain, they have fewer opportunities to acquire its norms. Hence they use such features less than men. The stereotype of Muslim Middle Eastern women as "sheltered," "secluded," and confined to the "private" domain, and the dichotomy between the "public" and the "private" have been challenged successfully by a vast literature in several fields (Nelson 1974, Tucker 1993, Badran and Cooke 1990, Keddie and Baron 1991, Early 1992, Ahmed 1992, among others). The implications of the claim that Classical Arabic is the language of the "public" domain may be critiqued on several grounds. It is true that Classical Arabic is the written medium of all officialdom. But in Cairo and most other urban centers, aside from sermons, political speeches, the nightly televised news program, and some debate oriented radio and television programs, the variety used orally by the overwhelming majority of people in most *public* settings including government bureaucracies and other institutions is not Classical Arabic. Thus, men and women who might be very active in this domain, come across Egyptian Arabic far more frequently than Classical Arabic.

Second, although the concept of the "public" domain is not limited to work outside the home, holding a job and all its entailments are at the center of this construct (Rosaldo 1974). Among the 50 women that I interviewed during my fieldwork in 1988, only 14 did not work. Four were under 22 and had just finished high school or college. The other 10 were housewives some of whom had at times held various jobs. The rest had diverse occupations such as university teaching, accounting, public relations, acting, housekeeping, owning and operating small businesses, diplomatic positions and so on. Also based on the last census data available (CAPMAS 1978: 33-34)[8] the number of women who work is so large that one has to make a point of searching for women who do not. In lower income families, women cannot afford not to work. In higher income ones, they often become professionals and start work early on. There are in all probability women who operate mostly in the "private" domain, but one cannot use

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8. *Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics*. 1978. [Cairo census of 1976] Cairo governorate, vol 1.

their case to offer a global explanation of women's linguistic preferences.

Before continuing with our critique of such explanations, there are problems with the underlying theoretical assumptions of Arabic sociolinguistic studies that have to be examined first.

Conceptualizing Stylistic Variation in Arabic

To begin with, there are inherent tensions in applying theories and methods developed for speech communities like New York, to those such as Cairo or Damascus. The study of the *vernacular* occupies a privileged position in sociolinguistics. Labov has repeatedly spoken of the vernacular as the "most systematic data for linguistic analysis" (Labov 1984: 29), defining it not as "illiterate or lower class speech," but as that most spontaneous style of each social group "relative to their careful and literary forms of speech" (Labov 1971: 112). Arabic linguistics, on the other hand, has historically privileged *Classical* Arabic as its legitimate focus, expressing ambivalence or more often strong disdain towards non-classical varieties of Arabic.[9] Such a fundamental difference in language ideology is of utmost importance in understanding the research that has been done in the Arab world for any interpretation of what women and men "do" in speaking revolves around analyses that equate Classical Arabic with "standard Arabic," and non-classical Arabic with "non-standard" speech.

A conceptualization of stylistic variation as essentially and uniquely the product of competing forms between Classical and non-classical Arabic is implicitly or explicitly assumed in the majority of studies of Arabic. It may be critiqued by a re-examination of one of the most basic terms in Arabic linguistics: the "colloquial." All non-classical varieties of Arabic are referred to in the literature as "colloquial Arabic," or "colloquial Egyptian," Syrian, etc. The appellation implies that when people speak Egyptian Arabic, for example, they cannot style shift, particularly if they wish to elevate their style since non-classical varieties *lack their own resources* for shifting. The term suggests the

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9. See Altoma 1969; Beeston 1970; Ibrahim 1983 for similar formulations of this ideology.

existence of a monolithic linguistic variety, that however much it may vary in forms and features remains "colloquial" and "non-standard." Thus, the language of those playwrights and poets who write in non-classical varieties is "colloquial" and the language of those who cannot read or write is also "colloquial." It further implies that as Arab societies have changed and transformed, as they have become increasingly more complex in occupational, educational, economic, and cultural terms, their languages have remained "colloquial" incapable of nuances, elevations, and rhetorical devices *unless* the speaker resorts to Classical Arabic. Further, even when scholars may agree that one may move down within the "colloquial" and speak "deep colloquial," one may not move up without using elements belonging to the classical language, that is, without moving in part at least, out of the "colloquial."[10]

If we bury the notion that the non-classical varieties are "colloquial" languages, as I argue we should, then a more theoretically and empirically tenable conceptualization of variation becomes possible, and with it a more nuanced interpretation of gender differences. Languages that have been serving such complex societies as Egypt, Syria, or Lebanon cannot be *monolithic* "colloquial" entities unless we

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10. Such problems are not alleviated by resorting to labels such as "educated colloquial Arabic," "Educated Spoken Arabic" and the like to define what some speakers do as a "mixture of written and vernacular" (Meiseles 1980; Mitchell 1986, 1990: 245-55). Long ago, in his "Analysis of Linguistic Borrowing," Haugen (1950) rightly cautioned us against treating the use of features from one language while speaking another as a special linguistic phenomenon and states:

> A further inaccuracy is introduced if the resulting language is called 'mixed' or 'hybrid'. Mixture implies the creation of an entirely new entity and the disappearance of both constituents [...] *It implies that there are other languages which are 'pure', but these are scarcely any more observable than a 'pure race' in ethnology*" (Ibid: 211, emphasis added).

Thus the point is not to deny that "mixing" takes place-- it certainly does-- but to stress that it is not unique to Arabic, and that its existence does not justify a theoretical machinery that renders the language situation opaque.

are ready to argue that Classical Arabic *alone* (which saw a decline for at least five centuries) has served the needs of their speakers. Thus, non-classical varieties of Arabic are languages, not "colloquial" languages, whose stylistic resources do not depend exclusively on their contact with Classical Arabic, but also on their own sociolinguistic dynamics, *and* their contact with other languages.

