GENDERED LANGUAGE

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Lucrarea evidențiază rolul variabilei sociale 'gen' ca determinant al variației lingvistice în limbile engleză şi română. Avansăm ipoteza că genolectele devin funcționale la nivelul strategiilor conversaționale şi propunem următoarele variabile lingvistice relevante în acest sens: monitorizarea conversației, componenta fatică (small talk), componenta conflictuală (conflict talk), precum şi preferințe la nivelul strategiilor politeții conform modelului Brown şi Lenvinson (1987).

1.0. Aim of the paper. Since the publication in 1975 of Robin Lakoff's *Language and Women's Place,* the subject of gender and language, previously neglected, has become the main concern of a vast multidisciplinary literature. An explosion of research on language and gender carried out within various fields such as anthropology, dialectology, variation and interactional sociolinguistics, ethnographic discourse analysis, psychology establishes that women and men *do* use language differently. At the intersection of these fields of interests several research question arise: to what extent do men and women speak differently i.e. to what extent can we speak of a gendered language, how these different speech styles correlate with the roles men and women fulfill in society, what are the societal implications of these speech differences and what are the relevant gender-related linguistic variables that can form the basis of a contrastive analysis of language and gender? This paper is an attempt to provide an overview of recent research on language and gender and to answer, at least partially, these questions. The paper will focus on two languages: English and Romanian.

1.1. Stereotyping gender in English and Romanian. Beliefs about language that are generally accepted as common sense can be found in any society. These beliefs not only explain to language-users what they might have observed for themselves, but they also regulate linguistic behaviour. For instance, in English-speaking cultures, women are widely believed to be good listeners. However, *to be* seems to have a certain flavour of *ought to be,* since a lot of oral and written advice to women (the problem page of women's magazines is a case in point) urges women to make full use of this supposed

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talent. Thus a tendency that is real but slight may become exaggerated; or one that is not real may come into being. All too often linguists – feminist ones included – seem to overlook the folklinguistc roots of their supposedly unbiased observations. This section addresses impressionistic works with the view to identifying gender-related stereotypes at both paradigmatic and discourse levels. In this section I also discuss the results of a survey that I conducted among Romanian students at the University of Constanta. The findings reveal a striking resemblance between gender-related stereotypes in English and Romanian.

1.2. Stereotyping women's speech in English. As early as the sixteenth century, English writers noted differences between men and women in terms of pronunciation and favoured the masculine form even when it was losing ground to the innovative form attributed to women. In 1568, Sir Thomas Smith complains about the affected speech of women and Richard Mulcaster in his *Elementarie*[1] identifies a pair of gender-linked diphthongs, implying the superiority of the masculine, though it is the pronunciation attributed to women that has become standard in modern English:

> Ai [that is, /ai/ as in *fine*], is the mans diphthong, and soundeth full: ei [that is, /ei/, as in *faint*], the womans, and soundeth finish in the same both sense, and use, a woman is deintie, and feinteth soon, the man feinteth not because he is nothing daintie.

This reveals an androcentric view of linguistic usage that singles out women's speech as deviating from the (male) norms. Elyon[2] in *The Governer* (1531) claims that gentlemen, as the educated literate group in society, differed in their use of language from women, the former's English being " sillable, as folisshe cleane, polite, perfectly and articulately pronounced, omittinge no letter as women oftentimes do".

Turning to vocabulary and grammar, commentators singled out women's words for special treatment. Women's vocabulary is viewed as ephemeral and associated with the unimportance of what they say. Lord

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Chesterfield[3], writing in *The World* of 5 December 1754 complains about women's excessive use of certain adverbial forms:

> Not content with enriching our language with words absolutely new my fair countrywomen have gone still farther, and improved it by application and extension of old ones to various and very different significations […] For instance, the adjective *vast* and it's [sic] adverb *vastly*, mean anything and are the fashionable words of the most fashionable people. A woman is *vastly* obliged, or *vastly* offended, *vastly* glad, or *vastly* sorry. Large objects are *vastly* great, small ones are *vastly* little.

