The Use of Sexist Words in Both English and Bangla Languages and the Ways to Avoid These Biased Words

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Abstract

Words mean things, but the meaning of a word is a complex reflection of the values of the culture which the language evolved. As such, all languages contain terms which, if taken individually and objectively without a context, appear overly nationalistic and sexist. Sexism in language is a social problem, since it is the reflection of human beings' thoughts. As we know, language is a comparatively stable system, much of its reduction in sexist language appears to be taking place as an unconscious reflection of social and attitudinal changes. Therefore, to eliminate the sexist language, we should above all eliminate the concept of prejudice in human beings' thoughts. Only by this way can we be free of sexism both in language and the society forever.

Keywords: sexist words, avoid and eliminate, Bangla, English.

Introduction

Sexist language is language that expresses bias in favor of one sex and thus treats the other sex in a discriminatory manner. In most cases the bias is in favor of men and against women. The existence of sexist language is due to sexism in society. As a social phenomenon, language is closely related to social attitudes. In the past, women are supposed to stay at home, remaining powerless and generally subordinate to man, whereas men are considered as the center both in the family and society. In a word, for a long-time women have been looked on as "the

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weaker sex" in society. Even in English-speaking countries, which hold the claim that "everyone is created equal", discrimination against women exists. Language simply reflects this social fact. However, because of their greater status-consciousness, the movement amongst feminists to reduce sexual discrimination and sex-role stereotyping has led to a number of conscious attempts to influence and change languages and linguistic behavior. In Bangla also we notice frequent use of some sexist language. Things are changing day by day and now it's the time to avoid sexist language.

Exploring the Ways to Avoid These Biased Words

If we pay a close consideration to this fact, we will find that, in society, men are considered the norm for the human species: their characteristics, thoughts, beliefs and actions are viewed as fully representing those of all humans, male and female. At a very young age, society begins to teach children of their roles in life. Children are taught to be sexist from the beginning. This practice can make women invisible in language or altogether excludes them. It can also lead to their portrayal as deviations from this 'male = human' norm. Women's linguistic status is often dependent on or derives from that of men, which is represented as autonomous. By relegating women to a dependent, subordinate position, sexist language prevents the portrayal of women and men as different but equal human beings. Many words that we use are so common to us that we do not even realize that they are not inclusive towards women. A lot of these words are in reference to occupations. Such words include mailman, policeman, second man, milkman, etc. There is logical reasoning as to why we use these terms when talking about jobs. Years ago, women were not allowed to work. They stayed home to tend to the house and children. From that very period in language also we have hardly found women dominated words. Common forms of sexism in English include the use of 'man' and 'he / him / his' as generics—that is, nouns and pronouns referring to both men and women—the use of suffixes *-man*, *-ette*, *-ess*, *-trix* in occupational nouns and job titles, asymmetrical naming practices, and stereotyped images of women and men as well as descriptions of (mainly) women which trivialise or denigrate them and their status.

Similarly, there are many words, which are clearly male-orientated in that they contain the element "—man" while they can in fact apply to both sexes,

For example:
Chairman, congressman, councilman
Newsman, foreman, freshman
Policeman, salesman, mailman etc.

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Sexism in language is also showed in that the noun of feminine gender can only be obtained by adding a certain bound morpheme to the noun. For example:

MALE   FEMALE   MALE   FEMALE

Man	woman	manager	manageress
Prince	princess	god	goddess
author	authoress	mayor	mayoress
count	countess	shepherd	shepherdess
host	hostess	steward	stewardess
poet	poetess	usher	usherette
heir	heiress	sailor	sailorette
hero	heroine	conduct	conductette

In Bangla also, especially the name of some professions, are basically of common gender, namely, they can be applied to both sexes. However, people usually will habitually associate them only with male. Consequently, we have to add "Mahila" that is, "Woman" before those names if we want to refer to female of those professions. For example:

COMMON GENDER   FEMALE

Doctor	Mahila (woman) doctor
Professor	Mahila professor
Engineer	Mahila engineer
Lawyer	Mahila lawyer
Reporter	Mahila reporter

The above examples obviously reflect people's deep-rooted discrimination against women, that is, women have to be dependent on men and are even just some appendages of man. There is one tendency that involves words that are clearly restricted in reference to one sex or the other, with female words tending to have less favorable meanings. A classic pair is master and mistress, where the male meaning is 'good' and the female is 'bad'; specifically, a mistress but not a master is a partner for extra-marital sex.

