GENDER DIFFERENCES IN STUDENTS' CONSTRUCTED DIALOGUES USING FILIPINO

Leonisa A. Mojica
De La Salle University, Manila

1.   INTRODUCTION

One topic that has caught the interest of both experts and non-experts in the field of sociolinguistics is that of language and gender. This is presumably due to their acceptance of the fact that both are an integral part of a human being's existence. It seems impossible to live without using a language of any form. Language does not only make communication transactions possible. It also paves the way for the acquisition of knowledge, exchange of ideas, argumentations, formulation and execution of plans, and evaluation of performances. Co-existing with language is gender, which denotatively means the sex of a person and is referred to as "behavior that was socially acquired rather than biologically innate" (Mc-Connell-Ginet,1988; Nicholson,1994, cited by Bing & Bergvall, 1996:3). Such a definition distinguishes the term from the word "sex", which Maggio (1987) refers to as the biological status of a person. Indeed it is gender that provides the avenue for the manifestation of a person's role in the society using the language of their preference. It is not surprising, therefore, that researchers continuously conduct studies on these two areas since new theories and frameworks can prove useful in resolving social and political issues that affect women's and men's attitude toward each other.

Scholars, however, are divided in their views concerning studies on gender differences. A number of them fear that this type of investigation may only heighten female-male dichotomy and the notion that women's language is weak and powerless. I believe, though, that positive results obtained through this type of research can outweigh such negative findings. Studies have made people aware that sexist language which stereotypes people according to gender is damaging, for it promotes gender ideology as noted, too, by Dionisio (1993). More of us in today's society have become aware of the usefulness of non-sexist language, which Maggio (1987:165) defines as one which treats people equally and "does not refer to a person's sex at all when it is irrelevant, or refers to men and women in symmetrical ways when their gender is relevant." Hence, such words as *chairman, foreman, businessman, mankind,* and other exclusive terms, which could be used freely before as generic terms, are considered "sexist language" (Devito, 1991:137) today.

Research findings on gender differences can help change the linguistic habits prescribed by the society which are believed to be biased and degrading, and which contribute to women's lack of power and assertiveness as pointed out by a number of investigators in the field. Such findings, too, can hopefully prevent the formulation of overgeneralized conclusions that may heighten male-female polarization.

My readings and observations on women's issues in relation to language use motivated me to focus my investigations on these aspects. I have noted that very limited literature and studies on male/female differences in the use of the Filipino language exist. I know of only two major studies conducted on this particular aspect – that of Montenegro (1981), involving a description of male and female language in the native language, and that of Mendiola (1995), on determining how females and males differ in telling narratives using Filipino. I believe that this paper, which further investigates gender differences in language use, and which focuses on the description of the language using a framework based on the most recent and tested theories in the field, can be considered a contribution in the area of Philippine sociolinguistics. This study is contributory, not only in the enrichment of literature in the area, but also in terms of consciousness-raising among Filipinos, who, as native speakers of the language, ought to familiarize themselves well with its characteristics. Lastly, noting possible female/male language functions and observing how the results of my investigation would relate to other findings with the use of a new methodology are additional features that make this study a relevant study in the field.

Among the limitations of my paper is the fact that the description of the written Filipino language used by selected Filipino female and male college students from two universities came from constructed dialogues based on contrived situations. Another is that the respondents' socioeconomic status (SES) was based on one parameter only – the annual income as declared by the students. Said SES was in terms of respondents who constructed the dialogues, not in terms of characters in contrived situations.

The study investigated three main points: 1) if there were differences in females' and males' use of written Filipino in terms of these linguistic features: codeswitching (CS), descriptive lexical items (DLI), taboo words, euphemisms, tag questions, and non-inclusive language; 2) if each of the aforementioned linguistic features was related to any one of the following variables: age, SES, materials read, TV programs watched, and language use with the family, with friends, and with persons of authority; and finally, 3) how the respondents described each other's language in relation to their perception of the writer's sex.

2. METHODOLOGY

Respondents totaling 180 freshmen and juniors – 45 females and 45 males each from the University of the Philippines, Manila, and Pamantasan ng Lunsod ng Maynila – were classified as either writer-participants or reader-participants. Please see Table 1.

