Chapter II

Relevant Theoretical Frameworks

Historically, mainstream sociological discourses have never acknowledged or discussed about the interrelationship of language, gender and social class. Language has always been the most neglected one in sociology, except a few theorists (Levi Strauss, Althusser, Wittgenstein, Berger and Luckmann and more recently the feminists, poststructuralists etc.), who attempted to study it in relation to society. Nevertheless, in Sociolinguistics, historically, there has always been an attempt to introduce and amalgamate varieties of approaches, even before today’s theoretical complexities. But, since this research is sociologically oriented, here the attempt is to delineate the significance of both sociological as well as sociolinguistic theories on the basis of their applicability and relevance for this research. Here, primarily the various theoretical approaches have been categorized with reference to the relation between language and society, the social formation of class and finally the interface between language, gender and social class.

Theories on Language and Society:

To begin with, French sociologist Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), long acknowledged as one of the founding figures of ‘Functionalism’, had noted long ago that languages in many ways reflect the culture of a society and also that these play very significant roles in the maintenance of a society. Besides, in the opinion of Sapir and Whorf- it has been put forward that language creates and debases the world and it is also recognized as the determinant organizer of cognition. As the pioneer linguist Sapir (1884-1939) noted, humans are very much at the mercy of language concerning what constitutes “social reality”. Another seminal anthropological linguist Whorf
(1897-1941) took this further to propose that language determines one’s entire way of life, including one’s thinking and all other forms of mental activity. To use language is to limit oneself to the modes of perception already inherent in that language.

Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), having a grounding education in linguistics (including the history of languages), also contributed to the study of language in society. He stressed the active role of individuals— for example, creative writers— in shaping the development of a language. According to him, ‘hegemony’ or ‘ideological domination’ locks up a society even more tightly because of the way ideas are transmitted by language. The words we use to speak and write have been constructed by social interactions through history and shaped by the dominant ideology of the times. Thus they are loaded with cultural meanings that condition us to think in particular ways, and to not be able to think very well in other ways.

In reality, the linguistic turn in social theory in general and sociological theory in particular came about as a result of increasing awareness of the role of language in how social actors perceive the world. It is very difficult to think of how actors can build up mental representations of reality, to describe and make sense of it, if they do not have the words to do so. It is at this point of time that ‘structuralism’ entered the scene, where the contributions of Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure and Belgium born French structural thinker Claude Levi Strauss are widely read by both sociologists and linguists. Saussure (1857-1913) contended that language must be considered as a social phenomenon, a structured system that can be viewed synchronically (as it exists at any particular time) and diachronically (as it changes in the course of time). He also introduced two terms that have become common currency in linguistics—“parole,” or the speech of the individual person, and “langue,” the system underlying speech activity. For Saussure, the existence of ‘langue’ makes ‘parole’ possible. Parole is actual speech,
the way that speakers use language to express themselves (Ritzer, 2011: 459). Although Saussure recognized the significance of people’s use of language in subjective and often idiosyncratic ways, he believed that the individual’s use of language cannot be the concern of the scientifically oriented linguist. Such a linguist must look at langue, the formal system of language, not at the subjective ways in which the actors use it. He further states that meanings, the mind and ultimately the social world are shaped by the structure of language. Thus, instead of an existential world of people shaping their surroundings, we have here a world in which people, as well as other aspects of the social world, are being shaped by the structure of language. Later on during the 1960s and ’70s in the ideas of Claude Levi Strauss (1908-2009) it did indeed become common to think that society is structured like a language and that all social action is like speech in being a rule-conforming or rule-violating practice enabled by the resources which social structure, as a sort of grammar, provides.

We also find Austrian- British philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein’s (1889-1951) ideas on language to be relevant here. As far as Wittgenstein is concerned, ordinary language is perfectly adequate as it is. His aim was not to show the underlying structure of language but rather to show that all attempts at digging beneath the surface of language lead to unwarranted theorizing and generalization. One of Wittgenstein’s primary targets in the Philosophical Investigations is the language of psychology. Our language and customs are fixed not by laws so much as by what Wittgenstein calls “forms of life,” referring to the social contexts in which language is used. In other words, the most fundamental aspect of language is that we learn how to use it in social contexts, which is the reason why we all understand each other. We do not understand each other because of a relationship between language and reality. Elaborating on his view that language functions according to shared norms and forms of life, Wittgenstein denies the possibility of a
private language. That is, it is inconceivable that someone could invent a language for his or her own private use that describes his or her inner sensations. In such a language, there would be no criteria to determine whether a word had been used correctly, so the language would have no meaning. Wittgenstein illustrates this point by arguing that the sentence, “I know I am in pain” makes no sense. The claim to know something carries with it further baggage that is inapplicable when talking about our own sensations. To claim to know something, we must also be able to doubt it, we must have criteria for establishing our knowledge, there must be ways other people can find out, and so on—all of which is absent when dealing with our inner sensations.¹⁴

Later on Louis Althusser (1918-1990) also argued while expressing his general conception of society or social formation that it is possible to uncover the underlying rules and patterns of linguistic structuring (langue/ language competence) by examining surface utterances (parole/ language performance) and that this same approach can be applied in tracing back from the actual institutions and practices that surround social actors in search of the underlying structuring forces that have given rise to them (Ransome, 2011: p-229).

It seems obvious from the above discussion that the existence of language and its structure in the society received substantial amount of attention among various sociologists, linguists, philosophers as well as sociolinguists. Their theories are relevant in so far as they discuss about language as a structure or system and its impact on society. However, the language and society interface can also be looked at from another point of view, i.e. how language is constructed socially and how societal factors influence language usage. In this context we can refer firstly to the Social Constructionist perspective, propounded by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1991), who view society as existing both as an objective and subjective
reality. The former is brought about through the interaction of people with the social world, with 
this social world in turn influencing people resulting in routinization and habitualization. They 
suggest that our identity originates not from inside the person but from the social realm. 
Socialisation takes place through significant others who mediate the objective reality of society, 
render it meaningful and in this way it is internalised by individuals (Berger & Luckmann, 1991) 
and all this is done through the medium of language. They further added that conversation is the 
most important means of maintaining, modifying and reconstructing subjective reality. 
Subjective reality is comprised of concepts that can be shared unproblematically with others. In 
other words, there is shared meaning and understanding, so much so that concepts do not need to 
be redefined each time they are used in everyday conversation and come to assume a reality 
which is by and large taken for granted.15

Furthermore, reference can also be drawn from Alfred Schutz (1899-1959), who has not 
only espoused ‘Phenomenological’ understanding in sociology, but also has discussed 
extensively on everyday-world experiences and the role of language in constructing and 
determining these experiences. According to him, the objective meanings of language also bear 
subjective connotations for language users due to their unique histories of linguistic experience, 
even though for practical purposes of communication they are able to set aside such differences. 
He was of the view that individual actors come to share common meanings, on the basis of 
which they create a common view of the world and here their language plays a pivotal role in 
shaping their lifeworld (a common world of experiences and sensations). Drawing from the 
influences of Schutz, Ethnomethodological perspective emerged and gained momentum in the 
works of Harold Garfinkel (1917-2011), who saw the perspective as a field of inquiry that sought 
to understand the methods people employ to make sense of their world. He placed considerable
emphasis on language as the vehicle by which this reality construction is done. Indeed, for Garfinkel, interacting individuals’ efforts to account for their actions— that is, to represent them verbally to others— are the primary method by which a sense of the world is constructed. In his terms, to do interaction is to tell interaction, or— in other words— the primary folk technique used by actors is verbal description. In this way, people use their accounts to construct a sense of reality. So, something becomes socially "real" only when it has been talked about, and the nature of this "reality" emerges as the person or persons keeps talking. While discussing about the relevance of different theoretical perspectives in this study, we should also consider Garfinkel’s (1967, 1989) work on the societal construction of gender, which has definitely proved to be groundbreaking. Though he has not attempted to investigate the relation between gender and language, but his conceptualization of gender as an enactment, performance and as social construction, which is dynamic and not static has actually influenced a branch of feminist theorization. (Butler, 1990; Kessler and McKenna, 1978; West and Zimmerman, 1987).

