NICOLE MEIERHOFER

Language Reform

There has been much feminist discussion concerning aspects of language reform, its implementation practices that regulate reform for institutions, and for all discourse communities. For many years feminists have tried to choose which ways language needs to change, how to implement that change and what to do when there is much ventured but little gained.

There are three aspects of language reform discussed by feminists. The first, includes creating words for womyn that are missing, to parallel words used for men. Secondly, feminist reformers explore the ways in which words for womyn are introduced as neutral or positive, then are misconstrued into sexual or negative connotations. Lastly, this reform includes creating the missing egalitarian words that are needed to reflect womyǹs experience.

In an article called Gender-Based Language Reform and the Social Construction of Meaning, published in 1992, Susan Ehrlich and Ruth King address issues of language reform. They begin with the introduction of terms for womyn that parallel words for men. For example, when Ms was introduced as a parallel to Mr., its use was resisted and when used, not interpreted correctly. The media and larger society uses Ms to describe a womyn who is divorced, Mrs. for married and Miss for a womyn who has never been married. These categories are heterosexist because, no lesbian couple fits into the 'boxes' to be defined. It also defines heterosexual womyn only in relation to men.

Similarly, the introduction of chairperson has been used in ways not intended. Chairperson is supposed to be gender neutral and describe anyone who is a committee chair. It has been used to describe only womyn chairs and men are still referred to as chairman, which keeps words within terms of sex-based distinction. "The introduction and use of non-sexist terms does not guarantee the usage. The success of non-sexist terms is largely based on the social context in which the reform occurs. Reform is more likely to succeed within a community that values egalitarianism or non-sexist views and structures" (Ehrlich and King 1992, p.152, 157). Words like 'hussy' and 'spinster' were originally neutral and positive words that took on negative sexual connotations in which there are no paralleled words like these, designating men. Ehrlich and King state the reasons for this phenomenon being that, "Sexist values also influence the meanings of terms that already exist in language." The word 'no,' when used by womyn in phrases like 'no means no' has a different and oppressive connotation, created by patriarchal views about womyn. One has been that 'no means maybe.' An example of this connotation is clear in a story Ehrlich and King begin their article with. After a 'No Means No' " awareness campaign at the University of Kingston, Ontario Canada, men's dormitory windows were filled with messages in response to the campaign, such as: "no means dyke, no means harder and no means please." The social construction

of language to change the word 'no' into something sexually violent, when it refers to womyn's sexual humyn rights, is an example of the sexist social structure changing connotations of words that already exist to fit sexist norms. In 1990, Cameron stated, "In the mouths of sexists, language can always be sexistÓ (qtd. in King and Elrich, 1992, p.152). "Again we see that terms originally with very specific feminist-influenced meanings are subject to redefinition and, not accidentally, are redefined in terms of the perspective of white (heterosexual) males experience" (Ehrlich and King 1992, p.156). "Along the same lines, traditional 'boy names' given at birth, then used as 'girl names' end up disappearing and not being used again for boys" (Ayim, 1995, p.17).

Many feminist linguists believe that our language is a language of rape. Helen Benedict, (1992) wrote an article called The Language of Rape, in the text Transforming A Rape Culture (Buchwald, Fletcher & Roth, 1993), where she points out that there are many hidden ways in which girls and womyn are oppressed within the English language. For example there are 220 words for a sexually promiscuous womyn and only 20 for an equally promiscuous man. "This anti-woman bias in our language not only reflects the culture of rape, but encourages it, because it portrays women as sexual objects, fair prey for the hunterman. In short, English is a language of rape" (Benedict, 1992, p.103). For five years Benedict followed newspaper stories about rape and other sex crimes against womyn, to assess the language usage. She found that womyn were described within gendered language contexts like: hysterical, attractive, vivacious, pert, etc. "These words, never used for men, either infantilize women (the woman is bright, the man intelligent; the woman is bubbly, the man energetic; the woman is hysterical, the man is terrified; the woman is a girl, a man is a man), or, in the context of a sex crime, make them sound like sexual temptresses (a male crime victim is never described as attractive, pretty or the suggestive equivalent)" (Benedict 1992, p.104). By changing the subjects gender, an obvious bias is seen: "Petite John was a pert, vivacious boy, who flirted in bars and when victimized, ran from the scene half-naked and hysterical" (Benedict, 1992, p.4). Benedict states that if the media can eradicate words like n███r/negro from print, they can learn to reform their language about rape. The fact that this has not happened yet, serves as an example of the heterosexist and degrading language still prevalent in society today.

