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Gender Pragmatics, Transgender and Challenges

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Abstract: This research investigates the linguistic implications of transgenderism with the objective of determining the impact of transgenderism on existing gender theories. The orientation of this research is situated in the linguistic field of pragmatics and adopts Yule's (1996) classification of presupposition as the theoretical framework for this study. The research problem is hinged on the fact that disruptive processes create upheavals for existing structures such that the affected structures require critical rescue. In this connection, transgenderism and its attendant complications pose strong challenges for gender pragmatics. The data is a real-life video, captioned "Sorry, I'm A Man", collected from JERRY SPRINGER – Transsexual Tell All official channel on YouTube. The method of this research is qualitative. The methodological paradigm is interpretive, based on content analysis. The relevance of this research is based on its contribution to resources geared towards salvaging humanity from adulteration and destruction, particularly being that language and gender are essential constituents of the existence of human beings.
Keywords: Gender Pragmatics; Transgender; Presuppositions; Challenges.

INTRODUCTION

Gender is used to describe socially constructed categories that are based on sex. Basically, sex is a biological concept that has to do with male and female species, as created by God. Essentially, God created two sexes, namely, male and female. So, sex is nature-based.

Apparently, gender is hinged on sex, but largely a social construct determined by the regulations and expectations of the culture of a society. Gender is basically a social product; a social phenomenon; a cultural construct whereby a society makes someone either masculine or feminine. Inherently, gender is nurture oriented. Thus, sex is nature-based and refers to being either male or female, while gender is nurture-oriented and refers to masculinity or femininity issues.

However, gender identities have gone beyond male and female, to include transgender, gender neutral, non-binary, agender, bigender, cisgender, pangender, genderqueer, gender nonconforming, gender fluid, and more. Nevertheless, transgender is the gender identity that is the concern of this research.

A transgender person is typically someone whose gender identity differs from that which is distinctively associated with the sex defined by their birth. Ever since the categorization of transgender symptom as gender dysphoria (i.e. a condition in which someone feels that they were born with the wrong sex, which results to strong dislike of one's sexual anatomy), alongside the trans pride movement, the term 'transgender' came into widespread use during the 1990s.

However, scholars such as Virginia Prince and Harry Benjamin have tracked the term's origins to the 1950s and 1960s, when it was used both in medicine and by trans activists such as Christine

Jorgensen, an American trans woman who was the first person to become widely known in the USA for having sex reassignment surgery.

The aim of this study is to examine the linguistic implications of transgenderism with the objective of determining the impact of transgenderism on existing gender theories, from the perspective of pragmatics. Pragmatics is a branch of Linguistics which focuses on the study of how meaning is determined or influenced by context, as well as how people produce and interpret meaning. The context could be physical or social.

Gender pragmatics is concerned with the study of language use that investigates the connection between meaning generation and gender. Basically, this study focuses on the sex / gender dichotomy of the transgender person in relation to language use and meaning in context.

The research problem is hinged on the fact that disruptive processes generate disarray for existing structures such that the affected structures require critical rescue. In this connection, transgenderism and its attendant complications pose strong challenges for gender pragmatics. The following research questions call for attention:
- What challenges could transgenderism pose for gender pragmatics?
- What could be the disruptive impact of transgenderism?

The significance of this research is based on its contribution to resources geared towards salvaging humanity from adulteration and destruction, particularly being that language and gender are essential constituents of the existence of human beings.

Evidently, literature on gender studies is prevalent from diverse perspectives, some of which are presented as follows. Boyi (2013), titled "Gender Studies and Sustainable Development in Nigeria", focused on three key issues namely: gender, gender inequality/stratification and sustainable development. The paper highlighted different forms of gender inequality that are challenges to achieving sustainable development in Nigeria and other parts of the world, particularly educational, professional, household, ownership, and natality inequalities.

