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**G e n d e r**  
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Language and the  
Socially Constructed Self

KIRA HALL and MARY BUCHOLTZ

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For Robin Tolmach Lakoff  
Dux femina facti

— *Aeneid* 1.364

In addition, we gratefully acknowledge the invaluable support of Leanne Hinton, not only during the editing process but throughout our graduate careers. Finally, we would like to thank Robin Tolmach Lakoff for commenting on the introductory essay and for providing us both with a rigorous and wide-ranging training in feminist issues in linguistics. We do not presume to speak for Robin in the discussion that follows but instead offer our own understanding of her scholarship. In gratitude for her guidance, we dedicate this volume to her.

## Introduction

Twenty Years after *Language and Woman's Place*

Mary Bucholtz and Kira Hall

In reflecting on the position of *Gender Articulated* in the current context of language and gender research, we have found it useful to return to the field's foundational text, Robin Lakoff's *Language and Woman's Place* (1975). This is both a timely undertaking, coinciding as it does with the twentieth anniversary of the publication of the book, and a necessary one, for no other study of women's language has been as influential and as controversial as Lakoff's volume. At the time of its publication, *Language and Woman's Place* was met with widespread criticism, yet it launched a far-reaching program of research on language and gender whose effects we still feel today. In light of this apparent paradox and in recognition of the book's continuing influence, the need for a reassessment is evident.<sup>1</sup>

It is not our primary goal in this essay to review and refute the criticisms that have been made of *Language and Woman's Place*; we have very little interest in reviving what is by now a rather tiresome and familiar debate. Instead, we wish to rescue the text for contemporary use by reading it from perspectives that differ from those of earlier reviewers. Previous commentators approached Lakoff's work from a restricted perspective, concentrating as they did on the extent to which the book lived up to the epistemological commitments of their particular fields. By contrast, we

examine the book within its own disciplinary context and consider the reception of the work among lay readers outside academia. The necessity of distinguishing academic and general audiences has been brought to light by the recent controversy generated by the publication in 1990 of *You Just Don't Understand*, written by Lakoff's student Deborah Tannen. This popular best-seller on language and gender has been subjected to the same sorts of criticism as *Language and Woman's Place*; the renewal of the debate points up the importance of engaging with such influential texts and understanding them on their own terms, and on the terms of a nonacademic readership.

In looking afresh at *Language and Woman's Place*, we are especially interested in locating the seeds of contemporary research. The significance of the work as a research program has been widely acknowledged, even by its critics (e.g., Thorne 1976), and the ongoing success of its project is manifest in the many links we are able to trace between Lakoff's early work and the essays in the present volume. Clearly, not all these points of convergence are due to direct influence, but Lakoff's book set the terms for research as few others have done.<sup>2</sup> In the following discussion, we note the most salient associations between Lakoff's work and the studies in this book, but many more could have been invoked.

### Putting the Text into Context

The historical context of *Language and Woman's Place* has often been misunderstood, even in its own time, and its methods and goals have therefore been challenged in ways that fail to recognize the text's theoretical framework. The book emerged from the intellectual climate that produced the theory of generative semantics, a paradigm that challenged transformational-generative grammar (Chomsky's autonomous model of language) in favor of a more contextually enriched analysis (Lakoff 1989). The struggle for generative semantics consolidated the subfield of pragmatics as part of linguistics and laid the groundwork for other contextual approaches such as cognitive linguistics. This mini-revolution has been said to have been led by the "Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse"—George Lakoff, James McCawley, Paul Postal, and John Robert Ross—but insufficient attention has been paid to the lone horsewoman, Robin Lakoff, who, in addition to her other accomplishments, succeeded in a brief eighty-three pages in bringing feminist analysis into linguistic scholarship, thereby ushering in an exciting program of research that spans linguistics, anthropology, sociology, psychology, and other fields.

That *Language and Woman's Place* represents a position that is consonant

with generative semantics has generally been overlooked in surveys of the theory. Randy Allen Harris (1993) lists the book in his bibliography but does not discuss it, except to allude to Lakoff's theoretical shift (which is not as dramatic as he seems to believe) from generative semantics to ordinary-language philosophy and issues of power in language. Frederick Newmeyer's (1986a) more biased account of the rise of generative semantics does not even include Lakoff's work on gender in its bibliography, and his popular history of linguistics (1986b) portrays Lakoff's research in this area as ill conceived.<sup>3</sup>

The book's connection to generative semantics has also been missed by scholars of language and gender. Lakoff's achievement is the more remarkable because she puts forth her vision of a feminist linguistics from a position not in the new subdiscipline of sociolinguistics, which had already begun to advance its empirical methodology within linguistics, but from the very core of the field, within the theoretical mainstream. Thus Lakoff's methods are wholly consistent with her disciplinary commitments at the time: introspection and native-speaker intuition were the central methodology of linguistic investigation (as, indeed, they continue to be); empiricism, then as now, had not taken its place in the toolchest of mainstream linguistics.<sup>4</sup>

It is significant, then, that nearly all of Lakoff's critics were outside her disciplinary milieu; most of the early critiques were by scholars in the empirically oriented social sciences (anthropology, psychology, sociology, speech communication). One of the less antagonistic reviews comes from philosophy (Moulton 1976), which, the author notes, shares Lakoff's introspective methodology. Even one of the very few reviews to be published in a linguistics journal berates Lakoff for using the methodology of linguistics for a "sociolinguistic investigation" (Timm 1976:245), although Lakoff does not pretend that her enterprise is sociolinguistic; it is surely not accidental that the reviewer was herself a sociolinguist.

