

CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

Most studies on gender and language (Flannery, 1946; Hass, 1964; Ekka, 1972; Bodine, 1975; Lakoff, 1975, 1990; Saint-Jacques, 1976; Bolinger, 1980; Ide, 1980; Beattie, 1981; Kramarae, 1981; Schenk-van Witsen; 1981; Taylor, 1983; Preisler, 1986; Sachs, 1987; Tannen, 1986, 1990; Holmes, 1992a, 1992b; Nordenstam, 1992; Coates, 1993; Kuo, 1995, 2002; Farris, 2000; Freed & Greenwood, 1996; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003) claim that there are differences between men's and women's languages. In 1975, one of the earliest language and gender researchers, Robin Lakoff, published a book entitled "Language and Woman's Place", which argues that women's language use is different from men's. Based on her own intuition and observation, Lakoff (1975) has found that women's language is different from men's in lexical items, syntactic rules, intonational and supersegmental patterns. Lakoff proposes that women use certain linguistic features more often than men do when they talk, such as hedges (*sort of, I think*), precise color terms (*lavender, mauve*), specific adjectives (*divine, lovely*), intensifiers (*so, such*), tag questions (*isn't he, don't D*), and so on. Besides, women tend to raise intonation even when making declarative statement. Such linguistic devices are labeled as "women's language", signifying that women's talk is weak, trivial and hesitant. Since Lakoff made such claims, there have been many studies centering on language and gender.

In the following, Section 1.1 will explicate the objectives of the study. Section 1.2 will present research questions. Section 1.3 will introduce the theoretical framework of the present study. Section 1.4 will state the significance of the study. Section 5 will be the organization of the thesis.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

Following Lakoff's work, a great number of studies and books on male and female languages have been carried on. They are concerned with gender differences in a number of languages, such as English (Lakoff, 1975; Bolinger, 1980; Beattie, 1981; Kramarae, 1981; Preisler, 1986; Sachs, 1987; Tannen, 1990; Holmes, 1992a, 1992b; Coates, 1993; Freed & Greenwood, 1996; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003), French (Schenk-van Witsen; 1981), Swedish (Nordenstam, 1992), Japanese (Saint-Jacques, 1976; Ide, 1980) and many other dialects spoken in other countries (Flannery, 1946; Hass, 1964; Ekka, 1972; Bodine, 1975; Taylor, 1983).

There are also some studies on the gender issues in Chinese language, such as the studies of Shih (1984) and Farris (1988), dealing with the relationship between gender and Chinese word meanings, word formation, as well as grammar. Kuo (1995) compares male and female college students' speeches in private contexts. Wei's (1999) research focuses on gender differentiation in political discourse based on the data collected from slogans in newspaper articles, documents and commentaries. Farris (2000) examined the interaction of preschool boys and girls when they were having conflicts. Ettner (2001) investigates Chinese characters related to genders.

However, no study has yet examined male and female speech differences in public contexts, for example. Such an area of research is worth a thorough investigation for two reasons. For one, mass media industry has been booming rapidly in Taiwan in recent years. For the other, TV talk shows can largely reflect the state-of-the-art development of speech styles of males and females in the society.

Based on the above reasons, I propose to study the speech differences between the two genders in TV talk shows in the contemporary Taiwan by adopting a sociolinguistic framework. The goals of the study are two-fold: (1) to investigate whether women in Taiwan have a different way of speaking from men, as Lakoff has

postulated; (2) to investigate how *accommodation theory* may account for men's and women's speech in different types of talk shows.

1.2 Research Questions

The research questions of the present study are as follows. (1) Do women in Taiwan use more "women's language" proposed by Lakoff (1975) than men do in public domains? (2) Do men and women adjust their conversational styles as contexts change?

