

“COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF MALE AND FEMALE LINGUISTIC FEATURES IN THE MOVIE “MY FAIR LADY”

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Abstract

This study analyzes the linguistic differences between male and female characters in the film My Fair Lady (1964) through a feminist linguistic lens. Drawing upon Robin Lakoff's theory of women's language (2004) and Dale Spender's critique of patriarchal discourse (1998), the research examines how language functions as a marker of gender, class, and power. Focusing on the dialogues between Eliza Doolittle and Professor Henry Higgins, the study highlights how linguistic prejudice, accent modification, and social mobility intersect within a patriarchal hierarchy. Findings suggest that women's linguistic conformity is portrayed as essential to social acceptance, revealing the ideological bias embedded in both language and culture.

Key Words:

Gendered language, Feminist linguistics, Patriarchy, My Fair Lady, Robin Lakoff, Dale Spender, Sociolinguistics, Linguistic prejudice, Power dynamics, Class and gender.

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1. Introduction

Language is not a means of communication, but it is an indicator of social identity, and the sphere in which power relations are built and sustained. Language in cinematic discourses tends to echo and support hierarchies in the society and it gives an understanding of the implicit ideologies that human beings interact with. My Fair Lady (1964) directed by George Cukor based on a play written by George Bernard Shaw, Pygmalion (1913), provides an example of such a phenomenon very well. The movie tells the tale of Eliza Doolittle, a Cockney flower girl whose colloquialism is said to be inferior socially. Professor Henry Higgins, a linguist and a teacher, takes the pain to correct her speech and manners to fit the language and social conventions of the aristocratic society. Although the transformation is introduced as a social climbing story, they also reveal the gendered and stratified power networks within British society in the middle of the twentieth century.

The linguistic path of Eliza Doolittle in the movie is not merely the phonetic remediation, but rather the symbol of social rise and turmoil of the patriarchal notion (Diteman, 2024). The control that Higgins has over the language emphasizes how in the past, men were the ones to establish the norms of proper speech, which gave them social control over women. His corrections, which span vowel-sounds and consonants, Cockneyisms, and even the choice of

avoiding Cockneyisms, are not, as such, acts of education, but are, instead, interventions that control the social identity of Eliza. Language thus functions as a form of empowerment and a means of control whereby the ways in which women are viewed and regarded in society is constructed.

Another aspect of the film that brings out the nuances of gendering speech as a form of influence on audience perception is the way in which the speaker is perceived by the audience. According to Robin Lakoff (2004), the language of women is characterized by politeness, tentativeness, hedging, as well as indirectness, and the speech of men is usually authoritative, assertive, and controlling. The communication of not just the differences between classes, but also the hierarchy between genders is conveyed through this difference, which can be traced in the dialogues of *My Fair Lady*. The fact that Eliza speaks Cockney at the beginning places her at a socially marginal position, and her eventual switch to the use of the etiquette English language is an indication that she wants to conform to socially-constructed standards of being in the mainstream of male society. The viewers are set to perceive her verbal elegance as a sign of intelligence and respectability but the subtext to all this is that this change is only possible under the guidance and counsel of men.

Additionally, the movie puts language in its further social and cultural contexts. The mid-twentieth-century Britain was marked with strict class division, where language became one of the major markers of social status. Speaking proper English was equated with education, sophistication, and moral refinement and vernacular speech became stigmatized as vulgar or unworthy (Coppack, 2025). In this perception, women such as Eliza had fewer opportunities of ascending the hierarchy and spoken conformity was a condition of social inclusion. *My Fair Lady* romanticizes this relationship by showing the way in which patriarchal cultures equate the value of women with their capacity to conform to male-constructed norms of behavior and speech.