One important implication of the foregoing is that the standard variety of any one of the non-classical languages is the variety spoken in their urban capitals (e.g. Cairo, Beirut, etc.) by educated speakers. Just as the variety of French spoken in Paris by the educated upper classes serves as a national standard for France as whole. As was mentioned earlier, the variationist paradigm used for studies of Arabic is one that privileges the study of the vernacular, while the study of Arabic has historically been concerned with its Classical version. The clash of these two ideologies is thus fertile ground for asking a number of important questions: Are "standard" varieties socio-historical formations closely associated with the native speech of a group of powerful speakers within the speech community (á la Bourdieu 1977, 1982, 1991), or desired norms that are privileged largely through *textual authority*, not reflecting the habitual and daily speech of any particular group? Is there only one "standard" per speech community? I would argue that for Arabic-speaking speech communities, there is a standard variety such as Cairene Arabic for Egypt; and a "supra standard" variety, namely Classical Arabic. The former owes its standard status to the fact that it has served and continues to serve an important cultural, intellectual, and commercial center; and to the fact that it reflects and reproduces social differentiation so that the dialect of the more powerful groups is a living standard variety. On the other hand, the latter is supra-standard not because it represents the speech of any powerful group or cultural center, but because it is recognized as representing the highest linguistic norms through the language of the most revered and authoritative texts in religion, literature, science, and grammatical studies. Ibrahim (1986: 119) states:

> there is an important difference between standard Arabic (H[igh]) and standard English. It is possible for an individual to acquire standard English simply by belonging to a particular socioeconomic class [...] Social status and mobility in any Arab society, however, are insufficient for the acquisition of the H[igh] language [i.e. Classical Arabic].

Within a framework that takes into account the specificities of settings and communities, interpretations and valuations of linguistic difference including gender differences become far more complex. In Egypt, there are two kinds of standard varieties. If we follow sociolinguistic practice, we would have to conclude that the use of both Classical Arabic and urban, educated Cairene is constitutive of "conservative" ideology. Women use the urban, and following our reasoning "standard," forms instead of the classical forms, can we characterize their linguistic preferences as "conservative"? In this case, because non-classical standard forms are institutionally unsanctioned, their use cannot automatically be judged as conservative. To the degree that the term "standard" has been used with connotations of an "official," "institutional" "older" and therefore "conservative" sociolinguistic variety, it is the linguistic behavior of men that is "conservative" within Arabic-speaking speech communities. Institutionally sanctioned norms generally represent "conservative" linguistic norms. Hence, the controversial conclusion made by Labov and others about a reversal of the gender patterns in the Middle East, is inaccurate. Insofar as phonological forms are concerned, both in the "West" and the Middle East women use "standard" forms more than men, but in the latter case, "standard" does not also entail "conservative" behavior.

Second, the minimalist paradigm of the social meanings of linguistic forms as "standard/non-standard," and "conservative/innovative" cannot capture multiple and complex social meanings whose understanding is necessary if we are to explain the causes of gender differences. However, the dominant macro-sociological approach in variationist studies that only indirectly is equipped to deal with ideology and context (through a division of speakers into different classes, ethnicities, and so on) cannot get any closer to social meaning. This is both a question of theory and one of methodology, and although a full elaboration of this point is outside the scope of the present paper, I will return to the question of social meaning a bit later on.

Following another implication of the conceptualization of variation in Arabic that was put forward above, we must investigate linguistic differences that do not span the classical/non-classical dichotomy--stylistic forms that represent the dynamics of non-classical Arabic alone. What would be the patterns of gender differences in this kind of variation? Haeri (1995) investigates the stylistic use of apical

palatalization in Cairo[11]--a variable whose spectrum of forms fall within Cairene Arabic proper. Palatalization turned out to have been a linguistic innovation of women in the upper classes, introduced into the phonology of Cairene Arabic probably sometime after the 1930's (Ibid: 69). While the speech of younger women in other classes is marked by a high frequency of strong palatalization[12], most men do not make use of this stylistic device. The findings of Royal (1985) with respect to the degree of pharyngealization among Cairene speakers should also be mentioned here. She found that the upper classes in general, and women in particular have weaker pharyngealization. Heavier pharyngealization being the norm for proper pronunciation in Classical Arabic, weak or no pharyngealization again seems to be an innovation of women. Since men participate less in the propagation of such innovations, their speech as compared to women can be called more "conservative." Yet, in his most recent article on the subject, Labov (1990: 213) explains women's less frequent use of classical forms by again noting their putative limited access: "...for women to use standard norms that differ from everyday speech, they must have access to those norms.[...] It stands to reason that the conservative tendency of women applies only when the opportunity for it to apply is present." He does not elaborate further, but claims that where women do not "participate in the wider system of sociolinguistic norms," then they clearly cannot realize their "conservative tendency" (Ibid: 213) Thus, given "access" and "opportunity," the tendency would "apply." It is unclear why women's "conservative tendency" is treated as a given notwithstanding the findings mentioned above. But while with respect to the use of some forms, women use their standard variants more than men, the pattern is far from uniform as the data on Arabic show. In fact this data demonstrate that the role of gender in the dynamics of the

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11. Apical palatalization involves a phonological process whereby dental or alveolar stops undergo frication or affrication. In Cairene Arabic, for example, palatalization occurs in these and many other similar words where the stop is followed by a glide or high front vowel:

/intī/	[inçī]	'you [fem.]'
/gidīd/	[gijīd]	'new'
/fāḍī/	[fāji]	empty'
/tuḥuttī/	[tuḥuçī]	'(you) put [fem.]'

