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Language, Gender, and Society

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- Course director:** **Louise O. Vasvári**, Professor, Comparative Literature & Linguistics, State University of New York at Stony Brook, USA
- Resource persons:** **Don Kulick**, Professor, Department of Anthropology, New York University, USA
Juliet N. A. Langman, Assistant Professor, Division of Bicultural-Bilingual Studies, University of Texas at San Antonio, USA
Itesh Sachdev, Professor, School of Languages, Linguistics & Culture, Birbeck College, University of London, UK
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- Staff person:** **Sólyom, Erika**

Short Biographies

Louise O. Vasvári

Professor of Comparative Literature & Linguistics at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, Prof. Vasvari has also taught at the University of California at Berkeley and at Davis, New York University, at the Eötvös Lorand University in Budapest, and at CEU. She received her M.A. and Ph.D. at the University of California at Berkeley, and has been the recipient of the National Endowment for the Humanities and of Fulbright research fellowships. Her research, at the intersection of humanities, folklore, and linguistics, is concerned with the history of sexuality and gender. Her most recent booklength publication, *The Heterotextual Body of the "Morilla d'un bel catar"* (1999) deals with sexuality, ethnicity, and gender roles in the Spanish and European folk ballad.

Don Kulick

Professor of Anthropology at New York University, and Stockholm University, Sweden. He received his Ph.D. from Stockholm University and has taught at the University of Chicago, University of Manchester, Linköping University, Sweden, and the Australian National University. His publications in English include *Language Shift and Cultural Reproduction: Socialization, Syncretism and Self in a Papua New Guinean Village* (1992) and *Travesti: Sex, Gender & Culture Among Brazilian Transgendered Prostitutes* (1998). He has also edited several books in Swedish on gender and sexuality, and he is currently completing a book, co-authored with linguist Deborah Cameron, entitled *Language & Sexuality*.

Juliet N. A. Langman

Prof. Langman is Assistant Professor of Bicultural-Bilingual Studies at the University of Texas at San Antonio. She received her M.A. and Ph.D. from Stanford University, and has taught in several universities in the USA, as well as at the Eötvös Lorand University and at the Linguistics Institute, National Academy of Sciences, both in Budapest, as well as at CEU. She has been the recipient of a number of grants for research on ethnic and sexual identities among bilingual youth groups in Slovak and Hungarian communities. She publishes in several languages, including in Hungarian. She co-edited *Beyond Borders: Remaking Cultural Identities in the New East and Central Europe* (1997) and has authored numerous articles on second language acquisition, communication strategies, bilingualism, and ethnic identities.

Itesh Sachdev

Prof. Sachdev is presently Professor and Head of School of Languages, Linguistics & Culture at Birkbeck College, University of London. He received his Ph.D. at McMaster University, Canada. His research expertise includes the social psychology of language and groups, gender, race and language, quantitative research methodologies and statistics, social and sexual identity and multilingualism, and multilingualism

and multiculturalism. He has been the recipient of numerous research awards, grants, and contracts, most recently the “Prix de Quebec” (1999-2000). He is, since 1993, the editor of the *London Journal of Canadian Studies*, consultant editor on a number of other social psychology journals, and has organized many symposia in Great Britain, Canada, the USA. His most current booklength publications are *The New Handbook of Language and Social Psychology* (in press), with R. Y. Bourhis, and *Social Psychological Perspectives on Second Language Learning* (1998), with N. Elmufti and P. Collins. He has authored numerous publications on topics such as codeswitching in Arabic and French, bilingualism and language policy, and language use and attitudes.

Erika Sólyom

Erika Sólyom is a Ph.D. candidate in Linguistics at New York University. She received her M. A. degree from the Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest. She has received a number of fellowships, including a Fulbright Grant and a Soros Foundation Fellowship. She has taught at New York University, Long Island University (NY), and at CEU. She has co-authored an article on gendered discourse markers, and has also published on bilingualism and on address systems. Her research interests include minority language education, linguistic human rights, language and gender, language and political economy, and language shift. Currently, Erika Solyom is completing her Ph.D. dissertation on the sociolinguistic entitled, “The Sociolinguistic Landscape After the Collapse of Communism: Shifting Formalities in Hungarian Urban Discourse.”

