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To my Dad, Bill Simpson,
for teaching me the art of fly fishing.

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standard derivation 'defeat' which tends to carry wider non-linguistic reference.

4 The use of implicature in narrative fiction has received a great deal of attention over the years, with the first book-length treatment of the subject published by M.L. Pratt in 1977. Numerous articles have appeared since then, of which the following are especially useful: Weber (1986), Henkel (1988), Nair *et al.* (1988), Pilkington (1990). All of these analyses offer a specifically pragmatic perspective on literary communication.

5 An extremely influential account of the interactional significance of naming strategies is Ervin-Tripp (1972). Some of the methods used in the present analysis are adapted from Ervin-Tripp's article. J. Wilson (1990: 77-103) assesses the pragmatic implications of *self-referential* naming strategies. Where the present analysis concentrates on the third-person naming techniques characteristic of newspaper accounts of political events, Wilson focusses, for the most part, on the ways in which politicians refer to themselves in the course of parliamentary debates.

6 The 'piratical' subtext developed here could be productively analysed within the terms of models developed in artificial intelligence. Many AI models seek to account for the 'knowledge store' which is activated when discourse processors are confronted with texts. For instance, in the extract under scrutiny, the reference to 'walking the plank' can be said to trigger a *frame*. A frame is a fixed representation of knowledge about the world, and in this case a frame of 'piracy' is activated which may include additional concepts such as the Jolly Roger, eye-patches, stolen treasure and so on. Thus, extra density of meaning may be created by mapping frames onto a text in this way. Unfortunately, a more detailed AI approach is beyond the remit of this chapter. However, a useful survey of frames and related categories can be found in Brown and Yule (1983: 236-56), while an extensive application of these categories to advertising language can be found in Cook (forthcoming).

7 These figures are provided by a poll on tabloid readership patterns commissioned by BBC television's *The Late Show*.

8 If the distinction between *factive* and *non-factive* verbs is not clear, reconsider, first of all, an earlier example containing a presupposition-carrying *factive* verb:

(7) John realizes that Russell is dead.

Now alter the verb to a non-factive counterpart like *believe* or *think*:

(7) a. John believes/thinks that Russell is dead.

This sentence no longer contains a presupposition trigger, and the sequence *Russell is dead* is therefore no longer presupposed.

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6 Gender, ideology and point of view

Cats possess so many of the same qualities as some people (expensive girlfriends for instance) that it's often hard to tell the people and the cats apart.

(P.J. Rourke, *Modern Manners*)

6.1 INTRODUCTION

A weekly television magazine recently included a conversation with Brian Walden, a well-known British political interviewer and commentator. Walden, popularly regarded as an astute and tenacious interviewer, provided an assortment of opinions about his *métier*, politicians and the British political climate in general. The insights offered included the following theory about why politicians cannot always be trusted:

Anybody who wishes to have power over his fellows should be regarded with some suspicion. It's unusual. Most people don't feel like that. They want a good job, a nice wife, pleasant children, friends and a bit of fun.

(*ITV Times*, 29 September 1990, p. 9)

As this little discourse unfolds, it seems that the generality suggested by 'Anybody' is not quite intended, and that Walden has a rather exclusive view of who exactly make up 'people'. The point of view which is projected in the text is one where men appear to constitute a centre of being around which other more sundry items, like fun and wives, revolve like satellites. The response of most of the women to whom I have presented this piece has been a mixture of anger, incredulity and resigned amusement. Female readers in particular may care to reflect on their own immediate reactions as they were reading through the piece.

The type of language-use which the Walden quotation epitomizes will be the central concern of this chapter. It seems fair to say that the world-view projected by the quotation is not untypical of that represented by many everyday discourses. But what are the implications and consequences of these discursive practices? Do they forge sexist divisions into the structure of society, actually determining gender-biased behaviour, or are they simply innocuous 'off-the-cuff' remarks which merit no serious scrutiny? Certainly, the question of 'sexist language' and the world-view it reflects now occupies a central place in feminist linguistics. As we shall see shortly, some exponents have argued that sexist language is directly responsible for the way we see the world. Others, more guardedly, see it as an important means of reinforcing sexist assumptions. Cameron sets the agenda for the 'reinforcement' theorists:

our linguistic habits often reflect and perpetuate ideas about things which are no longer embodied in law, but which continue to have covert significance in the culture. This is one reason why feminists have often paid detailed attention to language and discourse: our ways of talking about things reveal attitudes and assumptions we might consciously disown, thus testifying to the deep-rootedness of sexism. (1990: 16)

The ideological implications of this 'linguistic habit' will be explored in detail in the next two sections. Although this chapter, unlike the previous four, does not introduce an explicit linguistic framework, it draws on many elements of the models developed throughout the book. Moreover, the section which follows will provide an opportunity to discuss more general questions concerning the interrelationship between language, thought and reality. This largely theoretical section will be complemented by section 6.3 which, by contrast, offers a selection of analyses intended to illustrate how the critical linguistic analysis of gender, ideology and point of view in language might be undertaken. This section also provides an appropriate place at which to re-assess the quotation which opened this section. First, however, we need to define more precisely the nature of the topic which is being investigated.

