

Male Chauvinistic Language - A Tool for Suppressing Women

Dr. R. Saravana Selvan

M.A. (Eng.), M.A. (Pol. Sci.), M.Phil., M.Ed., P.G.D.J., P.G.D.T.E., Ph.D.

R. Suguna, M.A. (Eng.), Ph.D. Scholar (Full-Time)

=====
Language in India www.languageinindia.com **ISSN 1930-2940 Vol. 13:9 September 2013**
=====

Language and Thought

Language is the thread that connects a person's thoughts and ideas with other person's in the form of communication. It is the backbone for communication. Communication turns out to be effective when language acts as a best platform in carrying the thoughts of the speaker and conveying it aptly to the listener in a comprehensive and lucid manner. In this case, language speaks a person's thoughts and ideas, which, when successfully reaches the other person, builds in a kind of sociable relationship between them. Hence, such a sociable relationship is parallel to the communication tendency which leads its way to one's language usage.

Sociability and Language

Sociability among people is as important as language is for communication. The bond that has sociability as its essence paves way for the interpersonal relationship which is otherwise the human relationship. Interpersonal relationships are social associations or connections between two or more people. With those as background, each one is affected by the presence of other people, forms relationships with other people, join groups with masses, and behaves in certain ways towards members of his/her own and other groups. This relationship is governed entirely by language, in order for that to be sustained.

Interpersonal Relationship Skill and Success in Career

People, who develop good interpersonal relationships with almost everyone they encounter, will for sure experience more success in life than those who do not. Exploring the function of language in the context of interpersonal relationship, language is the means of classifying and ordering the world: the means of controlling reality which, with its day to day usage brings world into realisation in developing the rapport between one or more persons.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com **ISSN 1930-2940 13:9 September 2013**

Dr. R. Saravana Selvan, Ph.D. and R. Suguna M.A. (Eng.), Ph.D. Scholar (Full-Time)

Male Chauvinistic Language - A Tool for Suppressing Women

Realisation in the sense of language crosses the boundaries of syntax and reaches the level of semantics, which closely examines the meanings implied within the language.

An Example of Effective Language Use – Telephone Skills

Effective language sustains itself at the heart of every relationship, when a person is interacting with a friend, a family member, a professional colleague or a clerk in an office. If the language is accurate, it leads to the summit of a healthy interpersonal relationship. But on the contrary, if it is essentially inaccurate, it misleads to the level of abusing and accusations. Telephone conversation can be taken as a best example.

1. “It’s been great catching up with you. Thanks for calling.”
2. “Your talk sickens me like a stale mbege. Get lost!”

The conversation, in the first example proves that the language used cultivates a gracious and sociable atmosphere in deepening the relationship between persons. But the second example confirms to the offensive and abusive use of language, which damages a healthy interpersonal relationship. This shows that when language is accurate, yielding and emotionally well expressed it softens the relationship which in no time turns a relationship to a coarse path when it is erroneous. The conversations given above brings in the difference of how an interpersonal communication is enriched as well as led to astray having language as the cause.

Bias, Prejudice and Male Chauvinism

Language and its biased and prejudiced usage also narrows itself as gender biased, where women are marginalised. Marginalisation of women is done through language and especially male- centred language which attempts to subdue women by all means. Male- dominance as seen through the eyes of society as Male chauvinism is nothing but a belief that men are superior to women with the perceptions of women as inferior to men, especially intellectually. This practice happens to have emerged since man realised his sense of reasoning. Hence, it is a clear indication that language also carries down to posterity the concept of male chauvinism or male- dominance by assigning a secondary status to women.

Representation of Men and Women

The representation of men and women in language is reflected in the position given to men over women when they are referred together. Examples are ‘Son and Daughter’, ‘King and

Queen' and 'Adam and Eve'. Women are also referred to in the terms of their male counterparts where their position is indirectly restrained like Robert's wife and not the other way round. This testifies the fact that even when men and women are referred together in their relations, preference is given to men and not women. An important function of language is add to add dignity to a person, but in this case in paired words like 'Mister- Mistress', 'Courtier-Courtesan' and 'Dog-Bitch', the derogatory words are meant to be used only for women. This implies the respect shown to male, which can also be perceived as language is male chauvinistic. Also a few words like 'Prostitute' and 'Widow' are termed and signifies women in a scornful manner, where there are no substitutions for men.

Lack of Words

Beyond the refined and scornful language used for women, there is also a lack of language meaning that lack words for things that costs a great deal to women. Clear evidence can be seen through 'Sexual Harassment' a word of feminine invention. Prior to this invention, there was not a right word for both the physical and mental sufferings of women. This is conceptualized as "Encoding of Male Worldview" in anonymous article on 'Feminist Philosophy of Language'. Through this, it is obvious that how male dominated language opens the world up that is more natural for men than for women.

