Language and Gender: An Analysis of Gendered Words and Discourses in the Media

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ABSTRACT

Language is a scheme of speaking or writing in communication. The language is considered as disparate aspects in different fields. Some words have the wrong connotation in some places especially gendered words are mispronounced or misunderstood in media. The aim of the study analyzes two domains of language and gender and its influence in media. The media is a communication tool, which outlets the information. Likewise, some words are explicated wrongly, especially the word 'sexism', and this word has the wrong connotation in media. The methodology of this study splits into two segments: theoretical and empirical. In theoretical, Lakoff, Spender and Tannen, the approach of these theorists is highlighted towards language. In empirical, the author analyzes the importance and influence of language and finds out relevant discourses through language. These two folds are adopted in this present study. The author has analyzed the words through language and gender in the media. The results of the study are investigated the two domains of words. The recommendations for the future study are the influence of language in other fields, the problems of language in society and the tactics of language etc.

Keywords: language, gender, media, discourse, communication, domain, words, sexism.

1. INTRODUCTION

Besides its role as a key tool of communication, language is an essential instrument in the construction of our reality together with our sets of values and beliefs. Mentalities can be built, altered and reflected by language. The aim of research paper aims to bring forward the issue of the sexism conveyed by language, namely by both words alone and by discourses.

First, the sociolinguistic domain of language and gender, its aims and development will be introduced to the reader, who will be provided with a solid theoretical background, useful for the practical part that will follow – namely an analysis of gender words and discourses that can be interpreted as sexist. Frameworks such as deficit, dominance and difference, together with key conceptual pairs (e.g. sex-gender, masculine-feminine, male-female) and the differences between them will be discussed, leading to more modern approaches that focus on discourses (e.g. the discourse turn), not on merely isolated terms.

Then sexist and non-sexist words will first be analysed in isolation, as the discussion will focus on problematic lexical items such as generics, names and titles, pejoration, taboo and bad language, food and animal metaphors, or pairs of masculine-feminine terms that give rise to inequity (e.g. *bachelor-spinster*, *master-mistress*, *governor-governess*, etc.). Some of the solutions that have been found in order to avoid sexism in language are also presented, as different guidelines for a gender-neuter and politically correct language are described together with their advantages, disadvantages, and effects. Parallels and comparisons with other languages can be made concerning sexist lexical items.

In the last, but central part of the research, the focus shifts on discourse, namely on discourses in the media, in an attempt to see how gender is built and reflected in the media, and to what extent it is still sexist or not, disadvantaging either females or males.

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Genuine samples of native material such as magazines, advertisements, movies, or popular TV shows can be taken into account so as to get to a relevant and veridical conclusion.

2. AIMS OF THE STUDY

The first part of the study aims at offering a solid theoretical background in the domain of language and gender, trying to include and encompass all the essential stages in its development, together with its goals, accomplishments and failures. Then, the aim will be to prove that sexism is still a relevant and existing issue in English, and not only, by looking at both words and discourses in the media, and at how they built and reflect gender, mentalities, and inequality.

3. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

Mostly speaking, this study is essential first of all because it brings crucial evidence in favour of the importance of language and how it can build, change, and reflect the world. It brings back into focus an issue that has been abandoned by many linguists, since it is considered by some unimportant or irrelevant nowadays. However, the issue of sexism in language is still very much alive, as this study will successfully prove.

How is this study different of the many others in this domain? Its unicity when compared to others, is given by various aspects that describe it. One of them it is the fact that it offers a very comprehensive presentation of the sociolinguistic domain of language and gender, starting with the pioneers in this domain and ending with the current trends in feminist linguistics.

The first approaches in the study of language and gender are known as the deficit, the dominance, and the difference approach. The key representative of the first and the pioneer in this domain is Lakoff (1973) with her famous article *Language and Woman's Place*, where the linguist introduces the idea that women's language is deficient and inferior to that of men as it reflects the "marginality and powerlessness" of women. No longer claiming the

inferiority of women, the dominance approach, mainly a result of the core ideas introduced by Spender (1980) in *Man Made Language*, supports the idea that men dominate conversations and language generally reflects their dominance. Without suggesting any longer that women are somehow inferior or weak when compared to men, the difference approach looks at language and gender from a different perspective. Just like Tannen (1990) tries to explain in her work, this approach regards men and women's language as merely different because they grow up mostly in same-sex groups. However, such a perspective fails to take into account the social aspects of performing gender.