Language commentators have little trouble in identifying what they think to be women's words, though their lists are usually impressionistic and have little validity. The view that women have their own unenviable vocabulary has been held for over three centuries. The following list provides a sampler of words that have been ascribed to women:

ah!, oh!, such, so, somehow, fine, pronominal *one, ruck,* 'covered', *flirtation, vast, vastly, frightful* (18th century) *implicit, splendid, pretty, horrible, unpleasant, thousands,* 'any number greater than two', *unwell,* used by women primarily as an euphemism, presumably for menstruation (19th century) *person,* 'woman', *nice,* 'fine', *common,* 'vulgar', *perfectly, because, lovely, darling, sweet, horrid, mean, dear, just-too-sweet, poor thing, minx, cat, just, so, too, adorable, precious, cunning, cute, stunning, itsy bitsy, terribly, awfully frightfully, sweetie, honey, dear heart, doll, all rightie, natch, hi, love, beige, mauve, taupe, ecru, hanky, panties, undies, nappies, scanties, nightie, powder room, wonderful, heavenly, divine, dreamy, sensational, hysterical,* 'really funny'(20th century).

According to these passages, women are believed to have restricted and vacuous vocabulary and to exert a malign influence on language. Language is defined by these writers in terms of male language, the way men talk is seen as the norm, while women's language is seen as a deviation from this norm.

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As far as grammar is concerned, eighteenth century men of letters argue that women are frequently guilty of incorrect usage. The following passage is typical of its time[4]: “most women and all ordinary people in general speak in open defiance of all grammar”. The androcentric bias is still present in twentieth-century observations on English vocabulary and grammar. Jespersen[5] argues that gender-related variations in the area of words choice correlate with limitations in the experience of women and with different organizations and capacity of male and female minds According to the Danish linguist, women avoid hard words, are incapable of making or understanding puns and leave linguistic innovation to men, who are semantically less banal. Curiously enough, Jespersen (1922: 16) claims that women’s limited vocabulary results in their supposed volubility, while men superior knowledge of words proves an impediment to fluent speech:

> Women move in narrower circles of the vocabulary, in which they attain the perfect mastery so that the flow of words is always natural and, above all, never needs to stop, while men know more words and always want to be more
> precise in choosing the exact word with which to render their idea, the consequence being often less fluency and more hesitation.

He generalizes that “the vocabulary of a woman as a rule is much less extensive than that of a man" (Jespersen, 1922: 17).

On the whole, women’s language is stereotyped as deviant and inappropriate in terms of pronunciation, limited, vacuous and ephemeral in terms of lexis, less elaborate in terms of syntax. Without adducing any empirical evidence, the language commentators mentioned above argue that women speak more politely than men, they have fewer ideas and fewer words with which to express them, they tend to speak without thinking. As a result they construct their sentences loosely and leave them unfinished, jumping from one topic to another. Therefore men are labelled as abstract, complex, adult, rational, aesthetic and creative, while women as concrete, childlike, emotional and practical. These stereotypes of women’s and men’s verbal behaviour bear little or no relation to actual language use. All the same they tend to persist for

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so long as the social differences they enforce. As Cameron (1992) has put it "so long as women are subordinate to men, their language will continue to be stereotyped as indicating natural subservience, unintelligence and immaturity".

Even feminist linguists have not always subjected linguistic stereotypes to the scrutiny they require with the consequence that some of them have perpetuated some of the gender-related stereotypes mentioned above. Robin Lakoff's *Language and Women's Place* (1975) is a case in point. The book is remarkable for creating a stereotype of its own.

Lakoff argues that women's subordinate social status in American society is reflected in the language they use, as well as in the language used about them. She identifies a number of linguistic features which she claims are used more often by women than by men and which in her opinion express a lack of forcefulness and assertiveness. She distinguishes between two styles of speech *neutral* and *women's language*. The following linguistic features characterize what Lakoff (1975) calls *women's language*:

a) Lexical hedges or fillers, e.g. *you know, sort of, well, you see*
b) Tag questions, e.g. she is very nice, *isn't she?*
c) Rising intonation in declaratives
d) Empty adjectives, e.g., *divine, charming, cute*
e) Intensifiers such as *just, so,* e.g., I like him *so* much
f) Precise colour terms, e.g., *mauve, magenta, aquamarine*
g) 'Hypercorrect grammar', e.g., consistent use of standard verb forms
h) 'Super-polite' forms, e.g., indirect requests, euphemisms
i) Avoidance of strong swear words, e.g. *fudge, my goodness*
j) Emphatic stress, e.g., it was a BRILLIANT performance

Lakoff's claims were based on her intuitions and observations, but they sparked off a spate of research. However, as we shall see in the next section, her claims have not always been borne out by empirical research.

