



Men, Masculinities, and Language

Scott Kiesling*

University of Pittsburgh

Abstract

How do men use language to express masculinity? How is language masculine, and how does it become so? These are the issues that I address in this article. I first discuss why men and masculinities should be a focus in sociolinguistics, and why they generally have not been. I then explore what is meant by masculinities and the sociolinguistic processes that connect language with masculinities. Finally, I discuss some of the ways researchers have claimed men tend to speak, and why, and the problems with generalizing to all men from these data.

The Problem With Men and Masculinities

In the last three decades of the twentieth century, linguists began to study how language is used by speakers to do social things like expressing power, solidarity, and identity. Within that research, one of the most fruitful and contentious areas has been the investigation of how people use language to express gender, how a person's gender affects the choices they make in how they speak, and how their talk is received. Almost every area of language has been shown to be connected with gender, from the smallest segments of sound to broadly characterized discourse strategies.

We have learned much from these studies, but from the outset there has been a striking asymmetry in them: women are the object of study overwhelmingly more than men. The founding of the field of language and gender studies is often traced to Lakoff's (1975) *Language and Woman's Place*, which focuses on how women are expected to use language and how their linguistic usages perpetuate their subordinate position in society. Since then there has been much empirical and comparative work, often testing Lakoff's claims, but even in these comparative studies the men are generally not the gender that is focused on in explanation; rather it is the women whose behavior is explained, or whose perspective is taken. Men, in short, are relatively invisible, and when discussed are generally treated as a homogeneous group. In fairness, the political goals of this early (and continuing) work in language and gender necessitated a focus on women, who had been stereotyped as weak and sometimes verbally deficient

(although in many ways, Lakoff's 1975 work made some interesting comments about men's language; see Kiesling 2004b).

Language and gender is often presented as having certain 'schools' or theories (see, for example, Crawford 1995 and Cameron 1998): difference and dominance. As often happens, this characterization of the field oversimplifies positions that are much more complex, but I would like to indicate how each of the perspectives characterized men. The dominance view supposedly saw the root of (almost) all gender differences in language as being related to male dominance and female subordination, while the difference perspective viewed these differences as arising from the different 'cultures' that girls and boys inhabit when they are young. For 'difference' researchers, among whom Deborah Tannen is usually taken to be the main proponent (especially in Tannen 1990), men and women's misunderstandings are a kind of cross-cultural communication problem, and men simply have different goals than women. With respect to men, either side can be taken to indefensible extremes: 'men are evil villains whose only goal is to dominate women,' or 'men do not ever try to dominate women and the misunderstandings they have are simply that, misunderstandings.' Of course, most researchers do not present such simplistic findings (they occasionally do – usually when describing the views of the other school), but this dichotomy characterized the field for two decades.

More recently, a more nuanced view of gender and language has arisen. This perspective acknowledges that most men do not spend their time plotting the domination of women, but also that they are nevertheless participating in a system of social practices that almost always privileges them and subordinates women. While this *performance* view of language and gender (outlined more fully below) is more complex and acknowledging of men's perspectives, (white heterosexual) men are still very often the invisible standard against which a group's language is compared.

I am not going to complain that men are being neglected and that all the talk about men's dominance is misguided – certainly the focus on women is intellectually and politically necessary. Rather, I see this 'neglect' of the problematization of men and masculinity as one of the ways in which what used to be called patriarchy works.¹ The interesting thing about men (and in the USA, especially heterosexual, Christian, middle-aged, middle-class, white men) is that they are the norm against which other identities are measured. For example, if someone begins their story with 'I saw this person the other day . . .', chances are that hearers of that story will most often understand this unmarked 'person' to be an unmarked middle-class white man until further specified. Studies of non-middle-class non-white identities have also often assumed that men's identities are the 'default' identities; the study of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) had until recently been very much focused on men, and it is still the case that studies of AAVE-speaking women are

marked as studies of both race and gender in language, rather than just race, as the studies of men have been (Jacobs-Huey 2006).²

So men are invisible and dominant all at once, and their dominance relies in part on that invisibility: they are dominant not only because they are presumed to be always coercive, but because they are the default human category in language, in society, and even in most studies of language and gender. This is the first step in thinking about men and languages: piercing this invisibility to see men not as unmarked, but as people who, like women, are subject to societal stereotypes about gender and language and who have to work hard to keep up the appearance of masculinity. Note also that before 'mainstream' masculine identities were the focus of much research (beginning in the mid- to late 1990s), non-mainstream, or 'marked', masculine identities were studied: African American men (e.g., Labov 1972), homosexual men (Leap 1996). In fact, as objects of sociolinguistic research, these groups were often studied because of their assumed differences from heterosexual middle-class white men: until recently the study of gay men was mostly a search for the features of 'gay language', rather than an investigation of how gay men use language to negotiate a homophobic society and challenge hegemonic masculinities. This focus is simply a reflection of the larger social unmarkedness of white, heterosexual, middle-class (WHMC) men. In recent years, there has been an interest in problematizing these invisible categories, especially 'whiteness' and heterosexuality (see Frankenberg 1997; Kiesling 2002; Cameron and Kulick 2003).

