

Gender, Communication and Culture

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Seo, Eun-Mi. 1997. *Gender, Communication and Culture. Linguistics*, 5-1, 45-56. Gender and communication are very interesting topic in sociolinguistics. There have existed communication problems between males and females because they have different communication styles. They also have different gender culture. It is important to accept differences between males and females in communication to avoid communication problems. In this paper, the researcher tried to make clear about the culture, gender and communication. Recommendations for successful communication are suggested. (Chonbuk Sanup University)

1. Introduction

We communicate with people everyday. However, we sometimes have communication problems doing this. Men and women especially tend to have different communication styles at work or at home. Couples sometimes do not agree with each other because they express certain feelings and concepts differently. When we experience communication breakdowns because of gender differences, we feel frustrated and disappointed. We are easily hurt.

We need effective communication skills to maintain better relationships with other people. We live among people. To do this, we need to understand gender cultures and differences of gender. Successful communication is very important if we are to live good lives, specially at work. In this paper, the researcher will give an overview gender culture and communication style. The following issues will be discussed in this paper about gender culture.

- 1) How differences between gender cultures influence communication?
- 2) Why would we regard masculinity and femininity as different cultures?
- 3) What are feminine and masculine gender cultures?

4) How are they created?

5) How do differences in gender cultures affect communication?

In the global village, we also need to learn how to understand other country's cultures. Intercultural communication is necessary for people living in the rapidly changing world. Successful communication styles are suggested in this paper.

2. Gender, Communication and Culture

2.1. Definition of Culture

It is important to define culture before we discuss gender and communication. Samovor and Porter (1994) define culture as follows.

a) Culture is not innate; it is learned.

In Korea, we learn Korean culture as Koreans. After we are born, we begin to learn about our own culture. Even though there are many changes in Korean culture, we still learn how to respect our elders. We understand that there is discrimination between males and females in job choice. Even though time changes, Korean people still prefer sons to daughters to continue their blood line.

b) Culture is transmissible.

Through films, pictures, books and oral channels, culture is transmitted to the following generation. For example, we can understand Chosun dynasty culture when we watch historical dramas or movies. We also can understand other countries' culture by reading books. We learn how they dress and their life styles in the museums.

c) Culture is dynamic.

Culture changes with time and exhibits trends. The Korean younger generation have their own culture which is very different from the older generation's. In their culture, they like to express their ideas freely. They also have different dress codes which the older could not imagine in the past. Present life styles are different from the old ones. In the past, in Korea, large families lived in one house. However, the nuclear family is now popular. Housing has also changed. Apartment styles are popular in the cities because they are more convenient for nuclear families. These days, people want to have more free time from work to

enjoy their lives instead of working only.

d) Culture is selective.

In Korea, young girls prefer to be thin. They select the diet culture and they really try hard to lose weight. Staying in shape is highly valued by young Korean girls.

e) Facets of culture are interrelated.

Women get a higher education and they choose to work rather than to stay at home. That is the reason why the number of single career women is increasing. This is closely related to the women's rights movement in Korea.

f) Culture is ethnocentric.

In most cases, we Koreans think our culture and tradition are better than those of other countries. In a global society, we have to learn how to accept other countries' cultures because each has good points. We should have more generous views about other countries' cultures.

Byram & Morgan (1994) suggest that culture is what a person needs to know in order to be part of a social group. It is ways of thinking and valuing, ways of behaving, shared knowledge of the world. Misunderstandings are likely to occur between members of different cultures. Differences are real and we must learn to deal with them in any situation in which two cultures come into contact. (Brown, 1987)

Gumperez (1982) maintains that many difficulties in cross-cultural interactions arise from misunderstood cues, conversations and organizing features of discourse. Some of these difficulties are due to contexting, which can make intercultural communication quite a complex and even bewildering act even between two fluent speakers. Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson point out, knowledge of a culture, sometimes, even mastery of specific behaviors does not necessarily lead to well-functioning communication. When people observe behaviors which differ from what they expect in their everyday lives, they tend to make judgements and draw conclusions in order to make sense of their observations. These judgements about the causes of behaviour, known as attributions, can lead to misunderstandings even at the most basic level. Nodding the head, for example, can mean 'yes' or 'no' depending on the culture. In India, people shake their heads left to right instead of nodding their heads when they say 'yes'. This can cause

misunderstanding to other people from the different countries.