Course Objectives

This interdisciplinary course lies at the intersection of several areas, including gender studies, socio- and psycholinguistics, feminist literary analysis, and anthropology and folklore. The central issue that will concern us is how linguistic practices both reflect and shape our gender identity and how these reflect more global socio-cultural relationships between the sexes. We will examine the epistemological, linguistic, and philosophical structures that define and naturalize gender, investigating questions such as: Do women and men talk differently and to what degree do these differences seem to be universal or variable across cultures? How do dominant gender-based ideologies function to constrain women’s and men’s choices about their gender identities and gender relationships? How does gendered language intersect with race, ethnicity, nationality, social class, and other dimensions of social identity? How are gender norms challenged by linguistic “gender bending” and what are the possibilities of gender self-construction? From a socio-political perspective, we will investigate what impact gendered language has on power relationships in given societies and whether non-sexist language reform can be instrumental in avoiding the downgrading of women.

Several modules of the course will focus on research methods generally as well as with a specific focus on quantitative methodologies and statistics. Their purpose is to help students in the critical appraisal of primary research in the field of social sciences generally and gender studies specifically. A survey of research methodologies from case studies to survey research and including experimental research will be presented. Additionally, with the aid of the SPSS statistical computer package a review of univariable and multivariable statistics will be presented.

The great majority of published research to date on language and gender has been on American and British English practice. Therefore, it will be one of our principal course objectives throughout the course to have ongoing discussions and group work, where students will provide complementary analysis from their own native languages.

An additional objective of the course is to prepare students for undertaking their own research projects on language and gender. With this in mind, we will provide both technical advice on research methods and conduct a half-day miniconference. Several young researchers from Central and Eastern Europe will present twenty-minute presentations on their current projects. Those students chosen to attend the course who are themselves already engaged in research in this area will also be invited to submit abstracts of their research to the course director before the start of the course, so that they, too, might be considered for inclusion in the panel. The presentations will be followed by a round-table discussion.

The course director, as well as each resource person, will conduct several tutorial sessions, in order to give individual students opportunity to discuss their research interests with them.

Course Level, Target Audience

This two-week course is an introductory-level graduate course for postgraduate students and junior faculty. Although candidates with background in the humanities, social sciences, or law are all eligible, some knowledge of a basic level of linguistics is highly desirable.

The course is intended to assist students in three different but potentially overlapping areas: in furthering their education in Western Ph.D. programs, in developing syllabi to teach related courses in their home institutions, and to help them develop research projects. (This course was taught in Summer 2001, a result of which was a collaborative research project that has developed between Prof. Sachdev and several

participants; it is to be hoped that this collaboration can be further extended with participants from the 2002 course.)

Application Requirements

There are no specific application requirements, but prospective applicants are encouraged to prepare a brief paper detailing their particular interest in any aspect of the topic to be covered, which can be a review of previous readings or a proposal for a research project. They are also encouraged to submit samples of their scholarly writing.

Course Description

This course will examine gender from a multidisciplinary perspective and in particular as a sociolinguistic variable in speech behavior. The scientific investigation of gender-linked language is a discipline which has begun to be studied scientifically only in the last twenty-five years. Research into language and gender may be said to fall into two major categories. The first has to do with gender-based ideologies, or sexism in language, where attitudes toward men and women have become attitudes toward language. These include the ways that women have been negatively positioned by dominant naming and representation practices in language or the ways in which speakers (and writers) demonstrate their different cultural attitudes toward men and women. An alternative to sexist practices is gender-based language planning, whose aim is to challenge hegemonic discursive practices which disadvantage women, by creating new forms or selecting alternative forms, for example, in vocabulary and grammar. We will investigate both the linguistic and the cultural problems involved in such reforms, which have been only minimally successful.