Yang (2013), titled "Gender Differences in Pragmatic Strategies of Disagreement in Chinese", examined gender differences in the selection of pragmatic strategies of disagreement. The study was based on Searle's speech acts theory; Brown and Levinson's politeness theory; as well as Gu's Chinese politeness maxims. The findings show that females are more likely to use mitigated strategies than males, and males tend to use aggravated strategies more frequently than females. Such differences indicate different gender psychology and gender identities in their socialization process.

Kukla, Q. & Lance, M. (2023) titled "Telling Gender: The Pragmatics and Ethics of Gender Ascriptions", focused on a pragmatic analysis of the structure of gender ascriptions. The findings depict that the grammar of gender ascriptions helps to hide the equivocation between the constitutive work of language and its putative descriptive work, which the writers call for revision.

The concern of this research is to investigate the linguistic implications of transgenderism with the objective of determining the impact of transgenderism on existing gender theories. The orientation of this research is situated in the linguistic field of pragmatics and adopts Yule's (1996) classification of presupposition as the theoretical framework for this study.

Yule's (1996) Presentation of Presupposition

In explicating the concept of presupposition, Yule (1996: 26 - 27) provides some instances as follows:

> If we say that the sentence in [2a.] contains the proposition p and the sentence in [2b.] contains the proposition q, then, using the symbol >> to mean 'presupposes', we can represent the relationship as in [2c.]:
> [2]   a. Mary's dog is cute. (= p)
>   b. Mary has a dog. (= q)
>   c. $p >> q$

Interestingly, when we produce the opposite of the sentence in [2a.] by negating it (= NOT p), as in [3a.], we find that the relationship of presupposition doesn't change. That is, the same proposition q, repeated as [3b.], continues to be presupposed by NOT p, as shown in [3c.]:
[3]   a. Mary's dog isn't cute.   (= NOT p)
        b. Mary has a dog.   (= q)
        c. NOT $p >> q$

This property of presupposition is generally described as **constancy under negation**. Basically, it means that the presupposition of a statement will remain constant (i.e. still true) even when that statement is negated.

Types of Presupposition

Yule (1996) points out that in the analysis of how speakers' assumptions are typically expressed, presupposition has been associated with the use of many words, phrases, and structures. He considers these linguistic forms here as indicators of potential presupposition which can only become actual

presupposition in contexts with speakers. Yule (1996: 27 – 29) provides six main types of presupposition as presented below.

1) Existential Presupposition: The possessive construction in English is associated with a presupposition of existence, as already illustrated in examples [2] and [3] above. However, the existential presupposition is not only assumed to be present in possessive constructions (for example, 'your car' >> 'you have a car'), but more generally in any definite noun phrase. By using any of the expressions in [5], the speaker is assumed to be committed to the existence of the entities named:
[5] The King of Sweden, the cat, the girl next door, the Counting Crows

2) Factive Presupposition: A different type of presupposition occurs in the structure with the verb 'know', for example:
> [4] 'Everybody knows that *q*', with *q* as the presupposition.

The presupposed information following a verb like 'know' can be treated as a fact and is described as a factive presupposition. A few other verbs, such as 'realize', 'regret', as well as phrases involving 'be' with 'aware', 'odd', and 'glad' have factive presupposition.

3) Lexical Presupposition: There are also a few other forms which may best be treated as the source of lexical presupposition; the use of one form with its asserted meaning is conventionally interpreted with the presupposition that another (non-asserted) meaning is understood. Each time you say that someone 'managed' to do something, the asserted meaning is that the person succeeded in some way. When you say that someone 'didn't manage', the asserted meaning is that the person did not succeed. In both cases, however, there is a presupposition (non-asserted) that the person 'tried' to do something. So, 'managed' is conventionally interpreted as asserting 'succeeded' and presupposing 'tried'. Other examples involving the lexical items, 'stop', 'start', and 'again', are presented, with their presupposition, in [7].
> [7] a. He stopped smoking. (>> He used to smoke)
> b. They started complaining. (>> They weren't complaining before)
> c. You're late again. (>> You were late before)

In the case of lexical presupposition, the speaker's use of a particular expression is taken to presuppose another (unstated) concept, whereas in the case of a factive presupposition, the use of a particular expression is taken to presuppose the truth of the information that is stated after it.

