

Allyson Jule: Speaking Up: Understanding Language and Gender.

1st edition. Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 2018, 127 pages, ISBN 978-1-78309-959-7.

DOI: <<https://doi.org/10-32422/mv.1582>>.

The book *Speaking Up: Understanding Language and Gender* represents a not very typical example of current problems in the context of international relations. The unusual connection of gender, as a social variable, with language and speech in general, may seem to be outside this field completely, but the opposite is true. Despite the fact that the author does not explicitly describe reality in an international context, each chapter contains passages dedicated to the field of international relations. The reason may be simple – Jule tries to force the reader to think about the problem in depth. In order to achieve this, she teaches the reader to think about the implications that gender and language can have for the international community.

Allyson Jule, PhD, is a Canadian academic and a Professor of Education and the Dean of Education at Trinity Western University in Langley, British Columbia, Canada. She is also the Co-Founder and Co-Director of the Gender Studies Institute, and is on the Advisory Committee of the International Gender and Language Association (IGALA). In 2011 Jule won TWU's Davis Distinguished Teaching Award and in 2016 she became one of the top 10 Canadian professors of the year. She is the only TWU professor who was awarded the prestigious 3M Teaching Fellowship for her remarkable academic results. In her researches, Jule specialises in gender – with a connection to language, education and/or religion, and a focus on how gender assumptions affect the way people speak in various contexts. She authored and edited many excellent publications, the most famous being *A Beginner's Guide to Language and Gender* (2008) and *Shifting Visions: Gender and Discourses* (2015). Allyson Jule's main aims are to end female silence in the classroom and to create a more just world.

In her latest publication, Jule has outlined two main topics: “*How language represents, reveals, constructs and sustains attitudes to gender*” and “*how language users speak in ways that contribute to their gendered-inflected lives*”. Simply put, Jule, in her book, explores how gender influences the way we communicate in a domestic or international environment. According to Jule, “*gender is a major part of who we are and why we behave in certain ways, and so it is worthwhile to consider the many places that gender and language intersect*” (4). This intersection is present not only in the private sphere, but also in the public sphere, which is probably more internationally visible thanks to the global audience for news media. In news media, problems of gender-linguistic inequalities can be easily found in various contexts: “*Islamic terrorism and violence, the refugee crisis, gender-based violence on university campuses and in conflict zones, increasing poverty in developing countries, [and] shifts in geopolitical alliances*”, among others (9). Jule's book aims at presenting the complexity of this problem by using a bottom-up approach – going from a detailed understanding of the roots to international impacts of language-gender relations.

Both of the main topics set by Jule include historical and societal impacts on gender expression in language: or more specifically, they include traditional views of what criteria a good woman must meet and what criteria a good man must meet in order to meet general expectations. Meanwhile, the way we communicate predestines our other activities. Jule, however, suggests that our own decisions, activities, and/or life plans are largely influenced by what society expects us to do. As Jule states, “*he [Otto Jespersen,*

1922] believed that the greatest orators of history were men because of innate abilities in them that were rarely found in women” (8). The relationship of gender and its subsequent language use in practise has a significant impact on the building of our own identity, working or private relationships and living preferences. Today’s perception of this relationship, however, locks people into metaphorical cages, which represent a long-lasting, historically-conditioned trend. But the one who becomes free of the cage is then out of the norm for the rest of society. Jule therefore asks: Do we want a world in which we have strictly divided divisions of femininity and masculinity, or will we begin to build together an equitable and just world?

“*Language plays a complex part in reflecting, creating and sustaining our own genderedness and the genderedness of others*” (20). Language and our speech in general, in conjunction with gender as a social variable, are overlapping in contexts in which we build our social awareness of the world. This applies to different areas that affect the way we live our lives – the school environment, the working environment, the religious community, the media... In all these contexts there are rooted gender assumptions and expectations that show significant differences. Women are expected to be informal, emotional and sophisticated, while men are expected to be strong, formal and decisive. Furthermore, language plays an important role in both social and political life. In many countries, language is still a tool of oppression and control governing the distribution of power in a state. Women and sexual minorities are thus considerably disadvantaged in many areas – power is predominantly accumulated in the hands of heterosexual men, who also adapt their style of speech to this purpose. This is so not only in totalitarian regimes, but also in the strongest democracies today: for example, “*the whole world witnessed the connection of gender and language watching America under Trump: for example the way he dismissed his opponent, Hillary Clinton, and other women, mocking a woman’s appearance and discarding women’s voices entirely*” (10). He used a powerful masculine rhetoric to win the elections. And he succeeded. This raises the question: can social success be partly based on the social linguistic structures? The answer is still unclear.

