

Deborah Tannen, "There Is No Unmarked Woman"

MULTIPLE CHOICE

Deborah Tannen, *There Is No Unmarked Woman*

The term “marked” is a staple of linguistic theory. It refers to the way language alters the base meaning of a word by adding a linguistic particle that has no meaning on its own. The unmarked form of a word carries the meaning that goes without saying — what you think of when you’re not thinking anything special.

The unmarked tense of verbs in English is the present — for example, *visit*. To indicate past, you mark the verb by adding *ed* to yield *visited*. For future, you add a word: *will visit*. Nouns are presumed to be singular until marked for plural, typically by adding *s* or *es*, so *visit* becomes *visits* and *dish* becomes *dishes*.

The unmarked forms of most English words also convey “male.” Being male is the unmarked case. Endings like *ess* and *ette* mark words as “female.” Unfortunately, they also tend to mark them for frivolousness. Would you feel safe entrusting your life to a doctorette? Alfre Woodard, who was an Oscar nominee for best supporting actress, says she identifies herself as an actor because “actresses worry about eyelashes and cellulite, and women who are actors worry about the characters we are playing.” Gender markers pick up extra meanings that reflect common associations with the female gender: not quite serious, often sexual.

Each of the women at the conference had to make decisions about hair, clothing, makeup, and accessories, and each decision carried meaning. Every style available to us was marked. The men in our group had made decisions, too, but the range from which they chose was incomparably narrower. Men can choose styles that are marked, but they don’t have to, and in this group none did. Unlike the women, they had the option of being unmarked.

Take the men’s hair styles. There was no marine crew cut or oily longish hair fall- ing into eyes, no asymmetrical, two-tiered construction to swirl over a bald top. One man was unabashedly bald; the others had hair of standard length, parted on one side, in natural shades of brown or gray or graying. Their hair obstructed no views, left little to toss or push back or run fingers through and, consequently, needed and attracted no attention. A few men had beards. In a business setting, beards might be marked. In this academic gathering, they weren’t.

There could have been a cowboy shirt with string tie or a three-piece suit or a necklaced hippie in jeans. But there wasn’t. All eight men wore brown or blue slacks and nondescript shirts of light colors. No man wore sandals or boots; their shoes were dark, closed, comfortable, and flat. In short, unmarked.

Although no man wore makeup, you couldn’t say the men didn’t wear makeup in the sense that you could say a woman didn’t wear makeup. For men, no makeup is unmarked.

I asked myself what style we women could have adopted that would have been unmarked, like the men’s. The answer was none. There is no unmarked woman.

There is no woman’s hairstyle that can be called standard, that says nothing about her. The range of women’s hairstyles is staggering, but a woman whose hair has no particular style is perceived as not caring about how she looks, which can disqualify her from many positions, and will subtly diminish her as a person in the eyes of some.

Women must choose between attractive shoes and comfortable shoes. When our group made an unexpected trek, the woman who wore flat, laced shoes arrived first. Last to arrive was the woman in spike heels, shoes in hand and a handful of men around her.

If a woman’s clothing is tight or revealing (in other words, sexy), it sends a message — an intended one of wanting to be attractive, but also a possibly un intended one of availability. If her clothes are not sexy, that too sends a message, lent meaning

by the knowledge that they could have been. There are thousands of cosmetic prod-	50
ucts from which women can choose and myriad ways of applying them. Yet no	51
makeup at all is anything but unmarked. Some men see it as a hostile refusal to please	52
them.	53
Women can't even fill out a form without telling stories about themselves.	54

1. Which of the following is an example of a gendered “linguistic particle” (line 2)?
 - a. “*will*” (line 7)
 - b. “*makeup*” (line 18)
 - c. “*ette*” (line 10)
 - d. “*tense*” (line 5)
 - e. “*form*” (line 3)

2. The primary rhetorical function of the quotation from Alfre Woodard (lines 13–14) is to
 - a. demonstrate that even successful women are marked
 - b. exemplify the broader claim that appears in the subsequent sentence (lines 15–16)
 - c. offer a counterpoint to the author’s central argument
 - d. anticipate the reader’s objections to the argument in lines 10–11 by appealing to authority
 - e. set up a larger argument about the bias against women in particular occupations

3. In this excerpt, Tannen argues that women are “marked” in which of the following ways?
 - I. linguistically
 - II. physically
 - III. emotionally
 - a. I only
 - b. II only
 - c. III only
 - d. I and II
 - e. II and III

4. Which of the following best describes the development pattern present in paragraphs 1–3 (lines 1–16)?
 - a. definition of an established concept followed by a novel application of it
 - b. academic explanation followed by a practical explanation
 - c. generalization followed by an example
 - d. statement of premise followed by a clarifying statement and a conclusion
 - e. specialized discussion followed by a simplified discussion for a broader audience

5. The specific clothing descriptions in lines 30–33 illustrate which of the following claims?
 - a. Men’s clothing is never marked.
 - b. Few men are willing to wear clothing that stands out.
 - c. Women’s clothing options are more diverse than men’s.
 - d. Men can choose to dress in unmarked styles.
 - e. Women rarely choose to wear neutral clothing.