The lengths to which such partisanship may go is typified by the comments of literary critic Elaine Showalter (1975). Showalter urges feminist scholars to consider the role of women's language in literature, but rejects the contributions that *Language and Woman's Place* might make to this endeavor; she dismisses the text as "embarrassingly self-indulgent" (450). Ironically, however, in her pursuit of a literary "women's language," Showalter embraces work by Erica Jong and other writers that has had a similarly unsympathetic reception. She says of these authors, "In looking at the new poetry, some of which is ragged and angry, we need first of all, as Rich says, to honor the risk, and second to understand it" (452). Yet for Showalter such generosity of spirit does not extend beyond the literary

realm, and she makes no attempt to understand the anger—and the utility—of Lakoff's own feminist project. (Indeed, Showalter's goal is called into question altogether by the work of Anna Livia in this volume, who subverts any essentialist understanding of women's literary language in her analysis of butch and femme speech in lesbian fiction.)

Lakoff's willingness to examine multiple linguistic levels in her study has likewise met with reproach from critics (e.g., Timm 1976) yet this same method has come to be recognized as a valuable strategy for locating the full context of interaction, and in this volume it is used with considerable success by Jenny Cook-Gumperz and Michèle Foster, among others. The fixation on hegemonically positivistic methodologies has been relaxed in feminist scholarship generally since the days when these critiques were first issued; the present collection represents a wide variety of methods that take us beyond the scientized discourse that has been advocated in the past.

The test of Lakoff's methods must after all be in the results that they produce, and the range and accuracy of her hypotheses preclude the wholesale dismissal of the text. The work lays out a program of research that has been successfully pursued by many scholars; for this reason one contemporary review completely misses the mark in its prediction that the book would fail to inspire further research (Walum 1977). More telling is another reviewer's comment that "by stimulating others to empirically investigate much of its conjecture, this book has put itself out of date" (Hoffman 1980:314). Although the reviewer speculates that this turn of events was unintentional and perhaps undesirable, such an outcome speaks volumes about the success of Lakoff's agenda, for to have transformed the field is a remarkable and desirable achievement for a programmatic text only five years after its publication.

With respect to theory, Lakoff has been criticized for advocating too strongly the "dominance" position within language and gender, which views gender-based differences in language use as the result of power differences between women and men. This theory still has important explanatory force, as illustrated in these pages by Elinor Ochs and Carolyn Taylor, Susan Herring, Deborah Johnson, and Tamra DiBenedetto, and Norma Mendoza-Denton. Commentators have nevertheless lamented Lakoff's supposed pessimism and her suggestion that women might find it necessary to speak as men do in order to gain male respect. Bonnie McElhinny's chapter reports a similar situation among female police officers; the adoption of "male" speech practices is one survival strategy of this group of women. Lakoff's opponents (e.g., Kramer, Thorne, & Henley 1978), by contrast, often embrace a cultural feminism that valorizes "feminine"

features of speech, making a virtue of necessity. But it seems dubious that cultural feminists would have celebrated the use of "women's language" for economic gain among female phone-sex workers, as reported by Kira Hall. At the time she wrote the book, of course, Lakoff herself had little reason to argue for women's agency and autonomy: in 1975 few of her discipline's practitioners were women. In her own contribution to this volume, Lakoff shows that power relations are not static but dynamic, emerging in dialectical struggle between women and those who control hegemonic discourse; a similar point is made by Cathryn Houghton.

Yet it is precisely this insistence on unpleasant realities that makes Lakoff's book overtly political. Lakoff writes from a feminist stance, and names sexism as the primary target of her investigation; Laurel Sutton's chapter in this volume is written in a similar spirit. Lakoff, as the first and perhaps most eloquent writer to raise the specter of male power in discussions of women's language, faced overwhelming criticism from anxious male colleagues. In light of this personal risk, it is the more remarkable that what distinguishes Lakoff's book from most later writings in language and gender research is its author's willingness to look for answers and offer recommendations. The book is a manifesto both for scholars concerned with women's language and for all individuals who seek to remedy social inequalities between women and men. Its call to action, we appreciatively note, is met by an answering call in the chapter by Tara Goldstein.

Such efforts to move from scholarship to political struggle are what give the text, and the field of language and gender, its enduring relevance both within the academy and outside it. In addition to the profound effect it has had in social science research, *Language and Woman's Place* has been perhaps the single most influential text in introducing language and gender issues to lay audiences. The uses to which it has been put by nonacademic readers may trouble feminist scholars, yet we cannot ignore the reverberations of Lakoff's work in the popular culture. The first step in understanding this phenomenon is to recognize the crucial distinction between linguistic ideologies and actual practices.

