

Part IA Sociolinguistics and Dialectology

Lecture 4: Language and Gender

1. Sex vs gender

- Sex is biological (to a certain extent) and is traditionally assigned at birth based on a range of biological features including genitals, sex chromosomes and hormones.
- Gender is socially constructed.
- Some gender-differences can be based on both biology and society, e.g. height (especially in societies where female children are given less food than male children) or voice pitch (the difference between male and female voices varies across cultures)
- Gender-based linguistic differences are socially constructed rather than innate.
- In some languages gender differences can be very significant (e.g. in Gros Ventre, an Amerindian language spoken in Montana).

2. Ancient world

- So how can we find out about gender differences in language for the ancient world?
- Problems: it's all written evidence; most of the evidence was authored by men for a male-dominated world; the features we might be interested in are attested sporadically; non-literary material may be formulaic or dictated; it's often hard to be sure when women are involved in a text's production.

3. Direct evidence for women's language

a. Literary

- Greek: Sappho, Corinna, Erinna, Anyte, Telesilla
- Latin: Sulpicia ([Tibullus] III, 13-18)
Sulpicia II. 2 lines preserved:

*si me Cadurcis restitutis fasciis
nudam Caleno concubantem proferat*

b. Non-literary

- Papyrus letter, AD 115, Hermopolis, Egypt. A wife to her husband:

'Aline to dear Apollonios, many greetings. I am very worried for you on account of the things that people reported about what is happening and because you left so suddenly. I take no pleasure in food and drink, but always stay awake day and night with only one thought, your safety. Only my father's care revives me and, by your safety, I lay without eating on New Year's Day, until my father came and forced me to eat. I beg you, therefore, to look after your safety, and not to face danger alone without a guard' (*P. Giss.* 19)

- Vindolanda tablet 291:

‘Claudia Severa to her Lepidina greetings. On 11 September, sister, for the day of the celebration of my birthday, I give you a warm invitation to make sure that you come to us, to make the day more enjoyable for me by your arrival, if you are present (?). Give my greetings to your Cerialis. My Aelius and my little son send him (?) their greetings. (2nd hand) I shall expect you sister. Farewell, sister my dearest soul, as I hope to prosper, and hail.’

- Examples of epitaphs commissioned by mothers for their daughters

V. Saluidiena Q. L. Hilara | Saluidienae Faustillae | deliciae suae | eruditate omnibus artibus | reliquisti mammam tuam | gementem plangentem plorantem | uixit an. xv | mensib. iii, dieb. xi, hor. vii | uirginem eripuit Fatus malus | destituiti Vitilla mea | miseram mammam tuam (CIL 6 25808)

‘V. Salvidiena Hilara, freed slavegirl of Quintus to Salvidiena Faustilla, her darling, educated in all the arts. You have left your mamma groaning, wailing, weeping. She lived for fifteen years, three months, eleven days, and seven hours. An evil fate tore her away, a virgin. My Vitilla, you have left your mamma miserable.’

mamma fegit [= fecit] Claudiae Hyciae Iunone (CIL 6 15471)

‘Mummy made it for Claudia Hygia Iuno.’

4. Ancient (male) writers’ statements about female language

a. Greek

- Plutarch

ἐνορᾶται γὰρ αὐτῇ καὶ πάθος καὶ ἦθος καὶ διάθεσις λαλούσης (Plutarch *Moralia* 142d)

‘For in a woman’s speech can be seen her feelings, character and disposition.’

- Plato

οἴσθα ὅτι οἱ παλαιοὶ οἱ ἡμέτεροι τῷ ἰῶτα καὶ τῷ δέλτα εὖ μάλα ἐχρῶντο, καὶ οὐχ ἥκιστα αἱ γυναῖκες, αἵπερ μάλιστα τὴν ἀρχαίαν φωνὴν σῶζουσι. νῦν δὲ ἀντὶ μὲν τοῦ ἰῶτα ἢ εἰ ἢ ἦτα μεταστρέφουσιν, ἀντὶ δὲ τοῦ δέλτα ζῆτα, ὡς δὴ μεγαλοπρεπέστερα ὄντα (Plato *Cratylus* 418b-c)

(Socrates) ‘You know that our ancestors made good use of the sounds of iota and delta, and that is especially true of women, who best preserve the old form of speech. But nowadays they change iota to ei or eta, [...] thinking that they have a grander sound.’

