

THIRD WAVE FEMINIST LINGUISTICS

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Key word and phrases: feminism; gender differences; stereotypical speech; women's and men's language; women's speech; men's speech.

Abstract: This paper critically examines Third Wave feminist linguistics, a form of analysis, which challenges Second Wave feminist linguistics' analysis of the language of women and men as homogeneous groups. Rather than assuming that men and women necessarily speak in different ways, men being direct and forceful, women being hesitant, polite and apologetic, Third Wave feminist linguistics analyses the complex negotiations undertaken by women and men with gendered domains.

In this article, we contrast Second and Third Wave feminist linguistics, broadly speaking, Second Wave feminism focusing on the language of women as a subordinated group and Third Wave feminism challenging the homogeneity of women as a group and focusing instead on localised studies. We challenge the notion that these forms of analysis are simply chronological so that Third Wave feminism supersedes and supplants Second Wave feminism; rather we argue that Third Wave feminism is best seen as a development from Second Wave feminism, which nevertheless depends on the basic framework of Second Wave feminism for its theoretical integrity. In order to contrast the way in which these two approaches work and to demonstrate that each tendency can be put to work in particular contexts, we examine the way the difficulties, which each approach finds with the analysis of sexism.

The term "Third Wave feminism" has developed relatively recently to describe a form of analysis which is critical of Second Wave feminism. It seems to be part of a wider postmodernist-influenced theoretical position where big stories are bad, little stories are good, but, unlike some other forms of analysis, such as post-feminism, it locates itself within a feminist trajectory [Potter 1996]. Second Wave feminism has achieved a great deal: feminist campaigning and consciousness raising in the 1960s and onwards have changed attitudes to the role of women and have resulted, in Western Europe and the US, in equal opportunities legislation, greater access to work within the public sphere, access to childcare, access to contraception and abortion. However, this campaigning was largely focused on the needs of straight white middle class women. The linguistic work, which stemmed from Second Wave feminism, focused on the stereotypical speech of these same women and made generalisations about all women's language on the basis of anecdotal evidence [Spender 1980; Lakoff 1975]. Thus, women were assumed to be oppressed in similar ways by men and by a patriarchal social system; research drew attention to the way in which women's use of language exhibited powerlessness. Lakoff and Spender characterised women's speech as hesitant, deferent and polite and suggested that elements such as tag-questions and back-channel

behaviour were more likely to be found in the speech of women than in men, and that men interrupted women more than vice versa. Deborah Tannen challenged this work by suggesting that women and men's speech was characterised by a difference in style rather than a difference in power and that misunderstandings occurred between men and women because women try to establish empathy with their interlocutors in speech through the use of what Tannen terms "rapport talk", whilst men try to establish a place for themselves within a hierarchy, through the use of information-laden talk, what Tannen terms "report-talk" [Tannen 1991]. Lakoff, Spender and Tannen's Second Wave feminist research assumed that women's and men's language are necessarily different even though they often disagreed as to the cause of that difference. This focus on global gender differences has been criticised by a number of feminist linguists who have suggested that what is needed is a form of analysis which is less focused on the individual woman or man and trends of speech in the society as a whole, and more focused on the way that context and individual mutually shape the way that interaction takes place [Troemel-Ploetz 1998; Bergvall 1996; Bucholtz 1999]. These critiques have led to a new form of feminist linguistics, which seems to share certain tendencies.

Third Wave feminist linguistics does not assume that women are a homogeneous grouping and in fact stresses the diversity of women's speech. For example, Penny Eckert analyses the differences between the language use of different groups of girls in a high school in America, drawing on the categories and groupings that they themselves use, such as "jocks" and "burnouts" [Eckert 2000]. Mary Bucholtz and Nancy Henley analyse the way that Black American women's speech does not necessarily accord with the type of speech patterns described by Lakoff and Spender, since there are different linguistics resources available, signalling potentially different affiliations [Bucholtz 1996; Henley 1995]. The essays in the collections edited by Bergvall (1996) and Coates and Cameron (1988) all stress the way in which women's language differs according to context and factors such as class, ethnic and regional affiliation. Even the notion of the status of the variable itself has been questioned; for example, Mary Bucholtz has argued that in Second Wave feminism "locally defined groupings based on ongoing activities and concerns were rarely given scholarly attention; if they were, members were assigned to large scale categories of gender, race and ethnicity and class" [Bucholtz 1999:8]. In contrast, in Third Wave feminism, these large scale categories are now questioned, so that rather than gender being seen as a stable unified variable, to be considered in addition to race or class, gender is now considered as a variable constrained and constituted by them and in turn defining them in the context of local conditions. Indeed, feminist linguistics now seems to have turned away from these more established identity categories to an analysis which focuses on "a whole set of identity features (being a manager, someone's mother, a sensible person) which might be potentially relevant" [Swann 2002:49]. Furthermore, identities are now seen as plural and potentially conflicting even within a specific individual in a particular interaction. Third Wave feminist linguistics does not make global statements about women's language but rather focuses on a more punctual analysis, that is one which can analyse the way that one's gendered identity varies from context to context. However, Swann has argued that this contextual focus in relation to variables has almost invalidated the notion of the variable; she argues, "if gender identity is something that is done in context, this begs the question of how an analyst is able to interpret any utterance in terms of masculinity (or working class, white, heterosexual masculinity). How does an analyst assess whether a speaker is doing gender, or another aspect of identity?" [Swann 2002:48]. What Swann goes on to argue is that rather than seeing Third Wave (or as she terms it Postmodern) feminism as a simple reaction to Second Wave feminist linguistics, we need instead to see the way in which Third Wave feminism depends on

