

The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology: Division of Humanities/Center for Language Education

HUMA 1000: Cultures and Values: **Cover sheet for final essay**

Full name	
Student ID	
Writing workshop section number	
Writing workshop instructor	
Title of essay (please copy and paste from the document on Canvas)	Linguistically, are men really from Mars and women from Venus? Use what you have learned from the course to explain your viewpoint.

Declaration: The attached essay represents my own work. I have read and understood the University's policies on academic honesty and I confirm that the attached work conforms to these policies.

Please type your name:

Response to feedback: note here the comments from your instructor you have responded to (you can copy these from your feedback sheet).

- You are focusing too much on the differences between men and women and not enough on the course materials that may support this claim
- You need to be writing arguments, and not expositions.

There was once a wonderful story, where men are from Mars and women are from Venus. The Martians and the Venusians tried to get along with each other, and gradually they learnt a lot about their differences. Everything was in peace and harmony, not until they decided to fly to Earth and live together. Due to the effect of the Earth's atmosphere, they forgot that they were supposed to think and speak differently. From that day onwards, conflicts between men and women have been arising. (Gray,1992) Although this is only a fictional story, it demonstrates that men and women are as if born from two entirely distinct planets. Since they have different places of origins, men and women tend to interpret language differently, according to their conformity to social norms, cultural behaviors and varied biological structures. Due to these three main aspects, it is believed that men and women are linguistically different, such that language serves different functions for both genders.

From a social perspective, the foremost reason is that men and women use language in different ways according to their positions within the society. Women are taught to take up a subordinate position according to social norms, such that their style of speaking is weaker and less important. The Women Language (WL) suggests that women are being taken away from position of power and status, this also affects the way they use language to express themselves. (Lakoff,2004) Therefore, women tend to use relatively less stigmatized and non-standard variants comparing with men. For instance, devices such as hedges, inessential intensifier, color terms and question tags are commonly used in women's speech. This shows that women tend to speak in a rather weaker and more implicit manner. On the other hand, men often have more authority within the society, thus, the way they speak is relatively stronger and more decisive comparing with women's. This could be shown by the larger amount of vernacular forms of words spoken by men.(Romaine,2003) For example, more non-standard s-endings, such as she understands, we has, he runs, are spoken by men. (Cheshire,1978) Another case is that men tend to ignore the letter "g" and pronounce "-in" in most gerunds, such as "are you comin'?" , instead of "are you coming". This shows that men pay relatively less attention to the rules of using language while speaking and are more lenient to using standard language.

From a cultural perspective, it is crucial to understand that language have different meanings and functions to both genders, such that it can be interpreted differently by men and women. From men's perspective, language is a more of tool for receiving and conveying information. Therefore, men may talk more about facts and logical reasoning, so as to get things done efficiently in order to get optimized results. Men

care more about the consequences of events and how their speech can bring them success in various aspects. From women's perspective, language and communication plays a major role in their lives, as they like talking more and consider it as a way to build interpersonal relationships. Rather than focusing on the results, women are more likely to show compassion and understand other's feelings during the process. Furthermore, the attitude that men and women show towards politeness varies in terms of language. Through observing men's behavior, they tend to make more interruptions and challenges to other's statements.(Defransico,1998) Most of them want to have some degree of control on the discussion of a specific topic. This could be explained by the fact that men often use language to increase their status and competitiveness amongst their social groups. In contrast, backchanneling signals and questions are frequently used by women to show that they are paying attention and encourage others to continue with what they are trying to say.(Shelley,2013) In addition, according to Janet Holmes, a New Zealand sociolinguist, stated that women compliment and apologize more frequently than men do.(Holmes,1995) This can explain that women in general have a larger preference for equality and harmony, since language is used for connecting people together in a more cooperative sense.

From a biological perspective, men and women are different linguistically mainly because of their distinct brain structures. The Wernicke and Broca area, brain areas which are responsible for speech, are significantly larger in women than in men. According to MRI studies, it showed that the Broca and Wernicke area 's volume in women are 23% and 13% more than men respectively.(Zaidi,2010) As a result, it is found out that women tend to have a higher language proficiency than men. Not only are women more verbally skillful than men, they are also better at learning language, as their brains allows them to be more used to words and sounds. Thus, with the structural advantage in women's brain, they may excel in more language-based subjects such as history and geography. Apart from this, language is being processed in both sides of women's brain, while men only process language in the left hemisphere only. (Zaidi,2010)This also accounts for the larger vocabulary making power in women. The male brain only enables the development of vocabulary in the left hemisphere, limiting the overall capacity of learning new words. However for women, both sides of their brain take part in language production, allowing them to express emotions and feelings through a larger variety of structures. Therefore, the difference in brain structures allows women to be more proficient in language comparing with men.

Wrapping up, men and women have a series of linguistic differences due to their social, cultural and biological differences. The differences in social and cultural behaviors may lead to the use of separated form of spoken language and attitudes in achieving goals respectively; whereas the contrasted brain structures accounts for their differences in language learning ability. Therefore, men and women should always remember their differences as if they are from Mars and Venus, so as to prevent any conflict arisen from miscommunication or misinterpretation of other's intentions. Regular interactions are inevitable between these two wonderful creatures, thus, both genders should understand, embrace and appreciate each other's differences, in order to establish a harmonious community on planet Earth.

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