Garfinkel’s (1967) contention of gender as an achievement was also developed by Erving Goffman (1976) in his work on gender displays. Goffman used the term ‘gender display’ to refer to the kind of ritualistic, conventionalized acts of interpersonal interaction that members (for non-transsexuals unconsciously and for transsexuals consciously) perform to portray the cultural indicators of gender. Hairstyle, clothing and tone of voice were considered by Goffman to be ‘early warning’ displays of gender, with more subtle and indirect behavioural displays, such as politeness features, varying in different interpersonal and social contexts. Goffman, like Garfinkel, believed that what characterized a person as a man or a woman was not an expression of biological sex or learned gender. Instead what characterized an individual as being a man or a woman was their willingness to sustain, and competence at sustaining, the appropriate schedule
of gender displays (Weatherhall, 2002: 102). Goffman is also more significant here for his contributions to the understanding of everyday life, frame analysis and interaction order, and thus for comprehending the underlying relation between society and language at large. Goffman has in fact questioned Schutz’s assumption that everyday life is a single distinct, paramount reality in the experience of the individual. According to him, actual everyday activity consists of ‘quickly changing frames’, many of which derive fanciful, non-literal terms. He believed that there is a more intimate relationship of make-believe to reality than is commonly thought. It is because of the interpenetration of fictive and literal realms that Goffman recommends the close study of each in order to learn about the other. This realization further led him to write about theatrical frames, where he acknowledged that ‘the language of the theater has become deeply embedded in the sociology from which this study derives’ (1974: 124) (Smith, 2006: 60). In most of his works and especially in the later books such as ‘Frame Analysis’, Goffman has emphasized the significance of verbalizations for focusing people’s attention. When ‘talk’ is viewed interactionally, “it is an example of that arrangement by which individuals come together and sustain matters having a ratified, joint, current, and running claim upon attention, a claim which lodges them together in some sort of intersubjective, mental world”. Thus, in his view, “no resource is more effective as a basis for joint involvement than speaking”, because it fetches “speaker and hearer into the same interpretation schema that applies to what is thus attended”. Thus ‘talk’, presented as the linguistic interactional practice becomes a crucial mechanism for drawing individuals together, focusing their attention, and adjudicating an overall definition of the situation. So Goffman, like Durkheim primarily discussed about as well as emphasized the societal functions of language and linguistic practices (talk) in everyday life-situations.
The existence and maintenance of language in society is also studied by several other theorists to be mentioned here like Frankfurt School Critical Theorist Jurgen Habermas, Poststructuralist and Postmodernists like Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Pierre Bourdieu and so forth. Among contemporary theorists, it is Jurgen Habermas (1929-) who has most consistently oriented himself towards language as the royal road to social understanding. Distinctively, he has looked towards linguistic pragmatics as developed by J. L. Austin and John Searle (1969) as the key resource for a project, which has both empirical and transcendental or quasi-transcendental aspects. At an empirical level, linguistic pragmatics provides a better technical framework for analyzing all forms of socially situated communication than does any theorization of parole (speech) within the traditions of post-Saussurean semiology and semiotics. At a philosophical level, pragmatics can provide both an account of the conditions of possibility of society in general and a critique of actions, which undermine the possibility of social life. For all speech raises or presupposes claims to truth, truthfulness, comprehensibility and legitimacy are important without which language would be unusable as a means of communication. Habermas, as portrayed by Charles Taylor, attempted to understand society from the vantage point of language...society to be explained by the structures of discourse. Some philosophers say Habermas is so concerned with language because he wants to use modern philosophy to support his views on democracy and participation, and to put the latter on a firmer scientific basis than can be provided by theories of instrumental rationality. David Rasmussen says Habermas’s strategy is to “retrieve the project of modernity through a highly specialized form of the philosophy of language” (1990, p. 17), his project is to show that “language as communicative discourse is emancipatory ....” (p. 18), and “his task is to rehabilitate the project of modernity by
reconstructing it vis-à-vis the theory of communication, i.e., communicative action, communicative reason” (p. 4).

Furthermore, Poststructuralism proposes that the meanings of words, images, stories or other texts are not to be found elsewhere, in the mind of the author or in the world depicted. Since they have no external, extratextual guarantees, meanings are unfixed, discontinuous and unstable. Poststructuralists also argue that the primary property of language is that it differentiates. As a poststructuralist thinker Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) attempted to draw out the truly radical implications of Saussure’s model of language which Saussure himself failed to realize. He proposes, in a nutshell, that his own notion of differance (both to ‘differ’ and to ‘defer’), derived from Saussure’s own model, more accurately accounts for the true nature of signification than does Saussure’s concept of ‘difference’. Derrida’s interest is in langue, that is, the abstract principles by which any language operates rather than parole (or actual uses of langue). According to him language without the capacity of humans for thought would itself be merely gibberish. Meaningful thought and its communication occur when the capacity for thought intersects with the use of language. For Derrida, Saussure was right to argue that langue operates in a systemic fashion. In other words, signifiers, signifieds and, thus, signs are defined not by their positive content (i.e., the fact that they refer to a real object) but negatively (i.e., by phonic and conceptual differences which issue from the system) (Sweetman, 1999: 3). Another notable poststructuralist and postmodernist Michel Foucault (1926-1984), in his ‘The Order of Things’, introduced the concept of the return of language. According to him language is related to knowledge in diverse ways, and to each there corresponds a distinctive sort of ‘return’. His departure point was that language can often be treated as an autonomous reality and for him literature is literally nothing but language- or rather many languages, speaking for and of
themselves. His focus on language actually focused on his conceptualization of discourse, which often refers to the speech patterns and usage of language, dialects and acceptable statements, within a community. According to him, discourse is described as the conversations and the meanings behind them by a group of people who hold certain ideas in common. Poststructuralists like Foucault also viewed language as a system with its own determining effect on the way that individuals think and express themselves. He also believed that discourses are inherently ideological “flows of information”, which construct the world through language and texts and “subject positions” of individuals. His emphasis on discourse analysis also actually focused on power relationships in society as expressed through language and practices in so far as they refer to ways of seeing the world, often with reference to relations of power and domination. Poststructuralism further proliferated in the writings of another French philosopher and sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002). Bourdieu believed that ‘Linguistic Exchange’ is not only a relation of communication between a sender and a receiver, based on enciphering and deciphering and therefore on the implementation of a code or a generative competence, is also an economic exchange which is established within a particular symbolic relation of power between a producer, endowed with a certain linguistic capital, and a consumer (or a market) and which is capable of procuring a certain material or symbolic profit. In other words, utterances are not only signs to be understood and deciphered, they are also signs of wealth, intended to be evaluated and appreciated, and signs of authority, intended to be believed and obeyed. Quite apart from literary and poetic uses of language it is rare in everyday life for language to function as a pure instrument of communication. Bourdieu also added that linguistic practice inevitably communicates information about the manner of communicating i.e., about the expressive style, which, being perceived and appreciated with reference to the universe of theoretically or
practically competing styles, takes on a social value and a symbolic efficacy. Utterances receive their value and their sense only in relation to a market, characterized by a particular law of price formation. The value of the utterance depends on the relation of power that is concretely established between the speaker’s linguistic competences, understood both as their capacity for production and as their capacity for appropriation and appreciation, in other words it depends on the capacity of the various agents involved in the exchange to impose the criteria of appreciation most favourable to their own products. The linguistic relation of power is not completely determined by the prevailing linguistic forces alone: by virtue of the languages spoken, the speakers who use the term and the groups defined by the possession of corresponding competence, the whole structure is present in each interaction. That is what is ignored by the interactionist perspective, which treats interaction as a closed world (Thompson ed. 1991: 502).

Though all the above discussions were directed towards identifying language as an existing structure in any society and its relation to society at large was under scrutiny too, but these theories have important limitations in so far as they talk only about language as a social entity as well as a reality and not of the relation of language with other social variables like gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality or the like. Therefore, the need for going through the theories relating to social class, as well as those of language, class and gender was felt essential and significant for a comprehensive understanding of the research problem.

For instance, in analyzing class location, sociologists have traditionally relied on conventional indicators of class location such as market position, relations to the means of production and occupation. Some recent authors, however, argue that we should evaluate individuals’ class location not only or even mainly in terms of economics and employment, but also in relation to cultural factors such as lifestyle and consumption patterns. Thus here we can
refer to French sociologist Bourdieu, who supported the view that lifestyle choices are an important indicator of class. He argued that ‘economic capital’, which consists of material goods such as property, wealth and income was important but it provided only a partial understanding of class. Bourdieu’s conception of social class is extremely broad. He identified four forms of ‘capital’ that characterize class position, of which economic capital is only one, the others are cultural, social and symbolic (Bourdieu 1986). For him, while cultural capital includes education, appreciation of the arts, consumption and leisure pursuits, social capital refers to one’s networks of friends and contacts. He defined social capital as the resources that individuals or groups gain ‘by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition’ (1992). Lastly Bourdieu argued that ‘symbolic capital’, which includes possession of a good reputation, is a final important indication of social class (Wacquant, 2006).