#### **Language and Lakoff's Place in the Popular Imagination**

The distinction between ideologies of language and actual linguistic practice continues to be neglected by many researchers. The proliferation of psychological and sociolinguistic studies that have been formulated to test the empirical validity of Lakoff's identification of "women's language" (e.g., Cameron, McAlinden, & O'Leary 1988; Crosby & Nyquist 1977; Dubois & Crouch 1975; O'Barr & Atkins 1980) is one telling example of

this oversight. Yet Lakoff states quite clearly in her introduction that she is interested not in the quantitative realization of linguistic variables but in the cultural expectations that have come to influence their use. That there is something very real about her assertions may be seen in the fact that so many consumers of American popular psychology have embraced her text as part of the "self-help" genre. Although the linguistic reality Lakoff depicts is rooted in cultural ideologies, it is nevertheless a reality, particularly because it continues to be accepted by diverse groups of speakers as a valid representation of their own discursive experiences. In this volume Mary Talbot shows the power of these features in advertisements aimed at teenage girls. Likewise, the current popularity of Tannen's *You Just Don't Understand* speaks to the persistence of the popular ideology of gendered language, for Tannen incorporates many of the features identified by Lakoff fifteen years earlier into her own discussion of women's speech strategies.

Despite the fact that Lakoff's and Tannen's theoretical explanations of the relationship between gender and discourse are not congruent, with Lakoff locating gender differences in hierarchical power structures and Tannen in divergent paths of language socialization, their findings have been embraced by a number of disparate communities. Besides the many avid readers of communication-oriented self-help books [e.g., Butler [1981] 1992; Elgin 1993; Glass 1993; Stone & Bachner [1977] 1994], there are a number of groups whose interest in Lakoff's and Tannen's research could not have been easily predicted by the authors. These groups are as dissimilar as African American journalists in an East Coast workshop on communication, transsexual communication specialists who write for the California-based transgender journals *Cross-talk* and *Transsexual News Telegraph*, Roman Catholic organizers of "marriage encounter" weekends in Alabama, female phone-sex employees in San Francisco and New York City, and speech therapists hired by Hollywood to train male actors to take on female roles in gender-bending films.

Framed in postmodern terms, then, Lakoff appears to have successfully identified the precise hegemonic notions of gender-appropriate language use that Susan Gal in this volume urges contemporary researchers to uncover. The cultural expectations that Lakoff locates through her intuitions and observations reflect the ideologically dominant socialization process of middle-class European American women, the influence of which extends far beyond this subculture (Barrett forthcoming a, b).

Glass's (1993) popular self-help manual, which she directs primarily to heterosexual couples with communication problems, serves as evidence for the existence of these hegemonic expectations. Glass, a speech pathologist in

private practice in Beverly Hills, takes ideologies of gendered language use to the extreme in her itemization of precisely 105 communication characteristics that distinguish women from men, among them features of speech, voice, facial expression, and body language. Although the empirically oriented scholar would shudder at such lists, Glass's assertions apparently make sense to many consumers of mainstream American culture, if a book's sales are any indication of its cultural intelligibility. That these traits are truisms among mainstream European Americans suggests the prevalence of a dichotomous model of "women's speech" and "men's speech."

Ironically, Glass's decision to study gendered language can be traced back to her counseling interactions in the mid-1970s with a male-to-female transsexual whose vocal and speech characteristics she had been asked to diagnose. With Lakoff's *Language and Woman's Place*, the only available book on the subject, as her guide, Glass was able to teach her new client how to "sound and act like a woman" (1993:17). Her dabbling in linguistic gender-bending did not end there, however; she was later asked to teach Dustin Hoffman to sound like a woman for the movie *Tootsie*, in which, Glass reports, "Dustin portrayed a woman so brilliantly that he won an Academy Award for his performance" (18). Glass also boasts of her linguistic success with actors like Conrad Bain, star of the television situation comedy *Diff'rent Strokes*, whom she taught not only "how to sound female but how to sound like a Dutch female—accent and all" (20), and with Bain's female costar Dana Plato, whom she taught to speak and behave like a Dutch boy.

Despite all the dichotomous essentialism of Glass's itemized list, the goal of her book is covertly postmodern. She implies that gendered speaking styles exist independently of the speaker, illustrating that they can be manipulated for communicative effect at home and in the workplace. Her book clearly belongs to the popular genre that Deborah Cameron (1995, forthcoming) has called "verbal hygiene," a discourse that promotes certain linguistic practices over others for pragmatic, aesthetic, or even moral reasons. Ironically, however, when verbal hygienists like Glass encourage their readers to improve their communicative skills through the appropriation of other ways of speaking, they parallel postmodern musings on the discursive construction of gender identity and the related assertion that speakers can assume multiple subject positions (Davies & Harré 1990; Davies 1989, 1990). Glass's simple assertion that speakers can learn and appropriate "women's language" or "men's language" for better communicative success (or, in this instance, for happier heterosexual relationships) suggests that language use is not indexically derived from the sex of the

speaker but rather is constructed from a vast array of ideological discursive mappings. An especially powerful example of how linguistic ideologies may be undermined through women's appropriation of men's language is presented by Shigeko Okamoto in this volume.