The lack of research in the literature regarding *My Fair Lady* also makes the significance of a feminist approach to linguistics more obvious. Past literature, including Echezona-Johnson (2014), has concentrated on Eliza and her transformative learning experience without bringing up gendered hierarchies in the use of language. In the same way, Jiao and Li (2017) also studied sociolinguistic patterns in the movie, but ignored the idea that male and female speech indicate more prominent patterns of patriarchy. This paper explores not only macro-level implications of linguistic control that Spender (1998) highlights, but also micro-level linguistic mechanisms of women language, such as hedges, tag questions, politeness strategies, etc., by applying the feminist linguistic lens to the subject. The intersection of class, gender, and language in *My fair lady* presents a special chance of discussing how the social hierarchies are reproduced, challenged, or negotiated in the cinema narratives.

The analysis of *My Fair Lady* can thus be placed within the wider context of feminist sociolinguistics in this article and how language can be a tool of oppression and possible resistance. The study evaluates how linguistic transformation can be understood as a mirror of social power relations, the light of patriarchal ideologies, and help the audience to form their expectations about gender and classes by analyzing the conversation between Eliza and Higgins. In this analysis, it is clear that the process of women speech refinement is not only an educational process or a process of self-bettering but rather a process of social mediation that meets the requirements and expectations of men. In such a manner, *My Fair Lady* shows the perennality of language as an object of the study of a gendered power and the ideological areas of the social mobility.

To sum up, the introduction preconditions a critical exploration of the connection between language, gender, and power in *My Fair Lady*. It follows that by following a feminist linguistic approach, this paper is able to analyze the peculiarities of male and female speech

and place them into the cultural and social frameworks that predetermine the domination of paternalism. It is through the prism of Lakoff and Spender that the movie comes out as more than a musical; it is an elaborate examination of how language interacts to create and mediate identity, authority, and gendered social role within a particular historical context.

1.1 Research Objectives and Research Questions

In light of the above discussion, this study aims to critically examine the role of language as a site of gendered and class-based power in *My Fair Lady* through a feminist sociolinguistic framework. The primary objective of this research is to investigate how linguistic practices in the film construct, reinforce, and legitimize patriarchal and class hierarchies, particularly through the transformation of Eliza Doolittle's speech. By foregrounding feminist linguistic theories, this paper seeks to move beyond interpretations of linguistic change as mere self-improvement and instead frame it as a mechanism of social control and ideological regulation.

Specifically, the objectives of the study are to:

1. Analyze how male and female speech patterns in *My Fair Lady* reflect and sustain gendered power relations.
2. Examine the ways linguistic correction and "proper" speech function as tools of patriarchal authority and class mobility.
3. Identify micro-level linguistic features (such as hedges, politeness strategies, and indirectness) that contribute to the construction of feminine speech in the film.
4. Explore how language mediates audience perceptions of intelligence, respectability, and social legitimacy.

Guided by these objectives, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How does language use in *My Fair Lady* construct and reinforce gender and class hierarchies?
2. In what ways does Professor Higgins' linguistic authority reflect patriarchal control over female identity and social mobility?
3. How are features of women's language represented in Eliza Doolittle's speech, and what ideological functions do they serve?
4. How does the film's portrayal of linguistic transformation shape audience perceptions of femininity, respectability, and power?

2. Literature Review

The intersection of gender, language and power in the media and literature has been studied by scholars over a long time. In his original creation, (1975/2004) *Language and Woman Place*, Lakoff introduced such phenomena as hedging, tag questions, politeness, and indirectness to be peculiar to the speech of women as they are the marginalized members of society. In line with this, Spender (1998) posited that the language has been historically man-made and that it is a way of maintaining patriarchal domination. These theories still play a central role in the interpretation of gender discussion in cultural stories.