In this article, then, I will discuss some of the ways that linguists have discovered that WHMC men maintain their invisibility and how being a non-WHMC man affects linguistic practices. I will assume, following the general assumptions of the language and gender field, that masculinity is something that can be 'put on' by anyone – male or female – in just the way that anyone who wears a suit and tie takes on a flavor of masculinity. Finally, I will discuss the kinds of language that have been found to be associated with men and masculinity, but in the end these details are less interesting than *why* we find men using them more than women. There are two sides to this discussion: one about men and masculinity, and one about how language gets connected to them.

A Performative View of Gender

Men and masculinities are different things, and while they are connected, all things that men do are not masculine, and all things masculine are not necessarily done by men. Men are the corporeal beings identified as such, usually ultimately based on genitalia and body; however, maleness is also socially constructed (Bing and Bergvall 1996). Masculinity is a quality or set of practices (habitual ways of doing things) that is stereotypically connected with men. The 'stereotypically' is important in that sentence,

because a quality or practice need not actually be performed by any particular man to be associated with masculinity. Nor need it be exclusively done by men. In fact, women may engage in a certain practice equally as much, but because this practice is stereotypically associated with men, it is either not noticed or censured (as when girls are aggressive).

There are many ways of being a man and of being masculine, hence, the 'masculinities' in my title. First, masculinity is not something inherent to men, but is 'performed'. That is, social practices become associated with men, and these social practices then become seen as masculine (or practices are masculine from the start). Under this view, it is possible to have non-masculine men and masculine women, because masculinity is in how people perform social practices for the world (including themselves). This understanding of masculinity follows the social constructionist and performative view of gender (see Kessler and McKenna 1978, Butler 1990, and Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003 for articulations of this view). When gender is viewed in this way, the research on language and gender loses its emphasis on simply finding differences between men and women. Rather, we need to understand what difference gender makes for how people use (and acquire) language. When focused on men and masculinity, the performative view leads to the following questions:

- What linguistic practices are understood to be masculine?
- How and why are those practices seen as masculine?
- How and why do men do some linguistic things differently than women?
- How do men use language to create different masculinities? Why do they create the ones they do? and
- How is the interpretation of men's use of language shaped by their gender?

In order to be able to begin to answer these questions, a little more discussion about the nature of masculinity is necessary.

What Is Masculinity?

One of the most obvious (but again, relatively invisible) stereotypes about men and masculinities (and gender) is the assumption of categorical dichotomy that underlies the entire gender system. In this basic stereotype, there are two and only two categories (men and women, masculinity and femininity), and they are stereotypically opposite and homogeneous. Their opposition is also completely categorical: things men do are assumed to be things that no women do. For example, women are on average shorter than men, but in gender ideologies in the USA and many other countries, all men are taller than all women. This is so natural for people to think about that it is almost never discussed. There is much variation among men and among women, but our gender ideologies deny

that variation. Without this assumption, the entire edifice upon which gendered language and practice is constructed would falter.

So the dichotomy is basic. Part of that dichotomy, though, is the construction of 'ideal' masculinities and femininities – those that fulfill the stereotypes on each side of the dichotomy perfectly.

So what about the men's side of that dichotomy? R. W. Connell (1987, 1995) argues that in every society there is a conception of masculinity that is dominant. She calls this *hegemonic masculinity*. In other words, this is the kind of masculinity that is most valorized, and that most men would strive to emulate. This is an important term because it recognizes that there are multiple masculinities, but at the same time it acknowledges that one, or a small subset of them, is dominant. Moreover, it acknowledges that this is an unattainable ideal, rather than a biological reality, and allows for non-hegemonic identities that are subordinate or even ones that challenge that hegemonic ideal. This is a valuable concept, but I have found that it is very difficult to use this term to understand and explain men's linguistic practices. This difficulty arises mainly from the ambiguity of what hegemonic masculinity actually is, and from the fact that in the men's studies literature, it has come to be used as a cover term for masculinity in general, so that the initial power of the term has been lost. This term, therefore, needs to be decomposed to really understand the ideologies that are associated with masculinities and men's practices.

I thus argue that in every society there are 'cultural discourses of masculinity' that comprise hegemonic masculinity. These cultural discourses describe qualities and practices that people value, desire, and strive for, and it is the combination of these cultural discourses that yield hegemonic masculinity. A cultural discourse in the way I use it here refers to assumed and stereotypical ways of talking and thinking about men and masculinities (based on the notion of discourse in Michel Foucault's work; see Foucault 1972). I use the term 'discourses' rather than 'ideology' because in the way it is conceived of by Foucault and followers, cultural discourses encompass not only ideas, concepts, and values of a society, but also the institutions and practices that are intimately tied to and mutually reinforcing of those ideas. Furthermore, the conception of cultural discourse is much more changeable than ideology, and is able to acknowledge competing discourses and challenging discourses. That is, the term 'ideology', it has most often been used, gives the impression of a consistent and unchanging set of values that is often seen as determined by the elite in a society, without challenge by those disadvantaged by the ideology. Cultural discourses are much less rigid and deterministic.