6.2 SEXISM IN LANGUAGE OR SEXISM THROUGH LANGUAGE?

This section reviews an important controversy which has developed over the relationship between language and gender.¹ The controversy hinges on the degree to which one can say that the system of language projects sexist bias. One side of the debate views sexism in language as inherent to the system itself, and considers that by using a system which is intrinsically biased speakers and writers actively construct the inequality that exists between men and women in society. The other side proposes that sexism is encoded into language, either consciously or unconsciously, by users of language. In this way, linguistic practices will tend to re-inforce and naturalize sexist divisions in society. An underlying premise which is shared by both sides of the debate is the valid assumption that Western society is organized in terms of a *patriarchal order*. This is a symbolic order into which we are all born; a behavioural system in which men simply have power over women. Thus, patriarchy is endemic to all types of social interaction and organization, and as language is crucial to the way society is organized, it is not surprising that language has been identified as a site of struggle by many feminist linguists.

Foregrounding and demystifying the ways in which language is used to bolster the patriarchal order has now become a major concern of such work. Closely related to this concept of patriarchy is the notion of *androcentrism* (Coates 1986: 15). Androcentrism describes a male-centred word-view wherein male activities are evaluated positively and female activities negatively. The principle extends even to explanations of language itself, so that usages which are attributed to men are regarded more favourably than those attributed to women. For instance, when language change was generally stigmatized by scholars of the eighteenth century, blame for the introduction of new constructions into the language was assigned to women. By the turn of the twentieth century, when it had become clear that linguistic change was not only inevitable but a valid object of scholarly study, the chief innovators of language were, it may come as no surprise, believed to be men. This type of asymmetry prompts Coates to formulate an 'androcentric rule' which states roughly that men's linguistic behaviour fits the view of what is admirable or desirable, whilst women will be blamed for whatever is considered negative or reprehensible (Coates 1986: 15). Even feminist critiques of language have unconsciously embraced this pervasive androcentric rule. In her famous account of 'women's language' (1975), Lakoff contends that women have a tendency to use 'empty' adjectives like *adorable*, *divine* and *cute*. Whether

they actually do or not is debatable, but what is not made clear is why these adjectives are considered 'empty' in the first place. After all, greater elaboration of vocabulary is surely a positive achievement and one wonders how these words would be evaluated if they were identified as a specifically *male* usage.

One of the most influential contributions to the debate on sexism in language in recent years has been Dale Spender's book *Man Made Language* (1980). In addition to the extensive media coverage which it has received, the book continues to be adopted on both language courses and literature courses in university departments. Perhaps more importantly, as Cameron points out (1985: 3), it has put the subject of women and language on the map for many people outside the women's movement. The provocative title of Spender's book captures the spirit and essence of her argument. She contends that by a straightforward act of linguistic appropriation men have constructed a supremacist social position, a position which oppresses and excludes women. Men, she argues, have literally 'made' the English language and have never relinquished control of it. Through their control of language, men are able to exercise their control over women. An especially trenchant statement of this theory of control is the following:

it has been the dominant group – in this case, males – who have created the world, invented the categories, constructed sexism and its justification and developed a language trap which is in their interest. (1980: 142)

Spender makes a direct connection between this type of linguistic domination and the existence of the patriarchal order. The chain of reasoning involved in her argument might be set out as follows:

- 1 Men made language.
- 2 Language controls reality.
- 3 Men control reality.
- 4 Men control women.

The examples used to support this argument are, if selective, none the less interesting. Spender contends that many everyday words reflect a kind of 'trapped' expression because their meanings have been 'fixed' by men. One item that receives extensive discussion is the word *motherhood*. Because men have appropriated the meaning of the word to signify things like 'replete with joy' and 'the epitome of feminine fulfilment', women are effectively denied an experience which for many is both painful and traumatic. The same principle governs the use

of the word 'frigidity'. This has become codified in dictionaries as 'failing' to become sexually aroused. However, this negative evaluation is not carried over into the male equivalent, *impotence*, which, Spender argues, is defined as not a failure but an 'inability' to become aroused. In standard androcentric terms, women 'fail' where men, through no fault of their own, are simply unable. By foregrounding linguistic asymmetries of this sort, Spender calls for a wholesale re-invention and rejuvenation of the English language.² Only through this type of linguistic overhaul will sexism be tackled head on.

A key to understanding the theoretical foundation of Spender's argument lies in the view it takes of the relationship between language, thought and reality. Half-way through the book, the following concise statement of her theoretical position is provided:

It is language which *determines* the limits of our world, which *constructs* our reality. (p. 139; my emphasis)

This determinist view of language is one which can be traced directly to a specific tradition of anthropological linguistics. Before going any further with our discussion of Spender we will need to digress for a moment and consider some of the basic tenets of this tradition of linguistics.

The theory of *linguistic determinism* is attributable largely to the work of anthropologists Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf. Their ideas on language are collectively known as the 'Sapir-Whorf hypothesis' or more recently 'Whorfianism'. The basic principle of Whorfianism is that linguistic differences determine differences in world-view. Thus, our language delineates the boundaries of our understanding; or, put another way, the way we 'see' the world is constructed by the language we use. Taken a little further, the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis specifies that the linguistic system is the 'shaper of ideas, the programme and guide for the individual's mental activity' (Whorf, quoted in Carroll 1956: 212); consequently, speakers are therefore 'very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society' (Sapir 1929: 207). In this view, words precede concepts, so if you have few words, your perception of the world around you will be seriously impoverished.

