



A politics of the Performativity in Forming of the Gender Identity

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ABSTRACT

This study is an attempt to examine the role of performativity in forming and determining gender identity in a society. This study included articles and books that were written about language, gender, identity of a gender and also politics of performativity. These studies were analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively. The result of these analyzing shows gender identity is not natural or innate. Rather it takes its meaning from the inside of a person. This formation is influenced by the thoughts and ideas of society about gender and identity. It is clear gender and also gender identity constructed by language, then language goes into behavior, it, finally, begins to shape people's identities. It means that gender and identity of gender are formed and determined by language and behavior; people's acts.

Keywords

Performativity; identity; gender; subject.



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Introduction

Politics of performativity is a theory that Butler mentioned it in her *Excitable Speech* book. Butler first assumption about this theory is social construction. She does not give a credit to a gender and believes gender is formed by culture and society. She also says in all cultural status, gender is a kind of norm that it is introduced by societies. Hence, she claims that sex and gender are social constructions. Judith Butler says gender identity is not natural and constant but also it is something which is acquired. It means, sex and gender and all issues that are related to gender identities are not natural or innate. The Gender identity is formed based on preset cultures and it becomes as a social norm due to its performativity throughout its repetition in a society. Now there are some questions that one should bear in mind toward this theory. What is gender performativity? Is gender innate? Do words, speech acts, actions and behaviors, such as the way we talk and walk and even the type of dress, define our gender identity?

Sex and Gender

The meaning of terms sex and gender in sociolinguistics are completely separated. Oakley (1972: 160) in *sex and gender and society* claims that there is a clear distinction between sex and gender. Sex refers to the biological features and gender is a cultural construction. Holmes (2008:157): I have used the term gender rather than sex because sex has come to refer to categories distinguished by biological characteristics, while gender is more appropriate for distinguishing people on the basis of their socio- cultural behavior, including speech. Butler (2009) claims, of course gender and sexuality are different issues, but I do not think they can be fully dissociated. Certain forms of sexuality are linked with phantasies about gender, and certain ways of living gender require certain kinds of sexual practices. There are significant and widespread discontinuities between gender norms and normative sexuality, as we know. But in relation to both gender and sexuality, none of us has the choice of creating ourselves *ex nihilo*. We are transformed and acted upon prior to any action we might take. And though we can radically rework our genders or even try to rework our sexualities (though often failing), we are in the grip of norms even as we struggle against them.

The Role of Speech Acts in Performativity

The title of J. L. Austin's *How to Do Things with Words* poses the question of performativity as what it means to say that "things might be done with words." The problem of performativity is thus immediately bound up with a question of transitivity. What does it mean for a word not only to name, but also in some sense to perform and, in particular, to perform what it names? On the one hand, it may seem that the word-for the moment we do not know which word or which kind of word-enacts what it names; where the "what" of "what it names" remains distinct from the name itself and the performance of that "what."

After all, Austin's title questions how to do things with words, suggesting that words are instrumentalized in getting things done. Austin, of course, distinguishes between illocutionary and perlocutionary acts of speech, between actions that are performed by virtue of words, and those that are performed as a consequence of words. The distinction is tricky, and not always stable. According to the perlocutionary view, words are instrumental to the accomplishment of actions, but they are not themselves the actions which they help to accomplish. This form of the performative suggests that the words and the things done are in no sense the same. But according to his view of the illocutionary speech act, the name performs itself, and in the course of that performing becomes a thing done; the pronouncement is the act of speech at the same time that it is the speaking of an act. Of such an act, one cannot reasonably ask for a "referent," since the effect of the act of speech is not to refer beyond itself, but to perform itself, producing a strange enactment of linguistic immanence.

The title of Austin's manual, *How to Do Things With Words*, suggests that there is a perlocutionary kind of doing, a domain of things done, and then an instrumental field of "words;" indeed, that there is also a deliberation that precedes that doing, and that the words will be distinct from the things that they do.

But what happens if we read that title with an emphasis on the illocutionary form of speech, asking instead what it might mean for a word "to do" a thing, where the doing is less instrumental than it is transitive. Indeed, what would it mean for a thing to be "done by" a word or, for that matter, for a thing to be "done in" by a word? When and where, in such a case, would such a thing become disentangled from the word by which it is done or done in, and where and when would that conjunction between word and thing appear indissoluble? If a word in this sense might be said to "do" a thing, then it appears that the word not only signifies a thing, but that this signification will also be an enactment of the thing. It seems here that the meaning of a performative act is to be found in this apparent coincidence of signifying and enacting.