In fact, all these three approaches have several common disadvantages. They are all too simplistic, they promote a dichotomy, focusing on differences and ignoring similarities, and, maybe the most significant disadvantage, they look at gender in isolation, disregarding its interaction with other social factors such as region, race, age, culture, social class, and so on. This is why the perspective shifted to discourses, as a language started being regarded as social practice and gender as something that people perform in order to build their own gendered identities. These two crucial shifts that occurred in the language and gender domain are known in the literature as the discourse turn and the performance turn. These so-called turns led to an analysis of discourse as something both gendered and gendering.

Besides providing an encompassing theoretical background on the domain of language and gender, by outlining the main ideas included in the essential literature written in this domain, this study also contains concrete examples of gendered lexical items and discourses. Thus, it has the advantage of combining the theoretical with the practical, using the latter to support the first. This is done by looking at genuine examples of sexist words, at guidelines that promote a gender-neutral language by providing solutions meant to avoid inequality between the sexes that could arise due to language, and also by analysing actual pieces of discourse in the British and American media.

Considering the previously mentioned ideas and the advantages of this study, it will surely manage to raise awareness to the power of language, to the

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inequality that it can give rise to, and to its ability to both reflect and construct gender, and not only.

4. METHODOLOGY

As it has been already mentioned, the overall approach in this study is twofold – both theoretical and empirical. This is because the truthfulness, usefulness, advantages, and disadvantages of the approaches and ideas introduces in the theoretical part of the paper, should be backed-up by concrete evidence from the language itself.

Taking this into account, the theoretical part of this study will explore both a summary and an analysis of the most important pieces of work (both merely theoretical literature and research that has been conducted) written in the sociolinguistic domain of language and gender.

First, the pioneers in this domain, namely Lakoff (1973), Spender (1980), and Tannen (1990), together with their works will be taken into account, as both their contributions and shortcomings will be analysed. The first ideas and claims that have been made regarding gender and language typically gave rise to new, different, and more interesting exciting questions or represent the reason why various empirical studies were conducted.

 Therefore, it is only natural to see how these first ideas developed and how evidence was brought either for or against them, so the procedure will be to consult the literature that helps us in this direction, such as Sunderland (2006), Coates (1993, 2007), Talbot (2010), or Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003).

One instance of an early idea later analysed in greater depth is that according to which boys and girls grow up differently, in different environments, and this leads to the development of differences. Following this idea, studies were conducted which claim to prove, for instance, that parents use more diminutives and inner state words while talking to girls, when direct and emphatic prohibitives predominate in the conversations with boys, girls. Boys follow the model provided by their same-sex parents when it comes to politeness (and their mothers are more polite than their fathers), girls use the standard variants more often than boys, and that, contrary to popular beliefs, boys talk more is a mixed-sex conversation. Another idea supported by

Cambridge (1754), Lord Chesterfield (1754), Jespersen (1922), and Lakoff (1973) is that women tend to use short words, and adjectives and adverbs typical of their vocabulary such as *lovely*, *vastly*, *excessively*, *divine*, *nice*, *pretty*, *sweet*, and others. However, this claim was quickly refuted, since no evidence could support it.

More complex debates, analysis, and studies were conducted in connection with the discussion on the use of standard and non-standard forms by the two genders. The claim that many early studies and surveys support is that women tend to use the standard more often than men and to have a "hypercorrect" (Lakoff 2004) grammar. This is because they are conscious of their status and social position (which are insecure), also showing solidarity. However, as we will later see, some of the results in favour of this claim have been obtained in studies that present several shortcomings (e.g. the surveys included a small number of people, so generalizations were unreliable; all the informants had to face the same interview; pressure could have been put on the informants to speak more correctly, etc.).

Lacks and issues have also been identified with concerning the claims that women use more tag questions than men, and this conveys uncertainty. This claim made by Lakoff (1973) is extremely simplistic, since it completely disregards the fact that, like any linguistic tool, tag questions too have different functions, there are different types of tag questions that fulfill various purposes. Women's preference for tag questions is connected somewhat to the solidarity and closeness that they mean to convey in conversations in order to encourage the participants, than to any uncertainty.

