

ジェンダーと外国語学習

Does Gender Matter in Language Learning ?

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ABSTRACT

本研究の目的は大きく分けて次の二点である。1) 女性の方が男性よりも外国語学習をする傾向にあり、さらに女性の方が男性より外国語学習において優れている、という、しばしば当然の事のように人々が信じていることが、実際に正しいのかを検証する。2) 上記の点に関して、女性と男性が外国語と外国語学習において異なる傾向をしめすならば、違いが出る要因に何があるのか検証する。幅広い分野（ジェンダー学、社会心理学、社会言語学、言語教育、教育学など）の先行研究ならびに新聞雑誌の記事に加え、統計上の数字を検証（イギリスの GCSE / GCE, 東京外国語大学の入学志願者／入学者数、国際基督教大学での語学クラスの登録状況と TOEFL の成績）した結果、男性より女性のほうが外国語学習に熱心で、しかも成績がいい、という一般的な考え方を確かめるものとなった。そこで次に外国語学習者自身に焦点をあて、アンケートとインタビューによる調査をエディンバラ大学（パイロットスタディ）と国際基督教大学で行った。その結果、まず卒業後の進路とその前段階での高校での理系文系の進路に決定により、語学科目が「女性のもの」という規範が学生達によって認められていることが確認された。更にインタビューから分かったことは、語学学習を取り巻く環境のなかで、学生達が自分の信じるジェンダーアイデンティティやエスニックアイデンティティと社会規範に沿って行動していることが多い、ということである。つまり、「女／男であること」「日本人であること」の意識が外国語学習に対しても影響を与える要素であり得るのである。これは今までの言語学習におけるジェンダーの研究のなかで、ほとんど触れられてなかった点である。本研究は、言語学習におけるジェンダーの有り様をより良く理解する鍵が、インタビューの語りにおける言語学習者達の生きた声のなかに見つかる可能性を示している。

Introduction

In Japan at the turn of the century, language learning is still generally associated with women rather than with men. Why is that the case? My search of the literature for a simple answer to the question was unsatisfactory. Although there are indeed studies in applied linguistics and social psychology of language learning that have addressed gender factors in language learning, the emphasis is overwhelmingly upon the elaboration of ‘facts’ — numbers and differences and statistics — but not people.

The aim of this study is two-fold. The first adopts a documentary and statistical approach to clarify whether women are more likely to embark on language study than men, and whether they perform better than men in language classes. The second adopts a documentary and qualitative approach to investigate socio-cultural context of language learning and beliefs concerning gender and language learning. Beliefs concerning language are named ‘folklinguistic beliefs’ which is defined by Goddard and Patterson (2000: 87) as “popular beliefs about language”. In my view, what Bauer and Trudgill (1998) call ‘language myths’ is of the same nature. This kind of research topic demands an interdisciplinary approach. Both statistical data and qualitative data are combined to serve the purpose.

Theories in Gender, Language Learning and Social Psychology

I share with some researchers (e.g., Guiora 1983; Gardner 1985; Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope 1991) the view that language learning is

different from other school subjects in a way it potentially threatens the learner’s cultural values and identity. It is this aspect of language learning where the cultural and social notion of ‘gender’ plays an impivotal role. The word ‘gender’ implies that many differences between men and women are socially and culturally created and / or sustained (e.g., Gentile, 1993; Unger and Crawford, 1993).

The field of SLA does not seem to provide much to go on where gender is concerned. Neither of the textbooks, *Introduction to Applied Linguistics* (1991) by Grabe and Kaplan or *An Introduction to Applied Linguistics* (1999) by Davis deals with gender factors in language learning. The 700-page volume of *The Study of Second Language Acquisition* (Ellis 1994) spares just three pages on ‘sex’ as a social factor that could affect language learning. This lack of attention to gender in SLA necessitated that I conduct documentary research in social psychology, particularly in the areas where gender and beliefs are concerned.