The misrepresentation of womyn's words and experiences has led language reformers to create words that are missing, in order to reflect an egalitarian value system. For example, when people discuss sex, it is in heterosexist terms like fuck, screw and lay, etc. If talk about sex reflected the heterosexual female experience, society would use words such as, engulf, surrounding, and enclosure, etc. The absence of words that reflect the heterosexual, female experience, reveals male bias in the English language. The creation of more words that reflect womyǹs experiences are needed, but feminists need to remember that, "Linguistic meanings are, to a large extent, determined by the dominant culture's social values and attitudes, terms initially

introduced to be non-sexist and neutral may lose their neutrality in the 'mouths' of a sexist speech community and/or cultureÓ (McConnell-Ginet 1989, p.47). Language reform also works to rearrange the sexist, generic language already in use. Research has demonstrated that the use of the generic he/man has detrimental effects on womyn because it evokes images of male rather than females. Using he/man as the generic effects belief systems about femalesÌ ability to perform in many aspects of society. Language reformers suggest the use of he or she, and they, because of the negative effects of the generic he/man. Although many people will still interpret 'they' as being male, "Becoming aware of linguistic choices forces us to monitor our thought processes, and will gradually enable us to unlearn patriarchal ways of thinking (Penelope 1990, p.213). A recovered drug user and my father Bill Meierhofer, lives by these words, "I tried to believe right, so that I could act right, but it was only when I acted right, did I come to believe" (Bill Meierhofer,1999). Putting this into the perspective of gendered language reform, it is only when people begin to rearrange their language actively, that they will come to believe more wholly in egalitarian, non-sexist social structures. "Language change is evolutionary and changing social attitudes will proceed language" (Lakoff 1973). There are many institutions that were mandated to erraticate the use of sexist language in different areas of their work. At the University of Regina the policy states: "All members of the University shall use inclusive language when engaged in communication in their capacity as members of that community. This policy applies to students, members of academia, administrative and other staff, as well as any others affiliated with the institution" (Ayim 1994 p.1) Ehrlich and King noted the University of Alberta plan. It was intended to reduce discrimination against womyn on campus. It called for professors to eliminate all sexist language from their educational materials.

Many other college institutions with this rule, have evaluated its success by including the question of sexist language use in class materials, in student class evaluation forms. This not only makes the students aware of the rule professors have to work with, but creates an avenue for students voices and perceptions, regarding the rule itself and its outcome. "A number of professional organizations, including the Canadian Association of University teachers, no longer publish job advertisements using he/man language" (Ehrlich and King, 1992). This kind of reform is based on inclusionary language methods that do not specify sex, which will hopefully be a model to society about egalitarian roles for womyn. The reason it is better to not specify sex is because that form of language has already been widely used to oppress womyn, by putting them in the position of 'other' or 'alternative'." An example of this is 'woman-doctor', but no use of the phrase, 'man-doctor,' only doctor when referring to men, because that is the supposed norm, not the other or alternative. If gender specific language reform is enforced, then consider race, sexual orientation, and age specific language to be next. When those classifications are considered for reform, all of language reformation will be lost because of its complexity. Gender neutral language is implemented

more readily and acceptance within institutions is greater. Ayim argues this is because in gender neutral language, womyn are excluded by being hidden. "Women are largely excluded from the images resulting from the use of the so-called generic terms" (Ayim 1995). This type of language may also leave out acknowledging the problems of sexism and solutions to it. The positive aspect of this language is the modeling of non-sex specific words, which implies that everyone can fit the role described. Terms used to describe sexist practices would be free from gender, therefore the sexism within them, invisible.

