

Linguistics and Women's Speech

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Abstract

This article, which has as object of analysis the women speech, will be an addition to those articles and to that authentic scientific literature, in the sociolinguistics field and respectively the ethnolinguistic one. Some of the questions that are asked today regarding this object are precisely related to the fact of how women are treated today based on their language, which are their language corpus, the possibility that they have to use it in specific fields and in different linguistic situations discourse, reacting with their support, their protests and their appreciation. Also, this article, will present that way of speaking, that today researchers have defined as "the rhetoric expression" and "subversive speech strategies". Through the linguistic behavior and the women attitude according to their position and social status, will emerge the importance of the gender belonging of the speaker in certain situations and environments.

Keywords: *linguistic, ethnolinguistic, speech, women register.*

'Studies on women' in an interdisciplinary field in many American universities which can be studied as a primary subject, upon which influence the following disciplines: sociology, psychology, political sciences, pedagogical sciences, justice, history, literature studies, anthropology and linguistics. There have been two prominent attitudes regarding women's speech, one given by the dialectological school of the first middle of the 19th century, according to which women are more conservative than man, and the other given in more recent times by the sociolinguists, who are prone to considerate women as innovative subjects, because they are more sensible to the shapes of prestige, as frequently testified by the sociolinguist William Labov, according to which 'in careful speech, women use fewer stigmatized forms than men, and are more sensitive than men to the prestige pattern. They show this in sharper shape of style shifting, especially at the formal end of the spectrum'.¹ Women generally use a lower number of stigmatized forms compared to men and they are more sensitive to the prestige model compare to men. Therefore they want a clear inflection toward style change, especially in the extremity of the formal spectrum.²

Only in linguistics we can find bibliography with hundreds of titles regarding women's speech. Since 1958 Fishman has mentioned and augmented the acceptance of a linguistic variety connected in a visible way with the situation and sex. He analyzed the social understanding of varieties with -im and -ing (verbal suffixes in English language), by inquiring the speech of a group composed of 24 children in a village of New England, divided by two criteria, by age from 3-6 years and 7-10 years and gender females and males. Every child had to tell a story which is going to be studied as the material of the study. The result of the analysis was that the -ing suffix was more frequently used by women than men, therefore according to Fishman, the -ing suffix is a characteristic of women's speech, whereas the -im suffix is a characteristic of men's speech. Moreover Fishman noticed that children coming from higher social class had a broader use of the -ing suffix, but this should not be considered to be less meaningful than the difference based on sex.³

These so called varieties were up to recently regional or historically determined, in the present days they are determined by sociolinguistic which deals with language and with the neglecting of minorities and of the underprivileged will be determined according to the correspondence to specific groups. For instance there are studied on children belonging to low social classes in England, to people with color in Detroit, to young people with color in New York, to Italian workers in Germany etc. From the moment when women were conceived as a group and were placed in the centre of public scrutiny, from the moment they showed importance of being neglected, in linguistics began a movement interested in finding their neglectation in linguistics and by male speakers.

Specific social facts have a direct linguistic analogy. For instance taking into consideration the fact that there are

¹ Labov, 1984, f. 243

² Gj. Shkurtaj, *Etnografia e të folurit të shqipëse*, SHBLU, Tiranë, 2004, f. 246

³ Gj. Shkurtaj, *Sociolinguistika*, SHBLU, Tiranë, 1999, f. 156

just few women in specific scientific positions, administration or politics, in language we have a lack of specific professional terms, titles or verses dedicated to women; however discriminating acts are just linguistics act or the discrimination of a specific situation can be verbally expressed. Even though we still do not have enough data and there is the need to conduct deeper research, we can preliminary say that we can notice a certain distinction between men's and women's speech even in Albanian language. It has been noticed that in the city of Tirana and also in many parts belonging to the South the pronunciation of the phoneme /rr/ as vibrating /r/ is more frequent among women than in man, and the forms with /r/ are more frequent in the standard language, and also a type of distinguishing element of coming from the capital and cities of Southern Albania, whereas the full vibrating /rr/ is pronounced in the North. From women living in the city we hear rush (rrush), ara (arra), buri (burri): rrush, arra, burri. Moreover, there is the need to stress the importance of geo-linguistic elements because regarding dialectic extension, the diminution of the difference /rr/ and /r/ comes from the Tosk way of speaking especially found in the cities.⁴