1.3 Theoretical Framework of the Study

This is a study exploring gender differences in Mandarin Chinese language, in which a sociolinguistic framework is adopted to explore the speech patterns of males and females. Lakoff's (1975) proposal is used as the theoretical and analytical framework to examine men's and women's languages. In Lakoff's (1975) view, gender differences in language reflect men's and women's unequal status in society; in other words, men are in a dominant position and women are subordinate. Lakoff makes the following remarks (1975:4-5):

Women experience linguistic discrimination in two ways: in the way they are taught to use language, and in the way the general language use treats them. Both tend, as we shall see, to relegate women to certain subservient functions: that of sex object, or servant; and therefore certain lexical items mean one thing applied to men, another to women, a difference that cannot be predicted except with reference to the different roles the sexes play in society.... If a little girl "talks rough" like a boy, she will normally be ostracized, scolded, or made fun of. In this way society, in the form of a child's parents and friends, keeps her in line, in her place.

Lakoff assumes that women are oppressed by the society dominated by men. Consequently, women's behavior and speech styles are affected by the unequal social position as well as the way the society expects of them. For example, they are not encouraged to express themselves assertively. Moreover, they are forced to talk like a lady. If not, they would be criticized and scolded by people around them. The social environment makes women's speech uncertain, negligible and powerless.

Besides unequal status, Lakoff suggests that gender-related differences in language have a strong psychological component (1990:202):

They are intimately related to the judgments of members of a culture about how to be and think like a good man or woman. So the characteristic forms cluster at the end of the linguistic spectrum most related to psychological expression.

In her work, Lakoff (1975) points out that women use certain linguistic devices more often than men. For instance, women use more precise color terms (*mauve* and *lavender*), empty adjectives (*adorable, charming, and divine*), hedges or fillers (*you know, sort of*), tag questions (*John is here, isn't he?*), hypercorrect grammar (no use of "ain't" or "goin'"), intensifiers (*so*), superpolite forms (*Would you please ...*), and intonation raising (*Oh...around six o'clock*). Moreover, women seldom tell jokes and they avoid speaking strong swear words (*fudge*).

The major differences between Lakoff's work and the present study are as follows. First, the data collection is different. The data in the present study were collected from public domain while the data in Lakoff's work came from private and public domains. The corpus data of the present study consisted of spontaneous speech from 12 clips of conversational programs. The TV programs were videotaped from August 15th to November 8th, 2003. However, Lakoff's data were

from the random speech of herself, her acquaintances and the media. Second, the data analysis is also different. The present study was an empirical study but Lakoff analyzed the data based on her own intuition.

The present study mainly follows Lakoff's analytical framework, with some adaptations made, though the data and language examined by the present study are different from Lakoff's. In the present study, intonation, grammar, precise color terms and expletives are not examined because of the following reasons. First, Mandarin is a tonal language instead of an intonation language (Gao, 2000). Gao argues that "Mandarin does not use intonation to express meaning. Unlike English, Mandarin does not raise the intonation at the end of the sentence to create a question... When we raise the intonation, we actually change the tone of the words on which the raised intonation is placed, and this, then, changes the word" (pp.62-63). For this reason, intonation is not investigated in the present study. Second, speakers' grammar in the present study is not considered because Mandarin grammar is different from English grammar. In Chinese, grammatical morphemes are not overt ones, and therefore they are not easy to be examined. Third, precise color terms do not occur frequently in the collected data based on the preliminary result of the pilot study. Fourth, the expletives are not found in the data.

In addition, the amount of talk and Southern Min dialect are added to be investigated. While it is people's stereotype that women are chattier than men, some previous studies claim that men talk more than women in public contexts (Tannen 1990; Holmes 1992b). What's more, Holmes (1992a) asserts that men use more vernacular language than women. Besides, some studies show that men in Taiwan code-switch more frequently than women do. More details about the modifications will be discussed in Section 3.2.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The present study investigates language and gender in the public domain. The data in the present study were collected from 12 TV programs on various TV stations in Taiwan. Other studies on gender differences in Chinese languages may have different scopes. Some focus on the private contexts, some examine children's language and others are case studies. Therefore, the present study is the first study that contributes to the understanding of male-female speech patterns in Mandarin in the public domain in Taiwan.

1.5 Organization of the Thesis

This thesis consists of five chapters. Chapter One gives a brief introduction of this study. In Chapter Two, some related previous studies are reviewed. Next, data collection and data analysis are described in Chapter Three. Chapter Four discusses the results of the study. Chapter Five summarizes the major findings, indicates implications of this study and gives some suggestions for further research.