Gender-related stereotypes are widespread among feminists who are not linguists. Cameron has put together a feminist folklinguistic profile of women's speech as emerging from a series of feminist seminars and workshops

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on language that she attended. According to Cameron (1992:45), this profile evinces the following features:

1. Disfluency. Women have trouble communicating in a 'male' language and this results in hesitation, false starts, and so on.
2. Unfinished sentences.
3. Speech not ordered according to the norms of logic (i.e. ordered according to women's *differing* notion of logic)
4. Use of questions, including statements couched as questions
5. Speaking less than men in mixed groups
6. Using co-operative and supportive strategies in conversation, whereas men are more competitive.

Interestingly enough, this type of research has never defined, except by implication, the male speech which is seen as the norm from which women's speech is said to deviate.

1.3. Gender-related stereotypes in Romanian. Starting with the hypothesis that Romanian men and women differ in their use of a particular set of linguistic variables, we can expect gender stereotypes to occur in Romanian culture as well. In what follows, I shall report the findings of a survey that I conducted in order to check the existence of gender stereotypes in Romanian.

Data collection and methodology. The survey was conducted among Romanian students studying at the University of Constanta. The sample consisted of 26 male and 26 female Romanian students belonging to one age-group (20-25). All informants live and study in Constanta. A list of sentence was devised to incorporate the features which, according to Lakoff, distinguished men's and women's speech styles since the aim of the survey was to check the extent to which these sentences reflect people's stereotypes with regard to gendered language. The occurrences of each stereotype were counted and the figures were reduced to percentages since this makes comparison much easier.

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Task. The informants were given the list of sentences reproduced in (1) and were asked to put **F** beside the features they think were said by a woman, **M** beside those they think were said by a man and **F/M** beside those they think could have been said by either. Additionally they were asked to account for their choices.

(1)

1. Închide uşa.
2. Ce câine adorabil!
3. Dumnezeule, s-a stricat frigiderul!
4. Este foarte obosit.
5. Este aşa de obosit.
6. Te superi dacă te rog să-mi dai puțin creionul?
7. Unde dracu' mi-am pus cheile?
8. Şi-a cumpărat un pulover cafea-cu-lapte şi unul gri-petrol.
9. Şi-a cumpărat un pulover bej şi unul gri.
10. Au făcut ceea ce trebuia, nu-i aşa?
11. Ce idee nemaipomenită!
12. Nu te superi dacă te rog să-mi împrumuți puțin dicționarul, nu-i aşa?
13. La ce oră scapi?

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Findings. Overall, Lakoff's stereotypes seem to be found in the Romanian society as well. The informants' answers are given in **Table 1.** When asked to comment upon their choices, two clusters of stereotypes emerged. Romanian women are stereotyped as being more sensitive, more polite, as paying more attention to details. They are said to use more standard forms because they are more concerned with their public image and using grammatically correct forms is viewed as a constitutive part of this image. Other distinctive features of women's language include, according to the informants interviewed, women's preference for euphemisms, hypercorrect forms, adjectives, small talk, tag-questions, which, interestingly enough, are viewed as signalling women's non-assertiveness and their lack of confidence.

Men, on the other hand, are said to be self-confident, direct and objective. The way they use language has no impact on their public image, consequently they can freely choose to be either polite or vulgar. Non-standard linguistic forms, swearing, taboo language and concise sentences with less attention paid to details are considered to be features of male speech. When asked how they decided which sex to attribute, the students mentioned their own way of using language as well as the way people around them use language (their parents, friends or ordinary people on the bus or in the street).

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Table 1. Gender-related stereotypes in Romanian.