Class is also often considered as the main concept within sociology to theorize social inequality. As postulated by Sylvia Walby (1990), while doing class-analysis, it is both important and appropriate to ask in a systematic fashion whether there is any relationship between class and gender. Traditionally class analysis has often ignored gender relations, only recently even attempting to justify this omission. Today there are several ways in which gender relations are fitted into the concerns of class theory. In the 1960s, ‘70s and early ‘80s most writers on class ignored gender relations (Beteille, 1977; Lockwood, Goldthorpe et al, 1969; Blackburn and Mann, 1979; Stewart, Prandy and Blackburn, 1980; Goldthorpe, 1980) (Walby, 1991: 8). It is only in the hands of feminist writers that gender relations occupied an important place for discussion in relation to various other social factors.
Moreover, it has been argued often that gender and language-use as well as its relation with social class was addressed later, more substantially, by variationist sociolinguistics, with gender – or, rather, biological sex – and often class having the status of an independent variable (Labov, 1990, 1966; Cheshire, 1982; Milroy, 1980; Gal, 1978; Trudgill, 1972). While some sociologists and sociolinguists aimed to relate language and social class, some others had the intention of relating it with gender and only few theorists have attempted to theorize on the interrelationship of gender, language and class.

**Theories Relating Gender, Language and Social Class**

At the outset, according to famous British sociologist and sociolinguist Basil Bernstein (1924-2000), distinct forms of spoken language are associated with the organization of particular social groups. Bernstein has asserted a direct relationship between societal class and language. He wrote in ‘Class, Codes and Control’ (1971), “Forms of spoken language in the process of their learning initiate, generalize and reinforce types of relationship with the environment and thus create for the individual particular forms of significance” (p. 76). That is to say that the way language is used within a particular societal class affects the way people assign significance and meaning to the things about which they are speaking. The code that a person uses indeed symbolizes their social identity (Bernstein, 1971).

Besides, classic sociolinguistic researches like that of William Labov in New York City and Peter Trudgill in Norwich, aimed to examine the correlation between linguistic variation and other variables particularly social class. Both the studies revealed clear social stratification and also gave rise to the related concepts of ‘prestige’ and ‘stigma’. Prestige is considered to be attached to those linguistic forms that are normally used by the people of the highest social
status. Here standardization followed by correct usage is enshrined in this variety. On the other hand, stigma is attached to non-standard forms. As interest in the use and persistence of non-standard forms has grown, non-standard varieties have come to be known as ‘vernacular’ (Coates, 2004: 47). Now, while attempting to establish a correlation between gender and social class, researchers argued that in every social class men use more vernacular forms than women. 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).

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. 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. Among the variationist sociolinguists, Labov for the first time focused extensively on both class and gender as having influences on language usage. 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: 206).
Now, with regard to the relation between gender, language and class some sociolinguistic as well as sociological theories have prominent relevance, particularly for this study. The sociolinguistic theories viz. Deficit, Dominance, Difference and Dynamic or Discourse perspectives have left significant impact on gender and language research from the 1970s. Some of these perspectives (dominance and difference) are often considered as representatives of feminist perspectives, while the dynamic or discourse approach as having the postmodernist outlook.

**Deficit Approach:**

Robin Lakoff’s “Language and Woman’s Place” (1975) is the representative of the deficit approach in sociolinguistics. Arguing that language is fundamental to gender inequality, Lakoff pointed to two areas in which inequalities can be found: Language used about women, such as the asymmetries between seemingly parallel terms like master and mistress, and language used by women, which places women in a double bind between being appropriately feminine and being fully human. Lakoff’s central argument that "women's language" expresses powerlessness triggered a controversy that continues to this day.¹⁹ Lakoff proposed that there is a “women’s language” and that it is characterized by the more frequent use of nine forms:

1) Words related to feminine interests
2) “Empty” adjectives (charming, sweet)
3) Tag questions (“you are going to dinner, aren’t you?”)
4) Hedges (phrases like “sort of”, “kind of”)
5) Intensifiers (“I am so glad you came!”)
6) Hyper-correct grammar and pronunciations
7) Superpolite forms (“would you mind…”)
8) Avoidance of humour e.g., women do not tell jokes well and often don't understand the punch line of jokes, and

9) Talking in italics (so, very, quite).\(^{20}\)

According to Lakoff apart from using these forms, women speak less frequently, apologise more, avoid coarse language or expletives, use indirect commands and requests. Lakoff argued that a number of these forms, particularly hedges (which include disclaimers, in Lakoff’s scheme) and tag questions, indicate uncertainty or tentativeness. Women use these forms, because of their childhood socialization, and because they are expected and sanctioned to do so.\(^{21}\) In the book “Language and Woman’s Place: Text and Commentaries” by Robin Tolmach Lakoff and Mary Bucholtz, Lakoff has argued that if we look at the list of distinguishing criteria for women’s language, we’ll note that most of the characteristics are apt to be found only in spoken, or at least highly informal style. This is because they are personal markers, they signal to the addressee how the speaker feels about what she (he, of course, in the analogous case of men’s language) is saying and how the speaker hopes or expects that the hearer will react.\(^{22}\) While talking about women’s language Lakoff also turned her attention to the fact that it’s not always the case that women have all the problems, that it’s easy for men and their lives are simple. It’s not that they aren’t constrained or bound into roles. Lakoff has also added that if a woman learns and uses women’s language, she is necessarily considered less than a real, full person- she’s a bit of fluff. So that means, a woman is damned if she does and damned if she doesn’t. It has been observed that the narrow definition of women in language refers to the fact that women are more often discussed in terms of their appearance and their family relationships, whereas men are generally discussed in terms of what they do.\(^{23}\) So, in reality actually the case is that the distinction between men’s and women’s language is a symptom of a problem in our culture, not the problem
itself. Basically it reflects the fact that men and women are expected to have different interests and different roles, hold different types of conversations and react differently to other people and ultimately this language discrepancy makes manifest social inequality.

Although highly influential, Lakoff’s work has been subjected to criticism on a number of grounds. Like, Lakoff viewed women’s speech as weak in comparison with men’s. She also relied on literary texts, casual observations and reflections on her own linguistic usages rather than large bodies of empirical evidence in forming her generalisation. She also said that certain language features necessarily connote weakness. William O’Barr and Bowman Atkins challenged Lakoff’s claims in 1980. O’Barr and Atkins studied language variation in American courtrooms and became interested in questions of gender through noticing that legal manuals give special advice on the behaviour of female witnesses. Using the linguistic features highlighted by Robin Lakoff (1975), they analysed the speech of a range of witnesses, both male and female, to see whether their language use varied along gender lines. While they found some female witnesses who used language in a way that accorded Lakoff’s categories, they also found others who did not. The witnesses were typically expert in their job and since belonged to high social status, they therefore spoke confidently and assertively in court. Male witnesses varied in the same way, with individuals having lower social status, using language with more ‘female’ features. These findings led O’Barr and Atkins to claim that what Lakoff described as ‘women’s language’ would better be termed as ‘powerless language’, since these features are associated with speakers of low status, irrespective of gender. The fact that the female witnesses in their sample were more likely than men to use powerless language they explain in terms of social structure: American society allocates women to relatively powerless social positions (Coates ed., 2005: 373). Besides distinctions other than heterosexual-male and heterosexual-
female (or even variability within these categories!) are not discussed beyond stereotyped statements such as that gay men use some of the characteristics of "women's language" (for example, a wider range of colour terms). Thus, according to William O’Barr and Bowman Atkins, Lakoff’s discussion of “women’s language” confounds at least two different patterns of variation. Although their title suggests a dichotomy between “women’s language” and “powerless language”, these two patterns undoubtedly interact. It could well be that to speak like the powerless is not only typical of women. Gender meanings draw on other social meanings; analyses that focus on sex in isolation from the social positions of women and men and thus can tell us little about the meaning of “women’s language” in society and culture (Coates ed., 2005: 386). However, there are several problems with O’Barr and Atkins’ account. The first is its uncritical use of Lakoff’s set of ‘women’s language’ features, features which Lakoff arrived at through introspection and personal observation, not through empirical research. The second is its assumption that any linguistic form, such as a hedge or a tag question, can be matched, one-to-one, with a specific function. This means that their analysis assumes that a hedge such as sort of, for example, must express tentativeness. This view has been challenged and many linguists have written about the multifunctional nature of such linguistic forms (for example, Coates 1987, 1996; Holmes 1984, 1995). More fundamentally, O’Barr and Atkins make the assumption that the value placed on the set of linguistic forms they call “women’s language” is independent of culture; in other words, they seem to believe that hedges, for example, are intrinsically weak or tentative. Feminist linguists in English-speaking countries have suggested that the low value placed on forms such as hedges might have less to do with hedges and more to do with their supposed association with female speakers. That means, since female speakers have low status,
linguistic forms said to be typical of women will acquire low status by association (Coates ed., 2005: 374).

