



Association of Gender and Language: A Case Study of Transgender Caitlyn Jenner

Syeda Mahnoor Saeed¹, Alina Waris², Uzma Khalil³

ABSTRACT

Keywords:

Difference Theory,
Dominance Theory,
Genderlect,
Language Differences

Sociolinguistics is the study of language while interacting in society and language is tightly knitted with our experiences. Difference of gender specific language is a debatable issue in linguistics. This study aims to identify the changes which occur in the language of transgenders after changing their gender. For this purpose, the study uses a case study of Caitlyn Jenner who is a transgender. This study observes the transformation of Caitlyn Jenner, a transgender who previously was a male athlete; however, after changing his gender, became a model and producer of a reality show named 'I am Cait'. The data is taken from YouTube videos, including the times of her being male (Bruce Jenner) and female (Caitlyn Marie Jenner). Result of the study shows that Caitlyn has adopted the female features of speech which emphasizes a person's language may change with the transition of the gender, hence pertaining the fact of each gender has its own unique features in language which changes.

INTRODUCTION

The evolution of sociolinguistics started in 1960's has rapidly grown qualitatively and quantitatively in language sciences which was started in 1960's. This field basically covers the relationship between language and society (Campoy, 2014). Sociolinguistics is study of the use of language while interacting in society. Society is described as the group of people living together for any purpose or purposes (Barbara, 2018). However, language is described as a way of communication through which people communicate and express themselves (Crystal and Robins, 2019). American Psychologist, Pinker (1994) states language is so tightly knitted with our experiences which our life cannot be imagined without it. When we talk about language, gender specific language differences are studied under the subject of sociolinguistics. Difference of gender specific language is a debatable issue in linguistics which explains the massive literature about use of language between men and women (Chouchane, 2016).

¹BS Scholar, City University of Science and Information Technology, Peshawar, Pakistan, Email: smano.saeed.sms@gmail.com

²BS Scholar, City University of Science and Information Technology, Peshawar, Pakistan, Email: alinawaris01@gmail.com

³Lecturer, City University of Science and Information Technology, Peshawar, Pakistan, Email: uzma@cusit.edu.pk

Sex and gender are commonly referred to male and female characters, which linguistically gives two different meanings. Sex refers to biological features of males and females, whereas, gender is considered as a social construct that involves psychology, genes, social, cultural and language differences between males and females. Gender is scientific linguistic term for sexism, (Wardhough, 2002). According to Chouchane (2016), the language of men and women varies according to the superiority and inferiority complexes in societies where women are suppressed and treated subordinately. In past, females were mainly supposed to take care of home and their domestic life and should obey the commands of the males. Including this major difference there are some other factors which also influence the speech of both genders.

There have been researches which refer to the use of language with reference to specific gender. (Barbara, 2018; Campoy, 2014; Chouchane, 2016; Spender, 1980 & Wardhough, 2002). Women use more polite form while speaking. They are emotional and their speech is mostly limited to family and home therefore, their speech is said to be non-assertive. Women keep changing their language, borrowing words from other languages (Spender, 1980), While, men are tended to speak more about their surroundings, business but, their language is considered to be slang because they are not conscious about reputation and standards however, they use language to judge, command and argue (Haas, 1979). Based on the above argument, depending on their gender, women are reputed to use standard form of language, while, men are carefree in speaking and use nonstandard form.

In recent years, people are changing their genders. Transgender is an umbrella term used for those who change their birth assigned gender in the opposite gender (Bradford, 2018) Caitlyn Jenner is one of the examples of transgenders. “I lived a lie my whole life and I cannot do that any longer” (“Jenner to abc NEWS”, 2015).

As discussed above, male and female use language specific to their genders, however, transgender is born in one gender and opt to change to another gender. This highlights the issue from biological aspect which determines one’s language, then, a transgender being male should use male language and, a transgender being female should use female specific language and vice versa. The present study tries to find out the differences between the male and female use of language with reference to transgenders; before and after changing their gender. It also tries to find out the connection between the gender in biological sense and the use of gender specific language in relation with transgenders.