Gender-related stereotypes	M	F	M/F
Închide ușa.	8%	6%	85%
Ce câine adorabil!	0%	100%	0%
Dumnezeule, s-a stricat frigiderul!	9%	71%	20%
Este foarte obosit.	9%	43%	45%
Este așa de obosit.	4%	90%	5.7%
Te superi dacă te rog să-mi dai puțin creionul?	20%	50%	30%
Unde dracu' mi-am pus cheile?	65%	5%	30%
Și-a cumpărat un pulover cafea-cu-lapte si unul gri-petrol.	6%	90%	4%
Și-a cumpărat un pulover gri si unul bej.	36%	28%	32%
Au făcut ceea ce trebuia, nu-i așa?	7%	65%	25%

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Ce idee nemaipomenită!	6%	53%	38%
Nu te superi dacă te rog să-mi imprumuți putin dicționarul, nu-i așa?	10%	65%	25%
La ce oră scăpi?	45%	25%	30%

(**Note.** Underline indicates emphatic stress.)

However, there are enough data that enable us to argue that some of the gender-related stereotypes discussed in this section are at odds with the gender-related speech differences that emerged from empirical research. Thus in the next section I will examine empirical research findings of feminist and non-feminist sociolinguists with a view to distinguishing between gender markers in speech and stereotypes attempting thus to establish the features of male and female speech in English.

2.0. Empirical research. In examining empirical research, I shall split it into two. I shall examine first the quantitative studies which investigate phonological and grammatical variation by means of statistical methods (2.1.). The importance of these studies lies in the fact that they drew attention to the differences in the speech of men and women. However, these studies and the paradigmatic speech differences they revealed are of a particular, limited kind. They have little, if any, explanatory force due to their methodology, which is based on statistical correlations. Reference is therefore made to research carried out within the frameworks of pragmatics and conversation analysis, since my hypothesis is that it is at level of conversational strategies that gender-related speech differences become functional and we can establish the relevant gender-related linguistic variables that can form the basis of a contrastive analysis of gendered language.

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2.1. Variation sociolinguistics. The best-established approach to social differences in pronunciation and grammar is the quantitative sociolinguistic survey. Either a representative sample of the population (i.e. a sample made up of randomly chosen informants) is studied, or a judgement sample (i.e. an already existing peer group or network of people who know each other) is interviewed and recordings of speech are analyzed. These studies have shown that linguistic variables (for example the realization of the phonological variable (t) as the voiceless alveolar plosive [t] or the glottal stop [?] in words like *butter*) do not vary randomly, but systematically in relation to social variables such as social class, gender, age and ethnicity. Speakers' use of linguistic variables is thus one of the way in which they locate themselves in social space.

Quantitative studies have been carried out in many speech communities since the pioneering works of Labov (1972) and Trudgill (1974). In Britain detailed studies of sociolinguistic variation have been carried out in Norwich, Tyneside, Reading, and Belfast. By replicating the sociolinguistic survey in various speech communities, sociolinguists have identified several patterns that recur very frequently. One of these patterns relate to language and gender.

Variation sociolinguistic research carried out in Norwich, Edinburgh, Glasgow, West Wirral and Reading reveals an interesting trait of female speech. Regardless of their age and social class membership, women ***tend*** to use more phonological and grammatical standard forms than men in both formal and informal styles of speech. Although the level of education can favour a consistent use of standard forms and research has shown that schoolboys and schoolgirls tend to use fewer stigmatized forms as they get older, nevertheless the difference between gender groups still persists: boys tend to use fewer standard forms than girls (Romaine 1984). On the whole there is a ***tendency*** among men to move away from the standard RP, while women tend to be more sensitive to the prestige norms of RP. It is this ***preference*** that can be viewed as a ***gender marker***.

2.2. Gender-related conversational styles. Gender-related speech differences, however, are not confined to phonological and grammatical variables. Apart from paradigmatic differences, there are also differences at the level of

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discourse. Research has shown that, when engaging in verbal interaction, men and women employ different conversational styles. In what follows I shall discuss the differences in the speaking patterns of men and women focusing on turn-taking, topic and topic development, minimal responses, hedges, questions, politeness, swearing and taboo language. However before embarking on this task, it should be pointed out that any analysis of conversational interaction should be based on a model of normal conversational structure. In this paper I use the model of turn-taking devised by Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974) whose rules govern turn construction, providing thus for the allocation of a next turn to one party and coordinating transfer so as to minimize gap and overlap.