Burn (1996: 2-3) explains that “the explanation for many gender differences lies not so much in the chromosomes or hormones as in the social norms which communicate that different behaviors, attitudes and interests are appropriate depending upon your gender. Sets of norms that communicate what is generally appropriate for each sex are called sex roles or gender roles.” Eagly (1987) states that gender stereotypes actually form social norms regarding gender. Several studies (e.g., Berndt and Heller 1986, Steriker and Kurdek 1982) found that boys who deviate from same-sex play norms were ridiculed by their peers and were less popular than other boys

who conformed to the norms. Bandura (1977) proposes the ‘social learning theory’ that postulates that people can learn appropriate behaviour by observing other people and whether they are rewarded or punished for what they do. These studies suggest that we have the pressure to conform to gender-appropriate roles, behaviors, values, etc. and those social norms are then *internalised* by ourselves, which will be used then to regulate our own behaviour (Bussey and Bandura 1992).

Some studies have addressed situations of English language learning in a Japanese context, discussing the aspect of ethnolinguistic identity. English language teachers (and students themselves) in Japan are familiar with students speaking English with a Japanese-like pronunciation. This phenomenon, according to Hildebrandt and Giles (1984), is a realisation of the students’ ethnolinguistic identity. Students are expressing their group identity as Japanese and asserting their bond. While English speaking ability in Japan is perceived by the Japanese necessary or desirable and there is great pressure to learning English towards the social or economic rewards, at the same time “there will be social pressure not to become too proficient in English” and “Japanese who resist this pressure and make the attempt to integrate (into the English speaking culture) may be considered by other Japanese as traitors who have assimilated” (ibid. : 450-452). The study by Beebe and Giles (1984) also finds that ethnic identity and belief in one’s own language could lead to linguistic differentiation.

As Hildebrandt and Giles state, “Notions of status and power are central” to the ethnolin-

guistic identity theory (1984: 437) and the status and power issues are central to gender studies too. What is important, therefore, is to note that the important determinant of behaviour — including language learning — is the individual’s *subjective* perception of these dimensions in language learning, and this issue of subjectivity brings back the notion of belief. The subjectivity issue also leads to the issue of identity.

Previous Research on Gender and Subject Choice

Extensive studies on gender-based imbalance of subject choice are found in the UK. For example, Department of Education and Science (DES) consultative paper issued in 1983; HMI (Her Majesty’s Inspectorate) reports *Girls and Science* (1980) and *Boys and Modern Languages* (1985); Powell’s *Boys, Girls and Languages in School* in 1986. Powell (1986) made it clear that all through the educational levels females dominate language classes with the only exception at the post graduate level. More recent reports (e.g., Department for Education Statistical Bulletin 1993, Baxter 1999) confirm that the trend continues in the early 90s, there are a significantly larger number of girls than boys taking languages at GCSE; and a considerably larger number of boys than girls take “traditionally male, career-orientated subjects” such as physics, chemistry and computer studies (Baxter 1999).

Qualifications in those traditionally masculine areas of study are more likely to lead to the better paid, higher status jobs and careers and seen as more important for boys’ future lives (e.g., Spear 1985, Baker and Jones 1992).

The students' performance, it is argued, is linked to their perceptions of future opportunities, with current achievement regarded as some sort of currency or resource to be spent in the future so as to gain access to further educational or occupational opportunities.

In Japan, as Kimura's book, *Gakko Bunka to Jendaa* (School Culture and Gender) (1999) introduces studies by Amano (1980) and Amano et al (1983), Iwato (1982), Kimura (1996), it is revealed that students have different school subject orientations by gender; moreover, students often have gender-stereotype attached to each school subject (Kimura 1999).

Previous Research on Gender, Achievement and Attitude / Motivation

Gender and achievement has also been addressed in the UK. Burstall (1970) found that girls consistently scored higher than boys in the French class. Burstall et al (1974) again obtained a similar result. Powell's study in 1983 also found that girls performed better than boys (Powell 1986).

