

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-02905-7 - Language and Gender: Second Edition
Penelope Eckert and Sally McConnell-Ginet
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Language and Gender

Language and Gender is an introduction to the study of the relation between gender and language use, written by two leading experts in the field. This new edition, thoroughly updated and restructured, brings out more strongly an emphasis on practice and change, while retaining the broad scope of its predecessor and its accessible introductions which explain the key concepts in a non-technical way. The authors integrate issues of sexuality more thoroughly into the discussion, exploring more diverse gendered and sexual identities and practices. The core emphasis is on change, both in linguistic resources and their use and in gender and sexual ideologies and personae. This book explores how change often involves conflict and competing norms, both social and linguistic. Drawing on their own extensive research, as well as on other key literature, the authors argue that the connections between language and gender are deep yet fluid, and arise in social practice.

PENELOPE ECKERT is Professor of Linguistics and Anthropology at Stanford University, where she has also directed the Program in Feminist Studies.

SALLY MCCONNELL-GINET is Professor Emerita of Linguistics at Cornell University, where she directed the Women's Studies Program.

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PENELOPE ECKERT
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Contents

<i>List of figures</i>	<i>page vii</i>
<i>Preface</i>	<i>ix</i>
1 An introduction to gender	1
Sex and gender	1
Learning to be gendered	7
Keeping gender: the gender order	21
Masculinities and femininities	33
Gender practice	35
2 Introduction to the study of language and gender	37
The development of the study of language and gender	37
Focusing on change	42
Fashioning selves	47
Researching language and gender	49
3 Linguistic resources	62
Introduction	62
Languages and dialects	64
Levels of language	66
Speech situations, events, and activities	79
Gender in grammars	81
4 Getting it said	88
Getting into the discourse	88
Speech activities, events, and genres	106
Gendered styles of talk?	116
5 Making nice	119
Politeness	121
Evaluation	125
Address	135
6 Being assertive . . . or not	141
Questioning?	144
Calibrating claims	154
Expressing affect	158

vi	Contents	
	7 Where common sense comes from and where it hides	164
	At-issue messages	166
	Backgrounded messages	169
	Metaphor	178
	Naming	187
	8 Mapping the world	193
	Labeling disputes and histories	193
	Category boundaries and criteria	196
	Category relations	204
	Elaborating marked concepts	208
	Genderizing discourse: category imperialism	214
	Genderizing processes	220
	New labels, new categories	222
	9 Constructing nations, constructing boundaries	226
	Language varieties in contact	226
	Gendering language “choice”	232
	Language and gendered work	240
	Gendering the self through language choice	243
	Crossing or reinforcing boundaries?	245
	10 Fashioning selves	248
	What is style?	248
	Stylistic practice	250
	Girly girls and manly men	253
	Style and social change	261
	Legitimate and illegitimate performances	267
	From styles to types	274
	Where are we headed?	275
	<i>Notes</i>	277
	<i>Bibliography</i>	285
	<i>Index</i>	311

Figures

5.1	Addressing in English	page 135
5.2	Reference to the addressee in English	136
6.1	Advice to women on being assertive at work	142
6.2	Advice to women (and men) on being assertive in everyday relations	143
6.3	Advice to men on being assertive with women they're dating	144
7.1	Famous women who changed their names	188
8.1	US cuts of beef (adapted from Rombauer 1998)	198
8.2	French cuts of beef (adapted from Montagné 1961)	199
8.3	Polarized oppositions	206
8.4	Default background, marked subcategories	206
9.1	Percent pronunciation of postvocalic /r/ in New York City	228
10.1	Leveling of <i>were</i> over time by townies and populars © Moore, Emma. 2004. Sociolinguistic style: A multidimensional resource for shared identity creation. <i>Canadian Journal of Linguistics/Revue canadienne de linguistique</i> , 49: 375-96. Reprinted by permission of the <i>Canadian Journal of Linguistics/Revue canadienne de linguistique</i>	257
10.2	Use of negative concord in Belten High, shown as deviation from the graduating class mean	260
10.3	Beijing yuppies' and state managers' use of rhotacization (factor weight) and full tone (percentage use)	262

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[More information](#)

Preface

A lot has happened in the study of language and gender in the decade since we published our first edition – there have been big changes both in the gender and sexual order, and in the study of language and society. We tried in the first edition to do justice to all kinds of diversity as well as diversity’s companion, change. With this edition, we have gone further beyond English-speaking white middle-class people and gender-conforming heterosexuals, and beyond those who happened to populate studies of earlier decades, most of whom are now at least middle-aged. In a field that draws on so many disciplines and approaches, there is no possibility of comprehensive coverage. We have tried instead to articulate a framework growing from our own research programs and then to find relevant work from other scholars to help us develop a fuller picture. Because gender is above all an ideological construct, we encourage our readers to question the foundations of their beliefs about gender and about how it emerges in language use. We hope that readers will take away a robust ability to appraise claims they hear about language, gender, and sexuality, and be better equipped to articulate and explore questions in this area, recognizing that definitive answers are probably not in the cards. This book is very much a collaborative effort. As in all our joint work, our names are listed alphabetically.

