Chapter I

Introduction

The discourses on the interrelationship of gender, language and social class are now one of the most promising academic discourses in most parts of the world. Tracing their origins back mainly to the second half of the last century, especially during the second-wave feminist movements, these areas attained enormous importance primarily in the English speaking societies alongside other European ones. There have been several discussions in linguistics emphasizing the lexical, phonetic or syntactic dimensions of language. But the inquiry of language as a social construct and as the most challenging as well as productive area of Sociological research is still a developing field in India. While undeniably some important work has been published describing relationships between language and gender, it is fully endorsed that language and gender studies have an overarching responsibility ‘to contribute to the wider struggle against unjust and oppressive gender relations, by revealing and challenging the ideological propositions which support and naturalize those relation’ (Cameron 2007a: 16).

Historically, it has often been argued that women and men are still largely segregated into the private and public spheres and this division results in language differences and differences in attitude of both women and men to each other’s speech. Differential linguistic practices not only distinguish between women and men as different language users but also construct and constitute separate principles of masculinity (masculinities) and femininity (femininities), which indubitably discriminate against women and marginalize them. Most of the linguistic research, focusing on gender dimensions, has often put forward the hypothesis that gender-specific
differences in communication arise in the perception of linguistic interactions. It is assumed that
gender stereotypes, which function as cognitive patterns of perception, are responsible for the
different reception of women’s and men’s communicative behavior. Moreover, as argued by
Jennifer Coates, gender differences do exist in language and that these differences are quite
similar to ‘cultural’ differences (Coates, 2004:6). But, unfortunately, this argument has not been
considered significant in India and still remains an uncharted territory in mainstream Indian
sociology. Ergo, there is acute dearth of research in Indian sociology as well as under-emphasis
on the studies of variations in language use patterns and its social causes like how social
variables e.g. gender and social class etc. affect the way language is expressed and used.

Furthermore, it has also become evident that all women are not same, and that women can not be
straitjacketed into either/or categories. At this point we not only find multitude of diverse
women, but also notice that different dimensions of social life cannot be separated out into
discrete and pure strands, because multiple identities of both women and men operate
simultaneously in our society. And it is for this reason only that we often find disparities among
both women and men, when considered as a single homogeneous group. Thereby, women’s
differential social class positions also become important while analyzing their linguistic practices
because of the principal social dimensions sociolinguists have been concerned with gender and
social class have probably been the most researched ones, as these issues have given birth to a
new proliferation of literature particularly in the English speaking West (Holmes, 2001: 45).
However, even in recent times, these ‘intersectional’ identities have not obtained desired
acceptance or approval in Indian Sociological discourses.

Besides, till date research on language and gender has not only emphasized the basic
question, i.e., “do women and men speak differently”, but also various other related issues have
been addressed as serious concerns. Some of them are the specific context of differences between women’s and men’s speech, differences within each gender group, gender differences in family interactions, public domains etc. and many more (eg. Eckert/McConnell-Ginet 2003, Cameron 1995, Coates 2001, Tannen 1990).

Thus, here, beginning with a broad introduction, this chapter has further included a brief review of the existing literature on these issues. The overview of the relevant literature has helped the researcher not only in identifying the research objectives like how the social construction of gender and social class affect the language use patterns of Bengali women in Kolkata, but also in outlining the research design by deciding the overall methodological parameters. In the second section of the study the relevance of applying different theoretical approaches has been discussed for a better understanding of the research problem as well as to analyze and interpret the results in a compact and comprehensive manner. The detailed analysis of the findings has been presented in the next three chapters namely “Differences in Language Use Patterns and Linguistic Style of Women and Men in Private and Public Spheres”, “Gender and Language- Different Nuances”, and “Gender, Language and Social Class”. Finally, in the conclusion the attempt has been to focus on the summary of findings as well as to explore future research potentialities.

Review of Relevant Literature

Gender and Language Research: Global Context

Language is often considered to be the more generalized capacity on which speech depends. The relationship of one to the other may be partially understood by reference to various analogies,
among which none is perfect. Language stands to speech like a pattern in relation to the garments that can be produced from it, like a musical score in relation to the actual performances of the work, like the rules of chess in relation to the playing of specific chess games. All these analogies emphasize the abstract characteristics of language. But the chess analogy probably best illuminates its rule-governed character. Just as playing chess depends upon participants sharing the same basic set of rules for the manipulation of its pieces, so language is constituted as a meaningful human activity only by virtue of shared conventions for the manipulation of its symbols. We make sense to each other when we speak, only in so far as we share the same abstract set of underlying conventions (Montgomery, 2008: 2). Linguists have also shown that one of the eternal truths about living languages is that they all change. Change is inevitable because speakers of every language are exposed to new concepts and ideas that require accommodation to the language. In addition to this, because there is no single form of any language the distinct varieties of each language, whether they be regional, ethnic, racial, age-based, gender-based or class-based, are constantly affecting each other as their speakers live and work together (Winkler, 2011: 197). Herein the importance of ‘culture’ becomes relevant that refers to all the ideas and assumptions about the nature of things and people that we learn when we become members of social groups. We develop awareness of our knowledge, and hence of our culture, only after having developed language. The particular language we learn through the process of cultural transmission provides us, at least initially, with a readymade system of categorizing the world around us and our experience of it (Yule, 2006: 217). However, culture is not only significant for the development of language rather it also plays a pivotal role in the social conditioning and transformation of the biological ‘sexes’ to the socio-cultural ‘gender’. Being born male or female has far-reaching consequences for an individual. It affects how we act
in the world, how the world treats us. This not only includes the language we use, and the language used about us, but also tries to explain how languages, individuals and social contexts ‘interact’, and how this interaction sustains unequal gender relations.

The earliest work on men, women and language attended to ‘sex differentiation’. Studies of such differences were carried out by Europeans (and other ‘Westerners’) with an interest in anthropology. They have tended to concentrate on phonological and lexicogrammatical ‘exotica’ (sound patterns, words and structures). A great deal of this kind of study has focused on the existence of different pronouns or affixes specific to men and women, whether as speakers, spoken to or spoken about. Sex differentiation of this kind is uncommon in languages of European origin. The pronoun systems of Germanic languages such as English and Danish- only distinguish sex in third person singular reference (he/him, she/her or it). Then the suffix- ess transforms a male or generic noun into a female one (heir; heiress). Besides theses, since gender is embedded in the signs and in their use in communicative practice in a variety of ways we find differences in the ways particular linguistic signs are used. For example the adjectives ‘pretty’ and ‘handsome’ both mean something like ‘good-looking’, but have background meanings corresponding to cultural ideals of good looks for females and males respectively, and are generally used gender-specifically or to invoke male or female associated properties (Eckert, 1992: 60). As researcher Mary Talbot has placed it, for an individual to be assigned to the category of male or female has far-reaching consequences. Gender is often thought of in terms of bipolar categories, sometimes even as mutually exclusive opposites- as in “the opposite sex”. People are perceived through a “lens” of gender polarization (Bem, 1993) and assigned to apparently natural categories accordingly. On the basis of this gender assignment, naturalized norms and expectations about verbal behaviour are imposed upon people. There is a strong
tendency for gender stereotyping to set in. Stereotyping involves a reductive tendency: to “stereotype someone is to interpret their behaviour, personality and so on in terms of a set of common-sense attributions which are applied to whole groups (e.g., ‘Italians are excitable’; ‘Black people are good in sport’)” (Cameron 1988:8). They focus obsessively on certain characteristics, real or imagined, and exaggerate them. Early work in the field that we now know as language and gender was highly speculative and certainly did not reflect on the category of gender itself. Instead, it simply accepted and used the commonsensical categories of female and male. As a consequence, it tended to reproduce sexist stereotypes. Indeed, early pre-feminist scholarship was profoundly androcentric. In 1922, Otto Jespersen wrote on Language: Its Nature, Development and Origin including a single chapter on ‘The Woman’. He presents various alleged characteristics of women as speakers, including softspokenness, irrational topic shift, and, not least, volubility and vacuity; in other words, talking a lot but making no sense. The “evidence” (other than his own opinion) that he refers to for his claim about women’s voluble vacuity consists of proverbs, witticisms, and the views of authors and fictional characters. And here Deborah Cameron has rightly observed that several years later this view still holds to be true (Holmes ed., 2006: 468,469). As presented by Jennifer Coates and many other sociolinguistic researchers, differences between women and men have always been a topic of interest to the human species and supposed linguistic differences are often enshrined in proverbs:

A woman’s tongue wags like a lamb’s tail. (England).

Foxes are all tail and women are all tongue (England-Cheshire).

It has also commented and recorded by contemporary observers in diaries, letters, poems, novels etc., that significant evidence of folklinguistic beliefs about gender differences in language.
Coates, 2004: 9). They have mainly concentrated on six areas viz. vocabulary, swearing and taboo language, grammar, literacy, pronunciation and verbosity. While men are considered the chief renovators of language there is usually a tendency to associate the use of various adverbial forms with women or women’s speech (Coates, 2004: 10, 11). Besides, the widespread belief is that women’s language is more polite, more refined or to be more specific more ‘ladylike’.

