The Influence of Language and Background Culture on Speakers from the Viewpoint of Gender and Identity

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Abstract : The purpose of this research is to examine the assumption that female bilingual speakers more often change the way they talk or think depending on the language they use compared with male bilingual speakers. The author collected data through questionnaires on 241 bilingual speakers. Also, in-depth interview surveys were conducted with 13 Japanese/English bilingual speakers whose native language is Japanese and 16 English/Japanese bilingual speakers whose native language is English. The results indicate that both male and female bilingual speakers are more or less influenced consciously and unconsciously by the language they use, as well as by the background cultural values of each language. At the same time, it was found that female speakers are much more highly affected by the language they use, its background culture and also by the interlocutors they were talking to. This was probably due to the larger cultural expectations on women. Through conversations, speakers are not only conveying a message but also attempting to express who they are, and what they want to be like. In other words, they are constantly building up and updating their own identities by choosing the most appropriate language and descriptions to express themselves in the dialogues. It has been claimed that the images of ideal L2 self could strongly motivate learners. The author hopes to make the best use of the fact that bilingual speakers change their presence depending on the language they use, in order to motivate Japanese learners of English, especially female learners from the viewpoint of finding their new selves in English.

Keywords : cultural influence, gender expectation, language learning, L2 self
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