Like the first edition, this one is structured around the use of language in gender practice rather than around the linguistic resources themselves. Chapter 1 offers an introduction to gender and pays more attention than in the earlier edition to some of the complex connections of gender to sexuality. Its basic message – that gender is socially constructed – is unchanged, but new research and continued thinking have helped us develop our picture of how that happens. Chapter 2 sets the stage for the rest of the book by offering a quick overview of research on language and gender, with attention to some of the pitfalls. In Chapter 3, we present the linguistic resources on which people draw in constructing gender and sexual identities, and we conclude the chapter by considering gender in grammar, i.e., places where a language’s grammar constrains how a speaker (or writer) invokes gender.

Having set the stage in Chapters 1 through 3, we turn in Chapter 4 to examine “Getting it said.” Here we discuss the role of gender in the logistics of conversation, and then turn to consider how gender structures participation in speech activities and events. Chapters 5 and 6 explore issues of theory and data in relation to prominent gender and language stereotypes. We emphasize that because

linguistic resources are multifunctional, and dependent for their effects on context, many across-the-board claims about gender difference do not hold up to empirical scrutiny. Chapter 5, “Making nice,” takes on the stereotype of girls and women as sweet and considerate, men as battling for ascendancy. We discuss a number of areas: overt conflict, politeness, evaluation (including both compliments and insults), address, and honorifics. Chapter 6, “Being assertive . . . or not,” explores other but related issues, including “uptalk,” tag questions, hedges, and the expression of affect. We argue that real women and men are far more like one another as groups and far more diverse within each group in their use of linguistic resources viewed as promoting or impeding assertiveness than popular accounts suggest. This does not mean there are no gender differences to be found, but it does mean that their significance can only be understood in context.

Chapter 7, “Where common sense comes from and where it hides,” addresses the question of the linguistic underpinnings of our ideas about the world, including stereotypes and biases. Language seems to play a role not only in planting common sense, but in keeping alive and influential at hidden levels ideas already abandoned at more reflective levels. In Chapter 8, “Mapping the world,” we explore some of the categorizing practices that enter into constructing gender and sexuality. We look not only at established labels and their role in carving up the world but also at changing categorizing labels and at contested schemes for organizing and understanding ourselves, one another, and our circumstances.

Chapter 9, “Constructing nations, constructing boundaries,” explores the intersection of language, gender, and sexuality in constructing and maintaining boundaries, both at the macrolevel in sociopolitical processes and at the local community level. And this edition like the first concludes with a discussion of stylistic practice. Chapter 10, “Fashioning selves,” builds on all that precedes and offers a richly detailed picture of indexical possibilities, including discussion of a number of currently emerging gendered and sexual personae.

This book is the culmination of just over two decades of collaboration, which began in 1990 when Penny was asked to teach a course on language and gender at the 1991 LSA Linguistic Institute at the University of California at Santa Cruz, and Sally was asked to write an article on language and gender for the *Annual Review of Anthropology*. We combined these projects into a joint effort to rethink approaches to language and gender, and particularly to bring together our work in quite different areas of linguistics – Penny’s in sociolinguistic variation and Sally’s in formal semantics and pragmatics. These early beginnings led to a decade-long collaboration on a variety of projects, leading up to the first edition of this book.

Judith Ayling, then the linguistics editor at Cambridge University Press, talked us into doing this book. Andrew Winnard, who took over from Judith in 1998, is the one who has had to deal with us during both editions. He has been wonderfully patient and supportive, and always a joy to be with. The first edition took shape during a four-week residency at the dream environment of the Rockefeller Study and Research Center in Bellagio, Italy. We are eternally grateful to the Rockefeller

Foundation, and to the director of the Center, Gianna Celli, and her wonderful staff.

Sally was teaching language and gender courses to undergraduates at Cornell during the years of working on this book, and their comments and questions as well as those of her graduate student assistants and graders have been very helpful in showing us what worked and what did not. Beyond that, Sally thanks her language and gender students over an even longer period, far too many to name individually, for thoughtful insights and imaginative and stimulating research projects. Cornell graduate students with whom Sally has been lucky enough to work on language and gender issues in recent years include Lisa Lavoie, Marisol del Teso Craviotto, and Tanya Matthews; she has learned much from them. New Zealand sociolinguist Janet Holmes offered insightful comments on a first edition draft as did Cornell anthropologist Kathryn March and the Telluride Association Summer Program students whom she and Sally taught in 2001.

