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LANGUAGE EDUCATION AND GENDER

INTRODUCTION

In the past three decades, gender issues have received a wide coverage in the education literature. Working at the intersections of gender, race, and class, education scholars have tried to understand which students are disadvantaged by particular contexts and what can be done to address these inequities. Two areas remain largely invisible in the larger field of research on gender in education, however. One relates to the unique challenges faced by educators working in linguistically and culturally diverse contexts, where learners bring with them distinct and oftentimes conflicting gender ideologies and practices. Second, are those working in foreign Language Classrooms, where students are introduced to the 'imaginary worlds' of other languages whose gender ideologies and practices may appear unfamiliar or perhaps even illegitimate. Consequently, the aim of this chapter is to survey research on gender issues in the education of linguistically diverse speakers and in foreign/second language education.

EARLY DEVELOPMENTS

Early research sparked by Lakoff's (1975) *Language and Woman's Place* and Thorne and Henley's (1975) *Language and Sex*: *Difference and Dominance* conceptualized the relationship between language and gender through the notions of difference and dominance, and, implicitly, the notion of deficit. In the deficit framework, women were viewed as inferior language users and oftentimes as "the muted group" who speaks a "powerless language." In the study of linguistic diversity, this view translated into the *linguistic lag* hypothesis, the view of minority women as less bilingual than men, and thus lagging linguistically behind them (Stevens, 1986). In the *dominance* framework, theorized in Lakoff (1975) and Thorne and Henley (1975), "women-as-a-group" were seen as linguistically oppressed and dominated by "men-as-a-group." In the study of linguistic diversity, this view led to an argument that women lag behind because they are linguistically oppressed by men (Burton, 1994).

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In the *differences* framework, introduced by Maltz and Borker (1982) and developed and popularized by Tannen (1990), "women-as-a-group" and "men-as-a-group" were seen as speakers of different "genderlects," developed through socialization in same-gender peer-groups. In the study of linguistic diversity, this approach explained instances of language shift spearheaded by women (Gal, 1978; McDonald, 1994) as rooted in women's preference for more prestigious languages and varieties. In the study of second/foreign language education, this approach led researchers to posit that females generally do better than males and to explain their achievement through more positive attitudes and better use of learning strategies (Oxford, 1994).

Beginning in the early 1990s, all three frameworks were criticized by feminist linguists for their essentialist assumptions about "men" and "women" as homogeneous categories, for lack of attention to the role of context and power relations, and for insensitivity to ethnic, racial, social, and cultural diversity that mediates gendered behaviors, performances, and outcomes in educational contexts (Cameron, 1992; Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 1992).

MAJOR CONTRIBUTIONS AND WORK IN PROGRESS

The postmodern turn in educational and gender scholarship (see also Pennycook, Critical Applied Linguistics and Language Education, Volume 1) led to a reconceptualization of gender as a socially constructed and dynamic system of power relations and discursive practices, rather than an intrinsic property of particular individuals (Cameron, 1992, 2005; Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 1992). This means that "women" and "men" are no longer seen as uniform natural categories where all members have common behavioral traits. Rather, these labels function as discursive categories imposed by society on individuals through a variety of gendering practices and accompanying ideologies about "normative" ways of being "men" and "women." It is these practices, and ways in which individuals adopt or resist them, that are at the center of current research. Gender categories in this inquiry intersect with those of age, race, class, sexuality, and (dis)ability to understand how particular groups of people are privileged or marginalized. They are also placed within the larger context of globalization to examine ways in which social, political, and economic changes affect gender ideologies, relationships, and practices (Cameron, 2005; see also Block, Language Education and Globalization, Volume 1).

Consequently, where possible, our discussion will not focus on "men" and "women" per se, but on particular groups of people, such as older immigrant women or working-class men in specific cultural and institutional contexts. We will review four major contributions of

recent scholarship that have influenced the ongoing work in the field. These contributions have advanced our understanding of: (i) gendered access to linguistic resources; (ii) gendered agency in language learning; (iii) gendered interactions in the classroom; and (iv) gender in the foreign and second language curriculum.