- Scholia

παρὰ τοῖς νεωτέροις ὑπὸ γυναικῶν λέγεται ὃ μέλε μόνον ὡς τὸ ὦ τάλαν παρὰ δὲ τοῖς παλαιοῖς καὶ ὑπ’ ἀνδρῶν (Scholl. Plat. *Theaet.* 178e)

'In more recent times ὤ μέλε is said only by women, like ὤ τάλαν, but in earlier times it was also used by men.'

b. Latin

- Cicero

equidem cum audio socrum meam Laeliam - facilius enim mulieres incorruptam antiquitatem conservant, quod multorum sermonis expertes ea tenent semper quae prima dedicerunt - sed eam sic audio ut Plautum mihi aut Naevium uidear audire: sono ipso uocis ita recto et simplici est ut nihil ostentationis aut imitationes afferre uideatur. (Cicero *de Oratore* III xii 45-7)

(Crassus is speaking) 'For my own part, when I hear my wife's mother Laelia - since it is easier for women to keep the old pronunciation unspoiled, as they do not converse with a number of people and so always retain the accents they heard first- well, I listen to her with the feeling that I am listening to Plautus or Naevius: the actual sound of her voice is so unaffected and natural that she seems to display no trace of display or affectation.'

- Pliny

legit mihi nuper epistulas; uxoris esse dicebat. Plautum uel Terentium metro solutum legi credidi (Pliny *Epistles* 1 xvi 6)

'He [Pompeius Saturninus] recently read me some letters which he said his wife had written. I could believe that they were Plautus or Terence read in prose.'

- Juvenal

uerborum tanta cadit uis,/ tot pariter pelues ac tintinnabula dicas / pulsari (Juvenal 6.440-2)

'So torrential is her speech that you would think that all the pots and bells were being clashed together.'

- Medical writers

hic autem multo simplicius uolui loqui et ut uerius dicam muliebribus uerbis usus sum, ut etiam inperitae obstetrices licet ab altera sibi lectam rationem facile intellegere possint (Mustio *Gynaecia*)

'Here I wanted to speak much more simply and, to be frank, I have used "women's words" so that even uneducated midwives can easily understand the account, even if it is only read to them by another woman' [e.g. *dida, mamma*, but otherwise not too many (Adams 2005)]

- Aulus Gellius, grammarian

in ueteribus scriptis neque mulieres Romanae per Herculem deiurant neque uiri per Castorem. sed cur illae non iurauerint Herculem non obscurum est, nam Herculeo sacrificio abstinent. cur autem uiri Castorem iurantes non appellauerint non facile dictu est. nusquam igitur scriptum inuenire est apud idoneos quidem scriptores, aut 'me hercle' feminam dicere aut 'me castor' uirum; 'edepol' autem, quod iusiurandum per Pollucem est, et uiro et feminae commune est. (Aulus Gellius *Noctes Atticae* xi 6)

'In our early writings neither do Roman women swear by Hercules nor the men by Castor. But why the women did not swear by Hercules is evident, since they abstain from sacrificing to Hercules. On the other hand, why the men did not name Castor in their oaths is not easy to say. Nowhere, then, is it possible to find an instance, among good writers, either of a woman saying 'by Hercules' or a man saying 'by Castor'; but *edepol*, which is an oath by Pollux, is common to both man and woman.'

5. Representations of women's language in the texts of male authors

- Noteworthy and detectable features of women's language include:
 - terms of address
 - exclamations
 - oaths
 - (avoidance of) obscenity
 - different words for 'please' (or increased use of 'please')
- 'gender-exclusive' usages are rare; 'gender-preferential' usages are easier to find.

a. Greek

- Generally oaths seem to have marked gender
 - μὰ τῷ θεῷ and oaths to Artemis and Aphrodite are used by women.
 - νή/μὰ τοὺς θεοὺς, πρὸς (τῶν) θεῶν, and ὦ πολυτίμητοι θεοί are used by men.
- In new comedy (Menander), women prefer τάλας especially in the vocative τάλαν, ὦ τάλαν. Women use γλυκὺς and τέκνον much more; women exclusively use αἶ, δύσμορος.
- For Old comedy (Aristophanes), see Willi 2003 ch. 6.