Not surprisingly, correlation between attitudes and achievement is often observed. One of the earliest and probably the largest study in this area is Burstall's (1970) which noted that boys and girls with favorable attitudes towards learning French tended to score significantly higher in their tests than those with unfavorable attitudes towards French.

What about gender and attitudes? Female language learners are found in many cases to show more favourable attitudes towards language learning and are more strongly motivated (e.g., Bartley 1970, Burstall 1970, Muchnick and Wolfe 1982, Gagnon 1974,

Gardner and Smythe 1975, Jones 1950, Gardner and MacIntyre 1993, Boyle and Houndoulese 1993, Koizumi and Matsuo 1993).

Newspaper Articles Reporting Gender and Subject Choice in Japan

Newspapers articles reporting the subject and departmental choice by Japanese *jukensei* (examinees for universities) such as Asahi Shimbun articles (January 15, 2000; January 20, 2001) and Nihon Keizai Shimbun articles (September 16, 1999; January 20, 2001) illustrate the recent trend among both female and male students to choose to study a subject that is more career-oriented. However, it is true that after the bubble economy was over, it was female students rather than male students who suffered in terms of employment (see, for example, The Ministry of Labor's *Shinki Gakusotsu Saiyo Niatei-to Chosa* in Tachikawa 1994). Some women give up to seek their career paths in Japan and look elsewhere. A Hong-Kong agency for Japanese temporary reported that the number of registered Japanese women rose to nearly 400 in the first half of 1993, while in 1990 the number was only about 90 (Ishihara 1994). Many women wish to work abroad these days, not only for companies but also for organizations such as the United Nations, JICA, or other NGOs (ibid.)

Gender and Subject Choice in Japan: More Numbers

It was reported in 1996 in *AERA*, the Asahi Shimbun weekly journal, that Tokyo Gaikokugo Daigaku (Tokyo University of

Foreign Studies) had an 'excessive' number of female students in comparison with the small number of male students. 510 female students dominate among the 800 first year students with only 290 male students, the ratio being 64 percent of women to 36 percent of men. A look at the university's web site reveals that the ratio of male students to female students is 35 per cent to 65 per cent in both the number of applicants and that of the accepted students in the year 1999. Also at International Christian University, a female student is found to be more likely to take foreign language courses (other than English) than a male student (years 1989-1996, Morizumi 2001).

Towards a Case Study

Thus far, we have observed gender and language learning in terms of subject choice, achievement, and attitude / motivation. And yet, there seems to be something missing in the abovementioned studies. After all we have not yet heard the voices of the individuals who have been involved in the process of language learning. As Sunderland (2000) quotes, it is probably 'telling cases' (Mitchell 1983) in interview data that can best guide us to the understanding and insights into gender identity as it comes into play in language education. Sunderland states that extracts from interview, rather than differences, numbers and degrees of statistical significance, may be the most promising way forward for the study of gender and language education.

This new step suggested by Sunderland in gender and language education research is what I will be following in this study: a case study which incorporates both quantitative,

statistical data and qualitative data focusing on interviews. These two kinds of data are complimentary.

International Christian University, Tokyo: A Case Study ¹⁾

International Christian University, unlike most of the other universities in Japan, does not require Japanese students to take any other foreign language course other than English. That is, taking language courses is entirely voluntary. Examination of the enrollment lists of language courses (French, German, Spanish, Russian and Chinese; English not included) reveals that a female student is more likely than a male student to take a foreign language class. This seems to confirm the women-go-for-languages trend.

As for the achievement, the students' TOEFL scores were examined. In the academic year '98-'99, women are doing better than men both at the beginning and the end of the year, and this seems to be a every-year pattern, according to some of the teachers responsible for the English Language Program (ELP) at ICU. Thus, at least in English language, the overall trend of female students outperforming male students is confirmed again.

