Language and gender, a critical perspective

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SUMMARY OF CONTENTS

The seminar entitled **Language and gender, a critical perspective** is an in-depth approach to a topic dealt with timidly in the **Grade in English Studies**. We scrutinise the relationship between a social construct such as gender and the quasi-magical system of communication we human beings come to use every single day.

The syllabus develops in a double direction: from language to gender and from gender to language. This means that we analyse both how the speaker's gender may influence their linguistic behaviour, and the way gender is represented in various contexts. The evolution from the *deficit*, *difference* and *dominance* approaches to a shift to discourse is regarded as crucial here. So attention is not directed only on whether men and women speak differently, or whether the language used by females is a deviation from the male norm (which has happened to be the excuse to explain male superiority at some levels), but on which grounds can gender be comprehended as a dynamic construct.

The main theoretical framework underpinning this course is **(critical) discourse analysis**. Thus, among other things, we examine enactments of power by men and women in the public domain. We also see how research has abounded on the role of gender in politics, the media, the workplace or the classroom context. Sexism, victimisation, emancipation and the construction of identity are key issues in question. As for our methodological bent, we aim for **qualitative corpus-based research**.

The description of so-called female language is the starting point from which students will depart. By the end of the course, they will have debunked some views on this particular issue and will have got familiar with **sociolinguistics** and **pragmatics**, as well. Notions such as power, status and hegemony will be employed to understand how asymmetry works.

SYLLABUS

1. INTRODUCTION
1.1. Key concepts
1.1.1. "Sex" is not the same as "gender"
1.1.2. "Sexism", "androcentrism", "feminism", etc.
1.1.3. Gender and language vs. Language and gender
1.2. "The woman": Was Jespersen right?
1.3. Silence, alienation and oppression: causes and consequences

2. LANGUAGE, GENDER AND SOCIETY
2.1. The contribution of sociolinguistics
2.2. Coseriu, Labov & Trudgill: Three linguistic perspectives

2.3. How can we define a "sociolect", an "idiolect" and a "genderlect"?

3. IS IT TRUE THAT MEN AND WOMEN SPEAK DIFFERENTLY?
      3.1. The starting point: Robin Lakoff
      3.2. Trying to describe the difference
      3.3. Stereotypes and prototypes
3.3.1. The *COBUILD* at stake
3.3.2. A feminist dictionary
3.4. The empirical evidence
3.4.1. One example in Irish literature
3.4.2. Men and women in politics
3.4.3. The representation of sexual orientation

4. BY WAY OF CONCLUSION
4.1. From deficit, to difference and dominance
4.2. "Women's language" as a construct
4.3. In search of a theoretical alternative
      4.3.1. Power, solidarity, resistance and social rules
      4.3.2. The "discourse shift" and the "post-Structuralist stance

ASSESSMENT

The student's final mark will depend on: (a) tasks (30%); (b) attendance to the seminar and active participation (30%); (b) final exam (40%).

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