

## CHAPTER TWO

### PREVIOUS RESEARCH AND APPROACHES TO GENDER DIFFERENCES IN LANGUAGE

In this chapter, some general relevant studies on the dissimilarity of male and female linguistic patterns will be reviewed in Section 2.1. In Section 2.2, Chinese studies dealing with male and female linguistic patterns will be discussed. In Section 2.3, *accommodation theory* will be presented. Section 2.4 will summarize the main points of this chapter.

#### **2.1 Studies on Male and Female Linguistic Patterns in Western Languages**

In both Eastern and Western cultures, it is widely believed that gender differences exist in men's and women's languages. Plenty of studies further justify the belief (Lakoff, 1975, 1990; Bolinger, 1980; Kramarae, 1981; Tannen, 1986, 1990; Holmes, 1992a; Nordenstam, 1992; Coates, 1993; Crawford, 1995; Kuo, 1995; Freed & Greenwood, 1996; Gordon, 1997; Farris, 2000). Some of these studies claim that women's speech contains certain linguistic features which seldom occur in men's speech, some compare men's and women's speaking styles, and the others deal with the interaction between males and females.

##### **2.1.1 Lakoff (1975, 1990): Women's Language**

In her article and books, Robin Lakoff (1975, 1990) argues that women talk in a very different way from men. This phenomenon can be traced back to their childhood. In childhood, "rough talk" is discouraged in little girls' speech more strongly than in boys' speech. If a little girl "talks rough" like a boy, she may be teased, scolded, and criticized. The society keeps girls in their place. Besides, when they grow to womanhood, they are still demanded to speak precisely and

politely. Therefore, “women’s language” was formed. Lakoff (1975:7) makes the following statements about women’s language:

“Women’s language—meaning both languages restricted in use to women and language descriptive of women alone—is this: it submerges a woman’s personal identity, by denying her the means of expressing herself strongly, on the one hand, and encouraging expressions that suggest triviality in subject matter and uncertainty about it; and when a woman is being discussed, by treating her as an object—sexual or otherwise—but never a serious person with individual view.”

Additionally, Lakoff (1990) defines men’s language as “the language of the powerful, which is meant to be direct, clear, and succinct” (p.205). Women’s language was “originally defined as language spoken by people who are not in power” (1990:206). However, when women have achieved power in business and in professional fields, they still use women’s language to some degree. As Lakoff (1990) has presented, “women’s language becomes a symbolic expression of distance from power, or lack of interest in power” (pp.205-206). Compared with men’s language, women’s language is considered so “unimportant” and therefore, women are asked to listen more than to speak, to agree more than to confront, to be dedicated, to be indirect and so on.

According to Lakoff (1975), the speech difference between males and females resulted from the fact that “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” (p.4). Lakoff notes that women tend to choose more precise color words (*mauve* and *lavender* instead of *purple*) to describe things. They are also likely to raise intonation even when they are stating declaratives (Men: When will we have dinner tonight? Women: *Oh, around six o’clock?*). Besides, empty adjectives

(*adorable, charming, and divine*), hypercorrect grammar (hence they won't say "ain't" or "goin'"), intensifiers (*so; such*) and superpolite forms (*Would you please ...?*) occur more frequently in women's speech. In contrast, women seldom tell jokes.

In addition, women are claimed to use more hedges or fillers (*you know, sort of*) to express uncertainty and unassertiveness. Besides, women's speech also includes a lot of tag questions (*John is here, isn't he?*) which decrease assertiveness. Moreover, they also avoid using strong swear words (*fudge*) (Lakoff, 1975; Bolinger, 1980; Holmes, 1992b; Coates, 1993).

For a long time, Robin Lakoff's work has been viewed as a great influence on research on language and gender. Crawford (1995:23) comments:

It was the work of linguist Robin Lakoff that began the search for the definite features of women's speech. She introduced the term "women's language" in a 1973 article in *Language in Society*,... Her 1975 book *Language and Woman's Place* has been enormously influential... Virtually every empirical study of sex difference in language use for the next two decades would cite her works.