I have argued (Kiesling 2004a, 2005) that there are four main cultural discourses of masculinity in the USA (the first is tied up in more general cultural discourses of gender as I have already discussed, but I will repeat it here):

- *Gender difference* is a discourse that sees men and women as naturally and categorically different in biology and behavior. This discourse is present in most cultures around the world; see Connell (1987, 2002) for a discussion.
- *Heterosexism* is the definition of masculinity as heterosexual; to be masculine in this discourse is to sexually desire women and not men. For a particularly strong articulation of the role of this discourse in masculinity, see Kimmel (2001); and for studies that show how it is constructed in talk, see Cameron (1997) and Kiesling (2002).
- *Dominance* is the identification of masculinity with dominance, authority, or power; to be a man is to be strong, authoritative, and in control, especially when compared to women, and also when compared to other men. That men are oriented to dominance, whether or not they achieve it, is probably one of the oldest claims in gender research. Dominance comes in many forms, though, as we will see below. See Connell (1987), Bourdieu (2001), Whitehead (2002), among many others for discussions of how this discourse manifests in different societies. For an articulation of the value of performing dominance in language, see Kiesling (1997b) and Tannen (1990).
- *Male solidarity* is a discourse that takes as given a bond among men. Men are understood to normatively want (and need) to do things with groups of other men exclusive of women. The best known discussion of homosociality is probably Sedgwick's (1985) *Between Men*, in which she argues that men's heterosexual rivalries produce a homosociality among men that marginalizes women. For more discussion, see especially Kiesling (2005: 702–3).

As argued by Whitehead (2002: 212–16), these discourses are experienced as *desires* by men. That is, men are not so much constrained to be dominant as to have learned to *want* to be dominant. This desire is thus not a sexual desire – it is more generally a want of something missing in a man's being, and fulfilling this desire is part of developing and maintaining the self (see also Cameron and Kulick 2003). This desire is fulfilled by performing masculine practices for the social gaze (whether real or imagined). In a short (and overgeneralized) statement, men are socialized to desire to be men. This is an important point, because it allows us to argue that men actively try to be men through their social performances, rather than acting as a Skinnerian rat. In summary, there are four main discourses that comprise hegemonic masculinity in the USA, and they are desired by men in that culture.

While these discourses may be somewhat different in some cultures, they seem to be fairly universal, especially in European or 'European-descended' cultures (e.g., mainstream USA, Brazil). Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman (2001) note cultural discourses among young men in the UK that are almost identical to those listed above. There is variation, however. For

example, Sampath (1997) notes that male identities in Trinidad are focused more on the conflicting values of respectability and reputation that change the dynamics of power and solidarity especially. Herdt's (1987, 1999) study of the Sambia shows a case in which misogyny is taken to such as extremes that heterosexism is subordinated to male solidarity.

One reason we can find these discourses in so many cultures is that they are very abstract. This abstractness has the effect of making it difficult to connect them to the lives and practices of actual men. The concept of *cultural models* allows us to do this. These cultural models are like cultural discourses in that they represent assumptions about how we think the world ought to be, but they are more specific and can be described narratively. In one of the most vividly articulated uses of this concept, Holland and Skinner (1987) show how the terms young women use for men (such as *jerk*, *nerd*, and *guy*) can be explained best through the use of a cultural model that takes as normal a narrative of the typical heterosexual romance. This romance is one in which the man and woman are normatively of equal attractiveness, and then the man does nice things for the woman and she progressively allows more intimate behavior. The terms for men describe ways that men deviate from this norm, by being unattractive, too focused on sexual intimacy, or as not following the normative story, for example. These terms show that cultural discourses are translated into lived experience and (what is supposed to be) normative lived experience. Social actors then have something to compare themselves and others against. As an example, below I will discuss the different cultural models available to men in the USA.

In summary, the theoretical view I am outlining is one in which masculinity is defined as *social performances which are semiotically linked (indexed) to men, and not to women, through cultural discourses and cultural models*. This definition captures the normative dichotomy discussed above, but does not define any particular traits as masculine. This lack of specificity entails a flexibility such that the definition can remain constant from culture to culture, while the nature of masculinity may differ. Moreover, masculinity is located in the connection between social performances and the cultural discourses.