12. Women in the upper classes use weak palatalization (frication); while women in the lower classes use strong palatalization (affrication).

sociolinguistic setting of at least some Arabic-speaking speech communities is such that women launch innovative linguistic forms and show stronger preferences for the urban, non-classical forms, while men use the resources of the classical language more often--a practice that can but need not be always interpreted as constitutive of conservative ideologies.

Beyond Conservation and Innovation: Social Meaning and Other Caveats

The straight jacket of values confined to conservation and innovation of linguistic forms imposed by sociolinguistic theory (and followed in research on Arabic) limits the very questions that it sets out to answer. For another way of asking why languages change, is to ask why some forms come to be used by an increasing wider circle of speakers and replace other forms, while some die out or remain alive only within certain formulaic expressions. Without understanding the problem of transition (Weinreich, Labov, and Herzog 1966), why a form is adopted by *different* groups of speakers, we cannot understand why languages change. And the problem of transition is directly related to the social meanings of linguistic forms as they come into being, evolve, transform, and become objects of negotiation (Haeri 1991, 1995). Moreover, the macro-sociological categories of class, gender, ethnicity and the like are indeed important in providing a broad perspective on sociolinguistic settings. But in searching for explanations of gender differences in Arabic (and in general), they are insufficient. Equally importantly, the approach encourages use of global categories such as "women" and "men", and hence also global explanations. There is a need for historical contextualization; and explorations of the role of ideology within the framework of detailed ethnographies of language use.

The gender patterns presented above may be better understood through a brief discussion of the views of some of the women and men that I interviewed during my fieldwork in Cairo. Men from a variety of educational and class backgrounds saw the role of Classical Arabic as culturally and politically highly significant. Though some invoked Islam most emphasized its crucial role in resisting Western cultural and political imperialism and in providing cohesion for a unified "Arab" identity. For many women, it seemed the issues are far more complex and ambiguous since Classical Arabic often represents (and has

historically represented) an ideology that is against their full participation in social, cultural, and political life--one that undermines their position, while seeming to strengthen the place of men. As such, Classical Arabic is rarely as unproblematic and transparent an anti Western "weapon" for women as it is for men. And while women may not deny that it has helped forge an "Arab" identity and has served nationalist aims, that identity has hardly been constructed by challenging the patrriarchal structure, and the male-dominated values that women have been struggling against.[13]

Outside of the purely political, we should mention that unlike men, women are not allowed to pray outloud--where the phonetic intricacies of the prayers in Classical Arabic would have to be followed more strictly; they cannot become reciters of the daily *azān*; and are rarely, if ever, considered capable of achieving the aesthetic ideals of Quranic recitations for public audiences.

Still following our critique of the treatment of social meaning, and the need for historical contextualization, a word about the ambiguous nature of the power implied by the use of Classical Arabic should be mentioned here. Most people concur that Classical Arabic is "beautiful," "powerful," and "rich" in linguistic resources. However, on the one hand, contrary to the general claim in the literature that Classical Arabic is used by the "elite," if we include the upper classes within the elite, the assertion is ahistorical and false. In Egypt, as in many other countries in the Middle East, the gradual incorporation of its economy within the world capitalist market has resulted in the establishment of a private educational system through the services of mostly Catholic missionary schools where the majority of the upper classes receive their education. Such private language schools (*madāris il-lugha*) use languages such as English, and French as their main media; and teach Classical Arabic only as a subject a few hours a week. Thus an important and powerful section of the "elite" who grow up bi- or multilingual in foreign languages are largely ignorant of the official language of their country. On the other hand, those who are associated

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13. Most women writers, including feminist ones like Nawaal El-Saadawi write and publish in Classical Arabic. Not to do so would further gurantee their marginality. In a brief interview with El-Saadawi in 1988, I asked her why she chose to write in the classical language. Defensively, she responded that she writes in a "simple" style and hence does not think that the language she uses is "really classical."

with deep knowledge of the classical language, mainly the sheikhs of Al-Azhar, are not popularly viewed as cultural vanguards (Haeri 1995). In fact, since Classical Arabic has not been used as a medium of communication for everyday life, its use in those contexts is treacherous and can bring ridicule rather than authority to the speaker.

Finally, language use has multiple dimensions, one of which is the dimension of phonological forms. Although a "choice of sounds" is one of the most basic and immediate aspects of language use, and although with regard to Classical Arabic "correct" and "good" pronunciation is of utmost importance, research on other aspects of use is needed before a fuller understanding of gender differences in Arabic can be reached. These and other caveats further confirm that much work remains to be done in delineating what Classical and non-classical Arabic have come to symbolize, represent, and signify for different groups of women and men.