In the same way, Hill highly praises Lakoff's work as well: (1986:17)

Despite criticisms... her book has stood the test of time. *Language and Woman's Place* is still in print, and it is the most cited work in the field. It is virtually impossible to pick up a book dealing with women and language without finding a reference to Lakoff. Whether the author agrees or disagrees with her thesis, Lakoff is mentioned.

However, it is a weakness with regard to the methodology in Lakoff's work. Lakoff examined the random speech of herself, her acquaintances and the media. Besides, she analyzed the data based on her own intuition. In terms of this weakness,

Swann has made the following comments (2002:57-58):

One of the earliest language and gender researchers, Robin Lakoff, explicitly appealed to her intuitions as a member of a (North American) community in arguing for the existence of a set of linguistic features that were associated primarily with women. At the time Lakoff made this claim there was still relatively little in the way of empirical research on women's (or men's) language. Her work proved useful as a stimulus for further studies (although, as I mentioned above, her intuition have not been consistently supported by such studies). Researchers today would be unlikely to make explicit use of intuition to support an empirical based claim about women's/men's language use.

In my view, in spite of such weakness, Lakoff's work still contributes a great deal to the linguistic field in general. Just like Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003) has stated, "It is easy to criticize Lakoff's specific asserts about gender and the use of particular forms, but her pioneer work had the important effect of directing attention to the critical issues of power in the interaction of language and gender" (p.160).

Similar to Lakoff (1975, 1990), Bolinger (1980) agrees that women's language has been regarded as the "marked" or "exceptional" form and women play subordinate roles in the society. The language about women reflects the attitudes of men toward women and the attitudes of women toward themselves. The language of women is evidence of women's perception of themselves. Bolinger notes (1980:99):

"Female speech is stigmatized... A woman is not apt to be more esteemed by a man if she sounds less feminine... But for a man to use feminine tones and forms in any consistent pattern is taken by most other men to be grossly inappropriate, and this tells us something of men's regard for women and their place in society, as well as men's regard for men."

### **2.1.2 Other Studies on Linguistic Differences Between Males and Females**

In addition to Lakoff's and Bolinger's work, many other studies display language differences between males and females (Maltz and Borker, 1982; Fishman, 1983; Tannen, 1986, 1990; Coates, 1993; Nordenstam, 1992). First, women are believed to ask more questions, give and receive more compliments while men use more directives and taboo languages. Second, women employ more minimal responses and back-channels (*uh-huh, mhm, yeah*) at appropriate moments to show listener's attention and support. Despite the fact that men and women both use minimal responses and back-channels, they tend to use them in extremely different ways. Women keep inserting "mhm," "yeah," and other such comments throughout the conversation to exhibit they are listening and understanding. It is a way to demonstrate women's participation, attention and interest, which is viewed as "support work." In contrast, men tend to use minimal responses to display lack of interest or to show that they agree (Maltz and Borker, 1982; Fishman, 1983).

In general women use more hedges than men do, however, Coates (1993) and Freed & Greenwood (1996) suggest that researchers should pay attention to the different functions of using hedges and take situated contexts into consideration rather than merely count the instances.

Besides precise color terms, intonation raising, empty adjectives, hypercorrect grammar, intensifiers, superpolite forms, hedges and fillers, tag questions and avoidance of strong swear words, women are considered to use more prestige speech and standard forms of language but men use more vernacular forms (Holmes, 1992a; 1992b; Gordon, 1997).

### **2.1.2.1 Tannen (1986; 1990)**

Along the same line, Tannen (1990) has pointed out several asymmetries between men's and women's speech. For instance, when responding to friends' troubles, men tend to contribute information, suggestion or solution but women try to provide comfort and support. Besides, men incline to use technical language (like terminology of computers or electric appliance) in explaining things when acting as helpers while most women avoid using those terms but choose simpler and clearer words. Moreover, according to convention, women are willing to be givers of compliments while men give more information, criticism, and questions to others.

However, Tannen (1986; 1990) holds different views from Lakoff in the reasons contributing to gender differences in language. Lakoff (1975) claims that the gender differences in language reflect men's and women's unequal status in society. But Tannen (1986; 1990) suggests that male-female conversation can be like cross-cultural conversation. Tannen states that during the process of socialization and acculturation, boys and girls learn different ways of speaking. Therefore, women and men have different experiences because they are treated differently and are talked to in different manners. As a result, they talk differently. Therefore, men and women speak different "genderlects" even though they live in the same community. Tannen explains that although boys and girls grow up in the same world, they grow up in different worlds of words because they accept different ways of talking from others (1990:42-43):

Even if they grow up in the same neighborhood, on the same block, or in the same house, girls and boys grow up in different worlds of words. Others talk to them differently and expect and accept different ways of talking from them. Most important, children learn how to talk, how to have conversations, not only from their parents but from their peers.