Following the trend of the ‘first debate’ between Lakoff’s ‘Women’s language’ and O’Barr and Atkins’ ‘Powerless language’, there has also been rise of a ‘second debate’, which involves two other major approaches to gender variation in language, the difference approach and the dominance approach. Early work on language and gender took a dominance approach. The reaction against this, and the subsequent flourishing of the difference approach, arose not because researchers denied the existence of dominance and oppression in male-female relationships, but because researchers, particularly feminist researchers, became unhappy at the negative portrayal of women in work using the dominance approach. Women’s language was described as weak, unassertive, and women were presented as losers, as victims (Coates ed., 2005: 411).

Researchers who began using the difference model in the 1980s argued that the dominance model had become a deficit model, that is, a way of interpreting the linguistic facts which represented men’s language as the norm and women’s language as deviant. The advantage of the difference model is that it allows researchers to show the strengths of linguistic strategies characteristic of women and to celebrate women’s ways of talking. For those carrying out research involving mixed talk, the dominance approach provides a useful explanatory framework, but for researchers investigating same sex talk it seems less appropriate, since dominance and oppression are not obviously helpful categories for the description of all-female talk (or all-male talk, for that matter, but it is only very recently that sociolinguists have turned their attention to the informal talk of men). Nevertheless to continue with the ongoing
debate one has essentially to go through the basic tenets of both the theories among which here dominance approach is perhaps the first one.

**Dominance Approach**

To put it very simply Dominance Approach considers women as an oppressed group and interprets linguistic differences in women’s and men’s speech in terms of men’s dominance and women’s subordination. Researchers associated with this paradigm are Dale Spender, Pamela Fishman, Don Zimmerman and Candace West.\(^{26}\) This theory suggests that in mixed-sex conversations men are more likely to interrupt than women. The classic paper on gender differences in interruptions by Don Zimmerman and Candace West claim that women in contemporary American society, like children, have restricted rights to speak, and that interruptions are used both to exhibit and to accomplish socially sanctioned relations of dominance and submission. With reference to the study of a small sample of conversations, recorded by Zimmerman and West at the Santa Barbara campus of the University of California in 1975, they concluded that, since men interrupt more often, then they are dominating or attempting to do so (when we consider interruptions in light of women’s lack of social power, they become “constant reminders of women’s subordinate status”).\(^{27}\) Though these claims were also challenged since interruptions do not always reflect dominance, but they might reflect interest and involvement of the male speakers. Besides that, another notable dominance theorist Dale Spender advocates a radical view of language as embodying structures that sustain male power. She refers to the work of Zimmerman and West, to the view of the male as norm, and to her own idea of patriarchal order. She claims that it is especially difficult to challenge this power system, since the way that we think of the world is part of, and reinforces, this male power.
According to theorists like Spender, men's ability to control language gives them great power indeed. We have already seen ways in which what one might call the maleness of language contributes to the invisibility of women (with respect to words like ‘he’ and ‘man’). If one takes the maleness of language to go beyond a few specific terms, one will take language's power to make women invisible to be even stronger. We have also seen ways that what might be called maleness can make it more difficult for women to express themselves. Where we lack words for important female experiences, like sexual harassment, women will find it more difficult to describe key elements of their existence. Similarly, where the words we have — like ‘foreplay’ — systematically distort women's experiences, women will have a difficult time accurately conveying the realities of their lives. If one takes such problems to go beyond selected particular terms, and to infect language as a whole, it is natural to suppose that women are to a large degree silenced — unable to accurately articulate key elements of their lives, and unable to communicate important aspects of their thoughts. Spender and others also suggest that the maleness of language constrains thought, imposing a male worldview on all of us, and making alternative visions of reality impossible, or at least very difficult to articulate. These arguments often draw upon the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis (Sapir 1949; Whorf 1976). This is generally described as roughly the hypothesis that “our worldview is determined by the structures of the particular language that we happen to speak” (Cameron 1998b: 150).

Some suggest that male power over language allows men to shape not just thought, but also reality. For example, Spender claims that men “created language, thought, and reality” (1985: 143). This is a very strong version of what Sally Haslanger has called discursive constructivism. She defines this view as follows:
Something is discursively constructed just in case it is the way it is, to some substantial extent, because of what is attributed (and/or self-attributed) to it. (Haslanger 1995: 99)

Another advocate of the dominance theory, Pamela Fishman argues in ‘Interaction: the Work Women Do’ (1983) that conversation between the sexes sometimes fails, not because of anything inherent in the way women talk, but because of how men respond, or don't respond. In Conversational Insecurity (1990), Fishman questions Robin Lakoff’s theories. Lakoff suggests that asking questions shows women's insecurity and hesitancy in communication, whereas Fishman looks at questions as an attribute of interactions. Women ask questions because of the power of these, not because of their personality weaknesses. Fishman also claims that in mixed-sex language interactions, men speak on average for twice as long as women (Eckert, 2003: 1).

However, the major drawback of the dominance framework is that male dominance is often treated as though it is pan-contextual. But since all men are not in a position to dominate all women, such a ‘monolithic’ perception of patriarchy is useless. More specificity should have been taken care of by the dominance theorists, e.g., ‘how do patterns of male dominance vary across different cultures, and in different contexts within cultures? There was need to answer in what institutions, in what situations and in what genres men can and do dominate women, and how those institutions, situations and genres help them to do so. According to Mary Talbot, ‘one final observation about the dominance framework needs to be made, i.e., researchers into private language working within a dominance framework face an ethical problem. In researching into private language, you are dependent on people’s goodwill. If people allow you to record their private conversations, they are doing you a considerable favour. It may constrain the nature of the results’ (Talbot, 2010: 101).
Continuing with the debate between ‘dominance and difference’, we can now move forward to refer to Daniel Maltz and Ruth Borker’s ‘A Cultural Approach to Male-Female Miscommunications’, which explicitly claims to present a new (anthropological) framework for discussing gender differences in language. Their paper is not based on new data, but rather presents a synthesis of work on gender and language in a variety of fields. Their argument rests on the claim that the ‘difficulties’ found in cross-sex communication- like the ‘difficulties’ found in cross-ethnic communication- are the result of cultural difference and should be seen as miscommunication. At the time it was published, many sociolinguists found Maltz and Borker’s paper refreshing: it certainly gave impetus to those linguists wanting to carry out research into women’s talk outside a framework of dominance and oppression. Certainly, for research into single-sex groups, the difference approach had a lot to offer. But, like all frameworks, it has also its limitations. Probably the main problem with the approach is its assumption that all interactional difficulties can be called ‘miscommunications’.\textsuperscript{28} Besides, this approach can also be criticized for failing to explain why men and women use certain forms of language on some occasions and not on others.\textsuperscript{29} However, despite this loophole, this theory had immense popular appeal and also it had significant influence on the works of Deborah Tannen, who is best known as the proponent of the ‘difference perspective’.

**Difference Approach**

Theorists associated with the Difference perspective proposed that women and men speak differently because of fundamental differences in their relation to their language, perhaps due to different socialization and experiences early on (Eckert, 2003: 1). According to these theorists, the problems of the dominance approach lie in their basic assumptions, like not only their views
are based on a simplified view of gender identities and relations, but also often these assumptions disregard context and generalises from specific settings. Though they focused on men’s dominance and women’s subordination but failed to recognise and analyse the principal reasons behind this. Apart from this, though this approach explicitly acknowledges the importance of power relations, it is criticised because of failing to recognise the social, historical and political situatedness of power. Another major or perhaps most important problem of this theory is that they have taken women for granted as deficient and powerless victims (ibid: 2, 3).