Table 1
Distribution of Respondents

Writer-Participants						Reader-Participants			
School	Freshmen		Juniors		Total	School	Juniors		Total
	F	M	F	M			F	M	
PLM	15	15	15	15	60	PLM	15	15	30
UP	15	15	15	15	60	UP	15	15	30

The writer-participants were asked to construct dialogues based on given situations which were either gender-based or gender-free. Gender-based situations are those that emphasize the sexuality of each group; gender-free situations are those that present the two sexes in a neutral manner, such that none or almost no distinction can be noted between the two sexes. The situations included a variety of scenes, like friend/s to friend/s discussions of ordinary topics, those that involved superior-subordinate confrontations in the family and in a business setting, and those that seemed bold or indecent in nature, my intention of which was to possibly obtain more substantial data. The reader-participants, on the other hand, were asked to guess the gender of each writer of the ten dialogues given to them and to give reasons for their choice. The reasons expressed were taken as the respondents' descriptions of each other's language.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The ANOVA, t-test, and Two-Way Repeated Measures Design revealed that there were statistically significant differences on females' and males' use of codeswitches (CS) in terms of respondents and characters. Females assigned a lot more CS to their characters than the males did. Also, the female characters surpassed the males in their employment of both types of CS – the Intersentential and Intrasentential categories – using the four codeswitching categories formulated by Poplack and Sankoff (1988, cited by Bautista, 1997 and Mojica, 1997). A sample of their Intersentential codeswitches is: Be ready for the responsibility. *Pinasok mo yan* 'You got yourself into it . . . .' Their Intrasentential CS include the following: As far as I am concerned, *wala pa sa capacity mo ang maging isang padre de pamilya* ' . . . you don't have the capacity yet to be the head of a family . . . .' *Mahal ko siya* 'I love her' but how can I be a good father and husband?'

Like the female respondents, the males had an inclination to assign more CS to their male characters. This seems to be an indication that code-switching is becoming more pervasive these days regardless of sex, particularly among college students. Such observation has been very well noted, too, by Gonzalez (1984). Gonzalez attributes it to the fact that "the majority of Filipinos are at least bilingual" (p.124).

On the employment of descriptive lexical items (DLI), the only significant difference noted was between the respondents' assignment of the device to their respective characters, with the females surpassing the males on this aspect. Both groups showed an inclination to assign more of this lexicon to characters of their sex. The descriptive words assigned to females, like *panot* 'bald', *walang hugis* 'shapeless', *nakakanginig ng laman* 'makes me shiver', seem to be less offensive than those given to males, among which are *mukhang puwet* 'like an ass', *mukhang kabayo* 'looks like a horse', *mokong na babae* 'unrespectable woman'.

Findings imply that the female respondents perceive women to use descriptive lexical items more than men. Such perception is in consonance with other scholars' finding that women tend to use more adjectives than men. Males, on the other hand, believe that they are capable of employing this linguistic device freely, too, thus, their tendency to assign more adjectives to their male characters. Other things to note are the females' ease in using more loan adjectives than males; females' preference to use the standard form of the language in showing approval or disapproval; males' inclination to use more slang expressions than the standard forms particularly when talking about women; and the inclination of both groups to use color words on an equal frequency.

Findings also show that the females and males differed significantly in their use of taboo words in terms of characters. Both groups assigned more of this device to their male characters with the males assigning it significantly more to their male characters than the female respondents did. Both groups believe, too, that females are capable of using this device although on a minimal level. Most of the taboo terms used were those referring to women and their body parts, particularly to sexual parts. Examples are *bitch, pokpok* 'prostitute', *puta* 'prostitute', *suso* 'female breast', and other terms considered equally indecent. In general, taboo words used are negligible in number.

On the use of euphemisms, the only significant difference observed was between the respondents' assignment of this lexicon to their respective characters. Males assigned many more of this device to characters of their sex than the females did to their female characters. The students' preference to use euphemistic terms indicates their desire to avoid using this type of speech which they believe is either totally unacceptable or almost unacceptable to society. Euphemisms were used to substitute for the direct names of sexual parts, like *putulin* 'cut', *ano* 'that', *kanya* 'his', *yun* 'somebody's sexual organ', *kargada* 'man's testicles' to name a few, and to subdue the vulgarity of curse words through omission of letters or drawing of symbols. The latter is believed to have been influenced by the respondents' reading of Komiks, examples of which are: *P_ _ _ _ _ i _ _ ! Engrata* 'Ungrateful!' ; and * ? # ^ !

No significant differences were noted in the use of tag questions both in terms of respondents and characters. Both groups employed the device with ease. The male respondents used more tag questions to seek confirmation, which is contrary to other researchers' finding that females do seek confirmation more, and as a means of disciplining those in lower ranks, the latter connoting dominance. The female respondents were more inclined to employ this device to express uncertainty and to keep the conversation going. Examples of sentences with tag questions are: Alam 'nyo na, *di ba* 'You know it already, don't you?' Magsabi ka ng totoo, *ha* 'Do tell the truth, won't you?' . . . *sobra, 'no* ' . . . too much, isn't it?'