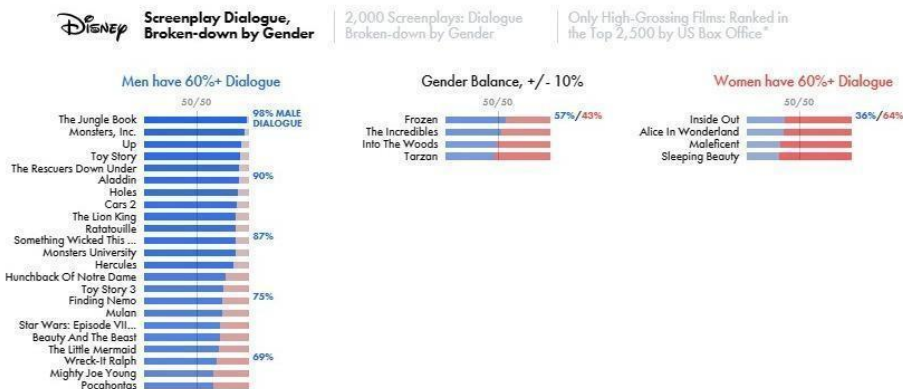


Figure 1: *Film dialogue for 2,000 films, broken down by age and gender* (Anderson & Daniels, 2016).

Dan and Rui (2017) examine *My Fair Lady* from a sociolinguistic perspective, focusing on the relationship between language behavior and social background. The study argues that linguistic variation is closely shaped by factors such as social class, gender, and geographical origin, even among speakers of the same language. Through analysis of the film's dialogue, the authors demonstrate how characters' speech patterns reflect and reinforce their social status, with particular attention to accent, pronunciation, and language use as indicators of class mobility. While the study acknowledges gender as one of the variables influencing language behavior, its primary emphasis remains on social class and sociolinguistic variation rather than on a detailed comparison of male and female linguistic features. Consequently, although the research provides useful insights into how language mediates social status and identity in *My Fair Lady*, it does not explicitly engage with feminist linguistic theory or systematically analyze gendered power relations in male and female speech. This limitation highlights a gap that the present study addresses by comparatively examining male and female linguistic features to reveal how gendered language use intersects with power and patriarchy in the film.

Thren (2018) conducts a sociolinguistic analysis of *My Fair Lady* with a primary focus on societal class differentiation as reflected through linguistic variables. The study examines phonological and grammatical features in the speech of upper- and lower-class characters, identifying consonantal and vocalic variables as the most salient markers distinguishing standard and non-standard varieties of British English. The findings indicate that standard linguistic forms are socially preferred and associated with higher class status, while non-standard forms are stigmatized and linked to lower class identity. By tabulating the distribution of these linguistic variables according to class membership, the study demonstrates how language functions as a symbolic marker of social hierarchy and group affiliation within the film. Although the analysis provides valuable empirical evidence of class-based linguistic variation, gender is not treated as an independent analytical category. As a result, differences in linguistic behavior between male and female characters remain underexplored. This limitation is particularly significant given that class mobility in *My Fair Lady* is enacted primarily through a female character, Eliza Doolittle. Therefore, while Thren's study contributes to understanding class-based linguistic stratification, it leaves room for further research that comparatively examines male and female linguistic features and interrogates how gender intersects with language and power in the film.

Khodijah's study analyzes the use of social dialect in *My Fair Lady*, with particular emphasis on the speech of Eliza Doolittle. Adopting a qualitative approach and drawing on Holmes' theory of social dialect, the research examines dialogue from the film script to identify

varieties of language used by the main character. The findings reveal the presence of four types of social dialects in the film: those based on social class, sex/gender, age, and ethnicity. Among these, social class-based dialects are identified as the most dominant in Eliza's speech. Although the study acknowledges sex/gender as one of the social factors influencing dialect variation, it does not provide a systematic comparative analysis of male and female linguistic features. Instead, the focus remains largely on Eliza's individual linguistic shifts as markers of class movement. Consequently, while the research contributes to understanding dialectal variation and sociolinguistic change in *My Fair Lady*, it leaves unexplored how male and female characters differ in their linguistic strategies and how such differences relate to power relations. This gap supports the need for a comparative gender-based linguistic analysis of the film.

The landmark work of Robin Lakoff, *Language and Woman Place* (2004) continues to form the basis of gendered language study. Lakoff has proved that there are certain linguistic characteristics which are more female in nature including hedges, tag questions, intensifiers, polite forms and frequent apologies. They are characteristics, she said, that show the low social status of women and serve to counteract the conflict and in the course of upholding social order. The patterns are actively dramatized in cinematic contexts, such as *My Fair Lady*, to draw a reflection of gendered expectations. To illustrate, the initial speech of Eliza Doolittle with its polite deferential and undecided tone reflects the low status women held in post-war Britain during the middle of the twentieth century (Giles, 2002). The framework by Lakoff enables researchers to study how these micro-linguistic elements can indicate larger hierarchies in society and affect the audience opinion about the competency, authority, and the social acceptability of characters.

