Book Review


Deborah Tannen, in her pioneering work in the field of language and gender inequalities, *Talking from 9 to 5: Women and Men at Work*, argued that women are disadvantaged, particularly in male-dominated workplaces, in that they are judged by their appearances and speech styles, and they are ‘marked’ (Tannen, 1994). After nearly three decades, women still face challenges in the workplace, as detailed in *Globalisation, Geopolitics, and Gender in Professional Communication*, which is a new addition to the Routledge Research in Applied Professional Communication series that aims to explore gender discrimination and inequalities in various geopolitical contexts and professions. Crucial issues in relation to language, gender and professional communication in different workplace practices and geopolitical contexts are critically discussed from a feminist perspective, with authors applying various methods and approaches. Readers may be surprised to find in the volume that men also face challenges at work, particularly when working in feminised occupations. The chapters of the volume explore how the professional identities of both women and men are discursively constructed at the intersection of their gender and national, religious and cultural identities.

The volume consists of eleven chapters, including introductory remarks by the editors and an epilogue. **Chapter 1** (Louise Mullany and Stephanie Schnurr) introduces challenging issues for communication in professional workplaces. They highlight the fact that although the COVID-19 pandemic has had a disruptive effect on working women globally, their different experiences hinge on the geopolitical situation that exists within different socio-cultural contexts, as well as the intersectionality of their identities. Challenges faced
by women in the workplace during the pandemic “[point] to an annihilation of many of the advancements and progress made in workplace gender equality, as a global trend, which is particularly worrying” (p. 2). The editors also emphasise the importance of studying the interplay between language and the geopolitics of gender in global workplace environments by taking a different sociolinguistic approach. Finally, they argue that it is important to bring the local and the global together, and that linguistics helps to understand the hidden power relationships, bias and discrimination in various geopolitical contexts.

Chapter 2 (Stephanie Schnurr) analyses the sociolinguistics of family and work in leadership stories by celebrity female leaders in mediatised TEDx talks and television interviews, which were delivered to both local and global audiences. As a narrator performs a variety of actions by telling a story, the author uses narratives as the approach to investigate social practice in this chapter. The stories, as the author observes, not only indicate how successful and famous women (the storytellers) from different geopolitical contexts (the Middle East, India, the USA, Kuwait and Nigeria) experience similar gender discrimination and stereotyping issues, but also accentuate global hegemonic masculine discourses of leadership. As the author argues, these narrators combat global hegemonic masculine discourse through storytelling. The first part of the chapter analyses stories relating to how women juggle the demands and expectations of motherhood and their professional career. Through storytelling, the narrators challenge the traditional views of this incompatibility and see their role as mothers as contributing to their success in the workplace. In the second part of the chapter, the author analyses stories relating to household and family responsibilities. The findings suggest that, with regard to household and family responsibilities, the narrators reinforce traditionally held views on gender ideologies, rather than question them. The author concludes this chapter by arguing that storytelling helps to fight against gender inequality in the workplace in different geopolitical contexts.

Chapter 3 (Louise Mullany and Peter Masibo Lumala) investigates how female politicians in the East African countries of Uganda and Kenya construct their identity and gendered leadership by looking at lexico-grammatical features that include pronouns, metaphor, in-group/out-group identity markers, reported speech and agency. As the authors suggest, gender-based violence in the political domains of Uganda and Kenya may have an impact on the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals 2030. More specifically, the investigation of representations of identity through verbatim narratives is used to examine the challenges encountered in politics by East African women. Four such narratives are analysed. In the first narrative, a female politician standing...
for the Ugandan parliament discursively positions herself as an unsuccessful candidate because of her age and gender. In the second narrative, a Kenyan woman seeking a parliamentary seat indexicalises her gender, age and marital identity. In the third narrative, a Ugandan female political candidate reports her fear of gender-based violence during campaigning and negatively evaluates her lived experience of this candidature. In the fourth narrative, a female leader who was successfully elected in Kenya adopts a positive stance and aligns herself with the identity category of ‘politician’. As the authors argue, women can be regarded as unsuitable political candidates after getting married, as they are no longer part of their natal families and thus occupy a geographical space that no longer belongs to them.