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'Backlash' in Language and Gender Research: Lakoff (1975) and Tannen (1990)

1.0 Introduction: The Difference and Dominance Models

The 'difference' and 'dominance' models are two important approaches to research in language and gender which have emerged since the 1970s. In its strong form, the difference model espouses the view that linguistic differences between genders are based not on power, but rather on different 'cultural' styles. The dominance model, on the other hand, attributes differences between linguistic styles and patterns to differences in power. Research since the 1970s has shown that neither the difference nor the dominance model is entirely adequate in explaining language use by men and women; rather, it has been convincingly argued that an 'integrated' approach, incorporating both dominance and difference, brings us closer to an accurate account of gender differences in language use.[1]

Robin Lakoff's (1975) book, *Language and Woman's Place*, pioneers the dominance model, and while this work has been crucial in stimulating further research in language and gender, it has also been heavily criticized for perpetuating the stereotype that women's speech strategies are 'weak,' and thus linguistically inferior to men's. Empirical research has shown, however, that Lakoff relies too heavily on dominance, without acknowledging the contribution of difference in the study of language and gender. Deborah Tannen's (1990) nationally acclaimed book *You Just Don't Understand*, still on the *New York Times* bestseller list, is written within a difference model. This book has also been embraced by the popular press, but as I show here, many of the criticisms leveled at Lakoff's book can also be directed at Tannen's. In particular, though presented within a different theoretical

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[1]The original discussions of the difference model arose out of work by Goodwin (1980), Gumperz (1982), and Maltz and Borker (1982). Foundations for the dominance model first appear in Thorne and Henley (1975) (see also Henley and Kramarae, 1991). Coates (1986), Coates and Cameron (1988), Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992), and Sheldon (1990, 1992) discuss models which integrate these two proposals.

model, Tannen's book, like Lakoff's, fails to acknowledge the necessity of integrating difference and dominance.

These two works share other weaknesses as well: both depend on anecdotal rather than empirical evidence, and discuss primarily white, middle class subjects. How other variables such as race, ethnicity and class contribute to the study of gender is consequently largely ignored. These books therefore undermine much important empirical research in linguistics, though both are by professional linguists who claim to support the importance of a theoretical approach to the study of language and gender. In different ways, however, both reinforce certain myths about women's linguistic strategies, and essentially defend a male conversational model as more highly valued than a female one.

A further comparison I suggest can be made between Lakoff's and Tannen's work is that both represent, in Faludi's (1992) terms, a kind of 'backlash' to language and gender research. For example, as pointed out by Coates (1986), Lakoff's book originally met with wide acceptance, although it in fact supported many of the highly criticized claims made by Jespersen in his 1922 work, *Language, its Nature, Development and Origin*. Lakoff's work thus turns out upon closer scrutiny to support rather than explode gender stereotypes. Similarly, Tannen's (1990) book falls prey to many of the criticisms levelled at Lakoff's, but as Freed (1992) points out, Tannen's book is in spite of its weaknesses embraced by the American public and the popular press. Why are these two books so immensely popular, when they are based largely on unsupported generalizations? Following Freed (1992), I suggest here that readers are inclined to embrace comfortable stereotypes presented as fact. We thus see a dangerous, repeated trend in language and gender research, one in which non-scientific generalization is presented to the public as reality, and is adopted by those eager to rationalize behavior which perpetuates the status quo of women as subordinate to men.

1.1 Lakoff (1975): Dominance without Difference

Lakoff (1975) isolates what she refers to as characteristics of 'Women's Language' (WL), language used by and about women which she claims keeps women in a socially subservient position. She proposes that women use certain unassertive conversational features which brand them

as 'weak' and socially subordinate to men. Men's language, on the other hand, though it is never clearly defined as anything other than what Lakoff assumes women do not typically do, presumably consists of 'strong' conversational features commensurate with higher social status. Male conversational features are therefore taken as the 'norm,' or in Lakoff's androcentric terms, as 'neutral,' in contrast to the characteristics of WL briefly enumerated below.

1. Specialized vocabulary: Women tend to use color terms such as *'magenta' and 'mauve.' Such terms are rarely if ever used by men, and* are associated with trivial topics, defined as those men have no interest in.

2. Superpolite forms: Women are less apt to swear than men, and women use more euphemisms. This follows from women's role as more polite in social interactions.

3. Empty adjectives: Women, not men, are more likely to use words such as 'divine,' 'charming,' and 'cute.'

4. Tag questions: Women use more tag questions in declarative contexts. *For example, a woman is more likely to say John is here,* isn't he? Lakoff ascribes this to women's unwillingness to make assertions, due to lack of confidence.

5. Hedges: Lakoff claims 'women's speech seems in general to contain more instances of 'well,' 'y'know,' 'kinda,' ...words that convey the sense that the speaker is uncertain about what he (or she) is saying, or cannot vouch for the accuracy of the statement' (1975: 53).[2]

6. Hypercorrect grammar: Women are not supposed to 'talk rough,' and thus tend to adhere more strictly to standard English.

7. *Jokes: Women don't tell jokes, nor do they 'get' them.* The conclusion here is that women have no sense of humor, and are too unassertive to hold the floor.

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[2]Lakoff states: 'Anyone may do this if he lacks self-confidence, as everyone does in some situations; but my impression is that women do it more, precisely because they are socialized to believe that asserting themselves strongly isn't nice or ladylike, or even feminine' (1975: 54).

8. Italics: Women are more likely than men to linguistically 'underline' their statements using *so* and *very* as in 'He is *so* cute!' Lakoff states that 'Women use more italics... (to give) directions telling you how to react, since my saying something by itself is not likely to convince you' (1975: 56). [3]

When we consider Lakoff's set of characteristics of WL, we see many familiar stereotypes, and are perhaps therefore at first glance inclined to agree that WL in fact exists, and that women do, as Lakoff claims, have a 'weaker' conversational style than men. As Coates points out, Lakoff's book was in fact widely acclaimed as marking the beginning of 20th century interest in language and gender research (1986: 18). Coates also observes, however, in a comprehensive overview of the linguistic literature on language and gender during the 70s and early 80s, that research shows that there are several reasons to be sceptical of Lakoff's conclusions, and that her work contributes more to anecdotal, folklinguistic lore about gender differences in language rather than to empirically supported research. Lakoff's characteristics of WL therefore tend to only perpetuate rather than subvert stereotypes about women's speech. [4]

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[3]Lakoff also claims that beginning students in English composition tend to use italics far more than do established and confident writers of prose, precisely because the former are afraid, even as they write, that they are not being listened to (1975:56). Though no actual research is cited here, if this is in fact the case, one wonders why Lakoff continues to attribute use of italics to women, and not to those in a socially powerless situation.