Folk-linguistic discussions of this kind should therefore be considered more seriously by analysts of language and gender, for they reveal dominant cultural expectations of gender-appropriate behavior. Gender expectations in turn underlie the actual practices in which speakers engage, as Penelope Eckert and Sally McConnell-Ginet demonstrate in the chapter that concludes this volume. Because the speakers of every community invoke dominant language ideologies together with their own local ideologies and practices in order to establish positions of power, the language analyst must become aware of these belief systems before embarking on the study of discursive identity. Any analysis of gender and power, then, should first isolate the external language conventions that influence the community under study, and then ascertain the more local conventions that may or may not override those of the dominant symbolic system. Although external expectations can be found in the public discourses that surround and influence the subordinated community, local values can be found in speakers' own attitudes about their linguistic choices; in their chapters for this volume Mary Bucholtz, María Dolores Gonzales Velásquez, and Birch Moonwomon all make this point from somewhat different perspectives. Once these sets of conventions have been isolated, the researcher can go on to examine how speakers enact, challenge, and subvert them in their everyday interactions. The process of locating ideologies and their uses is, in one way or another, the overriding project of the present collection of essays; and it would not have been possible without the groundwork that Robin Lakoff laid for us in 1975.

#### **From Woman's Place to Women's Places**

In recent years, several promising new frameworks for the analysis of language and gender have emerged in linguistics and related fields. These new approaches share a concern with the complexity of actually occurring interactions, and therefore favor ethnographic and discourse-based methodologies over the traditional linguistic methods of native-speaker intuitions and carefully controlled experimental research. Such awareness of the importance of context in the analysis of social interaction has given rise to new ways of understanding gender as a factor in language use: recent theoretical work in language and gender emphasizes that social categories are negotiated rather than fixed, and that the process of negotia-

tion occurs primarily through linguistic practices whose meanings are themselves shifting and variable.

In our organization of this collection of essays, we trace three general analytical stances in the new feminist scholarship on language: the investigation of how cultural paradigms of gender relations are perpetuated through language; the study of women's innovative use of language to subvert this dominant belief system; and the examination of how women construct social identities and communities that are not determined in advance by gender ideologies. Each of the three parts of *Gender Articulated* treats one of these theoretical perspectives; the possibilities offered by each framework are explored from diverse vantage points by the authors in each section. Part 1, "Mechanisms of Hegemony and Control," comprises articles that consider language as a force maintaining gender ideology. Part 2, "Agency through Appropriation," explores how women challenge hegemonic linguistic practices by creatively reinterpreting them for their own uses. Part 3, "Contingent Practices and Emergent Selves," shows how women's construction of and participation in communities of linguistic practice offer new visions of gender and identity as constantly shifting categories. By organizing the volume into these sections, we hope to give shape to the many strands of gender-based language research, both by tracing the history of the discipline and by presenting new analytical directions within each framework.

#### *Mechanisms of Hegemony and Control*

The first section of the volume begins with Robin Tolmarch Lakoff's examination of some of the means by which women are silenced in contemporary American culture. Lakoff argues against accounts of gender differences in language use that maintain that women and men belong to different cultures. She favors instead a model that incorporates male power as an explanatory factor. In support of her argument, Lakoff locates four strategies of silencing in men's interaction with women, two of which, interruptions and control of the discourse topic, have been much studied by scholars of language and gender and are compatible with a cultural explanation. However, Lakoff uncovers two additional strategies, nonresponse and the control of discursive meaning, that have been largely overlooked by previous researchers. She demonstrates that the cultural view cannot account for these strategies, because their effect, especially in the public arena, is to render women not only silent but invisible. Yet Lakoff finds evidence in contemporary public discourse that women have begun to resist being silenced and to undertake the construction of their



own discursive meanings. She illustrates this cultural shift by examining media representations of a number of public figures who symbolize larger social patterns of gender and power—Anita Hill, Hillary Rodham Clinton, Lorena Bobbitt, Tonya Harding, and Nicole Brown Simpson. The inordinate amount of media attention given to these individuals, Lakoff suggests, points to a large-scale change in gender relations that authorizes women's own interpretations of cultural meaning.

Lakoff's work emphasizes the gendered aspects of the metadiscursive level of linguistic meaning, that is, how discourse events are interpreted by female and male participants, media commentators, and members of the general public. Norma Mendoza-Denton's study of the Clarence Thomas confirmation hearings conducted by the U.S. Senate provides an in-depth analysis of how the metadiscursive level can be shaped by the discourse itself, and specifically how race and gender can be represented through speakers' interactional practices. By examining the details of the senators' interaction with Clarence Thomas and Anita Hill during the hearing, Mendoza-Denton demonstrates that the two speakers received very different treatments that in turn influenced the outcome of the hearings. She found that whereas senators surrounded Thomas's turns at talk with respectful silence, they granted Hill only brief silences between her responses and their subsequent questions. Moreover, the senators asked Thomas more yes/no questions, thereby avoiding any inclusion of potentially incriminating details; but they asked Hill questions containing embedded presuppositions that challenged her narrative. Senators also bombarded Hill, but not Thomas, with rapid-fire questions, abruptly changing topics with each one as though interrogating her. These tactics, in conjunction with Thomas's deployment of a weighty "judge style" of speech, as well as his use of dramatic African American discourse strategies like testifying, sermonizing, and signifying, garnered approval for Thomas from both European American and African American audiences. Such strategies were not available to Hill because she needed to resist the stereotypically aggressive and emotional behavior associated with her as an African American woman. Mendoza-Denton's research thus makes explicit the gender- and race-based implications of silence and differential access to speech in the public arena.

