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GENDER DIFFERENCE IN CHILDREN'S LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

Up to the present day the gender difference in children's language has been studied by various researchers. The amount of research done, the differences in methods used, and the contradictory results raise questions about the initial idea – Are there gender based differences in children's language? If there are, how are they demonstrated and what are they? What are the best research methods? Does the gender language difference in childhood, in any way, influence language skills in adulthood? The questions being so complex, it is impossible to cover all the areas mentioned above.

What I want to do in this contribution is to summarize the actual research done in this field until today. I present a few theories that have been available over the last fifty years and I have given various research models and methods in order to cover this topic. The actual results are not surprising: differences do exist and the variations are huge. However the amount of gender innateness and the social influence of gender stereotypes create difficulties in measuring separately the difference in language caused by gender. We therefore, need to go back to the original biological and social questions of what makes a male male and what makes a female female. In the same way, all the other individual differences in children are posited under the same question - Are they a part of gender difference or is gender difference only a small part of the whole individual forming his or her personality?

Key words: language, gender differences, innateness, social environment, girl's stereotypes, boy's stereotypes, language styles

LA DIFFERENZA DI GENERE NEL LINGUAGGIO DEI BAMBINI

SINTESI

La differenza di genere nel linguaggio dei bambini è stata fino ad oggi studiata da diverse discipline. L'ammontare delle ricerche fatte in questo campo e specialmente le differenze nei metodi usati con risultati contraddittori mette in dubbio l'idea iniziale - Esistono differenze nel linguaggio dei bambini basate sul genere? Se esse esistono, quali sono e come si esprimono? Qual è il migliore metodo di ricerca? È possibile che la variazione linguistica nel linguaggio dei bambini basata sul genere possa, in qualsiasi modo, influenzare la capacità comunicativa degli adulti? Siccome le domande sono complesse, è impossibile coprire tutte le aree menzionate. Perciò fare un riassunto di tutte le ricerche fatte in questo campo, è l'unica strada da prendere. Presenterò teorie che sono state analizzate negli ultimi cinquanta anni e darò esempi di ricerca in tutto il campo. I risultati attuali non sono sorprendenti: Le differenze esistono e sono enormi. Tuttavia, la quantità dell'innatezza del genere e l'influenza sociale sugli stereotipi di genere fanno sì che le determinazioni linguistiche di differenza siano molto difficili da fare. Per questo dovremmo ritornare alle domande originali di natura biologica e sociologica - che cosa fa di un maschio, un maschio e che cosa fa di una femmina, una femmina. Anche le altre differenze individuali nei bambini sono poste nella stessa domanda – Fanno esse parte della differenza di genere oppure è la differenza di genere che in una parte crea la personalità del bambino.

Parole chiave: lingua, differenza di genere, innatezza, ambiente sociale, stereotipi di genere, stili di lingua

INTRODUCTION

There is a popular belief that girls are more advanced in language development than boys. The first part of this article summarises some theories that brought completely opposite results and which have been present for the past half a century until sex discrimination has diminished and the approach to this subject has become more objective. The first problem we noticed in the literature was the actual *notion of superiority*: girls are superior to boys; boys are superior to girls, etc. The first step to take is to eliminate the idea of superiority, because there is no evidence that certain language style is superior to the other and there is no evidence that quantity means quality, etc.

On the other hand, there is no debate about differences in *innate language gender specific features* and at the same time *the social influence* on the biological patterns. This information is discussed in the following section.

Another problem I find in the literature is *the comparison between studies based on different criteria*. It is very risky to draw conclusions based on two differently conducted researches: for example the studies based on language styles being compared to the initial studies based on number of words used by children, up to the research done on using morphology or word articulation, etc. Therefore, there is one chapter in which I give attention to methods used in research and the problems we encounter in that field. The amount of research material is very restricted. I found articles that are expressing results and opinions but usually the explanation of methods that was used in the research, and the criteria, were missing.