[4]Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992:470) point out that making statistical generalizations about what is 'male' style and what is 'female' style runs the risk of labelling those who do not fit into such a model as 'deviants' from the 'norm.' Such an approach presents a dichotomous view of gender, and leads us away from investigating the differences within these two, often arbitrarily devised categories.

Another problem with Lakoff's analysis in Eckert and McConnell Ginet's (1992: 471) view is her use of 'faceless abstractions' such as 'society' as that which perceives women's language as 'deficient.' They suggest that by failing to recognize the role individuals play in evaluating gender differences, Lakoff misses the generalization that the view of women's language may differ depending on the individuals that make up a community.

A range of studies have shown that not only do many of the characteristics of WL discussed above lack empirical support, but that those which can be supported can also be analyzed not as markers of weakness or unassertiveness, but rather as cooperative and facilitative, and therefore in some cases powerful, conversational strategies. It is possible to conclude from this work that women's and men's speech strategies cannot be analyzed strictly in androcentric terms of dominance, where men's language is viewed as 'strong' and women's as 'weak.' Rather, analyses of speech strategies which take into account same versus mixed sex groups, ethnicity and class, all show that gender cannot be profitably studied without considering a variety of other non-linguistic variables.

For example, Lakoff presumes that tag questions such as 'John is here, isn't he?' are markers of unassertive linguistic behavior. She states 'it is my impression, though I do not have precise statistical evidence, that this sort of tag question is much more apt to be used by women than by men' (1975:16). Her claim is therefore based on nothing other than her own observation and opinion. Several empirical studies show that Lakoff's contention that tag questions mark linguistic unassertiveness is unsupported. For example, Dubois and Crouch (1975) find in their study of responses to formal conference papers that all tag questions recorded were produced by men. Further, Holmes (1984) shows that not only do different types of tag questions exist, but that men in her study tended to use more 'modal' tags, 'speaker-oriented' tags which ask addressee for confirmation. Women, on the other hand, used more tags overall, but they also used more facilitative tags, tags which express solidarity with the addressee. From these studies we can conclude that it is in fact unclear whether women use more tags than men, and furthermore, that it may be the case that men use the majority of tags expressing a degree of uncertainty. Cameron, McAlinden and O'Leary (in Coates and Cameron, 1988) argue further that tag question use correlates with conversational role rather than with gender. Some types of tags are used more by powerful than powerless speakers in a conversation, failing to support not only Lakoff's claim that tag question use correlates with conversational unassertiveness or weakness, but also her contention that use of tags is 'gendered.' (See also Fishman, 1980, who argues that questions are often stronger than statements, as they elicit responses. This evidence also fails to support Lakoff's claim that tag questions mark a 'weak' conversational strategy.)

Other studies provide interesting evidence that linguistic characteristics which Lakoff attributes to women do not necessarily correlate with gender, but rather with social status. In their study of the language of courtroom witnesses, O'Barr and Atkins (1980) argue that characteristics of WL correlate with lower social status and lack of courtroom experience rather than with gender. Similarly, Brown's (1980) study of politeness suggests that speakers' use of hedges and impersonal constructions such as passives correlates with the speaker's (inferior) social position rather than with gender.

Lakoff also fails to consider the linguistic strategies of women talking to women, and how these strategies differ from those used in mixed sex groups. In Jones' (1980) study of conversational strategies among women, she finds that 'gossip' serves an important social function, and is characterized by certain conversational strategies which therefore should not be analyzed as marking 'weak' or unassertive linguistic behavior under a strong form of the dominance model. She suggests that women talking to women tend to acknowledge and build on each other's utterances, pursuing a conversational strategy of solidarity rather than power. Though Jones' study is criticized for drawing on anecdotal rather than empirical evidence, it nevertheless offers an alternative means of interpreting what Lakoff labels as 'weak' conversational features in terms of 'difference' rather than 'dominance.' (See Coates' critique of Jones' work in Coates and Cameron, 1988. See also Kalcik, 1975, Harding, 1975, and Aries, 1976 for studies of women talking to women.)

Though Lakoff's dominance approach is too strong, Coates and Cameron (1988) elucidate the necessity of incorporating the study of the role of dominance, citing research which clearly shows the importance of power in explaining conversational strategies. Woods' study in their volume shows that gender differences cannot be explained entirely without reference to power. Woods' analysis of linguistic strategies in the workplace demonstrates that males tend to hold the floor in that context regardless of status, which suggests that power is crucially at work in explaining linguistic gender differences. (A similar conclusion is found by West's 1984 study which shows that female rather than male doctors more consistently interrupted by male patients.) Swann's article in Coates and Cameron (1988) shows further that dominance is not categorical, but rather context specific. She maintains that in classroom studies, boys are linguistically dominant, but that their dominant role is facilitated by both the teacher and female students. As

there are talkative girls and quiet boys in both the groups studied, it is not possible to categorically claim that girls are (inherently) less talkative; rather this claim is true only within a particular context in *which a particular group (namely, the boys) manipulates* the linguistic strategies made available to it.