After providing a holistic view of the theoretical background of this domain and looking at such claims, followed by evidence for and against them from the existing literature, the study will continue with a more practical part. This part is meant to show that a discussion on language and gender is still relevant and that sexism still exists in English (other languages could also be included schematically).

Firstly, individual isolated examples of sexism conveyed by language will be provided. In order to do so, the literature about sexist language

offers a good start (e.g. Mills 2008. *Language and Sexism*). Different sources can be used to provide a more complex discussion on issues such as the generics (e.g. is generic *man* typically interpreted and understood as including both men and women?), the contrast between *Mrs*. and *Mr*. (together with the introduction of Ms.), the negative connotations that *woman*, *lady*, or *girl* can carry (e.g. *Don't be such a woman*!), the problems that arise when it comes to occupations names and the attempt of finding solutions to refer to women and show that they are also included (e.g. *lawyer, scientist, surgeon* vs. *babysitter, nurse, schoolteacher*, etc.), or the pairs of terms where only the female one has been affected by the semantic change known in the literature as pejoration (e.g. *bachelor/spinster, courtier/courtesan, lord/lady, governor/governess, master/mistress*, etc.).

Examples will also be collected from the literature that reflects animal metaphors, which, again, can convey inequality and can be used to refer to women simultaneously carrying either negative sexual connotations or ugliness (e.g. *nag, bitch, cat, pussy; cow, mare, sow* etc.). Food metaphors are also used in connection to females either as terms of endearment (1a) or to refer to their sexual organs of females (1b).

(1)   a.   *cherry*, *cookie*, *dish*, *honey*, *sugar*, *sweety-pie* (Greer 2008:297)

          b.   *cake-roll*, jelly-*roll*, *honey-pot* (Greer 2008:297)

Discrepancies in the description of men and women are also noticed by Mills (2005) while looking at topics such as pregnancy (2) or men/women with many sexual partners (3).

(2)   a.   *to get someone pregnant*, *to get someone in the family way*, *to put   someone in the pudding/club*, *to put a bun in the oven* (Mills 2005:79)

          b.   *I'm expecting*, *I'm pregnant*, *I'm in the family way* (Mills 2005:79)

(3)   a.   *Casanova*, *gigolo*, *Jack the lad/lad*, *stud* (Mills 2005:86)

          b.   *easy lay*, *goer*, *scrubber*, *slag*, *slut*, *tart*, *whore* (Mills 2005:86)

Taboo and sexuality can be discussed at length by looking at the literature that already does this (e.g. Allan and Burridge 2006. *Forbidden Words. Taboo and Censoring of Language*), but dictionaries

can also be consulted to find other relevant examples, not only for this topic, but also instances of sexist words and words that carry negative connotations while referring to women in general.

Besides the existing literature on sexist language and other useful dictionaries, various guidelines on gender-neutral language (such as that of UNESCO) can be used. The important recommendations in these guidelines will be presented, but, at least where possible, together with the effects that the suggested changes had, showing how efficient and beneficial they proved to be.

This is relevant because, for instance, the recommendation of using *Ms*. failed to be successful since it acquired negative connotations (it is said to be used "only by divorced women, feminists, lesbians, 'man-haters', and women who are living with men without being married to them" (Mills 2008: 64)). However, this form (i.e. *Ms*.) does appear on official forms. Other examples of changes that were recommended, but ended up conferring derogatory and negative connotations for women are variants of feminine forms for occupation names, most of them no longer in use: *authoress, stewardess, poetess, lady doctor, female surgeon*, and other similar examples.

The last part of the study will no longer have as a main resource the existing literature and dictionaries, but it will analyse actual discourses in the media that are relevant to the issue of sexism and language and gender. These discourses either build gender or reflect mentalities regarding the way men and women are perceived, so inequality is either reflected or built. Possible sources can be newspapers and magazines, advertisements, TV-shows or movies. The potential impediment of having access to materials from the UK and the US can be surpassed by resorting to the online resources, though here the selection should be conducted very carefully.

Eventually, corpora of English could be used to increase the diversity of the materials. Moreover, these corpora, since they allow looking for words, can prove useful also to analyse the contexts in which words that were previously found to be sexist to indeed appear in contexts where they give rise to inequality. This is a way to develop the previously described part of the study, gradually moving from words to discourses.