What's more, Tannen (1986; 1990) has presented that the games boys and girls play are also distinct, in which they learn how to talk and behave. Boys mainly play in a large group and they play competitive, rule-regulated and untamed games. "Once in the group, boys must jockey for their status in it. One of the most important ways to do this is through talk: verbal display such as telling stories and jokes, challenging and sidetracking the verbal display of other boys...their talk is often competitive talk about who is best at what" (p.135). Yet, girls tend to play gentle, cooperative and harmless activities in small groups in which everybody has a turn to take part. In such different worlds of play, the variation of boys' and girls' ways of speaking emerges.

#### **2.1.2.2 Holmes (1992a)**

Different from Tannen, Holmes (1992a) considers that the reasons contributing to the gender differences may be as follows. She states, "if a community is very hierarchical... men are more powerful than women, then linguistic differences between the speech of women and men may be just one dimension of more extensive differences reflecting the social hierarchy as a whole" (p.166). She indicates that women's opinions are easily overlooked because of their subordinate position in a male-dominated society even though they have good occupations. Holmes further manifests that "the norms for women's talk may be the norms for small group interaction in private contexts, where the goals of the interaction are solidarity stressing-- maintaining good social relations... By contrast, the norms for male interaction seem to be those of public referentially-oriented interaction." It reveals that women's discourse is viewed as insignificant, trifling and worthless.

### **2.1.2.3 Sachs (1987)**

Like many other researchers, Sachs (1987) has found gender differences in language when he observes children who are formed in same-sex pairs in role plays. The results show that boys use much more simple imperative forms (*Lie down!*) than girls when they attempt to change the partner's behavior. In addition, boys also use five times of prohibitions like the pattern which starts with "Don't" than girls. However, girls use twice more tag questions than boys to provide their addressees with more opportunities to agree or disagree with the statements. When showing mitigation, boys tend to use yes/no questions while girls used more joint utterances (*we; let's*). The overall data show that much more of girls' utterances are mitigated than boys'.

### **2.1.2.4 Topic Differences**

In addition to the linguistic styles, the topics which men and women choose to talk about are also distinct (Tannen, 1986; Holmes, 1992a; Nordenstam, 1992; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003). Previous studies suggest that in men's groups, the topics under discussion are mainly about things or activities, such as cars, jobs, plans, sports, politics, history and so on. But they talk very little about such topics as feelings or relationship with others. On the contrary, women share a lot about feelings and personal relationships, such as friends, family, lovers, problems, fears and so forth. Nordenstam (1992) has found that in his study that the women prefer to talk about personal topics, especially in the single-gender groups. Similarly, in married couple groups, wives tend to talk about womanly things but husbands talk about other things.

With regard to topic difference, Tannen (1986) proposes that because men and women are interested in different types of topics, sometimes they feel that the



participants of the opposite sex are not paying attention when the conversations are going on. Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (2003) argue that such topic difference is based on social values. Since childhood, men are supposed to be strong, competitive and powerful and are encouraged to play outside. Consequently, they spend more time engaging in activities with their friends. On the contrary, a woman's worth is built in domestic realm. Women are expected to maintain the family order and therefore, they are supposed to pay more attention to their personal relationships. Such different expectations and social environment make men's and women's conversational topics distinct.

Moreover, Fishman (1983) notes that in male-female everyday conversations, women raise about twice more topics than men do. However, although women have the attempts to raise topics, only 38 % of the topics introduced by them develop into conversations. The topics initiated by women are apt to fail because in many cases men do not support to make them go on. In contrast, men's topics constantly go on smoothly not because their topics are more interesting but because women regularly respond to the topics by taking conversational turns. What's more, Tannen (1990) suggests that women make more adjustments than men in choosing topics. In male-female conversations, women follow the style of men and talk more about "men's topics" such as activities and sports.

