

## Language Use

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- Language use
  - this is another aspect of language, apart from how it works as a system
  - rather than looking at words, grammar, and cognition, one can also look at
    - speech **performance**: the *way* language is used in specific cases, in specific contexts
      - Linguistic performance style:
        - Word choices, slang, metaphors, foreign terms
        - Cadence/rhythm, pitch, volume, accent, pronunciation... etc.
      - Social interaction aspects of linguistic performance:
        - Who talks most vs. who listens
        - Who interrupts, and whether interruptions are successful
        - Do listeners speak up (“yeah!”) or remain silent...
        - how the focus of attention is divided
          - one-to-one
          - one-to-many
          - group with people getting the floor in turn
          - group with chaotic, overlapping speaking... etc.
  - some aspects of language performance are conscious
    - you might intentionally avoid swearing or using some slang when you talk to authority figures
    - you might consciously talk differently to someone you were trying to pick up than to someone in class
  - and others are unconscious
    - many of the details of *how* you change your speech performance in those contexts may be automatic, unplanned
      - you may know that you are speaking angrily, without thinking about exactly how your pitch, pace, grammar, etc. indicate that
    - you may adjust your performance unconsciously, without thinking about it
      - your friends might notice that you speak differently to some people than to others, when you don't realize that yourself
  - example: performance (language use) may express ethnicity or other aspects of identity
    - often intentionally, often not
    - a Latino in the US may speak perfect, unaccented English at school and at work, and speak Spanish or "Spanglish" with his or her friends and family
      - the choice of ways of speaking can create and express solidarity with the group the speaker is with
    - it can also express the speaker's identity or difference from some or all of the audience
      - student who announced in class that he was a gangster from LA
      - made much of this identity
      - but was also able to write perfectly idiomatic academic papers
  - example: linguistic performance can express class or education

- often intentionally, often not
- performance can relate to, or give hints about many other aspects of identity and social interaction
  - relative authority (who has it, and who doesn't, in a given interaction)
    - who talks more, vs. who listens more
    - who makes more statements, vs. who asks more questions
    - who uses tone, grammar, word choice expressing certainty and confidence, vs. uncertainty or doubt... etc.
  - the claimed nature or source of someone's authority
    - the linguistic performance of preacher, as opposed to that of a professor, as opposed to that of a politician...
    - differences in cadence (rhythm) and pitch
    - differences in the kinds of metaphors or "code phrases" used
      - preachers might refer to "the light", "grace", biblical references, etc.
        - indicating that their authority comes from God, their insight into spirituality, etc.
      - professors will (ideally) try to use direct language to explain concepts
        - indicating that their authority comes from knowledge of facts and reasoned argument
      - politicians will refer to facts or opinions they expect the audience to understand and share about "corporations", "free trade", "taxes", "democracy", "choice"
        - indicating that their authority comes from representing the group's values
  - age
  - gender
  - sexual orientation
  - choice of social identity (cool; serious student; goth; punk; etc.)
  - and many, many other aspects of social interaction
- Example of meanings attributed to language variants, and how they are manipulated in use: BEV or "Ebonics"
  - AAVE (African American Vernacular English) = BEV (Black English Vernacular) = Ebonics
  - Review the events in Rickford reading
  - AAVE is a dialect of English with some vocabulary and grammatical differences
    - including a finer division of present tenses than Standard English (SE)
  - AAVE is just as grammatical and effective as any other language
    - NOT just a collection of slang terms
    - NOT "lazy" or "incorrect" English, because the differences are consistent, patterned, rule-based -- just different rules
  - AAVE is often used consciously to mark AA identity
  - but speakers may not learn any alternative, like SE, either
  - Many SE speakers consider AAVE lower class, uneducated, etc.
    - they respond to a meaning (in this case, a value) that their culture leads them to attribute to AAVE and its speakers

- the point in the Oakland schools was to better teach SE, the high-status dialect needed for success, by starting from AAVE and explicitly teaching students the differences
- The Oakland school board took lots of abuse over its "ebonics" proposal, and was voted out of office
  - the whole matter was dropped
- But as of 2004 (according to Joan Ryan, SF Chronicle, 16 May 2004), about 60 schools in LA were using a similar program called Academic English Mastery, starting as early as 1991
  - It "teaches black students how to translate what they call African American Language into Mainstream American English"
  - and it is apparently succeeding
- AAVE is not a special case: Code shifting and culture-shifting
  - many people are multi-lingual or multi-dialectal
    - and shift their language or dialect according to the circumstances
    - this is called **code-switching**
      - you probably speak differently to your employer than you do to your friends
      - sometimes may be intentional, sometimes may be automatic
      - observing how people code-switch can provide clues about the meanings attributed to different dialects
      - and insights into how people work those meanings for their own ends
- the "Jive Lady" scene
  - fictional, exaggerated, but clear example of code-switching
  - why is this funny?
    - it treats a devalued, low-status "slang" or dialect with the respect accorded to a high-status foreign language
      - an unexpected contradiction
      - but telling: it confirms that we value the two forms of speech differently, or it would not be funny
    - it has a white lady speaking "Jive" (not necessarily good AAVE)
      - an unexpected inversion of social status
      - note that a black person speaking SE is NOT funny, just expected
      - again, confirming an uncomfortable truth about the different values we place on the two dialects
        - we expect African Americans to learn white SE
        - but we don't expect Euroamericans to learn BEV
  - note that it shows that Jive and SE are equally effective
  - note the (fictional but believable) example of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis in action
    - the "Jive Lady" is very polite in SE
    - but she can be rude and crude in Jive
      - you would not expect her to every be rude like this in SE
    - so the language she is using affects the sorts of things she will say, her behavior, maybe her thinking
  - alternative explanation
    - she has never been properly socialized in Jive