The degree of linguistic determinism which the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis espouses has never been easy to pinpoint exactly, but in its raw form – the form outlined here – the hypothesis is very difficult to sustain. Words simply do *not* precede concepts. An 'anteater', as Lakoff (1975: 46) astutely points out, is so named because of what it

does; it is not some animal which obligingly eats ants in order to satisfy a lexical entry in the language system. Similarly, the term *skyscraper* has been coined to account for a specific modern architectural phenomenon and it is manifest nonsense to claim that people were only able to notice this phenomenon once equipped with the word. In fact, if followed through, a Whorfian solution to the problem of urban decay would not be to demolish tall ugly buildings, but simply to remove, Orwellian style, the words that refer to them. In this way, the concepts associated with them would cease to exist, and environmentalists could turn to other issues.

A more realistic alternative to Whorfianism is to propose that the language system is shaped by the functions which it serves. In this sense, language reflects and to some extent re-inforces the cultural and ideological practices which it describes. Concepts become *lexicalized* in language, and the system expands or contracts relative to the concepts it needs to express. This is the type of process by which *skyscraper* has entered English, or, for that matter, its calqued counterpart *gratte-ciel* has entered French. So when, in the course of their development, cultures are confronted with new concepts and objects, their respective languages make use of a range of available devices for introducing new words into the lexicon. The Spanish never had any trouble with 'hot-dogs' (*los perros calientes*), nor the Arabs with 'paracetamol' (*parasetamol*) nor the Chinese with 'telephone' (*dian-hua-ji* (literally, 'electric speaker apparatus')). Furthermore, the more prominent a concept becomes in a particular culture, the more economical the linguistic means of describing it. Thus, in Colombian and Venezuelan Spanish the phrase *el traficante de drogas* ('trafficker of drugs') appears to be undergoing a rather telling change to a single lexical item *el narcotraficante*. By contrast, as long as ice-cream remains a relatively remote commodity in many southern African countries, its linguistic designation in Swahili is likely to remain *chakula kitamu kilichofanyizwa kwa maxiwa na viuu vingine na kugandishwa kwa baridi* – which can be translated roughly as 'delicious food made from milk and all sorts of things and kept cold'!

Although it is not difficult to adduce evidence which contradicts the basic tenets of Whorfianism, the principle of linguistic determinism has been used to underpin a great deal of language-related research. In some areas, it has been appropriated as a means of denigrating non-standard language, especially the systems used by working-class or ethnic groups. Honey (1983), for instance, argues that those who do not have standard English are intellectually trapped by the 'substandard' forms they do use. He cites the case of primitive tribespeoples

who are unable to handle the complex constructs and 'delicate nuances' which are available to speakers of Standard English, adding that this cognitive impoverishment will become immediately apparent to

anyone who has actually tried to translate a scholarly paper in physics, psychology or semantics from a major world language into the speech of a preliterate jungle tribe or into the local dialect of a remote province.

(1983: 6)

For a start, standard languages do not have a monopoly on technical vocabulary, and if, by some malevolent quirk of fate, semantics did become culturally prioritized by these tribes, then their linguistic systems would be altered accordingly. The host of linguistic devices available for such alteration has already been illustrated. As far as the question of 'translation' is concerned, Honey may simply have forgotten to mention that many of the complex concepts which are lexicalized in the so-called preliterate jungle languages – such as terms for kinship, weather conditions, vegetation and types of religious ceremonies – are notoriously difficult to translate into standard English. Speakers, whatever their culture, enrich their language in order to cope with what they need to talk about; their language is not a monolithic grid through which a restricted set of concepts is filtered. Honey's position, like many other deterministic accounts of linguistic diversity,³ is highly 'monocultural' in its outlook.

In the light of this short review of determinist approaches to language, we may re-assess Spender's theory of sexism in language. By proposing that male control of language facilitates male control of reality, Spender is clearly arguing within the parameters of an unchallenged Whorfian model. Despite its vehemence, her argument is difficult to sustain theoretically and in many respects highlights flaws in the very model of language it seeks to espouse. Moreover, parts of the argument, if looked at more closely, are actually patronizing and critical not of the behaviour of men but of women themselves.

First, the issue of 'trapped expression'. Spender argues that men have fixed the meaning of the word *motherhood*, thereby denying many women the more unpleasant aspects of the experience. Yet if men really had appropriated the terms, how would women know about the unpleasantness in the first place and, more importantly, how have they been able to articulate this experience so clearly? In other words, if it is the positive term which determines the reality, how can we explain negative experiences of that reality? This also raises the more

general questions of the language system which Spender herself uses in the book. If men genuinely do have control over language, then she is forced into one of two possible positions: either she is writing with a form of language which is as trapped as any other form of female expression or she is writing in a liberated language outside male control. If the first position is occupied, then the book is a waste of time in so far as it is only another example of male-appropriated meaning; if the second is occupied, then all men and presumably most women would be unable to understand this 'new' language in which it is written.

The practice of making selective forays into the dictionary to elicit sexist usage is also highly problematic. This etymological method assumes that dictionaries are accurate repositories of what words mean in every context. Yet we have already seen in chapter 5 how context shapes the interpretation of much everyday language. If there is to be an objection about asymmetrical definitions of *impotence* and *fidelity*, then it should be directed towards the dictionary makers. This 'etymological fallacy'⁴ has important consequences for other parts of the argument. Spender claims as a feminist victory the now widespread use of the expressions *chauvinism* and *sexual harassment*. It is, she says, a case of women, not men, 'naming the world'. But within the terms of her position on language this is surely the last thing women should do. After all, if the word constructs the reality, women, by introducing these terms, are actively bringing about their own repression. What they should be doing is exorcising these words from the system, not introducing them into it. A more realistic explanation for this, of course, is that women have sufficiently alerted society in general to endemic sexist practices. Thus, 'sexual harassment' has come into everyday parlance, and specific manifestations of it, such as harassment in the workplace, have now been placed firmly on the agenda. Similarly, the word *chauvinism* has entered common usage and has become associated specifically with male sexism – that is, in its common usage and not its dictionary usage!