Discussions of masculinity almost always focus on dominance or power; the definition proposed above moves the power component away from masculinity and into the cultural discourses (dominance can be seen as one kind of power; see Kiesling 1996, Chapter 2, and Kiesling 1997b). Masculinity is thus not all power (or all heterosexuality, as Kimmel 2001 argues), even though power does figure into the cultural discourses that almost universally define masculinity (as does the gender dichotomy). But one of the most paradoxical aspects of masculinity is that while men are supposed to be powerful and dominant, very few men feel that they have power. This paradox is one reason why many men find it hard to understand those feminisms that stress women's powerlessness vis-à-vis men. The reason for this disconnection between men's power and the lack of men

feeling powerful is that the advantages that men enjoy are for the most part based on group norms and not the experiences of individuals; for example, men have on average a higher income than women, but there are many women with higher incomes than many men. More importantly, there are always other men who are more powerful in one way or another and, as Eckert (1989) has noted, people compare themselves more to people of the same gender than the other gender. So most men do not feel like they are the most powerful men, so they do not feel powerful. This feeling of non-dominance is especially true of men who do not fit the stereotype or overtly challenge the cultural discourses of masculinity, who together probably compose the overwhelming majority of men: there are only a few tall, white, heterosexual CEOs, or star quarterbacks. Nevertheless, all men's linguistic practices (even, I argue, men who use practices to reject one or more cultural discourses, such as gay men; see Kiesling 1997a) are still shaped by the same cultural discourses as those who show 'dominant' practices, and their identities are evaluated based on how these practices situate them in the cultural discourses. Another factor that makes men's power difficult to deal with is that power comes in different forms: as outlined in Kiesling (1997b), power can come from a structural or institutional hierarchy, from physical strength, from wealth, from knowledge, and/or from skill. Men thus have an array of practices that allow them to be powerful and, thus, masculine, in many different ways. However, they may also feel powerless in one of these domains while being powerful in another; being physically powerful in no way entails being economically powerful.

In summary, power or dominance is one of the four discourses of masculinity, discourses that men come to desire to construct in their identity. Power is one of the most prominent, but most men do not feel always powerful even as they work to construct power in different ways.

The study of masculinities has blossomed in the last two decades; the discussion above is only an introduction to a large and complex topic, often fraught with strong political feelings by researchers. Readers wishing to investigate the field further should consult Connell (1995), Whitehead (2002), and the online bibliography maintained by Michael Flood (2006).

Connecting Language to Social Identity

Now that we have investigated masculinity somewhat, let us explore how language is connected to social identity and masculinity (a more extensive introduction to this connection can be found in Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003). We are going to try to make a connection between languages as a social performance and the cultural discourses of masculinity. The connection between a linguistic feature (including accent, morphosyntax, words, and discourse strategies) and meaning that is not denotational (i.e.,

what one finds in the dictionary) is called 'indexical meaning'. Indexical meaning is meaning that arises because of a connection between a linguistic feature and the context(s) in which it is most frequently used. For example, the meaning of a deictic term like *here* or *today* is partially indexical because we need to know where the speaker is or when they are speaking (aspects of the context of use) in order to understand their meaning fully.

The indexicals that come into play in language and gender are based on different aspects of context. A good example is voice pitch: women have higher voices on average than men, so higher pitch is usually indexical of femininity. Thus, the gender of the speaker is an aspect of the context of use that is connected to pitch, so we can say pitch is indexical of gender.

But indexicals are not always so straightforward. When men wish to become 'more masculine', they will often lower the pitch of their voice. Thus, pitch is not just biological, nor is it simply a matter of indexing masculinity. What does it mean to become 'more masculine' in such an instance? If we return to our definition of masculinity, we would look for some way that lower pitch connects the speaker to some cultural discourse of masculinity. In this case, low pitch might be indexical of physical size; animals with lower pitch are generally animals with larger size. Low pitch might also be indexical of power and authority, which are other ways of being dominant, because, in US society, we take people with lower-pitched voices (such as Walter Cronkite, a famous US news anchor) more seriously.

So indexical meaning, or simply indexicality, can work *indirectly*: low pitch might not be directly masculine, but indirectly so, low pitch directly indexes size and authority, and these qualities are further indexed with masculinity (see Ochs 1992 for the definitive discussion of indirect indexicality in gender). So rather than taking a straight path from the linguistic form to the gendered meaning, the path first goes to some other contextual feature, which then points to gender. Given this theoretical background, we can see how linguistic features are going to get connected to masculinity: *Masculinity is expressed in language through features of language indexical of cultural discourses of masculinity, or through features directly indexical of certain kinds of men.* Unfortunately, it is not always easy to discover exactly what a linguistic feature indexes; in fact, many readers will likely disagree with the indexicalities I have suggested for lower pitch. In the next section, as we explore some of the linguistic features that have been researched in connection with men, we will see that we have to be very careful in claiming indexical meanings for specific linguistic features.

Patterns of Men's Language Use

I now turn to a discussion of the kinds of linguistic practices that have been found for men. As I work through these features, I will point out

how they are connected to the cultural discourses of masculinity, and I will present some case studies that require us to understand the interaction among the discourses in order to explain the difference being a man makes in linguistic patterns.

DOMINANCE

The most prominent feature claimed for men's language and masculine language is power and hierarchy, so we will begin there. Focusing on power and hierarchy also makes sense given the theoretical perspective outlined above: dominance is one of the cultural discourses of masculinity, so we would expect men to use linguistic features that create or index power and dominance. It has also been claimed and shown that men tend to use discursive strategies that are indexical of hierarchical or powerful stances, or that in some way directly create those stances (Coates 2002).