However this is still a hypothesis which needs to be analyzed and verified and we cannot confirm it as a product of a profound research. The discrimination can be observed in: how somebody speaks to a woman, how her speech is not taken into consideration, misunderstood, wrongly paraphrased, is interrupted or ignored. Linguistics, psychologists, sociologists and anthropologists who study women's language have another request and other cases compared to the few linguists and anthropologist who previously have encountered some exotic aspect of women's language in some exotic languages etc. Today's interest on women's language is based on the experience of inequality. Women are everywhere treated differently and even worse than men are treated. Linguistically speaking the questions which are posed regarding the topic which is being treated are:

How are women treated by language? Which possibilities are given to talk to r include women in the linguistic system, how are women treated by the speakers, i.e. how do they follow linguistic and communicative expectations and how can they be protected by them. In the Koasate language (in Louisiana SO) it is possible to form masculine forms from feminine forms through a complexity of rules, but not the contrary. The feminine forms of Koasate are archaic compared to masculine forms and they can find a corresponding term in other languages of the group. Masculine forms in this way are presented like a novelty. A fundamental help given in the study of language diversity related with the lexicon was given by the Danish linguist Oto Jaspersen, one of the pioneers in the research of this field since the beginning of the 20th century. He noticed that women's way of talking it was filled with hesitation and euphemisms: women purposely avoided the usage of vulgar expressions while learning for the sake of their social role to deposit civilian and educated ways of speaking. They are more prone than men to be more reserved and elegant in their attitude and linguistic behavior.⁵ Men talk more about things and facts whereas women talk more about people, relations and feelings. Men use language in a competing way by reflecting their general interest in taking and preserving their status, whereas women's use of language is collaborative by reflecting their preference for equality and harmony. Nevertheless what is the origin of the concept 'women's speech/language'? People's differentiation based on sex is one of the crucial problems treated by sociolinguistics. Different researches which were conducted till present days, although they are not investigated thoroughly, it was observed that women (females) speak in a different way compared to man. They might also have their own lexicon which is, specifically speaking for typical aspects of women's life and generally speaking in daily communication, different from men's lexicon, might it be from their spouse or older sons.

For the first time, by noticing some euphemisms of Albanian language, the term 'women's speech/language' was mentioned by our distinguished linguist⁶ Egerem Cabej. In the vocabulary or lexicon used by women, there appear unknown terminological sectors which are rarely used by men, for example: the words and the manners of saying which are related with the house and its furniture, especially related with cleaning and clothes preparation, with services and child feeding, with the kitchen and cooking etc. Generally it is everything related with the word group 'women's work'.

Therefore there also exists the popular expression: "women's work and women's words". There is some typical womanly labeling which men might know but practically pretend not to know, as a result they do not use them.⁷ The existence of women's language has been noticed since ancient times in some classical authors who have tried to find an explanation to this phenomenon: *women speak a different language from men because they come from a different group*. In this way Herodoti showed that the Skits were never able to learn the Amazonian language, which was the language spoken by the women they had married, whereas the Amazonian were able to learn the Skit language, even though not in a perfect way. "*Sauromans (who were the descendants of Amazonian and Skits) use Skit language, eventhoguh they*

⁴ Gj. Shkurtaj, *Sociolinguistika*, SHBLU, Tiranë, 1999, f. 157

⁵ Gj. Shkurtaj, *Etnografia e të folurit të shqipëse*, SHBLU, Tiranë, 2004, f. 245

⁶ 'Studime gjuhësore', Prishtinë, 1978, f. 17-25

⁷ Gj. Shkurtaj, *Sociolinguistika*, SHBLU, Tiranë, 1999, f. 155

speaking it with some mistakes because the Amazonian do not learn it in a perfect way."

Another well known case was the speech of Santo-Domingo where men spoke Karibish whereas the women spoke Aravakish, this fact was documented in 1564 in the book Du Tertres "*Historia general de las pesquenas Antillas*". In both cases it is not about different languages, but it is about the same root language but different varieties.⁸

Women's emancipation is connected with the equality of her role with her spouse in the family, society or nation. This phenomenon is encountered in the moment of activation, with the employment, with the education and intellectual capacity. In this way there is a mutual dependence between men and women everywhere. There is a popular expression which states that: '*behind a successful man there stands a wise woman*' which can also be understood reciprocally.

In the emancipation of the society there is of great importance the respect and reciprocal honor between men and women in the family, especially now where there are not pronounced differences amongst the couple in education, culture, employment, abilities and concepts.