LANGUAGE STEREOTYPES OR REAL DIFFERENCE

Pro difference

The early evidence for sex differences in language development rests on both performance and neurological data. There have been a number of reviews of the literature on sex differences in language development like:

Jespersen (1922) (in: Macaulay, 1978, 353–363) observes that "little girls on the average learn to talk earlier and more quickly than boys; they outstrip them in talking correctly; their pronunciation is not spoiled by many bad habits and awkwardness so often found in boys."

McCarthy (1954) (in: *ibid.*) "one of the most consistent findings to emerge from the mass of data accumulated on language development in American white children seems to be a slight difference in favour of girls in nearly all aspects of language that have been studied". The author also concludes that "the vast array of evidence in the same direction from a variety of investiga-

tors working in different parts of the country employing different situations and methods of observation, and employing different analyses and linguistic indices, certainly is convincing proof that a real sex difference in language development exists in favour of the girls."

Maccoby (1966) (in: *ibid.*) in her study supports the same view: Out of 102 studies reported, 61 showed superior performance by females and 12 superior performance by males, although in many cases the differences were not statistically significant. She also later qualifies and admits that for large, unselected populations, there seems to be sex difference in verbal skills from about 3–11 with a new phase of differentiation occurring at adolescence. Garai and Scheinfeld in a smaller number of studies came to the same conclusion: "studies of verbal ability have shown that girls and women surpass boys and men in verbal fluency, correct language usage, sentence complexity, grammatical structure, spelling, and articulation, while males tend to excel in verbal reasoning and comprehension." (Garai and Scheinfeld, 1968, 198–200). Nelson (1973) and Bloom (1975) support the theory that analytic/referential nominal style (left brain dominant learners who analyse speech stream into individual phonetic elements and words and tend to use isolated monosyllabic words) is reported more often for girls while the holistic/expressive pronominal style (right-brain dominant learners who pay attention to the overall sound/rhythm of the language and its use) is reported more often for boys. Moss and Robson (1970) in their research confirm that boys at the age of 6 months produced consistently more negative vocalizations and more smiles than girls but the difference was significant only for negative vocalizations at 6 months.

From a general point of view, in their exhaustive review of thousands of psychological studies in which sex of the subject was a variable, Maccoby and Jacklin (1974) concluded that there are only four psychological areas in which sex differences have consistently been found: males appear to be more aggressive than females, to excel in visual – spatial ability and to excel in mathematics, while females excel in verbal ability. General findings of many studies indicate that girls begin to talk earlier than boys and that they begin to use sentences earlier. They suggest that the clear advantage in favour of girls tends to dissipate after the early school years; while others have contended that females continue to have greater facility than males in such things as spelling, essay writing and the learning of foreign languages. Furthermore the sex differences visible in early childhood coincide with those found in adults. For example; boys and men tend to use more aggressive and assertive language than females (Sause, 1976; Cook, Fritz, and Cornack, 1985; McCloskey & Coleman, 1992) and girls and women use more mitigating and cooperative utterances than males (Austin, Salehi and Leffler, 1987).

Moreover, sex differences in language use have been assessed on a variety of levels; such as intonation (Edelsky, 1979), use of conversational devices such as attention getters and reinforcers (Lakoff, 1975), interruptions (Nohara, 1992), general verbosity (Swacker, 1975), and that they have also been assessed in terms of various other measures of articulation and fluency.

The results of these studies mostly show that males and females do indeed use language in different ways, even as early as at the age of 3.