2.2. Cultural Awareness and Communication

We cannot live without communication with other people in society. Successful interchanges between people are called communication. There are six processes or concepts involved in communication: encoding, the message, channel, the responders, decoding, response and feedback. The key point of communication is language because we use language to achieve social goals. Through these processes, we interact with others in society. There are certain rules that need to be followed for successful communication. Even when people use correct grammar, it is still very possible for misunderstanding to occur. Extralinguistic features such as intonation and gestures can be also problems.

Gaston (1984) emphasizes the importance of the cultural awareness. According to Gaston, cultural awareness is the recognition that culture affects perception and that culture influences values, attitudes and behavior. He suggests four stages in understanding the other cultures. Stage one is the recognition stage. We begin to recognize the existence of other cultures. In this stage we need to have nonjudgemental attitudes towards other cultures. We should avoid quick and easy labelling of cultural behavior as "funny" and "dumb". Stage two is the acceptance/rejection stage. After we recognize the existence of other cultures, we can have negative or positive attitudes to them. Stage three is the integration/ethnocentrism stage. At this stage, people adopt bicultural attitudes or rigid ethnocentrism. The attitude of global people is to admit other culture. Stage four is transcendence. When we reach the final stage of cultural awareness, we are able to value and appreciate those of our own cultural roots and also to value and appreciate all other countries. This is a very important attitude for people living in international society.

2.3. Sex and Gender

It is necessary to distinguish sex and gender in this paper. In Korean, there is no difference between sex and gender. However, in

English, sex means female and male. Gender indicates feminine and masculine. Sex is called as the sexual identity.

FEMALE, MALE, woman, man = SEX--sexual identity
FEMININE, MASCULINE = GENDER

Biological sex needs to be distinguished from social gender. Females exhibit generally greater specialization in the right hemisphere of their brains. They do more integrative and creative thinking. Males have developed left lobes. They tend to be analytic and abstract thinkers. These ideas are very general not absolute. In college, girls tend to major in liberal arts and boys like to study science or engineering. These tendencies show how their interests differ.

Individuals are not born with a gender but we become gendered as we internalize and then embody our society's view of femininity and masculinity. The following table shows clearly the differences between sex and gender.

Table 1. Sex and Gender differences

Sex	Gender
*biological	*socially constructed
*established by genetics & biology	*produced & reproduced by society
*permanent	*varies over time & across cultures
*individual property	*social & relational quality *core aspect of identity

Poynton (1989) explains the form of ideology in gender differences in the following table. Table 2 shows some of the associated oppositions for speakers of English.

Table 2. Some oppositions associated with gender in English

Man/Male/Masculine	Woman/Female/Feminine
reason	emotion
active	passive
instrumental	expressive
knowledge	ignorance
competence	incompetence
action	speech
culture	nature

The reason/emotion opposition incorporates notions of man as rational, logical, reasonable, and in control of his feelings, compared with woman who is irrational, illogical, unreasonable and emotional. In other words, woman is tender-hearted and man can be callous and unfeeling (Poynton, 1989) In the past, women were considered as passive. However, currently society requires women to take a more active role. There are lots of women who are very active. Many professional career women create positive lives for themselves.

Much of the discussion of language in relation to sexism has focused on words. Well-known examples include the following: 'chairman' and its alternative, such as chairperson. Ms is an alternative to Miss and Mrs. The use of pronoun 'he' refers to a person who could be female or male (generic reference) and alternatives such as 'he' or 'she' and s/he (Poynton, 1989). In Korean language, it is difficult to find sexism.