Dale Spender (1998) makes this further analysis by concentrating on the ideological and structural aspects of language. In *Man Made Language* Spender argues that languages are socially and historically made by men in order to perpetuate the patriarchal dominance. The language is not simply indicative of the social power, but it is also actively involved in the perpetuation of social power as it provides legitimacy to patriarchal power and marginalization to the women. In *My fair Lady*, Professor Higgins is the symbol of this type of dynamics. Through his attempt to re-correct Eliza in her language, Higgins imposed linguistic rules of the upper social group therefore dominating the identity of Eliza and her social mobility. The macro-level perspective of Spender brings to the fore the institutionalized gendered linguistic oppression whereby what can be construed as education or even refinement is actually a social control mechanism.

A number of researches explored *My Fair Lady* as a language-learning tool and a sociolinguistic change. As an example, Echezona-Johnson (2014) applied transformative learning theory to the movie, focusing on the learning process and personal development of Eliza. Whereas this side of things emphasizes the pedagogical dimension of her change, it generally ignores the gendered consequences of lingo conformity. On the same note, Jiao and Li (2017) also explored the sociolinguistic aspects of the movie, where people social background plays a major role in the linguistic behaviors. Their work, however, overlooked the interaction between gender and the language with more emphasis on the class groups without based on the ideologies of patriarchy that were incorporated in the linguistic activities. Ma and Guo (2012) studied *My Fair Lady* through a sociolinguistic point of view but equally failed to use a feminist perspective to address such problematic questions as gendered language and power.

Gender differences in media talk have also been reported in quantitative studies. Conducted by Anderson and Daniels (2016), the massive analysis of 2,000 film scripts revealed that male characters always take up more dialogues than female characters and dominate them in

terms of frequency and power. Female characters, on the contrary, are most commonly pushed to the background or represented in a subservient speech pattern. This is in line with the findings by Lakoff on the marginalization of women in language and justifies the fact that language can be used to reinforce male power as argued by Spender. The significance of these studies lies in the fact that combining both feminist and qualitative study with more extensive quantitative results can help comprehend the role that media plays in reinforcing gendered linguistic structures.

In addition to *My Fair Lady*, the gendered language has been studied in different literature and media. Cameron (1998) placed special focus on the fact that language of women is socially created to serve relational and emotional purposes, which tend to be underrated in patriarchal societies. Tannen (1994) emphasized the styles of conversations, where men are more competitive and assertive in their speech, but women in their speech are cooperative and supportive. These theoretical frames are especially applicable to the movie, as the speech with the elements of aggressiveness and correctiveness by Higgins is contrasted with more hesitant and submissive words of Eliza, which dramatize the balance of power. Furthermore, these contributions demonstrate that the gendered language use in the film is not only reflective but also performative and it influences the manner in which viewers perceive the role of characters and social norms.

Another significant gap in the literature analysis of the intersection of class, gender, and language through a feminist perspective has been identified as well. Although previous researches have been conducted on sociolinguistic transformation, language learning and accent modification, not many studies have examined how the processes are gendered. *My Fair Lady* is a rare case study since the change that Eliza undergoes is both linguistic and social and gendered. Her fluency in the fine art of English is explained as a prerequisite to social acceptance, which supports the idea that female social mobility depends on the ability to live up to the stereotypes set by men. This scholarship gap points to the necessity of a more detailed, feminist linguistic study that considers micro-level linguistic elements and macro-level systems of social power.