Presumably there have always been taboos on language, but in the Middle Ages there have been the strengthening of linguistic taboos in general, condemnation of the use of vulgar language by women and also its use by men in front of women. (ibid: 14) Since then the idea of distinct male and female swear words is still widely held. Besides, here another important point is that the androcentric attitudes were often used as the basis for certain prescriptive rules of grammar, where the commonly held assumption was that women are frequently found guilty of incorrect usage, as far as grammar is concerned in comparison to their male counterparts (ibid: 16)

Now, before twentieth century when state education was introduced for all there was no or very little access for women to literacy. In eighteenth or early nineteenth century only middle or upper class of women were literate and that too literate in the vernacular only. However, their male counterparts were literate in the classical languages also. During the eighteenth century women’s writing was clearly the subject of mockery and moreover women used to receive very little and very poor education. Then in the Romantic Age, women are seen as inferior because their writings lack passion. It is not until the twentieth century that we can take it for granted that women are literate, that women have somewhat equal access to education, and that women’s voices are heard equally with men’s (at least in theory) (ibid: 20). Moreover, women’s comments on writing give us an insight into the problems of using a medium which has over the centuries been in the hands of men. Virginia Woolf’s concern that the written sentence is ‘made by men’ is
part of a wider debate over whether language as a whole is man-made or not. Eventually, after
the development of a standard grammar and lexicon, the need was felt for a standard in
pronunciation (ibid: 21). The pronunciation of female speakers was explicitly compared with that
of male speakers and readers were urged to imitate educated men. The grouping of herdsmen,
porters and girls together shows us that non-prestigious speech was clearly associated with lack
of education. However, it is not clear whether women and men of the same social class in the
seventeenth century did talk differently, since it is only in the twentieth century that quantitative
sociolinguistic analysis has been applied to speech. Jespersen in his chapter on ‘The Woman’
included an excellent survey of male/female differences in pronunciation. He interpreted the
comments of early grammarians as showing that women had a more advanced pronunciation
than men. Apart from pronunciation, there was an age-old belief that women talk too much.
However, the other side of the coin to women’s verbosity is the image of the silent woman,
which is often held up as an ideal- ‘Silence is the best ornament of a woman’ (English proverb).
The model of the silent woman is still presented to girls in the second half of the twentieth
century. As eminent feminist sociolinguistic researcher Dale Spender has commented on the
issue of women and silence: ‘The talkativeness of women has been gauged in comparison not
with men but with silence.....When silence is the desired state for women...then any talk in which
a woman engages can be too much’. (Spender 1980a: 42)

Gender and language Ideologies, Stereotypes and Norms:

Language ideologies have emerged in recent years as a distinct focus for research and debate
among sociolinguists and linguistic anthropologists (Schieffelin, Woolard, and Kroskrity 1998).
The term ‘language ideologies’ is generally used to refer to sets of representations through which
language is imbued with cultural meaning for a certain community (Holmes ed., 2006: 447). It is worth commenting briefly on the definition of language ideologies in terms of ‘representations’ of language rather than, say, ‘beliefs’ or ‘attitudes’ relating to it. The study of language ideologies involves examining the texts and practices in which languages are represented not only spoken and written but also spoken and written about. It is from these representations that language users learn how linguistic phenomena are conventionally understood in their culture. Ideas about how women and men use language, and how they ought ideally to use it, have been a recurring theme in many historical periods. (ibid: 448)

It would appear that many of our typical views about the way men and women use language are based upon stereotypes which we have, at some stage, ‘learnt’ and therefore regurgitate when asked about language and gender. Frank and Ashen (1983:27) claim that:

Perhaps the most common stereotype about women’s speech is that women talk a lot…there seems to be no study which supports this belief, while there are several which show just the opposite.

According to Graddol and Swann (1989:2) ‘Stereotypes of women’s and men’s speech are plentiful and they seem to have an extremely long history’. Through these stereotypes, women are ‘consistently portrayed as chatterboxes, endless gossips or strident nags patiently endured or kept in check by strong silent men’.

Stereotypes and Norms:

An important way in which language interacts with aspects of gender role and identity is through the commonsense beliefs and stereotypes that are held about the basic differences between the language of men and women (Montgomery, 2008: 177). In English language a remarkable
variety of words are available for vocal, particularly verbally aggressive women. Some of them are- scold, gossip, nag, virago, dragon, bitch, magpie, parrot, poll etc. All these are highly pejorative though some of them are fortunately out of use now (Holmes ed. 2006: 469). In addition, researcher Key (1975: 13) moved on to give specific examples of ‘feminine usage’, including ‘precious’, ‘cute’ and ‘oh dear!’ Key then described how, for males, the ‘continuum moves toward strong or brutish terms such as ‘belly’ or ‘guts’.

The abovementioned discussion actually reflects the fact that gender stereotypes are closely linked with and also support gender ideologies. If these are viewed as ideological prescriptions for behaviour, then actual individuals are expected to adhere to these stereotypical roles (Holmes ed. 2006: 472).

**Age and Gender-differentiated Language:**

In course of time, age is also considered to be another important factor contributing to the gender-language research. One of the most obvious speech differences between women and men is in the pitch of their voices. Most people believe this difference develops at puberty. It has been clearly evident that young boys’ voices often break at puberty and also that they become noticeably lower in pitch. Not only that their voice quality reflects their physical growth but generally male voices sound lower in pitch than women’s. However, these differences are relative and the pitch ranges of women and men overlap to a considerable extent. This physical or biological explanation is only part of the reason for gender differences. Social and cultural factors also contribute to it. Actually prevalence and acceptance of the gender stereotypes often inculcate in young boys the tendency to speak with a lower-pitched voice. Since the notion of masculinity is closely linked with speaking in low pitched voice, young boys often develop this
masculine feature along with other more obviously sociolinguistic features of male speech such as the greater use of vernacular forms (Holmes, 2001: 166). Work on phonological variation in children’s speech also confirms that gender differentiation is present from an early age. In the course of a study of child-rearing in a semi-rural New England village, Fischer (1964) was struck by differences between the pronunciation of girls and boys. Fischer’s analysis of his data of twenty four children (equal number of girls and boys aged between 3 to 6 years and 7 to 10 years) revealed that the girls used the standard variant more frequently, while the boys preferred the non-standard variant (Coates, 2004: 152). Then in a study of a single Ozark family, Mock (1979) showed that teenaged children followed the sexual differentiation of their parents in the use of (ing). In Glasgow, Macaulay (1977) found that male school children used the stigmatized vowels of the local dialect more than females. An even more sensitive measure of sex differentiation is found in the use of glottal stop for /t/.

Preadolescent children of both sexes and all social classes show a high level of glottal stop, about 90%. Among adults, a sharp social stratification is found with middle-class women in particular showing very little glottal stop. The adolescent groups show a high reduction in this feature among middleclass girls; middle-class boys follow suit, but only in their 20s (Labov, 1990: 212). Then in her study of primary school children in Edinburgh, Suzanne Romaine (1978) found that speaker’s gender was the single most important factor correlating with use of the phonological variable (r). In a survey of gender differences in the language of children and adolescents, Romaine (1984) compares her results for 10 year olds in Edinburgh with Macaulay’s results for 10 year olds in Glasgow. Both the studies reflected that girls obtained lower scores than boys due to their less frequent use of non-standard forms or variants. The pattern found in both the studies is also similar to that of the result found in adult population, where the girls consistently
preferred to use forms closer to standard pronunciation, while the boys preferred forms that are non-standard (Coates, 2004: 152, 153). There are other features of people’s speech which vary at different ages. Along with pitch, vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar also differ with varying age groups. For example, certain patterns reflect that despite being appropriate in specific age groups such as among teenagers they simply disappear as the young individuals grow older. These are thereby labelled as age-graded patterns.

Social Class and Gender Differences in Language:

In sociolinguistics linguistic variation has received enormous importance from centuries ago. Distinct groups or social formations within the whole society are set off from each other in a variety of ways, such as by gender, by age, by social class, ethnic identity etc. And these differences most frequently go hand in hand with differing degrees of access to material resources, to knowledge, to power. If the society is stratified, then as language enters into the life of that society to shape, cement and reproduces it, it too displays stratification. Particular groups will tend to have characteristic ways of using the language—characteristic ways of pronouncing it, for example—and these will help to mark off the boundaries of one group from another. In the realm of language this stratification can work itself through a variety of levels (Montgomery, 2008: 74). Most of the sociolinguistic studies have started by grouping individuals into social classes on the basis of factors such as education, occupation, income and so on, and then looked to see how certain linguistic features were used by each group.¹ Sociolinguists have found that almost any linguistic feature in a community which shows variation will differ in frequency from one social group to another in a patterned and predictable way. Some features are stable and their patterns of use seem to have correlated with membership of particular social groups in a
predictable way for many years. According to famous British sociolinguist Basil Bernstein, distinct forms of spoken language are associated with the organization of particular social groups. Bernstein in his popular work Class, Codes and Control (vol.1, 1977), has distinguished between two types of language codes namely the restricted code (which is context dependent and particularistic) and the elaborated code (which is context independent and universalistic) as a way of accounting for the relatively poor performance of working-class pupils on language-based subjects, when they were achieving as well as their middle-class counterparts on mathematical topics. The term ‘code’, as defined by Stephen Littlejohn in Theories of Human Communication (2002), “refers to a set of organizing principles behind the language employed by members of a social group” (p. 178). He reported that in the working class use of the restricted code is more likely to be found, while in the middle class both of these codes are used. The restricted code is suitable for insiders who share assumptions and understanding on the topic, whereas the elaborated code does not assume that the listener shares these assumptions or understandings, and thus elaborated code is more explicit, more thorough, and does not require the listener to read between the lines. Within the restricted code, speakers draw on background knowledge and shared understanding. This type of code creates a sense of includedness, a feeling of belonging to a certain group. Restricted codes can be found among friends and families and other intimately knit groups. Conversely, elaborated code can “stand on its own”, it is complete and full of detail, and most overhearing a conversation would be able to understand it. Here Bernstein has also argued that two factors contribute significantly to the development and use of these codes and according to him these are the nature of socializing agencies (family, peer group, school, work) and values present in a system. When the socializing agencies are well defined and structured restricted code is found, whereas where the agencies are malleable, an elaborated
code is found. So, in a society, which values individuality we come across elaborated codes, while in a narrower society use of restricted codes is frequent. Thus we find that in any given speech style social class stratification is maintained and each group maintains its position relative to other groups. Trudgill’s research findings showed that the average scores for one group of speakers is determined in terms of a variety of factors: occupation, income, education, housing, locality and father’s occupation (Trudgill 1974:36). Taken together, these factors are used to define a hierarchy of socio-economic classes and thus here we can refer to Karl Marx and Max Weber’s notion of social class, where they did mention about the economic determinants of class. While Marx argued that social class is based on economically determined relationship to the market, according to Weber, not only economic attributes but status and power differentials are also responsible for the formation of a social class. Trudgill’s research findings thus confirmed that use of (ng), a specific linguistic pattern is used more often by high-status people. Trudgill (1974a, 1983a) in social dialect interviews in Norwich, also showed that men used more of the vernacular [in] form at the end of words like ‘speaking’ and ‘walking’ than men. And this pattern was quite consistent across five distinct social groups namely the middle-middle class, lower-middle class, upper class, middle class and the working class (Holmes, 2001: 154). The findings of this study reveal that: a) in all styles, women tend to use fewer stigmatised forms than men because they are more status conscious. For Trudgill, this is because they are less secure socially and more likely to be judged on appearances than men and men on the other hand are judged by what they do. So they are not under pressure to use the prestige variants (Talbot, 2010: 23), b) in formal contexts women seem to be more sensitive to the prestige pattern than men, c) lower-middle-class women style-shift vary sharply: in the least formal style, they use quite a high proportion of the stigmatised variant, but in the more formal styles, they correct their speech
to correspond to that of the class above them (the middle-middle class), d) use of non-standard forms (i.e. of the vernacular) seems to be associated not only with working-class speakers, but also with male speakers. (Coates, 2004: 53,54)

Labov’s famous study conducted in New York City in 1972 revealed another significant pattern i.e. the process of change of a linguistic variable. Here, he has presented a clear picture of the interrelation between social class and language use. By conducting his study in three departmental stores in New York city, namely Saks, Macy’s and Klein he wanted to relate use of language or more specifically use of particular linguistic variables (r) with that of the social status of the speakers. These stores served different clienteles and thus could be ranked from high status (Saks, Fifth Avenue), through middle status (Macy’s) to low status (S. Klein). This ranking could be made on the basis of a number of easy criteria, such as the prices of their goods and the newspapers in which they advertised. Within each store further distinctions could be made among the assistants according to their jobs- between floorwalkers, sales-staff and stock boys- and even between different floors within each store, since higher-status goods are generally stocked on higher floors. The findings of this study argued that unlike the lower and upper working class, the lower middle class shows a much greater shift towards the prestige form in formal styles of speech. In the article “The Intersection of Sex and Social Class in the course of Linguistic Change” Labov referred to two general principles of sexual differentiation that emerge from various sociolinguistic studies. According to him 1) in stable sociolinguistic stratification, men use a higher frequency of non-standard forms than women, 2) in majority of linguistic changes women use a higher frequency of the incoming forms than men (Labov, 1990: 205, 206). Similarly, Ronald Macaulay’s work of Glasgow (1977, 1978) also depict the same fact that class differences do affect the way language is used by people of various classes
The predictable conclusions in all these studies were that as one moves up the socioeconomic hierarchy, one tends to produce an increasing percentage of standard pronunciations. Macaulay also showed that women in each social class use more prestige forms \([r]\) than men of the same social class. It is also noted that women in each social class pattern like the men in the group above them. Conversely, the men in each social class pattern like the women in the group below them. He also pointed out that the major break in the women’s scores comes between the lower middle class and the upper working class, while for men it comes between the upper middle class and the lower middle class. So, lower middle class women speak more like upper middle class women, while lower middle class men speak more like upper working class men (Coates, 2004: 55, 56). Besides these works of Labov, Trudgill and Macaulay, more research on language, gender and social class are worth mentioning here. Mark Newbrook’s (1982) study of West Wirral aimed to investigate a number of phonological variables and found that there were significant gender differences for most of them. With all three variables (‘ing’ as in jumping, ‘h’ as in house, ‘k’ as in kick), he found the expected pattern i.e. women’s pronunciation is closer to the prestige standard than that of men’s. Moreover, these group scores conceal the fact that the range of individual scores involved differs greatly between men and women. The typical score for a working-class man was much lower than that for a middle-class man, whereas women’s scores covered a much narrower range. This ultimately suggests that social class is a more important factor in determining men’s speech than women’s, at least in West Wirral (ibid: 57).

Eckert’s famous study in Detroit (1999) in the United States is also relevant in this section. Eckert’s data were obtained through participant observation: her subjects were students at Belten High, a high school in the suburbs of Detroit. The students she focused on belonged to two
dominant groups in the school: ‘jocks’ and ‘burnouts’. ‘Jocks’ were students who participated enthusiastically in school culture and aimed to go on to college; ‘burnouts’ were students who rejected the idea of the school as central to their lives, and who were more interested in activities outside school. To put it simply, the jocks constituted a middle-class culture, the burnouts a working-class culture. Eckert studied phonological variation in the speech of these students: her analysis revealed the complex correlation between pronunciation, gender and social category (jock or burnout). It was noted that overall, the burnout girls were the most advanced speakers in terms of new vernacular forms, while the jock girls prefer more conservative variants. This also meant that the girls’ usage is more polarised than the boys’ (ibid: 59, 61). Most of the studies looked at so far were carried out in North American or European countries, especially Britain and most of them focused on phonological variation. But gender-differentiated language is a world-wide phenomenon and it is not confined to pronunciation. Edina Eisikovits (1987, 1998) investigated the speech of adolescents living in working class areas of Sydney, Australia. She studied three grammatical features viz. 1) non-standrad past tense forms such as seen and done (e.g. he woke up an’ seen something), 2) multiple negation (e.g. they don’t say nothing), 3) invariable don’t (e.g. Mum don’t have to do nothing). She showed that female speech was closer to the standard and male speakers consistently used a higher proportion of non-standard forms. However, this pattern was not apparent in the speech of younger adolescent speakers interviewed by Eisikovits (ibid: 58).

Then in Spain, Silva-Corvalan (1986) studied the alternation of conditional and imperfect subjunctive in si- clauses—the same variable that was the focus of Lavandera (1975) in Buenos Aires. Men showed more than twice the frequency of the nonstandard conditional in the sociolinguistically sensitive focus of the variable: the apodosis of counterfactual sentences.
Silva-Corvalan (1981) studied pleonastic clitics in Chilean Spanish and found that men had a higher tendency to use this nonstandard form. Rissel (1989) reviewed other studies in Spain that showed women using more standard forms than men (Labov, 1990: 212).

**Gender differences in Conversational Practice:**

As the discipline of sociolinguistics developed with time, it was realized that conversational interaction should also be included in the study of gender and language. The emergence of the new disciplines such as discourse analysis, pragmatics, ethnomethodology, conversation analysis (CA) and speech act theory etc. has also accelerated the revival of interest in language-gender research. And the concept which marks the beginning of this revival is ‘communicative competence’. The term was first introduced by Dell Hymes (1972), where he argued that it was essential to incorporate social and cultural factors into linguistic description. He further added that it is not sufficient for the child to be linguistically competent, rather in order to function in the real world she or he must also learn when to speak, when to remain silent, what to talk about-and how to talk about it- in different circumstances. This knowledge of how language is and should be used in a given society constitutes communicative competence (Coates, 2004: 85). Jennifer Coates in her book ‘Women, Man and Language- A Sociolinguistic Account of Gender Differences in Language’ (2004: 86) referred very clearly to various strategies that are used by women and men in different conversational interactions. She found and concentrated on aspects like ‘minimal responses’, ‘hedges’, ‘tag questions’, ‘questions’, ‘commands and directives’, ‘swearing and taboo language’, and ‘compliments’. Here also a brief overview of these conversational strategies will help us to explore the way in which women and men draw on them while interacting with others. According to her, these minimal responses are also sometimes
called as ‘back channels’ to refer to forms such as ‘yeah’ or ‘right’ or ‘mhm’. Research on the use of such minimal responses is unanimous in showing that women use them more than men, and at appropriate moments, that is, at points in conversation which indicate the listener’s support for the current speaker. On the other hand, hedges refer to ‘filler’ items like ‘you know’, ‘well’, ‘kind of’ etc. which reduce the force of an utterance. We often use them to add tentativeness to statements, making them seem less dogmatic. Sometimes they indicate uncertainty, but not always. Robin Lakoff used this term as an important attribute of ‘women’s language’ (Talbot, 2010: 37). Lakoff also referred to another concept i.e. tag questions, which are questions tagged on to an utterance, such as ‘don’t you?’ or ‘isn’t it?’ etc. According to Lakoff (1975), they turn a statement into a question, so that its force is reduced. Lakoff claimed that women use sentences containing the tag questions more often than men. Siegler and Siegler’s (1976) study also supported Lakoff’s hypothesis that sentences with tag questions were most often attributed to women, while strong assertions were most often attributed to men. On the other hand, Dubois and Crouch (1975) listed all examples of formal tag questions (such as ‘Probably industrial too, isn’t it?’) as well as ‘informal’ tags (such as ‘Right?’, ‘Ok?’ as in ‘That’s not too easy, right?’) a total of thirty three tag questions were recorded and all of these were produced by men (Coates, 2004: 91).