Gendered Access to Linguistic Resources

Research conducted since the early 1990s has significantly enhanced our understanding of ways in which gendered practices mediate immigrants' access to educational and interactional opportunities. Studies conducted in North America demonstrate that immigrant women from traditionally patriarchal communities, and in particular older women and women with families, face a range of gatekeeping practices that restrict and at times even prevent their access to English as a Second Language (ESL) classes and to opportunities that would allow them to practice the language (Goldstein, 1995, 2001; Kouritzin, 2000; Norton, 2000; Norton Peirce, Harper and Burnaby, 1993; Tran, 1988; Warriner, 2004).

Gatekeeping practices in the majority community include the lack of daycare, inconvenient locations that make access to classes difficult for women who do not drive, and inconvenient times that make access impossible for women who work or for women who are afraid of being out of the house late at night. Access may also be complicated by economic factors that force women to prioritize immediate employment (Norton Peirce et al. 1993). Gatekeeping practices in some immigrant communities may prevent young women from being in the same classroom as men (Goldstein, 1995) and require that family care be offered exclusively by wives and mothers (Kouritzin, 2000). A study of workplace instruction by Norton Peirce et al. (1993) also revealed that some immigrant women were reluctant to attend ESL classes because their husbands did not want the wives to become more educated than they were. Lack of prior education, together with family responsibilities, was also shown to negatively affect older immigrant women's access to interactional opportunities outside the classroom (Norton, 2000; Tran, 1988).

Other studies in this area document successful attempts to respond to the needs of immigrant women and offer evening and weekend programs, externally funded daycare, and programs centered around these women's needs (Frye, 1999; Norton Peirce et al. 1993; Rivera, 1999). For instance, Rivera (1999) describes a program based in the United States, where all classes, those in Spanish and in English, aim at helping working-class immigrant Latina women acquire literacy skills, improve their basic education, increase English proficiency, and prepare for the high school equivalency exam. The curriculum and the pedagogy implemented

in the program build on the strengths, survival skills, and linguistic and cultural resources of these women and question and challenge the social and economic forces that shape their lives.

Studies by Gordon (2004), Kouritzin (2000), Norton (2000), Pavlenko (2005), and Warriner (2004), also remind us that immigrant women in western countries are not helpless creatures who passively await help from the majority society—rather, they are adults who are able to use their linguistic and cultural resources creatively to deal with everyday challenges of living in a new language and to contest and negotiate their positioning in the labor force. The gendering of household responsibilities may become an advantage to these women as they benefit from linguistic opportunities offered by domestic language events, that is, interactions with social institutions connected to care for children and the home (e.g. childcare, schools, welfare offices, etc.) (Gordon, 2004; Norton, 2000). Greater access to educational and employment opportunities offered to immigrant women in western societies may eventually lead to their empowerment, whereas immigrant men who are not fluent in the majority language may actually experience a loss of power and authority (Gordon, 2004).

Gendered Agency in Language Learning

Recent research has also resulted in a more nuanced picture of ways in which gender ideologies and practices shape learners' desires, investments, and actions with regard to what languages they choose to learn and speak. Perhaps, the best-known finding in this field is that in some contexts girls and women may be more inclined to study foreign and second languages and that they may outperform boys or men in this area (Sunderland, 2000). Rather than a cause for celebration of feminine accomplishments, as it would have been earlier, this finding became an impetus for inquiry into the social and economic factors affecting investments and disinvestments of particular learners.

Studies conducted in Japan show that young Japanese women are more likely than their male peers to study English, train for English-related professions, and travel to English-speaking countries (Kobayashi, 2002; see also Fujita-Round and Maher, Language Education Policy in Japan, Volume 1). This trend is most commonly explained by the marginalized status of young women in mainstream Japanese society and their limited choice of employment opportunities; English offers the women an advantage in the marketplace (Kobayashi, 2002), it also becomes a means of empowerment and a lens that offers a critical perspective on their lives and society (McMahill, 2001). Piller and Takahashi (2006) show that this trend is exploited by the booming English language industry in Japan that aims to sell English language to young women as a way to change

their lives, to enter a glamorous western world, to enjoy an emancipated lifestyle, and to form relationships with "chivalrous" western men.