4) Structural Presupposition: In addition to presuppositions which are associated with the use of certain words and phrases, there are also structural presuppositions. In this case, certain sentence structures have been analyzed conventionally and regularly presupposing that part of the structure is already assumed to be true. We might say that speakers can use such structures to treat information as presupposed (i.e. assumed to be true) and hence to be accepted as true by the listener. For example, the wh-question construction in English, as shown in [8a] and [8b], is conventionally interpreted with the presupposition that the information after the wh-form (i.e. 'When' and 'Where') is already known to be the case.
> [8] a. When did he leave? (>> He left)
> b. Where did you buy the bike? (>> You bought the bike)

The type of presupposition illustrated in [8] can lead listeners to believe that the information presented is necessarily true, rather than just the presupposition of the person asking the question. Such structurally based presuppositions may represent subtle ways of making information that the speaker believes appear to be what the listener should believe.

5) Non-factive Preupposition: A non-factive presupposition is one that is assumed not to be true. There are, however, examples of non-factive presuppositions associated with a few verbs in English. Verbs like 'dream', 'imagine', and 'pretend', as shown in [10], are used with the presupposition that what follows is not true.
> [10] a. I dreamed that I was rich. (>> I was not rich)
> b. We imagined we were in Hawaii. (>> We were not in Hawaii)
> c. He pretends to be ill. (>> He is not ill)

6) Counter-factual Presupposition: This type of presupposition means that what is presupposed is not only not true, but is the opposite of what is true, or 'contrary to facts.' A conditional structure of the type shown in [11], generally called a counterfactual conditional, presupposes that the information in the if-clause is not true at the time of utterance:
> [11] If you were my friend, you would have helped me. (>> You are not my friend)

Such conditional constructions are also interpreted with non-factive presupposition.

MATERIALS AND METHOD
The data is a real-life video, captioned "Sorry, I'm A Man", collected from JERRY SPRINGER – Transsexual Tell All official channel on YouTube. The method of this research is qualitative. The

methodological paradigm is interpretive, based on content analysis.

Data Presentation: The Video - "Sorry, I'm A Man"

Jerry Springer: Welcome, Ceaser. How did you guys meet?

Ceaser: Emm! At the bar.

Jerry Springer: At the bar. In the city?

Ceaser: Yeah! In the city, Manhattan.

Jerry Springer: And was it like wow, right at first sight, or?

Ceaser: Ahh, when I first saw her, yeah, because she's beautiful, so, you know, when I first saw her, it was, I got to talk to that, yeah, and from there, you know, you know what I mean.

Jerry Springer: Was it nice?

Ceaser: Yeah! I know. Yeah, you know, but into the night it clicked.

Jerry Springer: Aha, and you really like her?

Ceaser: Definitely. Definitely.

Jerry Springer: Okay. So, you don't know why you're here?

Ceaser: No. Not at all.

Jerry Springer: Okay.

Adrianna: Well, we've been seeing each other and so we have a really good connection and if we are going to pursue things, there's something that you do need to know. Emm, I was born a man.

Ceaser: So, you're telling me, I don't understand, you have been deceiving me?

Adrianna: Not anymore.

Ceaser: What do you mean, not anymore?

Adrianna: Not anymore. I don't

Ceaser: That doesn't make any sense. That doesn't make any sense. We've been dating for this long and you come here to tell me that you're a man.

Adrianna: It was hard.

Ceaser: Hard for what?

Adrianna: Hard to tell you. I care about you.

Ceaser: How could you care about me and you're lying to me the whole time.

Adrianna: Because I was afraid that you're going to leave without even giving me a chance.

