

LANGUAGE AND WOMAN'S PLACE

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EDITORIAL NOTE

The editor hopes that Professor Lakoff's article will stimulate research and contributions to this journal. Four observations are made here in that regard.

(1) A focus on women brings to light an aspect of language in social life that has its counterpart for men. Pre-emption of the 'serious' sphere of life by a certain style of 'maleness' is not without its cost for many men. The association of male creativity in the arts with effeminacy is a well-known instance. The channelling of the range of human attributes into stereotypes for a 'lady' and a 'man' harms identity and individuality for many of both sexes, as the younger generation widely recognizes. 'Men's language' needs study too.

(2) Comparative data is needed. Work such as that of Helen Hogan on Ashanti materials (Texas Working Papers in Sociolinguistics, 1, 1971) and of Elinor Keenan in Madagascar (see her paper in J. F. Sherzer and R. Baumann, *The ethnography of speaking* (Cambridge University Press, forthcoming - the title is tentative) can put matters in sharper focus. Women are widely denied equality in speaking, but the ways, including their compensations, are complex.

(3) The analysis of *lady* as a euphemism should be linked to the elaboration in English of derogatory ('dys-phemistic') terms for women. Lakoff broaches an important general topic. As we know, languages show elaboration of vocabulary in many spheres for many reasons (ecological importance, notably, in the literature but many others, including perhaps pure play). Elaboration of vocabulary with an attitudinal base may be euphemistic (the *toilet* example), 'dys-phemistic', or link the two, as in an ancient Chinese pair of terms, one describing the crossing of a boundary by armed force as profanation of sacred shrines, as a

punitive expedition, depending on the direction.¹ The plurality of terms for women in American English seems also to link both 'phemistic' types. One euphemistic substitute (*lady*) beside a proliferation of terms such as *broad*, *doll*, *chick*, *skirt*, *filly*, *dog*, *piece of* . . . , may be taken to mean that the weight of terminological interest in women is derogatory, and that the motivation is not so much need to avoid the unpleasant, pressing speakers on from one soon contaminated substitute to another, as a positive pleasure in classifying talk of women in terms of objects, animals, and sexual parts. One honorific term will do (and the honorific, as well as euphemistic, component of *lady* should be taken into account). Indeed, the euphemistic (as distinct from the honorific) component of the meaning of *lady* – the sense of avoiding embarrassment – is clear perhaps only when *lady* is seen as part of a series with *broad*, etc.

(4) Features of language characteristic of powerlessness and dependency are probably shared across all roles of subordination. To capture the generalizations implicitly in the subject, the communicative conduct of all those assigned dependency on the authority of others – whether because of sex, race, age, job, or some other circumstances – should be examined and compared. Perhaps the study of women's speech may lead linguistics to see beyond the potential equality of languages to the actual inequalities among speakers. (D.H.)

[1] The Vietnam war, of course, is a current example of creative use of language in this regard; many examples are collected and analyzed in a forthcoming book by Edward S. Herman.