early feminism; the contextualised studies are interesting “partly because they qualify, or complexify, or introduce counter-examples” [Swann 2002:60].

Thus, the localised studies should be seen against the background of the earlier global (and problematised) claims of Second Wave feminism, which they can perhaps help to modify and temper.

Much Third Wave feminist linguistics draws on the work of Judith Butler, particularly the notion of performativity [Butler 1990; 1993; 1997]. Gender within this type of analysis is viewed as a verb, something, which you do in interaction, rather than something that you possess [Crawford 1995]. Gender is constructed through the repetition of gendered acts and varies according to the context. In many readings of Butler's work, gender is seen almost like a set of clothes that one puts on - the individual chooses what sort of identity they would like to have and simply performs that role. However, it is clear that institutional and contextual constraints determine the type and form of identity and linguistic routines, which an individual considers possible within an interaction. Whilst Second Wave feminist linguistics assumed that gender pre-existed the interaction and affected the way that the interaction developed, Third Wave feminists focus on the way that participants in conversation bring about their gendered identity, thus seeing gendering as a process. This focus on the orienting of participants to gender is clearly influenced by heated debates between Conversation Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis about whether extra-textual factors such as gender and race can be considered if they are not specifically addressed by participants [Schegloff 1997; Wodak and Meyer 2001]. However, it could be argued this more process-oriented feminism still has a very clear notion of what gender is, bringing that pre-constructed notion to their analyses of the way that participants orient to gender within interactions [Swann 2002:48]. We now discuss certain issues or shared concerns, which seem to define a Third Wave feminist linguistics: meaning; power; questioning the notion of a women's language; the relation of the individual and the social.

Second Wave feminist linguistics was concerned with analysing the inherent meanings of words and often made statements about the abstract meanings of words, constructing dictionaries of sexist language and advising on the avoidance of certain words [Kramarae & Treichler 1985; Miller and Swift 1981]. There was also a tendency to assume that certain words or ways of speaking were simply more powerful than others; thus, interrupting was seen as a powerful strategy, and hesitating was seen to be a powerless strategy. After Cameron's work on the multifunctionality of tag-questions and Michael Toolan's work on the difficulty of assigning clear functions to specific formal features, the notion that there was a clear link to be made between power and, for example, talking time was made more problematic [Cameron 1988; Toolan 1996]. Third Wave feminist linguistics focuses on the way that words are made to mean in specific ways and function to achieve certain purposes in particular contexts [Christie 2001]. Thus, rather than discussing oppressive global social structures such as patriarchy, Third Wave feminists analyse the way that gender and conflict are managed by women at a local level [Cameron 1998]. It is still possible to refer to structural inequality and to highlight instances of discrimination, but Third Wave feminist linguistics is more concerned with variability and resistance than on making global statements about the condition of women in relation to language use. Thus, whilst a Second Wave analysis might focus on the use of the generic pronoun “he” to refer to both men and women, or the derogatory terms used to describe women such as “bitch” or “slag”, a Third Wave feminist analysis might focus on the way that within a particular context, a certain hesitation and ironic intonation might be considered to be sexist when articulating the word “chairperson” to describe a female chair. However, whilst this local focus helps women to describe practices which discriminate against them, Third Wave feminists find it difficult to refer to global, structural and systematic forms of discrimination.