#### **2.1.2.5 Differences in Interruption**

Besides the dissimilarities discussed above, there is a marked asymmetry between males' and females' language with respect to interruption. Nordenstam defines interruption as follows (1992:87-88):

An interruption is a turn talking which violates the current speaker's turn. The speaker is not allowed to finish his turn unit. This could occur with or without simultaneous speech. Thus, 1. speaker shift takes place before transition point, without simultaneous speech; 2. speaker shift takes place before transition point with simultaneous speech occurring. I call both these types *interruption*.

Zimmerman and West (1975) also view interruption as violation of the turn-taking system rules. They follow the model of Sacks *et al.* (1974), which describes the properties of the turn-taking mechanism for conversation. According to Sacks *et al.*, "a turn is constructed by the speaker out of 'unit-types' which can consist of single words, phrases, clauses or sentences" (p.107). The turn-taking mechanism suggests that under ideal conditions, there is a minimum of perceptible gaps and no instances of simultaneous talk.

Like other linguistic behavior, interruption also reveals unequal distributions in different groups. Generally speaking, interruption occurs more frequently in mixed-gender groups than in single-gender ones. Moreover, most interruptions are caused by men. As Lakoff (1990) states, "Men do much more interrupting of women than women of men" (p.49). In addition, when comparing two single-gender groups, men's group also interrupts each other more than women's group does (Zimmerman and West, 1975; Nordenstam, 1992). Nordenstam (1992) indicates that in all-man's groups 3.3% of interruptions are found, while only 2.3% of them occur in all-women's groups. However, in married groups the distribution of interruption between men and women is rather close. Nordenstam explains this indistinct difference may be due to the speech context. The data are collected at home and home is women's realm. Therefore, men reduce the degree of interruption at this sphere.

Contrary to Nordenstam, Zimmerman and West (1975) have found a significant difference of interruption in cross-sex conversations. In 11 cross-sex conversational segments, 96% of interruptions are made by male speakers. However, Zimmerman and West suggest that it is important to notice whether the interruptions are clustered in certain conversations or not. If they are, they are problems about personal styles instead of general phenomena. In addition, researchers should take the context and situation into account, such as what is under discussion, speaker's intentions, their reactions to each other and what effects the "interruption" has on the conversation, rather than simply count the instances (Zimmerman and West, 1975; Tannen, 1990). Zimmerman and West believe that interruptions function as a topic control mechanism. They make the following observation (1975:124-125):

Male assert an asymmetrical right to control topics and do so without evident repercussions.... men deny equal status to women as conversational partners with respect to rights to the full utilization of their turns and support for the development of topics.

Tannen (1990) also points out that interruption is generally viewed as a hostile act and it carries metamessages that the interlocutor doesn't care about, doesn't listen to and isn't interested in the topic. Sometimes it raises the issue of dominance and control. However, Tannen explains that an interruption does not always mean to interrupt. Inadvertent and unintended interruptions take place now and again when interlocutors are eager to show support and participation. Compared with men, women tend to be highly cooperative and collaborative speakers because in casual conversation they overlap in a highly cooperative and collaborative way. They do not mean to violate their partners' speaking rights but are keen to show enthusiastic involvement in the conversation. Yet, men often misunderstand women's

“interruption” as “control of the conversation” and have the feeling that their floors have been deprived. This situation results from men’s and women’s different conversational styles. Tannen (1990) proposes two terms, “rapport-talk” and “report-talk”, to describe women’s and men’s conversational styles, respectively. “Rapport-talk” is women’s way of talk, which reveals involvement and support in the conversation. By contrast, “report-talk” is a way for men to manage contest by using language. These terms also mean that women prefer personal talk in private contexts whereas men like to talk in public places. When the talk is much more like report talk, women do not incline to participate, and therefore cooperative interruption does not occur frequently. On the contrary, when the talk is like rapport talk, women are ready to take part in.

Distinct from the findings of Zimmerman & West and Nordenstam, Beattie’s (1981) research indicates that there is no significant gender difference in interruption when he observed 10 tutorial groups. However, this is not because males interrupt less but because females interrupt more. In most cases, women do not deliberately try to make impressions. But in this study, the students have some pressure on performance because the tutorial context requires them to make good impressions. Therefore, context has a great influence on interruption between genders.