The book itself is divided into two main chapters, of which the first – “Understanding Gender and Language Use” – discusses the basics of the subject itself. Jule already demonstrates on the first pages what kind of gender expectations we have in the structure of written and oral speeches. The feminine rhetoric used in the first chapter fulfils the expectations of the style “*to write like a woman*” (mainly using personal stories, anecdotes, and an informal style of speech), which does not correspond to the style “*to write like an academic*” (mainly a formal style of speech, and distance from the reader). Both types of style find a target audience for which the style choice is a problem they can not identify with. We face these and similar language challenges daily in different social areas – from politics, through education and the work environment, to religious communities. We expect the woman to stand out and express herself differently from the man because she is biologically predestined for different activities. But biology is just one argument for what causes this complex and historical problem. Therefore, the author offers an insight into the very core of the problem and shows that the gender-language-social status relationship is much more complicated than it seems at first glance.

The complexity of the subject is demonstrated in the first part of the book, where the reader becomes familiar with feminism as a theoretical approach that forms the basis for understanding the whole issue. From the historical point of view, it is complemented by a detailed analysis of the sex-gender relationship using ideas of the most successful feminist authors (for example, Deborah Cameron, Judith Butler, Mary Talbot, and many others). An important part of the chapter describes the political ambitions of feminists, from the time when the feminist movement was primarily active only in France (the national perspective), to the time when feminism started to be a global movement

fighting for equality (the international perspective). Jule closes the chapter with a brief description of the relationship between neoliberalism, the new feminism and globalisation, which is more than key to the application of the issue to present times.

An important part of the book titled “Language as Gendered” discusses how gender is reflected in our communication, and how it subsequently influences the social hierarchy and our social status. Besides sexism, the central theme is the relationship between language and power, in regard to which Jule works mainly with the research carried out by the author Robin Lakoff (1975). Demonstration of power, according to Lakoff, is particularly evident in the masculine speech that is typical for the public sphere, while the feminine language most commonly used by women fits more into the private sector. This disparity again shares the same global historical background that has created the current rigid social standards, and which expects male rhetoric to be used more effectively in the public sphere, while female rhetoric is to be more productively used in the private sphere. Jule, however, draws attention to this simplification and recommends evaluating rhetoric styles in broader contexts. Jule admits, though, that there are genuinely significant differences between feminine and masculine language styles, which can be used or even abused as a communication tool, regardless of gender. In this case, Jule recommends using critical discourse analysis, which can help uncover the link between what is said and what is meant in various domestic or international contexts.

The second large chapter of the book, “Understanding Gender and Language Use in the World”, provides a brief insight into the practise in which the relationship between language and gender often appears around the world. The author has chosen five social areas to demonstrate this occurrence – *media and technology, education, the workplace, religions* (specifically Judaism, Christianity and Islam) and *relationships in general*. Most of the attention in the chapter is paid to media, which on a global scale contribute to the current generation of gender trends and expectations. This is particularly noticeable in the advertising and marketing of western media, which vastly abuse gender stereotypes and create consumer femininity and consumer masculinity, which build our identities in a rigid way. Moreover, “*media often portray women as helpless, gullible and even invisible, which supports the cultural misogyny that is then deeply rooted and maintained in us*” (52). Media, on the other hand, can also be properly used for raising the international awareness of gender inequalities. Famous campaigns like *Ban Bossy, HerForShe* or 2018’s *#Metoo* and *#TimesUp* movements help reveal current problems connected to gender and language, which are present not only in Hollywood, but also in the workplace and in religious communities worldwide.

