

# An Analysis of the Gender Awareness and Sexism in English Vocabulary

Yanglu Cui

Xijing University, 1 Xijing Road, Chang'an District, Xi'an City, Shaanxi Province, China

yyx19900909@163.com

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**Abstract.** Aware of the influence that English vocabulary has on social linguistic, this paper aims to investigate the existing phenomenon. Kramarae said "Language is considered within four theoretical frameworks in which assumptions about the relations between women and men are made explicit." [1] Through a brief survey on English words and collocations, aware of the influence that English vocabulary has on social linguistic, this paper aims to investigate the existing phenomenon. Especially it focuses on some common issues occurring in English vocabulary which bear discrimination against women. In the end, it helps us find out the ways of reducing displeasure during the cross-cultural communication, in the hope of providing useful references for the senior English learning, hoping that sexist phenomena will draw our proper attention and sexist language will decrease in our daily life.

## Introduction

Human language which exists as a social phenomenon plays an important role in the process of the development of human society. It interacts with the society both directly and indirectly. It is common acknowledged that language is not only a tool for communication, but also a mirror of the society. It shows that language can be a direct reflection of the ideas and values of different social members and language speakers. Robin Lakoff said, "Our use of language embodies attitudes as well as referential meanings. 'Woman's language' has as foundation the attitude that women are marginal to the serious concerns of life, which are pre-empted by men." [2]

As for the content, this thesis is going to talk about the gender awareness in the English vocabulary. For centuries, women had been prejudiced in society. But in recent decades, women's status has been improved greatly. As a mirror of the society, language has also been left traces along the change. The change of prejudice towards women in society can be revealed clearly through vocabulary. Through a brief survey on English words and collocations, this article attempts to examine how the elevation of women's status is reflected in language and put forward some ways to limit and avoid our English learners unintentional misbehavior.

So far, papers abound concerning about the gender awareness of English vocabulary or what has commonly been referred to as the sexism in English vocabulary. However, there has been some investigation into the sexism effect on the daily English vocabulary overseas [3]. Aware of the influence that English vocabulary has on social linguistic, this paper aims to investigate the existing phenomenon and find out the ways of reducing displeasure during the cross-cultural communication, in the hope of providing useful references for the senior English learning.

**Research Orientation.** In the new century, people have more chances to get along with the foreigners especially for college students. They look forward to learning English well, and communicating with the foreigners in harmony, avoiding the displeasure of culture-cross misunderstanding. Blaubergs Maija said "Language plays a critical role in this struggle for gender equity and therefore deserves careful examination." [4] So it is very important for us English learners to learn about the culture of the English vocabulary in our daily life.

## Gender Awareness and Sexism in English

"It is a long way from learning English to use it successfully." This has long been a frequent complaint and headache among Chinese students. They look forward to learning English well in

spite of many difficulties. However even they have made great efforts, and master it well, there still exist some obstacles that may violate their communication. There should be some fine methods which can help them notice these traps. While we get this information we also remember it and get it used in our daily life. [5]

**Gender Awareness in English Vocabulary.** With the development of Women's Liberation in the western world since the 1970s, the society has undergone a revolution of reforming the English language into an equal and unbiased one. Many scholars and sociologists try to analyze women's way of using language and make comparison between the two genders. Such famous linguists as Peter Trudgill, Robin Lakoff, Don Zimmerman and Candace West have exerted a great influence on the study in this field. It's well recognized that there are great gender differences in almost every language and culture in the world, especially English.

In English, there is asymmetric between male and female words, for an obvious example: when refers to the words of men and women come in pairs, refers to the male words in most cases is unmarked, but the word refers to women is behind the word of men, That's what we said additional a morpheme after the word, for example: count-countess, god-goddess, manager-manageress. What's more, in many people's identity and occupation of deictic words with a gender tendency, also said most of the first professional male words without any mark, because traditionally take it for granted that men engaged in the professional, only they can do these occupations, for a long time, female role model is a wife and a mother, a respectable career seems to be men's patent, sacred, when the woman once have a decent work, people shall add tags of female words, such as, critic-lady critic, doctor-woman doctor, engineer-female engineer.

**The Sexism in English Vocabulary.** In most cases, sex discrimination refers to the discrimination against females. The reasons why sexism exists are concerned with different roles women and men are playing in a male-dominated society. Just as what Qin Xiubai comments. Language reflects social activities; the sex differentiation and discrimination in language are not determined by the natural properties of language symbols, instead they are reflection of social values and ways of thinking in a particular society or culture. In its original meaning, language is a tool for people to communicate with each other; it doesn't discriminate against either member of the group. However, with the development of the society, women and men take on different social roles and thus discrimination takes place.