### **2.1.2.6 Difference in Sense of Humor**

When it comes to sense of humor, men seem to be better joke-tellers. Norrick (1993) remarks that in general male and female speakers play different roles in humor production and reaction. That is, in a mixed-gender conversation, males are apt to initiate jokes while females tend to play the role as listeners, responding to the jokes with laughter. Moreover, Mitchell (1985) also points out that there are differences in joke-telling patterns between men and women. General speaking, men tell more

“openly aggressive jokes” than women because in the society men are encouraged to be more aggressive than women. Besides, men enjoy telling jokes to large audiences while women would rather tell jokes to small audiences. Although both men and women tell the majority of their jokes to the audiences of the same sex, men also like to tell jokes to the opposite-sex and the mixed-sex audiences but women do not. In addition, men tell more jokes in public places while women prefer doing this in private occasions. Besides, Tannen (1990) argues that fewer women than men can tell jokes and funny stories in front of others.

#### **2.1.2.7 Differences in Amount of Talk**

In spite of the differences mentioned above, Coates (1993) suggests that some of the language differences are only part of folk knowledge or cultural stereotypes. Eckert & McConnell-Ginet view stereotype as follows (2003:85):

Stereotypes are the starting point of much research on language and gender for a reason.... If gender stereotypes are part of our sociolinguistic life, they need to be examined – not simply as possible facts about language use, but as component of gender ideology. Our linguistic behavior is intertwined with ideology, and stereotypes are not simply “lies” about language, but exaggerations with a purpose. And that purpose is part of what makes language tick.

For example, it is widespread belief that women talk more than men. However, numerous studies do not confirm what people generally believe in. Eckert & McConnell-Ginet objected to such a stereotype. They make the following observation (2003:114-115):

We are all familiar with stereotypes about gender differences in speech quantity in western societies, where women are commonly portrayed

as talking excessively and trivially. But does this stereotype actually hold up? ... Research on amount of speech shows that not only do men talk more overall than women, but that women and men tend to talk more in different kinds of situations.

Likewise, Nordenstam (1992) has found that his result is not equivalent to the stereotype which claims that women talk more than men. When comparing 18 groups (6 male groups, 6 female groups and 6 marriage groups), Nordenstam notices that men's groups have the longest turns, with an average of 12.3 words per utterance. The next is marriage groups, with an average of 11.3 words per utterance. Women's groups have the shortest, with 8.2 words per utterance. However, if men's and women's utterances are compared purely in the 6 marriage groups, women talk in longer turns than men. It seems to correspond to the general belief. But Nordenstam explains that in these 6 marriage groups, the three most talkative women are the ones who are responsible for the data recording. Nordenstam believes that the people who are in charge of the data recording tend to talk more than their conversational partners because they are under the pressure of data recording. This pressure may have an effect on the amount of talk in the study.

By the same token, Tannen (1990) objects to such a stereotype by suggesting that men talk more in public contexts. Tannen states that in a one-hour talk show, 90% of the audience that called in to discuss the topic were men. However, very few women do so. That does not mean that women are not interested in the topic but they prefer to discuss it in private contexts, such as lunchtime or tea break. In contrast, men feel at ease and comfortable to speak in public. Tannen also asserts that as a woman, she herself does not always feel free to speak in front of others, and therefore, she never calls in to a talk show to give opinions even though sometimes she is sure that she can make some contribution to the topic.

In summary, Lakoff (1975) as well as some previous studies (Lakoff, 1975, 1990; Bolinger, 1980; Kramarae, 1981; Tannen, 1986, 1990; Holmes, 1992a; Nordenstam, 1992; Coates, 1993; Crawford, 1995; Kuo, 1995; Freed & Greenwood, 1996; Gordon, 1997; Farris, 2000) find that gender difference in language does exist. Men and women are different with respect to many aspects of language use, such as precise color words (*mauve* and *lavender* instead of *purple*), intonation, empty adjectives (*adorable, charming, and divine*), hedges (*I think, sort of*), hypercorrect grammar (women seldom say “*ain t*” or “*goin*”), intensifiers (*so*), superpolite forms (*Would you please ...?*), joke-telling, topics for talking, interruptions, sense of humor, the amount of talk, advice-giving and conflict-dealing.

