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New Insights into Gendered Discursive  
Practices: Language, Gender  
and Identity Construction

ANTONIA SÁNCHEZ MACARRO AND ANA BELÉN CABREJAS PEÑUELAS,  
EDS.

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Peñuelas: "Cohesion devices of three political texts: The Gettysburg Address, I Have a Dream and Obama's Inaugural Address", in the journal *Revista de Estudios Ingleses* de la Universidad Complutense de Madrid (2012); "The evaluative function in three political texts", in *Research Trends in Intercultural Pragmatics* (Mouton de Gruyter, 2013) and "Positive self-evaluation versus negative other-evaluation in the political genre of pre-election debates" in *Discourse and Society* (to be published in 2014).

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**MARÍA DEL MAR RIVAS-CARMONA** is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Cordoba. She has previously taught at Harvard University and the University of Seville. Her classes focus on Discourse and Pragmatics and her research interests include discourse analysis, gender studies and literary translation. In addition, she has coordinated and participated in over a dozen research and teaching innovation projects on these matters, and she has supervised various doctoral theses and numerous master's theses on discourse, gender studies, language teaching and specialized translation. As regards her publications, she has published several books and numerous articles on women writers, pragmatics and translation. Standing out among her recent publications are two international co-editions on the cultural aspects of literary translation, published by Peter Lang and Narr Verlag.

**CARMEN SANTAMARÍA GARCÍA**, European PhD in Linguistics from Complutense University, Madrid, is a tenured Professor of Linguistics at Alcalá University, Madrid, Spain. Her teaching includes pragmatics, discourse analysis and methodology of the English language at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. These are also her areas of research together with *corpus linguistics and computer-mediated communication*. She has participated in several research projects such as "Functions of Evaluative Language in Different Discourse Types" (FUNDETT) coordinated at UNED, Madrid (2010-2013) "Small heroes in trouble – Boys searching for their identity" (2006-2009) and "Education and Gender" (EDGE) (2011-2014), both coordinated at EHSAL, Brussels. She has more than fifty articles published in national and international academic journals and books. In her most recent publications she focuses on the combination of corpus linguistics together with conversation and discourse analysis and on the use of evaluative language in social networking sites.





**M<sup>a</sup> SANDRA VÁZQUEZ HERMOSILLA** is a teacher of English at the Official School of Languages. For the past few years she has also worked at the University of Valencia where she has taken part in different research projects related to Language and Gender within the research group GENTEXT. Her research interests and her published works are centred upon gender and language issues, the phenomenon of (indirect) linguistic sexism and its manifestations in computer-mediated communication.

**GORA ZARAGOZA NINET** is a lecturer at the University of Valencia. For the past few years she has published works which deal with the translation of 20th Century women novelists into Spanish. She has also translated and annotated a collection of short stories by Winifred Holtby, who was censored during the Spanish dictatorship. Beyond Gender and Translation she also works on Gender and Language together with the GENTEXT Research group at the University of Valencia and has also reflected on her English teaching practice and the implementation of ICT in the class (ANGLOTIC project).





## Prologue

This volume of the *English in the World* series is a welcome addition to language and gender studies. The chapters in this volume demonstrate the broadening range of vibrant and insightful research in the field. The interesting and exciting data presented in these chapters is a testament to the degree to which language use is permeated by gender across contexts. The papers here examine language data from magazines, advertising, social media, blogs, classroom interactions, and engineering journals. The authors approach this impressive range of data with an equally impressive range of methodologies, including corpus linguistics, Critical Discourse Analysis, contrastive analysis, and conversation analysis. The authors of this volume also break new ground with papers that challenge a number of commonly presumed divisions within the field.

Since Lakoff's pioneering work, the study of language and gender has typically been divided between studies of representation (sexist language, discourse about women, etc.) and studies of language use (gendered differences in language use, gender in interaction, etc). The papers in the volume suggest that representation and language use are intimately related. In data drawn from a range of sources, these papers map the ways in which gendered representations are also forms of interaction. The research presented here demonstrates that individual construction of gender identity cannot be divorced from the constructions of gender that circulate through public discourse and the media. Similarly, the papers in this volume challenge other assumptions in the field such as divisions between personal versus professional identities, the separation between public and private discourse, and the distinction between written and spoken discourse. This volume thus suggests new perspectives that integrate the various strands of language and gender research.