Even if there is difference does it really matter

When one tries to find the evidence that girls are superior to boys it turns out to be less obvious than it has been implied. Many of the studies cited by Macoby, "show slight but consistent differences in favour of girls in language development at the preschool level" (Macoby, 1966, 334), but many of these differences are not statistically significant. For example in a large scale study, only sporadic differences were found between the sexes in the 3 year old to 8 year old age group: in the 230 comparisons made, the girls received the better score 133 times, the boys 84 times and no differences occurred 13 times. However none of the differences reaches the 0.01 level of confidence and 15 reach the 0.05 level, and concluded that "in general the results reflect the findings of earlier studies showing that girls tend to exceed in articulation of sounds at the older ages and the boys in work knowledge" (Templin, 1957 in: Macaulay, 1978, 353–363). Yet the differences between sexes are somewhat less pronounced than is frequently stated. He also concludes "When the performance of boys and girls is compared over the entire age range, girls tend to receive higher scores more frequently than the boys but the differences are not consistent and are only infrequently statistically significant. It may be that the differences, which have appeared in the literature, have been overemphasised in the past. It may also be that over the years differences in language ability of the two sexes have actually become less pronounced in keeping with the shift towards a single standard in childcare and training in the last few decades". (Macoby, 1966, 334). However I do not have the possibility of finding and verifying the exact methods that Macoby and Templin used.

Winitz (1959) in a study of kindergarten children found girls to be significantly superior to boys on three out of twelve measures but Winitz points out that these measures were not those generally regarded as of major importance. His conclusion is the hypothesis that no language differences is tenable in the population of five-year-old children with regard to major verbalization measures, articulatory skills, vocabulary skills, and three of four word fluency measures. O'Donnell, Griffin and Norris (1967) in a study of the syntax of children in

grade K-7 (age 12) found no significant differences in speech. Moore (1967) in a longitudinal study covering the first eight years found only one significant difference out of 21 measures and that was for speech quotient at 1,6. Whatever the interpretation of speech quotient at this age may be it can hardly be of great importance if no other significant linguistic differences show up at the ages of 3.0, 5.0 and 8.0 for the same sample. Graves and Koziol (1971) found no significant differences in a study of noun pluralization. Nelson (1973) found that the mean age for acquisition of 50 words was 18 months for girls and 22 for boys, but Sause (1976) in a study of kindergarten children found that boys produced significantly more language (204 words average) than girls (163 words average). Macoby and Jacklin (1974, 76–83) list 123 studies with 159 measures of language behaviour. An overwhelming proportion of 62% show no sex difference, 28% show female superiority and 9% show male superiority.

Although the studies showing female superiority outnumber those showing male superiority the figures need to be interpreted with care, as some of the behaviours showing female superiority are of dubious value like "talked more frequently to other children, appropriate verbalization during movie, requests for information or evaluation from mother, etc." (Macaulay, 1978, 354).

Looking at the research from Bristol we can see that they used the corpus of speech collected among the children at the age of 3.3 years. Sequences of conversation were distinguished according to whether they were initiated by a child or by another person. 70% of all the sequences whose initiator could be determined were initiated by a child; and for these sequences there were only small and mainly insignificant differences between boys and girls with respect to context or purpose. In the remaining 30% of sequences; the vast majority of which were initiated by the mother (and few cases by the father), there were highly significant differences in the context in which adults chose to initiate conversations with boys and girls. Going back to the language style variation (analytic vs. holistic style) in a study done by (Bates and Fenson, 1993), based on the MacArthur CDI study, the group have found out that there are differences between styles of children's learning comprehension and production. With percentile-based measures of vocabulary composition, it was possible for (Bates, 1994) to investigate correlations of stylistic variation unconfined with developmental variation. For example referential vocabulary style for children between 8-16 months with at least ten words was modestly but significantly correlated with age (0.15), gender (0.11 girls higher), mother's education (0.18). The positive correlation with age for example means that children high in referential style are actually older than those with proportionally fewer common nouns.

