Current Approaches in Language and Gender Research, and their Potential Application to Mongolia

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"Language and gender" has gained prominence as an area of study in Western academia since the 1970s, mainly as a dimension of feminist scholarship (for recent overviews see Coates and Pichler 2011; Holmes and Meyerhoff 2003; Mills and Mullany 2011; Pichler and Eppler 2009). The growing importance of this field is evident from the proliferation of dedicated publications, including the recently-established journal *Gender and Language*, published by the International Gender and Language Association (IGALA), and a number of dedicated monographs, textbooks and readers (Eckert and Mc Connell-Ginet 2003; Jule 2008; Litosseliti 2006; Sunderland 2006; Talbot 2010), as well as chapters in books covering other topics such as "language and power" (Simpson and Mayr 2009) or linguistic anthropology (Ahearn 2012). Noting the need and potential for local scholarship in this research area in Mongolia (Khangaisaikhan 2012), in this article I will summarize the major and current approaches and themes in the field of language and gender studies, and briefly discuss their possible relevance to Mongolia.

Interest among linguists in the differences between men's and women's language is not altogether recent. Laying the foundation for inquiry in this area, Otto Jespersen introduced a chapter on women's speech in his major work *Language, its Nature, Development, and Origin* (1922) with the assertion that "there are tribes in which men and women are said to speak totally different languages, or at any rate distinct dialects". Jespersen described how he saw women as "innately" more talkative than men—reflecting their greater imitative capacity and "histrionic talent"—and how mothers' talkativeness was useful in helping children to learn to speak. Explaining these apparently significant differences between the ways that women and men use language remained the key area of study in the language and gender field until recently, although the dominant interpretive perspectives have progressed from what have been known as "deficit" to "dominance" and "difference" approaches.

The "deficit" approach, pioneered by Robin Lakoff (1973, 2004), described women's language as "weak" or "deficient" in comparison to men's assertive language. Lakoff discussed how English-speaking women use tag questions and "hedges" that express less conviction than direct or absolute statements (e.g., "I feel *so* unhappy"); use of affective modifiers such as "gorgeous"; and weak expletives (e.g., "oh dear!" instead of "shit!") (Lakoff 1973:50). While these speech differences are confirmed by statistical analyses of speech

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corpora (e.g., Rayson et al. 1997), more recent authors have questioned Lakoff's interpretation of women's speech patterns as reflecting inferiority. This critique is at the core of the "dominance" approach, whose proponents have argued that men's dominance over women leads to language difference, and that we should thus speak of male "power" rather than "superiority" (e.g., Spender 1980; see also Talbot 2010). Research in this area continues to reveal systematic gender biases in language (Litosseliti 2006:14-15), some of which are the target of feminist language reform attempts (see below). Baker's recent analysis of written English corpora from 1931 to 2006 demonstrates, for instance, that while gendered labelling in English has reduced quantitatively over time, gendered practices remain common—such as referring to adult women as "girls" (but infrequently men as "boys"), and the association of adjectives indicating power or success mainly with men (Baker 2010).

The "difference" approach, by contrast, makes weaker assumptions about power difference, exploring instead how men and women apparently inhabit different social spheres and perform different gender roles, which come to be reflected in language difference (Maltz and Borker 1982; Gilligan 1982; Tannen 1990). Authors writing from this perspective claim that language difference reflect social dichotomies, and are taught through childhood socialization, including play. Thus boys (and men) learn to value autonomy, reason (abstract logic), individual power, and competition; girls (and women) learn to value relationships, concrete and collective problem-solving, intimacy, and cooperation. Social interactions— including speech conversations—are, from this perspective, viewed as a means of status-seeking (for men) or relationship creating (for women); these are taught and reinforced in competitive play (for boys) characterized by negative speech such as ridicule, and small-group play (for girls) characterized by positive speech. A recent example of work from this perspective is Rühlemann's (2010) study of the British National Corpus, which concludes that women's speech displays a "feminine grammar" which is suited to conversational interactions.

