

Language and Women

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Abstract

The course of life of women and men has been continuing differently in almost all societies and all fields for ages. The different functions, positions and perspectives of women and men have developed in the societies in which life style bases on male domination, and this situation paves the way for negative results for women. Considering the fact that it is not easy to change the woman perception in the developed and developing societies, we have put some emphasis on the improvements in which men and women will be equal in the field of language at least with small changes in this study. We limited our study with German language and the way of addressing in German. In the first section of the study, we have addressed the issues of language and culture, the relationship between thinking and identity and the humiliation for women in language. After that, we try to reflect the emphasis suggestions as a table which can provide equality in the way of addressing in the second section.

Keywords: identity, language and culture

1. Introduction

The language may give information on social structures and processes, as it evolves depending on the social development. The usage of the linguistic structures forms a particular awareness-raising in the users, it reflects the apparent reality and it may also strengthen or soften enrolments and prejudices. Even an identity formation takes place over the usage of the language (Doleschal, 1998).

The aim of the current study is to make women and men – the main components of the social life-, their different roles and functions in the society, as well as their different living conditions and consequently arising problems on the linguistic level visible. In the first part of the study, it is attempted to illuminate the connections and interactions among language, culture, identity, gender, power and thinking. The interrelation between language and gender and possible causes of the linguistic behavior (e.g. why women are ignored, denied and debased) are highlighted.

In the second part, guidelines and advice for a gender-neutral language within the range of the forms of address are discussed.

First, one has to think, what the language facilitates for us, what kind of influences the words have on our relations.

Which kind of language may hurt the reputation of other people?

Whether should be there limitations on what we say regarding our thoughts and convictions?

Language is the most important communication tool among humans. With the language; thoughts, emotions and opinions are conveyed and exchanged. Nominations and designations, that are expressed with the language, are tools of organizing our messages and thus of establishing an overview. It enables us to understand others, while we produce and perceive phonetic gestures like expressions and articulations with the language and in doing so we associate the meaning with them. Hence, the language is the most important prerequisite for humans regarding their ability to exist as a member of the society, to communicate and to interact. Without a common language, a mutual communication is impossible. Communication is the most meaningful tool in the society for positioning and enforcement of the individual and social interests. Language shapes our ideas to a phonetic form and thereby it becomes an important, sometimes a useful, but sometimes also a dangerous instrument. A language exists only with its speakers and it is a reflection of their society. According to the scientific theory “linguistic determinism”, which was attributed to the language by many scientists (Brunzel, 2002), language and philosophy of life are linked and the cognition of the reality depends on the semantic structure of the language.

2. Language and Identity

As a social entity, every human possesses two kinds of identities. On the one hand there is the “individual” identity, the properties that make the individual unique and differentiate it from other individuals; on the other hand there is the “group-based identity”, which called also the “social”, “ethnic”, “collective” or “we-identity” (Fix, 2003).

According to Wilhelm Oppenrieder and Maria Thurmair, the group-based identity is:

“... The significant characteristics, that shape together a group, the behavior arising from it and the attitudes cherished in the group and that at the same time demarcate it from other groups. In turn, the identities of the groups manifest themselves in behaviors of the group members, whose individual identities are established within the framework of the group. It is expected from them that they behave loyally as members of the group and additionally they back primarily the identity-raising moves of the group.” (Oppenrieder & Thurmair, 2003).

Hence, one’s identity is shaped by different factors: One’s characteristics, behaviors, preferences, feelings and attitudes. They constitute one’s individuality and serve to distinguish the individual from others. On the other hand, one’s identity is defined at the same time by the different identities of the society, to which the individual belongs. Therefore, the personal and group-based identities belong together.

Every language has its own style to express the reality. Thus, the language directs and defines the thought. The language shapes the identity. There are concepts that obtain identity through the usage of a language. There are also general ideas like love or conscience that exist without any reference to a language. The language has a great importance for an individual:

“The need to feel oneself represented on a linguistic level, the need for an identity through language and language-identity are genuinely humane and arise in the cohabitation with others.” (Greule et al., 2003).

