

Speaking out: The female voice in public contexts.
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A project long overdue in the field of language and gender, *Speaking out* is the first anthology to focus exclusively on women as speakers in public domains. Edited by Judith Baxter, who is Senior Research Fellow for The National Centre of Language and Literacy at the University of Reading and author of *Positioning discourse in gender: A feminist methodology*, this volume makes a strong contribution to the study of language in context with its feminist interdisciplinary approach. The book is divided into two sections: the first is composed of three chapters discussing the theoretical, historical, and overarching themes pertaining to the study of the female voice in public contexts; the second includes ten chapters that each showcase locally situated research on women as public speakers.

Section I begins with a theoretical overview by Deborah Cameron, who introduces many of the broader themes to be found in the chapters that follow. Her chapter, entitled 'Theorising the Female Voice in Public Contexts,' begins by problematizing some of the assumptions that have surrounded the public/private dichotomy and, by extension, many discussions of gender. While noting that the dichotomy itself is not necessarily a valid one, she also points out that the types of discourse most valued in a given culture (whether or not considered 'public') are generally more accessible, or even exclusively available, to men. Thus, while the last decade of research on gender and language has illustrated

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the importance of looking locally, Cameron reminds us not to be blind to the global similarities regarding women's access to privileged speaking practices. The chapter also outlines two prominent theoretical approaches to the study of the female voice in public contexts: the first is a framework that Cameron calls economic, focusing on women's access (or lack thereof) to the linguistic resources that are most valued in sociopolitical terms. The second framework, which Cameron describes as symbolic, aims to answer a question which the economic approach leaves open: namely, why does gender inequality persist in the domain of public speaking even in those contexts where women have equal access to and competence in valued speaking styles? This question is addressed in studies which present social psychological and psychoanalytic accounts of women's ostensibly voluntary reluctance to participate in the public sphere. Yet Cameron, following Bourdieu's notion of symbolic capital, argues that these symbolic factors become meaningful only when grounded in a material reality. She concludes with a call for a more integrated approach, which is taken up by a number of the authors in this volume.

Judith Mattson Bean's article, 'Gaining a Public Voice: An Historical Perspective on American Women's Speech in Public Contexts,' situates women as public speakers in the historical context of the United States. In an account of public speaking and gender norms in the nineteenth century, Bean describes how early American women speakers made a place for themselves as orators. In particular, she describes the strategies used by these pioneering women to legitimate themselves as speakers, such as the use of religious register, references to female predecessors, and conservative dress. These strategies worked to challenge assumptions about women who spoke in public, particularly the dominant notion that such women were sexually 'unvirtuous.' Using the example of Maria Stewart, a free Black woman who made a career of public speaking in the mid-1800s, Bean describes how such women often 'created agency by drawing strategically on valued registers of religious and patriotic discourse' (p. 37). By challenging the idea that women speak in ways fundamentally unsuitable for public contexts, early feminists like Stewart transformed the possibilities available to women in the public sphere. Of course, as many chapters in this volume demonstrate, a theoretically equal right to speak does not guarantee equal space for women in public speaking domains.

Ending Section I is Lia Litosseliti's chapter, 'Constructing Gender in Public Arguments: The Female Voice as Emotional Voice.' Here, Litosseliti addresses the 'double bind' whereby women 'are faced with having to justify their presence and their achievements' yet are at once 'being measured against different norms to men' (p. 45). Using data from *The Guardian's* column 'Head to Head,' in which two participants with conflicting perspectives on a given issue carry on

a public debate through correspondence, the author shows how an intellectual dichotomy is constructed between “real, ‘rational,’ ‘proven,’ ‘common sense’ on one hand, and ‘personal,’ ‘felt,’ ‘emotional’ on the other” (p. 48), with the former set of characteristics associated with authority and legitimacy and the latter with intuition and anecdote. Speakers make use of this paradigm to construct the female voice as irrational and unauthoritative, thus undermining a female speaker and her message. However, as Litosseliti points out, women are highly aware of this dichotomy and its gendered connotations, and may seek to disrupt it during debate. While the ‘female as emotional’ stereotype can create power imbalances in discourse, female speakers can also draw on their knowledge of cultural perceptions of women in order to adopt strategies that legitimate themselves as speakers. While these tactics may involve adopting or adapting ‘masculine’ styles, they may also involve the strategic use of traditionally ‘feminine’ modes of speech. Because of the gendered subtext that frames such argumentation, Litosseliti concludes that in addition to the performative act of ‘doing gender,’ speakers may also deal with gender in a much more agentive way and thus could be said to ‘argue gender’ as well.