Why and how was the question of difference and superiority created

After the above mentioned analysis (Macaulay, 1978) states, that the more realistic conclusion from the evidence is that there is no significant sex difference in linguistic development which can be traced to a physiological or genetic origin. Such differences, as the tests were shown, are relatively slight and much smaller than those which have been shown to relate to social class or ethnic background. Therefore Macaulay is saying that the more appropriate question should be - How was the myth of female superiority in linguistic skills born? Primarily, she says there is a widely held view, among paediatricians, that girls are generally more advanced than boys in their linguistic development. Secondly, it is often asserted that mothers speak more to their female children than to male children and in a period when behaviourist views of language acquisition were dominant this belief would tend to reinforce the notion that girls must be more advanced in their linguistic development. However there is much evidence that also show the opposite. Lewis & Freedle (1973) found that mothers of girls vocalized more to their three month old infants than do mothers of boys. But Moss (1967) found that mothers talked more to male infants than to female infants during the first month and that there was no significant difference at three months. And for her the simplest explanation is the obvious one: most researchers have been so convinced in the linguistic superiority of girls that they have looked at the evidence with a rather prejudicial eye.

We are now coming to a point that brings us to a conclusion that sex difference in children's language exists, however it is more likely that we relate that difference to the actual language variations styles (analytic vs. holistic), present in both sexes, than solely to the separate sex.

BIOLOGICAL CUES

It is possible that there are innate differences between the sexes with respect to both temperament and to the neuroanatomical structures associated with language. If they exist, these inborn differences could affect language development directly or they could affect the way in which the infant interacts with the adults in her or his environment and thus help to shape the social factors that in turn reflect back upon the infant (Gleason, 1979).

Right ear advantage

Many studies have suggested a relationship between cerebral hemisphere and linguistic development. (Witelson and Pallie, 1973) published a study called "Left

hemisphere specialization for language in the newborn: neuroanatomical evidence of asymmetry". They found out that the females had significantly larger left hemisphere structures than right, while the males of comparable age (1-19 days) had no significant difference between left and right hemispheres. This extra tissue is observable in females but not in males during the first three weeks after birth. The brains of male infants, who were at least a month older, also showed larger left-sided planum. For example, (Kagan, 1971) suggests that the superiority of females in language development may be the result of earlier maturation of the left cerebral hemisphere which is normally dominant for certain speech functions. Buffery and Gray, (1972) claim that there is an innate neural mechanism for speech perception which is more developed in the female brain than in the male brain of the same age which means that lateralization of a usually left sided cerebral dominance for language function is accelerated in the female brain and such functional topography facilitates the development of linguistic skill in women. Taylor (1972) also found that boys (but not girls) with reading disabilities failed to show a right ear advantage even at the age's of seven and eleven. Knox and Kimura (1970) in a dichotic listening task employing environmental and animal noises found greater left ear superiority among boys than among girls in ages from five to eight. This is consistent with a study of preschool children Smith and Connolly (1972) that showed that boys made more play noises (brrr, bang etc) than girls did. Left ear superiority is evidence of right hemispheric dominance for non-speech sounds. The right hemisphere is also associated with spatial relationships. Buffery and Gray emphasize that "the male superiority only appears when manipulation of spatial relationships is involved, while when the tasks mainly concern discrimination or comparison of fine visual detail, females are superior." (Buffery and Gray, 1972, 127).

There are some indications that boys lag behind girls in the development of laterality but the actual laterality is less strong in females than in males once is developed. (Lake and Bryden, 1976) found out that male with left handedness in the family showed strong right ear superiorities on a dichotic listening test while females from a similar background showed little laterality. Also all the females without a background of family left-handedness showed weaker right ear superiorities than the males. They also argue that boys lag behind the girls in a variety of aspects of lateralization of functions thus providing an extended duration of vulnerability during which more "accidents" could occur. Males would therefore lateralize more thoroughly and completely and eventually overtake and surpass the females in degree of asymmetry. This might help to explain the greater vulnerability of boys to speech disorders. Boys have been found to suffer from speech disorders anything from

twice as frequently as girls to five times as frequently (Ingram, 1975). Nevertheless there appear to be remarkably few genetic differences between males and females which affect language development. Fairweather observes that "there is in sum very little evidence of an overall sex difference in verbal ability. However, there is, indeed, for spatial ability very suggestive evidence that this ability is more symmetrically represented across the cerebral hemispheres in the female than in the male brain." (Fairweather, 1976, 266).