Sally's first large language and gender project was *Women and Language in Literature and Society*, co-edited in 1980 with the late Ruth Borker, an anthropologist, and Nelly Furman, a literary theorist. Not only did she learn a lot from her co-editors (and from conversations with Daniel Maltz, Ruth's partner), but throughout this period she also corresponded with Barrie Thorne, Cheri Kramarae, and Nancy Henley, active figures early on in the field of language and gender; all remain good friends. Co-teaching experiences with Cornell Women's Studies colleagues Nelly Furman, Ruth Borker, and Kathryn March were particularly important for stretching her intellectual horizons. And Sally thanks Cornell psychologist Sandra Bem for her careful reading of the Spring 2001 draft of the book and for her continuing support.

Shortly after the first edition of this book was published, Sally co-taught a course on language and sexuality with Gregory Ward of Northwestern at the 2003 Michigan State University LSA Linguistic Institute, which she found not only great fun but also intellectually invigorating. Gregory and Larry Horn of Yale help keep her up-to-date on issues of language, gender, and sexuality in the media. Other colleagues whose invitations over the past decade or so to speak or contribute to volumes have pushed along her work in this area include Kate Beeching, Mary Bucholtz, Kathryn Campbell-Kibler, Deborah Cameron, Greville Corbett, Susan Ehrlich, Delia Graff Fara, Yihong Gao, Brian Joseph, Janet Holmes, Chu-Ren Huang, Ruth Kempson, Miriam Meyerhoff, Ana Cristina Ostermann, Theodossia-Soula Pavlidou, Robert Podesva, Craige Roberts, Gillian Russell, Doreen Wu, and Foong Ha Yap; Kira Hall, Robin Queen, and Elizabeth Closs Traugott have also encouraged her with useful comments. A number of these people have also become valued friends, and it is hard for her to imagine that she would have continued this work without their support and (too infrequent) companionship. She also thanks Lal Zimman, Andrea James, and C. J. Turett for their generous help in thinking about language issues facing transgender people.

Penny came to the study of language and gender through the study of phonological variation in Detroit area high schools. In the course of her ethnographic work it became painfully clear that gender had a far more complex relation to variation than the one-dimensional treatment it had been traditionally given. She owes her very earliest thoughts on this issue to Alison Edwards and Lynne Robins, who were graduate students working on this project at the University of Michigan in the early eighties.

Penny's arrival in the San Francisco Bay Area brought her to the Institute for Research on Learning, where she enjoyed a priceless collaboration with Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger as they were developing their ideas about communities of practice – a concept that figures prominently in this book. The Bay Area also brought her into close contact with Mary Bucholtz and Kira Hall, whose contribution to the field of language and gender is immeasurable. They were largely responsible for the heyday of the Berkeley Women and Language Group, which put on the best conferences ever and published proceedings that remain at the forefront of language and gender scholarship. Their continued leadership in the field of language, gender, and sexuality has been important and widely appreciated. At Stanford, Penny has benefited from the probing minds of many sociolinguistics graduate students who have engaged together with issues of the relation between identity and language practice. Each cohort has brought new ideas and inspiration, from the *Trendies* (Jennifer Arnold, Renée Blake, Melissa Iwai, Norma Mendoza-Denton, Carol Morgan and Julie Solomon) to the *Slicsters* (Sarah Benor, Katherine Campbell-Kibler, Andrea Kortenhoven, Rob Podesva, Mary Rose, Jen Roth Gordon, Sarah Roberts, Devyani Sharma, Julie Sweetland, Andrew Wong, and Qing Zhang), to those who came after the first edition (Eric Acton, Jeremy Calder, Annette D'Onofrio, Isla Flores-Bayer, Roey Gafter, Kate Geenbergh, Rebecca Green, Lauren Hall-Lew, Stacy Lewis, Kyuwon Moon, Tyler Schnoebelen, Rebecca Starr), as well as some wonderful visitors, particularly Lal Zimman. Penny considers herself the luckiest sociolinguist in creation to have been able to work with such amazing students, and she is grateful to the Linguistics Department at Stanford for providing a consistently supportive and collaborative environment for all. In addition, undergraduates over the years in Penny's Language and Gender course at Stanford have contributed countless examples, particularly from their often ingenious field projects. These examples have brought both color and insight to our thinking about language and gender, and many of them appear in this book.

In the times leading up to the first edition of this book, Penny had many wonderful conversations with Eleanor Maccoby, whom she admires for her probing mind and intellectual honesty. Penny feels a particular debt of gratitude to Miyako Inoue, who has been a constant and fundamentally important source of intellectual excitement and friendship. And she wants to thank Deborah Cameron for just being a great friend and inspiration, both to her and to the field of language and gender.

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[More information](#)

Finally, our partners, Ivan Sag (a linguist) and Carl Ginet (a philosopher), have offered, as always, unwavering support and companionship – intellectual and otherwise.

We dedicate this edition, like the first, to the memory of Ruth Ann Borker, a pioneer in language and gender studies. Blessed with insight, imagination, and a formidable intellect, Ruth was passionate about ideas and about people, especially the students whom she loved to introduce to the unnoticed social and cultural complexities of everyday kinds of communication. This book aims to continue the lively conversations and debates about language and gender that she did so much to launch.