



The gender-linked language effect: an empirical test of a general process model



Anthony Mulac^{a,1}, Howard Giles^{a,*}, James J. Bradac^{a,2}, Nicholas A. Palomares^{b,3}

^a Department of Communication, University of California, Santa Barbara, CA 93101-4020, USA

^b Department of Communication, University of California, Davis, CA 95616, USA

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 3 July 2012

Received in revised form 21 December 2012

Accepted 24 December 2012

Available online 16 February 2013

Keywords:

Gender roles

Gender linked language effect

Self-categorization theory

Communication accommodation theory

ABSTRACT

The gender-linked language effect (GLLE) is a phenomenon in which transcripts of female communicators are rated higher on Socio-Intellectual Status and Aesthetic Quality and male communicators are rated higher on Dynamism. This study proposed and tested a new general process model explanation for the GLLE, a central mediating element of which posits that males and females have socialized schema of how each gender normatively communicates. Participants described five landscape photographs in writing. Participants were asked to describe the first photograph with no other instructions. The next four randomly ordered photos were described under two guises: “as if you were a man,” and “as if you were a woman.” Under both gender guises, participants described the photograph “to a man” and “to a woman.” Transcripts were coded for gender-distinguishing language features. Discriminant analysis indicated that the language used by male and female respondents in the male guise differed from that used by the same respondents in the female guise, supporting communicators’ consistent gender-linked language schemata, and stereotypes, and the new process model. While the data supported the new gender-linked language model, no effects were found for predictions also made regarding communication accommodation or gender identity salience.

© 2013 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

The role that gender plays in shaping sociolinguistic patterns and communicative behaviors has engaged research activity for well over 30 years. An intriguing speculative essay by Lakoff (1975) captivated researchers’ attention by claiming the existence of a distinct “women’s language” in western societies. This style of speech and writing was deemed to be more hesitant, indirect, emotional, and uncertain than men’s whose manner of communicating was claimed to be more dominant, direct, and controlling (e.g., West and Zimmerman, 1987). Such differences were interpreted as reflective of the relative status and power of men over women vis-a-vis sex-role theory (see Henley and Kramarae, 1991; Thorne and Henley, 1975), and/or through people being socialized from an early age into what it meant to be a communicating member of men’s or women’s cultures (e.g., Foss et al., 2012; Maltz and Borker, 1982; Mulac et al., 2001; Tannen, 1990).

Since that time, there has been a plethora of studies and a number of attempts at integrative literature reviews (e.g., Borisoff and Chesebro, 2011; Coates, 1986; Dindia and Canary, 2006; Holmes, 1995; Holmes and Meyerhoff, 2003; Leapers and

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 805 967 9626.

E-mail addresses: HowieGiles@cox.net (H. Giles), napalomares@ucdavis.edu (N.A. Palomares).

¹ Retired from UCSB.

² Deceased.

³ Tel.: +1 530 554 1486 (O).

Ayres, 2007; Murachver and Janssen, 2007; Palomares et al., 2004) that have highlighted many supposed inconsistencies and contextual caveats to the abovementioned trends. Indeed, Aries (1996), in a book-length treatment of the area, concluded that language differences between the genders paled in comparison to their similarities and the study of gender and language has taken on a mainstream social constructionist stance (e.g., Speer and Stokoe, 2011; Weatherall, 2002a,b; Weatherall et al., 2010). All this notwithstanding, Mulac and associates found important and consistent gender differences when analyzing combinations of features rather than examining isolated language markers (for a review, see Mulac, 2006). As one of the few, perhaps only consistently replicable effect in this area, it is surprising that this *gender-linked language effect* (GLLE) has not attracted much explanatory attention. The major thrust of the investigation to be reported was to test an important aspect of the new model of this effect (to be introduced below) as well as explore issues of communication accommodation and gender identity salience.

1.1. Theorizing the gender-linked language effect

The GLLE has been found in over 20 empirical investigations with communicators 12–70-years-of-age (for an overview, see Mulac, 2006). It has been shown for spoken and written language transcripts where the communicators (whose sex cannot be guessed accurately by respondents) are perceived differently, such that girls and women are generally rated higher in *Socio-Intellectual Status* (e.g., high social status, literate) and *Aesthetic Quality* (e.g., pleasing, sweet), whereas boys and men are rated higher in *Dynamism* (e.g., strong, aggressive). The effect has been evident in coding public speeches, problem-solving interactions, and essays. Moreover, specific language features favored by male and female communicators (see Table 1) have been associated with the GLLE (Mulac and Lundell, 1986; Mulac et al., 1988). Although the gender-linked language effect is stable across populations and communication contexts and has been demonstrated repeatedly over the last three decades (Mulac, 2006), only recently has theoretical effort been expended on understanding its underlying mechanisms. In particular, we are compelled by the question as to how males and females enact distinctive language patterns that lead to social attributions inherent in the GLLE.

Toward that end, we introduce a general process model (see Cargile and Bradac, 2001; Giles and Marlow, 2011), which appeals to subjective processes mediating the GLLE, a schematic representation of which appears in Fig. 1 (for a full exposition of the model, see Mulac et al., 2009). Briefly, we propose that certain features of situations (SI) that speakers or writers perceive (PC_s) can trigger their cognitive schemata and stereotypes reflecting the intersection of gender and language (GLS_s), and that these cognitive structures influence speakers' production of gender-linked language behaviors (GLB_s).

Individuals likely draw upon a different kind of knowledge when communicating in situations where there is no special intention to use male or female language because the focus is elsewhere, which is probably true of most situations. We propose this different kind of knowledge exists in the form of gender-linked language schemata. As Bem (1985) argued: "Gender-schematic processing... involves spontaneously sorting persons, attributes, and behaviors into masculine or feminine categories... regardless of their differences on a variety of dimensions unrelated to gender—for example, spontaneously placing items like 'tender' and 'nightingale' into a feminine category and items like 'assertive' and 'eagle' into a masculine category" (p. 187). Speakers draw upon schemata unconsciously and automatically to achieve a wide variety of goals, and situations that heighten gender salience will spontaneously energize these sub-schemata, just as such situations energize more general gender schemata. These schemata are likely responsible for the language differences that males and females can exhibit under most normal situations when they are not consciously attempting to speak differently.

The counterpart to gender-linked language schemata is gender-linked language stereotypes. Gender-linked language stereotypes are explicit knowledge available to conscious thought, whereas gender-linked language schemata are implicit, existing largely outside of awareness. Thus, gender-linked language stereotypes are more available to speaker's control than

Table 1
Coded language variables associated by gender.^a

Language variable	Example
Words^a	Number of words
Sentence Initial Adverbials^a	"Actually, it's a ..."
References to Emotion^a	"a somber scene"
Intensive Adverbs^a	"It's so ..."
Uncertainty Verb^a	"It seems to be ..."
Hedges^a	"It's kind of fall like."
Justifiers^a	"...because the snow is ..."
Judgmental Adjectives^a	"...a beautiful scene."
References to Quantity	"60 feet tall"
"I" References	"I think it's a ..."
Locatives	"in the Rocky Mountains"
Negations	"not the desert"
Elliptical Sentences	"Great picture."

^a In past research, these italicized bolded language feature generally favored female use; those not italicized, generally favored male use.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1103208>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/1103208>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)