

National University of Lesotho

BA/BEd. Examinations

ELG3301: ADVANCED READING AND WRITING

January, 2024

Time: 3 hrs.

Total Marks: [100]

---

Section A

Reading Comprehension

Question A

Instructions

Read the passage below and answer the questions that follow.

**“In mixed-sex classrooms, it is extremely difficult for females to talk, and even more difficult for teachers to provide them with the opportunity.” Dale Spender looks at some myths about language and sex differences.**

1. Ours is a society that tries to keep the world sharply divided into masculine and feminine, not because that is the way the way the world is, but because that is the way we believe is *should* be. it takes unwavering belief and considerable effort to keep this division. It also leads us to make some fairly foolish judgements, particularly about language.
2. Because we think that language also *should* be divided into masculine and feminine, we have become very skilled at ignoring anything that will not fit our *preconceptions*. We would rather change what we hear than change our ideas about gender division of the world. We will call assertive girls unfeminine, and supportive boys effeminate, and try to change them while still retaining our *stereotypes* of masculine and feminine talk.
3. This is why some research on sex differences and language has been so interesting. It is an illustration of how wrong we can be. of the many investigators who set out to find the stereotyped sex differences in language, few have had any positive results. It seems that our images of serious *taciturn* male speakers and gossipy *garrulous* female speakers are just that: images.
4. Many myths associated with masculine and feminine talk have had to be discarded as more research has been undertaken. If females do use more trivial words than males, stop talking in mid-sentence, or talk about the same things over and over again, they do not do it when in investigators are around.
5. None of these characteristics of female speech have been found. And even when sex differences have been found, the question arises as to whether the difference is in the eye – or ear – of the beholder, rather than in the language.
6. Pitch provides one example. We believe that males were meant to talk in low-pitched voices and females in high-pitched voices. We also believe that low pitched is more desirable. Well, it has been found that males tend to have lower-pitched voices than females. But it has also been found that this difference cannot be explained by *anatomy*.

7. If males do not speak in high-pitched voices, it is not usually because they are unable to do so. The reason is more likely to be that there are penalties. Males with high-pitched voices are often the object of ridicule. But pitch is not an absolute, for what is considered the *right* pitch for males varies from country to country.
8. Some people have suggested that gender differentiation in America is more extreme than in Britain. This perhaps helps to explain why American males have deeper voices. (Although no study has been done, I would suspect that the voices of Australian males are even lower). This makes it difficult to classify pitch as a sex difference.
9. It is also becoming increasingly difficult to classify low pitch as more desirable. It is less than 20 years since the **BBC Handbook** declared that females should not read the news, because their voices were unsuitable for serious topics. Presumably, women's voices have been lowered in that 20 years, or high pitch is not as bad as it used to be.
10. Research into sex differences and language may not be telling us much about language, but it is telling us a great deal about gender, and the way human beings strive to meet the expectations of the **stereotype**. Although as a general rule many of the believed sex differences in language have not been found (and some of the differences which have been found by gender-blind investigators cannot be believed), there is one area where this is an exception. It is the area of language and power.
11. When it comes to power, some very interesting sex differences have been found. Although we may have been able to predict some of them, there are others which completely contradict our beliefs about masculine and feminine talk.
12. The first one, which was to be expected, is that females are more polite. Most people who are without power and find themselves in a vulnerable position are more polite. The shop assistant is more polite than the customer; the student is more polite than the teacher; the female is more polite than the male. But this has little to do with their sex, and a great deal to do with their position in society.
13. Females are required to be polite, and this puts the onus on them to accommodate male talk. This is where some research on sex differences in language has been surprising. Contrary to our beliefs, it has been found repeatedly that males talk more.
14. When it comes to husbands and wives, males not only use longer sentences, they use more of them. Phylis Chesler has also found that it is difficult for women to talk when men are present – particularly if the men are their husbands.
15. Although we might all be familiar with the sight of a group of women sitting silently listening to a male speaker, we have rarely encountered a group of men sitting quietly listening to a female speaker. Even a study of television panel programme has revealed the way that males talk, and females accommodate male talk; men are the talkers, women the polite, supportive and encouraging listeners.
16. If females want to talk, they must talk to each other, for they have little opportunity to talk in the presence of men. Even when they do talk, they are likely to be interrupted. Studies by Don Zimmerman and Candace West have found that 98 per cent of interruptions in mixed-sex talk were performed by males. The politeness of females ensures not only that they do not interrupt, but that they do not protest when males interrupt them.
17. The greater amount of man-talk and the greater frequency of interruptions is probably something that few of us are conscious of: we believe strongly in the **stereotype** which

insists that it is the other way around. However, it is not difficult to check this. It can be an interesting classroom exercise.