But as noted above, we need to be careful in assigning meanings to linguistic features. One early conception of the notion that men used powerful language is that men interrupt more than women. Given that interruption can be a strategy for claiming dominance (as one is preventing another party from speaking when they want to), it was suggested that men interrupt more than women, and that they especially interrupt women more than men. It turns out that we cannot make this kind of generalization, and probably cannot make any sort of generalization about interruption. There are two reasons for this. First, people's definitions of interruption differ, and even the same person will have a different definition depending on whether they are chatting with their friend or giving a speech at work (see Tannen 1993). Second, many studies have been done to investigate this discursive feature and gender and the results are resoundingly inconclusive (see James and Clarke 1993). So, just because a linguistic feature *can* be used to display or create dominance does not mean men will use it more often than women. It is possible, however, that interactional styles with more interruption may be seen as more masculine, but no research has been done on this question.

In fact, it is hard to find one discursive feature men generally use more than women; almost every study that shows some difference either has limited generalizability (because only a few people were studied) or is contradicted by another study (but see below). There are two reasons for this. One is that indexicality depends on the real context of an utterance as well as the context-free interpretation, and there are many aspects of context in addition to the gender of the speaker that make a meaningful difference. The second reason for the problem is that it is not necessarily the number of interruptions (for example) that are used, but how those interruptions are actually accomplished.

Let us take silence as another example. Silence is in a sense the opposite of interruption: one leaves 'space' in the talk for another person to speak.

On the surface, this can be heard as considerate and may even seem submissive (subordinates 'speak only when spoken to'). But there is also a cultural model in the USA of the 'inexpressive male', whereby men display and/or create power by suppressing their emotions (anger is an exception). In this view, silence is a withholding of a person's inner state that shows strength and power rather than weakness. Deployed strategically, especially when emotional responses are expected, silence can even be devastatingly dominant. Jack Sattell (1983) provides an example of how silence can be used as a powerful feature in his analysis of a scripted argument between a man and woman, in which the man simply does not respond to the woman. He shows not only that silence is powerful in this case but that the interpretation of silence as a powerful feature depends not just on how it is deployed by the (would be) speaker, but also on how the other participant(s) in the interaction orient to that silence. For example, in Sattell's example, the woman becomes very frustrated by the man's silence; if she had reacted another way, the man's power may have been non-existent.

It is not, then, simply what linguistic features a participant uses with great frequency that gives them a powerful style; in fact, the indexicality of any given feature is almost always potentially multiple (see Tannen 1993). Whether or not a person is powerful or dominant depends on how all participants in an interaction orient to different moves made and features used in a particular utterance. In this view, gender is going to play a role in whether a feature is ratified as powerful and dominant by other participants. For example, Norma Mendoza-Denton (2005) shows how silence was used by the senators in the Clarence Thomas–Anita Hill hearings to give weight to Thomas's statements, positioning him as an authoritative figure, and Hill as one lacking credibility. In this sense Thomas' speech is being made authoritative by other participants through their reaction to it, while Hill's authority is being eroded.

So one problem with the claim that men use powerful linguistic features is the indeterminacy and negotiated meaning of linguistic features. Another wrinkle is that, as noted above, there are many different ways to be powerful. One can show superior knowledge, threaten to use physical force, emphasize a position high up in a hierarchy, etc., or all of these at once. This multiplicity of power combined with the indeterminacy of social meaning for linguistic features means that it is much easier to make generalizations about men and masculinity and language than to make a catalog of what 'men's speech' or 'masculine language' looks like. So in general *we expect men to use speech that creates dominance in some way, but we cannot specify exactly what features men are going to use to do this, because the same linguistic feature can index different things depending on context.*

Men are also more likely than women to be positioned by *others* as having authority and power before any interaction begins. That is, silence from a man may be interpreted as powerful, whereas silence from a

woman may be interpreted as weakness. This difference is also true of men of different ranks or statuses in society. For example, in the film version of *To Kill a Mockingbird*,³ the courtroom silences of the main character, white lawyer Atticus Finch, exude power, while those of Tom Robinson, the accused black man, show subordination.

Therefore, a crucial variable in all of this is the gender of the other participants in a conversation. Dominance is performed very differently, for example, when men are talking to women rather than to other men. And even when talking to other men, how men (or anyone else) create dominance depends on what kind of speech event the men are engaging in. In my ethnographic study of a fraternity – a social club at universities in the USA that are male-only and in which membership is selective – I found that the men used different strategies in meetings vs. parties and other social activities (see Kiesling 1997b, 1998, 2005). In social situations, there was more focus on physical power and skill, while in meetings there was more focus on institutional power and intelligence.