Finally, there remains the question of how exactly men made language. At what notional point in prehistory did this linguistic schism occur, this schism which was to have such far-reaching implications for gender relations in society? And what was one half of the population doing when the other half was busy making language? These questions have a serious side. Disenfranchised groups who have been excluded from dominant or mainstream cultures encounter no problems in developing languages of their own, whether they be market-traders in seventeenth-century England or members of the underworld of

present-day Calcutta. These specialized languages, or 'anti-languages',⁵ are complex, rule-governed systems entirely suited to the needs of their users. Spender is asking us to believe, then, that women, as a disenfranchised group, have been both excluded from language, but been perversely incapable of developing even the most simple system of their own. At the very least, this is a facile interpretation of the evolution of English.

There are clearly problems, then, with a strictly determinist approach to sexism in language. Trying to remove sexual bias from society by altering the lexicon is like trying to cure a patient of measles by painting over their spots. We need to replace determinism with a more *functional* view of language; a view which explains the structure of language in terms of the functions which language serves. This does not mean that the analysis of sexism in language becomes any less radical. On the contrary, sexist assumptions and biases are reflected, perpetuated and naturalized in language use and critical linguistic analysis can bring these discursive practices into sharper focus. The point is simply that it is not the language code but the way in which the code is used that is significant – and this has been the guiding principle behind all of the critical linguistic analyses of previous chapters. It may be that the angle of telling adopted in a text represents the world in a sexist way. Linguistic analysis can unpack the 'angle of telling' and the representation which it produces, thereby 'denaturalizing' this type of discourse. Just how such analyses might be conducted is explained in the next section, where a variety of text types are examined from a functional linguistic perspective.

6.3 ANALYSING GENDER BIAS IN LANGUAGE

Part of the concern of feminist critical linguistic analysis has been to uncover asymmetries and inconsistencies in the way language is used. These discursive practices, as Cameron argues, represent historically evolved ways of defining the limits of femininity and masculinity. She adds:

One attacks these discourses primarily by becoming aware of them and by developing rival discourses (ways of representing) that people will eventually incorporate into their own method of dealing with reality.

(1985: 69)

One discursive practice which has received much attention is the use of so-called 'he/man' language and the related category of 'common

gender'. The first of these describes the institutionally sanctioned adoption of words like *he* and *man* to refer generically to male and female. However, evidence suggests that, despite being prescribed as 'correct' usage, the practice does represent a male-centred view of things. If it did not, then there would be nothing odd about the following oft-quoted example:

Man is a mammal which breastfeeds his young and experiences difficulty in giving birth.

Common-gender words encode a similar asymmetry, even though we are led to believe that they are non-sex-marked. Nouns like *people*, *teacher* and *linguist* (or the *boss* at the beginning of chapter 4) can in principle have either feminine or masculine reference, yet in actual usage they often assume male reference. And when the terms are used to refer explicitly to women, specific female markers are tacked on to the basic noun (*female linguist*, *woman teacher*). To give a clearer picture of how this works, let us return briefly to the Walden quotation which opened the chapter:

Anybody who wishes to have power over his fellows should be regarded with some suspicion. It's unusual. Most people don't feel like that. They want a good job, a nice wife, pleasant children, friends and a bit of fun.

The text is littered with he/man language and common-gender nouns, but as it progresses it becomes clear that Walden is using what are supposed to be non-sex-marked generics to refer exclusively to men and to exclude women. The *coup-de-grâce* is delivered with the sequence which stipulates that 'most people' want 'a nice wife' in addition to their other sundry requisites like children and a bit of fun. Throughout, Walden appropriates the terms for humanity in general ('Anybody'; 'people') and attaches them exclusively to male desires. Women are delineated as somehow contingent to this middle-class male heterosexual order, in other words, the patriarchal order. The mild-mannered smugness with which this world-view is projected is alarming: society can be arranged into a natural pattern where people (men) are defined in terms of a set of needs. These needs can then be identified as commodities like employment, leisure and, of course, women.

Where the isolation of linguistic asymmetries of this sort is one approach to the study of sexism in language, another is to undertake more systematic and sustained analyses of texts within a feminist linguistic perspective. The analytic models developed in the course of

this book all lend themselves to this type of critical linguistic approach. The model of transitivity, in particular, has proved insightful in its application to a range of discourse types. One notable example of this is Burton's (1982) analysis of a passage from Sylvia Plath's autobiographical novel *The Bell Jar*. Burton examines the transitivity patterns used in a disturbing sequence detailing the narrator's experience of electric shock therapy. This examination highlights the ways in which, on the one hand, the narrator is affected by the actions of others, yet, on the other, is herself unable to exert any influence on the people and objects around her. Adopting the principle that 'the personal is political' (201), Burton extrapolates from her analysis to a more general critique of the male-dominated power relations that pertain in society. The correlation of the situation of a woman undergoing shock therapy with the societal alienation of women is a bold interpretative move, though it is one which arguably manifests a strong degree of the type of *positivism* which was discussed towards the end of chapter 4. For instance, a description of the treatment from a male perspective, with the subject literally strapped in and with little physical control over his environment, would be likely to yield similar patterns of transitivity. Nevertheless, the polemic in which Burton engages still illustrates how linguistic analysis can be used in a productive and radical way.⁶