Ideologies that link gender and language may also inspire resistance toward particular linguistic markers or practices. Studies of English-speaking women learning Japanese in Japan show that some women resist certain linguistic features associated with native-speaker competence (e.g., high pitch), because they associate these features with an undesirable gender performance of excessive, "silly" or "fake" femininity (Ohara, 2001; Siegal, 1996).

Overall, the studies to date suggest that it is not the essential nature of femininity or masculinity that shapes language learning trajectories of particular individuals, but rather the nature of gendered social and economic relations, as well as culture-specific ideologies of language and gender that mediate these relations and assign particular symbolic values to linguistic forms and discursive practices (cf., Rampton et al., Language, Class and Education, Volume 1).

Gendered Interactions in the Classroom

Recent research has also contributed toward a more nuanced view of ways in which gender shapes interactions in the classroom, asking which participants have the right to speak and to define meaning, and who remains invisible and why. Heller's (1999, 2001) ethnography of a French-language school in Toronto demonstrated that older immigrant girls had least access to the school's linguistic resources, in particular, English, whereas academically successful middle-class males were most likely to become bilingual in a way envisaged by school. Girls who are ethnically or racially distinct from the mainstream population are particularly likely to be rendered invisible or inaudible. Miller's (2003) study of immigrant students in an Australian school shows that blond white-skinned Bosnian girls were easily accepted by their teachers and peers and perceived as competent speakers of English, whereas Chinese girls who arrived in the school at about the same time were oftentimes excluded from social interactions and positioned as incompetent. What is at play here is not gender or race or culture per se, but assumptions made about members of a particular community. The role of assumptions is highlighted in Julé's (2004) study of a Canadian classroom, where a middle-class white Canadian teacher firmly believed that Punjabi culture was a disadvantage from which the students, in particular girls, had to be rescued. She also ignored Punjabi girls' contributions in her class, thus contributing to their silencing.

Yet immigrant girls are not necessarily the only disenfranchised group. Heller's (1999, 2001) study points to another population alienated by the French-language school in Toronto—working-class male

speakers of vernacular Canadian French. Marginalized by the discourses of *francophonie internationale* that devalued their variety of French, these men often stopped speaking French at school altogether.

Studies conducted in kindergartens and elementary schools show that gender ideologies and practices shape access, interactions, and outcomes not only for the older learners, but also for the youngest ones (Hruska, 2004; Willett, 1995). Hruska's (2004) study, for example, shows how a discussion of soccer in a US classroom drew on gendered cultural knowledge and constrained opportunities for participation for girls from Latin America. McKay and Wong (1996) and Kanno (2003) also draw attention to the links between athletic prowess and the "normative" narrative of masculinity, and demonstrate that athletic Chinese and Japanese boys in their studies had an easier time gaining acceptance by the mainstream students and access to interactional opportunities than girls or nonathletic boys.

Together, these studies indicate that, rather than favoring undifferentiated "men" or "women," patterns of classroom interaction marginalize *specific* learners and/or groups of learners, such as immigrant and minority girls, working-class boys or nonathletic boys. Cultures of learning play an important role in this process as learners often hold beliefs about classroom behaviors and patterns of teacher–student interaction that do not fit well with majority classroom discursive practices and may be further alienating the learners. As a result, students whose voices are not being acknowledged in the classroom may lose their desire to learn the language, or even engage in passive resistance to classroom practices and curriculum demands.

Gender in the Curriculum

Recent scholarship has also made a major contribution toward ways in which issues regarding gender and sexuality can be broached in the classroom (Norton and Pavlenko, 2004). Boxer and Tyler (2004) propose scenarios as a way to discuss diverging views of what constitutes sexual harassment in International Teaching Assistant training. Nelson (2004) shows how one ESL teacher incorporated a discussion of gay and lesbian identities into the unit on modal auxiliary verbs. She argues that such discussions offer a relatively safe space in which students could explore their own and others' views of potentially ambiguous gender and sexual identities and acquire new interpretive skills.