Different types of dominance might also figure differently in different types of masculinity. For example, black and working-class masculinity are usually focused on physical power. Bucholtz (1999) provides a vivid illustration of how a white man uses aspects of African American speech in telling a story to index physical power and prowess at fighting. Similarly, SturtzSreetharan (2006) shows that Japanese men of varying life stages use Japanese language politeness features in different ways because the stances they take align with contrasting Japanese cultural models of masculinity.

Finally, the dominance associated with masculinity can also be used by any speaker to create dominance by using a linguistic feature that is masculine. For example, Hall and O'Donovan (1996) analyzed how *hijras* in India use masculine and feminine linguistic markers, including pronoun forms, to position themselves in interaction. The *hijras* are people in India who are born as boys but who form their own gendered identity by taking on the practices of both men and women. Because they most often present themselves as women, they also most often refer to themselves and each other using feminine terms and pronouns. However, they often use masculine forms for other *hijras*, especially when they want to distance themselves from the *hijra* they are talking about/to, and even more so when they are constructing positions that are associated with masculinity in Indian society. Most telling are instances in which *hijras* use masculine forms when they are referring to *hijras* in positions of dominance (including themselves). Hall and O'Donovan's work shows us that dominance and masculinity can be tightly connected, to the point that we find not only dominance constructing masculinity, but also masculine forms being used to construct dominance.

In summary, men use many strategies to gain dominance in conversation; there is no single feature that they use more than women that make them

dominant. In addition, others in a conversation (women or other men) may treat them as if they are dominant simply because they are men. Finally, there are many different kinds of power that men may use to create dominance, and there are therefore many corresponding ways to perform this power.

Competing Discourses

We have so far only addressed how the cultural discourse of power affects the way men talk and how their talk is heard. In what follows, I will consider some other patterns that have been found for men, and how we can look to the interaction of the cultural discourses as an explanation, even though in many ways these discourses often clash. For example, how can men use language to resolve the apparent clash between dominance and male solidarity? If men are all supposed to be competing for dominance, how do they 'do friendship', or *homosociality*? In addition, how can male solidarity and heterosexuality be reconciled? That is, how do men express homosociality without it being understood as sexual interest? It is these tensions in fact that connect most with men's speech and masculine language.

The clash between dominance and solidarity produces speech genres that in fact are well-known and expected of men, for example, men's use of overtly competitive and distancing forms, such as insults, to build solidarity. In my analysis (Kiesling 2005) of one of the fraternity's rush parties (which are held to attract new members), I show how members create homosociality by insulting each other in front of potential members (see also Coates 2002 for similar findings). Not only is it clear that the insults and competition are building solidarity, it is clear that the men are displaying this playful competitiveness for the potential member to create a desire to join the fraternity. Therefore, the men not only engage in competitive speech forms, but they also treat them as desirable and joyful. Competitive speech genres, acts, and stances such as insults and boasts are also used in other homosocial activities in the fraternity, for example, competitive (speech) activities such as drinking games, betting, and board games (see Kiesling 2001). Finally, all of the men, to greater or lesser degrees depending on the situation, employ a 'cool' stance. This stance allows for the expression of homosocial desire without the speaker coming across as 'too earnest' in his desire and is encapsulated in the pervasive use of *dude* within the fraternity and by men in general (see Kiesling 2004a). Other strategies are used as well by the fraternity men. One strategy is simply inclusion in a winning side. That is, competition is shown, but the participant who is the object of homosociality is included in the boast.

We have to be cautious with these analyses, because they are analyses of a particular community of practice (Meyerhoff 2002) that is all-male and in many ways 'hypermasculine'. Yet, there are two areas in which we

can use the cultural discourses of masculinity to help explain findings that have been more widely replicated, at least in Anglo and other 'European-based' societies. These are in the areas of politeness and morphophonological variation. In both of these areas, patterns have arisen that have been replicated many times, although for many reasons we should not deem them universal. Rather, they hold true because of the pervasiveness of the cultural discourses of masculinity (and gender) in these 'Western' societies.

Men and Politeness

The first of these well-researched areas of language and gender is politeness. There are a number of ways of representing linguistic politeness, but the most dominant is Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory. In this theory, each speaker has face needs, and this face has two facets, positive and negative. Positive face is the need to be approved of by others, or one's self-worth, while negative face is essentially freedom to do what one wants, free from imposition by others. Under this theory, speech acts that are potentially threatening to the face of the speaker and/or hearer are typically mitigated by politeness strategies of various sorts, to lessen this threat. One way to lessen the threat is to do the speech act indirectly, for example, by uttering a statement rather than a direct request or command (e.g., 'The trash needs to be taken out' vs. 'Take out the trash!'). Another set of strategies is to build up someone's face by either paying attention to positive face (e.g., telling the hearer how wonderful they are if they comply with the request) or to negative face (e.g., acknowledging the burden of the request).

Studies of gender and politeness generally show that men tend to be less polite (use more direct strategies without paying attention to face) and are especially less positively polite, than women (Holmes 1995). There are also significant differences in level of politeness depending on the gender of the other participant. In general, the fewest politeness strategies are seen in conversations among men and the most politeness among women, with mixed-gender conversations falling in between. All of these patterns are tendencies; while the differences among these gender situations are significant, they are not categorical.