Now, with reference to the difference theory, the very popular ‘You Just Don’t Understand’ by Deborah Tannen (1990) has often been taken as representative of this framework. Drawing on work by Daniel Maltz and Ruth Borker (1982), Tannen argued that girls and boys live in different subcultures analogous to the distinct subcultures associated with those from different class or ethnic backgrounds. As a result they grow up with different conventions for verbal interaction and interaction more generally (Wardaugh, 2003: 317). To quote from Tannen’s paper ‘Talk in the Intimate Relationship: His and Hers’,

Male-female conversation is always cross-cultural communication. Culture is simply a network of habits and patterns gleaned from past experience, and women and men have different past experiences. From the time they’re born, they’re treated differently, talked to differently, and talk differently as a result. Boys and girls grow up in different worlds, even if they grow up in the same house. And as adults they travel in different worlds, reinforcing patterns established in childhood. These cultural differences include differing expectations about the role of talk in relationships and how it fulfils that role (Coates ed., 2005: 435).
That is why author Ronald Wardaugh has put Tannen’s view in this way that part of the socialization process is learning not only gender related activities and attitudes but also gender related language behaviour (ibid: 440). According to Tannen, little girls and little boys learn how to have conversations as they learn how to pronounce words: from their playmates. Between the ages of five and fifteen, when children are learning to have conversations, they play mostly with friends of their own sex. So it’s not surprising that they learn different ways of having and using conversations. It has been found widely that while girls like to play cooperatively; their talk is also influenced by that very nature; but in case of boys- their talk is often competitive talk about who is best at what. Professor Tannen has summarized her book You Just Don't Understand in an article in which she represents male and female language use in a series of six contrasts. These are:

- Status vs. support
- Independence vs. intimacy
- Advice vs. understanding
- Information vs. feelings
- Orders vs. proposals
- Conflict vs. compromise

Tannen also adds that when women talk about what seems obviously interesting to them, their conversation often include reports of conversations. Tone of voice, timing, intonation, and wordings are all re-created in the telling in order to explain- dramatize, really- the experience that is being reported. If men tell about an incident and give a brief summary instead of re-
creating what was said and how, the women often feel that the essence of the experience is being omitted (Coates ed., 2005: 415).

As the critique of the dominance theory, though difference approach attempted to overcome its drawbacks but it was also not free from certain loopholes. Tannen’s ‘You Just Don’t Understand’ received some of the most critical reviews ever seen in the sociolinguistic world (e.g., Cameron 1992; Freed 1992; Troemel-Ploetz 1991). Theoretical debates do not usually generate such emotional heat, but in this case sociolinguists, particularly feminist linguists, felt very strongly that Tannen’s account of gender differences in language misrepresented research findings in the area, as well as over-simplifying the explanatory framework. Troemel-Ploetz articulates the widely held feeling that Tannen has taken the difference approach too far: dominance and power have disappeared from the analysis. Troemel-Ploetz claims that Tannen fails to make clear that women’s and men’s different ways of talking are not different-but-equal, but that men’s ways of talking have high status in society while women’s talk is denigrated. Moreover, Tannen’s book feeds into the genre of self-help books aimed at women which perpetuate the view that, where things aren’t working, then it is women who need to adapt (Coates ed., 2005: 415). Mary Talbot has also shared same opinion that ‘neglect of power’ is a major problem with the differences model and with the cross-cultural miscommunication account that it supports.

A difference framework also minimizes any blame for ‘cross-cultural’ tensions by putting the emphasis on miscommunication and ignorance. Besides this, Two-cultures proponents, including Tannen, maintain a carefully neutral position regarding the two distinct interactional styles men and women are supposed to use. Both styles are presented as equally valid. As we have already
observed, this stance of careful neutrality fits in with sociolinguistics. In describing language varieties, sociolinguists do not try to establish their relative merits (Talbot, 2010: 102).

The after-effects of Tannen’s book are still being felt: the difference approach is now seen as problematic, because it is associated with a political stance, which ignores male dominance. So in one sense it would be true to say that the debate has been resolved in favour of the dominance approach. However, interesting work on same-sex talk continues to be carried out which implicitly draws on a difference or sub-cultural approach. In other ways, the debate has moved on, with researchers assimilating ideas from European social theory, in particular the idea that gender is not a given but is accomplished through talk, and that speakers have available to them a whole range of (often conflicting) discourses (ibid: 415). Besides it is also being criticized because of paying little attention to contexts of communication and changes in individuals and groups over time. Then here only gender differences were focused rather than the similarities and most importantly this framework has taken an essentialist view of gender as a stable and inherent feature in speakers (ibid: 415).

However, in reality all the theories are interrelated because women’s different and deficient (Lakoff) speech patterns are not the result of inherent biological or mental deficiency, but rather of differential experiences (difference) in life and men’s greater power in society may be a factor in perpetuating women’s weaker use of language (dominance).

**Dynamic/Discourse Approach**

Apart from these approaches the fourth and most recent approach is called the Discourse approach or sometimes the Dynamic approach because there is an emphasis on dynamic aspects of interaction. Discourse as defined by Foucault refers to ‘ways of constituting knowledge,
together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledge and relations between them. Discourses are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning. They constitute the ‘nature’ of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects they seek to govern (Weedon, 1987, p. 108). Following the quotation from M. Stubbs’ textbook (Stubbs 1983:1), discourse analysis or approach is defined as –

a) concerned with language use beyond the boundaries of a sentence or utterance,

b) concerned with the interrelationships between language and society and

c) concerned with the interactive or dialogic properties of everyday communication.

It focuses on the situatedness of language use, as well as its inalienably social and interactive nature- even in the case of written communication. Discourse analysis foregrounds language use as social action, language use as situated performance, language use as tied to social relations and identities, power, inequality and social struggle, language use as essentially a matter of “practices” rather than just “structures”.

Researchers who adopt this approach take a social constructionist perspective. Social constructionism, broadly defined, sees gender as:

- The active/interactive/negotiated construction of gender, including self-positioning.
- Linguistic dealings with (individual/groups of) women, men, boys and girls, e.g., how they are addressed, what is said to them.
- What is said and written about gender differential tendencies, similarities and diversity, including what is said and written about (individual/groups of) women, men, boys and girls.
Social constructionist perspectives thus de-emphasize gendered speakers (and writers) as agents, focusing rather on what is communicated by, to and about women, men, boys and girls. The post-structuralist thinking associated with social constructionism allowed gender, inert alia, to be seen as not fixed but something interpreted- hence talked and written about (as well as enacted). Accordingly, any gender differentiation constructed in talk or writing may be more significant socially than any stylistic or interactional ‘differential tendencies’ in language use (Krolokke and Sorensen, 2006:106; Cameron, 1997b).

Most gender and language study today broadly encompasses social constructionist meanings of gender together with a nuanced version of ‘differential tendencies’. Its (post-structuralist) concerns are (Cameron, 2005a, b):

- Diversity (e.g. class, ethnicity, and their interaction with gender; multiple masculinities/femininities; differences among ‘women’ and among ‘men’)
- Gender being ‘performed’ in an ongoing way, allowing for agency; performance being achieved partly through language (which is therefore constitutive); power being ‘done’ rather than something speakers ‘have’
- ‘Local’ or ‘contingent’ explanations for gendered language patterns and the importance of specific contexts

In this context, we can refer to Judith Butler (1956-), who has also attempted to discuss how linguistic performativity is connected to gender? Towards the beginning of Gender Trouble Butler states that “[w]ithin the inherited discourse of the metaphysics of substance, gender proves to be performative, that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be” (GT: 24–5). Gender is an act that brings into being what it names: in this context, a “masculine” man or a “feminine” woman. She states that gender identities are
constructed and constituted by language, which means that there is no gender identity that precedes language. If you like, it is not that an identity “does” discourse or language, but the other way around- language and discourse “do” “gender”. There is no “I” outside language. Since identity is a signifying practice and culturally intelligible subjects are the effects rather than the causes of discourses that conceal their workings. It is in this sense that gender identity is performative, e.g., when the doctor or nurse declares “It’s Girl or Boy!” they are not simply reporting on what they see, but they are actually assigning a sex and a gender to a body that can have no existence outside discourse.