Besides, though in interactive terms, questions are often considered stronger than statements since they give the speaker the power to elicit a response, but research findings so far suggest that women use interrogative forms more than men and that this may reflect women’s relative weakness in interactive situations. It is said that they exploit questions and tag questions in order to keep conversation going (ibid: 93). However, as Cameron et al.’s (1989) research on tag questions demonstrates, some kinds of questions are associated with powerful speakers. It is also
being noticed that in situations or contexts where women and men both have equal status but the context has high status men ask far more questions than women. This finding has been supported by several studies such as that of Holmes (1988b, 1995), Bashiruddin et al. (1990), Swacker (1979) etc. Thus while it seems that in some situations women use more questions than men, in others it is men who ask more questions, while sometimes the relevant variable is occupational status not gender (ibid: 94). Moreover, some other features like commands, directives etc. were also introduced by the researchers. A directive can be defined as a speech act which tries to get someone to do something. Goodwin (1980, 1990, 1998) observed the group play of boys and girls in a street at Philadelphia, where he found that the boys used different types of directives from the girls. Goodwin called boys’ use of explicit commands as ‘aggravated directives’, the use of which attempted to establish their status differences between themselves. On the other hand girls had the tendency of using ‘mitigated directives’, characterized by suggestive statements. However Goodwin claimed that girls’ use of mitigated directives does not necessarily prove that they are incapable or less capable of using forceful directives (Coates, 2004: 94, 95). Later on another sociolinguistic researcher Candace West (1998a) looked at the directives used by male and female doctors to their patients. She found that the male doctors preferred to use aggravated forms such as imperatives, while female doctors preferred to use more mitigated forms, phrasing their directives as proposals. In gender and language research it has already been mentioned in the discussion of ‘folklinguistic’ belief that men swear more than women and use more taboo words. After Jespersen, Lakoff also claimed that men use stronger expletives like ‘damn, shit’ etc. than women, while women use phrases like ‘oh dear, goodness’ etc. Kramer (1974) analysed cartoons from the ‘New Yorker’, where she found that cartoonists make their male characters swear much more freely than the female characters. Now with
reference to taboo language, in Jennifer Coates’ own research on conversational narrative (2003), she argued that while telling stories as part of everyday interaction men and women differ linguistically in terms of their use of taboo words. In addition, a great deal of research conducted in United States, Britain and New Zealand has suggested that women are more likely to give and receive compliments than that of men. Janet Holmes (1995) defined compliments as ‘remarkably formulate speech acts that draw on a very narrow range of syntactic patterns’ (Coates, 2004: 98). Herbert reported that women preferred more personalised forms (compliments with first or second person focus) while men preferred impersonal (third person) forms (ibid: 99). Researchers also sometimes view compliments as functioning as ‘positive politeness’ strategies, however, in several other situations compliments can be face-threatening, because they ignore the negative face-needs of the addressee (ibid: 101).

In 1980, Deborah Jones published a paper which looked at the kind of talk normally labelled ‘gossip’ from a non-androcentric perspective. In other words, she used the term ‘gossip’ in a positive sense. She accepted it as a term describing women’s talk, but redefined it in a non-pejorative way as ‘a way of talking between women in their roles as women, intimate in style, personal and domestic in topic and setting’. Several other researchers have also been willing to accept gossip as a characterization of much of women’s talk while offering a nonstandard understanding of just what gossip is. In the study of sociolinguistics or more specifically gender and language politeness is an important aspect to be dealt with. As Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) have defined politeness, they have focused on the concept of ‘face’ that is used in everyday phrases such as ‘to lose face’. Respecting face is defined as showing consideration for people’s feelings. Politeness can thus be defined as satisfying the face wants of others (while protecting our own) and linguistically this can be carried out in many different ways.
Conversational Dominance in Mixed Talk:

The term ‘conversation’ is sometimes used, very loosely, to refer to spoken language, talk in general. But in a broader sense conversation is all about keeping the channel of communication open, which is also known as the ‘phatic’ function of language. It is the vital social glue that keeps relationships going. When people engage in conversation they do so in a fairly symmetrical way. If they are in ‘conversation’, they each have a share of the talk. Usually we tend to think of conversation as private, but it occurs in public places as well. But as mentioned just now that conversation involves a share of talk but this share may not always be equal. Thus conversational dominance is the concept or the phrase that is used to refer to the phenomenon of a speaker dominating others in interaction. While investigating about gender roles in private conversations, Pamela Fishman examined talk between intimates. She studies conversations of three couples, recorded separately in their homes (Fishman 1983, 1998). She divided the entire responses in several categories: questions, minimal responses, attention-getters, topic initiation and topic uptake. She found that women asked three times as many questions as the men probably due to their need of eliciting responses from men and getting them involved in the interaction. Beside this, as we have already seen minimal responses are often called supportive feedback or backchannel feedback. Not only that, they are also often considered an essential part of ‘cooperative talk’. Fishman noted that women used them supportively to develop the topic, while men withheld or delayed minimal responses to curtail the topic, which she termed as ‘uncooperative’. She also added that women used some questions as pre-sequence just to engage their husbands’ attention (Talbot, 2010: 77). Now, with reference to the topic of initiation and uptake she argued that while men’s topics always succeeded, women’s were often not taken up. As Fishman has put it, most of the time men’s topics succeeded due to the supportive efforts of
women (ibid: 78). Victoria DeFransisco’s study among seven couples (1991) also shared almost similar view. Now following both Jennifer Coates and Mary Talbot’s version, we can divide the concept of conversational dominance into further sub-parts like- ‘turn-taking’, ‘interruptions’, ‘talkativeness’, ‘non-cooperation’, and ‘silence’. Turn-taking is often referred to as the organisation of talk. As speakers, we always learn as part of our everyday communicative competence to orient to certain norms which guarantee that talk is distributed on a turn-by-turn basis. We do this in order to achieve a speech event that can be called conversation, not chaos. Turn-taking in conversation has been studied thoroughly by researchers like Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974) as well as by Zimmerman and West (1975) (Coates, 2004: 111, 112). On the other hand, interruptions are perhaps the most unambiguous linguistic strategy that achieves dominance, since to interrupt someone is to deprive them or at least to attempt to deprive them of the right to speak (Coates ed., 2005: 161). Interruptions are often considered as turn-taking violations, one person taking another person’s speaking turn away from them (Talbot, 2010: 80). As Zimmeman and West showed in their study, it is men who are more likely to interrupt women particularly in mixed-sex conversations rather than same-sex talk. Furthermore, talkativeness or talking too much is also an important aspect of conversational behaviour. As far as mixed talk is concerned, there is a widespread belief in our society that women talk more than men. In fact a number of researches also support the fact that in public realms where high status is involved, men are more likely to do the talking. Men have been shown to talk more than women in diverse settings, starting from staff meeting, seminars, and television panel discussion to mock jury deliberations and experimental pairs (Coates, 2004: 117). Dale Spender (1980a) attempted to explain the persistence of the myth that ‘women are more talkative’ or that ‘women talk a lot’ by comparing it with that of men’s linguistic behaviour. She argued that women and men are
expected to speak differently and while men have always the right to talk, women are expected to remain silent. In that case, talking at any length is perceived as talkativeness in women. Spender also estimated that in the school classroom, teachers normally give two-thirds of their attention to boys, which is also supported by Joan Swann’s (1998) research on classroom interaction (ibid: 118). Nicola Woods (1989) stated that in occupational settings, male bosses spend more time holding the floor, i.e. they speak more than that of their female counterparts-the female bosses (ibid: 119). It is also argued that interruptions are not the only linguistic strategy in conversational dominance. Victoria DeFrancisco’s (1998) ‘The Sounds of Silence: How Men Silence Women in Marital Relations’, focused on non-cooperation in interaction. She found that although the women talked more than the men and introduced more topics, this was not associated with dominance. In fact the women were less successful than the men in getting their topics accepted. The men used various non-cooperative strategies to control conversations such as no response, interruption, inadequate or delayed response and silence. DeFrancisco concluded that men have the power to establish the norms of everyday conversation in the home, and that women have to adapt to these norms (Coates ed., 2005: 162). This finding is supported by Sattel (1983), who argued that no response, or silence, is used by men as part of male dominance (Coates, 2004: 122). Silence is often considered to be the frequent outcome of the violation of turn-taking norms. Speakers tend to fall silent after being interrupted by others in interaction. Silence, thus, can be described as a sign of malfunction in conversation. They further added that silence is not always the result of interruptions or overlaps but can also be the result of ‘delayed minimal responses’. Adversarial or unpleasant behaviour of any kind in interaction typically renders women silent. Laurel Sutton (1994) has observed men’s use of adversarial language in Internet discourse and noted that it resulted in women’s silence. Sutton also stated
that silence could be interpreted as the silence of disapproval, the silence of being fed up, the silence of women when something offensive or threatening is said. It is claimed that women often avoid contributing to discussion because of their fear of unsupportive or critical responses from men. Such fears also result in women’s silence (ibid: 123,124).