The native language is one’s first language and therefore, it is very important for the development of one’s personality and it is an important component of the identity. The first language conveys the *weltanschauung*, socialization and behavior patterns of the society and encodes the further life of the individual. Hearing of a language activates the ideas and prejudices about the country, where the related language is spoken:

“Value judgements of particular languages are transmitted to the users and vice versa the valuations of people and language-groups are projected to such an extent to the languages that they are eventually considered as its immanent properties” (Illius & Gugenberger, 1999).

“We owe many in our self-feeling, which we perceive as personality, just to the language. And it may arouse the feeling to something like prayer mode in humans: I hear speaking in the language around me and the power of the self flows inside me through the language! – If you have this feeling of the holiness of the invocation, of the self through the language, you can also arouse it in the children within different measures.... If a person actually arouses it, it acts as a fomentation of the will, almost to selflessness, almost to the life with the external world ” (Steiner & Steiner, 1948).

Not only being a tool of communication, the language is also a tool of the construction of the social and cultural human relations and represents the relation between the genders. Therefore, the query about the linkage of language, culture and identity is a central issue concomitantly with the social arrangement and organization.

Classifications, that we need, provide descriptions for experiencing, registering and understanding the variety and quantity with the help of impressions which we structure. Differences and the similarities of the objects become by means of these classifications. In this way, the language enables us to organize several things that we have to know and name, into meaningful categories. Sapir defines the language as a system of freely created symbols:

“Language is a method, eventually unique to humans and not originating from the instincts, for the transmission of thoughts, feelings and wills by means of a system consisting of freely created symbols” (Sapir, 1921).

The language is something wonderful, something fascinating, because it exhibits numerous variations, it is subject to the cultural evolution, it is anthropologically well-founded and thus it contributes to the identity of a group. It serves to the layout of the social relations. This property makes the language a part of the culture and users’ continuous formation of the culture. Because if a child hears a language, it learns a linguistic codex, a particular sound combination, a grammatical rule, a syntactic structure, but also the mindset, the way of thinking of the people lived in the past. Besides these, the language serves to the formation of a value system for the individual practice in the social group (religious rituals), for the use of the knowledge that has developed in this society (technology, economy etc.). The history of a language reflects the social history of the relevant people. Root words of a language show which objects were most important for the people at the time of the formation of the language. The thesaurus of a language indicates what people think, the syntax shows how they think. And the child obtains its place in the society with the help of the language it learns:

“It discloses itself to the others but at the same time, it differentiates itself and in this way it resolves the question about its identity... By the means of the language, one can act instead of only to behave, that is, it can change the reality by acting” (Illius et al., 1999; Pelz, 1996). How far the power of the language extends, shows the ability to wipe out the individuality with the language. Humans are deemed to individuals, hence they are unique in all peculiarities and characteristics. Therefore, language accomplishes consciousness. The word stands between the human consciousness and the meant object. The word takes them apart, as it enables the humans to distinguish the imagination produced by the word from the object, without the word the imagination might not emerge. But the word binds also the object and consciousness. Without the word, the imagination might not become the symbol of that what is meant:

“By means of the language, the whole reality of experience and the thought can make themselves to their own object of knowledge, they may objectify themselves and can be forwarded to others: they become transferable. The language, the self-objectifiable mind, become the body of the mind. The mind is wrapped in the word.” (Seebass, 2012).

3. Language and Culture

One may define ideas, norms, concepts and values of the members in a society to the culture. It is regarded as self-evident that one takes over the values and norms of the culture, in which one grows up. The culture defines its own value and behavior patterns and these norms are so firm anchored in one's mind that one is led by them for decisions in an unconscious and unquestioned way. For humans their own culture is the measure for valuation. The opinion that their own norms, habits and customs are the only true ones, is anchored in them. Of course, the language plays here the most important role. For Putzer, the language is an indispensable and prominent characteristic of a nation:

“All people that belong to a nation, speak the same language” (Weinrich, 1993).

On the other hand, the language is also embossed by our value ideas, cliché and prejudices.