Social constructionist perspectives thus de-emphasize gendered speakers (and writers) as agents, focusing rather on what is communicated by, to and about women, men, boys and girls. What is generally suggested by this discourse/dynamic approach is that although any given individual may speak in a range of ways, this range is governed by the subject position that the individual takes on at a particular moment, and, since the subject position is socially constructed, what can be said is socially constrained. What this has been taken to imply is that as individuals we may take on any number of roles in our daily lives, and that which roles we take on depend on which discourses we are able to engage in. Norman Fairclough makes the additional point that the subject positions we take up when we engage in discourses do not only constrain what we can do and say: they also provide the conditions that enable us to act and speak meaningfully. As Coates argues, ‘There is no neutral discourse: whenever we speak we have to choose between different systems of meaning, different sets of values’ (1998: 302). What Coates along with many other researchers then moved on to explain is that how it is implicated in the construction of different ‘selves’. Coates also used it to show how women in friendly conversation actively construct themselves as ‘women’ through their language choices. (Christie, 2000: 49).
Though we generally treat gender as ‘given’ and unalterable, automatically classifying every person we encounter as female or male without a moment’s reflection, sometimes our assumptions are however challenged and we have to re-think. Approaching gender identity as a construction, rather than as a fixed category, is also useful in accounting for examples where women adapt to ‘masculine’ contexts, and men adapt to ‘feminine’ contexts. Women in the police force, for instance, are sometimes advised to portray a masculine image—to wear bulky sweaters suggesting upper-body strength, and well-worn boots to suggest they are used to hard work. They also adopt a cool distant style; they don’t smile much, and they talk ‘tough’. Men who work in clothing shops and hairdressing salons, on the other hand, often construct a more ‘feminine’ identity in these contexts than when they are in the pub or the sports club changing room. They use features of the more cooperative discourse style associated with ‘gossip’, avoiding swear words, using respectful or sometimes affectionate terms of address, and encouraging the addressee to talk.

That is why West and Zimmermen (1987) have eloquently put it that speakers should be seen as ‘doing gender’ rather than statically ‘being’ a particular gender (Mills ed., 1995: 5). Here language is seen as a symbolic resource that speakers can draw on selectively and strategically to perform masculine or feminine identities according to context (ibid: 5). In the late 1980s, study of the relationship between language and gender also moved towards viewing language as performative of gender and not simply reflective of it. In short, people create gender through speech (and other actions). If people perform gender roles, it is expected that the performance will vary from one context to the next, and different theories may explain different situations. Gender may be performed through language in a variety of ways. As a single example, Penelope Eckert investigated the speech of Detroit high school students who could be categorized as either
"jocks" or "burnouts." She found that girls pronounced three vowels differently from boys, but did not themselves constitute a uniform group. Instead, the girls were using language in order to polarize themselves as either jocks or burnouts. In other words, the girls were using language to perform both a gender and a jock or burnout identity. Eckert argued that language was used to create social identity specifically because self-definition through action (such as by being a star athlete) was unavailable for girls. Studies such as Eckert's have been important for understanding the ways that gender is performed within context, and the degree to which both gender and its linguistic expression can vary from one situation to the next.\textsuperscript{33}

Though the understanding of the relation between gender and language is one of the core interest areas of Sociolinguistics, where the societal effects on language receive much importance, it is also essential to refer to some Sociological theories, which have discussions on the issues related to language.

**Feminist Theories on Language and Gender**

Apart from all these sociolinguistic theories, the only sociological theory, which has delved into both the concepts of gender and language use for the purpose of unearthing their interrelationship, is the Feminist Theory or rather feminist theories or approaches.

Because of the diversity that characterizes feminist research in general, it follows that the ways in which feminist scholars engage with language use are equally diverse. As referred to in Christine Christie’s “Gender and Language: Towards a Feminist Pragmatics”, Burman and Parker have argued that language contains the most basic categories that we use to understand ourselves; affecting the way we act as women or men (in, for example, the sets of arguments that are given about the nature of gender difference deployed to justify inequality), and reproducing
the way we define our cultural identity (in, for example, the problems and solutions we negotiate when we try and define who we are as a member of a minority group) (1993:1) (Christie, 2000: 45). Much of the variation within feminist approaches to language arises out of disciplinary differences, therefore, in that, clearly, studies of language and gender within linguistics are informed by linguistic debates and aim primarily to say something about language, while of course studies of language and gender within cultural studies are informed by that discipline and aim, ultimately, to say something about culture.

There are also however differences in the aims and focus of feminist studies of language within linguistics. As Ruth Wodak (1997a) shows, feminist researchers have long been concerned both with language as a system and with language as behaviour, and this is evident in their concern with two basic questions concerning gender: “How are women represented in the existing language system? How does the linguistic behaviour of the group of women differ from that of women? Researchers concerned with the first question take it as axiomatic that language ‘encodes’ the values of a culture. As Cameron puts it:

Many strands in the feminist critique of language have concerned themselves with what languages tell their users and their learners about gender and about women. On the whole, feminists have concluded that our languages are sexist. They represent or ‘name’ the world from a masculine viewpoint and in accordance with stereotyped beliefs about women, men and the relationship between them. (Cameron 1998b:8).

Materialist feminists across disciplines tend to address language use as symptomatic of existing social inequalities, and language use is often addressed from this perspective in terms of the ideologies it gives access to. From this perspective, language use is seen as reflecting and arising out of the social. Where an approach is premised on a poststructuralist or post-Foucauldian
conceptualization of language-in-use (that is, discourse) it is often assumed that, in contrast, language use affects, or even, it has been argued, constructs the social (Christie, 2000: 45-46).

**Gender, Language and French Feminism**

In the writings of French feminists (e.g. Julie Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, Helene Cixous, and Monique Wittig) we find flourishing discussions on the interrelation between gender and language. Here we can refer to their approach to examining how gender is constructed in language and discourse. Quite a long time ago notable feminist Susan B. Anthony gave a speech within court in which she addressed the issues of language within the constitution documented in her publication, “Speech after Arrest for Illegal voting” in 1872. Anthony questioned the authoritative principles of the constitution and its male gendered language. She raised the question of why women should be punished under law but they cannot use the law for their own protection (women could not vote, own property, nor themselves in marriage). She also critiqued the constitution for its male gendered language. After that women writers have addressed the issues of masculinized writing through male gendered language that may not serve to accommodate the literary understanding of women’s lives. Such masculinized language that feminist theorists address is the use of, for example, “God the Father” which is looked upon as a way of designating the sacred as solely men (or, in other words, biblical language glorifies men through all of the masculine pronouns like “he” and “him” and addressing God as a “He”). Feminist theorists attempt to reclaim and redefine women through re-structuring language. For example, feminist theorists have used the term “womyn” instead of “women” (which comes from the root term: “men”). Some feminist theorists find solace in changing titles of unisex jobs (for example, police officer versus policeman or mail carrier versus mailman). Some feminist
theorists have reclaimed and redefined such words as “dyke” and “bitch”—and others have invested redefining knowledge into feminist dictionaries.\textsuperscript{36} 

It has often been argued that in the streets, in groups and general assemblies, in journals and publishing houses, women’s words and women’s writings explode. Slogans, speeches, tracts, manifestos, articles, poems, narratives and essays have a few resonances. Women feel they are saying what has not yet been said, writing in ways not yet explored. The Women’s liberation movement of the 1970s is also that liberation: the joy of speaking, of writing. The forms in which women began to express themselves in the 1970s, the relationship to language, to writing, the way this was lived and theorized by certain women as a weapon for liberation, that was specific to the movement. Women took up speech to say something else, and to say it differently. Perhaps first to speak of oneself, to speak to other women about what was most personal to each.\textsuperscript{37} 

More recently, in Cate Poynton's “Language and Gender: Making the Difference”, for instance, the focus is on the ideological reasons for language practices that keep women alienated from power. Elaine Showalter also echoes Poynton's appeal to a universal female oppression, suggesting that (a phallocratic) language structure is not the problem; the problem is getting the "full resources of language" to women so that they might begin to alter language usage as they speak themselves into it ("Wilderness").\textsuperscript{38} Apart from that French feminist-psychoanalyst and philosopher Luce Irigaray has examined the uses and misuses of language in relation to women in such works as “Speculum of the Other Woman” (1974), which argues that history and culture are written in patriarchal language and centred on men.\textsuperscript{39} Irigaray argues that women constitute a paradox, if not a contradiction, within the discourse of identity itself: Women are the “sex” which is not “one”. Within a language (details of French feminism) pervasively masculinist, a
phallogocentric language, women constitute the unrepresentable. In other words, women represent the sex that cannot be thought, a linguistic absence and opacity. Within a language that rests on univocal signification, the female sex constitutes the unconstrainable and undesignatable. In this sense, women are the sex which is not “one” but “multiple”. (Butler, 2006: 15-16).