Specific features of the gender-language relationship are reflected in the work environment. An important concept of the chapter is *the glass ceiling*, which represents an imaginary boundary between top social and work success and women, who often (even nowadays) are unable to reach this peak. According to the author, the public may be afraid of a strong and visible woman – society accepts it if a woman has an important position, but she stands in the background, or, on the contrary, if she performs publicly, but from a minor position. The combination of *strength and visibility* is often denied to women, which also maintains our gender stereotypes in society. The glass ceiling is mainly visible in global politics. Top political positions of power which would involve leading a country are also affected by global gender stereotypes, probably in the biggest possible way, which leads to a more challenging path for women to get to the top. According to Jule, greater possibilities for women in politics are surprisingly found in Africa and Asia, as the world already witnessed top level female political leaders on these continents. In the West, though, the situation is more complicated. The main reason for the lack of female leaders is obvious: top political positions require much time and energy, and in the conventional way, women’s time and energy are supposed to be devoted to their families. This is the current world’s majority opinion. Meanwhile,

“the lives of Angela Merkel of Germany, Theresa May of Great Britain, Nicola Sturgeon of Scotland and Hillary Clinton in the US are under constant public surveillance” (71). As Hillary Clinton lost the US presidential elections in 2016, women all around the world witnessed that today’s world is still not ready for powerful and, at the same time, visible women.

In religious matters, gender issues are globally manifested most particularly in Islam, which in many countries significantly destroys women’s social status. However, gender issues are also relevant in Christianity, Judaism or other religions – one example is the descriptions of God, Allah and Yahweh in the male gender, which contribute to the superiority of masculinity in the international perspective. Although religious books themselves describe women and men as equal in many passages (even the Qur’an), men’s interpretation of these texts greatly degrades male-female equality, and men therefore stand in the centre of attention. From this point of view, women are “on the edge” of social attention, not only in islamic countries but also in European or Asian states. Today’s religious perceptions are globally based on the same principle – these gender-based problems within religious communities are evident and common all around world. In connection to Islam, Jule states: “They [Middle Eastern feminists] have sought to challenge the idea that Islam needs fixed gender roles and contended that the fixation on gender roles impedes women from controlling their own sexuality” (88).

The language we use to build and develop our relationships includes gender stereotypes as well. According to Jule, our co-existence is based on socio-historical foundations that are deeply rooted in global society. Consequently, we arbitrarily move around in these stereotypes and act and communicate according to them, because we identify with them and they fit us well. We use language for two different purposes – to build new relationships and to control those already created. If an individual is aware of the power of speech, he/she can use either masculine or feminine rhetoric regardless of their biological sex and take advantage of the benefits that these speech strategies offer. In the international context, the consequences can be either very positive, or dangerously negative – that is the real power of the right language use.

The main stumbling blocks of the book are the prevalence of theory over empirical information and a lack of coherence. Jule wrote the book in an interesting way, but also in a confusing and very difficult way in certain places, which requires maximum concentration and an undisturbed environment on the part of the reader. The reader must read the book as an academic text whose attractiveness disappears in some places. This may be caused by the purely theoretical nature of the book, which, in spite of the high amount of detail, discusses the historical and social causes of gender inequalities in linguistic expressions in the world, but lacks empirical states that would suggest possible solutions to these inequalities. Although in the conclusion, the author herself describes the issue as very complex and challenging, and states that it is not possible to establish a universal process that would lead to change in this regard, *Speaking Up* would be more interesting if it also included case studies of successful changes to a more just world, and a motivation to help in carrying out such changes. Another drawback is the depth of the research in individual chapters. If the author chose fewer research areas to analyze (for example, only media and religion), the book could serve as a guideline for other, similar researches on similar themes. In this aspect, *Speaking Up* works somewhat superficially, especially in the second part of the book.

If the reader perceives the book as a theoretical textbook that provides insight into areas in which language and gender difficulties are present, then *Speaking Up* might be a good start for further empirical research. Jule’s high expertise and rich experience offer a basis for a comprehensive and detailed understanding of the very roots of the gender-linguistic problem that can be applied to areas where inequality is found by the reader. Thanks to *Speaking Up*, we can work with a different view of gender asymmetries in

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global society and find the reasons that brought us into these rigid tracks. In this aspect, Jule's book is an exceptional asset for those who are fighting for an equal world and who are not afraid to look the truth in the eyes.

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Literature

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