Studies conducted in Japan illustrate practical ways in which critical reflection about language and gender can be incorporated in EFL curricula through examinations of gendered vocabulary and discursive practices in English and Japanese, and through discussions of sexuality, sexual harassment, domestic violence, and sexism in textbooks and the media (Cohen, 2004; McMahill, 2001; Saft and Ohara, 2004; Simon-Maeda, 2004; Toff, 2002). Toff (2002) uses lifewriting to help her female students to discuss and analyze topics that they might otherwise find too difficult or controversial. A reliance on personal narratives is also found in a grassroots feminist class described by McMahill (2001), where the teacher acts as a discussion facilitator, while Japanese women take charge of the learning process and class management, inviting or disinviting instructors and negotiating the class content with them. Both the teachers and the learners approach English as a tool that would allow Japanese women to resist their marginalization and give them an edge in the sexist job market. The class time is used to discuss feminist readings and analyze and critique gender ideologies and practices prevalent in the women's own lives. These analyses are often embedded in personal narratives, where individual experiences are used as a source of knowledge and authority.

Similar practices emerge in Frye's (1999) study that examines implementation of critical feminist pedagogy in a literacy class for immigrant low-income Latina women in the USA. Among the favorite forms of participation in this class were discussions and storytelling where the women could share experiences, give each other advice, and explore differences in age, race, social class, religious background, sexual orientation, national origin, educational background, and the use of Spanish. It is these explorations that engendered most meaningful—albeit heated and at times even angry—conversations, discussions, and activities where the participants learned to negotiate differences and to practice their own new voices. The comparison of their own stories to those of others allowed the women to see commonalities and disparities, to question the oppressive social and cultural forces which shaped their lives, and to perform new critical selves, constructing new possibilities and new visions for the future.

PROBLEMS AND DIFFICULTIES

Problems and difficulties in current research on gender in language education often stem from oversimplified assumptions about gender effects, inherited from earlier research. One research area plagued by such problems is the study of gender differences in the amount and quality of classroom interaction (Chavez, 2001; Julé, 2004; Losey, 1995; Shehadeh, 1999). These studies show that in some contexts teachers address boys more than girls, that boys and men may dominate classroom talk and mixed-gender interactions through interruptions and unsolicited responses, whereas girls and women profit more from same-gender group discussions, and that girls may be silenced by the classroom culture. These findings are undoubtedly important and

informative, but they may also be misleading because they are based on problematic assumptions.

The first problematic assumption is the essential nature of men and women: boys and men are assumed to be dominant, whereas girls and women are seen as easily silenced. These assumptions may well hold true for certain contexts, but not without an explanation as to why particular men and women behave in particular ways in these contexts. Second, these studies commonly assume that a high amount of interaction is in itself a positive phenomenon that leads to higher achievement. In reality, it is quite possible that some students may speak up quite frequently but progress very little, if at all, whereas others, who contribute little to classroom discussions, for individual or cultural reasons, may succeed in accomplishing their own language learning goals. For instance, in a foreign language class studied by Sunderland (2004) boys received more attention from the teacher overall, but girls received more academically useful attention. These results suggest that studies of interactional patterns in foreign and second language classrooms should focus on the distribution of interactional opportunities beneficial for language learning, such as speaking practice or requests for clarification and feedback. Even more importantly, we should look beyond "donation" of equal classroom time, as this focus skirts "the structural problematic of who, in schools or universities, has the authority to speak, to critique, and to judge what is worthwhile (student) speech and critique" (Luke, 1992, p. 39).

Another area that often suffers from shortcomings is the study of textbook representations of gender. These studies show that language textbook stereotypes that place men in the public domain and women in the home had continued well into the 1980s, despite the appearance of nonsexist guidelines for educational materials. Since the 1990s, the situation has been steadily improving. Nevertheless, analyses of ESL and EFL texts published around the world (Sunderland, 1994) and of Greek, Russian, and Japanese textbooks published in the USA (Poulou, 1997; Rifkin, 1998; Shardakova and Pavlenko, 2004; Siegal and Okamoto 1996) reveal that many foreign and second language textbooks continue to reproduce gender biases. Siegal and Okamoto (1996) found that Japanese textbooks aimed at American students present highly stereotypical linguistic "norms" based on the hegemonic ideologies of class, language, and gender. Poulou (1997) demonstrated that Greek textbooks reproduce traditional gender roles through discursive roles assigned to men and women in dialogues.