As put forward by Butler (G.T, 1999), a great deal of feminist theory and literature has nevertheless assumed that there is a ‘doer’ behind the deed. Without an agent, it is argued, there can be no agency and hence no potential to initiate a transformation of relations of domination within society. Monique Wittig’s radical feminist theory occupies an ambiguous position within the continuum of theories on the question of the subject. On the one hand, Wittig appears to dispute the metaphysics of substance, but on the other hand, she retains the human subject, the individual, as the metaphysical locus of agency. While Wittig’s humanism clearly presupposes that there is a doer behind the deed, her theory nevertheless delineates the performative construction of gender within the material practices of culture, disputing the temporality of those explanations that would confuse ‘cause’ with ‘result’. Wittig refers to ‘sex’ as a mark that is somehow applied by an institutionalized heterosexuality, a mark that can be erased or obfuscated through practices that effectively contest that institution. Her view, of course, differs radically from Irigaray’s. The latter would understand the ‘mark’ of gender to be part of the hegemonic signifying economy of the masculine that operates through the self-elaborating mechanisms of specularization that have virtually determined the field of ontology within the Western philosophical tradition. For Wittig, language is an instrument or tool that is in no way misogynist in its structures, but only in its applications. For Irigaray, the possibility of another language or signifying economy is the only chance at escaping the ‘mark’ of gender, which, for the feminine,
is nothing but the phallogocentric erasure of the female sex. Clearly drawing on Beauvoir’s critique of the myth of the feminine in *The Second Sex*, Wittig asserts, ‘there is no feminine writing’. Wittig is clearly attuned to the power of language to subordinate and exclude women. As a ‘materialist’, however, she considers language to be ‘another order of materiality’, an institution that can be radically transformed. Language ranks among the concrete and contingent practices and institutions maintained by the choices of individuals and, hence, weakened by the collective actions of choosing individuals. Butler also found in Lacan that the feminine is never a mark of the subject; the feminine could not be an ‘attribute’ of a gender. Rather the feminine is the signification of lack, signified by the Symbolic, a set of differentiating linguistic rules that effectively create sexual difference. The masculine linguistic position undergoes individuation and heterosexualization required by the founding prohibitions of the Symbolic law, the law of the father.

In this backdrop the theory of ‘the law or rule of the father’ or more specifically the ‘patriarchal system theory’ of Sylvia Walby (1990) is also worth mentioning. After defining patriarchy as a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women, Walby further suggested that patriarchy as ‘private’ and ‘public’ practices is also a manifestation of the articulation of the even more deeply sedimented systems of patriarchy along with systems of capitalism and racism. She wrote:

Private patriarchy is based upon household production as the main site of women’s oppression. Public patriarchy is based principally in public sites such as employment and the state. The household does not cease to be a patriarchal structure in the public form [i.e. once the public form holds sway] but it is no longer the chief site. In private patriarchy the expropriation of women’s labour takes place primarily by individual
patriarchs within the household [its institutional forms is individualistic], while in the public form it is a more collective appropriation [its institutional form is collectivistic]. In private patriarchy the principle patriarchal strategy is exclusionary; in the public it is segregationist and subordinating. (Walby, 1990, p-24)

The applicability of this ‘patriarchy theory’ is pertinent here because it is that system and practice in which gender relations become unequal over time and continue to be reinforced on us as an integral part of our everyday life.

**Language, Gender and Social Class through the Lens of Feminist Intersectionalist Perspective**

During the late 1970s Sociolinguistics became directly affected by the new visibility of groups proclaiming their difference from the relatively unchallenged white, male, heterosexual, middle-class norm. It became clear that all these different groups in society would have their own linguistic identities too. Sociolinguists set out to study them. To the traditional variables of class and geographic origin were added those of ‘race’, and ‘ethnic group’, age and – of specific interest to all, especially to ‘feminist’ sociolinguists- ‘gender’. Rather at that point of time ‘sex’ was considered as a significant social variable, since feminist theorization of ‘gender’ was just at its initial stage. Nevertheless, it is in this context that ‘intersectionality’ perspective gains momentum by not only considering ‘human beings’ or more specifically ‘women’ as a homogeneous group, but also by focusing on multiple dimensions of their realities, especially inequalities (Gibbon, 1999: 87).

Intersectionality since its inception is considered useful as a handy ‘buzzword’, aiming to make visible the multiple positioning that constitutes everyday life and the power relations, which are
central to it. It also addresses the most central theoretical and normative concern within feminist scholarship: namely, the acknowledgement of differences among women (Davis, 2008: 9(1):70). The concept is popular because it provides concise shorthand for describing ideas that have come to be accepted in feminist thinking and scholarship through longstanding political struggles. One critical thematic of feminism that is perennially relevant is the important question of what it means to be a woman under different historical circumstances. Throughout the 1970s and the 1980s, this concern was the subject of major debate as the concept of ‘global sisterhood’ was critiqued for its failure to fully take on board the power relations that divided women (Haraway, 1991, Davis 1981, Feminist Review, 1984, Talpade- Mohanty 1988) (Brah and Phoenix, 2004: 5(3):75). It is at this point of time that legal feminist scholar Kimberle Crensaw introduced the concept of ‘intersectionality’ (1989), when social science perspectives were increasingly becoming incapable to depict and theorize the multiple problems of identity politics. Primarily being a legal feminist scholar, she rightly felt and understood the need of rejecting the predominant ‘single-axis’ frameworks by introducing and embracing ‘multiple dimensions’, especially during talking about ‘gender’ or more specifically about ‘women’. Her conceptualization of ‘intersectionality’ has been employed in feminist work stressing on how women are simultaneously positioned as women and, for example, as black, working-class, lesbian or colonial subjects (ibid: 75). While distinguishing between structural and political intersectionality Crenshaw (1994) attempted to elucidate how inequalities and their intersections are directly relevant to the experiences of people in society (structural) as well as for political strategies (political).

Intersectionality has always emphasized that different dimensions of social life cannot be separated out into discrete and pure strands. Thus, it becomes evident that the increasing
worldwide affinity among feminist sociologists to adopt ‘intersectionality’ perspective has contributed significantly not only to the understanding of gender but also has emphasized women’s lived experiences by unearthing the hitherto uncultivated and subjugated areas of knowledge regarding everyday practices, including their linguistic usages. Among sociolinguists, William Labov (1991) in his essay The Intersection of Sex and Social Class in the course of Linguistic Change, Penelope Eckert (1989) in her famous work on ‘Jocks and Burnouts’ in a Detroit high school have demonstrated significant insights of intersectionality perspective in sociolinguistic research. After that most gender and language study started to encompass social constructionist paradigm along with feminist post-structuralist discourse analysis (FPDA). With roots in post-structuralism and feminism, feminist post-structuralist discourse analysis not only emphasizes on the notion of ‘positioning’ but also includes individuals as being ‘multiply positioned’. Having a degree of agency, manifested in different linguistic forms, they have the potential not only to recognize how and through which discourses they are being ‘positioned’, but also to take up particular subject positions, and to resist positioning. Here as Judith Baxter (2002, 2003) has put it that a woman may be (simultaneously) positioned as powerful within one discourse and powerless within another. And thus in gender-language research intersectionality was introduced as a new paradigmatic shift. In recent years, the intersectional approach has made a major breakthrough into gender research and has prompted a number of theoretical and conceptual discussions about how to understand and analyze gender in combination with other categories. We can now see the increasing importance on intersectionality as a positive trend that potentially captures the complex interplay between gender and other social differentiations in contemporary, multicultural societies. Intersectionality is a “travelling concept”, which has taken on new meanings in different contexts (Knapp, 2005). Gender researchers in political science
and sociology adopted the concept and emphasized that intersectional analyses must be able to encompass the interplay between structures and institutions at the macro-level, and identities and lived lives at the micro-level (Christensen & Siim, 2006; Jensen, 2006). Contemporary gender theory is informed by the idea that gender intersects with other aspects of a person’s identity, such as class, race or nationality (Burman, 2003; Staunæs, 2003; Valentine, 2007; Yuval Davis, 2007). It has long been recognized that gender discrimination may be compounded by race, class or age discrimination. However, rather than considering these as add ons where one compounds the other, intersectionality describes a fusion of such subjectivities.\footnote{40}