What about gender and employment patterns? ICU Employment Office replied to my questions in November 1999, confirming the general trend among the students that female students are more interested in getting language-related jobs or working for foreign firms. The female students' awareness that proficiency in foreign languages would help them get a job was also confirmed, and female students indeed seem to benefit more than their male counterparts by having a

foreign language in command.

The next step now is to listen to the students tell their stories.

ICU Teachers and Students: Their Stories²⁾ **Teacher Questionnaire and Interviews**

A questionnaire asking their impressions on gender and language learning was sent to instructors of the ELP by e-mail. Ten replies were obtained out of twenty-five teachers. After the questionnaire, five follow-up interviews were conducted. It was pointed out that a) gender differences in employment patterns and future career goals play a crucial role in determining one's subject choice, b) language subject is a 'gendered subject', that it has been generally recognised as 'women's thing', c) female students make more disciplined students than male students, and d) there is stronger peer-group pressure on male students to conform to the group norm of appearing 'cool' (and studying language diligently is not a cool thing).

Student Questionnaire and Interviews

A total of 64 students (FSs=42, MSs=22) were interviewed based on the questionnaire which had been given to them before the interview. The students were ICU first-year students at the end of the 1998 academic year / beginning of their second year. Students from each English proficiency level, in Programmes A, B, and C (lower-higher), were interviewed. The questionnaire basically contained three questions. Question 1 asks their own 'reason' to study English, Question 2 asks what advantages they think there may be in being able to speak English, and

Question 3 asks if they have noticed possible gender differences in terms of language learning. Questions 1 and 2 are based on the Gardner and Lambert study (1972).

Although the sample might not be large enough to make generalisations, narratives by the students seem to shed light to some interesting aspects of what they think is going on in gender and language learning. In short, female students are more likely than male students to emphasize the importance of acquiring English language proficiency (or proficiency in other foreign languages) in order to obtain a desirable job. They are also more likely than their male counterparts to emphasize the entertainment factor of learning (such as travelling abroad or watching films), whereas male students are more likely to show passive motives for studying language. Their own observations and opinions on gender differences in language learning centre around differences in attitudes and motivation, and traditional gender divisions in school. It was also found that many of their statements are based on what they have heard or read somewhere. Very often their beliefs are expressed as in, "Women are ---, men are ---", making a clear division between the two genders and what they are supposed to be. If those beliefs based on what they perceive to be the norm of their society could regulate their behaviours, as proposed in studies in social psychology, they might well account for gender differences in language learning.

Following the semi-structured interviews, more in-depth interviews took place. Three all male-student groups and three all female-student groups were interviewed. In this interview protocol, things were arranged so

the situation would allow the students to be able to relax. First of all, they came in a small group of friends. Second, one of the students in each group had been interviewed in the previous one-to-one, short interview, so the student already knew the researcher. Third, the interviews were conducted over lunch. In addition, each interview took 45-80 minutes, offering the students enough time to develop their ideas.

Students were to talk about 1) their own 'reason' to study English, 2) advantages in being able to speak English, and 3) possible gender differences in terms of language learning in both types of interviews.

A limitation of this study must be pointed out. Since the interviewees, both students and teachers, were volunteers, the individuals investigated here may not represent the group population. Secondly, since English language was predominantly the foreign language the students were studying, the question also arises to how well the findings and suggestions of this research will be generalised to learning of foreign languages other than English. In addition, ICU students are generally what might be called 'successful learners' of English. Thus, their perception of what English language could offer them might well be different from students from other universities.

Students' Voice in the In-depth Interviews

When the students started to talk to each other, rather than one-to-one with the researcher, their discussion went into various directions which, in the end, seem to encompass a large picture involving the mechanism

of the gender in language learning matters. It appeared impossible for the students to talk about gender-and-language-learning issues only: while talking about gender and language learning issues, they also addressed other topics, such as gender identity, their career plans, their dreams, or man-woman relationships. These 'bits and pieces' of ideas seemed to construct the students' belief systems about gender and / or language learning and education.