A study done in a Transylvania High School, students ranging from 14 to 19, the use of sexist language was assessed. Forty-five students were assigned to the control group and fifty-one to the non-sexist example group, and forty-eight to the sexist example group. The sexist language detector was used, which is a 24 -item questionnaire involving ethical dilemmas, similar to that in the McMinn questionnaire. Students were instructed to use their first impulse and needed to use two complete sentences answer them. Freshpersons used significantly more non-sexist language than seniors; within this, females used less non-sexist language than males. Students in the non-sexist testing group showed more non-sexist language, which suggest that modeling non-sexist language has a positive impact on students. Over all, there was more sexist language used than non-sexist, therefore we not only need to model non-sexist language, but discourage sexist language.

It has been suggested that the reason males use more sexist language than females is their resistance to change. Maybe strategies for teaching males non-sexist language need to be somewhat different from that of teaching females. Implementation of non-sexist modeling by teachers is a part of language reform that is visionary, but possible.

At the University of York in Canada, the UniversityÌs Status of Women Communications Committee, (of which both Ehrlich and King are members) works to promote the implementation of YorkÌs non-sexist, or gender-neutral, language policy set up in 1985. The committee was set up in 1989 and found that the York non-sexist language policy had clearly had a positive effect. "Most university documents do not use non-sexist alternatives to the so-called generic 'he', and 'chair' rather than 'chairman.'" (Ehrlich and King 1992). This reform was further implemented in areas needing improvement, such as classes with titles like 'man' to refer to the species as a whole, by the committee writing letters to each department that participated in that language, i.e, the science department. That specific department argued that the use of 'man' as referring to all species reflected social practices and as grounded in 'nature.' "Biological determinism is the most prevalent example of this kind of thinking: womenÌs biology, particularly womenÌs reproductive biology, is used to justify women being relegated to the home. In other words, the invocation of nature has been one way of rationalizing a whole range of social practices that oppress women" (Ehrlich and King 1992).

A similar argument against language reform is that the English language needs to stay maintained to keep its purity and elegance. It has been stated by some university department personnel in Toronto and other areas that, "English is uncontaminated, but runs the risk of losing its 'natural' beauty through the infusion of atrocities." Opponents of reform also believe that the English language is frozen and dead because it derives from the ancient Greek and Latin which also need to be preserved and respected. "Thus, language, rather than being viewed as a system that is specific to a social and historical context, is seen as unchanging just as the social roles of men and women are often represented as unchanging and inevitable, i.e, natural" (Ehrlich and King 1992). To create new ways of seeing womyn in society, Giroux states, "It is through changing educational language that this can happen. New language makes it possible to deconstruct and challenge dominant relations of power and knowledge legitimated in traditional forms of discourse. We need new languages, to enable us to rethink meaning and identity" (qtd. in Jackson, 1992, p.21). Invisioning and practicing the rethinking of meaning and identity around 'doing gender' in language, with the ultimate goal of the creation of a feminist syllabus, requires addressing feminist pedagogical theories for the classroom.

NICOLE MEIERHOFER

Liberatory Pedagogies

Language reform will be a slow and long process especially because of the "natural" argument, but will still successfully take place, as it has already begun in academic institutions previously mentioned. Teachers are becoming the central force of the language reform taking place in institutions. Anthony Dimatteo reviewed two books: "Theory as Resistance: Politics and Culture after (Post) structuralism", by Mas'ud Zavarzadeh and Donald Marton; and "Styles of Cultural Activism: From Theory and Pedagogy to Women, Indians and Communism, by Philip Goldstien. These two books urge teachers to understand that writing and teaching are modes of critical action as it shapes, not just informs students thinking. In striving for 'student empowerment' teachers ignore that the materials used cause many conflicts and often disenfranchise female students. The very theory of teaching used can control and influence the teaching that is done. The question addressed here is, How does a teacher bring critical pressure upon the dominant social powers that have vested interest in reproducing and expanding their own conditions of power, (one condition of power being the male voice over the female), which is an excluding system, as the classroom can be. Paralleling that statement, how should teachers change the negative gender system apparent in classrooms? Glodstien is especially concerned with how teachers should model the democracy that is

supposed to be reflected in larger society. Learning about unequal gender systems through stereotypes that build on 'doing gender,' in a collaboratively active classroom, would begin the process of the democracy Goldstien is calling for.

