

Men's Vs Women's Speech in Algeria

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Résumé

Le comportement langagier des hommes et des femmes est parmi les sujets qui ont fasciné les chercheurs. Ces derniers pensent que les raisons qui ont fait que les hommes et les femmes parlent différemment sont biologiques, sociales et psychologiques. Dans cet article nous analysons cette différence langagière en Algérie (Les exemples sont pris du Kabyle et l'Arabe parlé à Chlef, El-Bayadh, Oran, Sidi Bel Abbes et Tlemcen). Ensuite nous parlerons des raisons, citées ci-dessus, qui déterminent ce comportement langagier. Notre analyse est basée sur notre expérience personnelle.

Introduction

Men and women all over the globe communicate differently, though they speak the same language. The speech differences, found almost at all linguistic levels, made an avalanche of scholars interested in this linguistic phenomenon, and find out the reasons why these two speech communities (men and women) have different linguistic behaviour. After many deep and serious investigations, these scholars came to the conclusion that women speech is softer, more polite and less assertive compared to men's which is regarded by **STRODBECK** and **MANN (1956)** as more aggressive. In a similar vein, **HERRING (1993)**, in her discourse analysis, noticed that men's language consists of strong assertions, self-promotion, rhetorical questions, authoritative orientations, challenges and humours, whereas women's language contains attenuated assertions, apologies, questions, personal orientation and support. Scholars see that the reasons for these linguistic differences are biological, psychological and social.

One does not need to be a linguist to distinguish between males and females speech. In other words, language differences are so obvious that we can easily notice them at many linguistic levels. Phonologically speaking and according to some researchers, some phonemes in men speech are replaced by their counterparts in women's. **Peter Trudgill (2000:64)** claimed that in Gros Ventre, an American Indian language from the north eastern USA, palatalized dental stops in men's speech correspond to palatalized velar stops in the speech of women. The word /djatsa/ "bread" in male form is /kjatsa/ in the female one. In our society, this process is found in the Kabylia variety where the voiced bilabial plosive /b/ in men's speech is replaced by a voiceless bilabial plosive /p/ in women's in words like /θəb^wa/, /θəp^wa/ (cooked), /æbu/, /æpu/ (smoke), /θabu:rθ/, /θapu:rθ/ (door). In Algerian Arabic this sort of shift exists mainly in Tlemcen where women use the glottal stop as in /ʔali/ instead of /qali/ or /gali/. Similarly, the voiced sound /ḍ/ is replaced by its counterpart /t/ in female speech. For instance, /xḍar/ Vs /xtar/.

During their first language acquisition, children use the form that they hear from their mothers. However, boys stop using it once they become aware of the language differences and recognize the sounds that are restricted only to the female version. An example of that would be the kabylia word /θapu:rθ/ where the bilabial fortis /p/ is replaced by /b/ when the child recognizes the language suitable for men.

This sound shift can extend to the morpho-phonological and morpho-syntactic levels. In the Kabylia variety, for instance, the sentence /b^wab^was-ən-wəqjij/ (the boy's

father) is uttered /b^wab^was-əb^wəqʃij/ by male speakers. It is uttered as such, with the voiced bilabial /b/, because of the coalescence (mutual assimilation) that occurs at the level of /n/ and /w/. Since /p/ is used in lieu of /b/ in the female speech, then the above sentence will become /b^wab^was-əp^wəqʃij/.

Among the reasons why the sound shift takes place is that there are some words that sound like tabooed words. As far as our society is concerned, some women avoid the phonemes used in tabooed words and replace them by other phonemes. For example, the word /baqlawa/ (a sort of a traditional cake) is pronounced /bahlawaw/. This process has been confirmed by Peter Trudgill (2000: 67) who claimed:

“...taboo can extend to words which simply resemble the original tabooed words. In Zulu, it appears that this process could go so far to include particular sounds of the language. Say, for example, that the tabooed name contained the sound /z/. This might mean apparently, that the woman in question would not be able to use a word like amanzi “water” without converting it to a form without the tabooed sound, amandabi...”.

In addition to the sound shift, another phonological aspect that is worth mentioning in this paper is “elision” (omission of one or more sounds or syllables). This aspect is one of the characteristics of the linguistic behaviour of the females who have the tendency to use the incomplete or reduced forms. It had been asserted by Edward Sapir (1968: 274), in his male and female forms of speech in Yana, that the longest and the most absolute forms are those used by men. According to him, female speech form derives from the male’s one. That is to say, if women use the reduced form, men use the complete one; and if the former use the complete form, the latter add one syllable to the word. The same process is seen in some parts of Algeria like Oran and Sidi Bel Abbès, females tend to say /ham bu:k/ instead of /jarham bu:/, the complete form used by men. Similarly, in the Kabylia variety, where the negative form consists of three segments: the prefix /u:r/+ the stem + the suffix /ara/, in some areas, sounds are taken out from the prefix. Thus, the form /u:r-xədəmə-aara/ ‘I do not work/do’, for instance, becomes /u:xxədəmə-aara/ in women’s speech. However there are parts where elision is noticed in both male and female speech. An example taken from El Bayadh, where the forms /nta xaji/ and /nti xajti/ are reduced to /ta xaji/ and /ti xajti/.