Because the values and notions of a person are reflected in his language. A person builds his/her *weltanschauung* on the base of the cultural values which he/she encounters through his/her native language. With time, a person gains the ability to judge how far his current cultural perception conforms his behavior. Therefore, the language cannot be imagined without world-perception, identity and cultural heritage.

As the language is based on the exchange of speaker's and listener's views, it serves to the formation of the social relations. That feature makes the language a part of the culture and carriers' continuous creation of the culture. The language serves to the formation of a value system (religion) for the individual practice in a social group (ritual, traditions), it serves to the management of the social knowledge (economy, technology) (Daum & Sprache, 1998). All these are acquired in the childhood and a place in the society is achieved through the language which one learns. The person communicates himself to others, but at the same time, he demarcates himself from others and in this way he resolves the question about his identity.

4. Language and Thinking

The word stands between the consciousness of the speaker and the meant object. It takes part in the style of being of both. We mean something with every word we speak. The word separates the consciousness and the object. Without the word, the speaker cannot distinguish the generated idea from the object. With the word the idea appears in us. However, the word binds also the object with the consciousness. With the word the idea becomes a symbol of what is meant. The history of a language reflects the social development of the related society. Root words of a language show which objects were most important for the people at the time of the formation of the language. The vocabulary and the syntax of a language show, how and what people think. A society is best characterized by the language. The social content of gender is also formed by different factors:

“A masculine or feminine appearance of a body is the starting point of different labeling as boy or girl by physicians and parents – even if it does run contrary to the genetic or gonadic features (gender of the germ cells)” (Bilden, 1991).

Socialisation starts with one's birth. It is a lifelong, continuous process of contention of the person with his socio-cultural environment:

“The totality of all processes, in their course the individual becomes an active member of the society and culture. (...) Socialization is at the same time a) “socialization” of the person in terms of takeover and internalization (Verinnerlichung) of the socio-cultural values, behavioural expectations and social roles as well as b) personalization of human in terms of “individuation” of his individually determined contention with the offerings and influences of his society” (Endrueit et al., 1989).

In the first phase, the interaction with the mother constitutes the first stage for the development of the identity and for the formation of the basic personality.

In the second phase, the child has contact with the fundamental cultural elements, which are transmitted and filtrated by

the family. In this phase, the official formation starts too. "Playing, learning, working are three sequential types of activity and environmental relations, in which socialization takes place. They are following each other in the history of the person."

Bilden suggests that the gender-specific socialization develops also in this phase:

"Many girls become more socialized before their mode of socialization becomes "passive". "Self-socialization" plays mostly a greater role in boys, their mode of socialization is more "active" (Bilden, 1991). Girls are considered as weak, ductile and flexible. Independent exploration is not encouraged and they are mostly kept at home.

The third phase is the takeover of the social role which corresponds to the expectations of the society.

With every word, which we speak, we mean something. The word stands between our consciousness and the meant object. It enables us, to distinguish the idea formed by the word from the object. Without the word, the idea in us and in others will not emerge. The word binds also the consciousness and the object. That, what we think becomes through the word the symbol of the development:

"By means of the language, the whole reality of experience and the thought can make themselves to their own object of the insight, can objectify themselves and can be passed on others: they become deliverable. The language, a mind objected in itself, becomes the body of the mind. The mind is wrapped in the word" (Lawitschka, 2008).

With the language we understand everything. Every object becomes the carrier of a being and becomes mentally available.

5. Discrimination with Language

With the language one can describe, announce and threaten. Words can even put on something.

"From the gentle irony to the sarcastic mockery, from the indiscreet tactlessness up to bare insult, from condescending humiliation up to discriminating hate speech, the language can act as a force" (Anhut & Heitmeyer, 2005) .