Caitlyn Marie Jenner, previously known as William Bruce Jenner was born on October 28th, 1949 in Mount Kisco, New York, USA. Jenner is an American television celebrity and retired Olympic gold medal winning decathlete. Jenner is an actress and producer, known for her work as Can’t stop the music (1980), The fall guy (1981), and Jack and Jill (2011). Caitlyn Jenner (formerly known as Bruce) had already gained fame as “an American hero” before changing her gender; she set a third successive world record while winning the Olympics. She was given the traditionally unofficial title of ‘world’s greatest athlete’ as a winner of Olympic decathlon. With this prestige, Jenner eventually established her career in television, film, writing, auto racing and as a model. Jenner has six children with three consecutive wives. In April 2015, Jenner openly came out as a Trans’s woman in giving an interview to Diane Sawyer, where she talked about how she dealt with gender dysphoria her entire life.

Aims and Objectives

This study aims to find:

- the differences between males and females use of language with reference to transgender before and after changing their gender
- the links between gender and the use of gender specific language

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sociolinguistics is an interesting area for many research topics, amidst them, language and gender exist (Li, 2014). Gender issues became the part of language. Gender studies and language studies both have been collaborated in academics (Xia, 2013). According to Broadbridge (2003), it is the culture which demands the behavior and language of both of the genders which are studied under the field of 'Folk linguistics'. The differences can be psychological, physical, lingual and social class as mentioned above.

According to Nemati (2007), males and females are different from each other right from the childhood both mentally and physically. Females have sharp memories while on the other hand, males are more particular about sense of directions. Men give appropriate responses in visual-spatial tests while women lack appropriateness in response to visual-spatial tests. In field of mathematics, males are razor sharp than females. (Eisenman, 1997). Female genderlect has been the focus of study for linguists. It is usually regarded as deviation from the male (grammatical, phonological and lexical) norms (Hidalgo-Tenorio, E. 2016).

There are two more theories that are significant and show the social differences between males and females:

- a. Difference theory
- b. Dominance theory

Difference Theory

Difference theory also known as cultural theory discusses men and women differently as in the same group, both live in different and separate cultural worlds. The way both genders act, speak, and talk is totally different from each other. Both genders have different specifications and qualities in them (Uchida, 1992). Debora Tenon (1990) identified six main differences in the usage of language by both genders. Male's language is more dominant because it carries imperatives whereas female use hidden directives. Men argue more often whereas women do not. Men see language as a medium to assert thoughts whereas to women language is a source to express their feelings and emotions. Furthermore, men's language is supportive and women's is emotional. This means that through language it becomes easier to detect gender differences.

Dominance Theory

Social dominance discusses intergroup relations which focuses on the maintenance and stability of group-based social hierarchies. Group-based gender inequalities are maintained through three primary intergroup behaviors: institutional discrimination, aggregated individual discrimination, and behavioral asymmetry. These behaviors are visible in language used by both the genders (Pratto and Stewart, 2012).

Male and Female Differences in Language

Differences in utterance

Men usually talk or discuss competitive topics like sports, business while women usually discuss family life, individuals and emotions (Jinyu, 2014). According to Wenjing (2012), the topics usually discussed by men include news, politics, sports, business and current issues of that specific time, while, females are more intended towards family issues and social status. This shows that men are more practical than women and they do not express their feelings very easily and despite this, women are very emotional (Holmes, 2013).

Pronunciation and Intonation Differences

Talking about the pronunciation, many of the linguists claims women's speech is more relatable to the standards that are set by the society (Wardhaugh, 2006). They are more conscious about the correct pronunciation. Females belonging to the upper class usually have a change pronunciation from the females belonging to the lower class, although they live in the same society (Nemati, 2007). They are not anxious about their status in the society. Women pronounce /t/and /r/ easily. Their speech is concise and accurate. The upper-class women pronounce more correct than those of the lower class, because of the high expectations, they have to pay more attention to their language use and pronunciation (Wenjing, 2012).