2.2.1. Women's speech. Research on women's speech has identified a number of distinctive conversational strategies that give a particular dynamic to women's talk. It seems that their talk does not always proceed according to the turn-taking model mentioned above which focuses on the rule of one-person-speaking-at-one-time. Despite their concern with decorum, interruptions and various forms of simultaneous speech is common in all-female discourse (Maltz & Borker 1982; Coates 1995). Yet they are rarely seen as disruptive, as a sign of conversational malfunction, and getting the floor is not seen as particularly problematic.

Coates (1993) distinguishes three types of simultaneous speech in all-female discourse:

- asking questions and making comments while another participant is speaking; these questions and comments contribute to the production of joint discourse, i.e. they elaborate the topic currently discussed signaling active listenership
- simultaneous speech also occurs under the form of repetitions and rephrasing of the other party's words
- pursuing a conversational topic simultaneously.

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These forms of simultaneous speech are not seen as attempts to grab the floor and to reduce the others to silence, but as signs of support and interest which allow for a multi-layered development of topics.

Talk seems to be central to women's friendship. In conversation women are negotiating and building a relationship that should be under the form of support and closeness, but which at times may also involve criticism and distance. Therefore, the topics they choose for discussion generally revolve around feelings and highly personal issues involving mutual self-disclosure. As examples of distinctive female topics in conversation, Coates (1993) mentions the following sequence: mother's funeral, child abuse, wife's loyalty to husband and fear of men.

Women typically develop their topics slowly, accretively by linking their utterance to and building on the previous one or by talking about something related to it. They generally begin their utterances by explicitly acknowledging and responding to what has been said by others. Research has shown that they use a wide range of strategies of tying utterances together, filling in, serializing with a view to creating continuity and reaching consensus in conversation (Maltz & Borker 1982).

Lakoff described women's speech as tentative and one piece of evidence used to support her claim was women's frequent use of hedges as opposed to men. Lakoff (1975:54) explicitly linked women's use of hedges with their supposed unassertiveness and claimed that their speech contains more hedges because "they are socialized to believe that asserting themselves strongly is not nice or ladylike, or even feminine".

The empirical work carried out in order to investigate Lakoff's claim has shown that in some cases women *do* use more hedges than men. In a piece of research focusing on the expression of tentativeness, Preisler (1986) recorded groups of four people (both single-sex and mixed) discussing controversial topics as violence on television and corporal punishment for children. His sample consisting of men and women living and working in Lancaster and belonging to two different age groups (20-25 and 45-50) and three occupational groups. His study showed that the women in his sample used significantly more hedges than the men.

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Hedges vary greatly not only in terms of form, but also with regard to functions they serve. The use of hedges is one the negative politeness strategies identified by Brown and Levinson (1987). Hedges are used to redress various kinds of face threatening acts (such as criticism, complaints, requests, suggestions, etc.). Hedges are important devices used in marking topic changes. Such changes are face threatening and therefore are often done off record, the use of hedges serving precisely this purpose rather than signalling lack of confidence. I n such cases hedges redress the imposition on the addressee's face, perhaps partially apologize for it.

Moreover, given such highly sensitive topics as those mentioned above, women's use of hedges prevents their talk from being too face threatening. Coates's (1993) research on hedges in all-female discourse shows that "women's use of hedges to mitigate the force of utterance can be seen as a strength rather than as a weakness". When the topics discussed are so sensitive as to involve self-disclosure, the use of hedges can be a powerful device for saving both the speaker's and the addressee's face. The following example illustrates this. As the speaker A's description of an old friend enters the taboo area of malicious criticism, she uses hedges more and more frequently till she is eventually rescued by C's jockey comment:

A: but I did see what amounted to *sort of* chest black hair, she is a very dark *sort of* dark skinned and sallow complexion and a *I mean – I mean* I hope I'm *just* reporting this without any edge to it, *you know*, so *I mean* I *probably*

B: you mean you really think that she is turning into a gorilla? (laughter)

Another distinctive feature of women's conversational style is their use of questions. Lakoff (1975) notes that women ask more questions than men. In her view, women's tendency to ask more questions is indicative of their insecurity. Questions, however, serve various functions in conversation. They often function as information-seeking devices and in conversation a speaker can assume the role of 'expert', while the others ask the 'expert' questions. Women generally avoid the role of 'expert' in friendly conversation and therefore information-seeking questions are rare in all-female discourse.