Words appear externally, so that they fade fast, have no substance and establish nothing permanent. They are not merely symbols which try to intervene with our material world. With words, we can express our feelings in a positive or negative way. With words we cannot let one's body bleed, we cannot inflict wounds to anyone or kill anyone. However, we can hurt someone deeply with our words and put on someone with the language. Language may hurt people in different ways. Linguistic violence and discrimination are directed straight against people. People can speak out ethical or psychological force like slanders, threats or insults, disparagement, mockery, ridicule and marginalization (Menke & Honneth, 2006). All these forms of force we exert with language. According to Petra Gehring, language can function as a hitting thing. The hurting act of speaking is not a speech act anymore, it approximates to a mute act, to a beat. The language provides us an endless list of concepts, which enables us to express the violent acts in the form of speech: we criticize, judge, suspect, slander, betray, insult, talk tactlessly, threaten, curse, provoke, tease, mock... (Grundmann et al., 2008)

6. Discrimination of Woman with the Language

Today, women in Europe and in all highly-developed countries are equal to men thanks to the education opportunities and to the social competence compared to women in the under-developed countries. They obtained many political rights, the right of voting and the right of standing for election. Many women get an academic education and good positions. They took over important leading positions in the society. Hence, in these countries, women and men have the same rights and chances. However, the usage of language shows whether that is true or not in the highly-developed countries. Gender-equal language is still an important issue. We will deal here with a good example: "Forms of address in German" (Foucault et al., 1983).

If the language is an important component of the society and if just a part of the society feel discriminated by the language, here is something not right:

"The women feel discriminated if the language is displayed only in stereotypical roles and thus it disputes them interests and abilities beyond the stereotype and if it makes women submissive and ridiculous by the condescending language" (Meineke & Frank, 1992; Trömel-Plätz, 2004).

Luise F. Pusch believes that women have the feeling that their identity is not recognizable in the language:

"It is existentially important for all people, to be perceived, to be respected and confirmed in their identity by others.... But women were and are often in a schizophrenic situation so that even their identity as "a human being" was not confirmed" (Pusch, 1988).

Many Linguists, scientists and authors have dealt with the gender-specific scope of the language, as communication and a gender-equal communication is an important component of the socio-linguistic research. Shannon Weafer emphasizes

the importance of the transmission of information:

“A transmitter wants to communicate something. He encodes his issues in recognizable symbols and transmits a message to the recipients over a medium. The receiver recognizes these symbols, decodes them and process the message” (Samel, 1995).

For communication, particularly the expression of feelings, the description of facts is important. In meetings of men and women, independent from being a professional, friendly or intimate meeting, communicative problems emerge. The communication is mostly disrupted. Communication problems occur between the transmitter and the recipient:

“The dissatisfaction of women with the German language is not primarily a problem of the language systems but a problem of the language-usage” (Hufeisen, 1993). The German language has many possibilities to make women linguistically visible. Besides this, the language changes with time. Some words get older and they are used to a lesser extent or not at all. For example, the old form of address “Herr” (mister) became “Mann” (man). With the new form of address of „Männer” (men) are not anymore called, talked or written as “Herren” (mister) and become equal men. So, equality and gender-equality between women and men are expressed (Froitzheim, 1980). The forms of address “Herr” (mister) and “Frau” (mistress) are equivalent and do not convey any linguistic symmetry. The equivalent of the form of address “Frau” is the form of address “Mann”. The form of address “Herr” originates from the times of feudalism and slavery. It designates a man of high social status and noble origin that rule his underlings. In 1977, the concept “Herr” nominated the head of the family. The word “Herr” claims the reign, also the reign over women. Unlike from the designation “Herr”, the designation “Frau” is not only a form of address but it nominates also the biologic gender. Independent from the origin of the word “Frau”, “Frau” and “Herr” are not equivalent and are not considered as equivalent forms of address by many users (Aebischer, 1980).

A language with gender-awareness should let one to speak out women and men directly and personally and should make both of them equally visible.

The German Language has basically three possibilities to formulate gender-equality:

Restatements (rewordings)

Pair-forms

Gender-neutral and gender-abstract formulations

In this last section we will try to show on tables how the new formulations can be utilized (Tablo 1-6).