We have seen above that Lakoff's assumptions about WL can be criticized for (i) being based on anecdotal rather than empirical evidence, and (ii) failing to address differences between same versus mixed sex *interactions, and (iii) being framed within* too strong a version of the dominance model, without attention to 'difference.' A fourth weakness in Lakoff's work is that it ignores how race, ethnicity and class often *cross-cut gender*, as *her account* is based only on personal assumptions about the world of white, middle class men and women. She states: '...(my) introspective methods may produce dubious results. But first it *should be noted that any procedure is* at some point introspective...one necessarily selects a subgroup of the population to work with:is the educated, white, middle-class group that the writer of the book *identitifies with less* worthy of study than any other' (1975: 5)? Though any group is certainly 'worthy of study,' Lakoff presents her work to the public as a set of sweeping generalizations about what 'men and women,' in general, do, and fails to recognize how other sociolinguistic variables can influence her conclusions.

For example, Goodwin (1980), in her study of the use of directives in the street play of black children in Philadelphia, finds that girls in same sex groups used cooperative rather than competitive linguistic strategies which reflect the non-hierarchical formulation of the all-girl group. Girls are not, however, incapable of using more competitive strategies in mixed sex groups. This suggests not only that linguistic strategies which may correlate with gender are not necessarily signs of weakness, but also that strategies may reflect the social organization of a particular group, and thus may vary depending on the gender and race of the group. Goodwin clearly shows that what works in an all female group does not necessarily extend to mixed sex interactions, making generalizations about 'what girls do' inadequate. Wodak (1981) discusses the discourse strategies of working class speakers in group therapy, and observes that social class influences how speakers present their problems. Also, men are found to be overall less personal than women in such discussions. This study again underscores how a non-linguistic variable, in this case social class, is integral in the study of language

and gender (a conclusion also supported by O'Barr and Atkin's work mentioned above).

In conclusion, while *Language and Woman's Place* must certainly be commended as a groundbreaking work which triggered interest in research in language and gender, this work must also be criticized for perpetuating the strong form of a dominance model which preserves the androcentric view of male as norm, and female as not only 'other,' but 'weak' (a 'deficit' model). The studies cited above show that while it can indeed be argued that men and women use language differently, many of Lakoff's claims are undermined by empirical study, and that her work therefore supports rather than subverts many of the stereotypes which contribute to the view that women's conversational strategies are 'weak' and 'unassertive.'

1.2 Tannen (1990): Difference without Dominance

From studying Lakoff's work and the reactions to it, we see the importance of integrating difference and dominance, and also how difficult it is to determine what constitutes 'female' and 'male' conversational strategies. As both Coates and Cameron (1988) and Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992) suggest, only further work on conversational strategies including women in a wide range of social contexts which address not only gender but also ethnicity, class, age, occupation, etc. will shift the focus from white, middle class women and bring us closer to a real model of linguistic gender differences. It is therefore both remarkable and dismaying that one of the most popular recent books on language and gender is Deborah Tannen's (1990) *You Just Don't Understand*. As Coates and Cameron observe, 'in order to move beyond the first phase of language and gender research represented by pioneers like Robin Lakoff, we must develop a more sophisticated view of the complexity of both linguistic and social behavior' (1988: 92). No such move forward is made in Tannen's immensely popular book; in fact, this study falls prey to many of the criticisms levelled at Lakoff (1975).

In what follows I outline Tannen's approach and the arguments against it, in particular criticisms raised by Alice Freed in her (1992) article 'We understand perfectly: a critique of Tannen's view.' Freed's arguments are

similar to those I discovered independently in a course I taught on language and gender in which students investigated Tannen's claims.

Tannen's (1990) central thesis is that miscommunication between men and women can be attributed to the division of these two genders into different social 'subcultures.' Conversational asymmetries which arise are thus a result simply of failing to understand one another's strategies. In Tannen's view, men's conversational strategy concerns the search for status, while women's revolves around the search for connection. Crucially, in her view miscommunication is not a result of asymmetries in power. Rather, Tannen states that her readers are 'relieved to learn that what has caused them trouble is a common condition, and there is nothing terribly wrong with them, their partners, or their relationships. Their partners' way of talking, which they had ascribed to personal failings, could be reframed as reflecting a different system' (1990: 14).

Tannen does not directly address the integration of models of dominance and difference though she observes that '...differences can be used to justify unequal treatment and opportunity. Much as I understand and am in sympathy with those who wish there were no differences between men and women-only reparable social injustice-my research, others' research, and my own and others' experience tell me it simply isn't so. There are gender differences in ways of speaking, and we need to identify and understand them' (1990: 17). While the idea that there exist gender differences in language is, as we have seen, for many undisputed, Tannen's claim suggests that power plays little if any role in explaining these differences. She goes on to say that 'male dominance is not the whole story. It is not sufficient to account for everthing that happens to women and men in conversations-especially conversations in which both are genuinely trying to relate to each other with attention and respect. *The effect of dominance is not always the result of an intention to dominate. That is the news that this book brings*' (1990: 18) (emphasis mine). In other words, though Tannen acknowledges that both difference and dominance exist, she fails to also point out that research suggests that an integrated approach to gender roles in conversation has proven more adequate than adopting a strong version of either difference or dominance. Moreover, by claiming that behavior that causes one group to dominate another is not always intentional, dominance is explained away as part of a 'cultural style' rather than as an exertion of power.

As Freed (1992) points out, this focus on 'difference' can in fact mask real power inequities, and that 'Tannen is an apologist for men. She repeatedly excuses the insensitivities of the men in her examples and justifies their outright rudeness as just being part of their need for independence...Tannen emphasizes the importance of women's adjusting to men's need for status and independence over men's need to understand women's desire for connection' (1990: 23).[5] In short, in Tannen's quest to analyze conversational asymmetries simply as cultural differences rather than in terms of negotiation for power, Freed argues that Tannen excuses oppressive linguistic behavior. Therefore, though in Tannen's book women's style is not characterized as inherently 'weak' as in Lakoff's work, women are nevertheless left disempowered if they adopt Tannen's view, as it oftentimes requires accepting male linguistic domination.