Rather than meanings being imposed on women, Third Wave feminists consider meanings to be co-constructed. Thus within particular contexts, women and men engage in the contestation and affirmation of particular types of practices and interpretations. What something means in a particular context is the result of the actions of all of the individuals concerned, negotiating with the institutional constraints of status and institutionalised linguistic routines. For example, Joanna Thornborrow, in her analysis of an interview between a woman and two police officers, where the woman claims that she has been raped and the police try to throw doubt on the veracity of her claim, by suggesting that she is mentally ill, the woman plays an active role in contesting their assertions [Thornborrow 2002]. A Second Wave feminist analysis would analyse this interaction as the police oppressing and silencing the woman; however, this woman seems to have accrued to herself a certain amount of what we have called interactive power, that is, she has drawn on linguistic resources which were available within that particular context, using questions and rebuttals to challenge her characterisation by the police as an untrustworthy person. Ultimately, however, the police officers' version of events seems to be the one which holds sway, even though the woman's interventions are important in defining the way that the interview takes shape - the institutional status of the police officers plays an crucial role in their version being seen as the "truth". We cannot see this woman as simply powerless as a Second Wave feminist analysis might have done. However a Third Wave feminist analysis does not seem to be able to argue for a change in the way that police interviews are carried out, or call for training for police officers in the type of language which it is appropriate to use with rape victims.

Most Third Wave feminists have been influenced by Michael Foucault's theorisation of power [Foucault 1978]. Power is seen as a net or web of relations not as a possession; thus power is enacted and contested in every interaction [Thornborrow 2002]. Power becomes a much more mundane, material and everyday element rather than something abstract and intangible, which is imposed from above. Thus, there is now a concern with the local management of power relations, the way that individuals negotiate with the status which they and others have been allotted or which they have managed to achieve, and which within particular contexts they can contest or affirm, through their use of language and through their behaviour. Many feminist theorists draw a distinction between institutional status (that is the status that you are allocated through your position within an institution) and local status (that is the position that you manage to negotiate because of your verbal skill, confidence, concern for others, "niceness" and so on) and whilst these are clearly interconnected, it is now often the local status which is focused on by feminist theorists [Manke 1997; Diamond 1996]. However, this move away from the analysis of institutional rank to that of local status, whilst important in challenging the characterisation of women as powerless speakers, means that feminists no longer concern themselves so much with the way that institutional rank and gender relate, and the way that the basis on which local rank is negotiated may be heavily determined by stereotypes of gender and gendered practices. This means that the analysis of the speech of men in positions of authority will only focus on the way that their speech is negotiated at the local level and will not consider the way that particular styles are authorised with reference to factors outside the local context.

Second Wave feminists assumed that all women were more deferent, polite, more concerned with the welfare of others and more co-operative. Third wave feminist linguistics suggests that this type of speech style is perhaps only available to a very small number of white middle class women, and even then only within very specific contexts. Holmes (1995) and Coates (1998) also call for a re-evaluation of co-operative speech styles and question whether they necessarily denote powerlessness; both argue

that concern for others in speech should be valued and Holmes in particular claims that women's greater use of positive politeness within the work environment leads to more productive discussions. However, whilst all women are not powerless, we have to accept that, for many people, powerlessness and deference are stereotypically associated with women and therefore when women speak assertively, their speech will be considered aberrant and aggressive because they are judged against a stereotypical norm of deference. This is why many women, as Crawford has shown, rather than being assertive, decide to temper their speech by using politeness strategically: "unassertive speech, rather than being a (female) deficiency in social skills, may reflect sensitivity to the social impact of one's behaviour. Tentative and indirect speech may be a pragmatic choice for women. It is more persuasive, at least when the recipient is male, less likely to lead to negative attributions about personality traits and likeability, and less likely to provoke verbal attack" [Crawford 1995:68]. Thus, rather than asserting that women are more polite or indirect than men, Third Wave feminist linguists argue that women engage in a complex process whereby they assess others' stereotypical beliefs about gender and then strategically adopt strategies which will be most likely to achieve their ends; some of those strategies may be ones stereotypically associated with feminine language. Third Wave feminists tend to avoid discussing the notion of stereotype since it is one of those problematic concepts often drawn on unproblematically by Second Wave feminists in their analysis of the workings of a global gendered ideology; however, it is clear that a hypothesised stereotype of gendered behaviour informs interaction. For example, Queen has shown that lesbian speech is often produced in a parodic, ironic playing with hypothesised stereotypes of "straight" feminine speech and masculine speech [Queen 1997]. Halberstam, in her analysis of masculine women has tried to prise apart the relation between masculinity and men and has shown that, rather than stereotypes being fixed and either accepted or rejected by individuals, they are played with, parodied and used for particular strategic ends, and in the process of being changed and ironised by individuals they are inevitably globally changed [Halberstam 1998].