Vocabulary

According to Jespersen (1922), women speech is more conservative than men. They are conscious about the vocabulary. They keep the language same as they have learned or acquire while men innovate new words by adding suffixes and prefixes to the words (Holmes, 2013). Women use more adjectives and adverbs in their speech than men for exaggeration or superficiality (Jinyu, 2014). According to Lakoff (1975) and Kramer (1974) lovely, charming, divine, sweet, cute, darling is used by females, while, terrific and neat are mostly used by men. Jespersen (1922) explains the reason behind language conservatism is the restricted vocabulary. Women stick to more normal and comprehensive words, while, men speak different terms for one word to convey their message.

Intensifiers

According to Lakoff (1975) use of intensifiers is majorly the quality of women. They very often use 'so' and 'very'. On the other hand, men do use intensifiers but in a less amount. The reason behind women using intensifiers is that, their speech does not count considerate without it.

According to Corey (2014) intensifiers are used to evince verbal skills and attracts the attention of the audience. Murphy (2010) divide intensifiers into two groups ‘amplifiers and down toners.

Amplifiers

Amplifiers are the adverb that raise the quality of the words such as really, very, extremely, highly, or Adverbs that boosts or maximize the meaning (Carter& McCarthy, 2006). According to (Labov, 1985; Partington, 1993 and Peter, 1995) amplifiers can be used in two ways for social and emotional expression of speaker. Firstly, that it creates versatility and color to the speech. Secondly, it also asserts that they can be constantly changed according to the situation. Amplifiers are used by women more than men. Men either do not use or if they use, they use very less.

Downtoners

Downtoners can be verbs ‘suppose, think, would, could, might’, adverbs ‘like, probably, really, quite’ and expletives which lower down the quality of speech. Using verb and adverbs can make conversation ambiguous for the listener and reader (Holmes 1990; Carter and McCarthy 2006). Use of downtoners is based on two situations. First is the conversation type. Second is the life stage.

Dahui Dong & Andrew Chiu (2013), talks about (Biber, Conrad and Reppen, 1998) were the only people who worked upon the corpus study which focuses on downtoners. They concluded the most common downtoners have diverse distributional patterns transversely registers. Downtoners are in contrast to amplifiers, decreasing the impact of a statement or express the uncertainty. On the contrary, they emplace the tone of a statement. There are three common functions of downtoners; reducing intensity, expressing doubts or showing imprecision. There are three common downtoners in informal English: maybe, pretty and probably (Biber, Conrad, 1998). The different use of language by both the genders, highlight their different role and status in society. Women have a lower status in a society therefore, they are strain to use hedges/ downtoners to make their speech a lady like. In result they use more hedges / downtoners in their speech than men (Lakoff, 1975).

Swear words/ expletives

We have observed in every society woman have more graceful personalities They avoid swear words or bad language because in their perspective it makes others uncomfortable. As women are more concerned about the social status, if they speak or use such words, they will be considered uncivilized (Xia, 2013). Bailey and Timm (1976) divide expletives into two, strong and weak expletives. Strong expletives are bastard, shit, crap, and fuck. While weak expletives are, holy moly, jeez, nuts, and darn. According to Stenström (1991), women use more expletives in their speech than man. Those expletives are the weak expletives. While men use less expletives but those expletives are strong expletives.

Politeness

Keikhaie and Mozaffari (2013) define politeness as, it is a social behavior which is common in every culture. The concept can be studied linguistically and non-linguistically. There are several definitions of politeness given by several linguists. Politeness is the term that includes actions, the way things are said that matches to the listener's perceptions (Nurjanah, 2017). As we know that females are taught from the childhood that they should behave well, their voice should not be higher than men, and they must know the etiquettes. Hence, when it comes to speech, they speak politely which is also called 'women language' (Brown, 1980). Brown further elaborates the point that females are considered inferior that is also the reason of adopting standard form of language which makes their language superior and elegant. On the other hand, men use non-standard form because of their dominant role in society which means that are not courteous or polite in usual (Trudgill, 1972).

METHODOLOGY

The present study is a case study which is qualitative in nature and is focuses on the language of transgender Caitlyn Jenner (female), before and after transforming her gender from Bruce Jenner (male). Data is collected from several interviews on Youtube which includes Thirteen videos from Caitlyn Jenner and five from Bruce Jenner. The interviews have been selected keeping in view the nature of the following theories: Genderlect Theory, Social Dominance Theory and Difference Theory. The selected data has been viewed multiple times and analyzed through Discourse Analysis.

