

Jenny Cheshire (1982) - Gender Theory

In 1982 a renowned study was published. Cheshire looked specifically at certain grammatical variations in the speech of young children. She considered the frequency of the children using:

- non-standard -s (she *calls* me...)
- non-standard has (you *has* to...)
- non-standard was (you *was*...)
- multiple negation (I *ain't never* doing that...)
- non-standard never (I *never* did this)
- non-standard what (are you the boys *what* hit...)
- non-standard do (she *do*...)
- non-standard come (I *come* here yesterday...)
- use of ain't.

Overall, boys used non-standard forms more frequently than girls did. Cheshire concluded that 'variation is controlled by both social and linguistic factors'.

In boys' speech, variation is governed by norms that are central to the vernacular culture, i.e. the language or dialect spoken by the ordinary people in a particular country or region. Variation in the girls' speech appears to be a more personal process, and less rigidly controlled by vernacular norms'. Can we therefore conclude that our language varies from a young age? This is a very interesting idea and leads us to ask 'why?' and 'how?' why is our language different from such a young age? How does society reinforce such varieties.

Pamela Fishman - Gender Theory (1982)

Fishman was responsible for a continuation of the dominance model a year after Cheshire's study. She focused on tag questions, listening to 52 hours of pre-recorded conversations between young American couples. She agreed with Lakoff's finding about how women use tag questions more often, (4 times more). However, the conclusion she drew was very different to Lakoff. She argued that questions are used by females to start conversation and to continue dialogue, she calls this 'conversational shitwork'. Fishman accepts this is down to male dominance. Males are reluctant to do this 'shitwork' due to their dominant role. This links to the 'difference model' by Deborah Tannen.