A STUDY OF SEXISM IN LOCAL MAGAZINES

Ramesh Nair a/I S. Raman Nair

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Languages and Linguistics, University of Malaya
In partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the degree of Master of English as a Second Language
1999
ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to investigate the presence of sexism in two local magazines and to identify the sexist elements contained therein. The magazines, Men's Review and Female, were selected to represent local magazines that have a gender specific audience in mind. Both qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis were employed. The data collected was analysed to investigate the practice of stereotyping women and men and also to examine the use of sexist terms. A questionnaire was posed, firstly, to investigate how respondents viewed terms which western feminists and linguists consider sexist, and secondly, to identify differences in the use of sexist language between male and female writers. The analysis reveals that the local magazines used as corpus do indeed encourage the practice of stereotyping and more sexist terms were used to refer to women than men. Interestingly, it was found that several terms identified as sexist by western feminists were not regarded as such by the respondents. The analysis also reveals that both male and female writers used more sexist language when they had a male audience in mind.
ABSTRAK

WARNING

This thesis contains texts that address gender studies with particular focus on the use of sexist language. Some terms of references for women and men, as well as language that contains strong sexual innuendo is found in this thesis and may be offensive to some.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my deepest appreciation to:

My supervisor, Pn.Faridah Noor Mohd. Noor, whose guidance and encouragement led to the completion of this thesis.

My family, especially my parents, whose love, support and understanding continue to inspire me to be the best that I can be.

My many wonderful friends who kept me going with their words of encouragement.
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to
My parents
For their love and continued sacrifices
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstrak</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warning</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table of Contents</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Tables</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Chapter One: Introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>Statement of the Problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>Research Questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>Significance of the Study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>Rationale of the Study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>Limitations of the Study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Chapter Two: Literature Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Sexism and Sexist Language: A Working Definition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1.1</td>
<td>Sexism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1.2</td>
<td>Sexist Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>Forms of Sexist Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.1</td>
<td>The Pronoun Problem</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter Two: Sexism in Language 14

2.1 Sexism in Language 14
2.1.1 Sexism and Power Relations 15
2.1.2 Social, Cultural, and Political Contexts 16

2.2 Sexism in Language Structure 17
2.2.1 Sexist Terminology 17
2.2.2 Man-Linked Terminology 18
2.2.3 Feminine Suffixes 18
2.2.4 Derogatory Terms 19
2.2.5 Sexual Language 19

2.3 Sexist Linguistic Practices 20
2.3.1 The Order of Terms 20
2.3.2 Parallel Construction 21
2.3.3 References to Relationships 22
2.3.4 Titles and Salutations 23
2.3.5 Euphemisms and Insults 24
2.3.6 Active Man and Passive Woman 25

2.4 Sexism in the Mass Media 26

2.5 Parallel Studies on Sexist Language 28
2.5.1 Sex Stereotypes and Trait Favourability 28
2.5.2 Women in Norwegian Papers in the 20th Century 30

2.6 Summary 32

Chapter Three: Methodology 33

3.0 Introduction 33
3.1 Corpus 33
3.2 Method 38
3.2.1 Topics 39
3.2.2 Male-Female Relationships 41
3.2.3 Gender Based Portrayal of Celebrities 41
3.2.4 Female and Male Terms of Reference 44

3.2.5 Usage of Sexist Language 46

3.3 Instrumentation 54

3.4 Respondents 56

3.5 Pilot Test 57

3.6 Data Analysis 57

3.7 Summary 58

4 Chapter Four: Results and Discussion 59

4.0 Introduction 59

4.1 Topics 60

4.1.1 Stereotypical Topics in *Female* 62

4.1.2 Stereotypical Topics in *Men's Review* 67

4.1.3 Comparison of Topics in *Female* and *Men's Review* 68

4.2 Articles on Male-Female Relationships 71

4.2.1 Articles on Male-Female Relationships in *Female* 72

4.2.2 Articles on Male-Female Relationships in *Men's Review* 76

4.3 Portrayal of Celebrities 79

4.4 Sexist Terminology 84

4.4.1 Sexist Terminology on Cover Page and Table of Contents 93

4.4.2 Sexist Terminology in Articles 96

4.5Usage of Sexist Language 100
4.6 Summary

5 Chapter Five: Conclusion

5.0 Introduction

5.1 Research Questions Revisited

5.2 Alternatives for Sexist Language

5.2.1 Alternatives to the Pronoun Problem

5.2.2 Alternatives to Man-Linked Terminology

5.2.3 Alternatives to Feminine Suffixes

5.2.4 Alternatives to the Order of Terms

5.2.5 Alternatives to Euphemisms

5.3 Recommendations for Further Research

5.4 Summary

Bibliography

Appendices
## LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Topics covered in <em>Female</em> and <em>Men's Review</em> from October 1997 to March 1998</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>Gender specific topics found in an average publication of <em>Men's Review</em> or <em>Female</em></td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>Approximate word count of “Swoon” and “Woman of the World” between October 1997 and March 1998</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>Respondents’ opinion on the connotation that each term has</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>Terms referring to men which were identified by at least 70% of the respondents</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>Terms referring to women which were identified by at least 70% of the respondents</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>Terms used to refer to men and women in the cover page and the table of contents in <em>Female</em> between October 1997 and March 1998</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>Terms used to refer to men and women in the cover page and the table of contents in <em>Men's Review</em> between October 1997 and March 1998</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>Terms used to refer to men and women by a male writer in <em>Female</em></td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>Terms used to refer to men and women by a male writer in <em>Men's Review</em></td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>Terms used to refer to men and women by a female writer in <em>Female</em></td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.12 Terms used to refer to men and women by a female writer in *Men's Review*  

4.13 Respondents' identification of the writer's sex and the degree of sexism of selected sentences  

4.14 Respondents' identification of the writer's sex and the degree of sexism of selected sentences from *Female*  

4.15 Respondents' identification of the writer's sex and the degree of sexism of selected sentences from *Men's Review*