Mendoza-Denton demonstrates that time-honored democratic institutions and practices may in fact engender asymmetrical power relations between women and men, both through collective male collaboration and through the strategies of individual men. Susan Herring, Deborah Johnson, and Tamra DiBenedetto discover the same patterns in their examination

of the new realm of computer-network discourse, which has been widely touted as a site of democratic exchange. Their results indicate that such a descriptor is overly optimistic. Studying the interaction on two electronic discussion lists, one in an academic discipline in which feminism has had a strong influence and one in which it is largely absent, they found that men consistently dominated interaction on both lists. The authors' topic-based analysis yields further insights: during discussions of issues related to feminism, women's contributions to the list briefly increased, and as a result, some men perceived themselves as being "silenced," and threatened to withdraw from the list. Other strategies that men used to shift the power balance in their own favor include ignoring women's contributions, offering humorous and patronizing responses, and co-opting women's topics. Such research indicates that male domination is still a potent force. But women in the study were able to draw upon counterstrategies that may serve as new methods of empowerment for female users of computer-mediated communication.

Whereas Herring, Johnson, and DiBenedetto, like Mendoza-Denton, consider the gendered component of public talk, Elinor Ochs and Carolyn Taylor show that male authority to evaluate women's narratives is constructed in private discourse as well. In their research in Southern California on middle-class European American families, they found that traditional gender roles are a strong predictor of how power dynamics are played out in everyday narratives. Most of the dinner-table narratives, Ochs and Taylor report, are introduced by mothers and are about themselves or their children. Such narratives are directed to fathers, who evaluate the actions of the protagonist. This evaluative role emerges from the ideology that Ochs and Taylor call "Father knows best." They note that the workings of power in this process are not one-dimensional; children are subject to the control of both the mother and the father. But the power of fathers is more pervasive, for fathers frequently "problematize" the narratives introduced by mothers, turning them into forums for criticism. Even though mothers often strive to regain control of individual narratives by "counter-problematizing" the fathers' critical comments, fathers continue to be reinstated as arbiters of the events laid before them. The social relations seen in these data make clear that traditional arrangements of gender often thought to be obsolete are still very much with us and are constantly renewed through everyday narrative practice.

Ochs and Taylor show that women may collude in practices that deprive them of power and autonomy in order to fulfill the role of "mother." Likewise, in her analysis of a feature article on lipstick in a magazine marketed

to teenage girls, Mary Talbot demonstrates that the construction of femininity itself is a practice in which institutions and individual women work together, often to women's detriment. Noting that femininity is produced through women's work on their bodies (e.g., through clothing and makeup), Talbot finds that norms of femininity are reinforced by the mass media in order to encourage the consumption of commodities. Over time, women's magazines have increasingly performed this function because of their dependence on advertising, and as magazines have become more dependent on such funding, their texts have assumed a more personalized and friendly tone. In her data, Talbot isolates a variety of devices—such as pronouns, expressive vocabulary and punctuation, and the attribution of shared beliefs—that are used to construct a community between the editorial voice and the reader. Although the pleasure that women and girls may derive from the work of femininity should not be dismissed, Talbot concludes, what is deserving of criticism is the covert exploitation of women's desires and uncertainties for financial profit.

The ideological underpinnings of superficially helpful and supportive discourse is further evidenced by Cathryn Houghton's ethnographic study of a therapy group for poverty-level Latina teenagers. Houghton reports that counselors "discipline" the language of the girls and force them into conformity with the ideology of the mental health industry, in the guise of socializing them into a better way of life through menial work. During group therapy, therapists monitor and correct what they perceive as inappropriate language use such as "talking out of turn," "side talk," and "mothering." Even within the authoritarian environment of the mental institution, however, power can be subverted. Many girls resist the imposition of therapeutic authority by exploiting the language rules of the therapy group to level challenges at counselors or by engaging in an oppositional discourse genre, "girl talk." Far from passively accepting the dominant system of beliefs and values, such patients are actively involved in constructing and deconstructing social relations. But those girls who accept the framework of therapy, gaining "health" in the terms of the therapeutic establishment, thereby internalize a system of social control that sustains existing power relations and the capitalist economy.

#### *Agency through Appropriation*

In their fine-grained analysis of controlling forces within language, the chapters in Part 1 address the linguistic strategies through which women challenge existing power relations. Part 2 treats this issue in greater detail, examining ways in which women as producers of language resist and

subvert hegemonic notions of gender. The chapters in this section present women as agents who may defy or embrace gendered expectations of language behavior for their own purposes.

