

A beginner's guide to language and gender. Allyson Jule (2008)

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Allyson Jule's newly released book *A Beginner's Guide to Language and Gender* provides a solid and extensive introduction to the field of gender and language use. Being one of the few works on this area, this textbook has succeeded in demonstrating the importance of studying language in relation to gender.

Organized into eight chapters, this insightful resource is engaging not only due to the clear manner topics are unfolded and presented, but also because of the host of examples that are cited. In that respect, the author engages the reader throughout by indicating the applicability of all matters she looks into. Additional assets are a glossary of key-terms on language and gender at the end of the book and a number of useful subsections after each chapter, namely concise summary statements, intriguing discussion points and suggestions for further reading, which help readers familiarize with the issues raised in each chapter. I enjoyed the writing style of the text which establishes directness between author and reader and makes it easy to follow.

The author has utilized her personal experience as an educator and her knowledge of the most significant studies on language and gender to compose this academic monograph which greatly contributes to the area of Sociolinguistics. Also, the student-oriented nature of the text is obvious in all its sections, thus complying with Multilingual Matters Textbooks and their primary focus on students.

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The book is structured in two main parts. Part 1, which is comprised of two chapters, offers a concise introduction to the study of gender and language use. It outlines previous work done on the interaction of language and gender, concluding in contemporary approaches and beliefs. In this way, Jule provides readers with essential knowledge of the theoretical background of the topic she deals with.

Part 2 includes six chapters and takes up an interdisciplinary exploration of gender and language in five different settings or situations: in the mass media, in education, in the workplace, in the Western Church and in relationships. Finally, chapter 8 touches on several points that arise from the study of language and gender and corresponds to a conclusion of the whole book.

Following Part 2, the book closes with a glossary of key terms in the field, a substantial bibliography and a thorough index that renders the whole text user-friendly.

In chapter 1, Jule begins her discussion by informing the reader about the motivations for studying language and gender. Examining the way gender is enacted can anticipate choices people of both genders make in their lives. In addition, language is the most obvious aspect of the way humans are gendered. The author also draws a distinction between sex and gender. Whereas sex is a biological, predetermined category of behaviour involving a binary distinction between male and female, gender is a socially constructed category which comprises a host of characteristics pertaining to sex. These characteristics hinge upon the context and the relationships one is engaged in. Jule lays emphasis on the fact that gender is a notion that we, as humans, perform ('doing gender'), unlike sex, which is something we are. The distinction between sex and gender at this early point of the text was extremely helpful for understanding the message the whole book wishes to deliver.

An important part of chapter 1 is dedicated to an overview of feminist movements which enables readers to grasp the strong relevance of language to political agendas. Gendered language is engaged by liberal feminists, as they are concerned with displays of women as victims in an androcentric structure. In general, Jule conceives of feminism as an attempt to bring justice into people's lives by eliminating gender stereotyping and racism of all forms. She makes this point clearer by explaining the notion of 'sexist language', which is a universal phenomenon and appears in all levels of language analysis. All in all, the interaction of sexism and language is vital given the power of language to reproduce and enhance social attitudes and stances, a conclusion with which I couldn't agree more.

Chapter 2, 'Language as gendered', explores how language contributes both to the mirroring and production of genderedness. Jule presents two dominant yet opposing theories that are used to account for language use and gender: the

theory of deficit or dominance and the theory of difference. The author further distinguishes between the difference model and the social constructionist model, which stipulates that gender identities are regulated by cultural and power factors. The author discusses the *Critical Discourse Analysis* perspective, which is principally concerned with the role of language on the social change and reproduction as well as with social displays of power relations. *Critical Discourse Analysis* is of strong relevance to the issues raised in the book because it is one of the most prevalent approaches to gender as a social construct and language use. Once again, I found this section informative and well-written; it educates the reader in a straightforward manner about diverse points of view within the field of gender and language.

The next chapter, 'Gender and Language use in the media', signals the beginning of part 2 and the examination of gender and language use in different social contexts. Chapter 3 focuses on the ways genderedness is projected via the mass media. The author cites a host of recent work carried out on media and gender alongside media and language use with respect to gender identity. All these cross-references are linked to up-to-date illustrations that enable readers of diverse background knowledge to comprehend the points made in each occasion.