One of the most incisive applications of the transitivity model to non-fiction is Clark's (1992) study of newspaper reports of male violence towards women. Clark examines the *Sun*'s coverage of John Steed, the notorious 'M4 Killer' who was sentenced to four life sentences for killing one woman and raping three others. (Ironically, the verdict delivered on the killing was *manslaughter*.) Unlike other British newspapers which covered the event, the *Sun* devoted most of its coverage to Steed's girlfriend and the part she played in shielding his crimes. In fact, the bulk of the space allocated to the story was filled with pictures of this woman in the 'sexy' poses which have become the hallmark of the *Sun*'s soft-core pornography policy. Again, unlike other papers, the *Sun* devoted little space to the actual crimes Steed committed, and when it did, the choices it made from the system of transitivity were highly significant. Here is an example of the pattern which the paper adopted:

(1) Two of Steed's rape-victims – aged 20 and 29 – had a screwdriver held at their throats as they were forced to submit.

(the *Sun*, 11 November 1986, p. 4)

This is an odd configuration in that Steed's victims, although positioned at the head of the sentence, are represented only obliquely to their attack. The first process with which they are associated is a relational-possessive one displaying a 'X had Y' pattern. What they 'have', in fact, is encoded as a separate process with the following transitivity structure:

GOAL	PROCESS	CIRCUMSTANCES
a screwdriver	held	at their throats

This is the classic 'agentless passive', with the holder of the screwdriver having been removed totally from the process. The final clause of the sentence exhibits a similar format:

GOAL	PROCESS
they	were forced to submit

Again, an agentless passive is used where the 'doer' of the process remains completely unspecified.

Other parts of this news report are equally significant. Here is another example:

(2) His third victim, a 39-year-old mother of three, was attacked at gunpoint after Steed had forced her car off the M4.

Here, there is an absence of any agency from the process expressed by the first clause, although the GOAL element receives considerable elaboration:

GOAL	PROCESS	CIRCUMSTANCES
His third victim . . . mother of three	was attacked	at gunpoint

In fact, the agency involved in this process has to be inferred by implication from the process expressed by the second clause where Steed does now feature in the role of ACTOR/AGENT:

ACTOR/AGENT	PROCESS	GOAL	CIRCUMSTANCES
Steed	had forced	her car	off the M4

The message is constructed in such a way as to obscure the relationship between Steed and the attack. The only entity upon which Steed acts as AGENT is 'her car', whilst the victim of the attack, although prominent in the information structure of the report, is acted upon only by an implicit and unspecified agency. Indeed, so obscured is the relationship between attacker and victim that it allows a possible reading wherein someone else attacks the woman at gunpoint while Steed only forces her car off the road.

Like many of the examples encountered in chapter 4, we see a wilful refusal to 'tell it like it is'. What, for instance, is so difficult about presenting the details of the story in the following way, where the relationship between attacker and victim is not obfuscated:

- (1) a. Steed held a screwdriver at the throats of two of his victims as he forced them to submit.
- (2) a. Steed attacked at gunpoint his third victim, a 39-year-old mother of three, after he had forced her car off the M4.

Of course, these 'rewrites' are no more ideologically neutral than the original version – notice, for instance, how the victim in (2a) is still referred to as a 'mother' and not simply a woman – but at least they do not use language to shield the perpetrator of the crimes. It is not the objective 'truth' of the *Sun's* account which is at issue; rather, it is the way the 'angle of telling' is predicated upon an underlying dominant political ideology. Playing down these crimes, Clark suggests, helps to avoid awkward questions like why such acts of violence are committed against women at all. In this case, the *Sun* is unable to shift the blame for the attack onto the women themselves – a practice traditionally reserved for the murder of female prostitutes who are considered somehow 'responsible' for their own demise. Furthermore, the position of the killer and rapist cannot be rationalized by casting him in the role of the 'monster', 'beast' or 'fiend'; in other words, in the role of a social outcast which distances him from 'normal' men. The 'mystification' which this social and psychological distancing offers is elaborated upon by Cameron and Frazer, who comment:

the archaic formulas of tabloid journalism have just this mystifying effect: the pages of *The Sun* and *The News of the World* are apparently still stalked by motiveless 'fiends' whose 'brutal lusts' remain for ever unspecified, their connection with masculinity somehow obvious, yet unexplained.

(1987: 44)

And finally, there remains the entertainment value which is to be gained from the story. This report is different from the paper's normal strategy of reporting violence against women in that prurient blood lust is overridden by the 'exclusive' which the paper secures by getting the killer's partner to pose in leather underwear. So sensational a 'scoop' will presumably grab more attention than more peripheral and prosaic matters such as murder and rape.

We can supplement the analytic procedure adopted in this section with some of the material introduced in the previous chapter. The

strategies of naming and referring constitute another important facet of the discursive practices examined here. The way in which referring expressions are deployed asymmetrically to designate men and women is another index of a symbolic order in which 'male' constitutes the norm and 'female' a deviation from that norm. To illustrate this, we will concentrate initially on a short report which appeared in the *Daily Mirror* of 17 November 1983. As important as patterns of transitivity are the expressions used to refer to the participants within the story.