Susan Gal's overview of anthropological research on language, gender, and power encourages linguists to study the categories of "women's speech," "men's speech," and "powerful speech" not as indexically derived from the identity of speakers but as culturally constructed within different social groups. Emphasizing the recent work of feminists and cultural analysts like Micaela diLeonardo, Joan Scott, and Janice Radway, Gal proposes a new way of analyzing gender in language use, one that serves as a theoretical challenge to earlier studies that have defined gender relations in terms of static oppositions. By taking a second look at Carol Edelsky's study of gendered ways of speaking in mixed-sex faculty meetings at an American college and Lila Abu-Lughod's discussion of the subversive nature of oral lyric poetry performed by Bedouin women and youths, Gal argues that cultural constructions of language behavior are not merely ideas that differentiate the genders with respect to interaction; they are themselves sources of power that are enacted and contested in talk. In both of these practices, female speakers locate a contradiction in dominant conceptions of language behavior and attempt to subvert ideological structures through rival practices. Female participants in the university setting undermine the hierarchical form of meetings through their introduction of a collaborative discourse practice; female poets among the Bedouin subvert dominant linguistic ideologies of autonomy, personal strength, and sexual modesty by performing expressions of dependency, emotional vulnerability, and romantic longing.

The chapters that follow Gal's in this section demonstrate how hegemonic notions of language behavior, as differently valued cultural creations, are variously appropriated, reworked, and rejected both in the projection of self and in the establishment of relationships. An unusual example of such negotiations is discussed in Kira Hall's study of workers in the telephone-sex industry, who exaggerate popular expectations of feminine speech over the telephone in order to create a certain body fiction. Hall demonstrates how the practices of the workers call into question traditional assumptions about language, gender, and power, for by using the features of a stereotypically feminine and powerless speech style, the women (and men) in the industry gain economic power. Moreover, the workers themselves reject the notion that this arrangement is exploitative; in fact, they view themselves as feminists who are empowered by their linguistic manipulation of men's desires. In taking seriously women's

experience of themselves as social agents, Hall's study forces a reanalysis of the reductive dichotomy between "powerful" and "powerless" speech that informs much of the research on language and gender.

Bonnie McElhinny, in an interesting contrast to Hall's work, discusses how women working as police officers in the Pittsburgh police department have learned to project a masculine gender identity in their interactions with the public. She analyzes two conversational interactions—one involving a female police officer taking a report from a victim of domestic assault and the other involving a male police officer performing a similar task—in order to show how the women working in this predominantly male occupation have appropriated a "subordinate" middle-class masculinity in their own nonprojection of emotion. She approaches her data from a postmodern and ethnomethodological perspective that takes into account the fluidity of identity performance in interaction. The chapters by both Hall and McElhinny indicate the need for a more flexible definition of gender and its effects on language use, one that accords speakers more agency to develop a speaking style based upon their occupational choices, personal histories, sexuality, and lifestyles. Both authors incorporate Gal's theoretical interest in linguistic resistance and reinterpretation, and in their ethnographic studies of two very different kinds of work environments, they suggest that such negotiations should become a central focus of language and gender research.

Stereotypically feminine and masculine language may be appropriated not only in real life but in fictional contexts as well. Anna Livia's examination of lesbian authors' uses of gendered speech to represent butch and femme characters demonstrates that in the realm of fiction, as in life, appropriation has multiple meanings. Livia finds that butch speech, as represented by authors, does not conform to the reality of masculine speech style but to the cultural stereotype of such language. Furthermore, a hypermasculine butch speech style was present only in the work of European American authors that Livia examined; African American authors used a more egalitarian style for their butch characters. Livia demonstrates that the origin of butch speech style in fiction lies in gangster films, westerns, and Raymond Chandler's detective fiction. Authors implement the style in two ways: as a sincere representation of butch interactional style, and as a parody of the style that challenges simplistic equations of the butch with masculinity or maleness.

Like Livia's research, Laurel Sutton's study of California college students' use of slang terms for women reminds us that even strongly gendered language may be multivalent. Taking as her starting point several early studies of derogatory labels for women, Sutton finds that women have

undertaken an innovative use of such terms. Highly derogatory words like *bitch* and *ho* (whore) may be used not only as insult terms by women or men but also as terms of solidarity among close female friends. Appropriation of this kind has limits, however: although these two negative terms may take on positive meanings, other terms that are more sexually explicit in form cannot be used in the same way. Sutton demonstrates that the bulk of slang words for women are of the second, more strongly negative type. Most slang terms for women in her corpus are negative, and most deal with physical appearance and sexual promiscuity; by contrast, far fewer terms for men are negative, and those that are do not have the same focus upon the body and sexuality. Yet despite this ongoing gender imbalance in insult terms, the possibility of a community of women's assigning positive meanings to such terms points to a creative subversion of the gender expectations that insult terms are designed to enforce.

Shigeko Okamoto's chapter also explores the strategic use of negatively valued language by young women. She argues that speech that contains features marked as male or masculine cannot be mapped simplistically onto a "masculine identity," but may be used creatively by speakers. Examining the discursive styles of young Japanese women, Okamoto points out a generational shift among Japanese students from Tokyo, whose speech contrasts with that used by older married women in its employment of forms traditionally thought of as masculine, less polite, and coarse. Her findings challenge the conservative nature of much previous research on Japanese women's speech, which has tended to further dichotomous notions of gender in its characterization of Japanese female speakers as polite, powerless, and linguistically rigid. Okamoto instead suggests that Japanese women's language is variable and innovative: the female students in her study employ masculine speech forms with their peers both to signal independence from hegemonic expectations of gender and to establish solidarity with one another, jointly constructing an unmarried-student identity.