Because of the change in focus in relation to power, there has been a move away from the analysis of subordinated women. Mary Bucholtz argues that in the past: "much of the scholarship in language and gender has been what might be called "good-girl research" - studies of "good" (that is normatively female - white straight middle class) women being "good" (that is normatively feminine)" [Bucholtz 1999:13]. Now rather than analysing women's indirectness or lack of assertiveness, many linguists focus on strong women speakers and women's resistance to masculine forms of speech, such as interruption or aggressiveness [Mills 1999]. Clare Walsh has analysed the language of women working within masculinist or male-dominated environments, for example, women priests, MPs and environmental campaigners [Walsh 2000]. She has found that women within institutions are often viewed very negatively and if they use direct, confrontational language they are often criticised [Walsh 2001]. Sylvia Shaw (2002) has also analysed the language use of women MPs and has shown that whilst women are very able to adopt the type of aggressive formalised Parliamentary debating techniques, which have been developed by male MPs, they may be judged differently to men when they do so. She has also shown that women MPs tend to adhere to the speaking rules very strictly, observing Parliamentary forms of address, protocol and etiquette, whereas the male MPs often manage to achieve certain advantages for themselves by breaking the rules. Marjorie Harness Goodwin has analysed girls' language in play and has contested the notion that girls' language is necessarily more co-operative or nicer than boys', showing that girls use direct and confrontational language [Goodwin 1998]. In her most recent work, she argues that it is expertise, for example in play, which determines who uses assertive language, rather than sex

difference. Bonnie McElhinny has analysed the language of women police officers in Pittsburgh and found that they feel obliged to adopt particular masculine ways of speaking simply to appear to be doing their job in a professional way [McElhinny 1998]. They adopt what she calls “an economy of affect” because disinterestedness is demanded of police officers by the public, since it signifies authoritativeness and impartiality. McElhinny argues, “that women who move into powerful and masculine institutions sometimes adopt the interactional behaviour characteristic of these institutions might disappoint some feminists. But it seems clear that whom we think can do certain jobs changes more rapidly than expectations about how these jobs should be done. The process by which women enter a masculine workplace necessarily includes some adoption as well as adaptation of institutional norms” [McElhinny 1998:322]. Thus, all of these studies suggest that women, when entering primarily masculine environments, adopt the language styles prevalent in those institutions, and those styles themselves are both an indicator of masculinity and also of professionalism. McElhinny states that masculinity is not referentially (or directly) marked by behaviours and attitudes but is indexically linked to them (in mediated non-exclusive probabilistic ways). Alice Freed, in her analysis of the language styles of intimate conversation, suggests that masculinity and femininity should be seen as a characteristic of the context or situation, rather than an attribute of individuals [Freed 1996]. She argues that intimate self-disclosing conversation is associated with stereotypical femininity and therefore when males engage in such conversations, they may tend to display the same “feminine” speech styles as women. Thus, these Third Wave feminist analyses are interested in analysing the way that masculinity and femininity can be seen to exist at an institutional level, linked in some ways to particular institutional contexts rather than simply at the level of the individual and can be associated stereotypically with attributes such as professionalism and competence.

There are certain contexts, however, where women do seem to have brought changes into the predominantly masculine norms in institutions. Wendy Webster's analysis of Margaret Thatcher's speech styles demonstrates that rather than simply adopting the speech norms associated with the role of Prime Minister, Thatcher integrated more feminine elements into her overall style, incorporating elements of self-disclosure and informality with a more public authoritative discourse [Webster 1990]. Thus, women's negotiations with the speech norms of the context within which they find themselves should not be seen as simple capitulation to dominant forms. However, generally as yet these feminine forms do not seem to have been adopted by male politicians. Furthermore, we should see women's adoption of masculine dominant forms as strategic and perhaps argue that women's adoption of positions of institutional status may result in the use of language styles which are characterised by a different approach to “doing power”. Thus, as Diamond has argued in her analysis of group dynamics in a group of psychotherapists, in certain contexts, those in positions of institutional authority in fact do not use direct commands and assertiveness, preferring to use indirectness [Diamond 1996]. Third Wave feminist linguistics forces us to reconsider the way that we think that power is exercised through language, but perhaps does not enable us to describe adequately the way that rank within an organisation may influence our localised interactions.