These linguistic differences go so far to include vocabulary in the sense that women use words different from those used by men. For example the Kabylia word ‘a:po’ meaning ‘God’ is restricted to women. Men who use it will be regarded to have a womanish verbal behaviour.

As it has been mentioned so far, men language contains utterances that express challenge. Sentences like:

- 1- rana gaa3 ouled tās3 jhor.
- 2- gaa3 ntiro.
- 3- gaa3 naklou ləhdid.
- 4- marche arrière 3andi mkasara.
- 5- nifi maʃi nta3 əzɔdaj.

cannot be found in women language. Women who utter this sort of sentences are certainly regarded to have a mannish linguistic behaviour.

It is worth mentioning here that male and female speech differences vary from one area to another. Say, the expression 'ahawji', which is used by both sexes in Chlef, is restricted only to the females speech in areas like Oran and Sidi Bel Abbes.

Prestige is a matter that should be discussed in this work, for it is a linguistic aspect that engendered a great deal of controversy among researchers. Some believe that women use more prestigious forms than men do. In this respect, Peter Trudgill (2000: 70) claimed:

"...women on average use forms which more closely approach those of the standard variety or the prestige accent than those used by men, although we cannot predict which form a given man or woman is going to use on a given occasion. In other words, female speakers of English, like their Koasati counterparts, tend to use linguistic forms which are considered to be 'better' than male forms".

This linguistic feature is not common to all societies. In other words, there are some areas where the prestige depends on whether or not women are educated. In this regard, Trudgill asserted:

"...in communities where the standard variety is acquired only through education and/or travel will obviously not use more standard forms than men- this has been reported for some Arabic-speaking communities, for example."

In a similar vein, Fasold (2003: 93) claimed:

"... In some traditional communities, fewer women learn higher-status national and regional languages than men because they receive less formal education and have fewer opportunities to be in situations where the higher-status is needed. "

This claim holds true for our society where many educated women use French which is considered to be more prestigious than any other linguistic variety.

Politeness is a momentous factor which made the speech of the two sexes different. As a matter of fact, girls all over the globe are brought up with the idea that they must be polite and docile. All the investigators who studied the linguistic behaviour in terms of politeness came to the conclusion that women were more polite than men. In this regard, Holmes (1995: 8) claimed: **"...So in communities where women are powerless members of a subordinate group, they are likely to be more linguistically polite than men who are in control"**. In addition to this linguistic feature, many investigations showed that men had a strong tendency to interrupt their addressees. Scholars agree that interruptions can be positive as they can be negative. Again, in this respect Holmes (1995: 54) asserted: **"...interruptions to the speech of another may be negative in effect, disrupting another's turn and restricting their contribution. Stubbe called these 'non-supportive**

interruptions'. Alternatively, simultaneous speech, which technically 'interrupts' the other speaker, may function positively to encourage and support them."

Language differentiation is so profound as to concern even the field of interest of both males and females. It has been suggested that men and women are innately programmed for different cognitive abilities and interest. In other words, men are found to be the leaders, thus more successful and suitable in technical and scientific fields such as mathematics, computing, engineering and science, while women are considered to be better in teaching, nursing and baby care. This evidence has been interpreted by many as a lack of intelligence in women. However, experiments proved that the difference in the females and males mathematical and scientific capacity takes place only after the emergence of estrogen, which makes females focus more on their emotions and communications while testosterone makes males less communicative and become obsessed about scoring in games, and in the backseat of the car. (See Brizendine, 2006:7). In regard to this, Tennen (1990: 24-25) claimed:

"For men, conversations are negotiations in which people try to achieve and maintain the upper hand if they can, and protect themselves from others' attempts to put them around. Life, then, is a contest, a struggle to preserve independence and avoid failure."

The linguist continues:

"For women, conversations are negotiations for closeness in which people try to seek and give confirmation and support, and to "reach consensus. They try to protect themselves from others' attempts to push them away. Life, then, is a community, a struggle to preserve intimacy and avoid isolation..."(Quoted in Hudson, 1996: 141).

Generally speaking, women speech is considered to be polite, soft and powerless. But one should be aware of the existence of certain pressures that effect women speech. For instance women working in predominantly male fields such as business and army must adapt their speech to the men's. It has been reported that women in the military environment have had to prove that they are aggressive, skilled, and self-confident on the playing field, and have learned to reply with snap and confidence and to present speeches and briefings to mixed audiences.

It is a well known fact that there are numerous factors that make males and females behave differently in terms of language. These factors, which I consider to be complementary, are, according to the scholars, biological, social (including taboo, profession, and invasions) and psychological.