18. It was an exercise I set myself at a recent conference of teachers in London. From the beginning, the men talked more because although there were eight official male speakers, there were no female ones. This was seen as a problem, so the organizing committee decided to exercise positive discrimination in favour of female speakers from the floor.
19. At the first session – with positive discrimination – there were 14 male speakers and nine female: at the second session, there were 10 male speakers and four female speakers. There was almost twice as much man-talk as woman-talk. However, what was interesting was the impression people were left with about talk. The *stereotypes* were still holding firm. Of the 30 people consulted after the sessions, 27 were of the opinion that there had been more female than male speakers.
20. This helps to explain some of the contradictions behind sex differences in language. On the one hand, we believe that females talk too much; on the other hand, we have ample evidence that they do not talk as much as males. But the contradiction only remains when we use the same standard for both sexes; it disappears when we introduce a double standard, with one rule for females and another for males.
21. A talkative female is one who talks about as often as a man. When females are seen to talk about half as much as males, they are judged to be dominating the talk. This is what happened at the conference. Although females were less than half of the speakers, most people thought they had dominated the talk.
22. This double standard was not confined to the general session; it was also present in the workshop on sexism and education. At the first workshop session, there were 32 females and five males. When the tape was played afterwards, it was surprising to find that of the 58 minutes of talk, 32 were taken up by males.
23. It was surprising because no one realized, myself included, just how much the males were talking. Most people were aware that the males had talked *disproportionately* but no one had even guessed at the extent. We all, male and female alike, use double standard. Males have to talk almost all the time before they are seen to be dominating the talk.
24. There are numerous examples of the ways in which males can assume the right to talk in mixed-sex groups. Not only can they use their power to ensure that they talk more, but that they choose the topic. The polite female is always at a disadvantage.
25. It is not polite to be the centre of conversation and to talk a lot – if one is female. It is not polite to interrupt – if one is female. It is not polite to talk about things which interest you – if one is female. It *is* polite to accommodate, to listen, to be supportive and encouraging to male speakers – if one is female.
26. So, females are kept in their place. they enjoy less rights to talk. Because they have less power and because politeness is part of the *repertoire* of successful feminine behaviour, it is not even necessary to force females to be quiet. The penalties are not so great if they break the rule, they will *obligingly* monitor themselves.
27. In the past few years, a lot of attention has been paid to the role of language and learning, but the assumption has been that sexes have enjoyed equal rights to talk. Yet it is quite obvious that females do not have equal access to talk outside the classroom, so it would be surprising if this was reversed in the school.

28. However, if talking for learning is as important as Douglas Barnes maintains it is, then any teacher in a mixed-sex class who upholds the social rules of talk could well be practising educational discrimination. Such teachers would be allowing boys to engage in talk more frequently than girls.
29. In looking at talk, it becomes clear that there are differences in girls' single-sex and mixed-sex schools. In single-sex schools, (providing, of course, that the teacher is female), females are not obliged to defer to male authority; to support male topics; to agree to interruptions; or to practise silence; or to make the tea while the males make the public speeches.
30. "Free speech" is available to females in a way which is not available in mixed-sex schools. This could be the explanation for the frequently claimed superior achievement of females in single-sex schools; free to use their language to learn, they learn more.
31. In mixed-sex classrooms, it is often extremely difficult for females to talk, and even more difficult for teachers to provide them with the opportunity. This is not because teachers are supremely sexist beings, but because they are governed by the same social rules as everyone else.
32. It is appropriate for normal boys to demand more of the teachers' time, and they cannot always modify this situation. Male students in the classroom conform to expectations when they are *boisterous*, noisy and even disruptive; female students conform when they are quiet and *docile*; teachers conform when they see such behaviour as gender-appropriate.
33. Although it is unlikely that teachers deliberately practice discrimination against their students on the grounds of sex, by enforcing the social rules for talk they are *unwittingly* penalizing females. But this situation is not inevitable. There is no physical reason, no sex difference, which is responsible for the relative silence of females. As John Stuart Mill stated, this asymmetry depends upon females willingly *conceding* the rights to males.
34. Perhaps teachers can help females to be a little less willing to be silent in mixed-sex classrooms. Perhaps they can help females to enjoy the same rights to talk as males. But we would have to change our *stereotypes*.