CRAZED DOG BITES OFF A WIFE'S EAR

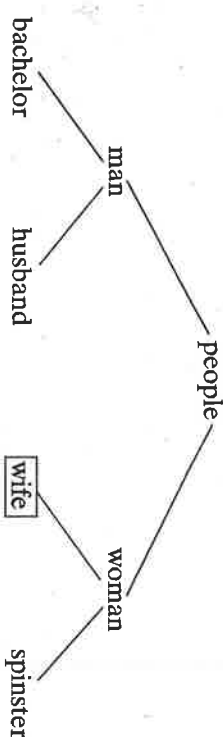
A crazed bull terrier attacked a 36-year-old wife without warning and bit off half her right ear.

Ambulancemen called to [Dora Smith's] home in Denby Dale Way, Royton, nr. Oldham, found it.

It was packed in ice and rushed to Writlington Hospital, Manchester, where it was stitched back.⁷

There is no need for a detailed breakdown of the transitivity structure of the headline of the story; suffice it to say, the key participant roles involved in the material process of 'biting off' are the 'dog' (ACTOR) and perversely, not the woman, but her 'ear' as the GOAL element. In the opening text the dog is further defined ('bull terrier') while the affected participant now becomes 'a 36-year-old-wife'. It becomes clear, as the report progresses, that the key players in the drama are to be the dog and the ear, resulting in an almost comic denouement where it is the ear, and not the woman, that is rushed to hospital for emergency surgery. The way the woman is referred to in the text is also significant. It hinges on an important pragmatic principle concerning the degree of *specificity* which attaches to words. Lexical specificity, as it is known,⁸ is a way of conveying pragmatic, non-truth-conditional meanings. It describes the practice of selecting a term which exhibits a greater degree of either precision or generality than would be expected in a particular context of use. For instance, if you are on your way out to the shops and are asked where you are going, you might reply *Out!*. By being less specific than the exchange would require, you are implicating perhaps that your interlocutor should mind her own business. Similarly, an injunction on a recalcitrant family pet couched in under-specific terms like *Take that animal away* may implicate distance or dislike, if only momentary. Overspecificity may carry similar pragmatic significance. If, in response to a question like *What have you got in the case?*, you reply *A Fender Stratocaster* instead of, say, *A guitar*, you may be attempting to convey expertise, superiority or in-group knowledge. The point is that the interpretations deriving from the

degree of lexical specificity employed are contextually driven, so greater or lesser specificity will not always generate the same type of meaning in every situation. Returning to our report, the term 'wife' forms part of a lexical scale which might be postulated thus:



In this 'consists-of' configuration, items lower down are always instances of those immediately above. Thus, all wives are women and all women people. Put another way, the term *wife* can be said to be a *hyponym* of *woman*, and the term *woman* a *superordinate* of *wife*. This 'consists-of' relationship does not, of course, operate downwards on the scale: not all women are wives, and not all people are women. What this highlights in relation to the *Mirror* story, is the way in which the woman is identified through a more specific term taken from a lower level on the lexical scale. The same 'markedness' would surely not apply if the victim were a married man. Would we really expect a headline to read: *Crazed dog bites off husband's ear*? What further entrenches this markedness is that the woman's identity is mediated through her relationship to a man, through the fact of her being married. (Indeed, even the marriage ceremony itself encodes this asymmetry with its dictum 'I now pronounce you *man* and *wife*.') It is only by the time we reach the second paragraph of the text that a name, in the form of FN + LN, is provided and only then is any independent status accorded to her. Finding similar examples of asymmetrical lexical specificity in public discourse is not difficult. Here is an example from *The Liverpool Echo* of 1989:

MURDER POLICE IN BEDSIDE VIGIL ON SPINSTER, 78

A woman police officer was last night keeping a constant vigil at the hospital bedside of battered spinster, [Ethel Braithwaite].

(9 November, p. 3)

Lexical specificity in this example extends not only to the victims of the attack but to the 'woman police officer', where a common-gender phrase has been prefixed with an explicit gender marker. Regarding the use of 'spinster', we now have a woman defined through the

absence of her relationship with a man, a tactic presumably designed to make her plight appear all the more pathetic. If the victim were an unmarried man, a transposition of relevant parts of the text to reflect a comparable degree of lexical specificity would look very strange:

MURDER POLICE IN BEDSIDE VIGIL ON BACHELOR, 78
... at the bedside of battered bachelor ...

The oddity of this version reveals just how naturalized the type of language used in the original has become. Interestingly, even if *bachelor* were used, it would not carry the semantic derogation that often attaches to terms like *spinster* which designate specific female reference. Compare also the positive and negative evaluations that are ascribed to other relational opposites such as the following: master/mistress; patron/matron; governor/governess.

It might be objected that too much attention is being directed here towards trivial, inconsequential texts and that, furthermore, as journalists are often hard-pressed to meet publishing deadlines they cannot be held responsible for the odd 'sexist' slip here and there. Well, for a start, such commonplace 'trivial' texts are what characterize everyday discursive practices, the very practices which reflect in language gender differentiation in society. Moreover, the fact that rushed or ill-prepared reports result in this type of asymmetry highlights the basic assumptions which are first brought into play in the construction of these reports. In fact, analysing a text which is constructed on the basis of 'the first thing that comes to mind' can often be more insightful than analysing one which has been carefully preplanned and revised.