For many Third Wave feminist linguists, the notion of the community of practice has been important in terms of trying to describe the way that group values affect the individual and their notion of what is linguistically appropriate [Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1998; 1999]. The community of practice is a group of people who are brought together in a joint engagement on a task and who therefore jointly construct a range of values and appropriate behaviours, for example, a community of practice might be a group of people who meet to plan an event, or a

group of people who go out drinking together. Thus, rather than focusing on the role of an oppressive social system, ideology or patriarchy in relation to individual linguistic production and reception, Third Wave feminists focus on the interaction at the level of the community of practice. Individuals hypothesise what is appropriate within the community of practice and, in speaking, affirm or contest the community's sense of appropriate behaviour. In this sense, one's choice of words and one's speech style, can be seen as defining one's position within a group or community of practice. Bourdieu's notion of "habitus" has also been extensively drawn on by Third Wave feminist linguists: "habitus" is the set of dispositions which one draws upon and engages with in order to perform one's identity through discourse [Bourdieu 1999]. This set of attitudes or practices which are seen as constituting a norm by individuals are then discursively negotiated by individuals in terms of their own perception of what is acceptable for their own behaviour within a particular community of practice. Gino Eelen, drawing on Bourdieu's work, argues that we assume that there is a common world, that is, a set of beliefs which exist somewhere in the social world and which are accepted by everyone, which we as individuals need to agree with or contest: "On the one hand, collective history creates a "common" world in which each individual is embedded. On the other hand, each individual also has a unique individual history and experiences the "common" world from this unique position. The common world is thus never identical for everyone. It is essentially fragmented, distributed over a constellation of unique positions and unique perspectives" [Eelen 2000:223]. Thus, this view of the relation between individuals and others moves us significantly away from notions of society as a whole influencing the linguistic behaviour of individuals to an analysis of the way that at a local level, individuals decide on what type of language and speech style is appropriate. This local focus of Third Wave feminism is one of its benefits, but it does make it extremely difficult to discuss the impact of the values and pressures of the wider society; talking about society above the level of the community of practice is almost impossible, and it is clear that the wider society as a whole needs to be discussed in terms of the impact it has on practices within communities of practice. Third wave feminist linguistics tries to maintain a balance between a focus on the local and an awareness of the negotiations at the local level with structures, which are largely imposed. Mary Bucholtz characterises the concerns of Third Wave feminism within the following themes: "that language users' identities are not essential to their natures but are produced through contingent social interactions; that those identities are inflected by ideologies of gender and other social constructs; that speakers, writers and signers respond to these ideologies through practices that sometimes challenge and sometimes reproduce dominant beliefs; and that as new social resources become available, language users enact and produce new identities, themselves temporary and historical, that assign new meanings to gender" [Bucholtz 1999:20]. However, perhaps this quotation draws our attention to the difficulties encountered by Third Wave feminist linguistics since it does not seem possible to maintain both a focus on contingent social interactions and wider societal notions such as ideologies of gender, without some fundamental rethinking of our models of language and gender.

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Феминистская лингвистика третьей волны

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Ключевые слова и фразы: гендерные различия; женская речь; женский и мужской язык; мужская речь; стереотипная речь; феминизм.

Аннотация: Исследуется феминистская лингвистика третьей волны, представляющая собой одну из форм анализа, противоположного лингвистическому анализу феминистской лингвистики второй волны, рассматривающему язык женщин и мужчин как гомогенные группы. Феминистская лингвистика третьей волны не просто утверждает, что мужчины и женщины должны говорить по-разному: мужчины – прямо и убедительно, женщины – неуверенно, вежливо и апологетически, а анализирует комплексный состав речи между мужчиной и женщиной с точки зрения гендера.

Feministische Sprachwissenschaft der dritten Welle

Zusammenfassung: Im vorliegenden Artikel wird die feministische Sprachwissenschaft der dritten Welle untersucht. Sie stellt eine der Formen der sprachwissenschaftlichen Analyse der feministischen Sprachwissenschaft der zweiten Welle gegenständlichen Analyse, die die Sprache der Frauen und der Männer als homogene Gruppen betrachtet, allseitig dar. Die feministische Sprachwissenschaft der

dritten Welle nicht nur behauptet, daß die Männer und die Frauen anders sprechen sollen: die Männer sprechen direkt und überzeugend, die Frauen sprechen unsicher, höflich und in der Verzeihungsform, sondern analysiert den komplexen Redebestand zwischen dem Mann und der Frau vom Hendergesichtspunkt.

Linguistique féminine de la troisième vague

Résumé: Dans cet article on étudie de différents côtés la linguistique féminine de la troisième vague qui présente une des formes de l'analyse opposée à l'analyse linguistique de la linguistique féminine de la deuxième vague examinant la langue des femmes et des hommes comme des groupes homogènes. La linguistique féminine de la troisième vague affirme que les hommes et les femmes doivent parler de la manière différente: les hommes – directement et sûrement, les femmes – pas sûrement, poliment, elle analyse aussi la composition complexe du langage entre un homme et une femme du point de vue du genre.