Though important and informative, this line of inquiry is also overly narrow in that it does not document the uptake of materials by the students. Very few studies clarify the link between what is deemed to be gender biases or sexist representations, the role these representations play

in the teaching process, and students' learning outcomes. Consequently, it is possible that biased representations may not affect the students at all. This lack of connection is documented in Pavlenko's (2005) historiographic study of gendered aspects of the Americanization movement in the early twentieth century. The study shows that Americanizers had distinct "hidden curricula" for men and women of different racial and ethnic origins: European-born men were offered instructional support for their citizenship exams, European-born women were offered "pots and pans" English and encouraged to remain at home, and Asian and Mexican immigrants were conceived of as a cheap labor force and were not encouraged to assimilate at all. Using oral histories, immigrant memoirs, and Americanization reports, the study showed that immigrant women mostly ignored Americanizers' messages. Even when they took the classes and used the texts in question, the women did not necessarily adopt the femininities imposed on them—rather, many were appropriating English to join the labor force.

Interesting questions with regard to the impact of perceived gender biases are raised in Durham's (1995) study of the controversy at Yale, where students filed a complaint stating that their textbook, *French in Action*, and the accompanying video were explicitly sexist and offensive. Durham argues that the students engaged in an ethnocentric reading of the text and—since their teachers did not attempt to counteract such a reading—lost an opportunity to access important dimensions of French culture. Their interpretation of depictions of the female body as sexist and of female silence as powerless was consistent with the principles of American academic feminism, but displayed a lack of knowledge and understanding of French discourses of feminism, sexuality, and gender. In other words, argues the researcher, they imposed their own culturally informed beliefs and stereotypes on what could be alternatively perceived as an ironic postmodernist feminist critique of Hollywood's sexual romance narrative and of conventional discourses of masculinity. These concerns are echoed in the work of Kramsch and von Hoene (1995, 2001) who argue that foreign language instruction in the USA promotes a biased and ethnocentric knowledge, or "single-voiced consciousness", and does not allow students to view themselves from the perspective of other cultures and thus acquire intercultural competence, or "multi-voiced consciousness."

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

To sum up, we have discussed four focal points where gender issues are central in language education: (i) access to linguistic resources; (ii) agency and (dis)investment into language learning; (iii) classroom interaction; (iv) textbooks and teaching practices. Throughout, we have

tried to highlight studies of educational contexts that respond to the needs of marginalized learners, striving to (i) ensure equal access and equal conditions for participation for all students, (ii) create curricula that legitimize the students' daily realities and multilingual lives, and (iii) approach language teaching from an intercultural and critical perspective which, on the one hand, engages students with cross-linguistic and cross-cultural differences in gender ideologies, constructions and performances and, on the other, allows students to analyze how dominant discourses of gender function to subordinate individuals.

Future research in this area should go beyond the issues of access, interaction, and representation, and consider ways in which changes in the global economy affect linguistic, educational, and labor markets (Piller and Pavlenko, in press; see also Block, Language Education and Globalization, Volume 1; Kalantzis and Cope, Language Education and Multiliteracies, Volume 1). It also needs to pay close attention to changes in gender ideologies and relationships in particular communities and to ways in which these changes affect learners' investments into particular languages or resistance to them. Studies of foreign and second language pedagogy should engage with the challenging questions raised in the work of Durham (1995), Kramsch and von Hoene (1995, 2001) and Pavlenko (2004), and particularly relevant for North American contexts, often accused of linguistic imperialism: What conceptions and discourses of gender do we aim at reflecting in our texts and classes, the ones accepted in the target language communities or the ones that have currency in our own? And if we aim at avoiding gender biases in our foreign language materials, are we engaged in ethnocentric oversimplification, portraying the world on our own terms and not providing our students with important linguistic and cultural capital? On the other hand, if we are aiming at reflecting gender discourses of other cultures—which may be quite different from our own—what if in the process we offend or upset our students who by now are fairly used to bland and noncontroversial teaching materials? And what if, in our attempt to ensure the students' comfort, we erase differences in cross-cultural understandings of gender—will we simply end up teaching our students to speak English in a variety of languages?

See Also: *David Block: Language Education and Globalization (Volume 1); Ben Rampton, et al.: Language, Class and Education (Volume 1); Mary Kalantzis and Bill Cope: Language Education and Multiliteracies (Volume 1); Alastair Pennycook: Critical Applied Linguistics and Language Education (Volume 1)*

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