#### *Contingent Practices and Emergent Selves*

Underlying the studies that make up Part 2 is the understanding that through acts of resistance and innovation women shape the contours of their social identities. The chapters in Part 3 further interrogate the notion of a fixed self. They demonstrate that language is a crucial resource for identity construction while cautioning that it has no privileged status in this process. Rather, language is connected to an entire network of practices, knowledges, and subject positions.

Michèle Foster's chapter on the use of language by African American women shows the fluidity of social identity as manifested in language. She finds that the African American women whose speech she examined invoked an identity of Blackness in interaction with other African American speakers by drawing upon shared linguistic practices. In a classroom in which Foster conducted ethnographic research, the effect of this stylistic shift by the instructor was to enhance students' motivation and understanding. At the same time, by taking on multiple roles in the classroom, the instructor was able to reach a variety of students and to demonstrate the importance of being proficient in both the Black and the non-Black speech communities. In a second study in which interviews were conducted with African American teachers, Foster noticed that once interviewees had established a social relationship with the researcher, they began to code-switch from Standard English to African American Vernacular English, primarily in order to express affective meanings in a display of solidarity. Significantly, given claims that women's speech is closer to the standard than men's and that teachers are prescriptive in their language attitudes, Foster reports that female teachers in interviews tended to code-switch into the vernacular more than males did, and that the women's linguistic practices indicated positive attitudes toward African American Vernacular English. Her findings suggest that the subject positions that African American women occupy are more complex than sociolinguists have previously supposed.

Whereas Foster explores the multiple social identities available to members of a single ethnic group, Mary Bucholtz's article on "passing" demonstrates that for individuals whose ethnicity is ambiguous, the notion of identity is even more malleable. Drawing upon recent feminist examinations of ethnic identity and mixed cultural heritage, Bucholtz describes how some American women and girls in certain social contexts may be taken for members of an ethnicity other than their own. At times the decision to cross ethnic boundaries may be conscious; women who do not conform in appearance to their community's expectations may temporarily assume a new ethnic identity, thereby negotiating the restrictions of gender ideology within their own community or the racism of the dominant society. Bucholtz also finds that outsiders frequently impose ethnic categories on individuals of ambiguous background. Rather than accept these readily available ethnicities, individuals assert ethnic identities of their own choosing. Although passing has been described primarily as an issue of boundary crossing in the physical presentation of the self, Bucholtz argues that it is in fact a representation that is shaped largely through linguistic

practices. Bucholtz's study shows that essentialist approaches to ethnic identity and community membership obscure the creative work women do to shape their lives.

Foster's and Bucholtz's work demonstrates how important it is to do research that rejects a priori analysis and generalization, and looks closely at speakers' practices and beliefs. This point is also made by Tara Goldstein in her study of female immigrant factory workers in Canada. Many researchers of English as a Second Language assume that non-native adult speakers are motivated to learn English because they see it as a way of advancing their careers. Goldstein finds that for Portuguese women in the Canadian factory in which she conducted her research, Portuguese, not English, is the language associated with success on the job. As assembly-line workers, the women must rely on the friendship and assistance of other workers in order to perform their tasks effectively, and friendship within the production department of the factory is constructed through use of the Portuguese language. Just as solidarity emerges from local linguistic practice, so too is power locally produced through language. "Talking bad" is a gossip activity that imposes language-based sanctions upon workers who fail to fulfill their social obligation to assist other members of the assembly-line community. Thus Portuguese is simultaneously a tool of community and of social control, obviating the need for English. Moreover, the workers do not aspire to higher-paying jobs where English skills are essential, for as women they do not have access to the same opportunities to develop this linguistic resource as do their male counterparts. These facts, notes Goldstein, do not argue against teaching English to immigrant workers but, rather, show that effective ESL instruction must be grounded in a recognition of the gendered nature of such workers' lives, especially the risk of sexual harassment.

Goldstein shows us that the workings of power can sometimes be ironic, in that a position that seems subordinate to outsiders is embraced as powerful by the women within the factory community. Likewise, Jenny Cook-Gumperz takes up an issue first raised by Simone de Beauvoir and expanded upon by Nancy Chodorow: Why do girls aspire to womanhood when it is culturally marked by inferior social status? These theorists conclude that to young girls, the mother is a powerful figure to be emulated, a point that Cook-Gumperz illustrates in her study of the play practices of preschool girls. She shows how girls explore the mother role in a complex speech event called the narrative game, in which children use language to construct an imagined world and sequential events within it. In the particular game studied by Cook-Gumperz, two three-year-old girls pretend to be the mothers of their baby dolls. By manipulating the multiple discourse

levels of the game—narration, in-character speech, and real-world speech—the girls display their understanding of the gendered social practice of mothering. This position is ambiguous: on the one hand, the children use powerful language in their role as mothers, but on the other hand, this power is contingent upon their enacting the subordinate role of women. Hence, in creating a gendered self through play the children draw upon the roots of women's secondary status even as they explore its consequences for power within the family unit.