Table 1. Forms of Address

Old	New	Comment
Dear Sirs!	Dear Madam / Sirs	“Dear Sirs” acts impersonal and refers only to one gender.
Miss. Krause	Mrs. Krause	Until the decree of the Federal Ministry of Interior in 1972, “Mädchen” (Miss) was the official form of address for unmarried women irrespective of the age. Today it is common to speak to female persons with “Mrs.”
Mr. Wolfgang Schröder and Mrs.	Mr. and Mrs. Schröder; Mr. Wolfgang Schröder and Mrs. Angelika Schröder	Every person is spoken individually and separately.
Family Peter Wüst	Family Wüst; Family Beate and Peter Wüst; Mr. Peter Wüst and Mrs. Beate Wüst	Either the family name is used as a general form of address or the member of the family are spoken individually.
Mäizer, Surgeon Mrs. Graf, nurse	Mäizer, Surgeon Graf, nurse	The forms of address are used symmetrically. If a person is recognized only with the surname or is spoken with “Mrs./Mr.”, this scheme is used also with other persons.
Mrs. Blum, Süddeutsche Zeitung Raab, Berliner Morgenpost	Mrs. Blum, Süddeutsche Zeitung Mr. Raab, Berliner Morgenpost	
US-president Obama Und Mrs. Merkel	US-president Obama und Federal Chancellor Merkel; Mrs. Merkel and Mr. Obama	Neither women nor men are disrespected or sublimed. If the publicity of the person cannot be presumed, the use of the forename is recommended.
Krause and Maria Kunze	Krause and Kunze; Anina Krause and Maria Kunze	Name and Surname are used in the same proportion.
Riemann D. Jäger, Y. Uhl, G.	Riemann, Dennis Jäger, Yvonne Uhl, Günter	In scientific, literal and competent papers the forenames should be written, in order to avoid misunderstandings regarding the gender.
Dear Mrs. Doctor Peters	Dear Mrs. Dr. Peters; Dear Mrs. Doctor (Ger: Doktorin: female doctor)	Titles like “lecturer”, “doctor”, “professor” should be written in female forms. “Mrs. Doctor”, “Mrs. Professor” are also acceptable, although the way of writing “Mrs. Professor (Ger: Professorin: female professor) is recommended.
Dear Mrs. Senator Dear Mrs. Professor Schneider	Dear Senator (Ger: Senatorin: female senator) Dear Mrs. Prof. Schneider; Dear Mrs. Professor (Ger: Professorin: female professor) Schneider	
We ask Mr. David Sohl and wife to come in the room 102.	We ask Mrs. and Mr. Sohl to come in the room 102; We ask Mrs. Gloria Sohl and Mr. David Sohl to come in the room 102.	Symmetrical use of the names, if they are known, is recommended.

Table 2. Designations of the Profession and Work

Old-	New	Comment
All students	All female and male students	If both genders is meant, then they should be spoken individually. This is also called splitting, that is the separation of the persons, which are spoken to.
Every worker	Every female worker (Ger: Arbeiterin) and every male worker (Arbeiter); Every work force, all working persons, the working staff	Also the common sequence masculine – feminine can be often reversed.
A Lawyer No Lawyer (Ger: Anwalt) shall break his silence.	A female lawyer (Ger: Anwältin), a male lawyer (Anwalt) Lawyers shall not break their silence.	

Table 3. General form of address

Old	New	Comment
The Voter	The female voter (Ger: Wählerin), the male voter (Ger: Wähler)	If men and women are spoken equally, the splitting may be done in different ways.
The Resident	The female resident (Ger: Bewohnerin), the male resident (Ger: Bewohner)	
The Seller	The female seller (Ger: Käuferin), the male seller (Ger: Käufer) Female promoter (Ger: Bewerberin) and male promoter (Ger: Bewerber), please report!	
Promoter, please report!		
every worker	every working person, all workers	If a splitting is not wanted, rewordings with the neutral plural should be used.
every employer	who employs someone, the responsible person for work distribution	
every employee	all who are active in a workplace	
We have a room for non-smokers.	Smoking is prohibited. Smoking is allowed only in this room.	
Staff parking lot	Private parking, Parking area of the company XX, Parking area only for the staff of the company XX	
A patient, a police officer, a traveller	Patients, police officers, travellers	If possible, the neutral plural is used.
The young	The young (plural)	
The responsible	The responsables	
The roots of our fathers lay in ...	The roots of our ancestors lay in ...	Patriarchal expressions can be changed with neutral expressions.
Not anymore being the lord of oneself	To be confused.	

