

Book Review:

Lakoff, Robin T. *Language and woman's place*. New York:
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Reviewed by Aqsa Iqbal

The marginality and powerlessness of women is reflected in both the ways women are expected to speak, and the ways in which women are spoken of. In appropriate women's speech, strong expression of feeling is avoided, expression of uncertainty is favored, and means of expression in regard to subject-matter deemed 'trivial' to the 'real' world are elaborated. Speech about women implies an object, whose sexual nature requires euphemism, and whose social roles are derivative and dependent in relation to men. The personal identity of women thus is linguistically submerged; the language works against treatment of women, as serious persons with individual views.

A patriarchal society suppresses woman in every possible way. Women are told how to behave, how to dress, how to walk and even the choice of their vocabulary is governed by the rules decided by society. Society labels women as 'good' and 'bad' categorizing their behavior as "lady-like" (highly acceptable by a patriarchal society) and "manly" (highly undesirable by society). Right from the beginning girls are trained to behave and act like perfect ladies whereas this concept sounds very foreign when talking about a little boy. A list of don'ts is quite longer for a girl i.e, good girls don't shout, they don't get over excited, they don't scream, don't use swear words and they can't be assertive in their opinion. From Robin's point of view woman's language lacks certainty and they are always asking for reinforcement in simple statements from their listeners. Society wants man to be heard and to be taken more seriously than women. For this reason man's choice of words sounds more reassuring and confident than women. Robin further argues that the use of forceful lexicon by men is not incidental and society denies the acceptance of woman as individual that's why women language is uninvolved and out of power.

Robin Lakoff in her book 'Language and Women's Place' courageously ventures in the realm of gender and language and sees how women are linguistically bound with their choice of

words. Robin argues that women's cognitive abilities are judged as per their linguistic behavior and are thus denied access to authority. Woman's language, as termed by Robin Lakoff, is characterized by super polite terms, extensive use of intensifiers, question tags and lack of assertive imperative sentences. She believes that all these elements tend to make woman's language less dominant rather giving it a submissive tone; thus making women very uncertain and doubtful about their opinion. Women register has proved a double edged sword for women, if they accept the register and adopt themselves to it; they lack certainty and are unable to think clearly and always find themselves at risk of being taken not seriously. On the other hand, if they use more assertive impressions they are considered rebel, 'un-lady-like' and 'manly'.

Making point clearer that WL actually lacks the authority Robin states that women choose neutral language in professional and academic context when they want to sound more realistic and authoritative. So for women making a choice between neutral and woman's language is not an easy task. They can use WL (woman's language) and sound uncertain and less competent or can use a neutral language and be labeled as unfeminine and man like.

"Language and Woman's Place" consists of 3 sections namely: the language used by women, syntactical patterns followed by women speech and languages used for women. Robin further argues that woman language sounds more apologetic than a neutral language. Basing her argument on these points Lakoff in subsequent chapters discusses the way women language differs from neutral or men language.

Choice of the words made by a speaker actually conveys his strength that is completely lacking in a women language. Robin records the two reactions to the same situation:

- i) Oh dear you have put the peanut butter in the refrigerator again.
- ii) Shit, you've put the peanut butter in the refrigerator again.

1st sentence can easily be classified as a representative of WL because of its apologetic tone and second sentence is from a neutral language where displeasure is shown forcefully. A requirement of WL is to be polite even when it is not needed that's why women's choice of word is being mocked at.

Robin wisecracks the use of adjectives that she believes occur more frequently in WL than in neutral language. Men very consciously avoid using these terms in their language since they believe that it could cause a serious harm to their reputation. Following are the carefully selected words by Robin.

<u>Women language</u>	<u>Neutral Language</u>
Adorable	Great
Charming	Terrific
Sweet	Cool
Lovely	Neat
Divine	

Robin calls attention to another feature of women speech that is extensive use of intensifiers i.e. the use of 'so' instead of 'really', 'very' and 'utterly'. She cites example from women language.