6. The sentence beginning “Their hair” (lines 26–28) features which of the following rhetorical devices?
- I. parallel negative clauses
 - II. aggressive tone
 - III. visual and tactile imagery
- a. I only
b. II only
c. III only
d. I and II only
e. I and III only
7. The author’s claim in line 43 that “women must choose between attractive shoes and comfortable shoes” is arguably an example of which kind of fallacy?
- a. bandwagon
b. either/or
c. straw man
d. slippery slope
e. ad hominem
8. In context, the author’s claim that clothes that are “not sexy” are “lent meaning by the knowledge that they could have been” (lines 49–50) most directly implies which of the following?
- a. Women are seen as objects regardless of what they wear.
 - b. Men impose fashion choices on women.
 - c. Women are more likely to be perceived as attractive when they wear revealing clothing.
 - d. Women who wear sexy clothing are seen as less competent and less professional than women who dress in modest clothing.
 - e. Not wearing sexy clothing is seen as an overt rejection of sexuality rather than as a neutral style choice.
9. In the context of the passage, which of the following can be inferred from the author’s claim that “for men, no makeup is unmarked” (lines 35–36)?
- I. For men, makeup is marked
 - II. For women, no makeup is marked
 - III. For women, makeup is unmarked
- a. I only
b. II only
c. III only
d. I and II only
e. I, II, and III
10. The development pattern in the tenth paragraph of the excerpt (lines 43–46) follows which of the following development patterns?
- a. induction
b. argument to counterargument
c. generalization to illustration
d. formal proof
e. definition to demonstration

1. *The ending “ette” is an example of a gendered linguistic particle, defined by Tannen in lines 1–3 as a linguistic unit that alters the meaning of a word without carrying an independent meaning of its own. The word “will” is also an example of linguistic particle, but not a gendered one.*
2. *Alfred Woodard’s claim that the term “actress” suggests a greater concern with physical attractiveness than with the substance of acting illustrates the claim that Tannen will make in the subsequent sentence: “Gender markers pick up extra meanings that reflect common associations with the female gender: not quite serious, often sexual” (lines 15-16).*
3. *The excerpted paragraphs focus primarily on the ways in which women are marked linguistically, with modified language like “actress” or “hostess,” and the ways in which they are marked in their physical presentation—clothing, hairstyles, and the like. There are no specific references to emotional marking.*
4. *In the first two paragraphs of the excerpt, Tannen defines the concept of “marked” language as it has been developed and applied to the field of linguistics. In the next paragraph, she applies that concept to explore how women, in particular, are linguistically marked, and begins to discuss the broader implications of that marking.*
5. *The clothing descriptions in this paragraph illustrate Tannen’s earlier claim that the men at her conference “had the option of being unmarked” (lines 21-22). The hypothetical clothing styles at the start of the paragraph (“a cowboy shirt with string tie or a three-piece suit or a necklaced hippie in jeans,” in lines 30-31) represent men’s fashion choices that could be marked in some way. The fashion choices described later in the paragraph represent the neutral, unmarked clothing that the men Tannen observed actually wore. Tannen’s point, then, is not that men’s clothing is inherently unmarked; rather, she argues that men have neutral, unmarked clothing options while women do not.*
6. *This sentence makes use both of parallel negative clauses (“obstructed no views . . . needed and attracted no attention”) and visual and tactile imagery (“left little to toss or push back or run fingers through”). The tone of the sentence is not particularly aggressive.*
7. *It could be argued that this sentence presents a false dichotomy between shoes that are comfortable and shoes that are attractive. While this dichotomy may be prevalent in women’s shoe design, there is surely some overlap between the two categories as well—i.e., shoes that are both comfortable and attractive.*
8. *The primary implication of this claim is that a woman’s decision NOT to wear sexy clothing is often seen as a rejection of sexuality, rather than an affirmative choice to wear some other kind of clothing. By contrast, if someone chooses to wear a blue shirt, it is typically understood as an affirmative choice in favor of blue, not rejection of yellow, red, green, and purple. Tannen’s argument implies that the social expectations surrounding women, sexuality, and attractiveness create a climate in which female sexuality is always “on the table,” and as a consequence, opting out of sexy clothing choices is a conspicuous and marked act.*

9. *The initial claim is that not wearing makeup is an unmarked fashion choice for men. From the context of the passage, it can be inferred that (1) wearing makeup would be a marked choice for men, since makeup is the norm for women and unusual for men, and (2) for women, going without makeup is a marked choice. Tannen states this directly in lines 51–52: “Yet no makeup at all is anything but unmarked. Some men see it as a hostile refusal to please them.” However, wearing makeup is also a marked choice for women. Remember, Tannen’s central argument is that “there is no unmarked woman” (line 38).*

10. *Tannen begins the paragraph with a general claim, “Women must choose” (line 43), and then illustrates the claim with an example from her conference observations. The initial sentence of the paragraph is a generalization rather than a definition, and the rest of the paragraph anecdotally supports the first sentence, so no counterargument is present. Induction is reasoning from specific to general—the opposite of the pattern seen in this paragraph.*