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Instead, asking questions is a way of inviting others to participate, of checking that what has been said is acceptable to everyone present, of ensuring that conversation continues.

Fishman (1997) analyzed her transcripts of couples in conversation for questions and found a striking difference between male and female use of questions in cross-sex conversations. In seven hours of talk the three men asked fifty-nine questions, the women one hundred and fifty (three times as many). She explains women's question-asking in linguistic terms. Questions are interactionally powerful utterances, as they open a two-part sequence. They are first part of the adjacency pair question-answer. In interactive terms they are more powerful than statements, as they give the speaker the power to elicit a response. The absence of a response is noticeable (it triggers off a significant or attributable silence) and may be complained about. Questions thus are a way of ensuring minimal interaction. Women use this strategy as a means of inviting others to take part in interaction, of keeping the conversational flow going, helping thus the conversation away when it has been halted or when it shows some other signs of malfunctioning.

It has been asserted within folklinguistics, as well as by sociolinguists that women are more polite than men (Trudgill 1983; Holmes 1995). In this paper I shall make use of the distinction between negative politeness and positive politeness drawn by Brown and Levinson (1987). In English-speaking cultures women tend to favour positive politeness strategies such as 'small talk', complimenting, the use of the vivid present in reported conversation and of directly quoted speech rather than indirect speech and the use of tag-questions and expressions like *you know, see what I mean*. For women these are efficient ways of achieving their main goal in all-female speech, that of building and maintaining good social relationships, since positive-politeness strategies act as a social accelerator indicating that, in using them, the speaker wants to come closer to the addressee.

2.2.2. **Men's speech.** The speaking patterns of men, and this is valid for women too, vary greatly from one structure to another, since gender interacts with other social variables such as social class, age, and ethnicity. Moreover there may be striking variation among domains. Speakers may consider

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different patterns of speech appropriate for the domain of family, others for the domains of work and still others for the domain of friendship or when interacting with strangers. However, more surprising than these differences are the similarities across subcultures in patterns of verbal interaction between men, which point to a distinctive male conversational style. Research on the speaking patterns employed by men points to the same three features: storytelling, (aggressive) argument and verbal posturing.

Narratives such as storytelling and joke telling are common features of men's speech and they are highly valued when they are well performed for an audience. They are efficient devices for gaining and maintaining an audience. Transcripts of such storytelling events reveal an interesting feature of storytelling among men: audience is not overtly supportive. Men seem to respond to the storyteller not so much with elaboration, minimal response encouragement or questions on deeper implication as with side comments, challenges or even mockery. Their primary functions, however, is not to interrupt, change the topic or grab the floor, but to assert the identity of the individual audience member (Maltz & Borker 1982).

Loud and aggressive argument is another feature of all-male speech. Such arguments, which may often include, shouting, name-calling, verbal threats are not taken as a sign of real conflict. Rather they are seen as signs of involvement and solidarity and they are enjoyed for their own sake (Sacks 1992). Verbal aggression is another feature of all-male speech. Challenges, insults, put-downs are accepted as normal in friendly male discourse and may be used as strategies for achieving status especially in a working-class environment:

> It seems clear that status at the Oasis is related to the ability to "dish out" in the rapid fire exchange called "joshing": you have to have a quick retort, and preferably one that puts you "one up" on your opponent. People who can't compete in the game lose status.
> (LeMasters 1975:140)

Although male/female differences in swearing are under-researched, as we saw in the previous section the stereotypes that men swear more than

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women and use more taboo words is widespread (Lakoff 1975; Kramer 1975). According to Gomm's study[5], the male speakers in his sample swear more than the female speakers. Moreover, both men and women swear more freely in the company of their own sex; male usage of swear words drops significantly in mixed-sex conversation. On the other hand, there is evidence that women are familiar with – and also ready to use – a wide range of taboo words. Research on working-class women in deprived inner-city area has shown that such speakers make frequent use of taboo language. As one of Hughes's informants said: "It's not swearing to us, it's part of our everyday talking". Thus swearing and taboo language seem to be markers of a certain socio-economic and educational background rather than primarily gender markers.