Aphasiological studies findings indicate that it requires a good deal more brain damage to produce aphasia in females than in males (McGlone, 1977). There are also many more male aphasics than female, but there are also many more male stroke victims. If, however, language is more resistant to dissolution in even damaged female brains there exists the possibility that males may be more strongly lateralized for language, while females may have some language areas in both hemispheres.

Other opinions are "that males and females probably have somewhat different brain structures because they have a different prenatal hormonal environment; the prenatal hormonal environment does exercise during a few critical days of brain development; a determining influence on neural pathways that will subsequently mediate sexually dimorphic behaviour". (Money and Erhardt, 1972).

Environmental variables

Whether the prenatal hormonal environment might also exert an influence on parts of brain associated with intellectual activity is a fascinating question that remains unanswered. No such postulation is needed to account for sex differences in language, since there are observable environmental variables that can be evoked to explain those differences; but the possibility that male and female brains are organized differently remains.

Gleason (1979) is looking at another frequently offered explanation for differences, that girls mature more rapidly than boys. There appears to be some physiological evidence for this general finding, but it is not clear how it applies to cognitive functioning, or to what extent it is a sufficient explanation for what is observed. If maturational differences explain girls' linguistic superiority; perhaps they should also be called upon to explain boys' mathematical superiority. If male and female brains mature at different rates and in different ways, then they are very different indeed. The maturational argument also leads to some conclusions that simply do not follow. Earlier maturation would be a good explanation for why girls begin to speak earlier, but if girls' verbal superiority were based purely on maturational factors, we would expect them to lose their advantage once they had matured. In fact, since language acquisition is

so much easier for children who have not yet reached puberty than for adolescents, and since girls on the whole reach puberty before boys, we might expect that around the age of 12 boys would become much better second language learners. This simply does not happen. Girls continue to do well as foreign language students even at a time when their earlier maturation might be expected to work to their disadvantage.

Moreover there are other individual innate differences that could, but also may not be, sexually divided. Kagan (1981) reports that shy children are more likely to show a cautious analytic approach to cognitive problems while very sociable children are more likely to leap before they look when presented with various intellectual tasks in the laboratory. Specifically, the holistic/expressive/pronominal style may be more typical of very gregarious children, for example the children who are particularly anxious to be with and to be like their fellow human beings. Bates (1988) research also shows that on a host of biological indices from conception onward. Males tend to be more variable or unstable since the two children scoring highest across the course of the study were boys despite the fact that the mean scores for boys and girls did not differ.

I will conclude this section by saying that innate differences do exist but the actual biological and genetic evolution would have been different if the boys and girls had to adjust their mind to talk differently. That would be like saying that the woman were programmed to talk and men were not. As we know that people need to communicate with each other we are pretty sure that man has evolved programmed to talk too. On the other hand it is possible that genetic memory and evolution has memorised the actual functional needs in the environment which created a division between the skills men & women need to communicate differently.

SOCIAL CUES

If the sex differences exist in language, whether in the distribution of abilities or in different kinds of linguistic performance it is clear that they stem at least in part from environmental or social factors. No one would argue, for instance, that men use more direct imperative constructions than women because of innate differences between the sexes. Many sex differences are out of differing sex role expectations. Children growing up must learn not only to act like girls and boys, women and men, but to talk like them as well. Some sex differences are thus sociolinguistic in nature.

Social class

The difference in social class can be found even in the early studies. Kimura in 1961, for example, in a dichotic listening task for speech stimuli found a signifi-

cant right ear advantage for both boys and girls from professional families from the age of four upwards. Right ear advantage for speech stimuli is generally taken to indicate that the left cerebral hemisphere is dominant for speech. However, Kimura also found that among children from a low to middle class area five year old girls but not boys showed a right ear advantage. It is somehow an indication of influence of social class on language and cognitive development.

