



---

Review: [untitled]

Author(s): Penelope Brown

Reviewed work(s):

Language, Gender and Sex in Comparative Perspective. by Susan U. Philips

Source: *Man*, New Series, Vol. 24, No. 1 (Mar., 1989), p. 192

Published by: Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2802583>

Accessed: 03/08/2009 07:33

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=rai>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit organization founded in 1995 to build trusted digital archives for scholarship. We work with the scholarly community to preserve their work and the materials they rely upon, and to build a common research platform that promotes the discovery and use of these resources. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).



Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Man*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

never written book, *The psychology of culture*, on the basis of its outline prospectus and lecture notes taken by Sapir's students in courses with this title in the 1930s.

In sum, this is an excellent sourcebook for anyone interested in the thoughts of Edward Sapir; it has provided me with not a few new insights

WILLIAM A. FOLEY

*University of Sydney*

PHILIPS, SUSAN U. *et al.* (eds). *Language, gender and sex in comparative perspective* (Stud. social cult. Fdn Lang. 4). xiv, 332 pp., illus., tables, bibliogr. Cambridge: Univ. Press, 1987. £27.50 (cloth), £9.95 (paper)

This is an excellent collection of essays, and unique in at least three respects. It is the first serious attempt at a cross-cultural look at the interaction of language and gender, bringing together ethnographic and linguistic data from six different societies. It is also cross-disciplinary, combining sociocultural and biological approaches to sex differences in language. And many of the papers in the volume combine the methodologies of two subdisciplines within sociolinguistics: the quantitative methods of Labovian analysis with the in-depth ethnographic approach of the ethnography of speaking. It is an ambitious programme of integration in what has been a fragmented field.

The book had its origin in the Conference on Sex Differences in Language held at the University of Arizona in January 1983, but its strengths lie in the careful editing and integration of the papers, which are uniformly of high quality, in the general introduction explicating the biological/social issues, and in the introductions to each of the three sections. The result is a stimulating discourse on the ways in which language use varies in relation to gender, age, rank and other social parameters in different societies.

Part 1 (comprising half of the book) presents analyses of language and gender in five societies and languages: Japanese, Samoan, United States English, the Kuna language spoken by the Kuna Indians of Panama, and the Mexicano/Spanish bilingual Nahuatl Indians of Mexico. Part 2 focuses on gender differences in the language of children, and of parents' speech to children, in English and in the Kaluli language of Papua New Guinea. The papers in these two sections present detailed evidence of the great diversity in the role that language plays in the sociocultural construction of gender, and of the very early age at which sex differences in language use (in English-speaking children, at least) appear. They also undercut the suggestion (which comes out of the Labovian studies of urban dialect variation)

that women always speak in a more standard, more formal style than men in comparable situations; both the Japanese and the Samoan studies found men's speech more syntactically complete. The papers do, however, suggest a number of features of gender-differentiated language which are widespread in societies (notably, the tendency for women to use more polite request forms, for women to be the specialists in certain verbal genres, and to be excluded from major public speech-making); their wide distribution makes these patterns arguably influenced by biology.

Part 3 brings in the biological data, with two papers discussing experimental evidence of sex differences in the localisation of language processing in the brain. Despite the attempts at integration, these biological papers still stand alone, and we are left with the impression that although biological sex differences in brain function may appear at a very early age (and the evidence here is controversial), they have no necessary implications for either the learning of language or the use of language as adults.

Nonetheless, the editors and authors are to be commended for raising these issues, intelligently discussing them, and producing the best volume to date on language and gender in their social, biological and cultural context. It ought to be obligatory reading for any anthropologist interested in the ethnography of speaking or in the construction of gender.

PENELOPE BROWN

*Stanford University*

SHUMAN, AMY. *Storytelling rights: the uses of oral and written texts by urban adolescents* (Camb. Stud. oral lit. Cult. 11). x, 227 pp., illus., bibliogr. Cambridge: Univ. Press, 1986. £25.00

In *Storytelling rights*, Shuman focuses on oral and written narratives created by black, white and Puerto Rican students in an urban American junior high school. In the main, these are 'fight stories', i.e., 'narrative accounts of quarrels about who has the right to say what to whom' (p. 2).

Shuman draws on the work of M.M. Bakhtin, Erving Goffman, Harvey Sacks and others in pointing to the need to base study of the form and content of narratives on analysis of the uses of reading, writing, and oral performance in specific speech communities. A particularly valuable contribution of the book is a detailed look at *entitlement*, the way that the relationship between the teller and the events described shapes the negotiable right of a given person to tell the story. The trick in this communicative setting seems to be to demonstrate one's knowledge of and involvement in the community by performing