An Inquisition into the Stratagem for Employing Gender Neutral Lexicons in Corporate Communication

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Abstract

Language is an inimitable aspect that needs a careful management. Moreover, using language in formal communication environment is a challenge to any expert. At some instances, even great specialists of language feel using language an onerous task not because of the correct use of syntax or semantics, but because of the need for the sensitive use gender sensitive terms. The careful use of these parameters will help the communicator to win a non-gender bias position while communicating (UNESCO, 2000). This paper details the parameters for achieving success over a better use of gender neutral language in executive communication. It explains how a communicator can use language at workplace that do not dominate or degrade the gender dignity.

Keywords: Gender-neutral lexicon, Corporate communication, Gender sensitivity, Gender neutral language, Gender bias, Professional identity, Psychological division.

Introduction

In the current era of technological development, business or corporate communication has become inevitable in all the fields irrespective of government and private sectors. In spite of the developments, changes and updated forms in communication, still there is a scarcity of the exposure and skill set in the use of non-gender bias language in corporate communication. It has been evident that communication in a corporate atmosphere is expected to be standard and civilized (Kaul, Asha., 1998). Hence, a cautious selection of linguistic terms is very important in any given corporate environment. There are sufficient ways by which the communication in a corporate or business environment could become non gender bias (UNESCO, 1999). This paper

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details the technical use of words that shall be strategically used in any business environment to make that communication a gender neutral one.

Statement of the Problem

1. Using the word 'person' for 'man', 'woman', 'lady' etc.

It is evident that the third person singular word 'man' finds a surplus use in corpus. It is also to be noted that the even proficient communicators whoever speak generally about people assign the word 'man' as a common terminology referring to both men and women. Despite of the sufficient degree of words for replacing the same meaning without gender discrimination (Reutlingen University, 2012), the communicators does not use those gender neutral words as they are trained to use the gender bias terminologies through various stages of their observations.

The paradox is that even if one wants to use the word 'wo*man*' or 'wo*men*' he or she cannot ignore the word 'man' or 'men'. Though experts suggest that the word 'hu*man* being' can be used in the context to make it free from gender discrimination, one cannot avoid the usage of the word 'man' as in the case of 'wo*man*' and 'wo*men*'. However, the word person is neutral and shall not be put into complaint. So, the word 'man' can better be replaced with the word 'person' at workplace communication. Moreover, the word 'persons' can be used for 'men' or 'women'.

   a) ~~Practice makes a **man** perfect~~ (*gender bias usage*)
       Practice makes a **person** perfect (*gender neutral language*)
   b) ~~**Man** is mortal~~ (*gender bias usage*)
   a) A **person** is mortal (*gender neutral language*)

2. Using the Compound word 'that person' for 'he' or 'she'

Instead of using the words 'he' or 'she', a communicator can use the compound term 'that person' in a business environment. Such type of tactical usage will result in a non-gender bias communication, besides offering the employees a stimulus for standing united as a single team without gender difference. It is necessary to avoid pronouns in singular form in view of generating gender neutral language (Reutlingen University, 2012). It is evident that, some reports or documents prepared by corporate employ the usage as the following: 's/he' in their writings. However, still there is an indication of two different identities of gender in the writings of such style. So, there is a need for a terminology that do not specify words that make a listener to imagine the mental image in the aspects of gender. Hence, the term 'that person' can be a good choice for the communicators in corporate setting. Though the use of this term is not very common, it will be of great application in putting across information in corporate sectors if followed. Let us observe the following examples.

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a) ~~If any employee needs clarification,~~ **he** ~~or~~ **she** ~~has to approach the team leader~~. *(gender bias usage)*

   If any employee needs clarification, **that person** has to approach the team leader. (*gender neutral language*)

b) ~~If anybody wants leave tomorrow,~~ **he** ~~or~~ **she** ~~has to approach the manager~~. *(gender bias usage)*

   If anybody wants leave tomorrow, **that person** has to approach the manager. (*gender neutral language*)

3. *Replacing the words 'he' or 'she' with 'one'*

A communicator can also use the word 'one' instead of other gender differential terms. In a point of view, the word 'one' is a better replacement (UNESCO, 2012) for the above mentioned gender differential terms when compared to the compound word 'that person'. The unique feature of this word is that, it can be replaced with any singular noun referring to human beings. Let us observe the following samples.

a) ~~If~~ **any employee** ~~needs clarification,~~ **he** ~~or~~ **she** ~~has to approach the team leader~~. *(gender bias usage)*

   If one needs clarification, **one** has to approach the team leader. (*gender neutral language*)

b) ~~If~~ **anybody** ~~wants leave tomorrow,~~ **he** ~~or~~ **she** ~~has to approach the manager~~. *(gender bias usage)*

   If **one** wants leave tomorrow, **one** has to approach the manager. (*gender neutral language*)

4. *Addressing the employees with their designations*

Addressing the employees with their designations is another tactics of making the language gender neutral in working environment (Michigan Technological University). Instead of the terms like 'madam', 'sir', 'he', 'she', 'man', 'woman' etc., a communicator shall adders the people at workplace with their official designations. This parameter does not only make the speech act gender neutral, but also annihilates differences among the specific gender identifications. Let us learn from the following examples.

a) ~~Inform this to the~~ **madam**. *(gender bias usage)*
b) ~~Inform this to the~~ **sir**. *(gender bias usage)*

   Inform this to the **manager**. (*gender neutral language*)
c) ~~Kindly consult this matter with the~~ **madam**. *(gender bias usage)*
d) ~~Kindly consult this matter with the~~ **sir**. *(gender bias usage)*

   Kindly consult this matter with the **team leader**. (*gender neutral language*)

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5. *Addressing the employees with their professional identity*

There is no great distinction between addressing the employees with their designations and addressing them with their professional identity. However, technically, there is a thin line of variation between the two. Employees or workers who are formally appointed in a corporate sector are officially given a post or position which is referred to as their designation (Michigan Technological University). Contrary to that, workers who are not officially appointed may not be given positions to be referred to be designations. For example, workers like 'a person who is in-charge of the internal water needs of a company', 'garden guard', 'gardener', 'driver' etc., can be addressed on the basis of their professional identity irrespective of the gender.

6. *Using the term 'employees / workers of the company'*

It is very often used in corporate sectors the policy of addressing the whole manpower as 'all the men and women in the company'. As it has already been mentioned, the use of differential terms like men and women create a line of segregation resulting in the event of leaving the employees of the company into two different teams. It is always good for a company to unite the employees as a single team under the company. Hence, to eradicate the psychological division in to two teams, it is always better to address them as 'employees of the company' instead of 'men and women in the company'.

Conclusion

It is a hazardous task to use the language correctly and appropriately in formal corporate environment. Most of the communicators, though good at the technical use of language, find it very difficult to manage the speech event when it comes to gender specific terms. However, the cautious employment of corpus will fetch success over such struggle. In a corporate sector, the communicator shall make the best use of words like 'person', 'that person' and 'one' to refer to the employees. As it is applicable to the need of the milieu of the communication event, the designations of the employees and professional identities can also be used to perform gender neutral communication.

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