Some other examples are as follows:

1) The word "master" means "host" while the feminine word "mistress" has the surface meaning "hostess". But, its connotative meaning is "lover", "woman who depends on man" In the following sentence "He grew tired of his wife and went out for a mistress" Here we will sure know that "mistress " cannot be his wife.

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2) The word "governor" refers to "a person appointed to govern a province or state, whereas the word "governess" just means 'nurse maid".

3) The word "professional" refers to a person qualified or employed in one of the professions. When we say, "he is a professional", he may be thought to be a boxer, whereas when we say "she is a professional", she is likely a prostitute.

4) When "tramp" refers to male, it means that the man is homeless, he goes from place to place and does no regular work. While when it refers to a female, it also indicates that she is a prostitute.

5) The word *shrew* taken from the name of a small but especially vicious animal is defined in *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* as an "bad-tempered, scolding woman," but the word *shrewd* taken from the same root is defined as "having, showing, sound judgment and common sense." and illustrated with the phrase "a shrewd businessman."

6). "The man in the street" and "The woman in the street" is in the same situation, yet the former one just shows that the man is an ordinary person, the latter one can indicates that she is a prostitute.

Such sexual use of the female word is typical. North American English has no fewer than 220 words for a sexually promiscuous woman, but only twenty for sexually promiscuous men, and London school children had a rich vocabulary of insult terms for girls, all related to sexual behavior, but very few specifically for boys.

Recommendations

We can refer such thousands of examples of sexist language in every language. Now it is the high time to avoid the use of sexist language in every form of language. Every respective authority should take necessary steps to reconstruct these words and create neutral language which would be the means of showing respect to both man and woman.

There are some recommendations regarding this aspect:

It is recommended that women are made more visible in language by avoiding the use of 'male-specific' and 'male-identified' words in the generic sense. namely, man (generic sense) humans, human race, human beings, human species, humanity, humankind *or* women and men, person(s), man and woman, individual(s), people(s).

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The use of 'man' should also be avoided in idioms and phrases when the author or speaker clearly intends the expression to include both women and men. Expressions such as 'the best man for the job' or 'the man on the land' not only make women's presence and achievements in the workforce invisible but can also lead to discrimination.

Alternatives for some common expressions are suggested below: "the man in the street" ----- the average citizen, the average person, an ordinary person, ordinary people; "the best man for the job" ---- the best candidate or applicant, person for the job, best man or woman for the job. "man to man" ----- person to person. "man of the year" ---- 'citizen of the year' or 'employee of the year'. In gender-specific contexts expressions such as 'man to man', 'woman to woman', 'one woman show', and 'one - man show' are appropriate.

Occupational nouns and job titles ending in -*man* obscure the presence of women in such professions and positions. There are various strategies for replacing –*man* compounds. For example, the use of an existing gender-neutral term (*police officer* instead of *policeman*), or of the -*person* alternative (*layperson* instead of *layman*) or the explicit naming of both sexes (*sportsmen* and *women* instead of *sportsmen*) are some of the possibilities. It is, of course, acceptable to use the -*man* compound to refer to a man occupying the position if a woman in such a position is referred to by a -*woman* compound (*spokeswoman* for a woman and *spokesman* for a man). However, the practice of referring to a man by means of the –*man* compound and to a woman by means of the -*person* compound is discriminatory.

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