Although the papers in this volume provide new directions and suggest new possibilities for the field of language and gender studies, they also stand firm in their recognition of the original feminist goals of the field in fighting sexism and promoting gender equality. Across a diverse set of contexts, the authors remind us of the central role of language in reproducing forms of sexism and



exerting forms of power. The authors also demonstrate the innovative and creative ways in which women (including linguistic researchers) use language to promote human rights and challenge forms of inequality.

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## Introduction

The first paper I ever gave on the subject of gender and language outside the United Kingdom was at The University of Valencia in 2006. My paper on the gendered practices of women in leadership was delivered at IGALA4, the International Gender and Language Association's fourth conference. This was a momentous occasion, not only for me personally, but because it was the first gender and language conference to be held outside America and Britain, and in many ways marked the first step towards internationalisation of this now flourishing field. In my view, the Valencia conference was the first in which a fruitful debate took place between gender and language researchers from English-speaking countries and their counterparts from Spain and other Mediterranean countries. Since then the field has gone global, with researchers from Africa, South America, Asia and the Middle East all working to one purpose: to critique and reveal hidden assumptions about gender and sexuality within discursive practices that continue to constrain the daily lives of both women and men.

It is easy to forget that gender and language is a relatively new subject area with a short history. Associated in the early 1970s with 'second wave' feminism, gender and language has now shifted its primary focus from the study of sexism and 'differences between men and women' to the discursive practices that produce gendered identities in general. Early research focused on two aspects: first, the presumed differences in how women and men *used* language, and secondly, how females and males were *represented* in language – as a code, as discourse, and in actual texts. Today, these quests appear more integrated in a postfeminist concern to explore how and why individuals' identities are discursively constructed in gendered ways, and to critique the potentially constraining effects of such identities within different social contexts.

All the scholars in this volume embrace this social constructionist perspective of gender as relational, a process, something that is done, and a vital resource for constructing social roles and identities. According to this perspective, gender is a highly fluid and unstable social category, whereby constructs of masculinity and femininity are always negotiable and often competing. So, for instance, just as there are many inconsistencies and contradictions



*within* any individual woman, there are always differences *between* women, governed by their age, class, sexuality, ethnicity, education, and so on. Gender is just one of many defining aspects of a person's identity, and therefore not considered to be a macro-social category that always 'behaves' in predictable ways. Rather, gender is best identified and investigated within specific, local contexts or communities of practice (or CofPs), where it may emerge as relevant (or not) through detailed, micro-analysis of linguistic interactions. Arguably, this new focus on the context, complexity and fluidity of gender has depoliticised the category to a certain extent. Nonetheless, a consensus remains that gender is still highly pertinent to the way people interact through language, and to the way they are positioned and represented by gendered discursive practices. The authors in this volume focus upon identifying the linguistic markers that index gender within spoken, written and multi-modal texts by deploying 'fit for purpose' discourse analytical tools such as conversation analysis, critical discourse analysis and corpus linguistic analysis.

All the authors show that by grounding their analyses within highly specific contexts, they can pave the way for identifying wider, gendered discourses that circulate within broader cultural settings and can create exclusion and inequality. Their chapters provide fresh, critical insights about the ways in which our use of language constructs, reinforces and challenges gender identities that are approved by, and naturalised within hegemonic institutions such as the mass media, the internet and higher education. The papers in this volume move the field of language and gender forward by investigating the most up-to-date ways in which people today negotiate their sense of identity via the multi-modal resources of the mass and social media. The authors assess the ways in which digital interactions actively produce and sustain gendered identities in both the online and offline worlds. On the positive side, social networking forums such as Facebook or weblogs are shown to be a crucial resource by which young people negotiate their identities dynamically and thus maintain social relationships. However, less encouragingly, media artefacts such as female adolescent magazines naturalise gender-stereotypical identities and behaviours that continue to constrain women's full participation in social and professional life. In the final two chapters on teacher education and classroom practice, the respective authors show that gender is still



a salient category for understanding professional identity construction, but this moves away from the stereotypical profile often assigned to women.

Overall, this volume contributes new, postfeminist insights on identity construction to the field of gender and language. Each of the authors shows that people can proactively manage the discursive resources at their disposal in order to negotiate different versions of their gendered identity, some highly conventional, others more contesting, within specific contexts. While gender differences are identified in some of the chapters, these are viewed as resources that people may exploit to achieve strategic and relational goals. Finally, the volume reminds us that if we can deploy discourse analytical methods to reveal hidden assumptions about gendered identities, we can play an important role in making this world a better place to live as scholars and human beings.

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