b. Latin (mostly from the study of early comedy - NB change over time)

- Females use *au* as exclamation, males use *heus, ei*.
- In oaths generally men use *hercle, mehercle*; women use *ecastor, mecastor*; both use *pol, edepol*, though these are preferred by women and women tend to use more oaths overall.
- Polite modifiers: women tend to use *amabo* and *obsecro* while men (who say 'please' far less frequently) prefer *quaeso*.
- Vocatives with *mea/mi* more prevalent in speech assigned to women.
- But other factors also important, such as context and relative status, e.g. women addressing slaves will use bare imperatives.

c. Examples

- **Iliad**
 (Thetis) καρπαλίμως δ' ἀνέδου πολιῆς ἀλδὸς ἠΰτ' ὀμίχλη,
 καὶ ῥα πάροιθ' αὐτοῖο καθέζετο δάκρυ χέοντος,
 χειρὶ τέ μιν κατέρεξεν ἔπος τ' ἔφατ' ἔκ τ' ὀνόμαζε:
 τέκνον τί κλαίεις; τί δέ σε φρένας ἵκετο πένθος;
 ἔξαύδα, μὴ κεῦθε νόω, ἵνα εἶδομεν ἄμφω. (Iliad 1.359-362)

'She rose swiftly from the grey sea like a cloud, and sat beside him as he wept, and she stroked him with her hand, and spoke to him, calling him by name, 'Child, why are you crying? What sorrow has entered your heart? Speak, do not conceal it in your mind, so that we may both know.'

- **Aristophanes** *Ecclesiazusae* 155-160

A woman is preparing to address the assembly disguised as a man

Γυνή Β	έμοι μέν ού δοκεῖ μα τῷ θεῷ
Πραξάγορα	μα τῷ θεῷ; τάλαινα ποῦ τὸν νοῦν ἔχεις;
Γυνή Β	τί δ' ἔστιν; οὐ γάρ δὴ πιεῖν γ' ἤτησά σε
Πραξάγορα	μα Δί' ἀλλ' ἀνὴρ ὦν τῷ θεῷ κατώμοσας, καίτοι τά γ' ἄλλ' εἰποῦσα δεξιότατα
Γυνή Β	ὦ νῆ τὸν Ἀπόλλω

Woman B:	I don't agree, by the two goddesses (Demeter and Persephone).
Praxagoras:	By the two? Wretch, have you lost your mind?
Woman B:	What? I haven't asked for a drink?
Praxagoras:	No, by Zeus, but you swore by the two goddesses although you're meant to be a man. Everything else you said was excellent.
Woman B:	O.K. 'By Apollo.'

- **Aristophanes** *Thesmophoriazusae* 590-5

The women of the festival are told by Kleisthenes that a man in disguise is among them; the man disguised as a woman tries to put them off the scent.

Κλεισθένης

ἀφηῦσεν αὐτὸν κάπετιλ' Εὐριπίδης
καὶ τᾶλλ' ἄπανθ' ὥσπερ γυναῖκ' ἐσκεύασεν.

Μνησίλοχος

πείθεσθε τούτῳ ταῦτα; τίς δ' οὕτως ἀνὴρ
ἠλίθιος ὅστις τιλλόμενος ἠνείχετο;
οὐκ οἶομαι 'γωγ' ὧ πολυτιμήτῳ θεῷ.

Kleisthenes: Euripides has singed him and plucked him (i.e. his pubic hair) and dressed him up in all respects like a woman.

Mnesilochus: Can you believe him? What man would be so stupid to let himself be plucked. I don't believe it, by the respected goddesses.

- **Aristophanes** *Lysistrata* 78-84

Λυσιστράτη

ὦ φιλάτη Λάκαινα χαῖρε Λαμπιτοῖ.
οἶον τὸ κάλλος γλυκυτάτη σου φαίνεται.
ὡς δ' εὐχροεῖς, ὡς δὲ σφριγᾷ τὸ σῶμά σου.
κᾶν ταῦρον ἄγχοις.

Λαμπιτώ

μάλα γ' οἶῶ ναι τῶ σιώ:
γυμνάδομαι γὰρ καὶ ποτὶ πυγὰν ἄλλομαι.