ANALYSIS

Difference in utterance

Men are generally interested in news, sports and politics. These topics always get the attention of men more than women. In one of the video Jenner while interviewing about his athletic career which he lost to Ethel Kennedy said "I vowed that, a day would come when I will come back and win this. And this year I may have the chance". Here, it shows masculine features that men usually possess, which is clearly the appreciation of their work and career, and their keen interest in activities such as sports. On the other hand, females prefer to participate in family talks and issues regarding family problems and, their life style etc. After transformation, her interest clearly fell into issues relating family. Proving the mentioned fact, in another video she talks about her relationship with her mother after the transition and says "our relationship is better now my mom and I right, because, I don't have to lie to her anymore. When you are honest to everybody and to yourself its works". Here, the speech contains feminine elements more as compared to the first one.

Pronunciation and intonation

Men mostly speak without breaks and pauses from linguistics perspective, and contains the same intonation then women. Females pitch raises when they need to get the attention of listeners. The statement given by Bruce in video 1: "I vowed... the chance". Here, it has been noticed that his intonation never goes up and down it is the same throughout the interview. Females are cautious regarding their speech whereas, men are not. Caitlyn in another video said: "what am I going to

do” Caitlyn as Bruce in video 5 said “I got everybody out of the nest. Everybody is doin great. I gotta deal with myself. The last thing I wanna do is to hurt anyone of you”. Words like ‘doin’, ‘gotta’, ‘wanna’ shows that Bruce was not cautious of her pronunciation.

Vocabulary

Females mostly remember the time and date of events are common tools they use as evidence for proving their point or making their statement more authentic and attention worthy. Another fact about a women’s speech is they use standard form of language while, men tend to use vernacular. Caitlyn gave bits of her life information like ‘back in 80’s’ shows that she is very retentive, the use of accurate time as an evidence when she was facing hardships, is a common trait woman possess. When Caitlyn welcomes Diane, an interviewer, in her home, she says “how are you doing baby?” while in video 1 where Bruce greets the interviewer with a “hi how are you?” a clear difference can be visualized in both the statements. Caitlyn used the word ‘baby’ which is quite commonly seen in a female speech indicating their loving and caring nature. Whereas, Bruce has not been observed using such informal language while conversing with a stranger.

Intensifiers

Intensifiers are commonly used by females in their speech. Intensifiers are divided into downtoners and amplifiers. They are observed in that of Caitlyn’s speech below:

Downtoners

In video 2, Caitlyn says “that may be now is the time to talk on this issue, to come out publicly. Because I was getting destroyed in the tabloids”. The statement given by Caitlyn talking about her past, she uses ‘may be’ because she did not know in the past whether the decision, she was making to transform herself was the right at that time. Using downtoner in a speech makes the speech less valuable and it can be seen in the statement that she was still confuse, using another statement which was “because I was getting destroyed in the tabloids” she has proven or given the reason for her decision that she made; which automatically makes her speech authentic. This proves the fact that, her language after transformation is indeed showing broader difference.

Amplifiers

Females use amplifiers to make their speech colorful and show her emotional expression. Answering to a question, Caitlyn in video 4 says “people think it’s a physical thing but’ it really isn’t”. Again, she says “the dyslexic kid and little Caitlyn was not more important for me”. In statement 1, it is ‘really’, statement 2: ‘more’. While Bruce said in video 8: “the press gonna do one of two things. Either they talk positive or negative there is no in-between. And 95% of things in media are positive. Hence, the separation of Bruce and Chrystie is the only one negative issue they know that is why they are pushing it.” Here, expressing her views on media/press she as Bruce has used a single amplifier ‘only’.

Swear Words

It is believed that men use more vernacular forms and expletives than females. Proving both the facts, in video: 9 he says “you are gonna be getting asshole” in the same video Caitlyn as Bruce used another expletive “screw you Khloé”. ‘Asshole’ and ‘screw you’ are considered to be the strong expletives. Caitlyn tackles the same situation differently. In video 10: where Kris talking about her past and gender conformation surgery which Caitlyn do not want to discuss and her talk made Caitlyn angry. She says “you know what, don’t even go down on this road because I’m not talking about it.” Here it is noticed that she is angry but she did not lose her temper.