And yet it seems that this "act-like" quality of the performative is itself an achievement of a different order, and that de Man was clearly on to something when he asked whether a trope is not animated at the moment when we claim that language "acts;" that language posits itself in a series of distinct acts, and that its primary function might be understood as this kind of periodic acting. Significantly, I think, the common translation of Nietzsche's account of the metaleptic relation between doer and deed rests on a certain confusion about the status of the "deed." For even there, Nietzsche will claim that certain forms of morality require a subject and institute a subject as the consequence of that requirement. This subject will be installed as prior to the deed in order to assign blame and accountability for the painful effects of a certain action. A being is hurt, and the vocabulary that emerges to moralize that pain is one which isolates a subject as the intentional originator of an injurious deed; Nietzsche understands this, first, as the moralization by which pain and injury are rendered equivalent and, second, as the production of a domain of painful effects suffused with conjectured intention. At such a moment the subject is not only fabricated as the prior and causal origin of a painful effect that is recast as an injury, but the action whose effects are injurious is no longer an action, the continuous present of "a doing~ but is reduced to a "singular act:" (Butler, 1997, pp.40_ 47)



Gender Performativity

To say that gender is performative is to say that it is a certain kind of enactment; the “appearance” of gender is often mistaken as a sign of its internal or

inherent truth; gender is prompted by obligatory norms to be one gender or the other (usually within a strictly binary frame), and the reproduction of gender is thus always a negotiation with power; and finally, there is no gender without this reproduction of norms that risks undoing or redoing the norm in unexpected ways, thus opening up the possibility of a remaking of gendered reality along new lines.

When I speak about the subject in such contexts, it is not a “subject” who is the sovereign precondition of action and thought. But it is a socially produced “agent” and “deliberator” whose agency and thought is made possible by a language that precedes that “I”. In this sense, the “I” is produced through power, though not the deterministic effect of power. Power relies on a mechanism of reproduction that can and does go away, undo the strategies of animating power, and produce new and even subversive effects. The paradox or quandary that emerges from this situation is one that we find in politics all the time: if the terms of power lay out “who” can be a subject, who qualifies as a subject of recognition, in politics, or before the law, then the subject is not a precondition of politics, but a differential effect or power. It means as well that we can and must ask the question, “who” comes after the subject, not expecting another form of the subject to emerge in historical time, but because some name must be reserved for those who do not count as subjects, who do not sufficiently conform to the norms that confer recognizability on subjects. What do we call those who do not and cannot appear as “subjects” within hegemonic discourse? It seems to me that there are sexual and gender norms that in some ways condition what and who will be “legible” and what and who will not. And we have to be able to take into account this differential allocation of recognizability.

The theory of gender performativity presupposes that norms are acting on us before we have a chance to act at all, and that when we do act, we recapitulate the norms that act upon us, perhaps in new or unexpected ways, but still in relation to norms that precede us and exceed us. In other words, norms act on us, work upon us, and this kind of ‘being worked on’ makes its way into our own action. By mistake, we sometimes announce that we are the sovereign ground of our action, but this is only because we fail to account for the ways in which we are in the process of being made. We do not know, for instance, what precisely the norms of gender want of us, and yet we find ourselves moved and oriented within its terms (Butler, 2009, pp. 2- 15).

The Politics of the Performativity

Salimi (1391) points, in Butler’s view, body is not natural, rather it is formed based on the structure of a culture and society. Totally she believes that gender and gender identity are not pre- existing in nature. Although she accepts that a subject has a great tendency to get an identity throughout the narcissism, she believes this tendency before forming the subject takes place by social structures. The politics of social structures want to control and supervise the humanity and their bodies. Butler, by using the theory of speech acts in linguistic, puts the performativity against the constativity. Thus, if constative in linguistic is what is in language, performativity is an action that arises from language.

Gender Performativity and Language

When we claim to have been injured by language, what kind of claim do we make? We ascribe an agency to language, a power to injure, and position ourselves as the objects of its injurious trajectory. We claim that language acts, and acts against us, and the claim we make is a further instance of language, one which seeks to arrest the force of the prior instance. Thus, we exercise the force of language even as we seek to counter its force, caught up in a bind that no act of censorship can undo.

The insult, however, assumes its specific proportion in time. To be called a name is one of the first forms of linguistic injury that one learns. But not all name-calling is injurious. Being called a name is also one of the conditions by which a subject is constituted in language;

One is not simply fixed by the name that one is called. In being called an injurious name, one is derogated and demeaned. But the name holds out another possibility as well: by being called a name, one is also, paradoxically, given a certain possibility for social existence, initiated into a temporal life of language that exceeds the prior purposes that animate that call. Thus the injurious address may appear to fix or paralyze the one it hails, (Butler, 1997, pp. 1_2).