Other principles of pragmatics can be employed productively in the explanation of language and gender. The concepts of semantic presupposition and implicature, which were discussed extensively in the previous chapter, provide useful instruments for investigating the gender-related assumptions which underlie texts. As a brief illustration only, consider the following extract from an advertisement which appeared in an edition of *Exchange Contracts*, a magazine produced by lawyers which purportedly offers advice to potential home-buyers. The advertisement is for 'booster showers' and the heading and opening text are reproduced below. The written text which makes up the advertisement is arranged in a columnar format against a background of squares resembling bathroom tiles:

GIVE
YOUR
WIFE
A HARD
TIME
IN THE
BATHROOM

Turn on a little excitement. Choose your shower pressure. The Stuart Monsoon booster pump range makes it easy.

(November 1985, p. 28)

This certainly takes the concept of phallocentrism in language to a new extreme! At the level of implicature, there is the crass play on the image of male sexual arousal and the 'hardness' of the booster pump on offer. This is not to mention the sinister connotations which accompany the expression *to give someone a hard time*. In addition to this 'suggestive' layer of the text's meaning, which hardly merits further discussion, there are other, more insidious devices operating in the advertisement. One way of tackling these is to consider, first of all, what preconditions need to be met for the heading to function as an appropriate speech act. In other words, to what type of idealized reader is the text addressed? An examination of the presupposition-carrying items will reveal that the text places this reader in a specific gendered and socio-economic role. Existential presuppositions create a specific discourse situation, operating very much in the manner of the advertisement which was examined at the beginning of the previous chapter. For example, the phrase 'your wife' constructs a subject position which is to be occupied by a married man, one who, moreover, needs 'a little excitement'. The specific targeting of a notional 'bread-winning head-of-the-family' unfolds towards the end of the advertisement, which runs:

Show this ad to your plumber. He'll know just what you're after.

The idealized reader is now one who is *au fait* with a plumber (common gender again⁹) and who, by implication, has the responsibility and wherewithal for maintenance of the home. The text thus presupposes its own interactive context, establishing a subject position through which real readers come to mediate. In this case, the subject position is constructed as that of a married male, and, remembering that the magazine targets potential house-buyers, as one who has financial means and responsibility for decision making. Women as a group occupy, by contrast, only an oblique relationship to the text and,

moreover, only a sexual relationship to men. Again, language use functions to reflect and support an ideological system.

The short analyses undertaken in this section have only been a few of a range of possible suggestions as to how the critical-linguistic analysis of gender bias in language might be undertaken. Aspects of the linguistic model not touched upon here, such as *modality*, can be equally productively applied to the issue. Indeed, some investigation into the gender-related use of modal constructions has already been undertaken (Coates 1987). The general thrust of the present critical linguistic analysis is to illustrate how language use functions as an index of a particular social order. By examining linguistic practice, we gain a point of entry into a societal system, a system, which feminists argue, is influenced if not controlled by a patriarchal order. The package of analytic procedures proposed in this section provides one means of denaturalizing these endemic and everyday discursive practices.

6.4 SUMMARY

After a brief introduction which broached the issue of gender and language, the chapter began a more extensive survey of the different strands of feminist-linguistic research on language. One particularly influential strand was identified as the 'determinist' approach of Dale Spender. Spender's view of language, heavily influenced by Whorfianism, proposes that the language system delineates the limits of our understanding, our perception of reality. Thus, sexist language creates a sexist world. However, in the light of linguistic evidence presented it was argued that this theoretical perspective is largely untenable and that if an adequate account was to be developed then a more theoretically sound model was required. The alternative model proposed was a 'functional' one, which postulates that the shape of a language is conditioned by the functions which it serves. This functional framework governed the analyses which were undertaken in section 6.3, where a range of texts were examined from a critical linguistic perspective. In keeping with the later chapters of this book generally, newspaper language and advertising language occupied a central position, although brief attention was also given to feminist-stylistic approaches to narrative fiction.

An underlying premise not only of this chapter but of all the chapters of the book has been that language use cannot be regarded as neutral, value-free or exempt from at least some 'angle of telling'. Rather, it is shaped by a mosaic of cultural assumptions, political beliefs and institutional practices – in other words, ideologies. The

concern of this chapter has been to target the ideology of *gender* and to explore the mechanisms by which it is mediated and transmitted between producers and interpreters of texts. It is to be hoped that this discussion will have highlighted some of the ways in which linguistic habits can reflect and perpetuate deep-rooted sexist attitudes and assumptions.

NOTES AND FURTHER READING

- 1 The discussion here is not to be confused with that branch of sociolinguistics which is concerned with the study of 'sex differences in language use'. Although there is some overlap with the issues covered in this chapter, this type of sociolinguistic analysis is normally directed towards sex-related accent and dialect variation. The goals of such analyses, moreover, are often descriptions of the phonological and syntactic changes which influence particular linguistic systems. Patterns of sex differentiation in language use are thus viewed as important determinants of linguistic change. A useful collection of essays on this topic is Coates and Cameron (1988).

The term *gender* is used in this chapter to refer to the socially determined distinction between male and female. *Gender* thus encompasses the various social, cultural and psychological meanings that attach to sexual identity. The term *sex*, on the other hand, is reserved for the straightforward biological distinction between women and men. The use of these terms is consonant with the way it is used in the body of research covered in this chapter. Although the term *gender* is also used elsewhere by linguists to refer to a particular grammatical category, no confusion between these uses should arise in the context of this chapter.