Looking in particular at the work on language used in advertisements, I appreciated the author's frankness when she mentioned that women are treated as the absolute consumers, whilst men are viewed as having more autonomy and independence in their lives. In this respect, the majority of advertisements adopt the linguistic style that relates to the gender they have as their target group.

In a similar vein, in chapter 4, under the title 'Gender and language use in education', Jule investigates the ways genderedness relates to school systems and the teacher, and how gender is performed within classroom settings. The central concerns are certain structures of school life where the interface between gender and language use is prominent. In particular, studies in this area, including Jule's own research, show that there are specific classroom practices which are indicative of the patriarchal system holding for society and postulate that women are less powerful than men. As for the relationship between pupils and teachers, it has been argued that teachers dedicate more attention to boys. Therefore, we must ensure that teachers concentrate on giving equal opportunities for participation of students during the class, considering that pupils' speech surfaces social power relations.

Chapter 5 considers important research done on language and gender in the work environment. Various studies reveal how the view of women has changed over time, such that the paradigms used for an account of the facts are not oriented to a gendered binary. Yet, as readers will come to realize, women

continue to face great difficulties in combining work and home life. This forces them to be kept away from power positions and thus, the vicious circle of not breaking the glass ceiling, as this situation is widely known. In turn, lack of women in top positions of leadership enhances the misconceived belief that women cannot cope with jobs that involve pressure, an argument that the author delivers convincingly.

Chapter 6 then is concerned with the connections of gender and language use with religion, especially in the Western Church. Going through the two main views with regards to the role of women within the Christian Church, namely the complementarian and the egalitarian view, Jule discusses the secondary role of women as the point of agreement of both views. This appreciation of women has often led feminist scholars to reinterpretations of God as both masculine and feminine instead of either male or female. In addition, feminist movements in the 1970s pursued a gender-neutral language for Christian scriptures which were to replace the gender-specific one that exists up to now. This derives from the participation of more men than women in positions of leaderships in Church, a fact that promotes and maintains the views of male dominance in Western Church and thus affects gendered behaviours and identities. Overall, chapter 6 gives special addition to gender and language studies as it speculates over the domain of Church that the majority of readers may ignore, and certainly widens their horizon.

There is a chapter reserved for the intersection of gender and language as reflected by human relationships, a setting that constitutes the most conspicuous illustration of language and gender interaction. In particular, chapter 7 investigates the ways in which social talk contributes to the establishment and maintenance of interpersonal relationships of family members and friends. The author informs us about the differences between single-gendered and mixed-gendered conversations and the features of women's and men's talk individually. At this point I was amazed by the author's power to lead readers to an identification of themselves with the language attributes that pertain to their gender. She also points out that the speech styles women and men adopt both in the family and friendship contexts indicate the accepted gendered behaviours social practices have conditioned them to have.

In the final chapter, Jule comments on a series of issues that follow from the content of the book. I found this chapter a good way to conclude the discussion of gendered language. Jule argues that language use in the media, education, the workplace, Church and in personal relationships joined to gender considerations should not be disregarded because it constructs and sustains to a great extent a better world. She also contends that the issue of gender does not lie in differences but rather in the polarization of the said differences, as understood by each individual. Therefore, she proposes the use of alternative terms of 'dif-

ference, such as 'tapestry' of gender, which are not suggestive of a dichotomy and allow for a conception of gender as a blend of numerous elements. Jule's last proposal reflects the fact that, although language sexism is a reality, change is always feasible.

This valuable resource manages to communicate both how language creates and maintains attitudes towards genderedness and how speakers formulate and display their gendered identity through their linguistic choices. The evidence cited throughout the book reveals the significance of the ternary language-gender-identity, which is central to current sociolinguistic research, and also governs many aspects of human life. In addition, the structure of the book in a coherent manner allowed for a flow between all chapters and enhanced the readability of their contents. The multidimensional perspective permeating the text and the avoidance of rehashing well-known material within the field of language and gender also added to the intellectual integrity of this book. Ultimately, the issue of linguistic prejudice against women highlighted throughout the discourse points to the need for further study. To this end, this resource provides all readers with a spherical understanding and a critical view of gendered language before going deep into any sociolinguistic research on this matter.