Καλονίκη

ὡς δὴ καλὸν τὸ χρῆμα τιθίων ἔχεις.

Λαμπιτώ

ἄπερ ἱερεῖόν τοί μ' ὑποψαλάσσετε.

Lysistrata: Welcome, Lampito, my dear friend from Sparta. Darling, you look absolutely beautiful. What a lovely complexion, and how strong you look! I bet you could throttle a bull.

Lampito: By the two goddesses, I'm sure I could. I do gymnastics and do kick-jumps every day.

Calonice: And what beautiful tits you have!

Lampito: Well, now you're feeling me up like a sacrificial bull.

- **Terence** *Adelphi* 288-293

('Female' expressions in bold, following Adams 1984: 75.)

SO. **Obsecro, mea nutrix**, quid nunc fiet? CA. quid fiet, rogas?
recte **edepol** spero. SO. modo dolores, **mea tu**, occipiunt primulum

CA. iam nunc times, quasi numquam adfueris, numquam tute pepereris?

SO. Heu **me miseram**, habeo neminem
solae sumu'; Geta autem hic non adest qui arcesserat Aeschinum.

CA. **pol** is quidem iam hic aderit.

Sostrata: Please, nurse, how are things going?

Cathara: How are things? All right, I hope, by gosh.

Sostrata: My dear, my pains are only just beginning.

Cathara: Now you're not worrying, as if you've never been present at a birth or given birth yourself?

Sostrata: Alas, I've got no one! We are alone, even Geta isn't here who had gone to get Aeschinus.

Cathara: Bless you, he'll be here soon.

6. Further Reading (* for particularly helpful reading)

- Adams, J. N. 1984. 'Female Speech in Latin Comedy' *Antichthon* 18: 43–77
- Adams, J. N. 2005. 'Neglected Evidence for Female Speech in Latin' *Classical Quarterly* 55.2: 582–596
- Bagnall, R. S. and Cribiore, R. 2006. *Women's Letters from Ancient Egypt 300 BC–AD 800* (Michigan)
- Bain, D. 1984. 'Female Speech in Menander' *Antichthon* 18: 24–42
- *Butler, J. 1990. *Gender Trouble* (New York/Oxford)
- *Clackson, J. 2011. 'The Social dialects of Latin' in J. Clackson (ed.) *A Companion to the Latin Language* (Oxford): 506–526.
- *Clackson, J. 2015. *Language and Society in the Greek and Roman Worlds* (Cambridge): Chapter 5
- Coates, J. 2004. *Women, Men, and Language*, (Harlow) (3rd edition)
- Cribiore, R. 2001 'Windows on a Woman's World: Some Letters from Roman Egypt' in A. Lardinois and L. McClure *Making Silence Speak. Women's Voices in Greek Literature and Society* (Princeton): 223–239
- Dailey-O'Cain, J. 2000. 'The sociolinguistic distribution of and attitudes toward focuser *like* and quotative *like*' *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 4.1: 60–80
- *Eckert, P. and McConnell-Ginet, S. 2013. *Language and Gender* (second edition) (Cambridge)
- *Fögen, T. 2010 'Female speech' in E. J. Bakker (ed.) *A Companion to the Ancient Greek Language* (Oxford): 311–326
- Gilleland, M. E. 1980 'Female Speech in Latin and Greek' *American Journal of Philology* 101.2, 180–183
- *Kruschwitz, P. (2012) 'Language, Sex and (Lack) of Power; Reassessing the Linguistic Discourse about Female Speech in Latin Sources.' *Athenaeum* 100: 197–230.
- Lakoff, R. 1975. *Language and Woman's Place* (New York)
- Lardinois, A. and McClure, L. 2001. *Making Silence Speak. Women's Voices in Greek Literature and Society* (Princeton)
- Merriam, C. U. 1991. 'The other Sulpicia' *The Classical World* 84.4: 303–305
- Mesthrie, R et al. 2009. *Introducing Sociolinguistics*: Chapter 7
- Stevenson, J. 2005. *Woman Latin Poets* (Oxford/New York)
- Taaffe, L. K. 1993. *Aristophanes and Women* (London/New York): p.115f.
- *Willi, A. 2003. *Languages of Aristophanes* (Oxford): Chapter 6