- 2 Spender is not alone in her call for a 're-invented' language. Feminists like Irigaray, Cixous and Kristeva, whose influences include Lacanian psychoanalysis, have attempted to write with explicitly 'female' voices. Their work is characterized by complex puns and word-play, interpretation of which often requires detailed knowledge of psychoanalysis, philosophy and major world languages. Specifically female innovations include 'Gyn/Ecology', 'The M(other) Tongue' and 'Herstory' (for 'History'). Not surprisingly, such coinages have been criticized for being elitist and obscure as well as being inaccurate linguistically. An excellent review of the 'female language' issue can be found in Ryder (1989).

- 3 A similar deterministic principle is evident in many educational-linguistic theories about non-standard language. Perhaps the most notorious of these is Bereiter and Engelmann's 'language-deficit' hypothesis. This hypothesis seeks to explain the relative academic underachievement of American black children in terms of the language they use. Bereiter and Engelmann contend that not only is Black English Vernacular (BEV) an unsuitable medium for education but it hinders the intellectual development of its users. Seen from this perspective, BEV is a 'basically nonlogical mode of expressive behaviour' (Bereiter and Engelmann 1966: 112–3). The model of language which unfolds in the course of section 6.2 and the arguments presented against a strongly determinist view of language should demonstrate how ill-founded this language-deficit hypothesis actually is. An extremely influential and convincing book which challenges the deficit theory head-on is

- Labov (1972: *passim*, but especially pp. 201–40). Reviews of the debate can be found in Trudgill (1983) and Wardhaugh (1986).
- 4 The term, attributed to Crystal, derives from the assumption that dictionaries always store single, correct and exhaustive meanings for individual words. Wilson (1990: 17–18) surveys the implications which the 'etymological fallacy' has for linguistic analysis.
- 5 The term 'antilinguage', which is used to refer to the specialized and often secret languages of alienated social groups, is introduced and discussed in Halliday (1978: 164–82). For an illuminating stylistic application of the concept, see Fowler's analysis of the use of antilanguages in Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange* and William Burroughs's *The Naked Lunch* (Fowler 1981: 142–61).
- 6 Another feminist-stylistic analysis which examines narrative fiction from the point of view of transitivity is Wareing (1990), which concentrates specifically on romance fiction, investigating the extent to which the passivity of the female protagonist is a characteristic of the genre. More general surveys of women's language within a stylistic perspective include Attridge (1989) and Milesi (1989). Attridge undertakes an analysis of the 'Penelope' episode from Joyce's *Ulysses*, supplementing this with a critique of some gender-biased literary criticism (including ostensibly 'feminist' criticism) on the episode. Milesi provides a rather erudite study of aspects of the language of Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*, arguing that the novel 'cowerly elaborates a grammar of sexual positions in male dominant society' (1989: 574). As Milesi writes the article very much in the manner of the novel he examines, his argument is less than transparent in places!
- 7 For obvious reasons, the name of the victim of the attack, which appears in the second paragraph of the opening text, has been altered. However, the FN + LN naming configuration has been preserved. The same principle extends to the extract from *The Liverpool Echo* which is discussed later.
- 8 The concept of *lexical specificity* and its pragmatic significance is explored in Cruse (1977).
- 9 It might reasonably be pointed out that it 'makes sense' to assume male reference in the case of a term like 'plumber' as the profession is almost exclusively a male preserve. Furthermore, if women are not treated as special cases, then there is a risk of ambiguity. Consider what reading would be made if the following headline did not contain gender specification:

WOMAN POACHER CONVICTED AT BUNCRANA COURT
(*The Derry Journal*, 21 June 1992, p. 23)

Had the noun 'poacher' not been so marked, then the 'natural' tendency is to assume male reference. This would be borne out by the fact that this is the first case of female poaching reported by this paper – indeed, part of the newsworthiness of the story rests on this aspect of the text. Yet this type of common-sense assumption is far removed from assumptions which are made without this type of warrant, such as the assumption, for example, that the reader of this book is male. The appropriation of common-gender terms which have no clear demographic or occupational differentiation is the real issue here and I have attempted to argue that such appropriation serves to reinforce the 'unmarked-male, marked-female' dichotomy which forms a substratum of meaning in many of the texts examined in this chapter.

7 Afterword

It's the way I tell 'em!

(catchphrase of standup comic, Frank Carson)

As part of their ongoing publicity campaign, the Australian Tourist Commission recently produced a poster displaying a map of the world headed by the slogan 'Australia: No Longer Down Under'. What is striking about the poster is that the map is inverted, so that the familiar layout of the continents and oceans is, literally, turned upside-down. The Antipodean countries, no longer 'down under', now preside over the globe from their commanding position in the north-west. On the other side of the Northern Hemisphere, South America becomes a formidable iceberg-shaped mass which rises from the equator, while Southern Africa moves to the central position that was once occupied by Europe. Europe itself becomes a minor cluster of states overshadowed by what was originally North Africa and the Near East. Canada and the United States are marginalized to the extreme south east of the globe, a position initially allocated, of course, to the Antipodes. The Tourist Commission make their point in an extremely interesting way. By inverting a highly conventional representation of the earth, they invert our framework of perception. We are encouraged to see the earth in a way that is not 'normal', but in a way that has as much validity as the format through which it is conventionally presented. In more theoretical terms, it might be said that the standard presentation of the globe has become 'naturalized' as an everyday discursive practice. Yet, as the action of the Australian Tourist Commission shows, this practice can be 'denaturalized' by a simple act of inversion. Why, indeed, must Australia be viewed as 'down under' and not 'up over' – it is, after all, only a cartographical convention which dictates that we see the world in this way.