Table 4. Use of Pronouns

Old	New	Comment
Someone has taken my pen.	A person has taken my pen. He or she has taken my pen.	Usage of relative pronoun "someone"
Nobody should be discriminated because of his disability.	Nobody should be discriminated because of his or her disability. Nobody should be discriminated because of a disability.	Usage of possessive pronouns or a transcription.
There was nobody, who has not promoted.	There was nobody, who (he or she) has not promoted.	Masculine forms are replaced with neutral forms.
Smoking is prohibited, everybody who works here, knows that.	Smoking is prohibited, all who work here know that.	Usage of the plural "all".
Someone feels overstrained by the daily tasks.	Many feel overstrained by the daily tasks.	Usage of the plural "many". Herewith a confusion of genders is avoided.
Who has an idea for the birthday party, he should get in touch.	Should a person among you has an idea for the birthday party, he or she should get in touch.	

Table 5. Usage of the pronoun "one" (Ger: man)

Old	New	Comment
A well-groomed appearance is very important in the job interview. Therefore, one should get properly dressed and should pay attention to his care.	A well-groomed appearance is very important in the job interview. Therefore, female and male applicants should get properly dressed and should pay attention to his/her care.	The usage of indefinite pronouns "one" (Ger: man) is common. Avoidance of its use is not recommended but there are alternatives like: I, we, she, You (Ger: Sie).
Television makes the eyes tired. One realizes it, if one watch television for long hours.	Television makes the eyes tired. You realize it, if You watch television for long hours.	
One should use headphone during calling with a handy.	While calling with a handy, headphone should be used.	
One can prevent the burning of puddings with constant stirring.	Burning of puddings can be prevented with constant stirring. (Ger: Anbrennen des Puddings lässt sich durch ständiges Umrühren verhindern).	Rewording with "let" (Ger: lassen).
How can one as a woman combine family and career?	How can a woman combine family and career? How can woman combine family and career?	

Table 6. Speakings containing masculine designation

Old	New	Comment
Reader's opinion (Ger: Leser) Worker's daily life (Ger: Arbeiter)	Female reader's opinion (Ger: Leserin) Female worker's daily life (Ger: Arbeiterin)	If the involved person is a woman, the usage of the feminine form is recommended.
Spectator's letters (Ger: Zuschauer) Politician's round (Ger: Politiker)	Female spectator's letters (Ger: Zuschauerin) Female politician's round (Ger: Politikerin)	
Presidential election Chancellor's election Party leader election	Election of... President Chancellor Party leader	
The german sports team (Ger: die Sportsmannschaft)	The german sports team (Ger: das Team)	If the women can be included in a group, the masculine form should be avoided.
One of the team (Ger: die Mannschaft) has always the ball.	One of the team (Ger: das Team) has always the ball.	

7. Concluding Remarks

Also, in the highly-developed countries even today there are areas, where women and men are not equal. In order to materialize the equality in all areas, the usage of the language should be taken into consideration. For a gender-equal usage of the language, there is not a generally accepted formula. The introduced possibilities have advantages and disadvantages. Research on this subject shows that the majority of the women side very strongly with gender-equal language, strengthening the social position of the woman and the equalization on the linguistic level, from which not only a consciousness shift but also a tendency of a further spread of the gender-equal language can be derived.

In order to avoid an insensitive or discriminative usage of the language:

Avoidance of hurting, insulting or discriminating expressions, descriptions, concepts or paraphrases for others, which are known as swearwords.

To make women and men aware of preconceptions in the society and in the language. Linguistic preconceptions are hostile simplifications of the human doings and actions.

The language is a constitutive element both of the changes of the social relationships and of the stabilization of these relationships and it is recognized as an active tool. It has a direct influence on the social conditions, trends and power structures. But it is also vivid. Usage of the language and meanings are constantly changing. A gender-equal language respects both women and men equally and is based on two important principles: Visualization and symmetry.

But it is noteworthy to mention that it is much worse for women e.g. in the Arabic countries, although the Arabic language contains these recommended formulations.

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