The second major category in the study of gender and language concerns possible differences in the actual way of speaking, or interactional style, of men and women. It has been posited that women's speech is more polite, and makes more use of a variety of "powerless" linguistic strategies such as "empty" adjectives, hedges, tag questions, and a question intonation in statements. Some researchers, focusing on male dominance in interaction, have added different kinds of features to this list: for instance, that men interrupt women more than women interrupt men, that men raise new topics more often, talk more in public than do women, while, on the other hand, they also make use of silence as a form of control. More recently, other researchers have suggested that what had been termed "women's language" would be more appropriately termed "powerless language," and that, in fact, both men and women used these features in certain situations.

We will review this controversy, which has been labeled "dominance" versus "difference." The dominance approach sees women as an oppressed group and interprets linguistic differences in women's and men's speech in terms of men's dominance and women's subordination. Researchers using this model are concerned to show how male dominance is enacted through linguistic practice. Their motto might be: "Doing power" is often a way of "doing gender". The second approach, the difference model, emphasizes the idea that women and men belong to different subcultures, and the differences in women's and men's speech are interpreted as reflecting and maintaining gender-specific subcultures. Because boys and girls grow up in what are essentially different cultures, talk between women and men can be considered as a form of cross-cultural communication. In this context, work is being done on children's and on adolescents' socialization in single-sex and in mixed peer groups, and on the consequent development of gender-differentiated linguistic styles. This two-cultures model has, in turn, also been widely criticized as a watering down of feminism for its failure to recognize the importance of sexual inequalities at the societal level, where men are accorded greater power, status, and privilege than women. Many researchers have preferred to adopt a compromise position, in which they combine elements of both the dominance and difference model.

Another area that we shall examine is related to feminist literary concerns: the role of the personalized gendered voice in scholarship and in personal narratives. The scientific/scholarly voice, which has traditionally been gendered male, relies on a number of linguistic protocols to achieve a depersonalized style. These include features such as the use of the agentless passive voice (suppressed person), a heavy use of nominalization, and the use of preposition "in" rather than "by" for citing authorities. The aim is to achieve a style that pretends to exclude emotions from the process of attaining knowledge. Feminists, on the other hand, insisting that the private is the public and the personal is the political, have been concerned with questions about how women can create stories of their lives if they have only the male language with which to do it. The so-called personal turn in academic writing – linked to both Postmodernism and Multiculturalism – is largely a female strategy. We will question if this autobiographical turn is a phenomenon that can properly be gendered.

We will also review the variability in the linguistic expression of gender in cultures around the world, as well as in a survey of differences in language and gender within a single national context, the United States. It is appropriate that in a setting like Central Europe we also consider gender in multilingual societies, in

postcolonial contexts, and in diglossic linguistic situations, where it may be access to certain languages, in particular to the prestige or textualized language, which differentiates the speech of men and women. For example, we will discuss cases like the resistance of some highly educated Arabic women to the use of the high language, classical Arabic, bilingualism among Andean Indian women, and the gender differentiation in the use of Hungarian and German in Austria, which focuses on the effects of urbanization and industrialization on the speech patterns of the sexes. We will also consider gender diversity across cultures in the United States, among native-born white Americans, among Chicanas, in different immigrant communities, and African-Americans, as well as in the adolescent subculture, and, finally in the classroom, one of society's primary socializing institutions.

Finally, we examine if anatomy need not be linguistic destiny, that is, if the bipolar categories of man and woman are really fixed categories. Instead of assuming that women and men behave in certain ways linguistically, we might ask how particular linguistic practices contribute to the production of people as "women and men"? Judith Butler and others who have taken a constructive view of gender propose that ways of talking and behaving that are associated with gender are a matter not of identity but of performance or display. They suggest that behavior is not a reflection of the individual's nature but rather of some performance that the individual is accomplishing. According to this view "gender is doing, not being," so that it is the practices people engage in that produce their gendered identities, and not the other way around. Constructionists also emphasize that no one is ever finished becoming a woman, or a man, but that each individual must constantly negotiate the norms, behaviors, and discourses that define masculinity and femininity for a particular community at a particular point in history. In this context, we will discuss how language may be used to perform social identities that do not match the individual's biological characteristics, such as "queerspeak," "cross expressing," or "linguistic gender bending. For example, performance has a literal force in the "fantasy femininity" enacted by telephone sex workers (some of whom are male), whose use of powerless women's speech is specifically marked as sexy. This will lead us to the final issue: the limits and possibilities of gender self-construction.