Same-Sex Talk:

Same-sex talk refers to either all-female or all-male talk. When women’s talk is considered within their own female groups and not in comparison with males, it is addressed not in relation to oppression or power-dominance strategies of men. Similarly when men’s talk is under scrutiny, it is also not considered or addressed as having elements of oppression or dominance. These differential speech patterns are termed as ‘cooperative pattern’ (all female talk) and ‘competitive pattern’ (all male talk) respectively by Jennifer Coates. An understanding that these different ways of talking may share the goal of creating group solidarity suggests that it would be unwise to exaggerate male-female differences. However, even work that explores cooperation in all-male talk (e.g. Cameron 1997; Hewitt 1997) suggests that such cooperation either enables or accompanies competitive behaviour (Coates, 2004: 143). Sociolinguists have investigated the talk of all kinds of single sex-groups, old and young, middle-class and working-class, from a variety of different cultures. One observation that has been something of a constant is that, while men tend to disagree with or ignore each other’s utterances, women tend to acknowledge and build on them. It seems that men pursue a style of interaction based on power, while women pursue a style based on solidarity and support. Cheshire and Trudgill, summarising research on the links between gender and conversational discourse, come to the following conclusion: It seems clear that, other things being equal, women and men do have a preference for different
conversational styles. Women - in most western societies at least - prefer a collaborative speech style, supporting other speakers and using language in a way that emphasizes their solidarity with the other person. Men, on the other hand, use a number of conversational strategies that can be described as a competitive style, stressing their own individuality and emphasizing the hierarchical relationships that they enter into with other people (Cheshire and Trudgill 1998: 3).

During 1970s and 1980s a number of researchers declared that the prime pattern of interaction in all-female groups is cooperative rather than competitive. Elizabeth Aries (1976) analysed the interaction patterns of six experimental groups: two all-female, two all-male, and two mixed groups. The all-male groups were concerned to establish where each member stood in relation to other members and in these groups a hierarchy emerged with some members holding dominant positions and others more submissive positions. The two women’s groups, on the other hand, were more flexible: active speakers were concerned to draw out more reticent or silent speakers and the women developed ways to express affection and interpersonal concern (Coates, 2004: 126,127). In 1983 Aries and Fern Johnson wrote a paper entitled ‘The Talk of Women Friends’ from an ethnographic perspective, which shed light on women’s cultural practices, on the way talk functions for women who are friends. These authors carried out a series of research projects on talk and friendship using a range of methodologies. They pointed out that for women talk has a key role in friendship. Then in Jennifer Coates’ ‘Gossip Revisited: Language in All-Female Groups’, she argued that women’s friendly talk has as its chief goal the establishment and maintenance of good social relations. This has consequences for the way talk is structured: friendly talk, or talk-as-play, is very different from talk-as-serious-business. Features of all-female talk which are selected for analysis are- topic development, minimal responses, simultaneous speech, epistemic modality or hedging and tag questions. Coates’ paper finally
concluded that women’s friendly talk is cooperative in the strong sense that speakers collaborate in the construction of talk, and that the voice of the group has priority over the voice of the individual. While discussing about women’s collaborative style of speech it is worth mentioning that considerable evidence has shown that women and men tend to discuss different topics in same-sex groups. Whereas men in all-male groups are more likely to discuss current affairs, travel and sport (ibid: 128). Moreover, women use minimal responses to signal their active listenership and support for each other. Similarly, hedges are used to respect the face needs of all participants, to negotiate sensitive topics, and to encourage the participation of others. Mitigated utterances encourage discussion because they prevent speakers taking a hard line. Another notable point in all-female talk is that female speakers often adopt a way of organizing talk where the rule of one person at-a-time does not apply. Rather here, the conversational floor is potentially open to all participants simultaneously (ibid: 131).

On the contrary, the stereotypical notion regarding men’s talk is that male talk tends to be competitive rather than cooperative. By competitive it is meant that all-male talk most often include contest, battle and gladiatorial, all of which derive from an underlying metaphor that equates talk with conflict (ibid: 133). Besides this monologues, which are described as stretches of conversation where one speaker holds the floor for a considerable period of time, are significant characteristics of men’s talk. They seem to be associated with ‘playing the expert’ i.e. a conversational game where participants take it in turns to hold the floor and to talk about a subject on which they are an expert. Associated with this tendency is obviously men’s likeliness to ask questions. Questions are used primarily to seek information as well as to invite the addressee to speak. Moreover, questions are also used as a way of introducing a new topic which the speaker, rather than the addressee, can talk expertly about (ibid: 134, 135). In addition to this,
it has been depicted that all-male talk does not always consist of monologues. Rather it often takes the form of an exchange of rapid-fire turns. Researches have shown that in all probability male speakers always prefer a one-at-a-time model of turn-taking, unlike women, who often adopt the way of talking simultaneously. Overlapping talk is also rare in all-male talk. Another important feature of men’s talk according to Deborah Cameron is ‘sports talk’, which she described as typically a masculine conversational genre. Finally Cameron concluded that cooperation and competition as styles of talking cannot be simplistically attributed to one gender or the other (Coates ed., 2005: 212,213). In this context reference can also be drawn to Jack Sidnell’s article ‘Constructing and Managing Male Exclusivity in Talk-in-Interaction’. Here it has been suggested that the recognizable gender exclusivity of particular settings is the product of members’ interactional work (Holmes ed., 2006: 344).

Women’s Talk in the Public Sphere:

In the 21st century globalized world sex-segregation still has been one of the “backbones of social stratification and inequality” (Achatz, Allmendinger, and Hinz 2000:2). Many women experience the effects of sex segregation: they are confronted, for example, with gender stereotypes, gendered expectations, and their related behavioural manifestations (Holmes ed., 2006: 528). Moreover, historically, it has always been noticed that the public sphere has been an exclusively male domain and it is still prevalent in various traditional societies. It is also being argued that the discourse patterns of male speakers have become the established norm in public life. Historically, the split between public and private is associated with industrialization. But, from the late 20th century, as a consequence of Equal Opportunities legislation, women have entered the public domain as lawyers, doctors, Members of Parliament etc. The increase in the
number of women joining into these spheres has not only given them equal access to professions but has also paved the way for a new struggle, where the question is whether women should and have to adapt to androcentric working practices. In linguistic terms, this means that women are expected to adopt the more adversarial, information-focused style characteristic of all-male talk, and typical of talk in the public domain. But women, who successfully adapt to characteristically male linguistic norms run the risk of being perceived as aggressive and confrontational, as unfeminine- in other words, there is a clash between what is expected of a woman and what is expected of a person with high status in the public sphere (Coates ed., 2005: 295). Public language was always being considered to be formal and to convey status; and public speakers were generally in positions of authority. In Greek philosophy, Aristotle wrote that women should be prevented from taxing their brains with things like political activity, because it would dry up their wombs. Until into the 19th century, Aristotle’s claims fuelled attempts to frighten women away from public speaking with dire warnings about it inducing sterility (Jamieson 1988: 69). Daring to address the public- whether orally or in writing- was damaging to a woman’s reputation for many centuries. The ‘virtue’ of an 18th century woman who had novels published was highly suspect. Women as preachers were widely ridiculed. Being forced to remain silent, to have no public voice, is like being invisible. As Robin Lakoff remarks, women are still not free of the restrictions traditionally forced on them: Silence is analogous to invisibility.....in ancient Athens women of the upper classes were not supposed to appear in public at all (literal public invisibility), in fundamentalist Muslim societies, women must be veiled in public (symbolic public invisibility). We pride ourselves on our liberation from those humiliating constraints. We tend not to realize how recent and partial our liberation really is (1995:290). Historically it has also been noticed that women have been excluded from prestigious and potentially influential
kinds of discourse. While women in most industrialized societies are no longer barred from such discourses, they are still marginalized in many public contexts. As Deborah Cameron has pointed out, the problem is not so much access to public talk at all as continued marginality in those settings, genres and ways of using language that carry the greatest weight of cultural authority for the community as a whole. Female voices are most obviously unwelcome in contexts where the community’s most cherished values are ritually and solemnly affirmed, using a formal or elevated register of language to discuss ‘the great subjects’ in a quasi-‘sacred’ institutional space - the Parliamentary chamber, the courtroom, the church. (2006c:8) In an article ‘Female Speakers of Japanese in Transition’, researcher Katsue Reynolds claimed that there is conflict in Japan between the contemporary ideology that women and men are equal, and the pressure on women to speak in a way that expresses an older female identity, one which is more in line with the Confucian doctrine of ‘men superior, women inferior’. Reynolds showed that in Japanese, some rules for gender-marking are categorical, and that, overall women have a much more restricted stylistic range available to them than men have. This asymmetry is in conflict with the communicative requirements of the late twentieth century where women are taking on new roles in the public sphere and need to talk to men as equals. ‘In order to be accepted as a “good” woman, a female speaker of Japanese must choose to talk nonassertively, indirectly, politely and deferentially; but in order to function as a supervisor, administrator, teacher, lawyer, doctor etc. or as a colleague or associate, she must be able to talk with assurance’. Reynolds also reported current perceptions of women in public life and described the linguistic strategies they adopt often unconsciously to resolve the conflicting demands on them. These strategies seem to consist predominantly of ‘defeminizing’ their language, that is, choosing variants towards the middle of an imaginary masculine-feminine spectrum, and avoiding variants associated with the feminine
end of the spectrum (Coates ed., 2005: 295). The defeminization of interactional patterns has also been focused by Bonnie McElhinny in her famous paper ‘I don’t smile much anymore’. Here she has analysed the linguistic behaviour of women police officers in the Pittsburgh police. It is a well-known fact that the police force is a workplace that has traditionally been defined as all-male and masculine. However, such workplaces demand from women several adoptive strategies that are typically employed by male officers, in order to be at per with them which also help them damp down the personal and the emotional. She also argued that gender differences in language are not found when both women and men work in a workplace with established masculine practices (ibid: 315, 317). In contrast to the patterns described in two most illustrating articles, it is also evident that in some workplaces women are resisting the androcentric discourse norms of the public sphere as well as also employing their own more cooperative speech style in the working environment. For instance, Candace West’s paper ‘Not just doctors’ orders’, focuses on doctor-patient talk. West analysed directive-response speech sequences between doctor and patient, and discovered that women and men doctors issued directives in very different ways. While male doctors preferred to use imperative forms, or statements in which they told patients what they ‘needed’ to do, or what they ‘had’ to do, female doctors preferred to use more mitigated forms. Moreover, women doctors were more likely than men to use directive forms which elicited a compliant response from the patient. Besides this, Marie Wilson Nelson’s ‘Women’s Ways: Interactive Patterns in Predominantly Female Research Teams’ also focused on the successful use of collaborative interactive strategies by women professionals (ibid: 297).

