

國立高雄應用科技大學
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應用外語系英語專業溝通與教學科技
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英文閱讀與寫作

試題 共 5 頁第 1 頁

- 注意：a.本試題共 2 題，共 100 分
b.作答時不必抄題
c.考生作答前請詳閱答案卷之考生注意事項

PART A: READ THE FOLLOWING ARTICLE.

What language barrier?

(<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/oct/01/gender.books>)

Do men and women speak the same language? Can they ever really communicate? These questions are not new, but since the early 1990s there has been a new surge of interest in them. Countless self-help and popular psychology books have been written portraying men and women as alien beings, and conversation between them as a catalogue of misunderstandings. The most successful exponents of this formula, such as Deborah Tannen, author of *You Just Don't Understand*, and John Gray, author of *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus*, have topped the bestseller lists on both sides of the Atlantic. Advice on how to bridge the communication gulf between the sexes has grown into a flourishing multimedia industry. Gray's official website, for instance, promotes not only his various Mars and Venus books, but also seminars, residential retreats, a telephone helpline and a dating service.

Readers who prefer something a little harder-edged can turn to a genre of popular science books with titles such as *Brain Sex*, *Sex on the Brain*, *The Essential Difference*, and *Why Men Don't Iron*. These explain that the gulf between men and women is a product of nature, not nurture. The sexes communicate differently (and women do it

better) because of the way their brains are wired. The female brain excels in verbal tasks whereas the male brain is better adapted to visual-spatial and mathematical tasks. Women like to talk; men prefer action to words.

Writers in this vein are fond of presenting themselves as latter-day Galileos, braving the wrath of the political correctness lobby by daring to challenge the feminist orthodoxy that denies that men and women are by nature profoundly different. Simon Baron-Cohen, the author of *The Essential Difference*, explains in his introduction that he put the book aside for several years because "the topic was just too politically sensitive". In the chapter on male-female differences in his book about human nature, *The Blank Slate*, Steven Pinker congratulates himself on having the courage to say what has long been "unsayable in polite company". Both writers stress that they have no political axe to grind: they are simply following the evidence where it leads, and trying to put scientific facts in place of politically correct dogma.

Yet before we applaud, we should perhaps pause to ask ourselves: since when has silence reigned about the differences between men and women? Certainly not since the early 1990s, when the previous steady trickle of books began to develop into a raging torrent. By now, a writer who announces that sex-differences are natural is not "saying the unsayable": he or she is stating the obvious. The proposition that men and women communicate differently is particularly uncontroversial, with clichés such as "men never listen" and "women find it easier to talk about their feelings" referenced constantly in everything from women's magazines to humorous greeting cards.

The idea that men and women "speak different languages" has itself become a dogma, treated not as a hypothesis to be investigated or as a claim to be adjudicated, but as an unquestioned article of faith. Our faith in it is misplaced. Like the scientists I have mentioned, I believe in following the evidence where it leads. But in this case, the evidence does not lead where most people think it does. If we examine the findings of more than 30 years of research on language, communication and the sexes, we will discover that they tell a different, and more complicated, story.

The idea that men and women differ fundamentally in the way they use language to communicate is a myth in the everyday sense: a widespread but false belief. But it is also a myth in the sense of being a story people tell in order to explain who they are, where they have come from, and why they live as they do. Whether or not they are "true" in any historical or scientific sense, such stories have consequences in the real

world. They shape our beliefs, and so influence our actions. The myth of Mars and Venus is no exception to that rule.

For example, the workplace is a domain in which myths about language and the sexes can have detrimental effects. A few years ago, the manager of a call centre in north-east England was asked by an interviewer why women made up such a high proportion of the agents he employed. Did men not apply for jobs in his centre? The manager replied that any vacancies attracted numerous applicants of both sexes, but, he explained: "We are looking for people who can chat to people, interact, build rapport. What we find is that women can do this more ... women are naturally good at that sort of thing." Moments later, he admitted: "I suppose we do, if we're honest, select women sometimes because they are women rather than because of something they've particularly shown in the interview."

The growth of call centres is part of a larger trend in economically advanced societies. More jobs are now in the service than the manufacturing sector, and service jobs, particularly those that involve direct contact with customers, put a higher premium on language and communication skills. Many employers share the call-centre manager's belief that women are by nature better qualified than men for jobs of this kind, and one result is a form of discrimination. Male job applicants have to prove that they possess the necessary skills, whereas women are just assumed to possess them. In today's increasingly service-based economy, this may not be good news for men.