Course Syllabus

The following syllabus is based on a two-week 4 credit course for 48 credits. The teaching mode for all classes is lecture plus group work and participant presentations. There will also be the screening of at least one film (perhaps *Paris is Burning*) and at least one field trip relevant to the course.

TOPIC	PROFESSOR	HRS	DISCUSSION POINTS
Introduction & Historical Background; Personal Narratives & Personal Voice in Scholarship; Folkloric and Literary Approaches	L. Vasvari	12	Grammatical vs. natural gender; are gender-based languages more sexist? Is the personal voice in scholarship gendered female? The retrieval of lost female voices in folk poetry. The linguistic silencing of women in folklore & literary themes.
Linguistic relativity (Sapir-Whorf) and later modifications of how language influences thought. The historical and epistemological context of performativity theory. How does language constitute social reality? Language & sexuality/desire.	D. Kulick	12	Different understandings of the relation between language and thought. How do metaphors influence perceptions of gender and gendered bodies? Performativity ? performance: the theoretical foundations of performativity theory. Judith Butler's idea of 'the politics of the performative'. What is the relationship between language and sexuality? How can we investigate desire in language?
Gender socialization; gender & language in a multilingual setting; aspects of female. The difference and dominance models of linguistic behavior	J. Langman	10	Children's and adolescent's language socialization; interactional sociolinguistics in male-female and single sex gender & other identity; Are the differences in male and female speech patterns predominantly due to differences in socialization or to unequal power relationships?
Anthropological approaches to linguistic expression of gender in different cultures; African and Asian case studies.	E. Solyom	4	Consideration of gender in multilingual settings like Central Europe, in postcolonial contexts and in diglossic linguistic situations.
Quantitative vs. qualitative methods; the social-psychology of gender differences	I. Sachdev	10	Quantitative methodologies and statistics. Are there actual psychology of gender from a social interactional styles of males & females? Is reform possible from a psychological perspective?

Methodology & Course Requirements

Well before the start of the course, all students will receive reading materials which they are expected to have read before the course begins.

The course will combine lectures and discussion. In order to be adequately prepared for informed discussion, class members should assume responsibility for reading all materials before the date for which they have been assigned. Attendance at all class sessions and special lectures will be required, with students asked to keep a running log of questions, and issues raised in each session. Students will also occasionally be asked to form groups for the purpose of discussing their responses to the material read.

Readings are drawn from a required reader and a required basic text, as well as from additional articles from the supplemental reading list, available on reserve in the Library. Additional lists of required and recommended readings for each topic will be available. We will do an overview of the relevant literature, close examination of selected primary research, as well as analyze popular treatments of the subject. Students will also collect data based on direct observation of language use and/or attitudes. They will be required to observe a particular behavior discussed, to record what they observe, and to analyze the resulting data. For example, in order to explore principles of data collection students might note and record how women are addressed by strangers in public places, how men and women use color terms, intensifiers, or profanity.

Students will also receive direction on formal aspects of preparing oral and written presentations and scholarly bibliographies, including background discussion of differences in the two modes of discourse and their implications. During the course they will submit their work in oral and written presentations. After the completion of the course students will be required to submit a final paper approximately one month after the completion of the course. Ideally, the paper will combine an overview of the course with a research proposal for further study by the participant.

At the completion of the course the course director will be available to continue to advise those students by e-mail who have developed individual research topics which they seek to develop further.

For more detailed biographies, updated course description, syllabus, reading lists, selected bibliographies please check <http://www.ceu.hu/sun/sunindx.html>

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