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Features of Power in Women's Discourse with reference to David Mamet's *Oleanna*, Sam Shepard's *Simpatico*, Mohammad Sedqi's *The Wall and the Ivy*, and Mohammad El-Gamal's *Two in One*

A Ph.D. Dissertation in Linguistics
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Abstract

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This dissertation is motivated by outdated assumptions in the literature equating men's linguistic strategies with power when men and women disagree about an issue, even if they use the same strategies. Most of the literature has failed to acknowledge the ways in which women use power in their conversational style. In essence, the researcher refutes earlier associations between less-powerful linguistic strategies and women conversational style. The main objective of this study is to investigate how females exercise conversational control and how they manage competitive interactional style. This has been achieved by analyzing features of power used by females to maintain and increase their power and status. It also investigates aspects of similarities and differences of female discourse of power in Egyptian Arabic and American English dramatic dialogues under study. The most significant finding of this study is that females interact competitively and exercise conversational power over the male co-participants and practice one-upmanship on each other in ways which do not promote solidarity. Further, both Egyptian females and American females use the same communicative strategies with varying degrees due to social and cultural differences. In addition, communicative strategies are situation and role-based rather than gender-based.

Keywords: Power; Female discourse; Egyptian drama; American drama.

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Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Prologue

The relationship between language and gender has always been a topic of interest in linguistics. As researchers (Bing and Bergvall 1996, Talbot 1998) point out that gender has often served as a grammatical category. However, recent research views gender as a social category, and explores the way language is used to create, display, and reinforce gender identities. Particularly the publication of (Lakoff 1975) promotes awareness not only of how deeply related language may be to female and male identities, but also how language and gender may be examined from a critical perspective.

Sociolinguistically, previous research promotes awareness of the importance of gender as a social variable that affects and influences the way language is used in society (Meyerhoff 1996). However, research on gender and language stresses that gender alone is insufficient to understand the complicated ways language is used in society. As Ochs (1992) states, "in relating sociocultural constructions of gender to social meaning of language, an issue of importance emerges: *few features of language directly and exclusively index gender*" (emphasis in the original) (p.340). In addition, Bing and Bergvall (1996) propose that by placing the focus of their work on studying differences between women and men's use of language, researchers contribute to and stress the predominant notion that females and males are distinct varieties. Bing and Bergvall (1996) state:

> Researchers can accept evidence that shows that gender is a social construct and that language is learned behavior. However, because they accept a biological female-male dichotomy, they often assume that language reflects this dichotomy. Studies that

> reinforce female-male differences continue to capture the interest and imagination of both scholars and the general public, thus further reinforcing the presupposed dichotomy. (pp. 4-5)

Rather than isolating gender as a social variable, research on gender and language recognizes the need to examine gender in relation to other variables, considering age, culture, race setting, and social class (e.g., Bucholtz 1996, Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1992, 1995, Freed & Greenwood 1996, Gal 1992, Meyerhoff 1996, and Ochs 1992). Alvanoudi (2017) studies gender as a cultural category and concludes that "Cultural cognition is shown to be a socially situated phenomenon, embedded in social action that can be examined empirically in interaction" (p.125).

Discourse may be considered a place where relations of power are actually exercised and enacted. The concept of power is defined by Tollefson (1991) as "... the ability to achieve one's goals and to control events through intentional action" (p.9). Besides, Fairclough (1989) points out that power is not a characteristic of individuals in isolation; rather, individuals exercise power as a result of their social relationships within institutional structure that provide meaning to their actions and also constrain them. Hence, there is a dynamic relation between social structure and power which is essential to both individual action and social organization. Fairclough (1989) advocates that "Power is won, held, and lost in social struggles" (p.74), and discourse is the site of the social struggles.

Traditionally, women have been associated with the ability to exercise control over others with the help of the power of manipulation, personal power, and the power of helplessness (Lakoff, 1990). Indeed, women do have power both in the private world and in public life. In the private world of the home, women usually have the upper hand. In public life, women have

gained increasing formal recognition, but they have always wielded power behind the curtain. In addition, today, more women have become powerful figures in politics, business, and education. This resulted in significant advances in the field of female discourse in the twentieth century especially in its last decade.

In addition, language and gender studies provide two theories to explain gender variation in language: dominance and difference approaches. The dominance approach stems from the notion that men traditionally dominate women in speech (Thorne & Henley 1975, Thorne, Kramarae, & Henley 1983). In these studies, researchers identify certain male conversational strategies which characterize male conversational style as competitive and therefore dominant in speech. Conversely, female conversational style is identified as insecure, hesitant, (Lakoff 1975) and cooperative (Goodwin 1998, Fishman 1983, Tannen 1990) by which solidarity is sustained and increased. Holmes (1998) states that "Women tend to interact in ways which will maintain and increase solidarity, while (especially in formal contexts) men tend to interact in ways which will maintain and increase their power and status" (p.472).

The difference model originates from the application of Gumperz's (1982) cross-cultural model of the differences in men and women conversational style. This approach originated at the hands of Maltz and Borker (1982) and was developed by Tannen (1990). On the contrary to the dominance model, the difference model states that the difference is not due to the power disparity but the interactional style of women and men, acquired from the socialization patterns. Accordingly, the two models advocate that women interact in ways to promote cooperation and solidarity (Emily 2016; Lutzky & Lawson 2016; Nayef 2016; Hamed & Abuagla 2017). But neither of these approaches indicates the possibility that women can interact competitively to gain status and power. (Cameron 1990, 1992; Foster 1995; Coates 1996 ; Holmes1998; Pauwel