Language and gender

VOCABULARY PRACTICE
ADVANCED | C1

Name: _____ Date: _____

1 Match each advanced term with its definition.

1 linguistic relativity (gender) ____	**a** the hypothesis that a language's gender-marking system subtly influences how its speakers conceptually categorise objects and people
2 performative gender ____	**b** the theory that gender is constituted through repeated, socially recognised linguistic and behavioural acts rather than being a fixed, pre-existing trait
3 gendered discourse pattern ____	**c** a recurring pattern in how a language's typical usage differs systematically between speakers of different genders
4 sociolinguistic gender paradox ____	**d** the sociolinguistic finding that women, across many studied communities, tend to use more standard or prestige forms than men of the same social class
5 heteronormative language ____	**e** language that implicitly assumes heterosexuality as the default, unmarked norm
6 gender-inclusive reform ____	**f** a deliberate policy or movement to reduce or eliminate unnecessary gender distinctions within a language's vocabulary and grammar
7 language ideology (gender) ____	**g** a set of underlying beliefs and assumptions about gender that a speech community holds regarding language use
8 indexical gender marking ____	**h** the phenomenon whereby particular linguistic features come to signal or index a speaker's gender identity within a community
9 cognitive bias from grammatical gender ____	**i** the tendency for grammatical gender categories to influence how speakers of that language perceive or describe genderless objects

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10 backlash effect ____	**j** a documented pattern in which reforms promoting gender-neutral language sometimes provoke resistance or unintended reinforcement of the very norms they aimed to change

2 Choose the most precise term for each context.

1 The hypothesis that gender marking shapes categorisation is linguistic relativity / a purely arbitrary system.

2 The theory that gender is constituted through repeated acts is performative gender / an innate, fixed trait.

3 A recurring pattern differing systematically by speaker gender is a gendered discourse pattern / random individual variation.

4 The finding that women often use more prestige forms than men is the sociolinguistic gender paradox / a universal linguistic law.

5 Language assuming heterosexuality as the default is heteronormative language / neutral, unmarked language.

6 A deliberate policy reducing unnecessary gender distinctions is gender-inclusive reform / preserving existing distinctions.

7 Underlying beliefs a community holds about gendered language use is language ideology / a neutral fact of grammar.

8 Resistance provoked by gender-neutral reforms is a backlash effect / universal acceptance.

3 Match the verbs with the noun phrases to form academic collocations.

1 encode ____	**a** gender through repeated speech acts
2 destabilise ____	**b** gender-inclusive reform
3 institutionalise ____	**c** heteronormative assumptions
4 resist ____	**d** natural gender grammatically
5 perform ____	**e** social identity through linguistic markers
6 index ____	**f** a gendered discourse pattern statistically
7 quantify ____	**g** grammatical gender categories
8 challenge ____	**h** a backlash effect empirically

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4 **Complete the analysis with terms from the box.**

backlash effect | cognitive bias from grammatical gender | gender-inclusive reform | gendered discourse pattern | heteronormative language | indexical gender marking | language ideology | linguistic relativity | performative gender | sociolinguistic gender paradox

Researchers investigating 1 _____ have found evidence that speakers of languages assigning grammatical gender to inanimate objects sometimes describe those objects using adjectives stereotypically associated with the assigned gender, lending some support to broader theories of 2 _____ as applied specifically to gender. This connects to a philosophical tradition emphasising 3 _____, the view that gender identity is constituted through repeated, socially recognised acts rather than existing as a fixed prior state that language merely describes. Sociolinguists studying variation have repeatedly documented the 4 _____, whereby women across many studied communities favour more standard or prestige forms than men of comparable social background, a finding that resists any single, fully agreed explanation despite decades of research. Certain recurring 5 _____ have also drawn scrutiny, including 6 _____, language that implicitly assumes heterosexuality as an unmarked default. Deliberate 7 _____ efforts sometimes provoke a documented 8 _____, unintended resistance that can occasionally reinforce rather than erode the very norms reformers intended to change. Underlying all this variation lies a community's broader 9 _____, its collective assumptions about how gender and language properly relate, while individual features achieve 10 _____, coming to signal gender identity within everyday interaction.

5 **Read the text and answer the questions briefly.**

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The puzzle of the sociolinguistic gender paradox

The sociolinguistic gender paradox, whereby women in numerous studied speech communities tend to favour standard or prestige linguistic forms more consistently than men of comparable social class, has resisted any single, universally accepted explanation despite decades of dedicated sociolinguistic research. Some researchers attribute the pattern to women's historically greater reliance on linguistic capital for social advancement in contexts where other, more direct avenues to status remained comparatively restricted, while others emphasise differing social network structures between genders as the primary explanatory factor instead. Critics caution against treating this pattern as a universal law of language, noting genuine and substantial cross-cultural variation in its strength and even its direction, which suggests the phenomenon likely reflects specific social conditions rather than any deep, biologically rooted linguistic tendency inherent to gender itself.

1 What is the sociolinguistic gender paradox? _____

2 How has this pattern been treated by decades of sociolinguistic research? _____

3 What do some researchers attribute the pattern to? _____

4 What do others emphasise as the primary explanatory factor instead? _____

5 What do critics caution against? _____

6 What does the cross-cultural variation in this pattern suggest, according to the text? _____

6 Replace the words in bold with a precise term or collocation.

1 The grammatical gender system subtly shaped how speakers described the object. _____

2 The reform effort provoked unintended resistance and reinforcement of the old norm. _____

3 The language implicitly assumed heterosexuality as the unmarked default. _____

4 The feature came to signal the speaker's gender identity within the community. _____

OVER TO YOU

Write a 160-190 word critical commentary on why women in many speech communities favour standard linguistic forms more than men, distinguishing observation from competing theoretical explanations.

[ ] Use at least twelve target expressions. [ ] Include four academic collocations. [ ] Maintain a precise, balanced register.

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ANSWER KEY

1 Advanced terms

1 a 2 b 3 c 4 d 5 e 6 f 7 g 8 h 9 i 10 j

2 Precise terms

1 linguistic relativity 2 performative gender 3 a gendered discourse pattern 4 the sociolinguistic gender paradox 5 heteronormative language 6 gender-inclusive reform 7 language ideology 8 a backlash effect

3 Academic collocations

1 d encode natural gender grammatically 2 c destabilise heteronormative assumptions 3 b institutionalise gender-inclusive reform 4 g resist grammatical gender categories
5 a perform gender through repeated speech acts 6 e index social identity through linguistic markers 7 f quantify a gendered discourse pattern statistically 8 h challenge a backlash effect empirically

4 Analysis

1 cognitive bias from grammatical gender 2 linguistic relativity 3 performative gender 4 sociolinguistic gender paradox
5 gendered discourse patterns 6 heteronormative language 7 gender-inclusive reform 8 backlash effect
9 language ideology 10 indexical gender marking

5 Reading - suggested answers

1 The finding that women in numerous studied speech communities tend to favour standard or prestige forms more consistently than men of comparable social class.
2 It has resisted any single, universally accepted explanation.
3 Women's historically greater reliance on linguistic capital for social advancement where other avenues to status remained restricted.
4 Differing social network structures between genders.
5 Treating this pattern as a universal law of language.
6 That the phenomenon likely reflects specific social conditions rather than a deep, biologically rooted linguistic tendency.

6 Precise terms and collocations

1 cognitive bias from grammatical gender 2 a backlash effect 3 heteronormative language 4 indexical gender marking

Over to you

Answers will vary. Look for conceptual precision, evidence-aware reasoning and balanced evaluation.