Dimatteo argues that the only way to change the system is through active resistance of not only what it perpetuates, but attack the core belief systems and creations behind the system. He said that schools are failing to create students who question the many unequal systems in society. Schools create an environment that naturalizes negative social conditions (like 'doing gender'), as they are somehow "needed", and those who question that are radically deranged. They teach students to accept exploitation and to exploit others because that's how to be part of the productive labor market. When teaching students to accept any kind of exploitation, all types of inequality are accepted, since they are all built on mostly the same theories. Patriarchal classrooms that disenfranchise females through the male texts, allowing male interruption, or allowing basic male domination in any form, perpetuates 'doing gender', since the stereotype of females is silent and shy. Teachers who play into stereotypes about 'doing gender,' are allowing sexist domination and schwelching the learning of females. Dimatteo says it's not enough to acknowledge diversity and develop ways to practice multiculturalism because the status quo will still remain the same. It will still be built on exclusion, exploitation and it is the "American Experience" that needs to be demythologized and denaturalized.

The American Experience that perpetuates rigid gender roles, therefore valuing females and males who 'do gender' over those people who do not. If students are to be free thinkers, they first need to be taught to see the gender system. Giroux (1992) states, "This can only happen when there is a radical change in debate, with old values being stripped away arising in new ways of seeing" (qtd. in Jackson, 1997, p. 21). Teachers must challenge not only the ways in which gender exclusion takes place, but the construction of exclusion itself. This connects to a feminist, collaborative, teaching theory because it is democratic, which in turn creates a more open learning environment that invites, not only learning about, but the changing of negative gender systems present in classrooms. Giroux (1992) also stated that, "Radical education, is interdisciplinary: it questions fundamental categories and is concerned with making society more democratic. It brings together theory and practice" (qtd. in Jackson, p.42-43, 1997). Investigating social systems openly, with the goal of making them better through change, can only successfully take place within a collaborative classroom. Since teaching and writing are critical modes of change, the way in which teaching and writing takes place, becomes the center around which to focus. A course in gender and language studies and the way it is taught can be constructed to embrace democratic, collaborative learning, if it is carefully put together.

There are many ways to comprise collaborative teaching methods within the classroom. In his book "Border Crossings," Henry Giroux states,

"Pedagogic conditions must be created which enable students to make border crossing, deconstructing and challenging dominant power relations" (qtd. in Jackson,1997, p.458). Chapter seven provides a generic syllabus for a course in gender and language studies, that is based on collaborative, feminist teaching and learning methods. The course objectives themselves (see page 41), exemplify an open learning environment, that closely models and values what Dimatteo, Giroux, Goldstien, Gore, Weiner and Weiler collectively call for. To begin painting a picture of this kind of classroom, a physical description is needed first and foremost. The classroom set-up of desks or tables arranged in a circle, can create the psychological environment needed for collaborative learning. It sets the students in a physical position to not only share in learning through speaking, but listening as well. This kind of classroom set-up battling against what Sethi describes when she explains the experience of one female student in her class as saying, "I sit in the back row of class and watch the intellectual pin-ball game: from professor to student..." (Sethi, 1994, p. 62). In this circle of desks, the teacher becomes part of the learning group which takes away from the authority figure or power position, which values lecturing and filling the students as if they were sponges, needing to regurgitate for tests. ÏFeminist and student-centered pedagogical structurings have arisen that do not portray the teacher as the only source of all knowledge and powerÓ (McAndrew, 1996, p.369). McAndrew more specifically supports this by stating, "The lecture classroom with its rigid hierarchy of the teacher up front lording it over students seated in rows, a managerial heirarchy that silences student voices through domination, is being replaced by alternatives like the writing/reading workshop with the teacher moving about the classroom or seated in student desks..." (McAndrew, 1996, p.369). Being in a circle with the students also values questioning the authority figure because the teacher is not hovering over the students up in front of the room, behind a podium. This lessens the hierarchical environment that many teachers still use and value. Gaby Weiner (1994) supports this theory by stating, "A feminist pedagogy is one that questions the role and authority of the teacher, considers questions of difference, and considers personal experience" (qtd. in Jackson, 1997, p.125-127). Kathleen Weiler (19991) goes further with this theory stating, "A feminist pedagogy is about questioning the role and authority of the teacher, explaining difference, and valuing personal experience, above all feminist pedagogy rests on a vision of social transformation" (qtd. in Jackson, 1997, p.149-150).Group projects that are done in small groups have the same collaborative goal in mind. Learning collaboratively, means that learning is a project the whole class is involved in, whether in small or large groups. The students are allowed and pushed to create a text of learning collectively, which models the female discourse practice discussed by Overman and Jeske; thus female students may be less stifled in this kind of classroom set-up. At the University of New York Law School, small groups are a pedagogical practice that Sethi explains as "Comprised of small, supportive groups, the house model is a comparatively non-threatening environment within which students can