According to (Brizendine, 2006: 6), biology represents the foundation of our personalities and tendencies. This means that it affects our behaviour to a greater extent. She claimed that male brains are larger by about 9%. In the 19th C this difference in the brain size meant that women had less mental capacity than men. But

thanks to the sophisticated tools, the deepest and complex differences between male and female brain are no longer considered to be a subtle matter. Microscope and functional Magnetic Resonance Imagery (fMRI) showed that in the brain centres of language and hearing, for example, women have 11% more neurons than men. On the other hand, men have two and a half times the brain space devoted to sex drive as well as larger brain centres for action and aggression. (See Brizendine, 2006: 5). In addition, according to Mc Glone (1980), it has been suggested that speech or language impairment resulted from damage to the left hemisphere or disruption of its activity appears to be less severe in women. This is because, according to Hines and Gorski (1985), women show less dramatic lateralization of language function. (See Hines, 2004:18).

Another factor which seems to be crucial, since it affects significantly our linguistic behaviour, is taboo. The latter is a part the social factor. This linguistic aspect is widespread in our society. In most cases, female Kabyle speakers, for instance, do not utter their husbands' names in the presence of their fathers or fathers-in-law. So, they use words or phrases instead. Most of the time, their husbands' names are replaced by the word /wahi/ (hadak in Algerian Arabic) or /b^wab^was-n.../ (the father of...), if the husbands in question have children, of course. Trudgill (2000: 67) stated: **"...In Zulu, a wife was not allowed to mention the name of her father-in-law or his brother, and she might be put to death if she broke this taboo."** The punishment for breaking this kind of taboo in our society is not severe to that extent, but simply, it is regarded as a shameful fact. It is worth mentioning here that taboo does not concern only women. Men also should avoid some words. Say, for example, the kabyle word /swabo:d/ is replaced by /səldjiha/ or /sədaði:sə/ (pregnant). If a man uses this so called tabooed word, he will be considered to have a womanish linguistic behaviour. Women too avoid this word when addressing men. In Algerian Arabic, men are concerned with the phenomenon of taboo. This can be explained through the Arabic words /ədda:r/ (house) or /ləwlaad/ (children) which are used instead of /marti/ (my wife). Similarly, the words /bəlkarf/ or /bəlhaml/ (pregnant) are replaced by /mri:da/.

Psychologically speaking, males and females differ in many ways. Some researchers see that menstruation, menopause and child birth make women feel the great need of men and dependent of them. In regard to menstruation, Brizendine (2006:3) confirmed:

"...In all menstruating women, the female brain changes a little every day. Some parts of the brain change up to 25 percent every month. Things get rocky at times, but for most women, the changes are manageable. Some of my patients, though, came to me feeling so jerked around by their hormones on some days that they couldn't work or speak to anyone because they'd either burst into tears or bite someone's head off. Most weeks of the month they were engaged, intelligent, productive, and optimistic, but a mere shift in the hormonal flood to their brains on certain days left them feeling that the future looked bleak, and that they hated themselves and their lives. These thoughts felt real and solid and these women acted on them as though they were reality and would last forever-even though they arose

solely from hormonal shifts in their brains. As soon as the tides changed, they were back to their best selves."

Evidence showed that nurturance and tender-mindedness are the characteristics of women, while a high activity level, dominance and assertiveness are found in men. Scholars claimed that psychological traits of both sexes are identified as early as 12 months of age (Hines, 2004: 17) through the toy choices. It has been suggested that girls tend to prefer dolls, dolls clothes, cosmetic and dress-up items and household toys such as tea sets. In contrast, boys tend to prefer toys such as vehicles (cars trucks), weapons (gun, swords). In addition, they showed a stronger preference than girls for rough-and-tumble play or playful aggression including fighting, chasing, wrestling and rough play with one another or with objects (See Hines, 2004: 17). As it has been mentioned above, this behaviour is biologically explained by larger brain centres for action and aggression.

Conclusion

From what has been said so far, one can conclude that women and men verbal behaviour varies at different linguistic levels, and is determined and shaped by many factors. Hormones are strongly believed to control our behaviours including the verbal one. Social factor, too, has a crucial effect on both women and men in the sense that in all cultures men are regarded to be commanders, and women servants. This belief made the gap between men and women so large. However, this gap is getting restricted. This restriction is reflected in the presence of females in different fields even those which are predominantly male. That is to say, females succeeded in imposing themselves though they are far from being able to compete with males mainly in political, scientific and mathematic fields. According to Hines (2004: 1), in the period from 1951 to 1999, 90% of university professors in chemistry, physics, mathematics and engineering were men. And there has never been a woman president or vice president. However, in 2002, there were two women in the Supreme Court and 13 women senators. This makes us draw another conclusion that the reason why men dominate women in such fields is social rather than cognitive as some researchers believe.

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