Here are excerpts from the interview transcripts.³⁾

Extract from Interview Group 1. Two male students in Programme A

Int.: ... so does it mean that men remain in science major even when they aren't good at maths?

TN: and if they find they really aren't good enough, they'll opt for art and humanities

SH: they are 'kakure bunkei' (art / humanity majors in disguise)

Int.: they are called 'kakure bunkei'?

SH: say, the science major students, they also study English and Japanese, and even when they are poor at maths, they'll remain in the science major course while they study all the art and humanity subjects, and then they'll take university entrance examinations for art divisions

Even in this short transcript, seemingly different kinds of beliefs are found to be linked to each other, forming part of a larger belief system. They acknowledge that there are gender divisions in school in terms of school subjects; they think that science is more

appropriate for men than humanities or arts; they acknowledge that there is certain pressure on men to at least appear to be studying science rather than arts. These beliefs are all interwoven and seem impossible to be separated.

As shown above, there is a pressure to conform to the norm, to adhere to the gender group identity. In a language learning situation, the learners are also dealing with ethnolinguistic identity, as well as gender identities, weighing the group norm and identity of their L1 and the readiness to face possible threats to their group identity. Language learners who respect their group solidarity might purposefully speak poorly even when they are capable to do much better, for otherwise they could be called traitors (Hildebrandt and Giles 1984). Here is a typical example below.

Extract from Interview Group 3: two male students in Programme C, one in Programme B

KI: they could do it, but they would rather — I mean, they wouldn't, on purpose, pronounce clearly

SK: otherwise, (they would say to you) "why are you putting on airs"

KI: like when you perform the pronunciation for *th*

SK: they'd say, "but you are Japanese"

These male students are good English speakers, telling a story of how they got ridiculed in English class, while other students exercising 'poor' English pronunciation. They acknowledge that their classmates would pronounce English in a less-English way; they acknowledge that it is a violation of the norm to speak in fluent English; they acknowledge that there

is pressure to act 'as Japanese'. They went on to discuss their anxiety:

Int.: so you all are fluent in English, does any one of you want to go abroad, want to work abroad, or want to work for a foreign company?

TI: well... I think I am conservative in some ways and I don't think it is necessary to go abroad and, well, it is like an adventure in a sense and...

Int.: and

TI: that's scary, kind of

SK: and we may be fluent in English but not up to the standard of native speakers

The same group of male students further expressed their view on man-woman relationship as follows.

SK: yeah, you wouldn't want to be supported by your wife

KI: no, not that

Int.: why not?

SK: men's pride. I'm a traditional Japanese man, you see

KI: want to play the upper hand, want to be the superior one

SK: it's power relation

KI: this idea, kind of logic, has just come to my mind, it's just my image, see, but when a man 'loses' against his wife in terms the money he earns,

SK: then his existence won't be recognised

KI: it's like he is owned, like — like a pet cat

SK: that's true

KI: it shows how much the man depends on the woman's side

Int.: depends on the woman?

KI: you see, when the man 'loses' in terms of income, then. (in a coaxing voice)
“oh my darling thanks for taking care of me”

TI: oh no, I may not have such pride

KI: it's about being able and being a good provider

Int.: hmm...

SK: it's about being a real man

Just as they fear to have to admit that their English is not as good as native speakers' English, they are also afraid to be seen as not fully man. They believe that, to be a 'real' man, they have to be able to financially support their wives. They believe that it is men's pride to do so. They also acknowledge that maybe it is a Japanese way of thinking, and they acknowledge themselves to be Japanese men, and would thus follow supposed Japanese norms and values. The man-woman relationship, in their view, is a power relation, and it is the man who has to be the powerful one. Either in the contact with a foreign language or with a woman — both of them 'other' — the man wants to win, he has to win, he can't afford to lose. 'Will the real man please stand up?' becomes the underlying theme. In this narrative, issues of gender and language and language learning are all summed up by the overriding theme of power.