Feminist linguists also focus upon ideological aspects of language. Language is one of the places where social norms are reproduced, resisted and negotiated. Humor and irony are employed in the movie to support stereotypes making the early speech of Eliza a joke and accentuating her social inferiority. However, her ultimate acquisition of high-end English proves the falsity of these standards and outlines the possibility of linguistic empowerment. This process is further contextualized based on the theoretical contribution of Bourdieu (1992) in terms of habitus in which people internalize norms and behaviours of dominant groups in society. The language change demonstrated by Eliza is the manifestation of this internalization and discloses the empowering and limiting features of language in bargaining the identity and social status.

Collectively, these analyses suggest that language in *My Fair Lady* functions at various levels: it is an identity that signals class, a means of gendered social regulation and a means of negotiating identity in patriarchal society. Combining a micro level analysis of Lakoff and macro level critique provided by Spender, the present research fills an important gap in the literature providing a full feminist linguistic approach to the film. This strategy does not only further elaborate our comprehension of gendered language within a cinematic story, it shows media as indicative of and supportive to larger ideological and social stratifications.

To sum up, although the theoretical topic of sociolinguistics, transformational learning and media image have been already investigated, there is a gap in the literature on exact intersection of gender, language and power in *My Fair Lady*. This paper is relevant to the body of literature by using the feminist perspective of linguistics to examine how the patterns

of speech of males and females in the movie confirm the power of patriarchy, mediate social mobility, and influence the audience's perception. Placing the linguistic transformation of Eliza in the context of the larger social structure of gender norms, this study can shed light on why the feminist linguistic theories continue to be relevant in analyzing language as an embodiment of power, control, and resistance with respect to the cultural discourse.

3. Theoretical Framework

Feminist study of language permits a critical exploration of the ways in which the linguistic practices reproduce and mirror social hierarchies, specifically gender hierarchies. Two underlying feminist linguistic theories are used in this research, which are the theory of women language by Robin Lakoff (2004) and the criticism of the patriarchal discourse by Dale Spender (1998). A combination of these points of view gives a full picture of micro-level linguistic and macro-level social orders that regulate gendered communication in *My Fair Lady* (1964). Using these frameworks, the study sheds some light on how speech patterns of males and females express power of authority, subordination and power, and how language is a source of control and opposition.

In the article about Language and Woman role (2004), Robin Lakoff has presented the idea of the language of women having certain linguistic features, which are peculiar to the language of women and which are defined by the subordinate role of women in society. She singles out a number of characteristics usually linked to the speech of women, such as hedges, tag questions, intensifiers, politeness and using apologies often. Hedges- words such as kind of, maybe or I think, are used to weaken what is being said indicating doubt or politeness. Tag questions, e.g. It is a nice day, right? purpose to elicit confirmation or approval of interlocutors to strengthen a less authoritative conversational stance. The statement-enhancing tools such as so and very do not suggest dominance, but common application of politeness strategies and apologies indicate the awareness of social relationships, which can mean the loss of self-assertion.

The framework promoted by Lakoff can be traced in the case of *My Fair Lady* in the first speech of Eliza Doolittle. These linguistic features not only make her Cockney dialect socially stigmatized but also define it. As an example, through her communication with Higgins or other characters of higher social rank, Eliza even more often uses polite constructions and submissive wording to build her social relationship. This language act highlights her disenfranchised position and is in line with what Lakoff says that the English women language serves as a way of reducing conflict and meeting social expectations. Although Eliza starts her linguistic training with Higgins, her language continues to be a zone of negotiation between individual self and the social standards, which brings out the conflict between agency and conformity.

Dale Spender (1998) goes further to provide an analysis of the structural and ideological aspects of language. In *Man Made Language*, Spender holds that language is a social construct which was developed and is sustained by men to continue to exert patriarchal power. Language is not a neutral system but a weapon that men use to establish authority, social norms and relegate women. This macro-level approach is especially applicable in *My Fair Lady* in which Higgins being in command of linguistic norms is a representation of the patriarchal control of speech. His work as a teacher is not so much educational, but disciplinary as the fact that women are supposed to adjust their language to the standards established by males in order to be granted a social legitimacy. Higgins fixing Eliza speech, including the vowel pronunciation, avoiding colloquialism, etc., represents the larger mechanism of social control, whereby the dominance of males establishes the conditions of linguistic and, consequently, social favors.