## **2.2 Studies on Male and Female Linguistic Patterns in Chinese Languages**

Similar too many other Western researchers (Lakoff, 1975; Kramarae, 1981; Holmes, 1992a; Nordenstam, 1992; Coates, 1993; Greenwood, 1996; Freed & Greenwood, 1996; Gordon, 1997; Hopper & LeBaron, 1998; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003), Kuo (1995) and Farries (2000) also find some asymmetric linguistic behavior between males and females when they studied Chinese language.

### **2.2.1 Kuo (1995)**

Kuo (1995) discovers that the topics men and women talk about are different. In her study, the subjects are all college students. When male students get together, the topic they talk about most is curricula, such as courses, study loads, exams and so on. Besides, they also discuss a lot about political issues when they are only with male students. However, they never talk about their families and their relationships with families members. On the contrary, female students' topics are greatly dissimilar to male students'. Very few of females' topics are about study and

political issues. Instead, female students are more interested in topics related to interpersonal relationships and recreation when they are together. Yet, when the students are in a mixed-sex group, they discuss a variety of topics, including both men's and women's topics.

Besides, the ways men and women deal with humor are also different. Kuo (1995) points out that in mixed-gender conversations, 70% of the humorous expressions are generated by males. By contrast, 70% of the laughter created by females functions as women's understanding, appreciation and pleasure of men's performance. Her research result corresponds to that of Norrick's (1993).

In addition, when dealing with advice-giving, Kuo (1995) notices that men and women have distinct differences both in occurrences and in linguistic forms. In ten all-female conversations, seven contain advice-giving while only half of all-male conversations include this speech act. In these ten all-female conversations, there are 4 times as many examples of advice-giving as in all-male conversations. To give advice, women make use of various kinds of linguistic devices such as imperatives (*you need to use...*), sentences containing auxiliary modals (*can*) or hedges (*I think*) and justification with advice forms (*suggest*) so that the addressees have the option of carrying out the advice or let it alone. Unlike women's, all men's advice is in imperative forms.

In addition to the similarities, Kuo (1995) has found some points contrary to the previous studies. For example, Zimmerman and West (1975) state that men interrupt women more often, but Kuo (1995) does not find significant gender differences in interruption. In her study, it is not obvious which gender interrupts more or which gender is interrupted more. She explains that the interruption in her study is affected by the speakers' conversational styles, their role relationship and the speech activities they take part in instead of the distinction of gender. However, I argue that the



interruption pattern between genders in Kuo's study, which differs from the traditional pattern, is affected by the relationship between subjects. Traditionally, men have higher status than women. But the participants in Kuo's study are all college students and they are about the same age so they are equal in status. Therefore, regardless of their gender, each participant dares to express what they really want to say spontaneously, even when their interlocutors are males. In addition, Kuo (1995) also presents that most of the interruptions are considered cooperative and non-disruptive, such as repeating the first speaker's previous utterance, asking questions, giving comments and so on. The speakers show their enthusiasm about the topic under discussion by keeping overlapping or interrupting. Only 6 % of them are disruptive and dominated.

Moreover, Kuo's (1995) finding also contradicts the claim that women are more talkative than men. She recorded 24 daily conversations of college students and counted the total number of turns of talking, the total number of words and the average length of each turn. She indicates that in informal, private contexts, male speakers take more talk turns and talk in greater length. However, it should be noted that some of Kuo's male subjects were working for the University Counseling Center when the data were being collected. The verbosity may have something to do with their jobs so that it may influence the result of the study.

### **2.2.2 Farris (2000)**

In addition to Kuo (1995), Farris (2000) has found some speech distinctions between Taiwanese preschool boys and girls. She indicates that when dealing with cross-sex peer conflicts, preschool girls use both feminine- and masculine-linked speech styles. For example, sometimes they adopt mitigated forms of speech and subtle mediating devices, such as feminine-stereotypic lexicon, tone of voice,

nasalized speech and hand gestures, to prevent conflicts from becoming serious. Besides, they also use a more masculine sex-typed style, such as rude and bald directive forms in handling arguments. By contrast, boys generally use one style to handle conflicts. Most of the boys' forms are bald directives and very few mitigated expressions.