Sex expectations

Templin (1957) was the first one to include the new trend in studies of sex differences; towards an investigation of the differential treatment of the two sexes as an explanation of what had previously been taken to be a genetic superiority. Under this hypothesis, the relatively greater loquacity and fluency of girls Smith and Connolly (1972) would attribute to differential expectations and communication with the two sexes by their parents. There is some evidence for this in the responses of the Wells interview from 1979, where the children were at the age of 3.6. They found out that adults initiate a far greater proportion of sequences with boys in context of play. In contrast, over half the sequences with girls were in helping and non playing context. This suggests that adults emphasise more useful and domestic activities in their interaction with girls, whilst the emphasis with boys is towards a more free-ranging, exploratory manipulation of the physical environment.

Gleason (1979) finds that inborn differences are somewhat equivocal, but worth considering. One possibility for her is that constitutional factors contribute to different patterns of parent-child interaction in early infancy. Male infants, according to Moss from 1967 are more irritable than female infants and this might explain at least in part another consistently observed sex difference, namely that through the first two years of life, girl infants are looked at and spoken to by their mothers more frequently than are boy infants (Lewis, 1972). Girls therefore may receive more and higher quality of linguistic input at an earlier age than boys, and this extra input may lead to earlier and more highly motivated language development on the part of girls; while mothers tend to interact more physically with their infant sons, they tend to speak more to their infant daughters, and this interpersonal style may have had reaching effects on the development of girls language and their ways of dealing with others in their world.

Gleason is underlying as a most pervasive force set of sex role expectations that parents and society at large bring to any interaction between boys and girls. She is showing the research study from (Rubin, Provenzano and Luria, 1974) where they have shown that from the first day of child's birth parents have different attitudes toward girls and boys. It is shown that especially fathers

had quite different beliefs about the female and male infants. Daughters, for instance, were more likely to be rated little, pretty, and cute. And fathers saw their sons as harder, stronger and better coordinated and their daughters as weaker and more delicate, while mothers did not make such strong distinctions. Since parents have different expectations about their children from the day they are born and probably earlier, it is easy to postulate that those different expectations will manifest themselves in differential language treatment. As the parents speech is sex-typed as well, and children will eventually take on the speech characteristics of the same sexed parent through imitation or social learning.

McCarthy in the 1953 argues that the mother's speech is likely to provide a better model for the girl baby than for the boy baby who needs to identify with, and to imitate the father's speech, of which he is likely to hear a minimum, in our culture. When he does hear the father's speech and tries to imitate it, the experience must be less satisfying for him than for the girl, who can produce a fairly satisfactory echo reaction to the mother's voice. Also McCall (1981) has suggested that gender-related differences may fail to appear before the two years of age, because early developments are buffered against environmental effects. This assumes of course that gender related differences are enhanced if not caused by the social environment.

METHODOLOGICAL PROBLEMS

Research methods

Since the object of the study is language behaviour and it usually displays variation the problem is in knowing how to quantify the dimensions to be researched. The most frequently used general measure is Mean Length of Utterance (MLU), originally measured in words, but in more recent studies in morphemes. The validity of this measure has been the subject of a considerable amount of critical discussion, but because of its global nature and the ease with which it can be calculated, it probably remains the most satisfactory, although crude, general indicator of stage of development, at least in the first few years. Other measures that have been used include vocabulary size (Nelson, 1973), vocabulary comprehension (Reynell, 1969) and a variety of measures based on samples of spontaneous speech, including syntactic complexity, semantic modification, semantic range and pragmatic range.

The truth is that measures of linguistic proficiency, particularly for young children, are extremely crude instruments (Jones and Spolsky, 1975) and thus it is not surprising that samples of linguistic behaviour will reveal occasional differences between sub-groups of the sample. The discovery of occasional sex differences is most likely a chance product of this unreliability which has

arisen simply because the possibility of sex differences has been investigated. The fact that the majority of studies show no sex differences and that many of the findings with regard to sex differences are self-contradictory should be sufficient warning against drawing conclusions from the studies that show one sex to be linguistically superior to the other.