The combination of the frameworks by Lakoff and Spender can be analyzed in such a way that a micro-level linguistic behaviour is related to a macro-level ideological organization. Where Lakoff discusses the particular characteristics of the speech by women, Spender puts its characteristics in context against a system of male-dominated discourse. This duality in *My Fair Lady* throws light on the fact that the change of Eliza is not only a personal linguistic success but also an impression of the patriarchal social organization. Every fixed vowel or consonant is symbolic of the internalisation of male power, and her growing compliance to the rules of upper-class speech reminds the reader of how socially mediated the language is. The interaction of these structures demonstrates that language is both empowering and constraining and that language creates identity and access to social power.

Also, the idea of linguistic prescriptivism plays the core role in this analysis. The example of Higgins and correctness in speech can be taken as an illustration of prescriptive norms, which determine the admissible and understandable in the social world. According to Spender (1998), this kind of prescriptive is patriarchal in nature thus supporting male domination by undermining other types of expression. The Cockney accent of Eliza is not only a dialect in the movie but also a symptom of social inferiority, and its remedy is depicted as a prerequisite of her social advancement. This exhibits the nature of prescriptive language practices as agents of control whereby women are conditioned to be subjective to the male-dominated language and social conventions.

These feminist frameworks are further enhanced by Bourdieu (1992) concept of habitus. The HABITUS is the internalized dispositions and behaviors as well as preferences that a person learns to have as a result of socialization in certain social setups. The progressive transformation in the speech patterns of Eliza in *My Fair Lady* is the reflection of the internalization of the upper-class habitus, as she adapts her speech patterns according to the requirements of the dominant social group. Nonetheless, there are also social costs associated with this linguistic assimilation, which causes her to lose her former community and true identity. The micro-level attributes of Lakoff, macro-level criticism by Spender, and the sociological approach of Bourdieu enable the study to place language as a medium where the social identity, gender, and power intersect.

Lastly, there is the need to look into the performative aspect of language use in movies. As a cultural text, film enhances linguistic disparities to underscore social positions and messages. The change that Eliza undergoes in *My Fair Lady* is not only achieved through speech, but through posture, dress, and demeanor, and makes a whole picture of social mobility mediated by patriarchal norms. As structures by Lakoff and Spender enable scholars to break down the linguistic aspect of this performance, the frameworks of these two works become a way to see how language serves as a means of compliance and a point of resistance.

In summary, the theoretical framework of the paper is a mix of views of Robin Lakoff and Dale Spender to analyze gendered language in *My Fair Lady*. Lakoff gives a close insight into micro-level linguistic elements that indicate or announce female subordination whereas Spender puts these elements in the larger context of patriarchal ideology and social dominance. Combined, these approaches allow understanding how language serves as a source of power, identity, and social negotiation in the movie in a comprehensive way. Through these frameworks, the paper shows that linguistic modification in *My Fair Lady* is not simply a pedagogical endeavor, but a mediated socially and ideologically performance that can shed light on the perspectives of gendered hierarchies.

4. Analysis and Discussion

It is observed in the analysis of *My Fair Lady*, language is simultaneously both a signifier of social self and a tool to perpetuate hierarchies of gendered power (Wang, 2024).. The film uses the speech to dramatize the mediatory role of speech in the movement of classes and at

the same time enforce patriarchal authority, through the linguistic transformation of Eliza Doolittle. This part compares and contrasts the language characteristics of men and women in the movie, which is based on Lakoff's micro-level analysis of language among the women (2004) and Spender's macro-level analysis of the discourse that is patriarchal (1998) and Bourdieu sociological concept of the habitus (1992). The results suggest that linguistic sophistication offers Eliza symbolic power, but it reveals her subordination to norms male-determined, and the social orders governing what is acceptable and what does not fit in the social context.