The family is also the focus of María Dolores Gonzales Velásquez's research on three generations of women in Córdova, New Mexico. Gonzales Velásquez locates three linguistic codes in use in this community: Spanish, English, and code-switching. Incorporating Bea Medicine's notion of "cultural brokers," she illustrates how Chicanas' choice of each of these codes in intragroup situations is motivated by solidarity and in-group identity. Gonzales Velásquez's research differs sharply from the majority of previous studies on the use of prestige varieties by minority cultures, which tend to account for code-switching with reference to the speaker's linguistic insecurities and low social position. It also challenges long-standing assumptions about women's use of the most prestigious language variety in their community. Gonzales Velásquez shows how women in Córdova—as possessors of a broad linguistic repertoire—function as cultural intermediaries between their native speech community and the English-speaking community.

Gonzales Velásquez, like Foster and Bucholtz, explores speech at the boundaries between communities. Birch Moonwomon explores the issue of language at the boundaries from a somewhat different perspective; she considers the conjunction of social and linguistic notions of discourse in a graffiti interchange about a case of interracial rape. Such a research site brings together the tension between social and linguistic discourses; between social discourses themselves; and between public and private language use. The exchange upon which Moonwomon focuses takes the form of a text by multiple authors that developed over the course of several months on the wall of a women's bathroom stall on a university campus. The discussion revolves around an alleged gang rape of a female student by four members of the school's football team; the woman who made the accusation was Chinese American and the male students were African American. Hence sexist violence and racist blame are the central topics of the text. Moonwomon reconstructs the development of the discourse and interprets its conventions, finding markers both of solidarity and of power. Her analysis of these rich data thus shows in fine detail how linguistic discourses foster and reflect larger societal discourses or belief systems.

This observation, that linguistic practice and social practice are in a reciprocal relationship, is the central premise of the theoretical framework laid out by Penelope Eckert and Sally McConnell-Ginet in the chapter that concludes the volume. The authors demonstrate that language use at many levels contributes to wider social meanings. Drawing upon Eckert's ethnographic study of a Michigan high school, the authors show that the semantics of group labels, as well as linguistic details at the phonetic level, may have considerable social significance for their users by forging dividing lines between social categories. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet detail the social and linguistic meanings of the two main types of students in the school: "jocks," or those oriented toward corporate values, and "burnouts," or those oriented toward local values. Differences in values and social practices correlate with differences in language use; the burnouts lead the community in an innovation in the vowel system. But because girls and boys have differential access to the practices that mark their identities, girls more than boys turn to language as a place for expressing affiliation. Hence the most innovative speakers are the "burned-out" burnout girls. In analyzing the linguistic data and the social identities that they index, Eckert and McConnell-Ginet illustrate that gender cannot be separated from social class. Their work neatly encapsulates the major themes of the volume: it shows how the hegemonic construction of gender is imposed upon girls' lives; it illustrates female speakers' innovative use of language for their own purposes; and it vividly demonstrates the central role of community values, meanings, and practices in any analysis of language and gender.

### Conclusion

The chapters in this volume represent the state of the art in language and gender research. But their scholarly contribution is made fully visible only by considering them in light of the work of the preeminent "old mistress" of the art, Robin Lakoff.<sup>5</sup> *Language and Woman's Place* was and continues to be a highly subversive text. At the time of its publication, it simultaneously threatened the boundaries of linguistics and the assumptions of male linguists. And it has relevance for readers still, both in academia and in the culture at large. We therefore cannot agree with Rita Hoffman (1980) that we should lay the text aside as obsolete; instead, we urge scholars of language and gender to study it for what it suggests about where the field has been and where it is going. We can only hope that the present volume will have the same salutary destabilizing effect, as we usher in the third decade of language and gender research.



## Notes

1. Although much of the material in *Language and Woman's Place* was first published as a journal article (Lakoff 1973), we focus on the book-length study both because it includes new material and because its accessibility has made it the more widely discussed publication.
2. We must also acknowledge the important pioneering role of Barrie Thorne and Nancy Henley's (1975) *Language and Sex: Difference and Dominance*, which was published in the same year as *Language and Woman's Place*.
3. In both books Newmeyer takes the opportunity to argue against Lakoff's feminist credentials, based on her comment that women in linguistics disproportionately prefer to "escape into relevance" in fields such as sociolinguistics rather than pursue formal theory (Lakoff 1974:23). Newmeyer's rhetoric can only be called self-serving: "While she did not state whether mathematics and the sciences should also abandon formalism as a step toward sexual equality, she did, astonishingly, explicitly leave open the possibility that the 'indisposition toward formalism among women' might be inherent!" (1986a:134 n.7). Yet in assuming the stance of flabbergasted feminist, Newmeyer fails to recognize that Lakoff's observation is compatible with radical feminist discussions of the period, in which gender differences were posited as biological.
4. Likewise, Lakoff's theoretical assumptions in *Language and Woman's Place* emerge from the intellectual climate in which she worked. Virginia Valian's ([1977] 1981) accusation that Lakoff conflates the fundamental linguistic division between competence (knowledge of language structure) and performance (language use) is untenable, not only because it is unlikely that a linguist trained in the Chomskyan tradition could for a moment forget such a distinction but because the project of generative semantics was in large part to call that very distinction into question.
5. By labeling Lakoff an *old mistress*, we intend not insult but a subversion of English semantics: as Lakoff (1975) herself has observed, *old mistress* is not the equivalent of *old master*, although logically it should be.

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## Part One

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# Mechanisms of Hegemony and Control