Ceaser: Oh! Well, that's the point. That's why you should have told me from the beginning, and we wouldn't have to go through all of this, because at the end,

Adrianna: So, what are you saying though? Like, is it?

Ceaser: I'm saying, I don't want to be with a man. That's what I'm saying. I want to be with a woman. That's what I thought you were from the beginning. A woman, not a man! Uh! You're supposed to let people know, give people. I'm straight, that's what I am. I'm straight. I'm not.

Adrianna: And I am a woman.

Ceaser: And no. You're gay. That's what you are.

Adrianna: I am a woman.

Ceaser: No, you're gay. That's what you are.

Adrianna: I am a woman. Let me tell you something, I am a woman.

Ceaser: Keep your hands down. You're gay. You're gay. That's what you are.

Adrianna: I am a woman.

Ceaser: You're gay. You're gay. That's what you are.

Adrianna: I am a woman.

Ceaser: No, you're not a woman.

Adrianna: Yes, I was. I was a woman that night. I am a woman now.

Ceaser: Were you born a woman? Were you born a woman?

Adrianna: It does not matter. I do everything and better.

Ceaser: You were a man that night. That's what you were, a man.

Adrianna: And you didn't mind.

Ceaser: No.

Adrianna: And you didn't mind.

Ceaser: Because I thought you were a woman.

Adrianna: And you didn't mind.

Ceaser: Who would? Who?

Adrianna: You loved it.

Ceaser: I did love it. You know what? I'm not even going to be mad about that because,

Adrianna: So, guess what?

Ceaser: You know what though?

Adrianna: What?

Ceaser: You lied to me though. So, what I loved is no more.

Adrianna: And I apologize for that.

Ceaser: No! Apology! There's no apology!

Adrianna: Chill out! Chill out!

Ceaser: How are going to apologize to me after telling me, that's not something you apologize for. That's not something you, "I'm sorry, I'm a man." What is that?

Presuppositions in the Video: "Sorry, I'm A Man"

Yule's(1996) classification of presupposition is adopted for the analysis of the data. Intrinsically, gender is hinged on sex, but largely a social construct determined by the regulations and expectations of the culture of a society. To the extent that sex is a biological concept that has to do with male and female species, as created by God, certain characteristics distinguish the male from the female humans. A major distinctive biological component which is integral to human constituents called deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA), that is the molecule that carries genetic information for the development and functioning of an organism, is marked by the chromosomes which are unchangeable. The male species carry the XY Chromosome, while the female species carry the XX Chromosome. Each species is delineated by age and categorized as either plus (+)

or minus (-) Adult. So, the human male specie could be:

 +Adult = Man
 -Adult = Boy.

On the other hand, the human female specie could be:
 +Adult = Woman
 -Adult = Girl.

Basically, the shared background knowledge of the human sex is categorized as either the male species (i.e. Boy or Man) or the female species (i.e. Girl or Woman), respectively.

Thus, the conceptual meaning of **Man** denotes: +Human, +Male, +Adult, with several connotative meanings such as being logical, bold, brave, courageous, power-driven, aggressive tendencies, etc. On the other hand, the conceptual meaning of **Woman** denotes: +Human, -Male, +Adult, with several connotative meanings such as being emotional, gregarious, maternal instinct, capable of speech, experienced in cookery, highly intuitive, gentle tendencies, etc.

Below is an analysis of the presuppositions underlying some gendered expressions contained in the data for this research as presented in the preceding section above.

Extract One
Adrianna: Well, we've been seeing each other and so we have a really good connection and if we are going to pursue things, there's something that you do need to know. Emm, I was born a man.

In this Extract One, Adrianna says "Emm, I was born a man". This utterance contains existential presupposition. Invariably, the existential presupposition is associated with the lexical items: "I was born" which stipulates the existence of a human being. In the prevailing situation, the human being associated is called Adrianna. However, the lexical items "was born a man" presupposes that the individual used to be a male sex but has transited to a female sex. That confession was shocking to the partner called Ceaser, who is a straight real male.