Performativity and Gender Identity

In Judith Butler’s view gender identity is not natural and fixed. She believes it has acquired a meaning. She agrees with Simone de Beauvoir, one is not born a woman, but, rather, becomes one. Hence, activities and behaviors that gender is shaped by them, it has similarities by activities in theater. That is, gender is a performative act and the way of its performativity depends on the culture and society. Although gender is a kind of external process, however, the function of social norms affect on gender and limit the role of it. Playing gender is not a kind of free game without paying attention to other things. Playing gender, collapse the traditional division of male and female identity and over turned the conventional distinctions between sexes (Laughy, 2007, p.113)

Gender is not noun, but neither is it a set of free floating attributes, for we have seen that the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence. Hence, within the inherited discourse of the metaphysics of substance, gender proves to be performative that is, constituting the identity it is purported



to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed. The challenge for rethinking gender categories outside of the metaphysics of substance will have to consider the relevance of Nietzsche's claim in *On the Genealogy of Morals* that "there is no being behind doing, effecting, becoming; the doer is merely a fiction added to the deed the deed is everything". In an application that Nietzsche himself would not have anticipated or condoned, we might state as a corollary: there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the vary expressions that are said to be its results (Butler, 1990, p. 25).

Results and Discussion

In Butler's view there is no sex and gender. In other words, they are not natural and innate issues. On the other hand she believes they are made by the society and culture that one lives there. Sex, gender, gender identity and all issues that are related to this subject are acquired. She claims that we can never determine our identity throughout the biological features or our bodies, because bodies and biological features do not have any advantages except identifying the sex of a subject. But, we should consider an identity that a person shows through his/ her sex is a kind of social norms. These social norms always are applied from the birth of an individual and he/ she never has a chance to make a choice about his/ her gender identity. Even, when a person picks his/ her gender and claims that he/ she is the owner of it, in fact, he/ she is doing and making the norms of society strong. An individual always finds himself/ herself in a place that is moved and directed. So, he/ she can never claim to have a constant gender. A gender is built by social norms and most societies have a heterosexual culture toward sexuality. But, the gender performativity that Butler suggests in her studies unsettles the heterosexual political structures of society. Even, it undermines the feminist views that distinct the females. Because she believes feminist ideas about women help to the politics of heterosexuality in community they are live by.

Politics of the gender performativity that affect society by language, such as speech acts, claim that things are doing with words. It means what gives meaning to a word not only is it named and said the word, but also it is what the word says and acts. The politics of the performativity also state a gender identity relies on effective actions that arise from language and goes overboard from the heterosexual policy in societies and unsettles them.

An individual talks and acts considering to what he/she says, acts. Exactly like a judge that announced a verdict and by announcing the verdict performs an action, too. Therefore, gender is performative and its performativity depends on the norms and culture of societies. It seems gender always being played and this playing disturbs the division of male and female and eliminates the distinction between men and women. This gender playing depends on the language. It means gender identity is built by language and then language comes in to the act. We always, by using language, learn how to perform the role of masculinity or femininity. In fact gender is not what we are, rather, it is what we put into language and act it. By and large, language and performativity determine our gender identities.

Conclusion

One is not born male or female. Its gender identity is not natural and innate. A person does not learn to be male or female or any other genders. What they do for recognizing them, their identities and genders is their actions. It means individuals act like a man or woman or others. Butler's performativity theory claims, a subject born neutral and then it gains its gender in the community. Because, a subject has to choose one gender to be accepted and understood by others. A person has to make his/ her gender according to principles and norms of the society. This kind of gender structure helps a subject to understand others and their actions and also make himself/ herself easier to be understood by others. Hence, gender is something that is formed inside us. This formation is always influenced by the ideas and norms of the society. We always do the principles and norms of the society that were existed before us and we make them more stable and effective by repetition. Consistency and effectiveness of these norms takes place throughout a language. We should know that sex and gender are not formed and then define the language by gender, but, also sex and gender will be formed by using language and then this language comes into the action and finally a subject by performing language start to act such as like a gender.

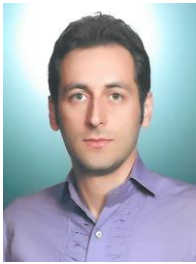
Gender identities are always products of language and social structures. They are formed and reform by linguistic features all the time. Therefore, we can conclude, gender and sex do not depend on biology or physical features. Sex and gender are shown up by language and words and also acts. In other words, sex and gender identity are not determined by biological features or characteristics but they are defined by the language and actions such as; way of talking, walking, dressing, etc.

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THESES

“Studying the Role of Language in Forming Gender Variable Based on the Performativity Theory”

This study is an attempt to examine the role of language in forming gender variable based on Butler's theory: Gender Performativity, in order to represent the features and the role of language that an individual uses and applies for forming his/ her gender as he/ she performs them, also it is to show that how the age range can affect this formation.

Theses Readers: Dr. Bahram MODARRESI. Dr. Marziye SANAATI and Dr. Maryam IRAJI



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