Why do men and women who speak a particular language use it in different ways? There exist male and female differences in using language. When we turn to certain grammatical matters in English, we find that the intonation patterns of men and women vary somewhat. Women use certain patterns associated with surprise and the politeness more often than men. Lakeoff also says that women may answer a question with a statement that employs the rising intonation pattern usually associated with a question rather than falling intonation pattern associated with making a firm statement. According to Lakeoff, women do this because they are less sure about themselves and their opinions than are men. For the same reason, she says that women often add tag questions to statements., eg. "They caught the robber last week, didn't

they?"

Other sex-linked differences exist. Women and men may have different paralinguistic systems and the moves and genre differently. The suggestion has been made that these differences often require women to appear to be submissive to men. We can see this clearly in traditional Korean society. Women are also often named, titled and addressed differently from men. Women are more likely than men to be addressed by their first names when everything else is equal, or if not by first names, such terms as lady, miss, or dear and even baby or babe. Apparently a wider range of address terms is used to them than to men, and men are more familiar with them than with other men. Women also do not usually employ the profanities and obscenities men use, or if they do, use them in different circumstances or are judged differently for using them. Women are also sometimes required to be silent in situations in which men may speak. Among the Araucanian Indians of Chile, men are encouraged to talk on all occasions, but the ideal wife is silent in the presence of her husband, and at gatherings where men are present she should talk only in a whisper if she talks at all. In Korea, women were supposed to be silent in family matters. Everything was decided by the authoritative husband. Men are considered more powerful and influential in important matters.

Men and women differ in the kinds of language they use and how they use them because men and women often fill distinctly different roles in society. We may expect that the more distinct the roles, the greater the differences, and there seems to be some evidence to support such a claim, for the greatest differences appear to exist in societies in which the roles of men and women are mostly clearly differentiated. Since boys are brought up to behave like men in those societies and girls to behave like women, the differences are also perpetuated.

Men and women and even boys and girls also exhibit certain differences in language use in such cities of modern societies as New York, Norwich. Most of those differences can be explained by the different positions men and women fill in society. Men have more power and may be more assertive; women tend to be kept in their place but aspire quite often to a different and better place. Women therefore appear to be more conscious of use of language which they associate

with their 'betters' in society, that is those they regard as being socially superior. They therefore direct their speech toward the models these provide even to the extent in some (Wardhaugh, 1986)

2.4. Female and Masculine Communication Cultures

There are distinctive speech communities or communication cultures. Communication culture is shared by a group of cultures.

Gender cultures exist because men and women in general have different perspective on why, when and how to communicate. For example, there are some magazines for females and for males. They have different communication styles and taste. Females may not read magazines for males and vice versa. In the females' magazines, most advertisements are to attract females' interest. Females are socialized into feminine culture and males into masculine culture. In Korea, there are more magazines for females, mostly fashion, children caring and home making.

2.5. Psychodynamic Influences on Gender Identity

Psychodynamics is the psychology of mental or emotional forces or processes developing in early childhood and their effects on behaviors and mental states (Webster, 1990)

Gender identity is shaped by psychological dynamics in families and most particularly by mother-child relationships in the early years. Mothers form different relationships with sons and daughters and these differences cultivate masculine and female gender identity (Wood, 1994).

Gender is formed from young girls and boys' early years. They have different ways to communicate and to play with their friends. Let's look at how girls' games and boys' games are different when they play.

In case of girls' games, they like to play house, school or jump rope. Following are the three basic rules they use to communicate.

- a) Be cooperative.
- b) Don't criticize or outdo others.
- c) Pay attention to others' feelings.

Girls like to be cooperative and to establish harmony and unity. Girls

like to play indoors. Another popular game is role playing. On the other hand, boys' games include competitive team sports such as football and baseball. They enjoy playing sports games with peers. They are more active than girls. They sometimes fight physically when they do not agree with each other. Their rules:

- a) Assert yourself.
- b) Focus on outcomes.
- c) Be competitive.

From childhood, girls and boys create different communication styles. This influences them for the rest of their lives.