A Subordinate Group

In reality where women are treated as sub-ordinates also extends its ruthless thread into language, in which the situation is the same too. Though the usages like 'female' 'manageress' and 'lady doctor' brings out the visibility of women, they tend to treat women in the subordinate position. Somehow related to this are the gender- neutral terms like 'Chairperson' that is applied to instead of 'Chairman' and not 'Chairwoman'. The use of these terms is a sort of symbolic insult to women as if they are gender- neutral which in real is the dominance of maleness as the norm and thus proving the language of male chauvinism.

Continuing Male Chauvinistic Usage

Expressions like "The proper study of Mankind is Man" by Pope and "The child is the Father of a Man" by Wordsworth also imply from within the male chauvinistic language. In either if the expressions "Man" is read as ambiguous, since it can mean either human being or male human being alone." But to be specific, Horn and Kleinder has given in the work "Feminist

Philosophy of Language” that ‘Man’ began as ‘Mann’, a gender neutral term to refer to human beings as a whole. This was later extended to be gender specific referring only to males which has led to the invisibility of women in the other way. This is represented in the 12-page booklet, “Guidelines on the Use of Inclusive and Non-Discriminatory Language” as "Used as a generic term, ['man'] has led to the misrepresentation and exclusion of women!"

Preserving Patriarchal Structure through Language Use

Knowledge, culture and language are so inter-related on a myriad ways that language preserves and transmits not only the culture and knowledge but also the patriarchal family structure in society as well as language. This patriarchal system in society has extended its chord to language which with its male chauvinism has left its traces for the prevalence of women’s subjugation. This is prominently seen in the language used which attempts to suppress in all the ways, though movements like Radical Feminist Movement and Liberal Feminist Movement arose.

Insufficiency of Terms to Refer to Women

Apart from language usage that is male chauvinistic, there is also an insufficiency for terms that refer to women. For example, there is ‘waiter’ and ‘waitress’, but words like ‘writer’, ‘driver’, and ‘maker’ do not have substitutions. The suffix ‘-er’ designates the person who performs a task. But at this context, the above words suffixed with ‘-er’ designates male in common and language lacks in corresponding words for women like ‘writress’, ‘driveress’ and ‘makeress’. This suggests that women cannot or should not perform the particular task. The lexical insufficiency in language also happens to suppress in an implied way.

Woman’s Place Filtered through the World of Men

In the words of Sheila Rothman “...much of our understanding of woman’s place has come to us filtered through the world of men...” This rightly brings out how women are subjugated in the minds of men in real life and also in the basis of language. Considering this as an issue women’s mind and enthusiasm are shuttered in encountering of male chauvinistic language in day to day life, though they are offered with all sorts of freedom. When male dominant language pushes itself forcefully into the feminine world, women’s thoughts and ideas become isolated, thereby sustaining the difference forever and never seeking for an equality which would bring the real harmony to the society as well as language.

Implications of Language Use

Putting into a nutshell the entire scrutinizing of male chauvinistic language and its effect on women's position portrays how language plays a major role in projecting the thoughts with its implications of suppressing women. Finally the chord of male chauvinistic usage of language is stricken with the words of Nietzsche that "All of us live in the 'Prison house of Language'; if it is the prison house, then the question is who made the prison. It is man-made, constructed by male dominance". Beyond this agreement women's possibilities have been suppressed and lost to humanity through the male chauvinistic language and that it that it is high time women be permitted to take up their role in their independent thoughts and language.

References

Eckert, Penelope., & McConnell-Ginet, Sally. (2003). *Language and Gender*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Feminist Philosophy of Language. First published. (2004)., substantive revision(2010).

Mobbs, Frank. (2000). *Sexist language: theological mumbo-jumbo*. A journal of religious opinion.

Spender, Dale. (1980). *Man Made Language*. Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Dr. R. Saravana Selvan
M.A. (Eng.), M.A. (Pol. Sci.), M.Phil., M.Ed., P.G.D.J., P.G.D.T.E., Ph.D.
Associate Professor & Head i/c
Department of English
Bharathiar University
Coimbatore 641046
raja_saravanan@rediffmail.com

R. Suguna
M.A. (Eng.), Ph.D. Scholar (Full-Time)
Department of English
Bharathiar University
Coimbatore 641046
Tamilnadu
India
ypr.suguna@gmail.com

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 13:9 September 2013

Dr. R. Saravana Selvan, Ph.D. and R. Suguna M.A. (Eng.), Ph.D. Scholar (Full-Time)
Male Chauvinistic Language - A Tool for Suppressing Women