Nevertheless, as Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992) point out, Tannen's study differs from Lakoff's in trying to account for men's behavior as well as women's and by attempting not to treat male style as 'norm.' Tannen's study also differs from Lakoff's in that Tannen is far more conscientious in citing others' research. Nevertheless, as Freed observes, inconsistencies often arise in Tannen's conclusions and those of the works she cites. For example, Tannen cites Goodwin's (1980) study on black children in Philadelphia discussed briefly above, Tannen focusses exclusively on the differences in the ways girls and boys build their social groups. Goodwin, on the other hand, also stresses the importance of the similarities between the boys and the girls,

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[5]Freed supports this point with the following example from Tannen's book. Josh invites an old friend to spend a weekend with him and his wife, Linda. The visit is to begin immediately upon Linda's return from a week's business trip but Josh doesn't first discuss the invitation with her. Linda is upset, but Tannen suggests her hurt feelings would disappear if she understood that for Josh, 'checking with his wife means seeking permission, which implies that he is not independent, not free to act on his own. He feels controlled by her desire for consultation' (Tannen, 1990: 26). Freed points out 'this sense of entitlement to act entirely on one's own and to make unilateral decisisons is part of the social empowerment that men enjoy. It has precious little to do with communicative style or language' (1992: 3).

suggesting that the 'two cultures' model alone does not adquately characterize the behavior under study. [6]

Freed also points out that though ethnicity and class are referred to in Tannen's book, there is no attempt to integrate the role these and other cultural factors may play in analyzing gender differences in conversation, despite the wealth of research available in this area. This is surprising, as Tannen herself has contributed to the literature on the importance of considering ethnicity in conversational interactions. (See Tannen, 1981, 1982 for example, and also Schiffrin, 1984 and McGoldrick, 1982, and McGoldrick and Preto, 1984.)[7] For example, in Tannen's discussion of interruption in Chapter Seven, she discusses the importance of understanding cultural differences in conversation, and how a lack of such understanding has led to stigmatizing discourse patterns of African Americans, Greek Americans and American Jews (1990: 205-210). She also points out how women who use 'high-involvement' styles in which interruption is sanctioned are often criticized by more 'mainstream' speakers, citing as an example Geraldine Ferraro, a New Yorker, criticized by Barbara Bush, a woman from a more 'mainstream' background. Tannen uses these examples, however, only to illustrate the importance of analyzing speech styles by men and women in terms of 'difference' rather than 'dominance,' and to support her claim that gender differences in language can be analyzed as different 'cultural' styles. She fails to address the obvious issue of how race and ethnicity might influence the analysis of gender differences themselves, and continues to base her analysis of what 'men' and 'women' do on anecdotal evidence involving white, middle class Americans.

Therefore, one of most glaring problems with Tannen s book, also a central weakness of Lakoff's, is her reliance on anecdotal, rather than empirical evidence. Her putative theoretical framework, based on asymmetries, framing and miscommunication, and punctuated by references to theoretical work in sociolinguistics, is built primarily on

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[6]In other work, (also cited by Tannen), Goodwin states 'though there are some differences in the ways in which girls and boys organize their arguing..., the features they use in common are far more pervasive. Were one to focus just on points where girls and boys differ, the activity itself would be obscured' (1987:205). See also Goodwin (1990).

[7]For example, Tannen's (1982) study of interactions between ethnicity and tendencies for directness raises doubts about drawing simple parallels between gender and indirection.

anecdotal conversational vignettes between heterosexual white, middle class couples. As Freed observes, this is problematic as Tannen makes sweeping generalizations based on this anecedotal evidence, and presents these generalizations as fact. In another example, Tannen follows Maltz and Borker (1982) in, in Freed's words, 'positing that women and men in general use questions differently, both in quantity, women asking more questions than men, and in kinds of things that quesitons are thought to accomplish for the speaker' (1992: p. 5). Though Tannen cites Fishman's (1978, 1980) studies in support of this claim, Freed points out that Fishman's work is itself based on limited data from cross-sex communication, and thus does not constitute a basis for generalization. (See Freed and Greenwood, 1992 who found little difference in either the number or type of questions used by women and men.)

In another example which shows the danger not only of relying on anecdotal evidence, but also of Tannen's basic conclusion that miscommunication can be eradicated through understanding different styles, interactions between an imaginary couple Harold and Sybil are presented to illustrate Tannen's otherwise unsubstantiated claim that men have difficulty asking directions, while women don't (pp. 61-63). She suggests that this difference comes from the male resistence to negotiate status; the person with the information is higher on the hierarchy than the person asking for the information. Women, on the other hand, are not threatened by this, as they do not view asking directions in terms of negotiating status. Whether this is in fact a valid generalization or not is not empirically supported in the discussion; rather, this generalization is presented as fact.

Furthermore, Tannen's proposed resolution of the possible conflicts which can arise from miscommunication between men and women over asking directions supports the role of the woman as subordinate to the dominant man. In putatitve support of the idea that miscommunication is alleviated if both parties 'understand' the other's conversational style, Tannen discusses how her view apparently helped clarify for a man an interaction he had had with his wife. The two had attempted to drive to a destination with which she was familiar, but he was not. Rather than trying to find the way, he resisted this impulse, and asked his wife directions. She told him the way, adding 'But I don't know. That's how I would go, but there might be a better way' (1990:64). Here, both partners may be attempting to 'understand' the other's linguistic style. Nevertheless, as Tannen herself states, '[the woman's] comment was a

move to redress the imbalance of power created by her knowing something he didn't know. She was also saving face in advance, in case he decided not to take her advice. Furthermore, she was reframing her directions as "just a suggestion" rather than as "giving instructions"' (1990: 64). While the man in this anecdote must resist the temptation to dominate, and ask his wife directions, she nevertheless preserves his status, accomodating him by framing herself as subordinate. Though both parties have perhaps achieved an 'understanding,' this understanding leaves the woman disempowered, and in so doing preserves, rather than subverts, her position as subordinate.