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It is also to discuss the impact that language can have on society. A model in this respect is the analysis that Clark (1998) conducts on the language used to refer to men and women in articles from *The Sun* on crimes of sexual violence. The linguist successfully proves that language itself is used to manipulate the blame, and to hide, maintain, and even encourage such crimes. This is done in various ways. For instance, the woman is portrayed as "available" so guilty for drawing attention, the passive is used to hide the Agent, the attacker is described as sub-human (*beast, monster, maniac*), abnormal so not to be blamed, or he is treated with a sympathetic attitude (*tormented, debt-ridden, crazed*).

Finding other relevant discourses where language has similar strong social impacts is a solid evidence in favour of its importance and power and, at large, on the favour of the importance of the domain of language and gender.

All in all, various sources can be used to complete this study, and what is essential is the selection of the relevant ones and the extent to which each idea or aspect is developed.

5. Results

The results are significant in the paper. People misunderstand some words, and it depends upon the person's attitude. Language plays a vital role in all the fields and depends upon the person while hearing some words. In media, some words have the wrong connotation and broadcasts also same especially sexism. The author analyzes this paper in two folds: theoretical and empirical. In theoretical, the author utilizes the approaches of Lakoff, Spender and Tannen.

Firstly, Lakoff approaches towards women and how they use some words like lovely, pretty, divine, nice, sweet and others. These words are taken as unadorned, and without any proof, everyone accepts these words while speaking or listening. Taking words and their meanings play a vital role. Lakoff points out that women can use whatever words like lovely, nice and sweet and no one can take into seriously. This matter reveals that status or position of women and some status show the favor of women. The approach of Lakoff shows the first preference of women, and

their words encourage conversations. Finally, the using of words depends upon the gender.

Secondly, Spender points out the language depend upon gender and mainly dominance also. If a woman makes a conversation and whatever the words she can use as her wish, and no one dominates and asks questions. Instead of men, a man dominates the other's conversation and reflects the dominance of language. Spender abbreviates the conversation of men and women show their attitude. Through this conversation, women are inferior to men. So, there is a different approach to gender in language.

Thirdly, Tannen accolades that language of men and women is totally different. They belong to the different sex. So the perspective of language differs from gender, and this is the performance by gender in society. Finally, gender and their opinions always remain opposition to language.

In empirically, the above three approaches show some demerits of language and highlights the gender's attitude, dominance and how they are biased. According to gender, the words have discoursed in language. It is not only language but also maybe culture, region, age, social class, race and so on. People build their attitude and they only reason for everything. These ideas may awake the people definitely.

According to overall observations, words depend upon gender, and that is created the gender in language. The word 'sexism' has the wrong connotations. Most of the TV series or shows broadcast sexism as wrongly and create negative connotation. Here, taking the meaning of a word and using a word should be careful because some other persons may interpret wrongly.

6. DISCUSSION

After the whole work is completed, the study will include a part for discussing the importance of the findings, to what extent this study proves to be useful and relevant, how it contributes to the existent work in this domain, and to what extent it fulfilled its aims. Its conclusions will be analysed more closely, and the problems that are encountered together with other issues and questions that arose will be presented. The

ideas in the introduction will now be looked at more critically since the main body of the paper will offer enriched perspectives and insights on the topic.

The study will prove that language, in this case, gendered words and discourses, can be extremely powerful, building, shaping, and reflecting society and its mentalities concerning the two sexes. Moreover, language can trigger, maintain, and reflect inequality between men and women.

7. CONCLUSION

This study draws attention to the domains of language and gender in media and how a gendered word is analyzed and discoursed in media. It is tough to analyze and to find out the words. Language is a system of communication structurally, and it plays a vital role in all the fields. In communication, there are many processes and language is the most important part that explored through speaking and writing. The present study abbreviates the language and gender in the field of media and how a word is used and interpreted in media. The two domains of language and gender are analyzed under theoretical and empirical. The limitations of the study are: most of the studies deal with language in many fields, and that is very tricky idea to find language in media and to find an apt study and theory for this study. The present study is utilized three theorists such as Lakoff, Spender and Tannen. The present study recommends for the future studies that can be carried out by the researches under the influence of language in media, an analysis of language in other fields, the problems of language in the society and so on.

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