**Postmodernist Perspective on Gender and Language**

Language and gender has also been studied by Postmodernism as well as postmodern feminism. ‘Postmodernism is not a clearly defined theory, but a loose body of thought which draws on interconnected ideas around language, knowledge, reason, power, identity and resistance’ (Bryson 1999: 36). Postmodernism as a North American intellectual movement draws inspiration from a variety of French poststructuralist and postmodernist theorists including Foucault, Lacan, Derrida, Lyotard and Irigaray. They begin with ideas about language and systems of thought. They claim that (what we think of as) reality is ‘discursively constructed’. This is the linguistic version of the thought that our minds grasp things not as they are “in themselves” but only through concepts, signified by words. “The linguistic sign acts reflexively, not referentially” in a discursive field. Postmodernism extends these ideas about language to social practices more generally. The key idea underwriting this extension is that actions and practices are linguistic signs. Like words, they signify things beyond themselves by means of linguistic devices such as metaphor and metonymy. Moreover, important to postmodernism’s view of language is the focus on the implied meaning of words and the power structures that are accepted as part of the way
words are used, from the use of the word “Man” with a capital “M” to refer to humanity collectively, to the default of the word “he” in English as a pronoun for a person of gender unknown to the speaker. However, this is merely the most obvious example of the changing relationship between diction and discourse which postmodernism presents. An important concept in postmodernism’s view of language is the idea of “play” text. In the context of postmodernism, play means changing the framework which connects ideas, and thus allows the troping, or turning, of a metaphor or word from one context to another, or from one frame of reference to another. Postmodernists also believe that we never really have the facts, there are only interpretations. Truth and knowledge are constructions of language. Each community constructs, through language, its own story of the world. No story is more true than another (since all stories are valid); but, in fact, truth is produced by the narrative of a community. ‘Truths’ then are not propositional statements about reality, but rather narrative realities for a particular group; and every group is distinguished by their particular use of language. In a sense, the postmodern turn can be considered a linguistic turn. Richard Rorty puts it this way, “We need to make a distinction between the claim that the world is out there and the claim that truth is out there…” To say that truth is not out there is simply to say that where there are no sentences there is no truth, that sentences are elements of human languages, and that human language are human creations… The world does not speak. Only we do.” In other words, since we simply cannot escape language in our attempts to describe reality, all objectivity is jettisoned. Postmodernist linguists always challenge gender polarity, arguing that speakers enact identities by their linguistic choices and other signaling behaviours such as dress, posture and gesture. The postmodernist challenge also argues that our gender performance constitutes our gender, rather than being a mere instantiation of it.41
Now, with reference to postmodern feminism it can be argued that since the 1980s feminist theories witnessed a cultural or linguistic turn. Three postmodern thinkers have been extremely influential in the development of postmodern feminism. The first of them is Michel Foucault, with his questioning of the metanarratives and grand institutions of civilization. The second, Jacques Derrida, is responsible for giving the world the concept and tool of ‘deconstruction’. Derrida tried to liberate thinking from assumption of singularity. He questioned the existence of one single truth or essence, of a transcendental signified which exists in and of itself as a giver of meaning. He tried to show how traditional interpretation of texts (anything communicated through language) have suppressed alternative interpretations. The third significant contribution to postmodern feminism came from a psychologist, Jacques Lacan. Lacan reinterpreted Freud, offering an alternative understanding of the process of development that a child undergoes in the journey from infancy to adulthood and pointing out the subconscious is structured like a language- the ‘symbolic order’- which has to be internalized and submitted to if we wish to fit into society. He holds that there are three stages in the development of any child: the pre-oedipal, the mirror and the oedipal. The communication at the two earlier stages is conducted in semiotic language, marked by rhythm, images, repetition, nonsense syllables and other characteristics of speech between mother and child.

After that there was a shift from ‘things to words’ (Barrett in Kemp & Squires 1997), for example the focus moved away from materialist issues related to domestic labour, gender inequities in the workplace and domestic violence to issues related to language, representation and subjectivity. It was proposed and believed that ‘gender is understood to be shaped not just by social structures but by dominant discourses – forms of language that construct what it means to be a man or a woman’ (Abbott et al 2005: 358). Postmodern feminism's major departure from
other branches of feminism is perhaps the argument that sex, or at least gender is itself constructed through language, a view notably propounded in Judith Butler's 1990 book, Gender Trouble. (Butler’s views are already discussed under discourse or dynamic approach). Then Mary Joe Frug suggested that one "principle" of postmodernism is that human experience is located "inescapably within language." Power is exercised not only through direct coercion, but also through the way in which language shapes and restricts our reality. However, because language is always open to re-interpretation, it can also be used to resist this shaping and restriction, and so is a potentially fruitful site of political struggle. Frug's second postmodern principle is that sex is not something natural, nor is it something completely determinate and definable. Rather, sex is part of a system of meaning, produced by language. Frug argues that "cultural mechanisms ... encode the female body with meanings," and that these cultural mechanisms then go on explain these meanings "by an appeal to the 'natural' differences between the sexes, differences that the rules themselves help to produce." Rejecting the idea of a natural basis to sexual difference allows us to see that it is always susceptible to new interpretations. Like other systems of meaning, it is less like a cage, and more like a tool: it constrains but never completely determines what one can do with it.42

**Relevance of Queer Theory in Gender and Language Research**

Arguments are placed both in favour of as well as against the notion whether ‘queer theory’ at all contributes to gender and language research or not. Most of the time, the study of sexuality and language has been treated as separate and distinct from the study of gender and language, and there are goo reasons for maintaining this distinction in terms of both theory and methodology (Cameron and Kulick, 2003; Kulick, 2000). However, other work, particularly in sociology and
social theory as well as linguistics, has noted rather a special relationship between gender and sexuality, arguing and illustrating how the two are inextricably linked (Butler, 2004; 1997; 1990; Halberstam, 1998; Munt, 1998; Livia and Hall, 1997). The term ‘queer’ became popularised in the 1990s but its meanings remain quite diverse. Most simply it has been used as referring to ‘lesbian and gay’ and also has historically been used in certain contexts as a term of abuse directed towards those who identify as non-heterosexual. Intellectually, it refers to that which is not aligned with any particular identity and resists categorisation (Sunderland, 2008: 271,272).

Before the 1990s, the most closely related area of research – language and gender studies – had considered sexuality, construed almost exclusively as heterosexuality, only insofar as it contributed to the understanding of gender; sexuality itself was rarely if ever the overt focus of analysis. Yet because of the close relationship between gender and sexuality, much language and gender research implicitly relied on cultural ideologies of sexuality in analyzing gendered linguistic phenomena. Thus, in this field too, sexuality has been omnipresent if mostly unacknowledged. In the past 15-20 years, however, theoretical shifts in language and gender have facilitated the study of sexuality as a necessary and equal complement to the study of gender. Where earlier gender research had tended to collapse sexuality into gender, more current work recognizes that these are separate theoretical concepts, while acknowledging that – like race, class, and other dimensions of sociopolitical relations – they cannot be productively discussed independently of one another. This theoretical clarification has been fruitful for the recent development of language and sexuality studies as a distinctive area of research that nevertheless retains close ties to gender and language scholarship (Bucholtz, 2004: 470). Queer theory has been influenced by the works of mainly Butler (2004; 1997; 1991; 1990), Fuss (1991), Sedgwick (1990), Foucault (1978; 1976) and Althusser (1971). Although purportedly not
restricted to the domain of sexuality and gender, a key line development of queer theories can be traced back to the homophile, feminist, and lesbian and gay liberation movements of the 1950s, 1960s and the 1970s. Jagose (1996), describes how homophile movements were generally characterized by being conservative and integrationist, whilst gay liberation movements were seen as more radical with their agenda of challenging and overturning existing social relations and institutions. Although queer theory shares some characteristics with gay liberation, it also partly arose out of a critique that gay liberation still espoused a commitment to some kind of ‘natural’ sexual identity, one which could only be understood in terms of power and oppression. Feminism, particularly lesbian feminism, has been influential in revealing how oppressions surrounding sexuality are intricately tied to oppressions surrounding gender. Rich (1997) explores how practices which function to naturalize heterosexuality and pathologize lesbianism simultaneously function to privilege (heterosexual) masculinity. She describes heterosexuality as a ‘political institution, which disempowers women’ and proposes challenging and denaturalizing heterosexuality by arguing that it is more ‘natural’ for women to align themselves with other women (epitomized by lesbianism but also realized as other heterosocial relationships between women) and for men with other men. Wittig (1993) also proposes that the categories of gender (i.e. women and men) are political categories which are complicit in the maintenance of heterosexuality (Sunderland, 2008: 272,273). Important contributions of queer theorists such as Butler, Sedgwick and Fuss have been to question the naturalization of heterosexuality in both academic study and outside academia. Gender and language research has too often been guilty of colluding in the privileging of heterosexuality over other forms of sexuality and queer theory has surely helped in addressing such issues.
To conclude, the reference and application of these multiple theoretical approaches from both sociological as well as sociolinguistic traditions have enabled this research to unearth as well as analyze the impact of gender and social class on the language use patterns of Bengali women in present day Kolkata. Besides, the social constructions of gender, language and class as well as the various nuances of gender relations have truly left considerable impact on this newly developed area of sociological research. This has also contributed significantly to the understanding of ‘gendering of language’ with reference to particular social classes and also in guiding the researcher, advancing the empirical inquiry as well as in interpreting the findings of the research.