- A
- i) I feel so unhappy.
 - ii) I feel very unhappy.
- B
- i) That movie made me so sick.
 - ii) That movie made me really sick.

In next part Robin Lakoff answers the question about the syntactical patterns found in the speech of women. She points out the extensive use of question tags by woman. Use of question is very much different to the use of question tag. A question tag shows that speaker has the knowledge but is not very confident of his knowledge and needs a reassurance from the listener. Question tags are all about asking and looking for a confirmation from the addressee, and do not show any kind of commitments on the part of speaker as they leave a doubt. Women, since they don't want to be assertive and want to avoid conflict with addressee if they hold a different opinion, make use of question tags.

- i) Can I qualify for a driving license?
- ii) I can qualify for a driving license, can't I?

Robin identifies the intonation pattern in the speech of women. She believes that intonation shows her hesitation, and in return this hesitation shown in her language declares her inability to take the serious responsibility, like rising intonations on a declarative sentence. Robin further demonstrates the idea of specific stress patterns used by women in their language as

women tend to use emphatic stress more in their language than man.

In next part of her book Robin analysis the language used for women. According to her words used for men and women lack parallelism. She argues that coy terms are used for women and her search doesn't go unanswered. She finds the words 'lady' and 'women' not a good substitute but rather having different connotations. Another such example is of the word 'women sculpture' while there is no term as 'male sculpture'; implying that if sculpture is used in isolation it is understood that it is a man since it is not very usual for a woman to be a sculpture; same is true for other professions like lady doctor where there is no word like male doctor in use. We do have the word like first lady to use for the wife of the president but we don't have its relational antonym may be thinking that a woman can never be a president.

Society is not ready to think of a woman as an independent being. She is defined with her relation to a male; she is somebody's daughter, a wife or a girlfriend. This domination is shown even in the titles used for women. The titles used for the women are Miss, Mrs. or Ms. indicating her marital status but there is no such thing for man. They are married, single or divorced; they always maintain their title 'Mr.'. Robin further investigates the choice of words used for women follow a quite different syntactical pattern than words used for men. Master and mistress both words are converse antonyms so should be following same syntactic pattern but they do not.

i) Liza is a mistress.....

This is an incomplete sentence it needs the masculine possessive noun to convey the complete the meaning while master demands something as its object. Bachelor is a neutral word often a compliment but spinster is an excessively prudish term implying the hopelessness. After the exchange of vows final declaration comes as 'I now pronounce you as man and wife.' So marriage has changed the status of woman she is a wife now but it didn't affect the status of man. Since man doesn't have any need to be known by the woman in his life.

Consider following sentences:

- i) He is a professional.
- ii) She is a professional.

In the first sentence a man can be anything a lawyer a doctor a banker or from any other profession but Robin argues that second sentence would convey to the most of readers most of the readers or hearers that she is a prostitute. Robin Lakoff thinks that man is defined in a serious world by what he does while woman is defined by her relationship to man. Women are known as someone's wife or girlfriends never otherwise. Robin Lakoff ends the book with some suggestion on how to make the women language more neutral and should be freed from the effect of sexuality.

Lakoff unarguably presents her argument in a best possible way. The main argument that questions Lakoff's all ideas is why does she consider man's speech a standard? What does make her feel that man's speech is better than woman's? Lakoff uses man's language as a yard stick to measure woman's language. Women's choice of words can make women's language different but certainly not inferior. Will the use of male language by women make them strong and more competent? Secondly, the use of question tags are not only limited to women, men do use them, and use them with virtual impunity. Dubios and Crouch in one of their survey proved that men use more question tags than women. Same is true for her observation about the use of intensifier it clearly can be just a marker of WL, not necessarily making it inferior.

The differences in speech patterns of woman and man are attained by speakers in their childhood so these differences are representative of culture and different roles that culture assigns to different genders and not determined by power and status. Lakoff considers women speech deficient and lacking power and authority; her work could have attained more acceptance by subculture theorists if there were a comparison between men and women's speech to show the differences and virtues of each.

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