What could be the explanation for these patterns? Let us first focus on the issue of same-gender conversations. Explanations for men's relative lack of politeness markers/formulas have characteristically been rooted in women's supposed need to be more polite for various reasons, including the need to project a 'refined' and hence more feminine identity, the need to avoid the appearance of sexual promiscuity, and women's supposedly greater focus on interpersonal relationships (see Lakoff 1975). These all have merit but focus mainly on women, and they tend to position men as merely having little use for doing things politely, in effect setting them up as 'politeness oafs'. But we know that men know about politeness; in

fact, when they talk to women they tend to use more of it, which provides evidence against the ‘politeness oaf’ theory. This observation also suggests that there is a reason men tend to *avoid* using polite linguistic behavior – they profit by not using it, and it helps them perform masculinity.

The cultural discourses of masculinity present a number of explanations for men’s lesser use of linguistic politeness, although we do not have the data to determine which one is right. Most likely they are all in part correct, at least for some men (and we only need some men to avoid politeness in order to bring the average down). First, they could be avoiding what is seen as feminine behavior, both to keep the contrast and to avoid the impression of homosexuality. This argument again associates politeness with just women, but it could be part of the reason. A second explanation could be that politeness is seen as powerless. Subordinates tend to be more polite to their superiors than vice versa, so men might see politeness as weakness. This view has the advantage that it can help explain the behavior of men when speaking with women. As Eckert (1989) has observed, people tend to compare themselves to people of the same gender, so dominance would be more important for men in same-gender conversations, and they might actually want to be more polite with women (especially given cultural models of romance in the USA; see Holland and Skinner 1987). So, just as in the case of *dude*, we can see here that using fewer politeness markers and strategies actually allows men to balance the cultural discourses of masculinity. One way to test this is to investigate how politeness varies among men; if we were to find a group of men whom we could determine did not feel as strongly connected to the cultural discourse of dominance, for example, then we might predict that these men would be more polite to each other.

In summary, the patterns of interaction that have been shown to be more characteristic of men, or indexical of masculinity, generally show men as less polite and more competitive than women, although there is wide variation among men. Because the discourses of masculinity can be used to explain these patterns of men’s language use, we might also suspect that the different ways that men orient to the discourses of masculinity would predict how they use language. This hypothesis has not been investigated, however.

MEN AND PATTERNS OF VARIATION

In addition to studying discourse strategies such as use or non-use of politeness markers/formulas, researchers of language and gender have also investigated patterns of variation in pronunciation and grammatical features. In general, researchers have found that for stable language features, that is, those not currently undergoing change in the community being studied, men usually show higher usage levels than women of variants associated with working-class speakers and lower levels of variants associated with education or the ‘standard’ language. When a language variety *is*

changing, men usually show lower usage levels for newer features than women. Keep in mind again that these are not categorical differences; there are always many men and women who, when compared individually, will not follow these patterns.

As above, while the patterns themselves are interesting, the explanations are even more so. Most of the explanations for these patterns have focused on women rather than men; however, there are two explanations that at least in part have focused on men. One is that the vernacular (the language usually associated with the working class) has 'covert prestige' for men, because it indexes toughness and a kind of working-class masculinity. This argument was offered by Trudgill (1974) to explain the curious pattern he found in Norwich, England, in which lower middle-class men used the vernacular more than working-class men in some situations. In addition, he found that overall the men tended to report that they used more vernacular forms than they actually did, whereas women tended to under-report their use of these forms, so he reasoned that men actually see a prestige in the vernacular forms. Of course, this explanation does not really address *why* men would want to index these things rather than women, or even whether women's use of vernacular forms has similar indexicalities.

The other explanation for men's behavior is the converse of Eckert's observation that because women have lesser access to non-linguistic power (e.g., hierarchical and physical) than men, women can only gain power 'through the indirect use of a man's power or through the development of personal influence' (1989: 256). And one of the chief ways of achieving indirect access to power and personal influence is through using the symbolic power or 'symbolic capital' associated with standard language forms. This argument suggests that because men do have access to 'real' power, they do not need to use language to achieve power and so are more free to use vernacular language forms. The problem with this argument is that it still treats men as the norm from which women deviate. A more gender-balanced view that is still in the spirit of this explanation would see that men are actively avoiding the forms women use more (or are actively trying to use the forms the women avoid). One would then need to look for explanations as to why men would avoid those forms. Such an explanation could focus on different *kinds* of power available to men and women (e.g., physical vs. moral power), as discussed above. I explored this in more detail in an article (Kiesling 1998) that looked at the stances created by fraternity men with high usage levels for vernacular features. These men tended to emphasize solidarity and resistance to the structural authority in the fraternity, and they used the vernacular to help them do that.