Part II of *Speaking out* comprises the bulk of the volume and echoes many of the themes found in the three anchoring essays of Section I. Each chapter in this section examines women’s relationship, as speakers, to the public sphere. The authors represent much of the English-speaking world, and research is set in such diverse locales as academic conferences (Chapter 4), the English and Scottish parliaments (Chapter 5), the lecture halls of a Canadian theological college (Chapter 6), political interviews on a BBC radio program (Chapter 7), a Canadian courtroom during a sexual assault case (Chapter 8), South African indigenous communities (Chapter 11), and the American stand-up comedy stage (Chapter 12).

There are a number of common threads to be found across these contributions, several of which Baxter discusses in her introduction. Perhaps the most salient theme of this volume is the use of what Baxter characterizes as a third wave feminist/feminist post-structuralist approach to the study of language and gender. Many of the book’s authors are united in their view of language as a social practice, emphasizing the performative rather than essentialized nature of gender, the co-construction of social meaning, and the potential for speakers’ identities to be fluid, multi-layered, and sometimes even contradictory. Nearly every chapter anchors itself to the local realities of ‘*which* discourses within *which* contexts sustain such notions [of gender inequality], and how those discourses can be challenged and, within the fullness of time, subverted’ (p. xvi).

Section II begins with the chapter ‘Gender and ‘Stage Fright’ at Academic Conferences,’ in which Sara Mills explores the factors which lead some

female academics to experience performance anxiety while giving papers at conferences. Drawing from questionnaires answered by 34 female and male academics, Mills finds that women are far more likely to experience (or admit to experiencing) this type of stage fright than their male counterparts. She skillfully argues that many women have internalized a sense that men are more capable speakers in this genre, and that conferences are indeed better aligned with modes of speaking associated with masculinity, particularly the crucial question-and-answer period. Mills concludes that 'a major role in the variation in gender performance is the degree to which hypothesised stereotypes of gender behaviour within particular gendered contexts lead to assumptions about our own position within the academic community and within the public sphere.' (p. 78).

With an eye toward the political contexts in which women speak (or don't speak), Sylvia Shaw's article 'Language and Gender in Political Debates' (Chapter 5) examines the participation of women in the British House of Commons, particularly during debate. Shaw finds that 'women may be more conscious of adhering to debate rules than their male colleagues' (p. 95), despite the fact that breaking these rules can lead to significant advantage. She attributes this both to female members' choice not to participate in the traditionally masculine linguistic practices of this community, as well as women's 'interloper' status, which keeps them from violating norms of speech and thus calling attention to their position as outsiders.

In Chapter 6, Allyson Jule delivers an ethnographically informed analysis of women's silence in an evangelically oriented Canadian theological graduate school. Jule observed that men took up nearly 100% of talk time during lectures at this college, despite a relatively equal balance of male and female students. Noting that women and girls are routinely given less access to speaking time in educational contexts, Jule argues that these women are further silenced by the moral standards of their religious community. Thus, their silence is rooted not only in their gender, but in their sense of religious identity.

Clare Walsh's article 'Gender and Genre of the Broadcast Interview' (Chapter 7) examines the styles implemented by male and female interviewers on the BBC's radio program *Today*. Walsh argues that although the genre of political interviews is dominated by an aggressive confrontational style associated with masculinity, *Today's* long time presenter Sue MacGregor was able to achieve success with listeners without using such a style. Nevertheless, MacGregor was seen as ineffective by BBC programmers and the broader media alike, a perception that had serious material consequences for her career as she was consistently assigned to more mundane stories.

Susan Ehrlich's article 'Trial Discourse and Judicial Decision-making: Constraining the Boundaries of Gendered Identities' (Chapter 8) is among

the strongest of the chapters in Section II. Ehrlich investigates how the female voice is silenced in the androcentric genre of the court trial, particularly when a woman's performance of gender falls outside of culturally prescribed intelligibility. Using data from a Canadian sexual assault case in which the complainant was coerced to perform sexual acts, Ehrlich demonstrates how the prosecuting attorney co-constructs a feminist narrative with the complainant that emphasizes the unequal power between a man and a woman in a situation where the woman fears sexual violence. However, this narrative was unsuccessful in both the trial and the appeal, with both judges acquitting the accused under the presumption of 'implied consent'. Ehrlich skillfully argues that the decisions reached by the judges are based on 'cultural beliefs that equate a woman's sexual passivity with consent' (p. 155). By challenging these beliefs, the feminist narrative of the prosecution involved a performance of gender which was culturally unintelligible and thus ultimately unsuccessful.