In English, male dominance is seen and exhibited at various levels, this thesis only analysis the phenomenon in the English vocabulary. For example, the meaning of the words for men is always wider than women, just like the word "man" which represent people, both man and woman, "Man can conquer nature." "All men are created equal." can't be replaced by woman. In addition, vocabulary for men is always more positive than women's. For example the corresponding English words for two genders such as bachelor/spinster, wizard/witch, "bachelor" means unmarried man, which suggests freedom, happiness and the spirit of adventure. While "spinster" means old maid who is withdrawn and depressed. In the same way, "wizard" means talent, and "witch" means old ugly woman who does something bad. Undoubtedly, those words with discrimination do exist in our communication with others; which have escaped from our notice.

### **Anti-sexism Strategies**

Nowadays, a growing number of people are aware of the fact that we live in a sexually unequal society where men have more power and authority than women, as is common in almost every country and region. Some researchers are mainly concerned about female and male differences in language use and the reasons behind the phenomenon. They stick to the view that though sexism is not so obviously manifested nowadays, it is still prevalent in modern English, which has led to a safe conclusion that the language must be changed into a nonsexist one. Because of the tradition in usage and rooted mentality in people's notions, there is much difficulty and resistance to language change; someone even consider that there's no need to change since people has make do with it. Yet more and more civilized and well-educated people have consciously abandoned the use of generic pronouns, which is considered the subtlest and most unbearable discrimination of the language.

Though it may take long time and much effort, we have every reason to believe it is likely to create a nonsexist language in the society in the future.

**The Propose.** A proposes is needed to make for our daily demand. In above, there exists a certain amount of the gender discrimination phenomenon in English language. Effective actions could be taken for modifying or eliminating discrimination, which will be good for our proper communication with the foreigner and achieving equality between men and women in language.

In addition, using words “Ms” to replace “Mrs” “Miss”, as can be regarded as a courteous words for our communication.

Finally, under teacher's guidance, we should master skills of avoiding gender discrimination in language. In our daily life, if we ignore gender factors, we may cause embarrassing situation by inappropriate words, or innocently harm the other side of the communication. Therefore, it is necessary for our students master some skills avoid gender discrimination language during learning English. For example: when calling a lady, we should use Ms. avoid Mrs or Miss marking women's marital status words, so as to respect the privacy of the lady. In addition, when the gender is not obvious, we should try to use neuter gender phrase or near synonym substitutions instead words which contain “- girl - woman- wife - man”.

**Limitation of the Study.** What we cannot deny is that there are several problems in our students in their English study and cross-culture communication. First of all, generally speaking, English is rarely used in our life and study. In our daily life, it is impossible for us to communicate in English even in our English classes. Secondly, college students pay much more attention to their own major than English. Thirdly, the form of English examinations is not perfect. When we have been used to kinds of examinations, it is quite difficult for us to develop our English thought and used English successfully.

## Conclusions

We are getting to know that Plentiful English words and phrases have character of sexism, which can't be ignored in our college English studying. Most we Chinese students even don't have an idea of this issue, or cannot find a most suitable way to achieve a satisfactory effect during cross-cultural communication. We can also know that nearly all the Chinese college students are looking forward to learning English well but large percents of them are not able to make it. While they have succeeded passing their examinations, they may give up using English and recite it instead, which leads to lower their English level than the time when they try to use it in their daily life. This paper firstly illustrates the sexism in English vocabulary from some aspects, that it is, word-building, semantics, word order, then describes the development and change of English gender vocabulary in the new era, making it out clearly for our intention. And the interview of the volunteers is not only a way to text the common students of this phenomenon, but also draws attention from the public, getting more attention from them. Consequently, the paper proposes the strategies in our English communication and offers some suggestion for our students. It may affect them significantly.

The phenomenon of gender discrimination within English is reflected in all aspects of this language. The gender discrimination is not a issue of the language, but a social problem. It is a result of accumulation and refraction of many thought dross and long-term outmoded conventions and customs in a culture medium. Along with the development of human society, people have made certain achievements in eliminating gender discrimination in the language. However, the concept of gender discrimination must be eradicated from the society, if we want to eliminate the common phenomenon of gender discrimination in any language. This needs sociologists, linguists and feminist and other aspects of the long-term unremitting efforts and cooperation, it is only through the social ideas, ideology, psychological cognitive change can make the language changes, and eventually eliminate gender discrimination in the language. With sociologists, linguists and feminist and other aspects' long-term unremitting efforts and cooperation, it is only through the social ideas, ideology, and psychological cognitive changes to make the language change, and eventually eliminate gender discrimination in the language .

## References

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