Following Henley and Kramarae (1991), Freed asks, why would male linguistic dominance be maintained if communcation from women were as highly valued as communication from men? That is, if Tannen is right, and there is no power attached to male style, why has male style remained as valued, 'mainstream,' and 'strong?' Henley and Kramarae suggest that 'the construction of miscommunication between the sexes emerges as a powerful tool, maybe even a necessity, to maintain the structure of male supremacy' (1991:30). Similarly, Eckert and McConnel-Ginet (1992) maintain that real and believed differences between men and women 'serve as interactional resources in the reproduction of gender arrangements, of oppression and of more positive liaisons.' (1992: 7).

Another question asked by these authors is, is it in fact the case that men lack knowledge of the differences between their way of talking and women's? As Freed states, the language of courtship can be taken as evidence that men seem to know very well how to engage in what Tannen views as female 'rapport-talk' when it suits their needs. This is not surprising, assuming that men desire intimacy and connection just as women do, and that men learn that this end can be accomplished better with non-dominant behavior. Men thus 'understand' in certain ways what Tannen views as 'women's communicative style,' undermining her claim that men and women can be divided into cultural subgroups, where consistent miscommunication arises as a result of a lack of familiarity with one another's styles.[8] Consider also women in

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[8]As Freed notes, 'sweet talk' by men is not necessarily non-dominance. 'Male expressiveness is a good way of coming on.. in a society as thoroughly sexist as ours, men may use expressiveness to continue to control a situation and to maintain their position of dominance' (Sattel,

politics, for example Hillary Clinton, or women in academia, who seem perfectly adept at publically using 'male' style. As Freed states, 'If the same set of conversational devices is available to all of us, female and male alike, and if we all make use of these forms and styles at varying times for divergent social purposes, then obviously, we understand perfectly.' (See also Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992:478) for discussion of how men and women use each other's linguistic strategies in different situations.)

Some of the points made above are underscored by my students' reactions to Tannen's book in a class I taught on language and gender in 1992. For their class projects I asked students to choose one of Tannen's generalizations and to determine whether it could be supported in 'real life' or not. They expected to find that Tannen's generalizations were true, as they immediately identified with many of her claims, and many had similar anecdotes of their own that they related to the class. They found, however, that first, as often as Tannen's generalizations held, there was also a huge amount of variation, suggesting that what the students had taken to be fact was in reality much more complicated and unclear. Their inquiries and the results of their interviews and questionnaires suggested that linguistic strategy depends not exclusively on gender, but on the interaction of many factors including education, age, occupation, social status and interpersonal relationships. A second conclusion they came to was that it is extremely difficult to construct empirical 'tests' to determine the validity of Tannen's claims. They found, in short, that although many of Tannen's claims seemed familiar, a much deeper and more empirically grounded investigation is required to separate myth and stereotype from fact. My students' investigations reflected the weakness of anecdotal study, and the difficulties in researching what it is that women and men really say and do without taking into account a wide range of other non-linguistic variables. Finally, their original assumptions that Tannen's claims about linguistic strategies of men and women were valid demonstrates shows the ease by which we adopt unsupported generalizations as facts.

1983: 123). See also Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992) for discussion of men's interpretation of a woman's 'yes' as 'no.'

1.3 Conclusion: Backlash in Language and Gender Research

As pointed out above, many of the same criticisms can be levelled at both *Language and Woman's Place* and *You Just Don't Understand*, even though these works are separated by fifteen years of research on language and gender. This suggests a rather alarming trend. Though research has taken scholars in this area to new levels of understanding about language and gender, the public, which has embraced both of these works, remains largely uneducated. Further, critical study of language and gender is undermined when scholars in the field promote to the public a view that is theoretically unsound. Lakoff's book originally met with wide public acclaim, even though it perpetuated many claims made by Jespersen (1922), which were decried as sexist. Lakoff's discussion of WL differed from his, however, in framing the discussion in terms of illustrating how women are subordinated in society, in her terms, by using 'weak' conversational strategies. Nevertheless, WL was initially accepted even though it was based on familiar stereotypes rather than empirical research. Similarly, at first glance Tannen's book gives readers hope that they can, through better 'understanding' of different gender styles, eradicate some of the inequities in communication between genders they themselves experience. Freed observes, 'its title has been accepted as a metaphor for what ails American female-male relations-- a simple misunderstanding.' The book, however, supports the status quo, by supporting 'understanding,' rather than 'change.' Any male reader can find himself in this book, and can also find vindication for his behavior. While female linguistic style is also recognized and 'validated' to a certain degree, what remains is a model in which men continue to linguistically dominate women, and in which male style is thus seen as more highly valued. In the words of Senta Troemel-Ploetz, also cited by Freed, 'that such a reactionary book should appeal to so many readers informs us, disconcerting as it may be, that what is non-threatening to the status quo sells better than critical analysis' (1990:490). Both Lakoff's and Tannen's books therefore seem to be part of what in Susan Faludi's (1991) terms is a 'backlash' to the women's movement, works which appear to support and empower women, but in reality perpetuate the status quo.

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