Males' and females' use of non-inclusive language differed significantly in terms of characters. Both groups of respondents assigned many more sexist expressions to their male characters than to their female characters. Most of the non-inclusive terms used were inappropriate forms of address for women like *patok ang katawan . . . tirahin natin* 'perfect body . . . let's attack her.' A few connoted dominance on the part of the males while a very minimal number of sexist terms to show irrelevant references to women like *waitress, stewardess, hostess* were employed on an equal frequency by each group.

As regards finding what variables would correlate with each other, age and sex were found not to have any significant correlation with the respondents' employment of each linguistic device. Significant correlations were noted on the respondents' language use, as well as media preferences, and their employment of certain linguistic devices.

Female language has been described as emotional, gentle, inclined to gossip, sympathetic, *maarte* 'affected', wordy, long, not straight to the point, and judgmental as contrasted with male speech which was perceived to be comical, violent, harsh, brutal, vulgar, devoid of gossip, concerned with reputation, concise, direct to the point, and not judgmental. The use of *Taglish* was ascribed to female talk. Finally, in terms of organization of ideas, no substantial description can be cited since it seemed only one or two respondents had given their comments on this aspect.

4.   CONCLUSION

Initially, two functions of language use among females and males can be noted: for solidarity and speech empowerment, both illustrated through their manner of assigning certain linguistic features to characters of their sex. Males seem to have shown their interest to belong – to establish solidarity – in group conversations. Although they attempted to demonstrate their desire to empower their speech, this inclination seems to have been overpowered by their desire to be accommodated to by their supposed interlocutors. In cases where females were given many more of the female-stereotyped lexicon such as code-switches, descriptive lexical items, and tag questions, the males tended to counteract it by assigning more of these female-stereotyped linguistic devices to their male characters.

Females seem to have worked towards speech empowerment – that is, to demonstrate that through language, they can express themselves skillfully using the linguistic devices of their choice. The female students' inclination to assign more of the female-stereotyped lexicon to their female characters than the males indicates their possession of a greater repertoire of such linguistic devices and a higher degree of confidence to take part in casual conversations using certain features they feel comfortable with. They seem to take pride in being able to use these devices with some sense of expertise, with an air of power. This is not surprising, for women have generally had the reputation of talking more than men (Mendiola, 1995) and their language has generally been described as affected and wordy. Respondents' assigning of more sentences to female characters – a total of 5494 – than to the male characters, 4447, seems to illustrate their belief that women talk more than men.

Another point that is noteworthy is the females' and males' almost total concession in assigning taboo words and non-inclusive language to male talk. They seem to see male speech in the same light – that is, in association with prohibited language. Filipino culture

undoubtedly plays a big role here. The upbringing of Filipino children includes teaching girls to be refined in their speech and manners and encouraging boys to be bolder and aggressive.

It can be said that although the respondents showed an inclination to empower each one's speech, this might have been done only to satisfy the demands of the role relationships the individuals were in or to show their skill in using "their language", as termed by Hughes (1992:300), without necessarily meaning to compete with the other gender. In this study, a neutral or inclusive type of language was used in gender-free situations, while sexist or non-inclusive language was employed in gender-based settings. Hence, the observation that men, for instance, can employ on an equal degree, the "cooperative speech style" (Freed & Greenwood, 1996, cited by Ehrlich, 1997:423) ordinarily employed by women, shows that it is the communicative settings that determine the speech style the speakers will choose to adopt, not gender. Likewise, the finding that women can opt to use the non-standard form, specifically expletives or taboo words as noted by Hughes (1992), shows that it is also the kind of environment and the functions of language use that matter, not gender.

An additional point to consider is that the significant correlations noted between the respondents' employment of certain linguistic devices and their language use or their choice of some forms of media do not necessarily mean these independent variables directly influence their employment of these linguistic features. The possibility that these students are in great possession of these linguistic devices regardless of whether they use such language or not, or whether they enjoy reading or viewing certain forms of media or otherwise, is still greater than believing that these independent variables have affected their use of such linguistic devices. In the case of non-inclusive language, for instance, which includes many prohibited expressions, the growing trend to tolerate it as has been observed worldwide may have prompted them to employ the device in higher frequencies. Results showing insignificant correlations, on the other hand, can be taken as indications of what to investigate further in order to give stronger inferences along this line.