Judith Baxter's addition to the volume, "Do we have to agree with her?' How High School Girls Negotiate Leadership in Public Contexts' (Chapter 9), explores the role peer feedback and gender differentiation discourses play on young women in educational contexts. This chapter is a crucial contribution to the volume, as the forces which socialize women as speakers ultimately shape the contexts explored in other chapters. Based on observations in a British secondary classroom, Baxter finds that while boys are encouraged by their classmates when they assume a leadership role, girls are undermined and censured by their peers. This, along with the expectation that women are collaborative, conspires to create an environment in which young men are more willing than young women 'to accept the concept of hierarchical leadership and the support structure this naturally entails' (p. 175).

In Chapter 10, 'Positioning the Female Voice within Work and Family,' Shari Kendall explores the role of social talk in the American workplace. Drawing on a single conversation between a pair of female and male co-workers, Kendall examines the degree to which family life is discussed either generally or specifically as well as the extent to which speakers align themselves in relation to an archetypical caregiver model. Finding that the female speaker aligns herself with family life while the male speaker distances himself from it, Kendall suggests that such differences, because they emerge during social talk at work, may have broader implications in the workplace.

Puleng Hanong's contribution, 'Sexuality, Discourse and the Public Sphere: Investigating Women's Voices on Sexuality in Black South African Communities' (Chapter 11), explores the moral, sociocultural, and political forces which contribute to indigenous South African women's reluctance to report sexual and physical violence or participate in public debate over sexual issues. Drawing on focus group and interview data, Hanong identifies several

important issues at work in these indigenous communities, including the valorization of women's silence as representative of femininity, dignity, and respect for traditional African family values. Men in the focus groups also relied on an analogy between colonialism and recent growth in reported sex crimes to criticize women as Westernized: for instance, they described women who publicly accuse their rapists as having 'lost their culture and traditions' (p. 208). Hanong concludes that indigenous South African women are not only oppressed by men, they also collude with them in their own silencing by adhering to traditional notions of womanhood and their correlating linguistic practices. Her chapter provides a much needed cross-cultural perspective to *Speaking out*, contributing to an understanding of the ways in which the complexities of identity can create problematic conditions for women in post-colonial societies.

In Chapter 12, "'They say it's a man's world, but you can't prove it by me': African-American Comediennes' Construction of Voice in the Public Space,' Denise Troutman analyses the effects of race on American women's role in public performance. Exploring the monologues of four African American female comedians, Troutman discusses a number of features of African American women's language that are distinct from that of European American women, and which would seem to indicate that African American women tend to have a different disposition toward speaking in the public sphere: for example, playing the dozens, the use of bawdy language, and what Troutman calls 'talking smart,' a set of clever and confrontational linguistic practices including signifying. These features go beyond performance, argues Troutman, to mirror the everyday talk of many African American women, even though they may break prescribed norms of speech for European American women. As the title of the chapter implies, Troutman's research suggests that it indeed may be less of a 'man's world' for African American women, and concludes with an aptly chosen quote from Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003): 'girls who are not of African descent might have a lot to learn from their African American sisters about confidence and standing up for themselves' (quoted on p. 236).

Speaking out closes with a chapter from Meredith Marra, Stephanie Schnurr, and Janet Holmes that analyzes the linguistic styles of women leaders in the workplace in the relatively public context of the formal meeting. The authors examine data from two distinct New Zealand professional communities, each of which is led by a woman, to examine how female bosses accomplish the two goals identified as primary components of effective leadership: namely, transactional/task-oriented goals, and relational/people-oriented goals. While transactional goals are associated with masculine styles of speaking and relational goals with feminine styles, the authors find that effective leaders are

able to accomplish both sets of goals by balancing masculine and feminine discourse strategies. However, the two women under discussion also present dissimilar management styles, indicating that factors other than gender and communicative goals may affect the kinds of interactional styles used to achieve effective leadership. The authors conclude that the character of each distinct community of practice contributes in large part to what is demanded of its leader.

This interdisciplinary volume is an excellent and much needed contribution to the study of language and gender, while having the additional applied value of addressing potential solutions to women's historical exclusion from the public sphere. As Baxter notes in her introduction, a question at the heart of this volume is whether women would be better served by appropriating masculine styles of speaking or innovating new genres, even if based on those considered feminine. There is little consensus among the authors on this matter, but this reflects the reality of the different communities studied: women in various contexts are not equally positioned to subvert the ideologies that dominate them, nor is it always clear what would need to be accomplished for this subversion to be complete. What is clear, however, is that women in a variety of English-speaking societies are attempting to forge a legitimate and authoritative place for the female voice in public contexts.

Reference

Eckert, Penelope and Sally McConnell-Ginet. 2003. *Language and gender*. New York: Cambridge University Press.