**Question 1:** Provide a **suitable title** for this passage.

**Question 2:** What is the writer's **main purpose** in this passage?

**Question 3:** Give the meaning of each of the following words as they are used in the passage:

- (a) *Preconceptions* [paragraph 2, line 2]
- (b) *stereotypes* [paragraph 2, line 5]
- (c) *taciturn* [paragraph 2, line 9]
- (d) *garrulous* [paragraph 2, line 9]
- (e) *anatomy* [paragraph 6, line 5]
- (f) *repertoire* [paragraph 26, line 2]
- (g) *obligingly* [paragraph 26, line 4]
- (h) *conceding* [paragraph 37, line 5]

**Question 4:**

- (a) The writer has used the words *preconceptions*, *myths*, and *stereotypes* to refer to the same idea. What is it?
- (b) These words (i.e. in # 4, above) have been chosen to suggest the **writer's viewpoint**. What is her viewpoint?

(8)

**Question 5:** In the **third** and **fourth paragraphs**, the writer describes what has led to the *preconceptions* to be challenged.

- (a) State the cause of the *preconceptions* that were challenged. Support your answer with examples from the passage.
- (b) Give the reason why the *preconceptions* had to be discarded.

(8)

**Question 6:** "*Pitch provides one example.*" [paragraph 6, line 1].

- (a) What does "*pitch*" exemplify?
- (b) What is the preconception about "*pitch*" which the writer challenges?
- (c) What is the true explanation for male/female pitch which the writer challenges?
- (d) What evidence does the writer give for this explanation?

(10)

**Question 8:** Which of the following statements are **true** and which are **false**? **Tick in the box.**

- (a) Women are more polite than men simply because they are women. **T/F**
- (b) The common belief that women talk more than men is incorrect. **T/F**
- (c) Women talk easily only if the men present are their husbands. **T/F**
- (d) Women do not interrupt as much as men in mixed-sex talk. **T/F**
- (e) We perceive men as dominating talk because they talk more than women. **T/F**
- (f) Men are responsible for keeping women in their place by the way they talk. **T/F**

(6)

**(40 marks)**

## Section B

### EXTENDED WRITING

#### Question B

##### Essay Rubric

Representatives of small-scale credit organizations (bo-machonisa) can often be found on university and college campuses offering special incentives to get students to fill out credit application forms. Many people strongly feel that this takes advantage of students, who are often low on cash, whose main source is the NMDS stipends. However, others feel that it is an excellent way to help students to learn to be financially responsible.

Write an **argumentative essay of about 1½ pages** on the **issue** above. Take a position and use specific reasons and concrete examples to support your claim/s.

**(30)**

## Section C

Choose either **Question C** or **Question D**

Either:

### Question C

You were passing by the ATM on 24<sup>th</sup> Lerotholi Street when you witnessed an ATM robbery. No one was nearby when the incident occurred and the police rely solely on you to tell them what happened.

- Write a **report to the Maseru Central Police Superintendent** telling him what happened, when it happened, how it happened, and the description (if any) of the person/s who robbed the ATM.
- Your report must not be more than one page in length.

**(30)**

Or:

### Question D

#### Instructions

A large wholesale firm has advertised for a diligent and capable person to do its advertising. The firm sells cosmetics.

- Write an **application letter for this post**, giving particulars of your academic qualifications, experience and extra-mural activities.
- Your letter must not be more than one page in length.

**(30)**