The famous researcher and patriot Sami Frashëri in the position of salient sociologist was among the first who studied the emancipation of women and who published a book regarding this phenomenon with the title "Women". According to Sami Frashëri in this book the foundation of society was the family whereas the foundation of the family was the child, child who was educated by the mother. Therefore when someone says 'family' it means woman. Human society (states Sami) is created by the family; taking into consideration the fact that harmony in human society is connected with harmony inside the family and finally is connected with the education of woman because her education is fundamental for the general harmony of the society.

An English researcher of ethnography once visited the villages of Tropoja and Kukës and always noticed that in steep mountain paths men walked 20 meters in front of women. By continuing his visit toward Kosovo in a bordering village he noticed that women walked in front of men. Taking into consideration the fact that both these phenomenon were part of Albanian tradition he was surprised by this difference and asked a peasant:

- How is it possible that old traditions were changed and Albanians become so emancipated and modern that they respect women and they leave women to walk ahead and they stand behind?! The peasant replied:
- You are wrong man, we respect traditions, but what can we do against mines! (Mines which were placed by Serbs).

Therefore, women were seen as 'great devices for detecting mines' and if it happened they would be the first to step on mines, whereas men could escape without being harmed. *What emancipation!*

Feminist movement is called that movement which strives for women rights. The terms 'feminism' or 'feminist' was firstly used in France and Netherland in 1872, in England in 1890 and in the United States of America in 1910.

According to western history, the modern history of Feminist Movement is divided in three periods.

The first period begins in the 19th century until the first part of the 20th century and this movement was more about obtaining the right to vote, to become employed and to be educated. The second period begins in the 1960s and it continued until 1980s. This wave was about obtaining legal and cultural rights and claiming the role of women in social life. The last period begins in 1980 and continues until the first decade of the 21st century. During this period there continued the strive for attaining rights which were not obtained during the second period. In the beginning women who had no rights and were without a representative in the political sphere were dependent by their spouses, even though political parties and old organizations supported women until the moment they needed them for their own interest. In the moment that their goals were reached women were left without a support. Consequently the first movement organized by women was mainly focused on obtaining the right to vote. There were done many tentative by women to have a unique and fundamental right which is the right to live a life as a free human being.

The Borghese French Revolution was the beginning of all tentative. The first movement begins in an époque of development and change of civil and political rights. The main promoter of this movement was Olympe de Goued, who wrote the Declaration of Women's Rights and Female Citizen in 1798. In the first article of this declaration there is written: 'The woman is born free and she has equal rights with the man in every aspect'.

Similar events were being observed also in Grand Britain, in 1918 there were given some rights to women in the same way given in America where the discrimination toward women had reached unprecedented levels, by humiliating not only older women but also children belonging to feminine sex, as it was done in pre-Islamic times.

Under these conditions in 1978 there is the approval of the Convergence for the elimination of any type of discrimination toward women (CEDAW). This Convergence holds civil, political, economical and cultural rights obtained by women.

⁸ Gj. Shkurtaj, *Etnografia e të folurit të shqipës*, SHBLU, Tiranë, 2004, f. 244

The Convergence recognized women as full human beings which were very important because until that time women were known as something which did not belong to the human race. However this phenomenon still continues to exist after so many centuries even in present days. After so many strives there were created many Convergences and declarations related with women's rights. Nevertheless it remained the fact that they remained only on the paper and were never implemented in real life.

Actually the case of 'women's speech/language' has been treated in Labov's researches, where there has been treated the relation of sex with the indicators of standard. According to investigations done in English language used in New York, women are nearer to the standard language, they keep a more conformist linguistic attitude fearing of receiving social sanctions which strikes provincial accent and in general the nonstandard variety. Labov states that: "... men use more nonstandard forms, less influenced by the social stigma directed against them, or, conversely, women use more standard forms, responding to the overt prestige associated with them".⁹

This specific attitude depends on the fact that women present a very low indicative of linguistic self-confidence. Linguistic conditions of women have a reflection on linguistic changes as 'women lead in both the acquisition of prestige patterns and the elimination of stigmatized forms', therefore women's way of speaking seems more sensitive for resuming and using novelties in this specific direction. However, many researchers think that the characteristics of womanly speech are in the majority of cased expressions of a certain cultural datum rather than of a linguistic one. This can be supported even with many data regarding ethnographic speech.¹⁰

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⁹ Labov, 1990, f. 210

¹⁰ Gj. Shkurtaj, Etnografia e të folurit të shqipes, SHBLU, Tiranë, 2004, f. 246