

Assignment 1: Summary

“The Power of Talk: Who Gets Heard and Why” by Deborah Tannen is an article dealing with the differences in linguistic styles between mainly men and women, but also between people in general. She talks about how the same phrase can have different meanings to different people and it can depend on your cultural background, but more surprisingly can depend also on your linguistic upbringing.

Linguistic style is the way we say things. In other words linguistic style is the way we learn to communicate that is how we say things, the tone of voice we use and at what speed we say it. Deborah Tannen writes about how children, both girls and boys, develop these skills at a very young age, but in very different ways. These skills are then taken into their future workplace. Girls generally tend to hang out in small groups and balance their needs with the needs of the other girls. They are more open and supportive and above all rather be a group than a hierarchy where one stands out more than the other. Boys on the other hand are in large groups and tend to be competitive and want to stand out more. The more you stand out the more power you have, and the more power you have the more control you have over your group. These groups are where boys and girls tend to learn their conversational styles. The result of this is that men and women can have trouble communicating by having different ways of saying the same things. Tannen (p. 245) explains it well when writing “You can’t assume that the other person means what you would mean if you said the same thing in the same way.”

Businesses in our time are mainly run by men, and though changing, most of the employees in higher position are male. Getting credit is one place where men tend to vary from women. Men are much more likely to demand credit about something they have done at work searching for praise, as women are likely to keep it low in case they will not be liked because they are looking for credit. This leads to confidence and boasting.

Tannen talks about studies which show that women are more likely to be less confident while men are more likely to minimize their doubts. This can be tracked down to the groups that are formed when in Pre School. Asking questions can be a problem to in the work place, where women are less frightened to ask questions because they don’t realise

how men think, while men know that asking questions can be seen as being losing face towards other men, so questions are avoided at all costs.

Tannen talks about how men have trouble making apologies while women do not hesitate to use it quite often. Women commonly use “I’m sorry” as expression of concern, but it does not always work that way with men who may think of it as putting the speaker in a one-down position. People who say sorry frequently can also end up seeming weaker, less confident and easier to blame than the others who don’t.

Women tend to “soften blows” as in they tend to put a positive before a negative as to not cause any pain to the person being criticised, this message can be misunderstood by the recipient who might think the main point of the conversation was the positive. It is the same with compliments where women often give compliments to each other to keep a positive attitude between the group, but men who grew up putting each other down to reach a superior position in the group, tend to put others down. This can disadvantage women in the workplace who are always treating everyone as equals while the men are putting themselves at a one-up position.

Men often get promoted before women because they are more likely to get recognised by the person in power. This is partly due to men having common linguistic style among other men in higher positions which can lead to them managing up. Indirectness can cause many problems from one culture to another, and can also do so from one linguistic upbringing to another. For instance women are much more likely to use indirectness when it comes to telling others what to do, because of the label of “bossy” during their upbringing. This can be a very effective way to ask for someone to do something and seem like a nice way to do it, but someone with a different upbringing might not catch on and find it annoying or even misleading. Talking in such a way can be judged by their superiors as a lack of confidence, even though to them it is just talking in a nice respectful way.

Tannen tells us that different people with different upbringings speak differently, and there is no real right way to talk. It all depends on the situation you are in and the best way to address that situation. A good manager will know how to observe the different styles and give credit where it is due; they will also know the appropriate way to speak when addressing each person to get the best working results out of their staff.

Bibliography

Oaks Daniel D (2001) *Linguistics at Work: A reader of applications* Heinle & Heinle

Tannen, Deborah *The Power of Talk: Who gets Heard and Why*