In summary, relevant Chinese studies on linguistic patterns have manifested linguistic variation between Taiwanese males and females. First, they are different in choosing topics for talk. Second, the ways they deal with humor are also different. Third, they are also different in advice-giving and dealing with conflicts.

### **2.3 Accommodation Theory**

Accommodation Theory, which is proposed by Giles and Smith (1979), states that people's speech styles become similar to each other according to the settings and the interlocutors when they have a conversation. According to Giles and Smith, the concept of *convergence* is "... individuals shift their speech styles to become more like that of those with whom they are interacting" (p.46). They also remark that "... many speech shifts traditionally viewed as rule-governed, for example, adult-to-child, young-to-old, male-to-female and speech to foreigners, can be subsumed under an accommodation rubric" (p.47). Holmes (1992a) further elaborates her viewpoints of accommodation, "Converging toward the speech of another person is usually a polite speech strategy. It implies that the addressee's speech is acceptable and worth imitating (p.255).

Therefore, in some contexts people tend to adjust their conversational styles in order to make the conversation go well and gain acceptance from others. Holmes (1992a) asserts that social and cultural factors may also contribute to accommodation. Holmes offers an example which describes a female Minister talks with a deeper

voice than average in the radio interview so that the Minister cannot be recognized the as a female. Lakoff (1990) also points out that since men's language is the language of power, and therefore "women in business or professional settings often sound indistinguishable from their male counterparts. Speakers of nondominant forms must be bilingual in this way, at least, passively, to survive" (p.202). Consequently, Holmes considers this the society's preference for voices with masculine associations in politics. Thus, female politicians may use male models in order to win the public's acceptance. This example reveals that a female changes her speech style to that of a man's to make her speech more forceful.

Similar to Holmes' (1992a) example, Kuo (2001) has found that the speech of Taiwan Vice President Xio-lien Lu contains some features that are not so much like "women's language" when she analyzed Lu's linguistic behavior and communicational style in a radio interview. For example, Lu interrupts the interviewer much more often than she is interrupted. When she is interrupted, unlike other women, she refuses to give up the floor by saying "I haven't finished speaking yet." Just as Lakoff (1990) has mentioned, "Women in public positions, in interviews on television, seem to be learning that they don't need to be nice ladies and take it" (p.213). Women in public context seem to be learning to tell people who interrupt them to let them finish their utterances, not just accept the interruption without complaint.

In addition, Lu also uses rhetoric questions which begin with "why" to express displeasure and annoyance directly. Hence, Lu has adapted her linguistic behavior in order to compete in men's world. However, this study is a case study, which observes Lu alone and the result cannot be generalized to the linguistic behavior of all the female political figures. As a result, a large-scale empirical study needs to be conducted to examine the general patterns of female speech.

In short, a lot of studies have suggested gender differences in language. However, sometimes people shift their speech styles consciously or subconsciously to be more like the opposite sex in order to make the conversation get on well, to make the interlocutors feel comfortable or just to win identity from the listeners.

## 2.4 Summary of Chapter Two

In this chapter, literature on male and female linguistic variation was reviewed. First, Lakoff (1975) proposes the characteristics of “women’s language”, which indicated the differences between men’s and women’s language use. Lakoff suggests that women use more precise color words (*mauve* and *lavender* instead of *purple*) to describe things, raise intonation even when they are stating declaratives (Men: When will we have dinner tonight? Women: *Oh...*, *around six o’clock?*), use more empty adjectives (*adorable*, *charming*, and *divine*), hedges (*I think*, *sort of*), hypercorrect grammar (hence they won’t say “*ain’t*” or “*goin’*”), intensifiers (*so*) and superpolite forms (*Would you please ...?*). By contrast, women tell fewer jokes than men. Second, other previous studies have pointed out that men and women are different with regard to the following aspects: topics for talking, interruptions, sense of humor, the amount of talk, advice-giving and conflict-dealing. Third, status, socialization and acculturation are the reasons contributing to gender difference in language. Fourth, studies on male and female linguistic patterns in Chinese languages also show linguistic differences between males and females. In addition, accommodation theory states that male’s and female’s speech patterns may change as context and addressee vary.