From these preliminary conclusions, one major conclusion that I can make is that differences do exist between female and male students' use of codeswitching and prohibited language. Also, the significant differences noted in their assignment of the different linguistic devices to their respective characters imply that gender interacts with language. But instead of using these observations to point out one's dominance, powerlessness, or indiscreetness, it may be healthier to interpret such language functions in the light of their differences due to factors beyond their control. This view finds an ally in Tannen (1986:13), who believes that "neither . . . styles are right or wrong, they are just different", and Hughes (1992:300) who says that women who widely employ expletives or taboo words "are not breaking any language rules . . . merely using their norm . . . ." Female and male language may have been described contrastingly, as noted, too, in Montenegro's (1981) and Mendiola's (1995) studies, but highlighting the fact that linguistic differences between men and women really exist without magnifying who is stronger or weaker may work positively in preventing gender polarization, a socio-political condition feared by modern scholars. Differences in language use can instead be regarded as an effective tool in strengthening the bond between females and males.

It can be noted, too, that the Filipino language is not non-sexist as noted by Bernardo (1997). Bernardo's conclusion that " . . . sexism may not be found in the words of Tagalog or Filipino speakers, but we can surely see it in their thoughts . . ." (p. 58) implies that the students sampled are in possession of unspoken non-inclusive language which has eventually found its manifestation in the written task, thereby strengthening the theory that the Filipino language contains sexist elements.

Finally, the usefulness of the methodology used, which is the first of its kind in the country for this type of investigation, cannot be ignored. The dialogue-construction task in written form has provided data from simulated conversations in an economical and speedy manner. What could have taken months or years in data collection took only eight weeks using this instrument. Through this innovative activity, too, certain problems usually encountered in recording oral conversations, like time and availability of target respondents, have been minimized. Compared to the idea of taping interactions, this methodology did entail less artificiality. As a whole, I consider this innovative methodology as a useful aid in obtaining substantial data which in turn contributed to the investigation of gender differences and the description of female/male language use of Filipino among the college students sampled.

REFERENCES

BAUTISTA, M. L. 1997. Systematic and rule-governed nga ba o baka naman anything goes talaga: Tagalog-English code-switching re-analyzed. Inaugural Lecture of the Go Kim Pah Professorial Chair in Liberal Arts, De La Salle University.

BERNARDINO, E. S. (Ed.). 1997. The Ma. Lourdes S. Bautista reader. Manila: De La Salle University Press, Inc.

BERGVALL, V. L., J. M. BING, and FREED, A. F. (Eds.) 1996. Rethinking language and gender research: Theory and practice. London : Addison Wesley Longman.

BERNARDO, A. B. 1997. If the language's lexicon is nonsexist, is the language user also nonsexist? A cognitive psychology study on gendered language and gender stereotyping. Danyag 2, (1), 46-61.

DEVITO, J. A. 1990. Messages: Building interpersonal communication skills. New York: Harper and Row Publishers.

DIONISIO, E. R. 1993. Sex and gender – More alike than different. Occasional Paper No. 3, National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women.

EHRLICH, S. 1997. Gender as social practice: implicatios for second language acquisition. Studies in Second Language Acquisition 19,(4) 421-446.

FREED, A. & GREENWOOD, A. 1996. Women, men, and type of talk: what make the difference? Language and Society 25, 1-26.

GONZALEZ, A., FSC. 1984. A survey of language use surveys in the Philippines, 1969-1983. In Language planning, implementation and evaluation: Essays in honor of Bonifacio P. Sibayan on his sixty-seventh birthday, ed. by A. Gonzalez, FSC, 94-105. Manila: Linguistic Society of the Philippines.

HUGHES, S. E. 1992. Expletives of lower working-class women. Language and Society 21, 291-303.

MAGGIO, R. 1987. The nonsexist word finder: A dictionary of gender free usage. New York: Oryx Press.

MC-CONNEL-GINET, S. 1988. Language and gender. In F. J. Newmeyer (Ed.). Linguistics: The Cambridge survey iv. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

MENDIOLA, C. M. 1995. Do Filipino females tell narratives the way Filipino males do? Philippine Journal of Linguistics 26, 1-2.

MOJICA, L. A. 1997. Who code-switch more: Women or men? A Graduate School Paper read at the Annual Convention of the Linguistic Society of the Philippines held at De La Salle University on May 23, 1998.

MONTENEGRO, C. 1981. Towards a description of male and female language in Pilipino. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Sto. Tomas.

NICHOLSON, L. 1994. Interpreting gender. Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society 20, (1), 79-105.

TANNEN, D. 1986. What are you trying to say? Reprinted in The Manila Chronicle, p. 12.