While discussing about women’s talk in the public domain, we should also refer to Janet Holmes and Maria Stubbe’s ‘Feminine Workplaces: Stereotype and Reality’, where they found that the distribution of humour in workplace meetings directly contradicts the stereotypical notion that
humour is more characteristic of ‘masculine’ workplaces. It was apparent that women typically contributed more humour than men in the meetings analysed, and the women chairs, in particular, encouraged workplace humour. While patterns of small talk in most workplaces appear to support the stereotype that ‘feminine’ workplaces are more tolerant of off-task social talk, there are exceptions in the form of apparently ‘masculine’ workplaces where, at least in some contexts, small talk is frequent and social talk is encouraged. Moreover, the stereotypical assumptions underlying the notion of a gendered workplace have been challenged on the basis of the discursive practices of two particular women managers. Like their male counterparts, they convey their instructions clearly and directly, and skilfully control meetings by using a variety of strategies. For example, they typically dominate the talking time, control the opening and closing stages of meetings, keep the discussion on track, summarize progress, and check that consensus has been reached. But they also use a wide variety of more subtle strategies to keep control of the discourse, with choice of strategy influenced by specific context. It was also noticed that these women tend to use a much less confrontational and more ameliorative style when dealing with problems on a one-to-one basis, when the task is more complicated, or when criticism of an individual is implied. In such cases, mitigation and indirectness are more often evident, even where this might appear to be a less immediately efficient style. Similarly, women managers typically use humour and social talk strategically to construct solidarity and cement good relationships in the workplace, as well as to control the behaviour of others in an acceptable and collegial manner (Holmes ed., 2005: 594).

Then, Mary Talbot has observed that practices of masculinist communities have become naturalized as simply professional practices. She noted that in both broadcasting and leadership positions women find themselves in a double-bind. On the one hand there is an expectation that
they will behave in ways that are considered to be acceptably feminine, while on the other hand they need to behave professionally, which requires behaviour that is perceived as masculine. (Talbot, 2010: 196). Actually the fact is that, women are relative newcomers in many professional contexts, particularly in positions of authority. Reference from a Spanish study on ‘interview and discussion group’ indicated that they continued to be regarded with suspicion and is considered to be ineffective leaders. Spanish women in authority are criticized for giving orders using indirect forms, for example. In using them, they are perceived as lacking self-confidence or as manipulative, yet men’s use of indirect forms in a similar fashion is not evaluated negatively (ibid: 199, 200). Besides these, women’s representation in the media also needs to be mentioned here. Vavrus, a feminist who specialized in political economy of the media, focused particularly on two recurring elements. These are a rhetoric of choice- the articles are peppered with the terms ‘opt’ and ‘choice’ and their variants- and lack of attention to social factors impacting on women. All the articles concluded by blaming individual employers for not implementing family-friendly policies, but they engaged in ‘privatizing rhetoric about social activities (like mothering)’. Rather than following the argument through with critical discussion of such issues as lack of child care provision, state support and so on. The ‘opting-out moms’ themselves are represented as self-satisfied, concerned only for themselves and their families. Their lifestyles are represented as freely chosen, without any discussion whatsoever of their actual circumstances that has generated them. Vavrus identified a caricature of feminism in this framing, since it implied ‘because what they’re doing is based on their choosing something-anything-that they are therefore upholding a feminist principle’. Missing from the media accounts of women leaving paid employment to bring up children is any mention of relations of
power and social inequality. To most women choice is all about bad options and difficult decisions. Women are not faced with genuine free choice, even, in contemplating motherhood.

The ‘off-ramping’ coverage is less crude than dire warnings about reduced fertility or threats about ticking biological clocks, but nevertheless it is ultimately a hostile misrepresentation of the female workforce. The net effect of the ‘off-ramping’ stories is to legitimize patriarchal beliefs about women and work. Despite the condemnation of corporate workplace practices, they legitimize ‘dangerously archaic notions about women, work and family used to justify sex discrimination and reproduce an unjust system of family labour and care. Ultimately they rationalize patriarchal power’ (ibid: 202).

Sexist/Gendered Language Use:

Sexism refers to the discrimination on the grounds of sex, based on assumptions that women are both different from and inferior to men. It is a label for behaviour that systematically derogates women. As per a Feminist Dictionary- “Sexism is that behaviour, policy, language, or other action of men or women which expresses the institutionalized, systematic, comprehensive, or consistent view that women are inferior (Talbot, 2010: 224). The use of sexist language creates, constitutes, promotes, or exploits an unfair or irrelevant distinction between the sexes and also it contributes to, promotes, causes or results in the oppression of either sex. It not only distinguishes between people purely on the basis of biology, but also defines the masculine or feminine labels attached to role, status, idea, behaviour, activity and condemns those who in any way overstep the bounds of their sex role stereotypes (Ghadially ed., 1998: 234). Sexism in language allows an ideology to legitimize the prescriptions and appraisals of every human endeavour solely on the basis of gender.
Since the early 1980s challenges to sexist practices have been taking place in both public and private domains. These have involved struggle over all sorts of things, including over how men and women are represented in the press, in job advertisements, in everyday conversations and so on. Laurel Sutton (1992), notable gender-language researcher had reported a host of slang terms for female reference that also categorize the referent’s body size and attractiveness. But she encountered virtually no such terms for male reference. Thus one can say that some male is fat and unattractive but a label like ugly fat slob can apply just as well to a girl or woman as to a boy or man. Sutton’s college-aged consultants reported no prepackaged male labels analogous to heifer or cow. The focus on women’s appearance is by no means simply a matter of language. Although increasing attention is being given to men’s appearance, there is still strength but not beauty contests for men. Among some groups, men sit watching women walk by and rate them on appearance (‘she’s definitely a 10’), but women don’t do the same for men. (Or still do so only vary rarely).\(^8\)

Now there certainly are many ways to categorizing men. They can be smart or stupid, strong or weak, kind or mean rich or poor, fat or thin, generous or stingy, leaders or followers. But these are generally seen as categories that also apply to women. They are principles that sort people. English has very few words for categorizing men as opposed to women on these or other principles. Perhaps the words prick or bastard might fall in this category. In some ways parallel to the female bitch, the expressions do seem to pick out a sub group of males on the basis of their negatively characterized behavior. Unlike the word bitch, however, they don’t seem readily to get extended to members of male sex in general, losing their implications of particular kinds of behavior or personality.\(^9\)
Gender and Language Research: Indian Context