McCarthy, concludes that the vast array of evidence in the same direction from a variety of investigators working in different parts of the country, employing different situations and methods of observation, and employing different analyses and linguistic indices, certainly is a convincing proof that a real sex difference in language development exists in favour of girls. However, Macaulay (1977) argues that the failure of a large number of investigators employing a variety of methods to establish significant differences between the sexes is even more convincing proof that such differences as may exist are trivial and unimportant compared with the clearly significant differences that have been established for social class and family size.

Gleason (1979) mentions the possibility of the actual epoch influencing the scores: in the 1930's and 1940's, when the dominant mode of study was through enumeration (number of words per sentence, number of grammatical errors, mispronunciations, etc), girls were frequently found to excel. In the 1950's and 1960's where the search was for evidence of internalization of generative language system, sex differences typically were not found. In the 1970's and 1980's when the conversational, interactional and stylistic variables are topics of study, sex differences once again emerge.

Sex and familiarity of testers

We found a claim that the sex of tester influences scores on tests of language development: "girls respond best to female testers, boys to male testers, therefore many of the reported differences favouring girls in early language development may result from the fact that most of the testers were female." (Johnson and Medinnus, 1969, 59). If the studies which claim to show sex differences in language development had discovered large differences which were consistent from one study to another, the risk of experimenter bias could perhaps be discounted, but when the situation is actually the reverse then the risk of bias is considerable.

(Wells, 1977) suggested on the basis of his own recorded data, that the frequency of expansions for example may owe a great deal to the presence of an adult who is relatively unfamiliar with the child, for whose benefit the mother, quite unconsciously, expands or interprets all the child's utterances that may be difficult for a visitor to understand. There are probably other systematic changes in parents if not in children's behaviour when an observer is present.

CONCLUSION OF THE RESEARCH SO FAR

The evidence of consistent sex differences in language development is too tenuous and self contradictory to justify any claims that one sex is superior to the other Macaulay (1977) concluded. In the present state of language assessment the only tenable position is that there is no significant difference between the sexes in linguistic ability.

We also encounter a conclusion from Sause (1975), where in his research of "Computer content analysis of Sex differences in the Language of Children" the pattern of sex related differences confirms to conventional stereotypes in most respects. Boys are verbally more aggressive and their language shows a greater interest in space quantity, and physical movement than does the girls' language. The boys' language appears to be more inquisitive, displays a greater interest in self, and indicates more willingness to make value judgements. The girls language, on the other hand indicates a greater interest in the female role. This was the only category more frequently referenced by girls than by boys. In contrast to the boys' aggressive verbal behaviour the girls appeared to be shy. The only finding incongruent with the traditional stereotype of boy-girl differences is the boys' more frequent references to oral communication. This research presented empirical procedures for the collection and content analysis of the oral language of kindergarten children. The analysis of language was done on samples of 144 randomly selected children from kindergarten class of Ithaca using a dictionary of 600 words and 30 categories. The program was an expansion of the language analysis program of Veldman in 1967.

Staley (1982) says that the key experience is the child's categorization of himself or herself as male or female. This categorization occurs at the same time language is being acquired, between the ages of eighteen months and three years. Since a child acquires a language from his/her parents, this finding could constitute indirect verification of sex differences in adult language. An alternative explanation of course is that sex differences in brain organization present from birth, are at least partially responsible for differences in the language of young children. Although recent literature on male female brain differences indicates that differences based on sex are identifiable, even if such differences are wired in at birth, differential treatment of girls and boys will still drastically affect development. Socialisation along sex lines remains a vital consideration. (Bates and Fenson, 1994) agree that the large number of analyses of gender effects reported in their study, reveal a remarkably consistent pattern. On nearly all measures females score on average slightly higher than males but this difference is typically an account for just 1-2% of the variance. The basic message revealed by their studies is that,

while females seem to be slightly ahead in the word comprehension and word production, gesture production, grammatical abilities and word combinations, this difference is very small compared with the large variability that prevails within each sex.