By considering the unique case of a gender-sensitive university context in Turkey, Chapter 4 (Hale İşik-Güler and Yasemin Erdoğan-Öztürk) investigates how female academic leaders negotiate their leadership and navigate gendered dynamics/conflicts at the intersection of their professional and gender identities. As the authors argue, female academic leaders in universities can negotiate and construct their identities through storytelling and sharing personal narratives, further combating gendered leadership. The analysis of interview data reveals that the appointment of women to positions of leadership is problematised. That is, women still face unequal barriers accessing senior leadership positions due to the exclusionary organisational structure that is commonly found in university contexts. In addition, emotional labour relating to familial responsibilities, role conflicts and the gendering of work is a barrier within female leadership practices in universities. Female leadership practices are reclaimed positively and the stereotyping of their leadership practices is also challenged. The interview data further reveal discursive transformation, moving discursive leadership negotiations to a meta-discursive level. As the authors conclude, storytelling allows female academic leaders to challenge normative leadership discourses.

Chapter 5 (Melissa Yoong) analyses how narratives relating to the empowerment of women (41 career comeback stories by women) are employed in two Malaysian state-linked websites (Flexworklife.my and Talent Matters) to attract caregivers back to the workplace after taking a career break to raise their children. Through a critical discourse analysis of the ideological and persuasive properties of the stories, the author uncovers how the government’s language use strengthens and conceals unequal power relations that may include gender, ethno-nationality, class and the hegemony of productive over reproductive labour. The data analysis demonstrates that the stories centre on a neoliberal feminist discourse; the latter highlights the women’s desire for their well-being and a work-family balance by combining epistemic and boulomaic modality.
and repeatedly mobilising a vocabulary conveying positive affect. However, many stories reveal the dominant ideology in Southeast Asia; that is, women are still expected to serve as the primary caregiver and childcare is normalised as their responsibility. Interestingly, just a few stories briefly mention migrant domestic workers, but primarily from the stance of middle-class women. As the author explains, suppressing the experiences of migrant women results in discursive absences around migrant domestic workers in the data.

Viewing identity from a social constructionist perspective, Chapter 6 (Catho Jacobs, Dorien van de Mieroop and Colette van Laar) explores intersectional identity work by thirteen Belgian women with Turkish or Moroccan migration roots, focusing on discrimination, gendered stereotyping and representations of Belgium's white-collar workplace culture. As the authors argue, women with a migration background grapple with the challenge of balancing their gender, ethnic and professional identities at work. The analysis indicates that the interviewees construct multi-layered compound categories by adding subgroups to the two compound categories of gender and ethnicity, such as their religious minority identity constructed through the presence or absence of a headscarf. On the other hand, the interviewees construct men with migration roots as rebellious and outsiders in Belgian society, with a low level of educational attainment. The authors conclude that although the interviewees construct a larger negative gender bias towards men than towards women, the picture painted is favourable only in comparison to their male counterparts.

By examining recorded data from corporate employees and carers, Chapter 7 (Janet Holmes and Meredith Marra) analyses implicit gender and cultural hegemony in workplace interactions in New Zealand. Emphasising the importance of reflexivity in their ethnographic approach to investigating recognised and unrecognised social biases, the authors’ study reveals the complexity of intersecting and competing ideologies, in which, while people are well aware of and considerably constrained by hegemonic gender norms of behaviour, they are also highly influenced by the hegemonic but more covert cultural norms relating to ethnic groups, although they may not be aware of them. When a majority group member is in a minority group context, such as a Pākehā woman manager in a Māori organisation, sensitivity to the Māori values of humility and the avoidance of boasting can be developed, despite the othering effect. In a majority group context, such as in Pākehā-dominated corporate environments, majority group norms can be asserted without further justification. The intersectional identities of interactants, as observed in elderly care settings, also enact bias. For example, a Pākehā male carer demonstrating masculinity is not welcome. There are also dimensions of the intersection with the culture order. The authors conclude that a hegemonic ideology may compete
with another hegemonic ideology and that it is important for discourse analysts to problematise hegemonies to account for unrecognised bias.

Informed by interactional sociolinguistics, social constructionism and discursive approaches to gendering processes, Chapter 8 (Joelle Loew) explores the linguistics of globalisation, geopolitics and gender in globalised Information Technology (IT) contexts in Switzerland, the USA and the UK. More specifically, this chapter is centred on how women discursively (re-)gender the notion of work in male-dominated IT workplaces. The findings suggest that a new gendered dimension of naturalising gender differences has been added to the IT industry in various geopolitical contexts. More concretely, female participants endorse and reject gender-based stereotypes simultaneously; they agree to homogenised categories of men and women, but position themselves as different from other women by referring to their personalities. The practices of sexism and discrimination are also trivialised by female participants to gender the notion of work. In brief, male norms are adopted and are also not adapted to. The author argues that while agile ways of working help to reinforce accountability and equality in the IT workplace culture marred by gender inequalities, they must be contextualised within the global issues of gender politics. In general, this chapter indicates how the gender order is discursively (co-)constructed, defied and reified in IT workplaces.