But it is not only men who stand to lose because of the widespread conviction that women have superior verbal skills. Someone else who thinks men and women are naturally suited to different kinds of work is Baron-Cohen. In *The Essential Difference* he offers the following "scientific" careers advice: "People with the female brain make the most wonderful counsellors, primary school teachers, nurses, carers, therapists, social workers, mediators, group facilitators or personnel staff ... People with the male brain make the most wonderful scientists, engineers, mechanics, technicians, musicians, architects, electricians, plumbers, taxonomists, catalogists, bankers, toolmakers, programmers or even lawyers."

The difference between the two lists reflects what Baron-Cohen takes to be the "essential difference" between male and female brains. The female-brain jobs make use of a capacity for empathy and communication, whereas the male ones exploit the ability to analyse complex systems. Baron-Cohen is careful to talk about -"people with

the female/male brain" rather than "men and women". He stresses that there are men with female brains, women with male brains, and individuals of both sexes with "balanced" brains. He refers to the major brain types as "male" and "female", however, because the tendency is for males to have male brains and females to have female brains. And at many points it becomes clear that in spite of his caveats about not confusing gender with brain sex, he himself is doing exactly that.

The passage reproduced above is a good example. Baron-Cohen classifies nursing as a female-brain, empathy-based job (though if a caring and empathetic nurse cannot measure dosages accurately and make systematic clinical observations she or he risks doing serious harm) and law as a male-brain, system-analysing job (though a lawyer, however well versed in the law, will not get far without communication and people-reading skills). These categorisations are not based on a dispassionate analysis of the demands made by the two jobs. They are based on the everyday common-sense knowledge that most nurses are women and most lawyers are men.

If you read the two lists in their entirety, it is hard not to be struck by another "essential difference": the male jobs are more varied, more creative, and better rewarded than their female counterparts. Baron-Cohen's job-lists take me back to my schooldays 35 years ago, when the aptitude tests we had to complete before being interviewed by a careers adviser were printed on pink or blue paper. In those days we called this sexism, not science.

At its most basic, what I am calling "the myth of Mars and Venus" is simply the proposition that men and women differ fundamentally in the way they use language to communicate. All versions of the myth share this basic premise; most versions, in addition, make some or all of the following claims:

1 Language and communication matter more to women than to men; women talk more than men.

2 Women are more verbally skilled than men.

3 Men's goals in using language tend to be about getting things done, whereas women's tend to be about making connections to other people. Men talk more about things and facts, whereas women talk more about people, relationships and feelings.

4 Men's way of using language is competitive, reflecting their general interest in acquiring and maintaining status; women's use of language is cooperative, reflecting their preference for equality and harmony.

5 These differences routinely lead to "miscommunication" between the sexes, with each sex misinterpreting the other's intentions. This causes problems in contexts where men and women regularly interact, and especially in heterosexual relationships.

The literature of Mars and Venus, in both the self-help and popular science genres, is remarkably patronising towards men. They come off as bullies, petulant toddlers; or Neanderthals sulking in their caves. One (male) contributor to this catalogue of stereotypes goes so far as to call his book *If Men Could Talk*. A book called *If Women Could Think* would be instantly denounced; why do men put up with books that put them on a par with Lassie or Skippy the Bush Kangaroo ("Hey, wait a minute - I think he's trying to tell us something!")?

Perhaps men have realised that a reputation for incompetence can sometimes work to your advantage. Like the idea that they are no good at housework, the idea that men are no good at talking serves to exempt them from doing something that many would rather leave to women anyway. (Though it is only some kinds of talking that men would rather leave to women: in many contexts men have no difficulty expressing themselves - indeed, they tend to dominate the conversation.)

This should remind us that the relationship between the sexes is not only about difference, but also about power. The long-standing expectation that women will serve and care for others is not unrelated to their position as the "second sex". But in the universe of Mars and Venus, the fact that we (still) live in a male-dominated society is like an elephant in the room that everyone pretends not to notice.

PART B. QUESTIONS

1. Write a summary of the article. (40%)
2. Write a critique (i.e., a piece of written criticism) of the view on the gender differences of language use in the article. It is important that you organize your ideas and present your arguments clearly. (60%)

Grading criteria: 1. Organization: 50% 2. Sentence grammar and writing expressions: 50%