CONCLUSION

From the above mentioned discussions and from the recent research it is clear that language acquisition is infinitely more complex than we thought and the question of sex differences in language is fraught with complexities. There may be inborn differences between the sexes in their biological endowment to acquire language; and even if there are not, there are clear differences in environmental forces. The acquisition process involves an elaborate interaction between children and older speakers. Language development is optimised if parents speak at a level that is appropriate to the child's state of development, and this requires a kind of judgment on the part of parents; this ability to judge also appears to be sex

related. While it is possible to find some sex differences by recording speech to children - in the use of particular lexical items, for instance - we may learn more about the relationship between language input and language acquisition by studying patterns of parental sensitivity to children. Parents have different expectations for their children, who may lead them to shape the speech of the children, and they themselves speak in sex-typed ways that children may come to imitate. Therefore sex differences arise out of a complex interaction between children with particular endowments, and patterns of sensitivity. Also, when we look only at language differences, other categories: ethnical, social class, birth order, age, style etc, seem to be influencing the child's language more than gender alone. Even though the gender difference remains, we will have to satisfy our categorisation need by saying that children and human beings would be very simple if their language was greatly influenced by the gender category. Styles of talking are creative processes and as such change constantly and so does the children's language.

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POVZETEK

Obstaja splošno prepričanje, ki pravi, da je jezikovni razvoj pri deklicah naprednejši. Glede na teorije, prisotne v zadnjih petdesetih letih, je jasno, da si rezultati nasprotujejo in da je bilo to področje šele po zmanjšanju diskriminacije med spoloma lahko analizirano z objektivnejšega zornega kota. Prvi korak pri analizi je opustitev vsakršnih večvrednostnih konceptov, saj ne moremo utemeljeno vrednotiti določenega jezikovnega sloga kot boljšega od drugega, ne enačiti količine (naprimer v jeziku deklic) s kvaliteto. Drugi potreben korak je analiza in primerjava študij, ki temeljijo na različnih kriterijih. Tvegano je namreč sklepati iz raziskav, ki so bile glede na njihovo metodologijo, vodene drugače: Npr. študije jezikovnega stila v primerjavi s prvotnimi študijami o kvantiteti besedišča, oblikoslovju in artikulaciji. Po drugi strani pa obstaja spor med teorijami o razlikah med spoloma v jeziku otrok. Prva se še posebej naslanja na lastnosti spola, ki so biološko pogojene, druga pa skuša razložiti socialni vpliv na te biološke modele.

Razliko med spoloma v jeziku otrok lahko povzroči določena lastnost. Kljub temu lahko trdimo, da obstajajo faktorji okolja, ki nanjo vplivajo. V proces pridobivanja jezikovnega znanja je vpletena interakcija med odraslimi govorci in otroki. Razvoj jezika je optimalen, ko starš uporablja ustrezen nivo jezika glede na razvojno stopnjo otroka, katero pa mora znati najprej dobro oceniti; prav sposobnost presoje deluje povezana s samim spolom. Čeprav je mogoče najti jezikovne razlike s snemanjem otrok (npr. z uporabo specifičnega besedišča), se o odnosu med inputom jezika in usvojitvijo jezika lahko naučimo več, če proučujemo sorodstvene modele čutne zaznavnosti pri otrocih. Starši imajo različna pričakovanja in to se lahko odraža na jeziku otrok. Otroci seveda oponašajo jezik staršev, ki je spet zaznamovan z določenim spolom in tako se s kompleksno interakcijo med otrokovimi sposobnostmi in modeli čutne zaznavnosti stimulirajo razlike. Po drugi strani, ko opazujemo jezikovno različnost otrok, izgleda, kot da vse ostale razlike kot so npr. etničnost, socialni položaj, to, kateri po vrsti se je otrok rodil glede na ostale sorojence, starost in stil vplivajo na jezik otrok veliko močneje kot sama razlika med spoloma.

Ključne besede: jezik, razlike med spoloma, prirojenost, socialno okolje, stereotipi vezani na spol, stili jezika

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