While these earlier models of gender difference continue to inform language and gender research, in the past decade scholars working in this field have rejected the binary categories assumed by "domination" and "difference" approaches as overly essentialist, arguing that gender is constructed in multiple ways through language practices in various contexts. Dualistic views of gendered speech can effectively obscure other variables such as location, age, and formality of the context (Foley 2011). As Sidnell (2012) has argued, studying language and gender outside the Western context requires us to rethink gender as a dimension of social organization rather than strictly in identity terms. Social relations may have gendered dimensions, but they can be much more complex than the generalized categories of "man" and "woman": for instance, gender is part but not the whole of kinship relations (and roles) existing between husband and wife, daughter and mother, father and son, or elder-sister's-husband and wife's-younger-sister. These comments have particular relevance to the Mongolian context, where age-rank and kinship relations combine with gender to produce complex sets of social relations. Such social relations, and their gendered aspects, may be reinforced by names used in addressing others, including nicknames, formal titles, or honorific terms. They may also be constructed through terms of endearment, such as the feminine "Baby", "My dear", "Darling", "Honey", "Sweetheart", "Sweetie", and "Sweetie pie" (Afful 2010).

A substantial proportion of recent work from this perspective has been guided by Judith Butler's work on performativity (1990, 1993, 1997). Butler described gender as "performative" insofar as it is constructed by actors through their repetition (i.e., repeated

performance) of socially-defined activities that make up gender roles. Performativity theory broadly intersects with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which aims to describe "discourses" in the Foucauldian sense as sets of communicative practices that define the terms of reference for a field of knowledge, thereby constituting their objects and instituting power difference (Lazar 2008; Talbot 2010; Mills and Mullany 2011). The central tenet of these approaches is that gender categories such as "women" (or "girls") are created and reproduced by discourses and practices. Thus Gómez (2010) describes, for example, how female adolescents participate in gendered narrative discourses about their love lives and relationships, by reproducing such narratives in online communications; these traditional romantic "love myths" place the girls' identities as subservient to those of their boyfriends'. Yet the performance of such gender roles is not necessarily absolute; in Gómez's account, for instance, female adolescents also perform narratives of independence when the relationships break off. Similarly, Didi-Ogren (2011) finds that women mainly deploy the local Japanese Iwate Dialect and "Japanese Women's Language" (JWL) for tactical reasons, but that JWL—which has been described as an "obligatory cultural category" that marks women's subordinate positions—is not always directly experienced by the Japanese women in her study.

Many of the articles published in *Gender and Language* have approached gender studies from a CDA perspective: for example, describing how a conservative Christian organization uses "objective" scientific language to lend credibility to homophobic messages (Peterson 2010); discussing the use of "fag jokes" and homosexual language in Brazil (Junge 2010); or describing gay men's narratives about sexual violence (Leap 2010). Jane Sunderland's (2010) recent monograph on gendered roles and language in children's books highlights the highly stereotyped social roles of men and women in the "authoritative" texts used as narratives in readers or stories, in which boys and men tend to be dominant.

While earlier research in the field of language and gender focused almost entirely on the English language, in the past several years the field has expanded somewhat to encompass work on a broader range of languages, including a number of non-Western contexts. These include recent works concerning Sub-Saharan Africa (Atanga et al. 2012, as well as other contributions to the June 2012 special volume of *Gender and Language*), Ghana (Afful 2010), the Caribbean (Sidnell 2012), Finland (Pyykkonen et al. 2010), Japan (Didi-Ogren 2011; Hiramoto 2010), Serbia (Filopovic 2011), and Sweden (Milles 2011).

A large part of this internationally-oriented research has investigated the context of language policies and non-sexist language reform. For example, Milles (2011) discusses the successful feminist language reform in Sweden which instituted the neutral (non-derogatory) colloquial term *snippa* for the female genitals, mirroring the similar adoption of the term *tissekone* in Danish *vajayjay* in U.S. English. Abbou (2011), taking note of official "feminization" policies of the French General Commission for Terminology and Neologisms, which aim to replace the use of the generic masculine, contrasts the non-standard uses of antisexist double gender markings by anarchist feminists. These include various typographical and morphosyntactic conventions (dash, slash, mixed case, underlining, etc.) to draw attention to the gender of pronouns: "radicaux-ales" ("radicals", combining m. "radicaux" and f. "radicales"); "traducteurs/trices" ("translators", combining m. "traducteurs" and f. "traductrices"); "manifestantE" ("demonstrator", combining m. "manifestant" and f. "manifestante"); "individuE" ("individual", which adds a capitalized feminine ending to a word of normally invariable gender); or "tout-te-s" ("all", adding endings for both f. "toutes" and m. "tous" to the inanimate/neutral "tout"); and even more deliberately "non-grammatical"

forms such as "auteurSEs" ("authors", which assumes the f. form "auteuses" rather than "auteures", removing the morphological bias of standard French toward the masculine form).

