

GENDER DIFFERENCES IN L2 LEARNING



Definitions

- ‘**Gender**’ has replaced ‘**sex**’ in sociolinguistics.
- **Sex**: biologically or physiologically based distinction between males and females.
- **Gender**: a social and cultural notion. It indicates the social identity that emerges or is constructed through **social action**, and adherence (following) to certain cultural norms and proscriptions.
- **Gender** – the difference between masculine and feminine identities, believed to be a fluid category depending on the individuals’ social, cultural, and situational **contexts**.

(Ehlich, 1997; Pavlenko, 2001; Kubota, 2003).

Definitions

- **L1** – First language
- **L2** – Second language
- **ELL** – English Language Learner
- **ESL** – English as a Second Language
- **Language Learning** – an individual's proficiency in language at a given time, which can be quantified as a measure from a language test.
- **Intervention** – strategies used to enhance (improve) language learning (e.g. scaffolding language; using techniques to aid comprehension; integrating listening, reading, speaking, and writing into lessons; teaching language in the content areas).

Definitions

- **Bilingual Setting** – context in which students are learning an L2 simultaneous to their L1 (usually a context in which the student is a minority).
- **ESL Setting** – context in which students are learning an L2 (usually a context in which the student is a minority).
- **Foreign Language Setting** – context in which students are learning an L2 as a foreign language (usually a context in which the student is a majority).
- **Heritage Language Setting** – context in which a person is studying a language he/she has proficiency in and/or has a cultural connection to that language.
- **Sociolect** (or **social dialect**): a socially distinct language variety.

Introduction

- **Trudgill**: in Western society, men are evaluated more on what they do, and women on how they appear.
- **Eckert**: women rely on symbolic resources, e.g. speech, dress, make-up, to establish their position in their social groups.
- Women are aware of what is proscribed (prohibited) and therefore avoid it more than men (subconsciously).
- Women use innovative and positively evaluate variants more than men.

Introduction

- There seems to exist a female advantage in first language (L1) learning

(Burman, Bitman, & Booth, 2008; Roulstong & Northstone, 2002).

- Much less is known regarding gender differences in second language (L2) learning.
- Yet, L2 researchers note that gender is a critical individual and social variable in language learning

(Brantmeier, Schuller, & Wilde, 2007).

Past Reviews

- Past reviews conclude that:
 - Gender differences in L2 learning are likely due to cognitive and cultural differences (*Ekstrand, 1980*).
 - More conclusive research on gender related to L2 learning is needed (*Spencer & Lewis, 1986*).
 - Research findings are not conclusive regarding male or female advantage in L2 learning (*Brantmier et. al, 2007*).

Theory & Past Research

Study Type with Example	Theoretical Premise	Findings
Language Strategy Use <i>(e.g. Oxford & Nykos; Andreou, Andeou, & Vlachos, 2008)</i>	Successful L2 learners use more language learning strategies.	Earlier studies – Females use more strategies. More recent studies – No difference in strategy use by gender.
Affective (Emotional) Studies <i>(e.g. Gardner, 1972; Kssau, 2006; Kobayashi, 2002)</i>	Successful L2 learners have more positive attitudes, higher motivation, and less anxiety.	Females tend to report more positive affective variables than males.

What causes gender differences in L2 learning measure outcomes?

■ Age and interventions

- Younger vs. older students + presence or non-presence of interventions
- Younger seems ideal to mitigate (decrease) gender differences.

■ Language learning setting and interventions

- Bilingual vs. foreign language settings + presence or non-presence of interventions
- Bilingual settings seem ideal to mitigate gender differences.

■ Presence of interventions seem to be critical to mitigate gender differences, but also confound conclusions.



What educational practices appear promising for optimal L2 learning for male and female L2 learners?

- **Interventions** – good to implement
- **Environment** – should be supportive and engaging
- **Individuals** – students with a strong L1 base seem to have higher language learning achievement regardless of age or gender



Gender differences

■ Cognitive

- rational vs. illogical

■ Pragmatic

- communicative means

■ Psychological

- long-term vs. short-term memory
- non-affective vs. affective

■ Linguistic

- expressive language means
- discourse structure

Descriptive statistic for Rating of Motivational Determinants by Gender

Variables	male	female
Parental Encouragement	37	38
Degree of Instrumentality	33	32
Degree of Integrativeness	31	30
Attitude toward learning English	38	36
Attitude toward English people	17	16

Descriptive statistic for Rating of Motivational Determinants by Gender

English Class Anxiety	15	16
Ethnocentrism	29	29
Cultural Identity	12	12
Need for Achievement	32	32
Interest in Foreign Languages	37	36
Desire to Learn English	20	19

Question Period





What causes gender
differences in L2
learning?

What educational practices
appear promising for
optimal L2 learning for
male and female L2
learners?



many
Thanks!