Communication between men and women is like cross culture communication, prey to a clash of conversational styles. Wood (1994) explains the differences between feminine and masculine communication cultures in Table 3.

Table 3. Differences between feminine and masculine communication cultures

Feminine talk	Masculine talk
*Use talk to build sustain rapport with others.	*Use talk to assert yourself & your ideas.
*Share yourself & learn about others through disclosing.	*Personal disclosures can make you vulnerable.
*Matching experiences with others shows understanding and empathy. (I know how you feel.)	*Matching experiences is a competitive strategy to command attention. (I can top that.)
*Use talk to create symmetry between people.	*Use talk to establish your status and power.
To support others, express understanding of their feelings.	*To support others, do something helpful- give advice or solve a problem for them.

2.6. Gender gaps in communication

The differences/cultural approach suggests that women and men will interpret each other's behavior according to their own rules for friendly interaction. Thus, if miscommunication occurs, it can be explained in terms of cultural differences.

The framework of cross-sex communication as cross-cultural communication seems too simplistic, mainly because no matter how much time children spend interacting with their same sex peers. They

are not completely segregated from the other sex while they are learning the rules for friendly conversation from their peers and by listening to conversations between their parents, and to various other conversations, real or fictional. They internalize the culturally prescribed sex-role stereotypes, learning how girls and boys are supposed to differ in the ways they behave and interact. They would not be in the same situation as "real" intercultural encounters. For example, between Japanese and American autoworkers in the same plant, each member has not been truly exposed to the other's culture prior to the encounter (Uchida, 1992).

There are many cases of misunderstanding in communication between men and women. For example, one participant has been confused, frustrated, and even angry when the other participant of the other sex has not given them what they wanted or has not valued their effort to be supportive. This kind of case is very common.

In terms of women's and men's characteristic ways of speaking, both styles make sense. They are equally valid in themselves, though the differences in styles may cause trouble in interaction. In a sense, when two people form a private relationship of love or friendship, the bubble of their interaction is a world unto itself, even though they both come with the prior experience of their families, their community and a lifetime of conversation. But someone who takes a job is entering a world that is already functioning, with its own characteristic style already in place. Though talking at work is quite similar to talking in private, it is a very different enterprise in many ways (Tannen, 1994)

Korean males like to communicate with each other while they are drinking in an informal way. In male drinking culture, they prefer to give each other their glasses after they drink. They think this makes for a more friendly atmosphere. Problems occurs when females do not accept males' requests when they drink. Some conservative women do not agree with males' culture.

2.7. Communication Effectively Between Gender Cultures

For have successful communication, men and women should bear in mind the following six principles for effective cross-gender

communication.

a) Suspend judgment

It is not ideal to judge people quickly. Even though there may be something about them we do not like, we need to be patient communicating with people. It is very important for us to have a more generous attitude communicating with people. We can learn important things from others who do their best. Prejudice can cause misunderstanding to interfere human relationships.

b) Recognize the validity of different communication.

To avoid miscommunication, we have to try to find translation cues which will help to solve problems. It is easy to argue over trivial matters when males and females get together in the work places.

c) Seek translation cues.

To avoid unpleasant happenings, we should try to seek translation cues which will solve communication problems.

d) Provide translation cues.

When we communicate, we should provide translation cues to make meanings clear.

e) Enlarge your own communication style.

For successful communication, we need to acquire various communication strategies. Strategic competence is one of the important communicative competences. All of the elements of communicative competence (grammatical, discourse, sociolinguistic, pragmatic, strategic) are involved in human interaction. All aspects must work together for successful communication to take place (Brown, 1994).

3. Conclusion

Because we are socialized into distinct communication cultures, women and men tend to communicate for different reasons and in different ways.

To avoid the frustration, hurt, misunderstanding that occur when we apply the rules of one gender's communication patterns to the behavior of a member of the others, we need to recognize and respect the distinctive validity and value of each style. Our goal in society is to undertake more effective communication to live better lives. Successful

communication makes life more interesting.

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