Almost all of the cultural discourses of masculinity can provide an explanation for gender-based patterns of variation in usage levels for vernacular vs. standard phonological and grammatical features. Eckert's explanation focuses very much on difference and power, but we could also

imagine a situation in which the forms the men avoid are associated with homosexuality, or in some way suggests separation and hierarchy among men (violating the discourse of solidarity). Each of these may be part of the explanation, or they may in certain circumstances be the main explanation. Either way, the patterns are robust and the discourses of masculinity give us ample explanation for their presence.

Using discourses can also help with studies of variation and language in gender in non-Western societies, such as the study performed by Haeri (1996) for Cairo. In that study, Haeri finds that the axis along which differentiation is relevant is not a standard-vernacular one, but rather one that is much more complex. Much of this complexity has to do with the relationship between different varieties of Arabic in Cairo (Classical Arabic, Egyptian standard, and vernacular Egyptian varieties), and the fact that Classical Arabic is available almost solely to men and, moreover, is considered appropriate only for men. Hence, Haeri finds that in Cairene society it is men rather than women who use 'educated' variants, while women use more vernacular forms. Just like discourse patterns, then, patterns of variation in phonological and grammatical features are driven by the cultural models and indexicalities of the local speech community. While many speech communities share these discourses in 'Western' societies, they are by no means universal.

MEN, GOSSIP, AND HETEROSEXUALITY

We have mainly been concerned up to now with the discourses of power, solidarity, and difference, but we have not discussed the role of heterosexuality, other than its complex relation to hegemonic views of male solidarity. A question we should briefly address, then, is how men show their heterosexuality to other men. Cameron (1997), in an analysis of a conversation among fraternity members, shows one way in which this display of heterosexuality is accomplished. She argues that the group of men are actually gossiping about another man who was not present. They talk about his body and appearance and how that appearance makes him 'look gay', and, by constructing someone else as gay, they implicitly claim they are not. One of the interesting points Cameron makes in this article is that the men are doing this work using speech activities (gossip) and strategies (cooperation) associated with femininity. She, thus, points out that even if men are using linguistic features and discourse strategies in 'feminine' ways, they can still connect to the discourses of masculinity in the content of their talk. I found similar patterns in my analysis of the construction of heterosexuality in the fraternity talk I analyzed. In addition, I found overt displays of heterosexuality: stories about heterosexual sex, discussions of women and their looks, etc. Thus, there are a number of strategies that men can employ to create heterosexuality when talking with other men.

Summary and Conclusion

In summary, there is great variation in how men use language – more variation, in fact, between some types of men than between men and women. However, the patterns that do emerge are profitably explained through appealing to the cultural discourses of masculinity. We know a fair amount about how men talk and how they talk differently from women, on average. But one thing that has not been investigated in nearly as much detail is how different kinds of men talk. Do different men emphasize different cultural models of masculinity, or even challenge them in the way they talk? How? There has been some work on these sorts of questions. For example, Pujolar i Cos (1997) shows how men in Barcelona from different communities of practice with very different understandings of masculinity use Catalan at different rates and in different ways. More work in this vein in different settings will show how varied linguistic constructions of masculinities can be.

Early in the study of language and masculinity, men were assumed to be the ones who were less linguistically expressive, and to use language to be ‘inexpressive’ (Sattell 1983). However, after a little more than a decade of the study of language and masculinity, it is clear that men are just as expressive in their linguistic use, and just as varied as well. What is different is that this expressiveness is less often noticed, because it is so often the norm against which ‘expressiveness’ is constructed. When we start to understand the subjectivities of men and the discourses that shape their desires and identities, we find that they are (surprisingly, to some) extremely clever and subtle, and actively construct their identities as much as anyone else.

Short Biography

Scott F. Kiesling is Associate Professor of Linguistics at the University of Pittsburgh in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA, where he also serves as department chair. His work focuses on the ways in which language is used by speakers to express and understand social meaning. His main work has been in language and gender, particularly the study of masculinities and language, although he has also investigated meaning in Australian English and Pittsburgh speech. He is also the co-editor, with Christina Bratt Paulston, of *Intercultural Discourse and Communication: The Essential Readings*, published by Blackwell.

Notes

* Correspondence address: Scott Kiesling, Department of Linguistics, University of Pittsburgh, 2816 CL, Pittsburgh, PA 15260, USA. Email: kiesling@pitt.edu.

¹ The term ‘patriarchy’ is not used much anymore because it is seen as glossing over the complexity of masculine privilege; hence the rise of the term hegemonic masculinity, see below.

² This article will have a bias toward the US context for two reasons. First, I am most familiar with that context from my research and life. Second, it is the most widely studied context for language and gender. Some other contexts, especially English speaking, will likely show similar patterns, but many others are likely very different.

³ This is the film version of Harper Lee's novel about a falsely-accused black man in the South, a powerful condemnation of racism and an inspiring story of a white man who stands up to it. Gregory Peck's portrayal of the father/lawyer Atticus Finch won an Academy Award. His role is significant for masculinity studies in that in this role he is often seen as the ideal father: strong, principled, and caring.

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