Despite a large number of authentic and in-depth research works and an ongoing vibrant discourse on the interrelationships of language, gender and social class from various English speaking societies, India is still lagging far behind in this respect. Here Linguistics as a subject has developed mainly in terms of entirely core linguistic aspects e.g., as phonological, phonetic, syntactic explanations and studies etc. Though in the past twenty or thirty years various sociolinguistic works have also been done, e.g., D.P.Pattanayak ed. Papers in Indian Sociolinguistics (1978), Hans R. Dua’s “Language Use, Attitudes and Identity among Linguistic Minorities” (1986), which is a case study of Dakhini Urdu speakers in Mysore. This study shows a contrasting situation between Dakhini Urdu and Standard Urdu with regard to actual use and attitudes towards its use. Then Jennifer Marie Bayer’s work on the Anglo-Indians in Mysore city (1986) depicts that the Anglo-Indians are a linguistic, ethnic and religious minority in India who are defined by the use of English language. In the study the changing roles and mores of English within the community over generation provide interesting insight for the study of maintenance of ethnic identity and standardization of language. Some more works on Sociolinguistics are also worth mentioning, such as “Sociolinguistics: A guide to language problems in India” (Snehamoy Chaklader, 1990), “Explorations in Sociolinguistics” edited by Rajendra Singh, Probal Dasgupta, Jayanta K. Lele (1995), “Sociolinguistics, language and society” by Mahendra K. Verma in 1998 etc. However, very few studies on language and gender or its related aspects have been conducted so far. Among them are Professor Sukumar Sen’s book “Women’s dialect in Bengali (1929)”, Nirmal Das’s “Uttarbanger Narir Bhasa (1970)” etc. Besides this, G. Sankaranarayanan’s work on “Gender Bias in an Indian Language” is also representative of the gender and language research, where he has provided us
with some linguistic information from Tamil language, stating that these linguistic materials reflect the inferior status of women in the Tamil or more generally in the Indian society. Here the linguistic differences in woman and man’s speech are interpreted as reflection of men's dominance and women's subordination. Another noteworthy research work on ‘Man and Woman Talk: Grammatical and Syntactical Similarities and Disparities’, by Prof. Asha Kaul and Debmalya Nandan has stated that multiple research studies on grammar and syntax used by men and women stress disparities stemming from gender specific styles of ‘talk’. Borrowing from the existing literature, they analyzed transcripts of 107 employees in an Indian organization to study variations, if any, in grammar and syntax across genders at the middle management level. Then in Anjali Pande’s (2004) article “Undoing Gender Stereotypes in Hindi”, she has claimed that irrespective of their linguistic variety, speech communities in India show a certain level of uniformity with regard to the definitions of and differentiation between male and female linguistic behavior. She concluded by saying that in sum language is not a gender neutral instrument of expression nor is it free from socio cultural prejudices. It contributes to the process of shaping and reshaping of identities by virtue of its own dynamic nature and thereby gets used creatively or gets manipulated to create social distinctions. In theory the two approaches of 'difference' and 'dominance' have brought out the role of language in creating social gender differentiation. It is through using the language that we become gendered members of the speech community. In studying the intertwined relationship between language and construction of gender, the agency remains a point of debate. But looking at language use as one of the varied social practices it becomes possible to understand the social factors underlying each speech act. As Thorne argues, "Larger structures are instantiated, reproduced, and challenged through the daily practices of social actors, who in turn are constrained and enabled by social structures."
The language user as social actor conforms to as well as deviates from the social norms of speaking. She constructs, destroys and redefines her territories and her identity. Gender is one such social identity, "a complexity whose totality is permanently deferred, never fully what it is at any given juncture in time." (Butler 1990: 16). However societies have tried to fix this ambivalence in gender identity using compartmentalized instructions for language use separately for men and women. A child internalizes her gender identity and in performing it she conforms to the gender stereotype. As literature on gender and languages shows, there is hardly any language in the world that is completely gender neutral and efforts at creating such a language have not borne fruit. That leaves us with the alternative of using whatever languages we have in a best possible way to subvert linguistic gender discrimination. As highlighted in the discussion earlier the strategies could include using the same language or using code mixing. In India gender stereotypes are deeply anchored in the social psyche, they remain a valid form of establishing social hierarchies, finding their justification through religion and traditions. Challenging the existing notions of linguistic femininity or masculinity will go a long way towards displacing these gender stereotypes favourable to patriarchal traditions. (Anjali Pande, 2004)

**Objectives of the Study**

It must be mentioned here that to the best of this researcher’s knowledge, no in-depth study has been conducted among different groups of Bengali women belonging to middle and upper classes regarding the role and impact of social class and gender on their language use patterns. The primary aim behind the selection of this research topic as well as conducting this research has been to explore women’s place in the society at large with special reference to their linguistic practices. Moreover, the research has also attempted to find out how far the existing discourses
of the West, regarding gender and language use patterns have proved to be relevant in Indian context, which has long been known as a typical patriarchal society. In the light of this, the research work has attempted to explore the following questions:

1) Do middle and upper class of Bengali women think that they speak differently from that of their counterparts, i.e. men?

2) Do these women perceive gender as having any impact on the way language is learnt and used by the middle and upper class of Bengali men and women in Kolkata and, if so, what are the causes?

3) Does language, in particular Bengali language serve as a facilitator for constructing gendered identity of Bengali women belonging to these two different social classes?

4) Whether and how class differences are responsible for variations in language use among these two groups of Bengali women, belonging to these two different social classes?

5) Does age along with education and family background have any impact on the gendering of language use of these two groups of women? If so, what are the root causes?

**Methodological Parameters:**

**Research Design:**

The present study has attempted to use a qualitative interpretative approach to explore women’s subjective perceptions of their language use patterns vis-à-vis their male counterparts. Qualitative research approaches have been used to obtain “a more naturalistic, contextual and holistic understanding of human beings in society” (Todd, Nerlich, & McKeown, 2004 p. 4). These approaches have focused on studying phenomena in their natural settings and striving to
make sense of or interpreting phenomena with respect to the meanings people bring to them (Banister, Burman, Parker, Taylor & Tindal 1994; Denzin & Lincoln 2005a). Qualitative approach aims to make sense of an issue through the participants’ own meaning of it and also it interprets the issue with its focus on various social experiences. Since for this kind of exploratory study qualitative methods (relying on in depth understanding) appear to be most suitable, hence the study has used different methods of qualitative approach. In this research inductive style of inquiry has been followed, focusing on individual meanings and also on importance of rendering the complexity of a situation (Creswell, 2011: 4).

Qualitative research has always tended to be concerned with words rather than numbers and since in this research women’s perceptions about their linguistic practices have been the focal point, therefore qualitative methods have been adopted. Using the qualitative approach here means adherence to qualitative methods both epistemologically and ontologically, that is when the researcher stresses on the understanding of the social world through an examination of the interpretation of the world by its participants as well as believing in a constructionist paradigm, which entails that social properties are outcomes of the interactions between individuals (Bryman, 2001: 366). Here the researcher has used this qualitative interpretative approach (epistemologically) primarily to focus on women’s lived experiences regarding their language use patterns i.e. the world here is viewed through women’s perceptions and experiences. Besides this, ontologically also it has been adopted this constructionist method to give stress on the fact that both ‘language’ and ‘gender’ are socially constructed and complement each other during the course of social interaction.

Though the research has mostly used qualitative methods, but certain quantitative measures are also used in some specific contexts. For instance while analyzing demographic data some
techniques of the quantitative approach have been used. However, since in this exploratory research quantitative methodology has several lacunas, therefore ultimately the attempt has been to use an approach to enquiry that combines or associates both qualitative and quantitative forms of research. In that way, this research has focused mainly on ‘mixed methods’ approach.

As Denzin and Lincoln (2008:7) have put it, qualitative research is inherently multimethod in focus. However, the use of multiple methods, or triangulation, reflects an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomena in question. Triangulation is not a tool or a strategy of validation, but an alternative to validation (Flick, 2002: 227). The combination of multiple methodological practices, empirical materials, perspectives, and observers in a single study is best understood, then, as a strategy that adds rigor, breadth, complexity, richness, and depth to any inquiry. (ibid: 229) Qualitative research, as a set of interpretive activities, privileges no single methodological practice over another. It has no theory or paradigm of its own, nor does it have a distinct set of methods or practices that are entirely its own. Qualitative researchers use semiotics, narrative, content, discourse, archival and phonemic analysis, even statistics, tables, graphs, and numbers. They also draw on and utilize the approaches, methods, and techniques of ethnomethodology, phenomenology, hermeneutics, feminism, rhizomatics, deconstructionism, ethnography, interviewing, psychoanalysis, cultural studies, survey research and participant observation among others. All of these research practices “can provide important insights and knowledge” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008: 9). As following Denzin and Lincoln, it has already been mentioned that qualitative research is inherently multimethod in focus; thereby the researcher has also attempted to combine elements of both qualitative and quantitative research approaches i.e. using qualitative and quantitative viewpoints, data collection, analysis, inference techniques for the purpose of breadth of understanding or corroboration. (Teddlie and Tashakori,
So the present study has adopted a mixed methods or multi-methods perspective, which is formally defined as the class of research where the researcher mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts or language into a single study. As Tashakkori & Teddlie have described it, (2003, p. x), “mixed methods research has evolved to the point where it is a separate methodological orientation with its own worldview, vocabulary, and techniques” and it is also attempted since it is considered superior for its methodological pluralism or eclecticism. Therefore since the use of multiple methods or triangulation reflects an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question the present study tends to adopt it. Though substantial integration of quantitative and qualitative data and findings in studies presented as mixed methods research is seldom seen, but qualitative and quantitative components can be considered “integrated” to the extent that these components are explicitly related to each other within a single study and in such a way as to be mutually illuminating, thereby producing findings that are greater than the sum of parts (Wooley, 2008: 7). Mixed Methods approach has been employed here because of its superiority over any single approach design. Mixed methods research can simultaneously address a range of confirmatory and exploratory questions with both the qualitative and the quantitative approaches, provides better and stronger inferences, and also provides the opportunity for a greater assortment of divergent views (Teddlie and Tashakori, 2009: 33). Therefore, in this research the researcher’s aim has been to adhere to mixed methods strategies, so that the combined use of both qualitative and quantitative approaches provides an expanded understanding of the research problem. Like in this research the researcher has included questions of who, where, how many or how much regarding the language use patterns of women and men to indicate the quantitative
dimensions of the study, while by probing deeper and answering why and how questions the qualitative aspects of the research have also been taken into account.

