Language and Gender
Language and Gender is...

- **Language and gender** is an area of study within sociolinguistics, applied linguistics, and related fields that investigates varieties of speech associated with a particular gender, or social norms for such gendered language use.

- **Sociolinguistics**: is the descriptive study of the effect of any and all aspects of society, including cultural norms, expectations, and context, on the way language is used, and the effects of language use on society.

- **Applied Linguistics**: is an interdisciplinary field of study that identifies, investigates, and offers solutions to language-related real-life problems.
Otto Jespersen (16 July 1860 – 30 April 1943)
- was a Danish linguist who specialized in the grammar of the English language.

- Jespersen's contributions remain relevant. These include the prospect of language change based on social and gendered opportunity, lexical (words of language) and phonological differences, and the idea of genderlects and gender roles influence language.
Robin Lakoff (born 1942)
- identified a "women's register," which she argued served to maintain women's (inferior) role in society.

- Her view of women’s register included:
  - **Tag Question**: "You're John, aren't you?"
  - **High Rising Intonation**: is a feature of some accents of English where statements have a rising intonation pattern in the final syllable or syllables of the utterance.
  - **Weak Directives**: (directives) speech acts that are to cause the hearer to take a particular action.
Studies of Gender and Language

- Jennifer Coates
  - outlines the historical range of approaches to gendered speech in her book *Women, Men and Language*. She contrasts the four approaches known the deficit, dominance, difference, and dynamic approaches.
Studies of Gender and Language

- **Deficit** is an approach established by Lakoff (1975) that introduces a 'women's language' as classified by linguistic trends in women's speech. This approach created a dichotomy between women's language and men's language.

- **Dominance** is an approach whereby the female sex is seen as the subordinate group whose difference in style of speech results from male supremacy and also possibly an effect of patriarchy.
Studies of Gender and language

- *Difference* is an approach of equality, differentiating men and women as belonging to different 'sub-cultures' as they have been socialized to do so since childhood. This then results in the varying communicative styles of men and women.
The "dynamic" or "social constructionist" approach is, as Coates describes, the most current approach to language and gender. Instead of speech falling into a natural gendered category, the dynamic nature and multiple factors of an interaction help a socially appropriate gendered construct.
Speech Practices Associated With Gender

- **Minimal Responses:** “mhm” and “yeah” are usually used to communicate that you are listening. These are used less frequently by men and mostly to show agreement.

- **Questions:** Men and women differ in their use of questions in conversations. For men, a question is usually a genuine request for information whereas with women it can often be a rhetorical means of engaging the other’s conversational contribution or of acquiring attention from others conversationally involved.
Speech Practices Associated With Gender

- **Turn Taking**: women are more likely to encourage turn-taking in a conversation, while men are more focused on their own points of view.

- **Changing the Topic of Conversation**: According to Bruce Dorval in his study of same-sex friend interaction, males tend to change subject more frequently than females. This difference may well be at the root of the conception that women chatter and talk too much, and may still trigger the same thinking in some males.
Speech Practices Associated With Gender

- **Self-Disclosure:** Female tendencies toward self-disclosure, i.e., sharing their problems and experiences with others, often to offer sympathy, contrasts with male tendencies to non-self disclosure and professing advice or offering a solution when confronted with another’s problems.

- **Verbal Aggression:** For years, all research on aggression focused primarily on males because it was believed females were non-confrontational. Recently however, people have realized that while "boys tend to be more overtly and physically aggressive, girls are more indirectly, socially, and relationally aggressive."
Speech Practices Associated With Gender

- **Listening and Attentiveness:** It appears that women attach more weight than men to the importance of listening in conversation, with its connotations of power to the listener as confidant of the speaker.
- **Men, however, interrupt far more frequently with non-related topics, especially in the mixed sex setting and, far from rendering a female speaker's responses minimal, are apt to greet her conversational spotlights with silence**
Speech Practices Associated With Gender

- **Dominance vs. Subjection:** Men desire conversational dominance while women want to participate in group conversation.

- **Politeness:** Lakoff (1975) identified three forms of politeness: formal, deference, and camaraderie. Women's language is characterized by formal and deference politeness, whereas men’s language is exemplified by camaraderie.
  - (Women are usually more polite, while Men require rapport in before initiating politeness. )