Employing an interactional sociolinguistic approach, Chapter 9 (Joanne McDowell) analyses how essentialist gendered beliefs are challenged in UK primary school classrooms. Essentialist views of gender assume that certain social roles and behaviours are for women (e.g., school teachers) or for men (e.g., male teachers performing 'hard' classroom discipline). The findings, however, provide evidence that male teachers perform 'soft' (liberal, mitigated) discipline work through the use of positive reinforcement and a variety of mitigating strategies, such as hedging, minimal responses and tag questions. In general, this chapter questions the gendered stereotyping of primary school teachers, arguing that their discursive behaviour is not associated with their gender, but with the workplace culture.

By adopting an integrated linguistic approach that combines interactional sociolinguistics and linguistic pragmatics, Chapter 10 (Victoria Howard) examines how four politicians (three men and one woman) in the UK House of Lords discursively construct their intersecting gender and national identities (of being Scottish and Welsh) as legitimate. More concretely, the author explores how these politicians, who are not English, use humour to enact legitimate professional identities and position themselves with regard to devolution and nationalism in Wales and Scotland. The quantitative data demonstrate that male politicians' humour, in general, is characterised by rivalry and female
politicians’ humour by subversiveness. This stereotypically masculine rivalrous humour functions as entertaining impoliteness, whereas self-deprecating humour helps to reinforce solidarity. As the author argues, professional discursive norms may be associated with masculinist discursive norms in political settings. The stereotyped constructions of gender and national identity provide further evidence of inequality in political discourse.

Finally, Chapter 11 (Brian W. King) is an epilogue focusing on the geopolitics presented in previous chapters, as it provides a new perspective for researching language, gender and globalisation in the workplace. As the author points out, despite the different approaches used in individual chapters, the fact that women find themselves in unfavourable circumstances in the workplace across national and regional contexts is repeated throughout the chapters. In addition, professional settings, like workplaces, allow the ideologies of globalisation and localisation to be reinforced. The author also suggests examining ‘geopolitics in contexts’ rather than ‘geopolitical contexts’ to combat geopolitical injustices. The author concludes this chapter by arguing that in workplace environments, geopolitical order operates and interacts with gender order and culture order.

The publication of this volume is significant as it not only contributes to the field of language, gender and professional communication, but also reminds us of gender discrimination and inequalities in professional workplaces in various geopolitical contexts. Excitingly, a number of chapters deal with the challenges faced not only by women, but also by men, in the workplace. The challenges faced by men in the workplace are discussed in Chapters 6, 7, 9 and 10. In particular, relatively little research has been conducted on the linguistic practices of men working in feminised occupations. Chapter 9, in which the gender stereotyping of primary school teachers is questioned, serves as a response to this lacuna.

The findings in this volume are thought-provoking, particularly for professional communication researchers. The editors contend that professional communication researchers who study gender have a social responsibility to not only report on local issues of gender equality in the workplace but also to use their findings “to change current practices in local and global contexts by sharing best practices and bringing together the local and the global” (p. 13).

While this volume successfully explores the challenges faced by women and men in various geopolitical workplace contexts, it would be strengthened if the discussion had been further extended to the working lives of LGBTQ people, since gender identity and gender norms cannot be separated by sexual identity and heterosexual norms. Resnick and Galupo’s (2019) investigation indicates that LGBTQ employees are confronted with covert discrimination,
such as microaggression, in the workplace. Transgender people, moreover, still face job challenges due to a lack of equity in the workplace (Davis and Yeung, 2022). From the perspective of queer linguistics, there is a mesh of possibilities in addition to the use of language relating to heterosexual practices outside the heteronormative terrain (Leap, 2021). As sexual identity is omnipresent in interaction (Bucholtz and Hall, 2004, 2005, 2008), the way in which both LGBTQ and heterosexual individuals negotiate their intersectional identities at work is worth exploring.

To conclude, the chapters in this volume present a critical examination of how gender interplays with professional communication in geopolitical workplace contexts. The book is a helpful reference for those wishing to learn how linguistics can be used to explore the unseen power relationships and the gender discrimination and inequalities that exist in the workplace culture in various geopolitical contexts. Lastly, I note some minor editorial errors, including the section numbers 4.3 (on p. 28) and 5 (on p. 80), which should be 4.2 and 6, respectively.

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References