Politeness

Caitlyn as Bruce use vernacular language in the video, she said: “particularly one article that was in herald examiner in the Los Angeles paper. This lady name Van Salisbury did the article. It was neat tackiest I mean; it was worse than my scandal magazine. She lied to get the interview. She lied to me. It was the worst article I have ever had written in my life.” Words like ‘neat tackiest’, ‘worse’, ‘worst article’ are the terms that are not considered to be used in formal setting but she used it being male. Whereas, Caitlyn in video 11 talks about paparazzi and says “it’s difficult. I can’t go out and seen by paparazzi. They are literally sitting down there. If I walk around the corner of the house. They have taken illegal shots from the other sides.” Her statement vividly describes she is angry at paparazzi but she has not used any harsh words.

DISCUSSION

Reviewing the differences discussed in the analysis section, Caitlyn’s language is female oriented. According to difference theory, male and female are different from each other on the basis of physique, language, and mindset (Uchida, 1992). Similarly, there are some differences found in Caitlyn’s language. Caitlyn being Bruce used social topics for her speech which are sports and her athletic life. It has been observed that now the topics of her discussion are mostly family and social issues.

Jespersen (1922) explains the reason behind language conservatism is the restricted vocabulary. Caitlyn’s vocabulary is more formal than Bruce. The lexicons she used as Bruce are considered as informal. She used vernacular form of language. Her expletives were as harsh as males. Proper pronunciation and standardized sentence structures are prominent in Caitlyn’s speech. She uses more intensifiers and amplifiers than Bruce.

Downtoners emplace the tone of a statement (Biber, Conrad, 1998). It is observed that both Bruce and Caitlyn used downtoners to make the utterance ambiguous in order to dodge the personal questions. Difference in courtesy and politeness follows the same approach of dominance and difference theory. Caitlyn lives a life totally different from her previous self-Bruce which is discussed in difference theory. On the other hand, dominance theory refers to the authority given to men only. Whatever decision he make, should be followed by everyone in the family. Taking this approach in mind being Bruce, she was not as polite as she is now being Caitlyn. She is cautious of her speech which shows that she follows the difference theory approach. She uses more formal terms as compared to Bruce.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that changing of gender influences the gender specific features of language. On the basis of analysis, the study concludes that Caitlyn has adopted the female's features of the speech. After the change of the gender, she is more family-oriented person. Her language, vocabulary and pronunciation has changed because of the freedom from psychological barriers. She uses all the tools that females use in their speech as stated in genderlect, difference and dominance theory. Keeping the differences in mind, her speech has become more emotional as compared to the time when she was male. However, the only feature that remained similar in both times of her being male and female use of downtoners. According to genderlect theory, there should have been difference in the use of downtoners' which remained the same. The study concludes that the gender identifies the language. Hence, the change in gender change in different features of language, which is concluded by the analysis of the case study of Caitlyn Jenner.

FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

This research has taken one case study for the analysis. Therefore, in order to get more insight into the transgender language further research is needed to be conducted on more than one case study. Moreover, due to the limited time and nature of study, the methodology used was already available videos further researches can be done by using interview method to get primary source data for the analysis. The current research uses only the difference and dominance theory, which has been linked with the similar features of genderlect theory, but further research can be carried out by analyzing all the features of the transgender language. The theory states male uses less downtoners as compare to female, however, this study has concluded that both Bruce and Caitlyn used similar downtoners. Hence, it can be a research gap for the further researchers which can be explored.

LIMITATIONS

In the present research project, a single case study of Caitlyn Jenner is taken as a representative of the transgender society which is the limitation of this research. Using single case study might have affected the results of the study. Moreover, limited videos are taken for the analysis because, it would have been a lot of data to be handled just for a research project. Furthermore, the researchers have taken difference and dominance theory for the analysis which are linked with the similar features of genderlect theory. Therefore, only few aspects are discussed in this research. However, there is a wide range of aspects that are not discussed.

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