Extract Two
Ceaser: I'm saying, I don't want to be with a man. That's what I'm saying. I want to be with a woman. That's what I thought you were from the beginning. A woman, not a man! Uh! You're supposed to let people know, give people. I'm straight, that's what I am. I'm straight. I'm not.
Adrianna: And I am a woman.
Ceaser: And no. You're gay. That's what you are.

In this Extract Two, Ceaser says: "I don't want to be with a man." His utterance contains existential presupposition connected with the existing biological distinctions of "a man" as the human adult male specie. Being that Ceaser is a straight real man, he would rather be in an intimate relationship with a straight real woman.

However, Adrianna's utterance: "And I am a woman" contains counter-factual presupposition. This type of presupposition means that what is presupposed is not only not true, but is the opposite of what is true, or contrary to facts. From Adrianna's confession: "Emm, I was born a man", the biological component of a man is XY Chromosome which does not change if the human being exists, so how could such individual then utter: "And I am a woman", while still existing with the male's XY Chromosome despite the illusionary transition to the female sex?

Extract Three
Adrianna: I am a woman.
Ceaser: No, you're not a woman.
Adrianna: Yes, I was. I was a woman that night. I am a woman now.
Ceaser: Were you born a woman? Were you born a woman?

In this Extract Three, Ceaser asks Adrianna: "Were you born a woman?" This question contains existential presupposition associated with the lexical items "born a woman?" which presupposes that an individual's sex is determined by birth which specifies the sex identity for the individual's existence.

To the extent that the **human DNA cannot be changed**, regardless of sex reassignment surgery, what could then be the motivation and benefit of engaging in both transsexual and transvestite components of transgenderism?

Gender Pragmatics and Challenges of Transgender
Transgenderism is negatively disruptive and could corrupt established findings about male and female human species with regards to communication and interaction. For instance, the third person singular pronouns in the English Language have been compromised such that the transgender have preferred personal pronouns as shown below:
- Preferred Gender Pronouns:
    - Trans Man: He / Him / His
    - Trans Woman: She / Her / Hers

The disruption of the third person singular pronouns has led to the adoption of plural pronouns, as gender neutral pronouns, to refer to singular entities as shown below:

- Gender Neutral Pronouns:
  - Singular: They / Them / Their / Theirs

Moreover, with reference to the data for this research presented in the sections above, the aggressive behaviour of Adrianna, the trans woman, negates expectations assigned to straight and real females from the perspective of gender theories such as deficit theory, doing gender theory, cultural theory, difference theory, and others.

Furthermore, consider the following clip from the same data above, that is the video: "Sorry, I'm A Man":

Ceaser: You lied to me though. So, what I loved is no more.
Adrianna: And I apologize for that.
Ceaser: No! Apology! There's no apology!
Adrianna: Chill out! Chill out!
Ceaser: How are going to apologize to me after telling me, that's not something you apologize for. That's not something you, "I'm sorry, I'm a man." What is that?

In connection with the above clip, how could Ceaser, the straight and real man who was deceived, be comfortable with dating a trans woman, regardless her apologies for concealing being born a male? Apologizing as an expressive speech act could only be relevant in issues that can be amended or pardoned.

Transgenderism constitutes a compelling negative challenge for gender pragmatics such that research in gender pragmatics could become confusing and terribly compromised.

CONCLUSION

Invariably, transgenderism poses a very strong threat to gender pragmatics, amidst its disruption and corruption.

On a thoughtful note, transgender people risk both social and medical discrimination, social stigma, depression, and worse still, suicidal tendencies. So, what then could be the attraction to transgenderism?

Ultimately, the widespread menace of transgenderism should cease. Research on strategies to curb transgenderism and abnormal gender tendencies is strongly recommended.

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