These clusters of linguistic forms that point to gender-related conversational styles can be termed ***men's speech*** and ***women's speech***. However, these speech differences should not be regarded as gender-exclusive but as ***gender-preferential***, since men and women do not use completely different speech forms, but different quantities and frequencies of the same forms. In other words, although particular patterns of language use are used by men and women, one gender group shows a greater preference for them than the other.

4. Concluding remarks. Empirical research on language and gender carried out within the framework of variation sociolinguistics and conversation analysis has shown that men and women use language differently. These studies revealed two clusters of linguistic features that enable us to distinguish between masculine and feminine speech, supporting thus the assumption that language is gendered.

By identifying these feminine and masculine features of language use whose existence is supported by empirical evidence, sociolinguists and discourse theorists drew a distinction between some of the gender-related stereotypes and linguistic facts. Yet other stereotypes, such as men's using more swearing and taboo language and less polite forms or their dislike of being complimented are still under-researched.

Although sociolinguists' and discourse theorists' explanations offered useful insights into the nature of women's and men's speech, gender is used as

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a bottom line explanation when this cultural construct needs explanation itself. Viewing gender-related linguistic forms as the products of gender roles and leaving *gender* un-theorized have led discourse theorists to the over-generalizations that women's speech is co-operative and solidarity-oriented, while men's speech is more competitive. Therefore my assumption is that gendered language should be accounted for in terms of gender identity construction.

Human societies are structured in gendered terms. In modern European societies gender ideologies that assign men and women dominant and subordinate roles respectively (Seidler 1998; Baca Zinn &Eitzen 1990; Stanciulescu 1997) are manifest in language to the extent to which men's domineering ways of engaging in conversation and women's preference for a *less* challenging speech style match the gender roles assigned to them by society. These different conversational styles are acquired through the process of socialization within private and institutionalized settings. Rather than saying that these styles are employed by men and women as markers of their gender identity, we could say that these styles are part of their gender identity that is they are two of the ways women and men choose in the process of producing and presenting themselves as gendered subjects.

The picture that emerges from this paper is necessarily coloured by an uneven distribution of Romanian and English data at all levels. Section 3 has addressed English data, since Romanian is under-researched with regard to gender-related speech differences. For instance no study on language and gender was published in *Limba Română* between 1989 and 1997. On the other hand, there is only one empirical study in Romanian linguistics published so far that deals with the structures and strategies of conversational discourse in spoken Romanian, namely Ionescu-Ruxăndoiu's *Conversaţia: structuri şi strategii: sugestii pentru o pragmatică a românei vorbite*. However, the Romanian linguist basis her analysis on a corpus of dialectal texts published in the last three decades and originating in the Southern part of Romania since there is no corpus of recorded naturally occurring conversations for the Romanian language (Ionescu-Ruxandoiu 1999:100). Moreover, in Ruxăndoiu's study, the conversational strategies identified in spoken Romanian are not correlated with the social variable of *gender*. Nevertheless my assumption is

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that the findings of the survey discussed in Section 1 point to the existence of gender speech differences in Romanian as well and that they will emerge from subsequent research.

The complexity of the issue suggests several topics for further investigation. I hold the view that the paradigmatic gender-related speech differences that emerged from variation sociolinguistic research are of a limited kind and are insufficient in a contrastive approach to language and gender. My assumption is that gender speech differences become functional at the level of conversational strategies. Thus the research on men's and women's speech styles carried out so far and reviewed in this paper enables us to hypothesize that *the monitoring of conversation, 'small talk', conflict talk, a preference for either positive or negative politeness* can be the relevant linguistic variables in a contrastive analysis of language and gender carried out within the frameworks of pragmatics and conversation analysis.

Notes:

[1] Quoted in Baron, D., *Grammar and Gender,* New Haven, Yale University Press, 1986.
[2] Quoted in Coates, J., *Women, Men and Language,* London and New York, Longman, 1993.
[3] quoted in Coates, J., *Women, Men and Language,* London and New York, Longman, 1993, pp. 18-19.
[4] Lord Chesterfield is quoted in Coates, J., *Women, Men and Language,* London and New York, Longman, 1993.
[5] Gomm's study is mentioned in Coates (1993)

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