feel nurtured and supported" (Sethi, 1994, p.65).

Sitting in a circle in class helps to accomplish the goals involved in having students take turns reading texts out-loud. Reading out-loud is an activity that is present in the weekly schedule part of the syllabus in chapter seven. First, reading out-loud creates an environment where everyone gets a chance to speak and is not silenced. Mc Connell (1994) states that "the climate we create in our institutions must encourage those who have been victimized by bias to speak out" (qtd. in Sethi, 1994, p.65). Sethi supports this in part two of her article called ÏSpeech As A Liberatory and Transformative Tool.Ó Speaking out loud assumes the language of the power structure as it gives a voice to persons not included in that structure. In this sense, reading out loud can be validating to students. "Audre Lorde, in a paper delivered for the Modern Language Association encouraged 'oppressed' people to speak out in order to self-heal" (Sethi, 1994, p.64). It may also inspire better listening skills, because students have to pay attention to know when it is there turn to speak by following along in the text. Student are also accountable for discussion about the reading afterward, which encourages listening carefully. This activity does not include calling on people who are not ready to speak, by putting them on the spot, because that may embarrass and stifle some students who need time to reflect and think. As a result, this activity values diversity within learning styles (see page 47). The most significant aspect of reading out loud is stated by Sethi, "The process of speaking, of disclosing helps to dissipate the pain and alienation of oneÌs experience. It forces everyone in the room to contend with their responsibility, complicity, or ignorance. Voicing words publicly is emboldening as it legitimates and confirms our experiences as real" (Sethi, 1994, p.64).

Embracing a liberatory pedagogical classroom also needs to be reflected in the way in which students show what they have learned. In the syllabus presented in chapter seven, there is not a traditional exam, because regurgitating memorized information is not the goal. Having short one paragraph reactions right after a reading, combined with discussion will assure that students learn the information, which is better than simple memorization because students gain a deeper understanding of the material and can analyze it. Traditional exams value memorization and this syllabus values understanding, which is accomplished through open discussion, reading, and written responses.

Having a pre-test (see page 49), gives the teacher an understanding of what level the students are at in the beginning of the course, as to make any adjustments accordingly. Learning the key concepts or answers to the pre-test through group discussion will aid in the understanding and analyses of them. Students who can work with a set of key concepts throughout a course, have a better chance of synthesizing them by the end of the course, when the post-test is given. The post-test (see page 49) is exactly the same as the pre-test, and from this, the instructor can measure how much the students have learned; therefore evaluating the course itself and if it needs any adjustments. The definitions of terms in the pre/post-test are partially from the Webster's dic

tionary and improvised by the instructor. The students need to be informed that there are other definitions of the key concepts. Informing them of this values feminist, democratic ideologies in that it teaches students to question authorities and search for more than one answer in their academic quests for knowledge.

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