By the very beginning of the movie, Eliza can be identified as socially outcast because of her Cockney accent, non-standard grammar. She has speech with dropped consonants, vowel changes and colloquialisms that upper-class characters perceive to mean stupidity and social inferiority (Sebastian & Ryan, 2018). As an example, her first words, including I haven't got no money or Gorbliney, what a mess! indicate either linguistic or social deviation out of the norms of the elite. The response of Higgins to these types of speech shows the ideological value attached to language. He notoriously says that Eliza should be taken out and hanged as the cold-blooded murderer of the English tongue, dramatizing the perceived linguistic crime and underlining the fact that going against the norms of the elite is unacceptable in the society. This is in line with the statement of Spender (1998) that language is a creation of the male power in which a non-conformity to the established norms serves to perpetuate the patriarchal domination of the social hierarchies.

The framework developed by Lakoff (2004) can be seen especially when Eliza is talking in the early stages of her speech which is characterized by linguistic subordination. Her uncertain role on the social level is emphasized by the prevalence of hedges and tag questions, e.g., by saying I think... and Isn't it? as well as by use of polite language, e.g., Please, sir. These aspects are typical of female speech in the patriarchal society where politeness and deference are highly regarded at the expense of assertiveness. Indicatively, the first time Eliza tries to communicate with Higgins, the polite nature of her questions and the awkward way she puts them shows the difference between her subordinate speech and the authoritative one of Higgins. He keeps on interrupting her, correcting her pronunciation and enforcing his style of the language, which is an example of macro-level control of discourse outlined by Spender. Such a relationship between Higgins and Eliza, therefore, demonstrates the gendering of linguistic power: men are the ones who are in authority, and the speech of women is limited by the requirements of civility and conformity.

The teaching part of the language change of Eliza is the main focus of the film plot. Practicing such sentences as *The rain in Spain stays in the main in the plain* or *I did it!* she experiences systematic re-education in pronunciation, intonation and grammar. Although the exercises are portrayed as educational, they are the forms of social and patriarchal conditioning. Every corrected vowel or consonant is the internalization of the male authority and norms of the upper classes. The concept of habitus developed by Bourdieu (1992) can shed light on such a process: Eliza integrates the language and behavioral patterns of the upper class and, therefore, identifies herself with the social majority (Maton, 2014). This internalization however, comes at the expense of alienation of her primary social circle and identity. Her linguistic assimilation is therefore an illustration of the two-sidedness of language as a source of empowerment as well as of constraining in that it facilitates social mobility at the same time that it strengthens gendered and class hierarchies.

The prescriptive aspect of language control by patriarchs is brought out by the position of Higgins as the linguistic authority. His demand of the right speech illustrates a greater societal pressure to be a woman who is expected to live to the standards of males in order to be socially acceptable. This kind of linguistic prescriptivism is not restricted to the sphere of

pronunciation, but it also goes to vocabulary, syntax and even behavior, as is the case with Higgins teaching Eliza about etiquette, posture and even voice tone. These instructions exemplify how Spender (1998) criticizes the idea that language is a patriarchal instrument: it is not impartial and helpful, but organized in a way that ensures the dominance of men and can govern the behavior of women. In that regard, the movie displays the success of Eliza as a modification of the adherence to patriarchal power, which emphasizes the ideological nature of linguistic change.

Gendered linguistic interactions are further supported in the film through humor and irony. The presence of Eliza is often mocked by Higgins who can make her seem ludicrous and inferior with her efforts in trying to be sophisticated, often receiving admiration and even derision. As an example, the scene, when Eliza reads *The rain in Spain in good English*, is created to create dramatic effect, as it shows her progression, and at the same time, reminds the viewers of her past failure. This duality is a key point to the ideological message that women's linguistic competence has to be measured against male standards to gain recognition. It is in this manner that the viewers are led to think of the social acceptability of linguistic finesse and in this way language as a marker of gender and social status, is emphasized.