- so she has not really learned to understand how rude the terms are, nor ever been seriously sanctioned for using them
  - like my roommate and his limited, profane Italian
- Gender differences in language use
  - Various studies of gender differences in language *use* or *performance*
  - Both of these studies are specific to our current US culture
    - they are not about gender universals
    - how might one go about studying whether or not there are gender differences that do not depend on cultural constructs, but might be based on biological differences between men and women?
- Deborah Tannen
  - "ways of talking are ritualized"
    - they seem natural because we are used to standardized ways of doing them
    - (note that this is a metaphorical, not very correct use of "ritualized")
  - men's ritualized ways of speaking
    - opposition: banter, joking, teasing, "playful put-downs"
    - avoiding the "one-down position"
    - Dilbert cartoon with Topper: demonstrating a male conversational strategy
    - asking for directions or advice is putting oneself in the "one-down position"
  - women's ritualized ways of speaking
    - maintaining appearance of equality, downplaying the authority of the speaker
  - each tends to use their own rules to interpret the other
    - "gender-centrism"?
    - leads to misunderstanding and ineffective interactions, just like ethnocentrism does
  - most workplaces were once, if they are not still, largely male
    - thus the male style tends to be the default
    - users of female style of speaking may be at a disadvantage
  - examples with male pilots not asking directions
  - examples of male vs. female medical students and residents
  - Tannen points out that her interpretation is opposite to the usual stereotypes of US gender roles
    - supposedly, men are more focused on information, and women are more sensitive to emotional responses
    - but if men are largely jockeying for "one-up position", even to refusing to ask for information, that is more emotion-driven than fact-driven
    - if women's goal of de-emphasizing inequality allows them to more easily exchange information, it seems less dominated by emotional goals
  - But using the male speaking style may, in many workplaces, lead to more personal success than efficiently exchanging information would
    - because men will misunderstand the woman's speaking style as a sign of ignorance or weakness
- Maltz and Borker
  - cross-sex miscommunication is basically cross-cultural miscommunication

- so, how can males and females in the same culture have different "cultures" of communication?
- Maltz and Borker's concepts of gender differences in communication
  - women's speaking style:
    - ask more questions
    - do more to encourage responses and ensure interaction
      - such as by giving encouraging reactions
      - or saying things that call for the listener to reply
    - more prone to use "positive minimal responses" while listening, rather than just at the end
      - "mm-hmm", nods
    - more likely to use "silent protest" when interrupted
    - more often acknowledge the other speaker by using "you" and "we"
  - men's speaking style:
    - more likely to interrupt
    - more likely to dispute the other's comments
    - more likely to ignore the other's comments
      - or to respond slowly with a "delayed minimal response" at the end of the comments
      - or to respond unenthusiastically
    - use more methods to control and change the topic
    - make more direct declarations of fact or opinion
  - in general, men's speech more emphasizes expressing power through the conversation
  - each gender uses its own speaking style to understand the other, leading to miscommunication
    - a woman uses "mm-hmm" and nods throughout someone else's speaking as a way to show that she is listening, and to encourage the speaker
      - but a man may understand this as what it would mean if a man did it: constant, explicit agreement
    - a man might use few "mm-hmms" while listening to indicate that he does not agree
      - while a woman may take this to mean that he is not even listening
- Maltz and Borker suggest that this arises because males and females learn speech styles at a time when they are living in somewhat separate subcultures
  - in largely same-sex groups of children
  - which have other, gender-specific rules of behavior that shape how they learn to speak
    - girls:
      - play in small groups
      - of uniform age
      - often must be invited to join
      - usually non-competitive
      - close friendship is important, not relative power
      - friendships tend to be exclusive
      - lack of simple hierarchy makes friendship-politics complex and subtle
      - speech serves to

- create close, equal relationships
  - criticize without damaging relationships
  - accurately interpret motives, relationships, politics, etc.
- boys:
  - play in larger groups
  - hierarchically organized
  - relative status is important
  - low-status boys not excluded, but made to feel inferior
  - all about posturing and responding
  - speech serves to
    - assert dominance
    - attract and hold an audience
    - assert oneself when someone else is speaking
- at the very end, they suggest that part of learning adult forms of interaction is learning to at least partially overcome the gender-specific speaking styles acquired in childhood