Discussion: Norms and Beliefs in Gender and Language Learning

As regard employment patterns, a) a stereotypical image is attached to language learning and the language-related career track as women's thing and b) there are different

degrees on women and men: career paths involving language learning that encourage women but discourage men. Since career tracks are 'gendered', a school subject that leads to particular career paths is gendered too. 'Language and literature is for girls and sciences and maths for boys' seems to be a die-hard norm often perceived and taken for granted as 'tradition'. These stereotypical images could foster certain beliefs regarding each subject either as more appropriate for men or women. They imply that men are not supposed to be studying languages and that men have to act as 'Japanese' men, which could hinder them in the process of language learning. Students in classrooms are exercising their gender identity through the way they are engaged in language learning activities. The issue of employment and school subject and language learning can also be seen an issue of gender identity and ethnolinguistic identity. These elements, which might appear unrelated to each other, are actually converge in a language learning situation, and imply that factors surrounding language learning tend to function in favour for women rather than for men. Sunderland (2000: 10) suggests that gender identity “may after all be what lies behind much classroom interaction, subject choice and even proficiency.” Indeed, gender identity and ethnolinguistic identity emerged from this study as very significant aspects of language learning, bringing together issues of beliefs. This is an area which previous studies on gender and language learning have so far left to be explored. As Beebe and Giles (1984) suggests, a language learner's strong ethnolinguistic identity could lead to his or her linguistic differentiation from the target language (TL). If male students have stronger

ethnolinguistic identity than female students — or at least if they think they have to act like they have strong ethnolinguistic identity and stick to the group norm, that might be one explanation for men not going for languages.

Ethnolinguistic identity might also affect what kind of learning the learner prefers. Spolsky (1989) suggests that someone with strong ethnolinguistic identity prefers a formal language learning setting where language can be studied as a school subject; someone with weak ethnolinguistic identity prefers learning the TL in communicative interactions. The ICU students in my study confirm this trend. While female students who said they liked studying languages emphasised the importance of being able to communicate with many people and the fun of being able to travel around on their, most of the male students who said they liked studying languages said they liked it because they had been good at English as a school subject. Above theories and the narratives obtained in this study seem to indicate that men have strong ethnolinguistic identity, or are expected to appear to have strong ethnolinguistic identity, whereas women seem to receive less pressure in this area.

It seems also likely that men feel stronger normative pressure to behave accordingly to social and group expectations to avoid ridicule or social rejection. As one group of ICU male students expressed, men, they believe, want to play the upper hand in a man-woman relationship, and it is an issue of power for them. Language learners are necessarily in the 'weaker' league compared to the native speakers of the TL. Maybe many men who have taken for granted their status as the majority in the power have difficulties dealing

with this aspect of language learning. Women, on the other hand, as minority group members, are already 'bilinguals' (Lakoff 1990) and may not have as much difficulty as men to accept their position as language learners. It implies that women's and men's gender identities could either encourage or interfere with their language learning process.

Detailed narratives seem to suggest new directions of research where we can bring together a variety of issues, both inside and outside the classroom, that surround language learners. Language learners themselves can provide us with real information and insights otherwise inaccessible. More studies of this nature are needed to establish a coherent theory of gender in language learning.

- 1) Research methods and data are fully described in my Ph. D. dissertation. Morizumi 2001.
- 2) Before this, a series of pilot studies had been conducted in Edinburgh, UK, in 1997. The studies involved language teachers and language students from a variety of background in terms of nationality, age, sex, and professions.
- 3) What is judged significant by the researcher is underlined. In the transcripts, Int. stands for the interviewer / researcher, and the students are identified by their initials. The original interviews were conducted in Japanese.

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