Language and Gender
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Assignments

Assignment 1 **(due October 16th)**
Choose one of the following questions:

1. Evaluate the principle of language reform (e.g. avoiding 'sexist' uses of language). How politically effective do you think it is?
2. The concept of 'women's language' is an empowering one. Do you agree?
3. How well does a 'performative' account of gender deal with issues of power?
4. "Being a man is an entitlement not to *masculine* attributes but to *non-gendered* subjectivity", (Coward and Black 1981). Discuss this statement in relation to both language use and language representation.
5. Evaluate the range of existing theories of the relationship between language and gender (deficit, dominance, difference, performative/poststructuralist). Which presents the most compelling account in your opinion and why?

Assignment 2 **(due December 4th)**

Choose from one of three themes. You are free to develop alternative ideas as long as you discuss them first with me. You will be required to construct your own research question with reference to the series of questions set out below the three themes:

(1) Record and transcribe a short sample of spoken data (e.g. an interview from the television, a conversation between friends in a pub; a conversation from a play or soap opera - here you must acknowledge the fictionality of the genre) or two short samples of data for contrastive purposes in which gender appears to be a salient feature. The sample(s) should be no more than five minutes in total.

(2) Choose a short extract of written text by a man or woman (or a fictional narrative written from a 'male' or 'female' perspective e.g. Doyle's *The Woman who Walked into Doors*; Hornby's *High Fidelity*) or two shorter extracts by both; this may be literary or non-literary. (e.g. travel writing; personal letters; e-mail, autobiographical narratives). Again it would be most fruitful to choose texts in which gender plays a self-conscious role (e.g. 'lad lit'/'chick lit').

(3) Select one or more media or literary text(s) in which gender is a salient factor. Using the theory and the linguistic frameworks so far covered concerning gender, discuss and analyse your chosen text(s). The following topics are offered as a possible focus, but you are free to develop your own ideas:

Advertising in men's and women's lifestyle magazines; positioning and responsibility in news reporting of crime; representations of gender in written media interviews with celebrities; constructions of motherhood and fatherhood in

parentcraft magazines; representations of gender in children's literature; agency and subjectivity in romantic literature; constructions of masculinity in "war" literature.

For all types of text you are asked to carry out a close and systematic analysis of how gender identity is being constructed, represented, enacted and/or negotiated through discourse. You might like to think about the following questions: What kinds of gendered 'scripts' or existing discourses do speakers/writers draw upon? What kinds of 'membership categories' are set up in the text? (e.g. wife/mother/lover/single 30-something). How do speakers/writer 'naturalise' and reify gender difference and relations in their texts? Or how do they challenge them? Is there any evidence of the kinds of gendered 'styles' suggested by e.g. Coates? Does your data support existing research on language and gender (e.g. males dominate mixed interaction)? In the written examples, do you find any support for Woolf's theories of differences between male and female writing? What kind of regular constructions of masculinity and femininity do we find in texts and what language strategies are employed to represent them?

This analysis will employ skills of conversation analysis or text analysis acquired in the previous weeks.

The **presentation** should last approximately twenty to twenty-five minutes. Remember that you are being assessed, so try to use interesting and audience-friendly methods of presentation, such as overheads and handouts.