In contrast to these antisexist trends, Filopovic (2011) points out that men's domination of official language policy has resulted in the persistence of masculine forms in Serbia. Focusing on the criminal justice system in Australia, Esteal et al. (2012) argue that the official terminology of domestic abuse, and associated language of the courtroom, position ongoing violence experienced by women as less severe than public forms of assault. The English language term "rape" exists to describe sexual assault, for instance, but the fact that this term does not encompass domestic assualt—a husband forcing his wife to have sex without her consent—serves to excuse the aggressor; likewise, there is often a lack of suitable terms to distinguish forced from consensual sexual acts.

From the above it is clear that language and gender research has definite practical applications. It aims to allow us to address gender difference in meaningful ways, partly by informing language policy and feminist action. While current language and gender research continues to engage with the "dominance" and "difference" perspectives developed in the 1980s, many authors currently work from the ideas of "performance" and "discourse", extending the scope of research to include non-English and non-Western contexts, and focusing increasingly on online communications. Recent research employs a variety of methods and sources, including analysis of primary written documents collected by the researcher (e.g., Abbou 2011; Sunderland 2010), Conversation Analysis or observation of interactive speech practices (e.g., Afful 2010); observed interactions in controlled experimental settings (e.g., Palomares 2009); and analysis of extensive language corpora (e.g., Rayson et al. 1997; Ruhlemann 2010).

Some challenges exist in the application of these methodologies in Mongolia. There is no existing spoken language corpus, and preparing one for the sake of a single study would inevitably demand more resources than would be available to a single researcher. Although the collection of written texts for corpus or Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is more feasible (e.g., using automated tools to harvest and process online resources), we cannot assume that written language will reflect broader communicative practices—which are largely oral—insofar as participation in print discourses or online communications remain relatively elite phenomena in Mongolia. Conversation Analysis (CA) potentially offers the greatest opportunities for research in Mongolia. CA involves non-interventionist audio or video recordings of natural conversations or other social interactions, followed by a complete transcription and analysis of those interactions (see Have 2007, Hutchby and Wooffitt 2008). It has become a major methodological approach in studies of language and gender and feminist research more generally (Speer 2002, 2012; Kitzinger 2000; Stokoe and Smithson 2001), generating a valuable understanding of "how, in our ordinary, mundane interactions, we produce the social order we inhabit" (Kitzinger 2000:174). Insofar as CA conventionally limits its conclusions to what is found in-text, I suggest that explication of the gendered dimensions of recorded interactions might be supported by additional and more participatory ethnographic study in sites (such as Mongolia) where such background is not already part of the broader linguistic, sociological, or anthropological literature.

Regardless of methods or interpretive approach, a common requirement of contemporary language and gender research is that it be grounded in concrete data about everyday language practices. Men's and women's speech may differ in significant ways, but concrete observations are necessary to appreciate how and why those differences occur. While there is much

"received wisdom" about gendered language use (e.g., that women are more talkative, or more tentative, or use more emotive speech), the findings by language and gender researchers lead us to challenge these stereotypes, potentially showing that supposed differences are linked to the context of interaction rather than gender alone (e.g., Palomares 2009). As the body of knowledge about actual speech practices has increased—and has broadened to encompass non-English and non-Western contexts—we have been able to revise earlier assumptions that tended to essentialize gender, making progress toward understanding the root causes and processes that produce gender inequality around the world.

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ТОВЧЛОЛ

Энэхүү өгүүлэлдээ орчин үеийн хэлшинжлэлийн нэгэн сонирхолтой, тулгамдсан сэдэв болох хэл ба жендер судлалын чиг хандлага, судлагдсан байдал хийгээд цаашид энэхүү чиглэлээр Монголд судалгааны ажил хийхэд анхаарах, тохирох аргазүйн асуудлын тухайд хөндөхийг зорьсон болно. Ер нь эрэгтэй, эмэгтэй хүмүүсийн жендерын ялгааны тухай асуудлыг зөвхөн нийгмийн эрх үүргийн нь талаас авч үзэж, тайлбарладаг нь өрөөсгөл хэрэг юм.

Мөн хэлний жендерийн тухай асуудал нь Нийгэм, хэл-соёлын нэгэн чухал сэдэв мөн. Гэхдээ энэ төрлийн судалгаа, хэлний баримт хэрэглэгдэхүүнийг голдуу англи хэл-соёлын жишээгээр тайлбарласан байдаг. Бид судалгаандаа эрэгтэй, эмэгтэй хүмүүсийн жендерийн ялгааны тухай асуудлыг өөрийн төрөлх монгол хэл-соёлын аспектүүд дээр ажиглалт хийж, улмаар нарийвчлан тайлбарлах санаатай байна.