In addition to mixed methods research this research has also used feminist research methodology and epistemology. By drawing on the insights and struggles of women’s lived experiences, the goal was to unearth subjugated knowledge and express deep feelings of exclusion from the dominant avenues of knowledge building (Hesse-Biber, 2011: 3). Here the researcher has kept in mind the feminist consciousness of opening up intellectual and emotional space for all women to articulate their relations to one another and the wider society. Since feminists have forged new epistemologies of knowledge by incorporating women’s lived experiences, emotions, and feelings into the knowledge building process, therefore it has been attempted to take a more in-depth point of view to obtain a better and fuller understanding of the research problem. Besides, the ideas of Dorothy Smith (1987), an early proponent of the feminist standpoint perspective have also been followed, who stresses the necessity of starting research from women’s lives, taking into account women’s everyday experiences through paying particular attention to and finding and analyzing the gaps that occur when women try to fit their lives into the dominant culture’s way of conceptualizing women’s situation (Hesse-Biber, 2011: 10). Thus in this research the primary aim was to include women’s day-to-day experiences regarding their language usage vis-a-vis their male counterparts, their attitudes towards it, their perception about their marginalization through their own language etc. in order to get a comprehensive understanding of the relation between gender and language use patterns. Moreover, the feminists increasing consciousness of the diversity of women’s experiences have also been kept in mind. As they argued against the idea of one essential experience of women and began to recognize a plurality of women’s lived experiences, likewise space is being left for
individual experiences of women and thus have focused on varied and diverse opinions and arguments of the women respondents of this research. Moreover, one of feminism’s central claims is that women’s perspectives have often been silenced or ignored; as a result of which, feminist researchers have been interested in listening for gaps and absences in women’s talk, and considering what meanings might lie beyond explicit speech. Following this tradition the researcher has also tried to listen to what the respondents have to say about their language use patterns, their experiences regarding the construction of gendered identity through everyday practices including linguistic practices etc., which have undoubtedly added to the understanding of the problem with every minute detail.

Methods adopted for the research:

In this research primarily I have used in-depth qualitative interview followed by narrative interviewing method, observation and conversation analysis. Through in depth interviewing method, the researcher can understand the perspectives, interpretations and meanings given by the informants to particular issues and problems. As Orbuch (1997: 455) explained, interview accounts offer a means of identifying “culturally embedded normative explanations [of events and behaviours, because they] represent ways in which people organize views of themselves, of others, and of their social worlds.” It is argued however that they do more than providing information on cultural and subjective meanings. Rigorous analysis of accounts provides two intertwined sets of findings: evidence of the nature of the phenomenon under investigation, including the contexts and situations in which it emerges, as well as insights into the cultural frames people use to make sense of these experiences. Combined, they offer important insights for theoretical understanding (Silverman, 2012: 137). Thus, the interview method which is the “favourite methodological tool of the qualitative researcher” (Denzin and Lincoln 1994: 353) has
been followed in this research. Besides, it is commonly believed that the strength of qualitative interviewing is precisely its capacity to access self-reflexivity among interview subjects, leading to the telling of stories that allow us to understand and theorize the social world:

Respondents may reveal feelings, beliefs, and private doubts that contradict or conflict with “what everyone thinks”, including sentiments that break the dominant feeling rules. ... In other cases, interviewers will discover the anxiety, ambivalence, and uncertainty that lie behind respondents’ conformity (ibid: 137).

Moreover, as in qualitative interviewing, ‘rambling’ or going off at tangents is often encouraged-it gives insight into what the interviewee sees as relevant and important (Bryman, 2001:437), thus in this case, in-depth interview has helped me to understand both young and adult women’s particular standpoints regarding their language use patterns vis-a-vis their male counterparts. Besides, the central idea of qualitative interviewing is to explore that knowledge can be produced in structured encounters organized around “telling about experience.” As put forward by Marjorie L. DeVault and Glenda Gross in the ‘Handbook of Feminist Research: Theory and Praxis’ (2012), qualitative in-depth interviewing should address the fascinating complexity of human talk- the flexibility and productive powers of language; the subtle shades of meaning conveyed through the nuances of speech, gesture, and expression; issues of translation; the ineluctable locatedness of any moment or stretch of talk; the specialized vocabularies of particular settings and groups; the organizing effects of format and genre; the injuries and uses of silence; the challenges inherent in listening; and so on (Hesse-Biber, 2011:206). It has always been kept in mind that in the conduct of any interview research, feminist scholars often attempt to maintain a reflexive awareness that research relations are never simple encounters, innocent of identities and lines of power. Rather, they are always embedded in and shaped by cultural
constructions of similarity, difference, and significance. In addition, the desire for an inclusivity that acknowledges and values difference has also led feminist thinkers to key insights about the challenges of listening to others. It is often said that listening is not as simple as it sounds, and failures of listening are also often part of our interactions with others. Perhaps because of the significance of listening, feminist researchers have been especially attentive to one recent trend in interview research, which involves a heightened attention to the structures and organization of language, talk, and discourse. Since the mid 1980s, scholars have been developing an interdisciplinary stream of thought focused on narrative and representation, sometimes referred to as a linguistic or narrative ‘turn’ (Behar and Gordon, 1995; Clifford & Marcus, 1986). One central idea to be noted here is that narratives are fundamental to identity and to the ways that people make sense of their worlds. People are constantly telling stories, to themselves and to others. As Elliot Mishler (1986) suggested in his most influential book on interviewing, ‘discourse analysis’ and ‘narrative analysis’ can offer an enriched and distinctive possibilities for maintaining the coherence of a person’s perspective (Hesse-Biber, 2011:218).

Narratives are defined as a movement from a start point to an end point, with digressions that involves the showing or the telling of story events. It is a re-presentation of events and, chiefly, re-presents space and time (Cobley, 2001:237). Narratives are a preferred choice here because it attempts to provide significant insights to the subjective experiences of women. It is true that people tell stories about life history (Gee 1991) and about their psyches (Schafer 1983; Spence 1987) and that stories are very ‘basic’ ways of thinking about the world. Narrative is considered a particular form of representation implementing signs which takes place in human discourse and also it is the showing or the telling of the events and the mode selected for that to take place. Narratives, described as stories that people tell about their lives and their experiences, helps the
researcher understand the entire context of the research problem as well as to interpret the whole thing more precisely. For instance, while answering a particular question, when a respondent narrates a life experience not only does it add to the credibility of the narrated incident, but also makes the entire interviewing process more lively and spontaneous. Therefore, this method has been used in my research in order to get detailed information regarding the respondents’ various linguistic practices with reference to their socio-cultural contexts and thus acquiring a full-fledged view of the entire situation in question.

Apart from that Observation has helped me to understand the non-verbal behaviour of the informants. Besides these, some necessary quantitative indicators and/or measures have been used for the analysis of the basic demographic profile.

In the present exploratory study the units of analysis i.e., the target respondents are 40 female college going students from the age group of 18-25 years, and 40 women in paid jobs in the age group of 30-45 years, whose both parents are Bengali and they have been selected primarily on the basis of purposive sampling technique. Initially respondents are being selected from all over Kolkata, keeping in mind the research objectives. Further, the method of snowball sampling has also been used to select respondents for this study. Since the research has included two groups of respondents, firstly I have talked to some known persons, fulfilling my criteria. After that I have contacted them for seeking time for the interview and have taken their face-to-face in-depth interview with the help of the interview schedule. In some cases I have written down all the answers, while in several cases I have also recorded the entire interview session. After completing the interview, I have also made field notes so that all necessary and relevant details are included in the research. Since for this research 80 respondents were needed, so I used my social network to contact more interviewees and also asked the existing respondents to give some
other references. Thus, through snowballing I could get the desired number of respondents for my study and was able to conduct the interview and proceed for the interpretation.

**Units of Analysis and Sampling:**

In this study women have been the primary units of analysis, however two specific groups of women have been studied for collecting authentic and varied data. Keeping in mind the objectives of the study I chose to collect data from 80 women, who were further divided into two groups according to their age. In this study of linguistic exploration, I involved two age groups of women for the purpose of obtaining responses that are in accord with the respondents’ maturity, their socio-cultural background as well as their mental and intellectual capabilities.

My intention to select respondents belonging to two different age groups led me to decide about the two categories of age, one category being 18-25 years and another 30-45 years. 18 years was selected as the lowest age limit because in this age almost every individual- female or male attain certain maturity, which is required of them for understanding my questions and answering them with full confidence and comprehension. 18-25 years of age reflects an individual’s ‘youth’ life-stage and it is the age when the young women and men go to higher education institutions like colleges and universities. Higher educational exposure not only increases their academic acumen, but also influences their worldview, their perceptions about several facts and incidents of their life. On the other hand, 30-45 years of age reflect the mature adulthood of an individual’s life cycle. By this age, usually both women and men, after the completion of their educational qualifications enter into the world of jobs for earning economically. During this phase their job, workplace, and their colleagues and in sum the whole milieu add to their knowledge about the society and its people. Therefore these two different age
groups have been selected for this sociolinguistic inquiry so that the respondents can throw light on their perception about their linguistic practices as well as their everyday usage of their language in a comprehensible manner.

With this backdrop I have attempted to present quantitatively the basic demographic questions. With the help of some univariate tables the demographic data has been represented, however, since my work is essentially based on qualitative methodological approach therefore the data regarding language use patterns and that of the interrelationship between gender, class and language has been presented qualitatively. Here the confidentiality regarding the identity of the respondents has also been maintained by changing their names.