This is not to say that there is not resistance that is shown in the film, even though it was constrained by these dynamics. The fact that Eliza finally states that she is an independent, self-reliant person, especially in the final standoff with Higgins shows her agency in the linguistic system that she is subjected to. When she states that she is independent, the film plays up a subversion of patriarchal domination: control of delicate language gives her symbolic control over the regulation of social interactions to impose personal control. However, this empowerment is limited, even to themselves by social and linguistic conventions of male authority. The success of Eliza is therefore ironic: she gets acknowledged and has her agency, but in a system that still sets the boundaries of what is acceptable female speech and conduct. Such tension is a manifestation of what Lakoff (2004) notes about the language of women: it is a place of negotiation in which conformity and resistance are integrated.

The connection between micro features of linguistics and macro features of social structures is also depicted in the comparison of male and female speech in the film. The speech of Higgins is authoritative in nature, as he is already in the authority position in society and is assertive, direct and is also controlling. On the contrary, Eliza shows hedging, politeness, and expressiveness in the early speech, which makes her socially inferior. This juxtaposition is rather a representation of the difference between the competitive male style of conversation and the cooperative female one: Tannen (1994) states that this difference is rooted in social construction of speech, whereas Cameron (1998) believes that the speech of females is socially organized to serve relational and emotional purposes. The differences in this film are dramatized to drive home the gendered nature of language to see the ways in which discourse perpetuates power relations and social.

As Anderson and Daniels (2016) suggest, these results are supported by quantitative data of more general studies, including an analysis of 2,000 screenplays. Male characters take more dialogue than the female characters and take charge more than the female characters do, and in most cases, the female characters are placed in a reactive or secondary roles. The same pattern can be observed in *My Fair Lady* when Eliza first speaks and when she interacts with other male characters, such as the colleagues of Higgins, and the high society people. The movie is therefore representative of wider trends in media representation whereby the cinema story can recreate inequalities in the society by linguistically narrating it.

Lastly, the idea of habitus highlights the social and cultural connotations of the linguistic transformation that Eliza undergoes. This happens as Eliza internalizes the speech patterns of upper classes and, as a result, is able to navigate elite social areas, but she is stuck within culturally gendered notions of behavior and expression. Her change shows how complicated is the correlation between the language, the identity, and the power: language mastery provides chances to advance in the society, yet it also sustains the patriarchal order, insisting that women should conform to the norms established by men. The movie, in turn, represents language as a two-sided tool, which allows women to act in social life but also limits them.

To conclude, these results indicate that *My Fair Lady* is a valuable source to study the gendered use of linguistic characteristics and ideological connotations of speech. The analysis shows that: (1) the language of women is characterized by politeness, hedging and expressive emotions, and such characteristics signify the subordinate social status; (2) the language of men is characterized by authoritative control and display of emotions, and these traits support the hierarchies of patriarchal society; (3) linguistic transformation can be seen as the means of social mobility and gender-based subordination, and (4) the means of defiance is possible, yet it cannot do it without challenging the structural and ideological norms of patriarchal society. Through the micro-level analysis of language as postulated by Lakoff, the macro-level critique of language by Spender, and the sociological commentary by Bourdieu, the paper shows how language acts as center of power, negotiation of identity, and social control in the film.

5. Conclusion

This male and female linguistic feature comparison in *My Fair Lady* shows how language can be used as the mirror and tool of gendered power relations. Assuming the frames offered by Lakoff and Spender, the analysis indicates that the linguistic refinement in the movie is more of an adherence to the norms that are created by men than an emancipation. The case with Eliza, who started out as Cockney flower girl and emerged as an eloquent lady, shows that the voice of women is repressed to become a respectable and intelligent woman, as dictated by patriarchy.

Although language helps Eliza to ascend socially, it, on the other hand, removes her true identity in underlining the fact that linguistic prestige is subject to the approval of males. Higgins being the linguistic authority and Spender stating that language is a construct created by man to perpetuate current hierarchies is further reinforced by the fact that language is man-made and exists to support the status quo. Finally, the *My Fair Lady* reveals the social fiction that knowing how to use appropriate language means being empowered, rather, it shows how language conventions promote gender inequality in the name of cultural sophistication.

This paper confirms that the feminist linguistic theory still holds relevance in the study of gender in the media. Further studies may further this discussion to modern film conversations in order to trace the way of how the linguistic bias has been or is changed over the period of time.

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